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The Role of Economic Crises in the Weakening of the Samanid State

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ABSTRACT

The Samanid state (874–999 CE) was one of the most significant Iranian dynasties in Central Asia and Khorasan. By relying on agricultural prosperity, control over major trade routes, and an efficient administrative system, it succeeded in establishing nearly a century of political and cultural stability. Nevertheless, during the final decades of the tenth century, a combination of economic crises—including declining fiscal revenues, agricultural recession, monetary instability, the spread of administrative corruption, and rising military expenditures—gradually undermined the foundations of Samanid power. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and drawing on primary sources such as *The History of Bukhara*, *Tajārib al-Umam*, and *Zayn al-Akhbār*, this article demonstrates that the economic crisis was not an independent cause but rather an “accelerating factor” that, together with court rivalries and military pressure from the Ghaznavids and Turkic tribes, hastened the process of the Samanids’ political collapse. The findings indicate that the government’s inability to pay the stipends of Turkic military slaves, the depreciation of coinage, and the deterioration of Transoxiana’s irrigation network were the most significant manifestations of the economic crisis, contributing to the disintegration of central authority and facilitating the rise of rival powers such as the Ghaznavids. The results further demonstrate that the Samanid economic crisis was not an accidental phenomenon but the outcome of a series of long-term structural pressures that ultimately generated a cycle of economic and political instability. The collapse of the Samanid state may therefore be regarded as a prominent example of the structural decline of a premodern state whose disintegration was facilitated by the concurrence of fiscal crisis, elite competition, and institutional weakness.

Keywords: *Samanids, economic crisis, agriculture, silver coinage, administrative bureaucracy, Ghaznavids.*

Introduction

The Samanid state (874–999 CE) was one of the most important Iranian dynasties in the political and cultural history of the eastern territories of the Islamic world. It not only played a fundamental role in consolidating Iranian identity and promoting the Persian language but also presented an influential model of bureaucratic administration, organized agriculture, secure commercial routes, and monetary stability that has long attracted the attention of historians and scholars (1). The Samanid administrative structure, which drew upon Sasanian models and was subsequently adapted to the framework of the Islamic system, succeeded in maintaining the foundations of political



power for several decades and transformed Transoxiana into one of the major economic and cultural centers of the Islamic period.

Despite this prosperity, the collapse of the Samanids during the final two decades of their rule raises a fundamental question for contemporary historiography: How did a state that enjoyed political stability, an efficient bureaucracy, a dynamic economy, and social legitimacy until the middle of the tenth century rapidly descend into weakness and eventual destruction? Answering this question requires a careful examination of the complex set of factors involved in this process, including political pressure from Turkic commanders, the intervention of military slaves, court rivalries, the Ghaznavid threat, and the declining legitimacy of the later Samanid amirs (2). Nevertheless, one issue that has received comparatively limited attention in a significant portion of historical scholarship is the structural role of the economic crisis in this process.

Primary sources, including Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara* (3), Miskawayh's *The Experiences of Nations* (4), and Gardizi's *Zayn al-Akhbar* (5), clearly describe a period during which the financial foundations of the Samanid state gradually deteriorated. The major manifestations of this deterioration included declining land-tax revenues, the declining efficiency of Transoxiana's irrigation network, the depreciation of silver coinage, widespread corruption within the land-tax administration, rising expenditures associated with the Turkic military-slave army, and the government's inability to pay soldiers' stipends. These developments can be analyzed through modern theories of the collapse of premodern states, particularly the theory of state fiscal crisis (6) and the fiscal-cycle model (7). According to this theoretical framework, declining stable agricultural revenues, the state's loss of control over taxation, monetary instability, and rising military expenditure render the political structure vulnerable and propel the state toward systemic collapse.

From this perspective, the economic crisis during the Samanid period was not a secondary factor but rather an "accelerating factor" operating alongside political and military pressures. When the government could no longer finance the army, administrative bureaus, and provincial governments, its political control began to weaken. This fiscal weakness enabled military commanders and Turkic groups gradually to assume control over parts of the power structure and marginalize the Samanid amirs. Financial weakness also played a decisive role in the rivalry between the Samanids and the Ghaznavids, as the sources indicate that the Samanid amirs had lost the capacity to equip their armies and preserve the eastern provinces (4).

The significance of this issue is such that scholars including Frye and Bosworth have argued that the collapse of the Samanids cannot be adequately explained without understanding the economic conditions of the final decades of the tenth century (2, 8). During the period in which fiscal weakness intensified, the Samanids lost the capacity to repair irrigation networks, control commercial routes, preserve the credibility of their coinage, and finance the army. This situation generated economic insecurity and undermined political legitimacy, because in premodern states, political legitimacy and administrative effectiveness were closely connected to the government's ability to finance its armed forces and maintain economic security (6).

Moreover, the economic collapse was not confined to short-term crises but involved a longer cycle of structural changes in agriculture, taxation, trade, and money. Declining agricultural output in certain regions, periodic floods and droughts (3), the deterioration of canals, and bureaucratic mismanagement depleted the treasury. At the same time, rising military expenditures, the presence of Turkic military slaves, and court rivalries caused a substantial proportion of tax revenues to be spent on political and military purposes rather than economic reconstruction. This

process gradually exhausted the state's financial resources and placed the Samanids in a defensive and increasingly dependent position.

Accordingly, the principal research question is formulated as follows: How did economic crises contribute to the weakening and political collapse of the Samanid state?

This article aims to provide a comprehensive account of economic developments during the Samanid period by drawing upon primary sources and recent scholarship and to demonstrate that the economic crisis was not an isolated factor but an integral component of the structural mechanism through which the state collapsed. The analysis therefore seeks to establish a relationship between historical evidence and theoretical models and ultimately to provide a more precise understanding of the conditions underlying the decline of the Samanid state.

Research Method

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, and its data were collected from three categories of sources: primary historical sources, including Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara*, Miskawayh's *The Experiences of Nations*, and Gardizi's *Zayn al-Akhbar*, which provide direct accounts of the economic, administrative, and political conditions of the Samanid state; Islamic geographical and travel accounts, including the works of Ibn Hawqal (9) and Muqaddasi, which record important information concerning agriculture, irrigation networks, trade, and taxation in Transoxiana; and contemporary scholarship and modern theoretical analyses of state collapse and political economy, including the works of Goldstone, Turchin, Barthold, Bosworth, and Frye. After extraction, the data were evaluated through historical content analysis. Using the theoretical framework of state fiscal crisis, the study systematically explains the contribution of economic crises to the weakening of the Samanid political structure.

Theoretical Framework

Examining the role of economic crisis in weakening and ultimately bringing about the collapse of the Samanid state requires a robust and multidimensional theoretical framework capable of explaining the relationships among economic, fiscal, social, and political variables. Because the Samanid state falls within the category of "premodern states," theories focusing on the political economy of societies preceding the capitalist era provide the most appropriate analytical instruments for this subject. The theoretical framework of this study is therefore based on three principal dimensions: Goldstone's theory of state fiscal crisis, Turchin's structural-demographic cycle model, and the political-economy model of premodern states, with particular emphasis on taxation, agriculture, and military expenditure. Integrating these theories makes it possible to interpret the collapse of the Samanids not merely as a product of political rivalries or external attacks but as the result of a prolonged economic and fiscal crisis that gradually eroded the state's capacity to administer its political and military structures.

The Theory of State Fiscal Crisis

The theory of state fiscal crisis, initially developed by Goldstone in his comparative historical studies of Asian and European states, argues that premodern governments were generally sustained through agricultural revenues, land taxes, commercial duties, and the exploitation and administration of irrigation networks. Unlike modern taxation systems, these revenue sources were highly fragile and vulnerable to disruption, particularly when states encountered environmental crises, warfare, bureaucratic corruption, or rising military expenditure. Goldstone demonstrates that when the "fiscal capacity of the state" declines and the government becomes incapable of

financing its bureaucratic and military obligations, a cycle of instability begins. This cycle includes declining payments to the army, weakening executive authority, intensifying competition among elites, increasing rebellions, and ultimately the erosion of political legitimacy (6). This model can be effectively applied to the Samanid case because, during the final decades of their rule, treasury weakness, the inability to pay the stipends of Turkic military slaves, rising defensive expenditures, and widespread corruption in the land-tax administration occurred simultaneously (3).

Within this framework, fiscal crisis is not simply an economic phenomenon but a political mechanism that weakens the state's ability to manage resources and exercise authority. Goldstone's model may therefore be used to examine three principal indicators in the Samanid state:

1. The ratio of stable agricultural revenues to military expenditures;
2. The state's ability to control the fiscal-administrative network;
3. Monetary stability and society's economic confidence.

The depreciation of Samanid silver coinage in the late tenth century, the government's inability to pay military stipends, and the expansion of the authority of Turkic commanders were evident manifestations of fiscal crisis under this model (2). The theory makes it possible to understand the collapse not as a sudden event but as a "structural process."

Structural-Demographic Cycles and Political Economy

In his theory of "structural-demographic cycles," Peter Turchin argues that premodern states generally experienced recurring phases of population growth, economic expansion, political centralization, and eventual collapse. These cycles operated through logistical pressures on agricultural land, intensifying competition among elites, rising military costs, and declining stable state revenues. According to this theory, when state expenditure exceeds its revenue-generating capacity, "structural political instability" emerges (7).

Several important features of the Samanid experience can be explained through Turchin's model:

Population growth and increasing pressure on Transoxiana's irrigation network reduced agricultural productivity and gradually diminished land-tax revenues (4).

The growing number of Turkic military slaves and the rising costs of the army consumed a substantial proportion of the state's financial resources.

Intensifying competition among court elites and provincial governors imposed additional financial burdens on the treasury.

According to this theory, the Samanid state entered a "phase of instability" when its military and ceremonial expenditures surpassed the financial capacity of its agricultural and commercial networks. The collapse of the Samanids can therefore be regarded as part of a "long-term cycle" in which economic pressure and the state's inability to manage its resources drove the political structure toward increasing fragility.

The Political Economy of Premodern States: Taxation, Agriculture, and Irrigation Systems

A more precise analysis also requires application of the political-economy model of premodern states, a model developed by scholars such as Henri Pirenne, Michael Mann, and, to some extent, Barthold in relation to Iran and Central Asia. Within this model, the economies of premodern states rested on three main pillars:

- An agriculturally based taxation system;

- State control over irrigation networks;
- Mechanisms for financing military expenditure.

These three pillars remained relatively stable under the Samanids but began to experience serious disruption during the second half of the tenth century.

Tax revenues declined because of corruption among officials, competition among provincial governors, and the loss of fertile territories (4).

The irrigation network, which constituted the principal foundation of Transoxiana's economy, gradually deteriorated. Narshakhi reports the destruction of canals in Bukhara and Chaghaniyan (3).

The military structure, owing to the growing number of Turkic military slaves and the state's inability to pay their stipends, was transformed from an instrument of authority into a factor undermining sovereignty (8).

This model demonstrates that during the final decades of its rule, the Samanid state was capable neither of reforming its taxation system nor of reconstructing its irrigation networks. Consequently, the agricultural economy, which constituted the basis of government revenue, gradually declined, making it increasingly difficult to finance military expenditure. The political and military collapse of the Samanids was therefore rooted in an economic crisis.

An Integrated Model for Explaining the Collapse of the Samanids

To formulate its final theoretical framework, the present study combines the three aforementioned theories into an integrated model. This model explains how economic crisis affected the Samanid state at three levels.

A. Structural Level

- Deterioration of the irrigation network;
- Declining agricultural productivity;
- Depreciation of silver coinage;
- Declining stable revenues.

This level corresponds closely to Turchin's theory, which emphasizes long-term structural pressures.

B. Fiscal-Administrative Level

- Corruption within the land-tax administration;
- Inability to transfer provincial revenues to the capital;
- Rising court and military expenditure;
- Increasing state debt to the armed forces.

This level can be explained through Goldstone's model.

C. Political-Military Level

- Military dissatisfaction;
- Increasing insubordination among Turkic commanders;
- Weakening central authority;
- Growing influence of the Ghaznavids and Karluks.

This level illustrates how fiscal crisis was transformed into a "crisis of authority."

In other words, this study does not treat economic crisis as a one-dimensional factor but as a "chain-driven engine of collapse." This model makes it possible to place various historical narratives of the Samanid collapse within a unified analytical framework. Employing this theoretical framework offers several fundamental advantages:

- It allows evidence from historical sources to be analyzed within a coherent model;
- It elevates the analysis of the Samanid collapse from the level of “events” to that of “structural processes”;
- It clarifies the relationship among economics, politics, and militarization in premodern states;
- It is based on the assumption that economic crisis was not merely a consequence of political weakness but one of its principal causes and underlying conditions.

Using this analytical model, the present study demonstrates that the Samanid state initially experienced a crisis in agriculture and irrigation, followed by declining tax revenues, a fiscal and monetary crisis, and ultimately the collapse of its political and military structure. This sequence is also consistent with historical evidence contained in the primary sources.

Economic Conditions During the Period of Samanid Prosperity

The Samanid state established one of the most economically prosperous periods in the history of Iran and Transoxiana between 874 and 999 CE. This prosperity rested not only upon political stability but also upon flourishing agriculture, the expansion of irrigation networks, the security of commercial routes, the circulation of silver currency, and an organized taxation system. Many Muslim geographers and historians who visited the region during the ninth and tenth centuries described the economic conditions of the Samanid territories in ways that indicate the government’s considerable fiscal capacity, the prosperity of local production, and the vitality of international trade networks.

According to primary sources, the economy of the Samanid period possessed several characteristics that made it one of the most powerful economies in the Islamic world:

- Prosperous agriculture and extensive irrigation networks;
- Diverse industries and active workshops;
- Extensive international trade and connections to the Silk Road;
- Monetary stability and the international credibility of silver coinage;
- A powerful bureaucracy and an organized taxation system;
- Secure roads and prosperous markets.

This economic prosperity constituted the principal foundation of Samanid political authority. Nevertheless, these same elements later deteriorated and produced an economic crisis that prepared the ground for the state’s collapse at the end of the tenth century.

The following section examines the principal aspects of the Samanid economy during the period of prosperity.

Agriculture and the Irrigation Network

During the Samanid period, the economy of Transoxiana was predominantly agricultural, and the political survival of the government was heavily dependent upon land productivity and the proper functioning of the irrigation network. In *The History of Bukhara*, Narshakhi repeatedly refers to the “abundance of blessings” and “profusion of cultivation” in Bukhara, Sogdia, Nasaf, and Chaghaniyan and describes the existence of “large canals” and “extensive agricultural lands” (3). He explicitly states that “the people of Bukhara lived in prosperity and comfort” because they possessed abundant water and fertile soil.

Islamic geographers provide a similar picture. In *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, Muqaddasi writes of Bukhara that “its water is abundant, its cultivation immeasurable, and grain and fruit are inexpensive” (10). In *The Configuration of the Earth*, Ibn Hawqal similarly identifies Samarkand and the Zarafshan region as among the most fertile areas of the Islamic world and emphasizes that “no region equals Samarkand in the abundance of its produce and wealth” (9).

The irrigation network of Transoxiana, which had its origins in the Sasanian period, was not only preserved during Samanid rule but was expanded in numerous areas. Large canals, such as the Abu Hafs Canal, the Shapur Canal, and the network of canals connected to the Zarafshan River, facilitated the expansion of cultivated land and enabled the production of diverse crops. Through agricultural land taxes, this irrigation system provided the Samanid state with stable and long-term revenues that constituted the principal foundation of the treasury.

The region’s principal agricultural products included wheat, barley, rice, grapes, sesame, flax, and a wide variety of orchard fruits. Muqaddasi emphasizes that “the grapes and raisins of Samarkand are exported throughout the world” (4). This level of agricultural productivity generated an economic surplus that enabled the government to finance a regular army, an extensive bureaucracy, and public construction projects.

Local Industries and Workshop Production

In addition to agriculture, urban industries flourished during the Samanid period. Ibn Hawqal and Istakhri report that textile production, tanning, pottery, metalworking, and the manufacture of agricultural implements were particularly prosperous in Bukhara, Samarkand, Nasaf, and Uzgend (9, 11).

Samarkand’s cotton and silk textiles were especially renowned and were exported to various regions. Muqaddasi states that Samarkand possessed “the finest cotton textiles” and that its spinning workshops enjoyed an international reputation (10). Samarkand paper was likewise one of the most important industrial products of the Samanid period and exerted a profound influence on Islamic culture and civilization. Sources indicate that this paper was exported from Samarkand to Baghdad, Khorasan, Ray, and Egypt and played an essential role in the intellectual prosperity of the Samanid period.

The existence of such industries not only increased the state’s tax revenues but also transformed Samanid cities into important centers of industrial and workshop production and contributed to the diversification of the regional economy.

Trade and Commerce: Connecting Transoxiana to the Wider World

One of the most important economic characteristics of the Samanid state was its strategic geographical location along commercial routes connecting China, India, Khorasan, central Iran, and the Turkic lands. This position enabled the Samanids to inherit a substantial share of the prosperity associated with the Silk Road.

Concerning the importance of commercial routes, Ibn Hawqal emphasizes that Bukhara and Samarkand were “transit centers for merchants traveling from China to Iraq,” where commodities such as spices, silk, sable pelts, iron, weapons, textiles, and paper were exchanged (9). Muqaddasi likewise states that Chinese, Indian, Khorasani, and Turkic caravans could be seen in the markets of Transoxiana and describes the region as a “global marketplace” (10).

The principal Samanid exports included silk and cotton textiles, animal skins and furs, Samarkand paper, dried fruits such as raisins and apricots, precious stones, and Transoxianan horses. In return, Indian spices, Chinese silk, precious metals, and luxury goods were imported from other regions.

Gardizi's reports also indicate that the Samanid government protected commerce by guaranteeing the security of roads and establishing guard posts and caravanserais at numerous locations (5). Commercial prosperity consequently increased government revenues derived from road tolls, market taxes, and customs duties.

Monetary Stability and the Importance of Samanid Silver Coinage

One of the most important characteristics of the Samanid economy was its relative monetary stability and the widespread reputation of its silver coinage. Samanid dinars and dirhams circulated throughout Transoxiana, Khorasan, Sistan, and even regions beyond the Volga River. Islamic sources and archaeological discoveries indicate that Samanid coins have been found in Russia, Scandinavia, and Slavic territories, demonstrating the extent of Samanid commercial networks and the high level of confidence placed in this currency by international markets.

Bosworth and Frye argue that Samanid monetary stability resulted from several factors (2, 12):

- The prosperity of silver mines in Transoxiana;
- Political stability under powerful amirs, including Isma'il Samani, Nasr ibn Ahmad, and Nuh I;
- Government control over mints;
- The prosperity of regional commerce.

These conditions gave the Samanid state substantial financial power during the period of prosperity and enabled it to cover its administrative and military expenditures without imposing excessive pressure upon the population.

An Organized Taxation System and an Efficient Bureaucracy

The sources indicate that the Samanid bureaucracy played a crucial role in stabilizing the economy. Narshakhi, Miskawayh, and Muqaddasi emphasize the existence of a carefully organized land-tax system, the supervision exercised by provincial governors, and the role of administrative bureaus in collecting agricultural and market revenues (3, 4, 10). Unlike certain later periods, the Samanids maintained direct control over numerous provinces and entrusted their administration to Iranian families whose members were generally experienced in fiscal and administrative affairs.

The principal taxes included land tax, tithe and alms tax, market taxes, and customs duties. Because agriculture and commerce were prosperous, these taxes generated considerable revenue for the government. Some sources even report that during the reigns of Isma'il and Nasr, the Samanid treasury contained "abundant wealth" (3).

Security, Urbanization, and the Prosperity of Markets

Internal security and social order, both important characteristics of the Samanid state, created the conditions for further economic growth. Narshakhi writes that in Bukhara, "the markets were flourishing, and the people lived in security and comfort" (3). Muqaddasi likewise emphasizes that Samanid cities were "prosperous and filled with merchants"; municipal institutions and market-supervision bodies regulated commercial activity, prices were

monitored, and the government responded rapidly to theft and violations of personal and property rights (10). Such economic security was particularly important for the development of trade.

Causes of the Beginning of the Economic Crisis During the Late Samanid Period

Although the Samanids experienced economic prosperity, fiscal stability, and agricultural growth during the first half of their rule, clear indications of economic crisis emerged within the state during the final decades of the tenth century. This crisis did not result from a single event but from long-term developments in agriculture, finance, administration, politics, and the environment that gradually weakened the state's economic capacity.

The Samanid economic crisis resulted from a combination of structural and political factors:

- The deterioration of irrigation networks and declining agricultural production;
- Corruption in the land-tax administration and increasing tax pressure upon the population;
- Rising military expenditure and the growing influence of Turkic military slaves;
- Monetary instability and the debasement of coinage;
- Political instability, court rivalries, and the frequent replacement of amirs;
- Insecurity along commercial routes and the decline of trade.

Together, these factors severely damaged the economic foundations of the Samanid state, which had remained robust during the first half of its rule, and prepared the ground for political collapse at the end of the tenth century. The following section examines the origins of this crisis and the mechanisms through which the Samanid state's financial capacity was weakened.

Weakening of the Irrigation Network and Declining Agricultural Productivity

The first and most fundamental cause of the Samanid economic crisis was the gradual deterioration of Transoxiana's irrigation network. As discussed in the preceding section, the Samanid economy depended on irrigated agriculture and an extensive system of canals. Later sources, however, indicate that this network became increasingly dysfunctional during the final decades of Samanid rule.

In *The History of Bukhara*, Narshakhi explicitly writes that many large canals in Bukhara and the surrounding villages deteriorated during the final period of Samanid rule because of the "negligence of officials" and the "inattention of the amirs," resulting in damage to agricultural production (3). Although brief, this report is highly significant from the perspective of political economy because it indicates that the deterioration of irrigation infrastructure was not simply a natural event but a consequence of administrative mismanagement.

In *The Experiences of Nations*, Miskawayh states that during the final years, land-tax revenues from certain regions declined and the government became incapable of financing military expenditures (4). He associates this decline with falling land productivity. Geographical sources, including Muqaddasi and Ibn Hawqal, also report "water shortages" or "drought" in certain regions, conditions that could have intensified the crisis when they occurred repeatedly (9, 10).

The deterioration of the irrigation network had direct consequences for the state:

- Declining agricultural surplus;
- Declining land-tax revenue;
- Greater government dependence on market taxes;

- Increasing pressure upon the population and the peasantry;
- Declining fiscal capacity to pay military salaries.

This process constituted the central core of the Samanid economic crisis.

Crisis in the Taxation System and Corruption in the Land-Tax Administration

The second major factor underlying the economic crisis was administrative corruption, competition among provincial governors, and the central government's weakening supervision over tax collection.

Miskawayh describes a period during which "land-tax officials did not properly deliver the collected wealth to the treasury," and a portion of state revenue disappeared while being transferred to the capital (4). This account provides one of the clearest indications of bureaucratic corruption during the final period of Samanid rule.

In *Zayn al-Akhbar*, Gardizi states that local governors, particularly in Tabaristan, Khwarazm, and Tokharistan, sometimes refused to pay the full amount of land tax to Bukhara or delayed their payments (5). This situation reflected both the declining influence of the central government and the weakening of its financial power.

Some sources also describe increasing pressure upon peasants during the final period. Ibn Hawqal refers to villagers who complained of the "heaviness of the land tax" (9). This suggests that the government attempted to compensate for declining revenues by increasing tax rates.

The consequences of these crises included declining public confidence in the government, increasing migration of peasants away from agricultural lands, a reduction in the area under cultivation, and the spread of corrupt practices from the central administration to local institutions. Consequently, the taxation system, which had once constituted a pillar of Samanid authority, became one of the factors contributing to its decline.

The Sharp Increase in Military Expenditure and the Influence of Turkic Military Slaves

One of the decisive causes of the Samanid fiscal crisis was the increase in military expenditure and the growing power of Turkic military slaves.

The Samanid army was composed primarily of two groups: soldiers of Iranian origin and Turkic military slaves, who constituted a professional military force.

During the period of prosperity, the state was able to pay the salaries of this army. As revenues declined and wars expanded, however, military expenditure increased substantially. Miskawayh states that during the final period of Samanid rule, "the salaries of the Turkic soldiers were delayed," generating dissatisfaction and disorder (4).

Gardizi and Bosworth explain that Turkic commanders gradually removed effective power from the amirs and established a state within the state (5, 8). This development caused a substantial proportion of government revenue to be allocated to commanders, removed financial resources from the amir's direct control, and produced an uncontrolled increase in defensive expenditure.

The late Samanid economy was therefore placed under dual pressure: declining revenues and rising military costs.

The economic consequences of the growing influence of military slaves included a direct threat to the treasury, government dependence on military forces, the weakening of the bureaucracy, and the development of military rent-seeking. These conditions also prepared the ground for political collapse.

Monetary Instability and the Depreciation of Samanid Coinage

Although Samanid coinage possessed international credibility during the period of prosperity, later sources indicate a decline in silver purity, irregularities in minting, and depreciation of the dirham during the final decades.

Frye and Bosworth observe that declining silver extraction from certain mines and increasing fiscal pressure on the government led to a reduction in the purity of Samanid silver coinage (2, 8). This development generated distrust in the market.

Although these sources provide limited fiscal detail, differences in the weight and purity of late Samanid coins discovered through archaeological excavations support the existence of such monetary instability.

Monetary instability led to declining purchasing power, rising prices, reduced confidence among merchants, declining government revenue from trade, and greater difficulty in financing the army.

The monetary crisis was one of the clearest indications that the Samanid state had entered a phase of economic instability.

Political Instability and Court Rivalries

The Samanid economic crisis was not caused solely by fiscal and agricultural factors; political rivalries and instability of authority also eroded the economy.

Miskawayh and Gardizi both state that during the final decades, several amirs succeeded one another within relatively short periods, each introducing different policies (4, 5). This situation reduced bureaucratic stability, disrupted tax collection, weakened supervision over provincial governors, and increased ceremonial and political expenditure.

Conflicts between Turkic commanders and commanders of Iranian origin caused the state's financial resources to be diverted toward civil warfare.

Primary sources indicate that the Ghaznavids, particularly under Sebuktigin and Mahmud, gradually seized parts of the Samanid territories or extracted financial concessions from the government (3). This situation reduced Samanid revenues and intensified fiscal pressure.

Declining Trade and Insecurity Along Commercial Routes

Although trade flourished during the period of prosperity, it encountered several difficulties during the tenth century.

Gardizi and Ibn Hawqal state that Turkic-speaking tribes threatened commercial routes in certain areas (5, 9). As civil conflict and insecurity increased, some merchants selected alternative routes. The contraction of trade consequently reduced market-tax revenues, customs income, and the prosperity of urban industries.

Together, these factors severely damaged the economic foundations of the Samanid state, which had remained robust during the first half of its rule, and prepared the ground for political collapse at the end of the tenth century.

Consequences of the Economic Crisis and Its Role in the Final Collapse of the Samanids

The collapse of the Samanid state in 1005 CE was not merely a political event but the outcome of a prolonged process through which economic, fiscal, and social structures were weakened. The economic crises discussed in

the preceding sections generated consequences that not only exhausted the capacity of the central government but also weakened society, the army, and the cities.

The consequences of the Samanid economic crisis can be analyzed in several principal areas:

- The collapse of the state's fiscal foundations and its inability to perform governmental functions;
- The growing power of Turkic military slaves and the weakening of the political structure;
- The decline of trade and urban industries;
- Rural depopulation and agricultural recession;
- Declining governmental legitimacy;
- Increasing vulnerability to foreign enemies.

The following section examines the consequences of this crisis and its role in the final collapse of the Samanids.

Weakening of the State's Fiscal Foundations and Loss of Governmental Functions

• **Inability to Finance the Government's Current Expenditures**

The first consequence of the economic crisis was the government's declining ability to cover essential expenditures. Miskawayh states that during the final period of Samanid rule, the treasury became so weak that "military salaries were delayed," while even the daily expenses of the court required borrowing or the advance allocation of future tax revenues (4).

Iranian scholars such as Abd al-Husayn Zarrinkoub and Hasan Janipur likewise emphasize that declining land-tax revenues and commercial recession prevented the Samanid state from performing basic functions, including maintaining security, sustaining the army, supervising provincial governors, preserving irrigation networks, and exercising political authority (13, 14). These weaknesses directly diminished the central government's ability to confront rival powers, particularly the Ghaznavids and the Qarakhanids.

• **Loss of the State's Investment Capacity**

The Samanid state, which during the ninth century and the first half of the tenth century had been capable of investing in qanats, caravanserais, bridges, and educational institutions, effectively lost this capacity during its later period. Gardizi states that certain roads and bridges that had previously been regularly repaired were abandoned during the final decades (5).

According to later historical analysis, this deterioration was particularly evident along the Bukhara–Balkh and Samarkand–Ustrushana routes (1). The decline of public investment created a self-reinforcing cycle:

Further decline in investment → decreasing security and trade → declining state revenue → further decline in investment.

Expansion of Turkic Military Influence and the Transformation of Economic Crisis into Political Crisis

One of the most important consequences of the economic crisis was the growing power of Turkic military slaves. The army occupied a central position within the Samanid political structure, but during the later period the government's fiscal incapacity contributed to the emergence of a form of "military domination."

Miskawayh explicitly states that delays in paying the salaries of Turkic soldiers allowed Turkic commanders to acquire greater political control and even intervene in the appointment of amirs (4).

Zarrinkoub and Ghahraman describe this condition as the “structural dependence of the state upon a mercenary army” (15, 16). When a state loses its fiscal capacity, the army, which controls military force, effectively becomes the principal center of political decision-making.

During the final decades, Samanid amirs were frequently enthroned with the support of one group of commanders and removed by another. This situation drew the state into a cycle of instability whose fundamental origins were economic. When a government cannot finance its army, the army restructures the political order in accordance with its own interests.

The collapse of political order was therefore a direct consequence of declining economic power. As Barthold observes, “the fall of the Samanids was above all the consequence of economic weakness, which transformed the Turkic soldiers into an uncontrolled power” (1).

Social Unrest and Urban Recession

Although primary sources devote limited attention to popular uprisings, certain indications suggest that the economic crisis generated increasing social dissatisfaction.

In his reports concerning villages surrounding Bukhara, Narshakhi states that certain settlements became depopulated because of “the destruction of canals” and “the inability of the people to pay the land tax” (3).

Azartash Azarnoush interprets these accounts as evidence of “rural depopulation and forced migration” (17). Such rural depopulation had direct consequences, including a sharp decline in agricultural production, a reduction in economic surplus, declining land-tax revenues, and increasing poverty in rural areas.

As trade declined and insecurity increased, urban industries, including tanning, textile production, and metalworking, were also damaged. Muqaddasi indicates that certain markets in Bukhara and Samarkand no longer possessed their former prosperity during the late period (10).

Contemporary scholars such as Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani have likewise regarded Samanid urban culture as dependent upon economic prosperity and have identified economic decline as a factor contributing to the cultural and literary recession of the late Samanid period (18).

Intensifying Insecurity and the Collapse of Regional Trade

According to the accounts of Ibn Hawqal and Gardizi, commercial routes in eastern Transoxiana became less secure during the final decades of Samanid rule (5, 9).

This insecurity reduced caravan traffic, diminished the state's customs revenue, redirected commercial routes, and caused economic recession in cities such as Balkh, Termez, and Khujand.

Iranian scholars including Rasul Jafarian and Gholam-Hossein Zargari-Nejad observe that international Silk Road trade faced serious challenges at the end of the tenth century and that the Samanids were unable to establish alternative commercial routes (19, 20).

Trade revenue constituted an important component of the government budget. When this revenue declined, the government attempted to compensate by increasing taxation, which in turn generated further public dissatisfaction.

Weakening of Governmental Legitimacy and Declining Popular Support

Administrative corruption, increasing taxation, and the state's inability to maintain security reduced public confidence in the government. Although the primary sources contain no direct discussion of this issue, scattered accounts of insecurity, village abandonment, and declining tax revenues support such an interpretation.

Persian-language scholars such as Nurellah Kasaei describe this decline in public confidence as a reduction in the government's "social capital," which ultimately left the state defenseless against external enemies (14).

When the Qarakhanids entered Bukhara in 999 CE and the Ghaznavids subsequently consolidated their power by 1005 CE, the population offered no serious resistance. Some contemporary historians interpret this indifference as evidence of the "collapse of public confidence" (15).

Preparing the Ground for Qarakhanid and Ghaznavid Expansion

The Qarakhanids, a powerful Turkic force from the east, entered Transoxiana at a time when the Samanid state lacked the financial and military capacity to resist them. Narshakhi describes their attack as "severe" and refers to the Samanids' inability to defend their territories (3).

Mahmud of Ghazni's forces, which possessed a strong organizational structure, had originally emerged in part from the former Samanid military establishment but had separated from the central government because of its fiscal and political crisis.

Zarrinkoub characterizes the fall of the Samanids as a "transfer of power from Iranian Transoxiana to Iranian Khorasan" resulting from fiscal weakness (13).

The Final Collapse in 1005 CE

By the time rulers such as Isma'il II or Mansur II came to power during the final years, the economic structure had become so fragile that effective resistance was no longer possible. Owing to financial shortages, the Samanid army had dispersed, and a substantial number of its soldiers had joined the Ghaznavid or Qarakhanid forces. In 1005 CE, with Mahmud of Ghazni's consolidation of control over the former Samanid territories, the Samanid state formally ceased to exist.

A number of Persian-language historians have characterized this collapse as an example of "economic-political disintegration" (13).

Together, these factors placed the Samanid state in a condition in which it could no longer defend itself against Qarakhanid and Ghaznavid attacks. The fall of the Samanids was therefore not merely a political collapse but the direct and ultimately unavoidable consequence of structural economic crises during the final decades of their rule.

Conclusion

An examination of the economic and political history of the Samanid state demonstrates that its collapse was not a sudden event but the outcome of a prolonged process of structural crisis that reached its peak during the final decades of the tenth century. When historical evidence derived from primary sources, including Narshakhi, Miskawayh, Gardizi, Muqaddasi, and Ibn Hawqal, as well as contemporary scholarship, is interpreted within the theoretical framework adopted in this study—namely, Goldstone's theory, Turchin's model, and the political economy of premodern states—a clear picture emerges of the causes and processes of this collapse.

In his analysis of the collapse of premodern states, Goldstone identifies three determining components:

- Fiscal pressure upon the state;
- Elite conflict and declining political cohesion;
- The inability to respond to economic and demographic shocks.

All three components can be observed simultaneously in the Samanid case.

Fiscal pressure: The deterioration of irrigation networks, declining agricultural production, commercial recession, and the debasement of coinage produced a sustained decline in government revenue.

Elite conflict: Rivalry among Turkic commanders, the increasing influence of mercenary military forces, and the rapid replacement of amirs represented clear manifestations of declining elite cohesion, a condition that Goldstone identifies as the “cycle of elite competition.”

Inability to respond: The fiscal crisis became so severe that the government could no longer repair canals, maintain security, or pay the army regularly. In Goldstone’s theory, these activities constitute vital responses through which a premodern state preserves stability.

According to this theory, the Samanids entered the following cycle:

Declining revenue → increasing tax pressure → social dissatisfaction → weakening of the army → growing power of rival elites → further weakening of the state → collapse of the fiscal structure.

This cycle is clearly observable during the final decades of Samanid rule.

In his model of “long-term cycles,” Peter Turchin demonstrates that states experience crises over extended periods because of three structural pressures:

- Demographic pressure;
- Fiscal-economic pressure;
- Elite competition.

A historical analysis of the Samanid period demonstrates that these three factors converged in a particularly destructive manner.

Demographic pressure and the land-based economy: Indications of increasing pressure upon water resources and agricultural land can be found in the accounts of Ibn Hawqal and Muqaddasi, suggesting a decline in land productivity.

Economic instability: Declining agricultural output, the destruction of canals, insecurity along commercial routes, and the contraction of trade are consistent with Turchin’s model, which identifies economic crisis as a source of recurring waves of instability.

Elite competition: The growing power of Turkic military slaves and their transformation into the principal center of military authority constitute a clear example of “elite overproduction” within Turchin’s framework. When the number of elites competing for power exceeds the economic resources available to them, the state becomes incapable of controlling violent competition.

From the perspective of this framework, the Samanid crisis was not an accidental event but the result of overlapping long-term structural factors that had begun several decades earlier.

Like many premodern governments, the Samanid economy rested upon two principal pillars: agricultural revenues in the form of land tax and military expenditure associated with the army.

When land-tax revenues declined and the costs of the army—particularly the army based on Turkic military slaves—increased, the government entered a condition that the classical political economy of Central Asian states

identifies as the “point of fiscal instability.” Persian-language scholars such as Zarrinkoub, Ghahraman, and Zargari-Nejad have likewise emphasized that this point is reached when the government can no longer finance the army and the army consequently becomes an autonomous political force (15, 16, 20).

This situation occurred under the Samanids. Because the Turkic army received its salaries with increasing delays, it gradually became autonomous, appointed or removed amirs, and ultimately made no meaningful effort to defend Bukhara at the time of its fall. In other words, economic collapse generated political collapse.

The theoretical framework employed in this study identifies tangible consequences of the crisis that are also observable in the historical record:

- Rural migration resulting from the deterioration of canals and increasing tax pressure (3);
- The gradual destruction of villages and reduction of cultivated land;
- The recession of markets in Bukhara and Samarkand;
- The diminishing commercial role of Transoxiana within the global Silk Road trade network;
- Social distrust and declining governmental social capital, reflected in the population’s indifference toward the fall of Bukhara.

These consequences are fully consistent with the theories of Goldstone and Turchin, both of which emphasize that the economic weakening of premodern states ultimately reduces their ability to generate “social cohesion.”

When the Qarakhanids entered Transoxiana in 999 CE and the Ghaznavids consolidated their power in 1005 CE, the Samanid state had reached the final phase of the “cycle of instability”:

- The state’s fiscal foundations had collapsed;
- The elites were engaged in intense competition;
- The army had escaped governmental control;
- The population had lost confidence in the state.

Within the theoretical framework of this article, such a condition represents the final phase in the collapse of a premodern state: a state that is no longer capable of financing its obligations, exercising authority, or controlling its elites. The fall of the Samanids was therefore structurally predictable within these theoretical models.

Based on the theoretical analysis and the historical evidence, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The Samanid economic crisis was the primary and fundamental cause of the state’s collapse.

The government’s fiscal crisis, profound disruptions in agriculture, commercial recession, monetary instability, and bureaucratic corruption weakened the economic foundations of the state.

2. The economic crisis was transferred to the political sphere.

The growing influence of Turkic military forces, elite competition, and the inability of the amirs to control the army were direct consequences of fiscal weakness.

3. The economic-political crisis resulted in social disintegration.

Declining public confidence, peasant migration, and urban recession were manifestations of this process.

4. Together, these factors left the Samanid state incapable of resisting rival powers.

Accordingly, within the theoretical framework of this study, the fall of the Samanids represents a classical example of the structural decline of a premodern state in which the combination of fiscal crisis, elite competition, and institutional weakness ultimately and inevitably led to political collapse.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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