

English Abstract

Unknown Legends Concerning the Jews of the Northern Caucasus and Their Relationships with Muslims

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In the years 1914–16, a group of Russian anthropologists headed by Feliks Lvovich Shapiro (1879-1961), a celebrated scholar of Judaism and the Hebrew language, traveled to the Northern Caucasus to study the folk-cultures of the minorities living in the area. The group concentrated mainly on the folklore of the mountain Jews of the northern Caucasus. These Jews arrived in the area from Persia in the fifth century CE and generally spoke the Judeo-Tati dialect of the Judeo-Iranian language. They lived in the midst of Christian and Muslim populations, both of which were more powerful than the Jewish community, and the Jews experienced friction with both the Christians and the Muslims. This was reflected in the folklore of the mountain Jews. The group found a number of stories of this nature in their community: the story of Shoshana, the daughter of a Jewish sage who fell in love with Rahim Ali, a Muslim and the son of a Mullah, despite God's will to keep the two peoples separate; the story of the building of the bridge over the river Yal – on one of whose banks there were Jews and on the other, Muslims – which was against the will of the gods to separate the two communities; the story of the rabbi's son who converted to Islam; and the story of Nuriel, a Jew who refused to marry a Muslim girl and who was murdered by her father. These tales reflect the apprehensions of the mountain Jews of the northern Caucasus.