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« A Surrogate Aristocracy?  
Sufi *Adab*, Modernity, Rurality and  
Civilisation in Ex-Soviet Central Asia »

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If compared with the “rest” of the world of Islam, the destiny faced by *adab* (as the classical Islamic norms of ethics and deportment) during the short twentieth century (1914–1991) in the Muslim-peopled south of the USSR offers a set of paradoxical features, peculiar to this extremely wide and composite cultural area. In southernmost Central Asia especially, a feature of the transmission of *adab* after the abolition by Russia of the Kokand Khanate in 1876, has been the gradual disappearance of the spaces of production of the Persian and Turkic-language court culture hitherto dominant in the region’s major cities. This occultation was complete with the fall, at the hands of the Red Army in the summer of 1920, of the Emirate of Bukhara and of the Khanate of Khiva, both under Russia’s protectorate since 1873. In August 1920, the exodus of the Emir towards Afghanistan emptied Bukhara of part of this fallen polity’s social elites, progressively replaced by waves of rural migrants while Bukhara itself was rapidly turning into a county town and museum city.

In Soviet Central Asia until the massive imprisonment campaign of 1932 and the state terror of 1936–37, the urban “circles” or “assemblies” (Ar., Pers. and Turk. *maḥfil*, *majlis*) of such figureheads as Bukhara’s scholar, man of letters and former Supreme Judge Mīrzā Muḥammad-Šarīf Šadr, better known under his penname of Žiyā (1867–1932), became an alternative centre of learned sociability.<sup>1</sup> It is within this semi-private sphere of the “salons” of madrasa-educated scholars that were progressively reinvented and redefined, during this still poorly documented though decisive period of transition, the criteria of authority as well as religious learning, ethical norms, the rules of propriety and the collective memory of the pre-Soviet past.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, the eclipse of the emir and khans of yesteryear during the summer 1920 was followed by a series of limitations imposed upon the ulama’s social surface by the Peoples’ Soviet Republic of Bukhara (1920–24), subdivided in 1924 into the new Uzbek and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics.

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<sup>1</sup> On this still understudied sociability, see my article “Les ‘tribulations’ du juge Žiyā”, 1105–7. On the learned circles of the 1930s in Samarqand and in Tashkent, the successive capitals of the Uzbek SSR (in 1924–36 and from 1936 onwards, respectively), see my “Islam et nationalisme en Asie Centrale”, 134–6.

<sup>2</sup> Against the backdrop of a deep transformation and quick professionalization of Central Asian historiography, cf. Khalid, “Nation into History”, 135–7.

One of the numerous measures taken during these years against the religious personnel of Islam was the establishment of state control and the confiscations of mortmain deeds (Ar. *awqāf*, sing. *waqf*) on which had long relied the ulama's autonomy as a separate status group.<sup>3</sup> The Cultural Revolution in 1927, the Latinisation of national alphabets and the starting of collectivisation two years later entailed new sets of restrictions and repressions. Ziyā himself died in jail, in April 1932, during a campaign of arrests and of confiscations that targeted, among others, the ulama. In parallel, Soviet authorities were promoting radically new norms of socioeconomic life, the collision of which with Central Asian society was symbolised, in early March 1927, by the near overlap of International Women's Day with the beginning of Ramadan. Seeking supporters in local societies, the new regime actively encouraged the liberation of the 'surrogate proletariat' reportedly made up in Central Asia by women. The unveiling 'campaign' (Taj. and Uzb. *hujūm*) of 1927 raised many ulama's hostility, especially in the cities endowed with rich pious foundations, which were quickly exposed to waves of repression in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

Against this specific historical background and its effects on the destiny of Islam in the south of the Soviet Union, this chapter will endeavour to suggest how, in the Tajik SSR, religious and gnostic circles gradually re-formed, especially after de-Stalinisation from 1956 onwards, around a limited number of closely interconnected sacred lineages. We shall see how these assemblies, in the near absence of madrasas, transformed in several instances into key transmitters of theological knowledge, though more often into holders of ethical values and norms of deportment deemed peculiar to the aulic culture that had been wiped out from Central Asia between 1876 and 1920. This may permit us to understand why the hagiographic processes that have been developing in the Soviet South since the last third of the twentieth century, dealing principally with Muslim saints of the Soviet period, explicitly insist on the latter's specific role as substitutes for the emirs and khans of times gone by. As a 'surrogate aristocracy' of sorts, the main force of resilience to the imposition of new values from outside and of promotion of a specifically Hanafi Sunni and Tajik Persian 'civilisation' or high culture (Taj. *madaniyyat*).

Indeed, it is quite paradoxical that Sovietisation, while reducing religious space, ultimately facilitated a gentrification for part of the religious personnel of Islam. In this process, a special role fell to a set of sacred lineages of descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima (ar. *sādāt*, sing. *sayyid*) or of the Prophet's Companions (Pers.

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<sup>3</sup> On the *waqf* policy of the People's Soviet Republic of Bukhara, see in part Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*, 129–30, 135–9, 148–9, 233–40. See also the overviews by Pianciola & Sartori, "Waqf in Turkestan", *passim*, and, about Soviet Central Asia as a whole, Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, esp. 128–9.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, 128–33. On the unveiling campaigns of the Cultural Revolution period, see Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 193–9.

*khwāja*, pl. *khwājaqān*).<sup>5</sup> Several of them heirs to the powerful Samarqand-based Dahbīdiyya hereditary line of Naqšbandī masters,<sup>6</sup> these dynasties have been struggling since de-Stalinisation—sometimes with financial support of Tajikistani power since the country’s independence in 1991—against the emergence of newcomers in the competitive religious field of present-day Central Asia. The private sponsorship of genealogical research, with the assistance of domestic and international academic philologists and historians given jobs as hagiographers, has permitted these holy dynasties to restrict the risk of “*ashrafisation*”, viz. the promotion of commoners to prestigious hereditary status groups.<sup>7</sup>

We shall see, too, that since the dissolution of the USSR, identification of Soviet Muslim saints with classical figures of the Muslim ruler has permitted Tajikistani President Imām-‘Alī Raḥmān (ex Rahmonov, in this post since 1992) to develop the patrimonial approach of Islam favoured since 1991 by ex-Soviet Central Asian leaders. Supporting a limited amount of interconnected *sayyid* lineages of Sufi guides, the Tajikistani president has been brandishing a standard of the country’s Sunni Persian ‘heritage’ (Ar. and Pers. *mīrāth*, Taj. & Uzb. *meros*, another term of reference, together with *madaniyyat*, in ideologies of post-Soviet independence), against Western influences, transnational Salafi trends and a Muslim-Brother-inspired Tajik Islamic Revival Party. For President Raḥmān, a former kolkhoz chair, it is also significant that such figureheads of the Soviet Islamic past (and the sanctuaries erected on their tombs, sometimes with public subsidies, by their offspring) usually belong to rural areas. Not to remote upper valleys spared by electrification and by CPSU’s control, but to the universe of the collective farms, sometimes to “virgin lands” conquered by the Soviets in the decades just after WWII. There, sheltered by the Iron Curtain from international competition and protected by the personal patronage dispensed by kolkhoz and sovkhos bosses, these sacred dynasties could develop, especially when antireligious campaigns broke out between the early 1960s and the mid-1980s.<sup>8</sup> Striving hard to maintain, since the opening of the Iron Curtain in 1989, their grip on a quickly diversified religious field, they have been nourishing, through a specific cult of ancestors, apologetic views of the short twentieth century. In so doing, they have been producing a rare and rather paradoxical association between *adab*, modernity, rurality, civilisation and a specific nostalgia for Soviet things.

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<sup>5</sup> On the *sādāt*, *khwājaqān* and other status groups of sacred ancestry in pre-modern Central Asia, see notably Muminov, “*Dihqāns* and Sacred Families”, esp. 199–200.

<sup>6</sup> Algar, “Dahbīdiyya”; Papas, “No Sufism without Sufi Order”, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> We borrow this term from the social history of Islam in South Asia: e.g., Buehler, “Trends of Ashrafization in India”, 240–2; see also Boivin, “The Saint as Ancestor”, 330.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Dudoignon & Noack, “Introduction”, esp. 37–62; and the discussion of the postulates and results of this research programme by R. Abdugafurov, J. Sahadeo and R. Zanca in *Central Asian Affairs*, 3/3 (2016), 287 ff.

In societies deprived since the late 1920s of madrasas and subjected to tight control of the public practices of Islam, small religious centres gradually reappeared, after the start of de-Stalinisation in 1956, redeploing slowly from the cities to the region's countryside. Part of the urban Islamic culture that had characterised pre-modern Transoxiana (Ar. *Māwarā al-nahr*, the region north of the Amu-Darya River) developed in the decades after collectivisation in the framework of the kolkhozian world. The mass resettlements implemented from 1947 onwards, within the Tajik SSR, from populous mountain valleys towards desert or steppe flatlands, henceforth dedicated to cotton production, further strengthened this ruralisation of religious practice and space. In a number of instances, these massive migrations, which were operated coercively in short amounts of time, brought Persian-speaking mountaineers in close contact with their Uzbek-speaking lowland coreligionists.<sup>9</sup>

A consequence of these massive rural-rural population resettlements characteristic of the last decade of Stalin's reign was not only the propagation to new territories of distinct religious trends—of Sufi Paths, most particularly, in the Northeast Caucasus as well as in Southern Central Asia—but the identification of these currents with distinctive migrant (Ar. & Pers. *muhājir*) populations.<sup>10</sup> A result of these demographic confrontations, sometimes sharpened by economic specialisation and by competition for access to scarce resources (drinking water, notably), was the gradual development of inner-confessional cleavages. Another, the appearance of pilgrimage places attached to saints of the Soviet period revered by *muhājir*-background practitioners dispatched in the country's cotton-growing flatlands. Some of these sanctuaries, thanks to public support and to their attendance by migrant-background pilgrims from all over Tajikistan, emerged gradually as nationwide Tajikistani memorials.

An autonomous republic of the Uzbek SSR until 1929, with a mountainous and rural territory limited to the Zerafshan and Wakhsh Rivers' valleys and to the Isma'ili Shia-peopled Upper Badakhshan Autonomous Region (*see the map below*), the Tajik SSR detached itself, that year, from its Uzbek counterpart. At the same time, it enlarged its territory, at the latter's expense, to the partly Uzbek-speaking region of Khujand (renamed Leninabad), in the north, in times past a major caravan post at the entrance of the densely populated Ferghana Plain. From that year on, besides its Russian-speaking capital Dushanbe (initially a modest market town, renamed Stalinabad until 1961), the main urban centres of the Tajik SSR found themselves located, in the north, in the middle of a predominantly Uzbek-speaking area. Conversely, the principal Tajik Persian-speaking urban centres of the region, Bukhara and its

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<sup>9</sup> See the historical reconstructions by Abdulhaev, *Ta'rikhi muhojirat*; Kurbanova, *Pereselenie*; discussed in Ferrando, "Soviet Population Transfers", esp. 46–9, and in Dudoignon and Qalandar, "They Were All from the Country", esp. 67–74.

<sup>10</sup> On the North Caucasus, see Shikhaliev, "Downward Mobility and Spiritual Life", 404–10. On migrations from the Upper Zerafshan River Valley to the New Matcha Lowland in Tajikistan, Zevaco, "From Old to New Matcha", 181–6.

neighbour Samarqand, the former capitals of a succession of Muslim polities since the tenth century CE, were finding themselves in the territory of the Uzbek SSR. Combined with the socio-political transformations of the Soviet period, these territorial redefinitions preserved the predominantly rural dimension of Persianophone Hanafi Sunni Muslim religious life as it continued to develop within the Tajik republic.



Illustration 1: Map of Tajikistan (source: University of Texas Libraries)

Together with the mass resettlements of the mid-1940s onwards, waves of antireligious repression in 1929-37, 1944-45 and 1958-59 brought about in the countries of the Soviet South a phenomenon of confessionalisation cum ethnicisation of *adab*. Indeed, in the pre-Soviet past *adab* had been related to polyglot urban milieus in the shade of the khans’ and emir’s courts—whatever the cleavages in Bukhara between the Persian-speaking ‘Tajik’ bazaar and madrasa, on the one hand, and on the other the settled Turkic ‘Uzbek’ military

aristocracy.<sup>11</sup> Among the Persianophone population of the Tajik SSR, *adab* became an element of belonging to a Sunni Persian tradition in contrast to Russian culture (*kul'tura*, seen locally as adherence to value systems imposed by the metropolis of the Russian Empire and the USSR), but also in contrast to a predominantly Uzbek-language Islamic religious establishment.

It is true that Stalin's recreation, from 1943 onwards, of an accredited (Rus. *zaregistrirovannyi*) state-hired Muslim clerisy, on the model of the Muslim Spiritual Assembly inherited from the Tsarist era, and the reopening two years later of the Mīr-i 'Arab Madrasa of Bukhara, under state control, established the prominence of Uzbek-speaking or bilingual religious personnel from the Ferghana Plain. (Until the 1970s, the chancery documents of religious bureaucracy in the Persian-speaking Tajik SSR continued to be handwritten in Chaghatay Turkic.)<sup>12</sup> The multiplication of independent 'cells' (Ar. and Pers. *hujras*) of unsanctioned theological teaching after the opening of the Gulag in 1956 strengthened this tendency. Such was the case even within the Tajik SSR, where the leading post-World War II non-official Hanafi Sunni theologian remained Ferghana-born Muhammad-Jan Rustamov, alias Mawlawī Hindūstānī (c. 1892–1989), who until the end of his long life used to address his audiences predominantly in Uzbek.<sup>13</sup> A strong dichotomy developed, during this time, between 'ilm-i qāl (Islamic theology and law) and 'ilm-i ḥāl (Islamic gnosis). It relied on a division of work stricter than in pre-Soviet past between a limited number of oftentimes Uzbek-speaking madrasas or *hujras* and Persian-speaking gnostic assemblies.

Dervish hostelries properly said—Pers. *dargāh*, *khānqāh*—had vanished until the gradual reconstruction that took place in the early 2000s, usually near the recent grave of a Soviet Muslim saint. At the same time, the reduction of Sufi sociability on restricted numbers of interconnected sacred lineages endowed with protections in the system brought about a gradual disappearance of antinomian Sufism, of lawless saints and *qalandars* who revolted against the rules and norms of the *ṭuruq* while exposing the ulama's formal piety.<sup>14</sup> One of the last known of these holy men in the Tajik SSR was probably the recluse Īšān Majnūn (1911–

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<sup>11</sup> On the critical, often satirical exposure of the 'Uzbekiyya' as the embodiment of Bukhara's military elite after their defeats of 1868 and 1873 against the Russian army, see the understudied Persian treatises by Bukharan 'ālim Aḥmad Makhdūm al-Ṣiddīqī al-Bukhārī (1826/7–97), better known under his penname of Dāniš ('Knowledge') or his nickname of Aḥmad Kalla ('Aḥmad Brainbox'). On him, see the short presentation by Wennberg, *On the Edge*, 169–73.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance the documents emitted by Qāzī 'Abd al-Rašīd b. Mūsā Bīk (1883–1978), the qāzī of the Tajik SSR during the last two years of Stalin's reign and an influential figure until his death, as the Imam of the Šāh-Manšūr Mosque near the renowned 'Green' market (Rus. *Zelenyi Bazar*) of Dushanbe. For example, Central State Archive of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, F. 1516, O. 1, Ed. Khr. 65, D. 4, esp. ff. 7–14 (a 'characterisation' by the Council for Religious Affairs near the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, as well as elements of biography and autobiography attached to an application to the hajj in May 1957).

<sup>13</sup> One can see aging Mawlawī Hindūstānī haranguing people in a videotaped *majlis* on the necessity of mobilisation for the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the early 1980s (private collection, district of Ḥiṣār; partly released in the documentary film by Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Ludovic Segarra, *Asie centrale, états d'urgence*).

<sup>14</sup> On the pre-modern history of antinomian Sufism, notably in Central Asia, see Papas, "Antinomianism (*ibāḥa*, *ibāḥiyya*)", 3: 22–7.

91) of Matcha, who during his lifetime played with humour with the social conventions from which one had to free oneself, obeying to the supreme *adab* popularised by *qalandars*.<sup>15</sup>

From the Second World War onwards, the spiritual guides (Ar. *murshid*, Pers. *pīr*) of the Sufi tradition, released from the Gulag in two successive waves, in 1943–44 and 1955–56, accommodated in their houses equipped with large reception rooms (Pers. & Uzb. *mihmānkhāna*)<sup>16</sup> a redefined gnostic and religious teaching. A key asset of these households was the presence of private libraries made up, most of the time, of collections of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century lithographs. Mostly destroyed in the 1930s, these collections could be partly reconstructed through the small underground second-hand book market of the Khrushchev to Gorbachev periods. In this specific transmission of Islamic learning, *adab* was recognised a preponderant force, in a region where the impact of seventeenth- to nineteenth-century reformist trends and of the modern revivals of Hadith studies had enforced equivalence between *adab* and personal ethics (Ar. and Pers. *akhlāq*). Overall, pietistic stances predominated until the mid-1980s, when ‘Young Mullahs’ (Pers. *jawān mullāyān*) of *muhājir* background, often educated by prominent Sufi masters, initiated a revolt against the authority of the Muslim Spiritual Board or *muftiyyat* of Tashkent and, just after the fall of the Wall, against the CPSU itself in the framework of a Muslim-Brother-inspired Islamic Revival Party.<sup>17</sup>

The bureaucratisation of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Middle Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM in its Russian acronyms) created in 1943 by Stalin, combined with the restriction of theological studies in the Mīr-i ‘Arab of Bukhara (and from 1971 onwards in the Imām al-Bukhārī Institute of Tashkent), contributed towards the distinction between the respective professional profiles and pedigrees of ‘*ulamā*’ and ‘*urafā*’. Even more so that most of the latter used to come from sacred lineages targeted by repression after 1932. Did not the *qāzī* of the Tajik SSR from 1968 to 1989, Ḥājjī Mīrā ‘Abdallah Kalānzāda (1925–2005), a scholar from Khujand, use to regard himself as a civil functionary? This is how at the end of his life Ḥājjī Mīrā ‘Abdallah was justifying his adoption of the title of *mīrā*, reserved in the Persianate world for the corporation of scribes, instead of a religious one.<sup>18</sup> (As to the title of *ḥājjī* mentioned in SADUM’s documents, at a time when the hajj remained in the USSR reserved to tiny elite groups, it reflected until 1990 the affiliation to Soviet Central Asian officialdom and is, as such, rarely borne by representatives of Sufi paths or *ṭuruq*.) As in other regions of the USSR, moreover, the Muslim religious administration of Central Asia showed, in the post-World

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Īshān Nabī Khān, in Khūdḡif-i Īshānhā, 26 August 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Some, when accommodating the loud (*jahrī*) version of the invocation (*dhikr*) ceremony of Sufism, were adjoined in the late 1980s by a *samā’-khāna* (audition room): interview by the author with Qādirī master Īshān ‘Abd al-Khalīl-Jān Ḥiṣārī at his place in Šūrāb near Ḥiṣār, south of Dushanbe, 31 October 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Elements of history of the ‘Young Mullahs’ movement and datation of its origins in Dudoignon and Qalandar, “‘They Were All from the Country’”, 95–106.

<sup>18</sup> Taped interview by the present author with Mīrā ‘Abdallah Kalānzāda, Khujand, 27 August 2004.



War II decades, conspicuous by the publication of fatwas against Sufi rituals and sociability, especially against the cult of holy places.



*Illustration 2: Naqshbandī master Dāmullā Sharīf Ḥiṣārī (first rank, third from left, with the black turban) sitting beside qāzī Mīrzā ‘Abdallah Kalānzāda (with the orange robe) and the sixteen other imams of the accredited mosques of the Tajik SSR. (Undated photograph of the early 1970s, taken at the Ya‘qūb Charkhī sanctuary near Dushanbe, from the SADUM album of the Kārāmishkār Mosque in Dushanbe)*

Inspired by the Muslim reformist heritage of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dogmatic hostility did not imply a lack of interconnections between the state-appointed “priests” of SADUM and the sacred lineages of Muslim “sorcerers” whose legitimacy used to proceed from genealogy and charisma. During the Brezhnev years especially (1964–82), characterised by a reduction in the antireligious campaigns that distinguished earlier decades and the mid-1980s, a special role as an intermediary fell to Naqshbandī guide Dāmullā Sharīf Ḥiṣārī (c. 1899–1991). A major interlocutor of the accredited imams within the Tajik SSR, he can be seen sitting with them, wearing the black turban of a *sayyid*, in group photos in SADUM mosque albums of this period (see *ill. 2*). Bukhara-educated theologian and gnostic Dāmullā Sharīf remained until his death a key intermediary for SADUM and an or-

ganiser of religious sociability. His role as a propagandist, for example during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89),<sup>19</sup> permitted him to participate in the restoration, in the decisive mid-1980s, of the mosque and sanctuary of Mawlānā Ya‘qūb Charkhī (a fifteenth-century founding father of the Naqshbandiyya) in a suburb of Dushanbe, where Mawlawī Hindūstānī was buried in 1989.<sup>20</sup>

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Against the general backdrop of a specific division of work between the ‘*ulamā*’ and ‘*urafā*’, distinct couples emerged in the semi-public religious sphere of the Tajik SSR after de-Stalinisation, uniting the figures of a theologian and a gnostic. The most famous of them is the duo made up by the aforementioned Mawlawī Hindūstānī with Naqshbandī *murshid* Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-Jān ‘Awliyā’ (1920–91), to whom we shall return in our next pages. Their duo survived through the respective disciples whom each of them had in Ḥasanābād (a village of the former Lenin District, south of Dushanbe): theologian Makhdūm Burhān al-Dīn and gnostic master Makhdūm Ḥājjī Sulṭān of Shīngilīch (both born in 1938).<sup>21</sup> According to their personal life stories, while Makhdūm Burhān al-Dīn was the main educator of Makhdūm Sulṭān in madrasa disciplines (Ar. ‘*ulūm rasmiyya*) of the Maturidi Hanafi Bukharan tradition, the latter introduced the former into the Naqshbandiyya. The heir to several lineages of Naqshbandī masters and the author of several booklets of sapiential literature, Makhdūm Sulṭān has become, in the wake of his *murshid* Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-Jān, a reputed commentator of classical Persian didactical poetry. In parallel, he has been striving to revive in the Dushanbe region, in which Ḥasanābād accommodates a *muhājir* population from Qarategin, the religious and gnostic past of his valley of origin—where Shīngilīch, enjoyed until the mass resettlements of 1947–49, some reputation as a small religious and gnostic centre closely related to the cities of the Ferghana Plain.

One finds a reflection of this re-division of work between theologians and gnostics in the distribution of religious titles. The term *dāmullā* of mixed Arabic and Chinese origins designates, in modern Central Asia, the graduate students of the Bukharan madrasa system.<sup>22</sup> The much rarer, in this region, title of *mawlawī* refers to pre-World War II boarders of Northern Indian madrasas, principally of the Deoband School, such as Ferghana-born, Kashmir-

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<sup>19</sup> Dāmullā Sharīf sits with Mawlawī Hindūstānī and Mīrzā ‘Abdallāh Kalānzāda in the propaganda videotape mentioned above in note 14.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews with his son Īshān Khalīfa, in the family residence, and with local faithful at the Fish Mosque (*Masjid-i Māhiyān*) in Ḥiṣār, 16 October 2005.

<sup>21</sup> On Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-Jān and his posterity, see my article “Abd al-Rakhmān-Dzhān Avliiā’, *passim*; Abdujalilkhoja, *Az nasabnomai saiidzodagon*, 332–4. Our information on the life and work of, respectively, Makhdūm Burhān al-Dīn and Makhdūm Sulṭān, come from interviews that we had with each of them in Ḥasanābād in the morning and afternoon of 29 July 2004.

<sup>22</sup> According to historian Jarring (*Return to Kashgar*, 107), the term *dāmullā* is the product of a combination of Chinese *da* (大, « great ») and Arabic *mawlā* (master) in its Persian form of *mullā*. See also Muminov, “Dāmullā”.

educated Mawlawī Hindūstānī.<sup>23</sup> The Persian title of *īshān* designates the members of sacred lineages going back, in many instances, to the Prophet Muḥammad or to one of his Companions and, by extension, a wide typology of hereditary keepers of holy tombs.<sup>24</sup> Often confused in present-day Tajikistan with the dignity of *sayyid*, the title of *īshān* has been overloaded since the nineteenth century by Muslim reformist literature with an alternation of vilification and eulogy. Long inveighed against by Muslim theologians, Soviet ethnographers and Western Orientalists, as the embodiment par excellence of the “superstitious” practice of “popular” or “everyday” Islam, “ishanism” has come into favour throughout Central Asia, since the opening of the Iron Curtain, as a bulwark against local anti-establishment or “radical” movements and transnational Islamic trends flowing in from the Middle East. A heritage of the Soviet period, the strong dichotomy between professional (Ar. and Pers. *iktisābī*) and genealogical (Ar. and Pers. *intisābī*) personnel of Islam has been reactivated in a completely new geopolitical context after the appearance of missionaries, preachers and militants deprived of a Soviet background.

Indeed, as elsewhere in the worlds of Islam those different categories are mutually porous. Several prominent Sufi Guides of the Tajik SSR such as Sharīf Ḥiṣārī have borne the title *dāmullā*, others are reputed to have taught both *‘ilm-i qāl* and *‘ilm-i ḥāl*, especially when they belonged to older generations educated in the pre-Soviet or early Soviet madrasas of Bukhara, Samarqand and the Ferghana Plain. This was notably the case of ulama who could remain active during the twentieth century in the geographical isolates of the upper valleys such as Matcha (the upper course of the Zerafshan River, which flows towards Samarqand and Bukhara) and Qarategin. Making up the upper valley of the Wakhsh River, which flows southwestwards to the Amu-Darya, Qarategin is separated from Matcha and farther north from the Ferghana Plain by low and easily surmountable passes. The demographic reservoirs of the resettlements of the late 1940s from the mountain valleys to the cotton-growing lowlands of the Tajik SSR, Matcha and Qarategin used to accommodate local religious and gnostic schools. Among the figureheads of Islam whose memory has been locally preserved in these uplands by relatives and disciples, it is worth mentioning still another near centenarian, who died just after the launching of Perestroika, theologian and gnostic poet Dāmullā Iskandar Bīdakī (1895–1989).

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<sup>23</sup> Born in the Ganges River Valley in 1867, the Deoband School advocated the regeneration of Muslim societies by the propagation of Islamic teaching reorganised on the model of British boarding schools. Deobandi influence reached Central Asia in the interwar period, first, and again after the turn of the twenty-first century.

<sup>24</sup> See the historical overview by Sergei Abashin, ‘Ishan’, passim—this author concluding a bit quickly, as do many of the Russian and Soviet sources on which he must rely, as to the disappearance of the *īshān* as a social force during and after the Soviet period. The title of *makhdūm* borne in Ḥasanābād by both Burhān al-Dīn and Sulṭān of Shīngilīch usually refers in modern Central Asia to descendants of prominent scholars of Islam.

A pupil of Naqshbandī guide Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Dawlat Īlākī (a gnostic of the Qarategin Valley who had also among his disciples Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-Jān ‘Awliyā’), Dāmullā Iskandar belonged to the last generation of Bukhara-educated ulama before Soviet domination. Locally celebrated nowadays for his double pedigree as a scholar and a gnostic, he had perfected his theological training in Qarategin near India-educated scholars (*mawlawī*). He later reportedly taught madrasa disciplines and calligraphy in Qizil-Qal‘a, a village of the southwestern cotton plain of Qurghan-Teppa, where he was in close relationship with the Dahbīdī Naqshbandī master Īshān ‘Azīz Khwāja. The only trace that remains of his activity, however, consists of collections of Persian gnostic poetry edited in Iran in the early twenty-first century.<sup>25</sup> One finds examples of this double curriculum, too, in the *vitae* of Sufi masters of the second half of the twentieth century. As far as the Tajik SSR is concerned, however, such a double profile remains exceptional. On a behavioural model set up by Ghazālī (an author much commented upon in nineteenth-century Transoxiana), the Soviet Central Asian *murshid*, deprived of revenues after 1919 and compelled to exercise his arms in the collective farms’ economy, used to epitomise after collectivisation humility, altruism and accession to the knowledge (*ma‘rifā*) of God through personal effort. He moderated, too, the arrogance of scholastic philosophy personified by the state-employed personnel of Tashkent-based SADUM. As such, prominent ‘*urafā*’ have inspired a wide range of protagonists of the religious field within Tajikistan, including their disciples within the Young Mullahs movement since the mid-1980s and the Islamic Revival Party after 1990.

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For long ignored since completely absent from archive documentation on which historians of Soviet Islam have exclusively relied, these figureheads of Soviet Islam have made their appearance in collective memory through the complex hagiographic process that became known during the late 1980s. At a perilous crossroads of textual history and anthropology (the risk, here, is that researchers resort to a pre-Malinowski anthropological approach, through retro-projection of present-day discourses onto an embellished past), our study is based on the analysis of written text and [the] patient oral collection, since 2004, of testimonies by witnesses and successors. Ethnography as it is still practiced in Central Asia rarely shows itself able to recognise the *adab* that it sometimes describes. Soviet ethnography, in particular, insisted *ad nauseam* on the ‘non-Islamic’ character of rituals and other practices otherwise largely documented in mediaeval didactic literature. Our concern in this study has consisted of confronting the written norm with the data of our fieldwork, in order to better identify the impact of, respectively, the Soviet and present-day contexts on nascent hagiographies. A key factor that we have been facing is the role played in the valuation of Muslim

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<sup>25</sup> Interview [by] the author with Īshān Sharaf al-Dīn b. Dāmullā Iskandar, at his place in Bīdak, 28 September 2005. See also Raḥīmzāda, ‘Zindagīnāma-i sarāyanda’, *passim*.

sacred ancestries in present-day Tajikistan by a small number of mutually related lineages of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through the Dahbīdī line of Naqshbandī masters.

Confined in their lifetime by Soviet modernisation to the field of *‘ilm-i ḥāl*, Soviet Central Asian *murshids* and *pīrs* have found themselves posthumously endowed with a new role, central in the special hagiography that has been developing since the end of the twentieth century, as substitutes to the disappeared khans. Within the political countryside created by the abolition of the monarchy in 1920 and, from 1927 onwards, the Cultural Revolution, collectivisation and mass terror, the lineage-based religious staff of traditional Sufi Paths gradually appeared as the best custodian of the aulic and urban culture (Taj. and Uzb. *madaniyyat*)<sup>26</sup> of pre-Russian khanates. A number of symbols of this culture, borrowed from the classical literary genre of “mirrors for princes” can be found now in the *vitae* that a nascent Central Asian Muslim hagiography has been dedicating to local holy men of Islam active from the late 1920s to the late 1980s.

Among princely attributes closely associated by this hagiography with varied figures of the saint are equestrian skills. A necessity of everyday life in an essentially rural Tajik SSR granted with a mountainous territory and with roads asphalted from the 1960s only, the art of mounting became a major symbolic attribute in the yet often oral personal tradition of Tajik Muslim saints of the short twentieth century, as a heritage of pre-Soviet court culture. Nowadays celebrated as great equestrians—as well as chess players, archers, hunters<sup>27</sup> ..., all things less highlighted as distinct attributes of sanctity in pre-modern Islamic hagiography—Soviet Muslim saints appear in their *vitae* as custodians of this courtly culture eclipsed after the mass emigration of Bukhara’s urban elites in the late summer of 1920.

This dimension of Islamic sainthood as the receptacle of a courtly Persian culture in the decades after the Cultural Revolution helps us explain the presence of horse riding in the traditions of several Soviet Tajik saints of Islam. One is the *‘ālim* and *‘arīf* Dāmullā Pīr Muḥammad b. Dāmullā Qurbān Parwāzī, alias Sang-i Kulūla (c. 1884–1964). A Naqshbandī Guide of Dahbīdī ascent, Sang-i Kulūla epitomises the primacy of *sādāt* lineages in Soviet-day Central Asia. His grave built in the early 2000s has become a pilgrimage place on the road between Dushanbe and the frontier city of Kulab in southern Tajikistan. His hagiographic tradition, so far exclusively oral, has been developing in the Ḥiṣār area, a rural district south of Dushanbe, the siege of a fortress of the Emir of Bukhara legendarily connected, among others, with the figure of Iskandar (Alexander the Great) and with the Basmachi resistance of the early 1920s against the Red Army. The main hagiographer of Sang-i Kulūla is the holy man’s youngest son, Ḥājji Ismā‘īl Pīrmuḥammadzāda (b. 1952), an important Muslim CD and

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ma’rufov, *Ūzbek tilining izohli lughati*, 1, 439; Nazarzoda et al., *Farhangi tafsirii zaboni tojikī*, 1: 772–3.

<sup>27</sup> All talents attributed by his family tradition to the Naqshbandī Guide of Dahbīdī ascent Īshān Malīḥ Ḥwāja of Askalān (interviews with his grandson Īshān Muqtadā b. Īshān Pārsā Ḥwāja, in Askalān, district of Gharm in the Qarategin Upper Valley, 28 September 2005; and in Dushanbe, 21 July 2006).

DVD-preacher and a renowned apologist of horse breeding in general, of horse riding in particular.<sup>28</sup>



*Illustration 3: Hājjī Ismā‘īl Pīrmuḥammadzāda at his place in Dushanbe in August 2009*

For Tajikistani authorities, who have been promoting since the 1990s the “Tajik horse” as a symbol of national identity,<sup>29</sup> Sang-i Kulūla and in his good-natured son and grave keeper offer tranquilising embodiments of a vernacular lineage-based Islam, penetrated by Sunni Persian tradition. Father and son offer a possible ideological bulwark against transnational Middle Eastern and South Asian revolutionary Shia or Salafi Sunni influences. As such, Hājjī Ismā‘īl Pīrmuḥammadzāda has become a key figure of sociability and of Tajikistan’s religious diplomacy. In October 2009, for example, he received in Ḥiṣār a delegation of Hanafi Sunni ulama sent by the Islamic Republic of Iran for the international jubilee of Abū Ḥanīfa, at a time when Dushanbe ambioned to become an international centre of anti-Salafi struggle.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation”, 61–4; see also Abdujalilkhoja, *Az nasabnomai saiidzodagon*, 339–41.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, the Tajik Horse is a breed developed in the southern plains of present-day Tajikistan by nomadic Uzbek-speaking Laqays, a people punished by the state several times during the twentieth century, for reported participation in the Basmachi movement of the early 1920s and the ‘White’ anti-government militias in the Tajikistani civil war of 1992–97.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance the chronicle “Rossiiskie musul’mane predlagaiut sozdat’ tsentralizirovannyi organ Khanafitskogo mazhaba s tsentrom v Dushanbe” [The Muslims of Russia Propose the Creation of a Centralised Organ of the Hanafi School Based in Dushanbe], *www.asia-plus.tj* (posted 6 October 2009).

Ḥājī Ismā‘īl appears as a major protagonist of the current reinvention of modern Islamic sanctity in ex-Soviet Central Asia, the vector of a distinct “civilisation” and the element of a national “legacy”. A patrimony threatened since the dissolution of the USSR by cross-border “non-traditional” trends—according to the official taxonomy adopted by the CIS countries since Russia’s law of 1997 on “non-traditional religions”.<sup>31</sup>

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A related virtue of Central Asian Muslim saints of the Soviet period, as reflected today in their hagiography, is their explicit role as curators and transmitters of *adab* as the Islamic code of sociability and refinement based, since the tenth century CE, on the faculty of reason to overcome the carnal soul (*nafs*) through a culture of temperance.<sup>32</sup> A culture and ethics that draw from the Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad, passed down from generation to generation by a rich Persian and Turkic didactical literature in verse and prose, taught and commented on throughout the twentieth century in the *maḥfil* of still active Sufi guides. *Adab* comes here as social etiquette, education—in short, manners, as well as the conformity with the ideal of the man of breeding, well versed in the sciences and highly skilled in the arts. The notion of refinement combined with intelligence and wit (Ar. and Pers. *zarf*), often taken in a spiritual meaning in the world of Islam, is also seen literally in Soviet Central Asia, although most Soviet Central Asian *murshids* lived in rather destitute conditions (which contrasts with those enjoyed today by some of their parents and heirs). It is not by chance if, given the overall background of the degradation of Persian literacy (*inshā’*) after the change of alphabet in 1929, distinct spiritual masters have been cultivating and sometimes, such as Dāmullā Iskandar Bīdakī, teaching Arabic calligraphy. Some, such as Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥman-Jān, made a name for themselves as copyists of classics of Persian didactical poetry, such as the late-twelfth-century *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* by ‘Aṭṭār and the late-thirteenth-century *Mathnawī* by Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn.<sup>33</sup>

Together with its particular interest in court culture, classical Sufism, due to its refusal to accept a cleavage between inner and outer *adab*, developed, too, a distinct practice of eremitism (Ar. and Pers. *khalwat*). Closely associated with the art of companionship (Ar. and Pers. *ṣuḥbat*), pious retreat or quarantine (Pers. *chilla-khwānī*) appears in a number of oral traditions as a key attribute of the activity of Soviet Muslim saints. *Adab* is silence, too, and education to it passes through the master’s living example—the non-verbal teaching by the latter turning more decisive when normative literature becomes poorly accessible. A key element of the personal prestige enjoyed by a gnostic such as Makhdūm Sulṭān Shīngilīchī in

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<sup>31</sup> Dudoignon, “Russia”, 545–7.

<sup>32</sup> See Mayeur-Jaouen and Patrizi, “Introduction” to *Ethics and spirituality in Islam*, edited [by] Chiabotti et al., 1–44, and the introduction to the present volume.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Īshān ‘Abd al-Ḥāšir, Īshān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-Jān’s eldest son, Dushanbe, 2 November 2005; see also the hagiography by Darvozī & Badalipur, *Zindaginoma*, 25.

Ḥasanābād, besides the refinement of his poetical culture and his embodiment of Qarategin as a historical continuum for generations of rural migrants, being his exceptional deportment and the quality of his table manners.

As in other persecution periods in the history of Islam, *adab* in the Soviet era had to focus again on the figure of the master who, among his disciples, held the place of the Prophet Muḥammad among his Companions—many Tajik *īshāns*, although not all of them, having operated a transition from *shaykh al-ta'lim* to *shayḥ al-tarbiya*. Due to the restricted access to normative literature during a substantial part of the Soviet period, the non-verbal teaching of spiritual guides assumes in their folks' memories, and in hagiographies in the making, an exceptional importance. Besides the *malfūzāt* (sayings) of sanctified *murshids*, other elements that partake of their way of being in connection with the norms of classical *adab* have become part of their current hagiographies. Among these elements comes, first, these holy men's everyday behaviour, their bearing, manners and discourses, most notably during gatherings and banquets occasioned, in a context of rarefied religious sociability, by a number of rites of passage. This valuation contrasted with the current legends on theologians, either accredited or underground, such as Mawlawī Hindūstānī whose laidback attitude and addiction to cigarettes are nowadays recalled by many witnesses. The funerals, sometimes impressive, of men of God, especially, remained during the last decades of the Soviet period a rare moment of reunion, confrontation and organisation into a hierarchy of the religious personnel of Islam, either accredited or not.

Often mentioned, too, by his heirs and pupils is these holy men's dress. In the absence of a Muslim ruler, under the overall pressure of Russification the traditional clothes of Soviet Sufi guides became an element of distinction for a largely self-defined status group of reported sacred ancestry. These paraphernalia have often been preserved by families like so many relics, such as the simple shirts and robes of Dāmullā Sharīf Ḥiṣārī, the shepherd's quilted coat (Taj. *chapān*) worn all his adult life by Īshān 'Abd al-Raḥman-Jān, or still the stick (Ar. and Pers. *ʿaṣā*, an attribute of thaumaturges in Abrahamic traditions) used by the reputed Naqshbandī amulet-maker of *sayyid* ancestry Dāmullā Khwāja Labābawī (1895-1988) of Kulab.<sup>34</sup> All contrasting by their extreme sobriety with the coloured silk robes of SADUM's accredited imams. Conversely, turbans have sometimes been added to these figureheads' passport photos by descendants concerned about their lineage's pedigree. Such was the case for another Naqshbandī guide of Dahbīdī ascent, although of more local repute, Īshān 'Azīz Khwāja (1888-1976) of Qizil-Qal'a who, in the wake of the mass population resettlements of 1947 onwards, had established himself in a kolhoz of the cotton-growing lowland of Qurghan-Teppa, in the southwest of the Tajik SSR. Revered by descendants active in international trade, Īshān 'Azīz Khwāja is locally celebrated for the excellence of his mores and manners, besides his reported talent as a commentator of the *Maktūbāt* of Aḥmad Sirhindī, as a

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with his son Makhṣūm 'Abd al-Wahhāb (b. 1927), in Labāba, near Kulab, on 22 September 2005.



magical healer of mental diseases (epilepsy, in particular) and by the *karāmāt* told by his offspring.

Among these supernatural powers, worth mentioning perhaps is the capacity the holy man is reported to have demonstrated, in the early 1930s, to move in the air in order to escape the NKVD—a prodigy common, besides gifts for ubiquity, to the *vitae* of several Muslim saints of Central Asia under Stalin.<sup>35</sup> Such qualities and deeds, indeed, were diversely valued in the master's lifetime, sometimes even exposed to harsh criticism by the reform-minded staff of SADUM. In an interview with the present author half a year before his death, *qāzī* Mīrzā ‘Abdallah Kalānzāda called ‘balderdash’ (Taj. *gap-i sākhta*) the holy man's marvels, although Mīrzā ‘Abdallah had solemnly presided over his funerals twenty-eight years before.<sup>36</sup> This derogatory vision reflects the influence of reformist ideas that were preponderant among the accredited clerisy of SADUM and of the spiritual boards created in other Muslim-peopled regions of the USSR. It probably affected, too, the reluctance of many hagiographers, especially those with a university background, to highlight the supernatural powers of such or such holy man of the past, and an overall preference to insist on the guides' role as transmitters of *adab*. This impact of rationalist ideas on the *vitae* of Muslim saints of traditional profile must be situated in the context of the special places where the criteria of religious authority if not of sanctity itself continue to be defined in Tajik lands.

There is one place in particular where the late Soviet and present-day hagiographic process spreads out in its complexity and dynamism, although neglected by many specialists of Sufism in Central Asia and more generally in the former Soviet realm. This place is the personal salon (*mahfil*) of a traditional Sufi guide, which gathers at regular intervals assemblies in the master's residence. Despised by historians, who are interested in genealogy and ritual typology, and anthropologists, who are rarely preoccupied with learned culture, the *mahfils* of spiritual guides are since the 1950s the place where different actors, whose role is organised into a hierarchy, elaborate the memory of a *murshid* or *pīr* — often the father or grandfather of the master of the house. As suggested by a number of historical and ethnographical studies, the *mahfil* remains a key locus of intellectual, gnostic and religious sociability in modern-day Transoxiana.

After the opening of the Gulag in 1955–56, the return of hundreds of former mullahs to their quarters and villages of origin brought about a selective and gradual revitalisation of this sociability as well as of the classical *adab* that, in times past, cemented it. Initially discreet, sometimes kept in the background for example in the ‘rest areas’ (Uzb. *shipon*) of cotton growing kolkhozes and sovkhoses,<sup>37</sup> these gatherings were organised in villages at the scale

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<sup>35</sup> Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation”, 2011, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with him, Khujand, 27 August 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Babajanov, “The Economic and Religious History of a Kolkhoz Village”, 269, 272–3.

of one and the same brigade of production formed by a group of chain migrants. Though restricted initially to the close relatives of a master, the numerical significance of these get-togethers tended to grow from the late 1970s onwards and they gradually became the central place of a particular hagiographic process. In town, such was the case of the circles that used to assemble after 1956 around literati freshly liberated from the Gulag for discussions on classical didactical literature and poetical jousting. One of the best documented of these assemblies was the Rawshan-Dilān (“Pure Hearts”) circle that used to gather in Kulab from the Khrushchev period onwards under the leadership of the gnostic poet Mullā Sharīf “Sāmi” Ādīnazāda Khaṭlānī (c. 1906–95). Celebrated today by local historians as an embodiment of resilience of Tajik Muslim culture through the twentieth century, the Rawshan-Dilān of Kulab also appear in the discourse of ‘*urafā*’ such as Īshān ‘Abd al-Khalīl-Jān of Ḥiṣār as a key element of gnostic sociability, besides the initiated society of the *ṭuruq*.<sup>38</sup>



*Illustration 4: Gathering at the place of the Naqshbandī guide of Dahbidī ascent Īshān ‘Abduh Khān b. Īshan Naqshband Khān (on the left with the black turban, Dushanbe, 20 July 2006)*

The hagiographic process discussed in such circles focused, significantly, on modern sanctity instead of the glories of a more remote past. For local groups of Muslim literati and within networks of personal protection with strong kinship outlines, the Muslim saints of the short twentieth century were making up a key element of historical continuity and genealogical legitimacy, through participation in the re-elaboration of *adab*. The competitiveness of the post-Soviet Central Asian Sunni Muslim religious field could but strengthen the role bestowed on them. During an informal conversation, some years ago, with Īshān Maḥmūd

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Dudoignon and Zevaco, “Sur le ‘Mail des Rhapsodes’”, *passim*; interview of the present author with Īshān ‘Abd al-Khalīl-Jān, in Shūrāb, 31 October 2005.

Tūrajānzāda, a descendant of a powerful Qādirī lineage originating from the Zerafshan Valley who included the last *qāzī* of the Tajik SSR, we evoked still another *murshid* of Dahbīdī ascent: Īshān Tīmūr Khwāja (b. 1948) of Shahr-i Naw (a wine-growing lowland in the west of Tajikistan). Renowned for his hermetic trends and extreme reluctance to attend the gatherings of religious personnel occasioned, notably, by their elders' burials, Īshān Tīmūr Khwāja enjoys a contrasted repute among his peers. Īshān Maḥmūd, in particular, in our interview condemned his isolation, which he explained by Tīmūr Khwāja's fear of his peers' opinion through exposure, in funeral ceremonies and the banquets that follow them, of a weak pedigree by personal manners and discourses that may not be equal to his genealogy. Whatever the occasion, the *maḥfil* remains in contemporary Central Asia the place par excellence where, in the absence of a central authority embodied during the Soviet time by the Muslim Spiritual Boards, is renegotiated the hierarchy of the actors of a religious field once stabilised by the "stagnation" (Rus. *zastoi*) of the Brezhnev decades. Has not this specific religious field faced, since 1989, an assault of competition and stimuli for hagiographic one-upmanship? In this context, local conservatives regard Sunni Persian *adab* as a precious asset for Soviet Muslim saints and a vehicle of legitimation for those of their descendants who certainly intend to keep under control a religious field in rapid expansion and diversification.

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Contrasting with the pictures offered by the history of Islam in the Soviet Union written, through archive materials, before and since the fall of the Wall, the present study has tried to cast into relief a small amount of key aspects of the transmission of Sufi *adab* north of the Iron Curtain, in close interaction with its present-day collective memory. Highlighting the weight of repression and mass resettlements on the complex interrelations between Central Asia's Muslim religious officialdom and the region's rich Sufi underground, we have notably strived to show that, contrary to a postulate of classical Soviet studies, resilience and moral rearmament are not consubstantial with resistance. Overall, the colonial, Soviet and current visions of Central Asian Islam have tended, too, to overestimate the organisation of Sufism, while they have had little regard for its general fluidity, adaptability and social rooting. Research in oral history and interest in present-day hagiographic processes have, perhaps, permitted us to take more contrasted measures of the deep change implied for the religious field by the resonance of Soviet legacies and of their negation.

We have tried here to show, too, how the repressions of the 1930s and the mass population resettlements of the following decade brought about a double phenomenon of ethnicisation and confessionalisation of *adab*. The Persianophone spiritual guides coercively displaced, with their fellow mountaineers, from the region's uplands to the cotton-growing valleys from 1947 onwards have embodied, from then on, the classical figure of the *ʿarīf* in face of silk wearing state-sponsored ulama. Combining the classical cult of inner refinement with the extreme modesty proper to recluses, companionship and eremitism, they raised complex

behavioural models reminiscent of modern *qalandars*' proud rejection of formal piety. At the same time, under Brezhnev and successors especially, several played roles sometimes documented as intermediaries between Stalin's Muslim Spiritual Board (SADUM) and Soviet Tajik peasantry. In many instances, too, underground *'urafā*' and accredited *'ulamā*, sometimes commonly targeted by atheistic policies and political repression, have demonstrated mutual solidarity.

The old blue shepherd quilted coat that Īshān 'Abd al-Raḥman-Jān reportedly never parted with helps us remember it: Persian *adab* as it developed in the cotton growing lowlands of present-day Tajikistan partakes of an essentially rural Islam. In sharp contrast with the 'rest' of the Muslim world, this feature largely appears as a result of the demographic and migratory upheavals characteristic of the post-1947 decades, combined with a strict legal control of the population, intended notably to limit the scope of the drift from the land. Stalin and Khrushchev, in particular, displaced, oftentimes brutally, towards the cotton-growing lowlands of the Tajik SSR a Persian-speaking population from the republic's upper valleys. Within kolkhozian brigades dominated by a migrant-background (*muhājir*) religious and gnostic leadership, the teaching of *adab* nourished by the comments, for instance, by Īshān 'Abd al-Raḥman-Jān on the *Mathnawī* of Mawlānā opposed the dominance of Russian *kul'tura*. It also endeavoured to highlight a specifically Tajik Persian cultural legacy against the anti-Sufi Uzbek-language Islam represented by SADUM staff. Many values expressed in Persian terms were and remain meant to be heritages of a remote and common past—as early Islamic Persian *farhang* reflected Sassanid court culture—and eternal values covered by a layer of religious veneer.

In the meantime, since the dissolution of the Soviet system, Muslim hagiographers sometimes endowed with university backgrounds have sought to overcome the modern-day dichotomy between the sacred and the profane introduced by the social sciences. The public promotion of *adab* has increasingly become part of a national culture that seeks the optimal mutual integration of its religious and spiritual dimensions. Written hagiography as it has been developing between the late 1990s and the late 2000s—at least until restoration of censorship on 'religious' publications by Dushanbe in 2009—differs of course noticeably from oral traditions much more penetrated by a culture of supernatural powers. The cult of 'objectivity' developed by university-educated hagiographers—through a rationalist critique of oral tradition, combined with the reformist background of the holy families who sponsor this literature—lie at the core of the modernity of the nascent hagiographic process that we have tried to evoke here. At the same time, the eminently 'traditional' character (in the post-Soviet meaning of this epithet) of religious and gnostic practices now rehabilitated is precisely what has made them so attractive in a geopolitical context marked, since 2001, by the 'antiterrorist' struggle and the unexpected convergences and alliances to which it has been giving way. It remains to be seen whether the revived memory of the 'genealogical' confessional leaders

of the short twentieth century can make up, as expected by Central Asian established powers, a useful bulwark against the present-day model, conveyed at nauseam by the internet and the social networks, of new, completely unseen forms of revolutionary Islam.

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