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Fazliddin Muhammadiev's Journey to the "Other World": The History of a Cold War *Ḥajjnāma*

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Abstract

Fazliddin Muhammadiev's *Dar on dunyo* ("In the other world"), first published in Tajik in 1965 and later translated to Russian, Uzbek, and many other languages, is the only known fictionalized account of the *ḥajj* produced in the Soviet Union. Based on a trip made by the author in 1963, the novel provided the Soviet reader a rare glimpse into this sacred rite. Drawing on archival sources, contemporary responses, and the text itself, this article traces the origins and publication history of the novel, situates it within Soviet domestic and foreign policy goals, and analyzes the text to see how the author tried to reconcile competing ideological priorities.

Keywords

ḥajj narratives – (non-)fiction – little homeland – Orientalism – Cold War

“Traveling on an IL-18, we are going on the *hajj*.”¹ So begins Fazliddin Muhammadiev’s novel *Dar on dunyo* (“In the other world”), first published in 1965 in the Tajik-language journal *Sadoi sharq* (“Voice of the Orient”) and two years later in Russian in the journal *Druzhiba narodov* (“Friendship of nations”). In the novel, Muhammadiev takes his readers on a journey, from Tajikistan to Moscow, and then to Khartoum and Jeddah, and eventually to Mecca and back. While ostensibly a work of fiction, *Dar on dunyo* is based on an actual journey that Muhammadiev completed in 1963, as one of 18 pilgrims on a state-sanctioned Soviet *hajj*. But Muhammadiev was not there as a pious Muslim; rather, he was a member of the Communist Party, a journalist and talented writer entrusted with carrying out a delicate task: representing the Soviet Union, demonstrating its respect for religious tradition, and at the same time showing that these religious traditions were receding into the past. The novel appears to be the only such account² to be published in the Soviet Union; it was translated into multiple languages, with the Russian version seeing several reprints.³ How do we explain this novel’s strange origins and success? What were its intended message and audiences? What narrative tropes did the author use to achieve his goals? And why would Soviet officials support the publication of a *hajjnāma*, let alone encourage its frequent republication?

Answering these questions can shed light on a larger puzzle about the late USSR. The Soviet Union proclaimed to be an atheist state that guaranteed religious freedom, which was nevertheless supposedly used only by a (shrinking) pool of elderly believers; the persistence of belief and ritual was explained as a “survival of the past.”⁴ During the Cold War, some Western scholars insisted that, at least in the Muslim areas of the USSR, religious practice not only survived but presented a source of resistance to the Soviet state.⁵ More recent

1 F. Muhammadiev, “Dar on dunyo. Qissai hajji akbar”, *Sadoi Sharq*, 3 (1965), 43. For a short biography of Muhammadiev see https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-iranica-online/muhammadiev-fazliddin-COM_1223 [accessed 16 March 2021].

2 A. Borschchagovskii, “Obrazy meniaiuschegesia mira”, F. Muhammadiev, *Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1976), 8.

3 The Russian edition of the novel published by Irfon publishers in Dushanbe in 1970 was the most popular and the closest to the Tajik original of 1965. For this reason we cite these two editions.

4 J. Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist ‘Scientific Atheism’ and the Study of Religion in the USSR* (New York: Mouton, 1983), 337–39; D. DeWeese, “Survival Strategies: Reflections on the Notion of Religious ‘Survivals’ in Soviet Ethnographic Studies of Muslim Religious Life in Central Asia”, in *Exploring the Edge of Empire. Socialist Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. F. Mühlfried and S. Sokolovsky (Berlin: LIT, 2011), 46–48.

5 W. Myer, *Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

scholarship has generally recognized that religious practice certainly continued, particularly in rural areas. While there is still disagreement about the way Soviet rule affected religious authority, most scholars today recognize that although religious practice could be a site of resistance to Soviet *rule* in an everyday sense, there was no religiously rooted political resistance to Soviet rule in any significant sense until the end of the Soviet period.⁶

The question of religious freedom was one that hung over the USSR's foreign policy, and its anti-religious policies were frequently employed by the United States as it sought to draw postcolonial elites to its own camp in the Global Cold War.⁷ The Soviet Union maintained its commitment to atheism and restricted freedom of worship, but it also proclaimed the right to religious freedom and touted this commitment in relations with the outside world. Proving that these two commitments could be reconciled became particularly important for the USSR in the late 1950s, when it began to support postcolonial states and liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, including Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Egypt, and Syria.

Domestically, Soviet religious policy aimed not just to eliminate religious belief but to replace it with a world view grounded in scientific atheism. One might thus be tempted to explain the USSR's stated commitment to religious freedom simply as a result of cynical propaganda, completely unmoored from reality. But whatever the gap between Soviet propaganda and reality, they were not separate domains of fact and fiction. As Victoria Smolkin argues in *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, anti-religious policy in the late USSR oscillated around three oppositions: political (between purity and pragmatism), ideological (between superstition and reason), and spiritual (between "emptiness and indifference and fullness and conviction").⁸ Soviet propaganda reflected a reality that officials were trying to achieve while oscillating within the oppositions identified by Smolkin. Soviet leaders envisioned

6 A. Khalid, *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); S.A. Dudoignon and C.U. Noack, eds., *Allah's Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2011); E. Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim. The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1944-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

7 O.A. Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For more on religion and the Cold War, see P. Muehlenbeck, ed. *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012). These issues were not limited to Soviet policy regarding Islam. Particularly after the USSR signed the Helsinki Accords in 1975, which Moscow sought to guarantee borders in Europe, it also opened itself up to criticism about the treatment of Jews and other religious minorities.

8 V. Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 4-5.

their state as one where freedom of religion was indeed guaranteed, but people were abandoning religious belief in favour of scientific atheism of their own free will. As we will see, Muhammadijev's *Dar on dunyo* speaks to all three dimensions of the Soviet struggle with religion and atheism identified by Smolkin.

In this article, we trace *Dar on dunyo*'s origins, context, and publication history using archival sources, contemporary responses, and memoir accounts. Working with the Tajik original and the dominant Russian translation, we then analyze the text and suggest several possible readings. We argue that *Dar on dunyo* can be read as a travel account, a genre that became relatively common in the 1950s and 1960s as the Soviet Union became increasingly open to the outside world. During the Cold War, both superpowers, representing competing ideologies and economic systems, tried to convince the world that their system was superior; simultaneously, they had to constantly remind their own citizens of this fact. Soviet officials wanted their citizens to recognize the superiority of socialism over capitalism and of the USSR over other countries, and travel accounts played an important role in reconciling these two goals. The novel follows the conventions of fiction and non-fiction travel accounts published by intellectuals, journalists, and even government officials. Consistent with the dominant literary conventions of the 1960s, it tries to advance a particular vision of the world by staying as close as possible to reality and to sincerity in expression. But at the same time, the narrator's comparison of the places he visits with his favourite places in Tajikistan suggests that the really important homeland is one's own republic within the USSR. A literary move which is supposed to inspire Soviet patriotism, in other words, has the effect of privileging one's ethnic home over the wider Soviet nation. Finally, *Dar on dunyo* tries to reconcile the atheism of the Soviet Union with respect for the traditions of its different peoples. But it does so within the framework of Soviet Orientology – a tradition critical of Western Orientalism that nevertheless produced its own tropes about Muslim societies whose development was held back by religious superstition and the effects of colonialism, while also celebrating those societies' cultural achievement.⁹ Ultimately, this novel shows the difficulty of reconciling these contradictions in Soviet (anti-)religious policy – for all of the

9 On Soviet Orientology, see S. A. Dudoignon "Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientology: Academic Visions of Islam in the Soviet South after Stalin", in *After Orientalism*, ed. François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 121–33. M. Kemper and A.M. Kalinovsky, "Introduction. Interlocking Orientologies in the Cold War era", in *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War*, ed. M. Kemper and A.M. Kalinovsky (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–15.

author's efforts to convey Soviet respect for Islamic culture, Muhammadiev wrote a caustic anti-religious novel.

The *hajj* and Other Travels Abroad

The Soviet Union was not the first non-Muslim state to use the *hajj* for political ends. In the nineteenth century, the experience of the *hajj* had already been transformed by the encroachment of European empires on lands formerly controlled by Muslim rulers, and by the rapid growth of train and steamship travel, which made it easier to embark on the *hajj* and changed the routes along which pilgrims travelled.¹⁰ The Russian empire was no exception; in the late nineteenth century it sometimes facilitated *hajj* travel, while at other times trying to restrict it for political or public health reasons. Russian officials were ambivalent about the *hajj*, on the one hand paranoid about the possibility of the empire's Muslims conspiring with co-religionists abroad, on the other hand eager to demonstrate that the empire not only respected Islam but could also use its diplomatic and logistical networks to facilitate religious practice.¹¹ As Lâle Can recently demonstrated, Tsarist officials at one point published a *hajjnāma*, written in Turkī, in a Central Asian periodical, which highlighted the difficulties and dangers of going on the *hajj* while downplaying the pilgrimages' spiritual rewards; the intention was presumably to discourage Central Asians from setting out on the journey at all.¹²

The consolidation of Soviet rule on the territory of the former Russian empire eventually cut off Soviet Muslims from co-religionists abroad. For a period in the 1920s, the Soviet state did try to revive the Russian empire's *hajj* infrastructure and make it accessible to pilgrims from outside the new Soviet state. Eileen Kane argues convincingly that this initiative was part of the young Soviet state's attempt to inspire revolution in colonial areas, and that the effort laid the groundwork for Soviet global engagement in the age of

10 N. Green, "The Hajj as its Own Undoing: Infrastructure and Integration on the Muslim Journey to Mecca", *Past & Present* 226:1 (2015), 193–226; N. Green, "The Rail Hajjis: the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Long Way to Mecca", in *Hajj: Collected Essays*, ed. V. Porter and L. Saif (London: British Museum, 2013), 100–07; N. Green, "Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West: Industrial Communications in the Making of the "Muslim World", *The American Historical Review* 118:2 (2013), 401–29.

11 E. Kane, *Russian Hajj. Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2015).

12 L. Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 56–58.

decolonization.¹³ But as Soviet paranoia about possible war grew in the late 1920s, the state put ever greater restrictions on foreign travel for its citizens, and new impediments for foreigners who wanted to come to the Soviet Union. The anti-religious campaigns of the late 1920s and the repression of intellectuals that had any links to pre-revolutionary elites further drove expressions of faith underground. Travelling abroad for religious study or to perform the *hajj* became virtually impossible, especially if one intended to come back. Nazir Tiuriakulov, Soviet plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd, made the *hajj* in 1930 or 1931; it appears this was the last time a Soviet citizen went on the pilgrimage before the mid-1940s.¹⁴

While the *hajjnāma* seems to have disappeared more or less for good until the end of the Soviet period, the *hajj* itself became possible, to a very few, starting with the Second World War. The Soviet regime relaxed religious control to broaden its appeal to the population. At the same time, the USSR needed the support of Middle Eastern countries in its fight against the Axis powers. Against this background, the USSR allowed a group of Muslims to perform the *hajj* for the first time in 1944: six pilgrims, all of them senior clerics of recently established Muslim directorates, travelled from Tashkent through Soviet Turkmenistan into Iran, and then on to Mashhad, Tehran, Baghdad, Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah, before returning home.¹⁵ Similar trips were planned in subsequent years, but they were abandoned with the onset of the Cold War in 1946, as Soviet officials became suspicious of the kind of interactions made possible by the *hajj*.

The *hajj* only became a semi-regular occurrence following Stalin's death in 1953, when the relaxation of domestic ideological controls, combined with Soviet outreach to newly independent states, forced Moscow to demonstrate its tolerance for religion at home. The Soviet Union's exclusion at the Bandung Conference in 1955,¹⁶ and, in general, scepticism among some post-colonial elites that the USSR was a genuinely anti-imperialist power, forced Soviet leaders to look for ways to demonstrate respect for the traditions of Soviet nationalities. This meant restoring classic works of Islamic architecture

13 Kane, *Russian Hajj*, 157–82.

14 Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (henceforth AVPRRF), f. 0127, op. 1, p. 91, d. 7, l. 68. Cf. V.A. Akhmadullin, "Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo gosudarstva po organizatsii khadzha sovetskikh musul'man", *Khadzh sovetskikh musulman* 5 (2014), 1.

15 V.A. Akhmadullin, *Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo gosudarstva i dukhovnykh upravlenii musul'man po organizatsii palomnichestva (1944–1965)* (Moscow: Islamskaia Kniga, 2016), 13–14.

16 For more details see Christopher J. Lee, "Introduction", in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 1–42.

within the Soviet Union,¹⁷ especially in ancient Silk Road cities like Bukhara and Samarkand, but also in Tashkent, the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan and destined to become the most important city, after Moscow itself, for Soviet foreign policy to the countries of Asia and the Middle East. Diplomats, intellectuals, and even religious delegations were regularly brought to these places to witness Soviet respect for religious traditions. Stalinabad (as Dushanbe was known until 1961) also hosted delegations from across South Asia and the Middle East, who were taken to observe prayers at its main mosque and the first Conference of the Soviet Committee for Solidarity with Asia and Africa (SKSSAA), in October 1960.¹⁸ The *hajj* became a nearly annual occurrence, although the number of pilgrims remained highly restricted, never exceeding 21 individuals. The importance of religious pilgrimage for Soviet diplomacy was underlined by the Tajik politician and Orientologist Bobojan Gafurov's performance of the *'umra* in 1974¹⁹ as part of Soviet efforts to improve relations with Saudi Arabia – the first time that a senior Soviet communist official had performed the rite since 1931.

While the renewal of *hajj* pilgrimages was part of a relaxed religious policy, it also reflected a more general openness of the USSR to the world and Nikita Khrushchev's insistence that the Soviet Union's competition with the capitalist world be guided by the principle of "peaceful coexistence". Demonstrating the superiority of socialism, according to this paradigm, was a surer path than armed confrontation to the eventual triumph of socialism. Starting from the 1950s, the Soviet Union began to more actively court foreign tourists, cultural delegations, and students. Soviet citizens even got the opportunity to travel abroad as tourists. But, while travel to other socialist countries was possible for many Soviet citizens, travel to the non-socialist world was a privilege reserved for trusted members of the intelligentsia and the party.

17 *Āthār al-Islām al-tārikhiyya fi-l'ittihād al-sufiyatiyya*/Historical Monuments of Islam in the USSR (Tashkent: Moslem Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, 1962); *Les musulmans de l'Union Soviétique: vers une vie nouvelle* (Moscow: Ed. du Progres, [1971]), 9, 11–12, 16, 18, 23, 24, 51, 53. Cf. F. Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet ili povest' o velikom khadzhezhe* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1970), 60. On the importance of restored Muslim monuments in Central Asia for Soviet foreign policy see A.M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 26–27; Sh. Shikhaliev, "Islamskaia pressa v rannem sovetskom Dagestane i zhurnal 'Musul'mane Sovetskogo Vostoka'", *Islamology* 7:2 (2017), 84–86.

18 Central State Archive of Tajikistan (henceforth TsGART), docs; State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth GARF), f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1414, ll. 46–50, 98–102a, f. 9540. SKSSAA, op. 1, d. 80, ll. 64–66. See also M. Kirasirova, "Sons of Muslims' in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–1962", *Ab imperio* 4 (2011), 106–31.

19 Akhmadullin, "Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo gosudarstva", 7.

Soviet travellers were also expected to be emissaries of the Soviet Union and all that it represented. Such “tourists” were thus carefully selected by professional organizations, vetted by party committees and state security (the KGB), and usually accompanied on their travels by a representative of the latter institution. They were instructed on proper dress and comportment, and also on how to avoid entrapment by foreign intelligence agencies.²⁰ Tourists from Tajikistan, for example, were recruited through the Society of Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries and directed to countries of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, where they could “speak about Tajikistan’s achievements in agriculture, industry, science, and culture”.²¹ Tourists were not just tourists, in other words, but agents in Soviet Cold War public diplomacy.

Selections for the *hajj* took place in a similar manner. Even once the Soviet *hajj* became a regular occurrence starting in the mid-1950s, joining a delegation required a multi-step bureaucratic process involving the Directorate of Central Asian Muslims (SADUM), the All-Union Council on Religious Affairs (CRA, Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in 1944–65), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KGB, and various local state and Communist Party organizations. Although the details varied from year to year, generally the religious organizations would reach out to the CRA, and, once an approval was secured in principle, a process of selecting, vetting, and preparing pilgrims could begin. Candidates had to provide Soviet officials with completed questionnaires (*anketa*), their CV, personal job references (*spravka-ob’ektivka*), notes on job performance (*kharakteristika*), 12 photos, medical and monthly salary certificates, a description of physical characteristics (*spravka o primetakh*), and their own petition to perform pilgrimage (*zaiavlenie*).²² Selection for the *hajj* was based on knowledge of Islam, facility with language (first and foremost, Arabic), and outward appearance.²³ Delegations regularly included individuals who maintained some supervision of the group (usually senior and trusted figures from the SADUM or the Directorate of Muslims of the European Part

20 Botakoz Kassymbekova, “Leisure and Politics: Soviet Central Asian Tourists across the Iron Curtain”, in *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States*, ed. K. Horschelmann and K. Burrells (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 62–86; *Tourism and Travel During the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences Across the Iron Curtain*, ed. S. Bechmann Pedersen and C. Noack (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); K.E. Smith, *Moscow 1956. The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), ch. 11.

21 Central State Archive of the Republic of Tajikistan, f. 1505, op. 1, d. 86, l. 21.

22 “Materialy o palomnichestve musul’man SSSR v Mekku (perepiska, vyezdnye dela)”, February 15–April 26 1963, GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1449, l. 28. For more details see V.A. Akhmadullin, “Organizatsiia khadzha musul’man SSSR v pervoi polovine 1960-kh godov”, *Nauchnyi dialog* 4 (2019), 207–08.

23 Akhmadullin, *Deiatel’nost’ sovetskogo gosudarstva*, 72, 75.

of the USSR and Siberia, DUMES), and doctors, who were expected to care for the group and also to provide medical assistance in countries visited by the pilgrims, further demonstrating the advantages of Soviet modernity. Although Soviet authorities usually insisted that religion was something of interest only to old people, *hajj* delegations from the 1950s onwards regularly included people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, presumably to show that religious practice was not restricted to older people.²⁴ Authorities also chose people who were ideologically trustworthy, meaning that they could speak positively about the Soviet Union, and, perhaps most importantly, would not attempt to defect during their journey. Indeed, defections were exceedingly rare, although once in a while members of the Soviet *hajj* delegations did cause trouble.²⁵

Soviet foreign policy needs shaped decisions about whether or not to allow a pilgrimage, who was selected to go, and the itinerary that pilgrims were expected to undertake. Bureaucrats supportive of *hajj* requests noted that participating in the pilgrimage helped "undermine bourgeois propaganda, supported the fight for peace, and the establishment of contacts useful for the USSR."²⁶ Between 1956 and 1964, most of the instructional guides produced for pilgrims urged them to convince their foreign co-religionists that "all the Soviet people including Soviet Muslims share the great principles of the Bandung conference and support the policy of the Soviet government to provide the independent countries of Asia and Africa with disinterested economic and technical aid."²⁷ Although Soviet pilgrims were discouraged from moving

24 Vivid caricatures of Muhammadiev's companions in *Dar on duryo* are in many respects only a reflection of official Soviet stereotypes. In fact, the oldest Soviet pilgrim in 1963 was only 67 years old. More than two thirds of the group were aged 40 or younger. The youngest, Pulatjon Abdurahimov from Uzbekistan, was only 24 years old. *Hajj* statistics show a gradual rejuvenation of pilgrims from the USSR in 1958–63. The groups in 1961 and 1963 included mostly middle-aged people. See GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 123, ll. 1–3, d. 173, ll. 42, 56, 94–98, d. 212, l. 130, l. 1401, ll. 11, 18–24, d. 1449, ll. 29–30.

25 However, a number of pilgrims did have trouble with local authorities. For example, on 6 May 1964 pilgrim V.G. Gaidarov from Dagestan disappeared in Medina. In March 1965, three pilgrims from Uzbekistan were arrested in Saudi Arabia for trying to bring in opium and were released only after the intervention of the Arabic interpreter accompanying the group. A year earlier, several pilgrims were reported to Soviet authorities for selling honey in Saudi Arabia. See Akhmadullin, "Organizatsiia khadzha", 202–06.

26 Mufti Z. Babakhanov, "Otchet o poezdke gruppy musul'man Sovetskogo Soiuzna na palomnichestvo v Mekku (Saudovskaia Araviia) v 1963 godu 26 aprelia – 16 maia", GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1451, ll. 23–24; d. 1449, l. 25. Cf. F. Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 175–76, 240–41.

27 "Ukazaniia grazhdanam SSSR, napravliaiushchimsia na palomnichestvo v Mekku v 1963 godu", GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1401, l. 26, d. 1449, l. 40. This document was recently published in V.A. Akhmadullin, *Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo gosudarstva*, 197–201.

around cities on their own or inviting locals back to their quarters, they were also encouraged “not to avoid meeting foreign Muslims”, and “to tell foreigners about religious freedom in the USSR”,²⁸ Embassies in friendly countries, like Egypt, organized receptions where local citizens could interact with Soviet pilgrims in a controlled environment.

Soviet citizens, whether tourists, cultural ambassadors, or pilgrims, also had to be prepared to run into émigrés or their descendants while abroad. For Central Asians, these were most often Uzbeks and Tajiks who had fled during the Civil War or Collectivization in the late 1920s and early 1930s and had settled in Afghanistan, Turkey, or the Arabian peninsula. (Many more Tatars and Muslims from the North Caucasus settled in Turkey.) Soviet officials were concerned that émigrés undermined support for the USSR in countries where they had settled, and hoped that Central Asian travellers could challenge anti-Soviet statements made by these individuals.²⁹ It appears that Soviet pilgrims were actually encouraged to make contact with émigrés, and even carried letters and gifts from relatives still in the USSR.³⁰ In 1961, for example, Soviet pilgrims reported interactions with 120 Soviet émigrés during their stay in the Saudi kingdom.³¹ Soviet officials even hoped to use these ties in the service of Soviet propaganda and diplomacy, though it is not clear if this ever achieved any practical results.³² As we will see, the émigré theme is an important one that Muhammadiev takes up in his account.

Soviet travellers were encouraged to write about their experiences, and their accounts were published as pamphlets, newspaper articles, longer pieces in journals, and even books. The Tajik-language *Sadoi sharq*, which was the first to publish Muhammadiev’s novel, had published dozens of essay-length travel accounts, referred to in Tajik as *safarnāma* in the post-war decades; they covered journeys to places like Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Iran, among others.³³ Such publications followed similar arcs: the writer described the suffering of these countries under colonialism and their struggle for freedom,

28 Ibid., 198, 200.

29 Russian State Archive of Modern History (henceforth RGASPI), f. 5, op. 35, d. 225, ll. 5–10.

30 E. Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim. The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1944–1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 272–73.

31 Akhmadullin, *Deiatel’nost’ sovetskogo gosudarstva*, 72. Cf. Babakhanov, “Otchet”, 8–9, 15, 23–24; Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 121–25, 174–75, 198.

32 Sh. Shirinbaev, “Zamechaniia po proizvedeniiu tadjzhikskogo pisatel’ia Fazliddina Mukhammadieva ‘Puteshestvie na tot svet ili povest’ o velikom khadzhzhe””, 23.08.[19]66, GARF, f. r-6991, op. 6, d. 51, ll. 198, 199.

33 A. Safronov, “Safari Pakiston”, *Sharqi surkh* 7 (1950), 104–07; A. Safronov, “Rokhi Hinduston”, *Sadoi Sharq* 8 (1981), 92–95; S. Uluzoda, “Shonzdah ruz dar Afgoniston”, *Sharqi surkh* 11 (1959), 28–41; M. Mullodonov, “Gizoli boldori Tehron”, *Sadoi Sharq* 12 (1972), 126–31; M. Osimi, “Khotiroti safari Hinduston”, *Sadoi Sharq* 4 (1982), 72–81.

supplementing facts gleaned primarily from Soviet publications with some eyewitness accounts. Often, the writer pointed to the yearning he or she found for friendship with the Soviet Union, and Moscow's willingness to extend a helping hand. Such accounts also sometimes spoke of the writers' nostalgia for home – both the great homeland (the USSR) and what was often called the "little homeland", the republic or region where the writer was from.

For the Soviet government, publishing such travelogues served several purposes. First, and perhaps most importantly, these accounts connected Soviet citizens – most of whom had no hope of seeing the world outside the socialist bloc – with the wider world, and provided them with an awareness of world affairs and the USSR's role on the right side of history in the confrontation with the United States. In other words, such publications helped the USSR achieve its goal of creating conscious citizens, ones who were aware of political development and their own place in history, without taking the risk of truly opening borders and possibilities for travel. Second, these travel accounts also showed potential travellers what kinds of experiences (and dangers) they might encounter and how they should behave themselves.³⁴

What Soviet travelogues did not do was offer criticism of the USSR. If travel accounts in other contexts sometimes offered an opportunity for the writer to suggest ways to improve things at home, the Soviet travel accounts never allowed the possibility that life elsewhere was better, or that Soviet people had something to learn abroad.

Muhammadiev and His Journey

Fazliddin Aminovich Muhammadiev was born in Samarkand in 1928 into a working-class family – his father worked as a bookbinder. After graduating from school, Muhammadiev worked as an accounting clerk (*uchetchik*) in the collective farm "Paris Commune" near Samarkand between 1944 and 1947. He was accepted to study aviation engineering in Moscow but had to return home due to lack of funds. After his father passed away in 1947, the future writer moved to Stalinabad, the capital of the Tajik SSR. This was a smart (or lucky) move for a Tajik-speaker with literary ambitions, since Samarkand had become part of Uzbekistan during the national delimitation in 1924 and 1929, and most of the Tajik-language newspapers, publishers, schools, and institutions of higher education (a university was founded in 1947) were located in the Tajik SSR.

34 Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 210–12, 229.

Muhammadiev started his career with *Tojikistoni surkh* (“Red Tajikistan”), before being sent to the Higher Komsomol School in Moscow, where he studied from 1949 to 1951. The year of his graduation, Muhammadiev joined the Communist Party. After that, he wrote for a number of Tajik periodicals and was executive secretary of *Jovononi Tojikiston* (“Youth of Tajikistan”, 1951–54), editor of *Gazetai muallimon* (“Teachers’ Newspaper”, 1954), and section editor for a number of other publications, including *Tojikiston Sovyeti* (“Soviet Tajikistan”) and the satirical journal *Horpushtak* (“Hedgehog”, 1956–57). He returned to Moscow at the end of the decade for advanced courses at the famed Gorky Literary Institute, graduating in 1962. From then on, he seems to have primarily earned his living as a writer, although he continued to sit on various boards, including that of Tajik Film studio (1965–66), the publisher Irfon (1967–68) and the Tajik Soviet Encyclopedia (1969–73).³⁵ In March 1963, he reported an impressive income of 276 roubles 50 kopecks per month, while the average Soviet wage was 85 roubles 40 kopecks.³⁶ Muhammadiev was a member of the Soviet Union of Writers and had a short tenure as the secretary of the board in its Tajikistan branch, from 1978 to 1981.³⁷ According to the literary historian Khudoinazar Asozoda, Muhammadiev “was a serious artist” and was removed from his post after speaking out too critically against some of his contemporaries at a meeting.³⁸ From that point on, he appears to have focused exclusively on writing, but five years later his life was cut short: Muhammadiev was stabbed in an altercation with street thugs in June 1986 and died on October 6, 1986.³⁹

By the time Muhammadiev was selected to take part in the *hajj*, he had been publishing fiction for a decade and had achieved some recognition in literary circles. His early pieces tended towards the satirical or didactic, and

35 F.A. Mukhammadiev, “Lichnoe delo”, 08 July 1978, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (henceforth RGALI), f. 631, op. 39, d. 4015, ll. 8rev, 11, 11rev, 12; “Mukhammadiev Fazliddin”, in *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, ed. A.A. Surkov (Moscow: Sovetskaia enthiklopediia, 1968), 5/29; “Mukhammadiev Fazliddin Aminovich”, in *Entsiklopediia kino Tadzshikistana*, ed. G. El’baum, S. Rahimov (Dushanbe: ER-graf, 2012), 158; V. Bobrovnikov’s interview with Shavkat Niyozī, a close friend and compatriot of Muhammadiev, conducted in Peredelkino, Moscow, on January 10, 2020.

36 “Vyezdnoe delo Mukhammadieva F.”, GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1450, l. 20; Akhmadullin, *Deiatel’nost’ sovetskogo gosudarstva*, 203.

37 F.A. Muhammadiev, “Lichnoe delo”, 14.

38 Khudoinazar Asozoda, *Tarixhi Adabiyoti Tojik* (Dushanbe: Maorif va Farhang, 2014), 566.

39 The writer A. Borshchagovskii suggested that Muhammadiev was killed because he refused the title of “*hājji*” after returning from the trip. A. Borshchagovskii, “Prestuplenie na ulitse Sharaf”, *Literaturnaia gazeta* 12 (10 December 1986). There does not seem to be any support for this claim, however, and it is especially unlikely considering that he was stabbed by youths more than twenty years after the novel was first published.

particularly the contrast between "old" and "new" types of people; he was working, in other words, with familiar master narratives established in the Stalin era.⁴⁰ Even in the late 1960s and through the 1980s, literary critics continued to praise Muhammediev's realistic depictions and the "psychological character" of his "thoughtful prose".⁴¹ A number of his early works, including *Raisi nav* ("The new Kolkhoz chairman", 1955) and *Muhojiron* ("Settlers", 1956), dealt with themes connected to rural life, although Asozoda also credits him with writing the first Tajik detective novel – *Tiri nokhurda* ("The explosion that did not happen", 1960). While Muhammadiev was clearly a widely published author by the early 1960s, it is unclear where he stood among the Tajik intelligentsia. Asozoda, for example, notes that from the 1960s through the 1980s, when Muhammadiev remained highly productive, he received little support from the Tajik SSR Union of Writers or from literary critics in the republic, who did not seem to take him seriously and did not consider his work worthy of academic study.⁴² At the same time, Muhammadiev was praised a number of times by the luminaries of Tajik literature in the pages of the USSR's most important literary periodicals. In 1964, a year before *Dar on dunyo* first appeared in Tajik, the renowned Tajik poet Mirzo Tursunzade called Muhammadiev an "interesting and original author, a master of rich language and of the psychological

40 On "master narratives" see K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

41 A. Makarov, "O velikom khadzhzhe. [Predislovie]", *Druzhba narodov* 3 (1965), 15; M. Parkhomenko, "Posleslovie. Dva pokoleniia", R. Jalil, *Pulat i Gulru*, F. Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet, ili povest' o velikom khadzhzhe* (Moscow: Izvestiia, 1969), 518–21; M. Shukurov, "Poyahoi kamalot", *Sadoi Sharq* 10 (1984), 118–29; Borshchagovskii, "Obrazy meniaiushchegosia mira", 4; S. Baruzdin, "Nepokhozhii na drugikh. Slovo o Fazliddine Mukhammadieve", F. Muhammadiev, *Uglovaia palata: Roman, povest'* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1989), 363.

42 Asozoda, *Ta'rikhi adabiyoti Tojik*, 569. From the mid-1980s onwards, Muhammadiev's travel account and other novels and short stories became the subject of numerous literary reviews and even PhD dissertations. See E. Grassi, "From Bukhara to Dushanbe: Outlining the Evolution of Soviet Tajik Fiction", *Iranian Studies* 50:5 (2017), 691–704; F.M. Tursunov, *Leksiko-semanticheskii analiz poslovits i pogovorok v tadjikskom i ruskom iazykakh (na materiale proizvedenii Fazliddina Mukhammadieva)*: PhD Dissertation in Philology (Dushanbe: Rudaki Institute of Language and Literature, 1999); N.Sh. Bozorov, *Zhanr safar-nama v sovremennoi tadjikskoi literature (na materiale zhurnala "Sadoi Shark")*: PhD Dissertation in Philology (Dushanbe: Rudaki Institute of Language and Literature, 2002); M.B. Murodov, *Publitsisticheskaiia satira v tadjikskoi periodicheskoi pechati (problemy istorii, teorii i praktiki)*: Habilitation Dissertation in Philology (Dushanbe: Tajik National University, 2009); M.I. Khomidova, *Osobennosti izobrazheniia i evolutsiia vospriiatiiia v proizvedeniakh Fazliddina Mukhammadieva*: PhD Dissertation in Philology (Dushanbe: B. Gafurov Khujand State University, 2018), etc.

portrait” on the front page of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (“Literary gazette”).⁴³ Five years later, Muhammadjon Shukuri, one of the most prominent Tajik literary critics, praised Muhammadiev as an “artist, always seriously thinking about the questions of existence”.⁴⁴ Two years later, Yusufjon Akobirov profiled Muhammadiev in the same paper.⁴⁵

Still, Muhammadiev would appear to have been an unusual choice for a task as delicate as describing the *hajj*. Most travel accounts were written by people with much broader support both among the party elite and the national intelligentsia: Mirzo Tursunzade was already one of the most important literary figures in Tajikistan when his first travel account of India appeared, while Sotim Ulughzoda was perhaps Tajikistan’s most well-known playwright when he published his account of Afghanistan in 1959. Sharof Rashidov was a decorated war veteran, experienced editor, and up-and-coming party official when his writings on India were presented to Soviet readers. All of these writers wrote about countries that were friendly to the USSR. Muhammadiev was sent to countries in the American camp and with a much more complicated assignment. Clearly, this had something to do with his experience as a journalist, and, more importantly, with his tenure as an ordinary party member. His relative youth may have been an asset: in 1963 Muhammadiev was unknown outside the USSR, allowing him a degree of anonymity during his travels, and he did not have to risk an established reputation, as someone like Tursunzade would have. Authors like Tursunzade or Ulughzoda were too well-known as high-ranking Soviet officials and communists to pass as pious Soviet pilgrims while applying for a Saudi visa.

Unfortunately, state archives are silent about the selection of Muhammadiev and other *hajj* candidates, a group of twenty ultimately reduced to eighteen people.⁴⁶ Like other candidates for the pilgrimage, he submitted the required documents, but eight pages are missing from his personal file in the archive. We know that Muhammadiev applied to perform the *hajj* in the beginning of 1963 from Dushanbe, where he had moved from Moscow after graduating from the Gorky Literary Institute in August 1962. Following standard procedure, Muhammadiev’s application was reviewed first by SADUM in Dushanbe and Tashkent and then passed to CRA in Moscow, where the final decision was

43 Mirzo Tursunzade, “Molodost’ tysiachiletnei literatury”, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 47 (28 November 1964), 1.

44 M. Shukurov, “Dorogu osilit idushchii”, *Literaturnaia gazeta* 15 (9 April 1969), 7.

45 Iusufdzhon Akobirov, “Redkii dar”, *Literaturnaia gazeta* 18 (28 April 1971), 4. Also see Mirzo Tursunzade, “Shahbeit – glavnaia stroka”, *ibid.*

46 GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1449, ll. 31, 33–34, 63–65. Many relevant Soviet documents are still closed to researchers.

taken by the CPSU Central Committee department that supervised all pilgrimage affairs with the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KGB. In all the lists of the 1963 group, he appeared as a "non-party (*bespartinyi*) journalist from Dushanbe".⁴⁷ It is unlikely that the writer attempted to misinform SADUM or the KGB about his party membership. Rather, the authorities themselves probably decided to tweak Muhammadiev's biography to help maintain his cover during the trip.

Clearly, Soviet authorities were hoping to gain more propaganda value from the 1963 *hajj* than they had from previous ones. From 1956, *hajj* delegations began to include party members and, increasingly, members of the intelligentsia: high school teachers, journalists, and writers, as well as doctors. Muhammadiev's companions included the journalist and writer Zulfar Khismatullin, from Bashkiria, who worked for the satirical and anti-religious journal *Henek* ("Pitchforks") in Ufa, two doctors (one from Kazan and one from Tashkent), a lecturer from an agricultural college in Ufa, and a teacher and student from the Mir-i 'Arab madrasa in Bukhara. Of the eighteen pilgrims, four were members of the CPSU,⁴⁸ including Muhammadiev himself.

Reading "The Other World"

Perhaps the strangest – and most important – aspect of Muhammadiev's journey is that Soviet authorities considered it necessary for the author to go at all before writing his account. Muhammadiev could have written the novel based on published sources, on reports submitted by pilgrims to Soviet authorities, and even on interviews with *hajjs*. Clearly, however, Soviet authorities believed that the power of this account – even if it was fictional – would derive from the verifiability of the author's own experience. The same was true of Soviet travel accounts more generally – their authors wrote about places they really had visited. Journalists and novelists who wrote about great construction projects were similarly encouraged to join these projects as workers, and to base their creative work on actual experience.

While *Dar on dunyo* was almost certainly the only Soviet novel of the *hajj*, its plot, message and style also reflect the literature of the era that followed

47 "Spravka tov. Mukhammadieva Fazliddina Aminovicha", GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1450, l. 18; Babakhanov, "Otchet", 1. Cf. F.A. Muhammadiev, "Lichnoe delo", 1; "Mukhammadiev Fazliddin", *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, 29.

48 GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1449, ll. 168, 185, d. 1450, l. 60; Akhmadullin, *Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo gosudarstva*, 194–96.

Stalin's death, commonly referred to as the "Thaw".⁴⁹ Liberally minded novelists like Il'ia Erenburg and Vladimir Dudintsev encouraged writers to portray contemporary society, frozen in deep inertia, being thawed by the warm sincerity of its main characters. They drew their attention to the relationship of intelligentsia and common people, the role of the individual in solving vexing social questions. In his famous article "On Sincerity in Literature", Vladimir Pomerantsev insisted that "the level of sincerity, i.e. frankness and directness of a piece, shall be the first measure for evaluation" in contemporary literature.⁵⁰ Some Western novelists of the interwar "lost generation", whose works had already been translated into Russian, also influenced the new Thaw fiction. Muhammadiev once wrote that since his youth he had been fond of the strong protagonists in *The Old Man and the Sea* and other stories by Ernest Hemingway, as well as in *Three Comrades* and *Arch of Triumph* by Erich Maria Remarque.⁵¹ Muhammadiev sympathized with the journalistic style of these writers and their protagonists, who lost faith and even mocked dead religious traditions. At the same time, Muhammadiev and other adherents of "sincerity" remained rooted in the Stalinist doctrine of socialist realism and thus retained the model hero struggling for a happy communist future.⁵²

The turn towards "sincerity" also influenced anti-religious journalism and fiction. Prominent examples include the works of Vladimir Tendriakov (1923–1984), especially his novels *Chudotvornaia* ("Miraculous icon", 1958) and *Chrezvychainoe* ("The extraordinary incident", 1961), which raised questions of faith, everyday prayer, veneration of icons and other "survivals of the past".⁵³ In line with the other Thaw novelists, Tendriakov insisted on a critical attitude to religious dogmas and proposed to rethink immorality of the soul in religion according to the Soviet premise of individual contribution in the building of

49 The term comes from Il'ia Erenburg's novel of the same name. I. Erenburg, "Ottepel", *Znamia* 5 (1954), 4 (1956). As a historiographical term, the "Thaw" has proved durable though not uncontested. See, for example, Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds. *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

50 V. Dudintsev, "Ne khlebom edinym", *Novyi mir* 8–10 (1956); V. Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature", *Novyi mir* 12 (1953), 218–45.

51 F. Muhammadiev, *Duston tojji sar: maqoloti publitsisti, yoddosht, ocherk, esse va-pamflet* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1985), 412.

52 K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); C.J. Fort, *Inhabiting Socialist Realism: Soviet Literature from the Edge of Empire*, PhD Dissertation in Slavic languages and Literature (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2019), 139, 154, 189.

53 K.A. Kolkunova, "Ateisticheskaia propaganda v khudozhestvennoi literature 1950–1960-kh godov", *Vestnik Pravoslavnogo Sviato-Tikhonovskogo Gumanitarnogo Universiteta* 5 (2013), 118–20, 129.

modern society.⁵⁴ Muhammadiev's *Dar on dunyo* offers a retelling of stories of the fourteenth-century Khorezmi poet Nāṣir al-Dīn Rabghūzī's *Tales of the Prophets*, in the anti-clerical style of the nineteenth-century French journalist Leo Taxil; this part resembles Isidor Shtok's satirical reading of the Book of Genesis in the play *Divine Comedy*, staged in 1961 by the famous Moscow puppeteer Sergei Obraztsov.⁵⁵ Although these works targeted not Soviet Muslims but rather Christians, especially outlawed Protestant congregations, they constituted the artistic context of Muhammadiev's atheistic *hajj* account.

The ability to write a fictionalized but sincere anti-religious travelogue required Muhammadiev to actually perform the *hajj* himself. Muhammadiev seems to have composed his travel account within a few months of his return from the *hajj*. The novel contains several intertwined narratives. The first is about what is familiar and what is foreign; it is this narrative that most closely resembles the Soviet *safarnāma* genre discussed above. The fictional narrator of *Dar on dunyo*, Qurbon Majidov, shares his impressions of the journey, of foreigners and émigrés, and compares what he sees to realities at home. The second narrative is a guidebook through which the author presents a description of the *hajj* rituals.

Using these two basic narratives, Muhammadiev tries to pull off a difficult task: to show that the Soviet Union respects religion, while at the same time affirming that religious practice is something that belongs to the past, while countries with supposed "religious freedom" are suffering from the burdens of religious fanaticism and capitalist exploitation. The author uses space and time to achieve these goals: the further the narrator gets from the USSR, the more he feels himself sucked into a dark medieval past. He finds himself homesick for the Soviet Union, not simply because it is modern but because it looks towards (an even brighter) future rather than to the past.

Dar on dunyo reflects and departs from Soviet literary conventions in other ways as well. The novel holds fast to a historical metanarrative that equates religious piety with feudalism, sees capitalism as a destructive (but nevertheless progressive) stage that exposes the hypocrisy of the old order, and presents Soviet socialism as the penultimate stage of history, already prefiguring full communism. Yet if in the classic socialist realist novel the

54 Ibid., 122, 127. Cf. F. Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 149.

55 Ibid., 169–70; Muhammadiev, "Dar on dunyo", 5: 59–60. Cf. *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'-i Rabghūzī* (Kazan, 1881, 5th ed.); *Uzbek adabiyoti* (Tashkent: Uzdabiiinashr, 1959, vol. 1); L. Taxil, *La Bible amusante pour les grands et les enfants* (Paris: Libraire anticléricale, 1882). The first Russian translation was published by the League of Militant Godless under the title *Zanimatel'naia Bibliia* (Moscow: Ateist, 1925–28, in 3 vols.). On the anticlerical pieces brilliantly staged by Sergei Obraztsov in Thaw-era Moscow see Kolkunova, "Ateisticheskaia propaganda", 120.

protagonist would reach full consciousness as he confronted obstacles and contradictions,⁵⁶ Muhammadiev's narrator is already a fully conscious actor at the very beginning of *Dar on dunyo*, and he undergoes no growth as a result of his journey. His journey backwards in time has the same function as memoirs of the pre-revolutionary period did in the 1920s and 1930s: they remind a generation raised in the socialist world why the revolution had been necessary.⁵⁷ The only character who undergoes a transformation as a result of this journey is the Baskhir mullah Isrofil. He believes in God and performs all the *hajj* rites piously but cannot tolerate clerics who profit from religion. We learn that, not long before embarking on the *hajj*, Isrofil suffered a personal tragedy: his wife Jannat left him and moved to Leningrad, where his son Sharaf, a physicist, works. Having returned from the journey to Mecca, Isrofil decides to abandon his clerical career, join his family and get a job as an Orientologist at the public library in Leningrad. The catalyst for Isrofil's transformation is the hypocrisy he observes during the *hajj*; if it is too late for him to become a physicist like his son, at least Isrofil can serve Soviet scholarship while preserving the achievements of the past in his new profession.

In trying to reconcile the needs of Soviet foreign policy, Soviet nationalities policy, and Soviet religious policy, Muhammadiev breaks apart the socialist-realist metanarrative and finds qualities that are redeeming in religious traditions generally and in Islamic culture specifically. The usual progression of feudalism – capitalism – socialism is modified, replaced with a more cyclical tale which includes a glorious past full of cultural achievements that is later corrupted by feudal interests. This view of history was fairly common in Western Orientalism, as well as in Soviet Oriental studies, though in the Soviet version the glorious past could be redeemed by defeating capitalism. Such tropes formed the backbone of much historical writing in the republics under the Soviet regime.⁵⁸ As a literary device, the appeal to a glorious past combined with a critique of a corrupt present was developed by Jadid reformers in the late imperial period and, as Christopher James Fort has recently argued, shaped

56 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 9; Fort, *Inhabiting Socialist Realism*, 24, 29–30, 45.

57 J. Hellbeck, *Revolution On My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13; A. Kalinovsky and I. Scarborough, "The Oil Lamp and the Electric Light: Progress, Time, and Nation in Central Asian Memoirs of the Soviet Era", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22: 1 (2021), 107–36.

58 E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, New York: Penguin, 2003), 6, 32–33, 34, 64, 69, 86, 97; H. Jansen, "Soviet 'Afro-Asians' in UNESCO: Reorienting World History", *Journal of World History* 30:1–2 (2019), 199, 211–12. Cf. R. Koselleck, *Futures Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9–10.

how Uzbek writers of the 1930s received Socialist Realism and adapted other trends (for example, Village Prose) in subsequent decades.⁵⁹ At the centre of this archetypal plot is a character out of tune with his society; in *Dar on dunyo*, the narrator is perfectly in tune with his homeland, but it is on the journey to Mecca that he feels a growing sense of alienation, which culminates during the *hajj* stages. He is trying not to jolt his own society awake – as Jadid authors and dramaturgs did – but to encourage taking pride in its achievements.

The "Other World" and the (Little) Homeland

Following the conventions of the *safarnāma*, Muhammadiev presents what is meant to be a realistic account of what is happening in those countries.⁶⁰ The narrator, Dr Qurbon Majidov, sees much that is strange, even wild, but is convinced and tries to assure the reader that Soviet propaganda is essentially correct: life in these former European colonies (Sudan and other British colonies in the Middle East) is shaped by the realities of American neo-imperialism. At the same time, the novel is a satire, not just of life beyond Soviet borders or of religion, but of Western propaganda about religious oppression in the USSR: the alleged destruction of historical and cultural monuments and the religious elite, wife-sharing, the poverty of everyday life, and the persecution of believers. The narrator is not concerned that Western propaganda about the USSR contains some truth. He dislikes ambiguity and prefers clarity; he avoids any mentions of the (not so distant) Stalinist past, or the anti-religious campaigns of the late 1950s.

It is not accidental that Muhammadiev makes his alter-ego in the novel a doctor: Majidov claims the mantle of modernity from the position of someone who is both a scientist and a humanist. As a doctor, the narrator is particularly perturbed by the lack of hygiene, including the ban on cutting one's fingernails or hair, on shaving, on using soap or toothpaste when in pilgrimage according to the *hajj* rules – all highlighting the distance between modernity and the anachronistic medieval fanaticism reflected in religious injunctions. But he can also highlight how the USSR has helped its own citizens and humanity more broadly by training doctors, building modern comfortable hospitals, advancing medical science, and making its benefits widely available.

59 Fort, *Inhabiting Socialist Realism*, 92–95. Cf. A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

60 Baruzdin, "Nepokhozhii na drugikh", 365. Cf. N.Sh. Bozorov, *Zhanr safar-nama v sovremennoi tadjikskoi literature*, 16, 24.

The portrayal of the “foreign East” as an “Other World” (*on dunyo*) is not central to the novel, but to a significant extent it determines the intended reading of the book. The Soviet critic Alexander Borshchagovskii compared Muhammadiev to the Georgian painter Niko Pirosmani (1862–1918),⁶¹ who favoured bold colours over more subtle tones. In the foreign East, Muhammadiev’s narrator constantly compares “our country, homeland” with the “foreign land”, from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia. He realizes that, at home, Soviet power removed all obstacles to independence, freedom, and social progress, and Russian colonialism had disappeared just like those emigrants who rejected Soviet rule. This dichotomy reflects Cold War-era Soviet Islamic studies and its Orientalist background.⁶² Typical for classical colonial Orientalism is the comparison of the Muslim East and the Christian West; here, however, the dichotomy is between the foreign East and the Soviet one. The former is full of disease, pollution, dirt, poverty, under the heel of “shameless American imperialism”.⁶³ The latter is independent, free, young, industrialized, physically and spiritually healthy. When we hear about industrial sites being built in Sudan, Somalia, or Egypt, it is because they are receiving the fraternal assistance of the Soviet Union.⁶⁴

The particulars of post-war Soviet Orientalist approaches to the East are most clearly presented in the narrator’s ruminations on seeing a crowd of pilgrims making the ritual circumambulation (*tawāf*) around the Ka’ba, hurried along by soldiers wielding whips:

I couldn’t help thinking “Asia...Asia...”. Once you were the cradle of human culture. Wasn’t the first written language, pencil and paper, the first lines of poetry and the first architectural drawing a result of your sons’ mental efforts? Was not the first surgery scalpel, the first book about health a result of your children’s’ wisdom? Why did you give yourself over to evil spells and sorcery? Who needs your deep sleep, in which you’ve been for so many centuries? Truly, the time of sleep has passed into eternity. The light of a new day has shown upon half the world, and yet, land

61 Borshchagovskii, “Obrazy menia iushchegosia mira”, 5.

62 M. Kemper and A.M. Kalinovsky, “Introduction. Interlocking Orientologies in the Cold War Era”, in *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War*, ed. M. Kemper and A.M. Kalinovsky (London: Routledge, 2015), 6, 8–9.

63 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 241.

64 *Ibid.*, 64. Cf. Babakhanov, “Otchet”, 23.

of mine, your children still come here in search of sleep, and asking for soporifics.⁶⁵

Rather than evoking the image of a "sleeping" Muslim Orient as employed by Mikhail Lermontov (1814–41), a classic of Russian literature familiar to all Soviet schoolchildren, Muhammadiev instead cites the modernist poet Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938) from British India.⁶⁶ By doing so, Muhammadiev distances himself from classical Russian Orientalism but also underlines the connection between Soviet Central Asia and the struggle for revolution and anti-colonialism abroad, in both cases articulated as a struggle simultaneously against foreign domination and repressive traditions.

Muhammadiev's account draws on his impressions of the first countries of the "Third World" that he encounters, especially Sudan and Saudi Arabia.⁶⁷ In Mecca, he feels himself thrown from the twentieth century into the Middle Ages, which he associates with practices such as marrying off underage brides, veiling practices, the punishment of a hungry man who has stolen 10 rials worth of food by chopping off his hand, the presence of domestic slavery, and the spread of epidemiological diseases.⁶⁸ The market in Khartoum, dirty and chaotic, reminds him of scenes from his own childhood in Central Asia in the early 1930s, before modern eating and shopping institutions were built. The squalid, petty life of Tajik émigrés in Mecca stands in contrast with great modern factories, mines, theatres, hospitals, schools and institutes in his homeland, kolkhoz markets like that in Leninabad, huge palaces of culture including the magnificent building constructed in the "Moscow" collective farm (today, Arbob Cultural Palace in Khujand).⁶⁹ The people really in charge, however, are the Americans, who place their legs on the table, cowboy style.⁷⁰

Unable to withstand the tortures of this "other world", the narrator daydreams about his homeland, which he misses. Unlike the "other world", the USSR represents modernity; it is a country of industrial cities, science, doctors, hospitals, space exploration, Yuri Gagarin, and the dog-cosmonaut Laika

65 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 104. On the archetypal image of "sleeping Orientals" in fictional plots of Socialist Realism and its Jadid epistemology see Fort, *Inhabiting Socialist Realism*, 44, 63–64, 198–99.

66 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 104.

67 Ibid., 274; Babakhanov, "Otchet", 21; M. Shamsadinskii, "Informatsiia o poezdke palomnika iz Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR v g. Mekku", GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1451, l. 30.

68 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 91; 124, 246; 131, 217; 234–35; 143–44, 180; 255.

69 Ibid., 37–38, 134.

70 Ibid., 50.

familiar even to the pious Muslims the narrator encounters abroad.⁷¹ But these daydreams are not just about the “big homeland”, the USSR, but also the “little homeland”, the narrator’s republic, Tajikistan. The narrator imagines himself conversing with his good friend Iskandar, a fellow doctor and man of science. His interactions with émigrés, by contrast, leave him thinking about the meaning and importance of patriotism. “What man in his right mind would renounce his homeland?!” – he exclaims, – “If you have no more homeland, what do you have left?!” As one folk song says, “He who has lost his homeland is a slave in foreign land!”⁷²

Muhammadiev does not shy away from presenting anachronisms in the USSR. These include religion and religious figures, who, according to the narrator, “people also need, but, alas, not for today’s and tomorrow’s affairs, but only for the worship of ancient prejudices.”⁷³ The narrator argues with émigrés and other foreign Muslims that the anti-Soviet propaganda on “Voice of America” and “Radio Free Europe” is false, that the Soviet government respects the religious beliefs of all its citizens⁷⁴ but at the same time does not hide from the reader that he considers religion as pulling people back to the Middle Ages. He follows Soviet conventions in seeing religious practices as a “survival of the past”, insisting that Muslim rituals, including those that comprise the *hajj*, are based on previous pagan and primitive belief systems and practices.⁷⁵ These “survivals of the past” are personified by old men and the mullahs who take advantage of them, 17 of whom are taking part in the *hajj*. Muhammadiev’s narrator, with his modern beliefs, is their opposite in every way. At the same time, the narrator classifies the seventeen mullahs according to how close they are to Soviet salvation – a classic Soviet metanarrative.⁷⁶ At one extreme are the narcissistic, selfish, and stupid fanatics such as Mahsum the Chewer or the rigid Allahnazar-qori, who stops the narrator from speaking Russian and singing; at the other end are Isrofil, a doubting mullah from Bashkiria who ultimately decides to become an Orientalist scholar, the intelligent Arabic translator Abdusamad-aka, and the wise head of the group, Qori-aka, who,

71 Ibid., 16, 19, 44, 145, 261.

72 Ibid., 41, 139.

73 Ibid., 65.

74 Ibid., 28, 44, 175–76. Cf. Babakhanov, “Otchet”, 5, 9.

75 D. DeWeese, “Survival Strategies”, 35–37, 43–44, 47–48, 52–53; V. Bobrovnikov, “From Collective Farm to Islamic Museum? Deconstructing the Narrative of Highlander Traditions in Dagestan”, in *Exploring the Edge of Empire. Socialist Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. F. Mühlfried and S. Sokolovsky (Berlin: LIT, 2011), 107–08.

76 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 15–24; Fort, *Inhabiting Socialist Realism*, 73, 88, 127.

according to the narrator, could have become a prominent Soviet scientist or politician.⁷⁷

Even though Majidov's journey follows a fairly predictable progression, the novel is not organized in a chronologically linear way. As he compares what he knows from home with what he sees abroad, he refers back to events in the chronological past. The distance between his present experience and that past grows throughout the novel; in the initial chapters, he is sitting on the plane to Cairo, and his flashbacks take us only to the week before departure. As he gets physically further away from Moscow, he refers to stories about his youth in Tajikistan, his student days, his experience as a doctor, and so on. Following the conventions of socialist realism, the novel combines the present with the heroic past and glorious future.⁷⁸ The Soviet Union represents modernity, where part of the promised future (modern medicine, industry, equality) has already been achieved, and an even more glorious utopia (represented by space exploration) is within reach.

Departing from the literary conventions of socialist realism and of journalistic reportage also allows Muhammadiev to underline the sincerity of Majidov's reactions to the "other" world and to religious practice more generally. These sections combine the satirical with the deeply felt and personal – Majidov's physical discomfort at the dirt and the superstition that he sees is not simply a rational response but a deeply subjective one, and is therefore all the more credible.

A Guide to Sacred Places

While many of the above tropes were common to other Soviet travel writing about the foreign East, Muhammadiev's novel was unique in its description of the rituals comprising the great *hajj* (*hajj-i akbar*) and the biting commentaries on the stories behind these rituals, drawn from the lives of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*). These two elements comprise the most important interlocking strands of the novel. The description of the "other world" thus begins in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, where Soviet pilgrims spend their first six days after travelling from Moscow via Cairo and awaiting a plane to Saudi Arabia. But the narrator devotes most of his attention to the road from Jeddah to Mecca, Medina, Taif, and back, starting from the investiture of the Soviet pilgrims into

⁷⁷ Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 57, 64–65, 152, 273.

⁷⁸ See S. Buck-Morse. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Boston: MIT press, 2002).

iḥrām before their departure from Khartoum. If it were not for the commentary that accompanies Muhammadiev's descriptions of the various stages of the *ḥajj*, the novel could be read as the kind of *ḥajjnāma* popular among pilgrims from Central Asia and the Volga-Ural region up to before the twentieth century.⁷⁹ As Nile Green has shown, the vast expansion of the *ḥajj* pilgrimage in the nineteenth century spurred a genre of travel writing that foregrounded reflections – often critical – of different Muslim places and believers from various Islamic lands: “the industrialized *ḥajj* of the masses – and its counterpart, the printed *ḥajj* narrative – became vehicles of critical comparison. Different travelers certainly took different lessons from their experiences.”⁸⁰ Of course such reflections were never meant to dissuade the reader from undertaking the *ḥajj*, let alone to abandon his or her faith; rather, they were meant to be read as calls for reform. Muhammadiev has no such agenda in mind; he is writing from a point where such reform has already reached its limits, and only socialist revolution can provide humanity's salvation.

Muhammadiev focuses in substantial detail on the *ṭawāf* (ch. 10, 11, 16), the ritual run between the hills of Safa and Marwa (ch. 10–11), the stand at the foot of mount Arafat, or *wuqūf* (ch. 12), the stoning of Satan with stones from Mina (ch. 13–14), the sacrifice (ch. 14), and the exit from *iḥrām* (ch. 14–15). He lists all of the prohibitions affecting pilgrims who have donned the *iḥrām*,⁸¹ discusses the norms of behaviour for pilgrims while on the territory of al-Ḥaramayn in Saudi Arabia, and writes out in Cyrillic the entire *talbiya* prayer, repeatedly invoked by pilgrims during the *ḥajj* rites, also providing its Russian translation. Muhammadiev also describes the exterior of the Ka'ba, the Great Mosque, the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, the valley of Arafat, the pillars of Satan, the opulent beauty of the summer residences of Saudi elites in Ta'if and other

79 *Central Asian Pilgrims: Hajj Routes and Pious Visits between Central Asia and Hijaz*, ed. A. Papas, T. Welsford, T. Zarcone (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2012), 13. But the more traditional examples of this genre, such as the *Rihla* of the famous Tatar scholar Shihāb al-Dīn al-Marjānī (1818–89), focus primarily on the writer's thoughts and impressions on the way to al-Ḥaramayn and back; they skip over the actual stages of the *ḥajj*, which would have been known to all educated Muslims. Instead, writers like Marjānī concentrated on the differences in ritual among pilgrims they met on the way to Mecca, as well as accounts of their discussion with Arab and Ottoman *ulamā*. “Rikhlāt al-Mardzhani”, *Ocherki Mardzhani o vostochnykh narodakh*, ed. A.N. Iuzeev (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo, 2003), 25–33. Cf. Gali Chokri, “Dastan Khadzname”, *Khadzh musul'manskikh narodov Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost'. Khrestomatiia*, ed. Z.R. Khabibullina (Ufa: Bashkir State Pedagogic University, 2018), 63–91.

80 Green, “Hajj as Its Own Undoing”, 208.

81 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 75–76.

important sites on the paths of the pilgrims.⁸² Considering that few Soviet Muslims had been on the *hajj* or 'umrah since the late 1920s, and that religious education was heavily circumscribed, Muhammadiev's account provided a unique source of information.

How did Muhammadiev know all of this? He does not appear to have received any religious education, and, according to materials he submitted to the CRA, could not read the Arabic script, meaning that much religious literature would have been unavailable to him. Even specialists in anti-religious propaganda usually had a very sketchy understanding of the faiths they were supposed to challenge, confusing the Qur'an and *hadith*, mixing up events and persons in biblical and Islamic sacred history, Arabic terms, and so on.⁸³ One of the likely sources is mentioned by the narrator: oral instructions for Soviet pilgrims on their way from Moscow to Mecca by the group leader Qori-aka and other SADUM clerics performing *hajj*.⁸⁴ It is also possible that Muhammadiev had religious relatives whom he consulted; in the novel, the narrator has a pious uncle, a *murīd* of one mullah Teshaboi.⁸⁵ Finally, Muhammadiev may have consulted professional Orientalists in Dushanbe, Tashkent and Moscow, such as specialists from the Institute of the Peoples of Asia and Africa (which is mentioned in his novel),⁸⁶ and Lutsian Klimovich, who specialized in Central Asian literatures and atheistic criticism of Islam, at the Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow.⁸⁷

From Satirizing the Clergy to Mocking Religion

Much of the Orientalist anti-religious aspect of the novel belongs to Muhammadiev personally and to the milieu in which his early career as a writer took shape, including his work as editor of the satirical *Horpushtak*. During the Thaw years in particular, journalists were encouraged to probe the failings of Soviet institutions, as long as they did not challenge the Soviet order as such.

82 In this respect his narrative is closer to that of Russian travellers and imperial officials in the Hijaz. See Sh. Isheev, "Mekka – sviashchennyi gorod musul'man", *Sredneaziatskii vestnik* 11 (1896), 60–81; 12 (1896), 43–83; D.F. Sokolov, "Poezdka v gorod Dzheddu", *Istoricheskii vestnik* 5 (1902), 616–49; M.E. Nikolsky, "Palomnichestvo musul'man v Mekku", *Istoricheskii vestnik* 4 (1911), 256–92; 5 (1911), 603–38.

83 A.V. Avksent'ev, *O preodolenii perezhitkov islama* (Moscow: Znanie, 1967), 6–7, 13.

84 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 53–55.

85 Ibid., 53–55; Muhammadiev, "Dar on dunyo", 6: 33–34.

86 Ibid., 134. Cf. Bobrovnikov's interview with Shavkat Niyozī.

87 See M. Kemper, "Ljucian Klimovič. Der ideologische Bluthund der sowjetischen Islamkunde und Zentralasienliteratur", *Asiatische Studien* 63:1 (2009), 93–133.

Writers could satirize bureaucrats, slackers (*tuneiadtsy*), sectarians, and religious bigots. These satirical tools are deployed in the novel against the pilgrims who are “far from exemplary Soviet people”.⁸⁸ There is mullah Urok-aka, always smoking other people’s cigarettes, and the pompous and round-bellied Mahsum Abdirazikdzhan-aka. Out of the seventeen pilgrims, only twelve are mentioned by name, and even fewer get something like an individual portrait. The rest appear as wordless and comic old men in turbans, something underlined in the illustrations of the Soviet artist Sergei Vishnepolskii that accompanied the Russian edition of 1970.⁸⁹ As already noted, not everyone is subject to the same level of satire: Qori-aka and Isrofil are portrayed more sympathetically than the other pilgrims, but the upshot is that in both cases the narrator laments that these smart and talented individuals did not do something more useful with their lives.

The narrator can only laugh at the dogmatism and superstition he finds among believers. In Khartoum, Allanazar-qori confuses Fahrenheit and Celsius and tries to convince the others that the temperature had reached 102 degrees – i.e., above the boiling point.⁹⁰ Qurbon is similarly perturbed that his companions seem to believe that turnips originated from black rocks, cooked by the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭima for her hungry children, that “rice came from a tooth of the prophet, that wheat had been brought to earth from the seventh heaven by Adam, that mice came out of the nostril of a pig, and the cat from the mouth of a tiger, when the latter happened to sneeze while on Noah’s Ark.”⁹¹ Even the educated Qori-aka believes that birds avoid flying over the Ka’ba and therefore respect the Almighty Allah, even as the pilgrims see birds flying directly over it.⁹² The narrator is mystified and made uncomfortable by the superstitions of his companions; their behaviour belongs to the “other” world he imagines as a kind of hell, which belongs to the past but has someone made its way into the present.

Friends and colleagues who knew him personally insisted that Muhammadiev did not attack religion, but only superstition and bigotry, which was also the official Soviet position on religion.⁹³ Nevertheless, Muhammadiev’s descriptions

88 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 40, 140.

89 Ibid., 2, 6–7, 13, 16, 20–21, 82–83, 92, 95, 102–03, 166, 177, 185, 199.

90 Ibid., 52–53.

91 Ibid., 141–42.

92 Ibid., 126–27.

93 Baruzdin, “Nepokhozhii na drugikh”, 365; U. Kuhzod, “Kuda smotrela tsenzura?”, *SMI i pravo* 37 (2009), 7; F.M. Tursunov, *Leksiko-semanticheskii analiz poslovits i pogovorok*, 86; Bobrovnikov’s interview with Shavkat Niyozhi.

and commentary of episodes from the lives of the prophets and Muḥammad's Companions suggest a satire that goes to the very foundations of the faith. This includes his description of the prophet Ibrāhīm, who in Islamic tradition is the builder of the Ka'ba,⁹⁴ and Muḥammad himself, who made it the main holy site of Islam.⁹⁵ Retelling in a sarcastic manner some controversial episodes from the Prophet's biography, Muhammadiev presents the prophets Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad as old and lustful men, and the latter also a cuckold. He does not spare 'Ā'isha, the Prophet's favourite wife, accusing her of having an affair;⁹⁶ and even pokes fun at the angel Jibrīl for helping the prophets.⁹⁷ He explains the tradition of donning *iḥrām* as a primitive pagan ritual,⁹⁸ and he states repeatedly that the water at the Zamzam source is polluted.⁹⁹

It is noteworthy that the blasphemous nature of *Travel to the Other World* is accentuated in the Russian translation by Iurii Smirnov. The styles of the Tajik original as well as the early Uzbek version that appeared in Tashkent in 1968 were different from translations to other languages. Despite all the attacks against Iranian and Arabic terms in national minority languages in the 1930s, there was no distinct division between sacred and secular vocabulary in literary Tajik and Uzbek languages even in the 1960s. Many abstract notions, even those expressing the Soviet realities and ideas, were loaned from Persian and Arabic. The Russian translation by Iurii Smirnov made the novel more Orientalist, perhaps inadvertently, by introducing many pre-Soviet missionary ideas about Islam. All of the Russian editions quoted the Qur'an using the Orthodox missionary translation of Gordii Sablukov,¹⁰⁰ even though an academic Russian version made by Ignatii Krachkovskii was already available to specialists in scientific atheism and Orientology in Moscow and Dushanbe.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the Russian version of Muhammadiev's novel defined Qur'anic *āyāt* and *sūras* as "verses" and "chapters" of the Holy Writ in the Christian Orthodox (and Soviet anti-religious) manner;¹⁰² Muslim prophets and their

94 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 108–09, 169–71.

95 *Ibid.*, 55, 114–15, 225–26, 230.

96 *Ibid.*, 226–28.

97 *Ibid.*, 84–45, 203–04.

98 *Ibid.*, 76.

99 *Ibid.*, 106–07, 111.

100 *Ibid.*, 112, 115, 224, 235.

101 *Koran*, perevod i kommentarii I.Iu. Krachkovskogo, ed. VI. Beliaev (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1963). Note, however, that in 1968 the Tatar literary historian and critic Rafael Mustafin criticized Krachkovskii's translation as being too literal and thus unhelpful for a "Russian reader to judge the poetic side of the Koran". R. Mustafin, "Snova o perevodakh", *Druzhba narodov*, 1968, no. 1, 261.

102 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 16, 210.

close relatives from the Islamic sacred history were called by their names in Christian tradition: Ibrāhīm appears as Abraham, his wife Hajar as Agar, and so on; Judgment day became Doomsday (*den' strashnogo suda*).¹⁰³

Majidov is not always negative about religion. Visiting the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, Majidov is drawn to thinking about the relationship between art and faith, and the role that great composers like Johann Sebastian Bach played in strengthening the belief of Christians with their music; the classic “Munojot” melodies sung by Tajik and Uzbek singers, which “were so deep and emotional that they turned the soul upside down”, would have sent anyone in doubt to immediately beg God for forgiveness. Similarly, he says a Muslim would only “strengthen his faith on seeing these giant and impressive mosques”.¹⁰⁴ Even a doubting person would have to admit, if he was truthful, that “this was wonderful, it was impressive, that he was in awe”.¹⁰⁵ In these reflections, Muhammadiev moves away from satire to a more subtle explanation of religious affinity – one that is rooted in the humanist aspects of Soviet modernity and atheism. In fact, this is the same logic which led the Soviet state to invest in maintaining sites like the Registan in Samarkand and bringing tourists to witness not just the sites but also the care they receive from Soviet authorities. Majidov expresses appreciation for the cultural achievements that religious faith inspired but wants to bring them into the present without the irrationality that seems to pull them constantly into the past.

Reactions

Dar on dunyo first appeared in *Sadoi sharq* in 1965, issues 3 through 6, and then was quickly translated into Russian by Iurii Smirnov.¹⁰⁶ (In all likelihood, this was a collaboration, with Muhammadiev himself doing a word-for-word translation and Smirnov then making the text more literary.)¹⁰⁷ We do not know how ordinary readers reacted to the novel when it first appeared in *Sadoi Sharq* in 1965. Curiously, a vocal opponent of the novel was Sharif Kaiumovich Shirinbaev (1908–82), the head of the Council for Religious Affairs for the Uzbek

103 Ibid., 7ff. Cf. Muhammadiev, “Dar on dunyo”, 3:43 (*ruzi qiyomat* – on Judgment day).

104 Mukhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 222–23.

105 Ibid.

106 For the first time, a chapter of the novel was published in Russian in the newspaper *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana* (16 January 1966).

107 On Soviet translation practices, see, for example, Rebecca Gould, “World literature as a communal apartment: Semyon Lipkin’s ethics of translational difference”, *Translation and Literature* 21:3 (2012), 402–21.

SSR, a KGB colonel and party member, and, like Muhammadiev, originally from Samarkand. In the summer of 1966, Shirinbaev tried to prevent the first Russian edition from appearing in *Zvezda Vostoka*, a Russian-language literary journal published in Tashkent.¹⁰⁸ Shirinbaev then wrote to Vladimir Kuroedov, the head of the all-Soviet Council of Religious Affairs, asking him to stop further publications of the novel.¹⁰⁹ According to a close friend of Muhammadiev, the author then appealed to Mufti Ziyauddin-khan Babakhanov, the head of SADUM, and with the latter's support managed to have the novel published as a book in Tajik in 1966 and in the spring of 1967 in Russian in *Zvezda Vostoka*.¹¹⁰

Shirinbaev had a number of complaints about the novel. For example, he accused the writer of revealing a state secret by including instructions to Soviet pilgrims and descriptions of the classified brochures about the *hajj*.¹¹¹ But most of Shirinbaev's criticism concerned the novel's treatment of Islamic rituals. According to Shirinbaev, the novel's atheism was too outdated and would not help anti-religious activists within the USSR. Abroad, it could actually be used for anti-Soviet propaganda, since it suggested that the USSR sent atheists on the *hajj*, something that would make future pilgrimages more difficult.¹¹² Shirinbaev then cited a number of passages which he found particularly insulting to believers, including the narrator's behaviour (which clearly violated *hajj* norms) and attitude towards Islamic dogma, the idea of heaven and hell, Judgement day, his disrespectful descriptions of the *hajj*, his drinking of cognac on the way to Mecca, and so on.¹¹³

Muhammadiev won in his conflict with Shirinbaev but was forced to accept some cuts and changes in most Russian publications, in 1966–69 and again in the 1973 edition. We found 35 changes, all of them relatively minor. These included jokes about the Saudi flag,¹¹⁴ removed presumably to avoid offending Riyadh. They also included one of the comments about instructions to pilgrims, the description of customs procedures in Moscow, the comment that pilgrims were instructed to move around as a group while they were abroad,¹¹⁵

108 GARF, f. r-6991, op. 6, d. 51, l. 195.

109 Shirinbaev, "Zamechaniia po proizvedeniiu tadzhikskogo pisatel'ia Fazliddina Mukhammadieva 'Puteshestvie na tot svet ili povest' o velikom khadzhezhe", 195.

110 Kuhzod, "Kuda smotreli tsenzura?", 7.

111 Shirinbaev, "Zamechaniia", 199. Cf. GARF, f. r-6991, op. 3, d. 1449, ll. 38–42; *Perechen' svedenii, zapreshchennykh k opublikovaniu v otkrytoi pechati, peredachakh po radio i televizioniu* (Moscow: Glavlit SSSR, 1976), 89–90, 95, 98.

112 Shirinbaev, "Zamechaniia", 199, 198.

113 *Ibid.*, 196–199. Cf. Muhammadiev, *Puteshestvie na tot svet*, 24, 36–37, 102–03, 106–07.

114 *Ibid.*, 130.

115 *Ibid.*, 11; 13–14, 178; 22.

as well as an allusion to Stalin's "personality cult".¹¹⁶ The remaining deletions were mostly those requested by Shirinbaev: mockery of Soviet mullahs, references to their habit of picking their noses in public,¹¹⁷ depictions of behaviour unbecoming Soviet citizens, as well as certain observations from the *hajj* itself, including of Saudi soldiers whipping pilgrims during *tawāf*, about the Zamzam as a source of infection,¹¹⁸ the illnesses of Soviet pilgrims on Arafat,¹¹⁹ and about dirt in Mina after the end of Qurban-Bayram.¹²⁰ Otherwise, however, the novel maintained its structure, style, and most of the episodes and meditations of the narrator.¹²¹

The first full translation, with the excisions noted above, appeared in *Druzhba narodov* in 1967. The journal, published by the USSR Union of Writers, showcased work from writers across the USSR translated into Russian, along with criticism and debates about Soviet literature. It was through *Druzhba narodov* that Russian readers discovered non-Russian writers like the Kyrgyz Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008) and the Chukchi Yuri Rythkeu (1930–2008), but also the way readers in non-Russian republics discovered each other. In the mid-1960s the journal was declining in popularity and readers found the quality of prose uneven at a time when other journals, like the liberal *Novyi Mir*, were publishing increasingly daring work. A new editor, Sergei Baruzdin, took over in 1966, intent on giving new life to the journal.¹²² An account of the *hajj* would have been truly novel for readers of the journal, and it was thus a good fit for a new editor trying to raise the journal's popularity with readers. Moreover, *Druzhba narodov* played an important role in Soviet literary ties with the Third World, and if Soviet authorities hoped to use the novel as a demonstration of Soviet respect for religion, *Druzhba narodov* was the natural place to introduce the novel to the wider reading public.¹²³

116 *Ibid.*, 45.

117 *Ibid.*, 40, 58–59, 193.

118 *Ibid.*, 103; 106–07, 111.

119 *Ibid.*, 153.

120 *Ibid.*, 184.

121 Again, even negative depictions of Mecca were not a Soviet innovation, but appeared in late nineteenth century accounts. See Green, "Hajj as Its Own Undoing", 207–08.

122 *Druzhba narodov* 12 (1985), 263–64. An abbreviated version of the Russian translation appeared in *Zvezda Vostoka* in 1966 (no. 4–6), almost simultaneously in Moscow in *Nauka i religii* (no. 4–9), and in Riga in *Sovetskāia Latvīia* (8 October 1966). The first full Russian version appeared in *Druzhba narodov* (nos 3–6), and then in book form from several publishers: *Izvestia* (Moscow, 1969), *Irfon* (Dushanbe, 1970, 1980), *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* (Moscow, 1973, 1976, 1988), *Maorif* (Dushanbe, 1983), *Sovetskii pisatel'* (Moscow, 1989). The novel was reprinted in Tajik by the publisher Adib in 1991 and again in 2020.

123 See, for example, R. Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema Between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2020).

From that point on, the novel went through a number of editions, throughout the USSR and eventually abroad.¹²⁴ The Russian version served as the source of further translations into Armenian, Ukrainian, Estonian and Latvian (1982), Turkmen (1992), Hungarian (1978), Czech (1979), German, Romanian and Bulgarian (1980) and even Arabic.¹²⁵ All in all, the book saw 32 editions, with a total print run of over 1 million copies.

Conclusion: Between Fiction and Reality

We should not assume that Soviet readers would have focused on the anti-religious aspects of the novel. After all, denunciations of religion had largely become routinized by the 1960s.¹²⁶ What would have been completely new to Soviet readers, whether Muslim or not, were the descriptions of the *hajj*, which, for all of the author's satire, are also highly detailed. The author's direct, journalistic style, which he used to try to show the "true" nature of the capitalist world and religion, also made it possible for a Soviet reader to imagine what it would be like to go on such a journey, although only a handful of them would ever have had such an opportunity.

The Soviet Union strove to show that it could be respectful of cultural traditions associated with religion even as it sought to eliminate religious practice. Travel to the Soviet Union was one way of accomplishing this goal; sending intermediaries like Muhammadiev (or his narrator/alter-ego, Qurbon Majidov) was another. The audience for this kind of outreach were not the pious or the committed foes of socialism, but rather progressive postcolonial elites who the Soviet Union hoped could be won over to the Soviet side in the Cold War. Ultimately, Muhammadiev was only partially successful in his attempt to reconcile the needs of Soviet foreign policy, Soviet atheism, and Soviet nationalities policy. The novel is hardly subtle in the way it satirizes religion, piety, and the pious. Even some Soviet authorities thought the first published version of *Dar on dunyo* too anti-religious to serve as a good propaganda tool. But the novel nevertheless proved popular, with multiple reprintings and translations.

¹²⁴ In 1966, the Dushanbe publisher Irfon released the novel in book form, with additional printings in 1968, 1980, and 1989. In 1968 the Uzbek translation was released in Tashkent. F. Muhammadiev, *U dunyoda, yoki haj qissasi: Povešt'*, translated into Uzbek by A. Ahmedov (Toshkent: Badii adabnashr, 1968), 286 pp, in 15,000 copies.

¹²⁵ F.A. Muhammadiev, "Lichnoe delo", ll. 14–23.

¹²⁶ A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was no More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

The novel's popularity surely had something to do with the author's ability to characters complex enough that the overall story remains compelling; even more important was the author's effective use of the travelogue genre to show local Soviet elites and citizens a world they would have had almost no chance of visiting themselves.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ The authors would like to thank Sergey Abashin, Aziz Niyozzi, Michael Kemper, Rainer Brunner, and the anonymous reviewers, as well as Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov and the participants of the *Antropological kruzhek* for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.