

**ISCKMC 2020****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****MIR-ARAB MADRASAH IN MUSLIM CLERGY PREPARATION  
OF TATAR AUTONOMOUS SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC**

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**Abstract**

The paper studies the significance of the Mir-Arab madrasah as one of the significant factors that contributed to the preservation of Islamic traditions in Tatarstan dominated by atheistic ideology. Based on a wide range of archival documents and other materials the authors of the study examined the basic principles and aspects of Soviet policy regarding religion, showed the forms of existence and survival of Muslim religious associations of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the conditions of massive atheistic propaganda and administrative-repressive measures of power, revealed the forms of continuity of Muslim traditions and worldview values from the older to the younger generation. The study focuses on the role and place of the Bukhara Mir-Arab madrasah in the education of Muslim clergy of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The paper reveals the reasons, according to which the power authorized the resumption of activities of this madrasah in the mid-1940s, shows the structure of the madrasah, its curricula, the quantitative composition of shakirds, their representativeness from the USSR regions, and generally shows the complexities of the madrasah's functioning in conditions of comprehensive control by the authorities. The study paid considerable attention to the main trends in the functioning of the Muslim clergy of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the mid-1940s–1980s, the authors determined the relationship of the position of the clergy and believers with domestic political and foreign policy situation at certain stages of the country's history during the above period.

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*Keywords:* Islam, Soviet State, Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Mir-Arab Madrasah, Muslim education, clergy



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## 1. Introduction

The state of religious education in the Soviet Union and, in particular, Muslim education, as an object of scientific research, has long and deservedly received great attention from humanitarian scientists. In the Soviet period, it could be interpreted only from the point of view of criticism of religion and was considered as an “inevitably endangered” element of society. For scientists of this period, this approach was the only possible for the implementation of their scientific activities. Despite limited possibilities of this approach, Soviet researchers managed to collect rich factual material and, as far as possible, study the state of religious education through the prism of ideological dogmas set by the authorities (Baltanov, 1973; Evdokoimov, 1967; Ishmukhametov, 1979; Iskanov, 1983).

The policy of perestroika in the USSR in the second half of the 1980s, and then the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the liberation of domestic humanitarian science from stereotypes of the Soviet era. The distinguishing features of this period were the use of new scientific approaches in interpreting the events of the past, as well as the access of historians to previously closed archival documents. All these aspects were also characteristic in the analysis of the history of the scientific problem under consideration (Malashenko, 1998; Mukhametshin, 2007; Nabiev, 2002; Yunusova & Bashkortostane, 1999).

Foreign historiography has developed its own certain traditions and approaches to the study of the state of Muslim education in the Soviet state. They were largely caused by the originality of political-ideological and socio-cultural conditions, which, of course, was reflected in the interpretation of historical sources, the assessment of events and processes (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1986; Fletcher, 1973; Nafikov & Nabiev, 2018; Pilkington & Yemelianova, 2003; Rorlich, 2017; Sattarova et al., 2019).

## 2. Problem Statement

One of the most important factors of sociocultural stability and evolutionary development of society is the presence of historically developed mechanisms of continuity of spiritual values. Religious traditions of education and upbringing play a fundamental role. The effectiveness of religion in performing its functions in society is largely caused by political and ideological conditions prevailing in the state. In this regard, a significant scientific interest is the study of the forms and mechanisms of survival and the existence of Islamic traditions of education within the framework of the Soviet political system, where atheism was brought to the level of official ideology.

The ideological postulates of the Bolshevik party determined its extremely negative attitude towards religion, which saw it as its competitor in terms of influencing the consciousness of the population. Therefore, in fact, immediately after coming to power, the Bolsheviks begin to fight its influence. At the same time, great importance was paid to the destruction of the centuries-old system of religious education, as a result of which the vast majority of religious educational institutions of the country were closed, and the clergy – carriers of religious knowledge – were persecuted and repressed.

## 3. Research Questions

The subject of the study is caused by the problem statement. The subject of the study in this case includes both Muslim religious communities, organizations and institutions, as well as state and party

authorities of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that have directly implemented the policy of the Soviet ruling elite regarding religion.

1. The structure and activities of the Mir-Arab Madrasah (Bukhara), which for a long time has been the only higher Muslim educational institution in the Soviet state; the situation of Muslim believers and the clergy of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.
2. The activities of the power structures of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic implemented the policy of the Soviet state regarding religion – authorized Council for Religious Worship (since 1965 – the Council for Religious Affairs) under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Tatar Regional Committee of the CPSU.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the role and significance of the Mir-Arab madrasah (Bukhara) in the education of the Muslim clergy of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the mid-1940s–1980s.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of the study is a civilizational approach. It made it possible to study the subject matter in a multidimensional format, taking into account the influence of political-ideological and socio-cultural factors.

During the study the authors adhered to the principle of historicism. In accordance with it, the studied events and processes were considered inextricably with the factors and realities that formed the essential features of the Soviet era. Chronological, synchronic and comparativistic methods were used to systematize the material and analyze the events. Accordingly, they made it possible to logically arrange the material in the paper, to identify the mutual influence of events that took place in the same period, but locally in different places, to compare them with each other.

#### **6. Findings**

In the first decade of the Soviet power, its attitude to faith was differentiated to a certain extent. For example, most Russian Muslims welcomed the establishment of Soviet power with enthusiasm hoping to improve their situation under the new regime. Indeed, back in the early 1920s the situation of Muslims was relatively strong, Muslim primary schools were functioning, sharia courts operated in a number of places. But in the late 1920s with the beginning of the Great Breakthrough, all confessions of the country were persecuted.

The situation is improving slightly for believers only during the Great Patriotic War, when the authorities were forced to respond to the patriotic activities of religious organizations, somewhat softening their policy towards confessions in the country, including Islam. One of the manifestations of these changes was the education in 1943, in addition to the current Central Religious Administration of

Muslims (with a center in Ufa), three more religious departments of Muslims – the North Caucasus (Buinaksk), Transcaucasia (Baku), as well as Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Tashkent). Thus, the state sought to influence the consciousness of believers in order to further stimulate and strengthen their patriotic activities.

Among the above-mentioned religious departments of Muslims, the Central Asian Religious Administration acquired the status of an informal leader, which was run by the only higher Muslim educational institution in the USSR – the Mir-Arab Madrasah (Bukhara). In this regard, “...other religious departments began to be considered by the authorities as secondary, representing the periphery of “Soviet Islam” (Malashenko, 1998, p. 39). Indeed, in 1946, after an almost 20-year pause, this madrasah began to work again.

In the madrasah program, along with religious educational disciplines, humanities and general development were also presented. Besides, the number of the latter was significantly higher. Thus, in the 1967-1968 academic year, shakirds studied the following religious disciplines: 1) tajwid (sophisticated and artistic form of the recitation of the Qur'an), 2) tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), 3) hadith (sayings or customs of Muhammad); humanities and general education: 1) spoken speech in Arabic and literature, 2) grammar of the Arabic language, 3) Russian language, 4) calligraphy of Arabic writing, 5) economic geography of foreign countries, 6) USSR history, 7) social studies, 8) physical education (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 92).

It should be noted that by the time the madrasah resumed its work, the religious life of Muslims of the Soviet state, including the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, was concentrated in the family, it was here that the continuity of knowledge and worldview values of Islam was carried out from the generation that received a full-fledged Muslim education in the pre-revolutionary period to generations whose mentality was formed in conditions of massive propaganda of atheistic ideology.

Over the years of Soviet power, the “taqiya” principle widespread in Islam, which allowed a Muslim in the interests of his denomination, to hide his true beliefs, thereby avoiding inevitable problems with state authorities and public organizations, thus remaining outside the influence of communist ideology, was particularly important.

Unregistered Muslim communities were provided with the so-called “mosqueless” mullahs, who received their religious education before 1917, well understood the dogmas of Islam and its rites. On an all-Union scale in the 1960s the Council for Religious Cults took into account 2346 unofficially operating mullahs (Roy, 1998), in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic their number was 366 (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 13). It can be said that until the 1960s in almost every Tatar village there was a person or group of people who were able not only to hold a festive service in all the canons of Islam, to perform rites, but also to appropriately explain to believers the narrative meaning of certain suras and ayats.

However, during these years, the number of such mullahs naturally decreased significantly. This inevitable process, against the background of the destroyed centuries-old system of Muslim education, led to the fact that the leadership of the religious life of the Tatars passed into the hands of the mullahs, who mainly had the minimal knowledge of religious dogma. In this regard, since the 1960s, the main criterion

by which the Tatars defined themselves as believers was their fulfillment of the rites of Islam, while its worldview was sidelined.

Getting the opportunity to study in the only madrasah on the territory of the USSR was fraught with many difficulties: future shakirds had to undergo numerous checks, questionnaires and interviews with the representatives of state authorities. There were periods when for a long time there were not a single native of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic among the students of the Mir-Arab madrasah. In general, the quantitative composition of shakirds was dominated by immigrants from the Uzbek SSR. For example, in the 1967–1968 academic year, 50 shakirds studied in this madrasah, of which 25 people from the Uzbek SSR, 7 from the Kyrgyz SSR, 5 from the Tajik SSR, 5 from the Kazakh SSR, 1 from the Turkmen SSR, 7 from the RSFSR (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 92).

At the turn of the 1970–1980s the situation with training personnel for the Muslim clergy significantly improved in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. This was largely due to the activities of Talgat Tajutdin (in 1973–1980 – imam khatib of the Marjani mosque), who managed to build constructive relations with the representatives of the authorities and used this fact in the interests of believers. Four shakirds from the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic studied in the Bukhara Mir-Arab Madrasah in the late 1970s (for comparison, in the same period only one shakird from Bashkiria studied at this educational institution). In addition to sending shakirds to study, the executive body of the Marjani mosque requested an improvement in their financial situation by increasing cash contributions to the DUMES fund. This initiative was supported by local authorities. In a cover letter regarding the above petition, the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic drew attention to the fact that “due to the fact that the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic except T.S. Tazeev (i.e. Talgat Tajutdin, since 1980 – the mufti of the Religious Administration of Muslims of the European part of the USSR and Siberia, since 1992 – the Central Religious Administration of Muslims of Russia) there are no imams who graduated from madrasah, and the amount of work to receive foreign Muslim delegations is not only increasing, but also urgently requires further improvement, I find it advisable to support the request of the Kazan Mosque and ask the Council for Religious Affairs to settle the issue positively” (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 93).

It is necessary to clarify here that in the late 1960s-1970s the practice was widely developed in the republic, when the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was a place of demonstration of the loyal attitude of the authorities to religion in general and to Islam in particular. Thus, in September 1969, a Muslim delegation of the Republic of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) visited Kazan; in October 1970, delegates of the international conference *For Unity and Cooperation in the Struggle for Peace*, held in Tashkent, arrived in the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic; in November 1972 – the Secretary General at the Office of the President of the State of Togo; in August 1974 – a delegation of Muslim figures from foreign countries who participated in a conference in Samarkand dedicated to the 1200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ismail Bukhari; in June 1977 – participants of the Moscow World Conference *Religious Figures for Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Fair Relations between Peoples*; in August 1978 – Muslim delegation of the state of Chad; in October 1979 – Turkish Muslim delegation; in 1980 – participants in the Tashkent conference *The 15<sup>th</sup> Century of the Hijra*

*Should Become a Century of Peace and Friendship Between Peoples*, etc. (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 73). During a visit to the republic, the members of foreign delegations from Muslim countries certainly visited the Marjani mosque, met with its imam, after which they left an entry in the book of honored guests that “the Soviet government does not interfere with the activities of religious organizations”. For example, during the visit of the delegates of the 1980 international Tashkent conference to Kazan, the chairman of the Muslim association Gayana said: “We were convinced that your people live well, there are many believers in mosques, and no one persecutes them for this” (RT SciCenter, 2012, Case 41). The religious organizations tried to use the desire of the authorities to conform to the image of a state where freedom of conscience and religion were truly respected in order to solve their pressing problems, among which education was one of the major ones. It is noteworthy that in the late 1970s-early 1980s, the future mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan studied in the Mir-Arab madrasah – Galiullin Gabdula Safovich (studied in Mir-Arab in 1978–1983, in 1992–1998 – the mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan) and Iskhakov Gusman Gumarovich (studied in the madrasah in 1978–1982, in 1998–2011 – the mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, in general, due to hostile political, ideological and sociocultural attitude to religion in the Soviet period there was a dramatic shift in religious educational system. In the context of forced closure of most traditional religious educational institutions, the process of religious education and upbringing moved to the family and domestic level, where it was almost inaccessible to the control and influence of state and party authorities. Despite the certain simplification of religious education, this factor largely made it possible to survive and preserve religious values dominated by atheistic ideology. Some watering-down of the state policy regarding religion during the Great Patriotic War led to the opening of the Mir-Arab Madrasah, which for a long time was the only Muslim educational institution in the USSR. In the 1960s in view of the natural decline of the Muslim clergy, who received full religious education before 1917, the question of the latter became especially relevant. In line with political and ideological conditions of end of 1960s-1980s, the Muslim clergy of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic managed to significantly improve the situation by sending its representatives to study in Mir-Arab.

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