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Retelling Mecca: Shifting Narratives of Sacred Spaces in Volga-Ural Muslim Hajj Accounts, 1699–1945

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Abstract: This article examines how Volga-Ural Muslims narrated their encounters with the sacred spaces visited during the hajj. It examines nine accounts hajj composed from the 1690s to the 1940s, to consider how changes in international politics, Russia’s domestic politics, and the culture of Islamic learning within the Volga-Ural Muslim community led to writers to revise narratives of why the sacred spaces of Mecca were sacred, how best to experience the power of these sacred spaces, and how these sacred spaces fit into the local culture of Volga-Ural Islam under Russian and Soviet rule.

Keywords: Islam; Russia; Soviet; Volga-Ural; Tatar; hajj; sacred spaces; Mecca



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1. Introduction

Ḥabībullah al-Ūriwī, a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh of Kazan province in central Russia, began his list of instructions to his disciples as follows:

“Five things are the basis of the [Islamic] faith: First, speaking the profession of the faith (*shahada*); second, performing prayer five times a day; third, giving alms (*zakat*) if one has sufficient wealth; fourth, holding the Ramadan-month fast; fifth, if one’s strength is sufficient, to circumambulate the noble Kaaba” (Ḥabībullah al-Ūriwī 1800s).

In the early nineteenth century, when Ḥabībullah gave these instructions, the fifth requirement—circumambulating the Kaaba—would have entailed making the long journey from the Volga Basin to the Arabian Peninsula, a trip that would have been not only beyond the strength of most of the shaykh’s followers, but beyond their economic means. For much of the history of Islam in Russia’s Volga-Ural region, few of the region’s Muslims undertook the hajj and not all those who set out succeeded in reaching Mecca and returning home. In the 1880s, hajjis (those pilgrims who completed the hajj) were uncommon enough in the Volga-Ural region that to say that individuals were treated as hajjis was to say that they were treated with extraordinary dignity and respect. When describing the great honor with which the disciples and supplicants returning from visits to the well-regarded Shaykh Ḥabībullah were received by other Muslims in the region, the late nineteenth-century historian Ḥusayn Amīrkhānov wrote that they were treated “better than a person returning from the hajj” (Amīrkhānov 1883).

Starting in the late seventeenth century, Volga-Ural Muslims (most often male Islamic scholars) recounted their hajj experiences in travel accounts, autobiographies, and letters. Recorded in multiple manuscript copies and mass-printed starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, these hajj accounts served multiple purposes. They preserved a record of a pilgrim’s successful journey to the Muslim holy places and celebrated the pilgrim’s spiritual accomplishment. They provided travel information to future pilgrims and offered the vicarious experience of hajj to those of the faithful who would never be able to visit Mecca. They could provide their authors with a platform for expressing views on religion, culture, and politics. Finally, they reminded their readers of the spiritual significance of the central Muslim holy sites and periodically re-interpreted the narratives surrounding these sites so that they remained resonant and relevant for believers as sacred geography,

global and domestic politics, and approaches to Islamic education and worship changed. From the seventeenth century to the Soviet era, the holy sites of Mecca continued to be regarded by Volga-Ural Muslims as the most sacred spaces of Islam. However, ideas about who could experience these sacred spaces, how these spaces were to be experienced, and what their relationship was to other sacred and profane spaces shifted continuously from the 1690s to the 1940s.

The history of the hajj in the early modern and modern eras has been subject to multiple courses of scholarly inquiry. Studies of the hajj in the early modern period have provided insights into how Islamic states facilitated travel across their territories, and the political and social issues that influenced this process (Faroghi 1994; Welsford 2012). Hajj travel in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has received especial attention as an example of European colonial governments' efforts to regulate a transnational non-European institution through visa and passport regimes, quarantines, and surveillance (Roff 1982; Brower 1996; Low 2008; Oishi 2003; Naganawa 2012; Kane 2015; Peters 1994; Tagliacozzo 2013). As a counterpoint to these European-focused studies, the study of hajj accounts and the cities along hajj routes has also revealed the history and development of transnational Muslim networks and institutions, such as Sufi brotherhoods, scholarly diasporas, and pilgrim support services (Algar 2012; Naganawa 2012; Papas 2012). In recent years, historians have examined the relationship between the hajj and pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) to lesser and/or local Muslim holy sites that might have been visited on the way to Mecca or in place of Mecca (Zarcone 2012; Sawada 2012; Frank 2012). Finally, hajj accounts presented alone or as part of larger historical, biographical, or autobiographical works offer fertile ground for exploring the emergence of the modern individual in Muslim literatures and tracing discourses on colonialism, nation, modernity, and religious reform (Matheson and Milner 1984; Metcalf 1990; Ziyodov 2012; Tosheva 2012; Papas 2012; Naganawa 2012; McDonnell 1990; Petersen 2014).

2. Results

Eric Tagliacozzo, in his study of the hajj in Southeast Asia, has proposed envisioning the hajj as "an evolving institution driven forward by the power of people to continually construct narratives of their own behavior" (Tagliacozzo 2013). Tagliacozzo extrapolates this interpretation from Anthony Giddens' writings on modernity, but it also harmonizes with scholarship that positions sacred spaces as constructed and maintained through appropriation, ritual performance, and narration (Chidester and Linenthal 1995). This concept of maintaining and renewing the sacredness of a space through ritual performance while simultaneously creating new narratives of those rituals that reflect the changing sensibilities and lived realities of the believers is central to the evolution of the Volga-Ural Muslim hajj narratives. The hajj itself is a highly ritualized, formulaic process. Pilgrims might vary their routes and choose which other sacred sites they would visit on their way to Mecca. Once in the Hijaz, they might choose which lesser sacred sites they would visit. However, the core rituals of the hajj (circumambulating the Kaaba, running between Safa and Marwa, drinking from the Zamzam spring, casting stones at Mina, and traveling to Mount Arafat) are fixed. If a specific Muslim community wishes to articulate what the hajj and its sacred spaces mean to them, they cannot do so through modification of the central rituals. However, they can alter the significance of the required hajj rituals through the generation of new narratives. For example, through their choice pilgrimage routes and visits to other sites during hajj, they can construct broader sacred and profane geographies within which to situate Mecca and its prescribed rituals. Additionally, by alluding to various religious and literary texts during the hajj and by describing and prescribing appropriate behavior at the hajj's sacred sites, they can construct an ideal vision of the believer's internal world (their morality, strength of belief, emotionality, and consciousness of the significance of the sacred space) as they perform the required rituals. In the Volga-Ural Muslim case, these two mutable narratives create the meaning behind the established sacred spaces and immutable rituals of the hajj.

That said, Volga-Ural Muslim hajj writers should not be viewed as cynically assembling narratives of the sacred. Scholars continue to wrestle with the question of whence the power of sacred sites originates (Kong 2001). An individual's belief in the sacredness of a given space will dictate their perception of that space and their behavior within it (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009). The Volga-Ural Muslim hajj accounts of the 1870s–1940s provide numerous examples of pilgrims emotionally overwhelmed by the power of Mecca's sacred sites. By situating these accounts within the political and cultural conditions at various moments in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it becomes possible to consider how narratives of local Muslim identity, imperial subjecthood, colonization, and religious repression can combine with the belief in the sacredness of a space to color or amplify an individual's experience of it, and how these factors can come together in ways the individual did not necessarily intend. Even as Volga-Ural Muslim pilgrims actively reimagined what made Mecca sacred, their imagining of and reaction to the sacred were dictated in part by political and cultural factors beyond their control. These factors placed limits on kinds of stories they could potentially tell at a given historical moment.

Finally, conflict and contestation play a large role in how sacred spaces are designated, maintained, and renegotiated. The sacredness of sacred spaces is often established through contrast with the profane. Studies of modern sacred spaces often explore boundaries and conflicts between sacred spaces and secular ones (Kong 2001; Gilliat-Ray 2005). The sacredness of a space may also be distinguished through conflict between multiple groups that claim the space as sacred or between those who consider it sacred and those who do not (Damrel 2013; Laird 2013). Contestation is central to the evolution of Volga-Ural Muslim narratives of what made the holy sites of Mecca sacred and how one should experience them. These narratives were penned during the expansion of European colonial rule, when the boundary between the lands of Islam and the lands of non-belief was in continual flux. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the European colonial powers had become thoroughly embedded in the hajj. At the same time, from within Volga-Ural Muslims society, the proponents of scripturalism challenged the texts, religious education, legal methodologies, and syncretic practices of the previous centuries. Finally, the Soviet state established a dichotomy between state atheism and religion. All these conflicts influenced how the authors of hajj accounts positioned Muslim sacred spaces on the world stage, how they explained their significance, and how they personally experienced these sacred sites.

3. Discussion

The discussion section of this paper will be divided into six sections. The first will use the oldest known hajj account from early modern Volga-Ural region to examine the pilgrimage as an authority-building exercise for elite scholars. The second section will turn to two possibly fictional hajj accounts from the late eighteenth century to explore how the sacred spaces of the Hijaz and the Levant were woven into a regional Islamic spiritual geography and textual world. The third section will compare three hajj accounts written by scholars traveling in the 1870s–1880s to consider how European colonialism impacted that ways that Volga-Ural Muslims narrated and responded to the sacred spaces along the Odessa-Mecca hajj route. The fourth section will turn to an account written by a Muslim officer in service to the Russian empire to assess how the contestations generated by colonialism affected one Muslim's perception of the power of Mecca's sacred spaces. The fifth section will examine how an early twentieth-century hajj account relocates the Hijaz from a regional Volga-Ural Muslim spiritual geography to global Muslim one by using the Quran and hadiths to create a narrative of Mecca and Madina's holy sites. The sixth section contextualizes the hajj letter of Soviet mufti Gabdrakhman Rasulev to his friends in relation to Stalin's changing policy on religion in the USSR.

3.1. Pursuing Baraka across an Early Modern Persianate Sacred Landscape (1690s)

Murtaḍa bin Qutlīgish al-Sīmetī (d. after 1724), a prominent Islamic scholar and teacher who lived and worked in Simet village, about 85 km northeast of the city of Kazan,

provides one of the earliest surviving firsthand accounts of a Muslim subject of imperial Russia undertaking hajj (Fäkhreddin 2006). Murtaḍa's hajj account, written in 1699, is very short; it consists primarily of a list of the cities, states, and regions through which he passed, and the holy sites he visited on his journey. That journey took him south through Bukhara and Khurasan to Iran and Iraq, then Syria and, finally to Mecca and Madina. On his way back to Kazan, he took a more westerly route, traveling through Egypt, across the Mediterranean Sea to Anatolia, across the Black Sea to Crimea and then back to Kazan (Mortaza bine Kotlgish as-Simeti 2015).

Murtaḍa's account offers little in the way of introspection or emotional reaction on the part of its author. However, what it does provide is a glimpse of a broader early modern Muslim sacred geography of which the Hijaz was only one part. Murtaḍa's entry into this sacred geography begins with his arrival in the Khanate of Khiva, where he visits the graves of the Sufi shaykh Najmaddīn Kubra (1145–1221) (DeWeese 1988), the medieval poet Pahlavān Maḥmūd (1247–1326), and Sufi Shaykh Mukhtār Walī/Mukhtār Ātā (d. 1287) (Mortaza bine Kotlgish as-Simeti 2015). In Bukhara, he visits the tomb of the prophet Job (Ayūb), the Sufi shaykh Bahā'addīn Naqshbandī, and numerous others (Mortaza bine Kotlgish as-Simeti 2015). Murtaḍa continues this pattern of visiting graves, tombs, and mausoleums as he proceeds through the Persianate world. Most of the sites he chooses to visit were associated with Sufi poets and scholars. As he travels through Iraq and Syria, lands closer to the Hijaz, he visits more tombs associated with the prophets (such as Daniel (Dānyāl) and Jonah (Yūnus)), and figures from the early days of Islam such as the military commander Khālīd bin al-Walīd, the first muezzin, Bilāl, and the founder of the Umayyad caliphal dynasty, Mu'āwiya bin Abī Sufyān (Mortaza bine Kotlgish as-Simeti 2015). Murtaḍa's tour of graves and tombs reaches its culmination in Madina, where he visits the tombs of the prophet Muhammad, the caliphs Abūbakr and 'Umar, the prophet's wife, 'Ā'isha, and the prophet's daughter, Fāṭima (Mortaza bine Kotlgish as-Simeti 2015).

In his description of his pilgrimage, Murtaḍa weaves together holy men and women from different eras of Islamic history. His journey from Kazan to Mecca is, in essence, a journey into Islam's past. As he draws closer to Mecca, he also steps further into the past through his encounters with figures from ever earlier episodes in the history of Islam. At the same time, his long journey toward Mecca is a journey into ever more sacred spaces. His arrival in Khiva and Bukhara brings him into the heartland of the medieval Turko-Persianate Muslim world and the spaces in which much of the Islamic literary, legal, and spiritual culture prevalent in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Volga-Ural region took shape. In Iraq and Syria, he crosses the territory on which the first caliphate emerged. Finally, in Madina and Mecca, he walks in the footsteps of Islam's founders. In this way, the Sufi shaykhs, poets, and jurists of later eras are positioned as part of an intellectual and spiritual tradition that can be traced directly to Mecca and Madina.

Murtaḍa appears more interested in recording the sacred sites he visited than in detailing what he did at any of them. He records that he reached Mecca, but does not relate what he did while he was there. Unlike Madina, for which he includes a long list of tombs he visited, Mecca appears only on the list of cities through which he passed. The effect of this is that Madina, Mosul, and Damascus receive more attention in his narrative and leave a much stronger impression as important Islamic sacred spaces than Mecca does.

Murtaḍa's reticence about what he did or felt when visiting various sites also reveals the role of the hajj for Volga-Ural Muslims in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The main purpose of Murtaḍa's account seems to be to list all the sacred sites he had managed to visit. Most of these sites are associated with prophets and Sufi saints, people considered to possess spiritual power (*baraka*). Murtaḍa's encounters with these sites put him into contact with this power and perhaps even allow him to accumulate some of it himself (Meri 1999). The specific rituals he undertook at any given site were assumed to be known to his audience or were considered less important than the simple fact that he reached the sites, as his presence would have been adequate to acquire spiritual benefits. His visitation to so many sites would have been considered an accomplishment beyond

what most Muslims could hope to achieve, and it would have set him apart as a teacher and spiritual guide upon his return home. For himself and his students, his hajj account served as a credential of his qualifications to be a madrasa teacher and a Sufi shaykh.

3.2. *Experiencing the Sacred from Home: (1780s–1840s)*

The next two oldest known Tatar-language hajj accounts come from the 1780s. Both are far more detailed than Murtaḍa's 1699 text and differ considerably from it in style and focus. The first of these eighteenth-century accounts is attributed to Ismā'īl Bikmuḥammadov (Fākhreddin 2006). By his own account, Ismā'īl and his four companions initially set out in 1751 from Seitov Settlement, a commercial community located near the South Urals town of Orenburg, on a trading expedition to Bukhara (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015). After spending the winter in Bukhara, Ismā'īl claims that he received an order from the Russian empress (or, more accurately, the imperial administration in Orenburg) to travel to India as an emissary of the Russian state (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015). Ismā'īl and his companions then traveled through what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan, eventually reaching Bandar Abbas on Gulf of Oman, before traveling to Basra and then, by ship, to Surat (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015). Over the next years, they traveled east across India to Kolkata and then back west through Delhi to Surat, whence they traveled by ship to Jeddah, and from Jeddah to Mecca (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015).

In 1783, the same year that Ismā'īl finally returned to Russia, another Volga-Ural Muslim set out on hajj. Muḥammad Amīn bin 'Umar was an Islamic scholar and jurist from the village of Yanga Kishet, 80 km north of Kazan (Mōkhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). Muḥammad Amīn's journey took him first to Kazan and then south along the Volga River to Astrakhan and from there to the city of Kizlar in Dagestan, through the North Caucasus, and across the Black Sea to Istanbul (Mōkhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). He then crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Alexandria. After a visit to Cairo, he traveled to Mecca (Mōkhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015).

According to their hajj accounts Ismā'īl and Muḥammad Amīn began their journeys with different intentions and came to Mecca by different routes. Whereas Muḥammad Amīn set out with the sole goal of performing hajj, Ismā'īl's performance of hajj represents only a small part of his thirty-year-long sojourn. That said, their descriptions of their activities in Mecca, Madina, Jerusalem, and Damascus are not simply similar, but substantially the same, sometimes repeating the same episodes almost word for word. Michael Kemper has compared Ismā'īl's account with other sources, from ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travel writings to Naṣraddīn bin Burhānaddīn al-Rabghūzī's *Tales of the Prophet (Qisās al-Anbiyā')*. He concluded that Ismā'īl's tale is a mishmash of borrowings from other works and a blend of several distinct genres (Kemper 2006). At the same time, Mami Hamamoto has pointed out in the 1760s Russian officials recorded receiving news from abroad of the deaths of two of Ismā'īl's companions and that Ismā'īl himself had not yet returned to Russia. These notations corroborate information recorded in Ismā'īl's travel account (Hamamoto 2012). This agreement between Ismā'īl's account and that of his Russian contacts suggest that he was indeed the author of part of the text or, at least, an informant for whomever wrote that section of it.

The question of the authorship of these pilgrimage descriptions is vexing for historians who wish to locate specific instances of Volga-Ural Muslim travelers to Asia in the eighteenth century. However, it is somewhat less troubling when these texts are used as sources for reconstructing Volga-Ural Muslim perceptions of the Muslim holy places in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nine manuscripts of Ismā'īl's account have been identified, all copied from the 1780s to the 1840s (Alieva 2015). Six copies of Muḥammad Amīn's account have been identified, mostly copied in the 1830s–1840s (Alieva 2015; Akhmetzianov 2011; Akhmetzianov 2013). The existence of multiple copies of these texts from multiple points of origin suggests that they were being copied and read by people beyond the families and friends of the travelers.

Ismā'īl's and Muḥammad Amīn's extensive borrowing from other sources and the repetition of incidents, stories, and, in some cases, entire passages in both of their accounts are perhaps best understood as a formulaic, culturally standardized presentation of Mecca. It was Mecca as Volga-Ural Muslims perceived it through the didactic literature, mystical poetry, and apocrypha popular in their region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Kemper has argued, Ismā'īl's account is simultaneously an adventure story and a travel guide, that is, it is both descriptive and prescriptive. It relates its author's experience of pilgrimage to the Hijaz and the Levant while delivering basic information about important sites, the significance of these sites, and the rituals to be performed in connection with each of them (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). This concern with listing and contextualizing the places and rituals of the hajj makes these two accounts contrast with Murtaḍa's earlier account, which is little more than a list of tombs and shrines.

In the accounts attributed to Ismā'īl and Muḥammad Amīn, the cities of Mecca, Madina, and Jerusalem emerge as places with complex, tactile landscapes. The Kaaba and the layout of the Great Mosque are described to the reader (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). So, too, are the hajj rituals, including: the casting of stones at Mina, the circumambulation of the Kaaba, drinking from the Zamzam spring, and the run between the hills of Safa and Marwa (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). At the same time, as the narrator recounts his travels through the Hijaz and the Levant, the reader is continually reminded of Islam's past. In these spaces, the stories that Volga-Ural Muslims knew well from commonly read works such as the *Tales of the Prophets* and the *Book of Joseph (Qiṣṣa-i Yūsuf)* came to life (Kefeli 2011). The pilgrim could visit the house of Fātima, daughter of Muhammad, in which one could reportedly see the stone that the prophet's daughter used to grind grain and the cradle in which Muhammad's grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, slept (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). The pilgrim could also visit Jebel Nur, where Muhammad was said to have received his first revelation (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). Each site visited in the Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn accounts evoke yet another story of the prophets, the beginnings of Islam, or the coming of Judgment Day.

The Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn pilgrimage accounts borrow from and reinforce the matrix of writings on pilgrimage, early Islamic history, and Islamic morality popular in the 1750s–1880s. Their sources of inspiration include: (1) the instructions for hajj performance given in the Arabic-language Hanafi legal digests (*Mukhtaṣar al-Wiqāya*, *Mukhtaṣar al-Qudūrī*, *Aīn al-ʿIlm*) used in the madrasas and in the Turki vernacular texts used to teach the basics of Islam to children and non-scholars; (2) the stories of the Islamic prophets as depicted in Turkic-language narrative literary works such as Rabghūzī's *Tales of the Prophets*, Qūl 'Alī's *Book of Joseph*, and Çelebi's *Muḥammadiyya*; and (3) Turkic-language apocalyptic poetry, such as *Badavām* and *The Book of the End Times (Akhurzamān kitābi)*. The Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn hajj accounts suggest how Volga-Ural Muslim readers living in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries might have imagined a pilgrimage based on the knowledge they had gleaned from the literary and educational texts available to them. The accounts bridge ritual and history; in fulfilling the rituals of hajj and tomb visitation, the accounts' narrators spatially position past events familiar to the readers within the landscapes of the Middle East. They also place the narrators' pilgrimage on an Islamic timeline that runs from the Creation (evoked through visits to the tombs of Adam and Eve) to the Day of Judgement (called to mind by the sight of the ihram-clad pilgrims gathered under the scorching sun at Mount Arafat) (Bikmōkhämmädov 2015; Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). Finally, the narrative positions the Muslim holy places (Mecca, Madina, Jerusalem, Damascus) within a world divided between Muslim and non-Muslim spaces. As he sets out on his pilgrimage, Muḥammad Amīn tells his readers that he is leaving the Abode of Unbelief (Dār al-Kuffār) for the Abode of Islam (Dār al-Islām) (Mökhämmäd Ämin bine Gomar 2015). Likewise, while in South Asia, Ismā'īl repeatedly signals to his readers when he has ventured into non-Muslim areas by designating certain cities and regions through which he passes as "Multani" (*muntali*)

(Bikmökhammädov 2015). These temporal and geographic frameworks, though certainly not unique to the Volga-Ural Muslim community, occur repeatedly in popular Muslim literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and reflect the sensibilities of that literature.

While in Murtaḍa's 1699 hajj account, the sacred spaces of Islam were remote and somewhat mysterious sites which a small number of determined and blessed pilgrims might visit to acquire piety and scholarly authority, in the Ismā'īl's and Muḥammad Amīn's eighteenth-century pilgrimage accounts, Mecca, Madina, Jerusalem, and Damascus were places that few Volga-Ural Muslim readers could reach, but all or most were already familiar with through the didactic and literary texts to which they were exposed in the maktab and the madrasa, at Sufi gatherings, and through communal storytelling. Most readers of the Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn hajj narratives would never go to Mecca. However, reading the semi-mythologized hajj accounts attributed to these local historical figures forged a link between the major holy sites of Islam and the local Islamic milieu of the Volga Basin. The texts also gave readers opportunities to recall and reflect on the stories of piety, faith, and divine providence that their community had already identified as meaningful. In this sense, the Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn narratives played a role similar to that of the Bulghar histories in integrating the local sacred sites and hagiographies and with places, people, and stories identified as sacred by all Muslims (Frank 1998).

3.3. Emotional Journeys through Colonialism (1870s–1880s)

The process of making hajj changed radically during the nineteenth century. The expansion of the British, French, Dutch, and Russian colonial empires brought all Muslim lands save the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Afghanistan under European rule. These last three Muslim states also experienced varying degrees of political pressure and interference from the colonial powers. This political reordering made millions of Muslims the subjects of one or another of the European empires and gave the empires a vested interest in facilitating and controlling the flow of pilgrims to and from the Hijaz. Imperial governments increasingly intervened to ensure the wellbeing of their Muslim subjects, who faced potential risks such as illness, impoverishment, misdirection, and robbery during their pilgrimage journeys (Kane 2015). Imperial governments' monitoring of their subjects' pilgrimages was also viewed as beneficial to the health and civil order of the empires, as it was seen to prevent the movement of infectious diseases, criminal elements, and harmful ideas, all of which might pose threats to state security (Roff 1982; Brower 1996; Low 2008). For many Muslim pilgrims traveling in the second half of the nineteenth century, European bureaucracy and security regimes became unavoidable parts of the hajj journey.

At the same time, improvements in transportation technology, most notably the steamship and the railroad, vastly reduced the duration of the pilgrimage journey. In the early nineteenth century, the journey from Russia to Mecca and back could be expected to take months. The arduous nature of the journey meant that pilgrims often combined other goals and activities into the hajj trip, stopping for days, weeks, or, in some cases, years to socialize with friends and colleagues, visit other pilgrimage sites, and study under well-known teachers and Sufi masters. By the 1870s, the duration of the hajj from Russian to Mecca was reduced to weeks (unless one met with especial misfortune or decided to take a longer trip). This shorter duration and the growth of a network of bureaucratic institutions and private businesses focused on pilgrims' needs made the hajj a feasible undertaking for Muslims of modest means who lacked the scholarly and commercial contacts that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pilgrims had relied on. The numbers of Russian Muslims who undertook the hajj rose dramatically in the late nineteenth century. In 1891, just over 2000 Muslims set out on pilgrimage. By the early twentieth century, the number of Russian Muslims going on the hajj rose to over 11,000 per year (Nurimanov 2009).

This new hajj environment inspired new ways of narrating sacred spaces in Volga-Ural Muslim hajj accounts. The poet 'Alī Chūqurī, the historian-theologian Shihābaddīn

al-Marjānī, and the political activist ‘Abdarrashīd Ibrāhīmov all made the hajj in the 1870–1880s. In the accounts of their pilgrimages, one can see the individualization of the sacred. Unlike the Ismā‘īl/Muḥammad Amīn hajj accounts, these late nineteenth-century hajj narratives were not universal or interchangeable. Each author experienced and responded to the sacred space of Mecca in his own way; their experiences belonged only to them. At the same time, all the accounts politicized the sacred. Colonial governance permeates all the accounts. Surrounded by a colonized world, the authors invest the Muslim sacred spaces of Mecca with new political and cultural significance.

Muḥammad ‘Alī ‘Abdassalīh-uli Keekev (1826–1889), who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Alī Chūqurī, was an imam in Iske Chūqır village in what is now the Republic of Bashqortstan in Russia. A Sufi master and a prolific writer, he composed poetry and took great interest in creating religious-educational texts. His *Dāstān-i Hājjnāma*, completed in 1872, was written as such a text. He notes in the opening pages of the book that he has recorded his first hajj experience (he would complete hajj three times in his lifetime) at the request of his friends, but that he has also written it for readers who have never undertaken the hajj or other international travel and that he intends to devote space to explaining things that a seasoned traveler would already know (Chokri 2002). So, from the first page, Chūqurī’s book is really two books plaited together, one a highly personal reflection (often rendered in verse) on his experiences and emotions during his first trip to Mecca, and the other a travelers’ guide for the Kazan-Odessa-Istanbul-Mecca hajj route.

Starting from his departure from his home village, Chūqurī emerges as a distinctive personality in his own hajj narrative in a way the narrators of the earlier hajj accounts do not. He is deeply fascinated with technology, taking delight in the speed of trains and the sight of ships’ lights in the harbor at night. Facts like the quantity of fuel needed to run a locomotive engine or the depth and color of the Black Sea are of the utmost interest to him, and he can stand on the deck taking pleasure in the joys of steamship travel while his fellow passengers are stricken by seasickness (Chokri 2002). Even quarantine is not a great burden to him, as it means he can spend more time aboard the ship viewing the sea and the landscape on the nearby shore (Chokri 2002). Chūqurī takes pride in his knowledge and preparedness. His descriptions of the bureaucratic processes for Russian subjects on hajj simultaneously explain these processes to readers and highlight his own extreme competence. He notes the delays that he avoids by having all his papers in order and knowing where the Russian consulates are located (Chokri 2002). By travelling alone, Chūqurī points out, he can choose what to eat and where to explore without being burdened by traveling companions (Chokri 2002).

Chūqurī’s journey toward Mecca is characterized by escalating emotions. He clearly enjoys the Kazan-Moscow-Odessa leg of his journey, but once he comes ashore in Istanbul, his excitement reaches new heights. “Rich” and “glorious” Istanbul is full of mosques and alight with countless candles and lamps, “as if all the stars in the sky had been gathered” (Chokri 2002). Chūqurī’s praise for the beauty of the architecture, the fountains, and the carpets and the sweetness of the air all present Istanbul as an almost heavenly space (Chokri 2002). The elated Chūqurī wanders through this cityscape, visiting tombs and mosques and sitting in at the lessons of local teachers and Sufi masters (Chokri 2002).

Chūqurī’s excitement increases when he reaches Jeddah. Surrounded by thousands of people dressed in ihram (the seamless white clothes prescribed for the hajj) and being himself dressed in ihram, the reality begins to set in that he is on hajj and nearing his destination. On the road from Jeddah to Mecca, he watches his fellow pilgrims walking, chanting, and singing. Initially, he rides in a camel palanquin, but he soon decides to walk, and he takes great pleasure in the sight of the pilgrims in their fluttering white clothes (Chokri 2002). By the time he enters Mecca, he has reached a state of ecstasy. As he walks into the Great Mosque, he can no longer contain his emotions and bursts into tears. With his fellow pilgrims, he runs to the Kaaba and presses his face to the cloth that covers it (Chokri 2002).

The *Journey of Marjānī* (*Riḥlat al-Marjānī*), edited and annotated by Riḍa ‘addīn bin Fakhraddīn and published in 1897, presents the historian-theologian Shihābaddīn al-Marjānī’s (1818–1889) pilgrimage to Mecca in 1880. Like Chūqurī’s *Dāstān-i Hājgnāma*, the *Journey of Marjānī* is a detailed and highly specific first-person account of a hajj experience. It also differs from Chūqurī’s *Dāstān* in terms of its purpose and genre. The *Journey of Marjānī* does not seem to have been intended for use as a guidebook. The imperial administrative structures so clearly outlined in *Dāstān* are relegated to the background in *Journey* and are invisible most of the time. *Journey* does not provide much in the way of hints or advice for would-be pilgrims, and as will be seen, it really cannot because Marjānī’s hajj is far removed from the kind of hajj an average Muslim would undertake.

Journey is, first and foremost, a celebration of Marjānī. Much of the narrative describes the places Marjānī visits as he travels from Istanbul to Madina. It also details the people he meets: the scholars and prominent figures with whom he converses, and locals and expatriates at whose residences he stays during his travels, and the people he encounters along the road. There are a few chance meetings, but most of the people with whom Marjānī socializes are already familiar to him or know him by reputation. In Istanbul, for example, he meets with the Ottoman foreign minister and with Sharif Said ‘Awn (identified in the text as a brother of the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin ‘Ali). Marjānī engages with them in a lengthy discussion about history and science, and eventually talks about his book, *Nāzūrat al-Ḥaqq* (Riḍa ‘addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). The accounts of these meetings give readers the impression that Marjānī is a scholar of international reputation. When asked by his Ottoman audience why he does not write his legal and theological works in Turkish, he answers that their Turkish-speaking students know Arabic and if one writes one’s works in Arabic, (Muslim) people in other lands can read them (Riḍa ‘addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). This response suggests the existence of audiences for Marjānī’s works beyond his native Volga-Ural region and, indeed, beyond the Turkic-speaking world.

Amid all these meetings and conversations, Marjānī still finds wonder in Mecca. He describes the lighting of the lamps around the Kaaba in the evening and how they burn through the night and are put out after the morning prayer (Riḍa ‘addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). This image of a sacred space lit through the night echoes Chūqurī’s description of Istanbul’s candles and lamps. However, for Marjānī, Mecca, like the other places he visits, seems to be most significant for the people he meets and to whom he gifts his books (Riḍa ‘addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897).

The hajj makes up only one of many episodes in Abdarrashīd Ibrāhīmov’s *My Autobiography* (*Tarjama-i Hālem*). First published in 1912, *My Autobiography* relates the events of Ibrāhīmov’s life from his youth until his return to Russia in 1885. So, as with *Dāstān* and *Journey*, *My Autobiography* represents yet another genre in which late nineteenth-century Volga-Ural Muslim writers might describe their pilgrimage journeys.

If Chūqurī’s *Dāstān* is a guidebook for pilgrimage, *My Autobiography* might be summarized as how not to go on hajj. Ibrāhīmov’s impetus for going on a pilgrimage is not especially religious; according to his own telling, while teaching in the Kazakh steppe, he becomes involved in trying to help a woman run away from an unwanted marriage. His plans are discovered by the leader of the local community. Ibrāhīmov appeals to this man and asks for money to travel to Madina to study (Ibrahimov 2001). Not knowing how much travel costs, he requests what he thinks is a sizeable sum: 100 rubles (Ibrahimov 2001). He sets out from Semipalatinsk in summer 1879 with 150 rubles and a horse (Ibrahimov 2001). Despite picking up work along the way, selling his horse, and making part of the journey on foot, he has only 30 rubles left by the time he reaches Odessa (Ibrahimov 2001). Numerous pilgrims from Semipalatinsk gather at the house of Ibrāhīm Adkaev, who, for a fee of 300 rubles, would get pilgrims their travel papers (Ibrahimov 2001). Unable to afford this fee, Ibrāhīmov and his traveling companions give Adkaev as much money as they can and most of their clothes but receive no assistance from him in return (Ibrahimov 2001). In a last effort to reach Mecca, Ibrāhīmov and one of his companions come to an agreement with a crew member of an Italian freighter, who lets them make the first twenty-four hours

of the voyage across the Black Sea to Istanbul hidden in a marble bathtub (Ibrahimov 2001). In Istanbul, Ibrāhīmov and his companion are fortunate enough to find an expatriate from Russia who is willing to provide them with food and shelter (Ibrahimov 2001). After briefly considering enrollment in one of Istanbul's madrasas, Ibrāhīmov instead volunteers to work as a personal attendant to a pilgrim from Irkutsk in return for food and passage to Jeddah (Ibrahimov 2001).

Ibrāhīmov responds to Istanbul the same way that he might to a Russian city with a sizeable Muslim community. There are streets, streetcars, mosques, madrasas, and khanaqahs (Ibrahimov 2001). Moreover, the comportment of Istanbul's inhabitants very much resembles that of Muslims in other places that Ibrāhīmov has visited or knows of. During one visit, a host offers Ibrāhīmov and his companion tea laced with opium, a drink that Ibrāhīmov immediately identifies with the Muslim scholarly culture of Bukhara (Ibrahimov 2001). As Ibrāhīmov goes to beg for financial assistance at the residences of various prominent Russian Muslims on their way to Mecca, he is rebuffed again and again (Ibrahimov 2001). Ibrāhīmov's vision of Istanbul is far removed from Chūqurī's heavenly city of a million candles and Marjānī's city of scholars; it is by no means a sacred space.

By contrast, the trip to Jeddah is a turning point in Ibrāhīmov's pilgrimage and, as he would have readers believe, in his larger spiritual and intellectual development: "In the midst of this, on the road my ignorance obscured my sight. I had envisioned nothing beyond the [Mediterranean] sea. I had even tried not to think about what the ihram was" (Ibrahimov 2001). As Ibrāhīmov travels to Jeddah, his horizons suddenly broaden. Ibrāhīmov describes the guides and pilgrims that crowd along the road from Jeddah to Mecca. He takes time to describe his run between Safa and Marwa and how he is moved to tears as he gets his hair cut afterwards (although looking down and seeing all the hair piled on the ground around his feet spoils his mood a little) (Ibrahimov 2001). He expresses amazement at the number of people praying in Mecca's mosques: "At prayer time, there were up to one hundred thousand people in the mosque. There was no counting the people on the street who came in and out. In all the world, we do not have a way to make a count of so many" (Ibrahimov 2001).

However, Ibrāhīmov is not free to explore the sacred spaces of Mecca. As the servant of a wealthy pilgrim, Ibrāhīmov's time is taken up with looking after his master (Ibrahimov 2001). When Ibrāhīmov's employer finally decides to travel to Mount Arafat, Ibrāhīmov is deeply moved by the desert landscape, by the vast crowd of pilgrims arriving to see the mountain, and by the imam of the mountain, who arrives on a white camel to read the khutba. However, at the same time, he is annoyed by his wealthy co-ethnics, who spend the entire day sitting around a samovar in the shade of a tent drinking tea and watching the supplicants that come to them to ask for alms. This scene of differing consciousnesses—Ibrāhīmov's awe of the sacred space of Mount Arafat versus his wealthy employers' apparent indifference to it—becomes a metaphor for the spiritual condition of the Russia's Muslims as a people: "Our Tatars still sat in their tents drinking tea. It was as if they were drinking all the tea they had missed out on drinking in the course of their lives. As evening drew near, they drank tea. The tents were collected in general, and each person gathered his own belongings and tea" (Ibrahimov 2001). The wealthy Tatar pilgrims are surrounded by the wonders of the most sacred spaces of Islam, but they are not really open to those wonders or interested in experiencing them. Their wealth and privilege create a barrier between them and Mount Arafat and blind them to the miraculous, otherworldly qualities of their location. By contrast, the impoverished Ibrāhīmov, unincumbered by wealth and privilege, can appreciate the sacred power of Mecca and its environs.

Thus, in Ibrāhīmov's account, the sacred is again presented as something encountered and processed by individuals on their own terms. As for Chūqurī and Marjānī, for Ibrāhīmov, the sacredness of a place is rooted not only in its connection to the holy people and miracles of the past, but in its power to evoke profound emotions in living people. For Ibrahimov, the relationship between sacred spaces and the people who visit them is interactive. A person will not automatically experience a sense of awe by standing

in Mecca. Believers must be in the proper mindset when they approach Islam's sacred spaces if they are to feel the power of those spaces. In the face of cynicism, ignorance, and self-absorption, Mount Arafat becomes just one more pile of rocks beside which to pitch a tent and drink tea.

In addition to their focus on individual experiences of the sacred, Chūqurī's, Marjānī's, and Ibrāhīmov's narrations of sacred spaces are shaped by European control of much of the Muslim world. In a world in which Muslim lands and Muslim pilgrimage routes were increasingly under the authority of the various European imperial powers, still-independent Muslim spaces such as Istanbul and Mecca acquired new significance. The fact that these spaces remained beyond direct European occupation enhanced their spiritual power. For Chūqurī, the trip from Odessa to Istanbul is a journey into the lands of Islam (Chokri 2002). The position of Islam as the politically dominant religion in Istanbul sets the city apart from the Muslim villages and urban quarters of Russia. Indeed, Chūqurī notes all the infidel territory he must cross on the train ride from Kazan to Odessa by commenting on the absence of Muslims villages along the route (Chokri 2002).

That said, Chūqurī's attitude toward European colonialism is ambivalent. While colonialism does not enhance the holiness of a place, Chūqurī does concede that it makes travel more efficient, as he implies when he compares the Arab bureaucrats unfavorably to their Russian counterparts (Chokri 2002). Ibrāhīmov's account also expresses a degree of ambivalence toward the European presence on the hajj routes. On the one hand, the Russian passport regime leads him to resort to extreme and illegal measures to reach Istanbul. On the other hand, Ibrāhīmov notes the European ownership of the shipping services that make his journey possible (Ibrahimov 2001). As Chūqurī is critical of the Arabs' administrative techniques, so too, is Ibrāhīmov critical of some Turkish and Tatar Muslims' selfish behavior, idleness, and general lack of regard for their co-religionists (Ibrahimov 2001). A similar ambivalence can also be detected in Marjānī's account. Marjānī's confrontation with the European colonial presence consists of ignoring it and emphasizing instead Muslim forms of political and cultural authority, such as the *maḥmal* procession leaving Cairo (Riḍa'addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). However, he freely acknowledges the gap between the European and Islamic sciences in one of his discussions in Istanbul (Riḍa'addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897).

Chūqurī, Marjānī, and Ibrāhīmov are all acutely aware of European political power over the Abode of Islam and of their own dual identities as Muslims and Russian colonial subjects. This awareness contributes to the ambivalence and contradictions in their accounts, such as Chūqurī's rejoicing at entering the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire and then complaining that the lack of potable water in Jeddah would be resolved if the city were under the control of one of the European empires. (Chokri 2002). Colonialism has tainted all three authors' perceptions of the Muslim societies they visit during the hajj. For Ibrāhīmov, bad behavior on the part of individual Muslims takes on global significance. The wealthy Tatars sitting obnoxiously and obliviously under their tent at Mount Arafat become a case study of the conditions that brought about colonial conquest. Their arrogance and self-satisfaction blind them to everything, including the threat of European aggression and the weaknesses and fractures within Muslim societies that make them vulnerable to European domination. This moral rot had spread so deep that not even the holiest places in Islam remained unspoiled by it.

At the same time, in a rapidly shrinking Abode of Islam, the Hijaz remains a place of hope in all three accounts. The sight of thousands of Muslim pilgrims clad in white ihram deeply affects Chūqurī and Ibrāhīmov, who both comment not only on their sheer numbers, but on the phenomenon of believers from across the world coming together peacefully and with purpose (Chokri 2002; Ibrahimov 2001). All three writers describe the vast crowds at prayer in the Great Mosque and the accommodation of all four madhhabs (Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi'i and Maliki) within the mosque (Chokri 2002; Ibrahimov 2001; Riḍa'addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). These anecdotes offer a counternarrative to Ibrahimov's tea-drinking Tatars: European domination is not inevitable or eternal; the Muslims are numerous and

capable of overcoming the prejudices and rivalries that divide them. Marjānī's gifting copies of his book *Nāzūrat al-Haq* to colleagues he meets in Mecca suggests that Muslim societies can embrace new ways of thinking, even if those ideas must be spread slowly through individual exchanges (Riḍa'addīn bin Fakhraddīn 1897). This theme can also be seen in Ibrāhīmov's account of his sojourn in Madina, when he converses with the exiled Ottoman and Egyptian intellectuals living there (Ibrahimov 2001). The sacredness of the Hijaz lies not only in its association with Islam's past, but in its promise of a future free of non-Muslim interference, sectarian rivalries, and social conflicts.

3.4. Competing and Threatening Sacred Spaces (1890s)

Chūqurī, Marjānī, and Ibrāhīmov all traveled through a landscape in which "profane" European colonial control and Muslim sacred spaces bordered on one another, connected, and overlapped. However, for all that these three writers lamented the European presence while simultaneously lauding certain aspects of European culture, technology, and bureaucracy, they identified with the Muslim side of the Muslim-European colonial divide. None of them questioned their status as insiders within the sacred spaces of the Hijaz. While they might have complained about specific behaviors, incidents, or institutions of their co-religionists, they identified with the crowds of ihram-draped pilgrims and drew joy and inspiration from the sight of so many fellow believers gathered in the birthplace of Islam. The hajj account of Shakirzian Ishaev offers an alternative to these insider views and foregrounds the contestation between European colonial expansion and Muslims' sense ownership of the Islam's holy places. Ishaev, a Muslim, an ethnic Tatar, and a Russian imperial officer from Tashkent, was assigned to the Russian consulate in Jeddah in 1896. Shortly after his arrival, he undertook the hajj with his wife and children.

Ishaev's hajj account is written for a Russian-speaking audience, but it shares the emotional immediacy of Chūqurī's and Ibrāhīmov's accounts. The difference between these two accounts and Ishaev's is that the emotions that Ishaev reports experiencing in the Hijaz are almost universally negative: disgust, disappointment, periodic boredom, and persistent fear. The tone of his account is set early in the text, when he describes the fate of the first Russian consul of Jeddah, who was reportedly abandoned by his subordinates on the road from Mecca and left to die of cholera (Ishaev 2009). Ishaev relates this story as part of his description of his visit to the grave of Eve and the cemetery that surrounds it. Compared to the story of the consul's death, Eve's grave and the cemetery receive only a perfunctory physical description (Ishaev 2009). This site is sacred to the Muslim pilgrims visiting Jeddah and, also, to Ishaev, but for two entirely different reasons, while for the pilgrims, the site evokes the mother of humanity, for Ishaev, it calls to mind a martyr in the service of the Russian colonial cause. Ishaev engages in mapping a completely different sacred landscape onto Jeddah, one that connects back to his previous post in Tashkent and, more broadly, to the Russian expansion into Central Asia. Despite being a Muslim, he shows little interest in the sacred geography that the pilgrims have come to experience and traverse. Indeed, he seems alienated from it.

Ishaev tells his readers that he has set out on hajj because such a journey is incumbent upon all Muslims. Yet, for Ishaev, the Hijaz is not spiritual, but filthy and inherently dangerous because it does not conform to his colonial-military expectations of civil order, sanitation, and rationality. He characterizes the entire region as a place constantly afflicted by cholera (Ishaev 2009). He is appalled by the crowds of pilgrims leaving Jeddah for Mecca, calling them "savage, strange, and incomprehensible" (Ishaev 2009). He expresses distain at the coffee houses he encounters on the road to Mecca (Ishaev 2009). He complains that the movement of the camel litter in which his wife and son ride gives them motion sickness (Ishaev 2009). He accuses the landlords in Mecca of price-gouging (Ishaev 2009). He criticizes the Kaaba and the Great Mosque for their poor craftsmanship (Ishaev 2009). He complains about the limitations placed on him by the state of ihram (Ishaev 2009). While he identifies himself as a Muslim, he dresses in European fashion (when not in ihram), and he is quite certain that the Muslims surrounding him suspect him of being a

non-believer (Ishaev 2009). At no point during his pilgrimage does he manage to engage positively with the sacred spaces that he enters. When he describes his circumambulation of the Kaaba, all he manages to say is that it took so long that he did not return to his lodgings until the next morning (Ishaev 2009).

The emotional apex of Ishaev's account comes when he and his wife travel to Mount Arafat. On the way to the mountain, Ishaev notes a ruined building. He explains that it had once been a disinfection station established by the Turks, but the Arabs had attacked it and torn it apart (Ishaev 2009). While at Arafat, his Muslim companions inform him that the European consulates in Jeddah have been attacked by the local population and the Christian staff have been killed (Ishaev 2009). This attack, in fact, happened before Ishaev left Mecca, but when he first hears the news, he assumes that it has just occurred, that he has been lucky enough to miss it, and that the attackers may come for him at any moment (Ishaev 2009):

“What I felt at this moment is impossible to convey. It is enough to say that my hair turned white from terror and anxiety, and my wife was sick . . . I thought now I'm done for, and my wife and children will be handed off like property [. . .] What could I have done, alone among tens of thousands of half-savage, fanatic people right there on [Mount] Arafat, where naturally religious fanaticism among the pilgrims is stirred up more than in other places? It would be enough for someone to yell in jest, “Here's a consulate Russian!” and they would have cut me to pieces. To say nothing of the local Arabs, even our pilgrims [from Russia], having set foot in the Hijaz, quickly transform into the most extreme Muslims, with utter hatred of all things European and Christian. Who could protect me here? Not, in any case, the Turks or the Turkish governor, who could not even stop a fanatic mob of Arabs from tearing apart their inoffensive disinfection station before their very eyes” (Ishaev 2009) .

Ishaev sees a group of Arab pilgrims headed his way and immediately assumes that they have discovered who he is and are on their way to murder him. As it turns out, they are simply looking for their lost camel (Ishaev 2009). Nonetheless, Ishaev blames his wife's subsequent death from consumption on the terrible fright she experienced that day at Mount Arafat (Ishaev 2009).

Like Chūqurī, Marjānī, and Ibrāhīmōv, Ishaev experiences intense emotions as he visits the sacred spaces of the Hijaz, but his emotional responses and his narration of those responses are shaped by his status as an agent of European colonial expansion. Despite identifying as a Muslim, he is keenly aware of himself as a colonial officer and, thus, an interloper in someone else's sacred space. His narration of the unhappy fates of the late Russian consul, the disinfection station, and the European consulates underscores the peril that awaits anyone who tries to bring “order” to the Muslim holy places. Other Russian Muslim pilgrims traveling in the Hijaz in the 1890s expressed concerns about becoming the victims of random violence (especially by Bedouin bandits) (Al'mushev 2009). However, Ishaev envisions himself as a potential victim of targeted violence. The imagined perpetrators of that violence are not bandits, but his fellow pilgrims driven to a frenzy by their religious fervor and determined to protect their sacred space from violation by non-believers. For Ishaev, the danger of the Hijaz lies not only in its filth or in the inability of the Ottoman or European governments to enforce their will upon it, but in the kinds of emotional responses that its sites provoke in their visitors. Ishaev characterizes the sacredness of the hajj in terms of its power to turn otherwise benign or indifferent Muslims into impassioned killers. For the colonial governments, containing or reducing this power seems impossible, because Hijaz seems to protect itself against such foreign incursions through its “savage” inhabitants and visitors and its rampant diseases.

3.5. A Scripturalist Hajj (1900–1917)

By the early 1900s, the balanced reformism (*al-islāḥ al-mu'tadil*) that had begun in the Arab world (Lauzière 2016) had taken root in the Islamic education institutions and

publishing houses of the Volga-Ural region. While, in Russian and Central Asian historiography, this intellectual turn has usually been bundled together with educational reform, cultural reform, and the development of national literary languages under the label of Jadidism, it was, in fact, closely connected with work and activities of Jamāladdīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍā, with which Volga-Ural proponents of Islamic legal and theological reform were thoroughly familiar (Naganawa 2012; Du-doignon 2006; Halevi 2019). Balanced reformism in the Volga-Ural region took the form of scripturalism. Hadith collections with Tatar-language commentaries, new Tatar-language tafsirs, and new approaches to teaching Tatars to read in the Arabic language were all directed at making the fundamental texts of Islam—the Quran and the hadiths—accessible to the widest possible readership. These fundamental texts were meant to replace medieval and early modern literary texts such as the *Book of Joseph* and the *Tales of the Prophets* as the average Muslim’s sources of information on Islam (Kefeli 2014). This replacement of popular literary and mystical texts with the Quran and hadiths is evident in “The Hijaz Journey” (“Sāfār āl-Khijaz”) published in Sterlitamak in 1911 by Aḥmadshāh bin Aḥmadjan al-Qazānī describing his trip to Mecca in 1909–1910.

Relatively little is known about Aḥmadshāh. However, while in the Hijaz, he meets with Abdarrashīd Ibrahimov, then fifty-two years old, a former qadi of the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly, an author and newspaper editor, and an organizer of the 1905–1907 Muslim Unions. Ibrāhīmov is accompanied by the Japanese official and convert to Islam Kotaro Yamaoka, (referred to by Aḥmadshāh as ‘Umar afande) (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan āl-Kazani 2015; Papas 2012). Aḥmadshāh also mentions that the hostel at which the party stops in Mecca had previously been managed by ‘Ālimjān Bārūdī (1857–1921), the head teacher of Kazan’s Muḥammadiya Madrasa and the editor of the Islamic legal journal, *al-Dīn wal-Ādab*, and Ṣalāhaddīn bin Ishāq bin Sa‘id al-Lazī al-Qazānī (1820–1875), the head teacher of Kazan’s Kül Buye Madrasa (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan āl-Kazani 2015). These associations with Ibrāhīmov, Bārūdī, and Ṣalāhaddīn bin Ishāq place Aḥmadshāh within the ranks of the scholarly faction promoting legal and theological reforms in the vein of ‘Abduh and Riḍā and position him as a chronicler of an ideal reformist hajj.

The pilgrimage route taken by Aḥmadshāh’s party combines aspects of the Ismā‘īl/Muḥammad Amīn itinerary and the more regulated, technologically advanced Black Sea route described by the pilgrims traveling in the 1870s–1880s. Aḥmadshāh’s party travels to Sevastopol, and from there by steamship to Sinop and then Istanbul, then through the Suez Canal to Jeddah before proceeding to Mecca (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan āl-Kazani 2015). However, after spending time in Mecca and Madina, they retrace the 1780s pilgrimage itinerary, heading to Damascus and Jerusalem before returning to Russia via Istanbul and Odessa.

Aḥmadshāh’s account lacks much of the intimacy and emotionality of the accounts of the 1870s–1890s pilgrims. He offers readers little insight into what he feels or thinks as he reaches the various sacred sites. “The Hijaz Journey” performs a function similar to the *Journey of Marjānī*: it records the hajj of a prominent Islamic scholar. It is also a guide to readers on how to properly perform a pilgrimage. However, it positions itself as a corrective to the earlier Ismā‘īl/Muḥammad Amīn accounts insofar as Aḥmadshāh and his party visit many of the sites described in the earlier accounts but interact with these sites in very different ways.

For Aḥmadshāh, Quranic recitation is a central and indispensable aspect of the Muslim believer’s interaction with sacred spaces. As he enters the Jannat al-Mu‘allā cemetery in Mecca, he recites the sūras “al-Fātiḥa” and “al-Ikhlāṣ” (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan āl-Kazani 2015) When discussing the historical significance of the Bayt al-Khayzurān, he notes to the reader that the Prophet Muhammad not only lived there for a time but received the ninety-fourth āyāt of the Sūra al-Ḥijr (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan āl-Kazani 2015). At another point in Aḥmadshāh’s visit to Mecca, the group’s guide takes them to the places where the sūras al-Sharḥ, al-Muzammil, al-Muddaththir, and al-Mā‘idah were revealed

(Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015). Later, during Aḥmadshāh's meeting with Ibrāhīmov and 'Umar, Ibrāhīmov recites parts of the Sūra al-Baqara and translated them into Russian for 'Umar (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015).

The hadiths also play a recurring role in Aḥmadshāh's hajj. When visiting a mosque library in Madina, he reads a few hadiths from the *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015). He also notes for the reader the hadith inscribed over the door to the mihrab in the Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Madina (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015). He likewise notes the hadith inscribed over the grave of Bilāl, the first muezzin (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015). When he is in Damascus, he again references a hadith to discuss a legend about the activities undertaken by Jesus (ʿĪsa) there and to remind his readers of the relationship between Jesus and Muhammad (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015).

While at a mosque in Madina, Aḥmadshāh and his companions hear an elegy dedicated to Naqshbandi shaykh Muhammad Mazhar (d. 1883) (Äkhmätsha bine Äkhmätjan äl-Kazani 2015). This represents the only moment in the hajj account at which Aḥmadshāh references a text that is not from the Quran or the hadiths. The overall effect of this textual approach is to convey a strong connection between Islamic scripture and the sacred sites of Mecca, Madina, Damascus, and Jerusalem. Some of these sites are rendered sacred by their role in the generation of the scripture, that is, as the places at which parts of the Quran were revealed or scenes preserved in the hadiths played out. In other spaces, such as the Ḥaram al-Sharīf, the inscription of hadiths in the physical space are used to highlight its sacred status. Finally, the sacredness of some sites, such as the Jannat al-Mu'allā cemetery inspires or even demands recollection and recitation of pieces of the Islamic sacred texts. This encoding of the Quran and the hadiths into these sacred landscapes stands in sharp contrast to the representation of these same sites in the Ismā'īl/Muḥammad Amīn accounts. In the 1780s accounts, the connections between Islamic history and Islamic sacred sites were established through references to the *Tales of the Prophets* and other Turkic-language literary works. As noted previously, these references not only explained to readers the significance of the various sites, but wove Mecca, Madina, Damascus, and Jerusalem into an Islamic sacred geography that included the local pilgrimage sites and hagiographies of the Volga-Ural region and Central Asia. By turning to the Quran and hadiths as the primary points of reference for marking and explaining the sacredness of the Hijaz and the Levant, Aḥmadshāh breaks with this older, Bulghar-centric Islamic sacred geography of the Volga Basin and turns to a more Mecca-centered, Arabized sacred geography. This turn was consistent with the new biographies of Muhammad written in the Volga-Ural region in the early twentieth century, which sought to present more "scientific" retellings of the life of the prophet and the origins of Islam based on a combination of archaeological research and close readings of the Quran and the hadiths. Aḥmadshāh's approach also reflected new trends in Volga-Ural Muslim religious education in the 1900s–1910s, in which teachers exposed students to the Quran and hadith in their Arabic originals rather than using Turkic-language literary texts as starting points for imparting Islamic history and morality. In this context, "The Hijaz Journey" represents a next step in pursuing a Muslim education. Once Muslims had gained a certain level of mastery of the Quran and the hadiths, they could travel to the lands in which those texts had originated and see where and how Islam began. That experience would be as direct as possible, unmediated by translations or intermediary commentaries and literary texts. Muslims would gain from this experience the "truth" of Islam, including the uniqueness of the Hijaz's architecture and landscapes and an account of the Islamic revelation free from apocryphal tales and fake relics such as Fāṭima's millstone and Ḥusayn's cradle.

3.6. Re-Establishing Ties through Sacred Spaces (1945)

The Russian revolutions of 1917 did not immediately put an end to hajj travel from and through Russia. In the 1920s, the new Soviet government viewed facilitating pilgrims crossing through the USSR as a useful tool of cultural diplomacy. Muslims crossing Soviet

territory on their way to Mecca would have a chance to see what life was like in the new socialist state, and Soviet assistance to foreign Muslims could be used to build goodwill with peoples and governments across the Muslim world (Kane 2015). A Soviet consulate general was opened in Jeddah in 1924 (Kane 2015). In 1926, new facilities were prepared in Odessa to accommodate pilgrims during the 1927 hajj season. However, by 1929, increasing concerns were raised by some Soviet officials over the ideological implications of the atheist Soviet government involving itself in a religious ritual. The submission of applications for hajj visas by Soviet citizens (who were not intended to be part of the government's hajj transportation program) also raised concerns (Kane 2015). The Soviet hajj transportation campaign ended in 1930, and, so too, did Russian Muslims' participation in the hajj (Kane 2015). During the dekulakization and collectivization campaigns of 1928–1932, Islamic facilities were confiscated and repurposed, and Muslim scholars often became the targets of state violence. (Tasar 2017). Islamic scholars were also targeted (along with the clergy and personnel of other religious traditions) in the purges of 1937–1938 (Tasar 2017). While not all the Islamic scholars of Russia were imprisoned or executed, the atmosphere of the Soviet Union in the 1930s was such that the institutions and intellectual networks that had promoted the hajj and the Muslim presses that had produced mass-printed hajj accounts in the 1880s–1910s largely ceased to function.

During the Second World War, the position of Islam in the USSR began to change once again. Starting in 1941, the Soviet government issued propaganda re-casting itself a protector of religions and religious freedom at home and abroad. This strategy was employed both to garner foreign support for the embattled USSR and to rally support from Soviet citizens on the home front (Tasar 2017; Eden 2021). In 1943, Stalin set into motion a series of reforms to create new Soviet bureaucracies for the USSR's major religions. These reforms would establish a stable institutional relationship between the Soviet government and the various religions that existed on Soviet territory (Tasar 2017). As part of these reforms, in 1945, a group of six Islamic scholars from the USSR received government permission to undertake the hajj (Tasar 2017).

One of these six scholars was Gabdrakhman Rasulev (1881–1950), the mufti of the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly from 1936 to 1943 and of the Spiritual Assembly of the Muslims of the European Region of the USSR and Siberia from 1943 to 1950. He recorded his 1945 hajj experience in a short letter addressed to his friends (Räsüli 2011). Despite the apparent intimacy of its genre, Rasulev was a Soviet official employed in the Stalin-era Soviet Union and it is unlikely that his personal correspondences would have gone unmonitored. Additionally, the 1945 hajj, as part of the government's effort to reposition itself as a protector of Islam, was part of larger propaganda campaign, and letters like this one would have served to build trust between Islamic scholars and the Soviet state. Thus, this letter is best viewed as a public document as well as a private communication.

Rasulev's account begins with a matter-of-fact description of his journey (by airplane) to Mecca, a journey that he notes, was undertaken with the permission of the Soviet government (Räsüli 2011). At first, he presents himself and his companions primarily as emissaries of the USSR, or as he puts it "We acquainted Russia's Muslims with the [other] Muslims" (Räsüli 2011). However, his descriptions of putting on the ihram and traveling to the sites around the Hijaz to perform the hajj rituals take on a poignant and almost miraculous quality when they are considered in the context of the Soviet government's treatment of Islam in the 1930s and the inability of Soviet Muslims to perform hajj from 1930 to 1945. Rasulev is keenly aware of this disruption. His awareness of his position. The moral duties that he shoulders find expression not before the Kaaba, but during his visit to the grave of the prophet Muhammad. He describes how the curtain was pulled back and he and the other Soviet visitors were bathed in light. At the sight of the beautifully decorated grave, he feels compelled to interact with it or, rather, with the one interred in it:

"I, being a mufti of thirty million Muslims in Russia, asked the Prophet, 'By God's mercy, will you intercede for me on Judgment Day?'

'Work with the Noble Quran and the noble hadiths that remain to you,' he said.

At this time, I felt as though I heard a voice in my ear, saying, 'Inshallah' (Räsüli 2011).

Rasulev's visit to Muhammad's grave is, perhaps, the most interactive depiction of a sacred space to be found in Volga-Ural Muslim hajj literature. In his account, the grave serves as a nexus between Islam's past and present and, also, between the mortal world and what lies beyond it. It is at this place, of all places in the world, that Rasulev asks what will happen to him and to Islam in the Soviet Union after more than a decade of hardships, and he receives an answer. His narration of this interaction forges a direct link between the sacred space of Muhammad's tomb and the new Soviet institutionalization of Islam. Rasulev's authority as a leader of Muslims in the USSR is conferred directly by the prophet at a site recognized as sacred by Muslims throughout the world. This scene illustrates the degree to which Soviet institutionalized Islam was constructed as contiguous with both pre-1930s Russian Islam and with Islam globally. Through Rasulev's interaction at the Prophet's grave, he signals both the renewal of Islam in the USSR and the reconnection of Russian-Soviet Muslims to the international Muslim community.

4. Materials and Methods

This study considers how shifts in geopolitics, technology, and Islamic epistemology shaped a Muslim community's understanding of what made the various sites visited on hajj sacred. It expands upon the existing studies of Volga-Ural Muslim hajj accounts by considering how hajj accounts evolved over the *longue durée*. In its scope, it follows in the footsteps of earlier studies of the evolution of South Asian and Southeast Asian hajj narratives in response to colonialization, decolonization, and the scripturalist turn in Islam during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Metcalf 1990; Matheson and Milner 1984). While this study acknowledges the mapping of political discourses and stories of self-realization onto hajj narratives, these are not its focus. Rather, it is interested in how Volga-Ural Muslims situated, described, and interacted with the spaces that they identified as sacred.

This study uses as its primary materials nine hajj accounts composed by Volga-Ural Muslims/Volga Tatars from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Eight of these accounts were originally composed in the Tatar language. One was composed in Russian. Four were circulated in manuscript form. Four were commercially published. One was a personal letter. While these accounts come from diverse genres and produced in different formats, they represent the range of forms in which hajj experiences were documented and circulated.

5. Conclusions

In the Volga-Ural Muslim community, the genre of hajj narratives became a medium for considering what made the holy sites of Islam sacred, how the power of such remote places connected with sacred sites and daily concerns closer to home, and how one might experience and interact with those sites. While the list of Mecca's sacred sites and the ritual to be performed at those sites remained constant, the stories that Volga-Ural Muslims told about their encounters with those sites evolved in response to the cultural and political changes experienced by that Muslim community. Through repeated re-imagining and new narration, the sacred sites remained vital and comprehensible to successive generations of believers.

Several trends can be detected in the evolution of Volga-Ural Muslims' depictions of the Hijaz's sacred spaces. The first trend was the shift from the local to the global. The hajj accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries located the sites of the Hijaz in relation to regional Volga-Ural and Turko-Persian sacred sites, holy people, and literary sources. Starting in the 1870s, writers such as Chūqurī, Marjānī, and Ibrāhīmov emphasized Mecca's position and role within an Islamic geography sacred to Muslims around the world. In these latter accounts, Volga-Ural Muslim pilgrims, when undertaking hajj, connected with their co-religionists of other lands. This connection and the apparent stripping away

of ethnic, class, and sectarian differences once Muslims donned the ihram and set out from Jeddah to Mecca became defining aspects of what made the sacred sites of the hajj sacred.

A second trend in the evolution of Volga-Ural Muslim pilgrims' narration of the hajj was the increased emphasis on individual experiences of the sacred. In early hajj accounts, the sacredness of the hajj sites was conveyed through lists of pilgrimage destinations. The accounts themselves could be assembled through the appropriation and re-organization of formulaic stories. These accounts relied on a large body of local Islamic literature to help readers understand why the sites discussed within them were sacred. By contrast, starting in the late nineteenth century, authors expressed what made certain sites sacred through their descriptions of personal emotions. They conveyed the power of sacred sites through the capacity of these sites to evoke ecstasy, wonder, hope, or dread. Likewise, they placed much of the burden of experiencing the sacred upon the individual pilgrim. Sacred sites had to be approached with accurate knowledge, undivided commitment to one's faith, and a desire to seek the divine. An individual who lacked one or more of these qualities might fail to experience the strong emotions through which the sites manifested their power. Or, like the colonial officer Ishaev, they might feel intense fear, doubt, and suspicion, the opposite of what devout Muslims should experience at the birthplace of their faith.

A third trend in Volga-Ural Muslims' narration of the hajj's sacred spaces was the increasing emphasis on the need for Muslims to experience the sacred directly rather than by reading other people's pilgrimage accounts. The hajj accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasized the difficulty of the hajj and the inaccessibility of Mecca for most Volga-Ural Muslims. The hajj accounts of Murtaḍa, Ismā'īl, and Muḥammad Amīn were meant to underscore their subjects' high level of spiritual accomplishment, as their pilgrimages could not be easily repeated by their readers and disciples. The expansion of steamship and railway networks in the second half of the nineteenth century reduced the duration and difficulty of the hajj journey and created expectations that more Muslims would undertake the hajj. The hajj writers of the 1870s–1910s wrote with their accounts with the assumption that the hajj was attainable for the average Muslim and that the sacred spaces of the Hijaz should be experienced in person. Reading the right texts could prepare pilgrims for their encounters with the sacred, but ultimately, reading about other people's pilgrimages could not yield the same emotional and spiritual experiences as going on the hajj oneself. The Soviet limitations imposed on pilgrimage travel in the 1930s and 1940s made this direct experience impossible for most Volga-Ural Muslims. However, as Rasulev's emotionally charged description of his trip to Muhammad's tomb suggests, the view that Muslims needed to experience Mecca and Madina for themselves remained a part of Volga-Ural Muslims' understanding of how one should relate to the sacred.

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