



THE REPRESENTATION OF THE HISTORY OF BUKHARA JEWS IN THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE OF THE 20TH–21ST CENTURIES

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Abstract: this article explores the representation of Bukhara Jews in scholarly literature from the 20th to the 21st centuries. It examines the historical narrative surrounding this unique community, highlighting its cultural, social, and economic contributions to the broader tapestry of Jewish history. By analyzing various academic sources, the article aims to identify prevailing themes, biases, and gaps in the scholarship. Additionally, it reflects on how changes in geopolitical landscapes and academic discourse have influenced the portrayal of Bukhara Jews over time. Through this exploration, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of minority histories and their significance within the larger framework of Jewish studies.

Keywords: Jewish history, Cultural representation, Minority studies, Geopolitical influence, Academic discourse.

One of the ancient ethnic groups living in Uzbekistan is the Bukharan Jews. In the current context, the history of the Bukharan Jews is being studied, analyzed, and reinterpreted through the memories of those who have emigrated from Uzbekistan. As a result, positive developments have emerged in the historiography of the Bukharan Jews, enriching it with entirely new facts and ideas.

However, to this day, there is no unified opinion regarding the origins of Jews in Central Asia, their numbers, or where they came from. In many books filled with legends and myths, these questions remain unanswered.

It is known that after many centuries, various ethnic groups of Jewish people live in Uzbekistan. Over time, the region witnessed the emergence of a diverse composition within the Jewish population.

The ethnic composition of the Jewish population in Uzbekistan is extremely diverse, with each ethnic group having followed its own path of development. After a long hiatus since the publication of ethnographic maps in the 1920s, the Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan was published in 2002¹. This atlas includes brief information about the Jewish ethnic group, alongside other nationalities living in the republic. This project, planned by L.I. Zhukov, is undoubtedly noteworthy.

The Bukharan Jews are considered one of the ancient and small peoples of Central Asia. They have lived among larger ethnic groups—Uzbeks, Tajiks, and to some extent Kyrgyz and Turkmens—sharing with them not only geographic space but also influencing their lifestyles and cultures. Together, they have experienced a common historical destiny.

¹ Назарьян Р.Г., Некрасова Е.Г. Евреи среднеазиатские. // Этнический атлас Узбекистана. – Ташкент, 2002.

One of the key characteristics of the Bukharan Jews is that, unlike surrounding populations, they did not adopt Islam as their religion. Furthermore, they played a significant role in the production of local goods—particularly in areas such as the manufacture of atlas fabric, silk dyeing, and textile processing. Their contributions were especially prominent in various fields of trade and economics, as well as in cultural domains such as music, singing, and the traditional Shashmaqom genre. Through this broad understanding of culture, a complex process of self-enrichment and cultural development took place.

Among the Jewish ethnic communities in the region, the largest groups have been the Central Asian (Bukharan) Jews and the European (Ashkenazi) Jews. Throughout history, both groups have played a significant role in the development of the region.

The work of E.L. Amitin-Shapiro, a specialist in the history of Bukharan Jews in Uzbekistan, did not go unnoticed. His scholarly expertise enabled him to publish a range of information on Bukharan Jews in Turkestan during the post-October Revolution period in the journal Soviet Ethnography in 1938².

According to Amitin-Shapiro, Central Asian Jews are referred to in the literature under various names: Bukharan Jews, Asian Jews, “native” Jews (tuzemnye evrei), and local Jews. Based on the results of a population survey conducted by the Uzbek Land Development Committee in December 1934, we can obtain further data about the regions where Central Asian Jews were settled and their numbers:

Samarkand – 5,750
Tashkent – 3,340
Bukhara – 1,850
Kokand – 2,000
Andijan – 900
Margilan – 860
Fergana – 580
Namangan – 470
Khatirchi – 980
Shahrisabz – 970
Karmana – 700
Termez-Boysun – 500
Kattakurgan – 250
Paishanba – 200
In collective farms (kolkhozes) – 3,150
Other parts of Uzbekistan – 1,500
In total, approximately 24,000 Jews were recorded³.

Jewish workers were widely employed in silk factories and other light industry enterprises, mainly concentrated in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Margilan. A total of

² Алмитин-Шапиро Э.Л. Национальные меньшинства евреи после Великой октябрьской социалистической революции. – Советская этнография. – Москва-Ленинград, Институт этнографии Академии наук СССР, 1938.

³ Алмитин-Шапиро Э.Л. Национальные меньшинства евреи после Великой октябрьской социалистической революции. – Советская этнография. – Москва-Ленинград, Институт этнографии Академии наук СССР, 1938. – С. 53.



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1,248 Jews were employed directly in factory work, while Jewish workers across all industrial plants numbered approximately 600,000.

According to statistical data, prior to the revolution, Jews had established certain scientific and scholarly ties with other local ethnic groups. However, the overall level of cultural and academic development remained quite low. Official pre-revolutionary records show that throughout Turkestan (excluding Bukhara), there existed religious schools known as khomlas. In 1894, there were 22 such schools employing 22 teachers and educating 603 students (602 boys and only 1 girl). By 1911, while the number of schools and teachers remained unchanged, the number of students had increased to 778 (684 boys and 94 girls)⁴.

Meanwhile, in the United States, significant efforts were undertaken by our compatriots to study Jewish communities. Numerous books, journals, and newspapers were published on the subject. Additionally, in April 1999, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan presented a range of valuable materials at an international conference⁵.

The conference was attended by prominent scholars, including historians, cultural experts, philosophers, art historians, philologists, and legal specialists. The list of reports was presented, and the directions of the scientific work were outlined:

- * Jews and Judaists in Pre-Islamic Central Asia (E.V. Rtveladze)
- * The Role of Zoroastrianism in the Development of Jewish Laws in Iran and Central Asia (3rd–7th Centuries) (A.V. Abdullayev)
- * The History of Judaism in Central Asia (G.Y. Dresvyanskaya)
- * The Ethnology of Bukharan Jews (R.V. Almeyev)
- * Several Debates on the Jews of Central Asia (Based on G. Lansdell's travel sketches) (V.L. Genshtke, T.E. Vaganova)
 - * The History of Bukharan (Central Asian) Jews according to the historian and ethnographer Z.L. Amitin-Shapiro (V.A. Germanov, B.V. Lunin)
 - * Jews in Turkestan Postcards (B.A. Golender)
 - * The History of the Bukhara Branch of the Imperial Society for Oriental Studies (S.M. Gorshenina)
 - * Bukharan Jews and the Music Culture of Central Asia (A.B. Jumayev)
 - * The History of Central Asian (Bukharan) Jews during the Turkestan Governor-Generalship (V.A. Ivanov)
 - * The Historiography of Bukharan Jewish History in the Archives of Uzbekistan (N. Nikitenko, R.N. Shigabdinov)
 - * Relations between Central Asia and Palestine, or the Affective Path of Zionism, 1793–1917 (K. Pujol)
 - * Central Asian Jews: The Role and Function of Ethno-Religious Deficiency in Eastern Societies (General Methodological Issues) (B. Siddikov)
 - * The Civil Status of Bukharan Jews in Turkestan, According to the "Turkestan Collection" (I.D. Fok)

⁴ Бағрикенг Ўзбекистон диаспоралари тарихи. //жамоавий монография. – Тошкент: “TURON-IQBOL”, – 2019. – Б. 26.

⁵ Евреи Средней Азии. Под редакцией Э.В.Ртвеладзе, Г.Н.Гикинита. – Изд.-во: Институт открытого общества Узбекистана и Институт истории АН РУ. – Ташкент, 2000.



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* Jews of Tashkent Province at the End of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century (A.I. Shevyakov)

* Two Essays on the Architecture of Uzbekistan Related to the Jewish Diaspora (M.A. Yusupova)⁶.

According to the academic E. Rtveladze's presentation, Jews in Central Asia played a significant role in the movement of the Great Silk Road, particularly in its western part, alongside other peoples. Due to insufficient historical, archaeological, and epigraphic data, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time of the appearance of Jews in Central Asia. Nevertheless, prior to the Arab conquest of Central Asia, there were four main centers where Jews lived: Bactria, Sogdiana, Margiana, and Khwarezm⁷.

G.Y. Dresvyanskaya has made similar comments regarding the archaeological monuments of Central Asia. R. Almeyev, in an attempt to answer these questions, explains why the Jews in our region are referred to as Bukharan Jews, clarifying their language, the name "Bukharan Jews," the emergence of this term, and its origin.

The renowned Central Asian scholar Professor B. Lunin proposes highlighting the works of V. Germanov, who conducted the first and principal research on the history and family law of Bukharan Jews in the 1920s and 1930s.

The researcher B. Glonder, in his work dedicated to the history and ethnography of the culture and peoples of the Turkestan region, which was completely unexplored, draws attention to the presence of Jewish communities in the cities of Central Asia, particularly in the cities of Movarounnahr, from ancient times, based on Turkestan postcards. He refers to N. Khamikov's writings in the work "Description of the Bukhara Khanate,"⁸ published in 1843: "Although Jews were not a large group, they had migrated to the khanate a long time ago, and the majority of them lived in Bukhara. Additionally, I saw them in the cities of Kattaqorgan, Samarkand, and Karshi. In all these cities, separate areas were allocated for their quarters, where they neither migrated nor mixed with the Muslims. The Jews called their quarters 'Juhud-Mahalla.' They were not numerous. They were Talmudists, spoke Persian, engaged in dyeing fabrics, and traded in the markets. Under the rule of the Kokand government, they were free from oppression. The local Jews came from Iran, as they spoke Persian, or more precisely, Tajik, and their clothing was different from that of the Uzbeks and Tajiks; they could not wear turbans."

L. Jumayeva's clear response to some views rejected by other specialists has attracted attention. There are fragmented opinions regarding the issue that the Shashmaqom, a traditional classical music of Uzbeks and Tajiks, is a heritage of the Bukharan Jews, which was later adopted by Uzbeks and Tajiks.

The forced inclusion of the Turkestan region into the Russian Empire had an impact on the centuries-old history of the Bukharan Jews. It was precisely during the period of the Turkestan General Governorship that V. Ivanov deeply studied the history of the Jews. He cites the opinion of his contemporary (M. Abramov), stating, "As a result of the establishment of

⁶ Бағрикенг Ўзбекистон диаспоралари тарихи. //жамоавий монография. – Тошкент: "TURON-IQBOL", – 2019. – Б. 27-28.

⁷ Бағрикенг Ўзбекистон диаспоралари тарихи. //жамоавий монография. – Тошкент: "TURON-IQBOL", – 2019. – Б. 27-28.

⁸ Ханыков Н. Описанияи Бухарского ханства. – Сант-Петербург, 1843.



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the Turkestan General Governorship in 1867, a new historical situation arose for the local Jews, providing them with new conditions and opportunities."

According to M. Abramov, "At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a unique synthesis occurred in the history of the Bukharan Jews: ethnic traditions changed, and a new Jewish-Tajik literature (replacing the Jewish-Persian literature) emerged. The local Jewish communities strengthened their ties with Jerusalem and European Ashkenazi Jews. According to M. Abramov, 'This historical period can be considered an awakening era, as books were widely prepared and published in the Jewish-Tajik language, and the music culture, poetry, and folklore flourished.'⁹

Tadqiqotchi K. Pujolning Markaziy Osiyo yahudiylarining Falastin (Muqaddas Yer) bilan aloqlari (1793 – 1917-yillar), B. Siddiqovning Sharq jamiyatni hayotida etnodiniy kamchilikning roli va vazifasi haqidagi nazariy asoslari nomli ishlari katta qiziqish uyg'otdi.

The works of researcher K. Pujol on the relations between Central Asian Jews and Palestine (the Holy Land) from 1793 to 1917, and B. Siddiqov's theoretical foundations on the role and functions of ethnoreligious deficits in the life of Eastern societies have generated significant interest.

One of the major experts on interethnic relations, particularly the history of the Jewish diaspora in Uzbekistan, is the renowned historian S.I. Gitlin. After moving to Israel, in 1998, he published a new scholarly work titled "National Relations in Uzbekistan: Myths and Realities"¹⁰. This work was highly praised by scholars and specialists from Russia, the United States, Germany, and Uzbekistan, despite being published far from Israel.

Additionally, S. Gitlin's monograph, published in 1999 in the Vostok journal of the Institute of Asia and Africa of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, is the first large-scale and meaningful Soviet-era Russian-language research dedicated to the Jews of Uzbekistan.

The author of the monograph mentions that the Jewish diaspora in Uzbekistan consists of two parts: the Central Asian (Bukhara) Jews and the European (Ashkenazi) Jews. Although their communities developed in parallel, they attempted to compete with each other, aiming to criticize one another and fight for distinct areas of contact between them. The monograph significantly discusses the role of European (Ashkenazi) Jews in the lives of Central Asian (Bukhara) Jews during the Soviet era. S. Gitlin, building on this idea, highlights that despite the limited interactions between the diasporas, extensive research was conducted, which helped trace back the two-thousand-year history of Bukhara Jews. The main focus of later discussions is, first and foremost, the attempt to reconstruct the history of European Jews, starting from the Russian conquest of the region and continuing until their mass emigration from this area at the end of the last century¹¹.

S. Gitlin's other two-volume work, "Minority Nations in Uzbekistan: Past and Future"¹², put a final point on the previous topics. This book encompasses all the previous issues, and the

⁹ Бағрикенг Ўзбекистон диаспоралари тарихи. //жамоавий монография. – Тошкент: "TURON-IQBOL", – 2019. – Б. 30.

¹⁰ Гитлин С.И. Евреи в Узбекистане: иллюзии и реальность. – Тель-Авив, 1998. – С. 456.

¹¹ Бағрикенг Ўзбекистон диаспоралари тарихи. //жамоавий монография. – Тошкент: "TURON-IQBOL", – 2019. – Б. 31.

¹² Гитлин С.И. Национальные меньшинства в Узбекистане: прошлое и настоящее. Книга 1. Евреи в Узбекистане. Том первый. – Тель-Авив, 2004. – С. 541; Книга 1, том 2. – С. 376.

author provides a fair assessment of the national question in Central Asia based on the current situation. S. Gitlin states that Uzbekistan stands out with unique phenomena in the Muslim East, such as moderate policies, steadfastness in implementing national policies, and distancing from interethnic conflicts. He also notes that Uzbekistan is currently developing along the path of interethnic unity and stability.

In 2013, the collection "Uzbekistan – Our Common Home (Essays on the Culture and History of Bukhara Jews)"¹³ was published in Tashkent. This book presents the history of the Jewish people in Uzbekistan and discusses their contribution to the development of various aspects of societal life. It highlights the mutual influence between Uzbek and Jewish cultures, emphasizing how Jews have lived, studied, and taught how to live in this land, while also retaining their own culture, national ancestors, customs, and traditions. The collection focuses on the activities of the Tashkent Jewish religious community and the Republic's Jewish National-Cultural Center.

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¹³ Узбекистан – наш общий дом (очерки истории и культуры бухарских евреев). – Ташкент, 2013. – С. 140.



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