

TURKESTAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the interpretations of the 1916 Turkestan uprising in contemporary Russian historiography. It explores the diversity of approaches to the topic in the post-independence period and reveals how historical events are evaluated from national, political, and social perspectives. The article compares the views of historians such as V. Buldakov, A. Ganin, T. Leontyeva, S. Abashin, and R. Pochekaev, examining the differences in their approaches.*

Keywords: *Russian historiography, colonial policy, historical memory, contemporary approaches, oral history, historical analysis, historical justice, national consciousness.*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Central Asian republics gained independence. This transformation brought about fundamental changes not only in the political and economic spheres but also in the field of historiography. The peoples of Turkestan were now granted the opportunity to reinterpret their history through the lens of self-awareness and write it independently. Nevertheless, contemporary historical works written in Russia still reflect diverse and sometimes conflicting approaches to this topic. In modern Russian historiography, the 1916 uprising remains a controversial subject. Some researchers recognize the events as a national liberation movement, while others attempt to portray them as local unrest or even acts of savagery.

For instance, Russian historian V. Buldakov describes the 1916 events as a “bloody ritual” and as “repressions with genocidal characteristics.” He criticizes the punitive measures implemented by the government and compares them to the Armenian massacre of 1915. According to Buldakov, these acts of violence resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Turkestan citizens—particularly women, the elderly, and children—or forced them to flee to China[5].

In contrast, A. Ganin proposes an opposing interpretation. He characterizes the 1916 events not as the “Turkestan uprising” but rather as an “ethno-religious rebellion.” In his view, these movements reflected ethnic and confessional tensions rather than genuine national interests. Ganin refers to the rebels as “rioters” and equates the event to a “local massacre with separatist tendencies.” While he bases his assessment on archival documents, the criteria for their selection and the interpretation itself have been widely criticized[7].

Another notable figure among contemporary Russian historians is T. Leontyeva, who, together with V. Buldakov, co-authored the book *The War That Gave Birth to a Revolution*. In it, they portray the 1916 events as an integral part of the broader socio-political crisis in Russia[6].

Their research emphasizes the internal political instability of the empire, interethnic conflicts, and the negative consequences of the mobilization policy. According to them, the pressure exerted in Central Asia led to some of the most tragic outcomes. Another important collection of research is the materials from the international conference held in Moscow in September 2015. At this conference, historians from Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan presented papers discussing the causes, consequences, and historical lessons of the 1916 uprising. However, this event did not result in a unified conclusion or a common stance; instead, it reflected a compilation of diverse approaches.

Some researchers also analyzed external political factors, particularly the involvement of the Ottoman Empire and Germany in the events of Turkestan. For example, A. Vasilev, in his article, discusses the religious influences that came through Istanbul, assessing them not as the main cause of the uprising, but rather as a factor that intensified it. Meanwhile, I. Barinov emphasizes that Germany had only a superficial interest in the situation in Turkestan and lacked any concrete strategic plan[5].

S. Abashin stands out in contemporary historiography for his important and impartial approach. He interprets the 1916 uprising not simply as an anti-colonial struggle, but as a complex reflection of social tensions within Central Asian society[3]. According to Abashin, the event was the result of inequalities and discontent among internal groups. He particularly stresses the importance of using oral history and collective memory as sources. Another scholar, R. Pochekaev, examines how the events of 1916 affected the relationship with the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. In his view, although imperial policy formally maintained the pre-existing legal status of these khanates, in practice, it was aimed at their full subjugation. Overall, post-1991 Russian historiography reflects a clash of diverse approaches, contradictory evaluations, and political perspectives regarding the 1916 Turkestan uprising. While some historians have attempted to come closer to historical truth, many still cling to outdated ideological stereotypes. Therefore, a modern, source-based, impartial, and multi-faceted approach is crucial for restoring the historical memory of Turkestan[2].

The 1916 Turkestan uprising is not merely a historical event. It is, in essence, a signal from the peoples of the region in defense of their freedom, pride, and historical values. The uprising was a natural response to the violent nature of colonial policies, the violation of local people's rights to land and labor, political discrimination, and cultural suppression. Throughout the past century, the interpretation of this event has been consistently tied to political circumstances. During the Soviet era, it was framed within the Marxist-Leninist ideology as a symbol of class struggle. Any movement against colonialism was redirected into the image of a "class enemy." After independence, however, the need arose to reevaluate this event. Today, the peoples of Turkestan are

confidently moving forward in restoring this historical memory and making it an integral part of their national consciousness.

It should be especially noted that the 1916 uprising was not always a unified, organized, or pre-planned movement. It often erupted based on local conditions, social inequality, political instability, and basic human dissatisfaction. In some cases, it arose spontaneously, while in other regions it was led by local leaders. Therefore, the uprising did not always fit the classical model of revolutionary movements, yet this in no way diminishes its historical significance.

Another important issue is collective memory. Beyond official historical texts, archival documents, and scholarly articles, the events of 1916 have been preserved in oral folklore, songs, legends, and memorials. These sources can reveal the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the events, reflecting human tragedies, trust, courage, and suffering. Unfortunately, for many years, these sources were neglected. Now is the time to restore them and bring them into scholarly circulation. The main task of modern historiography is to present these events free from political interpretations, as impartially and source-based as possible.

The 1916 Turkestan uprising represents a people's struggle, a historical pain, and a pursuit of truth. Therefore, the study of this topic must embrace new methodologies, including oral history, cultural anthropology, postcolonial theories, and approaches related to popular psychology.

Today, as we look back on the centenary of the uprising, we must realize that it is not merely a historical lesson. It is also a path to national self-awareness, a means of learning from history, and a striving toward a just society. The courageous act of the peoples of Turkestan must never be forgotten. This history is our collective memory, our truth, and the foundation of the road that leads to our future.

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