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ISLAM AND THE SPIRIT OF TOLERANCE IN BUKHARA IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of religious tolerance in Bukhara during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author analyzes how Islamic legal norms and the cultural traditions of the Emirate created conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the Muslim majority and religious minorities, including Bukharan Jews, Christians, and Hindus. Particular attention is devoted to the activities of the Jadids, who in the early twentieth century transformed the traditional idea of tolerance into a concept of civic enlightenment and intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: Emirate of Bukhara, Islamic tolerance, dhimmi, Jadidism, Bukharan Jews, interfaith harmony, Sharia law, Central Asia in the 19th–20th centuries, religious communities, cultural heritage.

For centuries, Bukhara bore the honorary title of "Sharif" (Noble). In the 19th century, it remained not only the capital of the emirate but also the intellectual center of the Islamic world, with approximately 300 madrassas and an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students at the beginning of the 20th century [1, 3 p.]. However, Bukhara's uniqueness lay not in its isolation, but in its ability to integrate diverse cultural strata within a single social space.

The Islamic doctrine of tolerance in Bukhara was based on the principle of "dhimmi"—patronage. Religious tolerance in the Emirate of Bukhara was not simply a political gesture, but an organic continuation of Islamic jurisprudence, which guaranteed the inviolability of the lives and property of non-believers. The foundation of legal relations in Bukhara was the fundamental verse of the Quran: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 256). Nineteenth-century Bukharan jurists emphasized in their interpretations that forced conversion contradicts the very essence of Islam, which is based on sincerity (ikhlos) and free choice. [2, 770 p.]

In the 19th century, Bukhara was a diverse tapestry of peoples. The most significant non-Muslim community were the Bukharan Jews. They lived compactly in the neighborhoods (mahalla) of "Old Synagogue," "New Synagogue," and "Amirobod" [3].

Despite certain restrictions (such as a ban on horseback riding within the city or a special type of belt), everyday life was filled with close cooperation. The economic interdependence between Muslim landowners and Jewish merchants created a unique social buffer, preventing interreligious conflicts based on everyday discord [4, 78c]. In the city's markets—Toki Sarrofon or Toki Zargaron—religious affiliation took a backseat to the integrity of the transaction. Tolerance manifested itself not only in economics but also in the arts. Bukharan Jews were the guardians and virtuoso performers of Shashmaqam, the region's classical musical heritage. The

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Muslim elite and Jewish musicians shared a common aesthetic platform, where spiritual chants and secular music served as a universal language of communication, understandable to representatives of both faiths. An important aspect of tolerance was also the internal self-governance of communities. The emir's authorities rarely interfered in the internal affairs of the Jewish community unless they concerned state interests or criminal offenses. Religious disputes and civil matters within the community were resolved by their own spiritual leaders (khakhams), which effectively signified the presence of elements of legal pluralism in the emirate.

The emergence of a Russian settlement (New Bukhara/Kagan) a few miles from the old city added a new element to the region's religious map. Despite the concerns of conservative circles, Emir Abdulahad Khan demonstrated diplomatic flexibility: he not only permitted the construction of Orthodox churches in Kagan but also donated funds to charitable projects related to Russian subjects, demonstrating a pragmatic ecumenism in the interests of state stability.

The Indian community in 19th-century Bukhara was one of the most colorful and at the same time closed groups. Unlike local Jews, Hindus (called "Hindu" in Bukhara) were most often temporary residents—merchants and moneylenders who came for periods ranging from a few years to decades, leaving their families in India. The center of their lives were specialized caravanserais, such as the Hinduyon (Indian) caravanserai, located in the very heart of the commercial city of Bukhara. The uniqueness of the situation was that, despite the city's strict Islamic appearance, Hindus were allowed not only to live according to their customs within these caravanserais but also to have small prayer houses for performing puja [5, 295 p.].

The emirate's authorities understood that Indian capital was a vital link between the markets of Central Asia and British India. Bukhara's pragmatism was evident in the fact that "dhimmis" (protected non-Muslims) were viewed as a valuable economic resource. In this case, Bukhara's Islamic legal system acted as a guarantor of security for transactions and property: Indian merchants could file lawsuits in the courts of the qazis and count on their rights being protected, confirming Bukhara's status as a city where the order and justice of Sharia law took precedence over xenophobia. [6, 112-115 p.]

With the advent of the 20th century, the intellectual elite of Bukhara, represented by the Jadids (Abdurauf Fitrat, Sadriddin Aini, Munzim), began to rethink the role of Islam in modern society. They opposed dogmatism, believing that enlightenment (ma'rifat) was the path to national unification.

Abdurauf Fitrat played a special role in promoting knowledge in the field of true Islam. In his work "Stories of an Indian Traveler," he emphasizes that acquiring knowledge in secular sciences does not contradict Sharia law. He also states that one should not reproach non-believers, especially Christians, for their faith, because There are hadiths and verses refuting unfriendly relations with respect to dhimmis. [7, 39 p.]

The Jadids emphasized that true Islam calls for the study of global achievements. In the works of Bukharan educators of the early 20th century, the concept of religious tolerance evolved toward the idea of civic equality and national revival. They saw Bukhara not as a closed fortress, but as an open system capable of absorbing the best of Russian, European, and Eastern cultures. The Jadid educators also proposed reforming the maktab system using a new method, borrowing elements of pedagogy from Tatar and European schools. They argued that a true Muslim should not fear the knowledge of others.

After 1920 and the formation of the BNSR, religious tolerance clashed with militant atheism. However, popular memory proved stronger. Even during the years of repression, the residents of Bukhara maintained respect for each other's holy sites. Vivid evidence of the

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resilience of these traditions is provided by archival data from the post-war period, for example, in 1947: The official opening of the synagogue in Bukhara was a landmark event, marking the legalization of spiritual life after decades of restrictions. [8, 186 p.] And in 1948, there is information about the celebration of Passover, demonstrating the high level of community cohesion. In the Soviet reality, the tradition of "neighborly rights" helped maintain peace: the making of matzah and the performance of holiday rituals were perceived by Muslim neighbors with traditional respect, serving as a survival mechanism for a multicultural society. [9, 240 p.]

The experience of Bukhara in the 19th and 20th centuries demonstrates that Islam and religious tolerance are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary concepts. Bukhara managed to maintain its status as the "Dome of Islam" while remaining home to representatives of various faiths. This historical lesson remains relevant today, as Uzbekistan builds a model of society based on mutual respect and interfaith harmony.

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