**Sheikh Khoja Zunnun Zupinov: fate and mission**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this work is to show the alternative forms of the existence of Islam in Kazakhstan during the Soviet period. No matter how rare and timid manifestations of religiosity, they still came to the surface and found people who could feed it and respond to persistent needs in faith and service. This problem is already being researched in the academic community, but with more emphasis on the mass consciousness, we want to focus on the representative of the informal Islamic clergy, who dared to resist the benevolent and embellished image of harmonious relations between religious associations and the authorities in Kazakhstan.

We used several documents from the archives and several interviews with the descendants of Zunnun Zupinov to collect information about this religious “oppositionist”.

The life and activity of Khoja Zunnun (1904–1985), the khatib-imam of the Dzhambul city mosque (Aulie-Ata), coincides with a difficult and long historical period when the official attitude towards Islam changed from tolerant to repressive with greater or lesser intensity. Under these conditions, Khoja Zunnun, who had already passed through the Stalinist camp, continued to actively advocate for “real” Islam as opposed to the positions of “Imams of the Communist Party”. The proposed hypothesis is that the harsh condemnation and rejection of official Islam, sponsored and controlled by state authorities, put Sufism in the position of the Muslim ideological opposition, as has happened more than once in the past, but the activity of Zunnun Zupinov demonstrates that the general complication of religious life, accompanied by deep ideological and spiritual quest, hard ideological pressure gave impetus to the development of Sufism in its rather popular than philosophical-ascetic mystical forms.

**Introduction**

The attitude towards the representatives of the *Khoja (Qozha*) clan in Kazakhstan, as well as throughout Central Asia, has always been special - respectful and recognizing the holiness of the “descendants of the prophet Muhammad family.” Some scholars believe that the genealogy of the steppe clergy was not based on biological kinship, but on the spiritual heritage from teacher to students (Zhabagin et al. 2017). In any case, representatives of those families were considered by believers to be ‘*Ishans*’ and ‘*Pirs*’, that are the highest layers of the Muslim clergy, and they also considered themselves “Sufis and spiritual elite.” The life and work of Khoja Zunnun (1904-1985), the khatib-imam of the city mosque of Dzhambul (Auliye-Ata), fell on a difficult and long historical era, which covered the long Soviet period when the official attitude to Islam changed from tolerant to repressive with greater or lesser intensity. Under these conditions, Khoja Zunnun, having already passed through the Stalinist camp, continued to actively advocate for “real” Islam as opposed to the positions of “imams - members of the Communist Party” and at the same time was not afraid to send letters directly to the Secretary-General of the CPSU with a request for restoration and opening for public visits, the Khoja Ahmed Yassawi Mosque in Turkestan.

The proposed hypothesis is that the sharp condemnation and rejection of official Islam, sponsored and managed by state Soviet authorities, put Sufism in the position of the Muslim ideological opposition, as has happened more than once in the past, but the activity of Zunnun Zupinov demonstrates that a general complication of religious life accompanied by in-depth ideological and spiritual searches, harsh ideological pressure gave impetus to the development of Sufism in its more popular than philosophical-ascetic and mystical forms.

As Russian islamologist Stanislav Prozorov notes, “In many regions of the Muslim world (in particular, in Central Asia, in the North Caucasus), it is in the form of Sufi ideology that Islam has become ‘their own’ religion.” (Prozorov 2006).

The religious policy of the Soviet government was characterized by variability and voluntarism, depended on the tasks and interests of a particular “historical stage”. If there was a need for broad support from the masses, the attitude to religion, ethnic and historical characteristics of peoples became tolerant and neutral. However, the growing sense of strength and unity around the slogans and values of communist ideology encouraged state and party functionaries handle without mittens religion, popular beliefs, ways of life, and customs, especially during periods of persecution, repression, and the fight against dissent. Decades of militant atheism gave way to years of “thaw” and neutrality, and again to active “uprooting” of religious consciousness.

So, in the first years of Soviet power, religious freedom seemed to be promised by the new government along with other freedoms and rights to all working people of the East. Moreover, the government supported certain initiatives of the clergy, and the clergy, in turn, declared their loyalty to state structures and politics. Soviet power in Central Asia needed widespread support, for example, calling on the masses to mobilization work, that is, working in wartime conditions, building roads, factories, carrying out various duties, requisitions and campaigns. Representatives of the clergy not only actively participated in the events of the Soviet government but often took part in official bodies for their implementation. Paradoxically, along with the physical destruction of part of the clergy, the destruction of religious buildings, the development of atheistic propaganda, special bodies were created to manage the religious life of the population, such as the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan ( Dukhovnoye upravleniye musul'man Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana) - SADUM, in 1943.

Nevertheless, as opposition to official clericalism, there was ‘*Ishanism*’, an unofficial clergy - which absorbed, along with Sufi views, elements of traditional social order. ‘*Khojas’, ‘Ishans’, ‘sheikhs’* or ‘*shirakshys*’ (caretakers of Muslim shrines), as well as ‘*duanas*’ (dervishes), ‘*taups*’ (healers) were respected by Kazakhs (Mukhtarova 2006).

The word ‘*Khoja*’ has slightly different meanings in Persian and Arabic, however, among the Kazakhs, ‘*Khoja*’ had the meaning of a competent and enlightened person, spiritual authority. According to Muslim genealogies, the origin of *Khojas* gave them the right to a special status and a certain place in socio-political life (Alpysbes 2006). However, this social status required them to be responsible and persistent even in conditions unfavorable for the existence of religious practices and religion in general. It would be a mistake to consider them to be people divorced from reality, completely immersed in mystical experiences, living in isolation from society. The times of Sufism in its classical form have passed, in any case, in Kazakhstan of the Soviet era. They had to use argumentation and a language that was understandable both to the ‘*murids*’, ordinary followers of the religion, and to the Soviet bureaucracy, talk about high and low, spiritual and material, depending on the audience, survive in conditions of political repression and militant atheism.

**Methods**

The article is written not so much in line with religious studies as historical ones. I found some documents from the state archives and conducted several interviews with the descendants of Imam Khoja Zunnun Zupinov to collect information about the life and work of this representative of the Sufi tradition, which give an idea of the existence of unofficial options for the implementation of religious discourse in Soviet Kazakhstan.

**Main body**

According to information from the “Victim of Political Terror in the USSR” Database of the Department of the National Security Committee (Departament komiteta natsional'noy bezopasnosti) of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Dzhambul Region under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Zunnun Zupinov, one of the representatives of the Ishan dynasty of Southern Kazakhstan, was born in 1904, in the Dzhambul region, Talas district. Before his arrest, he lived in the city of Dzhambul, where he worked as the imam of the City Mosque. He was arrested on November 17, 1953, by the Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Departament Ministerstva vnutrennikh del) in the Dzhambul region. Sentenced by the Dzhambul regional court on December 29, 1953, under article 59-7 of the Criminal Code for two years in prison. He was rehabilitated on January 6, 1989, by the Supreme Court of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic ( Verkhovnyy Sud Kazakhskoy SSR) for the absence of corpus delicti (Memorial 2016).

According to the opinions of contemporaries and members of his large family, Zunnun Zupinov was a charismatic figure, an extraordinary person, who, having received a local education, had never traveled abroad to study in Arab countries. The mosque of Kara-Khoja, father of Zunnun Zupinov, built at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by local Kazakhs from the *Oyyk* clan, is located in the village of Bestam (Sailbek). According to descendants, Kara-Khoja became an imam of this mosque from the age of 14 thanks to his knowledge of the Qur'an and the canons of Islam. By the age of 15-16, Khoja Zunnun had memorized the entire Qur'an and became a ‘qari’. In the thirties, when the Stalinist repressions began, Khoja Zunnun as a deeply religious person, trained by two teachers, the Sufis of Naqshbandiyya, whose names, unfortunately, were not preserved, had an ‘ijaza’ from one of them and was forced to hide. His family went to the desert areas of Talas, then Moyynkum districts, and in 1938 he changed his surname, taking the name of his mother. Later he got a job as a fireman of a steam locomotive in the Dzhambul depot. During the war years 1941-45, he proved himself so professionally trained specialist that the commission of the military commissariat, which arrived with an inspection, appointed him a steam locomotive driver, and he worked in this position until 1948.

The above document of the Department of the National Security Committee noted that he was illiterate, although some later documents indicated “secondary education”. However, Muslim and Sufi education did not coincide with secular and Soviet education. Russian Islamic scholar A. Bustanov observes: “A person may dream something - and he will become a completely legitimate Sufi sheikh, for example, or some important Sufi authority, because he dreamed, say, Najmuddin Kubra, who said: “My son, you are chosen!” And this is not a joke, this is described in books.” (Holin 2017).

Zunnun Zupinov also had mystical dreams, in addition to the chain of teachers who transmitted knowledge to him, ‘*Silsila*’, ascending to Abu Bakr and through him to the Prophet. According to the story, by the age of forty, he had a dream on the night of Thursday to Friday. Four in white robes come, lay him on the table, open his chest, he sees with horror his insides in the mirror. They cleanse the heart, then put a light in. Then they say: “Get up.” He gets up with difficulty. He feels that his chest is full of ‘*ayats*’. Exactly a week later they come again to say: “We put in the light so that you would not hide it, but go to the people and interpret the Qur'an.” Thirty years after that, he preached. But, as he bitterly said, few people returned to Islam. He called, but in such terrible times, everyone was afraid. He had eleven children from his first wife, two adopted children of his brother, eleven children from his second wife, but even they feared the religious authority and reputation of their father, which could harm and, indeed, adversely affected their careers during the years of Soviet rule. His grandson mentions this in an interview with the New Region newspaper in the years after Kazakhstan gained independence.

His further fate can be traced based on secret documents and reports to the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Sovet po religioznym kul'tam pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR). The controlling and punishing functions of this body are described in some studies (Soskovets 2008).

In particular, in the Information of the local representative of the Council for Religious Cults for the Dzhambul region of the Kazakh SSR, Y. Nuraliev sent to the Chairman of the Council I.V. Polyansky (Russian Perspectives on Islam 18846) dated August 27, 1948, he reports that there is a group of registered communities of Muslims in the city of Dzhambul. “The mullah (imam) of this mosque is Zufinov Zunin (as written in the original document), who lives in the city of Dzhambul on the Bezymyannaya street, No. 9, Kazakh by nationality, secondary education ... About 800 people are attending a mosque in the days of ‘*Zhuma-namaz’*, and more than 3,000 people participated in the days of ‘*Uraza Bairam’*. The mosque has a capacity of 800 people, most of them are old people. “

The same official in an information report dated October 18, 1948, indicates that in the Dzhambul region there are 3 registered communities: in the Muslim community, where Zufinov Zunin, the son of the former mullah, is the mullah of the mosque, the number of Muslim believers is large, mainly during the holidays, they do not even fit inside the mosque. Moreover, on the days of these holidays, Muslims of neighboring regions (an estimated number of believers are 3000-3500 people during the holidays) participate. For a more complete picture, he reports that in the mosque of Merke district, … the number of believers is about 50-70 people, and about 100-150 people participate on holidays and concludes: “In Merke district the influence of the Muslim religion on the surrounding region is not so active “ (Russian Perspectives on Islam 18847).

The process of growing popularity and attracting believers went so fast that the SADUM assessed it as an increasing competition of the Sufi imam and the threat of losing the authority of official Islam. The attitude towards ‘*ishans*’ in Soviet times was always wary and suspicious. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan issued a number of special decisions (fatwas) (for example, “On the incompatibility of ‘Islamism’ and ‘*muridism*’ with Islamic dogmas and Shari ‘at” dated 1952), in which it denounced Islamism, recognized it as “an innovation” and “delusion”, and also instructed the official imams to fight *Ishans*. And although the Russian scientist S. Abashin believes that this decision did not have serious consequences, since the muftis of the Spiritual Administration and large mosques were headed, as a rule, by the same descendants of the famous Ishan dynasties (Abashin 2006), a certain struggle was waged against competitors, as can be seen from the information of N. Aitmagambetov, an official of the Council for Religious Cults in the Dzhambul region of the Kazakh SSR, addressed to the Chairman of the Council for Religious Cults under the USSR Council of Ministers I.V. Polyansky about the religious movement, (”Russian Perspectives on Islam18857).

In the report for the II quarter of 1950 (We tried to keep the original style) it is reported that for about a year in the Muslim community (mosque) of Dzhambul, disagreements and discontent occur between believers, expressed in the fact that a group of religious Uzbeks, former suspended members of the executive committee, led by a former  Imam Abdullah Abdulkhov in the amount of 28 people, filed an application to the Spiritual Administration of Central Asia. Their statement accuses Imam Zupinov Zunin of the fact that:

“1) Imam Zupinov, participating in a liturgical meeting, talks and associates government policy with religious propaganda, takes time and talks a little about religious propaganda (apparently, the authors want to say that the imam speaks more about politics than religion).

 2) Imam Zupinov forbade the rite ‘dauyr alu’, in simple terms, for example: before the funeral rite, 2 mullahs “buy” all the sins of the deceased committed to death. For this, the mullahs receive livestock from the family of the deceased, or livestock and money, or household items, etc. Imam Zupinov argued that the Qur'an does not say anywhere about ‘dauyr alu’.

3) Imam Zupinov allegedly signaled to local authorities about (necessity) the termination of the mahalla (parish) mullahs. “

In a statement, they ask the SADUM to remove Imam Zupinov and appoint an imam from among the Uzbeks to replace him. The official describes in detail the arrival of a representative from the Spiritual Administration of Central Asia Fazilkhoja Sadykkhojaev to discuss the statement. “He (Sadykkhojaev), essentially not understanding the situation, raised the issue for discussion at the general meeting of believers. When parsing the application at the general meeting, the majority refused their signatures in the application and only 10 out of 28 people confirmed their authorship.

The meeting was attended by about 1,500 people. There was a dispute (disagreement): the vast majority of believers supported Imam Zupinov, the remaining groups of people, with the support of the representative of the SADUM Sadykkhojaev, left the meeting. Arriving in Tashkent, Sadykkhojaev appoints Myktybaev Sarsenbay, a 60-year-old man, a former imam of the Sayram Muslim community of the South Kazakhstan region, as imam of the Dzhambul mosque, temporarily leaving Imam Zupinov Zunin as an assistant and Osmanhojaev Akhmetkoja as deputy imam. The latter was engaged in preaching in an unregistered mahalla mosque and at the same time is the head of the group (in favor of) dismissing Imam Zupinov. In 1949, I called Osmanhojaev and categorically prohibited illegal actions in an illegal prayer house. After that, he closed the house of worship.” Thus, in the mosque of Dzhambul, there were 2 imams and a deputy Imam. ” Then an official of the Council for Religious Cults concludes: “The policy of the clergy of Central Asia and local Uzbeks of Dzhambul believers is that having removed Imam Zupinov, they want to give a wide range of all kinds of (wrong) forms of religious rites.”

These reports allow us to conclude that Khoja Zunnun Zupinov, as the head of the Muslim community - Ishan and the imam of the mosque, was guided by high moral responsibility and godly fear. According to family members, everyone around him particularly noted his honesty and selfless service to the community. It was modesty and asceticism that provided him with the authority and trust of the local population. Therefore, the penetration of the spirit of profit and money-grubbing among mosque officials should inevitably provoke his opposition, which was noted in the report of N.Aitmagambetov, an official of the Council for Religious Cults.

In the 1950s, the existence of Islamic authorities recognized by the Soviet government, and authorities not fully recognized, was not such a rare occurrence, as well as conflicts between them using means non-traditional for the religious sphere - appeals to public opinion, complaints to higher secular and religious institutions, intrigues, and scandals. Even if the Sufi *murshids*, to which Khoja Zunnun attributed himself, partially lived in a completely different world, this did not save them from the concerns of everyday life, relations with the authorities, problems of survival, economically and even physically.    The hostility and opposition of the SADUM nevertheless led to the removal of Khoja Zunnun from the imam’s post, although for some time he tried to achieve justice and defend his right to preach from the official ‘*minbar*’.

In the Information Report of the official of the Council for Religious Cults for the Dzhambul Region for the III quarter of 1953, he informs the Moscow authorities that after deregistration, with the support of a separate group of believers in the community, Zupinov is currently petitioning the SADUM and the regional executive committee to keep him in the post. “I called to Zupinov and the entire executive body of the community and explained to them that the Soviet authorities had nothing to do with the appointment and removal of the imam. This issue is the responsibility of the *mufti*. However, Zupinov, relying on support from believers in the community, does not want to recognize and obey the decisions of the SADUM.

A week later, believers make a decision and send dozens of people to me to the regional executive committee to apply for his continued employment.  I have repeatedly demanded that Zupinov cease his actions immediately. Finally, he was forced to turn to the *mufti*. On August 24, 10 people from supporters along with Zupinov left for Tashkent. It was at this time that the *mufti* was on a business trip to Moscow. They waited in Tashkent for his arrival. On September 26, the *mufti* and all SADUM workers return to Tashkent. On the third day, Zupinov and representatives were in the *mufti*’s office. The *mufti* categorically refused to have Zupinov as an imam in the mosque. September 30, Zupinov came to me and said that he leaves the mosque, takes away the family who lived in the courtyard of the mosque. On the third day, September 2 (apparently, it is a mistake, October 2), about 1000 people gathered in the mosque at the ‘*Zhuma-namaz’*, Friday prayer. Zupinov and Kasymov again speak and say that “we were with the *mufti.* The *mufti* refused to return us to previous positions, therefore we will appeal to you, if you, the majority of believers will support us, then without your consent SADUM has no right remove us from our positions.” Then all those present voted to preserve the former leader of the mosque and community. They said that “we don’t need another imam except for Zupinov,” etc.

Imam Akhlitdin Shamsudinov, appointed by the SADUM, a former ‘*shakirt*’ (graduate) of the madrasah, who studied for 2 years in Bukhara, from the Turkestan region of the South Kazakhstan, an ethnic Uzbek, arrived in Dzhambul at the end of July. On July 23, Shamsudinov was registered as the official imam of the Dzhambul city mosque. Since the day Shamsudinov arrived in Dzhambul, the majority of Kazakh community believers have opposed him, they do not allow him to go to the mosque and do not want to accept him, motivating that SADUM “has removed our Kazakh imam and wants to install an Uzbek, and secondly, he does not know religious issues at all . “

Further, an official of the Council characterizes the activities of the new imam, who has not gained authority either among believers or from a representative of secular authority.

“He turned out to be a random element, unable to speak not only on religious issues but even with simple speech among believers. Shamsudinov took the path of personal gain, taking this opportunity, he walks around the homes of believers, claims the money, groceries, etc. He holds prayer meetings among groups of believers in private houses. As a result, prayer houses were reopened in four places in Dzhambul. A group of believers, about 20-40 people gather in houses and conduct a prayer under the guidance of Shamsudinov. I have repeatedly forbidden Shamsudinov to hold all kinds of prayer meetings in unregistered groups of communities, but he continues his actions secretly. Based on the foregoing, Shamsudinov is unregistered and I ask you to work on the SADUM to quickly send their representative to Dzhambul to appoint another imam of the Dzhambul city mosque ... “ (Russian Perspectives on Islam 18881).

Zunnun Zupinov’s disagreements with SADUM did not go unnoticed, and the accusations of political unreliability made to him led to the fact that only a month after the outbreak of the conflict, on November 1953, he was charged under the article of the Criminal Code “Propaganda or agitation directed to incitement of national or religious hatred, as well as distribution or production and storage of literature of the same nature ” and was sentenced to two years in a forced labor camp.

There are family stories about his stay in prison similar to Sufi narratives. So, the Ishan’s grandson shared a story published in the New Region newspaper on December 7, 2016. He reports that, according to eyewitnesses who were in prison with his grandfather, one of the prison wardens reported to the head of the prison that in the morning, when he checked all the prisoners, the door of Zupinov Zannun turned out to be open, although the cells of the prisoners should always be locked. The head and the prison warden went into the open cell, where in the corner Khoja Zunnun performed the morning prayer. The prison warden kicked him, but the praying Ishan did not move. Only after completing the prayer, he got up and reported to the head, as it was supposed by the rules of the prison. The head asked him how the cell door was open. The prisoner replied that he performs the prayer five times a day. There is no water in the cell, but since ablution before prayer is necessary, he asked Allah to give him this opportunity, and Allah heard his prayers. The door locks opened by themselves. The prison head realized that he was not a simple person. On the same day in the morning, that warden who rudely treated prisoner Zupinov suddenly died in the locker room. Once, the head of the prison called Sheikh Zunnun and asked him for help, telling about the illness of his only daughter. Doctors have concluded that her illness is incurable. Ishan replied that he can only pray to Allah and ask for recovery. The head of the prison drove him to his home, where he read the Qur'an and prayed. After some time, the girl recovered, and in gratitude, the prison director wrote a letter to the higher authorities about the early release of Zupinov (newregion 2016).

After his release from prison, Khoja Zunnun remained under vigilant control by the authorities, and his subsequent activities were reflected in the next report of the representative of the Council for Religious Cults S. Saurgaliev (Russian Perspectives on Islam18891). Under the “Secret” heading, he reports that the leadership of the Muslim community of Dzhambul, as well as members of the executive body and the audit commission, work together, there are no disagreements and inconsistencies between these people, the clergy of the community have been put in order, the mosque’s building is in order, overhaul of the mosque building is made.

At the same time, he notes that the imams of the mosque of Dzhambul and Merke, Muslim communities and some mullahs in other places “by all means, in various ways at all costs try to expand their field of activity, to disseminate their blind superstitions, the ideals of the Qur'an and Sharia, the irrefutable presence of God and to be submissive only to God, they preach that all the events taking place in society and nature, in science and technology, news and events in the internal and foreign policies of states, including the Soviet Union, have occurred and are happening thanks to the order of god. They inspire believers to sincerely acknowledge their clergy and spiritual governance, which show the right path of Islam. The communities are doing their best to increase the voluntary donations of Muslims in favor of the mosque and the community, in favor of the madrassah and the Spiritual Administration, take all measures to expand and increase the number of registered mosques and prayer houses in the region.

Again, a struggle broke out between the Muslim community of Dzhambul and a group of the former imam of the mosque, Zunnun Zupinov. He and his group voluntarily hold a prayer service on separate collective farms of the Talas and Dzhambul districts, the village of Chulak-Tau, the station of Dzhambul, although he did not have and does not have any right to do so.

So, for example, in the year 1955, Zunnun Zupinov during ‘*Kurban Bairam’* in the village behind the Dzhambul station separately conducted ‘*ayt-namaz’*, where about 600 people took part, collected large sums of money, in addition, he visited several collective farms, a state farm Tokusken and the village of Chulak-Tau, where Zupinov collected 3 horses and about 5000 rubles.

Under the leadership of Zupinov, in 1955, ‘*Mavlud*’ - the birthday of the prophet Muhammad - was celebrated in Dzhambul in the house of Baltabay Kasimov. Zupinov received a foal from a citizen Alpysbay for reading Qur’an, 300 rubles from the funeral of Almanov Mustafa, from Kaztay Nogayshamov, who had no livestock, received 10 meters of fabric and 100 rubles. With the money raised, he built a five-room house, where one room is intended for a mosque, where he is going to be a mullah. He is going to go to Alma-Ata, Tashkent, demanding to appoint him as imam to Dzhambul or somewhere in the region again.

For this purpose, after returning from prison, he systematically engages in insulting and harassing the current leadership of the Muslim community of Dzhambul led by Kural Mullah and his assistant Zhumabay. He organized a group compromising statement against them ... As a result of the inspection of the commission from the Spiritual Administration of Alma-Ata under the leadership of Kazi Gilmanov (the charges) were not confirmed, they turned out to be slander. This is confirmed by the act drawn up according to the results of the verification of the group application dated November 24, 1955. Thus, Zupinov and his group are trying, by all means, to disorganize, demoralize and upset the current leaders of the Dzhambul mosque”.

The official claims that Zupinov is spreading gossip directed against Imam Khatib Kural Tuashbaev and his assistant Imam Zhumabay, explaining that they are not mullahs, and no matter how long believers pray under their guidance, Allah will not accept these prayers. Mufti (chairman of the Spiritual Administration) is a dry tree without roots, his blessing is not sacred, he serves not religion but the state, and freedom of religion is a hoax, he said, because in each region the control over mullahs is exercised by an official of the Council for Religious Cults, freedom was given only in politics, there was no freedom for believers. “Believe me,” Zupinov says, “I am appointed by God, not by the people and not by the state.” He also allegedly said that after his release, he asked the holy spirits to flood the mosque, and it turned out that the mosque was flooded (this was in March 1955).

And then the representative of the Council for Religious Cults S. Saurgaliev proposes to prosecute Zupinov and his supporters, which requires direct intervention and instructions from the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR on this very serious issue, because, as he writes, “further putting this question aside may lead to undesirable results ." (Russian Perspectives on Islam18891). This report most clearly shows the extreme concern of a system that can only oppress repressive measures in the struggle for the minds of citizens.

Apparently, the certain ambivalence that was present in the life of Khoja Zunnun, that is, on the one hand, a reverent attitude and involvement in Islamic traditions, books, rituals, and on the other hand, repeated attempts to appeal to state structures to solve real or artificially created life problems and conflicts that existed in the communities, it has become a burden, even for such a strong personality as Khoja Zunnun. There was no doubt that the path to the official position was closed for Khoja Zunnun, the opposition to power became more and more dangerous, and he began to live the life of a Sufi-murshid, standing aside from the political struggle against the state system, which once brought down the punishment on him.

His reputation as a Naqshbandi Sufi was so high that, according to his daughter, he very quickly acquired *murids* - students from all Muslim republics. Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turks, Uyghurs, Chechens, Kurds, Tajiks, etc. came to him and stayed in the house for a while. He also traveled throughout Kazakhstan, visited the southern, western and central regions of the country. For thirty years he professed the Qur'an and taught ‘tafsir’. Some of his murids recorded his sermons on tape, but subsequently, they were lost.

“My father had two chests filled with books in different languages ​​- Persian, Arabic, Old Ottoman. One day people from the police came to confiscate his books. There were two of them - Kazakh and Russian. Father talked with a Kazakh. He asked him: “Are these books yours? Not. These are my books, they belonged to my ancestors. If you’re not afraid, take it away, but are you sure that you will come out of the gate of my house alive?” When the Kazakh translated the words of Ishan to the Russian colleague, they made such a strong impression that both police officers chose not to risk their lives with books and left empty-handed.”

There were other stories from the life of Khoja Zunnun, similar to Sufi hagiographies. A certain murid, which was always near him, and later became a doctor, clairvoyant, herbalist, talked about the ‘*karama*’ of the Sufi, supernatural manifestations of his strength. According to him, during his apprenticeship at night he rode a motorcycle along an unfamiliar road, suddenly found himself on a cliff, cried out, and it seemed to him as if an unknown force had transferred his motorcycle to the other side of a deep ravine. A few days later he saw strange footprints on the back of Khoja Zunnun, similar to the track of a wheel. When he asked him about the origin of these tracks, the teacher calmly replied that he had to put his back under the wheels of the motorcycle so that his murid could move from one edge of the cliff to the other.

Obviously, in times of uncertainty about tomorrow, fear of uncontrollable crises, in an atmosphere of distrust toward state and party officials, ordinary people, especially in the provinces and rural areas, needed someone who possessed ‘karama’, could protect them with their prayers, and maybe create a miracle. When Ishan traveled through villages, people everywhere greeted him with reverence, slaughtered cattle, laid blankets in vegetable gardens in open areas where many believers gathered, and he gave his instructions there. His preaching work was mainly oral, as well as some other Sufi sheikhs’ activity of this period (Sufism in Central Asia

The training consisted of eleven stages of ‘*dhikr*’, each of which required a certain time for mastering. Unfortunately, the Sheikh’s daughter, whom we interviewed, could not name the murids, since she was still a teenager and did not delve into the activities of her father. Most often, the eldest son from his second wife was next to him, but he did not become his father’s murid. Daughter says he had other teachers in Uzbekistan.

Many followers and ordinary people believed that there was no greater authority in the region than Sheikh Zunnun, whose life and behavior were subordinate to the Sunna and Hadith. Fully surrendering to religion, he always helped people, he distributed everything that was brought to him. At the same time, he maintained simplicity, modesty, honesty, and piety in communication. His wife said that sometimes he prayed all night, and in the morning when the murids slept in their rooms, he worked in the garden, could cook food, feed the children.

He did not demand anyone worship and submission to himself. Nevertheless, the ability of Sheikh Zunnun to attract people, his high authority and charisma led to a number of spiritual leaders of the Central Asian republics asking him to leave for Moscow with a petition to the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) L. Brezhnev to open for visiting the mausoleum and mosque of Khoja Ahmed Yassawi in Turkestan. He did not get a collective petition to the top party official, but other officials who accepted him invited Sheikh Zunnun to attend the 25th CPSU Congress as a guest, obviously to impress the foreign delegations. In any case, in this version, the story was preserved in family traditions. The grandson of the Sheikh unexpectedly saw his grandfather in a television broadcast of the meeting of the congress and shouted to inform all other family members about this unexpected event.

Residents of the city and surrounding villages believed that a kind of grace (‘*baraka*’) spreads from Sheikh Zunnun, which can have a beneficial effect on a person even after the death of a Sufi. Months later, people came to his house and asked his family for permission to sit where he usually sat, and women sought to somehow provide home services to his wife and children, which once again confirms the desire to sacralize the images of Sufi sheikhs and related places and objects that were characteristic of the Central Asian religious discourse. According to Martha Brill Olcott, similar concepts, although in more complex forms, are well developed in classical Sufism (Olcott 2007). The cult of saints that arose in the Middle Ages successfully overcame the years of Soviet rule and has survived to this day in Kazakhstan.

Recognizing the powerful potential and inevitability of this popular commitment to the cults of saints, in April 2017, Nursultan Nazarbayev, at that time the head of state, in the article “Looking to the future: modernization of public consciousness”, proposed the project “Spiritual Shrines of Kazakhstan”, or, as it is now commonly called, "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan." (Baytanaev 2018). Within the framework of the project, worship of clan sanctuaries, burials, saints, mausoleums, temples and other monuments of cultural, religious and historical heritage takes on a completely legitimate form, as one of the spiritual traditions of the people. Thus, Sufism fits into the present and continues as an integral part of the national heritage.

**Conclusion**

The memory of loved ones is always selective and subjective, and the idealization of the head of the family, clan, especially the religious leader and Ishan, is inevitable. Secret documents of special bodies are also subject to certain ideological strategies and requirements. But the biography and trajectory of Khoja Zunnun’s life give us a picture, which includes both the historical stages in the fate of the peoples of Kazakhstan, sharp turns in the religious policy of the Soviet state, and the unrelenting desire of the clergyman to preserve his religious views, to pass on his faith to contemporaries and future generations, supporting the impulses of the Sufi tradition in the most severe conditions of the dominance of communist ideology, educating students, and preserving the foundations of ritual practice. And this mission was performed by Khoja Zunnun Zupinov with the modesty and dignity of a Sufi sheikh who cares about the moral condition and spiritual well-being of his fellow citizens in an era when these concepts were almost forgotten or interpreted quite differently.

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