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Uzbekistan's Eternal Realities, Part 2 *Along the Silk Road*

By Gregory Feifer

DECEMBER 2001

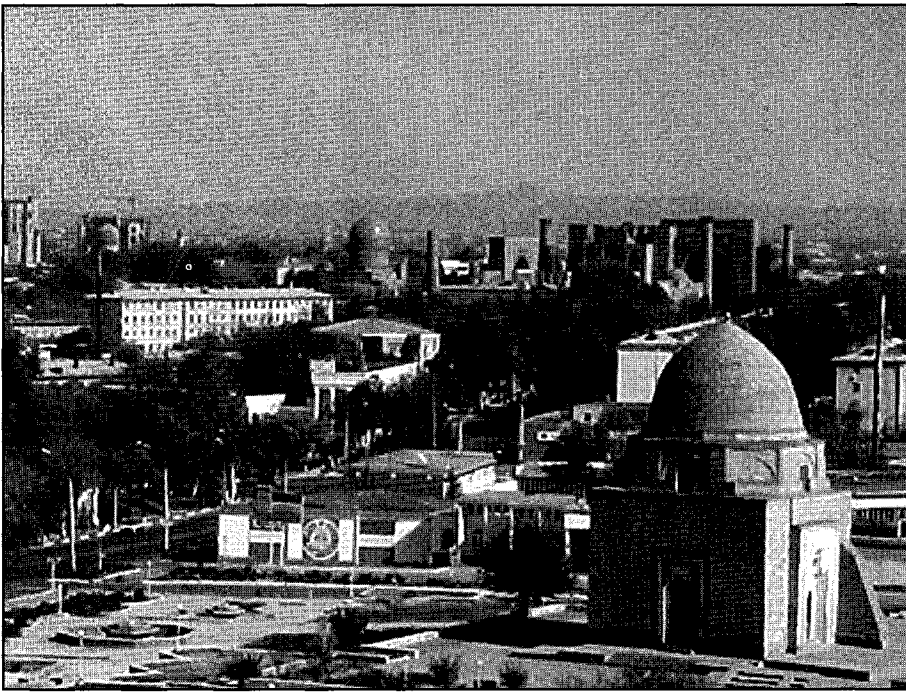
TASHKENT, Uzbekistan—Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, like Samarqand and Bukhara, lies along the ancient so-called "Silk Road." Before the demise of the trade route hundreds of years ago, camel caravans brought silk and spices westward from China along the Tashkent Road. Tsarist troops conquered the city in 1865 and built a "European Center" around the governor's mansion. It was Russia's first conquest of a large settlement in Central Asia, although the region's larger roots of power lay in the cities of Khiva, Samarqand, and especially Bukhara.

In October 2001, as streams of western journalists descended on Tashkent and the town of Karshi, near the old Soviet Khanabad airbase, I decided to strike out into the center of the country instead, to Samarqand and Bukhara—paradoxically, where most pre-9/11 visitors would normally go. Shortly after my arrival in Tashkent, I hired a minivan and driver and set off to the southwest.

It was late October, but the weather was still hot. The land on either side of the uneven and potholed concrete strip of road stretches as far as the eye can see: brown, green, murky colors absorbing the sun's hazy glare. Many cotton fields, but also stunted orchards and drooping vineyards, are sustained by wa-



Bukhara's early 19th-century Chor-Minor mosque was built by a wealthy Turkmen merchant and shows Indian influence. It's based on the design for a 12th-century Indian madrasa.



A view of Samarkand. At the top right is the central Registan ensemble of madrasai. The first was built by Ulugbek, grandson of Tamerlane, in the 15th century. The two adjacent madrasai were erected in the 17th century.

ter slowly moving through the above-ground, shabby, concrete irrigation troughs scarring the landscape. Cotton requires large doses of insecticides, herbicides and fertilizers. Defoliants are also used to make the cotton easier to harvest. As a result, groundwater contamination has become a serious problem, and birth-defect and infant-mortality rates in Uzbekistan are among the world's highest. Together with the agricultural chemicals used in the region, irrigation has also dried up much of the Aral Sea, in the northwest of the country.

Farther on, dirt roads curve and intersect through the deserty scrub and fields, although it's not clear where they lead since so few buildings dot the landscape. We encountered a lot of roadblocks. Many of them appear, well-lit and marble-façaded, out of the dry, barren landscape. On the way, we crossed into Kazakhstan for 17 miles and drove



through a section of land Khrushchev gave to Uzbekistan but Brezhnev took back.

Barren hills around Samarqand began to punctuate the generally flat land. In summer the sun parches the ground. In spring, green grass and the colors of flowering red tulips briefly cover the earth. We passed locals selling jars of cotton-blossom honey. Men and women riding donkeys herded sheep and cows grazing on the roadside grass. Sometimes the animals stood idly in the middle of the pot-hole-ridden road. Not much has changed in the last decade. Or the last half-century.

Samarqand

Samarqand washed away memories of the road's difficulties. Steeped in history and traditions, the city has kept alight a spark of life completely lacking in drab Tashkent. Narrow streets wind between houses in the town center behind the main bazaar. Streams of water run down gutters in the middle, let out from the sinks and tubs of surrounding buildings. Pipes carrying gas for cooking run above ground. The one-story houses generally show few or no windows; in the Muslim tradition, they keep women's eyes inside and those of passersby outside. Instead, windows overlook courtyards, where fruit trees and flowers frequently grow: cherries, peaches, grapes, tulips and roses. Sometimes, one sees hens and even lambs.

As in Tashkent, the center of public life revolves around the bazaar, where everything from spices to fruit, meat, fabrics and the traditional unleavened flatbread—*non*—is sold. (*Non*—called *lipieshki* in Russian—differs in each region of the country. In Samarqand, it has the consistency of U.S. bagels.) People wear Uzbek robes and baggy trousers more often than western clothes here. On the whole, most are very poor. But unlike Russia, where poverty-stricken towns seem to be sinking into ever-greater decay, Samarqand gives off a can-do atmosphere where people seem to make the best of what they have. Also unlike Russia, locals are friendly and fairly relaxed. While there's no open criticism of the president or the government, people feel free to comment about the general state of affairs, hinting at what's wrong. About 90 percent of Samarqand's inhabitants speak Tajik.

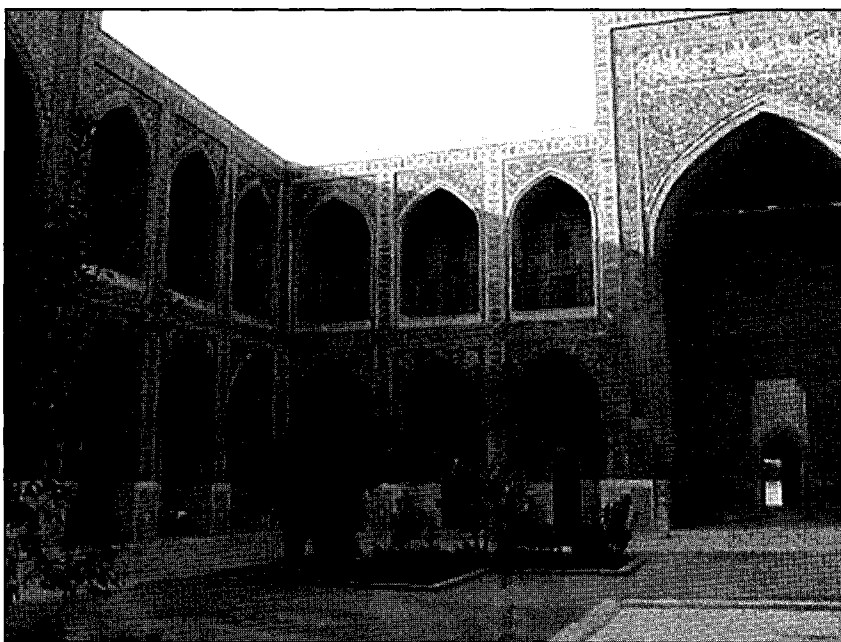
(It was in Samarqand that I met a wealthy trader in 1996. I remember it as a significantly more optimistic time. He'd just finished rebuilding his house. Located on a broken dirt road in a row of other similar houses—no windows—it nonetheless betrayed its owner's lofty status with its grand entrance and fancy geometric designs on its outer walls. Inside, he'd greeted his guests in a recep-

tion room complete with a towering decorated ceiling, luxurious carpeting, western windows, a large fish tank, sofas, tables and framed quotations from the Koran. In the middle stood a table laden with western chocolates and cookies. An observant Muslim, he wouldn't drink, but poured shots of Samarqand cognac, which is actually drinkable, into the little saucers Uzbeks use for drinking. He was always on his feet, bringing Fanta, tea, plates of meat and bowls of bouillon, and tearing *non*.)

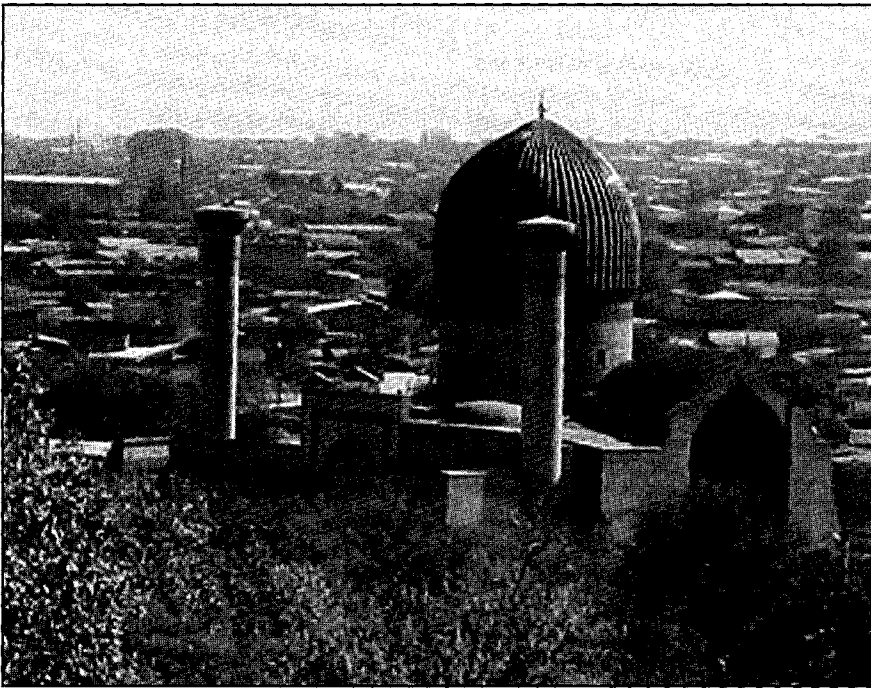
The city's best-known site is an ensemble of three madrasai—Muslim seminaries—called the Registan (Place of Sand). They seem almost unreal, towering in an unchanging time and place of their own, especially amid the shoddy Soviet buildings and machines that surround them. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, writers not infrequently traveled here to laud the architecture's arabesques and fancies, the tiles and dust of this mythic city. The British Lord Curzon visited here in 1888 and proclaimed, "I know nothing in the East approaching it in massive simplicity and grandeur... No European spectacle indeed can adequately be compared with it..." Local lore even has it that Scheherezade lived in Samarqand.

The madrasai have a traditional square main structure with an Islamic arch cut in it as an entrance. Looming pillars surround the buildings at each corner. Ribbed Islamic domes stand between the center structure and the pillars, although some of them have collapsed. Molded glazed tiles and mosaics cover the structures, the color of aqua blue and dark blue, symbolizing water and its coolness amid the scorched earth of the central plains.

I spoke to a portly, bald man selling ice cream in a madrasa courtyard. "A bunch of Muscovites just asked me



The interior courtyard of the Registan's Ulugbek madrasa, completed in 1420 during Samarqand's "golden age." Each arch rises over a door to a student's cell.



The 15th-century Gur Emir mausoleum, a crypt for the Timurid rulers. Both Timur and Ulugbek lie here.

whether we're afraid of bombs and terrorists," he said. Indeed, the Taliban had just issued a warning that it would lob projectiles into Uzbekistan were the United States to begin a military offensive. "Me? No! I'm not afraid," the man continued. "Our soldiers are ready to fight the Taliban. We'll crush them." I refrained from bringing up the reputedly dismal state of Uzbekistan's so-called armed forces. (Experts agree the Uzbek army would not be capable of resisting any major Taliban attack. Only last year, a group of about 100 armed IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) militants killed scores of Uzbek soldiers and penetrated to within 62 miles of Tashkent.)

Meanwhile, several German-army soldiers in red berets, accompanied by Uzbek counterparts, passed by. They were some of the very few tourists straggling around the Registan. "We have nothing to do with September 11," one of them assured me, explaining that their presence was actually part of a bilateral exchange planned long before the attacks.

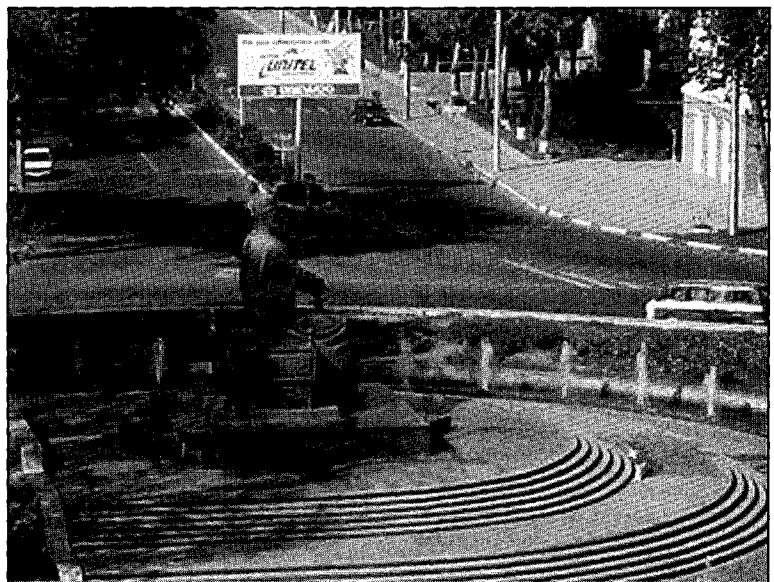
Samarqand once existed on a nearby site now called Afrasaib. A new Indian hotel now bears the name, and excavations are taking place at the area, close to the city's current site. Alexander the Great conquered the settlement in 329 B.C., and Genghis Khan annihilated it in 1220 by cutting off the water supply. In the 14th century, Tamerlane the Great—an anglicization of the already anglicized Timur the Lame (he was crippled in battle)—rebuilt the city where it now stands. Tamerlane is better known in Uzbekistan

as Amir Timur. He was born in 1336, and, according to local histories, set out to conquer the surrounding area in the desire to make Samarqand the center of the world.

In fact, Timur, who was a Tatar, essentially helped destroy the last of the Golden Horde by trying to reconstitute a great Central Asian trading empire. He moved the regional seat of power from the Bukharan emirate and his conquests eventually spanned from India to the Black Sea, helping establish a new, so-called Turkic-Mongol empire. In 1369, he made Samarqand his capital and is said to have sent over 90 elephants from India to move building stone from quarries. He also imported architects and artisans from as far away as Damascus.

Perhaps the subject most closely scrutinized today by those few in western academia who make Central

Asian studies their specialty is the creation of a new "national" identity following the collapse of Soviet ideology. That attempt chiefly involves the turning of Timur into a national "Uzbek" hero. Where statues of Lenin once stood are now monuments to Timur and his grandson Ulugbek. The new indoctrination is an attempt not only to fill the void once left behind by Communism, but also to reinforce the notion of Uzbekistan as a naturally evolving nation-state with deep roots in the past. Many of those living here



One of the many monuments to Timur erected since 1991. This one is in Samarqand. The 14th-century conqueror is lionized in part to fill the vacuum left by Lenin, but also in a nation-building bid to perpetuate the myth of an "Uzbek" state with centuries-old roots

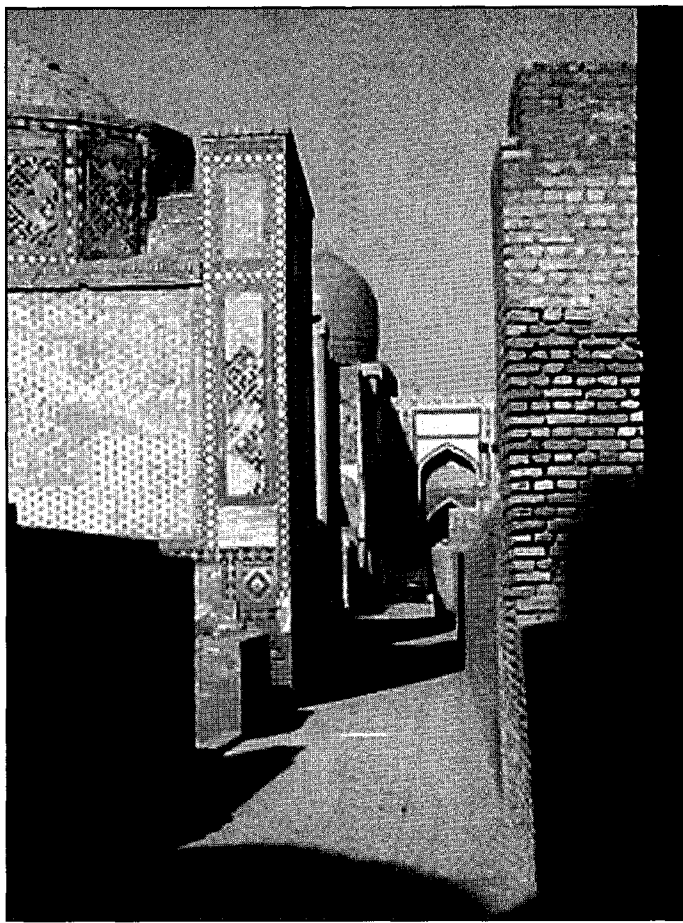
say they revere the conqueror. But although most of the locals with whom I spoke lauded him, one man waved his hand in dismissal, saying, "He was a wicked man, a killer, and now everyone's trying to resurrect him as a great man!"

Of the Timur-founded Timurid dynasty, Ulugbek, his grandson, also shares a great deal of fame. Ulugbek was a mathematician and astronomer who built an observatory to house a giant sextant of which remains an astoundingly massive underground marble section. He became Samarqand's administrative head at the age of 15 and built the Registan's first madrasa in the early 15th century, ordering its mosaics to be arranged in geometric star shapes that testified to his interest in the heavens. Its large scale and the facade's beautiful, complex designs and deep hues stagger the imagination.

The adjacent Tilakari madrasa, built later in the 17th century, also holds a Golden Mosque, unique because madrasai are usually never open for public worship. It is singular for another reason: in the Sunni tradition, most Muslim mosques were purposely built with little decoration so as not to distract the devout with worldly beauty. The Tilakari mosque, by contrast, is said to be one of the most ornate and beautiful in the world. Its complex, gilded, gold-leaf *trompe l'oeil* ceiling and walls, recently restored, make the room radiate. The wall facing Mecca is reminiscent of a grotto, with its geometric moldings, favorites of Ulugbek, made to conjure stalactites.

The Registan was almost completely rebuilt in the Soviet era, before which most of it lay in ruins. Hundreds of millions of dollars have also been spent on mosques and madrasai since 1991, in part to make the sites attractive to tourists, but also perhaps to show that Uzbekistan isn't a basket-case, like Afghanistan. Gur Emir, Timur's massive, ornate tomb, saw the most extensive renovation jobs last decade. (Ulugbek, murdered by relatives, is buried here, too.)

The most mystical of Samarqand's old structures is the Shakhi Zinda necropolis, a series of mausoleums called the "Dead City." Located on a hill in the eastern part of Samarqand, these intricate tombs contain the remains of Timur's wives and female relatives, as well as the alleged tomb of one of Mohammed's grandsons. Two trips here were once said to be as good as one to Mecca. Visitors look at the tomb through a wooden grate, and for many years it was covered by ornate silk cloth, since the structure was said to be too holy to be seen by the eyes of mortals. Outside, a path runs between the mausoleums. Each tomb is unique, more intricate and beautiful than the next, its façade crafted of mosaic and hand-molded glazed tiles by local and Persian masters. Samarqand, like Bukhara, shows signs of pre-Islamic pagan religion. Descendants of the Zoroastrians, fire worshippers, still sneak into the Shakhi Zinda to light fires. Some mosques even have



The Shakhi Zinda necropolis, stunning architectural ensemble of mausoleums in Samarqand built from the 11th to the 19th centuries. Legend has it that Kusam ibn Abbas, a cousin of Mohammed, is buried here.

shelves for candles, which are lit after prayer on occasion.

On the road to Bukhara the next day, our minivan was stuck behind a convoy of 12 buses delivering cotton pickers to glean whatever was left in the fields. Police wouldn't let the piling-up traffic pass, and we proceeded at a snail's pace past barren desert, herds of sheep and men with donkeys pulling small carts.

We stopped at a *non* bakery in a village set amid an orchard of short apple and mulberry trees (the leaves of which are used as food for silk worms). The building was a one-story brick house with a gas-fired brick oven, from which men were hauling *non* in sacks to be distributed throughout the village. Tea and *non* were served in a small, grimy whitewashed room. The *non* was atypical—made from a new sort of brownish Uzbek flour. Wheat, together with other staples, is now being grown in Uzbekistan as the country tries to diversify its agriculture. But the domestic variety is still considered worse than the usual kind, imported from Kazakhstan. It's yet another result of the Kremlin-imposed cotton monoculture.

The villagers, descendants from Turkic nomads, speak Uzbek—as opposed to the city-dwellers' Tajik—and very

little Russian if at all. Many eat food that's much simpler than that in the cities—a lot of potatoes and rice, and not so much meat because that is often sold rather than eaten.

Bukhara

As we approached Bukhara, it seemed as if we were driving through a post-Soviet industrial wasteland—the Bukhara region mines metals and has light processing facilities. Buildings are rarely taller than a few stories. The area is earthquake-prone, of course. But there are other reasons, too: the higher floors extend, the hotter they get in summer. Moreover, running water in this water-scarce region can't be pumped too high.

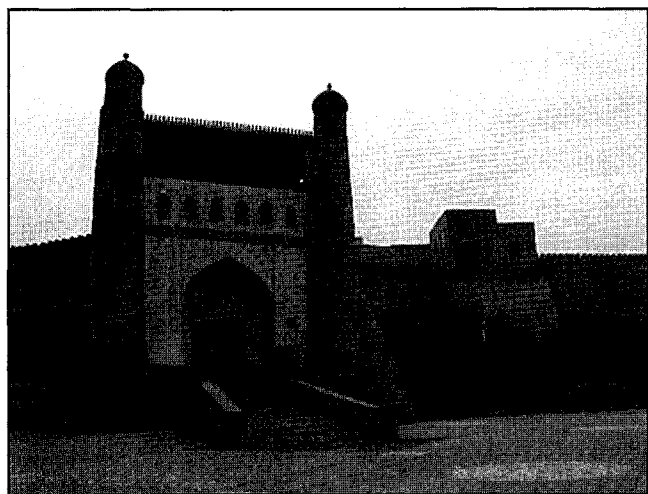


A detail of the Registan's Indian-influenced Sher Dor madrasa, completed in 1636.

The center of town, unlike the outlying areas, is an architectural oasis. The scale of Bukhara's architecture is much grander than Samarqand's and the tones are brown and grey—desert tones instead of the blues of Samarqand. The Persian Samanid dynasty set up the first proto-centralized political organization here beginning in the ninth century. Later, after the Timurid rule, the Sheibanids brought the seat of power from Samarqand back to the Bukharan emirate in the 16th century. The present-day façade of the Ark Fortress (first built in the first century B.C.) dates from this period. The fortress walls are massive and once held an architectural ensemble housing the emir and his entourage, which consisted of around 3,000 people. The last emir, Said Alim Khan, fled from the Communists in 1920 to what is

today Tajikistan. He then made his way to Afghanistan, where he was buried in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in 1944. Bolshevik bombs destroyed 90 percent of the fortress, and looters pillaged the rest. Most of Bukhara's riches—and thereby its cultural heritage—in other parts of the town have also been stolen.

Much depleted and ruined, Bukhara's role as a seat of power is still unmistakable. Sunni Muslim Timurid architecture, with only blues and yellows adorning ascetic designs, gives way to later, 16th-century, Persian-influenced multicolored ornate Shia styles. Indian-influenced architecture also exists—indeed, large swaths of northern India were ruled for centuries by Moghuls originating from Central Asia. (It was in the 16th century that Babur, an Uzbek, conquered parts of Northwest India. The “Mongol”—later “Moghul”—empire flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries.) The Silk Road passed right through the center of Bukhara, where bubble-domed trade complexes were built. Three still stand, testament to the centrality of trade to the city.



The main gate to Bukhara's Ark fortress. First built in the first century B.C., the current façade dates from the 16th century.

It's built on a massive scale testifying to Bukhara's political power and importance as a center on the East-West trade route.

Dinner was in an 18th-century house set in the clusters of clay-and-straw-bricked narrow streets of the old town. The house, with a high-walled courtyard and ornate wooden pillars, was bought five years ago by a restorer working on Bukhara's 15th-century Ulugbek madrasa. Akbar Mufraizy turned the building into a bed-and-breakfast. He is also a collector, and the reception room—in which one sits on the floor to eat—is decorated with antique Chinese and Russian porcelain, brass lamps and many other objects. The house long belonged to a merchant Uzbek family, but was bought in the 1930s by two Bukharan Jews. Stars of David and quotes from the Torah still adorn the otherwise typical Persian design of the interior, which was restored by around 20 craftsmen. The house is located in the old Jew-

ish quarter, one of around 20 neighborhoods once strictly divided by profession. A synagogue still functions in the quarter, but only about 150 of what was once around 2,000 Jewish families still remain in Bukhara, once thriving home to an Farsi-speaking Jewish community.

Akbar's wife, Mastura, cooked our meal. She made *plov*, not with the usual cottonseed oil but with melon-seed oil, which gave it a more fragrant and subtle taste. She also served *lagman*, a subtly spicy noodle soup, one of several popular Uigur dishes. It was ambrosia. Dessert consisted of fruit—grapes, melons, pomegranates, persimmons and pears—that were particularly sweet.

Bukhara now chiefly lives on tourism, which was, of course, devastated by September 11. As in Samarqand, millions of dollars have been spent by the government to rebuild mosques and madrasai devastated by years of Soviet neglect, when most of them served as warehouses. A new international airport is due to open here soon—along with others in Khiva and Samarqand—to bypass the traditional route through grim Tashkent. But when I was there, Bukhara's hotels—including a fancy new Indian one—which usually bustle with tourists at this cooler time of the year, were empty. Stalls selling spices in the old town had no customers.

Many here make a living by restoring architecture—and traditions long suppressed by Communism—despite the poverty. Mastura Mufraizy designs her own silk and wool cloth based on old styles. "I don't care about having many tourists here," she said. "I just hope that those who come here are interested in our history." Tourism is perhaps a modern-day continuation of the trade and cultural exchange that has gone on here for hundreds of years and has made this place what it is.

Still, there's a sense that any modernity is only a thin layer. One feels that the barren land isn't suited to functioning as a nation-state—a form of organization imposed by the Soviet Union only in 1924. More palpable is the sense that over hundreds of years, Persian (Tajik) sedentary populations moved in and interacted with nomadic Turkic groups. The cultural assimilation between groups hasn't changed the fact that city dwellers, as I've said, tend to speak Tajik while rural Uzbeks speak Uzbek.

Moscow friends tell me—perhaps with a hint of annoyance—that those living in Uzbekistan are proud of the Persian-influenced culture, and they're right. (Russians often seem to me to be hypersensitive in their perceptions of the influence of competing cultures on and within Russia's borders.) "It was a great civilization," one friend said of Uzbekistan's heri-

tage. "That sets them apart from the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, and virtually everyone else in the area."

One hopes that the future will hold reconciliation between modern-day reality and traditional ways of doing things. In my most optimistic moments (usually far away from Tashkent), I felt that I saw signs of that, witnessed by Akbar and Mastura Mufraizy. In any case, the popular attitude to the West—as in many of the former Soviet vassal states—is one of openness. Despite the media reports, Uzbekistan is still relatively secularized and it has nothing against looking to the West for models. The trouble, it seems, lies with the authorities.

National Delimitation

Tsarist Russia called the Central Asian territory it conquered "Turkestan." Historian Beatrice Manz explains the relative ease with which Russian soldiers took over large swaths of Central Asian land in the 19th century partly by the fact that native political structures operated not on a national but on a local, regional level. That is to say, the European idea of the nation-state and imperialism in general didn't pose an ideological threat to locals whose allegiances lay with local organizations.¹ They simply didn't think on a national level, so Russian rule didn't constitute a direct threat to their political organization. Since the Russian conquerors generally allowed local self-rule to continue—aside from short, sporadic, badly organized uprisings—natives didn't see a reason to unite to push the Russians out. Similarly, when the region was divided into states in 1924, and indeed throughout most of the 20th century, many natives didn't understand why they should have "Uzbek"



A typical street in Bukhara's old town—this one complete with Daewoo. The old city was once strictly divided into trade quarters.

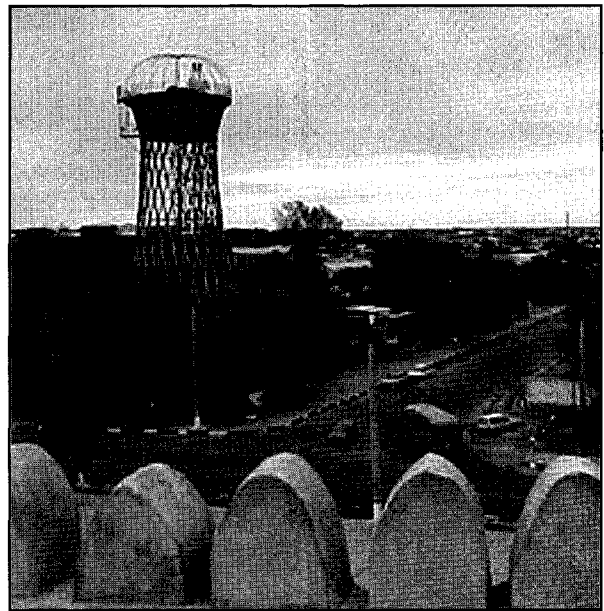
¹Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Central Asian Uprisings in the Nineteenth Century: Ferghana Under the Russians." *The Russian Review*, vol. 46, 1987, pp.267-281.

rather than, say, "Bukharan" loyalties as they had had for centuries.

As I've indicated, the Republic of Uzbekistan came into being as a separate unit in the Soviet Union as part of the national delimitation carried out in Central Asia during 1924-5. The Kremlin said the scheme was a manifestation of developments that had already occurred, and that the division of the region into states would only codify the formation of "national consciousness." In fact, nothing of the sort had been taking place. Ethnic groups formed distinct collections in some places, but they were largely dispersed throughout the region. Dividing them along national boundaries was neither natural nor easy.

The prevalent view in western academia is that national boundaries were imposed on unwilling locals for the sake of conquering the region. Alexandre Bennigsen's influential thesis concerning national delimitation was that Moscow used the policy to "divide and conquer."² This was at least partially the case, of course. Certainly for Stalin, who was tightening his grip on the entire Soviet Union, national delimitation meant a strengthening of Moscow's presence in the region. But, as historian Donald Carlisle writes, the division of Central Asia becomes much more comprehensible if seen alongside local power struggles—the very type that had been going on for centuries.³ Carlisle writes that by putting the history of the delimitation in national terms, the Soviets obscured "a thoroughly political drama."

A project for the partition of Soviet Turkestan along ethnic lines into Uzbek, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz (now called Kazakh) regions was unveiled in Moscow in 1920. In carry-



Bukhara's water tower. Before the Revolution, the city was dotted with open pools, which provided water but were also breeding grounds for diseases such as cholera and malaria. Soviet engineers filled most of these in and erected this water tower in the 1920s instead as a sign of modernity. A few of the pools—some of them very beautiful—still exist.

ing out the partition, Moscow harnessed the efforts of local collaborators in Soviet Bukhara—and chiefly that of Faizulla Khojaev. Khojaev was the son of one of Bukhara's wealthiest merchants and a member of the Bukharan Jadid reform movement (mostly Turks originally from the Volga region who had become Communists). Samarkand became the capital of the new republic of Uzbekistan. Carlisle writes that it may seem—by looking at a map of post-partition Central Asia—that the Bukharan state suffered a disastrous fate. In fact, if one considers the political events of the time, it becomes evident that Uzbekistan was really a "greater Bukhara." The Samarkand region of Turkestan, Tashkent, most of western Khiva/Khorezm, and a larger part of the Fergana Valley were combined with almost all of Soviet Bukhara, so that one could say that instead of losing Bukhara, Khojaev came to preside over what was actually the manifestation of a centuries-old desire of the Bukharan emirs: the conquering of lands of the outlying Kokand and Khivan khanates.

Thus, the jadids were largely the "winners" of the 1924 division. Uzbekistan gained the largest population in the region—six times that of any other republic—as well as the greatest wealth in agriculture and resources. Furthermore, Russified Tashkent—the major strategic center



Mastura Mufraisay, who cooked a delicious plov dinner, displayed some 19th-century Bukharan robes inside a newly restored 18th-century old-town house.

²Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerceier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1967, p.134.

³Donald S. Carlisle, "Soviet Uzbekistan: State and Nation in Historical Perspective." In *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, Beatrice Manz, ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, p.103-104.

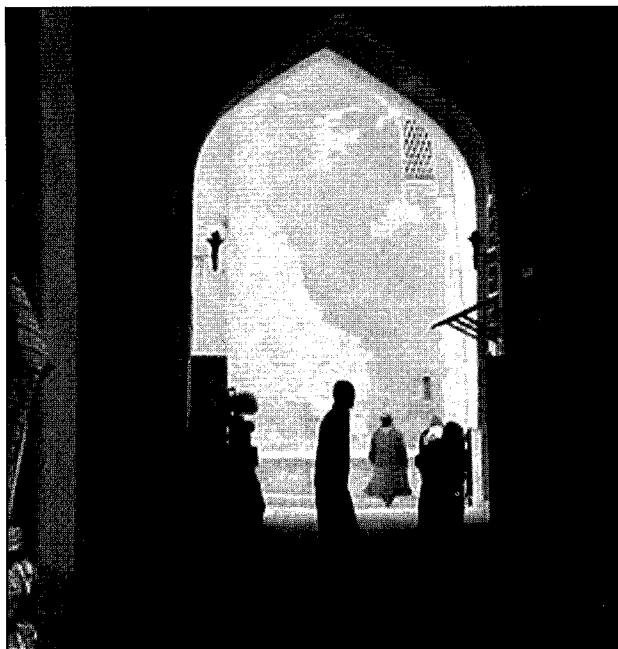
in Central Asia—should have logically been given to Kazakhstan since the surrounding area was predominantly Kazakh.⁴

In 1929, Moscow moved the capital to Tashkent, ending Khojaev's influence. This time the Kremlin relied on another set of collaborators headed by Akhmal Ikramov, the leader of the anti-Bukhara wing of the Uzbekistan Communist Party. The move was punishment for Khojaev, whom Moscow saw as too independent. Khojaev's political demise brought control of Uzbekistan closer to Moscow—which would, in the space of the coming decade, institute collectivization of the land and impose the planting of cotton. Eventually, after the launching of collectivization in 1929, which resulted in the disruption of traditional Muslim life, the 1930s purges, and the establishment of the cotton monoculture, Uzbekistan became thoroughly subordinated to Moscow.

Communist Legacy of Corruption

Although they bemoan *ad nauseam* the deprivations suffered under Communism, few residents of Uzbekistan speak openly of what everyone knows. It's still taboo to mention that the Uzbek Communist Party structure, wedded as it was to the old clan system, became uniquely crooked among the republics of the Soviet Union. In the height of Soviet bureaucratization under Brezhnev in the 1970s, when political power ostensibly radiated top down through the Soviet hierarchy, local allegiances formed the highest law of the republic.

Perhaps the most monumental problem now comes



*An arch through one of Bukhara's
three remaining trade complexes*

from decades of Moscow's quotas for cotton production. Much of the land was severely depleted by the one-crop system, leaving Uzbekistan's infrastructure inadequate for its current needs. But the cotton regime also has another legacy. Between 1976 and 1983, Uzbek Party bosses defrauded the Soviet central bank of billions of rubles during a notorious "cotton scandal." They did this by submitting *pripiski*, falsified production reports giving padded harvest results. It was but one of several scandals involving the notorious Uzbek Party general secretary, Sharaf Rashidov, who built an immense mafia machine out of Tashkent.

Brezhnev lavishly praised Rashidov for increasing production rates. Rashidov returned the favor, calling Brezhnev the "most outstanding and influential political figure of contemporary times." Besides reaping a great personal fortune, Rashidov won many awards, including ten Orders of Lenin, two Gold Stars, a Lenin Prize, Two Hero of Socialist Labor medals, a Red Banner of Labor, an Order of the Red Star, two Hammer and Sickle Gold Medals and the Badge of Honor.

Such was his power that it was only after Rashidov's death in 1983 that circumstances could change. Yuri Andropov had come to power in Moscow in 1982, after having been head of the KGB. He knew exactly what was going on in Uzbekistan, and he knew that kind of activity had to stop if the Soviet Union was going to have any chance of economic survival in the coming decade. But even the Soviet leader had difficulty in accusing Rashidov. Unable to work through the party structure—Rashidov's legacy in Uzbekistan was still too strong—he used spy satellites originally sent up to monitor the United States. Agriculture experts studied photographs of Uzbekistan's cotton fields to figure out the republic's maximum possible production rates. Hundreds of officials were eventually prosecuted. Many others, including officials from the Soviet Interior Ministry, were also implicated.

My driver Nikolai, a former KGB agent, told me he was fired from his post as a Soviet anti-narcotics and terrorism agent because he infringed on the deeply embedded clan-based system of corruption. "I arrested generals who dealt in contraband," he said. "But you reach a certain level [of officialdom], and you don't have any right to information about their activities. You can't touch them and you begin to be blamed for dishonesty."

After he was fired in the early 1990s, Nikolai says he could only earn money by working as a gypsy cab driver. "It was very humiliating," he said, and described a recent meeting with an army general. "He was once a friend of mine. He told me, 'You know what your problem is? You didn't make friends. You went against people instead. But you could have been a rich man.'"

One woman to whom I spoke described being forced to spend months picking cotton during her first years in

⁴Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, p.100.

graduate school in the 1980s. Cotton pickers slept on wooden slats, with barely enough room to move, piled on top of each other in underground caves. They picked cotton all day, working until frost covered the ground, unable to attend classes. Many students became ill, others tried to run away; none of these received diplomas.

It might seem strange that Rashidov isn't reviled in Uzbekistan today. Some of those I asked about this said the money he helped pocket would have disappeared in Moscow in any case. Some even think of him as a hero. One of Tashkent's central streets, the former Lenin Street, has been renamed Rashidov Street. And when Karimov erected a statue of Rashidov in the center of Tashkent in the mid-nineties, the president was seen as legitimizing himself by this homage to his predecessor.

Tashkent

Back in Tashkent, the city seemed more cosmopolitan and developed than I remembered it from 1996. That doesn't mean everything has changed. A large central-heating pipe, raised eight feet above ground, still wound through the courtyard outside my window. Each morning, women canvassed the neighborhoods chanting, "Milk, sour milk!" in a singing voice that sounded like the throaty-yet-high-pitched vocal turns of old Russian-Orthodox choir-song.

I often ate dinner at my relatives'—the family of my mother's cousin, Taufik. A large metal wall completely separates their house from a two-lane road. The building looks identical to all others on the street. Inside, through a door cut into the metal, there's a courtyard with roses and tulips growing in small rows. The house itself is a one-story building with a large fairly-modern kitchen, a living room with a satellite-linked Sony television and floors and couches covered in red Tajik carpets, an office with a new computer, several bedrooms and a small sauna. Behind the house is another courtyard with cherry and peach trees, grapevines and a shed with hens and roosters.

I remember a previous visit here in 1996, when Taufik had slaughtered a lamb for dinner. Taufik's wife, Fauzia, spoke about how she got to know her husband. A young secondary-school teacher in the early '60s, she'd wanted to take her students to see Samarkand, a good three-and-a-half hours' drive away, but had no means of doing so. She happened to meet a young Party worker, who, as part of his duties, was in charge of a platoon of cotton-pickers, and—more important—a truck. He came from an influential and well-educated family; his uncle had been in charge of several factories and made a point of distributing his generosity among friends and family. Young Taufik wanted to emulate him. He offered Fauzia his services, boldly stealing the vehicle for a day and giving his underlings the day off.

"I never paid too much attention to what people were saying then," Taufik interjected, half lost in thought. Taufik

is a short, swarthy, wrinkled man in his late sixties with a deep, gruff voice that served him well in positions of command. He has since retired and acts more reticently than before, but he cannot hide his enormous charisma—or the fact that he once had ties to every important political post.

"I went where there was *money*," he said in 1996, saying the word in English, half-jokingly. "*Money, money, money*. Meanwhile, everyone was building Communism... I could have risen to the top," he continued. I took him to mean that he could have become president. "But I never kissed anybody's ass. So they kept me on a certain level. I had influence, but not too much." He paused, then added, "Don't get me wrong, I wasn't a dissident. But I wasn't an ass-kisser."

Fauzia was embarrassed by her husband's straight-forwardness. But I was enthralled to hear what they thought during what I always pictured to be very dark years.

"Now we're building capitalism, right?" Taufik laughed.

"Not me," Fauzia replied somberly, as if suddenly exhausted. "I built Communism. It was very hard for me to realize that was over," she sighed. "You build capitalism, but I won't. I'm not against it, but I'm too old to start anew."

"That's all right." Taufik smiled, pouring another shot into my glass, "I'll build it, and you spend the *money money money*."

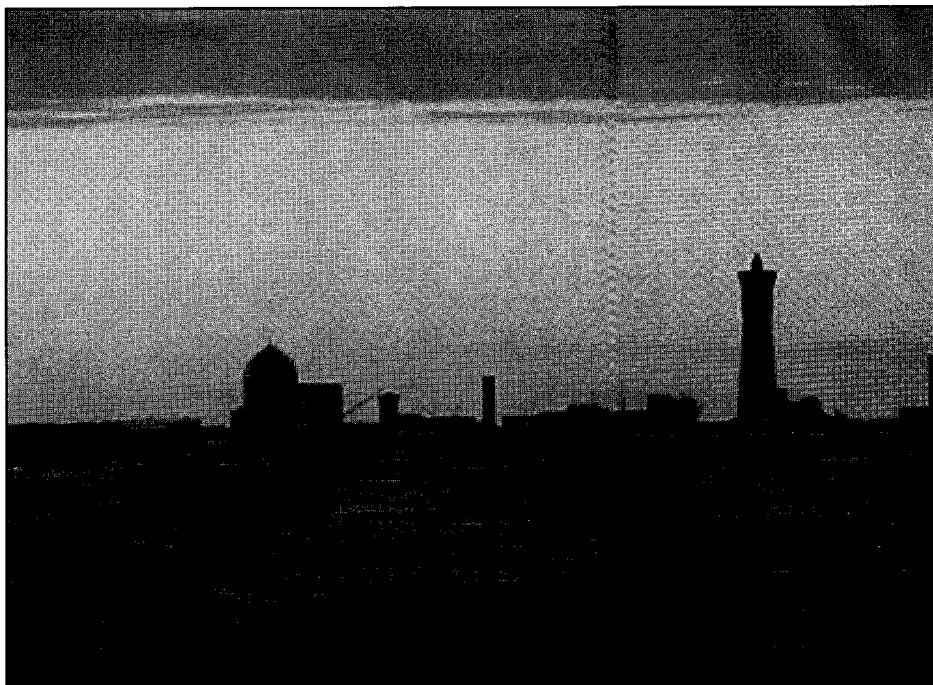
There's much less optimism today. Fauzia has died. Taufik's son, Ulugbek, who'd moved to Moscow at the age of 16, is culturally more Russian than Uzbek. Daughter Guzal, who still lives in Tashkent with her own 12-year-old daughter, Elina, is now preparing to move to the United States. She's an ultrasound specialist with a doctorate, but there's no future for her or Elina in Tashkent. (Both are also completely Russified, a sign of their family's status. Guzal speaks Uzbek, but can't write it.) Taufik will eventually also probably make the move to America. It's a depressing thought—that someone who made good in Uzbekistan can't retire in peace on the native land so important to him.

Bleak Outlook

Although the Tashkent airport is being rebuilt, I departed through the half that remains unfinished. Hulking plain-clothes security-service men accosted me at almost every turn. "Tickets! Passport!" they barked rudely. They typified for me the problems created by the so-called security measures enacted after 1999. Inside the crumbling building, personnel stood around with laconic indifference, one person to check bags, one to look at visas, one to scrutinize customs declarations; while at least 20 others milled around, eyeing wary passengers who pushed each other, jockeying for position in various lines. A moving walkway, motionless for at least ten years, still mocked those lug-

ging their carry-ons down a long corridor amid dust and filthy windows.

My departure gave me a sense, perhaps more than anything else, that things weren't getting better. To understand why, I found it necessary to look beyond simple criticism that the Karimov regime is authoritarian. Like the circumstances of Uzbekistan's creation in 1924-5, many age-old factors continue to influence current development. Even today, local allegiances in national politics continue to be underestimated. That's why Nikolai's greatest fear is that the country will disintegrate into clan warfare. Karimov's attempts to further strengthen his power only add to the possibility. The U.S. presence will most likely only strengthen those attempts. There's no pithy way to sum up a possible way out, no easy answers in this case for change toward a better life. □



Sunset over Bukhara. To the right is the Kalyan minaret. Made of fired brick in the 12th century, the structure served as a watchtower as well as a place from which to sing out calls-to-prayer. Fires were also lit there at night to guide traders and travelers making their way toward the city.

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Fellows and their Activities

Shelly Renae Browning (March 2001- 2003) • **AUSTRALIA**

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

Wendy Call (May 2000 - 2002) • **MEXICO**

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of *Italo/Latino machismo*. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Gregory Feifer (January 2000 - 2002) • **RUSSIA**

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. He sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican-American agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Peter Keller (March 2000 - 2002) • **CHILE**

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Leena Khan (April 2001-2003) • **PAKISTAN**

A U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement in Pakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

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