

MOSQUES IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN:
DISCOURSE INTERPRETATION AND
REGULATORY PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The authors have analyzed the dynamics of the growth of number of mosques built by religious associations in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and noted a transition from their unregulated and chaotic construction (proliferation) to their precise

association with specific maddhabs, and their construction norms conceptualized by religious institutions represented by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK).

The types of cultic facilities and the actors are discussed and ranked according to the type of their involvement and partnership. We should note that the participation of various actors adds weight to the

status of mosques as important public facilities.

The authors have paid particular attention to the religious communities' revised registration realized under the Law of the RK on Religious Activities and Religious Associations of 2011, which optimized the religious space, consolidated the positions of traditional Islam and, hence, standardized the rules related to mosque construction.

KEYWORDS: mosque, public space, post-Soviet realities, re-Islamization, re-appropriation, "mosque diplomacy," religious communities, traditional Islam, DUMK.

Introduction

The steadily growing number of mosques for the last thirty years noted by everyone living in Muslim states and confirmed by statistics is not a phenomenon specific to Kazakhstan. It testifies to global Islamic revival,¹ post-Soviet reanimation of cultural and historical (religious) memory,² and investments in the reputational capital.³ This article presents a model of local Kazakhstani discussions about the role of mosques in the social, political, cultural and emotional agenda of tripartite relations between the state, communities and the religious Islamic institutions in Kazakhstan.

We have paid particular attention to a paradox: during the years of independence the number of mosques increased by 58 times or even more,⁴ while the intellectual, analytical and expert accompaniment of this chaotic phenomenon is lagging behind. Few researchers have risked to analyze the appearance of newly built mosques, while the authors who seek to do so point at the scarcity of theoretical works and mostly focus on the concept of identity as an epistemological phenomenon. The growing number of mosques is treated as a result of deeply rooted spiritual processes unfolding in Kazakhstan.⁵ This aspect deserves detailed analysis; the same fully applies to the studies of mosques and places of

¹ See: F. Asadullin, "Urban Islam kak novy etnokulturny fenomen sovremennogo evropeyskogo megapolisa: ot retrospektivy k perspektivnomu videniiu problemy," *Islamology*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, pp. 43-56; G. Vainsteyn, "Islam v gorodskom prostranstve i v obshchestvennom soznanii Evropy," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, No. 6, 2013, pp. 29-37; O. Trofimova, "Musulmane i islam v Zapadnoy Evrope," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, No. 10, 2009, pp. 52-62.

² See: K.A. Medeuova, Y.M. Sandybaeva, Z.Zh. Naurzbaeva, D.T. Tolgambaeva, K.S. Ermanganbetova, D.N. Melnikov, M.Zh. Kikimbaev, A.Ch. Ramazanova, A.B. Tlepbergen, E.Zh. Zhetibaev, D.E. Orazbaeva, K.A. Potavets, *Praktiki i mesta pamiati v Kazakhstane*, Lev Gumilyov ENU, Astana, 2017, 320 pp.

³ See: A. Bissenova, "Building a Muslim Nation: The Role of the Central Mosque of Astana," in: *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes*, ed. by M. Laruelle, Lexington Books, 2016, p. 211.

⁴ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*, Site of the Committee for Religious Affairs, Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [<http://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/din/documents/details/113255?lang=ru>], 29 June, 2021.

⁵ See: M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandossova, "The Mosque in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Sacral and Spiritual Contexts," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Issue 3, Vol. 21, 2020, available at [https://www.ca-c.org/online/2020/journal_eng/cac-03/09.shtml], 29 June, 2021.

worship inherited from the pre-Soviet past.⁶ We would like to rely on these studies to move to the next analytical level and to discuss the role of mosques for cities, communities and the state.

We have proceeded from the following formula: the current state of “Islam in Central Asia can be comprehended only in the context of Soviet history.”⁷ Historian and social anthropologist Adib Khalid argues that since the Soviet regime promoted secularization, today Central Asia has been drawn into re-Islamization, the phenomenon, which, “being not completely natural in character, remains, however, connected, contextually and institutionally, with the structures inherited from Soviet epoch and, at the same time, with the worldwide context of the early 21st century.”⁸

This quote has summed up the legacy of the past and the trends of the present in post-Soviet Central Asia that determined the specifics of state ideology and the Islamic social spaces created by local populations. In his article Khalid relies not only on the concept of re-Islamization (Islamic revival) but also on re-appropriation.⁹ We have accepted it as a context within which we will disclose the very meaning of our studies.

In this article we will try to answer the following question: which prerequisites and trends contributed to the process of institutionalization of “traditional Islam” and which actors are responsible for the surge in mosque construction as important public facilities.

Re-appropriation of Islamic values as an important part of historical heritage and the social identity of the Central Asian countries mercilessly uprooted by colonial authorities have contributed to the development of communication spaces that are absolutely indispensable for new actors and religious communities. They consolidated the demand for the confirmation of visual and material identity in public spaces. Restoration of pre-Soviet and construction of huge numbers of new mosques are one of the symbols of this confirmation. Everything that has been said in this regard became an inalienable part of the authorities’ stance on the historical possibility of independent national construction and overcoming the negative repercussions of the rule of czars and Bolsheviks. These processes varied in different Central Asian countries; their historical prerequisites and political collisions were likewise different, yet it became clear that the first heads of newly-independent states eventually had to take into account the unfolding Islamic discourse and use it as part of their ideological agenda.

In this article mosques are not merely considered as places of religious practice, but, first and foremost, public spaces built by interested sides. In our discussion we rely on the term “participation,” which explains not only the concerted actions of religious communities (umma and jamaat), but also their partnership with the authorities and religious institutions, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan being one of them, as active creators of new mosques.

Research Methods

When writing this article, we relied on various materials produced by the state structures working in the religious sphere, scientific and analytical studies, the Internet and the programmed documents of the DUMK, Internet publications related to mosque construction.

⁶ See: S. Azhigali, *Monuments of Mankystau and Ustyurt. Album*, Oner Printshop, Almaty, 2014, 504 pp. (in Kazakh, Russian and English).

⁷ A. Khalid, “Postsovetskie sudby sredneaziatskogo Islama,” in: *Konfessia, imperia, natsia: religia i problema raznoobrazia v istorii postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Novoe izdatelstvo, Moscow, 2012, pp. 316-344.

⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁹ Unlike re-Islamization which the author used several times in his article, the term re-appropriation is used once yet the author has written a lot about the processes of return of Islamic values within the process of re-appropriation of cultural heritage.

Chronologically, our studies of the dynamics of the growing number of Islamic associations in Kazakhstan cover the period between 1990 and 2020. Qualitative information was obtained from official sources; the missing figures were taken from scholarly studies and international reports. Our tables and the diagram are based on information recovered from the official site of the authorized structures working in the religious sphere (for the year 2020),¹⁰ information and methodological handbooks *Religioznaia situatsia v Respublike Kazakhstan: prognozy i tendentsii* (1990-2010),¹¹ *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana* (2007),¹² analytical report *Tsentralnaia Azia: prostranstvo "shelkovoy demokratii". Islam i gosudarstvo (2011-2016)*,¹³ scholarly reports *Konfessionalny portret Kazakhstana* (2001),¹⁴ *Mechet v postsovetskoy Tsentralnoy Azii: sakralno-dukhovnye konteksty* (2017-2018).¹⁵

We should note that different sources may contain different figures related to religious associations in general and mosques in particular. They require verification and clarification from completely reliable official sources.

The Past: Religious Structures

The history of religious organizations and administration of religious activities is extensive and varied: it stretched from the colonial (1713-1917) to Soviet periods (1917-1990) and included the stages of administration and co-administration by religious centers and an absence of administrative structures. We did not include in our study either the Middle Ages, when Islam arrived in the area now known as Central Asia from other regions, or the rather protracted period of its modification in different states, since administration of religious activity, the appearance of the cleric corps, and the cultic activity of mosques in Kazakhstan began not earlier than the establishment of colonial czarist power. The history of administrative subordination of the local clergy to one of several structures or their complete independence can be divided into three periods:

- (a) subordination to the Orenburg Mahometan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) and the local civil administrations in czarist Russia;
- (b) relative independence of representation in the structure of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) under Soviet power;
- (c) independent Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (DUMK).

In czarist Russia, the Muslims of Kazakhstan took orders from the spiritual and civilian structures of the colonial administration. Until the 1860s, the Muslims of Turkestan and the Steppe Territory were supervised by the SADUM located in Ufa, the power of which was not absolute: it was limited severely by czarist authorities. Later, when the Russian Empire had practically integrated the

¹⁰ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*.

¹¹ See: A.K. Omarov, *Religioznaia situatsia v Respublike Kazakhstan: prognozy i tendentsii. Metodicheskoe posobie*, Astana, 2011, p. 49.

¹² See: *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana. Spravochno-metodicheskoe posobie*, Zhibek zholy, Almaty, 2007, p. 80.

¹³ See: *Tsentralnaia Azia: prostranstvo "shelkovoy demokratii". Islam i gosudarstvo*, ed. by E. Nogoibaeva, Almaty, 2017, p. 8.

¹⁴ See: M. Tulsikiy, "Konfessionalny portret Kazakhstana. Part 1—Statistika," available at [<http://tulsikiy.livejournal.com/50629.html>], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁵ See: M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandossova, op. cit.

territory of contemporary Kazakhstan with its own land, it tried to sort out and systematize the traditional (adat) and Muslim laws (the Shari‘a) in order to adjust them to the interests of the colonial administration. At that time, the empire had no centers of religious administration; czarist officials were not positively disposed towards Islam, therefore the Shari‘a and its stronger influence were interpreted as a threat to the mother country.¹⁶ Finally it was decided to remove the local umma from the OMDS in order to cease the gradual consolidation of Tatar imams’ power. According to the Temporal Provisions of 1868 and 1885 adopted by the Administration of Spiritual Affairs of the Kirghiz of the Steppe General Governorship, control over the religious sphere was transferred to civilian authorities.

Despite the attempts to suppress the influence of Islam in the colonial territories, big-city mosques (which formed a line of outposts of colonial power in Kazakhstan—Petropavlovsk, Semipalatinsk, Uralsk, Akmolinsk, etc.) remained important public facilities. Early in the 19th century, merchants and other rich Petropavlovsk residents built five stone mosques.¹⁷ Between the late 18th and the late 19th centuries Semipalatinsk acquired eight Tatar mosques. Built for different reasons, they became important centers of public life by the efforts of local merchants, religious figures, and the local umma.¹⁸

The next stage was marked by radical changes in the relations between the state and the religious communities: the gradually developing Soviet atheism was superimposed on the traditional colonial administrative practices. Religious freedom survived partially between 1917 and 1929; the decision On Religious Associations adopted in 1929, limited the freedom of religious service, confiscated mosques and closed religious educational establishments.¹⁹

New official religious structures that coordinated religious activities of the Central Asian Muslims were banned. It was in 1943 that the Muslim leaders finally met at a conference that resolved to establish the SADUM in Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan acquired kaziats; their heads were appointed by the SADUM Mufti. The first Mufti of Kazakhstan elected in 1946 was Abdulgafar Shamsutdinov (1946-1952) followed by Saduakas Gylmani (1952-1972), Zha-kia Beysenbaev (1972-1979) and Ratbek Nysanbaev (1979-1990).

~~—The kaziat of Soviet Kazakhstan was an autonomous structure with certain powers to regulate the religious life of the local umma. The SADUM was responsible for the key issues in religious life—appointment of the chief imams, lists of those permitted to perform haj, organization of spiritual education and publication of religious literature. Each of the kaziats was expected to transfer monetary donations to Tashkent. Under the czars, religious power belonged to the Tatar mullahs, while members of Uzbek clergy dominated during the SADUM period.²⁰~~

Despite the existence of regional spiritual administrations, Soviet authorities remained vigilant; in particular, they pushed out religious practices to the periphery of public life by limiting the number of mosques. Until the mid-1980s, religious activities were controlled and mercilessly restricted: “The authorities did not allow to build new mosques. In the 1960s-1980s, their number in Kazakhstan re-

¹⁶ See: P. Sartory, P. Shabley, *Eksperimenty imperii: adat, shariat i proizvodstvo znaniy v Kazakhskoy stepi*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow, 2019, 280 pp.: illustrated (Series *Historia Rossica*).

¹⁷ See: Zh.E. Nurbaev, “Istoki formirovaniya institutov Islama v Severnom Kazakhstane (na materialakh Petropavlovskogo uezda Akmolinskoy oblasti),” *Elektronny nauchny zhurnal “edu.e-history.kz,”* No. 1 (05), 2016, available at [http://edu.e-history.kz/ru/publications/view/360], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁸ See: P.S. Shabley, “Istoria tatarskoy obshchiny Semipalatinska,” *Istoricheskaia etnologia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2020, pp. 75-94, available at [DOI: 10.22378/he.2020-5-1.75—94], 29 June, 2021.

¹⁹ See: Z. Saktaganova, Zh. Mazhitova, E. Aimakhov, “Gosudartsvo i religia v sovetskoj istorii: etapy i osobennosti vzaimotnosheniy v Kazakhstane,” *Vestnik KazNPU im. Abaia*, Series *Istoricheskie i sotsialno-politicheskie nauki*, No. 2 (53), 2017, pp. 191=200, available at [http://sp.kaznpu.kz/docs/jurnal_file/file20190506024941.pdf], 29 June, 2021.

²⁰ See: A. Verkhovsky, S. Jukeyeva, V. Ponomarev, “Religiozny faktor v politike i v ideologii natsionalnykh dvizheniy v Rossii i Kazakhstane. 1989-1997,” available at Internet resource Panorama.ru [http://www.panorama.ru/works/rk/k1.html#1a], 29 June, 2021.

mained between 22 and 28. In 1961, for example, there were 25 registered Muslim associations with mosques of their own... The phenomenon of so-called wandering (unregistered) mullahs was widely accepted: they performed all sorts of rituals (weddings, burials, etc.). According to official information, there were 521 wandering mullahs in Kazakhstan in 1961. By the time of the republic's independence, there were 68 mosques in its territory."²¹

At the third stage, the kaziat of Kazakhstan withdrew from the SADUM and set up its own muftiat. The DUMK was set up on 12 January, 1990 at the first kurultai of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. It elected Ratbek Nysanbaev supreme mufti; later this post was filled by Absattar Derbisali (2000-2013), Erzhan Maiamerov (2013-2017), and Serikbay Oraz (2017-2020). Nauryzbay Otpenov elected in 2020.²²

Today, the DUMK is, to a great extent, the heir to the Soviet kaziats; during the years of independence it created its own corps of imams and a wide network of regional mosques. Ratbek Nysanbaev, the last leader of the Soviet kaziat and the first head of the independent muftiat, laid the foundations of cooperation with secular authorities of Kazakhstan. Those who came after him have to cope with the increasingly more complex confessional life strongly affected by globalization, i.e. regulation of confessional activities, development of Islamic educational establishments and standardization of mosque construction.

From Mass Production to Conceptualizing Requirements

The Republic of Kazakhstan presents itself as a polyconfessional state that recognizes “the historical role of Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity in people’s cultural and spiritual life.”²³

According to the List of Officially Registered Religious Associations, in 2020 there were 18 registered confessions in Kazakhstan (3,826 religious associations): 2,691 of them (over 70% of the total number) were Islamic.

While in 1990 there were 46 officially functioning mosques, in 2020 their number increased to 2,689 (the buildings of the DUMK in Almaty and Nur-Sultan registered as religious associations do not function as mosques). This means that in the last three decades the number of mosques in Kazakhstan increased by more than 58 times (see Table 1).

The largest number of mosques is registered in the Turkestan Region; the smallest, in Nur-Sultan—13 associations (12 mosques and the DUMK building). The majority of the mosques are situated in the republic’s south: apart from the Turkestan Region, over 100 mosques were opened in Almaty, Jambyl and Kyzylorda regions and in the city of Shymkent (see Table 2). The large number of mosques in the East-Kazakhstan Region is explained by its integration with the Semipalatinsk Region. A considerable number of mosques in the Karaganda Region is explained by its size—it is the biggest administrative unit in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the republic’s capital Nur-Sultan, with its spreading urban space and growing population, has the greatest mosque construction potential

²¹ A.P. Abuov, E.M. Smagulov, “*Religia v Kazakhstane*,” Mezhdunarodny tsentr kultur i religiy, Astana, 2013, available at [<http://textarchive.ru/c-1483988.html>], 29 June, 2021.

²² See: Z. Jalilov, B. Batyrkhan, “Islam in Kazakhstan: History of Revival under Conditions of Independence,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Issue 3, Vol. 20, 2019, available at [https://www.ca-c.org/online/2019/journal_eng/cac-03/00.shtml], 29 June, 2021; Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Concise history, available at [<http://www.muftyat.kz/ru/kmdb/>], 29 June, 2021.

²³ *The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 October, 2011, No. 483-IV On Religious Activity and Religious Associations*, available in Russian at [<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1100000483>], 29 June, 2021.

in comparison with similar administrative units—Almaty (52 mosques) and Shymkent (106)—two cities with republican statuses.

Table 1

Dynamics of the Growth of Number of Islamic Associations in Kazakhstan (1990-2020)

Year	Number of Islamic Associations	Year	Number of Islamic Associations
1990	46	2007	2,334
1991	68	2008	2,337
1993	296	2009	2,634
1995	483	2010	2,697
1996	679	2011	2,756
1997	826	2012	2,228
1999	1,003	2015	2,458
2001	1,282	2016	2,516
2003	1,652	2017	2,592
2005	1,766	2018	2,598
2006	1,853	2020	2,691

Table 2

Islamic Associations by Region (in decreasing order, 2020)

No.	Regions	Number of Islamic Associations
Total		2,691
1	Turkestan Region	750
2	Almaty Region	474
3	Jambyl Region	313
4	East-Kazakhstan Region	208
5	Kyzylorda Region	174
6	Karaganda Region	145
7	Shymkent	106
8	Pavlodar Region	94
9	Akmola Region	90
10	Aktobe Region	68
11	North-Kazakhstan Region	63
12	Almaty	52

Table 2 (continued)

No.	Regions	Number of Islamic Associations
13	West-Kazakhstan Region	47
14	Mangystau Region	33
15	Atyrau Region	31
16	Kostanay Region	30
17	Nur-Sultan	13

Source: The table is based on the *List of Registered Religious Associations in Kazakhstan and their Branches*, available at [<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/din/documents/details/113255?lang=ru>].

In 2012, there was a dramatic decline in the number of Muslim associations: their number dropped to the 2007 level (see Fig. 1) due to the Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations adopted on 11 October, 2011, under which all religious associations had to be re-registered by corresponding state structures. Those who did not fit the new requirements were either merged with others or closed down. Elena Burova presented a table for 2011-2014, which clearly shows that the number of religious communities dropped from 4,551 to 3,008. About 40% of the closed religious communities (1,463) were Islamic associations. Others were Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, etc.²⁴

The DUMK mosques with small attendance or those unable to hire the required number of clerics did not submit their documents for registration and were closed. Those that did not fit the standards for a mosque were registered as praying rooms (namazkhans). Despite strict optimization and standardization of mosque activities, their number continued to grow after re-registration, and in 2020, almost reached the 2011 level.

Shi'a, Sufi and Ahmadiya associations were not re-registered; their previous existence is confirmed by different sources. Russian political scientist Mikhail Tulsy, for example, relied on official information provided by the judicial authorities of Kazakhstan for 2001 when he wrote that there had been 1,277 Sunni, 1 Shi'a, 1 Sufi and 3 Ahmadiya associations.²⁵ According to official information published in 2007, out of 2,334 Muslim associations, 2,322 were Sunni, 4—Shi'a, 5—Sufi and 3—Ahmadiya.²⁶

The mosques, whose construction was funded by national diasporas—Uyghurs, Uzbeks, Chechens, Ingushes, Dungans, etc. (the majority of them belong to Hanafi maddhab), are registered as DUMK branches. Those ethnic groups that belong to different maddhabs (such as some Chechens and Ingushes) are allowed to worship individually according to their religious practices in Hanafi mosques if they obey common rules.

Some of the researchers state that the authorities are putting much effort into moving traditional Islam into the center of the republic's religious life. For instance, Elena Burova and Anatoly Kosichenko, who have analyzed the results of registration carried out in conformity with the new law, agreed that only Hanafi Islam had proved its compliance with the new normative requirements.²⁷

²⁴ See: E.E. Burova, *Trendy novoy religioznosti v sovremennom Kazakhstane (opyt sotsiologicheskogo izmereniya)*, Monograph, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science, and Religious Studies, KN MON RK, Almaty, 2014, p. 30.

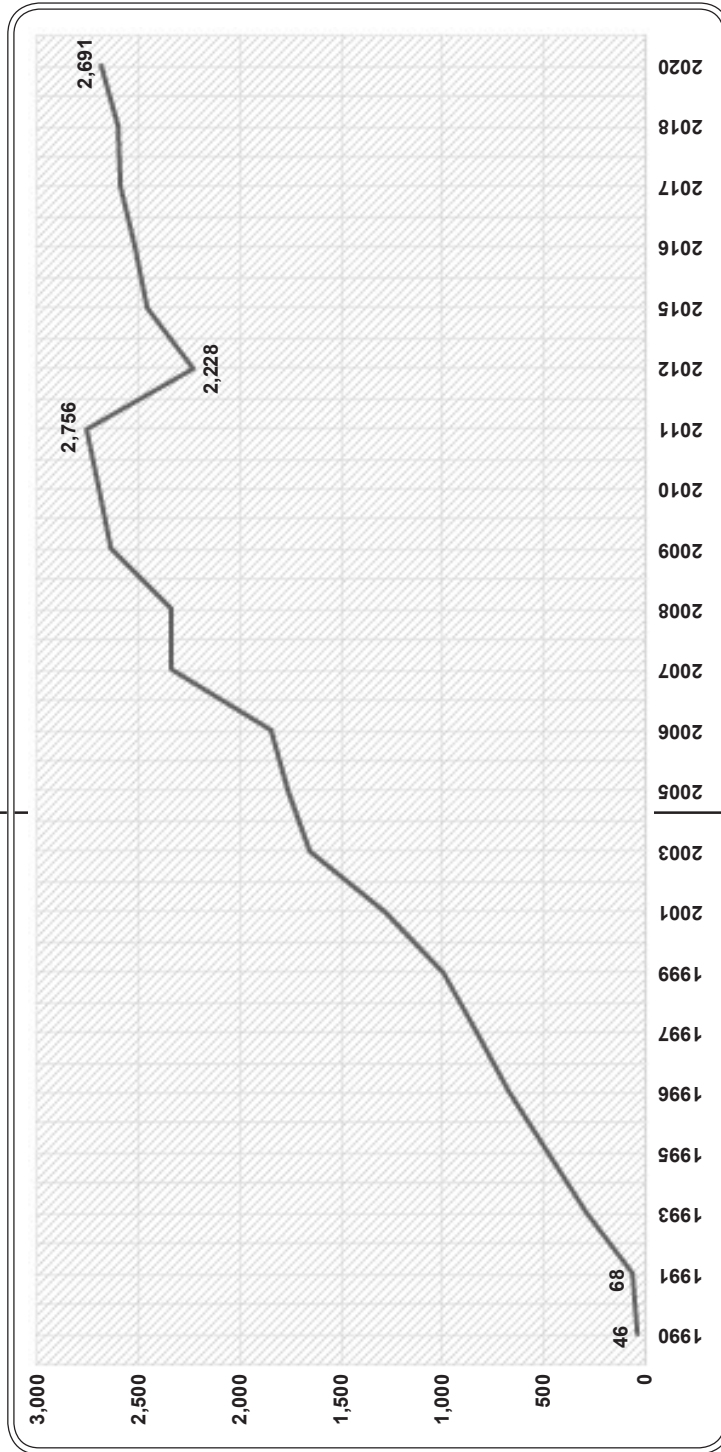
²⁵ See: M. Tulsy, *op. cit.*

²⁶ See: *Religia v sisteme dukhovnosti Kazakhstana. Spravochno-metodicheskoe posobie*, p. 27.

²⁷ See: E. Burova, A. Kosichenko, *Aktualnye problemy razvitiya religioznoy situatsii v Respublike Kazakistan*, ed. by Z.K. Shaukenova, IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2013, p. 74.

Figure 1

Dynamics of the Growth of Number of Mosques in Kazakhstan (1990-2020)



Anthropologist Alima Bissenova, likewise, wrote about the specifics of the new status of religious power: "...re-registration carried out on 19 June, 2012 transformed the DUMK into a social Islamic religious association, while, in fact, it is not an ordinary social structure. Administratively, it copies state structures and covers the entire territory of Kazakhstan."²⁸ At the same time, she deemed it necessary to point out that the state and the religious communities predictably had common interests, hence their drawing closer together. While the state has to move closer to religion in order to establish and consolidate official Islam so as to suppress the wave of chaotic Islamization of society to acceptable limits, the Muslim community draws closer to the state to be involved in the national modernist development projects.²⁹

Despite the storm of criticism from human rights activists outside Kazakhstan, the state has considerably optimized the situation in the religious sphere. Traditional Islam consolidated the religious administration structure through a unified system of propaganda among the members of the umma; the country acquired a centralized administration of religious buildings and ongoing activities, which made it easier to cooperate at the highest and local levels.

Today, the DUMK has practically all the subdivisions typical of any state power structure: the mufti, his deputies, a chancellery, the staff, press secretary, counselors, departments dealing with related spheres of activity; associated organizations, i.e., a publishing house, halal and licensing centers, charity funds, centers of ritual services, etc.³⁰ Future religious officials are educated at the Nur-Mubarak University, the Institute of Advanced Training and at nine madrassahs (colleges).³¹ The supreme mufti has the right to appoint the chief imams in regions and federal cities.

Following re-registration, the DUMK developed and adopted several programmed documents to regulate the religious life of the umma:

1. The platform of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (2015);
2. Ethics of the DUMK officials (2015);
3. Personal image of an imam (2015);
4. Personal image of a Muslim (2015);
5. "Seven Spiritual Pillars" as a platform of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (2019);
6. List of rites performed by religious ministers (2019);
7. List of religious posts (2019);
8. Standards of mosque construction in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2019);
9. Culture of memorial services (2020);
10. Culture of pilgrimage and cemetery attendance (2020).

All of these documents (except No. 8, which is related to mosque construction) can be found on the official DUMK website.³² The construction rules contain unified standards expected to ensure

²⁸ A. Bissenova, "Vozrozhdenie islama v postsovetskoy Tsentralnoy Azii: otsenivaia proshloe, zagliadyvaia v budushchee," in: *Tsentralnaia Azia—25: mysli o proshlom, proektsia budushchego*, Collection of essays from Central Asia, p. 88, available at [http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/25-Years_Russian.pdf], 29 June, 2021.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁰ See: Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Departments, available at [<http://www.muftiyat.kz/ru/kmdb/sections/>], 29 June, 2021.

³¹ See: *List of Registered Religious Associations and their Branches*.

³² See Official site of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Library and documents, available in Russian at [<http://www.muftiyat.kz/kk/books/>], 29 June, 2021.

mosques' efficiency as public spaces.³³ According to Paragraphs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the Rules, mosques will be built in full accordance with the number of people living in a specific settlement: the mosques in settlements with 300-5,000 residents should have an attendance capacity of 70-500; district centers and districts of cities with population of 5,000 to 15,000 should have larger mosques for 500-1,500 people; mosques in regional centers and major cities with population of over 100,000 should fit between 1,000 and 5,000 people. Paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 state that religious and national styles should be harmonized, and the decorations of the cupolas, the minaret, internal and external decorations should correspond to local traditions. Paragraphs 3.1, 3.5 and 3.11 state that, prior to being presented to corresponding state structures, the project should be approved by the DUMK. It is also responsible for registration and the name of the already built mosque and the appointment of an imam. Those who commission these mosques and those who participate in funding construction should take fire safety rules into account; the mosques should be accessible to transport and pedestrians, parking spaces should be available; the surrounding area should be green and brightly lit, with benches around it. Paragraph 3.8 demands that each mosque have a house for the imam nearby and a canteen for the umma.

Contributors to Mosque Construction

The mosque-building boom demanded an answer to a very reasonable question: who are the main actors in the process of construction of new mosques?

In 2007, speaking at the seminar "Islam and Central Asia" held at one of the colleges of Oxford University, Kazakhstani architect Alim Sabitov defined the main actors of cultic construction in Kazakhstan:

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1. The state that commissions cultic facilities;
 2. Professional architects who realize these projects;
 3. Local architects;
 4. Foreigners.³⁴

Those who study the culture of mosques in Kazakhstan added one more category of mosque builders to Sabitov's four: ethnic diasporas that realize their own projects of cultic buildings.³⁵

According to Sabitov, an architect who is commissioned by the state is limited by its demands; his project passes bureaucratic formalities, which takes a lot of time. The central Almaty mosque is one of the pertinent examples: it took the state seven years to complete the project intended to replace the old city mosque. This mainly happened in the initial years of independence, when the mosques acted as symbols of post-Soviet sovereignty. The first central mosque in Nur-Sultan, the capital of

³³ See: "Pravilo stroitelstva mecheti v tipovom proekte v Respublike Kazakhstan, Approved on 18 April, 2018 at the 19th sitting of the Council of the Ulema Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan," 3 pages (document from personal archive of M. Kikimbayev, in Kazakh); "Spiritual Administration Approved the Rules of Building Mosques," Informationny portal Zakon.kz, available at [<http://www.zakon.kz/4954141-dumk-utverdilo-pravila-stroitelstva.html>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁴ See: A. Sabitov, "Novoe kultovoe stroitelstvo v Kazakhstane," The author's personal site, available at [<http://www.sabitovalim.com/%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D0%B8>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁵ See: N.L. Seitachmetova, M.K. Bektenova, "Garmonia eticheskogo i esteticheskogo v fenomene mecheti: na primere g. Almaty," in: *Almaty—stolitsa islamskoy kultury 2015 goda: materialy Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii*, Almaty, 2015, p. 61.

Kazakhstan, belongs to the same category. The Saduakas kazhy Gylmani was erected in 1991-1996 in the place of the old mosque.³⁶

Local administrations and rich businessmen may, likewise, commission mosques and build them using their own money, which allows architects to demonstrate their personal ideas of contemporary Islamic culture. According to Sabitov, large mausoleums rather than mosques are being commissioned. Much has changed, however, since the time Alim Sabitov proposed his typology in 2007. Today, political elite and rich people do not hesitate to commission fairly futuristic projects. For example, the eco-friendly mosque Yryskeldi Kazhy in Nur-Sultan commonly known as God's Flower, decorated with skillfully altered ethnic Kazakh ornaments, is one of the most vivid examples of a post-modernist design project.³⁷ In 2018, The Austrian Green Planet Building international organization awarded this mosque a prize for being the first mosque in the world with a positive energy balance and an extremely low heat demand.

According to Sabitov, the biggest number of cultic structures in the regions of Kazakhstan (mainly mosques and mazars) were erected by local builders in villages out of locally available materials with the use of primitive construction instruments and machines. Some of them are former clubs, shops or other buildings altered for cultic purposes. Such projects are mainly realized in cooperation with local builders. Sabitov did not specify how it was organized: whether the brigades are paid for their services or may be implementing the traditional Kazakh practice of mutual assistance (asar).

Construction of places of worship using monetary donations from abroad is a rare occurrence, according to Sabitov. One of the examples is the University of Islamic Culture and its mosque in Almaty presented by former President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak. International relations experts consider the projects of this sort part of so-called "mosque diplomacy": Islamic world leaders fund mosque construction in the countries where they have geopolitical and economic interests. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE and others rely, to different extents, on this instrument in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is involved in the process more than its neighbors who, likewise, are putting a lot of effort into becoming a part of "mosque diplomacy." In Kazakhstan, for example, Arab countries have realized several projects—the Nur-Astana mosque with the capacity of 5,000 in the republic's capital presented by the emir of Qatar³⁸ and the central mosque of Shymkent with a capacity of 3,000 presented by the Zaid ben Sultan Al-Nakhaian Charity of the UAE.³⁹

The above-mentioned Sabitov's classification remains the main instrument when it comes to classifying mosques in Kazakhstan. There are certain additions, yet the definitions of the groups of actors and the criteria of their classifications have not been challenged.⁴⁰ It seems, however, that the author applies the term "cultic facility" without due specification: he has bundled together mosques, mausoleums, mazars and even facilities with no cultic characteristics. The latter include several buildings of the late Soviet period—the museum of history and the Arasan Wellness and SPA complex in Almaty. Contrary to the logic of his typology, its items 2 and 3 indicate the authors of the projects rather than its sponsors.

³⁶ See Official site of the mosque Saduakas kazhy Gylmani. O mecheti, available at [<http://old.sunna.kz/ru/page/view?id=37>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁷ See: G. Abenova, "'Tsvetok Vsevyshnego' s imenem ottsa Jaksybekova," available at [<http://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-astana-novaya-mechet/29231555.html>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁸ See: Sh. Ikromov, *Diplomatia mechetey v Tsentralnoy Azii: geopolitika, nachinaiushchiasia s mikhraba*, Central Asian Analytical Network, available at [<http://www.caa-network.org/archives/21135>], 29 June, 2021.

³⁹ See: "V Shymkente torzhestvenno otkryta samaia bolshaya v IuKO mechet," otyrar.kz, available at [<http://otyrar.kz/2013/05/v-shymkente-torzhestvenno-otkryta-samaia-bolshaya-v-yuko-mechet/>], 29 June, 2021.

⁴⁰ See: N.L. Seitachmetova, M.K. Bektenova, op. cit., pp. 54-66; M. Zhuzey, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Beketova, Sh. Zhandosova, op. cit.

At the same time, Sabitov pointed out the prerequisites of a new trend in Kazakhstan: foreign states involved in the process of construction of Islamic complexes. It seems, however, that the Nur-Mubarak University can be hardly defined as a cultic facility, since the university and not the mosque is at the core. We think that the very narrow interpretation of the actors of the fourth group limits researchers to the Arab countries and makes it impossible to include certain other actors that differ from the usual Arab countries and local communities.

In Kazakhstan, for example, certain states commonly uninvolved in “mosque diplomacy” contributed to mosque construction. In 2011, the Zharimbet ata mosque with a capacity of 400 was opened at the entrance to Baikonur with Russia’s involvement. The construction controlled by the head of Baikonur was realized by the Vozrozhdenie Charity, which accumulated donations from Roskosmos, local enterprises and regular people. The administration of the Kyzylorda Region in the territory of which the city is situated also contributed to the common effort.⁴¹ Uzbekistan funded the construction of a cathedral mosque with a capacity of 3,000 in the city of Turkestan in Kazakhstan, which began in 2019 with active involvement of Uzbek architects. The complex will include a building for conducting religious rites, a congress hall, madrassah, library, canteen, sport facilities, parking spare and a fountain.⁴²

The limits of the fourth group should be widened with regard to recent information. It should no longer be limited by Arab (Sabitov’s system) or Islamic countries (according to those who analyze the international aspects of “mosque diplomacy”), but include all countries which order, independently or in cooperation with other actors, new mosques outside of their borders and extend considerable financial assistance.

We offer the following typology of the main actors, which is free from the contradictions of the original typology and which takes into account the above specifications:

1. “Mosque diplomacy” projects;
2. State-commissioned projects;

3. Projects commissioned by the affluent and the political elite;
4. Projects commissioned by ethnic diasporas;
5. Projects commissioned by countryside communities.

Today, the above-mentioned groups are the main actors in mosque construction in Kazakhstan; they realize different scenarios of their involvement and help consolidate the status of mosques as important public facilities.

Conclusion

We have analyzed certain specifics of institutionalization and consolidation of Hanafi Islam in Kazakhstan, demonstrated that the number of mosques increased during the period of independence and explained the situation in which the number of mosques decreased and became optimized in 2012 by the state policy of re-registering religious associations. It allowed the DUMK to consolidate the power vertical, set up a network of associated mosques and, in 2018, adopt the construction rules

⁴¹ See: “Na Baikonure otkrylas novaia mechet,” Official site of the administration of Baikonur, available at [<http://www.baikonuradm.ru/index.php?mod=all/news&ID=1595>], 29 June, 2021.

⁴² See: “Kazakhstan i Uzbekistan postroiut unikalnuiu mechet v Turkestane,” News website platform Sputnik, available at [<http://ru.sputnik.kz/regions/20191206/12228123/mechet-turkestan-uzbekistan.html>], 29 June, 2021.

binding for all newly built mosques. Their capacities should correspond to the numerical strengths of local communities; their architecture should blend the religious and national styles; their territories should be well organized and comfortable; canteens, houses for the imams and other facilities are mandatory. The new rules conceptualized the requirements of construction and functioning of mosques as important public facilities.

We have analyzed the typology of cultic facilities in Kazakhstan and offered a new classification of the actors of mosque production: foreign states; the state itself; members of big business communities and the establishment, national diasporas, countryside communities and even private persons with an average income. This typology is open for specifications and additions if new actors of mosque construction appear in Kazakhstan.
