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FROM THE HISTORY OF SHIITE-SUNNI CONFLICTS IN THE EMIRATE OF BUKHARA

Abstract: *The article studies the historiography of the Sunni-Shiite uprising in January 1910 in the Emirate of Bukhara. While the Sunni Islam in this Central Asian state was based on Hanafi Sharia law, Shiite Muslims formed the majority in the administration of the emirate. When the Emirate of Bukhara became a protectorate of the Russian Empire, the influence of Shiites in its administration increased enormously. The reason for that was that by the middle of the 19th century, former hired Shiite slaves were appointed to important state positions, and social equality was specified in vassal treaties (1868, 1873). The emergence of such changes in the Bukharan society caused the opposition of the Sunni nobility, resulting in an acute conflict. In the emirate, the local population was dissatisfied with high taxes and social changes. Shiite Muslims were also influenced by the ideas of social equality propagated by members of the Babi movement in Iran, who were hiding from repression in Central Asia, which led to bloodshed between Sunnis and Shiites in Bukhara. The causes and consequences of the uprising are analysed on the basis of local and foreign historical sources, periodicals, archival documents, as well as data of modern research.*

Key words: *Bukhara, Kushbegi, slaves, Persians, Shiites, Sunnis, Sheikh-ul-Islam, Ashuro, Sarbaz, uprising.*

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In the middle of the 19th century, the Shiite domination in the territory of the Emirate of Bukhara was a very large. Sources do not clearly specify the time of the appearance of Persians, whom the Bukharans called *Ironi*, *Marvi* or *Mashhedi*. Most of them were descendants of settlers from Khorasan, mainly from Merv (*Sukhareva* 1966: 154-155). The Bukharan Persians themselves believe that their ancestors have lived there since the ancient times of the emergence of Bukhara. The Mangyt dynasty continued the policy of the Sheibanids and Ashtarkhanids of resettling opposing tribes. According to Muhammad Yakub Bukhari, Amir Shahmurad initially brought 17,000 families to Bukhara and settled them in different parts of the emirate. Later, he again brought to Samarkand from Iran and Khorasan 30,000 Tajik-speaking families, descendants of the Kyzylbash Shiites, and ordered that they converted to Sunnism. His successor Amir Haidar also resettled about 400 families in order to weaken local officials and prevent the local nobility from consolidating and striving for independence from Merv (*Khanykov* 1843: 71).

The influx of the Persian population in various ways to the territory of the emirate continued in later periods. In particular, until the late 19th century,

they were captured and sold as slaves by nomadic Turkmen tribes in the slave markets of Bukhara and Khiva. Most of the Persians in Bukhara were slaves brought from Merv in the 16th-19th centuries (*Schuyler* 1876a: 106, 109). In the middle of the 19th century, Persian slaves served in the army of the Emir of Bukhara, were the servants of officials from the emir's office and household workers in noble families. Arminius Vamberi wrote: "The Persians in Bukhara pay constant religious taxes and have adapted very well to the khanate. Because it was cheaper for them to live here than in their own country, and it was a convenient place for practising handicrafts. Some of them have even won the trust of noble masters."¹ According to the 1926 census, 6,000 Persians were registered in the emirate, with 2,000 living in the city of Bukhara (*Sukhareva* 1966: 154).

Residents of Bukhara had very active social ties with the Persians. In particular, the historian Mir Ab-

¹ According to A. Vamberi, the number of Persian slaves in Central Asia (mainly in Khiva and Bukhara) was 80,000 (*Vamberi* 2003: 15), while Pavel Ivanov claimed that these figures were rough and, citing other sources, indicated that in fact the number did not exceed 40,000 (*Ivanov* 1958: 164).

dulkarim Bukhori (died 1830) wrote that “the Mervs deported by Amir Shahmurad seemed to have found a new homeland in Bukhara”² V. V. Barthold also acknowledged this and wrote that “the Mervians lived here with gratitude” (*Barthold* 1927: 108).

According to the available information, it is difficult to specify time and numbers of the Persian population that penetrated into Bukhara, but there is a hypothesis. In Bukhara, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of Iranian-speaking population: free Iranians resettled by the rulers of Bukhara since the early 1st millennium AD and those that came from Merv and representatives of other Iranian peoples who were captured and sold by nomadic Turkmens until the early 20th century. They were the most numerous Shiites in the territory of the emirate. Shiites lived in different districts of Bukhara, mainly in the western guzars of the city. Many Shiites lived in the villages of Kumrabot and Afshar Mahalla, which were located near the city on the territory of the Jubor quarter.

Shiite Persians lived near the khojas of Jubor, in the mahallas of Chakar, Abdullahoja, Chukur Mahalla, Waqf and Hauzi Baland. The Persians who lived in the central part of the Tupkhona quarter and in the western part of the Ark in the old shahristan in the Dust-Churago quarter of Bukhara were Sunnis. They had lived here for many years and prayed in mosques with other residents of Bukhara (*Turaev* 2021: 39-40). In the second half of the 19th century, when the Persians, who had achieved social equality, settled in the Kosagaron mahalla, this street became known as Kuchai gulomo. Some other Shiites converted to Sunnism and mixed with the indigenous Bukharans.

The Shiite Persians also had to comply with certain restrictions in the emirate. In particular, their quarters in Bukhara were divided, and those who converted to Sunnism had three prayer houses (husainikhonas) in Bukhara along the Tupkhona and Jubor mahallas. The first was located in the old quarter of Hauzi Baland, the second in the mahalla of Morkush, and the third was between the mahallas of Juyizar and Janafaron. There was also another large husainikhona prayer house in Kagan (New Bukhara) (*Rahmatova, Kurbonov* 1995: 125). The visitors of the husainikhona prayer houses performed worshipping rituals guided by a sheikh. They did not gather there every day for prayer. People came to the husainikhonas in large numbers only for the *ashuro* annual mourning ceremony (*shohsei-vohsei* ritual, self-torture for the death of Hussein). The mourning ceremony was

dedicated to the martyrdom of the grandchildren of the Prophet Muhammad, descendants of Ali and Fatima – brothers Hassan and Hussein and their sisters. Shiites blame themselves for not having been able to save them from the tyranny of unbelievers, repent and during the ceremony beat themselves for this *gunohi kabir* (great sin). Every year *ashuro* lasts for more than a month, during which people mourn and wear mourning clothes. Sometimes a child on a horseback embodied a symbolic scene of the youth of Ali's descendants, and sometimes Ali's descendants were buried symbolically in a coffin (*Muhammad Solih* 2008: 34). So, starting from the tenth day of *ashuro* in the month of Muharram, Bukharan Shiites wore mourning clothes in the memorial hall of husainikhonas for 30 days (*Sukhareva* 1966: 160-161).

By the late 19th–early 20th century, the activity of the Persians in the center of the Emirate of Bukhara increased due to social equality (Amir Sayyid Abdulahad Khan abolished slavery in 1885) (*Becker* 1968: 320-321). They began to hold religious rites in the streets and squares of Bukhara. The attitude of the local Sunni population towards them was moderate. “Mostly the Sunni neighbors sympathised with the Shiites and joined their mourning ceremonies in the open air between the gates of Samarkand and Shergiron,” noted the British diplomat Alexander Burnes in 1834 (*Burnes* 1848: 369). By this time, the liberated Persian soldiers had returned to their homeland, while others remained in service as mercenaries. Emir Abdulahad Khan had to spend extra money to replenish his army (*Shubinsky* 1892: 266). They also became more active in domestic economic relations. In addition to activities such as handicraft, sericulture, silk production and processing, some free Persians also were hired as workers to assist artisans. Moreover, the Emir allowed the Persians to continue their activities in his office and in military units, which led to their increased influence in the political sphere.

Ahmad Donish (1827-1897) noted that the interference of Persian officials in palace affairs began during the reign of Emir Haidar, and they faithfully served as “disciples” under *divanbegi* and religious leaders, and by the time of his successor Nasrullah Khan Bahadir, they were engaged in military affairs (*Donish* 2014: 33). It is known that “hired slaves” were selected from Russian, Kalmyk and Persian prisoners for involvement in office and military work (*Kislyakov* 1962: 41).

P. P. Shubinsky and N. A. Kislyakov mention in their works that the position of a *kushbegi*, chief tax collector and head of artillery, was one of the important government positions in the emirate. The *kushbegi* controlled the administration of the entire emirate, managed bekships and supervised officials in responsible positions; the chief tax collector controlled tax-

² Materials on the History of Turkmens and Turkmenia. Volume II. 16th-19th centuries. Iranian, Bukharan and Khivan sources. M.-L.: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1938. P. 198-201.

es, income, internal and external trade relations; the head of artillery supervised military potential, the army, foreign policy affairs and maintained official relations on these issues with the Turkestan Governor-General, the political agency in the emirate and neighboring countries (*Shubinsky* 1892: 140; *Kislyakov* 1962: 47). By the second half of the 19th century, Mullah Muhammadi (1872-1889), one of Amir Muzaffar Khan's hired slaves, was a kushbegi at the latter's palace (*Kimura Satori* 2021: 199), and the chief tax collector and head of the military unit was the kushbegi's son Muhammad Sharif (*Schuyler* 1876b: 99). A number of other Shiite officials, such as the governor of Hisar, Astanakul-kushbegi (*Rajabov, Inoyatov* 2016: 285), devonbegi Muhammad Yusuf, Gulam Haidarbegi, Haidarkul Inak ibn Muhammad Sharif Devonbegi and Muminbek Inak, worked as kushbegi's subordinates (*Vohidov, Kholikova* 2006: 40). The grand vizier of the palace, Muhammad Shokhbiy, was a kushbegi (*kushbegi poin* or *kulli kushbegi*), as well as four successive high ministers before Astanakul-kushbegi (1905-1910), were descendants of hired slaves (*Kimura Satori* 2021: 194).

By the late 19th century, while Shiite officials were appointed to the main palace posts, all religious titles and positions in accordance with Sharia were transferred to Sunni Muslims. In particular, from the lowest ordinary muezzin and imam to the highest kazi-kalan and Sheikh-ul-Islam, there were religious duties that were assigned to Sunni Muslim scholars, and they were appointed only by the descendants of the Khojas and Seyids. After the emirate became a vassal of the Russian Empire, diplomatic relations were held through political officials. The kushbegi acted as an intermediary between the emir and the Russian government (*Bregel* 2000: 8-12).

The Sunni ulama Mirzo Somiy Bustoniy and Ahmad Donish, who were palace mirzas (scribes), in their works call all the Shiite movements and branches *rofizi*.³ Both authors wrote that the transition of the palace administration into the hands of Shiite officials would lead to a state crisis. They maintained that the reason was that the transition of not only the office, but also the entire state administration under the control of Shiites would also have a negative impact on the faith.⁴

By the early 20th century, disagreements on the multi-confessional aspect of Bukhara became more frequent. As a result, the Shiite-Sunni conflicts that arose several times under Emir Muzaffar Khan con-

tinued under Abdulahad Khan. Some Sunni scholars accused Abdulahad Khan, who ruled the emirate from Karmana, of "his mother, his wife, the kushbegi and several high-ranking officials being Shiites, which weakens Islamic beliefs; in addition, this is heresy, which the Crown Prince of the emir studied at a Christian school (*Rashidov U., Rashidov U'. 1987: 31*). These statements were distributed by Agha Reza Eshon Ali Askarkhanov, a citizen of the Ottoman Empire who came to Old Bukhara in 1909, and Mir Haidar Mirbadalov, a representative of the Russian Political Agency in Bukhara, who began to incite local Sunnis against Shiites. Turkish propagandist spies, Sunni nobles dissatisfied with the government, and clerics tried to replace Emir Abdulahad Khan with one of his Sunni brothers (*Tukhtametov* 1977: 33).

The Qazi-kalan of the Emirate of Bukhara, Sunni Bakohoja, and Chairman Burkhoniddin, were dissatisfied with the activities of kushbegi Astanakul and other Shiites in the political administration. According to the writer Sadriddin Aini, Burkhoniddin and Mullah Qamar from Tatarstan began to look for ways to remove Astanakul from his post (*Ainii* 1987: 57). Mullah Qamar was considered a secret employee of the Russian Political Agency.

Many reforms in the emirate caused discontent among the population: reforms in education, which consisted in the lowering of student allowances (scholarships) with a decrease in waqf property, renting out madrasah premises to merchants; the colonial policy of taxation of raw materials and wealth of the emirate was actually carried out by the Russian Empire through Shiite officials. The fact that kushbegi Astanakul appointed his relatives to many key posts in the administration of the emirate, in addition to all these difficulties, became unbearable for the local population and the Sunni nobility.

In January 1910, people began an open struggle with kushbegi Astanakul. On one of those days, with the permission of the kushbegi, Iranian Shiites gathered for the *ashuro* funeral ceremony at the Bolo-Hovuz Mosque in front of the Ark, not far from the Samarkand Gate. The ceremony took place every year in husainikhonas, but a public celebration in an open square became an impetus for an uprising. Sunnis called this ceremony heresy and asked Mufti Imam Domullah Ikram to issue a fatwa to cancel its public celebration. But Domullah Ikram rejected this claim, saying that Sunnis also had heretical traditions and rituals (*Ayniy* 2010: 73).⁵

At first, a Sunni mullah student studying at a Bukharan madrasah was punished by mourning people claiming that he laughed at Shiites who beat them-

³ Rofism – the word *rofiz* means in Arabic to walk or refuse. This was the designation for all Shiite movements that rejected the sunnahs of the Prophet Muhammad (*Tulepov* 2013: 73).

⁴ Mirzo Somiy. *Mirot al-yakin*. Manuscript from the Bukhara State Library, No. 70, ca 1893.)

⁵ This refers to a local pagan ritual known as the Red Flower or Tulip Holiday (*Peshchereva* 1927).

selves and cried. Abdurauf Fitrat, one of the most famous representatives of Central Asian Jadidism, was in the city when this conflict began in Bukhara: "On Saturday, when I left my room and came to Toki Tel-pakduzon, I saw about fifty mullahs who gathered to discuss something. I came up to them and listened. They told that behind the Samarkand Gate two or three mullahs travelling to a performance quarrelled with Iranians. It was the 10th month of Muharram, 1328 AH" (*Abdirashidov* 2023:5).

Sunnis protested and gathered in the Ark Square. They demanded that kushbegi Astanakul punish the Iranian Shiites and that the ashuro ceremony be prohibited in Bukhara. The rebels at first consisted mainly of madrasah students, and then they were followed by a Sunni crowd. There were more than 10,000 of them. Astanakul sent the Emir's soldiers against the Sunnis gathered in front of the Ark, which resulted in bloodshed on January 9, 1910.

The uprising lasted for three days with lulls and outbursts, and all publications described it as the largest Sunni-Shiite conflict at that time. In particular, in addition to official statements by the government of the Russian Empire, these events were covered by periodicals in the Muslim world, such as *Turkestan'skaya Oblastnaya Gazeta* (Turkestan Regional Newspaper, Tashkent), *Burkhan-i Tarakki* (The Basis of Development, Astrakhan), *Vakt and Shura* (Orenburg), *Bayan ul Khak* (Statement of Truth, Kazan), *Mullah Nasriddin* (Tiflis), *Tarjiman* (Translator, Bakhchisarai) and *Sirat-ul-Mustakim* (Turkey) (*Kimura Satori*, 2021: 206).

Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinsky, analysing the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Bukhara, recognised the financial system of the state and the pressure by the Russian Empire as the main reasons. He wrote about the collapse of the education system, which also damaged trade relations (*Abdurashidov* 2012: 182).

Amir Abdulahad Khan, who was in Karmana, sent Mirzo Nasrullah, the bek of Shahrisabz, Mirzo Nizamiddin Urganji, the bek of Charjuy, and Sayyid Olimkhan, the bek of Karmana, to Bukhara to suppress the uprising. But when the uprisings did not subside, at the suggestion of the political agency, the Turkestan Governor-General was asked for military assistance. On 13 January 1910, Russian troops headed by General G. Lilienthal came from Samarkand to Bukhara and suppressed the rebellion. After these bloody events, on 15 January, the leaders of the two sides, Shiite and Sunni, agreed on peace. Astanakul was removed from the position of a kushbegi, and the bek of Shakhrisabz was replaced by the Sunni Mirza Nasrullah kushbegi (*Tukhtametov* 1977: 30-48). Many innocent people suffered from the uprising. About 500 Iranians and Bukharans were killed. More

than 300 Shiites were expelled from Bukhara after the truce.

Describing the January events in Bukhara, the Russian officer Enpe noted in his memoirs that the military weakness of the Emirate of Bukhara increased its dependence on the armed forces of the Russian Empire (*Enpe* 1910: 188). Indeed, the socio-political and economic situations in the Emirate of Bukhara were very difficult and the emir's policy was under strict Russian control.

American traveller William Curtis in his essay *Turkestan – the Heart of Asia* wrote about these events as follows: "The movements of 1910 did not begin suddenly, they combined religious and political demands from the rebels, [...] although the Russian government took measures against the uprising, in fact both opposing sides wanted to protect their rights. The reason was the absence of a constitution and parliament in the country" (*Curtis* 1911: 141-144).

Sadriddin Aini in his works *The History of the Mangyt Emirs in Bukhara* and *Materials on the Bukharan Revolution* referred to the mutual disagreements between the Sunni Kazikalon Burkhoniddin (son of Kazikalon Badriddin), chairman Mullah Bakokhoja and the Shiite Astanakul-kushbegi as the cause of the uprising. Ahmad Donish wrote in *Meyor ut-Tadayun* that before the death of Kazikalon Mullah Badriddin in 1908, all religions, except Sunnism, were strictly controlled. Later, attempts to prove that their religion is the only true one intensified among Sunnis, Shiites, Jews and Christians. Although the state religion was the Sunni branch of Islam, the fact that it was headed by the Shiite Kushbegi Janmirza and the chief tax collector, the Shiite Astanakul, caused discontent among Sunni scholars (*Donish* 2008: 6a, b).

V. V. Bartold considered the 1910 events in Bukhara the response of Sunni officials to oppression and unjust rule or reactionary actions by religious fanatics (*Bartold* 1927: 246), while the Soviet historian A. H. Khamraev wrote that it was a bloody struggle between two feudal strata for political control over the working population of Bukhara (*Khamraev* 1955: 70). T. G. Tukhtametov in his research focused on this event and came to the conclusion that the uprising was caused by the activities of Turkish spies, and this was based on the "insidious plans of Germany (agents in Turkey)" in their colonial policy.

U. Zh. Rashidov concludes that the suppression of the rebellion with the help of the Russian military meant official interference in the internal affairs of the emirate (*Rashidov, U.* 1987: 33). Kimura Satori admits that the Sunnis were not against the Shiites, but against their beliefs, and that the uprising was a radical reaction to their long-standing discontent

(*Kimura Satori* 2021:208). O. A. Sukhareva assessed the events of 1910 as a strong blow to the cultural ties of Sunnis and Shiites, their blood and clan relations (*Sukhareva* 1966: 165). Despite the interfaith tolerance in Bukhara, some political agents managed to introduce discord into local traditions among a large number of Muslims.

Analysing the events of 1910 on the basis of archival documents, it is possible to see the influence of the participants of the defeated Iranian Babist movement, who took refuge in the territory of the Central Asian khanates, on the Shiites of the Emirate of Bukhara.⁶ Although Shiites became active in the government of the emirate, since the second half of the 19th century it was under the control of imperial curators. In 1898, tax collector Mullah Muhammad Gavhar Devonbegi was arrested and interrogated along with treasurer Astanakul for sending too much money to Mashhad, where he was born, and for abusing his political position. When Astanakul was proved innocent and Devonbegi imprisoned, the Russian Empire's control over the economic affairs of the emirate consolidated.⁷ In 1899, the Russian government ordered that the emir and his office move to a magnificent palace built at the expense of the emir's treasury in New Bukhara. But kushbegi Janmirza conveyed the emir's negative response, claiming that the emir ruled from Karmana because of the influence of the weather on his health and that the palace was not built in accordance with Muslim traditions (*Olufsen* 1911: 575). The ideas of social equality in the Babist movement⁸ had a strong influence on the Shiite nobility engaged in trade in the Emirate of Bukhara. Shiite Muslims who made pilgrimages to Mashhad and Karbala were familiar with the ideas of Babism.

The 1910 uprising requires an in-depth study of its origins, causes, results and consequences. Analysing archival documents, historical sources and modern research data about this event, we can make the following conclusions. Each social stratum that participated in the uprising had its own reasons for protest. In particular, rebelling madrasah students were dissatisfied with the increasingly difficult living and studying conditions in the education system; artisans, dehkans (peasants) and small middle-class merchants were tired of increased taxes; this was caused by an increase in the number of Shiite officials in the administration of the emirate of notable Sunnis and

their rejection of injustice. Moreover, influenced by the ideals of social equality in Babism, local Shiite Muslims also had their own claims. By the early 20th century, they began to consider themselves entitled to have equal relations with the Sunnis in all respects, which allowed external forces to organise an uprising.

The situation in the early 20th century required that the Emir of Bukhara Sayyid Abdulahad Khan ease the pressure of the Russian Empire, preserve relations between the government and religious figures in the world, and carry out reforms in the interests of the local population. But since the small numbers of Shiites in the political administration of the emirate were not taken into account by the majority of notable Sunni officials, the sharp protests caused by the religious factor had serious consequences.

As a result of the uprising, Sunni Mirza Nasrullah was made the kushbegi of the emirate, and although Shiites were removed from other positions, the system of governance in the emirate remained unchanged. Therefore, throughout 1910, the threat of a new rebellion worried the imperial government. Among other preventive measures, in April 1910, the passport system of the Russian Empire was introduced and a control group was created in Old Bukhara, the latter consisting of 12 Russian political agents who were paid (the annual salary of 7,980 roubles consisted of 2,000 roubles allocated by the empire, and 5,980 roubles that came from the emirate treasury). They were aimed at strengthening control over the population (*Tukhtametov* 1977: 46-48). The Russian authorities also intended to eliminate British, German and Turkish spies who were secretly operating in the emirate.

So, the main reason for the Sunni-Shiite uprising in Bukhara in 1910 was, of course, the socio-political protest, while religious discord actually became a pretext. The multi-confessional situation in the Emirate of Bukhara was favourable for the conspirators. Shiites were one of the main confessions there, like Jews and Hindus. They were mainly engaged in trade, handicrafts and sericulture, and followed legal and religious restrictions until they achieved social equality. In the late 19th–early 20th centuries, despite the consolidation of the political position of a small number of Shiite officials in the government of the emirate, they became oppositional to the Sunni elite. The big uprising in the early 20th century clearly showed that the emirate, as a de facto colonial territory, was strongly under the political influence of Western powers in the so-called Great Game.

⁶ National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Op. I-1, doc. 1020, shs. 1-3.

⁷ National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Op. I-3, doc. 127, sh. 52-54.

⁸ Babism is a movement founded in Iran by Muhammad Ali Tabrizi in 1826, promoting the ideas of social equality and fair legal governance (*Schimmel* 2009: 98; *Encyclopædia Iranica*, III/3:309-317).

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