



# THE HISTORY OF KHOREZMIAN JEWS

**Dilmurod Babojonov**

Senior Researcher Khorezm Mamun Academy, Khiva, Uzbekistan

## ANNOTATION

This article describes the regions of the region where the Jews lived in Khorezm, their professions, the names of the Jewish peoples by region, the views of the Jews in the works of great thinkers.

**KEYWORDS:** Khorezm, Central Asia, Jewish communities, handicrafts, trade, "Jewish-Turkish Dictionary", Moshe bin Dawud and Yusuf Yahudi "Seven Brothers", epic, anthem, "Judah boy", Bashir Barokat, Shamsiddin Kamoliddinov, Jerusalem.

## INTRODUCTION

Khorezm is an ancient land located on the Amudarya river delta on Turan plateau.

At the start of 1st millennium, the earliest states had shaped in Central Asia's rather developed regions. In the 9<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the state of Bactria and 8<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries on the lands from the middle course of the river until the Aral Sea (Today's North-western parts of both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) the Ancient Khorezm state formed.

Bactria and Khorezm states had bordered on the middle course of Amudarya river (Greek *Oxus*).

Large irrigation constructions of Khorezm date back to 7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The ruins of many cities and settlements dating back this period had been excavated and studied by historian and archeologists. The ancient constructions were traditionally made of clay and the clay bricks and the population was occupied in agriculture and animal husbandry. The cities had developed handicrafts and trade.

The state of Khorezm had been founded by the legendary king Siyavush and his dynasty had ruled until 305 AD. The Khorezmian rulers had usually titled themselves as "Khorezmshah".

## THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDING

Presently called Akchakhon - kala, Tuprak-kala, ancient Kat, Gurganch, Samarkand and Khiva had been capital cities of Khorezm state in different periods.

About this ancient state of Khorezm, the first President of Uzbekistan Mr. Islam Karimov had said the following: "The founding stones of Uzbek statehood had been put exactly in Khorezm oasis nearly three millennia ago. Thus the history of our national statehood stands alongside the ancient states like Egypt, China, India, Greece and Iran.

The history of Khorezm is a basis for Uzbek state's history and a proof to its might and antiquity".

Ancient sources such as sacred book of Zoroastrians "Avesta», The Achaemenids' inscriptions give information about ancient states that existed on the territory of modern day Uzbekistan.

Ancient Greeks had called this country "Kwarizmia" and the cuneiforms had mentioned it as "Ourazmia", "Zend-Avesta" as "Kairizau" or Khwarezm. The Arabs had called it "Khorarezm" (Khuvorezm). Chinese sources mentioned it as "Kholi-sh-mi-kich". Yakut Khamaviy in his immortal work "Majam al-Buldon" "Vocabulary of the countries" had given relatively fuller and precious information of his period about Khorezm and its villages: "Khorezm is not the name of a particular city, it is the name of a country. Its large city is called al-Jurjoniya (Gurganch), the Persians had called it country on plain land or country on the lowland"<sup>1</sup>. Modern day scholars specialized on Khorezm call "Khorezm" as "Land of Sun", "Land with magnificent fortress" or "Country with powerful fortresses"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Yoqut Khamavi. "Majam al-Buldon" "Dictionary of countries".

<sup>2</sup> Jabborov.I. The state of the great Khorezmshahs. Sharq. Toshkent. 1999. v-12.



## METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES

Ancient Khorezm was one of leading countries in advanced sciences. Particularly exact sciences had begun forming in this land. Important to note that the history of scientific intellect is closely linked with the history of social, economic and cultural intellect. The achievements of Khorezmians in the social life would not have been possible without vast knowledge in the field of mathematics, geodesy, astronomy and other exact sciences. For instance, constructions of irrigation system, canals, watermills and “coriz” systems, shipbuilding, fortress construction, building multi-level palaces would require accurate measurements and calculations. The practical needs for agriculture and architecture had stimulated the development of geometry.

The development of mathematical geography is a result of Khorezmian traders’ travels to distant countries as the astronomic orientation would be necessary in navigation both in overlanding and sailing. These kind of vast geographic communications had caused the development of cartography, descriptive geography and city planning.

Historically, Khorezmian cities had been inhabited by different nationalities and among them there were Jews too who mostly had done crafts and trade.

Jewish brothers would acquire local languages and assimilate to the culture, in most cases they would become known to the world as entrepreneurs. To have clearer imagination about Central Asian Jews, we may briefly study the reasons for their migration to Bukhara, Samarkand and Khorezm.

Greek, Persian and Arab sources that indicate the arrival of Jews in Central Asia, specifically in Khorezm, date back to the time of Persian Achaemenid conquests (6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC). It had also happened in the later period because of trade on Silk Routes as well as political situation in Persian Sassanid state in that time.

Based on the works of his teachers such as Ibn Khordadbekh’s “Roads and countries”, Tabariy’s “Tavarikh”, Persian chronologists Hamza al Isfakhanij and Ibn Durayda’s manuscripts, our countryman al - Biruniy in his work “Memorials” had given detailed information about this topic.

For example, in old Khorezmian language the Jewish scientists had been mentioned as Rabbais and the ordinary people as “al-khabr” and in plural “al-akhbar”<sup>3</sup>.

Historical sources indicate that after the Arab Caliphate had conquered Iran between 650 and 710 they were timely organizing raids to the southern cities and villages of Central Asia in the Summer and Autumn seasons. And in 712 with a large army they had conquered Khorezm and Samarkand.

As Khorezm had not strongly resisted Kuteiba’s forces, he let Khorezmshah Chogan remain on his throne in return of contribution and “Juzya” tax and had left Khorezm.

Having been angry about the mentioned action the Zoroastrian population, particularly feudal “dehqan” aristocracy revolted under the leadership of Khurzod, shah’s younger brother of Jewish origin. As a result, Khorezmshah Chogan was killed and Kuteiba arrived immediately and met the local opposition forces in the plains near Khazarasp. Four thousand local fighters were captured and killed. That was followed by actions like converting fire temples to stables and warehouses, the priests, the people of science were executed, books were thrown to fire.

Kuteiba ibn Muslim had enthroned younger brother of Khorezmshah Chogan Askadjumak and the position of prime minister he gave to his own brother Abdullah and left Khorezm. Such unprecedented catastrophe in the science and culture of Khorezm is described in the work of Soviet – Russian archeologist S.P. Tolstov’s monography: “Following the traces of ancient Khorezmian Civilization” (Part 2, chapter 9)<sup>4</sup>.

Also, a historian Arabist Krachkovski with scholar Igor Timofeev in their monography “Beruni” (Moscow, 1986.P 34-36) write that the Jews that had been living in Khorezm moved to north, to the deltas of rivers Itil and Yayik (Volga and Ural), the state of Khazars. According to Tolstov, a Jewish rabbi named Bulan had a great authority and had established trade and diplomatic relationship with Kiev and kingdom of Hungary<sup>5</sup>.

An Arab traveler Abu Hamid al- Garnatiy and Russian Orientalists K. Inostransev, B. Magalsky, E. Kiselev, E.E. Bertels and Tolstov give clear and trustworthy information about Jews’ politico-social, cultural contributions to Kiev and Hungary<sup>6</sup>.

Besides, the 10<sup>th</sup> and at the start of 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the Jews escaping persecution from Gaznevids and Karakhitays had found asylum in the state of Khorezmshahs and had taken an active part in the life of cities such as Kat and Gurganch.

They had carried out activities in science, literature, art, linguistics at “Darul Khikma” (The Khorezm Mamun Academy) in the years 1004 -1017 and had been occupied in crafts, weaving, wine production and trade. At that time the country of Khorezmshahs had 1079 pawnshops,1400 paper shops,1300 musical instruments shops.

<sup>3</sup> Abu Rayhan Beruni. *Monuments of ancient peoples*. T., Fan.1968.v-32.

<sup>4</sup> Tolstov.S.P.*Drevne xorezmiyskoy tsivilizatsii*.Moskva.1948 g.Chast 2. Galava IX.Str. 16

<sup>5</sup> Timofeev.I.*Buruni*.Moskva.1986 g, pp.34-36

<sup>6</sup> “Journey of Abu Hamid al Garnatiya”, Moscow. “Science”, 1971, pp. 150-176.



The full member of academy of science of Azerbaijan Ziyu Bunyodov during his visit to Khorezm, made it known that he had discovered a rare manuscript with 78 pages, written in Chagatai language called "The description of city of Khorezm" from Leningrad department V-723 (P.584) of "Oriental studies" Institute and he wrote a special commentary to it<sup>7</sup>. This work has precious information about Najmiddin Kubro, Jaloliddin Manguberdy and tells that until the Mongol conquest the city of Gurganch had 10 thousand Jewish households and they had been occupied in science, handicrafts and trade (SPB, Sharq, V-723 dep. P584)<sup>8</sup>.

An orientalist E.E. Bertels also getting acquainted with the literature about "Murder of Sheikh Najmiddin Kubro by the Mongols" brings the following words "The majority of Khorezmian population are the people of Israel, they are the descendants of prophet Jacob"<sup>9</sup>.

Academician Ziyu Bunyodov in his "Khorezmshah Anushtegins dynasty" wrote that Gurganch had 10 thousand family of Jews living permanently and large part of them were traders, craftsmen and skilled masters of musical instruments<sup>10</sup>.

In the period when Gengizkhan's descendants were in power and northern Khorezm was vassal of state of Golden Horde, the Jews were in the royal court service as well as were occupied in art and literature.

Some sources demonstrate that a famous Jewish memoirist of that time Suleiman bin Samuel (Salomon Samuel) had compiled "Hebrew – Turkic dictionary on requirement of Mongol rulers. Also, Moshe bin Dovud and Yusuf Yehudi (Mullah Iosif bin Isak) had written epic "Seven brothers" and hymns. The originals of these works are kept in the National library of State of Israel.

At the same time, it needs to be indicated that in the later periods, for example in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries we can observe some changes in life of Jewish people. Having compromised with destiny and converting to Islam poets and singers such as Korajiy, Kasim Ishan express sorrow. Kasim Ishan in his "Juhud Uglan" (Jewish guy) expresses the mood of a Jewish young man who converted to Islam. This epic was published in its full version in the scientific monography "A mysterious world of the Art" in Tashkent, 2011<sup>11</sup>.

There is information that in the time of Timurids (14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) and in the period of Bukhara and Khorezm khanates (16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) the Central Asian cities had large number of Jews.

Bukhara, Samarkand and Khorezm are said to have had 30 thousand Jews. Alongside, the historical sources indicate that Uzbek and Jew communities had close relationship. Recently researchers from Bukhara Bashir Barokat and Shamsiddin Kamoliddinov have published interesting materials about history of "al Uzbekia Khonaqo" located in Jerusalem. This Khonaqo was built in 1602 for the funds (1000 gold dinars) given by Jerusalem resident Usmanbek as Sufi and the building is still standing under the same name<sup>12</sup>.

Based on collected information by an English agent who came in the disguise of a missionary to Bukhara in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century and met Nasrullakhan (1820-1860), the Emir of Bukhara, it is possible to know that Bukhara had ten thousand Jews.

Several foreigners like Florini Benevini, sent to Bukhara by Russian Peter the Great in 1718-1725, Efremov Phillip Sergeevich, a Russian sergeant who traveled to Tibet and India through Khiva and Bukhara, a mining engineer Burnashev, K. Meyendorff who had arrived with a diplomatic mission in 1820, N.B. Khannikov, G.I. Danilevsky in 1841-1842 on their reports had mentioned the Jews of Bukhara and Khiva.

In particular, the Bukhara Jews were mentioned to follow some rules such that their community would not have to exceed 100 families in one place and would have to live in specific quarters, their houses would have to be lower for one meter than the Muslim houses, men were obliged to wear black belt, and women were long dresses, they were not allowed in mosques and madrassas, boys and girls were taught separately and even, until 1920 did not have officially their cemetery.

Some sources show that from 1868 to 1<sup>st</sup> World War out of 16.000 Bukhara Jews 1,500 had left for Jerusalem. In 1920-1930, 4000 Bukhara Jews had escaped to Palestine via Afghanistan and Persia. 1970-1980 out of 17.000 Jews 15.500 had migrated to Israel, USA, Canada and Austria.

In 1925 February 10 by the decree of Uzbekistan government the Jews were declared as equal citizens and documented as minor nation. In that time "Global surface", "Education and teacher", "Center of knowledge", Khorezmian "Yugurma" were publishing the world famous works. One of productive writers was Abdulhamid Cholpon. Cholpon had patronized the publication of "Oriental stories" of a Jewish Elena Zart in 4000 copies (In

<sup>7</sup> Bunyodov.Z. *Commentary to the manuscript "Description of the city of Khorezm"*. 1988 V-723, Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (584)

<sup>8</sup> SPB, East V-723 Division, 584 pages

<sup>9</sup> Nurjanov K. "People in the World" Urgench, "Avesto Heritage" Museum. 2018

<sup>10</sup> Bunyodov.Z. *Anushtegin Khorezmshah state*. T., 2008. p.76

<sup>11</sup> *Collective monograph. "The mysterious world of art"*. T., 2011. p.56

<sup>12</sup> "Moziydan sado" 2013, issue 4, pages 60-61.



1926). Jewish intellectuals had initiated the establishment of museum of history in Samarkand and Technical College in Kokand. Later on the museum of history became the museum of local history and Technical College was turned to Kokand State Pedagogical Institute.

The member of Russian geographic society G.I. Danilevsky who had come to Khiva in 1841 had written the following: The Jews of Khiva were in small number and had arrived from Bukhara 16 years earlier. They were occupied in production. The government of Khiva had not humiliated them and they had not had any barriers to practice religious ceremonies. But it was noticeable that their interest towards their belief had cooled down and they would pray only occasionally. The khanate had not had any restrictions or people's complaints on practicing any other religions<sup>13</sup>.

Jews that had come to Khorezm at the start of 19<sup>th</sup> century lived in other cities of Khorezm too, for example "Jews clan" in "Yukary Dorman" neighborhood of Urgench region, "Totlar" (Jews from Dagestan) in Karmish village of Yangiariq region. Gurlen "bekligi" (Gurlen district) had one family that had produced lacquer. According to E. Bekonov the people of "Ten household of Jews" neighborhood had assimilated with the local people.

The "Johits" (Jews) clan currently living in Sayot village of Khiva is now called "Javdons clan".

After speaking to seniors it has become known that the Jews in the times of suppressions in order to avoid different restrictions had named themselves "Javdon", i.e. Silk producers, weavers of beautiful fabrics to the royal ladies.

By the way, "The dictionary of Navai works" indicates that "Javlaha" means weaver, weaver of beautiful fabrics, craftsman.

Years later in the times of Khan of Khiva Muhammad Rakhimkan II Feruzkhan (1864-1910) the Jews who had come to Bukhara from Morocco sent their representatives to Khiva initiated by the Jews of Bukhara. They had met the khan and let the khan know they would wish to move to Khiva. Muhammad Rakhimkhan had told the representative that he would create necessary conditions if they convert to Islam.

The representative had accepted the condition forwarded by the khan and the Jews of 18 families had come and settled in Khiva. Muhammad Rakhimkan had created workshops and shops for them to trade and do crafts. Even though they had publicly followed Islamic traditions, in private they were loyal to Judaism.

Also within their community they kept their native language and secretly followed their traditions.

The Jews who had come in the times Muhammad Rakhimkhan II were busy in silk production, crafts, and jewelry. As they had followed the traditional custom of mutual support within their community they had lived in good provision and wealth. There were wealthy investors among Khiva Jews such as Yalman-bai (Yalman the rich), Aron-bai, Said-bai.

According to newspaper "Turkestanskije vedomosti" publication from 1998, number 7, region's different provinces were making profit from silk production and weaving. The beautiful clothes displayed in ethnography department of "Ichan Kala" museum one more time proves this fact.

Those 18 families that had settled in Khiva inhabited mainly in Ichan Kala (Inner city) and Deshan Kala (Outer city) parts of the city<sup>14</sup>.

The address of Jews that lived in Deshan Kala<sup>15</sup>:

1. Yalmons, 1 family, Jewelers, in neighborhood "Or"

2. 10 families; Silk fabric weavers had lived between Ashir maram and Islam Khodja's house, in the neighborhood "Jammobs". (Presently café Takhir-Zukhra, grieving Mother statue and Khorezm province puppet theatre (Ashir Mahram's house)).

3. 4 families; attars and healers. They had lived in "Elakchi" (The Sievers) and "Zargar" (Jewelers) neighborhood.

The addresses of Jews lived in "Ichan Kala"

1. 2 families; In "etikdoz" (Bootmaker) neighborhood near "Bagcha" gate.

2. 1 family had lived near the tax collector Yor Muhammad devon's mosque.

Besides, 16 families that had been living from the old times lived in different neighborhoods.

Stories tell that Muhammad Rakhimkhan II once had invited the chief of Jewish craftsmen and showed the reflection of a peacock in the water of his palace pool and asked him if he could make a fabric with such a pattern.

The chief said yes.

<sup>13</sup> G.I. Danilevsky "Description of the Khiva Khanate" Notes of the Russian Geographical Society - Moscow, 1851, p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> "Moziybon Sado" 2016 (69) p.19. Noskova Elena Sergeevna. "Oriental stories". 1926

<sup>15</sup> Turkistanskije Vedomosti newspaper. 1898 №7.

## CONCLUSION

The khan then asked him to watch and threw a piece of rock to the water in the pool, the water got waves formed and the peacock reflection trembled. The chief understood what the khan had wanted and after some time he presented a fabric which had the scene in the water. Subsequently, Khiva had established the production of “peacockcolor” silk fabric and began exporting it abroad with name “Royal silk”. Local aristocracy also started buying this fabric and later this fabric had become popular with name “Jewish silk”.

The researches and field expeditions show that Khiva had the neighborhoods of craftsmen such as dyers, silk producers, sievers, jewelers and others. The people living in them, in particular Jews, had assimilated with the local population.

In the 30's of 20<sup>th</sup> century because of its remote location a number of Jews, Germans, Koreans and Polish people were exiled to Khiva.

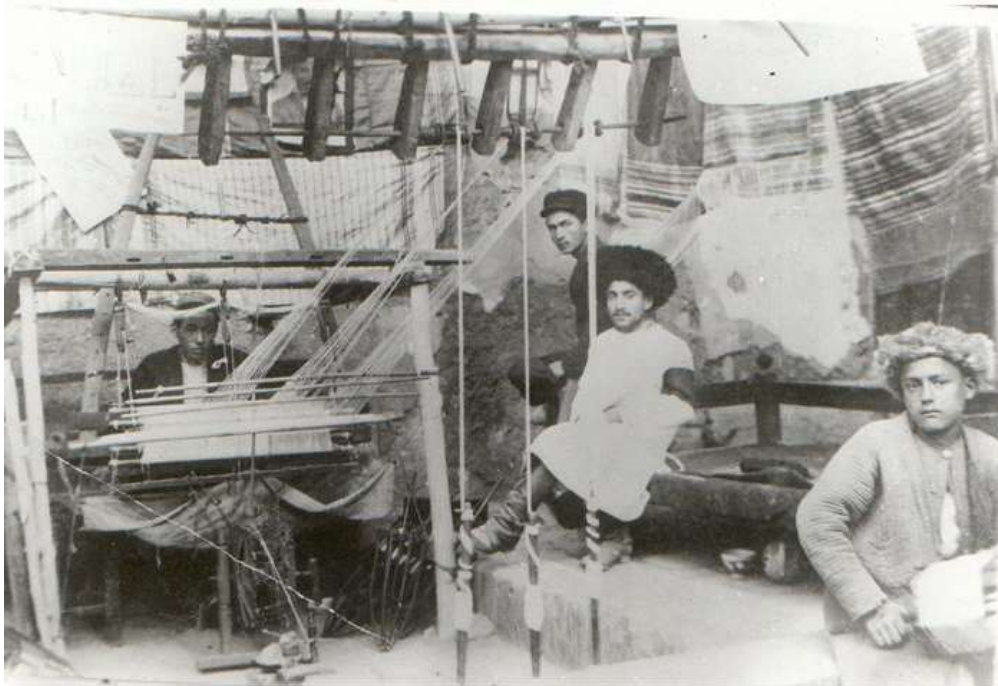
Later on among those people who had been moved were raised or born some notable figures such as famous polish singer A. German, master teachers R.A. Sovetnikov, G.M. Becher, A. Bensman, T.Ya. Sreda, O.S. Lenneh, M.A. Markman, A. Kim, Vladimir and Lida Milgotin. They were scientists, very qualified specialists, labor heroes and journalists.

According to state statistics of Khorezm province Jews were only 0.1% of total population in 1959. This number was 0.5% in 1939. It should be admitted that Jewish skills of adaptation to the local socio-political system, regime and climate is considered in the history as phenomenal. Thus, in the modern times the Jews that have assimilated with the local people over the years are living a peaceful life in Khorezm.



The Jews of Khiva (1910)<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “Ichan-Kala” State Museum-Reserve Fund. KP 4047



Jumyaz “silk maker” with Jewish origin in his workshop in Ichan Kala, Khiva (1920)<sup>17</sup>



T.V. Sreda (2<sup>nd</sup> from the left with a book). She was a director deputy in charge of science department at Khiva’s Ichan Kala museum. (1955)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “Ichan-Kala” State Museum-Reserve Fund. KP 4596

<sup>18</sup> “Ichan-Kala” State Museum-Reserve Fund. KP 4241



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