

**ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION OF THE
JEWISH DIASPORA IN TURKESTAN**

Gadaev Omon Olimzhonovich¹

¹Associate professor of the department of «Historiography and Source Studies»
Samarkand State University named after Sharof Rashidov

E-mail: omongadayev@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the processes of formation and development of the Jewish diaspora in Central Asia, particularly in the region of Turkestan. The study analyzes the ethnocultural differentiation of Jewish communities, including Ashkenazi, Bukharan, Tat, Krymchak, and Karaite groups, focusing on their origins, linguistic features, and religious traditions. Special attention is given to the impact of the national policies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet period on the social structure and identity of the Jewish population. The article also explores the socio-economic activities, migration processes, and levels of cultural integration of Jewish communities in the region. The findings suggest that the Jewish population of Turkestan evolved from a relatively unified confessional group into a complex ethnocultural system, shaped by broader historical and political transformations.

Key words

Jewish diaspora, Turkestan, ethnic differentiation, Ashkenazi Jews, Tat Jews, Krymchak Jews, Karaites.

**XIX-XX ASRLARDA TURKISTON HUDUDIDA YAHUDIY JAMOALARINING
SHAKLLANISHI VA TRANSFORMATSIYASI**

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada yahudiy diasporasining Markaziy Osiyo, xususan Turkiston hududidagi shakllanishi va rivojlanish jarayonlari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda yahudiy jamoalarining etnik va madaniy jihatdan differensiallashuvi, xususan Ashkenaz, Buxoro, Tat, Qrimchak va Karait guruhlarining kelib chiqishi, til xususiyatlari hamda diniy an'analari ilmiy asosda yoritilgan. Shuningdek, Rossiya imperiyasi va Sovet davridagi millatlar siyosati ta'sirida yahudiy aholisining ijtimoiy tuzilmasi va identifikatsiyasida yuz bergan o'zgarishlar ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada yahudiy jamoalarining Turkiston hududidagi ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy faoliyati, migratsion jarayonlar va madaniy integratsiya darajasi ham tahlil etilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, mazkur hududdagi yahudiy jamoalari yagona konfessional birlikdan murakkab etnomadaniy tizimga evolyutsiya qilgan bo'lib, bu jarayon tarixiy-siyosiy omillar bilan chambarchas bog'liqdir.

Kalit so'zlar

Yahudiy diasporasi, Turkiston, Etnik differensiallashuv, Ashkenaz yahudiylari, Tat yahudiylari, Qrimchak yahudiylari, Karait yahudiylari.

**ЭТНИЧЕСКАЯ И КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ДИВЕРСИФИКАЦИЯ
ЕВРЕЙСКОЙ ДИАСПОРЫ В ТУРКЕСТАНЕ**

Аннотация

В данной статье анализируются процессы формирования и развития еврейской диаспоры в Центральной Азии, в частности на территории Туркестана. В исследовании рассматривается этнокультурная дифференциация еврейских общин, включая ашкеназов, бухарских, татских, крымчакских и караимских евреев, их происхождение, языковые особенности и религиозные традиции. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию национальной политики Российской империи и советского периода на социальную структуру и идентичность еврейского населения. Также в статье анализируются социально-экономическая деятельность, миграционные процессы и уровень культурной интеграции еврейских общин в регионе. Результаты исследования показывают, что еврейское население Туркестана эволюционировало от единой конфессиональной группы к сложной этнокультурной системе, формирование которой было тесно связано с историко-политическими процессами.

Ключевые слова

Еврейская диаспора, Туркестан, этническая дифференциация, ашкеназские евреи, татские евреи, крымчакские евреи, караимы.

Introduction. The Jewish diaspora has historically been formed as a complex ethnocultural system covering vast territories, the internal composition of which includes many groups differentiated on the basis of various historical, linguistic and cultural factors. In particular, the formation and development of the Jewish population in the territory of Turkestan was closely related not only to local socio-economic processes, but also to broader migration, political and civilizational ties.

Historical sources and scientific research show that the Jewish communities living in the territory of Turkestan were not a single ethnic unit, but rather a set of groups with different origins and cultural characteristics. In particular, Ashkenazi, Bukhara, Tat, Krymchak and Karaite Jews had their own historical development path, each of which is distinguished by its own ethnocultural characteristics [1]. The processes of formation and entry of these groups into the region took place in connection with migrations, trade relations and political transformations that occurred in different periods.

In particular, although the Tat Jews were formed in the Caucasus, as a result of trade routes and territorial integration processes during the Russian Empire, some of their representatives entered the cities of Turkestan. At the same time, the Krymchak and Karaite Jews also went beyond their main areas of formation and to some extent came into contact with Central Asia, but they did not become widespread diaspora groups in this region. On the contrary, the Bukhara Jews occupied a leading place among the Jewish communities of Turkestan and played an important role in the socio-economic life of the region.

Also, from the end of the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century, the internal differentiation of the Jewish population began to be more clearly expressed scientifically and statistically, and a classification based on their language, territorial location and cultural characteristics began to take shape. This process was directly related, in particular, to the population census policy carried out during the Russian Empire and later during the Soviet period, which served to systematize the ethnic composition of Jewish communities.

Literature review and methodology. During the Soviet period, significant transformations occurred in the social and cultural life of the Jewish diaspora: as a result of the restriction of the activities of religious institutions, the intensification of secularization processes

and the official generalization of ethnic identity, the specific characteristics of many groups were partially weakened. At the same time, the processes of urbanization and social mobilization gave rise to new trends in their professional and social structure.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a comprehensive historical analysis of the ethnic and cultural diversification of the Jewish diaspora in the territory of Turkestan, to determine the processes of formation, mutual relations and their place in the regional social system of various Jewish groups. This aims to shed more light on the role and significance of the Jewish diaspora in the history of Turkestan.

Tat ethnic development of Jews and diasporic ties with Turkestan

One of the Jewish ethnic groups formed in the Caucasus region, which historically lived mainly in the territories of Dagestan and Azerbaijan [2]. This group differs significantly from other branches of the Jewish diaspora in terms of language, culture, and historical development.

The term “Tat” initially did not have an ethnic meaning; it was used as a historical-linguistic term in ancient times to refer to the population speaking Iranian languages [16]. Later, this term was also applied to certain Jewish groups living in the Caucasus region and was consolidated in the scientific literature as the term “Tat Jews” [9].

The issue of the origin and formation of the Tat Jews is interpreted in the scientific literature based on various conceptual approaches. The first approach is the theory of Iranian (*Persian*) origin, according to which this group is the descendants of Jews who migrated to the Caucasus from ancient Iran. This migration process is often associated with the Sasanian period (*3rd-7th centuries AD*) [4]. The second approach is the diasporic migration theory, which links the roots of the Tat Jews with the ancient Jewish diaspora and explains them in terms of the processes of dispersal after the Babylonian captivity [*6th century BC*] [2]. The third, more reasonable approach is the concept of localization and cultural synthesis, according to which the Tat Jews are considered a synthetic ethnos formed in the Iranian linguistic environment and socio-cultural conditions of the Caucasus region, while preserving their Jewish religious identity [9] [4].

Although the historical development of the Tat Jews is mainly associated with the Caucasus region, some of their groups also had some contact with Central Asia, in particular with the Turkestan region. These contacts are explained by a number of factors. First, economic ties formed through trade routes between the Caucasus and Central Asia created the basis for some Tat Jews to enter the cities of Turkestan as merchants or artisans [19]. Second, as a result of the conquest of the Caucasus and Turkestan regions by the Russian Empire in the 19th century, a single political-territorial space was formed and internal migration processes were activated [12]. The possibility that some representatives of the Tat Jews also moved to the large cities of Turkestan during this process is scientifically justified. However, it should be noted that the Tat Jews did not form a widespread ethnic group in the territory of Turkestan. The main part of the Jewish communities in this region was formed by the Bukhara Jews, who occupied a dominant position in local socio-economic life [23].

At the same time, important information about the social and territorial location of the Jewish population in Turkestan is found in the studies of O.A.Sukhareva and S.S.Gubayeva. In particular, these studies cover in detail the formation of Jewish communities in the Bukhara and Fergana regions, their settlement in separate neighborhoods, and their socio-economic activities [10]. From this point of view, it is not enough to study Tat Jews limited to the Caucasus region, but a comprehensive analysis of their broader diasporic ties, including economic and migration relations with Turkestan, is of great scientific importance. Historically, Tat Jews actively participated in various areas of economic activity, in particular, trade, crafts, viticulture and winemaking, and agriculture. In the Caucasus, they often served as economic intermediaries,

often forming part of the urban and semi-urban population, and played an important role in the development of trade and economic relations between different ethnic and religious groups [2] [4]. These areas of activity were closely related, in particular, to the natural and climatic conditions of the region and historical trade routes [9].

Since the first half of the 20th century, and especially with the establishment of Soviet power, significant socio-cultural changes have occurred in the life of Tat Jews. As a result of the atheistic policy of the Soviet state, the activities of religious institutions have been sharply limited, traditional religious life has weakened, and secularization processes have intensified in the field of language and culture [2]. At the same time, as a result of the census and ethnic classification processes carried out within the framework of Soviet nationalities policy, Tat Jews have often been recorded not as a separate ethnic unit, but as part of the general category of “Jews”. This led to a weakening of their official ethnic identity and a gradual transformation of their unique cultural characteristics [8]. At the same time, the processes of urbanization and social mobilization that took place during the Soviet period also caused significant changes in the professional structure of Tat Jews. In addition to traditional economic activities, they began to be involved in new areas such as industry, education, and public services. This process, on the one hand, strengthened their social integration, but on the other hand, led to a decline in their traditional way of life [19].

Crimean Jews: processes of ethnic formation and cultural development

Crimean Jews are a Jewish ethno-religious group that emerged on the Crimean peninsula, differing from other Jewish communities in language, culture, and historical development. In the scientific literature, they are often described as “ancient Crimean Jews” [20]. The Crimean Jews are sharply distinguished from the Karaites by their adherence to the traditions of rabbinic Judaism, since the Karaites recognize only the Torah and reject Talmudic traditions [20]. The origin of Crimean Jews is complex and multifaceted, and several main factors are distinguished in scientific studies. Representatives of the Jewish diaspora from the Byzantine Empire and the Middle East, the influence of the Judaized population during the Khazar period, and migration processes formed along trade routes played an important role in their ethnogenesis [4]. As a result of these processes, the Crimean peoples were formed mainly in the Crimean peninsula in the Middle Ages, which was a strategic region where various civilizations intersected.

As a result, the Crimean Jews, while preserving their Jewish religious identity, developed as a synthetic ethnos formed in a Turkic language environment and under the influence of local Crimean culture [13]. Their traditional language is the Crimean language, which belongs to the Turkic language family and is considered close to the Crimean Tatar language. This language contains Hebrew and Aramaic elements, and historically the Hebrew alphabet was used for writing, and later the Cyrillic script [13].

Although language served as an important factor in the ethnic identification of the Crimean people, its scope of application was sharply reduced during the 20th century under the influence of political and social processes. Religiously, the Crimean Jews followed the traditions of rabbinic Judaism, performing religious rituals based on the Talmud and other religious sources, and used the Hebrew language in their prayers [20]. This is one of the main features that distinguishes them from the Karaites.

Historically, Crimean Jews were engaged in trade, crafts, and small business activities, living mainly in the urban environment of the Crimean peninsula and performing the function of economic intermediaries [13]. This activity played an important role in the development of economic relations between different ethnic and religious communities.

Although Crimean Jews gradually began to be recognized as a separate ethnic group during the Russian Empire, official classifications often included them in the general category of

“Jews” [13]. Since the beginning of the 20th century, especially after the establishment of Soviet power, significant changes have occurred in their social and cultural life: religious life has been sharply curtailed, national identity has weakened, and in official statistics they have often been lumped into the general Jewish group [8]. At the same time, in the 1920s and 1930s, scientific attempts have been made within the framework of Soviet ethnography to study the Crimeans as a separate ethnic group [13].

The most tragic period in the history of Crimean Jews falls on the years of World War II. After the occupation of the Crimean territory by Nazi Germany, a large part of the Crimean Jews were subjected to mass exterminations, and this ethnic group almost disappeared demographically [13]. This tragedy dealt a sharp blow to their historical development and complicated the numerical recovery of the Crimeans in subsequent periods.

Relations of Crimean Jews with Central Asia and their modern status [with references]

Although Crimean Jews were formed and lived mainly on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula, some of their representatives migrated to other regions, including Central Asia, under the influence of historical processes. In particular, as a result of internal migration processes during the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet era, some groups of Crimeans appeared in the territory of Turkestan [13] [19]. However, they did not become a widespread ethnic group in this region and remained as representatives of a numerically limited diaspora. The main part of the Jewish communities in Central Asia was made up of Bukhara Jews, who occupied a dominant position in socio-economic and cultural life [23].

In modern times, the number of Crimean Jews has sharply decreased, and they mainly live in Israel, Russia, and Ukraine [13]. One of the most pressing problems for this ethnic group is the preservation of language and cultural heritage, especially the sharply reduced scope of the Crimean language.

Scientifically, Crimean Jews are considered a unique synthesis ethnos, formed as a result of the mutual integration of Jewish religious traditions with the Turkic language and local cultural environment [13]. Their historical development is inextricably linked with the geopolitical and civilizational significance of the Crimean territory, especially

Ethnogenesis, religious doctrine and ethnocultural characteristics of Karaite Jews

The Karaites are a distinct religious and ethnic group within Judaism that differs sharply from rabbinic Jews in terms of religious doctrine. They often call themselves “Qaraim.” The main feature of the Karaites is that they recognize only the Tanakh [Torah] as a sacred source and reject the Talmud and rabbinic interpretations [13].

Karaite doctrine was formed in the Middle East in the 8th-9th centuries and is often associated with the name of Anan ben David [20]. The ethnogenesis of the Karaites is complex and multi-component, associated with the initial religious movement in the Middle East, possible influence during the Khazar period, and migrations to the regions of the Byzantine Empire and the Crimean Peninsula [9]. Karaite communities are especially well-established in the Crimea and Eastern Europe [especially Lithuania].

As a result, although the Karaites were religiously Jewish, they developed as a synthesis ethnos, linguistically and culturally integrated with the Turkic environment [13]. Their historical language is Karaim, which belongs to the Turkic language group and is close to the Kipchak languages and Crimean Tatar. The language contains Hebrew religious terminology, and historically the Hebrew alphabet was used for writing, and later the Latin and Cyrillic scripts [13]. Currently, this language is among the endangered languages.

Historically, the Karaites were active in such areas as trade, crafts, and public services [especially in Lithuania]. They lived mainly in urban environments and were distinguished by a

high level of literacy and social adaptability [13]. During the Russian Empire, the Karaites were legally distinguished from other Jewish communities, often exempted from anti-Semitic restrictions and in some cases recognized as a separate ethno-religious group [13] [20]. This is explained by their religious position, which rejected the Talmudic tradition.

During the Soviet period, however, significant transformations occurred in the life of the Karaites: religious activity was sharply limited, ethnic and religious identity was weakened, and many communities underwent assimilation processes [8]. At the same time, there are cases where they are recorded as a separate group from the Jews in some statistical and administrative documents.

Although the Karaites lived mainly in the Crimea and Eastern Europe, as a result of historical migration processes, some of their representatives also appeared in Central Asia, including Turkestan. These processes are mainly associated with the resettlement during the Russian Empire and internal migrations during the Soviet period [19]. However, they were not widespread in this region, and the main place among the Jewish communities was occupied by the Jews of Bukhara [23].

Currently, the majority of Karaites live in Lithuania, Poland and Israel. Their number is very small, and the issue of preserving their language and cultural heritage is a particularly urgent problem. In general, the Karaites are a unique religious and ethnic group formed within Judaism, but based on a direct interpretation of the sacred text, rejecting the Talmudic tradition. Their formation is based on a synthesis of the Middle Eastern religious movement and the Turkic cultural environment, and the Crimea and Eastern European regions played a decisive role in their historical development.

Results and discussion. In the territory of Turkestan, the general term Jews [Russian: еврей] was initially used for the Jewish population, which mainly expressed religious identity and did not clearly reflect internal ethnic differences [12] [19]. During this period, Jewish communities were perceived more as confessional units, and their differentiation based on language, origin, and cultural characteristics was not sufficiently systematized.

However, from the late 19th – early 20th centuries, especially in connection with the 1897 census of the Russian Empire, a stage of scientific and statistical clarification of the internal composition of the Jewish population began [11]. The results of this census focused on classifying the population based on language, area of residence, and cultural characteristics, and Jewish communities began to be considered as internally differentiated groups. This process took on a more systematic character during the USSR. In particular, the division of Jews into ethnic groups was officially recognized and consolidated in statistical documents in the results of the 1926 USSR census [11]. Within the framework of Soviet nationalities policy, special attention was paid to issues of ethnic identification, and the determination and classification of the ethnic composition of the population became one of the important directions of state policy.

Some historical sources note that the Jews in the territory of Turkestan were conditionally divided into two main groups – European and Asian Jews – in the pre-revolutionary period [19]. The first group is associated with Ashkenazi Jews, which included Jews of Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and other European origin from various regions of the Russian Empire. Representatives of this group moved mainly to the large cities of Turkestan – centers such as Tashkent, Samarkand and Kokand, and were formed in a more urban social environment [12].

The second group is the Asian Jews, which include Jewish communities historically formed in the territories of East and Central Asia. This group included the Jews of Bukhara, Afghan, Persian [Iranian] and Turkish Jews. These communities, over a long historical process, became closer to the local peoples through economic and cultural ties and became an integral part of the regional social system [6].

Thus, the gradual ethnic and cultural differentiation of the term “Jew” from its general religious meaning is closely related to the political, social and statistical processes of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, and this process was especially strengthened at the institutional level during the Russian Empire and the Soviet period. In this process, Asian Jewish groups were gradually generalized within the community of Bukhara Jews. As a result, the concept of “Bukhara Jews” acquired a broader meaning, and began to denote not only geographical, but also ethnic and cultural unity. This was due to processes such as: the assimilation of Jewish groups of different origins, the formation of a single language and cultural environment, the unification of religious practices. Sources indicate that the acceleration of the settlement of representatives of this nationality in Bukhara began in the 18th century.

In particular, the mining expert T.S. Burnashev, who arrived in Tashkent as an ambassador in 1795, notes that Jews began to increase in Bukhara from the 18th century, while the naturalist Eversman, who arrived in Central Asia as part of the Negri expedition, wrote that the process of Jewish immigration began thousands of years ago [7]. In our opinion, if Burnashev meant the beginning of the increase in the number of Jews in Bukhara or the beginning of the emergence of Jewish communities, then Eversman should have paid attention to their initial arrival in the region. The famous Russian diplomat and orientalist Khannikov indicated Bukhara as the area with the largest Jewish population in Central Asia [24].

Contrary to Khannikov's opinion, Meindorf writes that initially Jews lived mostly in Samarkand, and later they moved from Samarkand to Bukhara [15.c.176]. From this it can be concluded that if Khannikov considered them to be more numerous than the Jews living in Bukhara at that time, then later, as a result of the increasing role of Bukhara as a center and its economic development, Jews from Samarkand and other cities of the region must have also moved to Bukhara. From this point of view, Meindorf's information must also be justified. Vambéry or Borns shed some light on this process, suggesting that the increase in the number of Jews in the Central Asian region during this period was a consequence of the forced deportation of Jews from Iran and Mashhad 150 years earlier [22].

Conclusion. In sum, the ethnogenesis and historical trajectories of Tat, Crimean, and Karaite Jews demonstrate that Jewish communities associated with the Caucasus and Crimea evolved as synthetic ethno-cultural formations, shaped by the interaction of Jewish religious identity with Iranian and Turkic linguistic-cultural environments. While each group followed distinct paths – Tat Jews within an Iranian milieu of the Caucasus, Crimean Jews within a Turkic-Crimean context, and Karaites through a unique scripturalist religious doctrine – their development reveals a common pattern of cultural adaptation combined with the preservation of confessional identity.

Their connections with Turkestan, although limited in demographic scale, were nonetheless historically significant. These ties emerged primarily through trade networks, imperial integration under the Russian Empire, and migration processes, which facilitated the movement of small groups into Central Asian urban centers. However, unlike the Bukharan Jews, these communities did not form dominant or widespread diasporic structures in the region, remaining instead numerically minor and socially integrated minorities.

Furthermore, the late 19th – early 20th centuries marked a crucial turning point, as imperial censuses and Soviet nationalities policies institutionalized ethnic classifications, transforming the understanding of “Jews” from a purely religious category into a set of differentiated ethnic identities. At the same time, Soviet modernization, secularization, and urbanization processes contributed to both social integration and the erosion of traditional cultural features, including language and religious practices. Overall, the study underscores that a comprehensive analysis of Jewish history in Turkestan requires moving beyond dominant groups

to include smaller, less visible diasporic communities, whose transregional connections enrich our understanding of cultural exchange, migration, and identity formation across Eurasia.

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