

Muslim Literature in the Atheist State

*Zainap Maksudova between Soviet Modernity and Tradition**

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Abstract

This article explores the revitalization of interest in Islamic literature in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. A broad picture of the preservation and transmission of religious knowledge in atheistic society appears in the biography of Zainap Maksudova (1897–1980), a scholar of Tatar manuscripts who spent her life collecting and interpreting the written legacy of Muslim intellectuals from the Volga-Urals region. Considering Maksudova's experiences in religious and academic studies, this article draws attention to a cohort of specialists with similar interests and life experiences. Maksudova was at the forefront of this cohort and produced major works on the intellectual history of Muslims in Inner Russia. Muslim Soviet scholars navigated the difficult terrain between the study of the Islamic past and the ideological structures of the Soviet academic establishment. These specialists also served as a bridge between the circles of religious personnel and secularized academics. Such a bridge enabled the exchange of ideas, establishing a common discourse on the shared past.

Keywords

Maksudova – reading practices – Inner Russia – Tatarstan – manuscript culture – Soviet Orientalism – Muslim scholars

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Introduction

Recent research on religious life in Central Asia has demonstrated that relations between 'Soviet' and 'Muslim' identities in everyday life cannot always be described solely in terms of conflict and repression. Negotiations between the two led to the emergence of a diffuse Soviet-Muslim identity that combined patriotism, loyalty to the regime and adherence to a certain set of religious practices and values.¹ The birth of this Soviet-Muslim identity in the post-war Soviet Union inevitably resulted in a reassessment of the role of Islamic culture in the history of Soviet nations. By the 1950s, the majority of Muslim-populated republics in the country had received their codified national histories in which Islam as religion did not play a significant role, but where its cultural and intellectual aspects were seriously considered.² The Islamic patriotism of Soviet Muslims, which came into being during and after World War II,³ as well as the process of institutionalization that Soviet Islam underwent in the form of officially sanctioned Religious Boards, forced a partial integration and acknowledgement of Islam as a cultural legacy for Soviet public and academic discourses. This new reinterpretation of Islam called for greater selectivity when establishing new paradigms for speaking about Muslim culture.

This article seeks to understand the process of selection concerning aspects of Islamic heritage and the patterns of their reinterpretation in scholarly and (semi-) religious circles. By looking at the personal profiles and academic endeavours of Muslim Soviet scholars of Islam, I suggest that the rehabilitation of Muslim culture in the post-Stalinist period went hand in hand with the revitalization and reconceptualization of Muslim written culture among the learned elites with a *madrasa* education, who bridged Islamicate intellectual circles and secular national intelligentsia.

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- 1 For a study of this phenomenon: E.M. Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); S.N. Abashin, "A Prayer for Rain: Practicing Being Soviet and Muslim," in: *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25/2 (2014): 1–23; S.A. Dudoignon, Ch. Noack (eds.), *Allah's Kolkhozes. Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation, and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s–2000s)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014); P. Sartori, "Towards a History of the Muslims' Soviet Union: A View from Central Asia," in: *Die Welt des Islams* 50/3–4 (2010): 315–334.
 - 2 A.K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), chapter 2.
 - 3 E.M. Tasar, "Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism in Postwar Kyrgyzstan," in: *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 52/2–3, Avril-Septembre 2011: 387–404. J. Eden, "A Soviet Jihad against Hitler: Ishan Babakhan Calls Central Asian Muslims to War," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59/1–2 (2016): 237–264.

In the late 1950s, in the Muslim-populated regions of the Soviet Union, local intellectuals, often with religious education, undertook a rehabilitation and reconceptualization of Islamic legacy in national, secular and scholarly terms. This process was accompanied by the formulation of a pantheon of national heroes whose chain of succession demonstrated a one-way path to modernity and progress: according to this view, Abd al-Nasir al-Qursawi (1776–1812) laid down the theological foundations of reform, then Husayn Faizkhanov (1823–1866) and Abd al-Qayyum al-Nasiri (1825–1902) suggested changes to the system of education and, finally, Sadri Maksudi (1878–1957) ventured into the political sphere.⁴ The legacy of this small circle of ‘progressive enlighteners’ became a reference point for an idealized past without much discussion of the actual content of the scholars’ works and their relation to any deeper legacy associated with backward and regressive ‘traditionalism’. In true Orientalist fashion, Qursawi was not allowed to speak directly to Soviet readers; instead, there were interpreters that translated his ideas into a secular discourse of national heritage.

But how did this scheme function for those who were able to access Muslim sources without translation? To answer this important question, I will focus here on the biography of Zainap Maksudova (28 March, 1897–3 February, 1980), a Tatar philologist from Kazan whose works include a major study of Muslim literature in Inner Russia and the biographies of local scholars. Her life experience allows us to understand a different current in the development of Soviet intellectual life. Maksudova is a telling example of the rather complicated nature of Tatar intellectual history in the twentieth century, a history that combines or rather goes beyond the notions of secularism and religiosity, reformism and traditionalism, nationalism and betrayal of national interests. Michael Kemper and Bakhtiyar Babajanov have recently studied similar

4 These developments are linked to a phenomenon sometimes called ‘Mirasism’ (from Ar. *mirāth*—heritage), a term that encompasses the selection of particular figures and concepts populating the officially sanctioned Soviet version of national history. Cf. E.J. Lazzerini, “Tatarovedenie and the “New Historiography” in the Soviet Union: Revising the Interpretation of the Tatar-Russian Relationship,” in: *Slavic Review*, 40/4 (1981): 625–635; E.L. Lazzerini, “The Revival of Islamic Culture in Pre-Revolutionary Russia: or, why a Prosopography of the Tatar Ulema?” in: Ch. Lemerrier-Quellejey, G. Veinstein, S.E. Wimbush, *Turco-Tatar Past—Soviet Present. Studies Presented to Alexandre Bennigsen* (Paris, 1986): 367–372. For a detailed account with bibliography on Tatar Mirasism see: A.K. Bustanov, M. Kemper, “From Mirasism to Euro-Islam: The Translation of Islamic Legal Debates into Tatar Secular Cultural Heritage,” in: *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, eds. A.K. Bustanov, M. Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus 2012): 29–53.

cases from Soviet Daghestan and Uzbekistan, demonstrating how ex-scholars of Islam (*ulama*) turned themselves into academic authorities or—in most cases—mere technical workers for the study of Oriental manuscripts.⁵ I aim to contribute to this discussion by drawing attention to cases from Soviet Tatarstan as relevant to the intellectual history of Soviet Muslims. Beginning with an analysis of Maksudova's life story, I then proceed to her ways of dealing with Oriental manuscripts and ideas of creating a coherent intellectual pedigree for Muslims of the Volga-Urals. In order to enrich Maksudova's distinct biographical narrative, I also include several further examples of how religious figures followed the paths of secular academics. Here I suggest that the late generation of Soviet Islamic scholars struggled to preserve and study ancient texts without being bound to the prevailing simplified discourses of national identity and Islamic modernity accepted in mainstream Soviet academia.

Scholars of Islam as Soviet Jadids

At first glance, Maksudova, the offspring of a lineage of Tatar *mullas*, appears to conform to the archetype of an Islamic reformist in Russia: she was a school-teacher who propagated the profits of Russian culture amongst Muslims; moreover, she was fond of Tatar folk literature, European scholarship and supported such ideas as the emancipation of women. However, a closer look at Maksudova reveals a much more complicated and nuanced picture.

Zainap Maksudova⁶ was born in the village of Urazai in the Elabuga district of the Viatka governorate, located in the present-day Agryz region of the Republic of Tatarstan. Her father, Abd al-Jamil (1838–1925), was a local Imam and is reported to have been well-educated in Islamic literature. In her official autobiography, written in the 1930s and 1940s, Maksudova calls her father a “peasant” who cared only about agriculture and who served as Mulla for just a short period of time between 1894 and 1907 simply because, “for the first time

5 B.M. Babajanov, “‘Ulama’-Orientalists: Madrasa Graduates at the Soviet Institute of Oriental Studies,” in: *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War*, eds. M. Kemper, A. Kalinovskiy (London: Routledge, 2015): 85–119; M. Kemper, “Ijtihad into Philosophy: Islam as Cultural Heritage in Post-Stalinist Daghestan,” in: *Central Asian Survey* 33/3 (2014): 390–404.

6 Zainap Maksudova was the daughter of Abd al-Jamil b. Abd al-Mannan (1776–1861) b. Maqsud (d. 1830?) b. Ibrahim (d. 1800) b. Mengli Bay (d. 1760?) b. Tukäch (d. 1710) al-Bulghari. This Islamic form of Maksudova's name written in Arabic script is to be found in her manuscripts. All the biographical and other data discussed below are based on Maksudova's own writings.



FIGURE 1

A photographic portrait of Zainap Maksudova. Uncatalogued item at the Institute of Language, Literature and Art, Kazan

PHOTOGRAPHER IS UNKNOWN,
CA. 1970S

in the history of the village a mosque had been erected there.”⁷ In this version of her biography, by 1907 Abd al-Jamil had already retired from his position due to old age and loss of eyesight.

For Maksudova, this rejection of her rootedness in Islamic scholarship became a regular means by which to avoid tensions in dealing with official Soviet institutions. However, in her private notes, we see a different picture. Not only her father, but also the rest of her family had strong intellectual and kinship linkages to the prominent religious authorities of the Volga-Urals and Northern Kazakhstan. For example, Zainap Maksudova’s mother, Bibi Sulu Shārifā, was a daughter of a hereditary Imam in the village of Narat, whose ancestors served as religious authorities in the region at least since the late 16th century. Their names, detailed genealogies and biographies survived in Maksudova’s private

7 Several versions of Maksudova’s autobiography are kept among her uncatalogued papers: Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan in Kazan. Collection 32. Zainap Maksudova. File 2. Uncatalogued private documents.

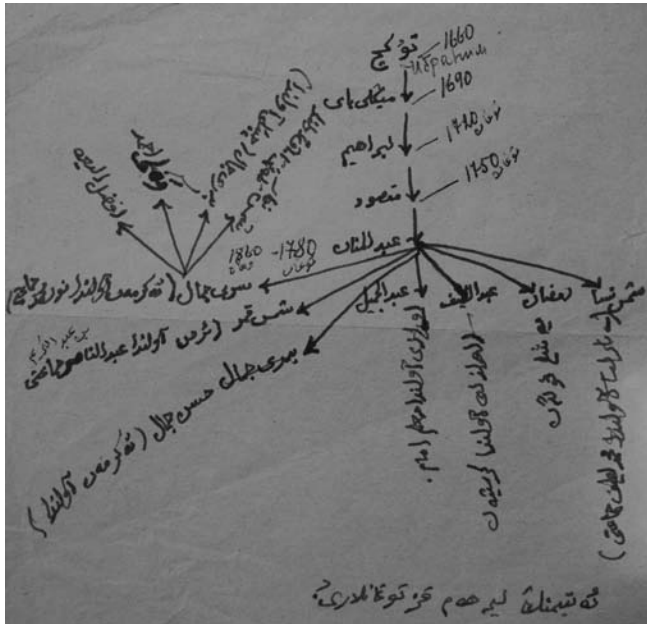


FIGURE 2
A genealogy of the
Maksudov family,
detail. Uncatalogued
file at the Institute of
Language, Literature and
Art, Kazan

papers. In his dissertation, the Tatar historian Mirkasyim Usmanov briefly mentions that, “according to her genealogies,” Maksudova’s ancestors lived in Kazan before its capture by the Russians in 1552 and belonged to the aristocracy. As we shall see, Maksudova’s ancestry played a crucial role in her scholarly agenda, although in writing she never appealed to her roots as stemming from ruling elites.⁸

Maksudova’s father, Abd al-Jamil, studied with a prominent Islamic scholar, Ya’qub b. Ni’mat Allah b. Mansur al-Amiri (d. 1875),⁹ in the village of Tirsä and left a significant manuscript library there. A description of Abd al-Jamil’s collection from the 1920s lists 165 books, of which the majority had been copied out in his own hand. A father of seventeen, he was a learned man who taught children and served as Imam of the Urazai village from 1856 and the Sharshadi village from 1871. Besides his serious grounding in classical Islamic scholarship, Abd al-Jamil seems to have been involved in popular healing practices and performing prayers in favour of patron saints linked with economic activities and

8 M.A. Usmanov, *Tatarskie istoricheskie istochniki XVII–XVIII vv.* (Kazan’: Izdatel’stvo Kazanskogo universiteta, 1972): 28.

9 For a biography of this scholar see: Fäkhreddin Rizaeddin, *Asar: 3 häm 4 tomnar* (Kazan, 2010): 79–80.

the protection of livestock.¹⁰ This fact challenges common assumptions about the existence of a clear-cut border between the learned specialists of Islamic law and the rituals of so-called popular Islam.

The lineage of Maksudova's mother Shärifä is also replete with Muslim religious figures. Maksudova's maternal grandfather, Abd al-Sattar b. Soenduk (1792–1880), studied in Izh Bubi village with Abd al-Karim häzrät (d. 1811)¹¹ and then served as a teacher in Narat village. Ahmad Shakir b. Abd al-Nafi' (d. 1909),¹² a nephew of Abd al-Sattar, was a teacher, *akhund*¹³ and writer from Ägerje village (modern Agryz in Tatarstan), who had some of his books published in Kazan. All of these personalities constituted a middle class of Muslim clergymen in the Russian Empire—of the type that Allen Frank has described in his monograph on the family of Ahmad al-Barangawi¹⁴—and were associated mostly with the southern regions of the Viatka governorate.

Following the footsteps of her relatives, Maksudova also went to a *madrasa* that became famous as a regional centre of Islamic education—the madrasa of Izh Bubi village located in the Viatka governorate. According to Rafilia Gimazova, Maksudova's father, along with her brothers Abd al-Rahman and Abd Allah, and sister Ma'suma, all studied in Izh Bubi.¹⁵ She also spent eight years there, first as a student and then as a teacher,¹⁶ until the *madrasa*'s ultimate closure in 1912.

10 A.J. Frank, "Muslim Patron Saints (Pirs) in Tatar Religious Belief and Practice: A Preliminary Inquiry," in: *Istochniki i issledovaniia po istorii tatarskogo naroda* (Kazan', 2006): 339–345.

11 Fäkhreddin Rizaeddin, *Asar. 1 tom* (Kazan, 2006): 91.

12 This information is drawn from Maksudova's archive, while Rida al-Din b. Fahr al-Din provides another date of Ahmad Shakir's death—1330/1912. The name of his father was misspelled in *Athar* as 'Abd al-Rafi': Fäkhreddin Rizaeddin, *Asar. 3 häm 4 tomnar* (Kazan, 2010): 421.

13 The title of *akhund* in the Russian Empire was used to designate a senior Muslim scholar responsible for the implementation of law in a given administrative unit: N. Spannaus, "The Decline of the Akhund and the Transformation of Islamic Law under the Russian Empire," *Islamic Law and Society* 20/3 (2013): 202–241.

14 A.J. Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, Education, and the Paradox of Islamic Prestige* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

15 R. Gimazova, *Prosvetitel'skaia deiatel'nost' Nigmatullinykh-Bubi (konets XIX–nachalo XX vv.)* (Kazan': Pechatnyi Dvor, 2004): 205–206. On the girls' school in Izh Bubi see: A.Kh. Mäkhmütova, *Vakyt inde: bez dä toryik ... (Zhädidchelek häm khatyn-kyzlar khäräkäte formalashu): ocherklar* (Kazan: Tatar kitap nashriate, 2012): 122–145; *Millät analary: tarikhi-dokumental' häm biografik zhyentyk*, ed. A.Kh. Mäkhmütova (Kazan: Zhyen, 2012): 208–257.

16 R. Gimazova, *Prosvetitel'skaia deiatel'nost' Nigmatullinykh-Bubi*: 188.

33	بخارزاده (بۇخارزاده) غە قاشىر- فىقە غە رە كىچە . موسائىقە : ۱۸۴۹ يىلى تۇنجى قېتىم ئاۋلادى غە بىرلەشكەن مىل غە بىرلەشكەن نائىب ئۇلارغا يازغان
34	يەكەن مىكايىل (يەكەن مىكايىل) فارىس مە نىظىم . ناظمى : يازغان : غە بىرلەشكەن مىل غە بىرلەشكەن نائىب ئۇلارغا تارىخى كۆرسەتكەن .
35	قەدر كىچە غە جەمەت كۈنىنىڭ غە سىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى . تۈرلۈك غە رەب كىتابلار ئىچىدە بىر قە رەب كىتاپ . جىيە : غە بىرلەشكەن مىل غە بىرلەشكەن نائىب ئۇلارغا . يازغان تارىخى كۆرسەتكەن . (۱۸۴۹ - ۱۸۵۳) يىلدا بولغان ئۇلارغا .
36	شرح قدورى (شەرھ قۇدورى) فىقە دەك ، غە رە كىچە . غە لىيە بىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى - رازى ئەر تەۋرىنى . غە لىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى (رازى ئەر تەۋرىنى) كۆپىنچە يازغان : (كۆپىنچە غە لىيە بىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى - رازى ئەر تەۋرىنى) قوبىلە / ۱۳۹ يىلى تۇنجى قېتىم ئاۋلادى تارقاتقان . ئۇلارغا بىيە ۱۸۵۱ يىلى تۇنجى قېتىم ئاۋلادى تارقاتقان . ئۇلارغا بىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى تۈرلۈك .
37	مىكائىل مىكائىل (مىكائىل مىكائىل) غە رە كىچە . جىيە : يازغان : غە بىرلەشكەن مىل غە بىيە ئەر تەۋرىنى .
38	جامع الرموز موسائىقە : يازغان : بىيە : موسائىقە : يازغان : بىيە :

FIGURE 3 Description of Abd al-Jamil Maksudov's library. Uncatalogued file at the Institute of Language, Literature and Art, Kazan

The *madrasa* years played a crucial role in the formation of Maksudova's worldview. Established in the early-19th century and revived under the village's fifth Imam Abd al-Allam al-Bubi (d. 1901), the Izh Bubi *madrasa* underwent a serious transformation at the exact time when Maksudova was studying there. As the brothers Ubayd Allah (1866–1936) and Abd Allah (1871–1922) Bubi attested, it took them six or seven years to change the *madrasa*'s curriculum with the support of their father, Abd al-Allam. Year by year, beginning in 1895, they reduced the prominence of traditionally taught subjects, such as *hadith* and Quranic exegesis, with the aim of broadening the students' worldview and familiarizing them with Ottoman and Tatar literature.¹⁷ Tatar and Persian languages, mathematics, geography, astronomy, physics and medicine had already been taught at the *madrasa* since 1835,¹⁸ but the key innovation of the Bubi brothers' approach consisted of the introduction of Russian language. Even though the amount of time spent studying the traditional fields of Islamic scholarship was cut in half, the students continued to receive a solid foundation in Arabic literature as well as Qur'an recitation, exegesis and calligraphy. As a result of removing Islamic ethics from the curriculum, the Izh Bubi *madrasa* stopped producing Muslim scholars (*ulama*), instead producing Islamically informed intellectuals with wide worldviews and sympathies towards the Socialist movement.¹⁹ There is no doubt that Maksudova actively participated in the life of this reformist school; in her memoirs she recalled theatre and musical performances there. This modernist trend looks striking against the background of Maksudova's relatives, who spent many years teaching and copying classical Arabic-language works on Islamic law and ethics.

Retrospectively, however, Maksudova did not regard the education provided by Izh Bubi as 'progressive' in any sense: in her memoirs from 1977, about a brief acquaintance with the poet Gabdulla Tukai (1843–1913),²⁰ Maksudova says that

17 Oriental Sector of Kazan' University Library, no. 207T, ff. 27–46.

18 *Medrese Kazanskoi gubernii vtoroi treti XIX-nachala XX vv.: sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, ed. L.V. Gorokhova et al. (Kazan': Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Kabinete Ministrov Respubliki Tatarstan, 2012): 24–25.

19 M. Tuna, "Madrasa Reform as a Secularizing Process: A View from the Late Russian Empire," in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 53/3 (2011): 554–557; M. Mehdiiev, "Bubi mädräsäse," in: *Mädräsälärdä kitap kishtäse. Mäshkhur mäg'rifät üzäkläre tarikhynan* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nashriiaty, 1992): 38–70. A detailed history of the Izh Bubi madrasa was written by one of its founding fathers, 'Abd Allah Bubi (1871–1922). The manuscript work is preserved at the Oriental Sector of Kazan University Library, no. 207T, ff. 2^a–95^a. This part was recently translated into modern Tatar: *Bertugan Bubyilar häm Izh-Bubyi mädräsäse: Tarikhi-dokumental' zhyentyk* (Kazan: Rukhiyat, 1999).

20 Gabdulla Tukai is a major figure of Tatar literature of the early 20th century who was

literature at Izh Bubi was not taught systematically, recalling only the study of Arabic, Persian and Turkic grammar through dogmatic texts.²¹ Elsewhere, the Izh Bubi *madrasa* has been subject to varying depictions: it was portrayed as a 'reformist' school in the late-Tsarist period and as a bastion of religious indoctrination in Soviet times. In principle, both positions are problematic, since it is the very complexity of the education provided at Izh Bubi that we encounter in Maksudova's work.

With the arrival of the Bolsheviks, Abd al-Jamil was not deprived of his rights as other *mullas* were; three of his sons had sided with the Red Army and a daughter was a partisan. From Maksudova's memoirs of the Civil War period, we see that she and her family initially seemed to support the Bolsheviks.²² After her graduation from school, Maksudova went to teach in the village of Nizhnie Tarkhany of the Kazan governorate (1912–1916) and then moved to the city of Atbasar in the Kazakh Steppe (1916–1918). In Atbasar, Maksudova started teaching Russian to the Tatar students and translated Russian literature into Tatar. With the beginning of the Civil War, Maksudova returned to the Volga-Urals and taught in Elabuga for two years (1918–1920), but soon decided to resettle in Tashkent where she married a schoolteacher, Rida al-Din Gazizov, and entered Turkestan University (renamed Central Asian University in 1923), the main institution for Oriental scholarship in the region. We can deduce from the emphasis given to the constant travel and teaching of the Russian language in the various versions of Maksudova's biography, that these two things must have served as means of survival as well as integration into Soviet society for her.

Maksudova spent only two years in Tashkent (1920–1922), but, in that time, she managed to learn much about the paleography of Oriental manuscripts and the scholarly skills required for dealing with them. It was a time when such renowned specialists in Islamic studies as Aleksandr Semenov and Aleksandr Shmidt were training their students at the university.²³ This Central Asian link, so common in Tatar family histories, proved to be very important

accepted in Soviet scholarship as the only appropriate figure of Tatar national heritage and was heavily associated with folklore. For more information on this see: M. Friederich, *Gabdulla Tuqaj (1886–1913). Ein hochgelobter Poet im Dienst von tatarischer Nation und sowjetischem Sozialismus* (Wiesbaden, 1998).

- 21 Z. Maksudova, "Khäterem türendä (G. Tukai türinda kechkenä khätirä)," in: *Sovet mäktäbe*, 4 (1977): 24.
- 22 Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan. Fond 32. Zainap Maksudova. File 1. Document 10.
- 23 For a brief overview on the importance of the Central Asian University see: P. Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

to Maksudova's academic interests: her *madrassa* education was now enriched by academic approaches to dealing with Islamic written heritage. Moreover, her knowledge of Russian opened the door to classical Russian Oriental studies based on the philological principles so dear to Maksudova. Given this direct acquaintance with academic manuscript studies, I assume that it was while she was in Tashkent that Maksudova realized the importance of manuscript sources for the literary history of the Volga-Urals region.

In 1922, Maksudova and her family finally arrived in Kazan, the place where she would spend the rest of her life. Now in the early stages of her career, Maksudova combined school teaching with work at archival institutions, collecting data on the role of the Tatars in the Pugachev revolt (1773–1775). In Kazan, Maksudova divorced her husband, taught at various different places and, eventually, after 1937, teaching at Soviet schools became her main occupation. Maksudova was particularly concerned with the role of the Russian language in Tatar culture: in December 1948, she began a series of articles in the local press that argued for the necessity of intensifying the teaching of Russian among Tatars. For this reason, Maksudova is remembered by some modern historians as a devoted 'Russifier'.²⁴ Yet, this obsession with Russian culture was not just the result of her 'reformist' educational background or personal taste. Given the fact that all of Maksudova's relatives were part of the regional Islamic elite, acting as an effective promoter of Russian literature can be understood as a survival tactic. The topic of anti-religious repressions is completely absent from Maksudova's private notes, even though she was undoubtedly a witness to many destroyed lives and libraries. Without making the assumption that Maksudova simply wanted to survive, it becomes difficult to understand her sophisticated interest in Muslim literary heritage, which started to come to light in the late 1950s.

Maksudova's retirement in 1957 was the starting point for her intensive academic work. In the context of the post-Stalinist thaw and the rise in interest of Oriental studies in the Soviet Union, Maksudova was employed as a teacher of Arabic at Kazan State Pedagogical University. During that time, she actively collaborated with scholars from Kazan State University and the Institute of History, Language and Literature (IILi). When Mirkasyim Usmanov began organizing regular manuscript expeditions in 1963, Maksudova helped Tatar historians to identify the manuscripts, and through her relatives and acquaintances she started to collect books left over from the libraries of Muslim scholars who

24 A.G. Galliamova, *Istoriia Tatarstana: modernizatsiia po-sovetski (vtoraia polovina 1940-kh–pervaia polovina 1980-kh)* (Kazan': Magarif, 2010): 158.

had been the victims of repression. In the 1950s and 1970s, Maksudova worked on a series of big projects. Together with Khatib Usmanov, she edited a poem of Sayfi Sarayi (1321–1396), the *Gulistan bi-t-turki*, which was written at the time of the Golden Horde.²⁵ In addition, she prepared a full Tatar translation of Abd al-Nasir al-Qursawi's major Arabic-language work *al-Irshād li-l-'ibād*.²⁶ Moreover, Maksudova also made short descriptions for an archive belonging to Sayid Vakhidi (1887–1938), a pioneer of Tatar manuscript studies, which is still preserved at IlaLI in Kazan.

While she was never a member of the Communist Party, Maksudova's two sons, Ravil and Rustam, became party members and officers in the Soviet Army. Her personal life was rather unhappy; one of her sons married a Russian girl, moved to Moscow and did not keep in contact with his mother, while her other son became a drunkard. Only her ailing daughter Gulnar still cared for her in old age. It was Maksudova's daughter who preserved all of her papers after her death in February 1980 and later donated them to scientific institutions in Kazan.

Maksudova's Engagement with Oriental Manuscripts

By 1981, the main part of Maksudova's archive was moved to the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan and a smaller portion placed at the Institute of Language, Literature and Art in Kazan. Soviet-era printed books from her library, full of personal notes and commentaries, were sold off in the city's bookstores and can be found today in private hands. These personal notes and commentaries reveal the nature of Maksudova's engagement with the remarkable body of sources that she had mastered. As a bearer of the intellectual tradition that she found in the dusty manuscripts, it is clear in Maksudova's sophisticated intertextual dialogue with the texts that she felt it her duty to correct and improve the corpus of knowledge preserved in the long record of manuscript and printed books in Inner Russia.

In January 2012, I became acquainted with the section of Maksudova's archive preserved at the National Museum. The documents in this archive can be subdivided into three groups. The first one is a manuscript library, which

25 Saif Sarai, *Gulistan bit-turki*. 2 vols (Kazan: KGU, 1980).

26 This translation has been published posthumously: Gabdenasiyr Qursavi, *Keshelärne tugrı yulga kündärü* (*Äl-irshad lil-gıybad*), Tatar translation from Arabic by Zäinep Maksudova (Kazan: Iman, 1999). I was not able to locate the manuscript of this translation in Maksudova's archive. Apparently, it was lost.

contains almost 400 volumes in Tatar, Arabic and Persian languages dating from the 15th–20th centuries.²⁷ This collection is of great significance since very few of the private libraries that belonged to Tatar scholars educated in pre-revolutionary times have survived. This private library, formed during the Soviet era, reflects the intellectual networks of Islamic scholars in the Viatka region in the 19th and early 20th centuries and shows the ways in which this legacy was apprehended in the Soviet period. Despite Maksudova's report to Mirkasyim Usmanov that her father's library had been lost in the 1908 fire in their home village,²⁸ the manuscripts of Abd al-Jamil b. Abd al-Mannan formed the core of Maksudova's private collection. Thus, the traditional familial library inherited by Maksudova became the basis for subsequent acquisitions. The majority of manuscripts were produced locally at various madrasas, but some copies arrived from Central Asia and even from Egypt. Maksudova's library represents a range of works characteristic of 19th-century Volga-Ural Islamic scholarship, especially on logic (*al-mantiq*), Islamic law and poetry.²⁹ The main value of this library is in the notes left by previous book holders and by Maksudova herself, since these sometimes very extensive annotations help us to learn more about Muslim intellectual circles in Russia.

As early as the 1920s, Maksudova left handwritten reports in Tatar in Arabic script on her fieldwork of collecting old manuscripts in the local vicinity.³⁰ She

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- 27 In April 1969, Yurii Bregel consulted a description in Arabic script of Maksudova's library that she had prepared herself, which included 299 titles of manuscript and printed books. Iu. E. Bregel, "Vostochnye rukopisi v Kazani," in: *Pamiatniki pis'mennosti Vostoka. Ezhegodnik. 1969* (Moscow, 1972): 366. A description of Maksudova's manuscript library (*fihris*) survived in her archive and will be published soon in the modern Tatar language.
- 28 M.A. Usmanov, *Tatarskie istoricheskie istochniki*: 28.
- 29 For an insight into the canon of *madrasa* literature of the Volga-Urals see: M. Kemper, *Sufis und Gelehrte in Tatarien und Baschkirien, 1789–1889: der islamische Diskurs unter Russischer Herrschaft* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1998): 215–217.
- 30 In particular, Maksudova wrote in one of her reports: "In 1927, I spent my summer vacation in several Tatar villages of the Elabuga canton. I tried to use these trips for the study of manuscripts and other materials left from former *madrasas*. For example, in Salaushah village I saw a significant body of old manuscripts. Among them are sources on the history of national movements among the Tatars, their participation in state affairs as well as on Tatar culture at large. For example, there is a short, but quite interesting text on the participation of the students of Tirsä *madrasa* in the Pugachev uprising [1773–1775—A.B.] (I wrote about it in one of the issues of the journal *Ma'arif* of 1927), materials on the participation of peasants in the construction of a factory in Izhevsk in 1729 and a number of fairytales." (Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan. Collection 32. Zainap Maksudova. File 2. Uncatalogued).

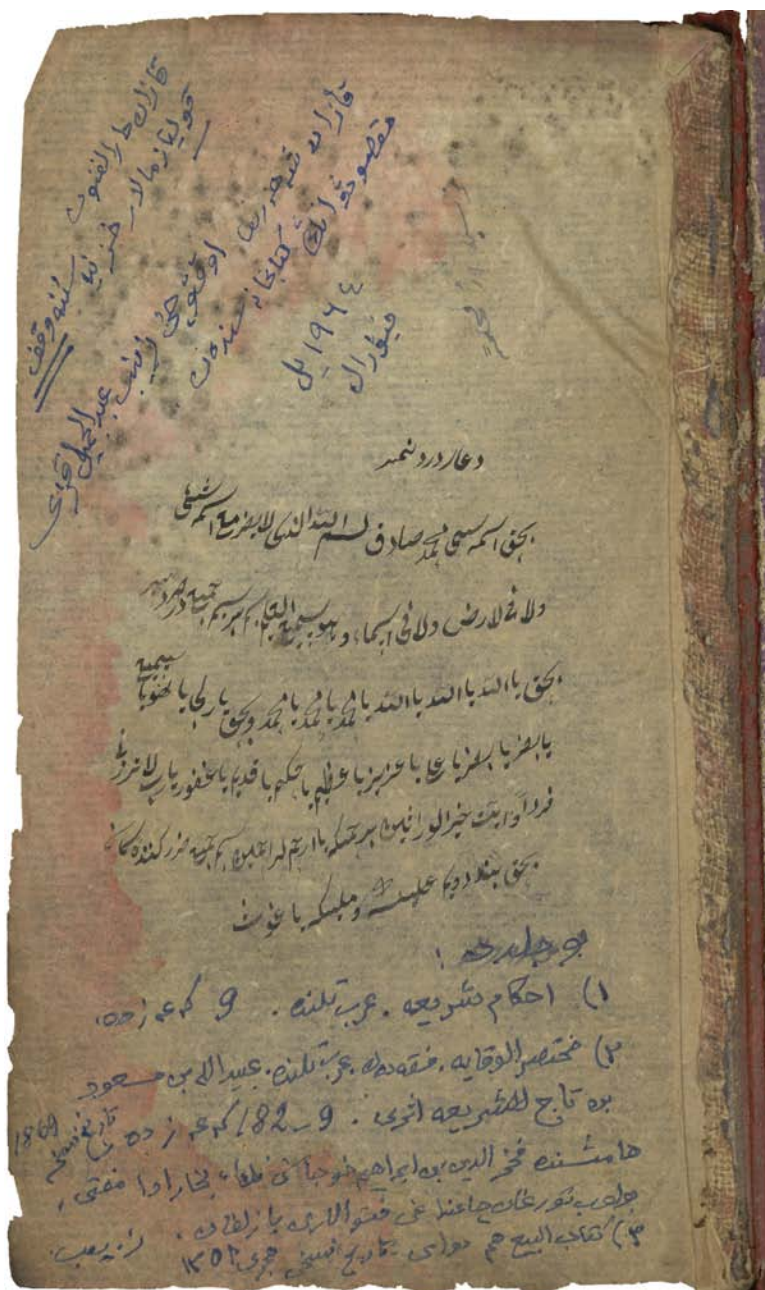


FIGURE 4 The first page of a Central Asian manuscript containing legal works. The inscription in Tatar says that Maksudova donated the book as a waqf to Kazan University Library in February 1964. Ms. 51851 Ar, Kazan University Library

not only copied out a number of interesting texts for academic purposes, but also transferred many books to other collectors, such as the Tatar writer and politician Galimjan Ibragimov (1887–1938). After the repression of the 1930s and her return to Kazan, Maksudova sent out letters asking about the remnants of former libraries of distinguished Islamic scholars. Some of the latter were her relatives, but she learned the names and biographies of many others from Rida al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din's (1859–1936) and Shihab al-Din al-Mardjani's (1818–1889) biographical dictionaries.³¹ In the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, Maksudova became a prominent actor in the network of exchange of Islamic literature, providing old books to members of the Soviet religious elite, such as Abbas Bibarsov (1937–2012), a secretary of the Spiritual Administration in Ufa in the 1970s and 1980s.³² Maksudova was in contact with Magomed-Said Saidov (1902–1985), the founding father of Arabic studies in Daghestan,³³ though they never met in person. She was also acquainted with Ziya' al-Din Babakhanov (1908–1982), the head of Central Asian Muftiate, and Kamal Bashirov (d. 1971), a *qadi* of the Religious Board in Ufa. Some of the books that Maksudova collected went into the hands of other collectors, and some were kept for her private library, which she used to compile a biographical dictionary. In the 1960s, Maksudova was already able to donate some of the books from the library to the Oriental Sector of Kazan University Library.

Most of the manuscripts had been produced on Russian manufactured paper throughout the 19th century and often dealing with the issues of Islamic law.³⁴ While there is nothing copied after the 1920s,³⁵ this absence of works of

31 Copies of these books preserved in Maksudova's library are full of her corrections and additions: see archival numbers 18369-206, 251, 252, 253 at the Archive of Written Sources of the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan in Kazan.

32 Maksudova's diary contains a short mention that "Abbas needs any kind of books on *tafsir*, *hadith*, and Tatar history either in Tatar or in Arabic" with an indication of his home address in Ufa. Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan. Collection 32. Zainap Maksudova. File 2. Uncatalogued private documents.

33 A.R. Shikhsaidov, Kh.A. Omarov, *Katalog arabskikh rukopisei (Kollektsiia M.-S. Saidova)* (Makhachkala, 2005); M. Kemper, "Ijtihad into Philosophy: Islam as Cultural Heritage in Post-Stalinist Daghestan," in: *Central Asian Survey* 33/3 (2014): 390–404.

34 This fact gives credit to Paolo Sartori's observation of "shar'i-fication", i.e. "the exposure of Muslims to an unprecedented number of institutions in which Islamic law either was a topic of sophisticated scholarly discussion or informed practices of conflict resolution and the crafting of court proceedings." P. Sartori, "Exploring the Islamic Juridical Field in the Russian Empire: An Introduction," *Islamic Law and Society* 24/1–2 (2017): 14.

35 However, there is an almost complete set of the Journal *Islam majallase* published in Ufa in the 1920s.

the Soviet era does not demonstrate a break in the manuscript tradition (which continued to exist until the 1990s),³⁶ but rather illustrates the views of the collector who purposefully built a library only with pre-revolutionary items that exemplify the long-standing tradition of Islamic learning in the region.

Works on the Hanafi law in Arabic include *al-Wiqāya* by al-Maḥbūbī (7th/13th cent.),³⁷ the popular work on inheritance law *al-Farā'id al-Sirājiyya* by Siraj al-Din al-Sajawandi (6th/12th cent.) and the commentaries on it;³⁸ Sufi ethics are represented by *Rawḍat al-ʿulama' wa nuzhat al-fuḍalā'* by 'Alī b. Yaḥya al-Zandusti al-Bukhari (d. 400/1009),³⁹ Islamic philosophy by *Ayn al-ilm* by Muhammad b. 'Uthman al-Balkhi (1426 AD),⁴⁰ while Islamic creed often feature the work *al-Aqaid* by Najm al-Din al-Nasafi (d. 537/1142)⁴¹ and the commentaries on it. The discipline of *hadith* is represented by a wide range of works, including al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhi's (d. 285/898?) *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, and *al-Futūḥāt al-Wahbiyya* by Ibrahim al-Shabrakhiti (d. 1106/1697).⁴² All of these standard works were copied between the late 18th and early 20th centuries by Tatar scribes, most of whom were Maksudova's relatives, one way or another.

Among the works written by the Tatar authors, a short commentary on the Qur'anic chapter al-Qadr (sūra 97) may be mentioned. It was compiled in 1866 by 'Abd al-Jamil Maqsudi, the father of Zainap Maksudova.⁴³ Another, larger, Qur'anic commentary is by Nu'man al-Thamani, who wrote it in 1821.⁴⁴ There are two Sufi hagiographies that are of interest for researchers: an account on the Yasawi *shaykhs* in Turkistan and their clashes with infidels⁴⁵ as well as a

36 A.K. Bustanov, "Against Leviathan: On the Ethics of Islamic Poetry in Soviet Russia," Michael Kemper and Ralf Elger (eds) *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 199–224.

37 GAL I, 377. Oriental Sector of Kazan University Library, no. 3181 Ar.; National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-5; no. 18369-68.

38 GAL II, 217. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-135, copied in the late 18th century.

39 GAL S I, 361. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-118.

40 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-91 (copied in 1860); no. 18369-92; no. 18369-100 (copied in 1854); no. 18369-138 (copied in 1868).

41 GAL I, 427. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-81, copied in 1832.

42 GAL S I, 683 (16). National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-112, copied by a Tatar student in Bukhara in 1865.

43 This work is known from Zainap Maksudova's description of her library and is assumed to be kept at the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan.

44 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-120.

45 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-59, ff. 12–28. Copied by the son of 'Abd Allah Bubi.

Chaghatay work on a Tatar migrant in Khorezm, who became an Uwaisi of Najm al-Din al-Kubra.⁴⁶ The latter narrative was copied together with a number of Persian treatises on Sufism ascribed to Najm al-Din al-Kubra, even though his works are almost unknown in Russia.⁴⁷ There is also a short treatise on Arabic philology by Mansur al-Burunduqi al-Bulghari (d. after 1139/ 1726–1727).⁴⁸ Some other works provide a clue to the everyday practices of Sufis in the Volga-Urals, mentioning litanies and longer mystical works in Tatar or Persian. One exemplary work on Sufism, namely Ni‘mat Allah al-Utari’s (d. 1816) *Risāla-yi madaniyya*, due to its popularity can be counted as a textbook for the Tatar students of *taṣawwuf*.⁴⁹ In addition to these works, Maksudova’s collection includes a fragment of a historical work that echoes the Golden Horde historiographical traditions, namely *Dāstān-i Chingīz-khān wa aḥwāl-i Aqsaq Timur*.⁵⁰

There are several other manuscripts that had been compiled by the Volga-Urals ‘ulamā’ during the 19th century. A collection of legal works by Fath Allah b. Husayn al-Uriwi al-Bulghari (1767/68–1843/44) in his autograph from 1224/1809 deals with the necessity of conducting the fifth prayer during the short nights, and with how to establish the direction and time of prayer.⁵¹ Several works on logic written by the prominent theologian Shihab al-Din al-Marjani (*Hāshiya ‘alā risālat al-shamsiyya*) were copied at the *madrasa* of ‘Aṭā’ Allah al-Qursawi in 1882.⁵² The latter wrote an extensive commentary on Abd al-Nasir al-Qursawi’s *Sharḥ ‘aqā’id al-Nasafī*, which survived in a unique copy from 1880, produced by Muhammad Safa al-Kunawi.⁵³ Another work (in two volumes) on Islamic creed was written by Abu-l-Hasan al-Qursawi, who also wrote an unpublished commentary on Abu Nasr al-Qursawi’s work.⁵⁴ It seems

46 Oriental Sector of Kazan University Library, no. 740F, ff. 92^b–110^b. For a detailed study of this manuscript see my article “The Bulghar Region as a “Land of Ignorance”: Anti-Colonial Discourse in Kh‘ārazmian Connectivity”, *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 9/2 (2016): 183–204.

47 Another manuscript of the same authorship comes from Maksudova’s library: National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-83, ff. 1^b–41^a, copied near Kazan in 1814.

48 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-103, ff. 222^b–265^b.

49 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-70.

50 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-141. Edition of the text: M. Ivanics, M.A. Usmanov, *Das der Dschingis-Legende (Dāftār-i Chingiz-namā)* (Szeged, 2002).

51 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-12.

52 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-19.

53 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-61.

54 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-35 and no. 18369-56. Both copied in 1884.

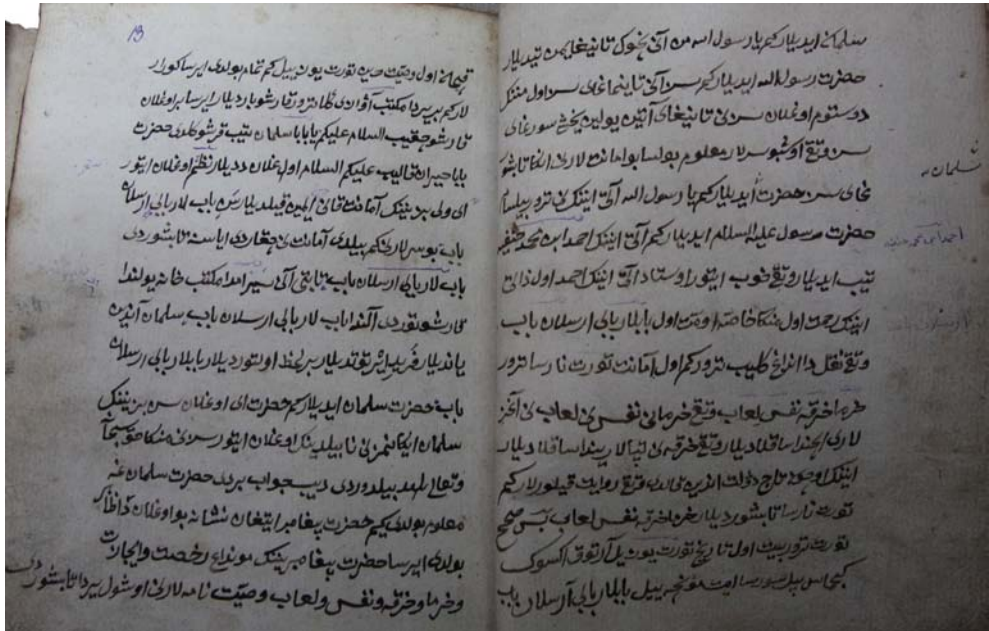


FIGURE 5 A Yasawi hagiography from Ms. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-59, ff. 12-28, here shown ff. 12^b-13^a

that by the late 19th century, Abu Nasr al-Qursawi had become a popular author and this is why we also have a collection of his works copied in 1881.⁵⁵

Besides the manuscripts and printed books, Maksudova managed to collect a number of unique documents related to the history of her family, including communal agreements (Rus. *prigovor*) on fishing, genealogies, family registers and private letters. They all remain uncatalogued, but certainly need to be published.

Every manuscript in this collection bears countless notes by their scribes, commentators, sellers, owners and heirs. All this information, however fragmented and unsystematic it might seem, provides us with invaluable data on the social history of Muslims in the Russian Empire. Even though Maksudova was not necessarily interested in the social aspects in her manuscript treasures, she had carefully recorded and copied most of these 'marginal' notes, including the dates of birth and death, selling remarks and alike.

Indeed, almost all manuscripts in the library were carefully read and bear notes and corrections made by Maksudova in pencil. Each volume has a de-

55 National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-41, ff. 66-134.

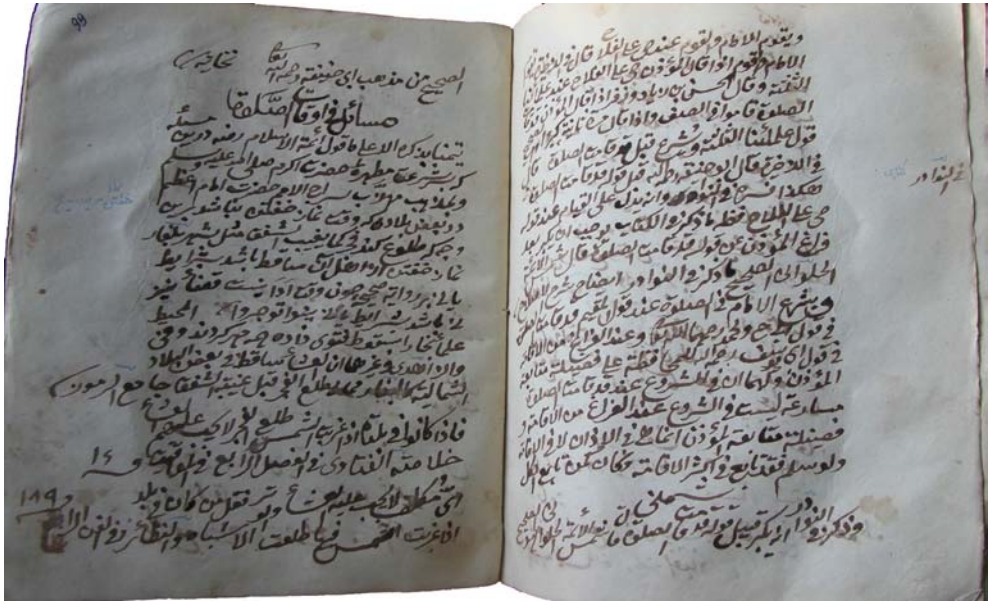


FIGURE 6 *Fath Allah al-Uriwi al-Bulghari, Mas'ail fi awqat al-salat, Ms. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, no. 18369-12, ff. 98^b-99^a*

tailed annotation written in the reformed Tatar Arabic script, containing a serial number for each work, which corresponds with numbers in the catalogue (*fihris*), its author, title, language(s), an approximate date according to paleography if there is no exact information, previous owners, and sometimes a commentary on the importance of the book. In addition to this information, Maksudova also placed extensive bibliographical lists with all of the names and titles mentioned throughout the given manuscript. Inside the books, one encounters extensive underlining, notes and commentaries on the books' contents, including corrections of the copyists' mistakes and a variety of readings from other copies of the same work. Her professional approach is striking, given that she had not occupied any formal academic position.

The library is filled with a huge number of notebooks and diaries composed by Maksudova, mainly during the 1970s. Here we learn about her personality. Despite her genealogical involvement in the circles of Islamic learning, Maksudova appeared publicly as a secularized Soviet person. This outward appearance notwithstanding, in her diary I found a description of how to perform the rite of *khatm-i khwājagān*, a famous Naqshbandi litany. Furthermore, Maksudova seemed to recite the Qur'an from time to time: she composed a long prayer in Tatar to be read out after each Qur'an recitation. In this prayer, Maksudova listed the names of her learned ancestors, scholars of the 18th-

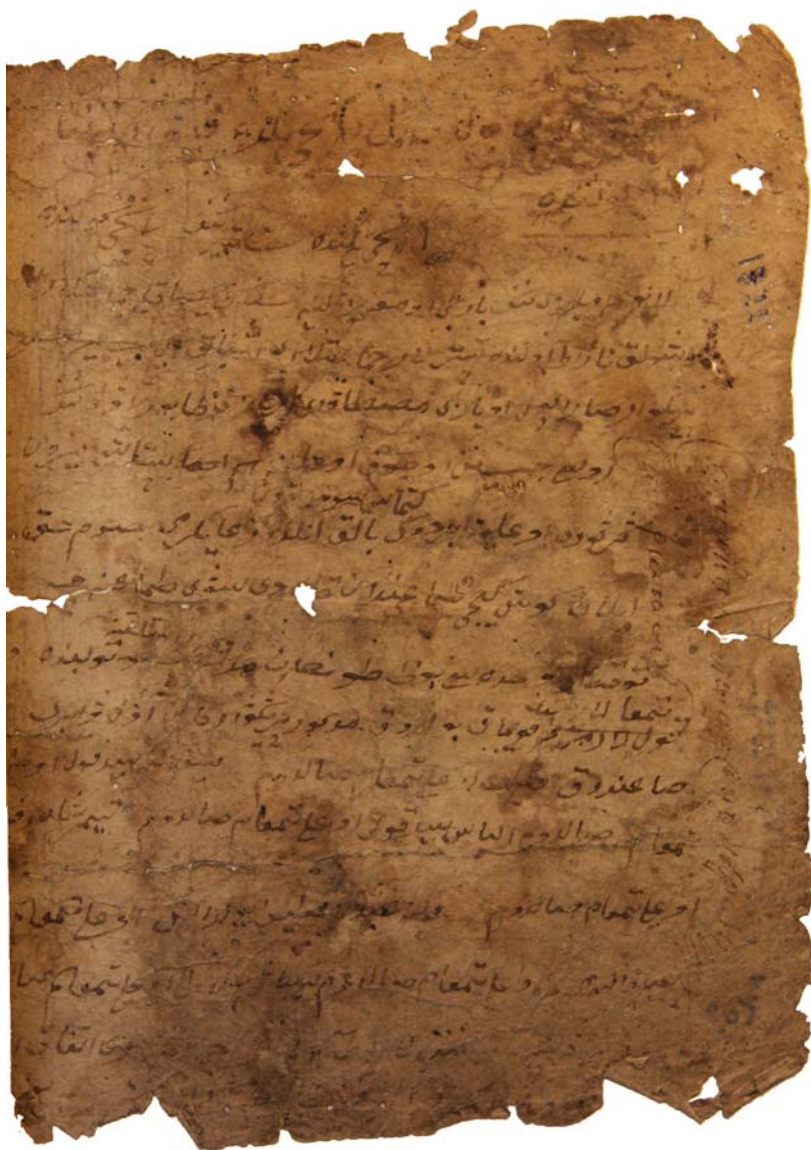


FIGURE 7 A communal agreement on fishing in the village of Narat, 1822. Uncatalogued item at the Institute of Language, Literature and Art, Kazan

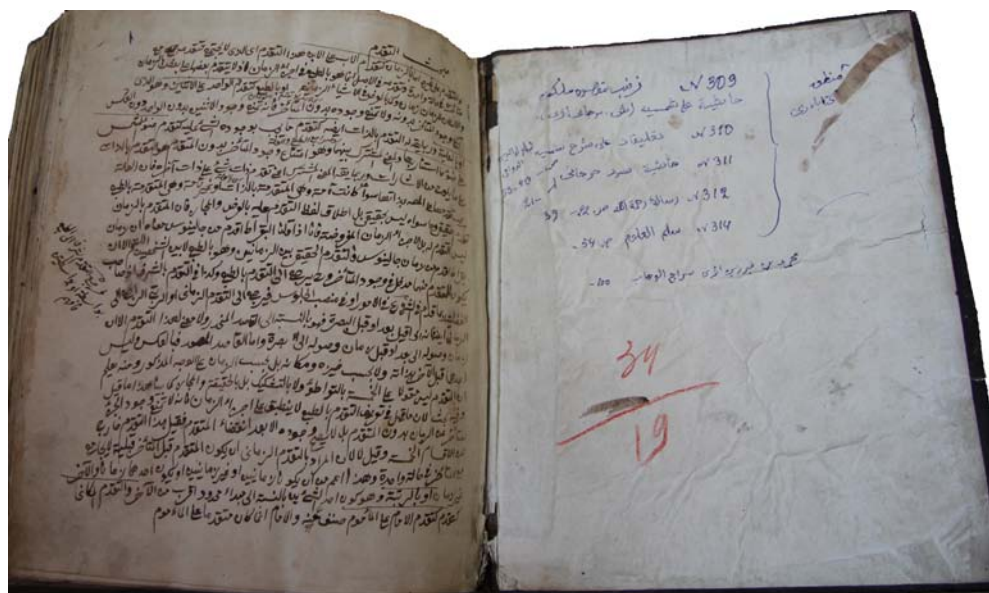


FIGURE 8 Zainap Maksudova's annotations to a legal compendium. Ms. National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, 18369-19

and 19th centuries, and asked God to place them in paradise. In this case, being Soviet did not automatically mean a rejection of religiosity, as is reflected in these seldom practiced rituals, which were clearly of importance for Maksudova.

On the basis of her in-depth study of manuscript sources, Maksudova embarked upon the ambitious project of compiling a bibliographical dictionary of the Tatar literary tradition, which I consider to be her masterwork. The dictionary had already been drafted by 1964, when Maksudova wrote a letter to Prof. Boris Serebrennikov at the Moscow Institute of Peoples of Asia and Africa asking for help with the publication of the catalogue. In this document, she explained that the absence of reference works on Tatar literature lead to mistakes and misunderstandings of its history. According to Maksudova, her catalogue included 4,500 entries on sources dating from the 8th to the 20th century.

The dictionary is eclectic in its character. While describing the life paths of Tatar scholars, Maksudova very much follows the line of traditional Tatar biographical literature, as represented in the works of Rida al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din and Shihab al-Din al-Marjani, though she often corrects and upgrades the data provided by her predecessors. In terms of its academic formatting, the catalogue has much in common with Brockelmann's reference work on Arabic literature, with division according to genres, and references to relevant manuscript

catalogues.⁵⁶ And indeed, Maksudova had in mind European models of conceptualization of literary history while looking at the world that she herself was a part of. She perceived the written heritage of the Volga-Ural Muslims as a coherent whole without separation into 'progressive' or 'modernist' wings. Her selection of authors and their writings was limited only in the sense that it entirely comprised the material that was readily available to her in her library and in the private and state archives in Tatarstan and the neighbouring Bashkir republic. Maksudova's seminal achievement still remains unpublished, despite the fact that it would make the study of the intellectual history of Muslim Russia much easier than it currently stands, since it actually represents the whole pedigree of regional scholarly tradition and its international ties.

Maksudova's "Biographical and Bibliographic Dictionary," as she named it, includes the titles of Arabic, Persian and Turkic works put in chronological and alphabetical order. The alphabetically organized section includes entries for each author with indication of name or *nisba* as well as full name, and sometimes the whole genealogy, date and place of birth and death, educational background (when known), a list of the author's works with indication of their language, date and place of composition, scholarly classification, place of manuscripts' storage or the date and place of editions, and also available sources concerning these works. The chronological part of the dictionary contains only those authors whose birth and death dates are established.⁵⁷

Why would a Soviet schoolteacher do anything of this kind? For Maksudova, manuscripts served as the main source of the literary and intellectual history of the Tatars at large, but also her large family in particular. By looking at texts and identifying their sources, she tried to (re)construct the whole range of literary genres and demonstrate the long roots of Tatar literature and the outstanding role of her relatives. In the post-Stalinist era, this endeavour led Maksudova to actively include herself in the networks of exchange and the scholarly trade of Islamic literature among secular, semi-secular and religious actors across the Soviet Union. The latter point allows us to go beyond merely biographical approaches and to see Maksudova's marginalia as part of a larger intellectual movement linked with Tatar nationalism and the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge in an atheist society.

56 C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*. 5 vols (Leiden, E.J. Brill: 1937–1949).

57 Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan. Collection 32. Zainap Maksudova. File 2. Uncatalogued private documents.

فیندی نه	قاسی مله	کم، قایل، قایان کوجر کم یاکی باسلفک	نیکسکه ره له رم
فقه اسلام	عرب تکرده		د الفنون که تا بهشردم
فقه اسلام	عرب تکرده		د الفنون که تا بهشردم
فقه موعظه و احادیث، حکایه که در	عرب تکرده، سنواری	نهی یلاردا عبد الستار بن مؤنیک یازغان	تقوه دانه که کور که حمله یار
نورک تکرده، یک اچ	1827 یلاردا یازغان	نصیر قورهای جعکه کیتکچ	مل یاغده که نه میتی
فرانز فقه			
د الفنون که تقوی حقنه	عرب تکرده، برایک	مه حق ثارنده اچور 1882 میلادی 1870 یلدا سرت احمد بی اچور	کلی مانتور که نه زله ری
که نه زبانه بیق	که نه زبانه بیق	مدیر، سنده، برهان الدین، به ملاه که نه زله ری	تازا
یازغانا عا	یازغانا عا		
فقه دونه	عرب تکرده	کوجر یاز وچن زبانه العربیه به مناسبه النورکادی 1814 یلدا	وطره جوغشی یلدا نورک
		بلفار و لایق او نایون طاشان یازغانا ابوبکر منصور	یازغانا شاورشاد یازغانا
		اوغلی مدرک سست یازغانا بلدریب گمزله قلم به نه قول	تاتار یازغانا مدرک
		تویغان جوغشی بیسند شول مدرک ده او قولغان کتابلار	نیشله که نه
		اسلامی ترکمه که نه: "مکتب، حکایه، کافیه، شریعت سواک،	بوقول یازغانا کتابین قازان
		یوسف، مرگل، شغفه، کولکوستان، جدر کجید یاغانا امیر	دولت دالفنون خزانده
		ترک، شریط الصلوة، کافیه، قصه انبیا، مقدمه یک	بیردم، زینب
		حکایت، قوت حدیث، معراج نامه، بخارزاده،	
تلفظ هم الحلاوت	عرب تکرده	عبد الباق بن قتلی احمد اله نسوی یازغانا 1848	جو بکنه کتابلارده آتغان
		میلادیده، دیمه ک دینسی ثارنده (مه که مع)	کجه که نه ترکمه که نه
		یشونده 6/11 یوزده زور عالم کشته برلغانا 1870	کتابقا ترکمه که نه قوتلی
		یلدا ده کتابین بورا کیرته اولندا نور وچ عبد الباق	بو خطا
		قتلعت اوغانا شادای اولنگه مسجد علی قربانعلی اوغانا	جو کتابین حاتلر عا که نه
		ساقان	زینب

FIGURE 9 An example of detailed manuscript descriptions prepared by Zainap Maksudova. Uncatalogued item at the Institute of Language, Literature and Art, Kazan

Soviet Ulama and Muslim Libraries

While Maksudova's life story can be read in light of critiques of the modernist narrative that insisted on Islamic modernists' secularization and the complete integration of 'progressive Muslims' into Soviet society, one can complicate the picture further by considering the contemporary Muslim religious circles that formed the elite of Soviet Islam in the last decades of its existence. In the 1970s, not only nationalist-minded secular academics, but also many religious figures

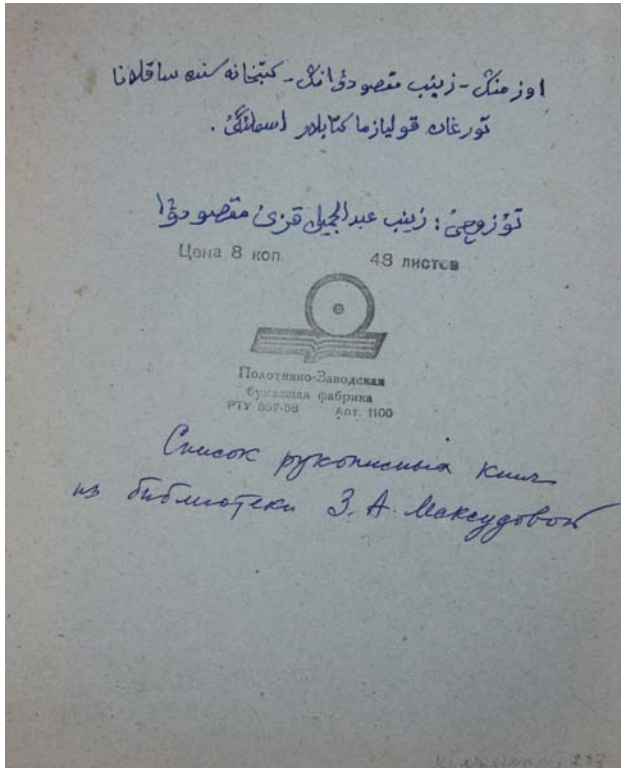


FIGURE 10
Title-page of Zainap
Maksudova's
manuscript catalogue.
Uncatalogued item at
the Institute of
Language, Literature
and Art, Kazan

who had been officially approved by the Soviet state, embarked upon the collection and study of the pre-revolutionary intellectual heritage of the Muslims of the former Russian Empire. This can be explained by examining several factors. Firstly, there was no legal market for Islamic literature in the Soviet Union (except for anti-religious writings and the Arabic studies reference books by I.Iu. Krachkovskii and Kh.K. Baranov, which heavily influenced the expanding Russian Islamic discourse in the 1980s and early 1990s⁵⁸) and *mullas* were looking for old books and hoping to establish informal book-trade networks across the country. Another reason was that the possession of and ability to read Arabic-script literature at that time became a major source of Islamic authority among people that had effectively been cut off from their religious heritage. Thirdly, partly under the influence of secular scholars, Soviet *mullas*

58 A. Bustanov, M. Kemper, "Valiulla Iakupov's Tatar Islamic Traditionalism," in: *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*, 67/3 (2013): 830.

integrated a pantheon of officially sanctioned Muslim scholars of the past into their religious discourse. In order to exemplify these trends, let us turn to some examples.

The mosque named after Shihab al-Din al-Marjani was the only mosque in Soviet Kazan that did not close its doors during the repressions of the 1930s. Between 1968 and 1994, this mosque was headed by Abd al-Khabir Jarullah (1905–1994), another figure of seemingly reformist background since he had studied at the Muhammadiya and Qasimiya *madrasas* in Kazan, two famous centres of Islamic modernism for the whole region. Jarullah's method of interpretation concerning the Muslim legacy, however, does not involve usage of the concept of Islamic modernism when writing about a proper way of social life. In particular, during his sermons, Abd al-Khabir Jarullah placed a clear emphasis on the importance of Kazan as an ancient international centre of Islamic learning: "The city of Kazan is famous in the whole Islamic world for its honorific title *manba' al-'ilm*—'the source of knowledge' (*gyilem chishmäse*) for the region of Tatarstan—because numerous respected scholars and teachers lived and worked in this scholarly center in the 18th and 19th centuries [...] Each of these scholars made a great contribution to Islamic civilization, taught religion and left a huge body of scholarly works (may God's mercy be upon them!)." ⁵⁹ Jarullah introduced his speech in this way on 26 March 1971, while proceeding to read out a Friday sermon written by the prominent Tatar Islamic scholar and first Soviet Mufti, Alimjan Barudi (1857–1921). ⁶⁰ In January and October 1971, Jarullah cited two short sermons written by the subsequent Soviet Mufti Rida al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din on ethics. ⁶¹ Reminding his audience of Kazan's prominence as the birthplace of famous scholars and important books, Abd al-Khabir Jarullah claimed that modern Soviet Muslims should maintain this high level of prestige in the eyes of foreign guests, scholars and famous persons. ⁶² Here, the Imam referred to the function of the Marjani mosque as a showcase of Soviet Islam being tolerated in the atheist state, in a similar fashion to how it was done in Central Asia, where tourists were shown mosques and shrines restored by the Soviet government.

Abd al-Khabir Jarullah seemed to be personally interested in the Tatar literary tradition preserved in old, printed books and Arabic-script manuscripts.

59 G. Iarullin, *Jomga vā gaet vāgaz'läre* (Kazan: Iman nāshriatī, 1426/2005): 25–26, 231.

60 For further reading on Alimjan Barudi see: Iosif Akchura, *Damella Galimjan al-Barudi*, (Kazan, 1997); Galimdzhan khazrat Barudi, *Pamiatnaia knizhka (Khater daftare)* (Kazan: Iman nāshriatī, 2000); M.Kh. Iusupov, *Galimdzhan Barudi* (Kazan': Tat.kn. izd-vo, 2003).

61 G. Iarullin, *Jomga vā gaet vāgaz'läre*: 179–180, 208.

62 Ibid. 116.

According to the Kazan-based historian Marsel' Akhmetzianov, the Imam collected Tatar manuscripts and donated some of them to the Ibrahimov Institute of Language, Literature and Arts in Kazan.⁶³ Some other texts, especially those belonging to a number of Jarullah's teachers, are preserved in his private archive.

When reading the reports of the regular manuscript expeditions established by Mirkasyim Usmanov—organized with the intention of researching old books among the Tatars outside of the TatarASSR after 1963, and conducted by Gīisa Husainov in Bashkiria in 1973 and by Marsel' Akhmetzianov and others in Tatarstan in the 1970s—it becomes apparent that local religious authorities actively participated as the main informants of these expeditions. Frequently, these local collaborators possessed libraries inherited from their learned ancestors or religious institutions. For example, Mirkasyim Usmanov once briefly mentioned that his discovery of the large archive of Rida al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din in Ufa actually took place in the office of Mufti Shakir Khyialetdinov.⁶⁴ In 1964, around 600 manuscripts were donated from the Marjani Mosque to the Kazan State University Library, and in the 1970s a huge part of the library of the Muslim Spiritual Administration in Ufa was moved to the local scientific centre. Broadly speaking, local mosques and their *mullas* became a source for acquiring old books for academics in Kazan and Ufa. However, at a certain point, the religious authorities themselves realized the significance of their own written heritage.

In this regard, an expedition to Troitsk, conducted by Bashkir philologists in September 1984, is quite telling. In their report, the philologists stated that as early as the late 1940s and 1950s, and thus after both the war and severe repressions against religion, people who were able to read books in 'Oriental languages' started to regain the manuscripts or books of their parents, relatives and acquaintances, according to marginal notes, autographs, seals and other marks to be found in the old books. Some of these people succeeded in building up big libraries. In the 1970s, the number of people who could read old texts decreased and manuscripts either remained in the family as artefacts or were moved to a local mosque. This process of collecting old books in mosques is reflected in the diary of a village Imam who kept a record of the new acquisitions.⁶⁵

63 M.I. Akhmetzianov, *Tatar ädäbi mirasın öiränü problemaları: ädäbi chüganaklarnı barlau, tiksherü metodı nätijäläre*. Filologiiä fännäre doktorı isemle fänni dārājägä laek bulunı däg'vā itep iazılğan dissertatsiia (Kazan, 1997): 23.

64 Mirkasyim Gosmanov. *Tarikhi-biographik, fänni-dokumental' zhyentyk* (Kazan, 2014): 275.

65 Ms Kazan University Library, 6048 T, 6 folios.

In 1981–1982, members of the local Islamic community in Troitsk visited all houses where Tatars and Bashkirs lived and acquired old literature for the needs of the mosque.⁶⁶ However, specialists who arrived in the city two years later were not able to find any significant libraries either in private hands, or at the only open mosque in the city, which had been an influential centre of Islamic learning before the October Revolution. Here, it becomes apparent that there was even competition between the secular and religious wings of the ‘Mirasism’ movement, since both groups attempted to appropriate the written legacy for their own needs. The disappearance of well-stocked libraries in former cultural centres, which can often be explained by severe Bolshevik repression, also testifies to the migration and change of Islamic authorities and the places where they were concentrated.

Conclusion

Even from this brief glance at Zainap Maksudova’s life story, it becomes apparent that the intellectual pedigree of Muslim scholarship in Russia and the fate of learned Muslim society in the Soviet Union are similarly complex. Maksudova was the offspring of a learned lineage and a graduate of a ‘reformist’ school that taught Russian to Tatar children. At the same time, she was interested in classical Oriental Studies, struggled to rebuild the library of her ancestors, donated Sufi manuscripts to the university library, and was busy compiling a catalogue of the Tatar literary tradition. She utilized the Russian language and a degree of secularization as means to acquaint herself with the modern European humanities. She subsequently used her skills to promote the concept of a millennium-long history of Tatar literature without separation into languages, genres and political camps.

By looking at Maksudova’s private files, it is clear that she was part of a wider circle of like-minded people, both inside and outside of academia and officially sanctioned religious institutions. The methods of preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge differed significantly: some people occupied themselves simply by collecting old books; others went beyond mere gathering and

66 I.G. Galiautdinov, “Svedeniia o rabote arkhograficheskikh ekspeditsionnykh otriadov Ordena ‘Znak Pocheta’ Instituta istorii, iazyka i literatury Bashkirskogo filial AN SSSR v 1984 g.”, 6 pages. Preserved at the manuscript department of the Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Ufa Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (uncatalogued).

cataloguing by making use of the written heritage in their regular mosque sermons and putting together the puzzles of Muslim literature.

Students of Islam educated in the modernist schools of the late-Tsarist period did not divide the written heritage into 'progressive' and 'backward' literatures. Soviet secular education and the European way of life had now become so easily attainable that it was the traditional *madrassa* education and its legacy that needed to be preserved and re-evaluated for Soviet realities.

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