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*Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor
States (review)*

Eren Tasar

Ab Imperio, 4/2011, pp. 452-457 (Review)

Published by Ab Imperio

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2011.0002>



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ни один будущий историк национального вопроса в СССР не сможет обойтись без упоминания и использования в своих исследованиях рецензируемой монографии. Хотелось бы надеяться, что большая административная нагрузка (В. Деннингхаус является заместителем директора Германского исторического института в Москве) не помешает ему продолжить серию столь удачных работ и соответственно еще больше обогатить наше знание о столь жгучих и сложных проблемах истории и современности.



отношений. Саратов, 2004; М. В. Корнилова. Немецкие поселения на Северном Кавказе. Владикавказ, 2006; С. Н. Коротун. Немецкие поселения на территории Воронежского края (1776–1941). Воронеж, 2008.

Eren TASAR

Michael Kemper, Raoul Motika, and Stefan Reichmuth (Eds.), *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). ix + 366 pp. Index. ISBN: 978-0-415-36815-5.

Specialists on Islam within the Muslim cultural spaces of the former Soviet Union, as well as students of Russian, Soviet, and comparative Islamic history, will welcome the appearance of this timely and empirically rigorous volume concerning the fate of traditional forms of organized Islamic education over the past century. This book constitutes the first comprehensive, comparative study of the topic across the Soviet space. It is also noteworthy for bringing together some of the region's most active researchers: the authors' ranks include several prominent Islamicists, and all have spent the entirety, or significant portions of their careers in the respective republics discussed in their articles. Unsurprisingly, the contributions reflect intimate knowledge of hitherto unavailable source materials, both written and oral. The six articles focus on Islamic education from the late Russian Empire through the present day in two regions of Russia (Tatarstan and Daghestan), Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan,

and Tajikistan. The editors do not claim to offer an exhaustive survey of Islamic education in the USSR: the contributions do not directly touch upon Islam in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Belarus, the Baltics, or much of the RSFSR. Rather, the editors explain that the study's aims are "primarily documentary in nature" (P. 2) with a view to shedding light on Islamic education "in the major centres of Islamic learning in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (P. 1)."

For the most part, the contributions focus on the institutional forms of Islamic education and their regional manifestations, namely, *maktabs*, *madrasas*, and, in the case of the Northern Caucasus, *khanaqahs*, though some of the authors (particularly Muminov, Gafurov, and Shigabdinov on Uzbekistan) devote significant attention to study circles that could take on a less formal character (known in Central Asia as *hujras*) as well. Given that such institutions existed within all the historically Muslim spaces of the former USSR, it is not surprising that the Bolsheviks applied similar methods to curtail them. In its broad contours, Bolshevik antireligious policy across the regions under consideration was uniform. The early years of Soviet rule saw remarkable toleration, and in some cases even official promotion, of Islamic religious institutions. This was due

both to the strategic need to secure local support for Bolshevik rule, and to the Party's largely pan-Asian agenda of promoting anticolonial nationalism (often labeled at the time as "the liberation of the East"). Although this is not a new finding, a number of the contributions offer striking data on the radical degree to which prominent Islamic authority figures (including scholars) and local Bolshevik organs sought to accommodate one another in the early 1920s. In Daghestan, according to Bobrovnikov, Navruzov, and Shikhaliev, "the majority of 'ulama and mudarrises sided with the Bolsheviks" during the Civil War (P. 112), while "shari'a courts, maktabs, madrasas, halqas and wirts continued to exist de facto within the Soviet state institutions, and some were even incorporated *de jure*" (P. 114). This trend extended to Turkestan, where the Soviets established a Central Waqf Administration, in significant part to woo the population away from the so-called Basmachi rebellion that threatened their rule well into the mid-1920s (P. 235). In a significant advance for the historiography, Muminov, Gafurov, and Shigabdinov demonstrate that this entity, which existed from 1923 to 1926, envisaged centrally regulating all formal Islamic education in Turkestan. All the articles are united in identifying the period from 1926 to 1928 as a turning point in policy

toward Islam, with an array of coercive and increasingly repressive tactics applied toward curtailing religious institutions. These culminated in the antireligious violence that accompanied the dekulakization and collectivization drives as well as the Cultural Revolution that brought early Soviet experimentation with moderation toward religion to an end. Unsurprisingly, this assault had a profound impact upon the personnel, premises, texts, and financial support that traditionally sustained Islamic education. The 1928 decision of the Party's Central Committee to shut down all religious schools was compounded by the collectivization drive, which witnessed the confiscation of lands that were traditionally used to financially sustain educational institutions (Pp. 10, 34).

Although the contributions rigorously trace developments from the 1917 revolutions until the Great Terror of 1937–1938, they offer an unclear periodization when analyzing developments in the five decades of postwar Soviet history. For this reason, the volume as a whole presents a less unified verdict upon the status of Islamic education from the 1940s until the late 1980s; a number of the articles deal with this period only cursorily. To be sure, this stems from the fact that archival sources for these decades remain largely off-limits, and the labor of process-

ing those materials that have been declassified, as well as gathering oral histories, remains ongoing (Pp. 2–3). As the editors acknowledge in their introduction, this question of periodization is important because “the state interfered in religious affairs on an unprecedented level” (P. 2). Therefore, the impact of political changes at the highest level upon the contours of Soviet religious policy could not but profoundly transform all aspects of Muslim life, including education.

All agree that Stalin's religious reforms of 1943–1944, which recognized legally sanctioned religious institutions for many of the major faiths of the USSR, marked a turning point away from the repressive violence of the late 1920s and 1930s. Bobrovnikov, Navruzov, and Shikhaliyev, in particular, offer a comprehensive periodization of postwar religious policy, treating the period from the 1940s to the early 1950s as one of “legalization of Muslim institutions,” the years from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s as roughly corresponding to Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, and the bulk of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as the heyday of “a stabilized relationship” between Islam and state (P. 107). Yet this chronology presents problems that are reflected in virtually all the contributions. Neither does it account for the profound liberalization of religious policy – and with it

religious life – that occurred in the territories under examination in the second half of the 1940s, nor does it clearly reflect the sharp break in that liberalization reflected by the sudden onset of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign in 1959. In terms of understanding Islamic education in the 1940s and 1950s, this leaves us only with a somewhat clear picture of the two officially tolerated madrasas in the USSR: the legally functioning Mir-i-Arab madrasa in Bukhara and semilegal Baraqxon madrasa in Tashkent. The possibilities for madrasas, maktabas, and other manifestations of organized religious education to reemerge from the cataclysm of the Great Terror are, therefore, largely not explored. The contributions concerning Daghestan and Uzbekistan serves as a notable exception (Pp. 136, 252–253).

Having tacitly acknowledged that any meaningful historical account of Islamic education in the USSR must to a large extent follow a comprehensive periodization of Soviet religious policy, the contributors' analyses would have benefited from a two-part division of the history of Islam in the postwar Soviet Union: before Khrushchev's antireligious campaign of 1959–1964, and after. All the evidence presented in the contributions supports the characterization of the years from the 1943–1944 reforms until 1959 as an era of remarkable moderation,

one that witnessed not only official toleration of the madrasas run by the Central Asian muftiate (SADUM), but the revival and reemergence of organized Islamic education (in the form of schools and study circles) beyond their purview as well. Yet a number of the contributions expand the traditionally accepted chronological parameters of Khrushchev's administrative and legal assault on religion, tracing its onset to the early to mid-1950s. Both the article on Daghestan and the contribution of Usmanova, Minnullin, and Mukhametshin concerning Tatarstan speak of 1954 – a year traditionally viewed in the historiography of the Soviet Union as the climax of official moderation toward religion – as “the end of the short period of liberalization” (P. 45). To support this statement, the authors of both pieces reference the Party decree of July 7, 1954, which called for an increase in antireligious propaganda and represented a temporary victory for Khrushchev's hard line against religion within the central leadership. Neither piece, however, accounts for the significantly more influential decree of November 10, 1954, which castigated abuses of Soviet citizens' constitutional right to freedom of conscience by Party officials. This document had the effect of dramatically scaling back antireligious activism at the local level and, especially in Central Asia,

led to the opening of hundreds of illegal mosques, with no retaliation from local officials. Other evidence presented for the supposed antireligious turn in the first half of the 1950s is problematic. The contribution on Dagestan cites the decline in the number of legally registered mosques throughout the USSR from the late 1940s to the early 1960s (P. 132). Yet this statistic tells us little about the potency of antireligious sentiment within official circles without corresponding proof that the authorities were broadly clamping down on unregistered mosques before 1959. (They were not.) Thus, it seems probable that many of the foundations of what Sovietologists viewed as the “parallel Islam” of the 1970s and 1980s were in fact established during a postwar era that featured relatively little in the way of concerted pressure against religious life, both registered and unregistered.

Most of the contributions are united in treating this phenomenon of “parallel Islam” or “covert Muslim communities” as a defining feature of the Brezhnev era, though, again with respect to periodization, it is not clear whether the authors view the mid-1980s as an extension of the Brezhnevian *modus operandi* or something entirely new (P. 13). Although the Dagestani piece laudably rejects the notion that “unofficial” religious figures were

anti-Soviet (P. 133), the pieces do not directly engage the more complicated question of the relationship between unregistered Islamic education and the legalized Muslim administrations. It therefore does not definitively answer the question: was “parallel” Islam really running parallel to the activities of the official bodies, or do the new source materials presented in the volume offer other explanatory paradigms for the phenomenon? Perhaps the two realms of education and knowledge functioned symbiotically? Or perhaps they comprised a larger circle of religious figures, groups, and practices that was not as compartmentalized as the registered/unregistered divide imposed by Soviet religious policy might lead us to believe? More generally, the volume as a whole is divided between two positions concerning “parallel” Islam, one viewing unregistered Islamic education as the surviving refuge of a tradition under assault by the Party-state’s atheistic orientation as well as the social processes of modernization more broadly (the articles on Tatarstan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan), and the other all but portraying a renaissance of madrasas, maktabas, and especially hujras in a landscape that did not make the political and legal costs of engaging in unregistered Islamic educational activity painfully high (the contributions

dealing with Daghestan and Uzbekistan). The limited sources available for the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, as well as methodological problems inherent in the archival and oral materials relied upon in this volume, make it clear that more work is required to determine which position corresponded to the social and political reality in which unregistered Islamic educational activities took place.

Regrettably, in a short review it is impossible to discuss other topics of tremendous importance for the field tackled by the authors. Beyond the issue of periodization substantively discussed here, these questions include the trajectory of Sufi-oriented education as a distinct phenomenon in the Soviet context; the relationship between Sufi masters transmitting chains of initiation to their disciples and Islamic scholars imparting knowledge in non-Sufi settings, where they existed; the question of how Islamic education fared compared to the other major religions of the USSR; the role of women in imparting sacred knowledge in textual and oral form; and the broader historiographical problem of bridging the 1991 divide by exploring the extent to which Islamic education in the post-Soviet space owes a conceptual and organizational debt to precedents established during the Soviet period rather than before it. In conclusion,

this historian of Islam in Soviet Central Asia can only register a debt of intellectual gratitude to the editors and authors for making available to the field a well-researched volume such as this, which surely marks a significant advance for the study of Islam in the USSR and the regions that comprised it, and which one hopes will serve to place this topic in its rightful place more prominently upon the map of Islamic, Russian, and Soviet studies.

