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## Sulaymān Bākirghānī in the Culture of the Volga Tatars: The Phenomenon of the “*Bākirghān kitābī*”

### ABSTRACT

The name of the Central Asian mystic Sulaymān Bākirghānī/Ḥakīm Ata and the literary legacy attributed to him were well-known among the Tatar Muslims of the Volga region in Russia until the middle of the 20th century. A representative of the Yasawiyya tariqat that in the past was widespread among the Tatars, he was venerated as a saint and as an author of many popular poems. The recitation of these texts became a part of ‘the book chanting’ /*kitap köyläp uqu*/ tradition. A special place in this repertoire was taken by the Sufi anthology *Bākirghān kitābī*, which was repeatedly published in Kazan from 1846. Thanks to these editions before the revolution of 1917, this collection could be found in almost every Tatar house. Until almost the middle of the 20th century texts of this book were recited with tunes called *Bākirghān köe*. At present time, this tradition has almost disappeared in the Tatar environment, as is knowledge both about Bākirghānī himself and the collection under his name.

The aim of this article is to show the specificity of the perception of the texts ascribed to Bākirghānī in Tatar culture and to follow the changes of their interpretation in the Tatar milieu towards the beginning of the 21st century. The study is based on the analysis of little studied textual sources and materials collected in the territory of the Tatarstan Republic on field trips in the 1990-2000s.

### KEYWORDS

Bākirghānī

Yasawiyya

Volga Tatars

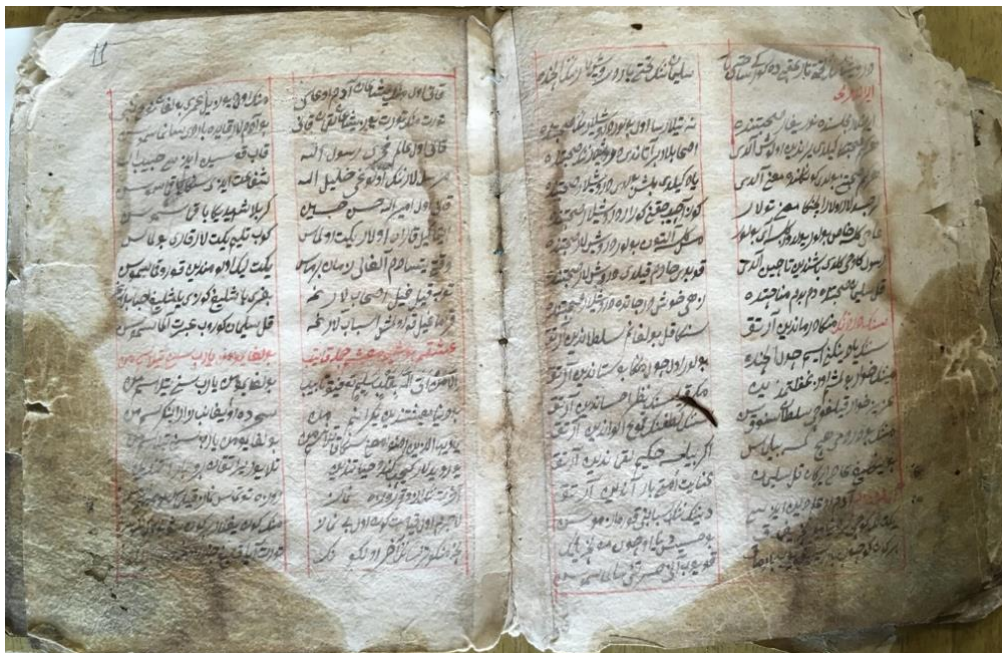
*Bākirghān kitābī*

Recitation of Sufi poems

The Central Asian Sufi Sulaymān Bāqirghānī is a legendary representative of the Yasawiyya tarikat, a contemporary and the closest follower of Aḥmad Yasawī. He was known under different names (Ḥakīm Ata, Ҷул Sulaymān, Ḥakīm Sulaymān, Khwāja Sulaymān and others). According to Devin DeWeese, who questioned the previously established date of his death (1186), he lived at the beginning of the 13th century (DeWeese, 2003). Various works were written on the life and the activity of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, primarily in the context of legends connected with his life, in the context of the Yasawiyya silsilas, of ‘the holy places’, that used to be places of pilgrimage, as well as in connection with the texts that are diffused under his name.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this figure for the Turkic Muslim world is proved by the fact that still today works under the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī are being published and commented on in the region (in particular in Uzbekistan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan)<sup>2</sup>.

In the culture of Tatar Muslims (‘the Northern Turks,’ according to definition of Fuad Köprülü), the figure of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī as a saint and as the author of popular religious texts has had a special place until the middle of the 20th century. For a long time, his poems circulated among Tatars in handwritten form.



**Figure 1.** Fragment of the handwritten *Bāqirghān kitābī*. End of the 18th century.

<sup>1</sup> In particular: Zaleman (1898); Bartold, (1964: 241); Köprülü (2006/1918); DeWeese (2009).

<sup>2</sup> In particular: *Bāqirghon kitobī* (1991); Ahmad Yasawi. Sulaymon Bāqirghānī (2011); Hakim Süleyman Ata. (2006); Güzel (2008); Sulaymān Bāqirghānī (2008).

The first editions of books connected with his name appeared in Kazan, the main centre of the Tatar Muslim culture, and from the middle of the 19th century until 1917 they were repeatedly published there. It is worth noting that all works dedicated to Sulaymān Bāqirghānī are based on these publications. For a long time, however, this ‘Kazan context,’ and the wider ‘Tatar context’ of their existence remained without scholarly attention<sup>3</sup>. The usage of ‘the Bāqirghāni texts’ in the Tatar milieu was not studied neither as a reflection of the culture of popular Sufism among Tatars, nor in connection with the forms of their presentation, especially the peculiarities of recitation. A certain role in this was played by the Kazan ethnomusicologists, who in the 1980s put to discussion the specificity of musical forms with which ‘the *Bāqirghāni* texts’ circulated in Tatar milieu, but were deprived of the possibility of studying their content.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this article is to show the specificity of perception of ‘the Sulaymān Bāqirghānī legacy’ among the Volga Tatars<sup>5</sup>, who populate areas that are significantly distant from the land of the Central Asian civilization, and who found themselves in conditions not conducive to the development of old Sufi traditions towards the end of the 20th century. What are the peculiarities of the existence of “the texts of Bāqirghānī” here? What accounted for the rise of popularity of traditions connected with his name in the Tatar milieu at the beginning of the 20th century and their fall into almost total oblivion towards the end of the same century? What was the *Bāqirghān kitābī* in the past for Tatars and what does it mean for them now?

The study I carried out in order to answer these questions was based on materials collected in the territory of the Tatarstan Republic on field trips which started in the 1990s and that are still ongoing today.

Speaking about “the legacy” of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, we should keep the conditional character of this term in mind. Just as the data concerning the biography, the places of

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<sup>3</sup> A noticeable step in this direction was made by researchers of “Siberian Islam” who showed the significance of the figure of Ḥakīm Ata for the Tatars of this region. See: Seleznyov et al. (2009); Bustanov (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The first publications where the melodies of “*Bāqirghān kitābī*” were published as examples of “book melodies:” Sharifullina (1981); Nigmatzyanov (1984). On the recitation of religious texts in connection with Sufi rituals in Tatar Muslim milieu: Sayfullina (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Here we speak about the Tatars who live on the territory of contemporary Tatarstan. Presumably, in future it will be possible to present a more complete picture of the spread of traditions connected with the name of Bāqirghānī in the culture of different groups of Tatars: the Astrakhan Tatars, the Mishars (central Russia), in Siberia, in Crimea. In recent years, we have seen growing interest amongst researchers in this direction. See: *Tariqat Yasaviyya i Krym* (2015); Bustanov (2011); Seleznyov et al. (2009).

residence and the burial<sup>6</sup> of Ḥakīm Ata are ambiguous, so the question of the authorship of texts connected with his name still remains open. Many scholars today share the opinion that most of these texts are merely ascribed to Sulaymān Bāqirghānī.<sup>7</sup> Based on various textual traditions in the Tatar culture of the 20th century (recital of religious books, the folk munajats, the ritual dedications “*baghishlau*”), we prefer to call them the “traces” of influence of the literary traditions and of the legends connected with this person.<sup>8</sup>

As a whole, the popularity of “the legacy of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī” among Tatar Muslims can be regarded as a sign of the amazing vitality of the traditions of the Yasawiyya tariqat, which were widespread in the area between the Volga river and Ural mountains for centuries. Down to this day the elements of these traditions can be discovered in various forms of folk culture.<sup>9</sup>

First of all, Tatars venerated Sulaymān Bāqirghānī as the closest follower of Aḥmad Yasawī, called by the people “the head of 99 thousand shaykhs”,<sup>10</sup> and about whom they recited the following lines: “*Mādinādä Möhämmät, jir jözendä Hujjahmät*”/In Medina is Muḥammad, on the /whole/ earth is Khwāja Aḥmad/.<sup>11</sup>

Sulaymān Bāqirghānī / Ḥakīm Ata was the central link in the chain of holy names that had a special place in the Yasawiyya tradition, beginning with the mythical Hozur/Hizr (or Hozur-Ilias, as he was more often called by Tatars), up to the members of the family of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, who were believed to be important protectors of Muslims: Hubbi khwāja (the son of Ḥakīm Ata), ‘Ambar-ana (his wife), Zangī-baba (the husband of ‘Ambar-

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<sup>6</sup> While the shrine in Bāqirghān near the town of Qonghirat in Uzbekistan is considered the burial place of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, there is a similar place in Siberia. In its significance, the pilgrimage to this place is comparable to the pilgrimage to Mecca, according to local Tatars. (Seleznyov et al. 2009: 54).

<sup>7</sup> See the translation and comments to the book by Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (2006); DeWeese (2003).

<sup>8</sup> In the context of the Yasawiyya traditions in Central Asia, Devin DeWeese uses the definition “the broader realm”, which seems appropriate in this case: “...by this designation I mean not only the specifically Sufi communities linked to the name of Khoja Ahmad Yasavi, as well as the elements of teaching and practice ascribed to him and to the later ‘Yasavi’ Sufi communities, but also the broader social, religious, and literary legacies of these communities as adopted in much wider circles of Central Asian society... This broader definition of ‘the Yasavi tradition’ is in part suggested by the forms in which the legacy of Ahmad Yasavi has survived even today...” DeWeese (1996: 206).

<sup>9</sup> This subject was discussed in my article “The Yasawiyya Legacy in the Culture of Tatar Muslims” (2013).

<sup>10</sup> The line from: *Kişşai Hubbi khwāja* (1899), 2. Translated by Guzel Sayfullina.

<sup>11</sup> A paraphrase of the line, widespread among followers of Yasawi: “*Mādinādä Möhämmät, Turkestanda Khujahmät*” /In Medina is Muhammad, in Turkestan is *khwāja* Aḥmad /. Recorded in the village Smail in 1991 as part of a munajat from Fahira Zakirova, b.1921 (Baltach district, Tatarstan, Russia).

ana after the death of Ḥakīm Ata). As my field observations show, faith in their patronage still remained in the 1990s (which can be seen most clearly from the texts of the ritual dedications /*baghishlau*/ performed after the recitation of the Koran<sup>12</sup>).

A special impetus that contributed to the spread of knowledge on Ḥakīm Ata and of the texts connected with his name from the second half of the 19th century onward was given by changes in the social life of Tatar Muslims, namely, the development of their own book-publishing and the widening of the network of Muslim schools and medrese. The texts that earlier were passed on orally and that circulated in manuscripts among relatively small groups of competent people, were now published in hundreds, and later, to 1917, in thousands of copies. In 1846, the *Bāḳirghān kitābī* was printed in Kazan for the first time. In 1847 it was followed by the *Ḥakīm Ata kitābī*, a well-known anonymous hagiography that Muslims used as the main source for the biography of Sulaymān Bāḳirghānī, and by *Akhīrzaman kitābī*.<sup>13</sup> Later these books, as well as other texts from the ‘circle of Bāḳirghānī,’ were repeatedly republished.

An important role in the distribution of literature of such kind was played by the ‘union’ of publishers with schools and medrese, where these texts were used for educational purposes, as manuals on the history of Islam and for reading in Turki.<sup>14</sup> This approach had a special impact on the perception of the people, for whom the ‘Sufi context’ of these texts now became fairly shadowy. Their recitation became an instrument of education and, to some degree, of entertainment.<sup>15</sup> The melodic reading /*köylap uqu*/ of the printed religious books became one of the favourite traditions in Tatar culture at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>12</sup> Several examples of dedications recorded in the 1900s show veneration of some Sufi shaykhs by Tatars. In the dedication, recorded in 1994 from the 85-years old Gölbustan Safina (Baltach village of the Baltach district of Tatarstan), among other Sufi shaykhs are mentioned: “...*Qasīym-baba, Bāhlül divana- khwāja, Hakim Ata, Hubbi- khwāja, Zangī Baba*” Sayfullina (2005: 51). Investigation of *baghishlau* in the 2000s shows the disappearance of this kind of information from the folk texts.

<sup>13</sup> “Only from 1855 to 1864, 9600 copies of this book were produced in Kazan”, writes Efimiy Malov (Malov, 1897: 39).

<sup>14</sup> “For a century, the *Bāḳirghān kitābī* by Ḥakīm Ata served as a manual in elementary schools. In my childhood, I had to learn it by heart,” writes the historian Zaki Validi Togan (1890-1970). (Togan, 1998: 24).

<sup>15</sup> This peculiarity of the existence of Sufi texts among Tatars was noticed by Russian missionaries already in the 19th century. Thus, concerning the *Māryam ana kitābī*, Stefan Matveev wrote: “For the *Mahomedans* of the Kazan land, the story of Sulaymān serves as religious-didactic reading for children, whereas in Central Asia, these verses are recited together with the poems of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī by the whirling dervishes in their praying sessions.” (Matveev, 1895: 4).

As we can see from the book catalogues of the pre-revolutionary period<sup>16</sup> and from the private libraries preserved in Muslim houses in the following decades<sup>17</sup>, there were several narrative poems connected with the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī at that time, which circulated among Tatar Muslims: “*Māryam ana kitabī*” /The Book of Mother Mary, first published in 1878/, “*Akhīrzaman kitabī yaki Taqiy ghajab*” /The Book of the End of the World, or the Miracles of Piety/<sup>18</sup>, “*Mi’rādīname*” /on the legendary night journey of the prophet Muḥammad/, “*Isma’īl qişşası*” /A Story of Isma’īl, on the sacrifice of Abraham/, “*Yarīm alma*” / A Half of an Apple, about Imam Aghzam<sup>19</sup>/. (The last three together with a large number of *hikmats* and other short poems were published in the “*Bāqirghān*” collection).

The popularity of these books was exceptional in this area and, according to Fuad Köprülü, exceeded that in Central Asia itself.<sup>20</sup> In 1922, a major Tatar writer, Galimjan Ibrahimov (1887-1938) mentioned that the book *Bāqirghān* is in the history of Tatar literature an example of the phenomenon that a text, born on foreign soil, becomes a national treasure (Gali, 1956: 43) Concerning *Akhīrzaman kitabī*, the authors of the History of Tatar literature (1923) noted that the people’s belief in it was comparable to their belief in the Qur'an (Gali Rahim & Gaziz, 1923: 110).

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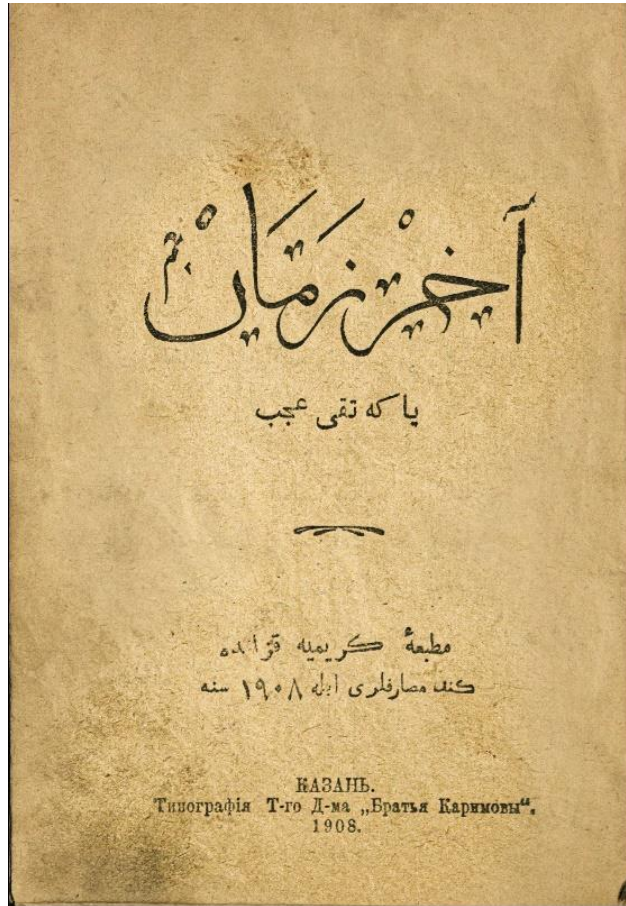
<sup>16</sup> In earlier catalogues, the titles of the texts of our study could be found in the sections on Sufism (as in *Āsame köteb*, 1901); later on, mostly in the sections on reading in Turki (*Āsame köteb* 1913, 1912, 1914).

<sup>17</sup> Even if we keep in mind that those were the remains of rich collections of Muslim books which were destroyed in the Soviet period.

<sup>18</sup> The text was also published under the title *Taqiy ghajab/ Taqiy ghajab kitabī*.

<sup>19</sup> Imam Aghzam – “The Great Imam”, as Muslims called Abū Ḥanīfah (699 – 767), the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school.

<sup>20</sup> “The major works that have been attributed to Ḥakīm Sulaymān Ata... are popular works that are still read with great rapture and excitement in Central Asia, especially in the region of the Volga.” Köprülü, 2006: 175.



**Figure 2.** *Akhīrzaman kitabī yaki Taqiy ghajab*, Kazan, 1908

There are several explanations of such love for “the texts of *Bākirghānī*.” First of all, there is the ease of understanding their language for Russian Muslims. Formed in Central Asia, the literary Chagatai/Turki language for centuries was the basis for texts spread among Tatars, beginning with the *hikmats* of Aḥmad Yasawī (Köprülü, 2006; Hofman, 1969: 230). Both poems, which consisted of a few *beits* and long narratives, recited from printed or handwritten texts in Arabic script, were always highly popular with the audience, be it during festivals or simply at times of leisure.



**Figure 3.** At the time of *kitap köyläp uqu* (book chanting). Iske Yerek village, Tatarstan.  
Photograph by Guzel Sayfullina, 1991.

But the factor which in course of time became most influential was the use of melodies, with which the poems were recited and which made the performances more attractive for the listeners. (It is noteworthy that the Russian missionary Yefimiy Malov, who was the first to study the *Akhîrzaman kitabî*, explained its popularity among Tatars as follows: “*Mahommedans* read this book with a singing voice, especially women and girls who charm the ears of the members of their families. For a long time, this book has been known and loved for its melody” (Malov, 1897 : 39).

Books of such a kind (called “*köyle kitap*” by the people) had their own melodies (whose titles were taken from the name of the book<sup>21</sup>), or there were tunes which through the compliance of their structure to the metrical structure of a poem (syllabic or *aruz*) could be easily used with different texts.

Despite the diversity of these tunes, they are united by a common feature, namely, their narrative nature, which also reveals itself in the manner of performance. As a rule, it is a recital in a low voice, without the use of bright dynamics and other effects that could overshadow the meaning of the verbal information; the ornamentation, typical of other

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<sup>21</sup> Such as *Yusufkitâbî köe*, the tune of *Kişşai Yusuf* by Kûl ‘Ali (13<sup>th</sup> century), *Muhammediya köe* of *Muhammediya* by Muhammed Yazijoglu Celebi (15<sup>th</sup> century). See: Sayfullina, 2008: 137.



genres of folklore, is kept to a minimum.<sup>22</sup> In the repertoire connected with the name of Bāqirghāni, different variants of the tunes of *Taqiy ghajab* and, especially, of *Bāqirghān* (*Bāqirghān köe*), turned out to be the most resilient.

♩ = 132

Bän - dä - lä - rem jir yö - ze - nä qay - chan ti - gän,  
 an - din ar - tiq tä - kiy gha - jab tang - na - ry var

Figure 4. *Akhīrzaman kitābī yaki Taqiy ghajab* (Husnullin, 2001: 695)

♩ = 158

Kil sā mi - nga ä - jal ji - tep(e) yom - shaq tü - shāk - lār - din tö - shep  
 Qa ra jir as - tı - na ke - reb(e) yal - ghız lä - het - tä nit - käy - men?

Figure 5. *Bāqirghān kitābī* (Sayfullina, 1991). Text by Shamseddin

As the materials of the expeditions and the existing literature show, *Bāqirghān kitābī* is the best-known book connected with the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī today. At the same time, there are still many uncertain points about it, beginning with the title itself: many commentators call it *The Book by Bāqirghānī*, although it is more appropriate to translate it as *The Book from Bāqirghān*. It is the place from which the mystic received his *nisba* and which is mentioned in the opening line of the collection: *Bāqirghāndan sāfār qılsam...* [I start my journey from *Bāqirghān*] (*Bāqirghān kitābī*, 1858: 2).

<sup>22</sup> These and other structural features of “the book tunes” have allowed Tatar ethnomusicologists to assign them to the category of musical epic. See: Nigmatzyanov, 1984 : 8.

A collection of poems by Turkic Sufi authors of different centuries - this is the only information on which all scholars agree.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, there is no clear answer to the question of the number of its authors<sup>24</sup>, as well as of the time that they represent: in the Kazan publication by Farid Yahin of 2000 they are poets of the 12th-18th centuries; according to Abdurrahman Güzel, they are poets of the 12th – 16th centuries (Güzel, 2008: 104); in his Survey, Henry Hofman writes: “On the whole we are obliged to conclude ...that this book most likely represents an old anthology, successively enlarged in the 16th-19th century” (Hofman, 1969: 230).

One cannot but agree with the opinion that the book was still being formed in the 19th century. Comparison of the first publication of 1846 with the following ones<sup>25</sup> shows significant differences in the language and especially in the structure of the collection: in the edition of 1846, three large poems by Bākirghānī, ‘Abidi and Saḳıyn, which come at the end of all other editions, are absent, as well as more than twenty short poems of various authors; in addition, there are many reshuffles or replacements of individual words and beits. All this suggests that the editions studied were based on different manuscript “*Bākirghān kitābī*.”

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<sup>23</sup> Analysis of the content of the collection is not the aim of this article. We will only mention that its “Sufi character” is recognized in both the subjects and the forms of the poems. A significant number of texts is dedicated to dhikr or even written in the form of dhikr (especially those by Yasawī, Bākirghānī, Shamseddin).

<sup>24</sup> In the Encyclopaedia of Islam 14 authors are mentioned (Alpay, 1986: 76); the editor of the new Kazan edition lists 18 poets (*Bākirghān kitābī*, 2000); Abdurrahman Güzel mentions 22 authors (Güzel, 2008: 97).

<sup>25</sup> Obviously, there was a gap of several years between the first editions of *Bākirghān kitābī*.” In the Kazan libraries the earliest are the publications of 1846 and 1858, which probably have served as a model for future reprints. In his Memoirs, Z.V. Togan mentions the edition of 1857. See: Togan, 1998: 24.



Figure 6. Kazan editions of *Bākırghān kitābī*: 1846, 1907

There is a detail in the book of 1846 which also points to differences in publications, but at the same time sheds light on the purposes of the publisher: not the spreading of Sufi ideas, but in the first place the education of ignorant Muslims.<sup>26</sup>

There are questions concerning the authors of the book as well. Apart from *Bākırghānī* himself, whose texts form a rather small part of the collection, there are: Aḥmad Yasawī, Rajji, Mashrab, Shamseddin Ghasıy, Җул Sharif, Hodaidad, Iqanıy, Ghabidi (Ghobäydi), Shohudi, Gidai, Ghazzali, Nasimi, Fakiri, Tafi, Җasim shaykh, Gharibi, Karim Hobbi, Hatai Saḳıyn and Baba Machin.

When investigating these names from the perspective of the Sufi *silsilas* and of the Central Asian literary tradition<sup>27</sup>, one can see that, with all their variety, they represent the oeuvre of the Central Asian shaykhs who have direct or indirect connections with each other. Tatar scholars who study *Bākırghān kitābī* in the context of Tatar history have another vision. According to their position, the characters of Җул Sharif and Җasim represent well-known persons in 16th-century Tatar history: the leader of Muslims Җул Sharif, who died in the capture of Kazan, and the shaykh Җasim. (The poem *Hubbi khwāja*, belonging to the

<sup>26</sup> A postscript to the text: “This *Bākırghān kitābī* was published in 1846 by the Kazan merchant Rahimjan Saḡid uḡlı in his own typography, with the hope that illiterate Muslims would read it.” *Bākırghān kitābī*, 1846: 84.

<sup>27</sup> Köprülü, 2006: 386, 175; DeWeese, the above mentioned works; DeWeese, 1999.

same range of reading for Tatars as “the *Bākirghāni* texts,” is also ascribed to the Kazan *Ḳul Sharif*).<sup>28</sup>

It should be mentioned, however, that over time the authorship of the texts of “*Bākirghān kitābī*” has become of less and less interest to the people. When reciting the texts by both *Ḳul Sulaymān*, *Shamseddin*, *Hudaidad* or others, Muslims simply called them “from the ‘*Bākirghān kitābī*’ (as both my field observations and recordings of the Kazan ethnomusicologists confirm).

The widespread knowledge of the *Bākirghān kitābī* at the beginning of the 20th century in all layers of the Tatar Muslim population made this book a cultural phenomenon, the significance of which went far beyond the frame of only a Sufi anthology (the original function of the collection) or a popular religious manual.<sup>29</sup>

However, together with the social changes in the life of Tatars at that time (in particular, innovations in the system of education),<sup>30</sup> a new attitude towards *Bākirghān kitābī* and other texts of this range was formed. These texts began to be perceived ironically, as a symbol of the old system of religious education and more broadly, as a symbol of an old – that is, obsolete – culture. In print, works in the form of certain verses from *Bākirghān kitābī* or *Taqiy ghajab* with new content appear, often having a socially accusing nature. Examples are the works of the most ‘audible voice’ of that time, the poet *Ghabdulla Tukay* (1886-1913), which are written in the style of *Bākirghān*.<sup>31</sup>

Use of the known poetical and musical forms with other content, mostly in a satirical vein, was practiced in the Soviet period (after 1917) as an instrument of an atheistic campaign and contributed to a new perception of once-favoured texts. An example of this is the poem by *Sulaymān Bākirghānī* written in the form of a dialogue between Paradise and Hell. If *Tukay* in 1906 made only an allusion to this poem in his dialogue of the Donkey and *Ishan*, in 1918 the renowned writer *Ghaliaskar Kamal* (1879-1933) repeated the

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<sup>28</sup>See in particular: *Kol Shārif hām anīng zamanī*, 2005. In the article by *Önal Kaya Ḳul Sharif* is shown as “a famous writer in Transoxiana” of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. See: *Önal*, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Among other *köyle kitap* of similar significance, the anonymous *Badawam* and *Muḥammadia* by *Muḥammad Yazıjoglu Celebi* should be mentioned. See: *Sayfullina*, 2008: 136.

<sup>30</sup> This subject is discussed in a huge amount of sources, in particular, in the context of *Jadidism* among Tatars. See in particular: *Iskhakov*, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the poet directly points to *Bākirghān* in the titles of verses: *Hatirāi ‘Bākirghān* [Remembering *Bākirghān*], *Maktanīshu (Bākirghānnan)* [Boasting. From *Bākirghān*]. *Tukay*, 2011: 407, 511.

original form of the verses in the dialogue of the Worker and the Bourgeois (Gali, 1956 : 43).

Similarly, as a musical 'sign' of the negatively depicted clergy, the melodies of popular religious books were interpreted in the first Tatar musical theatre performances, in particular, *Kazan sölgese* [The Kazan towel, 1923] and *Zängär shäl* [The Blue scarf, 1926].

During the seven decades of the Soviet period, the perception of *Bākirghān kitābī* in the Tatar milieu underwent fundamental changes. Together with the closing of Muslim schools, with the changes of alphabet (1929 in Latin, 1939 in Cyrillic), which cut off new generations of Tatars from the old literary legacy, knowledge of these books and their authors disappeared. Oral transmission of texts performed with popular melodies became the main mechanism of preserving the *köyläp uqu* tradition. Both musical and textual information connected with the tradition of the recitation of religious books moved to the repertoire of folk munajats and were evaluated as part of the song folklore of secular content.<sup>32</sup> When analysing munajats recorded in the last decades of the 20th century, one discovers that many of them are to a greater or lesser extent the transformed fragments of earlier popular religious books and that their melodies have the same origin.<sup>33</sup>

The new forms of existence of *Bākirghān kitābī* and other texts of the same kind at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries are their reprints in Cyrillic, accompanied by their translation into modern Tatar, and sometimes, their appearance in musical programmes, as a tribute to the poetical-musical traditions of the past. As a rule, these are performances by rare enthusiast-"restorers" of endangered traditions (singers Gulzada, b. 1946; Idris Gaziev, b. 1960; the scholar and musician Gennadiy Makarov, b. 1952).

## **Conclusion**

The study of the perception of the traditions connected with the name of Sulaymān Bākirghānī by the Volga Tatars actually brings us to the question of what happens when

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<sup>32</sup> On the interpretation of the form of the munajat in Tatar culture see: Sayfullina, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Examples of different kinds can be found in: Husnullin, 2001 (such as the munajat, recorded in 1983, which represents the poem by Shamseddin from the *Bākirghān kitābī*:144-145).

cultural traditions rooted in a particular cultural and historical context appear in a different environment.

‘The legacy of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī,’ which entered deeply into the life of the Tatars together with the spread of the Yasawiyya traditions and which obviously existed as a form of popular Sufism for a long time, underwent a fundamental reinterpretation in the 20th century.

While maintaining some of the formal elements of the Sufi tradition (such as mentioning some dhikr formulas, like *Hu-hu*, *Alla-hu*,<sup>34</sup> some ‘holy names’ in dedications), people lost real knowledge of it. The recitation of texts such as *Bāqirghān kitābī*, which at the beginning of the 1900s was mostly interpreted as an element of popular religious education, towards the end of the century was perceived as the stylistically special, musical poetical tradition *köyläp uqu*, which in its turn, received a new life in folk munajats and in a repertoire that was designed for professional performance on the concert stage.<sup>35</sup> A special role was played in this by the Kazan editions of *Bāqirghān kitābī*. On the one hand, they contributed to the preservation of this special layer of Central Asian Sufi poetry extending over several centuries; on the other hand, they brought the collection into a new cultural and historical context and predetermined the new ways of understanding it.

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<sup>34</sup> See: Sayfullina (2019).

<sup>35</sup> An example is the repertoire of such popular singers as Gulzada and Idris Gaziev.

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