Chapter 2. Intellectual Awakening

The words *tradition* and *treason* have the same Latin root of *traditio*, that is, the action of handing over teaching. According to *Webster's Word Histories* dictionary, "Tradition is maintained by passing information from one generation to another, whereas treason is committed when someone who has been entrusted with information passes it on to someone else." The problem of distinguishing tradition from treason could also be seen as a Tatar problem. The jadidists saw the qadimists as traitors and considered themselves as the real preservers of the line of tradition. Ironically, however, they became traitors themselves, betrayers in the eyes of the qadimists. The present chapter will explore some of these conflicts among jadidists and qadimists, and will focus mainly on four distinguished scholars, Qursavi, Marjani, Riza al-Din, and Bigiyef, who were extremely influential in the revivalist reforms.

Their confrontation and religious polemics went so far that some qadimists considered the jadidists even more injurious to Islam than the Orthodox missionaries: the qadimists thought that the attack of missionaries came from outside, and, therefore, had little effect, whereas the jadidists, in the guise of Muslims, attacked Islam from within, and their attack was more destructive. In the eyes of some qadimists, the jadidists were traitors who were receiving money from the Orthodox missionaries to destroy Islam.

What made Qursavi and Marjani, the leading religious reformers different from their contemporary qadimist clerics? They got the same education as these qadimists, they were pious, and they were knowledgeable in the Islamic sciences. Therefore, what made the qadimists bitter opponents of the jadidist `ulama to such an extent that each group charged the other with betrayal of Islamic tradition?

The first known conflict occurred in Bukhara. According to Marjani's account:

Qursavi went to Bukhara for the second time, and proceeded to attack what he considered the deviation of Bukharians from the right path (ahl-i Sunna) and the way of *salaf*. Big disputes took place between Qursavi and the ulama of Bukhara and later he was summoned into the presence of Amir Haydar [1800-1826]. After spreading many rumors about him, most of the ulama, either because of their ignorance or their stubbornness, or because of their fear of the Amir, did not listen to Qursavi and as a consequence of their wrong (batil) struggle, rejected his ideas. After expressing nonsensical (malaya’ni) and incorrect (batil) beliefs, the 'ulama finally threatened him with execution, asking him to repent of holding his wrong beliefs and forcing him to read a text of faith saying "my belief and school is such and such." All of his writings were burned from then on, and town criers (münadis) shouted in the streets threatening the holders of Qursavi's writings with execution.

Charges of deviation from the way of the ancestors (salaf), however, were neither new nor revolutionary. Like Qursavi, traditionalist scholars and the adherents of the Hanbali school of thought aimed primarily to defend Islam against "foreign cultural currents" and struggled against
any kind of deviation from orthodox Islamic thought. The most prominent Traditionalists, such as Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and the founder of the Wahhabi movement Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) were violently hostile to Muslim scholastic theology (kalam). It seems that the Tatar reformists such as Qursavi, Marjani, Riza al-Din, and Bigiyef inherited this Hanbali opposition to kalam.

1. Traditionalism of the Reformists

Anyone who reads the writing of the religious reformists will come across their obsession with anti-kalam and pro-salaf attitude. For example, Musa Bigiyef said:

In the first centuries of Islam a thing was coined called "the science of kalam". At that time the greatest of imams [founders of the Sunni schools], for whatever reason, severely forbade the study of kalam. Later, I realized the meaning of this prohibition. I understood why this subject of study was called "the science of talk." It is because it deals with unscientific and empty talk. I realized this after wasting my precious time. Muslim countries also understood this after they lost their glory, civilization, and dominance.

The reformists also explained the decline of the Muslim world by this ideological deviation from the pure creed of the early Muslims (salaf) to the distorted ideology of the medieval Muslim theologians (mutakallimun):

The regressive effect of mutakallimun ideology showed itself particularly in the scientific decline in madrasahs. Under the dominance of Ash'ari kalam, Muslim writers occupied and satisfied themselves with writing commentaries and super-commentaries on kalam books, at the same time Muslim madrasahs busied themselves with studying mainly commentaries on kalam books. This made the Muslim world sluggish and that led to its decline.

The Tatar reformists never tired of pointing out the defects of the mutakallimun, and if scholars look at their explanations, the following emerge as the basic reasons for their attack:

1. The first reason for the reformist detestment for the Muslim scholastic theologians was that they believed that the mutakallimun deprived the Muslim mind of free inquiry and reasoning. They regarded their own ideas as an integral part of Islamic dogma and accused people who did not conform with them of heresy. The mutakallimun caused the closing of "the gate of ijtihad" which led to the prevalence of the taqlid mentality.

2. Reformers explicitly denied the value of study of kalam, viewing it as a mere intellectual exercise and a source of confusion. Bigiyef, mistrusting Greek tradition and its implications, argued that the hypothesis and speculation of Greek philosophy, translated into Arabic, had poisoned the mind of Muslims. The mutakallimun raised doubts about the essentials of the faith, and this resulted in pollution and degeneration of the pure faith ('aqidah) of Islam. Speculative thoughts and controversies filled the minds of Muslim scholars, leading them to social, economic, and civil decadence. Musa Bigiyef even argued that speculative Greek thought, by causing anarchy in Islamic doctrine, was one of the causes of decline in the Muslim world. However, this assertion contains a major historical error. Contrary to his claim, the golden era of Islamic science coincides with the introduction of Greek thought into the Islamic world, that is the centuries following the ninth century.
Riza al-Din believed that salaf disapproved of the school of kalam because it spread confusion and skepticism among Muslims: “People who occupied themselves with kalam, became totally confused in the later days of their lives and some of them proclaimed their returning to the faith of ordinary Muslims.”

3. The mutakallimun had caused divisions by introducing Greek speculative thought, and they, caused disunity, sectarianism, and doctrinal anarchy. Bigiyev argued that:

   the clash of the Mu`tazila and Ash`ariyya theological schools had started a great conflict among Muslims. Ibn Kulab Abu Muhammad b. Sa`id, one of the greatest followers of the Ash`ariyya school initiated the heretical invention of talking about the attributes of God. The Ash`ariyya also shaped Islamic principles in accordance with Greek speculative thought.

   Bigiyef, moreover, argued that the Ash`ariyya put too much emphasis on the nature and essence of God while giving almost no value to the social aspect of shari`a. He continued to claim that in the later period, ignorant mutakallimun polluted the Ash`ariyya school and, in particular, the teachings of the later members of Ash`ariyya established principles most suitable to allowing bad morals and political intrigue.

4. The mutakallimun were detached from practical problems. The dominance of theological discussions in the Muslim world limited science to formulating vain assumptions with no practical or material benefits. Bigiyef rejected the idea of dealing with issues that had no practical benefit such as philosophy and kalam. In his opinion, these sciences had no place in the social aspects of the shari`a (shari`at-i ijtimaiya). Bigiyef’s idea was not new: it was Ibn Taymiyya’s idea in favor of using reason in the service of solving practical and social problems rather than abstract theology.

5. Kalam books made the teaching system of the madrasahs deteriorate. These fossilized manuals, still the main subjects of the madrasah curriculum in the nineteenth century, were taught to all theology students. Riza al-Din bitterly expressed his opinion about these subjects: “We are wasting the lives of our children with outdated philosophies inherited from Greeks and with distorted translations... How much longer will we keep poisoning the minds of our students and wasting the futures of our children by teaching such books?!”

6. Finally, the jadidists believed that mutakallimun caused the neglect of the study of the Qur`an and Tradition.

   What made the qadimists particularly angry was this anti-kalam attitude of the jadidists, and they concentrated especially on defending kalam and kalam scholars.

   The enemies of religion [reformists] discarded and removed the science of kalam from many madrasahs... They also removed mantiq from the curriculum by calling it ancient Greek scholasticism.

   Qadimists were also against Wahhabism and considered jadidism the same as Wahhabism. In an article entitled “Who are the Wahhabis?” (“Wahhabiler Kimler?”) the author called Wahhabism a contagious disease whose microbes penetrate the minds of those who never dealt with mantiq and kalam. Their accusation of a jadidist-Wahhabi connection was not unfounded since at least one Tatar jadidist, Musa Bigiyef, openly praised the Wahhabis. He called Wahhabis “the purest and the most mature believers” and regarded the government of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab as the exemplary Islamic government like that of the first four caliphs.

   As was briefly mentioned before, under the inspiration of the Hanbali school of thought and the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya, Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab started a reform movement redefining
what true Islam is. He urged Muslims to return to the way of their early Muslim forerunners (salaf) and reemphasized the monist feature of Islam, rejecting all innovations alien to the spirit of early Islam. These heretical innovations included Sufism, saint worship and all other beliefs and acts that constituted a kind of worshipping of gods other than God alone.

It has been difficult to pinpoint how the Tatar reformers became interested in the salafi ideology. The first known sign of salafism among the Tatars goes back to Qursavi. He studied in Central Asia where the influence of the Muslim Indian reformers reached. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindı’s (d. 1625) reformist (Mujaddidi) branch of the Naqshbandiyya spread its influence in Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both Qursavi and Marjani attended the lectures of Ishan Niyazgulu al-Turkmani, a Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi shaykh. Tatar students and disciples brought this influence to the Tatar homeland. ʿAbd al-Hakim b. Batlay (d. 1757/58) in the town of Qarghali and Shaykh Zayn Allah Rasuli in the city of Troitsk propagated the reformist Naqshbandi ideas. It seems that the order encouraged close attachment to the Qur’an and eliminating the later additions to Islam, as did the salafi ideology.

Another channel of salafiyya came through the Middle East. There was a flow of reformist ideas coming from Egypt and Hijaz. It is difficult to estimate the extent of it, but because of easier transportation by the end of the nineteenth century, more and more Tatars visited Egypt, Syria and Hijaz for pilgrimage and educational purposes. In addition to these visits, books, journals and newspapers published in the Middle East reached the Muslims of Russia: no doubt it was through them the reformist ideas must have penetrated into the Kazan region. For example, Ismail Gaspirali, Musa Bigiyef, and Abdullah Battal-Taymas (1882-1969) stayed in Egypt. Gaspirali even published an Arabic journal called al-Nahda (Renaissance) together with Battal-Taymas, who studied in Egypt and also published a book about the biographies of Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838/9-1897) and ʿAbduh. Musa Bigiyef studied under the supervision of Shaykh Bakhit, met with ʿAbduh and corresponded with Muhammad Farid Wajdi (1875-1954). An article by him appeared in the famous reformist journal al-Manar. In addition to these contacts, reformist newspapers and journals such as al-Manar and al-Habl al-Matin found readers among the Tatar Muslims. All of these contacts with the Muslim reformists outside the Kazan region must have helped the development of the Tatar version of Islamic reform.

The Middle Eastern influence also shows itself in the eager efforts of Tatar reformers such as Riza al-Din and Bigiyef to revive Arabic classics. They longed to create a new Islamic literature connected with the long neglected books of earlier critical scholars and thinkers such as Abu al-ʿala al-Maʿarri (973-1057), Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1050-1111), the famous sufi Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165-1240), and Ibn Taymiyya. The period they favored extended from the ninth up to the thirteenth century, before the European Renaissance, when the Islamic world experienced a period of creativity, and what the reformists tried to do was to revive the classics of this period. Interestingly, a similar movement of literary revival of Arabic classics took place in Egypt during the reign of Ismaʿil in 1860s and 1870s. This probably explains the interest of Bigiyef and Riza al-Din’s efforts to revive Islamic literature of the period before the Muslim decline. As stated before, Bigiyef visited and studied in Egypt for a couple of years then returned home in 1904, while Riza al-Din extensively read the writings of Egyptian and Syrian Arab writers as well as newspapers and journals from the Arab world. Naturally, they must have been aware of and influenced by this movement.

There is no doubt that al-Afghani’s visit to Russia also had an important impact on some Tatar intellectuals. Al-Afghani stayed in St. Petersburg for eighteen or nineteen months, regularly met with the Tatar intellectuals, and wrote articles for Russian newspapers about the politics of Turkey, Russia, England, Iran and Afghanistan. He even became a member of St. Petersburg Geographic Society. The Tatar writer Muhammad Fatih Kerim (1871-1945) and other Tatars met with him several times.

Riza al-Din acknowledged his debt to the ideas of al-Afghani, ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida, and stated that it was al-Afghani who drew his attention to the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, the promoter of the salafi ideology. Marjani, perhaps for the first time, introduced the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya among the Kazan Tatars. Riza al-Din and ʿAlimjan Barudi followed Marjani by directly studying the
works of Ibn Taymiyya. Riza al-Din even wrote a monograph about him. Then, many young Tatars became familiar with the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyum al-Jawziyya (1292-1350).

Marjani focused a great deal on the Qur’an and the Traditions of the Prophet and tried to follow the way of the early Muslims (salaf) in issues of belief (i`tiqad) and practice (`ibadat). He adhered to the practices and beliefs of the first and the second centuries of the Hegira (seventh and eighth centuries A.D.) and rendered judgment based on the practices and the sources of that period. He claimed that the later scholars deviated from the way of the early Muslims.

It is important to know whom the jadidists meant when they refer to salaf. They do not seem to have meant personalities who lived in a certain period of time but rather they referred to the representatives of the true Islam. They call Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (the great theologians of the Islamic centuries) salaf.

Riza al-Din -frequently mentions the term "scholars of salaf” as a perfect model for Islamic belief and practice, and gives examples to show how the salaf appreciated the value of science.

The works of the salaf were quite illuminating. However, after the late sixth century of the Hegira (the late twelfth century A.D.), some people started to summarize these works. Later generations started to write commentaries (sharh) to these summaries and the third generation started to write commentaries on earlier commentaries (hashiyas). Thus the works which the qadimists of our time clung to so persistently as salaf works are far from being original salaf works.

All of this evidence regarding the jadidist obsession with salafi idealization of the early Islam and anti-kalam attitude clearly shows the Traditionalist or backward-looking aspect of the religious reformists. They rejected everything that did not fit in with the idealized, pure and simple belief system of the early Muslims (salaf). The reformists believed that if Muslims gathered around the faith and way of the early Muslims, they would free themselves from sectarianism and fanaticism. They believed that in the days of the early Islamic community (`asr-i sa`adat), the period of the life of the Prophet and the first decades of Islam, the belief system of Muslims was pure and simple. The salaf did not need attachment to one of the four Sunni schools, and the reformists saw this era as the perfect example of belief and practices and tried to recapture the spirit of that time.

In order to understand the roots of the conflict between jadidist and qadimists, it is helpful to analyze the biographies of the four major reformist leaders who were widely accepted by their contemporaries as well as modern scholars of the Tatar reform.

3. The Major Reformist `Ulama as Master Conciliators

Rather than dealing with all the Tatar religious reformers, this research has concentrated on Qursavi, Marjani, Riza al-Din, and Bigiyef because they represent the major lines of the Tatar religious reform movement. During their lifetime and today, these reformists have been accepted as the primary personalities of religious reform. Analysis of these figures, who were active in the cultural and religious life of the Tatar community, will provide information about what pool or supply they came from and how extensive it was. Another reason for this choice was the relatively ample material available on these personalities other than Qursavi. However, as the primary reformist, it was crucial to focus on him. Riza al-Din and Bigiyef were themselves prolific writers; therefore they provided enough material for analysis.

At the same time, this research does not wish to overlook the contribution of many other Tatar religious reformers, particularly, `Abd al-Rashid Ibrahimov, Hasan `Ata `Abashi (b. 1863), `Alimjan Barudi, and `Abd Allah Bubi (1871-1922). At certain points, therefore, this study will refer also to the ideas of these other reformist `ulama.
The first reformist to agitate for change among the Tatar ulama was `Abd al-Nasr Qursavi. His theological discussions stimulated the awakening of a new era after centuries of stagnation in Muslim religious thought.

A. `Abd al-Nasr Qursavi (1771-1812)

Qursavi received his early education from mullah Muhammad Rahim of Machkara, then went to Bukhara. For a while he audited the lectures of Ishan Niyazquli al-Turkmani and met some other scholars, then returned to his home village, Qursa, where he became imam, khatib and mudarris. There, he built a big madrasah and gathered a large number of students. By studying Ihya-i Ulum of al-Ghazzali and other works by men of inquiry and early scholars (mutakallimun) he inquired into the real way of righteous men and the right path (ahl-i sunna wa’l-jama`a), also obtaining information about the deviation of the muta`akhkhiran and kalam scholars from the way of Islamic Faith.

This brief account by Marjani, Qursavi’s main disciple, gives some clues about the background and ideological transformation of Qursavi. Like the other ulama of his time, he received a traditional Muslim education and, like his contemporary Tatar ulama, he journeyed to Central Asia in order to study in the famous educational institutions of that time. So far, there is nothing unusual. However, it becomes clear that, in addition to formal courses he studied at the madrasah or madrasahs, he attended the lectures of a sufi shaykh, Ishan Niyazquli al-Turkmani.

Al-Turkmani belonged to the Mujaddidi (reformist) branch of the Naqshbandiyya. Qursavi’s presence at the lectures of al-Turkmani suggests his awareness of, but not necessarily his affiliation with, this reformist Naqshbandiyya. Probably this channel contributed to the revivalist orientation of his thinking.

Another thing we learn from this quotation is Qursavi’s rejection of the teachings of Ash`ari kalam. a dominant theology at that time in the madrasahs of Bukhara as well as in the Kazan region. Qursavi, in condemning kalam, regarded it as the product of speculative Greek thought. He criticized Ash`ari theologians for their ascription of attributes to God (Allahin sifatları), claiming that the theologians themselves were the ones who invented such attributes.

Qursavi wrote at least one of his books, A Commentary on the Qur’an (Haft-i Yak Tafsiri) in his native language, Turki, at a time when religious scholars wrote almost exclusively in Arabic. This may be interpreted as a sign of his revivalist agenda of spreading religious knowledge among ordinary people by writing in their native language. In this way, less educated people would have direct access to the religious knowledge that would help them develop their own reasoning about religious matters to a certain degree, diminishing their dependence on the religious scholars.

Qursavi’s traditionalist tendency has been misrepresented in most of the secondary sources, except Algar’s article which mentions the influence of the reformist Naqshbandiyya on Tatar reformists. One author has drawn the conclusion that Qursavi came up with new ideas all of a sudden seeking to “save himself from the domination of the medieval scholastic mentality of the Bukharan madrasahs, and interpreted religious matters according to his independent thinking.” However, Qursavi’s revivalist ideology aimed at returning to the creed of purity of the early Muslims, as was seen in the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi (1702-1762), which had a long tradition among the ulama. With Qursavi’s initiative, the Traditionalist ideology reappeared among the Tatar ulama at a time when the ideology of mutakallimun had an absolute dominance. Naturally this caused a conflict among the ulama.

Following Qursavi’s trial in Bukhara, it seems that condemning the ideas of Qursavi became a sort of conformist attitude among the ulama. However, the campaign of the ulama against Qursavi’s thinking did not put an end to the spread of his ideas. Furthermore, his most loyal follower in thinking, Marjani, initially opposed the ideas of Qursavi. A scholar of Tatar history claimed that Marjani was unaware of Qursavi’s ideas and arrived independently at the same thought
as Qursavi. Contrary to what this scholar claimed, however, Marjani’s own account definitely shows that he was deeply influenced by Qursavi’s ideas in his early youth.

B. Shihab al-Din Marjani (1818-1889)

Among the Kazan Tatars, Marjani became the first effective catalyst for recognition of the weaknesses in Islamic society, and a precursor of those who sought to strengthen Muslim society by reforming education and removing the later layers added to the core of Islam. He was one of the first reformers to confront seriously the problem of adapting Muslim traditions to new problems. A close examination of this precursor reformer may give some clues to understanding the making of a reformer.

Marjani was born into a scholarly family at Yabanchi village near the city of Kazan in 1818. Both his father’s and his mother’s families produced many religious scholars and prayer leaders (imams). Marjani’s grandfather, Subhan (d. 1834), had served as prayer leader (imam) of the villages of Jaki and Husni for 25 years, after which he resigned, occupying himself with trade until his death. Marjani’s father, Baha al-Din (d. 1856), who studied in the city of Bukhara, was one of those who had an audience with Amir Haydar Tora, the ruler of Bukhara, became an imam and teacher (mudarris) in the village of Yabanchi and later in Tashkichu, serving in this post for almost forty years. His maternal grandfather, Mullah `Abd al-Nasr b. Sayf al-Mulk Simbir (d. 1833), was also a distinguished scholar of his time.

Financially, Marjani came from the lower-middle class, as did most of the `ulama (ruhanilar) at that time, although it is claimed that he came from a rich family of Kazan city, named “Apanays.” However, information given in biographies of him does not suggest this.

Marjani had undergone the customary Muslim traditional education. Thus he studied Arabic grammar, logic, theology, Islamic law, and the methodology of Islamic law. In addition, he busied himself with reading books from his father’s private library, and was especially interested in the history and biographies of Muslims of the past. Up to this point, before 1838, it appears that Marjani showed no inclination toward changing his religious tendencies. He always stayed in his village, not even visiting the city of Kazan, which was not far from his home,

Change started with a journey to Bukhara, which opened up a new marketplace of ideas for him. This was in 1838, when, at the age of 20, he decided to leave Yabanchi in order to expand his religious knowledge. Bukhara was, at that time, the magnet for those Tatars who had an ambition to become Islamic scholars. On his way to that city, Marjani came across a learned muazzin who was deeply influenced by the ideas of the previous Tatar reformer, Qursavi. It is clear from the discussion that developed between them that Marjani, like many other qadimist mullahs of his time, opposed Qursavi’s ideas and argued that in certain issues Qursavi deviated from the way of the true Faith (ahl-i sunna). However, this dispute exerted an important impact on Marjani as is clear from Marjani’s own account: “My curiosity about Qursavi became aroused after hearing these ideas from this muazzin for the first time.”

After having spent five years in Bukhara, Marjani set off for the city of Samarkand, the other famous learning center of Central Asia at that time. He settled in the Shirdar Madrasah and found a very learned master, the famous scholar, Qadi Abu Sa’id b. `Abd al-Haq b. Abu al-Khayr al-Samarqandi (d. 1849), who opened his library to Marjani, where he read the rare manuscripts which greatly influenced his views.

He found answers to his questions on matters concerning belief (i’tiqad), receiving some of his answers from the qadi, who was not only a judge, but also an instructor (mudarris) in several madrasahs in Samarkand. He also acquired a knowledge of what was going on currently. Marjani wrote in his famous biography, The Legacy of the Ancestors, that the main reason for his interest in history, and the study of history came from the qadi, Abu Sa’id, from whom Marjani received a teaching diploma (ijazatnama). He also discovered the books of the mutakaddimun, and came to understand the inadequacy of scholastic theologians such as al-Taftazani (1322-1389/95) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149-1209). At the same time he developed a greater appreciation and better understanding of the works of Qursavi.
Up to this point, Marjani’s life story indicated that his diverse ideas did not originate in Tatarstan. Therefore, professor Bennigsen’s argument claiming that Tatar reform movement started under the religious and economic suppression of Russia does not prove correct, at least, for the cases of Qursavi and Marjani. As we have seen from their biographies, they both got their inspiration and ideas of revivalism not in Tatarstan but in Central Asia. Contrary to what has been believed, Bukhara seems not to have been merely a center of obscurantism as later pro-reformist sources claimed. Marjani got his idea of reforms from that city, perhaps through his personal contact with the scholars and other learned men of the region. It is obvious that Marjani was a typical qadimist *mullah* when he left Tatarstan for Central Asia.

It was in the libraries of Bukhara and Samarkand that he found classical Islamic works (“the books of *mutaqaddimun* scholars” or “*salaf* books” as his best biography expressed it) that attracted his attention, inspired him, and had an effect on his mental transformation. Two questions arise at this point: First, what kind of books were the works of these *mutaqaddimun*? Second, why was Marjani interested in these works rather than the required, formal madrasah textbooks? This indicates, first of all, that he must have been a brilliant student to have had time to study books outside of the heavy madrasah curriculum. Other than this, there might have been some people who drew his attention to the works of *mutaqaddimun*.

Fortunately, Marjani’s biographer expressed curiosity about what kind of “*salaf* books” caused the evolution in Marjani’s thoughts concerning *i’tiqad* and his choice of direction and purpose for his future. Searching Marjani’s private library after his death, the biographer found books and notes, dated 1843 and 1844 (that Marjani had copied in Samarkand) from al-Ghazzali, Jalal al-Din al-Dawwani (1427-1501/02), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Ibn Hazm (944-1064), Ibn al-`Arabi, and Suhrawardi (d. 1191).

These findings seem somewhat unexpected. Rather than the works of Traditionalists like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya with whom Marjani had parallel ideas, the works of the great sufis (Ibn al-`Arabi and Suhrawardi) occupied a significant part of his library.

As to the second question, we discover that some of his teachers knew what was happening in the outside world and recognized the ineffectiveness of the modes of teaching in Bukhara. Some even advocated the ideas of Qursavi, for example, Damullah ʿAbd al-Muʿmin Khawaja b. Uzbek Khawaja al-Bukhari al-Afshanji (d. 1866), who approved of Qursavi’s explanation of many issues, and had a critical view of the curriculum of the madrasahs of Bukhara. (The content of which will be discussed in the next chapter.) Another of his teachers, Damla Khudaybirdi b. ʿAbd Allah al-Baysuni (d. 1848) was the most traveled and enlightened scholar of Bukhara, having journeyed to India, Mecca, Medina, Istanbul and Russia proper before the czars expanded into Central Asia.

Further evidence supports the theory that Marjani’s Samarkand days were his period of gradual ideological change from being an imitator (*muqallid*), formalist thinker to becoming an original one. This was the method advocated by Qursavi whom Marjani, like most of the Tatar ʿulama, had previously criticized, and Marjani explained his intellectual transformation when he wrote the life story of Qursavi in his book *Wafayat al-Aslaf*.

> In my youth, because I [Marjani] had not realized the truth yet, I also imitated others without question, attacked Qursavi and had contempt for his ideas. But later, when I studied the works of the great imams (the founders of the four Sunni schools) the *salaf*, and after many inquiries, I understood the real religion, wisdom, and truth, and, thank God, I saved myself from the wrong path.

Thus it was in his Samarkand days that Marjani decided to study Qursavi’s works. Because he could not find these books in Samarkand, however, the first thing he did when he returned to Bukhara was to search for them, and with great difficulty obtained them from Damla Ismail.
Qashqari who warned him that Qursavi’s works contained fallacious ideas and were banned in Bukhara. Marjani borrowed Qursavi’s works, particularly those on the precepts of faith (’aqaid), copied them and gave them back.

Judging from Shahar Sharaf’s account and others, unlike Qursavi, Marjani never rebelled against orthodox conformity in Bukhara. He seems to have been in accord with the `ulama there. He acted very cautiously, or perhaps he did not have a problem with them. He participated in conversations at private gatherings of friends which were attended by some famous people of Bukhara. Marjani also met other important men of Bukhara. For example, when he was, presented to the Qadi Kalan (the Chief Judge, an authority responsible for investigating litigious matters of public concern) he posed a profound question about i’tiqad and was honored by the Qadi Kalan for his penetration in religious matters.

Marjani always had some religious issues on his mind. He lived a spare, simple life, was careless of his appearance and slept very little, but was careful about his health. He performed his prayers regularly and often read the Qur’an. His second Bukharan period was one of continual, intense study and thinking, which made him unlike most of the other students of Bukhara, who indulged in opium and taking snuff or gathered to pass time discussing trivialities. In Samarkand, he focused upon the biographies of Muslim scholars.

It is true, after some time he lost his appetite for this traditional education and became dissatisfied with the curriculum of the Bukharan madrasahs. Sources do not pinpoint exactly why Marjani became dissatisfied.

Despite feeling dissatisfied with the courses, Marjani continued his study in a madrasah, spending most of his time reading in the famous libraries of Bukhara and in his quarters at the famous Kokaldash Madrasah. During this time he met with Damullah Husayn Qarghali (d. 1858) who greatly influenced him. Qarghali was not a formal mudarris at madrasahs, but a free researcher and a learned man, and according to Marjani, a person “entirely superior to many formal mudarrises of Bukhara.” He was aware of world events as well as Bukharan affairs and had a good grasp of Islamic history. During his eleven-year-stay in Bukhara, Marjani always kept in touch with Qarghali and benefited much from conversations with him, becoming one of the few privileged to use Qarghali’s extensive library of rare manuscripts. Qarghali even helped Marjani with the methodology in his historical book Wafayat al-Aslaf.

After spending eleven years in Central Asia he returned to Tatarstan, to his village, Tashkichi, in a big caravan (21 May 1849) by way of Imamqal’a, Orsk, and Orenburg. Upon his return from Bukhara, known as a promising scholar who had studied in the famous Bukharan madrasahs, he was recommended for the vacant post of imam to Ibrahim Bay, the administrator and owner of the madrasah of the mosque of the First Quarter of the city of Kazan. The Assembly of Muslim scholars (‘Ulama Majlisi) of Kazan accepted him after an examination. He himself wrote that the examination included questions revealing an elementary knowledge of Islam, the low level of which frustrated him. He passed the examination and became the imam, khatib and mudarris of the mosque, then underwent another exam in Ufa before the Sobranie. There, he received his ukaze, a document showing that he was permitted to perform the office of an imam. The madrasah students of Kazan gained two opposing initial impressions of Marjani: Some were under the impression that he was a well educated scholar, while other students saw him as one who merely completed his courses well in Bukhara, and did not socialize with other scholars.

Working as a teacher, Marjani taught successfully and without problems for five years, until he clashed with the owner and administrator of the madrasah, Ibrahim Bay. At the beginning, Ibrahim Bay was pleased with Marjani’s teaching and helped him financially and in other ways. During that time, Marjani became financially better off. He bought some good property in the First Quarter and built a dormitory there.

Marjani’s progress is said to have provoked jealousy among the `ulama of Kazan. They expressed their disagreements with Marjani on i’tiqad and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and with
Marjani’s criticism of the system of education in Bukhara. When Marjani broke with Ibrahim Bay, they had an opportunity to attack him more directly. Because they accused him of conspiracy, his certificate (ukaze) was taken away and he was forbidden to teach in the madrasah, in addition to being beset with many problems. At this point, Marjani even thought of moving to Baghdad. But later the community of the First Quarter gathered and decided to condemn the Ministry of Internal Affairs, because they believed it was unfair to deprive such a scholar of his post simply to please others. The Minister of Police, Shah Ahmad Alkin, was convinced that he should disregard the complaints of the qadimist `ulama against Marjani, deeming them based on their bigotry and jealousy. In consequence, Marjani regained his position after a year (1855), serving in this madrasah for twenty-two years.

In 1864 Marjani obtained the degree of akhund and muhtasib from the Sobranie. He had gained the favor of certain wealthy Tatars (bays). Thus, in 1871 some esteemed bays of the neighborhood gathered, raised money, and bought buildings to establish a new madrasah and dormitory for him. As a result, students moved from Ibrahim Bay’s madrasah to this building and Marjani was spared the earlier conflicts in Ibrahim Bay’s private madrasah. He formed a board comprised of representatives from the community to take care of the madrasah and later received the approval of the Sobranie—an unprecedented event. The bays of the First and Second Quarters raised money and built a new madrasah, “the Marjani Madrasah” or “Aliya Madrasah”, which accepted students in September 1881. This modern building became the best madrasah in Kazan at that time, and he taught there for eight years, until his death.

In 1880 Marjani set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way he stopped in Istanbul and met with the Bukharan, Shayh Suleyman Efendi (1821/22-1890), Sháykh al-Islam Ahmed Said Efendi and other dignitaries. He met with Foreign Minister Asim Pasha and with the famous historian, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895) whom he admired greatly. He donated some of his books to the Bayezid (Hamidiye) Library.

Marjani’s biographer reveals another important aspect that distinguishes him from the other Tatar `ulama. Thus he contacted and established close friendships with some orientalists, and Russian government officers, socializing with Alexandre Kazim Bek (1802-1870), Vasilii Vasil’evich Radlov (18371918), Joseph M. E. Gottwaldt and some others, becoming a close friend of Gottwaldt. They exchanged visits and held long discussions. Again because of his enthusiasm for studying history, Marjani became a member of the Society for Archaeology (Arkheologicheskoe obshchestvo) of Kazan University, the first among the Kazan imams to do so. He gave a paper to be read in Russian at one of its meetings (Marjani knew a little Russian). Russian scholars, historians and Orientalists showed great respect for Marjant.

In particular, he had close contact and friendship with the Orientalist, V. V. Radlov, who was the director of the Russian Tatar Teachers’ College. Through Radlov, Marjani became acquainted with scholars in history, archaeology and ethnology, and he must have been acquainted with Radlov’s Tatar linguistic studies.

It is obvious from his correspondence with Husayn Fayzkhanov that he had a strong desire for the position of mufti of the Sobranie. He believed that it would help to elevate the situation of Muslims in Russia if the mufti acted strongly enough to protect their rights. Thus, when mufti `Abd al-Wahid died, Marjani wanted to succeed him. The famous missionary, Nikolai Ivanovich Il’minskii, however, after mentioning the possible candidates for mufti in one of his letters to Pobedonostsev, the head of the Synod in St. Petersburg, characterized Marjani in an unfavorable light.

The issue came up again when mufti Salim Giray died and some of his supporters encouraged Marjani to apply for the position. This time, however, Marjani did not want it. “Now I am old [he was about seventy at that time]... If I were younger, I probably would have made an effort to improve my knowledge of the Russian language... A mufti should know both Islamic knowledge and Russian language.” This opinion demonstrates a wish to communicate better with Russians.
Throughout his life he never tired of struggling to wipe out the corrupt elements surrounding Islam which, he believed, hindered Muslims’ progress toward modern civilization. Thus, he strove to abolish the absolute authority of the conservative ‘ulama over the Muslim mind. Again he held that a new epoch of enlightenment could arise in the Islamic World only when the time of *ijtihad* (free inquiry based on personal conviction) superseded *taqlid* (unquestioned submission to the religious authorities). He believed in the necessity of breaking down the old mentality of *taqlid* in order to introduce dynamic new ideas, modern discoveries, and science. Also, he struggled against the attitude of renunciation of the world, fatalism.

Because of his firm, serious and uncompromising character, Marjani annoyed many people. He was undeterred by that and remained convinced that he was right. He said directly to people what he believed to be true, and persevered in spite of what others thought. “Disregarding other people’s feelings, Marjani severely criticized the books which were well-known and valid in people’s opinion, and disapproved of the scholars who were respected by the people. On the other hand, his opponents criticized his character and attitude rather than his ideas. They blamed him for castigating respected people, calling him arrogant, hungry for fame.” Even some of Marjani’s sympathizers mildly criticized him: “Marjani is going too far in his criticism. If he had found a middle ground with the opposing qadimist ‘ulama he could have brought many people to his side.”

For almost four decades (1850-1889) he put his mark on the Tatar reform movement and became the pattern-setter for later modern tendencies among Tatars. It was he who prepared Tatar society for more radical steps toward modernization. In his time, the move toward Tatar reform became almost synonymous with his name, and Marjani, spurred on by previous individual scholarly efforts, became the primary organizer of the Tatar reform movement. The significance of his life and his writings on the intellectual history of Tatar society lies in the fact that he gave momentum to public opinion and prepared many Tatar youth for a profound enlightenment.

Riza al-Din, who knew and conversed with both Marjani and al-Afghani, praised the latter for his intelligence and talent as well as his mastery of rhetoric and insight into the temperament of the people. However, he held Marjani to be superior to al-Afghani in depth of knowledge. Although Marjani was well rounded and knowledgeable in all aspects of Islamic science, he failed to be as effective as he should have been, and failed to achieve immediate influence due to his proud, harsh, and uncompromising personality.

**C. Riza al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din (1855/58-1936)**

After Marjani and Nasiri, Riza al-Din was accepted as the third leading figure of the Tatar renaissance. As a biographer, historian, journalist, pedagogue, religious scholar, and a member of the ‘ulama, Riza al-Din resembled Marjani, who had the most profound influence on his way of religious thinking, while Gaspirali’s *Tarjuman* attracted his attention to worldly affairs. Also, several times in St. Petersburg he met with al-Afghani who influenced him through his approach to the philosophical meaning of Islam.

Riza al-Din was born in 1855 or 1858, in a village called Kichuchati of the *gubernia* of Samara. Unlike Marjani, Qursavi or other religious reformers, Riza al-Din had never been to Bukhara. He studied in a madrasah at a village called Bugulme and in 1889 or 1890 became a member (*qadi*) of the *Sobranie*. This was the only education he received. He was otherwise a self-educated person.

He was deeply interested in classical Chaghatay literature, and classical and modern Ottoman literature, especially Turkish writers such as Cevdet Pasha, Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1913), Ziya Pasha (1825-1880), and Namik Kemal (1840-1888). He was interested also in classical and modern Arabic literature and had read the Muslim reformist literature of such intellectuals as al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, and Qasim Amin (1863-1908), as well as Christian Arab writers Zaydan (1861-1914), Farah Antun (1871-1922), and Ya’qub Sarruf (1852-1927).

In 1906, he resigned from the post of *qadi* and moved to Orenburg to begin a new career, as a journalist, becoming a permanent writer for the newspaper *Vaqt*, founded that same year by Shakir and Zahir Ramigullari. In 1908 he began publishing a literary and scholarly journal, *Shura*,...
becoming its chief editor and main contributor. He helped it to become the most serious, rich, and long lasting of the Tatar journals before the Soviet regime.

It is claimed that Riza al-Din had a Naqshbandi connection, being a follower of the last great Naqshbandi Shaykh Zayn Allah Rasuli. However, Riza al-Din’s firm stand on the rejection of Sufism, and his salafi inclination is quite clear in his writings. Intellectually he was partial to the famous Muslim mystic Ibn al-`Arabi's thoughts on reasoning and rejecting adherence to any schools of kalam. In this respect, he did have intellectual discourse with the Shaykh Zayn Allah Rasuli, but this does not necessarily make him a “follower” of the Shaykh.

Riza al-Din, like Ismail Gaspirali and Musa Bigiyef, accepted pan-Turkism in language, in contrast to Qayyum Nasiri, who tried to promote the Tatar vernacular in his writings. Riza al-Din wrote in a language almost identical with Ottoman Turkish, as did Ismail Gaspirali and Musa Bigiyef.

Riza al-Din had a relatively milder, more cautious, and more solid foundation in his thought and writing than that of his close friend and another important reformist figure, Musa Bigiyef. Therefore, Riza al-Din, being a modest person, who tried to avoid hurting other’s feelings when criticizing them, received less hostility from the qadimist `ulama. His very character aroused respect among the religious and non-religious reformists alike, as well as among some qadimist `ulama. He became the second reformist to attain the status of mufti, the highest post of Muslim religious leadership. Thus after the death of a former mufti, `Alimjan Barudi, in 1921, Riza al-Din became the occupant of the post of mufti, and remained in it until his death in 1936. Under the Soviet regime, he maintained his position and never praised the regime.

His career change from man of religion to a man of politics offers a typical example of how a religious intellectual ceased to be primarily religious. His interest in temporal affairs increased, and he became a journalist (1906-1921) and an active participant in the political movement of the Muslims of Russia, before returning to his original career of religious leadership as chief of the `ulama (1921-1936). With his successful life story, he achieved the reformist aim of being both a man of religion and a man of the world. His legacy, after a long ban by the Soviet regime, has reappeared in today's Tatarstan Republic within the Russian Federation, and at last he has gained the respect he deserved and desired. As he wrote in 1905: “I am not writing for the people of this century, but for the future generation... Some readers ask me why I didn’t mention miraculous events (karamat) when I wrote biographies of great men... If I had intended to please the people of my generation, I would have written interpretations of dreams, divination of letters, or prayer talismans. I also would have written on the dangers of the new method (usul-i jadid) schools as the guardian of religion. Or I would not have written at all but just criticized what was written.”

Riza al-Din was a very prolific author. His writings include biographies of Ibn al-`Arabi, Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ghazzali, Abu al-`ala’ al-Ma‘arri, al-Afghani, the authors of six hadith books known as Kutub-i Sitta as well as collections of “famous women” (Meshhur Khatunlar) and “famous men” (Meshhur Irler). He published the longest-lived (1908-18) and probably best Tatar journal, Shura, of the jadidist era. His Asar is the best source for the history of Tatar scholars based on the archives of the Sobranie. He also wrote on the religious and administrative structure of the Muslims of Russia and their relationship with the Russian government. Finally, he wrote a large number of pedagogical works on students, women, men, and family.

D. Musa Jar Allah Bigiyef (1875-1949)

A close friend of Riza al-Din, belonging to the same school of thought, a member of the `ulama, journalist, politician and prolific writer, Musa Bigiyef was one of the major reformists of this period. Bigiyef’s attitude toward Sufis, mutakallimun, and contemporary qadimist `ulama bears a resemblance to Riza al-Din, although they differed completely in temperament.

Bigiyef went extreme in his criticism of past `ulama, criticizing the greatest and most respected figures, such as al-Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and al-Taftazani. He
passionately clung to every new idea, and, sometimes, he even attracted the criticism of his comrades.

Gaspirali found Bigiyef’s introduction of the discussion as to whether God’s mercy includes non-Muslims as well as Muslims inappropriate and irrelevant, and criticized Bigiyef mildly in his newspaper Terjuman. Another Tatar author judged him to have indulged himself in very ambiguous religious questions which were unrelated to real life.

With his arguments on theological issues, he attracted the qadimists’ criticism. Thus almost all issues of the qadimists journal Din ve Ma’isheret in 1910 have one or more articles against Musa Bigiyef, and to a much lesser degree Ziya al-Din Kemali and Riza al-Din. Some of these are very severe, to the extent of calling Bigiyef “heretic” (zindiq), “non-believer” (kafir) and so on.

Bigiyef performed some important tasks in the cultural-political meetings of the Muslims of Russia (1905-1917) by accurately keeping and later publishing the records of discussions. He knew Russian, Persian, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish and audited classes in the law school of St. Petersburg University (1904). He also studied mathematics and astronomy in Bukharan madrasahs. He was extremely receptive to the natural and mathematical sciences of the West, but he was rather critical of Western social sciences. He believed that the West moved from one extreme to another; in medieval times, Europeans put great emphasis on religious thought, but in the twentieth century, moving to another extreme, they laid extreme stress on the social thoughts with which Musa Bigiyef did not completely agree.

Musa Bigiyef was born in the city of Rostov-on-Don, in 1875, in a middleclass, scholarly family. His father had worked as a worker on the newly-built railroad of czarist Russia near Rostov-on-Don as well as serving as unofficial imam. After the death of his father at an early age, his mother, Fatima Hanim Bigiyeva, an enlightened woman, took care of the family, providing both religious and secular education for Musa and his brother Muhammad Zahir Bigiyef, who also became a well-known Tatar literary figure and a reformist. Musa Bigiyef studied in a Russian elementary school, then began studying in a technical high school, until, in 1888, his mother sent him to Kazan to study in Gol Boyu Madrasah. Then, he went to Bukhara where he studied privately with several instructors, learning fiqh and hikmat from reformist teachers Damullah ‘Ivaz Efendi and Damullah Ikram Efendi, and mathematics from Damullah Mir Sharif Efendi. After about ten years of study in Kazan and Turkistan madrasahs, he went to Istanbul, and then, after spending a short time there, to Cairo. Here, he took private courses from Shaykh Bakhit, a student and follower of the ideas of al-Afghani, and a close friend of ‘Abduh. After about five years of private study, he returned home in 1903 or 1904. In 1905, he started his publishing, journalistic and political activities.

In his early writings, Bigiyef dealt with the question of how the Qur’an was written, such as the early copies of the Qur’an (Masahif) the seven modes of recitations (al-ahruf al-sab’a) of the Qur’an, and the issue of abrogation of an earlier verse by one which was revealed later (naskh). He considered these subjects as crucial, because some Islamic narrators of traditions and various historians wrote many things that were totally false. These writings, he observed, formed weak doors inviting attacks by the enemies of Islam. Then, he wrote about commentaries of the Qur’an. Bigiyef criticized the interpretations of mutakallimun (the scholastic theologians such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi or al-Baydawi, who wrote in the spirit of kalam, and he also opposed the interpretations of some fuqaha (doctors of Islamic law) who wrote in a spirit of sectarianism.

In regard to some issues such as intoxicants, divorce, slavery and religious obligations, Bigiyef opposed the opinions of mujtahids and imams of the Sunni schools in the field of Islamic law. In the field of the methodology of Islamic law, he argued that the formulation of the sharia cannot be restricted merely to the four Sunni schools. In addition, Bigiyef condemned the opinions of the Muslim scholastic theologians. He believed that the kalam schools had turned the faith of Muslims into childish exercises by their method of disputation, and by deviation into the ways of fanaticism.

Like Qursavi, Marjani and Riza al-Din, Musa Bigiyef severely criticized the madrasah curriculum. Disappointed with the ancient books of madrasahs of Russia, he decided to travel to
other Muslim lands in the hope of finding different scholars and scholarly works. During his journeys to Turkistan, Istanbul, Mecca, Medina, Syria, India and Egypt, he was disappointed to find the same curriculum and the same method of teaching in these places. Being young and restless, however, he did not fall into despair, but took private courses from experts famous in their fields. More than that, he always sought scholarly works in the libraries of these countries. His efforts were not in vain, and he discovered great classics of Arab civilization and satisfied his thirst for knowledge of such works.

Bigiyef took part in almost all of the meetings of the Muslims of Russia, and provided the most accurate record of debates in these meetings, while simultaneously keeping up with his other responsibilities in the political area. Between 1905 and 1907 he wrote in various newspapers, including Ulfe and al-Tirmidh, the newspapers of his friend `Abd al-Rashid Ibrahimov, a famous religious reformist, as well as the radical modernist al-`Asr al-Jadid and moderate reformist Vaqt (in Tatar). In 1907 he began a project of translating certain Arabic and Persian classics of Muslim heritage into Tatar. In 1908 he audited courses in the School of Law at St. Petersburg University, pondering on the comparison of Islamic and Western laws. Finally, with the encouragement of Riza al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din, he wrote a book, The Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Qavaid-i Fiqhiyya) and published it in 19 10.

In 1910 and 1911 Musa Bigiyef was in the city of Orenburg, teaching in the Husayniya Madrasah and writing in Riza al-Din’s Islamic reformist journal Shura. At this time his thinking was much influenced by Sufi thinkers, such as Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), Abu Qasim `Abd al-Karim al-Qushairi (9861074), and Ibn al-`Arabi, particularly their ideas about the inclusiveness of God’s mercy toward all people, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. His lectures at the Orenburg Philanthropic Association (Orenburg Jam`iyat-i Khayriyasi) and his writings in the Shura journal on this issue drew severe criticisms from the qadimist `ulama, because of which he resigned from the school and left Orenburg City.

His works exerted influence beyond the Russian empire, for example in Istanbul. Indeed, based on the complaints of the shaykh al-Islam's office (Bab-i Meshihat), the Ministry of Domestic Affairs banned his four books, saying that they spread dangerous and heretical ideas (kufriyati muhtevi). However, this action served to attract more attention to Bigiyef’s books, particularly on the part of the students. Because of this action of censorship, Bigiyef wrote a severe criticism of Ottoman shaykh al-Islams in the Tatar newspaper Vaqt.

A conservative Turkish scholar Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954) criticized Bigiyef in his book Yeni Islam Muctehiderinin Kiymet-i Ilmiyvesi (1919). Sabri believed that Bigiyef exerted a profound influence on the Muslims of Russia by his publications refuting fuqaha, mufassirs and especially kalam scholars and gained the title of “the Luther of Islam.” Sabri’s main purpose was to defend kalam scholars. He claimed that kalam had served to protect the Faith of Muslims since Islam came into contact with philosophy, more than a thousand years ago. However, this religious reformer, Bigiyef, Sabri said, wanted to destroy kalam completely and raised suspicions about religious sources such as tafsir and fiqh.

Sabri distinguished Bigiyef from other reformers, that is, those who borrowed their ideas from Western sources and were ignorant of religious issues. He considered Bigiyef qualified to discuss religious matters. Sabri believed that Bigiyef had been influenced by the European idea of freedom of conscience (hurriyet-i vicdaniye) when he approved of every faith and not insulting anybody because of his belief. Sabri claimed that Bigiyef could not save himself from this contagious disease that surrounded many Muslim thinkers: European progress produced a psychological destruction in the minds of intellectuals. According to Sabri, the reasons for Muslim decline lay in their being diverted from the way of Islam and not acting in according with Islam’s requirements. Muslims suffer as a result.

From all of these discussions it is possible to judge that the religious reformists’ new approach and interpretation of Islam caused an intellectual ferment and controversy among the Tatar `ulama. They introduced a habit of doubt and the exercise of private judgment and disseminated relatively liberal ideas and intellectual skepticism among the Tatar youth.
But what we urgently need right now is a reform within Islam, so that Islam can speak to our modern situation with its present-day problems. What do you mean by that? El-Kaisy-Friemuth: By a reform of Islam I mean a process similar to that which occurred during the Christian Reformation. That's how we understand our scholarly work at the Department of Islamic Religious Studies (DIRS) in Erlangen.