



THE FORMATION OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN UZBEKISTAN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract: This article explores the intellectual and institutional emergence of historiography in Uzbekistan during the early 20th century—a period marked by political transformations, cultural renaissance, and national awakening. The formation of modern historical thought was influenced by the intersection of traditional Islamic scholarship, Jadidism, colonial Russian academic policies, and early Soviet ideological paradigms. Through the analysis of historical texts, educational reforms, and the activities of prominent historians, this study reveals the complexities of how Uzbek historiography was conceptualized, constructed, and contested in the transition from imperial to Soviet rule. The article further evaluates the historiographical legacy of this period and its influence on subsequent national history writing in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Historiography, Uzbekistan, early 20th century, Jadidism, colonial scholarship, national identity, Soviet history, intellectual tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 20th century was a watershed moment for the development of national consciousness and intellectual modernity in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan. This era saw the gradual emergence of historical scholarship that sought to document, reinterpret, and reclaim the region's rich past in light of new political realities. Prior to this period, historical writing in Central Asia was predominantly shaped by court chronicles and Islamic scholastic traditions, often emphasizing dynastic legitimacy, religious themes, and moral instruction rather than critical historiographical methods [1].

However, with the expansion of the Russian Empire into Central Asia in the late 19th century, new historiographical influences began to permeate the intellectual life of the region. Russian orientalists, military administrators, and ethnographers introduced new tools of documentation, archive work, and chronology. At the same time, the rise of the Jadid movement—a modernist reform initiative among Turkic Muslims—brought about a rethinking of education, national identity, and the role of history in shaping collective memory. It is within this intersection of empire, reform, and awakening that Uzbek historiography began to take a modern form.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Prior to the 20th century, historical writing in Uzbekistan was largely embedded within Islamic epistemological frameworks. Works such as *Tarixi Mulki Ambar*, *Shajarayi Turk*, and *Nasafiyнома* reflected a worldview grounded in religious cosmology and moral paradigms. Historians often operated as chroniclers of rulers, custodians of genealogies, and preservers of hadith and Islamic ethics. Though these works were invaluable in preserving historical data, they lacked systematic source criticism and methodological objectivity [2].

Nevertheless, these traditions provided an essential foundation for emerging historiographical currents. Many early 20th-century historians were themselves products of madrasah education, deeply familiar with Arabic, Persian, and Chagatai sources. Their transformation into modern historians was a gradual process that entailed both the preservation of cultural heritage and

adaptation to new intellectual currents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Jadid reformists, spearheaded by figures such as Mahmudxo‘ja Behbudiy, Abdulla Avloniy, Munavvarqori Abdurashidxonov, and Fitrat, played a pivotal role in reshaping historical discourse. They recognized history as a powerful tool for nation-building, moral rejuvenation, and anti-colonial awareness. Jadid intellectuals began writing and publishing historical works not merely to glorify the past, but to analyze it critically and derive lessons for the future [3].

Fitrat’s Munozara and O‘zbeklar treatises, for example, questioned why Turkic-Muslim societies had lagged behind Europe and emphasized the need for self-reflection through historical inquiry. Historical essays began to appear in Jadid newspapers and journals such as Shuhrat, Taraqqiy, and Oyna. These writings, though limited in formal methodology, reflected a growing awareness of historical causality, periodization, and national identity.

Moreover, Jadid educators introduced history as a subject in new-method schools (*usul-i jadid maktablari*), where students learned about Timurids, ancient Khorezm, and Islamic civilization not through rote memorization but through critical engagement with the past. This shift marked a departure from traditional historiography and laid the groundwork for modern historical thinking. While Jadidism cultivated an internal intellectual renaissance, Russian imperial scholarship exerted significant influence through orientalist institutions, archival systems, and translation initiatives. Russian scholars such as V. V. Bartold, N. I. Veselovsky, and S. F. Oldenburg conducted extensive research on Central Asian history, often from a colonial perspective. Their works, though invaluable in terms of source collection, often reflected Eurocentric biases and served the administrative needs of the empire.

Institutions like the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, local ethnographic commissions, and state-run schools introduced academic protocols and historical documentation practices. The publication of Turkestan Collection (*Turkestanskiy Sbornik*)—a multi-volume compendium of documents, reports, and studies—provided unprecedented access to both Russian and indigenous sources. At the same time, the colonial framework restricted native authorship and often silenced subaltern narratives.

However, these scholarly activities also facilitated the training of local historians, archivists, and translators. Indigenous scholars who collaborated with Russian orientalists gained access to methodological tools, paleography, and European historiographical models, which they later adapted for national purposes during the Soviet era.

CONCLUSION

The formation of historiography in Uzbekistan at the beginning of the 20th century was a multidimensional and contested process. It emerged at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, colonization and reform, ideology and scholarship. Traditional Islamic chronicles, Jadid reformist thought, Russian orientalism, and Soviet academic structures all played a role in shaping the contours of Uzbek historical writing.

While early efforts may have lacked the methodological rigor of modern academic history, they succeeded in transforming history into a field of public concern and national self-reflection. The legacy of this formative period continues to influence contemporary Uzbek historiography, which seeks to balance critical inquiry with cultural pride and national identity.

A comprehensive understanding of this era is essential for appreciating how historical narratives are constructed, manipulated, and mobilized in the service of both scholarship and statecraft. The historiographical developments of early 20th-century Uzbekistan remain not only a record of intellectual awakening but also a mirror of the political transformations that reshaped Central Asia.

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