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## **The Jewish Communities of Central Asia in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods**

*When the Jews first settled in Central Asia is uncertain, but circumstantial evidence clearly indicates that this happened at least two and a half thousand years ago. In the first millennium AD, the Jews lived only in cities no farther than 750 km east of the Caspian sea (in the eighth–eleventh centuries the sea was called Khazarian). Only later did they migrate to the central part of the region, to cities like Samarkand and Bukhara. It is possible that Jews from Khazaria joined them, since they already had tight trade connections with Central Asia and China. There is no trace of evidence regarding the existence of Jews in the entirety of Central Asia in the early sixteenth century. At the very end of the sixteenth century Bukhara became the new ethnoreligious center of the Jews in that region. In the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to European travelers visiting Central Asia at that time, the term “Bukharan Jews” was assigned to this sub-ethnic Jewish group. Drawing on a wide range of primary and secondary source materials, this article aims to prove that the presence of Jews in Central Asia was not continuous, and therefore the modern Bukharan Jews are not descendants of the first Jewish settlers there. It also attempts to determine where Central Asia’s first Jewish population disappeared to.*

**Keywords:** Central Asia; Khazaria; Khorasan; Khorezm; Bukhara; Mashhad; Samar-kand; Jews; Ten Lost Tribes; Silk Production; Judeo-Persian

### *Early Jewish Settlements in Central Asia*

According to Michael Zand’s assumptions, the first Jews in Central Asia settled in the southwestern parts of contemporary Turkmenistan during the Achaemenid domination, sometime after 559 BC.<sup>1</sup> The first direct evidence for their presence is a Babylonian Talmud story (tractate “Avodah Zarah”), dating back to fourth-century AD Pumbedita (present-day in province Anbar, Iraq), is about Semu’el bar Bisena, a religious academy member. The story describes how, while he was in Marv, Semu’el bar Bisena refused to drink alcoholic beverages, doubting their ritual cleanliness.

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<sup>1</sup>For details see Zand, “Bukharan Jews,” 531.

Zand argues that such doubts may indicate that Jews had already been dwelling in Marv for several generations, long enough for a Babylonian *amora* (authority on Judaic law) to suspect that knowledge or fulfillment of certain ritual requirements was lacking. At the end of the sixth century, the *amora* of the Babylonian academies finally began to be recognized beyond the limits of Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> A series of archeological discoveries also confirms the presence of Jews in the Marv oasis. Among them there are objects with inscriptions in square Hebrew, dishes from the second or third centuries AD, and a number of ossuaries (receptacles for holding the bones of the dead) from the sixth century AD.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a report by al-Tabari describes how Marv's Jews (as well as the Zoroastrians and Christians) had been recognized as *abl al-dhimma* in ca. 739, a community responsible for tax payment to the Muslim administration.<sup>4</sup>

The first evidence of Jews living in northwest Central Asia dates back to the middle of the first millennium AD. A remark in the *Šābrestānīhā-ye Ērānšāhr*, dating back to the sixth century, claims that Narseh, the founder of Kat (the then capital of Khorezm), was the son of a Jew. This statement is apparently traceable to an earlier legend aimed at explaining the presence of Jews in Kat.<sup>5</sup> Al-Tabari also writes about how the Khorezm-Shah would consult the *abbar* among his other subjects, the word *abbar* referring to non-Muslim religious authorities, particularly Jewish rabbis. This serves as further proof of a Jewish presence in the city before the Arab invasion of Khorezm (ca. 712).<sup>6</sup>

In addition, up until the tenth to eleventh centuries the Aramaic alphabet was used to record the special Khorezmian language that belonged to the East Iranian language subgroup. Soviet archeologist Sergei Tolstov drew attention to the Hebrew form of the Aramaic font on Khorezmian coins from the first half of the eighth century.<sup>7</sup>

Because Bulan, the ruler of Khazaria in the late 730s, converted to (presumably pre-Talmudic) Judaism,<sup>8</sup> it can be concluded that the Jews have existed in the Khazarian Empire since at least the beginning of the eighth century. The decision to come there was most likely influenced by Caucasian Jews, who became citizens of the Khazarian kaganat as a result of the extension of its border to the south. Douglas Dunlop argued that in the first decade of the ninth century Khazarian King Obadiah conducted a religious reform in the country, adopting the rabbinical form of Judaism as a state

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 532.

<sup>3</sup>Livshits and Osmanova, "New Parthian Inscriptions," 99–105; Ershov, "Nekotorye itogi," 179–80; Klevan, *Le-toldot ha-Yehudim*, 9.

<sup>4</sup>*The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXVI, 24 [1688].

<sup>5</sup>Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 3, 545; Zand, "Bukharan Jews," 532.

<sup>6</sup>*The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXIII, 185 [1237]. Konstantin Inostrantsev was the first to state this theory. See Inostrantsev, "O domusul'manskoi kul'ture," 293–4. But Bartold expressed his doubts. Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, part 1, 220. See also Zand's support for Inostrantsev's position: Zand, "Hityashvut ha-Yehudim," 9.

<sup>7</sup>Tolstov, *Drevnii Khorezm*, 187–91.

<sup>8</sup>Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 109–20, 158. Although, sources contradict each other in this matter. See their overview: Golden, "The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," 151–4.

religion.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that such a turn would not have been possible without the help of immigrant rabbis, and Obadiah most likely relied on immigrants from Muslim countries. Jewish historian Joseph haKohen (1496–1575) points out Persia's defeat by the Arabs in 690 in his work *Emeq ha-Bakha* (The Vale of Tears, 1575), which made extensive use of Spanish and Italian manuscripts. He describes how the Jews left Persia, wandered from country to country, and eventually arrived in Rus and Germany, where they found many of their brethren.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, these Persian Jews migrated to Europe through Khazaria, where they arrived via the Khorezm or the Caucasus, which was later conquered by the Arabs. If the author was right about the initial cause of emigration being the Arab conquest of Persia, then it really should have begun from the middle of the seventh century. By Rus, the author did not mean the modern (to him) Moscovia, though he mentioned it once in this book, but the Kievan Rus of the tenth to eleventh centuries.

Al-Mas'udi (ca. 943) also argued that the Jews came to Khazaria from all Muslim countries as well as from Byzantium.<sup>11</sup> He pointed out that the Byzantine Jews were migrating to Khazaria because they were persecuted by Romanos I Lekapenos, who ruled in 920–44. Al-Mas'udi also mentions that Khazaria's mass conversions to Judaism happened earlier, during the reign of Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809), which perfectly matches with the time of Obadiah's reform. Another important piece of evidence is from an unknown Khazarian, the author of the famous Schechter Letter (also called the "Cambridge Document," ca. 949). In this Hebrew letter, Khazarian Jews are mentioned as coming from Baghdad and Khorasan, and the Greek lands are in third place.<sup>12</sup> This order, most likely, is chronological, but could be quantitative. Analyzing the Schechter letter, Omeljan Pritsak proposes that, although it does not appear to be a translation from a different language, it retained the terminology and fragments of the linguistic structure

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<sup>9</sup>Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 148. Constantin Zuckerman argues that the official Judaization of Khazaria occurred in ca. 861, based on the *Vita Constantini* (Life of Constantine), which describes a dispute between Greek missionary Cyril and a rabbi in the presence of the Khazarian king. Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars," 237–50. But an analysis of the source doesn't erase the possibility that the Khazar elite was already Judaized at the time of the dispute. This is proved by the emergence of a Khazarian coin with the words "Mūsā rasūl Allāh" (Moses the Messenger of God), dating back to 837–38. Kovalev, "Creating Khazar Identity," 226–36. The lack of sources, on the one hand, leaves us uncertain whether this is the first coin with such a message, and on the other hand, if it were in fact among the first, what political background hadn't allowed such a coin to be minted before?

<sup>10</sup>haKohen, *Emeq ha-Bakha*, 19.

<sup>11</sup>Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. 2, 8–9.

<sup>12</sup>Schechter, "An Unknown Khazar Document," 206, 215. These and the following sources and arguments refute Alexander Kulik's version about the Byzantine origins of the Khazarian Jews. See Kulik, "The Jews of Slavia Graeca," 307–311. One can only assume the predominance of Jews from Byzantium in the Khazar settlements of the Crimea from the second quarter of the 10th century. There is no direct evidence of the preservation of their cultural heritage by the 11th century. Some examples of mutual cultural influence between Christians of Kievan Rus and the local Jews do not prove the Byzantine origin of the latter.

found in the Persian language,<sup>13</sup> indicating that Persian or Judeo-Persian was the unknown Jewish Khazarian's writing language. This in itself is a sign of the Jewish elite's origin in Khazaria.

In those days Khorezm was often considered part of Great Khorasan, primarily because of its role in Khorasanian culture. Al-Istakhri (ca. 941) and Al-Muqaddasi (ca. 985) considered Khorezm part of geographical Khorasan,<sup>14</sup> and it seems that the first Khorasanian Jews in Khazaria (especially in its capital, Itil) emigrated (but not all of them) from Khorezm because of that close proximity. Tolstov also points out the Khorezmian Jews' similar migration. He believes that the Islamization of Khorezm prompted Jews to emigrate to Khazaria<sup>15</sup> and flee the hostility of Khorasanian governor Qutayba ibn Muslim, who captured Khorezm in 711. Although Tolstov states that after the ensuing unsuccessful Khorezmian uprising the elite and the Jews were repressed, in reality the Jewish masses hardly suffered. Otherwise, they would have moved to Khazaria and this would be reflected in the Jewish–Khazarian correspondence or in the testimonies of Arab geographers. This is why it is possible that Walter J. Fischel was right when he claimed that, unlike Byzantine Jews, Khorasanian Jews were led to Khazaria above all by their commercial activity.<sup>16</sup>

For the previously stated reasons, most of the Khazarian Jews, if not all, spoke the Judeo-Persian language. The spread of the Khorasanian liturgy (also known as the Babylonian liturgy, to which we will return) in Khazaria indicates this too. The Byzantine Jews who migrated later were forced to accept this liturgy in order to assimilate. Most likely, the Khorezmian cities Kat and, somewhat later, Gorgānj (otherwise known as Urgench, and not to be confused with Gorgān, a Persian city in the southeast corner of the Caspian Sea) were regional centers of Jewish scholarship for Khazarian Jews. The famous work of scientist Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi—"Chronology of the Jews" (ca. 850)<sup>17</sup> provides evidence of Jewish scientists in Khorezm.

The Khazarian caravan trade to China was led through Khorezm. A business letter in Judeo-Persian by a Jewish merchant of Khazaria or Khorezm was found in Dandan Uiliq (West China), dating back to the end of the eighth century. This merchant was engaged in the barter of clothing, apparently with local Turks.<sup>18</sup> Traveler Abu Zaid Hassan al-Sirafi recorded that 100,000 Mohamedans, Jews, Christians, and Parsees arrived in Canton or Confu in 878 for reasons of

<sup>13</sup>Pritsak, "Historical and Geographical Evaluation," 127–9.

<sup>14</sup>Al-Istakhri, "Kniga putei i stran," 178, 180; Al-Muqaddasi, "Aḥṣan al-taqāsim fi ma'rifat al-aqālīm," 202, 205.

<sup>15</sup>Tolstov, *Drevnii Khorezm*, 192; Tolstov, "Novogodnii prazdnik 'kalandas'," 96–8. In that latter work, Tolstov even assumed that a Judaization of the Khorezmian non-Jewish elite, who also migrated to Khazaria, was taking place. This version drew sharp criticism from Mikhail Artamonov. Artamonov, *Istoriia khazar*, 283–7.

<sup>16</sup>Fischel, "The Jews of Central Asia," 48.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>18</sup>Fischel, "The Rediscovery," 151; Margoliouth, "Judeo-Persian Document," 570–4; Utas, "The Jewish-Persian Fragment."

commerce.<sup>19</sup> These Jewish traders went under the name Radhaniya, meaning “those who know the way” in Persian, which could indicate the Persian language’s dominance among the five other languages known to them, including Arabic, Greek, French, Andalusian, and Slavic, according to the work of Persian geographer Ibn Khordadbeh (ca. 820–912).<sup>20</sup> Knowledge of trade routes directly correlates with knowledge of languages.

Just before its end in the tenth century, Khazaria came under the political control of Khorezm, according to Mas‘udi,<sup>21</sup> and later Dunlop and Artamonov.<sup>22</sup> Khorezm’s economic growth contributed greatly to its strengthening. Istakhri (ca. 941) reports that the trading caravans had routes from Gorganj to Gorgān, Khazaria, and Khorasan.<sup>23</sup> A geography book, *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* (ca. 982), written in Persian by an unknown author, reports that the Khorezmian capital Kat was the gold trade market for Khazars, Turks, and all of Mawarannahr.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Hawqal (ca. 988) wrote that Gorganj, the second largest city in Khorezm and the center of trade with the Ghuzz, had regular caravans going to Khazaria and Khorasan.<sup>25</sup> Aleksandr Iakubovskii believes that Khorezmian merchants grew to own most trade caravan routes from Egypt to China and from Bulgar to Kashgar, and even invested their capital in trade between Mongolia and China.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is logical that some Khazarian merchants would have moved to Kat and Gorganj in the second half of the tenth century, due to the relocation of the trade center from Itil to Khorezm. From there, it was easier for them to continue engaging in trade, including trade with China.

Calling the trade route from China the “Silk Road” is hardly correct,<sup>27</sup> since at least the sixth century, silk, understandably, hardly appeared among the goods imported from China. From the middle of the sixth century, Byzantium extended silk production in its empire. Arab traveler Ibn Khordadbeh (circa 846) does not mention silk at all while listing Radhanites trade items from China.<sup>28</sup> Ibn al-Faqih (ca. 903) reported that the Radhanites brought silk from the land of Franks to al-Farama (Egypt) instead.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Istakhri (ca. 941) indicated that Gorgān and areas near Marv were producing large quantities of silk.<sup>30</sup> The manuscript “Ḥudūd al-

<sup>19</sup>Neubauer, “Jews in China,” 128; Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, 8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibn Khurradadhbih, “On the Routes,” 111. The other version is based on the phonetic coincidence with the name Radhaniya as proposed by Moshe Gil, that they actually came from the eastern shore of the Tigris River in Iraq, known in medieval times as the district of Radhan. Gil, “The Radhanite Merchants and the Land of Radhan,” 300.

<sup>21</sup>Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. 2, 9–11.

<sup>22</sup>Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 244–7; Artamonov, *Istoriia khazar*, 511–12.

<sup>23</sup>Al-Istakhri, “Kniga putei i stran,” 178.

<sup>24</sup>*Hudud al-Alam, The Regions of the World*, 121.

<sup>25</sup>Ibn Hawqal, “On Khwarazm and Its Trade,” 176.

<sup>26</sup>Iakubovskii, “Feodal’noe obshchestvo,” 35.

<sup>27</sup>Khodadad Rezakhani observes the “Silk Road” stereotype’s development in Rezakhani, “The Road That Never Was,” 420–33.

<sup>28</sup>Ibn Khurradadhbih, “On the Routes,” 111.

<sup>29</sup>Ibn al-Faqih, “On the Radhaniya,” 113.

<sup>30</sup>Al-Istakhri, “Kniga putei i stran,” 168, 174.

‘Ālam” (ca. 982) also reports that silk and silk fabrics were being produced by inhabitants of Isfahan, Astabad, Gorgān, Nishapur, and Marv.<sup>31</sup> In fact, silk boosted Nishapur into the richest city in Khorasan, as indicated by an unknown author. Muqaddasī (ca. 985) wrote that the majority of the population of Astrabad worked as silk weavers.<sup>32</sup> Abu Shama al-Maqdisi (middle of the thirteenth century) also does not mention silk as an item the Radhanites exported from China.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, if Chinese silk was indeed delivered into Central Asia at that time, it would have been a very expensive, thin silk, a luxury item, and its import volume would not have been large.

The participation of Jews to the trade route is indicated in a Kyrgyz legend recorded at the end of the nineteenth century in the Fergana region, Andijan district. According to the legend, a Jew on a camel came by a Muslim house located in a steppe. After he was denied lodging for being an infidel, he went on. The Muslim saint Azrat-Sultan (also known as Aḥmad Yasavi, a poet and promoter of Sufism in Central Asia, living in 1103–66/1167 Yasi, what would today be Turkestan town, South Kazakhstan), who was staying in that house, found out about the incident. Azrat-Sultan went after the Jew and asked him to return. The Jew agreed only on condition that Azrat-Sultan would carry him and the camel on his back, which Azrat-Sultan did, with God’s help. After that, the Jew converted to Islam.<sup>34</sup> The town of Turkestan is located on the road leading from ancient Khorezm to China. The “Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam” mentioned a settlement called Yahudliq (literally a place abundant in Jews). It was located in the borderland between Fergana Valley and the westward region of Ilaq, also on the way to China, but from Khorasan.<sup>35</sup> According to the records of Arab traveler Abū Dolaf, a community of Jews was also residing in tenth-century Bahī town, East Turkestan (Chinese province of Xinjiang).<sup>36</sup>

According to a stele found in Kaifeng City, East China, a population of Jews had settled there under the Northern Song dynasty (959–1126). At that time Bianjing was the capital, later to be renamed “Kaifeng.” As indicated on the same stele, seventy Jewish families brought the emperor cotton fabrics from the western lands, and he allowed them to settle there. In 1163, they built a synagogue, which would later be rebuilt several times.<sup>37</sup> Adolf Neubauer claims that these immigrants were Iranian-speaking and practiced *nosah Parsi*—Persian liturgy.<sup>38</sup> We will return to the question of language and liturgy later, but it is important to note for now that the synagogue’s builder was referred to as “ustad,” the Persian word for master or teacher, according to the Kaifeng Jewish records. The Persian language was the lingua franca all over the Far East during the Middle Ages, according to Berthold Laufer. His argument is based on

<sup>31</sup> *Hudud al-Ālam, The Regions of the World*, 102, 105, 131, 133.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, “Aḥsan-al-taqāsīmfi ma‘rifatal-aqālim,” 208.

<sup>33</sup> Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 6, 346.

<sup>34</sup> Poiarkov, “Karakirgizskie legendy, skazki i verovaniia,” 11–12.

<sup>35</sup> *Hudud al-Ālam, The Regions of the World*, 117.

<sup>36</sup> Zand, “Bukharan Jews,” 534.

<sup>37</sup> Adler, “Chinese Jews,” 21.

<sup>38</sup> Neubauer, “Jews in China,” 127.

the Persian names of many Jews, as recorded in the Mongolian Yüan dynasty annals (1279/1280–1368).<sup>39</sup> The annals also contain references to Zhuhu, “Jews,” usually along with Muslims, in various cities in China, such as the Jewish communities in Hangchow, Ningpo, and Beijing.<sup>40</sup> Visiting Beijing in 1719, the Scottish doctor and traveler John Bell noted, “few Jews and Mahometans residing here supposed to have entered China about six or seven hundred years ago in company with western Tartars.”<sup>41</sup> Here “Tartars” could refer to native Khazars, and “Mahometans” might refer to Khoresmians.

We have some evidence pointing to the existence of several strong Jewish communities in Khorezm after the death of Khazaria. Living in the highly developed city of Gorganj for twenty-three years (from 995 to 1017), Abū al-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī provided an exceptionally detailed description of Jewish chronology, numerology, history, ritual of the annual cycle, knowledge of the Torah, and also acquaintance with Séder ‘Olām (סֵדֶר עוֹלָם, literally “the order of the world”) in his “al-Atar al-Baqia.”<sup>42</sup> Without a doubt, it was based on information provided by Jewish informants. One of them Ya’qub ibn Musa Neqresi, was a resident of Gorganj, but there were others whose names Biruni did not mention. It is likely, however, that he relied on one or more Jews from Kat, one of the suburbs near his birthplace. Furthermore, his reports on the writings of his teacher, Abu’l-‘Abbas Iransahri, who must have been a resident of Kat, suggest that the teacher had good informants there on Christianity, Manicheism, and Judaism, but unreliable ones on Indian beliefs.<sup>43</sup>

In the second half of the twelfth century, the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela stated that there were a total of 8,000 Jews in the city of Giva (referred to as Gina in another instance). According to him, Giva was a large city on the banks of the Gozan River (i.e. Oxus or Amu Darya).<sup>44</sup> Some authors believe that there was a mistake in writing and that he is really referring to the town of Khiva,<sup>45</sup> located 150 km from this river. But in this case it would be strange that when providing Jewish statistics Benjamin of Tudela does not mention Gorganj, the then capital of Khorezm and a really big city on the banks of the Gozan River.<sup>46</sup> Apparently, the traveler was relying on data from other informants. As a result, distortions of Gorganj and

<sup>39</sup>Laufer, “A Chinese–Hebrew Manuscript,” 192.

<sup>40</sup>Wong and Yasharpour, *The Haggadah of the Kaifeng Jews*, 3

<sup>41</sup>Bell, “Travels from St. Petersburg,” 415.

<sup>42</sup>See the Russian translation for the most complete Petersburg version of the manuscript (thirteenth century): Biruni, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, 20, 25–40, 67–75, 90–101, 160–95, 301–16. See also: Schreiner, “Les Juifs dans Al-Beruni,” 258–66.

<sup>43</sup>Zand, “Bukharan Jews,” 534.

<sup>44</sup>Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi*, vol.1, 128. About the shared identity of these river names, see: Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 428.

<sup>45</sup>Slousch, “Les Juifs à Boukhara,” 403; Klevan, *Le-toldot ha-Yebudim*, 15.

<sup>46</sup>On the fact that Khorezm reached the peak of power and prosperity in the twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, see Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, part 1, 794. The even less likely version of Fischel and Zand implies that text was referring to Ghazna (Afghanistan), which is even further away from the river Gozan (Oxus) River. See Fischel, “The Jews of Central Asia,” 38, 39; Zand, “Bukharan Jews,” 533.

Khiva have merged into one name—Giva (Gina). Moreover, the author further writes about what exactly characterizes the Gorganj of that time: “Very extensive commerce is carried on in this place, to which resort traders of all countries and languages.”<sup>47</sup>

Gorganj continued to flourish. Arab geographer Yakut who visited it in 1219, a few years before the Mongol conquest, stated that he had never seen such a powerful and rich city.<sup>48</sup> After Gorganj’s capture by the Juchi Khan Mongols, many residents of the city were executed, as reported by Arab-Persian sources.<sup>49</sup> But perhaps this was an exaggeration, as the city was quickly reborn. In the first half of fourteenth century Arab traveler Ibn Battuta described Gorganj as “the largest, greatest, most beautiful and most important city of the Turks. It has fine bazaars and broad streets, a great number of buildings and an abundance of commodities.”<sup>50</sup> His contemporary, the traveler Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, noted that Gorganj was rebuilt several dozen kilometers away from its old location.<sup>51</sup>

The Arab geographer Shihāb ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī ibn Fadlallah reports in the first half of the fourteenth century that the number of Jews and Christians permitted to settle in Khorezm (by which he was referring to its capital Gorganj) was restricted to 100 houses in each community.<sup>52</sup> In Gorganj, in 1339, Shelomo b. Shmuʿel compiled an exegetical dictionary on the Jewish Bible, Talmud and Midrashim in the Khorezmian dialect of Judeo-Persian, *Sefer ha-melitsa* (The Book of Eloquence).<sup>53</sup> Amnon Netzer argues that the book, copied in Marv<sup>54</sup> in 1473, evidences a developed community, with scientists who had a profound knowledge of scholasticism. It is possible that the author of the dictionary died during the terrible epidemic that erupted in Golden Horde, Gorganj, and Caucasus in the summer of 1346. According to the Russian chronicle “Vladimirskii letopisets,” which reports on this epidemic, there was no one to bury the dead. Jews are mentioned as being among the victims.<sup>55</sup> After that the city failed to recover, and came under attack from Timur, who destroyed it in 1388.

There is no early evidence of the permanent residence of Jews in the first millennium AD in other parts of Central Asia, i.e. outside its western part (Turkmenistan and Khorezm). The ancient cities of Central Asia, Bukhara and Samarkand, were probably later inhabited by Jews after the beginning of Jewish migration to China. We also have no evidence, even indirect, of the participation of the Bukhara and

<sup>47</sup>Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi*, vol. 1, 128.

<sup>48</sup>Le Strange, *The Lands*, 448.

<sup>49</sup>See an overview of these sources: Timokhin, “Uchastie Dzhuchi-khana,” 49–52.

<sup>50</sup>Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battūta*, 541.

<sup>51</sup>Le Strange, *The Lands*, 449.

<sup>52</sup>Elomari, “Otryvki iz sochineniia,” 242–3.

<sup>53</sup>Fischel, “The Jews of Central Asia,” 44–5. Netzer, *Otsar kitve ha-yad*, 45. It is likely that many Jews in Marv died in 1510, when, as the chronicler Hafiz-i Tanysh Bukhari puts it, the Iranian Sham Ismail I Safavī exterminated the city’s population and destroyed the city walls; Hafiz-i Tanysh Bukhari, *Sharaf-nama-yi shakhi*, vol. 1, 83.

<sup>54</sup>Netzer, *Otsar kitve ha-yad*, 45.

<sup>55</sup>*Vladimirskii letopisets*, 108.



Samarkand Jews in the caravan trade with China. There is no such evidence regarding the Jews of the Marv oasis either.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Christian West, the East did not view trade as a shameful occupation, and therefore no ethnic group was disdainful of it. Because of this, the Jews could not find an unoccupied niche here, and double trade taxes in Muslim countries diminished their commercial success.

### *Jews of Samarkand and Bukhara in the Twelfth–Fifteenth Centuries*

It is uncertain when Jews first settled in Samarkand, though they likely moved there from Khazaria, Khorezm, and maybe from Marv. The abovementioned dictionary copy of 1473 is the last piece of evidence of the Jews' stay in old Marv. In any case, in the second half of the twelfth century, Benjamin of Tudela recorded the number of Jews in Samarkand to be 50,000 and that they had a *nāsī* (elder of the community) by the name of 'Obadiah.<sup>57</sup> This figure, fantastic as it is, attests to a contemporary belief that the Jewish population was quite numerous. A large Jewish population at that time in Samarkand is also evidenced by Burhān al-Dīn Margīnānī's book *Kitab al-Hidoya* (Hedaya), finished there in 1178, which comments on various Islamic laws and pays considerable attention to *al-Kitabi* ("people of the Book"). Similarly, Abū Hafs al-Nasafī's book *Al-Qand Fi Taarikhei Samarkand*, renamed as *Qandiya-e Khurd* (The Small Qandiya) and *Qand dar ta'rif Samarqand* (The Sweet in the Acquaintance with Samarkand) in reduced translations to Persian, provides additional proof. First written in Arabic in 1142–43, the book tells the tale of a Jewish sage arriving from China to Samarkand and teaching its inhabitants to build irrigation ditches and tall buildings with glazed tiles.<sup>58</sup> Some authors assumed that the Jewish community suffered along with everyone else when Samarkand was conquered by the Mongols in 1220, an event accompanied by great destruction and the enslavement of many inhabitants,<sup>59</sup> but we have no evidence of Samarkandian Jews being killed by Mongols.

The wars' destruction led to the Radhanites' transcontinental trade center moving to Western Europe, and perhaps the Jewish merchants from major Central Asian cities followed suit. With reference to al-Tabari, Moshe Gil reports that in the early 1060s, Abū Imrān Mūsā b. Halfōn al-Samarqandī transported a shipment of twenty pre-shrunk dresses, five coats, four Sicilian headdresses, and raw fabrics for a merchant in Alexandria.<sup>60</sup> It is clear that Abū Imrān Mūsā did not live in Samarkand, as he would not have been able to send Sicilian headdresses to Egypt. Since his brother-

<sup>56</sup>Despite the absence of such information, many historians follow the stereotype that if a source mentions a Jew, then he must be a merchant, and their assertions about the participation of Jews in the "Great Silk Road" trade is reinforced only by the fact of Jewish presence on this road's allegedly very elaborate routes. Some examples are Cansdale, "Jews on the Silk Roads," 23–30; Naimark, "Sledy evreiskoi kul'tury," 76; Foltz, "Judaism and the Silk Route," 11; Rabinowitz, *Jewish Merchant Adventurers*, 15.

<sup>57</sup>Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi*, vol. 1, 129.

<sup>58</sup>Viatkin, "Samarkandskie legendy," 224–6.

<sup>59</sup>See for example Pozailov, *Mi-bukh'arab li-Yerushalayim*, 26.

<sup>60</sup>Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 531.

in-law lived in Palermo at the time, as reported by the same al-Tabari, it is possible that Abū Imrān Mūsā's family lived there or elsewhere in Italy.

The disappearance of Jews from Samarkand somewhere in the thirteenth or fourteenth century is indicated by several facts. Visiting Central Asia in 1404 Ruy González de Clavijo did not mention Jews when enumerating the ethnic groups that lived in Samarkand at that time: Turks, Arabs, Moors, Armenians, and Greeks.<sup>61</sup> The English traveler Henry Lansdell, while visiting Samarkand in 1883, met a local rabbi who told him a legend according to which the city was destroyed seven times, killing 24,000 Jewish kohanim. Kohanim of Samarkand, according to this legend, had a separate cemetery from the rest of the Jews.<sup>62</sup> There is no mention as to how the rest of the Jews died, likely due to the legend fading away over the years. As for the exact figure of the dead kohens, it appears to have been the result of projecting the total number of Torah kohanic divisions, to highlight the severity of the loss of spiritual leadership. According to the Jewish annals, King David divided the services of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Tabernacle kohanim in twenty-four priestly groups.<sup>63</sup> Most likely, the victim count during the conquest of Samarkand was greatly overestimated, especially when it comes to a one-time slaughter.

The above mentioned Benjamin of Tudela does not say anything about Bukhara. Perhaps a number of Jews moved there from Samarkand after his visit. According to a written source, as early as 1239/40, all Jews and Christians were killed in Bukhara by order of *ṣūfī* Abū'l Karamal-Dārānī, though it is doubtful he managed to kill them all. In any case, according to Ibn-Battuta's information, the Chagatay Khan Buzan (r. 1334–35) allowed Christians and Jews to rebuild their temples,<sup>64</sup> as there had been some great massacre there before.

In the second half of the fifteenth century there was a well-established Jewish community in Bukhara. Its rabbi was named Ovadia, according to a copyist of the Torah by the name of Avraham ben Benjamin, in 1488. The grandson of Ovadia himself, Yakov, copied the book *Mishneh Torah* by Moses Maimonides (Rambam) two years earlier, in Bukhara. A few more religious writings were copied in Bukhara by Elkanan Cohen Bar Eliezer in 1496, 1497, and 1498. Around 1490 in Bukhara Uziel Moshe Ben-David wrote poetry in Hebrew and Persian. A number of learned men in this Jewish community suggest that the population of Jews increased, which would be the result of resettlement from the destroyed Gorganj—the former cultural center of the Jews of Central Asia, and located just over 400 km away.

There is no trace of evidence regarding the existence of Jews in the entirety of Central Asia from the early sixteenth century and until the 1590s. Most likely, they were converted to Islam or died during Uzbek Khan Moḥammad Shaibani's (r. 1501–10) rise to power, along with many Bukharan residents. The chronicler

<sup>61</sup>De Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy*, 171.

<sup>62</sup>Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia*, vol. 1, 594.

<sup>63</sup>Chronicles 24: 1–19.

<sup>64</sup>Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, part 1, 76; Fischel, "The Jews of Central Asia," 43.

Hafiz-e Tanysh Bukhari writes that the khan “was engaged in a holy war against the infidels and rebels, and exerted efforts to drive out the enemies of faith.”<sup>65</sup> Records of the chronicler do not contain details, and therefore it is difficult to say who he meant. After all, the enemies of faith could be the Shiites, whom Khan Shaibani had been fighting hard for many years.

Apparently, Jews assimilated in the territory of the former Khorezm state at the time as well. Russian General Nikolai Murav’ev, who traveled in Turkestan in 1819–20, reported finding Jews in Khiva who had converted to Islam.<sup>66</sup> According to Bartold’s theory, the conversion of the Jews of Khiva to Islam must have taken place a sufficiently long time ago, as otherwise the descendants of the involuntary proselytes would have returned to Judaism after the arrival of Russians in the 1870s.<sup>67</sup> The confirmation of this conversion’s antiquity is found in Christian missionary Joseph Wolfe’s book, where he records some retellings of Jews of the Bukhara and Marv oasis in the first half of the 1840s. According to these retellings, Khivinian Jews assimilated among the Turkmens were often involved in wars against the hated Bukharan emirs. During the battles, alongside the war-cry of the native Khivians “Serenk,” the Hebrew words “Rabone Shel Olam” (lord of the world) could also be heard.<sup>68</sup>

The disappearance of Jews is confirmed, for example, by the English traveler Anthony Jenkinson; when traveling to Central Asia in the late 1550s, he described the state of the economy in Bukhara, but did not mention the presence of Jews in that city.<sup>69</sup> If Jenkinson had found a Jewish population there, he certainly would have mentioned it, since in his notes he disputes the hypothesis, then widespread in western Europe, claiming that the Mongols descended from the ten lost tribes. This hypothesis goes back to the letters of the legendary King Prester John. Various attempts were made to find these tribes. Finally, one of the supporters of this hypothesis, the famous traveler John Mandeville, in his manuscript dating to the second half of the fourteenth century, claims to have localized the tribes in the mountains on the Caspian Sea coast. Considering the absence of mountains on the eastern coast of this sea, the localization appears to be about the North Caucasus. Mandeville reports that although Alexander the Great blocked the way out of the mountains with insurmountable stones, some Jews from these tribes still managed to escape. They allegedly crossed the desert with dragons and came to Bukhara, whose lands were inhabited by mythical animals.<sup>70</sup> Obviously, the news about Khazaria’s disintegration was reflected in Mandeville’s information on the Jews leaving the North Caucasus. Mandeville’s notes became very popular and were published in several hundreds editions.

<sup>65</sup>Hafiz-i Tanysh Bukhari, *Sharaf-nama-yi shakhi*, vol. 1, 83.

<sup>66</sup>Murav’ev, *Puteshestvie v Turkmeniiu i Khivu*, vol. 2, 30, 135

<sup>67</sup>Bartold, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, part 1, 374–5.

<sup>68</sup>Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission of Bokhara*, 380. The Jews of Marv oasis were recent settlers from Mashhad.

<sup>69</sup>Jenkinson, “The Voyages and Travels,” vol. 9, 378–9.

<sup>70</sup>Mandeville, *Travels*, 174–7. See the critical analysis of the various fantasies collected in Higgins, *Writing East*; Tzanaki, *Mandeville’s Medieval Audiences*; Larner, “Plucking Hairs,” 133–55.

While arguing against the story's explanation of the Bukharan residents' Jewish origin, Anthony Jenkinson states that the similar appearance of urban residents (which he calls Tajiks) with Jews cannot be strong evidence for this theory.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, if Jews had not left Bukhara or had not died there, but converted to Islam at the very beginning of the sixteenth century, then by the time of Jenkinson's visit there would be the first or second generation of converts still living in the city. In that case, someone would have told Jenkinson about this large group of converts.

Anthony Jenkinson's travel notes could not convince the still numerous supporters of the theory that identified the Mongols with the ten lost tribes. Giles Fletcher, who served as English ambassador in the Russian tsardom in 1588, published the work "Tatars or Ten Tribes" in 1610. He localized the residence of the descendants of the captive tribes in Central Asia, especially on the northeastern coast of the Caspian Sea,<sup>72</sup> i.e. in the Khorezmian state. Fletcher did not present any evidence for this and therefore it is difficult to identify his source. Perhaps he got the same information as the Dutch merchant Isaac Abrahamszoon Massa, who was in Moscow in 1601–9. In particular, Massa wrote that the Russian elite family Godunov originated from the Caspian region of the Golden Horde, which was destroyed during Timur's time. He noted that there are ruins of magnificent buildings with Greek and Jewish inscriptions, partially gilded<sup>73</sup>, but unlike Fletcher, Massa does not even roughly indicate where this city was located. Perhaps that city is Gorganj or Saksin (presumably the city was on the mouth of the Volga<sup>74</sup>), which likely was also destroyed during Timur's campaign to the Golden Horde, through Khorezm, and along the Volga River. The campaign ended with the defeat of Golden Horde khan Tokhtamysh in the battle of the River Kondurcha (present-day Samara region) in 1391.

The legend of the ten lost tribes remained very popular in western Europe until the second half of the nineteenth century, as follows from Claudius Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia*.<sup>75</sup> This legend was not only popular among Christians; in 1760, in their letter to the Chinese Jews, London's Jews wondered if they had heard anything about the Israelites in Tartary or the lost ten tribes.<sup>76</sup>

Returning to the issue of the disappearance of Jews in sixteenth-century Central Asia, one cannot exclude their flight to China, as their connections with Chinese Jews did not cease. Written in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Kaifeng, mainly in Judeo-Persian, two Easter Haggadahs speak in favor of exactly this development. Fook-Kong Wong and Dalia Yasharpour argue that the texts are very close to the Judeo-Bukharian or Judeo-Khorasanian writing.<sup>77</sup> In fact, they can only be in Judeo-Khorasanian writing, or at least its Khorezmian variety, since it is unlikely

<sup>71</sup>Jenkinson, "The Voyages and Travels," vol. 9, 378–9.

<sup>72</sup>Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes*, 189–90.

<sup>73</sup>Massa, *Kratkoe izvestie o Moskovii*, 34.

<sup>74</sup>Grekov and Iakubovskii, *Zolotaia orda i eë padenie*, 23.

<sup>75</sup>Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 131.

<sup>76</sup>Katz, "The Chinese Jews," 904.

<sup>77</sup>Wong and Yasharpour, *The Haggadah of the Kaifeng Jews*, 12, 56–64.

that Jews in Bukhara had managed to create their own separate writing. This is confirmed by Shaul Shaked, who claims that the written language of Kaifeng Jews is the Khorasanian dialect of the Judeo-Iranian languages, which was only used in Greater Khorasan from the eighth to the thirteenth century.<sup>78</sup> In addition, it is difficult to believe that the Jews of Kaifeng retained a Jewish writing and language from the second half of the tenth century. It is reasonable to assume that this culture in China was supported by new groups of Jewish emigrants from Central Asia.

As Wong and Yasharpour note, these two Passover Haggadahs differ from the famous liturgies by the absence of reciting Psalm 136 and the drinking of the fifth cup of wine. Therefore, they believe that the Haggadahs are written in accordance with the early Babylonian liturgy.<sup>79</sup> Based on research on these and other texts, the scholar of comparative religion Rafael Verblovski also concludes that Jews in Kaifeng used the Babylonian liturgy, a predecessor to its Persian version.<sup>80</sup> In fact, in medieval rabbinical correspondence this liturgy is sometimes referred to as Khorasanian.<sup>81</sup> Its long preservation can be explained only by China and Central Asia's conditions of isolation. Khorasanian influence is also indicated by some Passover ritual differences in Kaifeng. At the end of the nineteenth century, Elkan Nathan Adler considered the Kaifeng Jews' liturgical practice an amazingly preserved fragment of the old Jewish culture in Central Asia.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Genesis of Jews in Bukhara at the End of the Sixteenth to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries*

Suddenly, by the turn of the seventeenth century a whole Jewish quarter, Maḥalla-ye Kohna (old quarter), was established in Bukhara. The appearance of Jews in the city was reflected in the literature. In 1606 Khwājāh Bukhārā'ī composed the epic Judeo-Persian poem "Dāniāl-nāma," consisting of 2,175 parts and based on the "Book of Daniel" and various Midrashim. In 1704, also in Bukhara, Benyamin ben Mishā'el (Aminā) edited the text and inserted several of his own verses in it. The work is written in an epic style reminiscent of Judeo-Persian works "Musā-nāma" by Šāhin, Shirazi poet, and "Fath-nāma" by 'Emrāni, Isfahani poet.<sup>83</sup> Approximately at the beginning of the eighteenth century Yosef b. Isaac (Yūsuf Yahūdī) added his own verses to 'Emrāni's poem "Qeṣṣa-ye haft barādarān" ("The Story of the Seven Brothers") in 1688. In 1749 he also wrote the epic poem "Antiokus-nāma" (Book of Antiochus).<sup>84</sup> In all these works, the Judeo-Persian literary tradition is clearly traced, testifying to the close cultural intercommunal ties that could hardly be maintained from isolated Bukhara.

<sup>78</sup>Shaked, "Tmi'a 'o Hishtamrut," 348–51.

<sup>79</sup>Wong and Yasharpour, *The Haggadah of the Kaifeng Jews*, 75.

<sup>80</sup>Verblovski, "Al Yehude Kaifeng," 56–9.

<sup>81</sup>Fischel, "The Jews of Central Asia," 45–6.

<sup>82</sup>Adler, "The Persian Jews," 586, 601–25.

<sup>83</sup>Netzer, *Otsar kitve ha-yad*, 33.

<sup>84</sup>Bacher, "Judaico-Persian," 318–24.

Having migrated to Bukhara and being isolated, the Jews gradually moved from the Judeo-Persian to Judeo-Tajik literary language, which for the first time found some manifestations in “Antiokus-nāma.”<sup>85</sup> Another significant work is the narrative poem “Bi yād-e Khodāidād” (“To the Memory of Khodāidād”), also known simply as “Khodāidād,” written by Ibrāhim b. Abīl Khayr in 1809. Such a late language transition to Judeo-Tajik, influenced by the local population, also indirectly indicates a late migration, otherwise this linguistic assimilation would have occurred earlier. As we can see from the fundamental research of Ivan Zarubin, the phonetics and morphology of the Judeo-Tajik language greatly differ from the Tajik dialects of Central Asia.<sup>86</sup> After a long break in Bukhara, the manuscripts began to be copied again. There are manuscripts that were copied there in 1590, 1663, 1666, 1696, 1725, 1771, 1775 (two), 1778, 1781, and 1797. All this indicates the presence of religiously and secularly learned men among the Bukharan Jews.

Where did the new Jewish community in Bukhara come from? They were most likely forcibly relocated to Bukhara from some Khorasanian city that was captured by the Shaybanid dynasty khan Abdallāh’s (r. 1583–98) troops. It is important to note that Jews have lived in large numbers in Khorasan for centuries. According to Moqaddasi, there were “many Jews and few Christians” in 980s Khorasan.<sup>87</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, Jews could settle in the capital of Khorasan, Mashhad, which became one of the main cities of Persia, although in the early thirteenth century it was only a small town.<sup>88</sup> The researcher of Persian economy Willem Floor names Mashhad among other major Persian textile production centers. From the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth, Mashhadi silk, especially velvet, could compete with the famous Genoa silk. However, throughout the seventeenth century, the city is mentioned only once regarding textile production, and even then in relation to its felt carpets.<sup>89</sup> This fact is important for understanding the motives for the deportation, as Jews were heavily engaged in silk weaving, to which we will return below. Here, we only note that from the late sixteenth century, the silk trade became the most significant in Safavid Iran and the Ottoman Empire, as the rulers of these countries valued it greatly. Raw silk and silk fabrics were the most important items of trade for Persia with India, Russia, and western Europe.<sup>90</sup> However, soon there were no Jews in Mashhad at all until the

<sup>85</sup>Zand, “Evreisko-persidskaia literatura,” vol. 2, 446.

<sup>86</sup>Zarubin, “Ocherk razgovornogo iazyka.”

<sup>87</sup>Al-Muqaddasi, “Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifatal-aqālīm,” 201.

<sup>88</sup>Ibn al-Assir, reporting the destruction of Khorasan by the Oghuz in 1161, notes that they killed many residents of Mashhad, where Ali Ibn-Musa (Imam Reza) is buried. It is unlikely that this author would have provided this last detail if, during the writing of the chronicle in 1231, Mashhad was a famous city. Ibn al-Assir, “al-Kamil fi-t-tarih,” vol. 1, 399. But already in the first half of the fourteenth century Qazvini and Ibn Batuta noted that Mashhad was a big city. See Le Strange, *The Lands*, 390. In 1507/8, Sheibani-khan appointed his cousin Seyyed Khadi-Khoja as the city’s ruler, which speaks of the city’s importance. Hondamir, “Habibal-Siyar,” vol. 2, 42. During the entire sixteenth century, neighboring states were waging wars for the ownership of Mashhad.

<sup>89</sup>Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry*, 34, 36, 41.

<sup>90</sup>Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 106–23; Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 62–3.

1730s. This is a result of their complete transfer to Bukhara between 1589 until 1598, when Abdallāh Khan ruled Mashhad.

However, Jews could have been forcibly relocated to Bukhara from another Khorasanian city instead—Nishapur, ruled by Abdallāh Khan from 1590 to 1597. Jews had long lived in Nishapur according to information collected by Richard W. Bulliet. In particular, he reports that two Jewish villages were incorporated into Nishapur during its growth. Eleventh-century sources present cases of individual Jews who lived in this city.<sup>91</sup> The forcible transfer of Jews from Nishapur, the previous capital of Khorasan and a major city, is backed up by the fact that it was one of the centers of the Persia's silk industry too, as mentioned above.

Abdallāh Khan's main motivation for deporting the weavers was to damage the Persian economy, as he considered the Persian ruler his principal enemy. Additionally, it is unknown how long the inhabitants of Central Asia were producing silk fabric, but Bukharian silk fabrics were of far lower quality than the Persian ones in the sixteenth century.<sup>92</sup> Central Asian nobility preferred Persian silks, which stopped being delivered because of the war with Shah 'Abbās I (r. 1588–1629). Abdallāh Khan could not disregard this, especially since he paid great attention to the economy, as can be seen from his monetary reform that ended the economic crisis.<sup>93</sup> Central Asian silk was not in demand outside the region, except in India,<sup>94</sup> and something had to be done. Like Shah 'Abbās I, Abdallāh Khan made great efforts to develop the international trade. In this, he stood out from his predecessors, as Stephen Frederic Dale argues.<sup>95</sup> The ability to export silk fabrics instead of raw silk seemed especially promising to him. Additionally, silkworms have been cultivated in the Ferghana Valley of Central Asia for centuries and carried large cultural significance. According to a local ancient legend recorded in the late nineteenth century, the prophet Job was healing near the Khazret-Ayub hot springs. The worms falling from him landed in the water, where they turned into leeches, and on the mulberry, where they turned into silkworms.<sup>96</sup>

The Jews' relocation from Khorasan to Bukhara is recorded in legends collected by Europeans at various times; these legends are either disregarded by historians or not paid due attention. In 1831 Bukhara, the Scottish traveler and explorer Alexander Burnes was informed that the Jews had moved there from Mashhad.<sup>97</sup> The same information was reported in 1848 to the British journalist Joachim Hayward Stocqueler.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 15.

<sup>92</sup>Iakubovskii, "Feodal'noe obshchestvo," 45.

<sup>93</sup>Davidovich, *Istoriia monetnogo dela*, 85, 190.

<sup>94</sup>Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 24.

<sup>95</sup>Dale, *Indian Merchants*, 14.

<sup>96</sup>"Shelkovodstvo v Ferganskoi oblasti," 162.

<sup>97</sup>Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. 1, 275.

<sup>98</sup>Stocqueler, *The Oriental Interpreter*, 35.

In 1845 the London-based *Jewish Chronicle*, reported that Jews had migrated to Bukhara 300 years before from Qazvin (northwestern Persia), according to one Bukharan Jewish traveler.<sup>99</sup> Russian officer and ethnographer Aleksandr Khoroshkhin, while visiting Bukhara in the early 1870s, concluded that the relocation of Jews occurred during the reign of Iskander-Khan, according to available sources.<sup>100</sup> Iskander-Khan was on the Bukharan throne in 1561–83, but it is well known that all the affairs in the state were managed by his son, the very same Abdallāh Khan who robbed the throne for his father from another branch of the Shaybanids. Russian general Leonid Sobolev collected the information in 1872, from which it followed that the Jews came to Bukhara from Persia.<sup>101</sup> A contrasting legend, heard in 1863 by the Hungarian traveler Arminius Vambery, confirms the resettlement of Jews to Bukhara, but dates it to the beginning of the eighteenth century and claims that the settlers were formerly residents of Marv and Tabriz.<sup>102</sup>

According to information recorded in 1897 by a collector of Jewish manuscripts, Elkan Nathan Adler, the Jews were moved from Sabzevar to Samarkand by Genghis Khan, from where they were relocated to Bukhara in 1598—very close to the indicated time.<sup>103</sup> However there is no information about the Jews of Samarkand from the thirteenth century until the second half of the seventeenth, when it became the hometown of the poet Elisha ben Samuel, known by the penname Rāghib (Pers. Desirous one), the author of the Judeo-Persian epics *Shahzādah va Šūfi* (Pers. The Prince and the Šūfi, 1680) and *Ḥanukka-nāma* (Pers. The Book of Ḥanukkah, after 1680), as well as of several Hebrew poems.<sup>104</sup> The disappearing of the Jewish populace in the city was perhaps a result of forced conversions to Islam as well as emigration. The appearance of this poet there can only be the result of migrations from Bukhara to Samarkand. But the Jewish community did not reside there for long. By the early eighteenth century the community had all but ceased to exist, because Samarkand was almost completely destroyed, first by Kazakh nomads and then by Nader Shah in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The Jewish community reappeared in Samarkand only in the first third of the nineteenth century as a result of a second emigration from Bukhara.<sup>105</sup> In this regard, the information Lansdell heard from Rabbi Samarkand about the absence of Jews in the city for more than a century seems quite reliable.<sup>106</sup>

Even in the 1920s–1940s, the Bukharan Jews preserved legends about their mass migration from Mashhad to Bukhara. According to one particular legend, 400 years ago there was a queen of Bukhara who could not have children. The king consulted doctors but to no avail. Then someone told him that a Jewish doctor

<sup>99</sup>*The Jewish Chronicle*, July 18, 1845, 196.

<sup>100</sup>Khoroshkhin, "Narody Srednei Azii," 322.

<sup>101</sup>Sobolev, "Geograficheskie i statisticheskie svedeniia," 167.

<sup>102</sup>Vambery, *Travels in Central Asia*, 372.

<sup>103</sup>Adler, *Jews in Many Lands*, 221–2.

<sup>104</sup>Netzer, *Otsar kitve ha-yad*, 34–6.

<sup>105</sup>Kaganovitch, *Druz'ia ponevole*, 47–50.

<sup>106</sup>Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia*, vol. 1, 594–5.



living in Mashhad could cure the queen of her sterility. The king and queen went to Mashhad and soon after their return the queen gave birth to a child. The king wished such a learned doctor would live in his kingdom and he promised to fulfill all of the Jew's wishes if he'd only settle in Bukhara. The doctor was a religious Jew and he refused to go to Bukhara, as there would be no other Jews he could pray as a minyan with. The king then offered to bring ten Jews to Bukhara, who constituted the beginnings of a Jewish community. The Jews who subsequently immigrated introduced silk weaving and textile dyeing to Bukhara, this being occupations they pursued up to the time of the story's telling. The Muslims learned these trades from the Jews.<sup>107</sup> Soviet ethnographer Olga Sukhareva collected another legend in the 1950s recalling the resettlement of several Jewish ancestors, who were silk weavers.<sup>108</sup> However, this legend places this event considerably earlier, as it claims that Timur (r. 1370–1405) was the ruler who ordered Jews to move to Bukhara, but from Bagdad this time, which he captured in 1401.

The Jews in Bukhara were not happy with the resettlement. Tsofi Ben Iliahu Ha-Levi made an inscription on the copy of *Mishneh Torah* which read: "I ... edited this book and carefully studied in the country Bukhara in 1590, during a strong hatred of us and persecution."<sup>109</sup> By persecutions, the *sofer* (the scribe) likely meant the violent relocation.<sup>110</sup> The fact that he used the word "edited" rather than "copied" or "copied and edited" testifies that the book was copied before the relocation, and he edited the text in Bukhara.

According to one legend recorded in 1899, the Jews in Bukhara initially prayed in the mosque of Madjid Magav.<sup>111</sup> Alternative information implies that they prayed in the Chukur mosque, but that is unlikely since it was reported a quarter of a century later—in the middle of the 1920s.<sup>112</sup> A few decades after the deportation, the Jewish community in Bukhara finally got permission to build a synagogue, and it was erected at the beginning of 1620.<sup>113</sup>

In the aforementioned story, heard by Vambery, Jewish settlers appeared to be silk weavers. There were other rulers who resettled the Jews for the development of this craft. Assigning a high value to production and trade of silk fabrics in his domestic and foreign policy, in 1612 Shah 'Abbās I forcibly relocated more than a thousand families of Jewish weavers from Zagem (also known as Zagrum or Bazari, a city in Kakheti, a historical area in the territory of modern Georgia) into Faraḥābād, a city on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. By 1619, the total number of Jewish settlers

<sup>107</sup>"J.D.B. News Letter," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 16, 1928.

<sup>108</sup>Sukhareva, *Bukhara*, 166.

<sup>109</sup>Archive of National Library of Israel, F23007, 30.

<sup>110</sup>The scribe did not know yet that after their deportation, the situation of those Jews remaining under Shah Abbās I's authority deteriorated significantly. See Loeb, "Dhimmi Status," 249–50. It became worse than that of those Jews who found themselves in the Sunni Bukhara.

<sup>111</sup>Rabin, "Biografiah," 547.

<sup>112</sup>Amitin-Shapiro, "Predanie," 6.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 3–8.

was 7,000.<sup>114</sup> Nāder Shāh Afshar (r. 1736–47) also strove to develop the economy of the northern Persian provinces. Wishing to develop the crafts in Mashhad in particular, he forcibly moved the Jews from Qazvin and other Persian cities to there in the second half of the 1730s to the first half of the 1740s.<sup>115</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, it seemed the silk produced by Jews started to be exported from Bukhara into Moscovia and Siberia. Seventeenth century Russian sources mention that silk fabrics were imported in quantities from Bukhara, often under the names *kitaika* and *zenden*.<sup>116</sup> The production of silk fabrics became the main occupation of Bukharan Jews for a long time. A Russian non-commissioned officer Phillip Efmov, who lived there for several years at the end of the 1770s, noted the outstanding professional skills of Jews, whom he observed to produce silk fabrics in large quantities.<sup>117</sup> Timofei Burnashev, who visited Bukhara a decade and a half later, wrote that Jews would dye silk and produce fabrics and other products from it.<sup>118</sup> The skills of the Bukharan Jews' were pointed out by the Russian service lieutenant Abdunasyr Subkhankulov in 1809, the Indian traveler Meer Izzut-Oollah in 1813, and the Russian priest Vasilii Budrin, a member of the Russian expedition in 1820.<sup>119</sup>

After their arrival in Bukhara, Jewish weavers did not take on the two economic niches habitual for Jews in medieval Europe—money lending and trade, since they were already occupied. Traditionally, Tajik-speaking Muslims engaged in trade, and money lending was mostly the niche of Indians.<sup>120</sup> Only at the very beginning of the nineteenth century did the Bukharan Jews begin to get involved in trade, under the influence of expanding economic ties with Russia.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, by 1885 a third of Jews in the city Bukhara were still engaged in the production of silk. Their quality silk fabrics were traditionally purchased for the emir's palace. The translucent silk shawls (*kalgai*) they wove were especially valued.<sup>122</sup> The Turkestan governor-general's senior official of custom requests, Mikhail Brodovskii, who was distributing advanced technologies in agricultural production, wrote in 1874 that mostly Bukharan Jews engaged in the raw silk production of Central Asia.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>114</sup>Pietro Della Valle's Travels," 51, 94; Mathee, *The Politics of Trade*, 42, 44, 74–8, 102. Regarding 'Abbās I's attitude towards the Jewish population see Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorities," 124.

<sup>115</sup>Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours*, 132; Ben-Zvi, *Alilot dam*, 320; Levy, "Eduiot ve-t'eudot," 57.

<sup>116</sup>"Torgovye snosheniia Moskovskogo gosudarstva," 109, 143, 213; Ziaiev, *Ekonomicheskie sviazi Srednei Azii*, 27, 33–53, 59–70.

<sup>117</sup>Efmov, *Deviatiletnee stranstvovanie i prikliucheniia*, 96.

<sup>118</sup>Burnashev, "Puteshestviia ot Sibirskoi linii," 276.

<sup>119</sup>Subkhankulov, "Iz zamechaniï," 101–3; Izzut-Oollah, *Travels in Central Asia*, 65; Budrin, "Russkie v Bukhare," 29. About this also see: "Nekotorye svedeniia o Bukharii," 296; Eversmann, "Embassy to Bucharia," 54.

<sup>120</sup>Documentary evidence on the usury's occupation of Indians in Bukhara in the late sixteenth century can be seen in Levi, *The Indian Diaspora*, 154, 217–19.

<sup>121</sup>Kaganovitch, *Druz'ia ponevole*, 41–7.

<sup>122</sup>Khadashot, *Hamelits* [חדשות המליץ], 1885, no. 79, 4; Obruchev, *Po goram i pustyniam*, 63; Sukhar-eva, *Kvartal'naiia obschchina*, 76.

<sup>123</sup>Brodovskii, *Tekhnicheskie proizvodstva*, 27.

In fact, at that time in Bukhara, inhabitants of the Muslims quarters Alvondj, Tupkhona, Khonako, Eshoni Pir, and Mir-Mas'ud were engaged in this craft too; and in the last two quarters only Chala (Jews converted to Islam) produced raw silk.<sup>124</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, Jews were not the only silk weavers in Bukhara. Silk weaving was also done by Tajik-speaking Muslims in the Abdullo-khoja, Juizar, Gozio'n, Korkhana, Kosagaron, Shaikh Djalol, Khauzi Nau, and Urgandjio'n quarters, among others.<sup>125</sup> They were mostly descendants of former Marv residents, whom Shah Murad and his son Haydar relocated to Bukhara in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The rest of the silk weavers in the city, according to Olga Sukhareva, were native Muslims of Bukhara who learned this art from Marv's deportees.<sup>126</sup>

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After moving to Bukhara, the Jewish community grew at a rapid pace. Visiting Khiva and Bukhara in 1741, the English merchant Jonas Hanway noted that Bukhara had a large number of Jews;<sup>127</sup> however, he did not specify how many. The relative political stability and tolerance towards the Jewish community lead to increased Jewish immigration to Bukhara from Afghanistan, Persia, and even Syria and Iraq. This is evidenced by many oral family histories and toponymic nicknames (*lakobs*) based on their native cities and countries. These immigrants very quickly assimilated among the local Jews. Indirect sources help us estimate the number of Jews in the whole of the Bukharan emirate since 1810. At that time it was inhabited by 2,500 Jews, including 1,900 in the city of Bukhara.<sup>128</sup>

In this way, the descendants of Jews relocated to Bukhara at the end of the sixteenth century were preserved in separate Jewish ethnic groups with their own distinctive cultures and languages, as well as clear self-identity. In comparison, the Jews living in Central Asia before them left only occasional traces of evidence behind until their disappearance at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The only certainty is their great cultural impact on the Jewish communities of Khazaria and China.

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<sup>124</sup>c Sukhareva, *Kvartal'naia obshchina*, 74, 82, 107, 223.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 95, 97, 100, 103, 110–15, 120–3.

<sup>126</sup>Sukhareva, *Bukhara*, 216.

<sup>127</sup>Hanway, *An Historical Account*, vol. 1, 353.

<sup>128</sup>Kaganovitch, *Druz'ia ponevole*, 58.

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