



## FORMATION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES OF THE UNION "KHUDOSIZLAR" IN SAMARKAND (1930-1940S)

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the formation, institutionalization, and functioning of the Khudosizlar Union in Uzbekistan from the 1930s to the 1940s. It analyzes the preconditions for the organization's creation, shaped by the socio-cultural specifics of the region, as well as its main areas of activity, including agitation, propaganda, education, and publishing. Particular attention is paid to the role of anti-religious propaganda in the ideological policy of the Soviet state and its influence on the transformation of public consciousness. Based on quantitative and factual data, the scope of anti-religious activity, forms, and methods of work among various social groups are revealed. It is concluded that the Khudosizlar Union exerted significant influence on the secularization of society in Uzbekistan, despite the contradictions and limitations in the implementation of anti-religious policy.*

**Keywords:** *Khudosizlar Union, antireligious propaganda, atheism, Soviet ideology, Uzbekistan, secularization, cultural policy, party education, religion, social transformation*

**Аннотация;** *В статье рассматриваются особенности формирования, институционализации и функционирования Союза «Худосизлар» в Узбекистане в 1930-1940-е годы. Анализируются предпосылки создания организации, обусловленные социально-культурной спецификой региона, а также основные направления её деятельности, включая агитационно-пропагандистскую, образовательную и издательскую работу. Особое внимание уделяется роли антирелигиозной пропаганды в системе идеологической политики советского государства и её влиянию на трансформацию общественного сознания. На основе количественных и фактических данных раскрываются масштабы антирелигиозной деятельности, формы и методы работы среди различных социальных групп. Делается вывод о значительном влиянии Союза «Худосизлар» на процессы секуляризации общества в Узбекистане, несмотря на наличие противоречий и ограничений в реализации антирелигиозной политики.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Союз «Худосизлар», антирелигиозная пропаганда, атеизм, советская идеология, Узбекистан, секуляризация, культурная политика, партийное просвещение, религия, социальная трансформация*



## Introduction

The relationship between state and religion in the first decades of Soviet power occupies an important place in modern historical scholarship. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of regional studies, as the implementation of antireligious policies in various parts of the USSR had its own specific characteristics. Uzbekistan, as a region with deep religious traditions and a predominantly Muslim population, is of particular interest for studying the mechanisms and forms of atheist policies.

In the 1930s and 1930s, the Soviet government consistently pursued a policy of limiting the influence of religion and fostering a new, atheistic worldview. One of the key instruments of this policy was the Union of Militant Atheists, known in Uzbekistan as "Khudosizlar." Its activities were aimed at broad segments of the population and included various forms of ideological influence—from lectures and discussions to the creation of specialized educational and cultural institutions. Despite a certain amount of research on this issue, many aspects of the Khudosizlar Union's activities in Uzbekistan remain insufficiently studied, particularly in terms of regional specifics, scale, and effectiveness of its work. Therefore, the aim of this study is to comprehensively analyze the formation and activities of the Khudosizlar Union in the country, identify the main areas of its work, and assess its role in transforming public consciousness.

## Main Part

The formation of the Union of Militant Atheists in Uzbekistan had a number of specific features and was completed somewhat later than in the central regions of the USSR. This can be explained by both the stability of religious traditions in the region and the specific socioeconomic and cultural development, including a significant rural population, low literacy rates, and the strong position of Islamic institutions in public life. Under these conditions, the Soviet state's antireligious policy required more flexible and adapted forms of implementation.[1]

The final organizational formation of the "Khudosizlar" Union took place in November 1928 at the first republican congress, held in Samarkand. This congress marked an important stage in the institutionalization of the antireligious movement in the republic and concluded the preceding period, during which local structures of the Union of Atheists were formed in various regions of Uzbekistan.

It should be noted that even before the creation of a unified republican organization, active preparatory work was underway in Uzbekistan. In particular, by March 1925, 29 organizational bureaus were already functioning in Samarkand, a significant number of which were concentrated in the old city, indicating targeted work in traditional religious centers. These organizational bureaus acted as primary coordinating structures, organizing lectures, propaganda, and educational activities.

Of particular importance in the initial period was the practice of holding mass anti-religious events timed to coincide with religious holidays. Thus, in 1925, approximately 100 meetings were held in Samarkand aimed at exposing religious dogma and fostering





atheistic views. These events were held in clubs, cell groups, and "red teahouses," which became important centers of ideological influence on the population. Such forms of work testify to the desire of Soviet authorities to integrate anti-religious propaganda into everyday cultural life. The First Republican Congress of the "Khudosizlar" Unions (November 1928) played a key role in defining the strategic directions of anti-religious policy. Its agenda included the organizational structure of the union, the approval of its charter, the election of its governing bodies, and the definition of propaganda objectives. The adopted charter enshrined the ideological focus of the union's activities, aimed at mobilizing the working masses in the fight against religion as a "relic of the past."

The charter placed particular emphasis on the need to take regional specifics into account. It emphasized that anti-religious propaganda should be conducted with due regard for the cultural level of the population, especially in the village environment. Thus, a differentiated approach to various social groups was developed, demonstrating a desire to increase the effectiveness of ideological influence.[2]

The union's organizational structure was built on the principle of mass participation and accessibility. The primary organization, formed on a production or territorial basis, was the core unit. A minimum membership of five people allowed for the rapid expansion of the network of organizations. Youth sections became an important element of the structure, through which work was carried out to foster an atheistic worldview among young people.

From the late 1920s onward, anti-religious activity in Uzbekistan became systemic. In 1929, an anti-religious university was opened in Tashkent, and short- and long-term courses for training propagandists were organized. Similar educational institutions operated at higher education institutions, party schools, and Komsomol organizations. This marks a transition from episodic propaganda to a professionalized system of ideological training.[3]

Antireligious themes were actively integrated into the education system and party outreach. They were included in the curricula of schools, Soviet Party schools, Komsomol circles, women's meetings, and club activities. Thus, a comprehensive system of influence was formed, encompassing all age and social groups of the population.

Considerable attention was paid to the development of publishing. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the mass publication of antireligious literature in the Uzbek language began, including textbooks, brochures, articles, and visual aids. In the second half of 1939 alone, more than 20 brochure titles were published, with a total circulation of over 250,000 copies. Visual propaganda—posters, photo series, and slogans aimed at a low-literacy audience—played a special role.

The media became an important channel for disseminating atheistic ideology. In 1940, national and local newspapers published approximately 170 anti-religious





materials, and over 60 lectures were broadcast on the radio. Radio broadcasting made it possible to reach broad segments of the population, including remote rural areas.

By the late 1930s, anti-religious work had truly reached a mass scale. In the Samarkand region in 1939, hundreds of lectures and talks were held with tens of thousands of listeners. This activity continued in 1940, especially during religious holidays, when propaganda efforts intensified. For example, during the fasting period, hundreds of lectures and talks were held with tens of thousands of people participating, demonstrating a targeted influence on the religious practices of the population. [4]

Circle work played a special role. In Tashkent in 1940, more than 620 anti-religious circles were active, uniting approximately 15,000 people. Other regions also saw the active development of similar forms of work. The circles facilitated a deeper understanding of scientific and atheistic knowledge and the development of stable ideological attitudes.

The creation of specialized museums became an important element of anti-religious propaganda. The anti-religious museum in Samarkand enjoyed considerable popularity: in the first half of 1940 alone, it was visited by over 65,000 people. Museums served not only an educational but also an ideological function, demonstrating a "scientific" explanation of religious phenomena. [5]

At the same time, the documents also noted problems in the activities of the "Khudosizlar" Union. In particular, the practice of administrative pressure, including the closure of religious institutions without prior educational work, was criticized. The need to abandon campaigns and move toward systematic, scientifically based propaganda was emphasized. Insufficient attention from party organs was also noted, which was viewed as a manifestation of ideological inconsistency. Thus, between the 1920s and 1940s, a multi-level and extensive system of anti-religious activity was created in Uzbekistan, encompassing organizational, educational, informational, and cultural mechanisms. The "Khudosizlar" Union became an important instrument of Soviet ideological policy aimed at transforming traditional society and fostering a new, atheistic worldview. Despite certain contradictions and difficulties, its activities had a significant impact on sociocultural processes in the republic.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the analysis shows that the formation and development of the Khudosizlar Union in Uzbekistan occurred in the context of a complex interaction between the ideological tenets of the Soviet regime and the enduring religious traditions of the local population. Despite its later organizational formation compared to the central regions of the USSR, the union quickly developed into a diversified and widespread structure encompassing various spheres of public life.

Antireligious activities were comprehensive and included organizational, educational, propaganda, and cultural outreach. Lectures, discussions, club work, the publication of literature, and the use of mass media and visual aids played a significant





role. Particular attention was paid to influencing youth and the rural population, demonstrating the strategic nature of the policy pursued.

At the same time, certain contradictions were also identified, related to manifestations of administrative pressure, campaigning, and a lack of consistency in the work of party bodies. These factors in some cases reduced the effectiveness of antireligious propaganda and necessitated adjusting its methods.

Overall, the activities of the "Khudosizlar" Union had a significant impact on the processes of secularization and the transformation of public consciousness in Uzbekistan in the pre-war period. It became an important element of Soviet modernization policy aimed at shaping a new type of society based on the principles of a scientific worldview and ideological loyalty to the state.

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