

ANTI-RELIGIOUS POLICY IN SAMARKAND IN THE 1920S-1930S: THE ACTIVITIES OF THE KHUDOSIZLAR ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE UNION OF MILITANT ATHEISTS SYSTEM.

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Abstract. *This article examines the implementation of anti-religious policy in Uzbekistan in the 1920s and 1930s, in the context of the activities of the Union of Militant Atheists and its regional branch, the Khudosizlar organization. The article analyzes the preconditions for the formation of the anti-religious movement, its institutional foundations, and the mechanisms of its functioning in the context of Soviet modernization.*

Particular attention is paid to the role of state and public structures in the dissemination of atheistic ideology, as well as the practical forms and methods of anti-religious propaganda, including the organization of study groups, work in the education system, and the involvement of broad sections of the population. Measures to limit the economic base of religious institutions are considered, in particular, policies regarding waqf property, as well as the processes of reducing the network of religious educational institutions.

Keywords. *anti-religious policy; Union of Militant Atheists; Khudosizlar; Uzbekistan; USSR; secularization; atheism; waqf property; madrasah; clergy; cultural revolution; anti-religious propaganda; Soviet ideology; social transformations; religious policy.*

Аннотация. *В статье рассматриваются особенности реализации антирелигиозной политики в Узбекистан в 1920–1930-е гг. в контексте деятельности Союз воинствующих безбожников и его регионального подразделения — организации «Худосизлар». Проанализированы предпосылки формирования антирелигиозного движения, его институциональные основы и механизмы функционирования в условиях советской модернизации.*

Особое внимание уделено роли государственных и общественных структур в распространении атеистической идеологии, а также практическим формам и методам антирелигиозной пропаганды, включая организацию кружков, работу в системе образования и вовлечение широких слоёв населения. Рассматриваются меры по ограничению экономической базы религиозных институтов, в частности политика в отношении вакуфного имущества, а также процессы сокращения сети религиозных учебных заведений.

Ключевые слова. *антирелигиозная политика; Союз воинствующих безбожников; «Худосизлар»; Узбекистан; СССР; секуляризация; атеизм; вакуфное имущество; медресе; духовенство; культурная революция; антирелигиозная пропаганда; советская идеология; социальные трансформации; религиозная политика.*

Introduction

The anti-religious policy of the Soviet state was one of the key areas of transformation in spiritual and social life amid the emergence of a new ideological system. Within the framework of building a socialist society, religion was viewed as a relic of the past, hindering the development of a scientific worldview and socialist consciousness. Consequently, the fight against religious institutions and beliefs became systemic and targeted, receiving institutionalized form through the activities of organizations such as the Union of Militant Atheists.

The national regions of the USSR, particularly Uzbekistan, were particularly important in the implementation of anti-religious policy, where religion traditionally played a significant role in the social, cultural, and everyday life of the population. Here, the anti-religious campaign was combined with the broader goals of cultural revolution, modernization, and secularization of society, giving it specific forms and methods.

Main part

The anti-religious policy of the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s received institutionalized form through the activities of the Union of Militant Atheists, which became a key instrument for implementing state ideology in the fight against religion. The organization, which existed from 1925 to 1947 (initially the Union of Atheists and also the Society of Friends of the newspaper "Bezbozhnik"), aimed not only to promote atheism but also to systematically transform the population's worldview, aimed at ousting religious values from public and private life.[1]

The newspaper "Bezbozhnik," published since 1922, played a decisive role in the organizational and ideological development of the movement. A wide network of correspondents, agitators, and supporters formed around it, contributing to the creation of a stable social base for the antireligious movement. By the mid-1920s, antireligious activity ceased to be sporadic and acquired the characteristics of a centralized and coordinated policy. In April 1925, at the First Congress of the Society of Friends of the Bezbozhnik Newspaper, a decision was made to create a unified all-Union organization, known as the "Union of the Atheists," later transformed into the Union of Militant Atheists. At the same time, specialized publications began, in particular the journal "Anti-Religionist," which served a methodological and ideological function.

The organization's leadership was of particular importance. Throughout its existence, the Central Council was headed by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, who played a key role in developing the theoretical foundations of scientific atheism and the practical mechanisms of anti-religious propaganda. After his death in 1943, leadership passed to Fyodor Oleshchuk, but by this time, the organization's activities were already in a gradual phase of curtailment, due to changes in government policy during World War II and the post-war period. The Soviet leadership viewed the anti-religious campaign as a crucial element of the modernization project, aimed at cultivating a new personality type—the "Soviet man"—free from religious prejudice. In this context, the creation of the Union of Militant Atheists signaled a shift from spontaneous and localized anti-religious actions to systemic, planned, and ideologically rigorous work, involving party, Komsomol, trade union, and cultural and educational structures. Particular

attention was paid to outreach to youth, women, and rural populations, who traditionally maintained a higher level of religiosity.[2]

Under the Soviet Union, antireligious policies had distinct regional specificities, particularly evident in the Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan. Here, the fight against religion was combined with the goals of cultural revolution, modernization of traditional society, and the transformation of socioeconomic relations. Prior to the creation of the local organization "Khudosizlar," significant work on atheistic education of the population was carried out by the Commission on Clergy Affairs under the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Uzbekistan.

At its first meeting on March 3, 1927, key issues related to the status of the clergy and the reform of the religious education system were discussed. In particular, a project for the reorganization of old-method schools, presented by the People's Commissariat of Education, was discussed. At the same time, a weakening of antireligious work at the local level was noted, prompting the initiative to create a special antireligious commission under the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Uzbekistan. Its objectives included developing a comprehensive plan for anti-religious activities, as well as organizing a network of circles and cells involving Komsomol members, non-party workers, and intellectuals.[3]

The issue of waqf assets, which traditionally formed the economic basis of religious institutions, occupied a significant place in the anti-religious policy. The commission set the task of introducing strict accounting and control over the use of waqf funds and initiated their removal from the control of religious institutions and their subsequent transfer to educational authorities. It was assumed that these funds would be used to develop the public education system and cultural and educational institutions, consistent with the overall strategy of secularizing public life.

The practical implementation of the anti-religious policy was accompanied by significant changes in the religious education system. For example, in Kokand in 1926-1927, In 1928, there were 18 madrassas with 1,098 students, whereas by the beginning of 1928, their number had dropped to three, and the student body to 145. By mid-1928, madrassas in Samarkand had effectively ceased to function, and instruction was conducted only privately by individual mudarris. Such processes indicate the deliberate dismantling of the traditional system of religious education and its replacement with secular forms of education.[4]

At the same time, the anti-religious movement was taking shape locally. In Samarkand, for example, there were 26 cells of the Union of Atheists, uniting 697 people, a significant number of whom were in the old part of the city. It is noteworthy that the organization included representatives of the indigenous population, including women, indicating the expansion of the movement's social base. In addition, anti-religious circles were active, and corresponding propaganda work was carried out in educational institutions, party schools, and cultural institutions. The decline in the population's religious affiliation had a direct impact on the financial situation of the clergy. Sources record numerous complaints from religious circles about declining income and the weakening of the traditional system of donations. This indicates

the erosion of the economic foundations of religious institutions and their gradual loss of their former social influence.[5]

The Khudosizlar organization, a regional branch of the Union of Militant Atheists, played a key role in implementing antireligious policies in Uzbekistan. It served not only as an instrument of ideological struggle but also as a mechanism for engaging the general population in secularization processes. Through a network of study groups, lectures, publications, and mass events, the organization fostered an atheistic worldview and the gradual elimination of religious practices from everyday life.[6]

Thus, the activities of the Union of Militant Atheists and its regional branches, including Khudosizlar, were an important element of state policy aimed at fundamentally transforming the spiritual sphere of society. The antireligious campaign in Uzbekistan was comprehensive, combining ideological influence, institutional reforms, and economic measures, which together led to significant changes in the structure of religious life in the region.

Conclusion

The study showed that the antireligious policy of the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s was characterized by a number of factors. The campaign was comprehensive and systemic, encompassing ideological, institutional, and socioeconomic spheres. The key instrument for its implementation was the Union of Militant Atheists, whose activities ensured the coordination of antireligious propaganda and the involvement of broad sections of the population in secularization processes.

It has been established that in the Soviet Union, and in Uzbekistan in particular, the antireligious campaign acquired specific characteristics conditioned by the historical and cultural characteristics of the region. Religion traditionally occupied an important place in public life, which necessitated the use of more diverse and targeted methods of influence, including reforming the education system, limiting the economic base of religious institutions, and active propaganda.

The analysis revealed that the organization "Khudosizlar," the regional arm of the Union of Militant Atheists, played a significant role in the implementation of antireligious policy in the republic. Its activities contributed to the institutionalization of the anti-religious movement at the local level, the formation of a network of circles and cells, and the dissemination of an atheistic worldview among various social groups, including youth, workers, and representatives of the local intelligentsia.

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