

## ISSUES OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGION IN THE PE- RIODICALS OF SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN PERIOD (1920-1937)

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### Abstract:

The article aims to reveal the significance of the issue of Islamic religion in Soviet Kazakhstan. Furthermore, it gives analyzes of a number of papers published in periodicals such as Aq Zhol, The Lenin Tuyi between 1920 and 1937. By this, the authors demonstrated the crucial role of those periodicals in the reflection of social, political and spiritual changes of that period.

Keywords: lash intellectuals, anti-religion propaganda, Islamic religion, periodicals, Soviet Kazakhstan.

## CUESTIONES DE LA RELIGIÓN ISLÁMICA EN LOS PERIÓDICOS DEL PERÍODO KAZAJSTÁN SOVIÉTICO (1920-1937)

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## Resumen.

El artículo pretende revelar el significado de la cuestión de la religión islámica en el Kazajstán soviético. Además, analiza una serie de artículos publicados en publicaciones periódicas como *Aq Zhol*, *The Lenin Tui* entre 1920 y 1937. Con esto, los autores demostraron el papel crucial de esas publicaciones periódicas en el reflejo de los cambios sociales, políticos y espirituales de esa época. período.

Palabras clave: alash intelectuales, propaganda anti-religión, religión islámica, publicaciones periódicas, Kazajstán soviético.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The problem of Islamic religion in Soviet Kazakhstan is one of the crucial issues that needs to be revised by applying contemporary approach. The decree, issued on 23rd of January of 1918 “On Separation of Church from State and School from Church”, was the first legislative act of the Soviet authorities in the sphere of religion. This legislative act was incorporated into the first Soviet constitution adopted on July 10, 1918, at the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, to the Constitution of the RSFSR and to the first constitution of the USSR adopted at the Second Congress of the All-Union Congress of the Councils in Moscow in January 1924.

In fact, this decree, which legitimized the separation of religion from the state and from school, and other Soviet legislation on religious issues initiated substantial limitation of the influence of Islam in society and led to the breakdown of religious processes and to the endless stagnation of religious activity.

### 2 METHODOLOGY

Dialectical method, as a religious-historical methodology, was applied in the article to conduct the complex analysis of the essence of Islam reflected in periodicals in Soviet Kazakhstan, which ensures understanding of the social and spiritual-cultural situation of that time. Along with this method, there were used following methods: comparative and systematic analysis, historical-logical, comparative method, synthesis and generalization.

### 3 RELEVANCE OF THE ISSUE

These issues were not left behind attention by Alash intellectuals, who were ‘people’s eyes and tongue’. Those intellectuals were similar to the mirror of society, who reflected everything through periodicals. For example, in 1917-

1919, the decree on religion signed by Bolshevik members was published in Saryarka periodical, issued in Semipalatinsk with the chief editorship of Kh. Gabbasov. That decree was signed by Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V.I. Lenin, by Commissioners Rudnitsky, Alfasov, Tartuski, Shlichter, Proshyan, Mikhailovsky and others (The Bolshevik Government's Decree on Religion, 2004). The Alash people, who struggled against the ideology and atheistic policy, also responded to this tendency and expressed their opinion through periodicals. Those, who were involved in the production of famous periodical Aikap, argued that the Kazakh state should be based on Islamic law, and intellectuals based on periodical Kazakh were interested in keeping both the Islamic religion and traditions alive and encouraged the public to keep up with the European system. This is worth to emphasize that the issue of Islamic religion was presented as a separate chapter in the Alash party program.

#### 4 MAIN PART

Even though a major part of intellectuals did not practice Islamic religion, most of them considered preservation of religious belief as one of the methods of preservation of national identity. The evidence of this can be found in periodicals of those times. For instance, the national enlightener, the reformer of Kazakh language Akhmet Baitursynov, emphasized in his article *Bastauyish mektep* (Elementary school) published in the paper *Kazakh*, that the Arabic alphabet was introduced to Kazakh people through religion. Hence, the writing system based on religion will not disappear unless that religion is lost (The Bolshevik Government's Decree on Religion, 2004). This assumption made by Baitursynov clearly demonstrates the position of Alash intellectuals. In fact, Alash intellectuals did not remain silent at that threatening period to religion. Under the leadership of A. Baitursynov, they took serious actions and even initiated the foundation of Kazakh muftiate under the government of Alashorda. The newspaper *Kazakh*, which reached national independent status with 3000 circulations, which used to issue about 8000 copies in each volume, which publicized materials from February 1913 to September 1918, which was the most popular at that time, promoted and discussed in society problems of land distribution, issues concerned with education and religion-related problems. This statement can be proved by the articles published in the paper such as M. Tevkelev's *Musilman fraktsiasinin khati* (Letter of the Muslim fraction), *Khazret Sultan* (Khazret Sultan) and *Mufti saylau* (Mufti elections) by M. Dula

tov, Zher zhumisina din zhumisin qistirmalau (When land-related issues are disturbed by religion) by A. Baitursynov, Musilman siezi (Muslim congress) by A. Bokeikhanov and others.

Islam related issues were often raised in Kazakhstan from December 7, 1920, to 1926 in the periodical *Aq Zhol*, which was a weekly press office of the Turkestan Executive Committee, with three issues per week. The *Aq Zhol* periodical, which was initially based in Tashkent, was moved to Shymkent on the 19th of June in 1925 from its 577th issue, with the initiation of the Syrdarya Executive and Party Committee.

The *Aq Zhol* newspaper, which could find its way during harsh censorship of Bolshevik regime and expressed people's opinion both directly and insinuating, *Turkistan Ualiyatining Gazeti* (1870-1882), which was considered as the leader of periodicals in Kazakh language, *Dala Ualiyatining Gazeti* (1888-1902), which was considered as the second place periodical in Kazakh, *Aikap* periodical, which was published in Troitsk in 1911-1915 and issued 89 volumes in total, appendix *Serke* to the Tatar newspaper *Fikr*, which was published in Petersburg in the 1920s – all were worthy successors of the newspaper *Kazakh*. *Aq Zhol* periodical along with periodicals such as *Saryarka*, *Zhas Azamat*, *Birlik Tuyi*, *Tazhy*, *Zhas Kairat*, *Ushqyn*, *Kedei Sozi*, *Qyzyl Tu*, *Abay*, *Sholpan*, *Sana*, *Tan* and others had crucial role on delivering social situation in the country and in the propagation of the Soviet government's policy to the public. Therefore, we may assume that the burden and influence of periodicals in promoting the identity of the nation was crucial. We can even argue that *Aq Zhol* was one of the main sources about the history of Soviet Kazakhstan. Individuals such as S. Kozhanov, K. Kuletov, S. Ospanov, S. Aspandiyarov, S. Sadvakasov, I. Toqtybayev, N. Torequlov, T. Bayqasqauly, M. Qaiyipnazar, and M. Dulatov, Zh. Aimauytov, M. Zhumabaev, K. Kemengerov, A. Yusupov and others contributed to the development of the journal in different years to publish the most qualified materials and to raise the periodical's authority among people and to make it a major ideological instrument. They strictly followed national interests and expressed the bravest opinions on different issued. As the result of such dedication, I. Stalin sent a special note regarding the political section of the periodical *Aq Zhol* on 29th of May in 1925 to the Bureau of the Kazakh Regional Party Committee (Yessenkaraqyzy, 2011). As such, on June 10, 1925, the newspaper was decided to be reorganized and to be transformed to the provincial newspaper, which would be engaged in the propagation of the Soviet ideology. Due to these changes the paper had to remain silent on most issues. In fact, this periodical was one of a few papers publishing articles about the issue of Islamic religion in Soviet Kazakhstan. The editorial staff espe

cially paid high attention to the problems contradicting to Islamic values and brought them to the public debate. As such, the article Pork tax criticized the Soviet authorities' blatant initiatives by atheist leaders, who were not familiar with the local ethos, as follows:

“... Two or three days passed. We found following words at the telegram from a member of the chamber committee of the Shymkent from district N.:

“When comrade Krivoshapov, head of the food committee of the Shymkent district, distributed meat tax, he imposed 300 pork per each Kazakh bolis (head of administrative division) of Shymkent. They did not say at least “If you do not have pork, take it from Russians, but find it anyway”. Only the last point says: “if you do not have (!) any, then you can give lamb instead of pork”.

...Up to this time being in the position of the official of the Soviet government I have never heard the order from the food committee to collect pork from Kazakh people and to force poor Kazakh people to give their the last sheep - what a shame or injustice it is! It is obvious that if the relevant authorities, commissioners do not take under control this situation and do not rescue the people from the Krivoshapovs and Liventsovs, illiterate Kazakhs-Kyrgyz labour workers will not understand Soviet government” (Pork tax, 1920).

Indeed, this despotism of the local activists caused anger both of Aq Zhol editorial staff and of other Alash intellectuals. Imposing people with pork was a clear denial of the mentality, traditions, and spiritual values of the local people. Hence, Aq Zhol editorial published in the next issue another article titled Shoshqasi qurghir (Damn pork), demonstrating their serious intention concerning this issue. As a result, with the intervention of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz section at TurkTsic, initiators of this disrespectful tax were dismissed and were liable under the law. This fact approves high reputation of Aq Zhol, its potential to deliver people's message and the civic positions of editorial staff engaged in the publication of this periodical.

In our opinion due to the special dedication to nationality, Kazakh language and the religion, on December 15, 1923, the newspaper's circulation reached from 12,000, which was approved number by Republican authority, to 21,690 copies. Aq Zhol also provided a plenty of support to the ordinary citizens by delivering their message timely at those atheistic community times. For instance, S. Bahridinov wrote in his Zhauap Khat (Answer Letter) a response to the article Saldeli Kommunist Endi Tasbikhqa Umtildi (The Communist in Salde (Islamic headwear) is Now in Need of Beads) published in the 145th issue of Aq Zhol.

It is evident that many periodicals circulated in a narrow circle, avoiding topics of national interest. We will not emphasize too much if we state that Aq Zhol periodical was in the list of an exception for this tendency. In general, all Kazakh intellectuals involved in Aq Zhol were those, who were in favour of Islam. On the contrary, they all supported and protected it. If you take at least only Torekulov's statements, you will not find any negative comments concerning religion. For example, in an article *Islam zhane Kommunistizm* (Islam and Communism) the author emphasized on the history of Islam's emergence and its spreading and mentioned that we should not negate the role of Islam in making people closer to each other and its influence in maintaining unity among people. The main thing is that we should never forget the rule written on the Soviet legislation that the religion should not restrict an individual's conscience and freedom of belief (Torekulov, 1921).

However, during this period, anti-religious propaganda work was distorted, and religious education was forbidden in mosques and schools, and special religious schools ceased to exist. Aiming to weaken the influence of Islam religious organizations were stopped to be registered since 1925 and in 1929 state authorities deprived adherents of religions of religious buildings. Thus, since the end of the 20s, the Soviet power has increased the fight against religion. 101 mosques and churches were closed in 1937, and 125 mosques were closed in 1939 in Kazakhstan. Religious worshipers were taken into custody and supervised by internal affairs agencies with the whole family. Those under supervision were deprived of the right to elect and be elected.

Even though the new Constitution of the USSR of 1936 abolished the religious freedom and the freedom of religion, the new constitution did not guarantee the freedom of conscience, and religious propaganda was forbidden. By 1937, when the measures to punish the party and the Soviet workers, and the millions of innocent people were at the peak of the culmination, religious individuals and law-abiding religious leaders were also included to the list of people who were against Stalin's government (Kapellar, 2003).

In the main article of the newspaper *Pravda*, dated May 7, 1937, *Dinge qarsy ugıt-nasikhat* (The anti-religion propaganda), all central, regional, district and other types of periodicals were obliged to publish anti-religious propaganda articles periodically and to

strengthen struggle with religion by publishing anti-religious information. The Soviet Kazakh press was also involved in this policy. As such, in the article *Dinge Qarsy kuresti meilinshe kusheteyik* (Let's enhance the fight against religions), published in North Kazakhstan's *Lenin Tuyi* newspaper in 1937, someone as Zhaksybay wrote: "In some districts and collective farms of Stalin district, the mullahs and popes dispatched manuscripts to teach people religious traditions. They intended to build a mosque and tried to propagate religion" (*Flag of Lenin*, 1937). From the author's call to prevent any activities of the 'enemies', we may assume that Soviet authorities reinforced the repression of religious servants. Indeed, non-governmental organizations in that direction were formed, professional experts in anti-religious propaganda were prepared, atheist conferences and seminars, anti-religious holidays were organized during Soviet times. Mass media means were widely engaged in the propaganda work. In 1917-1941 there were published about 40 anti-religious magazines and 35 anti-religious newspapers in the USSR. The largest circulation among them belonged to *Antireligioznik* (Anti-Religious Paper), *Bezbozhnik* (Godless), *Voisntvuiushii Ateism* (Atheism as a Warrior). Since 1926 to 1927, the centers and circles of atheists were created in Kazakhstan with their divisions in district and city level.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

To sum up we could see the evidence of struggle against the religion in the form of repression by the end of the 1920s. This was supported by official legislation in the Constitution of the USSR which legitimized privatization of the lands of religious organizations; by depriving religious organizations of rights as a legal entity; the loss of electoral rights of religious leaders and individuals; the closure and destruction of religious buildings. Although repressive measures were equally applicable to all confessions, those repressions could not fully undermine society from the public consciousness of the religious world and establish a total atheistic society. The result of the 1937 census shows that the idea of creating a secular socialistic society by the Bolsheviks failed. Therefore, we argue that it is time to analyze and duly evaluate articles about Islam in the periodical press in Soviet Kazakhstan periods.

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