Research Report

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Non-Muslim Heritage of Muslim Asia[1]

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The report outlines the histories and migrations of various non-Muslim groups from Muslim Asia – Jews from Aleppo; Sikhs, Hindus and Jews from Afghanistan; and Jews from central Asia – and charts how and where these histories have been remembered and recognised as valued forms of Muslim Asia's heritage. Each section of the report concludes with policy recommendations for heritage organisations active within the settings where these minorities have historically resided.

ALEPPO'S JEWISH HERITAGE

Jews played a significant role in Aleppo's history prior to their traumatic departure after 1947. Yet Aleppine Jews have generally been omitted from official heritage narratives and practices within Syria. This omission can be understood in relation to post-1947 regional politics, but also more broadly in relation to the ways that understandings of Syrian and Aleppine heritage have developed

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and shifted through and since the colonial period, the awarding of UNESCO world heritage status, processes of economic development and change, and war and its aftermath. Beyond Syria, Aleppo's Jewish history has been the focus of heritage organisations in the Syrian Jewish diaspora, principally in New York, and in Israel, which have built archives and museum exhibits, and produced and disseminated a wide variety of publications. Much heritage work on Aleppine Jewry outside Syria tends to focus on communal traditions and memories rather than inter-religious institutions and spaces. The report considers a variety of additional sources available for documenting the Jewish history of Aleppo, and their multiple perspectives. Both informal oral remembrances, and the Arabic literary tradition of urban chronicling, which continues to develop in new forms, can enrich our understanding of Jewish contributions to Aleppo's history and bring inter-religious interactions in all their complexity back into focus.

HERATI JEWISH HERITAGE

Most if not all of Afghanistan's historic urban centres have been home to significant non-Muslim communities over the past century. The most sizeable groups of non-Muslims in the country are Jews and Sikhs and Hindus. A smaller population of Armenian Christians resided in Afghanistan until the first decades of the twentieth century, mostly in Kabul. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Jews from Afghanistan created built heritage in Afghanistan beyond. During the nineteenth century Jews in Herat established three synagogues and a ritual bathhouse. After most Jews left Herat in the 1950s, these buildings either fell into disrepair or were repurposed by the Afghan government to whom they had been entrusted by the Herati Jewish community. In the 2010s, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture restored one of the synagogues. In the same period, Herati Jews living in America and Israel gathered funds to repair graves in the Herat's Jewish cemetery.

AFGHAN SIKH AND HINDU HERITAGE

Between 2001 and 2021, various international NGOs and government departments played a role in the preservation of the built heritage of cities which had been home to large communities of Sikhs and Hindus, notably Kabul. Much such heritage work focused on either monuments of importance to the history of statehood in Afghanistan or neighbourhoods in the old city inhabited largely by Muslims. The area of Kabul's old city in which Afghans Sikhs and Hindus had lived (the Hindu Guzar) was not the focus of such heritage projects. Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan in the diaspora have played an increasingly vigorous role in the preservation of their cultural heritage. Organic intellectuals have written texts exploring the history of the community. These texts also identify sites of religious and social importance for Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan. Most such texts are written in either Punjabi or, though at least one such work was written in Persian.[2] Cultural associations established by Afghan Sikhs and Hindus regularly organise events that are

[2] Dass, Ischwar 2003. *A History of Afghanistan's Hindus*. Stockholm: Afghanistan Cultural Association.

devoted to raising knowledge about their heritage in Afghanistan and forging links with policy makers in the settings in which they live; more attention is now being directed towards the threats posed to vacant Gurdwaras and temples in Afghanistan. Afghan Sikhs and Hindus have also produced documentary films about their history, and Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from Afghanistan have collaborated with one another to raise awareness about the community's history in Afghanistan.

BUKHARAN JEWISH HERITAGE OF CENTRAL ASIA

The context of nation-building in independent Uzbekistan since 1991 has simultaneously undermined and acknowledged Bukhran Jewish cultural heritage in the main urban sites of their former presence (Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara). While during the Soviet period, Bukharan Jewish material heritage was only marginally recognised in the state's heritage practices, independent Uzbekistan has promoted a post-colonial and ethnically exclusive understanding of nationhood, in tandem with official representations of itself as a culturally diverse, multi-confessional and tolerant state. The latter has been integral to the formation of a post-Cold War Silk Road heritage and tourist industry where Uzbekistan actively promotes itself as the 'cross-roads of civilizations and cultures'.

In recent decades, in the key urban sites of Bukhran Jewish former presence, different types of material heritage have become the objects of increased interest of, and financial support by, the transnational Bukharan diaspora based mainly in the USA, Canada, Israel, Germany and Austria, as well as different international charities, NGOs and Jewish humanitarian organisations. The Bukharan Jewish diasporic organisations and hometown associations have particularly been active and successful in the rebuilding and restoration of Bukharan Jewish cemeteries in Uzbekistan, sometimes with the help of regional authorities, and in promoting 'cemetery tourism' focused on these heritage sites. Collaborative heritage work on other important Bukharan spaces in Uzbekistan, such as synagogues, historical residential buildings and neighbourhoods, some of which are protected by UNESCO, has been less evident in terms of tangible outcomes.

In New York and Vienna – sites of the most significant Bukharan presence outside Israel – heritage work is centred on both safeguarding Bukharan *Jewish* identity (i.e. religious identity/belonging) and *Bukharan* Jewish cultural identity (i.e. the cultural particularity of Bukharan Judaism combined with Central Asian cultural traditions). It is achieved through a variety of means, including celebrations and/or commemorations of the diverse artistic, cultural and educational achievements of the older, first-generation emigrants; amateur museum collection and curation (NY); production of memoirs and amateur cook and history books (including those documenting the history of the diaspora); and the founding of new community centres closely linked with religious institutions. A particular public role is played by the classical music tradition of shashmaqom, which is today considered a shared intangible heritage of Bukharan Jews and Muslim Central Asians.

ALEPPO'S JEWISH HISTORIES OF INTERACTION

After a brief outline of Aleppo's Jewish history and the traumatic departure of Syrian Jews particularly after 1947, this section charts how and where diverse Jewish and Jewish-Muslim histories in Aleppo have been remembered (or not) and rendered into heritage. It tracks how understandings of Syrian and Aleppine heritage have shifted over the last century, in the context of different political orders, the end of colonial rule and emergence of nationalist politics, UNESCO world heritage status, processes of economic development and change, and war and its aftermath. Aleppine Jews have generally been omitted from official heritage narratives and practices within Syria. At the same time, after their departure from Syria, they have been the focus of heritage organisations in the Syrian Jewish diaspora, principally in New York, and in Israel, which have built archives and museum exhibits, and produced and disseminated a wide variety of publications. Much heritage work on Aleppine Jewry outside Syria tends to focus on communal traditions and memories rather than inter-religious institutions and spaces. The report considers a variety of additional sources available for documenting the Jewish history of Aleppo, and their multiple perspectives. Both informal oral remembrances, and the Arabic literary tradition of urban chronicling, which continues to develop in new forms, can enrich our understanding of Jewish contributions to Aleppo's history and bring inter-religious interactions in all their complexity back into focus. The section concludes with policy recommendations for heritage organisations active within and beyond Syria.

JEWISH ALEPPO: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Aleppo had been a centre of Jewish learning for a thousand years,[3] and the Great Synagogue of Aleppo a site of continuous Jewish worship for possibly as many as 15 centuries, when the last Jews left in the 1990s.[4] Until 1947, the synagogue had housed artefacts of great religious significance, including the Keter Torah or Aleppo Codex, the oldest Hebrew Bible in the world. Alongside its religious significance, Aleppo had also risen to become a prominent trading hub under the Ottoman empire, with Jews playing a significant role in its commercial history. Its Jewish community was a mixture of families who traced their lineage back to the Iberian Peninsula, others known as "Francos" who were descended from Italian merchants who arrived in the 1700s, and those who had deep ancestral roots in the region. By the end of the 18th century, the Jewish community's influence on Aleppo's economy was so significant that commercial activities reportedly ceased in observance of Jewish holidays.[5] As the Ottoman Empire's power diminished, global trade routes

[3] Zohar, Z., 2013. *Rabbinic creativity in the modern Middle East*. A&C Black.
[4] Zenner, W.P., 2000. *A global community: the Jews from Aleppo, Syria*. Wayne State University Press.
[5] Laskier, M.M. and Simon, R.S. 2002. "Economic Life". In B. Klorman, R. Simon, M. Laskier, and S. Reguer (eds) *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times,* pp29-48.

shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. This change led to a decline in the importance of the long-established Sephardic trading network centred around the merranean. Despite this shift in global commerce, Jewish merchants from Aleppo remained prominent figures in the 19th-century cotton trade between Manchester and the Middle East. Their participation in this trade contributed to Aleppo's continued importance as a regional hub for the distribution of textiles from Manchester, Milan, and East Asia, a role it maintained until the 1940s.[6] In addition to their involvement in textile distribution, Jewish merchants in Aleppo imported used clothing from America, which they dyed, ironed, and repaired before selling.[7] Jewish merchants also played a leading role in the trade of precious stones, including emeralds, rubies, turquoise, and diamonds.[8]

Early in the 20th century, Jewish residents of Aleppo had an important impact on shared social areas in the Jamiliyyeh neighborhood, which was located outside the old walled city. For example, a café owned by a member of the Jewish Safra banking family became a popular gathering place for men of different faiths (Mahfouz 2022). Another nearby café was owned and operated by Jewish families. Jamiliyyeh also became home to a number of Jewish institutions, including two synagogues (Jamiliyeh and Silvera), which were associated with prominent families. Other Jewish institutions in the area included schools, a court, a social and sports club, a kosher butcher, and a school run by the Alliance Israelite, which educated both Jewish and Muslim students (ibid). However, the establishment of Israel in 1948, following the partition of Palestine, put Jewish communities within Syria in a difficult position, and tensions were exacerbated by Jewish ties to the former colonial government in Syria. On December 1, 1947, just after the UN announced the partition, a mob attacked Jamiliyyeh, destroying synagogues, schools, and Jewish businesses. The Silveira synagogue and a major Jewish social club were set on fire. Many of Aleppo's Jewish residents emigrated, with a large number relocating to England, Israel, or the Americas. Those who stayed in Syria experienced restrictions on their movement, property ownership, and employment. Their documents were stamped "Musawi" ("Mosaic"), which limited their rights. The government closed Alliance Israelite schools in 1950. By 1957, the Jewish population of Aleppo had fallen to 2,000, down from 17,000 in 1943.[9]

From 1947, much of Aleppo's Jewish heritage was subject to loss or damage. During the riots 150 buildings, 50 shops and offices, 10 synagogues, 5 schools suffered damage; 160 Torah scrolls were burned, while the Aleppo codex was smuggled out to Jerusalem (Cobb 2010). From the 1950s to the 1970s, urban

[6] Anderson, P., 2023. A Circulation Society, Reconsidered: Syrian Jewish Merchant Networks after the Exodus from Aleppo. *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, *41*(2).
[7] al-Asadi 1981 vol 6 p 205.
[8] al-Asadi 1981, vol3 p174.
[9] Laskier, M.M. and Simon, R.S. 2002. "Economic Life". In B.Klorman, R.Simon, M. Laskier, and S. Reguer (eds) *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times,* pp29-48.

development initiatives in Aleppo also resulted in the demolition of many structures that once represented the city's Jewish heritage – such developments also affected Muslim and Christian heritage. In the Jamiliyeh neighborhood, Jewish-owned cafés and low-rise buildings were sold by their owners and subsequently torn down to make way for new urban projects. Examples include the Ballour café, which closed its doors in the 1960s and was replaced with apartments, and the Mastat building, which disappeared from the cityscape by the 1980s; the Jamiliyeh café, which had transitioned to Muslim ownership in the 1950s, also met its demise in the early 1980s (Mahfouz 2022). These changes extended beyond the commercial realm, as the Jewish cemetery located in the Suleimaniyya district was appropriated by the Municipality and repurposed for construction projects; Muslim graveyards (for example in the city of Homs) also met the same fate.[10] Inside Aleppo's walled city, urban planning schemes implemented between the 1950s and 1970s drew inspiration from the French mandate model, widening roads that cut through historically significant neighborhoods, including those that had formerly been predominantly Jewish areas. While the Great Synagogue in Aleppo still stands, it has remained closed to the public since the early 1990s. This closure coincided with the departure of approximately 4,000 Jewish individuals from Syria as part of a political arrangement between the United States and the Syrian government.

HERITAGE FRAMEWORKS IN ALEPPO

The Jewish dimensions of Aleppo's history have largely been omitted from discourses of urban and national heritage within Syria. While the Asad regime guarded the Aleppo synagogue, and a sign insisted on "respecting this holy place of worship", the site itself remained closed (Cobb 2010). An Aleppine Jew who visited the synagogue in 2010 from New York reported that the path to the graveyard was overgrown with grass. The exclusion of Jews from discussions and practices of Aleppine heritage in Syria is not new or solely post-1947; it must be understood in a broader historical context. This is in line with recent scholarship which, rather than assuming that certain objects or sites have innate heritage value, studies the processes and contexts in which they have come to be recognized as such (Salemink 2021). In Syria, understandings of what counts as heritage have been shaped by external interventions, as well as regional trends, shifts in political economy, and civil and geopolitical conflict. During the French mandate (1920-46), administrators viewed heritage as isolated monuments rather than elements of a broader urban context (Lafi 2017). They focused primarily on ancient or pre-Ottoman heritage, emphasizing the Roman and Hellenic periods – for example removing centuries-old post-Roman mosque and church from Palmyra to preserve it as a site of "antiquity" (Munawar 2019). In 1931, a French Orientalist created a list of Muslim monuments that

[10] Al-Asadi 1981 (vol 3, p29). Some abandoned Jewish cemeteries had also been built on when the neighbouring extra-mural neighbourhood of Aziziyeh was built in 1868 (ibid vol 5 p387).

became a key reference for 20th-century heritage projects (Lafi 2017). Nora Lafi contends its primary goal was to disenfranchise waqf institutions, but it also excluded Jewish buildings from the purview of heritage. In the post-independence period (1946s-70s), modernising urban development followed the French-mandate pattern of widening thoroughfares (Vincent 2004), and cut through sections of the old city including Jewish areas.

In the 1980s, a civil society campaign resisted further modernising master plans in Old City of Aleppo and won Presidential approval, leading to a successful bid for UNESCO world heritage listing in 1986. But while the report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre commended Aleppo for its mosques and churches, it did not mention Jewish heritage (Cobb 2010). The new status of "world heritage" brought international attention. In 1992, the German development organisation GTZ launched a project to preserve the Old City fabric. Heritage preservation work was also carried out under the rubric of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's Islamic Cities Programme (Vincent 2004, Cobb 2010). UNESCO listing also facilitated another development in the late 1990s: the tourist-focused renovation of heritage sites as leisure and consumption venues. In Aleppo as well as Damascus, historic buildings were redeveloped as cafes, hotels, restaurants (Jacobs 2010, Salahieh et al, 2024). The patrons were not only international tourists; in both Aleppo and Damascus, leisure and consumption practices in historic parts of the city were a mode of social competition: an "appropriation of heritage" (Daher 2004) through which older urban elites sought to distinguish themselves from nouveaux riches (Salamandra 2004). Tourism also entailed the marketing of artisanal craft products and the staging of "traditional" production processes and visibly Muslim identities in Aleppo (Anderson 2023).

The Syrian regime sponsored the narrative of Islamic Aleppo. While the regime had repressed Islamists since the 1970s, it endorsed claims about the intrinsically Islamic nature of Aleppo's identity and heritage. In 2006, it hosted the "Aleppo, Capital of Islamic Culture" festival organized by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (Pinto 2007). According to Paulo Pinto, this initiative aimed to strengthen ties with Aleppo's Muslim bourgeoisie and gain support for economic liberalization; banners highlighting the city's trade heritage presented entrepreneurialism as a social good within an Islamic context (Pinto 2007). The pious Muslim trader became an emblem of Aleppo's identity, overshadowing the contributions of Greek Christian, Armenian, and Jewish traders, who had been vital in establishing the city as a commercial hub during the Ottoman era and who had dominated its mercantile middle class until the late 1920s. So while Syria's post-2000 period of economic liberalisation elicited new heritage practices and discourses, these omitted the Jewish past. In a similar development in this period, the wife of the Syrian President founded the "Syrian Trust for Development" in 2007 as an umbrella group of government-organised NGOs. The Trust projected images of Syria's modernity and inclusivity for international consumption portraying the country as an investable domain. While it showcased Syria's traditions of artisanal production and renovated parts of

Aleppo's historic markets, it also made no reference to the city's Jewish history of craftsmanship and commerce.

From 2012, heritage was a critical dimension of the war in Syria and the wider geopolitical rivalries in which the conflict was enmeshed. The destruction and renovation of heritage sites became a means by which various wartime actors sought to assert their sovereignty or legitimise their military interventions. In 2015, Daesh sought international visibility and to mobilise supporters by destroying the Bal temple in Palmyra and framing it as a re-enactment of early an Islamic destruction of idols. Shortly afterwards, both the Russian President and a former US Secretary of State justified their governments' respective military interventions in Syria as a defence of "civilisation" (Munawar 2017, 2019). In Aleppo, the reconstruction of heritage was also central to efforts to articulate an emerging post-war order. The Battle for Aleppo (2012-2016) had seen the destruction of up to 90% of the surface of Aleppo's historic city (Munawar and Symonds 2022). After 2016, the Syrian regime, with support from the Aga Khan Trust, rebuilt selected monuments in Aleppo in an attempt to elicit nostalgia for the pre-war order and to pose as protectors of Syria; it also inserted the language of "heritage" into the Syrian constitution for the first time in 2017 (Munawar 2022). A regime ally, the Chechen government, funded the rebuilding of the Umayyad mosque in Aleppo, staging both governments' "respect for Islam" to their respective populations (Deknatel 2019). The Syrian regime also renovated selected historic Christian monuments in Aleppo in its posture as a "protector of minorities". The Armenian Orthodox and Maronite Cathedrals in the Jdeideh neighbourhood of Aleppo received government support funding for renovation in 2017 (Salahieh et al 2024).

HERITAGE PUBLICATIONS AND ORAL REMEMBRANCE IN THE SYRIAN JEWISH DIASPORA IN NEW YORK

While Aleppo's Jewish heritage is of great historical significance, it has therefore been left out of frameworks for identifying and conserving Syrian heritage from the French colonial period, through post-independence urban planning, and the world heritage and tourist-led renovations of the 1990s, to the conservative Islamic heritage discourses of the 2000s and wartime/reconstruction practices of the 2010s. It is true that since the departure of Aleppo's last Jews in the 1990s, the regime has maintained diplomatic relations with members of the Syrian Jewish diaspora in New York, and has permitted them to fund renovations and visit the Great Synagogue of Aleppo. Syrian Jews in New York funded repairs to the synagogue in 1992, and planned further restoration of the synagogue and adjacent graveyard, visiting again in the 2000s. After the synagogue had been badly damaged during the Battle for Aleppo, the regime in 2018 invited further visits from Aleppine Jews in New York who had been fundraising for repairs. But these efforts have been privately-funded and low-profile, and have only fed into public narratives and representations of Aleppine heritage outside of Syria. For example, photographs of Syrian synagogues taken by the World Monuments Fund in 1995 were

exhibited in the US in 2005 (Cobb 2010). The Sephardic Heritage Museum in New York has drawn on photographs taken during subsequent visits to produce a computerised archive of gravestone photographs; descendents of Aleppine Jews now living in the US are able to access the archive to view their ancestors' headstones. In 2022, a virtual reality exhibit of the Great Aleppo Synagogue, based on photographs taken in 1947, was launched at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Such efforts, located in the diaspora, represent the city of Aleppo as a site of exemplary Jewish piety and family memory, but tend to disembed Aleppo's Jews from the wider social fabric in which they existed. Publications catering to the Syrian Jewish diaspora in New York tend to construct Aleppo in similar ways. The last chief Rabbi of Aleppo, Hacham Yom Tob Yedid, died in Brooklyn in 2016. In June 2022, an elegant hardback biography of him appeared, entitled "For the Sake of Heaven: the last Chief Rabbi of Aleppo who led his people with courage and strength". Running to almost 500 pages, it is described by the Chief Rabbi's son in the preface as a biography both of his father and of the whole Aleppo Syrian community. Both are presented as exemplars of devotion to the Torah and its values. In the book, Aleppo appears a bastion of tradition. The chief rabbi was "molded in Halab" (Aleppo) and brought "Halab to America". What Halab stands for is religious fervor, resistance to Westernisation, and respectful submission to rabbinical authority. A repeated theme in the book is that the rabbi fearlessly rebuked those who strayed from the Torah's values in order to secure the survival of the community. The publisher, ArtScroll or Mesorah Publications, began catering to Brooklyn's Orthodox community in the 1970s, and has since grown into one of the largest English-language Judaica publishers, paralleling the movement of "unapologetic Orthodoxy" to the centre stage of Jewish public discourse, according to Jeremy Stolow (2010). The movement promotes "intensive study of Jewish texts and submission to the authority of a narrowly defined rabbinic elite", and for some represents an "assault on Jewish traditions stressing autonomous powers of reason, pluralism and enlightened acculturation" (intro p1). Another Artscroll book is a coffee-table tome "Aleppo, city of scholars", published in 2005 and reprinted in 2019. Four initial chapters then offer various histories of Aleppo as a Jewish city. The bulk of the book offers biographies of "600 pious scholars and spiritually motivated laymen", who maintained Aleppo's tradition through the ages.[11] Jewish Aleppo has also been memorialised by diasporic authors and organisations in New York, through cooking books,[12] textbooks and lesson plans,[13] prayer books,[14] and genealogies of rabbinical and other prominent families.[15] While these

[11] "Aleppo, city of scholars" is an edited and expanded version of a Hebrew text published in 1952 by a Rabbi born in Aleppo in 1899. However, according to analysis by Zvi Zohar, Professor of Sephardi Law at Bar Ilan University, Aleppo City of Scholars edits out references in this earlier work to socio-cultural values which are at odds with those of ultra-Orthodoxy: an esteem for the humanities, philosophy and modern education. It reimagines Aleppo as a bastion of ultra-Orthodoxy, obscuring the Sephardic tradition of humanism.

[12] See "Aromas of Aleppo: the legendary cuisine of Syrian Jews" (Poopa Dweck, 2007).

[13] Published by the Sephardic Heritage Museum. See https://sephardicheritagemuseum.com

[14] Published by the Sephardic Heritage Foundation. See https://www.sephardicheritage.com

[15] Published by the Sephardic Heritage Project in New York. See https://sephardicheritageproject.org/sephardic-heritage-project-books

recognise the influence of Arabic culture, their focus on Aleppine Jewish familial and religious traditions tends to emphasise community life and continuity rather than cross-cutting social relations with Arab Muslims.

While heritage organisations in the diaspora play a vital role in documenting and transmitting Aleppo's Jewish past, the shared social milieu with Arab Muslims often recedes into the background or disappears from view in these constructs of heritage. Yet this shared social milieu does feature in informal everyday oral remembrances of Aleppo among the Syrian Jewish diaspora in New York. One of the last generation of Jews to leave Syria, who had grown up in Aleppo in the 1970s and 1980s, remembered his father as a person who drew his status and personhood through existing in a not-entirely-Jewish social world: being greeted respectfully in the street on his way to the factory he owned, having his departure lamented by his Muslim business partner as he was about to leave Syria, knowing how to navigate – even "command" – the predominantly Muslim bureaucracy, and how to manage ambiguous relations with his Muslim neighbours and with the Alawite-dominated regime – relations which could combine degrees of hostility and exploitation, as well as mutuality and loyalty. Reminiscing about his father, he portrayed him as knowing how to manipulate the intersecting web of relations of commerce, politics, and neighbourhood in Aleppo and turn them to his advantage. In this oral remembrance, his father was not only a member of Aleppo's "Jewish community"; he was also a recognisable figure in the wider sociocultural system of Syrian commerce and politics: a "trusted merchant" (tajir thiqa), with social authority (kalimeh) and guile (shatara), able to navigate the political dimension of relationships (al-siyasa).

ALEPPINE JEWISH HERITAGE IN ARABIC URBAN BIOGRAPHIES

The shared social milieu between Jews and Muslims in Aleppo has also been documented in Arab chronicles of the city. Kamel al-Ghazzi's 3-volume history of Aleppo (1926) shows that while Aleppo's Jews tended to cluster in certain neighbourhoods, they always lived among Muslims. His work can be located within an Arabic literary genre of chronicling urban life. Exemplars of this genre tended to combine historical happenings, notable persons, descriptions of neighbourhoods including demographic surveys and important buildings. For al-Ghazzi and other works this tradition, heritage is understood in terms of athar, literally "the traces that the past has left on a place" (Lafi 2017). The term did not necessarily imply a distant past: al-Ghazzi includes Jewish buildings from only one generation earlier in his category of athar. This understanding of heritage also differed from French notions of monuments disconnected from the surrounding social and built environment (ibid). Urban chronicles avoided a "monumental" conception of heritage by including descriptions of social habits, events and interactions as well as buildings. Al-Ghazzi records that a warehouse in Jamiliyeh built in 1883 had been co-owned by a Jewish and Muslim merchant

before the Jewish partner bought his Muslim counterpart out. Al-Ghazzi also described worshippers making devotions of oil to the prophet "Khidr" (often identified with Elijah) in the Great Synagogue. His use of the term Khidr (rather than Iliyya for Elijah) – a figure of Muslim popular devotion at shrines elsewhere in the city – implies that religious reference points could be shared between Jews and Muslims. By describing their social uses, al-Ghazzi locates Jewish buildings in the wider urban fabric of Aleppo and brings a shared Muslim-Jewish social milieu into view.

This conception of heritage was sidelined by French officials who, as mentioned above, commissioned lists of ancient monuments (Lafi 2017). But intellectuals connected to the Adiyat archaeological society in Aleppo (which was based in Jamiliyyeh) maintained the tradition of urban chronicling. Kamel al-Ghazzi was the founder and first President of the Adiyat society. Khayr al-Din al-Asadi, who became the Society's secretary in 1950, both sustained the tradition and developed it in new directions by focusing on Aleppo's demotic culture. His 7-volume comparative encyclopedia of Aleppo (mawsu'at Halab al-muqaranah) (1981) records the contributions of Jews to Aleppo's dialect. More recently, Iyad Jamil Mahfouz's series of four memoirs about Aleppo (2017-2022) extends the Arabic genre of urban chronicling in new directions. Published in the UAE after the signing of the Abraham Accords, the most recent two additions to the series document the Jamiliyeh neighbourhood and its Jewish residents. In the tradition of urban chronicling, Mahfouz narrates the neighbourhood through descriptions of its notable buildings and the events and interactions that animated them. These included residential blocks where Muslim and Jewish families were neighbours and where the former performed services for the latter on sabbath days; a prominent sporting association with a mixed Muslim-Jewish fanbase; entertainment venues with Jewish musicians and mixed Muslim-Jewish audiences; cafes owned by Jewish proprietors where men of different faiths mingled; and commercial partnerships between Jews and Muslims. Mahfouz emphasises Muslim-Jewish conviviality, valorising it explicitly as a heritage of the city. Citing both Ghazzi and Asadi, he is influenced by the literary tradition of urban chronicles in which they wrote. Heritage for him is not necessarily ancient, but includes buildings of relatively recent construction and their social contexts and uses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following these considerations, the report offers the following recommendations:

- that heritage foundations and museums in the Syrian Jewish diaspora consider collating and making available an archive of oral histories of Jewish experiences of Aleppo, addressing both traumas of oppression and departure, and experiences of navigating and sustaining and inter-religious relations in everyday life. A recent oral history project on Armenian (including Syrian Armenian) mobilities may provide an interesting model for collecting and disseminating testimonies: www.rerooted.org;

- that heritage organisations and researchers in Israel and the Syrian Jewish diaspora consider how the Arabic literary tradition of urban chronicling, and the concepts of heritage they deploy, can enrich our understanding of Aleppo's Jewish history and presence;

- that heritage organisations and museums in Israel and the Syrian Jewish diaspora enrich their excellent archives and studies by highlighting Jewish participation in a shared social milieu in Aleppo at least until the mid-20th century, for example in commercial enterprises, buildings and markets, both within and beyond the city walls;

- that heritage organisations and museums in Israel and the Syrian Jewish diaspora highlight the significance of "modern" or extra-mural neighbourhoods and non-ancient buildings (especially Jamiliyyeh), including the ways in which Jews participated in forging shared spaces and institutions in the late 19th- and first half of the 20th century;

- that responsible Ministries and NGOs and international heritage organisations working within Syria give due weight to the significance of Jewish heritage in Syria: the religious significance and extraordinary longevity of the Great Synagogue; the contribution of Syrian Jews to forging commercial ties under the Ottoman Empire and French mandate; and their role in building and sustaining neighbourhood institutions and shared spaces both within the walled city and beyond it.

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URBAN COSMOPOLITANISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Most if not all of Afghanistan's historic urban centres have been home to significant non-Muslim communities over the past century. The most sizeable groups of non-Muslims in the country are Jews and Sikhs and Hindus. A smaller population of Armenian Christians resided in Afghanistan until the first decades of the twentieth century, mostly in Kabul. This section briefly sketches the history of Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews in the country, and explores the settings outside of the country in which they have lived and built community.

AFGHAN SIKHS AND HINDUS

Sikhs and Hindus formed a sizeable and influential community of between 80,000 and 250,000 persons in modern Afghanistan; from the early 1990s onwards, both of these closely interlinked communities began to leave Afghanistan in large numbers. Relatively little is known about the history of 'Hindki' communities living in the territories that make up modern Afghanistan. According to Hanifi, Afghanistan's 'Hindkis' (a term used in the country to refer to people of Indian background) included Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. They worked as 'bankers, merchants and traders' and shared 'social origins in and economic connections to various localities in India' (Hanifi 2011). Historical studies suggest that communities identifying as Sikh and Hindu today are most likely the descendants of merchants and bankers from Punjab and Sindh who settled in towns across present day Afghanistan from around the seventeenth century onwards (Bonotto 2021). Hindki traders and credit providers were not isolated 'minority' communities but formed dispersed networks connected to the multiple societies of the transregional arena across which they worked.

Hindki merchants were initially encouraged to settle in the region by Afghan rulers who had close relations to India's Mughal rulers (Dale 2002; Hopkins 2009; Levy 2002). In the eighteenth century, Indian firms established contact with these merchants and sent their own agents (*arethi*) to the region. The merchants predominantly belonged to the Khatri caste (historically merchants and agriculturalists). Hindki merchants from this background sold textiles on behalf of Indian firms, and invested profits raised from trade in both short and long-term interest loans to Muslim traders and farmers. In the nineteenth century, Hindkis played a pivotal role in trade between South, Central and West Asia (Hanifi 2011) and beyond to Russia (Dale 2002). They built close relationships with the nomads who moved goods and also capitalising on their literacy by way of engagements with British India's colonial authorities (Dale 2002). Bonotto (2021) estimates that in the mid-nineteenth century, Hindkis were roughly equally divided between Sikh and Hindu. From the 1920s, a Sikh movement of reform was founded, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which actively encouraged Khatri communities to publicly profess their adherence to the Sikh faith.

Central Asia's incorporation within the Russian Empire transformed the region's commercial dynamics. The Russian administration of Turkestan targeted the activities of Indian moneylenders, initially allowing them to trade but preventing them from giving the loans from which they derived the bulk of their profits. Small

Indian outposts remained in Central Asia until the Bolshevik revolution, but most merchants left the region after the Russian conquest – some settled in Afghanistan others moved to British India (Levi 2016).

In Afghanistan during the first half of the twentieth century, Hindkis conducted business in urban centres and small towns across the country. Sikhs were reputed *hakims* (medical experts), known for their knowledge of and ability to administer *yunnani* (the Indo-Muslim expression of Ayurvedic medicine). Wealthier families were also involved in the trade of medicinal plants, such as asafoetida and liquorice, both within Afghanistan and between India and the country. Hindkis also owned and farmed land in Afghan.

Sikh religious life was inscribed on Afghanistan's landscapes. Shrines (*dargahs*) and other places of religious significance, such as sacred springs, in urban and rural Afghanistan and were a focus of veneration by Hindki communities who travelled to conduct pilgrimages and participate in religious festivals. In Afghanistan, Jalalabad (especially the village of Lal Pura), Khost (especially Camkani) and Ghazni were all home to sites of spiritual significance for Sikhs because of their having been visited by the founding figures of the Sikh faith.

Under the leadership of Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), Afghanistan's state embarked upon the path of modernisation. During the reign of Amanullah, individual Hindkis expanded their influence in society beyond the domain of commerce. During this period, Hindkis also became state employees, especially in the fields of education, health and, to a lesser extent, the armed forces. Most, however, continued their historic roles in trade. Hindki traders became pivotal to Afghanistan's economy, especially the export of dried fruits and nuts to India and Pakistan and the import of manufactured goods – including textiles, electronic goods and car spare parts – from Asian countries, including India, Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. Firms run by Sikhs and Hindus distributed imported commodities to commercial centres across Afghanistan. Sikhs continued to be active in the provision of traditional medicine but also studied medicine and pharmacology in Afghan universities. Some families opened pharmacies and imported drugs to Afghanistan, mostly from India, but also, later in the century, from Yugoslavia.

The stability of the era of King Zahir Shah (1933-1973) and the launch of a new constitution in 1965 resulted in gurdwaras opening and functioning across the country. Between the mid-1960s and late 1980s, their role in the public life and administration of the country grew. Wealthier Sikhs and Hindus in Kabul moved out of historic urban neighbourhoods (such as the Hindu Guzar neighbourhood in Shor Bazar) and into newly constructed residential areas, notably that of Kart-e Parwan, a middle class suburb in which a gurdwara was also constructed. During this period, families purchased orchards and small properties in rural regions of Afghanistan, visiting them in large groups for picnic parties during the summer months.

During the 1980s, Hindki communal life in Afghanistan became increasingly concentrated in Kabul. The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces and the US's decision to support the mujahidin by creating supply routes located in Pakistan resulted in violence and insecurity across much of Afghanistan, especially

early 1990s built good relations with Afghan Hindkis, supporting the construction of religious buildings and appointing Sikhs and Hindus as representatives in various legislative assemblies.

Insecurity in Afghanistan's provinces during the 1980s led Hindkis living in various parts of the country to relocate to Kabul. Islamists directly targeted non-Muslim communities. A place of worship of importance to both Sikhs and Hindus in the eastern province of Khost, for example, was damaged in an attack in 1986. In 1988, an attack by gunmen on Sikhs in a gurdwara in Jalalabad led both Sikhs and Hindus to leave the city. Initially, Hindki families migrated to Kabul from the provinces. From the mid-1980s, they increasingly sought to leave the country, mostly to India, though some individuals travelled to Germany. In the months following the capture of Kabul by the mujahidin in 1992, approximately 60,000 Sikhs and Hindus living in Afghanistan left the country for India, most travelling with family and possessions in large trucks by way of Pakistan, the government of which had assured them a safe passage.

Infighting between the various mujahidin groups seeking influence in the government of Afghanistan between 1992 and 1996 affected the entire population of Kabul yet had especially significant implications for non-Muslim Hindkis. Given their historic role as merchants in Afghanistan, mujahidin fighters and criminal gangs operating in the period assumed that all Sikhs and Hindus living in Kabul were wealthy. Strongmen and their fighters forcibly occupied properties belonging to both Sikh and Hindu families in Kabul and other provincial towns from 1992 onwards. Sikh and Hindu religious buildings were also occupied by mujahidin groups and were used as military bases in the street fighting that destroyed much of Kabul during the 1990s.

The security of Hindkis remaining in the country continued to be connected to wider geopolitical conflicts across the Indian subcontinent. The destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists in India in 1992 resulted in attacks on Hindu and Sikh religious institutions in Afghanistan, including on a Sikh Gurdwara in Gardez.

The first era of Taliban rule (1996-2001) resulted in further restrictions on Hindki activities – members of the community were required to wear yellow insignia in public that distinguished them from Muslims. Very few individuals who had sent their families abroad returned to Afghanistan, mostly those who imported medicine from India and travelled regularly between Kabul and Delhi; others maintained retail shops in the city; still more ran businesses but primarily stayed in the country to act as the custodians of Hindu and Sikh religious institutions.

After 2001, a handful of individuals returned to Afghanistan from abroad – sometimes with the hope of gaining access to family property which had massively increased in value. Few, however, settled permanently in the country. In the post-2001 period, Afghanistan's government enabled representation of Hindkis in the parliament. During this period, major Gurdwaras and temples were also reconstructed with

the support of funds sent by communities living outside of the country. The small size of the remaining community, however, meant that many built structures in Kabul and in the provinces remained in a state of disrepair.

Between 2001 and 2021, various international NGOs and government departments played a role in the preservation of the built heritage of cities which had been home to large communities of Sikhs and Hindus, notably Kabul. Much such heritage work focused on either monuments of importance to the history of statehood in Afghanistan or neighbourhoods in the old city inhabited largely by Muslims. The area of Kabul's old city in which Afghans Sikhs and Hindus had lived (the Hindu Guzar) was not the focus of such heritage projects.

Sikhs living in Afghanistan were ambivalent about their treatment as part of Afghanistan's heritage. In 2019, Sikhs in Kabul told me that government treated them as a 'treasure to be preserved' but did little to support them practically. Land was allocated by the government for the Sikhs and Hindus to cremate their dead was located, for example, on the outskirts of the city. During cremations, local Muslims pelted Sikhs and Hindus with stones in front of miniscule police presence who reportedly lacked the power to do anything other than stand back and watch. As the Taliban insurgency intensified, Sikh and Hindu places of worship were the target of several attacks by Islamist militants. Families able to leave Afghanistan continued to do so; Sikh movements and organisations, especially the Canada-based Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation in collaboration with the World Sikh Organisation, increasingly supported the emigration of Afghan Sikhs (especially those living in the insecure provinces of Helmand and Kandahar).

Upon the return to power of the Taliban in August 2021, international organisations evacuated several Hindki families in Afghanistan, mostly to India from where they began the process of being resettled in Canada. Only a handful of individuals continue to live in Afghanistan. The economic crisis and attacks by ISIS-Khorasan, including on the Kart-e Parwan Gurdwara on 17 June 2022, meant that in January 2023 several Afghan Sikh men left Kabul with copies of the sacred texts that remained in the country. Sikhs and Hindus who left Afghanistan after August 2021 report that their relationships with Taliban officials were cordial, though they were concerned for their lives after the Islamic State Khorasan attack. The Taliban have repeatedly pledged to support the resettlement of Sikhs in Afghanistan. In 2024, for example, a spokesperson of the Taliban Ministry of Justice said that the Ministry's Commission for the Prevention of Land Seizure had been instructed to 'thoroughly investigate the seized lands of Hindus in the provinces to prevent land seizure and return the seized lands to their rightful owners."[16] Officials in the Department of Information and Culture of Nangahar province were reported in the Afghan media as being committed to preserving the built heritage of the market of the Lal Pur district, known locally as the "Hindu bazaar", including a Sikh gurdwara.[17]

[16] Hindu, Sikh Citizens Lands to Be Returned: Ministry of Justice | TOLOnews
[17] Nangarhar's Historic Market in Lal Pur Must Be Preserved, Locals Say | TOLOnews

AFGHAN SIKHS AND HINDUS IN THE DIASPORA

Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan have built communities and religious and social institutions in a variety of settings over the past thirty years (2024a). Besides India, the largest population of Afghan Sikhs in the world today reside in West London. The region of the city in which they live is home to four gurdwaras that are attended by Sikhs largely on the basis of their region of origin in Afghanistan (Marsden 2024b). Sikhs in London are also active in the wholesale commodity trade and have established sizeable markets at which they work alongside Muslims and Hindus from Afghanistan. Most Afghan Sikhs resident in London hail from central and eastern Afghanistan and speak Hindko; the city is also home to a sizeable community of Pashto-speaking Sikhs from Khost. Afghan Sikhs have also established gurdwaras in Moscow, Odesa, Vienna, Ghent, and Amsterdam. Most recently, Afghan Sikhs have been resettled by the government of Canada and partner NGOs in Vancouver. These new arrivals are mostly from the southern provinces of Helmand, Uruzgan and Kandahar, and are speakers of Multani and/or Seraiki. There is also a smaller but well-established community of Afghan Sikhs in Long Island, New York, who established a gurdwara in the 2010s.

Afghan Hindus have established temples and cultural institutions around the world. Germany is a particularly important country for Afghan Hindus - associations and temples have been founded by them in Hamburg, Frankfurt, and other major cities. Hindus from Kandahar form a sizeable proportion of the community in Germany. In London, Afghan Hindus reside largely in West London, where they also run a cultural association and temple. In the USA, Afghan Hindus have established temples in Long Island and also in Maryland.

Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan in the diaspora have played a more and more vigorous role in the preservation of their cultural heritage. Organic intellectuals have written texts exploring the history of the community. These texts also identify sites of religious and social importance for Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan. Most such texts are written in either Punjabi or, though at least one such work was written in Persian.[18]

Cultural associations established by Afghan Sikhs and Hindus regularly organise events that are devoted to raising knowledge about their heritage in Afghanistan and forging links with policy makers in the settings in which they live. Given ongoing problems with the making of asylum claims in the countries in which they are settled, such events often dwell on the problems facing asylum seekers of Sikh and Hindu Afghan backgrounds, But more attention is also now being directed towards the threats posed to vacant Gurdwaras

[18] See, for example, Dass, Ischwar 2003. *A History of Afghanistan's Hindus*. Stockholm: Afghanistan Cultural Association.

and temples in Afghanistan. Afghan Sikhs and Hindus have also produced documentary films about their history, sometimes collaborating with movements campaigning for the human rights of Sikhs more generally to expand their reach. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from Afghanistan have also collaborated with one another to raise awareness about the community's history in Afghanistan, by filming and screening television debates and discussions, for example. Finally, individuals have established websites that seek to collate and bring together sources of information about the history and culture of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. These sites often contain vast archives of historic images of Afghan Sikh and Hindu life and built heritage in Afghanistan. Afghan Sikhs and Hindus in the diaspora remain in contact with co-religionists who remain in Afghanistan; figures in the community also communicate with the country's Taliban authorities with the aim of ensuring the preservation of their sites of religious significance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That heritage organisations and libraries in the UK, USA, Germany and elsewhere work with cultural associations founded by Afghan Sikhs and Hindus to collate and translate into English texts authored by organic intellectuals within these communities about their history and presence in Afghanistan. These texts include a wealth of detail about the distribution of Afghan Sikh and Hindu heritage across Afghanistan that would be of critical importance for any future, large scale heritage preservation project;

- That heritage organisations support existing attempts made by Afghan Sikh and Hindus to collate and archive on websites materials relating to the history and culture of these communities. Organic intellectuals within these communities have compiled vast amounts of photographs and other documents and it is of critical importance that these are stored in a sustainable and accessible manner;

- There is need for greater attention to be paid to the preservation of the non-built heritage of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. Work needs to be conducted into the historic role played by Afghan Sikhs and Hindus in the provision of local or yunanni medicine, the herbs used in this form of medicine and the settings in which it was delivered. Work on this aspect of Sikh and Hindu heritage will bring into view the close relationships between them and the Muslims amongst whom they lived;

- That governments and NGOs interacting with authorities in Afghanistan emphasise the importance of preserving and, if possible, renovating, as wide a range as possible of sites of religious significance to Sikhs and Hindus as possible. Such sites should not be limited to major Gurdwaras and temples in Kabul, but include those in provincial cities including Kandahar, Kunduz, Jalalabad and Khost and

in the country's rural areas. Afghanistan's Taliban authorities have shown an awareness of the importance of the country's Sikh and Hindu heritage in Afghanistan, perhaps as a result of their desire to strengthen bilateral ties with India.

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AFGHAN JEWS

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Judaeo-Persian speaking Jews living in the city of Herat in western Afghanistan were actively involved in the trade in carpets, furs and dried fruits (e.g. Koplik 2015). Peripatetic Jewish traders travelled across eastern Iran, northern Afghanistan, and Central Asia in order to procure carpets and furs, mostly from Turkmen tribespeople (Loy, 2023). Jews procured carpets and furs for onward shipment to Germany (Leipzig) and Britain (London). In the first half of the twentieth century, merchants from the region established firms dealing in furs and carpets in both cities and in New York, Paris and Ghent. In such contexts, Jews from Afghanistan interacted closely with their co-religionists from Iran and central Asia, communities that also spoke Judeo-Persian. They also traded with central Asian Muslims, who brought to Europe skins and furs for sale. In addition to carpets and furs, Jews from Herat were also active in the cotton trade, especially in the city of Marv in Turkestan.

By the 1920s, Central Asia's incorporation within the Soviet Union resulted in Jewish merchants based in Afghanistan being cut off from areas of historic importance to the carpet and fur trade. In the 1920s and 1930s, Turkmen peoples involved in the production of furs and carpets migrated to northern Afghanistan, taking their flocks of sheep with them (Spooner 1986). As a result, Jews resident in Herat, and those who had moved to Afghanistan from Central Asia in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, were able to continue to purchase furs and carpets in northern Afghanistan.

Considerable restrictions were imposed by the government of Afghanistan on the commercial activities of Jewish and Muslim Central Asia émigrés in Afghanistan in the mid-1930s, however (Crews 2015; Koplik 2015). Such restrictions were often justified by officials within and beyond the country in terms of the dangers posed to Afghanistan by Soviet spies infiltrating Afghanistan under the guise of being refugees from Central Asia; laws introduced during this period often targeted Jews in Afghanistan but also impacted upon the commercial activities of Central Asian Muslim émigrés. From 1933, for example, the Afghan state barred Jews from living and working in small towns across Afghanistan's northern region (known at the time as Afghan Turkestan). This policy had major implications not only for their livelihoods but also those of the Turkmen tribespeople from whom they purchased furs and carpets. In the 1940s, legislation surrounding Afghanistan's export trade became increasingly anti-Semitic. The government made it illegal for Jews to enter Kabul's customs house, for example. From the mid-1950s, restrictions on Jewish involvement in trade were less rigidly enforced by the state and gradually repealed. In the 1960s, wars in the Middle East involving Israel and Palestine led to increased hostility towards Jews by Muslims in Afghanistan. After the 1967 Arab-Israel war, Jewish families that had remained in Afghanistan left the country mostly for the USA and Israel with some families settling in London.

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Jews from Afghanistan created built heritage in Afghanistan beyond. During the nineteenth century Jews in Herat established three synagogues and a ritual bathhouse. After most Jews left Herat in the 1950s, these buildings either fell into disrepair or were repurposed by the Afghan government to whom they had been entrusted by the Herati Jewish community. In the 2010s, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture restored one of the synagogues. In the same period, Herati Jews living in America and Israel gathered funds to repair graves in the Herat's Jewish cemetery.

From the 1890s onwards, Jewish merchants from Herat had moved to Palestine, and begun to construct houses in the Shekhunat ha-Bukharim, Jerusalem's Bukharim neighbourhood (Bezalel 2016). Over the following century, however, the neighbourhood came to play a less significant role in the social and religious lives of Jews from Afghanistan and their Bukharian co-religionists. Many left the city for Tel Aviv after the Arab Israel war of 1948. By the 2000s, few families remained in the neighbourhood, and synagogues established by Jews from Afghanistan had either closed or continued to survived because they were able to attract a

more diverse congregation. The neighbourhood itself had increasingly been populated by Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews – groups that, according to Afghan Jews, had no knowledge of its history and had fundamentally changed and its character.

In 1950, the Afghan government legalised the migration from the country to the State of Israel, at which point most Jews left the country. Most of this wave of migrants settled in Tel Aviv, mostly in the central suburb of Shapira and the suburb of Peta Tikva. In these neighbourhoods they established synagogues that became places of worship for people hailing from the cities in Afghanistan in which they had lived, especially Herat, Balkh, and Kabul. Migration towards more middle-class settlements such as Holon from the 1970s onwards and to the USA, however, meant that by the 2010s synagogues established by Afghan Jews had either close or were being used by different communities, including Bukharian Jews who immigrated to Israel from the countries of the former Soviet Union in large numbers during the 1990s.

About 700 Jews continued to live in Afghanistan after the mass emigration of most members of their community in 1950/51. They mostly moved out of the large homes in courtyards that several families occupied jointly into Kabul's New City (Shahr-e Naw). This part of Kabul was mostly populated by the families of merchants, state officials, and was also home to embassies and foreign families. In Herat, the handful of remaining families continued to reside in the historically Jewish, the Kucha-ye Musaawihaa. Jews living in Afghanistan between 1950 and the late 1970s were all involved in trade – many ran firms that shipped the skins of karakul lambs and carpets to London and New York, others were active in the export of fruits, nuts and spices, while still more ran agencies that imported into Afghanistan products made in Europe and America, including silk yarn, razor blades, and machinery. Many of these products were then smuggled by Muslim networks out of Afghanistan to Pakistan, India, and even China. During this period, Jews in Kabul established a modern synagogue in the New City neighbourhood. This synagogue was maintained between the 1980s and 2022 by the handful of Jews that continued to live in Afghanistan during the eras of the Soviet invasion, civil war, Taliban government and international intervention. After the return to power of the Taliban in 2021, however, the final Jewish man resident in Afghanistan left the country and the Taliban committed to ensuring the security of the building.

Afghan Jews living in London and New York also constructed institutions. Jews from Afghanistan living in London attended a synagogue established by co-religionists from Bukhara that was in the Stamford Hill region in the north of the city. The synagogue closed at some point in the late 1950s because families moved to other areas of the city and were no longer able to maintain the building as a collective place of worship. The working lives of Afghan and Bukharan Jews mostly revolved around the Garlick Hill area near to Mansion House tube station as it was in this area of the city in which the international fur trade was located. From the

1980s onwards, however, the fur trade declined in significance, London's authorities demolished the buildings and warehouses that had been important to the fur trade in the city; traders who remained active in the fur business relocated their offices to suburbs in north London.

In the late 1970s, Afghan Jews in New York established the Anshei Shalom synagogue in the Jamaica Heights neighbourhood of Queens. Over the following decades, they constructed a purposeful built synagogue that was renovated in the 2020s. While being led by Jews from Afghanistan, the synagogue attacks a diverse range of worships following the Sephardi tradition, including from Yemen, India, Iraq and Syria. Until the 1970s, many Afghan Jews in New York traded in Karakul furs in Manhattan's Garment District. In the context of the decline of the fur trade from the 1970s onwards, many moved to the sale of coloured stones and diamonds, opening offices in the Diamond District. Several firms established by Jews from Afghanistan continue to operate in this part of the city, although newer generations are turning more towards professional employment and the real estate business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That governments and NGOs interacting with Afghanistan's authorities emphasise the importance of maintaining the upkeep of sites of importance to the country's Jews that were restored between 2001 and 2021. They should also emphasise the importance of to the country's culture heritage of modern buildings including but not limited to the synagogue in Kabul's New City neighbourhood;

- That heritage organisations and Jewish museums work with Jews from Afghanistan and central Asia to devise modes of better representing the contribution of their communities to these cities during the twentieth century;

- That heritage organisations, museums, and relevant municipal authorities in London seek to foster greater public understanding of the ways in which the Garlick Hill area of the City of London was a place of interaction between Jews of multiple backgrounds, Muslims, and others involved in the fur trade throughout the twentieth century;

- That heritage organisations in Israel be encouraged to bring more attention to the role of Jews from central Asia and Afghanistan in the construction of neighbourhoods such as the Bukharim in Jerusalem and Shapira in Tel Aviv. Relevant modes of conveying such information should be devised that will be of interest to these neighbourhoods' present-day residents.

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BUKHARAN JEWS OF CENTRAL ASIA: A CASE STUDY OF UZBEKISTAN AND DIASPORA

SUMMARY

This section of the report briefly introduces the history of the Bukharan Jewish community and its mass emigration from the (post-) Soviet Central Asia. It then proceeds to outline the ways in which the context of nation-building in independent Uzbekistan since 1991 has simultaneously undermined and acknowledged Bukhran Jewish cultural heritage in the main urban sites of their former presence (Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara). While during the Soviet period, Bukhran Jewish material heritage was only marginally recognised in the state's heritage practices, independent Uzbekistan has promoted a post-colonial and ethnically exclusive understanding of nationhood, in tandem with official representations of itself as a culturally diverse, multi-confessional and tolerant state. The latter has been integral to the formation of a post-Cold War Silk Road heritage and tourist industry where Uzbekistan actively promotes itself as the 'cross-roads of civilizations and cultures'.

In recent decades, in the key urban sites of Bukhran Jewish former presence, different types of material heritage have become the objects of increased interest of, and financial support by, the transnational Bukharan diaspora based mainly in the USA, Canada, Israel, Germany and Austria, as well as different international charities, NGOs and Jewish humanitarian organisations. The Bukharan diasporic organisations and hometown associations have particularly been active and successful in the rebuilding and restoration of Bukharan Jewish cemeteries in Uzbekistan, sometimes with the help of local authorities (*Khokimiat*, administration), and in promoting 'cemetery tourism' focused on these heritage sites. Collaborative heritage work on other important Bukharan spaces in Uzbekistan, such as synagogues, historical residential buildings and neighbourhoods, some of which are protected by UNESCO, has been less evident in terms of tangible outcomes.

This section of the report also considers the Bukharan focus on intangible heritage in the diaspora of New York, USA and Vienna, Austria – sites of the most significant Bukharan presence outside Israel. In these locations, heritage work is centred on both safeguarding Bukhran *Jewish* identity (i.e. religious identity/belonging) and *Bukharan* Jewish cultural identity (i.e. the cultural particularity of Bukharan Judaism combined with Central Asian cultural traditions). It is achieved through a variety of means, including celebrations and/or commemorations of the diverse artistic, cultural and educational achievements of the older, first-generation emigrants; amateur museum collection and curation (NY); production of memoirs and amateur history books (including those documenting the history of the diaspora); and the founding of new community centres closely linked with religious institutions. A particular public role is played by the

classical music tradition of shashmaqom, which is today considered a shared intangible heritage of Bukharan Jews and Muslim Central Asians. This section of the report concludes with policy recommendations regarding the preservation of Bukharan Jewish heritage in Uzbekistan and the diaspora.

A HISTORY OF THE BUKHARAN JEWS IN UZBEKISTAN

Bukharan Jews trace their presence in Central Asia back approximately 2,500 years, to the time of their exodus from Babylon. In the Khorezm and Bukhara regions, their migration from the great cities of Iran (Merz, Shiraz) and Afghanistan (Balkh, Mazari-Sharif, Hera) is documented in the 6th to 8th centuries. While there is no scholarly agreement on how the term 'Bukharan Jews' came into wide circulation, today it refers to all local/Eastern Jews of Central Asia who spoke the Jewish dialect of Tajik or Bukhori (Aulov 2020) and practiced the Sephardi rites. By the end of the 19th century, Bukharan merchants achieved prominence in the regional and transregional commerce (mainly in cotton, caracul, wool, leader and silk, Emel'ianenko & Noseiko-Stein 2018: 457), manufacturing and cotton industry. As a result, the well-to-do families invested in the development of Jewish neighbourhoods, adopting European style of architecture alongside traditional Central Asian forms, as well as building large houses in Russian-style in the Russian quarters of Tashkent and Samarkand. In particular in Samarkand, Bukharan properties were among the most expensive in the city (Kaganovich 2020: 140).

With the advent of the Soviets in Central Asia in the 1920s, Bukharan fortunes changed. By the late 1920s and 1930s, all industries and Bukharan Jewish merchant houses were nationalised by the state. (One of the most significant Bukharan mansions in Samarkand was transformed into a regional museum; in the 2008, a section dedicated to Bukharan Jews was opened there). The Soviets' ban on most forms of private trade and entrepreneurship led to the overall impoverishment of Jewish communities, and for many, initiated a break with their urban heritage: more than 70% synagogues were closed, and a number of urban dwellers had to join the newly founded Jewish collective farms (seventeen in total in Uzbekistan) (Kaganovich 20202: 146 - 148; Levin 2015). During this period, around 15% of Bukharan fled abroad to Afghanistan and Iran and further on to Palestine; few families managed to move to Western Europe, especially France (e.g. Weinberg 2018) and the UK. By the late 1920s, the most numerous Bukharan communities remained in Samarkand (10 000), Bukhara (7500), Kokand (5000), Tashkent (3200) and Andijan (2500) (Emel'ianenko & Noseiko-Stein 2018: 450).

Most Bukharans became fully integrated into the Soviet state structures and socialist economy, including an extensive informal or shadow economy. Although many Bukharan families managed to establish themselves in the Soviet economy, and could continue to practice Judaism privately, freedom to do business and freedom of religious worship were clearly associated with life outside the Soviet Union. The

first mass wave of Jewish emigration took place in the 1970s, and since the late 1980s, the majority of Bukharan Jews have moved to Israel (today there are approximately 110,000). There is also a sizeable community in the USA (more than 50,000), mostly concentrated in New York. Vienna, Hannover and Moscow had become the main European destinations. In many instances, these various locations do not represent the final points of destination: some families and individuals initially moved to Israel, and from there they relocated to Vienna or the USA and Canada; some have moved to New York after years spent in Vienna, and yet others moved to Israel or New York after years spent in Moscow. According to some unverified estimates, there are around 500,000 Bukharans scattered around the world. Approximately 2,000 Bukharan Jews are still left in Central Asia today, mainly concentrated in Uzbekistan (in Tashkent) (Pinkhasov 2021). In Bukhara - the place where this community got its name - there are now only a handful of families (some of which have intermarried with Muslims and Christians), numbering around 100-150 people.

TANGIBLE HERITAGE

In contrast to the medieval Muslim architectural heritage in the region, which UNESCO recognizes as masterpieces of Islamic cultural creativity (e.g., whc.unesco.org/en/list/603), the acknowledged Bukharan Jewish heritage of architectural-historical significance dates back mainly to the 19th and 20th centuries (Kimyagarov & Fazylov 2020). It can be divided into three main categories: synagogues, cemeteries, residential quarters and houses. The practices of commemoration, preservation and restoration of these categories of Bukharan tangible heritage vary from city to city and depend on the dynamics of the relationships between the activists and leadership of the remaining Jewish communities, emigrant communities from the cities in question, and regional and local Uzbek authorities, but there are also some general tendencies.

SYNAGOGUES

Many synagogues were closed during the Soviet period: some were demolished, while others were repurposed. With the sharp decline of the Bukharan Jewish population in the 1990s, many newly opened synagogues were also closed. Currently, each of the cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent has two Bukharan synagogues. Some buildings are part of the old architectural landscape of the Jewish quarters (neighbourhoods, *mahallas*) protected by UNESCO, others are more recent sites or post-Soviet replacements of private houses used as synagogues. There is no single architectural style of Bukharan synagogues. The ‘Gumbaz’ (‘Dome’) synagogue in Samarkand (est. 1891) is considered one of the most beautiful synagogues in Central Asia, merging distinct Islamic architectural forms and decorations (domes, blue tiles mosaic) with European details. Today, ‘World Jewish Travel’ NGO describes it as ‘the only Jewish

landmark in the city',[19] which reflects both a specific visual culture associated with Central Asian heritage and the poor state/public acknowledgement of other landmarks in Samarkand's historical Jewish neighbourhood. Although Uzbek authorities and scholars of tourism are in favour of developing religious or multi-confessional tourism and pilgrimage tourism alongside cultural and city tourism (Navruz-Zoda et al. 2019), the maintenance and restoration of the synagogues are largely the responsibility and financial liability of the synagogues' chairmen. The chairmen use their own funds, private donations and/or income from visiting tourists to run them or keep them open. The financial neglect of the Bukharan synagogues as objects of cultural heritage by the transnational Bukharan diaspora, and international and Israeli Jewish organisations, is locally explained by the negligible size of the remaining Jewish community, its mixed genealogies (i.e. inter-confessional marriages), and the uncertainty about the long-term viability of Jewish religious life in Uzbekistan. There is an expectation (in diaspora and Israel) that the remaining Bukharans will eventually leave Uzbekistan, either for economic, political or matrimonial reasons. The tolerant spirit of the Muslim majority is credited to the post-Soviet leadership of Uzbekistan by the last generations of leaders formed by the Soviet system; hence, there is a concern that once these 'Soviet school' leaders are gone, political Islam, intolerant to Jews, will become the order of the day (Skvirskaja 2022: 61). In the meantime, Bukharan synagogues are making efforts to establish themselves as acknowledged heritage sites within the wider Uzbek society and the Bukharan diaspora, beyond the confines of the local Bukharan community. In Tashkent, one synagogue has collaborated with the city guides and enthusiasts of urban history who include it on a par with a mosque and a Buddhist temple in their sightseeing tour 'The Temples of Tashkent'. The focus of such sightseeing tours is on the structures of the buildings, religious norms and the role of ritual artifacts, rather than the cultural history of Bukharan ethno-religious minority. The chairman of the other synagogue, who is also the head of the Tashkent Bukharan Jewish community, has ambitious plans to establish a pilgrimage centre around his synagogue, including a kosher restaurant and accommodation for pilgrims. (The question of funding for such an expensive project remains unresolved at the time of writing.) It is notable that 'pilgrimage' in this context does not imply travel to 'religious centres or holy centres for praying purposes' (Navruz-Zoda et al., 2019) as pilgrimage commonly defined, but instead, a type of 'cemetery tourism' or *ziyorat,* a pilgrimage to the graves of one's ancestors (Rapport 2014: 154).[20] Both Bukharan synagogues in Tashkent are part of a Jewish tourist infrastructure, facilitating cemetery tourism and providing services to the observant travellers, such as kosher provisions and cooks trained in kashrut rules (the latter often accompany the tourist groups on their travels in Uzbekistan).

[19] https://www.worldjewishtravel.org/listing/gumbaz-synagogue/

[20] The term *ziyorat* also refers to a pilgrimage to the tomb (*mazor*) of a Muslim saint. Religious pilgrimage features prominently in Central Asian cultures.

BUKHARAN JEWISH CEMETERIES

In the diaspora, people have mainly been buried where they died. In relatively rare cases, there have been bequests to be buried in Israel or in Central Asia. The rationale behind such bequests is a desire to join 'in death' a particular family member, to be buried in one's place of birth, or in the sacred land of Israel. People invest in cemetery plots for themselves to ensure that their preferences are met upon death. Besides investing into their own resting places, different *zemliachestvo* (in Russian, a region-based or hometown association of migrants) have been organized in the diaspora to finance the maintenance and reconstruction of urban cemeteries in their country of origin. There are International Memorial Fund Bukhoro, Charitable Fund Tashkent, Fund Kokand, and so on, established by the zemliachestva fund-raising activities that are responsible for Bukharan cemeteries in these cities. In some cases, the patrons also include Bukharans from other cities of origin. For instance, the Jewish Cemetery in Bukhara is sponsored by members of a synagogue in Vienna, managed by a Bukharan Jew originally from Bukhara and comprising individuals from different parts of Uzbekistan. In this way, and in contrast to the Bukharan synagogues, Bukharan Jewish cemeteries have become the destinations of substantial financial flows and a major type of collective remittance from the diaspora to Uzbekistan. They have also become the sites of collective Bukharan cultural heritage and an example of the so-called tangible 'heritage of absence' in Central Asian cities, i.e. recognised heritage sites of the largely absent heritage subjects.

During the Soviet period, some Bukharan graveyards scattered around Uzbekistan, mainly in the rural areas of the Jewish collective farms, were abandoned and virtually disappeared. In the city of Bukhara, attempts were also made to use the territory of the centrally located old Bukharan cemetery for new urban developments. (Local Jewish activists, including the current chairman of one of Bukhara's synagogues, succeeded in preventing this from happening.) Until mid-20th century, an ordinary Soviet Bukharan grave was marked by a small tombstone with the name and dates of the deceased carved on it. Since around the 1950s, similar to Russian graves, it became popular to erect big granite or marble tombstones with epitaphs and a photograph of the deceased or a portrait carved in stone. Due to the expense of such tombstones (with marble slabs often brought from other regions of the country), not many ordinary Bukharans dared to display their wealth (purchasing power) to Soviet authorities.

In the post-Soviet period, as Bukharan cemeteries have gradually been transforming into heritage sites of 'cemetery tourism', there is a tendency to restore and improve the modest Soviet graves and to adorn them with monumental tombstones, financed by the family members of the deceased, now mainly residing in the diaspora or Israel. New tombstones have been ordered even from Moscow and St. Petersburg, despite the huge costs. Every old tombstone, often with the inscription no longer visible and relatives not traceable, or

even a fragment of it, is now preserved and placed on a concrete or brick foundation (Emel'ianenko & Noseiko-Stein 2018: 474-75). The zemliachestvo funds are used to preserve not only the abandoned graves, but also to gentrify Bukharan cemeteries as complex architectural sites. New elements are added to the older layouts, such as elegant pergolas, a 'Hall of Memory' where people exhibit pictures of their dead, the sculptures of giant menorahs and monuments to the Second World War. The cemeteries' centrality in Bukharan migratory context and material heritage highlights that the management of the dead is related to the constitution and membership of political and moral communities (cf. Finn 2020) both in Uzbekistan and abroad. The transformation of the dead and cemeteries into cultural heritage is conditioned by the Bukharan tradition of commemorative rituals that may continue for many decades after a person's death, and by the cultural premise that 'memory is sacred' and that a person dies once his/her grave is abandoned and they are forgotten.

Bukharan cemeteries, which are today located in the middle of Muslim neighbourhoods, are, moreover, heritage sites of Jewish-Muslim interfaces. In a very rare instance, such as the city of Bukhara, the Jewish cemetery (claimed to be 1250 years old) received substantial financial support (c. 100.000 US dollars in 2020, has been used for landscaping, tree planting and other improvements) from the *Khokimiat* (the Regional Administration of the Bukhara Region). More commonplace is the collaboration between the remaining Jewish communities and the everyday caretakers of the Jewish cemeteries, who are Muslims. In Bukhara, the top management and reconstruction of the cemetery are entrusted to a local Muslim. Overall, as a result of the Bukharan overseas investments in making Bukharan cemeteries 'usable' and attractive as sites of collective and intimate memory, as well as collaboration on cemetery projects with local Muslims, the Bukharan cemeteries, similar to commemorative art, have also become cultural 'heritage of the future' (Salemink 2024).

HOUSES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS (*MAHALLAS*)

Historically, Bukharan Jews tried to settle compactly when living in the Muslim mahallas. Larger Bukharan communities had their own mahallas in Central Asian cities. The layout of the Jewish quarters was not very different from their Muslim neighbours. The main differences between Jewish and Muslim houses were 1. the absence of separation into female and male sections, both inside the dwellings and in the courtyard area, and 2. the architectural planning and decorations of home synagogues in larger houses. The traditional, old Jewish mahallas were preserved until the end of the 20th century, despite the movement of many Jewish families to modern, 'European' urban areas, both under Russian colonial rule and during the Soviet period. Although the traditional houses in the historic Uzbek mahallas have been listed as World Heritage properties since 1993, they have rapidly been transformed. After the mass emigration of Jews from Uzbekistan, their houses were bought by Uzbek owners, who rebuilt them in accordance with their traditions

and/or new business opportunities (Emel'ianenko & Noseiko-Stein 2018: 460-62). Not only have new construction materials and technology commonly been used, but the new family houses are also much larger in size and proportions.

In some cities, for instance, Navoi, central Tashkent, Shahrisabz (the birthplace of the Uzbek national hero Amir Timur/Tamerlane (1320s –1405),[21] the Jewish mahallas were demolished and replaced by new buildings. In Samarkand and Bukhara, the reconstruction and replacement of the former Jewish properties have followed different paths. In Bukhara, in the last decade, new concrete and brick family houses and hotels have dominated the landscape, pushing into the visual background the clay and wood architecture of the old Jewish mahallas. A novel style of Jewish heritage has also emerged. Some Jewish properties were merged and restored to create 'traditional Bukharan Jewish houses' as new tourist attractions and used as hotels and private dwellings (Bukhara). In Samarkand, there is a (rare) case of cultural fusion - an old clay and wood house in the Jewish mahalla 'Shark' (East) has been well-maintained but equipped with new elements of traditional Uzbek design - a tandoori oven - to enhance the ethnographic impact on visitors and to conduct Uzbek cooking classes for tourists.

In the same mahalla, several Western-style brick houses of the Bukharan wealthy merchants of the 19th and early 20th century have been left to decay for years. Included into UNESCO World Heritage List as cultural heritage,[22] these buildings do not represent a commercial value to potential investors. Some of these houses were taken over by new Tajik, Uzbek, and Gypsy owners, who must rely on their own means to make them livable, often in ways that do not comply with formal regulations regarding the protection of cultural heritage. While the city has not provided funding for the proper reconstruction of these dwellings by their owners, it has marked them with commemorative plaques stating that they are architectural monuments from the 19th and 20th centuries under state protection. The historical Jewish ownership of these properties is not mentioned. Recently, some informal attempts have been made to accelerate the collapse of empty buildings by making disgs very close to the walls.

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[21] There were no Bukharan Jews left in Shahrisabz by the mid-1990s, and the city's synagogue was closed in 1995. When the historical part of the city was reconstructed, the synagogue and the Jewish mahalla were demolished. The Bukharan Jewish cemetery has been taken care of by the local Muslims. It was recently reconstructed, and almost 200 Bukharan Jews came from Israel and the diaspora to celebrate the opening of the reconstructed cemetery (Elizarov 2022).

[22] The old quarters of Samarkand, Bukhara, Shahrisabz, and Khiva were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in different years. In 2021, Tashkent mahallas - as bearers of the characteristics of traditional Uzbek residential architecture - were entered into UNESCO's Tentative List by Uzbekistan to be considered for World Heritage nomination. The argument is that a makhalla is not only a territorial and administrative unit, a community of people living in a certain part of a city, but also a way of life and a centuries-old tradition.

Some scholars have linked the gradual bleaching out of Jewish material presence to Uzbekistan's nation-building strategy that privileged distinctly Uzbek cultural forms and ethnic coherence since the 1991 independence. The celebrations of Uzbek exclusive ethno-national identity have, moreover, been a response to the Russian/Soviet degradation of Amir Timur/Tamerlane's legacy as a backward Oriental tyrant (Cooper 2023). The main contradiction of post-Soviet Uzbek nationalism was the tension between an ethnic interpretation of the Uzbek nation and its de facto non-ethnic and multi-confessional nature, resulting in the neglect of issues related to the transnational Uzbek diaspora and ethno-religious minorities (Abashin 2007: 196-197), including the latter's heritage. This contradiction has also been manifested in Uzbekistan's political efforts to present itself as an ethnically diverse state situated on the Silk Road, which has recently become the most expansive heritage concept in the modern era (Winter 2021) of great importance to Central Asia.

There has been some improvement regarding the public and official recognition and representation of Bukharan Jewish heritage in independent Uzbekistan. On the one hand, various activities were taking place in Bukhara and Samarkand at different times to popularize the heritage of this disappeared ethno-religious minority. In Samarkand, for example, they concern one of the most splendid Jewish mansions in the European part of the city - the house of the merchant Abram Kalantarov (1868–1951) that was completed in 1916. The mansion has been functioning as the regional museum of culture and history since the mid-1930s. It was first in 2008, with sponsorship from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, that it came to host the permanent exhibition dedicated to the local Jews: 'Jewish Life in Uzbekistan: Past and Present'. The exhibition includes materials collected in the 1920s by the Soviet ethnographer Isaak Lurie from Leningrad, who founded the first Bukharan Jewish Museum in Samarkand (1927-1938). In 2023, the museum's director was hopeful to update and redesign the Bukharan Jewish exhibition with the help of the Bukharan diaspora in New York, particularly Rafael Nektalov, the Editor-in-Chief of the diasporic newspaper Bukharian Times and a native of Samarkand. This plan has now been postponed until at least 2026, when the general renovation of the museum is expected to be completed.

In Bukhara, in 2022, the World Monuments Fund (independent organisation) celebrated its 'Watch Day' by focusing on the 'traditional Bukharan Jewish house' with the aim of creating sustainable urban design standards for the adaptive reuse of the Bukharian houses, and of documenting the rich history of Jewish life in the region.[23] The event was attended by school children, heritage professionals, *ustos* ('masters',

[23] Since 1988, the World Monuments Fund's Jewish Heritage Program has supported conservation work at diverse sites across the world. In 2022, the WMF's project in Bukhara resulted in the development of conservation guideline. https://www.wmf.org/inside-look-wmfs-jewish-heritage-program. Regarding 'Watch Day' in Bukhara see e.g. https://www.wmf.org/blog/exploring-shared-heritage-traditional-bukharian-jewish-houses-watch-day-bukhara-uzbekistan

traditional craftsmen), regional and city authorities, and national partners, including representatives from the UNESCO Tashkent Office and Bukhara State University.[24]

On the other hand, especially after the turbulent 1990s, the transnational Bukharan Jewish diaspora has increasingly become active in (re-)establishing and reframing connections with its ancestral homeland in Central Asia. Tangible and intangible heritage supported by a cultural economy of the Silk Road heritage discourse has become an important mechanism in this development (cf. Shukurzoda 2019 on Bukharan Jews participation in people's diplomacy). The diaspora has not only mobilized the necessary financial capital to maintain their tangible heritage in Uzbekistan, such as the Bukharan cemeteries, but has also popularised intangible heritage that Bukharan Jews share with Central Asian Muslims, as discussed below.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The intangible heritage frameworks in Bukharan diaspora are structured around the community members' efforts to preserve their religious, Jewish identity and their cultural identity as Bukharan Jews. Since the 1980s-1990s, Bukharan cultural community centres and synagogues have been established in both New York (concentrated Queens and Brooklyn neighbourhood)[25] and Vienna (concentrated in the historic Jewish district of Leopoldstadt). It has been important for these centres to invite Bukharan rabbis who could speak Bukhori and/or Russian and conduct Bukharan rites and liturgy. For the older members of the diaspora, the Bukharan take on Orthodox Judaism and religious rites (which some community members call 'Bukharism') is an important heritage marker that differentiates them culturally from other Jewish communities in the cities of their residence. Bukharism implies a conservative but non-dogmatic way of being a practicing Jew belonging to a particular, Eastern culture. Some of the old practices in Bukharism were influenced by Muslim customs. For instance, a child inherited his/her Jewishness (i.e., confessional and ethnic belonging) from his/her father instead of the mother, as prescribed in Orthodox Judaism (Emel'ianenko & Noseiko-Stein 2018: 466). The younger members of the Bukharan diaspora are increasingly being trained in more mainstream versions of Orthodox Judaism taught in *yeshivas* (religious schools).

Senior members of the Bukharan diaspora, mainly the first-generation Soviet emigrants, have been active in promoting different types of intangible heritage in their transnational communities closely interconnected

[24] Sukhrob Babaev, the project lead in Bukhara, stated: "It is impossible to imagine the city without the Bukharian Jewish mahallas. Via this project, we would also like to conserve and highlight the importance of preserving the traditional Bukharian vernacular architecture techniques." (https://www.wmf.org/inside-look-wmfs-jewish-heritage-program)

[25] Bukharan Jewish Community Center in Forest Hills, Queens, is also the headquarters of the Bukharian Jewish Congress of the USA and Canada under the leadership of the President Boris Kandov (since 2004), and it hosts 'Bet Efraim' Central Synagogue. See https://www.bjccny.org/.

by kinship and friendship links: Bukharan cookbooks (e.g., Cordell 2017; Fazilov 2023), memoirs and amateur historyy of the Bukharan community and diaspora (e.g., Pinkhasov 2022), ethnographic exhibitions (e.g., the 'Bukharan Jewish Museum' organised and curated by Aharon Aronov),[26] and documentaries/audio-visual content about Bukharan heritage (e.g., Abbasov 2018), traditional, Central Asian music and specifically the genre of shashmaqom. (Self-)published mainly in Russian (sometimes also in the languages of the new host societies: English, German, Hebrew), the Bukharan cookbooks, memoirs, and amateur histories have primarily been oriented towards the members of the diaspora rather than the wider society or the Central Asian homeland. Aiming at preserving the legacy of their authors, such memoirs have sometimes been presented as gifts to guests attending the wake and subsequent commemoration rites organised by the family of a deceased author. In the main, these publications document the genealogies of Bukharan Jews, the history of their dispersion in modern times, and the painstaking processes of building new homelands (e.g. Galibov 1998 on the history of the Bukharan diaspora in Vienna).

The most significant exception in this body of mainly diaspora-focused intangible heritage practices is shashmaqom music. In 2008, it was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.[27] This classical music tradition developed in the urban centres of Central Asia in the pre-Islamic era is a fusion of vocal and instrumental music and performed solo or by a group of singers and an orchestra of lutes, fiddles, frame-drums and flutes. Oral transmission from master to student was historically the principal means of preserving the music and its spiritual values, and Bukharan Jews were among the most acclaimed masters. Shashmaqom thus represents both a cultural achievement/skill of the Eastern Jews and intangible cultural heritage shared with Uzbeks. In Soviet times, both Muslim and Jewish women could perform shashmaqom publicly. Since the 1970s, many of Bukharan Jewish performers emigrated to Israel and the US. In the early 1980s and 1990s, Shashmaqom, a New York-based ensemble, performed music and dance from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.[28] Since the 1990s, the performer Ezro Malakov (now in his eighties) has been practicing shashmaqom in New York, where he has also taught the genre to generations of Bukharan children.

Given that shashmaqom is branded as musical heritage that 'unites Jews and Muslims', Uzbek and Tadjik ambassadors in the US and dignitaries from Central Asia have often attended Bukharan musical events (Rapport 2014: 153). Ezro Malakov was awarded the title of National Artist of Uzbekistan by President

[26] The museum does not have a permanent venue and has to move from site to site provided by community members-business owners on their premises. The museum depends largely on the enthusiasm of Aharon Aronov, who is now in his 80s, and his daughter.

[27] https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/shashmaqom-music-00089

[28] https://folkways.si.edu/shashmaqam/music-of-the-bukharan-jewish-ensemble/central-asia-judaica-world/album/smithsonian

Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2018, despite having emigrated from the country decades earlier. With the disappearance of many shashmaqom masters in Central Asia, most present-day performers in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are graduates of the Tashkent Conservatory. To keep the musical heritage alive and actively 'shared' across Central Asian communities, the Bukharan diaspora has, in turn, collaborated with Uzbek authorities to organise regular shashmaqom festivals in Uzbekistan and the US. The International Shashmaqam Forever Festival has been founded by the US-based Rafael Nektalov (the Bukharian Times newspaper), the philanthropist David Mavashev and the Uzbek Ministry of Culture.[29] In 2023, Rafael Nektalov and David Mavashev organized the Bukharian Culture Week in Uzbekistan, declaring their commitment to preserving and promoting Bukharian heritage and shashmaqom music globally. As Mavashev summarised it: 'Being Bukharian Jews, we feel our rich culture deserves wider study and appreciation.' [30]

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues discussed above, the report suggests the following recommendations:

- that Jewish heritage organisations, Jewish museums, NGOs and researchers in the USA, Israel and transnational (post-)Soviet diaspora find the ways to support and develop the amateur Bukharan Jewish Museum in New York, paying particular attention to the collection of the diasporic publications, including memoirs, autobiographies, amateur history books and documentaries;

- that the model of successful collaboration between the Uzbek local authorities, the diasporic Memorial Funds and a Bukharan community leader focused on the maintenance and restoration of the Bukharan Jewish cemetery in Bukhara is implemented in other Bukharan Jewish cemeteries across Uzbekistan;

- that the Bukharan Jewish diaspora together with the Uzbek municipal authorities and the Uzbek Ministry of Culture support Bukharan synagogues in the historical urban centres to secure that in the case of the local Bukharan communities' failure to maintain these buildings properly, they are not demolished or left to decay, but are transformed into memorial sites representing the emigrated communities and former ethno-religious diversity of Central Asia;

[29] https://www.bukhariantimes.org/2023/12/20/shashmaqam-forever-and-ever/
[30] https://www.bukhariantimes.org/2024/07/10/bukharian-jewish-culture-week/

- that international heritage organisations and Uzbek authorities urgently consider how it is possible to restore and reconstruct the merchant Jewish houses of the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Jewish mahalla 'Shark' in Samarkand; and to consider and outline how these properties, protected by UNESCO, could be used commercially in order to attract private investors and guarantee the safety of their investments;

- that the relevant Ministries and other stakeholders in Uzbekistan as well as international heritage organisation promote professional, scholarly research and outreach about the Bukharan ethno-religious minority and their tangible and intangible heritage in wider Uzbek society and educational institutions.

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