

A first glimpse at Saduaqas Ghilmani's (1890-1972) "Biographies of the Islamic scholars of our times" : a possible rewriting of the Tsarist and Soviet history of Kazakhstan's Islamic community

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**A First Glimpse at Saduaqas Ghilmani's
(1890–1972) “Biographies of the Islamic Scholars
of Our times” – A Possible Rewriting of
the Tsarist and Soviet History of Kazakhstan's
Islamic Community**

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Abstract: The period in the history of Kazakhstan between the middle XIX – middle XX centuries, when significant transformations in the Kazakh Muslim community took place, is of great academic interest for researchers. Among the little-studied historical processes, which were under way in Kazakhstan, could be mentioned: (1) the interaction of Muslim and Russian (Orthodox) civilizations; (2) the awakening of the followers of the traditional Islamic school; (3) the initiation and dissemination of the ideas of Islamic modernism (Jadidism) and Islamic fundamentalism (Salafism) in local Muslim communities etc. However the use of well-known Russian official documents as the main and only sources for new investigations could lead to one-sided conclusions, as that was shown in the well-known review by Prof. Devin DeWeese.

Keywords: Islam in Kazakhstan, mid 19th and early twentieth century, interaction Islam Orthodox Christianity, Jadidism, Salafism

The period in the history of Kazakhstan from the mid-19th through the mid-twentieth centuries, during which significant transformations within the Kazakh Muslim community took place, is of great significance for historians. We can list among the insufficiently-studied historical processes that were under way in Kazakhstan: (1) the interaction of Muslim and Russian (Orthodox) civilizations; (2) the awakening of followers of traditional Islamic scholarly currents; (3) the emergence and dissemination of the ideas of Islamic modernism (*jadidism*) and manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism (Salafism) in local Muslim communities, etc. However the use of now-familiar Russian official documents as the

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main and only sources for new investigations could lead to one-sided conclusions, as Professor Devin DeWeese has explained in a notable review article.¹ Scholarly literature tends to divide the era of Russian dominance in the history of Kazakhstan, into two periods: one being the Imperial (Tsarist) and the other the Soviet one, followed by the period of independence. At the same time, each period's "state order" required that the historians take as their points of departure the "civilizing mission" during the time of the Russian Empire, "the peaceful inclusion of Kazakhstan into Russia" in the Soviet era, and the "national liberation movement of the Kazakhs against Russian imperialism" for Kazakh national historiography since independence, etc.²

As distinct from this received periodization, newly discovered local sources originating from the milieu of Kazakh Islamic leaders offer great potential for the study "on the ground" of the transformations and shifts in the intellectual life of traditional Kazakh society. Recently, one such source – the substantial biographical compendium work "Biographies of the Islamic Scholars of Our Times" (*Zamanimizda bolghan ghulamalarding ghümür tarikhtari*) was published by IRCICA in two volumes in Istanbul.³

The author of this biographical dictionary is the prominent Kazakh scholar Saduaqas Ghilmani (1890–1972), who served as *qazi* for the Kazakh SSR from 1952 until 1972, in the republic-level branch of the Religious Administration for the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), based in Tashkent from 1943 until 1992.⁴ The edition is based on the work's unique manuscript, which also constitutes the author's autograph. In collecting materials for his book Saduaqas Ghilmani made use of many assistants, among whom four individuals should be noted as the primary ones: 1) Momaqan Äliyev (1897–1969), imam-khatib of the mosque of the city of Kökshetau. From 1958 until 1969 he was the deputy (*na'ib-qazi*) to Saduaqas Ghilmani in the Kazakhstani branch of SADUM. 2) Ghabbas Eleusizov (1884–1980), who had received an Islamic education; he was born in Aqmola (Akmolinsk) *oblast'*. 3) Qarta Qangtarbayev (1900–1978), a researcher in an academic institute that collected folklore in North Kazakhstan. 4) Müftakhidden Usin (1900–1967), imam-khatib of the Central Mosque of Almaty from 1960–1967; he was born in the Ereymentau district of Aqmola *oblast'*.

Ghilmani's dictionary is not the only Kazakh biographical dictionary that was compiled in the twentieth century, but follows an untitled work compiled in

1 DeWeese 2002.

2 See: Pochekaev 2012. This work contains references to the chief literature on this topic.

3 Ghilmani 2018.

4 Nurmanova et al. 2018.

1912 by another qazi, Qurban-Ali Khalidi (1846–1913).⁵ Khalidi’s manuscript work was unknown to Ghilmani, and did not influence him, but both works focused on local regions, in Khalidi’s case, eastern Kazakhstan, focusing on Semey and Chuguchak, and Ghilmani’s, focusing on Aqmola and Qizilzhar (Pretropavlovsk). Ghilmani’s work, however, stands out for its scope. It contains biographies of 50 religious and literary figures from northern Kazakhstan who lived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This includes the biographies of 39 major Muslim scholars (*ghalim*), as well as information on 11 Kazakh prominent literary and political figures (*biy, sheshen, serı, and aqın*) in this region, with the presentation of the excerpts from their own works (verses and aphorisms). For the most part, these figures derive from three major subdivisions of the Arghın tribe: the Qanzhıghalı, Qarauıl, and Atıghay. The dictionary covers a range of unusually broad issues: it mentions more than 50 madrasas. It describes teaching methods, curricula, and textbooks, and it makes note of and analyzes numerous religious topics and issues that interested those Muslims. The dictionary records the responses of Muslims to phenomena and processes such as the fabrication of non-Islamic identity for Kazakhs, attempts at their forcible Christianization, and the seizure of land from the Kazakhs. It also reflects the consequences for the Muslim community of mass starvation, and the Stalin-era repression of intellectuals, as well as how Muslims survived such harsh conditions.

The book opens with the initial part (*bölım*) which contains the information on 11 authoritative people among the Arghın (*bi, aqın, zhırau, sheshen, serı*) from the Qanzhıghalı, Atıghay, and Qaraul Muslim communities: Kazakh national hero Bögenbay-Batır’s (1680–1775) descendant Bapan-Biy Türanülü (1755–1849), his son Saqqılaq-Biy Bapanülü (1800–1888), and the two sons of the latter person – Eralı-Aqın (1846–1932) and Nüralı-Sheshen (1881–1935). Other generations of Bögenbay-Batır’s descendants include Quat Arabıdanülü (1802–1892) and Temırbek-Sheshen Köbeyülü (nineteenth century), as well as some figures from the Qanzhıghalı, one of Arghın subdivisions, – Asaubay-Sheshen Zhädıgerülü (1815–1897), Ümbetey-Zhırau (1706–1778).⁶ This section functions as a link between “Antiquity” (1757–1758, from the period time after the Dzungar invasion and domination) and the New Time – *Zhanga Mızam/Nızam* in Kazakh, meaning “New Law”, (1868–1917).

These sections are then followed by biographies of 39 religious scholars (*ghalim*) of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the Aqmola region. Chronologically, the biographical section addressing the Kazakh ‘*ulama*’ starts

⁵ Khalidi 2005.

⁶ Ghilmani 2018: vol. I: 11–73 (original text); vol. II: 65–116 (translation).

from the 1860s, when the Russian authorities began appointing licensed *mullahs* from among the Kazakhs themselves:

1. The section “Official Mullahs” begins with the biography of the author’s great-grandfather, Mükhammediyar Mükhtarülü (1807–1870). He was the first official Kazakh *mullah* (*resmi molla*) appointed instead of Tatar licensed (*ukaz*) *mullahs* due to the New Law.⁷ It is well known that for a long time (1788–1868) the Kazakh Muslim communities were under the authority of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (1788–1917), and the spiritual life of the Kazakhs was controlled by licensed Tatar *mullahs* (*ukaznoi molla*).
2. Another early portion of the biographical section begins with a short digression explaining the genealogy of Shing-Qozha, a member of a local *qozha* (*khoja*) lineage, a leading figure in preaching and giving instruction in Islam in 1860’s. This passage was followed with the biography of ‘Aliäkbar-Khalpe Zhortpaülü (born in 1883 and died circa 1966), who was a direct descendant of Shing-Qozha.⁸ Such indecision and inconsistency likely testifies to the author’s incomplete conception of the specific traditional role of *qozhas* in the religious life of the Qanzhıghalı.
3. The second chapter (*bölim*) starts with the biography of a Kazakh religious leader originating from the Qanzhıghalı group itself (*Qanzhıghalıning piri*) Toqmükhammed-Khazıret (Toqang-Khazıret, 1851–1916). In the manuscript, the biography of Toqmükhammed-Khazıret (Toqang-Khazıret) is assigned the number 1.⁹

Further the book continues with the biographies of the students and descendants of the above mentioned three persons (Mükhammediyar Mükhtarülü, Shing-Qozha, Toqmükhammed-Khazıret).

From these data we may conclude that chronologically the biographical dictionary of Saduaqas Ghılmani starts from the period when the Russian authorities had qualified the Islamic faith for all Kazakhs, including the Qanzhıghalı, as an “unofficial religion” (*ghayr-resmi din*).¹⁰ It is well known that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire considered the Kazakhs to be faithful Muslims, and Islamic culture was recognized as the basis of their social and cultural life. Correspondingly, from 1788 until 1868 the Kazakh Muslim community was entrusted to the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual

⁷ Ghılmani 2018: vol. I: 178 (original text); vol. II: 208 (translation).

⁸ Ghılmani 2018: vol. I: 74–80 (original text); vol. II: 117–122 (translation).

⁹ Ghılmani 2018: vol. I: 82–112 (original text); vol. II: 124–148 (translation).

¹⁰ Ghılmani 2018: vol. I: 74 (original text); vol. II: 117 (translation).

Assembly based in Ufa, and part of the Russian state apparatus.¹¹ Suddenly, on October 21, 1868, the new law of the Russian Empire, entitled “Interim Provisions on Governance in Oral, Torghay, Aqmola and Semey Oblast’s (Vremennye polozheniia po upravleniiu v Ural’skoi, Turgaiskoi, Akmolinskoi i Semipalatinskoi oblastiakh),” was promulgated.¹² According to this law, the status of Islam had been designated as a non-legal religion for the Kazakh Muslim community.¹³

The Interim Provisions on Governance in Oral, Torghay, Aqmola and Semey Oblast’s, adopted on October 21, 1868, included the following rules and tasks:

1. Kazakhs were removed from the authority of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (OMSA) and transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (as Saduaqas Ghilmani says: «New Law gave the Islam the status of “unofficial religion” among the Kazakhs»);
2. The position «Ukaznoi mullah», who had primarily come from among the Tatars was abolished;
3. An “official mullah” (*resmi mulla*) must be approved by the military governor from among ethnic Kazakhs;
4. Only the Governor gave permission for the teaching of Islam by a Kazakh mullah;
5. The construction of a mosque required the permission of the Governor-General;
6. *Waqfs* (pious endowments) were prohibited.¹⁴

The implementation of the New Law had two direct consequences for the Kazakh Muslim community:

(a) all 32 mosques in the Steppe Territory (Stepnoi Krai) under the authority of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly were closed, and all 40 *ukaznoi mullas*, operating among Kazakhs, were dismissed.¹⁵

(b) Saduaqas Ghilmani’s work testifies to an increase in protest among Kazakhs and the intensification of the Islamic activism after 1868. For example, the work identified 50 newly-built madrasas mentioned in the work. 21 of these madrasas taught in the Kazakh language, and 17 in Tatar. Each madrasa taught from between 20 to 200 students. Likewise, Kazakh students attended some madrasas in Bukhara or the Middle East (Istanbul, Cairo). Consequently, much

11 Remnev 2006: 238.

12 Remnev 2006: 263.

13 Ghilmani 2018: vol. I: 74 (original text); vol. II: 117 (translation).

14 Remnev 2006: 264.

15 Remnev 2006: 257.

larger numbers of Kazakh obtained Islamic educations than before. Finally, the number of books and treatises written by Kazakh authors, and in Kazakh, also increased in this period. We can conclude from these materials that 1868 became the start date for a new era in the intellectual history of Kazakhstan.

Our research work, conducted in the private archives of the descendants of Saduaqas Ghilmani, led us to discover other new sources. The first of these was his “Will” (Ösiyet-name). Remarkably, it contains a list of works written by Saduaqas Ghilmani. The “Ösiyet-name” exists in two versions¹⁶:

- (1) The first version of the “Ösiyet-name” was compiled by Saduaqas Ghilmani in 1947. It consists of 62 lines, containing 23 titles.
- (2) The second version of the “Ösiyet-name” is dated by 1972. There are many stylistic changes in his text compared to the earlier version. The total number of listed titles is in the latter version is 41.

A survey of the books’ titles show that Ghilmani’s literary activity had multiple vectors. He compiled his own poetry,¹⁷ books on the history of the Kazakhs, an Arabic-Kazakh dictionary (comprising 108,240 words),¹⁸ the polemical treatise “Against Attacks and Slanders against the Qur’an (*Qūran turālī zhala men ötirikterge qarsi*),¹⁹ and a translation of the History of the Qur’an of ‘Uthmān by Ismā‘il Sattiev, the second highest-ranking figure in SADUM (1893–1976) into Kazakh, among others.

However, the bulk of his writings are translations of works by modern Egyptian, and other Arabic and Indian authors into Kazakh. Most of Ghilmani’s translations are the works of Islamic reformists and modernists – such as Muhammad ‘Abdo (1849–1905), Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Rafiq al-‘Azm (1865–1925) and other authors. The translations were made by Ghilmani himself. Sometimes, we find that between seventy and eighty-five percent of the material is translated from the influential “Tafsir al-Manar.” Ghilmani supplied these translations to many of his colleagues who served as imams of mosques in Kazakhstan, and to students for rewriting, making their new copies and further distribution among Muslims. Recently, we discovered copies of Ghilmani’s translations in the personal collections of Hakīm Omarov (1906–1974), Habibulla-Qari Srajev (1904–1977), and Tölepbergen Ilyasūli (1903–1974). All this shows that the ideas and teachings of Islamic reformers in the twentieth century spread and

¹⁶ Saduaqas Ghilmani. Ösiyet-name. Manuscript of Museum of Saduaqas Ghilmani (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan). Without inventor number.

¹⁷ Qamzabekūli 2010.

¹⁸ Ghilmanūli 2005.

¹⁹ Ghilmani 2004; Berdaliev 2016. See also Orazbek s.a.

became well-known and popular among Muslims in Kazakhstan even in Soviet times.

Professor Stéphane Dudoignon using as a case in point the activity of the mufti Riza al-Din ibn Fakhr al-Din (1856–1936), that the teachings of Middle Eastern Islamic reformers were given a certain interest and became popular among Muslims in Russia.²⁰ As we know that after the February Revolution of 1917, until 1943, the Kazakh communities were reincorporated into the TsDUM, the Soviet successor to the Orenburg Muslims Spiritual Assembly in Ufa.²¹ Kazakh Islamic leaders and scholars, among them Ghilmani, worked for a time under the authority of the Tatar *muftis* in Ufa. As Ghilmani's "Ösiyet-name" shows, Kazakh scholars actively read the works of the prominent Muslim reformers in Kazakh.

Acquaintance with the written heritage of Saduaqas Ghilmani permits us to make several critical observations concerning the periodization the history of Kazakh Muslim society, in order to advance the study of Kazakh Muslim society:

1. First Period – 1788–1868: Russian Empire recognized that the Kazakhs were faithful Muslims, and the Islamic religion was considered to be at the heart of their social and cultural life. The spiritual life of the Kazakhs was under the control of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly and Tatar Ukaznoi Mullas.
2. Second Period – Period of ignoring Islam (1868–1917): Under the dominant influence of the state apparatus which had fabricated a non-Islamic identity for the Kazakhs, the local Muslim society offered its resistance, and demonstrated survival and spiritual growth. No one before Ghilmani proposed such a version in the historical chronology of Kazakh society.
3. Third Period – TsDUM (1917–1943): The establishment of the Soviet system created new spirals of repression. First were those who suffered the confiscation of property and the deprivation of civil rights from 1928–1931. Then there was the period of mass famine from 1931 until 1933, during which several prominent scholars perished. Most religious scholars experienced repression, and these were forced to flee their homes and move to other regions. Many died in prison, and others were shot upon arrest. At the same time, the return of Kazakh Muslim communities to the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia promoted, among others, the dissemination of the ideas of Islamic reformation-modernization, preached by the Mufti Riza al-Din ibn Fakhr al-Din and its other representatives.

20 Dudoignon 2006: 87.

21 In July 1917, Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) was transformed into the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia (TsDUM).

4. The Fourth Period – the Religious Administration for the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, SADUM (1943–1990): However, after the reestablishment of a religious administration in the form of SADUM, the survivors began occupying leading positions in the religious life of believers in Kazakhstan.

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