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# Munavvar qori’s “Memoirs”: An Uzbek Confession-Testimony from the Files of the Secret Police

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This article<sup>1</sup> explores a well known autobiographical text from the early Soviet period in Uzbekistan. It is written by Munavvar qori Abdurashidxon o’g’li,<sup>2</sup> one of the major figures in the political history of Uzbekistan in the era of the Russian revolution. The text provides a great deal of information about subjects that were part of the blank spots of the republic’s history during the Soviet period. It has been published under the title of *Xotiralar* (Memoirs) and has been widely

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2. Surnames had just begun to appear in Central Asia at the time of the revolution and were not in widespread use. “Muvannavar qori Abdurshidxon o’g’li” means Munavvar qori, the son of Abdurashidxon. The last name is often rendered as Abdurashidxon. Both versions appeared in print during his life. *Qori* is an Uzbek honorific attached to the names of those who have memorized the Qur’an. It becomes a part of one’s name. In contemporary Uzbek usage, it is usually not capitalized. I have used the contemporary Uzbek Latin alphabet to transliterate all Uzbek.

used as a source of information on the political life of Uzbekistan on the tumultuous decade after 1917. Very few ego documents exist from Uzbek figures of this period and the text is of great significance for this reason alone.

Yet, I argue here that the text is of very complex provenance and cannot be considered a memoir in any accepted sense of the word. It was written at the demand of the OGPU while Munavvar qori was in jail on charges of “nationalism” and counterrevolutionary activity. As such, it belongs to the genre of *pokazaniye*, the testimony given by an accused in the Soviet Union. In it, Munavvar qori is speaking directly to the state—indeed, to its most coercive and vengeful organ, the political police—in the hope of saving himself from exile or execution. This intention determines much about the text. Munavvar qori narrates the events in such a way as to balance limited confession with plausible denial or extenuation. The text should be read as an attempt to bargain in from a very weak position in a highly asymmetrical contest. The factual details it provides need to be examined in this perspective.

### Munavvar qori's Life and Times

Munavvar qori Abdurshaidxon o'g'li was a key figure in the complicated politics of Turkestan in 1917 and the years that followed. Born in a family of Islamic learning in Tashkent in 1878, Munavvar qori studied at a madrasa in Bukhara before becoming convinced that Turkestan's Muslim society needed thoroughgoing reform in order to face the challenges posed by the Russian conquest. Reform began with elementary education, and in 1902 Munavvar qori opened a school that taught according to the new (i.e., phonetic) method. Over the next decade, he published a number of textbooks for new-method schools and was involved with several of the newspapers that appeared in Tashkent. In addition, he played a key role in getting the wealthier merchants of the city to open a reading room and to organize a benevolent society called *Imdodiya* (Aid). Taken together, this set of initiatives comprised *Jadidism*, a movement for cultural reform inspired by a global Muslim modernism. Munavvar qori was one of the most significant *Jadids* in Turkestan.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Adeb KHALID, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1998.

This experience made him a prominent organizer in 1917.<sup>4</sup> The revolution of 1917 followed a peculiar course in Turkestan. European settlers (who comprised as much as one third of the population of Tashkent) were surprised by the mobilization of the indigenous population and sought ways to preserve their position in the new order. Over the course of the year, the initial enthusiasms of the revolution turned into a multifaceted conflict that pitted settlers against the indigenous population but also saw different factions on each side. By October, the purely Russian Tashkent Soviet seized power in the name of the Soviets. The Jadids convened a congress in Kokand in the Ferghana Valley and proclaimed Turkestan autonomous within a democratic Russia. This so-called Kokand Autonomy was destroyed militarily by Red Guards from Tashkent, but it left a lasting imprint on the Soviet mind. In Tashkent itself, effective Soviet power was largely limited to the new city built across the river Anhor by the Russians and dominated by them. The old city, twice as populous, remained beyond the direct control of the new city and in the spring and summer of 1918, a number of semi-secret societies took root. The political situation was completely open in 1918 and these secret societies worked to organize the Muslim population along a national programme. While the framework of the February revolution (with its hope of wide ranging territorial autonomy) remained current, 1918 also saw attempts at rethinking Turkestan's future outside the Russian orbit. Several delegations travelled to Baku and to Istanbul in the hope of attracting Ottoman intervention. An Ottoman agent, a certain Yusuf Ziya Bey arrived in Turkestan to help establish "national organizations" in February 1918 and organized a branch of Committee of Union and Progress in Tashkent. At the same time, approximately 65,000 Ottoman prisoners of war, most of them kept in camps in provincial Russia or in Siberia, were "liberated" and left to fend for themselves. As they made their way back home, many of them travelled through Central Asia, where several of them found employment in the new schools being opened under Soviet auspices. Memoirs of Ottoman POWs present a picture of the old city functioning on its own, with new arrivals being offered jobs in schools that were run

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4. The most substantial biography of Munavvar qori appears in the introduction to his collected works: Sirojiddin AHMAD, "Yo'lboshchi," in MUNAVVAR QORI Abdurashidxonov, *Tanlangan asarlar*, Tashkent, Ma'naviyat, 2003, pp. 9-60. For the broader context of his life and times, see Adeeb KHALID, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015, *passim*.

by other Ottoman officers, who also presided over a number of youth groups.<sup>5</sup> Munavvar qori was the key figure in this activity. He seems to have coordinated the activity of the Ottoman POWs and was on excellent terms with them. We see him posing with groups of Ottoman officers in formal photographs in the old city, and his name was mentioned in correspondence among Young Turk leaders in exile.<sup>6</sup> Munavvar qori writes about organizations called *Ittihodi Taraqqiy* (Unity of Progress) and *Birlik* (Unity) being formed in Tashkent in these years.

By the summer of 1920, however, Turkestan had been brought back under central control and the Ottoman POWs began to leave the scene. The national movement, such as it was, went underground. Bukhara, which the Red Army conquered and turned into a people's republic at the end of that summer, then emerged a place where new organizations could form. As we shall see, Munavvar qori had a brief experience in Bukhara, where he had been seconded by the Turkestan government between September 1920 and March 1921, even though he had become the object of the Cheka's suspicion. He was arrested in March 1921 and spent most of the rest of that year in gaol. After that, he returned to work and was employed in the Tashkent branch of Sotsvos, the branch of the Commissariat of Education responsible for primary and secondary education, and then in the Uzbek Academic Centre of the same commissariat. He was one of the main authors of *O'zbekcha til saboqlig'i* [Textbook of the Uzbek Language] (1925), the first substantial textbook of the Uzbek language ever to be published. He was, however, shut out of the press. In 1926, the Communist Party of Uzbekistan opened the so-called ideological front and began to persecute "anti-Soviet elements," with those who had participated in the striving for autonomy and in clandestine organizations in the 1917-1920 period being at the top of the list. Jadidism and the Jadids turned into bad words, associated now with counterrevolutionary bourgeois nationalism and anti-Soviet attitudes. The circle began to tighten around Munavvar qori. He was concerned enough to attempt to move to Moscow. Escaping to the relative anonymity of Moscow his seems to have been a fairly common tactic used by those under surveillance

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5. Râci ÇAKIRÖZ, "Türkistan'da Türk Subayları," *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi* (Nisan 1987), 42-43; Ziya YERGÖK, *Sarıkamış'tan Esarete (1915-1920)*, ed. Sami ÖNAL, Istanbul, Remzi, 2005, pp. 230-240.

6. The photographs have been published in A. Ahad Andican, *Cedidizm'den Bağımsızlığa Hariçte Türkistan Mücadelesi*, Istanbul, Emre, 2003, pp. 106, 108. Cemal Pasha mentioned Munavvar QORI in a letter to Talât Pasha on 1 August 1920; see Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *İttihatçı Liderlerin Gizli Mektupları*, Istanbul, Temel, 2002, p. 252.

by the OGPU in the national peripheries of the USSR, but Munavvar qori ran into bureaucratic obstacles. With the help of old acquaintances, he found a job at the Committee for the Study of the Languages and the Ethnic Cultures of the Eastern Peoples of the USSR, but it turned out that he needed a letter of reference from Uzbekistan. So he had to return to Uzbekistan. For two years he worked at the Uzbek Committee for Museums and the Preservation of Ancient Monuments and Art (Uzkomstaris), but was fired from that job in 1928. He had begun to distance himself from his past and to win the good graces of the authorities. In June 1927, he even appeared at the Tashkent conference of Soviet cultural workers, where he "admitted his mistakes" and offered his readiness to work with the party. It was not enough. Munavvar qori was mocked by several speakers who mounted the podium after him.<sup>7</sup> He never appeared in the press or made a public appearance again.

He was arrested on 6 November 1929 in connection with a wave of arrests of the alleged members of the Committee of National Independence (Milliy Istiqlol), ostensibly "a counterrevolutionary organization of the national bourgeoisie" that sought independence for Uzbekistan. Munavvar qori was accused of "having preserved an irreconcilable enmity to Soviet power," having "continued to group around himself the counterrevolutionary element of the bourgeois intelligentsia, conducted systematic anti-Soviet propaganda, in particular among the student youth, [and having] conducted espionage work on the instructions of Afghan diplomats."<sup>8</sup> Along with the other defendants, Munavvar qori was shipped out to Moscow, where he was executed on 23 April 1931.

### The text

The text is a collection of 24 statements (*zajavlenija*) that Munavvar qori wrote over the period of his incarceration. Each statement is dated (the dates range from 10 December 1929 to 28 December 1930) and answers questions posed to Munavvar qori by the OGPU. The statements sometimes repeat themselves, when apparently the OGPU did not find the information provided on a subject the first time around sufficient or as per expectations. The text was written, of course, in

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7. "Toshkent o'krug' madaniyatchilar quriltoyida muzokiralar," *Qizil O'zbekiston*, 07.06.1927; "Tosho'krug' madaniyatchilar quriltoyida o'rtoq Komiljon Alimovning oxirgi so'zi," *Qizil O'zbekiston*, 08.06.1927.

8. Quoted by Šerali TURDIEV, "Rol' Rossii v podavlenii džadidskogo dviženija (po materialam arxiva SNB Uzbekistana)," *Central'naja Azija*, 1998, no. 1, p. 139.



Uzbek but then translated into Russian so that the OGPU bosses could understand it.

The OGPU had been at the forefront of the ideological front. In January 1925, just as Uzbekistan was being established, the OGPU initiated the formation of a "Commission for Working Out Questions on Attracting the Party's Attention to the Work of the OGPU in the Struggle with Bourgeois-Nationalist Groups and with Counter-Revolutionary Ideology" that brought OGPU officers together with high ranking party and government figures. According to Lev Nikolaevich Bel'skii, the long serving head of the OGPU in Central Asia, "it was no secret to anyone" that those who "fought us for five years ... have not been beaten either physically, economically, or spiritually, and that their influence on the masses is still enormous."<sup>9</sup> Jadidism was largely a cultural movement, but the OGPU saw it primarily as a political manifestation. The OGPU was obsessed with secret societies, their members, and their activities, and these concerns define the scope of Munavvar qori's "memoirs." They are an account of Munavvar qori's political activities, of the people he met, the rumours he heard, the conversations he could recall. There is nothing about the self here, no anteriority, no musings on the meaning of world or of the place of the author in it. There is a fleeting mention to religious belief and Munavvar qori's family appears once or twice in passing. Otherwise, the "memoir" is a report on public life.

At some point in the late Soviet period, the text was discovered. A few excerpts were published in 1992 in a collection published by the short lived magazine *Turon tarixi* (History of Turon), with no indication of the provenance of the text or of its editor.<sup>10</sup> In 2001, the historian Sotimjon Xolboyev published much longer excerpts from the text under the title of *Xotiralarimdan* (From My Memoirs).<sup>11</sup> The text was based on the Russian translation and translated back into Uzbek. Two years later, a separate project, that of Munavvar qori's collected works, produced the full text, this time from the Uzbek original, transcribed into the

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9. RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 194, ll. 8-17 (13.01.1925).

10. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralarim," *Turon tarixi: ommabop majmua*, Tashkent, Maxpirat nomli O'rta Osiyo xalqlari tarixi instituti, 1992, pp. 17-20.

11. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralarimdan," in *Xotiralarimdan (jadidchilik tarixidan lavhalar)*, Tashkent, Sharq, 2001, pp. 21-72. This volume also includes several essays Munavvar qori had published in newspapers as well as excerpts from reminiscences of and tributes to Munavvar qori by his contemporaries.

Cyrillic script by Sirojiddin Ahmedov.<sup>12</sup> None of the editors provide any information about the discovery of the text or its location in the archives.<sup>13</sup> The 2003 text is more transparent about the conditions in which the text was written. It also clearly dates each *zajavlenie*. None of the editions, however, are accompanied by any commentary or analysis of the nature of the text, and they are all content to call it a memoir.

### **Munavvar qori explains himself**

The key to the nature of the text appears about half way through its full published version. In a brief document dated 27 October 1930, Munavvar qori himself describes the way in which the text came about:

I think it was beginning of 1928 when Comrade Bel'skii called and invited me to give him a detail written account of the rise of the Jadids and of the events that had passed. He especially emphasised that events of the period after the revolution should need to be [described] expansively and documented. I was handed a lengthy questionnaire; while I could answer one part of the questions myself, the rest I could not without the help of others. I accepted this invitation with happiness, because this pretext made it possible to research the events of the past and to leave behind a historical material. Also, I hoped that if I could write this work, my political standing with the government would improve a bit. ... I made a plan for the note [*zapiska*] and presented it to Comrade Bel'skii. Comrades Bel'skii and Agidullin found my plan reasonable. According to that plan, I divided the note into three parts. First, from the rise of Jadidism to the February revolution; second, from the February revolution to the October revolution. As for the third, [it would include information] from the October revolution to the day I finished the note.<sup>14</sup>

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12. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," in his *Tanlangan asarlar*, Tashkent, Ma'naviyat, 2003, pp. 185-292.

13. The archives of the political police of Uzbekistan (currently called the National Security Service, *Služba nacional'noj bezopasnosti*, or SNB) are not open, although a few scholars have been allowed limited access.

14. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 244-245 (27.10.30).

In 1928, Munavvar qori was in the grip of the OGPU. By that time, "Jadid" and "Jadidism" had also become bad words. They denoted everything from "counter-revolutionary" to "bourgeois nationalist" to "anti-Soviet." Being commanded to write a "history" of the movement by answering a lengthy questionnaire was scarcely an invitation to research historical materials or to write a "memoir." In any case, things did not go according to plan:

I began writing down what I remembered and began asking those with whom I had worked about that which I had forgotten. By the beginning of 1929, I had finished my memoirs of the first period, to 1917, and handed them in. In 1929, I began writing [about] the second period. But I had very little time to write it, because at this time, I was laid off from work and became unemployed. There is no one else in my family who could earn a living. My wife I have placed in a school [*o'qishga bergan*]. I was forced to sit at home and knit stockings and gloves for 9-10 hours a day in order to feed my family from the 2-3 roubles I thus made. I became aware that I would not be able to finish my note quickly. Therefore around August 1929, I went to the Political Administration and petitioned the *nachal'nik* [head] of the Eastern Division and Comrade Agidullin. I described all by family situation openly. I told him that I would need some help if the quick completion of my note was desired. "What help do you need?" he asked, to which I answered, "I need spiritual support. I have applied for a pension. If there is some help from you in this regard, I would get the pension. This would improve my existence a bit. Then I will be able to devote my whole life to the note and to your service." The comrade promised to help, and also told me to begin turning in materials, even if bit by bit. At that time, I was about to finish the second period. According to the command of the *nachal'nik*, I turned in what I had, even if it was incomplete. While waiting for the comrade *nachal'nik's* help, I began searching for source materials for the third period. But I was arrested before any of these goals were attained.<sup>15</sup>

The two parts that Munavvar qori wrote before his arrest have not surfaced. The published text is the continuation of the account that he wrote piecemeal while he was under arrest. By then, the situation was desperate and Munavvar qori's hopes

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15. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 245-246.

"improving" his situation with the government or the OGPU had been dashed. In the 24 *zajavlenija* he wrote under arrest, Munavvar qori provides some information but also makes a sustained effort to distance himself from the action and to minimize his role in the events that he describes.

Of the greatest interest to the OGPU were the secret societies that had appeared in Central Asia during the years of the revolution and civil war. For the OGPU, these secret societies were organized dens of counterrevolutionary and anti-Soviet activity. Munavvar qori was arrested in 1929 for belonging to one of them, now called Milliy Istiqlol, and accusations of belonging to Milliy Ittihad figured in the indictments of Fayzulla Xo'jayev and Akmal Ikromov during the Moscow show trial of 1938.<sup>16</sup> In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, these secret societies have often been celebrated as bastions of national resistance against the "Soviet despotic regime." Yet, just how significant they were remains a real question, to which Munavvar qori's account does not give a clear answer. On the one hand, he satisfies the curiosity of the OGPU by giving a detailed account of the formation and activities of various organizations. On the other hand, he describes these organizations as amateurish and ineffective and casts himself as a passive actor, a figure of secondary importance. Speaking of Milliy Ittihad (National Unity) that emerged in Bukhara in 1920, he writes:

While I was in Bukhara [in 1920], I received a letter from Tashkent about the formation of "Ittihodi Milliy" [National Unity] to replace [the older] "Ittihodi Taraqqiy" [Unity of Progress]. The letter was in Turkish. ... But who was at the head of it, who wrote the Turkish letter to me, what was its program or its relationship to the earlier National Unity ..., these questions we could not answer.<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, he became involved and participated in a three-member central committee that set about "creating a new charter and a seal for the society [*jamiyat*]." Yet, in Munavvar qori's account, the organization was riven with conflict and irresolution and turned out to be largely ineffective.

We gathered together once or twice [before Munavvar qori was recalled to Tashkent in March 1921], calling it the "assembly" [*majlis*] of National Unity. No important problem was discussed at

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16. *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet "Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites," Heard Before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR: Verbatim Report*, Moscow: People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR, 1938, pp. 212, 216, 341, etc.

17. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralari," p. 185 (20.12.29)

these assemblies and they passed in squabbles and quarrels. ... The assemblies all took place with people like Sa'dullaxo'ja, Qushbigiyev, Yusuf Aliyev, Otaxon, Ali Rasulov, and me eating *palov* and *norin*. There still wasn't anything called an *ustav* [Russ., charter] or a programme, nor had a goal or a principle been established."<sup>18</sup>

Munavvar qori describes the Bashkir Zeki Vekidi as the main force behind this attempt to organize National Unity. Zeki Velidi had led a movement for Bashkir autonomy from 1917 on. During the civil war, he sided first with the Whites, then worked with the Bolsheviks in pursuit of that goal. By summer 1920, it was clear to him that Soviet-style autonomy was not sufficient. He broke with the party and made his way to Bukhara. Eventually, in 1923, he went into emigration and under the surname of Togan, re-established his academic career as a historian and a Turkologist. In his memoirs, Togan paints a slightly different picture. There were disputes aplenty between Turkestanis and Bukharans, but Togan nevertheless gives credit to the organization for sustaining an anti-Soviet insurgency into 1923.<sup>19</sup>

Munavvar qori pushes his own insignificance back to 1917. Munavvar qori describes how during the course of 1917, "while there was some tension between local intellectuals and socialists," they had formed a bloc in the Tashkent city дума after the victory of the ulama in the elections.

Naturally, these ideas changed after the October revolution. The socialists (Mensheviks) who, at the beginning of the revolution, had opposed the entry of representatives of local population into the city дума, now became supporters of the autonomy of Turkestan and local intellectuals began agitation on this subject.

Eventually, the Central Council [of Muslim Organisations] convened a congress at Kokand. At this time, I saw with my own eyes several Mensheviks who showed Cho'qayev, Xo'jayev, Tinishbayev, et al. [the main figures at the congress] an address by Lenin to the peoples of the East, which said, "The time has come to take the institutions of the state in your own hands." ... Eventually, the congress proclaimed autonomy. Personally, I was against this

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18. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," p. 188.

19. A. Z. V. TOGAN, *Hâtıralar Türkistan ve Diğer Müslüman Doğu Türklerinin Millî Varlık ve Kültür Mücadeleleri*, 2nd ed., Ankara, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1999, pp. 320-22 *et passim*.

autonomy. I expressed my opposition to a few people in those days. Therefore I could not participate neither in the government, nor in the national assembly.<sup>20</sup>

Having attached the idea of the autonomy to the Mensheviks, Munavvar qori withdraws himself into the background here. His account of the organization of secret societies in Tashkent in the months that followed is similarly a combination of considerable detail and self-abnegation. The central role is played by Ottoman officers, while Munavvar qori only reacts to invitations.

In fact, Munavvar qori writes that by 1924 he had "understood the lack in myself of any aptitude or ability for political and administrative affairs," and "decided to spend the rest of my life teaching and writing books."<sup>21</sup> But then:

The year 1925 began. The national delimitation was announced. Struggles began on the ideological front. The issues of indigenization [*yerliklashtirish*, i.e., *korenizatsiia*] arose. The third part of my book [the textbook on Uzbek language] encountered criticism on ideological grounds. Not being able to take it, I abandoned teaching and resolved to go to Moscow to spend the rest of my life there and to cut off all ties with this nation that had swindled me with nationalism.<sup>22</sup>

He indeed sold his belongings, divorced his wives, and went off to Moscow in 1926. Was the intent simply to escape the surveillance he experienced in Tashkent or was something else afoot? Munavvar qori's explanation of this move remains unconvincing. Indeed, there are two different *zajavlenija* in which Munavvar qori recounts the visit to Moscow. Clearly, his handlers were not satisfied with his first account penned in June 1930 and asked him again about it in December 1930. In the second, more detailed version, Munavvar qori states that he went to Moscow on the advice of Turar Rısqulov, whom he met in Qizilorda, then the capital of the Kazakh ASSR. He then took a leisurely path to Moscow:

I had never seen cities such as Samara, Kazan, Nizhnii Novgorod or travelled on the Volga. Therefore I decided to board a steamer at Samara and to go to Moscow on the Volga, travelling through

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20. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," p. 220 (30.1.30).

21. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotirlar," p. 210 (24.12.29).

22. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 229-230 (15.5.30).

Kazan and Nizhnii. ... From Qizilorda to Kazan, I was constantly in the company of a Russian Communist, who befriended and guided me. I have forgotten his name now. When we reached Kazan, I fell ill for two or three days. At that time too, the same Russian friend came with his wife and helped me out: they took me to the doctor, brought medicines from the chemist, gave me compresses. Once I improved a bit, he took me out and showed the Kazan market and the Suyum-bike minaret.

In short, for five days after arriving in Kazan, I could not meet any of the Tatars. The sixth day was *Qurbon hayit* [the Feast of the Sacrifice]. In order to see the *hayit* of the Tatars, I found my way to the hay market. There I saw Shahri Sharaf leaving the mosque in the company of with a few Tatars. I had met him a couple of times in Tashkent. We greeted each other, felicitate each other on the *hayit*. He took me home. According to the custom of the Tatars, there was a festive spread at his house, with a table filled with different dishes and sweets. Four or five Tatars (probably merchants) sat drinking tea there.<sup>23</sup>

One of those men then invited Munavvar qori to his house later in the day, and the following day Burhan Sharaf, a prominent Tatar Jadid, invited him to his house.

When I got to his house, I found a number of Tatars with their wives having tea in connection with the *hayit*. Burhan Sharaf introduced me to them. Over tea, they began asking me many questions about the state of education, publishing, commerce, agriculture, and the intelligentsia in Tashkent. To my eye, most of them looked like agents of the GPU. Even so, I did not leave their questions unanswered. I told them about the better than expected progress of education in Uzbekistan, of the many new publications that have appeared, and that we are on the cusp of achieving pre-war levels in agriculture. When it came to the intelligentsia, I could not avoid mentioning the many new attacks on the old intellectuals that continue today. [...] These are the topics that I talked about with people whom I met in Kazan. I could not see any other Tatar intellectuals or Communists. I tried to see Galimjan Ibrahimov, but it was not possible because he was at the dacha. ... Of government

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23. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 265-266 (9.12.30).

institutions, I visited the Education commissariat once looking for Galimjan Ibrahimov. Otherwise I did not enter or see any other institutions.<sup>24</sup>

Munavvar qori wants to convince the OGPU that his stance was completely apolitical by 1926. His Russian Communist friend sanitizes his story, while his denial of any political content to his meetings with Tatar figures seeks to buttress that claim. He describes the subsequent visit to Moscow and his failure to achieve his goals in great detail. He seeks the intercession of various Central Asian acquaintances (Abduqodir Muhiddinov, Nazir To'raqulov, Sanjar Asfendiyarov), but nothing works out, and he ends up in a meeting with Akmal Ikromov, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and the leading enthusiast of the "ideological front." Munavvar qori asked for his help in getting a paper from the Uzbek commissariat of education that would allow him to work in Moscow.

"What are you doing in Moscow," Ikromov asked me sarcastically. "I have expelled myself [*o'z-o'zinni visilka qildim*, < Russ. *vysylka*] from Uzbekistan," I replied. Ikromov said, "When it is necessary to expel you, we will have done it ourselves. It would happen even if you don't hurry." "If you expel me, there is a chance that I will end up in some place that I don't want to be. Therefore I acted in advance and brought myself to a place I want, the seat of government of the Soviets. Now only your help is needed with getting the paper," I said.

After a few exchanges in this humorous vein, he promised, "You go to Tashkent. I will help you with the paper there."<sup>25</sup>

Munavvar qori returned to Tashkent empty handed.

### **How (Not) to Talk to the OGPU**

Throughout the text, Munavvar qori is in a one-sided dialogue with the OGPU. It is clear that most of the time he knows what the OGPU wants to hear. He concedes large parts of his guilt, but he also seeks to modulate it. Munavvar qori never claims to be part of the Soviet system but he also indicates that he is not harmful to it. Hence his constant attempts to minimize his role and to assert that he had

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24. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 267-267 (9.12.30).

25. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 269 (9.12.30).



given up on public life by 1924. The political language that he uses varies over the 24 statements that comprise this text. In general, the tone is one of having conceded defeat. Nevertheless, in several places Munavvar qori is not averse to stating his views bluntly. Moscow intervened in the summer of 1920 to oust a number of Muslim Communists under Turar Risqulov who had battled Tashkent's European "Old Bolsheviks" for control of the direction of the party and its goals in Central Asia. Munavvar qori recalls the reaction:

Local intellectuals looked upon these actions as the clearest victory of "colonialist Europeans," and they came to understand the need for an organization to struggle with colonialism such as the old "Unity of Progress."<sup>26</sup>

Munavvar qori also forthrightly relays criticisms of Soviet policies related to cotton that were aired in private gatherings. The Soviet policy of "cotton independence" had meant that it became Uzbekistan's duty to provide as much cotton as possible. Even before collectivization in 1929, various pressures were applied to extract as much cotton out of the republic as possible. Peasants were encouraged to devote more land to cotton, at the expense of grain and other food crops. This created palpable discontent even among Uzbek Communists, and Munavvar qori relates it without glossing anything over:

[At secret meetings,] The question was often raised, "If war begins, is there a chance of famine beginning again in Central Asia?" In response, words to the following effect were often heard: "In that case, peasants who experienced the famine of 1918, should set aside some land for grain. If necessary, at that time it will be possible to make the peasants understand this, and at the same time the government will know the discontent of the peasants with the plan to expand the acreage of cotton at the expense of that of grain. [...] About September of 1929, I heard these words from a peasant comrade: "In 1912-13, one *pud* of cotton brought 5 pounds [*qadoq*] of tea, 30 of sugar, 45 yards of cloth, 5-6 puds of wheat, 3 puds of rice, while meat would be 50 pounds and butter 30. Now it gets 1 pound of tea, 15 pounds of sugar, 15 yards of cloth, 2 puds of wheat, ½ pud of rice, 10 pounds of meat and 7 pounds of butter. On average, our cotton is paid one fourth of what was given in 1913."<sup>27</sup>

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26. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," p. 216.

27. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 248-249 (27.10.30).

In these instances, Munavvar qori has no compunction in stating matters as he saw them. Occasionally, however, Munavvar qori attempts to "speak Bolshevik," to use the categories of the political language authorized by the Soviet regime.<sup>28</sup> An example would be his description of the Tatar Jadid theologian Musa Jarullah Bigiyev whom he met in St Petersburg in 1911 and then shared a jail cell with him in Tashkent in 1921. Bigiyev was one of the leading Islamic scholars of the Russian Empire and held in very high regard by other Jadids. Yet in 1930, Munavvar qori wrote:

Until that day [the day of his meeting in 1911], I thought of Musa Bigiyev as an enlightened intellectual who was completely against Islamic clerics and religious superstitions. As a result of this conversation, my thoughts about him changed somewhat. Because from the answers he gave me and from his words, I understood him to be a progressive Islamic cleric, but also an extremely fanatical religious person and an Islamist [*g'oyatda mutaassub bir dindor va islomchi*]<sup>29</sup>—a pan-Islamist in the complete sense of the word.<sup>29</sup>

If Munavvar qori needed to distance himself from Bigiyev, he had a different motive when describing Mannon Ramziy, a major figure in the new Soviet Uzbek intelligentsia who had nevertheless been arrested in 1930. As one of the standard bearers on the "ideological front," Ramziy had been one of Munavvar qori's tormentors. Munavvar qori comes closest to denouncing anyone when he writes about Ramziy:

Ramziy was an imam in a mosque even after the revolution and was considered one of the clerics. [...] I cannot definitely say that he was never inducted into any organization. At the same time, I cannot believe that he is a real Communist, cleansed of national feeling. Especially I think that Ramziy's national and factional feeling must still not be dead.<sup>30</sup>

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28. The term comes from Stephen KOTKIN, who sees "speaking Bolshevik" as participation in a game, complete with its tacitly understood rules of "maneuver and counter-maneuver—in short, as part of the little tactics of the habitat." What is important for KOTKIN are the habits the language imposes on the thoughts and actions of ordinary citizens; see Stephen KOTKIN, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 201, 220, 225-235

29. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," p. 253.

30. MUNAVVAR QORI, "Xotiralar," pp. 258, 263.

Munavvar qori never really succeeds in speaking Bolshevik. It was too distant from his worldview for that to be possible even as a tactical manoeuvre. Instead, he sometimes lapses into an Islamicate political language. The following passage is as far from a Bolshevik language as one can imagine in the circumstances:

The Great Russian chauvinism of the Europeans was very strong in the 1920s. The chauvinism in our nation might have been the same in name, but in purpose and goal [the two] differed from each other. The chauvinism of the Europeans was above all [meant] to allow the ruling nation to pursue the idea of colonialism, while the chauvinism of the locals [*yerliklar*] advanced the goal of the freedom of Muslims and the liberation from slavery of the oppressed nation. For this reason, the locals considered their nationalism legal [*mashru'*] from the point of view Communism and those of the Europeans illegal [*g'ayri mashru'*].<sup>31</sup>

The term *mashru'* literally means “in conformity with the sharia,” and Munavvar qori’s use of it in this context is a stark reminder that “Bolshevik” remained a very difficult foreign language for Munavvar qori.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the whole exercise of answering the OGPU’s questions was futile. In a petition to Agidullin in May 1930, Munavvar qori complained about his conditions. He was held in solitary confinement and denied even the use of the lavatory.

The reason for this [treatment] perhaps is that my testimonies [*pokazaniyalarim*] are not believed or considered incorrect. In fact, I have answered every question correctly and openly and unlike some others, I have recognized my guilt and not made things difficult for you or me. ... With this petition, I am submitting my latest information on the organizations in Namangan and Tashkent. You will probably not believe this note either and consider it incorrect, and reduce my prisoner’s rights even further, but I have no options. I am a prisoner under you. With one little movement of your finger, you can have me killed. Why should I give you incorrect information when I am in this state? I am not afraid of death. Because death

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31. MUNAVVAR QORI, “Xotiralar,” p. 240 (23.10.30).

is a thousand times better than my life right now. Every minute I wish death for myself. But now even death avoids me.<sup>32</sup>

Death continued to avoid Munavvar qori for almost another year after he wrote this note. In early 1931, he was transported to Moscow, where he was executed on 23 April. During this time, he produced another thirteen *zajavleniya*. Thus was produced the text that is today misrecognized as Munavvar qori's memoirs. I hope to have shed light on some of the intriguing aspects of this text. It should be read as a product of its time and circumstance.

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Résumé : cette étude examine les prétendus « Mémoires » de Munavvar qori Abdurashidxon o'g'li (1878-1931), une figure d'importance dans l'histoire politique du Turkestan à l'ère révolutionnaire et une des premières victimes de l'OGPU. Le texte autobiographique comprend une série de *pokazanija*, écrits quand Munavvar qori était en état d'arrestation, et qui racontent ses activités depuis la révolution. L'étude analyse la manière avec laquelle on se présente – soit une combinaison de confession limitée et de démentis vraisemblables – et le langage qu'on y déploie. L'étude offre aussi des extraits du texte en traduction anglaise.

*Abstract: This article explores the so-called "Memoirs" of M. Munavvar qori Abdurashidxon o'g'li (1878-1931), a major figure in the politics of Turkestan in the era of the revolution and an early victim of the OGPU. The autobiographical text is a series of pokazanija written while Munavvar qori was under arrest in which he describes his political activities since the revolution. The article analyses the way in which Munavvar qori presents himself—a combination limited confession with plausible denial or extenuation—and the way he deploys language. The article also presents lengthy excerpts in English translation.*

Абстракт: В статье исследуется так называемые «Воспоминания» Мунаввар кори Абдурашидхонов (1878-1931 г.), один из виднейших деятелей политической жизни Туркестана в эпохи революции и один из ранних жертв ОГПУ. Автобиографический текст состоит из ряда показаний, написанные во время выключения автора, и в которых он запишет его деятельность в послереволюционной период. В данной статье анализируется способов, в которых Мунаввар кори представляет себя (между умеренным признанием вины и отдалением в вероятной мере из ее) и языка, котором он используется. Статья тоже содержат в себе длинных выдержки из текста на английском переводе.

