



TERRITORIAL SETTLEMENT AND CLAN DIVISIONS OF THE LULIS IN THE SURKHAN OASIS

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Abstract

Over time, the Lulis have migrated to the Surkhan Oasis for various reasons. Their migration routes followed the directions of India–Afghanistan–Uzbekistan, India–Afghanistan–Iran–Afghanistan–Uzbekistan, and India–Afghanistan–Tajikistan–Uzbekistan. The stages of Luli migration into the Surkhandarya Oasis occurred at different historical periods. This article examines the division of the Lulis in the Surkhandarya region into distinct groups, their migration areas, the predominant occupations within these groups, the impact of these professions on their social life, the challenges encountered during their transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle, and the ethno-demographic and ethno-cultural processes that resulted from their settlement—issues which have not been sufficiently studied so far.

Keywords: Surkhan Oasis, ethnic processes, Luli, economic activity, fortune-teller, handicrafts, trade.

Introduction

Based on the study of historical and ethnographic literature, it can be stated that the migration of the Lulis into the territory of Uzbekistan occurred via the routes of India–Afghanistan–Uzbekistan or India–Iran–Afghanistan–Uzbekistan. They also entered through the India–Afghanistan–Tajikistan–Uzbekistan route. The presence of large Luli communities in Uzbekistan's provinces bordering Tajikistan—such as Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Samarkand, and Jizzakh—indicates that they passed through regions like the Hisor Valley, Qurghonteppa, Panjakent, and Khujand in Tajikistan.

The first Russian scholar to conduct research in the eastern districts of the Bukhara Khanate was N.A. Mayev. In 1875, under his leadership, the Hisor expedition conducted studies in all the principalities of the region. The expedition reported



that the population consisted mainly of Uzbeks and Tajiks, along with Central Asian Lulis, Jews, Afghans, recently arrived Kazakhs, and Turkmens settled along the Amu Darya [1].

In the process of studying the ethnic history and composition of the Surkhan Oasis population, it was concluded that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this area served as a confluence of various ethnic and ethnographic groups, cultures, and economic-cultural types.

At the turn of the 20th century, in the southern Surkhan Oasis, Lulis primarily lived in the Sherobod principality—near the village of Darband along the Sherobod River—and in four villages around Denov, Sho‘rchi, Sherobod, and Jarqo‘rg‘on, coexisting with the local Uzbek population. Their numbers did not exceed 300 individuals. During our ethnographic observations, we met with Luli communities in the present-day Sherobod and Jarqo‘rg‘on districts, specifically in the villages of Oqtapa, and became familiar with their way of life. Our field research revealed that the Lulis in southern Surkhan mainly belonged to the first group—i.e., local native Lulis [2].

According to the 1924 census materials, there were 1,420 Qoratog‘ Lulis living along the Surkhandarya River. Among them, 290 resided in the Sariosiyo district, and 1,130 lived in the town of Yurchi. In the Sariosiyo district, they were referred to as “Jugi.” According to local elders, they had only recently migrated from their homeland, Qoratog‘.

Qoratog‘ is located in the Hisor mountain range. One of the major left tributaries of the Surkhandarya River originates from this range and is called the Qoratog‘ River. It is known that Lulis often settled near rivers. It is presumed that the ancestors of the Lulis living in Sariosiyo and Yurchi came from along this river. This information indicates that the Lulis began living in this region many years ago.

The ethnic history of the Lulis living in the Surkhan Oasis has not yet been fully studied from a historiographical perspective. Although the Lulis in our country consider themselves a distinct people, researchers have described them as a single ethnic group. In the studied region, the Lulis consist of several ethno-social groups. Foreign researchers such as Y. Marushiakova and V. Popov have suggested in their academic work that Lulis should be studied in terms of “group boundaries.” These include:

1. **Core Luli groups** – Luli, Jugi, Multani, and Gurbet, who refer to themselves as *Mugat*;
2. **Intermediate groups** – Mazang, Tovoqtarosh (bowl-makers), Ogha, Qashqar Luli;
3. **Luli-like groups** – Kavol, Chistoni, Parya, and Baloch [3].

In the studied region, depending on their lifestyle, appearance, language, and time of arrival, Lulis in the Surkhan Oasis are often referred to as “Jugi” or “Multani.” Based on field data, the Lulis in the Surkhan Oasis can be divided into three groups: **First**, local Lulis, whose ancestors settled in the region between two rivers long ago and thus consider themselves indigenous. They refer to themselves as *Mugat* or *native Mugat*. Uzbeks and Tajiks also call them Luli, Jugi, or Multani.

Second, Afghan Lulis or Afghan Jugi, who identify as *Afghan Mugat* or *Kovuli*. Local populations call them *Afghan Lulis* or *Black Lulis* [4].

Third, the *Tovoqtarosh* (bowl-makers). Locals refer to them as *Soqataroshlar*.

Until the mid-20th century, Lulis led a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle in the oasis. They constantly moved from one place to another, temporarily settling in village houses during certain seasons. Mainly during harvest seasons, they worked in agriculture as hired laborers, and after a time, moved elsewhere. According to elderly Lulis, they stayed seasonally in particular areas, assisting locals in their labor and receiving shelter, payment, or agricultural products in return.

In the 1950s, the government began efforts to provide housing to nomadic Lulis and transition them to a settled lifestyle. As a result, Lulis living in the Surkhandarya region started building homes on allocated land and began settling down. Gradually, they established their own villages. They also invited their kin to join them, forming separate Luli communities. This migration continues today, mainly driven by labor market demands and kinship or marital ties within Luli groups [5].

Due to centuries of migration, the Lulis have spread across various regions, forming communities distinguishable by culture, anthropological features, lifestyle, and occupations. This has led to a unique identity as representatives of a single cultural group. Depending on facial features and lifestyle, they are referred to as “Jugi,” “Mazang,” or “Luli,” with most of them adhering to Islam.

Unlike other groups, *Mazangs* lived a sedentary lifestyle and mainly engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, medicinal leech harvesting, and fortune-telling.



Nomadic Lulis lived in tents made of white cloth, usually setting up near lakes and canals, and were allowed to move freely unless the areas were already occupied by Uzbeks. This explains why many Lulis settled in the Zarafshan Valley and near the Karakul district.

In the 1920s, among the 2.5 million population of the Bukhara Emirate, there were more than 2,000 Lulis [6].

Thus, based on the information above, it is clear that in the first half of the 19th century, numerous Lulis not only established new settlements for themselves but also enjoyed certain privileges under the Emirate.

At the beginning of the 20th century, historical sources mention a nomadic tribe referred to as the “long-headed Afghan Lulis” in Eastern Bukhara. Around the same time, during the rule of Amir Said Olimkhan (1910–1920), the ethnic group known as “Jo‘chi,” i.e., *Jo‘gi*, originally from the northeastern Hisor district, settled in the Miyonkol region of the Zarafshan district. It can be inferred that there may be a connection between the aforementioned ethnic groups, as both trace their origins to Afghanistan and later migrated through the Hisor Valley to southeastern parts of Uzbekistan [7].

Historical and ethnographic literature also notes that in the mid-20th century, a group of Lulis known as the “Chistoni” lived as separate families in Bukhara province. It is believed that the ethnonym “Chistoni” may have derived from the name of the Sistan province in Iran. The main occupations of this group were begging and basket weaving. Although they identified themselves as Tajiks and maintained close kinship relations with both Tajiks and Uzbeks, they were generally not considered suitable for marriage by these local groups.

In the 1960s, there were reports of a group called the “Pokaroch” tribe, consisting of about 150 families, living not only in Bukhara but also in Samarkand and Shahrissabz. This tribe was genetically related to the Baloch people. Researcher B. Karmysheva notes that the local population referred to them as “Indian Lulis.” However, neither linguistically nor genetically were the Pokaroch or Baloch related to Indians. They are of Iranian ethnic origin, but because of their anthropological resemblance to Indians, the locals gave them that name. Today, however, most of these ethnic groups exist only in historical records, having been assimilated into the local population as a result of dense ethno-cultural interactions [8].



Historical sources mention that in the past, Lulis did not have land ownership rights and were therefore compelled to migrate from one place to another. Eventually, they began settling in neighborhoods and villages around cities. Notably, they always chose to settle near water sources.

In the cities of the Surkhan Oasis and their surroundings, such settlements began to form, creating designated Luli residential areas and villages.

Here are a few examples of Luli village formation:

The residents of the “Luli” village in Sherobod district migrated from neighboring Turkmenistan about 40 years ago and settled there.

Residents of the Oqtepa and Ismoiltepa villages in Jarqo‘rg‘on district also migrated 40 years ago from the Sho‘rchi district of the region, particularly from the villages of Kultepa, Kommuna, and Oynakuo‘l.

Lulis in the Qo‘shtepa village of Jarqo‘rg‘on and the Zang village of Sherobod district came from Sho‘rchi and Denov districts.

The ancestors of Lulis in Qorayantoq village of Jarqo‘rg‘on district migrated from Turkmenistan.

The migration of Lulis to the Surkhandarya region was also driven by economic factors. For instance, in the Sherobod neighborhood of Sherobod district, a group of Lulis known as *Tovoqtaroshlar* (bowl-makers) resided. They primarily produced handicrafts from willow and moved toward trade centers to sell their products [9]. According to field research, more than 10 different Luli groups currently reside in the Surkhan region. A noteworthy feature is that unlike among Uzbeks and Tajiks, the Luli ethnonyms are often preceded by the word “*bobo*” (elder). For example, Bobo Abdurahim, Bobo Dilmurod, Bobo Ashurali, Bobo Yormat, Bobo G‘ulomi, Bobo Hojigi, and Bobo Rustam. However, these clan names are sometimes used without the “*bobo*” prefix. Every Luli identifies their ethnic belonging with one of these clans. Moreover, these clans are further divided into smaller branches, such as the *Yo‘ldoshi* clan, which includes sub-branches like *Kuttalig*, *Qoralig*, and *O‘tagi*. The Abdurayim clan is considered a sub-branch of the Niyoz Urganji clan. As a result of the ethno-social and ethno-cultural processes that have occurred in the region, the Lulis’ lifestyle has improved over time. They have gradually abandoned their traditional occupation of begging and engaged in other professions, which has contributed to the enhancement of their material conditions.



Certainly, this transformation is not the result of recent developments, but the outcome of a long-term historical and social evolution.

Today, many Lulis identify themselves as Uzbeks while still acknowledging their Luli heritage in terms of anthropology, economic practices, and material-spiritual culture. They consider themselves as integrated members of the local civilized population.

In the Surkhan Oasis, the Lulis developed unique local characteristics through centuries of ethno-cultural interaction. Their longstanding coexistence with neighboring peoples fostered close cultural ties with both the Uzbek and Tajik communities [10].

The Lulis have a distinctive pattern of settlement in the villages of the Surkhan Oasis. For example, in the neighborhoods of «**Ma'rifat**» and «**Majnuntol**» near the Dehqon Bazaar in the center of **Termez city**, there are six Luli households comprising over 50 individuals. The level of integration of the Lulis living in these neighborhoods with the Uzbek population is relatively high, and interethnic marriages are common among them.

This is primarily because begging is no longer part of the lifestyle of these Luli groups. In contrast, among other Luli communities, begging still constitutes a part of their household economy. This very factor determines whether or not intermarriage occurs with the surrounding population.

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