



DUSHANBE

DUSHANBE (Pers. Došanba “Monday”; in Russian known as Dyushambe until 1929, Stalinabad from 1929 to 1961, and Dushanbe after 1961), capital and most populous city of Tajikistan. It is located in the Hisor (Pers. Ḥeṣār, Russian Gissar) valley, at an average altitude of approximately 823 m, on the Dushanbe river (Russian Dushanbinka), the lower course of the Varzob (Pers. Varzāb) at the confluence with the Luchob (Lūčāb). According to tradition, the name reflects an earlier practice of holding a market in the area on Mondays.

There is archeological evidence of human habitation in the Dushanbe region since the late Neolithic era. Speculation that there may have been a large ancient settlement on the site remains controversial. The earliest historical references to a village named Dushanbe are from the 17th and 18th centuries; by the early 18th century a small fort was associated with it (“Dushanbe,” p. 353). Dushanbe and its environs were long subject to the beg of Hisor. In the 19th century the village of Dushanbe was a center for regional trade and artisanal production, including weaving, tanning, and ironworking (Ghafurov, p. 199). After a prolonged, though intermittent, struggle for control of the Hisor area among various local and regional rulers, the tsarist government allocated it to the amir of Bukhara in 1868, as compensation for the loss of other parts of his realm to the Russian governorship-general of Turkestan (Bartol’d, pp. 291, 430-31; Spuler, p. 247).

The civil war that followed the Russian Revolution caused extensive damage in Dushanbe. The last amir of Bukhara, Sayyed ‘Ālem Khan, fled to Dushanbe at the end of August 1920 to escape advancing Red Army forces from Tashkent.



For the next half-year he used Dushanbe as a base for directing his fight against the communists. The Red Army took Dushanbe on 21 February 1921; the amir fled farther east and eventually reached Afghanistan. Basmachi forces besieged the communist garrison in Dushanbe twice in the fall and winter of 1921-22. The derogatory term *basmachi* (lit., “bandit”) was applied by the Soviet authorities to those who fought against them in Central Asia during the civil war; though it was not a self-designation, it has gained widespread currency. The second siege, commanded by Enver Pasha, was successful, and Dushanbe fell in February 1922. The village remained in Basmachi hands until July of that year, when the Red Army retook it (Akademiya nauk, pp. 92, 99-100, 102, 110, 112, 118). As a result of the turmoil the population of the town declined from 3,140 in 1920 to 283 in 1924. Most of its buildings had been destroyed during the civil war; only about forty houses were still standing in 1924 (Veselovskii et al., p. 61).

Dushanbe was transformed in the Soviet era. With the return of the Red Army in 1922 the village became the center of Soviet power in eastern Bukhara. In 1924 the Tadzhikistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created as part of the Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic, and Dushanbe became its capital; the government began functioning there formally in March 1925. As part of this process, Dushanbe was officially redefined as a city, and two nearby villages, Sari Osiyo (Pers. Sar-e Āsiā) and Shohmansur (Šāh Manṣūr), were incorporated into it. The city developed slowly during the 1920s. Some of the most important cultural figures and official organizations of Tajikistan were located elsewhere in Uzbekistan and only gradually moved to Dushanbe; for example, the state publishing department of Tajikistan was located in Samarqand (Ikromi, p. 3). The city’s first telegraph link, with Bukhara, began operation late in 1923, and the first railroad line (from Termez, Uzbekistan) reached it in 1929. Dushanbe’s growth was planned and directed largely by Russian and Ukrainian architects and construction personnel, beginning in 1926 (subsequent plans were adopted in 1938, 1965, and 1983; Veselovskii et al., pp. 63-65, 132, 135, 137). In the interwar years most of the new buildings were single-story structures of mud brick.

In 1929 Tajikistan became a Soviet Socialist Republic separate from Uzbekistan, with Dushanbe remaining its capital. Since the 1930s the city has acquired an increasing number of larger public and official buildings (including a sports stadium, a theater for opera and ballet, government headquarters, and a post office) in architectural styles typical of the Soviet



Union at the time, though many have decorative details drawn from local traditions. In the 1950s the city government began to construct increasingly tall residential housing, at first four-story apartment buildings, and, since the 1970s, an ever-increasing number of medium- and high-rise apartment buildings, although some neighborhoods of small mud-brick houses remain.

Modern Dushanbe has expanded from its original core on the left bank of the river along both banks and along the Luchob as well. It is divided into four administrative units (*raions*): Rohi Ohan (Pers. *rāh-e āhan* “railroad,” Russian *zheleznodorozhnyi*), Markazi (Pers. *markazī* “central,” Russian Tsen-tral’nyi), Oktiabr’ (October, Russian Oktyabr’skii), and Frunze (Russian Frunzenskii, after M. V. Frunze, 1885-1925, commander of the Red Army in Turkestan during the civil war).

The few industries in Dushanbe during the 1920s and 1930s were primarily oriented toward local demand and processing locally produced raw materials. They included meat packing; production of soap, bricks, lumber, silk thread, leather, and clothing; and generation of electric power. The city’s industrial development was stimulated by the Moscow government’s decision during World War II to relocate some of the Soviet Union’s production facilities east of the Urals, farther from the war zone. In Dushanbe the effects were felt primarily in such light industries as textile manufacturing and food processing. Today the city is a major industrial center of Tajikistan, with approximately 100 factories and other production facilities, and is home to about one third of the industrial labor force and white-collar personnel of the republic, even though less than 10 percent of the total population of the country lives there (Fedorova, p. 18; Nasyrov, p. 26). It has several factories producing industrial machinery (including machines for the oil and textile industries), parts for farm machinery, consumer durables (like refrigerators and furniture), and textiles and thread (silk and cotton), as well as numerous facilities for processing meat, fruit, vegetables, and other locally produced raw materials. The city is also the center of publishing, television and radio broadcasting, and film production in Tajikistan.

There are a number of institutions of higher education and culture in the city, including the main campus of Tajikistan State University, the State Pedagogical University, the State Medical University, the State Polytechnic University, the State Agricultural University, the Technological University, and other institutions for the study of art, physical culture, and, in the Soviet era, Russian language and literature (now the Institute of Foreign Languages). The Tajik



Academy of Sciences and the Firdavsi (Ferdowsī) National Library, with its collection of more than 2,000 oriental manuscripts, are also located in Dushanbe. The performing arts are represented by a symphony orchestra, opera and ballet companies, a youth theater, and a puppet theater. Dushanbe has a resident circus and many movie theaters. Its main museums include the Behzod (Behzād) regional studies museum and the ethnographic museum of the Academy of Sciences. For many years during the Soviet era there were only one legally recognized mosque in the city and an unknown number of unofficial ones; beginning in the late 1980s changes in the Soviet Union made possible the opening of many new mosques in Tajikistan, as in other parts of the country where Muslim inhabitants are concentrated. In 1990 an Islamic institute was opened in Dushanbe. The city also has a Russian Orthodox cathedral.

Dushanbe was the scene of conflict in the 1990s, part of the dispute over who would wield power in late Soviet and independent Tajikistan. In this period there were large and prolonged demonstrations, serious shortages of basic necessities, hostage taking, seizure of public buildings, and armed clashes. Although much of this activity was politically motivated, violent crime also increased. The design of the contemporary city includes several squares, around which government offices are located. There are also parks and outdoor recreational facilities. In addition to shops along the streets, Dushanbe has two large *bāzārs*. Several large public teahouses decorated in traditional fashion are located around the city. There are also a central railway station and an airport. After Tajikistan declared its independence on 9 September 1991 the authorities replaced some Soviet designations and monuments with new ones symbolizing the Tajiks' pan-Iranian cultural heritage. For example, Lenin Street became Rūdakī Street, and a statue of V. I. Lenin in downtown Dushanbe was replaced by a statue of Ferdowsī.

The population of Dushanbe grew from 5,600 in 1926 (Fedorova, p. 8) to 604,000 (including 2,000 from the surrounding villages), according to the 1989 census ("Dar borai," p. 3; see [DEMOGRAPHY iii](#)). The increase resulted from immigration of Russians and other Soviet Europeans (an especially crucial factor in the early decades of the Soviet period, as they constituted most of the skilled and white-collar workers); rural-to-urban migration within the republic; and, especially in recent years, the natural increase of the existing urban population (Fedorova, p. 42; Alimov et al., p. 11). Another factor was the redrawing of Dushanbe's boundaries to include nearby villages. In the 1989



census, for example, 8,000 people were classified as inhabitants of rural areas subject to the city government. Data on the ethnic composition of Dushanbe's population are available from the 1989 census. Of a total of 602,000 who actually lived in the city the largest groups were Tajiks, 39.1 percent; Russians, 32.4 percent; Uzbeks 10.4 percent; Tatars, 4.1 percent; and Ukrainians, 3.5 percent. The remaining 10.4 percent included Jews, Kirghiz, Turkmen, and others (*First Book*, p. D-8). Since the 1970s the trend has been toward an increase in the Tajik proportion of the population. According to the 1970 and 1979 censuses, Dushanbe had a larger proportion of Russian inhabitants (42 and 39 percent respectively) and a smaller proportion of Tajiks (26 and 30.7 percent respectively) than in 1989 (Vinnikov, p. 20; "Faktku raqamho," p. 124). The population of Dushanbe dropped as a consequence of the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the ensuing civil war in Tajikistan, although estimates of the numbers vary. Concerns about the standard of living, the status of non-Central Asians, and turmoil associated with the post-Soviet power struggle prompted people of various nationalities to leave the city. Anecdotal information suggests that Russians and other non-Central Asians, many of them professional people, left in particularly large numbers. The civil war also drove other population groups into Dushanbe, as they fled the area of heaviest fighting, in southern Tajikistan.

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