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JEWES' ENTRY INTO CENTRAL ASIA AND THE FORMATION OF JEWISH DIASPORA

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Introduction: Central Asia has long been one of the regions where people of various nationalities lived. It is known from history that here they lived a peaceful life, preserving their culture and traditions. Among them, in particular, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Jews of Bukhara, an ethno-confessional community that has its place in socio-cultural processes as part of the Jewish nation, are should be mentioned.

The issue of first Jewish settlements in Central Asia, development of local communities and their socio-cultural life has always been of big interest among historians. Most famous of them are M.Zand⁹, S.Gitlin¹⁰, Z.L.Amitin-Shapiro¹¹.

Despite the abovementioned fact, the question about exact time of first Jewish settlements in Central Asia remains open. Dozens of books dedicated to the issue are overfilled with contradicting information and hypotheses.

There is no exact information about the appearance of Jews in the Central Asia in sources. It is worthy to state that although many books were written and researches were carried out on this problem, all of them give contradictory information about it.

Baseless information was spread in last century that Jewish diaspora has been formed since "Captivity of Babylon". In addition, it is scientifically baseless to compare Hever (mentioned in the book of the reign) with Bukhara by scholars of the medieval centuries, although the territory of modern Uzbekistan is not included into the territory of the reign of Babylon.

Since ancient times, the territory of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan, has become an abode for representatives of various nations and nationalities, which lived under the same sky and have become an integral part of our homeland. Among them should be noted the Jewish community. The article is devoted to analysis of views on the appearance of Jews in the Central Asia, formation, characteristics and social life of Jewish communities. Also are disclosed relationships of the Jews with local people (Persians, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others.), customs, and rites, the similarities and differences in the costumes.

Because, although the modern linguistics does not deny change of sounds such as "A" – "E" – "E"; "H" – "G"; "B" – "V" in the transition from one language to another one, it is impossible to apply this approach to the transition of the sounds "B" or "V" to "H" (Maystrovoy A., 2005: 93-94)

Every person who studies the history of Jews in the Central Asia and, at least, is interested in it, may have some questions like "When and from where Jews come to this region?". It is necessary to state that some views that far from a scientific character are also observed when we try to find answers to this question from sources. For example, it may be given a supposition that Jews of Bukhara ate considered as "indigene" – native people.

Methods: When we talk about Jews of the Central Asia and their role in the social-cultural life of the region, it is useful to emphasize a method of our research. It is advantageous to use a method of a transition from abstract to exactness in the study of the history of Jews in the region. Because, it is impossible to include all characters and shapes of a complicated, many-sided, differential and changeable subject in the study and explanation of it. In addition, some characters of this subject are not important or others are obstacle in the comprehension of it. That is why it is not necessary to take all of them into account. It is very important to distinguish all essential aspects in the correct comprehension of the subject of the research. It has more complicated and many-sided form in this abstract situation.

The second problem is a changeableness of the subject in its appearance and its mutual influence on the permanent change of results. In brief, we have to choose the true essence of the subject and to analyze it separately from other essences at the same time. Then we study it considering its other essences as well. A conclusion, obtained in a result of it, expresses a meaning and matter of the truth in the abstract case, which is free from various situations. Now, considering all shapes of appearance of the subject into account, we will have an opinion, which expresses a meaning

⁹ M.Zand – Israeli scientist - philologist, a specialist in the history of Persian and Tajik literature. Sand - the author of numerous publications on the Persian and Tajik literature and philosophy, as well as the Jewish culture in the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ S.Gitlin – doctor of history, professor. Honored Scientist of Uzbekistan. Research fields: international cooperation and history of jews and Judaism in Central Asia.

¹¹ Zalman Amitin L. Shapiro – Soviet orientalist, ethnologist, a classic of the Kyrgyz scientific bibliography..

and matter of the truth on the condition of accepting a concrete conclusion – all existed situations (Zinov'ev A., 1994: P. 49-50).

It is advantageous to use the above-mentioned method for a subject of our research – Jewish communities of the Central Asia or Bukhara.

Results and Discussion: Analyzing all information, we found out that most historians incline that first Jews came to Central Asia 2 000 – 2 500 years ago. The reason of such vagueness is lack of sources giving information about that time. According to most scientists, the III-IV centuries are least studied ages of Central Asian history. Only sources regarding that time belong to Arab writers and mostly consist of history of '*arab futuhat*' (conquests) of VII-VIII centuries. We can see little information about events of II-IV centuries in later sources (The World History. 1956: P. 749).

Historians agree that Central Asian Jewish communities came there from Israel (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 39.). Their settlement in these lands are closely related with their exile from Israel after collapse of Israel Kingdom in I century BC and destruction of The Temple in Jerusalem. In 586 BC, far earlier from destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity first Jewish diasporas spread to Egypt and Mesopotamia, in the beginning of new era to eastern coasts of Mediterranean Sea, Persia and other lands (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 39.). Life of Jews in Persia was complex. We can see many data in historical documents regarding discrimination of Jews there. Researchers parallel this with aggravation of political and especially religious conditions (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 39.). After enthronement of Yazdegerd II (438-459) and his son Piruz (460-484) oppressions toward Jewish people strengthened. During the rule of Piruz we can even see the genocide of Jews. For instance, historical documents state that in 468 (in some sources 472) Piruz killed half of Jewish population in Isfahan accusing them of killing two Zoroastrian *mobads* (priests). Another example of Piruz's severe attitude towards Jews was killing the leader of Babylonian Jewish community Hun Marin (Ochiliev D. 2002: P. 65-67.).

Intransigent policy of Yazdegerd II and Piruz towards Jews resulted mass migration of Jewish people from Persian kingdom. Migrated people settled in Byzantium, Crimea, India and China, where Zoroastrianism did not have much influence.

Most researchers agree in the point that Jews migrated and settled in Central Asia during the rule of Ahamanide dynasty (after 559 BC) (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 39.). As a proof they cite book of Esther from Old Testament, written in 78-77 BC, where it is said "...jews spread in all territories of Persia" (Rtveladze E., 2004:

P. 6.). First reliable information on the settlement of Jews in Central Asia shows that Jewish people emerged in Balkh, Merv and Khorezm in VIII-IX centuries AC. In contrary to this, according to M.Sand immigration of Jews to Central Asia falls on IV century (Zand M., 1989: 531-533). To prove this he adduces Babylonian Talmud, where it is written that member Babylonian Amoraim (Institute for Jewish legislature) Samuel Bar Biseni (Pumbedata¹²) travelled to Merv. Visiting his brothers in faith abstains from drinking wine. Stressing on this fact, M.Zand says that Jews, after several centuries' life in Merv, have forgotten religious rituals of preparing the wine. That is why Samuel did not drink their wine (Zand M., 1989: 531-533).

All researchers, including M.Sand, attribute the migration of Jews to Central Asia with their silk trade activity through The Great Silk road (Zand M., 1989: 531-533). But, it would be unreasonable to link this only with Silk Road. It is known that repressions of Jews by the romans during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, forced the Jewish people to migrate to other lands, including Central Asia (Rtveladze E., 2004: 8.).

According to Jacob Neusner¹³, in first centuries AC Jews played important role in socio-economic life of Parthian Empire. Most of them were engaged in Roman-Chinese trade (Neusner J., 1983: 910).

In the beginning of new era Dura-Europos became a big Jewish center¹⁴. Archeological excavations detected there remainings of ancient synagogue (Rtveladze E., 2004: 9.). Dura-Europos bordered with Khatra (arabic – al-khadhr)¹⁵, Khamadan, Parthia, Marghiyana and Baktria. E.Rtveladze, a famous scholar on history and traditions of Central Asian Jews states that Jews migrated to Central Asia from these territories (Rtveladze E., 2004: 9.).

Undoubtedly, it was Merv where most Jews of Central Asia lived. During the archeological excavations in 1954-1956 were found ossuaries with rectangular Hebrew inscriptions on it dating VI-VII centuries. Later information about those findings was published by A.Kelvan (Kelvan A., 1979: 91-92.).

According to E.Rtveladze, Jews later spread from Merv to Baktriya, Tokharistan, Soghd and

¹² Ancient city in Babylon founded in late 3rd century, where situated one of the academies of Talmud.

¹³ Jacob Neusner (born July 28, 1932) is an American academic scholar of Judaism. He is often celebrated as one of the most published authors in history, having written or edited more than 950 books

¹⁴ Dura-Europos - The ancient city on the Euphrates (near modern Qalat es-Salih in Syria), which existed from about the year 300 BC. e. up to 256 years. He is famous because of archaeological finds and well-preserved ancient frescoes. Dura in Aramaic means «fortress».

¹⁵ Ancient city in Northern Iraq.

Khorezm. The main reason of it, he states, was policy of Babylonian Jew academy, starting from 6th century, towards spreading Judaism across South Iran, Khorasan and other neighbouring territories (Rtveladze E., 2004: 9.).

Some researchers stress that Jews lived in Balkh till 709, when the city was conquered by Arabs. According to such sources as “Fadhail al-Balkh” and “Bakhr al-asrar” one of the gates of Balkh was called “Yahudiyyah” (Jewish), also in the outskirts of Balkh there was residential area called “Yehudanak” (Little home of Jews) (Zand M., 1989: 531-533.).

Historical sources evidence that in the Juzhjan province, north-west of Balkh, there was a town called Yahudiyyah. In the period between 988-1031 it was renamed as Maymanah. This fact corroborates that the town was founded by Jews or was reconstructed by them in early medievals. Furthermore, many graveyards of Jews with gravestones with written epitaphs in Persian and Jewish language were found in Herat and other cities of Afghanistan (Henning W., 1957: 335-342).

It is difficult to find written sources about life of Jews in Bukhara and Samarkand in early medieval. Famous historian Narshakhi in his “History of Bukhara” quoting from Nishapuris “Khazain al-ulum” (Treasury of sciences) states that territory of Bukhara was covered with riparian forests and only in 6th century after settlement of people from other territories of Central Asia it became a city. Researcher P.Is’hakov relies on these sources and in his “History of Bukhara-Jewish ethnos” supposes that since Bukhara city did not exist until the end of 6th century, then till that time there lived neither Jews nor other nations (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 43.).

E.Rtveladze in his article “Jews in pre-Islamic Central Asia” quotes a narration from Nasafi’s “Kandiyyah”. According to this, before the Arab conquest there was a well called Juyi Arziz, and this well was dug up by Jewish man (Rtveladze E., 2004: 9.). Another orientalist O.N.Logofet suggests that Jews came to Central Asia, particularly to Bukhara together with Arab conquerors.

Sources witness that settlement of Jews to Khorezm was much earlier from Arab futuhat (conquests). In the historical treatise called “Shakhrestani- Iranshakh” written in Pakhlavi language it is said that the founder of Kat, the capital of ancient Khorezm Narse (Narshakh) was a son of a Jew (Zand M., 1989: 531.). According to the myth given in medieval historical sources, another city of ancient Khorezm – Khiva was founded by Sam, the son of prophet Noah. Of course those myths may seem far from reality. But there may be a part of the truth. Because, Tabari in his famous “Tarikh” (History)

states that before the conquest of Kat by Arabs in 712, among advisers of the Khwarezmshah were people called akhbars (<http://izrus.co.il>). It is known that the term akhbar was used by Arabs for representatives of other religions, especially Jewish priests (rabbis). Later, through Soghd, Chach and Ferghana Jews reached Eastern Turkistan. An ancient document of Jewish merchants dating 8th century AC, found in Dandan-Uylak¹⁶ is written in Jewish-Persian language using abramic scripts. This evidences that those merchants who wrote this document were from Central Asia or Iran (<http://izrus.co.il>).

The information given above shows that there are many hypotheses about migration and settlement of Jews in the lands of Central Asia, and all of them pretend to be truth. It is known that some associate emergence of Jews in this region with biblical traditions. But we must not forget that there is difference between emergence, spreading and settlement. We cannot ignore that individual Jews existed in Soghd from ancient times. But this fact is not supported by historical sources. For instance, near the Onega Lake was found a graveyard dating the Neolithic Period. Among hundreds of skeletons was found skeleton of a human from Negroid race. However, despite this well-known fact, no one from researchers said that Negroids were widely spread in Northern Europe in Neolithic Period (Dresvyanskaya G., 2005: 3.).

Most researchers are sure in one point – Jews came to Central Asia through Afghanistan and other frontiers of the region. It is considered as undoubted reality. Cultural monuments of the region show that direct relations between Jews and people of Iran and Central Asia have at least four thousand year history.

It is important to stress that migration and settlement of Jews in Central Asia did not occur at the same time, but it was slow process, which lasted for hundred years, stage by stage.

The delta of Amudarya River is considered as historical and geographic center of Central Asia. Nowadays, much part of this region goes to the territory of modern Uzbekistan. Other smaller parts of it go to modern Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan (Chimkent region), Kirgizstan (Osh, Jalalabad), Tajikistan (Khojand, Khisar and head of Amudarya) and Afghanistan (left Coast of Amudarya River). Central regions of Central Asia are much fertile. Nearly all ancient cities of sub region as Samarkand, Merv, Bukhara, Khiva and little independent states are situated in this region (Kobischanov N. 1996: 24-25.).

Jews massively settled in Central Asia coming from Afghanistan, Iran and even Iraq. But, historians do

¹⁶ Ancient city in modern Eastern Turkistan.

not rule out the possibility of individual settlement of Jews in Bukhara in earlier periods. Relying on M. Sand we can conclude that migration and settlement of Jews to the region is closely associated with The Great Silk Road, which was founded in early 1st century AC (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 45.). Besides, according to Chinese Jews their coreligionists came to China in first century during the rule of Han dynasty. At this period there was a road linking Manchjuriya, Eastern Turkestan with Central Asia. Historians believe that migration of Jews to China was via this road (Katz A., 1900. 5-7.).

After the Jews settled in the region, for years, a separate diaspora has formed as a community of Bukharan Jews. Science questions such as, “Was Jews from Iraq, Afghanistan and other regions considered as ‘Bukharan Jews’ from the beginning?” or “Did it form under the influence of other cultures over time?” This can be answered only by examining Jewish history in the region and their social life. In fact, the Jewish community in this region was not formed in a single shell (vacuum). On the contrary, in the Central Asian region, their formation as a sub-ethnic community can be seen in Jewish migrations which happened many times and at different times as well as in the situation of the ethnically complex population of the region.

It should be noted that the relations between different peoples leave a certain mark on them: most of them are assimilated and some of them “die” as a result of their full acceptance of the language and culture of the majority. It is worth noting the following words of archaeologist G.Ya.Dresvyanskaya: “Historically, migration of various peoples to Central Asia was related to the name of Amir Temur. Among them were Persian Jews who, in the 14th century, had almost forgotten their native language. For centuries, they have become ethnicized as a result of being far from their historical cultural centers” (Dresvyanskaya G., 2004: 22.). It is noteworthy that the Russian, Chinese, European prisoners of war or other emigrating people associated with the Amir Temur epoch retained their identity only in the names of their places. For example: Uruskishlak, Khitay, Baghdad, Damascus and so on. In contrast, the Jews still hold the name “Bukharian” in relation to the region where they still live (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 95.).

Central Asian Jews can entirely be seen as a section that preserved their unity and cohesion. It is true that here was a struggle to survive. At the same time, people of majority were also influenced by the people around them (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 95.).

Jews lived as a particular category of civilized society in Central Asia. In this layer, the temporal transformations took place and had an impact on the

formation of ethnic groups. However, for all the people united under the name of the Turks, the common features of dress, house design and mentality were common to all. The material culture, customs and folk art of the people of this country were inseparable. The ancient, often medieval history of these people, including the Central Asian Jews is close and in many cases the same. The main reason is that their development emerged in one region.

Central Asian Jews have adopted many features of the local population (Persian, Tajik, Uzbek, etc.) and to a lesser extent they still retain them as their subcultures. The changes in the Jewish life occurred mainly in their lives, which reflected a major part of human life. It is well-known that this can be seen in everyday affairs, lifestyle, character similarities, customs and values, as a result of interethnic relationships (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 95.).

The life lasted centuries based on community neighborliness have led to the interplay of culture, language, everyday life and economy. As a result, the characteristics of the Tajiks and Uzbeks in dress, food, home arrangements, customs, music and everyday life were also reflected in the lives of Central Asian Jews. This is especially true in the tradition of cooking, serving meals and welcoming guests. It is worth noting that since many Central Asian Jews follow Kosher (foods that may be consumed according to Halakha law) there are certain characteristics in cooking and serving. In particular, milk and meat products are not served at the same time. Sabbath observance is also reflected in the preparation of dishes in advance (Gitlin S. 2002: 172.).

Speaking of the clothing of Central Asian Jews, traveler Franz von Schwartz wrote in the 19th century that: “...the situation had reached the point where Jews preferred to dress like Uzbeks and Tajiks” (Franz von Schwartz. 1900: 87). For example, suits, especially men’s outerwear, were practically the same as those of Uzbeks. Their national elements were mainly shirts, belts, hats and skullcaps. It can be said that skullcaps differed in shape, color and pattern, depending on the particular ethnic group. Also, some details in clothes depended on social status. Male Jewish shoes were identical to those of Muslims. Their boots with flat heels were made from leather (Suxaryova O., 1954: 344; Amitin-Shapiro., 2013: 40.). Scientists are currently conducting a number of studies in this area. In particular, it is worth mentioning T.G.Yemelyanenko, a leading researcher of the Russian Ethnography Museum, Department “Ethnography of the peoples of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Kazakhstan”. In her monograph titled “Traditional suit of Bukharian

Jews”, she discusses the clothing of Bukharian Jews. In his opinion, the clothes of Bukharan Jews who lived among Muslims were similar, but insisted that they had some uniqueness (Yemelyanenko T., 2012: 3-45).

Along with the above mentioned facts, it can be seen that assimilation processes were also reflected in other areas of Central Asian Jewish life. For instance, the Jews accepted some characteristics of Muslims in their marriage ceremonies. Examples of this situation include marriage registration, couples’ meeting, their relationship till the marriage, marriage contract and so on (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 96.). Z.Amitin-Shapiro notes: “Looking at the material aspects of the marriage process in Central Asian Jews, it was not different from other Central Asian nations. For example, kalima (money given the bride’s family), najama (bridal gifts), and jazi (father’s gifts such as home appliances, clothes, jewelry for his daughter) were the same (Amitin-Shapiro Z., 1924: 45; 2013: 40).

This is also reflected in the selection of bride. According to this, only the female relatives of the bridegroom were allowed to see the girl. The bride and groom had not met each other until the marriage was announced. All issues were agreed by the old as in local families. The bride and groom could see each other during the marriage ceremony. As is customary in the local tradition (mainly in Samarkand and Bukhara), the bridegroom stayed in the bride’s house on the first night of marriage and the second day he solemnly took the bride away from her parents’ house in the cab (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 96.).

In another case, a Jewish woman did not call her husband by his name, as in local families. This was considered a violation of the dignity of the man. The woman usually addressed to her spouse saying the words which mean “father of my children” and then called him with the name of their first child (Datxayev Yu., 1992: 31-37.).

Another tradition that has been preserved for centuries is related to the death ceremonials. After the funeral, relatives of the deceased had to organize “seven”, “thirty” and “year” ceremonies to commemorate the dead. Semen Gitlin says on this issue: “Rituals like the “seven” or “thirty” are not mentioned in the Torah or the Talmud. So in this case, these ceremonies might be adopted from Muslim traditions” (Gitlin S. 2008: P. 97.). However, it is surprising that by which source the scholar expressed this view. Because, there are references of such ceremonies in the Jewish legislation (Halakha) and it is remarked that these dates are based on the sacred sources of Judaism. For example, the mourning on the seventh day is found in the book of Genesis of The Torah, chapter 50, paragraph 10, which

states: “Joseph mourned for his father seven days”. This is why Jewish religious scholars have accepted the first week of mourning when one’s loved dies. In addition, the ceremonies of the “year” (Yahrzeit) and laying stones on the tomb have also been found in the Jews and this has also become customary to the local Muslims and still exists today (Veksler Ye., 1994: 264-275).

Conclusions: From the above, we can conclude that the study of history of Jews in Central Asia is based on written sources, archeological and ethnographic researches. Summarizing results of these studies and researches, it will be appropriate to date the first emergence of Jews in Central Asia as 1 500 - 2000 years BC.

Also, since Central Asian Jews have been living among the different nations in the same territory for centuries, they have evolved in similarity in many ways. At the same time, there was a danger that Central Asian Jews would be completely assimilated. Only time would tell if one of the ancient networks of the Jewish nation will disappear or be retained on the ethnic map of the world. The words of Joseph Maimon to E.K. Meiendorf, a Russian diplomat who visited Bukhara in the late eighteenth century, make this conclusion: “I saw my fellow believers in the depths of ignorance. Only some of them knew reading. They have only two copies of The Holy Book, with only the first three books of the Torah manuscript” (Meyendorf Ye., 1975: 95). Commenting on these words, R.Rabic concludes: “Taking into account the low religious knowledge of the Bukharan Jews, they can be barely regarded as Jewish. If two or three generations lived like this, the Jewish community would have been united with the Muslim population” (Yevreyskiy istoricheskiy almanax, 1989: 94). However, it did not happen.

Some scholars have concluded that the dominance of Islam in the region has led to the adaptation of Central Asian Jews to Muslim culture and the acceptance of some of the Muslim rituals. However, it would be a mistake on the other hand to define this state only with the hegemony of religion. Because, it is important to remember that these nations have lived side by side for centuries. As we have seen in the aforementioned examples, not only did the Jews accept the Muslim traditions, but also Muslims adopted the traditions of the Jews. It is not an exaggeration to say that Jews, with their national character, history, and lifestyle, have become integral parts of the lives of other Central Asian people, like Tajiks and Uzbeks. The rituals of daily life have united this nation of different race, culture, language for many years. Scholar Dresvyanskaya said: “The Jews of Bukhara had close ties to many people in

the process of adaptation in Persia and later in Central Asia. During this time, they learned some aspects of the life, customs and ceremonies of the native peoples. However, they maintained their ethnic identity first of all because of Judaism” (Dresvyanskaya, 1997: 3). Consequently, it was the religion that served to preserve Jewish nationality. It is because Judaism has ethnical and confessional character. According to the traditional view, the conversion of a Jew to a different religion is equivalent to the conversion to another nation. The Jewish theologian Lewis Jacoby describes this concept as follows: “The history of Judaism and Judaism itself is so intertwined that it is impossible to imagine them apart. Godless Judaism is not Judaism. Judaism without the Torah is not Judaism. Judaism without the Jews is not Judaism”.

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