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Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe

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Ismailis (less than 50,000) in the Pamirs. Some Bahaïs live in the cities of Central Asia and in Astrakhan.

When speaking of Islam, it is necessary to consider two different aspects: (1) The official aspect, the legal position of the religion; and (2) its psychological or political aspect, the 'Muslim way of life' and its impact on the Russian-Muslim relationship and on the problem of national consciousness.

THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF ISLAM

There exists in the Soviet Union a legal structure for the Muslim religion, created in 1941. When the war broke out Stalin was looking for support among the believers in the population and the result was the signature of a 'concordat' with Rassulaev, the *mufti* of Ufa, and the creation of four 'Spiritual Administrations' (*Nizarat*) for Soviet Muslims – a step similar to the re-establishment of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. However, there is a great difference between the Muslim religion and Russian Orthodoxy. A Christian Church cannot exist without an official hierarchy, while the Muslims may perfectly well do without one. Islam is a religion without clerics, and there is no intervening middleman between the believers and God. So the four Spiritual Administrations are not religious but *administrative* bodies. They are not supposed to direct spiritual life, but to control the Muslim community for the benefit of the Soviet power (a parallel with the Spiritual Administration of Orenburg created by Catherine II in the eighteenth century which played a dubious role, being half a police and half a religious administrative body).

The four Spiritual Administrations are: the *Ufa muftiat* (Sunni) for European Russia and Siberia, using Kazan Tatar as its official language; the *Tashkent muftiat* (Sunni), the most important of the four, covering all of Central Asia and Kazakhstan and using the Uzbek language (its chairman, Mufti Ziauddin Babakhanov, often plays a pre-eminent role in Soviet foreign politics); the *Buynaksk muftiat* (Sunni), for Daghestan and the Northern Caucasus, using the classical Arabic language; the *Baku Directorate* (mixed Sunni and Shii). Its authority covers the Trans-Caucasian Sunni communities and the entire Shii population of the Soviet Union. The chairman is the Shii *Sheikh-ul Islam*. The vice-chairman is the Transcaucasian Sunni *mufti*. The official language is Azeri.

Different heterodox sects, such as the Ismailis, the Bahaïs, the Yezidis and the Alli-Ilahis of Trans-Caucasia have no recognised administration.

Nothing is known abroad of the internal life of these four bodies. It seems to be limited to the maintenance of the cult in some rare 'working' mosques. There are no *Shariyat* courts to control the Muslim community's legal life, no *wagf* to administer and only very limited publishing activity. During recent years one Koran was published in Tashkent and perhaps another in Ufa, and one religious calendar was also published in Tashkent. There is no other spiritual literature, except for a new journal, *The Muslims of Soviet Union*, in Uzbek (Arabic script), launched recently in Tashkent. Teaching activity is also strictly limited. There is only one *medressèh*, the *Mir-i Arab* of Bukhara, with some hundred students, divided between five or six years, and a rather low level of instruction. It trains readers of the Koran and preachers (*Khatib*), but does not educate real doctors of theology (*Ulema*) or doctors of law (*Kadi, mufti*). Every year between five and ten of the best students completing their studies are sent to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

Observers disagree about the number of 'working mosques' in the U.S.S.R. It seems to be very low; probably not more than 400 of 500 altogether (for a total population of some 40 million). The Administrations have also under their control the official clergy, 'the registered mullahs' whose number is probably less than 5,000 (against more than 50,000 before 1917). These are generally old, pre-revolutionary, intellectual survivors of Stalinist purges, with a small number of young graduates from *Mir-i Arab*.

The private or public expression of the Muslim faith is more difficult to appreciate and here one must distinguish between 'official' Islam and what may be called 'unofficial' or 'underground' Islam.

OFFICIAL ISLAM

Here too one must distinguish between private and public life. The private expression of faith is virtually impossible to measure. The individual behaviour of a believer is based on five 'pillars of faith' (*arkan ud-din*), which in theory every believer is compelled to observe. These are: