



Article

The Term "Sart" in Central Asian Historiography

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Abstract: The term "Sart" holds contested significance in Central Asian historiography, encompassing ethnic, social, and linguistic dimensions. Historically associated with ancient Uzbek ethnonyms, its usage evolved, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, sparking debates among Russian and local scholars. Despite its widespread application, the term was often an externally imposed identifier, resisted by intellectuals like Sherali Lapin and Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi. Addressing the knowledge gap on its historical transformations, this study employs a historical-ethnographic method, analyzing primary sources, field studies, and academic discourse. Findings reveal that "Sart" lost relevance amid early 20th-century ethnic consolidation, reflecting broader processes of national identity formation in Central Asia. These results underscore how socio-political dynamics shape ethnic terminology, offering valuable insights for understanding identity construction in regional historiography.

Keywords: Sart, Central Asian historiography, Ethnonym, Uzbek identity, Ethnic consolidation, Socio-ethnic terminology, National identity, Historiography, Central Asia, Ethnic history.

1. Introduction

Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in the historical development of nations, shaping socio-cultural and political dynamics over centuries. In Central Asia, the term "Sart" has emerged as a complex and contentious identifier, used variably by different groups and periods to refer to segments of the settled population. Historically, this term has been linked to diverse ethnic, linguistic, and social connotations, often imposed by external powers rather than adopted by local communities. Despite its widespread historical usage, "Sart" remains inadequately understood in its etymology, socio-ethnic implications, and its role in the broader narrative of Central Asian identity [1].

While significant research has been conducted on the ethnonyms associated with the Uzbek people, including the works of Russian orientalist and local scholars, a gap persists in reconciling divergent interpretations of "Sart." Existing studies often reflect polarized viewpoints, ranging from its recognition as a legitimate ethnic marker to its rejection as a derogatory label imposed by external powers. This study addresses this knowledge gap by systematically examining historical records, scholarly debates, and field ethnographic data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the term's evolution and implications [2].

The study employs a historical-ethnographic approach, analyzing archival sources, published works, and oral histories to trace the development of the term "Sart." Findings reveal that the term, far from being a definitive ethnonym, often served as a marker of socio-political classification, contributing to debates on identity and belonging. The results highlight the decline of its usage by the early 20th century, coinciding with the ethnic

Citation: U.S. Abdullaev. The Term "Sart" in Central Asian Historiography. Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History 2024, 5(7), 276-281.

Received: 30th Sept 2024

Revised: 6th Oct 2024

Accepted: 13th Nov 2024

Published: 27th Nov 2024



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consolidation of the Uzbek people [3]. By exploring the implications of these findings, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of ethnic terminology's role in identity formation and the socio-political history of Central Asia.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative historical-ethnographic approach to analyze the evolution and socio-ethnic implications of the term "Sart" in Central Asian historiography. The research is grounded in the systematic examination of primary and secondary sources, including historical records, academic publications, and articles from local periodicals of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Key historical texts, such as works by Russian orientalists like N.P. Ostroumov and V.V. [4]. Bartold, and responses from local intellectuals like Sherali Lapin and Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi, were analyzed to trace the etymology, contextual usage, and sociopolitical significance of the term "Sart." Field ethnographic data, as referenced in historical articles and oral accounts, were used to capture the perceptions of local populations regarding the term's usage [5].

The research also critically examines published debates in contemporary newspapers and magazines, such as "Oyna" and "Turkistanskije vedomosti," to explore the varying interpretations and disputes surrounding the term. Cross-comparison of these sources helped identify contradictions, assumptions, and evolving perspectives on the ethnonym. Furthermore, the study contextualizes the term within broader socio-political developments of the time, including the processes of ethnic integration and consolidation in Central Asia [6].

Through this methodology, the study integrates historical narrative analysis with ethnographic insights to uncover the layers of meaning associated with "Sart." This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how external impositions and internal resistances shaped the term's trajectory, providing a nuanced perspective on its decline and the emergence of more unified ethnic identities in the region [7].

3. Results and Discussion

The issue of understanding ethnic identity has been the main factor of national-ethnic development in all times and all nations. Ethnic self-awareness is the main ethnic sign that is necessary for the recognition of a certain ethnic group as a separate ethnic community [8]. As a result of long ethnogenetic processes, the ancestors of the Uzbek people, formed on a local ethnic basis, recognized several ethnonyms in their consciousness during their historical development, like other peoples in Central Asia. [9] It is known that from the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the inhabitants of Uzbekistan's oases were called Sogds, Bactrians, Khorezms, Chochs, and Parkans, and ethnic groups living in steppe regions as nomads were called Sak-Massagets [10].

Throughout the Middle Ages, many ethnic communities migrated to the territory of our country. Of course, during these periods, there was a situation of assimilation (mixing) of foreign ethnic groups with the local resident population through ethnointegration processes. As a result, new ethnic groups were formed on a local ethnic basis, and a large part of the people was called by the name of the main ethnic unit or by the name of their place of residence [11]. So, the ethnonym attributed to our people has undergone transformation over the centuries, replacing one term with another [12].

In the 19th century and even at the beginning of the 20th century, it was not decided to use a single ethnonym for our people. After all, during this period, the process of consolidation (unification) of the Uzbek ethnic nucleus was not completed in the Uzbek people, as well as in a number of Central Asian nations [13].

The ethnonyms given to the peoples who lived in the territory of Central Asia in different periods of historical development (name of this ethnos) were not always fixed in the consciousness of that people [14]. However, the historical names of some nations were used by representatives of other countries. There are many examples of this in history. Just one example. The ethnonym *massaget*, which is attributed to a large clan-tribe association that lived in the steppe regions of Central Asia in ancient times, is found mainly in the works of Greek authors and entered scientific use through these sources [15].

Another such term attributed to our ancestors by representatives of other countries is the term "sart". The term "sart" is often found in the statistical publications of the early 19th-20th centuries and in the works of authors of that time [16]. Researchers of this period expressed many opinions about the issue of "sart" for several decades. In particular, information about "sarts" A.L. Kun, A.P. Somoylovich, V.P. Nalivkin, M.V. Gavrilov, V.V. Bartold, N.P. Ostroumov, N.G. Mallitsky, It is often found in the works of Russian-speaking scientists such as I.P. Magidovich, I.I. Zarubin and E.D. Polivanov [17].

The above-mentioned authors stated in their work that the word "sart" has an ethnic character or not. The relevance of the term "Sart" for the settled population is confirmed by the Russian researcher N.P. Ostroumov published in 1890 "Sartlar. Although it was mentioned in the book "Ethnographic materials", this author could not prove in his work who the Sarts are, based on the main factors that determine the ethnos [18]. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, various articles devoted to the research and analysis of the term "Sart" were published in the local press, including "Turkistanskije vedomosti", a number of issues of the magazine "Oyna" of Turkestan national progressives, and became the subject of intense debate [19].

The clash of opinions regarding the etymological analysis of the word "Sart" and its socio-ethnic character began with the resolute opposition of the representative of the local population, Sherali Lapin, to the views expressed earlier by Russian-speaking scholars on this issue. At the end of 1890, Sherali Lapin published an article entitled "Sarty i ix yazyk" ("Sarts and their language") in the newspaper "Orenburgskij listok", in which he criticized the views of orientalists V.V. Bartold and N.P. Ostroumov. Unlike the above Russian orientalists, Sherali Lapin firmly states that "... there is no Sart people, there is no Sart language, the name Sart was given to Uzbeks and Tajiks as a derogatory nickname by Kyrgyz (Kazakhs)" [20].

In response, V. V. Bartold published an article in the newspaper "Okraina" in 1894, in which he considered Lapin's opinion unfounded and wrote that "there is no reason to take the term "sart" from the ethnographic dictionary" [21]. The dispute between S. Lapin and V. V. Barthold regarding the term "Sart" did not end there. In his place, Sh. Lapin responded to V. V. Barthold with the article "The meaning and origin of the word Sart", which he published in several issues of "Turkistanskije vedomosti" newspaper in 1894. Sh. Lapin repeated in this article that the word "sart" was never recognized as an ethnonym by the Uzbek and Tajik population, it was given as a derogatory "nickname" by the nomads-Kyrgyz (Kazakh) [22].

After that, the articles of V. V. Bartold on the analysis of the term "sart" were published in the newspaper "Turkistanskije vedomosti" called "In response to Mr. Lapin" (1894) and "About the word sart again" (1895). In these articles, V. V. Barthold traced the evolution of the term "Sart" and showed that it has a long historical root [23].

In 1908, the third complete edition of the book "Sartlar" ("Sarty") by N.P. Ostroumov was published. It is in this edition of the work that the authors Barthold and Lapin discuss in detail about "sarts". However, N.P. Ostroumov did not openly support the opinion of any of the parties discussed on this topic [24].

In 1910, the well-known orientalist A.N. Salaylovich reacted to this book of N.P. Ostroumov named "Sarts" ("Sarty") in one of the central publications ("Jivaya starina") and published an article entitled "About the issue of Sarts". In his article, he evaluated this book

by N.P. Ostroumov as "... a book written not by an expert ethnographer, but by a statesman" [25].

By 1912, the newspaper "Turkistanskije vedomosti" published an article by M. V. Govrilov entitled "The origin of the word Sart" ("Proishkhozhdenie slova 'sart'"). The most important aspect of this article is that in the letter of the author, Kokanlik Muhammad Amin Muhammadjanov, published in "Vaqt" newspaper, "It should be known that the term 'sart' is not the name of any nation. This name was given to us by the Russians and may not have any basis".

Mahmudhoja Bekhbudi, a famous representative of the Turkestan national progressives, strongly emphasized that the use of the ethnonym "sart" for our people contradicts the historical truth, and that the Uzbek people never accepted this word as the name of their people. At this point, it is permissible to refer to Behbudi's article entitled "Sart sozi majhuldir" published in "Oyna" magazine on this issue.

The well-known historian D. Alimova writes about this article: "We value Mahmudhoja Bekhbudi's article 'Sart sozi majhuldir' as an extremely important source, but unfortunately, only a few historians and ethnographers know about it. The article is a scientific work created as a result of researching a number of literatures on the subject, relying on the scientific research of its time, starting from knowing the opinion of the population (conducting field ethnographic research - U.A.) and studying the sources".

In fact, this article by Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi is considered an important source for the correct coverage of the ethnic history of the Uzbek people in the early 19th-20th centuries, especially the article on understanding the ethnic identity of our people in this period. Because, as we mentioned above, it was common to call the local population "sart" among the Russian population in Turkestan during this period due to the actions of the high management circles.

Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi effectively used the ethnographic research method to determine the etymology of the word "sart" and determine the attitude of our people to it. He obtained important information on this issue by talking to elderly people living in different regions of Turkestan. In particular, "Ask a 60-70-100 person in some desert, mountain or administrative land of Turkestan to say the word 'sart', they don't know... Old people say: so-and-so lion is Uzbek or Tajik." Bekhbudi uses field ethnographic data such as "Aslo sart" [9] as evidence for his views.

In the article, M. Behbudi deeply studied and thoroughly analyzed the published works on the "Sart" issue. For example, about N.P. Ostroumov's "Sarty" book, which we mentioned above, Bekhbudiy writes: "Astromuf gentlemen probably classified a Russian book of approximately 300 pages called 'Sartlar'. There were several objections and arguments to this book by this Mr. Sherali Lapin. But Mr. Astro'muf, they haven't come to a decision by proving who the Sarts are, and their books are full of all sorts of contradictions and assumptions".

In addition, in this article, Behbudi analyzes the information related to the issue of "sart" in the works of Vambery's "Journey to Central Asia", Logofet's "Bukhara Khanate", Gayer's "Turkistan Travelogue". He supports Gayer's point of view in this matter, saying that he was suspicious of Uzbeks and Tajiks being called "sart".

In 1914, "Sadoi Fergana" newspaper published an article titled "The word Sart is known" about a person named Mullah Abdullobek. In it, the author tries to etymologically analyze the word "sart" and explains that this word has the meaning of "mosque and madrasa", "clean and cultured" and one should be proud of this name. For example, the author writes: "It should not be a secret to our dear friends that we should be happy and proud when anyone calls us a jerk." Quarterly, sart means cultural, mosque and madrasah, and bazaar and neat ulama".

Of course, the opinion expressed in this article about the word sart did not go unnoticed. Soon "Oyna" magazine published an article entitled "The word Sart was not known" refuting the opinions expressed in this article. It should be noted that the author's

name is not indicated in this article entitled "The word Sart was not known". However, the researchers claim that "according to the method and level of expression" the article belongs to Behbudi's pen. It says that the information given in the proverb "Sart word is known" has no scientific basis. "If, as Bekhbudi writes, the word "sart" was known, that is, if the term "sart" of all or a certain part of the peoples of Turkestan was proven by historical facts, then no one would open a word and argue about "sart". "

Criticizing the views of the author Mulla Abdullobek, he writes again "...we could not find out from which history book or from which source of reliability the information he narrated was taken. "It is not correct to judge that the word "has become known" or that the issue of "sart" has been resolved.... They consider it a crime against history to solve a great issue of history with an originally unknown narration".

So, the representatives of national patriotic intellectuals who lived and worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries strongly opposed the use of a foreign, foreign and absurd name for ordinary people, especially the term "sart" for the Uzbek people. Such objections, as we have seen above, found their clear expression in the works of Sherali Lapin and Mahmudhoja Behbudi.

This term "sart", which was introduced by the Russian ruling circles in relation to the settled population of some regions of Central Asia, regardless of their ethnic origin and language, gradually went out of everyday use.

Since the 20s of the 20th century, the term "sart" has been used less and less, and now the terms "Turks" and "Uzbeks" have become popular. This was certainly happening in connection with the ethnic processes, especially the ethnic consolidation of the peoples of the region. It should be noted here that on the eve of the establishment of the Uzbek SSR, although a single ethnonym for our people has not yet been decided, all the sub-ethnic groups that make up the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people have united into a single ethnic core - the Uzbek ethnic core, and recognized the name "Uzbek" as the name of their nation. became stronger and stronger. In the end, this name was absorbed into the spirit of the local population, and the term "Uzbek" became the ethnic name of the whole nation.

4. Conclusion

The historical evolution of the term "Sart" reflects its complex role as a socio-ethnic identifier in Central Asian historiography, shaped by external impositions and internal resistance. This study highlights that the term was often used as a tool of classification by Russian colonial powers, while local intellectuals, such as Sherali Lapin and Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi, strongly contested its validity as an ethnonym, arguing that it carried derogatory connotations and failed to reflect the true ethnic identities of the Uzbek and Tajik populations. The findings underscore the gradual decline of the term's usage by the early 20th century, coinciding with the ethnic consolidation of the Uzbek people and the emergence of a unified national identity. These results have significant implications for understanding how external sociopolitical influences and local resistance shape ethnic terminology and identity formation. Further research could delve deeper into the lived experiences of individuals labeled as "Sart" and explore comparative studies on similar imposed ethnonyms in other colonial or postcolonial contexts to broaden the understanding of identity construction under sociopolitical pressures.

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