

Shaykh Batal Hajji from Surkhokhi: towards the history of Islam in Ingushetia

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*Dunenna kheza ts'i yitslurgyats*¹

Batal Hajji Belkhoroyev has remained a rather enigmatic figure despite the recent heightened interest in the history of Islam in the Caucasus—in Chechnya and Ingushetia in particular. The first published materials about the Shaykh appeared in an article by Klavdii Ivanovich Borusevich in 1893. The author candidly remarked that ‘this evidence is disjointed, accidental, because I came across this question merely by chance’.² Even though the name of Batal Hajji has since been mentioned many times in scientific literature, information about him, his descendents and successors has remained fragmented.³

It is thought that the Ingush accepted Islam rather late: in 1861 the residents of the village of Gvileti/Gielta, in the upper reaches of the Daryal pass, were the last to do so. However, according to some scholars, Islam started to penetrate among the Vaynaks already in the period of the Arab conquests, when in the 8–10th centuries the Arabs passed many times through the Daryal pass. The earliest examples of putting the language in writing using the Arab alphabet go back to the 13–14th centuries. Ingush folklore includes an entire layer of popular traditions and parables about the history of Islam’s expansion, about the Prophet Muhammad and Turpal ‘Ali, about hermits and preachers and about the holy places connected with them.

According to one of these stories, when the *Qur’an* was lowered down to the Prophet on golden chains, it was as big as a millwheel. The prophet loaded it on a donkey and went on a journey from east to west to spread God’s word. Having reached Ingushetia he had to bury the *Qur’an* in the earth in the Targim gorge, where in later years the shrine of Elgits Tkhoba-Yerdi was built.⁴ According to another folk tradition, this shrine is the burial place of the legendary hero Abu Muslim, who according to folk tales spread Islam in the North-Eastern Caucasus.⁵ Very interesting are the legend about Kurmakh from the tribe of Quraysh⁶ and the widely known popular story about Shaykh, Timur’s son, the owner through his powers of perception of Turpal’s heroic horse and magnetic sword, who was educated by the Ingush *kant* (*k’ant*: daring, bold man) Barkim.⁷

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As for Muslim places of worship, the earliest of these surviving on the territory of Ingushetia is Borgha/Borogha/Borghan Kash ('the grave of Borgha/Borogha/Borghan'). According to the inscription above the entrance this is the burial place of Bek Sultan b. Khudaydad. The Mausoleum (dated 808 AH, that is 1405–6 CE; the builder—Girey) is located on the southwestern bank of the Sunja river, north east of the village of Plievo, on the river side slope of the hill known as 'the Shaykh's Mountain' (652 m). In its architecture the Mausoleum resembles Sufi monuments of the 14th century—the period of the 'Golden Horde'—built in Majary, not far from the present day town of Essentuki in the Stavropol *krai*.

Borgha Kash is wrapped with mystery and many legends are told about it. According to one, an Arab Shaykh (according to another version a follower of Timur Burhan) living in Ingushetia felt that his time had come to leave this world and decided to find a burial place for himself. He rode out into the steppe on a camel, leaving the animal to decide on the location. Indeed, on the spot where the camel stopped Borgha Kash was later built. A miraculous power emanates from it and in previous times, so it is said, also a pleasant odour of ripe apple.

The mausoleum was pillaged many times by robbers looking for the supposedly hidden treasure it contained. In the last third of the 19th century it was completely ravaged: in 1876, by order of the Russian authorities the mummified body was exhumed and transferred to Moscow, and in the 1880s Molokans from Vladikavkaz finding no treasure, spilt a keg of kerosene in the cellar and torched the building. (According to the local belief the robbers were destroyed by a sudden hail storm.) In the 1910s local residents restored Borgha Kash. It is an important holy place until the present and in times of draught prayers for rain are held in it.⁸

Of great interest is the evidence about 'Elmarz Hajji Khautiev (1766–1923)' [*sic!*], the last Ingush pagan priest (*ts'u* in Ingush) from the Shoa/Shoan/Shua/Shon/Shoani gorge.⁹ His co-villager told that Elmarz's 'shoulders shone. When he spoke, it was impossible to take the eyes off him.' He was considered clairvoyant, 'drove away epidemics and ruled the people well'.¹⁰ When Elmarz was finally ready to accept Islam (in 1873), he built his holy white flag—the earthly symbol of the god Dyala—into the wall of the shrine and then hid in a secret cave, where he remained secluded for 40 days. Only after all that he told the people of his decision. Elmarz went twice to Mecca (in 1905 and 1908) where he became acquainted with the Qurayshite Shaykh Jamaleyla/Jamalullah. A strong friendship connected the two sages and they exchanged messages.

It is noteworthy that while observing the Muslim rituals, Elmarz Hajji continued to celebrate the ancient festivals. For that matter he used to go to Khevsureti to perform the rituals together with the Khevsurs. (The Nakhs and the mountaineers of Georgia have lived from times immemorial in close contact and have strong ethno-cultural connections.) Elmarz Hajji used to warn his compatriots: 'Take care of the mountains. Love the mountains. If you part with the mountains—your roots—you will disappear from the face of the earth.'¹¹ (Incidentally, one of the folk sayings states: '*Loame d'akhiysachune loame a, ye are a khurgyats*' ['he who stays in the mountains will have both the mountains and the plains; he who leaves the mountains will have neither'].)

Such a stance, inconsistent and contradictory as it may seem at a superficial glance, is explained by the persistence among the Ingush communities, especially those in the mountains, of traditional views and cults. Neither Shaykh Mansur, nor the imams Ghazi-Muhammad and Shamil were able to move the Ingush away from their devotion to these ‘old ways’. Their attempts to propagate Islam did not result in massive Islamisation during the period of the wars in the Caucasus. It is widely accepted that the major role in this process was played by the famous Chechen Shaykh Kunta Hajji Kishi (1800 [according to other sources 1830] –1867) who based his propagation of Islam on the *'adat*—the mountain traditions and customs.¹²

Kunta Hajji performed the *haj* in the 1840s and probably then accepted the mystical path. The evidence is limited only to the mention of ‘three Khanafite Shaykhs from the Qadiri brotherhood’ from whom he received his *ijaza*.¹³ Coming back home, Kunta Hajji established a separate branch of the Qadiri *tariqa*, which has gradually come to dominate all the Northern Caucasus, and most particularly Chechnya, Ingushetia and western Daghestan.

According to the available information, the Shaykh arrived in Ingushetia in May 1847, accompanied by a few *murids*. At the place of the present *stanitsa* Assinovskaia¹⁴ Kunta Hajji was welcomed by the best representatives of each Ingush kin, five from each. He moved from one village to another, and on 11 [23] July, after the morning prayer, he performed on the mountain that would hence be called Du‘a Guv (‘The Mountain of Prayer’) a *chakhka zikr* (*chakhka* in Ingush meaning ‘fast, quick’), which lasted three days and three nights with short intervals for prayers and food.¹⁵ (At present the residents of nearby villages gather on the mountain for sacrifice and prayer, while in the village of Ovlurgovo a mosque was built called after the ‘holy *ustaz* Kishi Hajji’.)

The initiation ceremony (in Arabic *al-talkin*, *ahdh al-wird*) was rather simple: Kunta Hajji or his agent—the *vakil*—took the candidate by his hand and asked him whether he acknowledged in his heart the sainthood of the chosen agent and took upon himself to repeat one hundred times the *shahada* in addition to the five daily prayers. The candidate who was ready to make a commitment, took an oath before God and the Shaykh (or the *vakil*), and repeated the formula one hundred times. Thus the initiation was completed.

The main ritual of the followers of the brotherhood has been the loud *zikr* (*zikr-jahr* from Arabic *dhikr jahri*) glorifying God by dancing in a circle and singing in a choir. At first the dance consists of slow body movements, then it becomes a motion growing into a fast anti-clockwise run along the circle. In between the cycles of dance religious hymns—*nazms*—are performed. Their themes vary: remembrance of historical persons and events, general Muslim topics, praises to the Prophet, to Shaykh Kunta Hajji and to the ‘righteous’ Caliph ‘Ali. The main purposes of singing these hymns are to remind one of the transitory nature of this world and one’s obligations before God, to call one to live a virtuous life and practice all the commandments of Islam and to honesty in one’s thoughts and deeds.¹⁶ After the *zikr* a prayer—*du‘a*—is read.

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The number of the followers of the Qadiriya (among them many women) grew rapidly and by 1863 they counted more than 5000.¹⁷ Being the spiritual and political head of the brotherhood, Kunta Hajji established his system of government: the territory of Chechnya and Ingushetia was divided into *na'ibdoms*, the representatives of power in each were his agents.

The Russian administration could not tolerate the existence of a cohesive community not under its control. Concerned about the spread of the brotherhood and the authority enjoyed by Kunta Hajji, the Governor-General of the Terek *oblast*, D. I. Sviatopolk-Mirskii, took measures in 1862 to suppress the Shaykh's activity. He and his family were put under surveillance. Following that, on 3 (OS, 15 NS) January 1864 Kunta Hajji was arrested in the Shali *raion* of the Argun *okrug* by order of the new Governor-General, M. T. Loris-Melikov. He was sent via Vladikavkaz to Novocherkassk under a special guard, and from there to exile in the township of Ustiuzhino in the Novgorod *guberniia* (presently in the Vologda *oblast*). The Shaykh's 'holy letters'—his appeals to the Mountaineers of the Caucasus written in exile have survived. Many tales are told about his stay and the miracles he performed there, especially the telling that Kunta Hajji did not die (on 19/31 May 1867) and walked away on water. . . .¹⁸

According to some sources, Kunta Hajji named Batal Hajji as his spiritual successor. After the arrest of the Shaykh the *murids* started to form groups around his *vakils*. In Ingushetia they were Huseyn Hajji from the village of Plievo, Hayrbeg Hajji from Nasyr-Kort and Batal Hajji from Surkhokhi. However, part of the members of the brotherhood who refused to accept any other teacher separated from the rest and formed a *virid* of its own, which has received the name 'Kuntahajjintsy'. In the last third of the 19th century several *virids* developed from the united brotherhood, each with its specific form of *zikr* and ritual attributes and each following its own founder shaykh. The largest *virids* by number of followers were those led by the Chechen Shaykhs Bammatt Girey Hajji (Bammatt Gira Hajji) 'Ovda from Avturi (nicknamed 'irq'lelq'arsh'—'hoppers'), and Chimirza (Chim Mirza) from Mayr-Tup (nicknamed 'drummers') and 'the only Ingush Shaykh', as he is described, Batal Hajji.

Shaykh Batal Hajji was born in the village of Surkhokhi /Surkhakhi (in Ingush Surkhot'e, nowadays in the Nazran *raion* of the Republic of Ingushetia) and belonged to the Orstkhoi kin of Belkhoroy/Belkharoy (Belkhoroev in Russian) in 1821.¹⁹ Whether he received the evidence about his date of birth is contradictory. According to one version he was born in the mid 19th century. According to another—he was the age of Kunta Hajji. Whether he received religious education is unknown to this author. There is evidence, however, that while an *abrek* (a bandit of honour)—he was consequently arrested by order of Kakhanov and spent five years in exile in Kaluga—Batal went on *hajj*. In Mecca he was inspired from above: the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him in a dream and offered the choice between this world and the after world. Batal chose this world hoping that by good conduct in this life he could win his place also in the afterlife.

The Shaykh acquired a great number of followers. At first these were mainly the residents of the Ingush villages of Surkhokhi, Nazran, Nasyr-Kort, Plievo and

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Upper Anchalyk/Upper Achaluki, but later they came from many other places as well. The distinctive symbols of the members of the brotherhood (*voshal* in Ingush) were the cut beard, the long *kinjal* (dagger), the *berdanka* (a sharpshooters' rifle designed by the American colonel Hiram Berdan, which was in wide use in the Russian army between 1868 and 1969) and a couple of pistols. Their main distinction of character was fearlessness. The Ingush call such people *b'a q'ozhabe* ('to be fearless') or *berdakh chaqheqqhargwodash* ('one who leaps over a precipice'). Other characteristics of the followers of Batal Hajji included spiritual power, mutual assistance and supporting each other in difficult circumstances.

In the literature, however, the real situation was distorted through the prism of Borusevich—the 'incidental' outside observer:

The sect is distinguished by its *jigiti*sm and extreme intolerance. ... Even the meekest person, having become a 'brother' of Batal, becomes the most desperate *jigiti* even if before he had been meeker than a harmless sheep. Their *jigiti*sm is expressed in stealing, fearlessness, murders etc. Their intolerance leads them to such behaviour as stopping visiting relatives who have not joined the sect and not replying to the customary greetings of [other] Muslims they meet.²⁰

The 'secret' information about the concept of the mystical path, about the general rules of the *virid*, about the peculiarities of individual praxis and psycho-technic established by the *ustaz* are kept tight within the circle of those bound by the spiritual bonds of the 'brothers' (in Ingush: *voshash*, sg. *vosha*).

Among the people Batal Hajji enjoyed an exceptional authority. It is said that his wife was treated with the greatest respect, like no other Ingush woman. About the personal traits of the Shaykh one can learn not only from orally transmitted tradition, but also from impressions recorded by people who met him.

Thus, John F. Baddeley, travelling in the Caucasus with his famous guide, the Balkar prince Urusbiev, arrived in Ingushetia in October 1901 and stayed in the house of Hajji Maali Khoteyev in the village of Muzhichi. 'Com[ing] to take a great interest' in the functioning of the Sufi brotherhood, in the peculiarities of the social behaviour of their followers and in their Shayks, most particularly Batal Hajji, the English traveller learnt that Batal's followers 'numbered 100 families', that 'they might give you bread or water, but they would throw what remained to the dogs, nor would they on any account accept food or drink from you' and that the Shaykh himself 'is very hospitable, and treats a guest well, giving him even wine or *vodka* and cigarettes, though, being a Hadjji, he neither drinks nor smokes himself'.²¹ Baddeley quoted Maali as saying that 'Batal has the useful faculty of knowing beforehand when a guest is coming and what sort of guest, troublesome or the reverse'.²²

Baddeley did meet the Shaykh on 8 October and was allowed to take a photo of him.²³ This is how he described the meeting:

... at 9.30 a.m. horsemen suddenly appeared and amidst general and evidently pleasurable excitement Batal Hadjji rode in, accompanied by his fourth son and two of his fanatical followers, who scowled savagely at Ourousbi and me. He was an old man, rather stout, with a good face and a very courteous manner. Recognizing Ourousbi, who offered his condolences [Batal Hajji

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had recently lost his wife—JM], he leaned over, embraced and kissed him, while tears came in his eyes. He shook hands with me, allowed me to photograph him, and told me that I should be very welcome if ever I came his way.²⁴

It is said that the Shaykh had the ability to attract people. In his character converged all the demands of the Ingush code of honour—the *izdel*—and the Sufi *adab* (Arabic—manners, culture). As for hospitality, it is both valued throughout the Caucasus as one of the criteria for the reputation of a man—in the Ingush heroic poems *Illu* it is an obligatory trait (*hoshal*) of the ideal hero ‘who has the honour of the *kant’a*’—and a *diyyafa* of the Sufi *adab*. It was for guests who frequented Batal Hajji, that his *murids* constructed a ‘refrigerator’—an ice house in which they kept food which was brought to the house of the *ustaz*. Batal Hajji’s house was in the most beautiful place in Surkhokhi and in the garden grew the trees especially esteemed by the Vaynaks—pear trees (*qhor* in Ingush). Some of them, planted by the Shaykh himself, still bloom. . . .

People say that Batal Hajji was blessed with the gifts of foresight, had the ability to move quickly in space, to be invisible, to hear requests from his *murids* from far away and come to their rescue by ‘secretly’ taking their pain, spiritual depression and sins (*zunub* in Arabic) onto himself. The consequences of contact with the Shaykh were reflected not only in the thoughts, deeds and actions of those surrounding him: according to rumours those willing to join him, who for one reason or another abstained from doing so, were tormented and tortured by ‘unknown forces’. People attested that Batal Hajji did not make a secret of the fact that he was able to perform miracles, that he maintained friendship with *jins*, was a *zhinashsa tayna sag* (‘a man with whom the *jins* share their secrets’), that he had power over them and that they fulfilled his requests.²⁵

In November 1911 Batal Hajji was accused by the Russian authorities of ‘giving refuge to the *abrek* Zelimkhan’ (a follower of Bammatt Girey Hajji), arrested and exiled, together with other prominent religious leaders—the Chechen Shaykhs Bammatt Girey Hajji, Suhayp/Suhomi Mulla, Dokku Shaykh, Mulla Mahoma, Kana Hajji, Chimmirza and the Avar Shaykh Uzun Hajji. By sending into exile the major religious leaders the Tsarist authorities hoped not merely to ‘uproot’ the phenomenon of ‘*abrekism*’, but also to ‘direct’ the mountaineers on to ‘the only and sure road of progress’. That is, they believed that by repressing the carriers of knowledge and the keepers of the people’s traditions—the ‘inspirers’ and ‘concealers’ of the fighters for independence—they would succeed to intimidate and break the Caucasians’ resistance to the political, economic and cultural colonisation of the country. These hopes, however, proved to be premature. . . .

In the following summer the Interim Governor of the Terek *Oblast* and the *Ataman* of the Terek Cossack Host, Lieutenant-General Fleischer visited Chechnya and Ingushetia. Summarising his tour, he wrote:

. . . I cannot leave unmentioned the fact that I happened to see many public gatherings and to hear a great deal of talk on various questions, but very little of it was to the point and practical (*zhiznennogo*—of life). And this is because Chechnya still lives with the most minimal spiritual and material requirements, because it has not yet woken up and does not want to move along the

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cultural path forward, so as to be on a par with other native peoples, like the Ossets for example, who have long ago left the Chechens behind on the road to progress and have for quite a while now had intelligent representative in all the branches of the public and state services.

It is as if in Chechnya people do not know that the only sure path to progress and to improve all aspects of life, including the economic side, for each people is the school

It is due time for the Chechen people to come to its senses and, at least for the sake of their children, to toss away the baseless prejudice that the Russian school threatens their distinctiveness and even religion.

. . . Not to respond to this call means to intentionally doom oneself to spiritual and economic poverty.

And he went on:

I had many opportunities to talk to the population of Chechnya about the necessity for it to make a serious effort to uproot the *abreks* of all kinds who have found a haven in Chechnya and who have not been captured and destroyed so far only thanks to their universal sheltering by the population. . . . In confirmation of my personal explanations I demand once again from the population, that they stop their diverse evasions and instead of their various rash requests, such as to move the troops out, *to return the exiled Shaykhs* [emphasis mine—JM], etc., consider the damage to them of *abrekism* and put an end to it, so as to open for themselves the opportunity to live in peace and to direct their energy and means not to harm themselves but to improve their lives, which is so strongly needed by the Chechen people.²⁶

Among the conclusions ‘about the most important questions of their [the Chechens and Ingush—JM] lives’ the most important were: in the Vladikavkaz *okrug*:

The strong development of sectarianism among the Chechens, which introduces discord and hostility, especially of the so called *tariqat* of Kunta Hajji.

Even though the main Shaykhs of this schism have been removed from the *oblast*, sectarianism has of course not been destroyed. I find it necessary, therefore, to have on this matter a clear-cut [competent] opinion by the learnt-*qadis* and *mullahs* of the pure Muhammadan religion on this schism as well as on the measures to combat it. I, therefore, suggest to the governor of the *okrug* to gather in the nearest future a meeting in Venedo chaired by himself and to deliver to me its results with his conclusion.

In the Groznyi *okrug*:

The same development of sectarianism as in the Venedo *okrug*. With the same motives and aims as in the Venedo *okrug*, I suggest to the governor of the Groznyi *okrug* to gather an assembly of Qadis, Mullahs etc. under his chairmanship, and following that to report to me with his conclusions.

In the Nazran *okrug*:

I consider it a pleasant debt to pay a tribute of respect to the Ingush people for the skilful choice of its representatives to the public gathering, which in spite of its gigantic size, made me happy by its discipline and complete order as well as by the severe and reasonable [wise] self control of all the representatives speaking in its name. There was no superfluous chatter, only speech to the point.

. . . From all the Ingush villages, the greatest supplier of criminal elements is only the village of Surkhokhi. I, therefore, order the Governor of the *okrug* and the Commander of the Ingush

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‘Hundred’ to pay Surkhokhi their concentrated attention in order to lead them away from theft and the inclination to other criminal activities, and for that matter not to hesitate to use the most severe measures.²⁷

It remains unknown whether the Ingush demanded the return of their only Shaykh, or whether unlike the Chechens they kept silent about his arrest and exile. What is certain is that Batal Hajji died in 1914 in Kozel’sk (in the district of Kaluga). His family ransomed his body, brought it home and put it to rest in the cemetery of Surkhokhi.

The principle of inheritance of the spiritual leadership according to the bloodline was accepted universally in the *vird* and Shaykh Batal Hajji was succeeded by his son.

Soviet power had at the beginning of its ‘triumphant march’ proclaimed support for the freedom of religion. However, by the 1920s the Soviets started to conduct a repressive policy *vis-à-vis* Islam and its religious leaders: public prayers and ceremonies were forbidden, mosques and educational facilities—*maktabs* and *madrasas*—were closed down, the property of the Shaykhs and their followers was confiscated and they themselves were sent to prison or executed. Still, the believers continued to perform religious rituals, but in private prayer houses and Muslim schools continued to operate underground. Batal Hajji’s seven sons struggled actively against the Bolsheviks (in contrast to the sons of the legendary *abrek* Zelimkhan, who were collaborators of the NKVD and the OGPU²⁸). Batal Hajji’s son Muhammad, a supporter of Imam Najm al-Din al-Hutsi (Gotsinskii), was killed while trying to cross the border to Turkey (in 1920–1921?). Almost all the others were executed: Musa in 1925, ‘Isa in 1930 and ‘Ali in 1935.

In October 1935 the NKVD ‘discovered’ that ‘a group of class-alien elements headed by the ex-secretary of the *raikom* Cherbizhev, has infiltrated the Party, state and *kolkhoz* organisations and led disruptive activities against Soviet power and the *kolkhozes*’.²⁹ In July 1936 the trial of this ‘subversive counter-revolutionary group’ opened in Nazran and was nicknamed ‘the Surkhokhi affair’ (*surkhokhinskoe delo*).³⁰ On the second day of the trial *Groznenskii rabochii* informed its readers:

In the aul Surkhokhi existed the counter-revolutionary sect Batal Hajji. After its rout a new sect appeared—Kunta Hajji. The leaders of this sect were the Gagievs.

P. Gagiev started to adapt to the new conditions [i.e. the ‘collectivisation’ campaign and the organisation by P. Gagiev of a *kolkhoz* in Surkhokhi named ‘the path to socialism’—JM]

Once they were in control they started their sabotage activity. Its aim was to discredit the policy of the party and the Soviet authorities. . . . The sons of Belkhoroyev infiltrated even the school. They educated the children against Soviet power.

The remnants of the sects of Batal Hajji and Kunta Hajji assembled regularly in the mosque. They were led by Abo Gagiev [the son of P. Gagiev—JM]. In 1935 in the midst of the harvest season Abo gathered all the *kolkhozniks* and led them to worship Kunta Hajji’s mother in Elishkhan Yurt. The aim of the trip was to wreck agricultural work.³¹

The prosecutor Shpomer accused the religious leaders in ‘the gravest guilt before the new men of socialist society’. One of his arguments was:

Abo Gagiev refused to use the elders’ experience to fortify the economy of the *kolkhoz*. Rather he used it to fortify the ‘*adat* and religion. The Soviet authorities have not been elected to pray. They

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educate the people, prove scientifically the absurdity of religion. A. Gagiev used religion to wreck the work in the fields. He put the elders on an automobile and took them the distance of 200 kms to the grave of Kunta Hajji. [The state prosecutor, it seems, was not even informed that there is no grave of Kunta Hajji, and therefore the believers perform the prayers at the grave of his mother, Hedi/Hadi/Hyadi—JM.]³²

The trial took place when the proposed new constitution of the USSR was under public discussion. Accordingly, the issue of *Groznenskii rabochii* in which the verdict was published, also contained a letter to the editor from a certain turner by the name Sevast'ianov:

Discussing the project of the Constitution, my comrades pressingly demand not to restore citizen's rights to ministers of religious cults.

Each worker is familiar with the hostile, subversive activity of the *kulak-Mullah* elements in Checheno-Ingushetia. They demand, therefore, not to grant them citizen's rights.³³

The 'Surkhokhi affair' thus contributed to the struggle against the 'enemies of the people'.

Batal Hajji's son, Qureysh, led the guerrilla movement in Checheno-Ingushetia and North Ossetia and was arrested. In 1957, after a term of ten years, he returned home and led the brotherhood. He died in 1964.

Batal Hajji's only daughter, Zaleikha, was also no ordinary personality. The 'whirlwind' of socialist transformations in Ingushetia caught her energetic and impressionable personality. The Ingush proverb '*wizzacha q'onakhchokh qhalsag khinnayats, yizzacha qhalsagakh q'onakh larha mottigash khinnay*' ('a real man will never become a woman, but a real woman may on occasion be equal to a man') describes her best. Here is a small item from the 'Chronicle' part of the journal *Revoliutsiia i gorets*, published in 1929:

The village of Iandyrki. [present day Iandyri—JM] . . . The farmers listen to the report of the *selsovet* [Village Council]. The door opens loudly. A rider who has just arrived comes in quickly, assuredly.

The newcomer takes off the *papakha* [the felt hat of the mountain peoples of the Caucasus]. The assembly exhales noisily. It's a woman! An Ingush woman has dared to put on a man's *besmet*, *cherkeska* and *papakha*, to mount a horse and gallop!

This is the socially active campaigner from the village of Plievo—Zaleikha Plieva. She galloped here, to Iandyrki to meet personally the *zavoblzhenotdel* [Head of the *Oblast* Women's Department] in order to report to him about the progress of the election campaign in her village.

Zaleikha is the daughter of the famous organiser and leader of the Muslim sect Batal Hajji.

She has violated the centuries-old moral principles of the mountains. She has dumped her husband, rejected religion, the mosque and all rituals, and fully immersed herself in social activity. She is a member of the *selsovet* and the *selkhoztovarishchestvo* [the Village Economic Association].

Zaleikha criticises mercilessly the actions of the local *kulaks* and *Mullahs*. The *kulaks* burnt in revenge the wattle-fence of her *saklia* [house] and tried to carry off her only horse. . . . But Zaleikha was not frightened but has taken up her activity even more stubbornly.

All the power in the village is in the hands of the *kulak* Pliev family. They dominate the *partia-cheika* [the Party cell] (out of the 14 members of the cell 12 are Plievs). They dominate also the

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selsovet and the *selkhoztovarishchestvo*. They have started to openly persecute Zaleikha. The *partiacheika* has taken the lead of the *kulak* block. Zaleikha's grain was burnt. Her candidacy to the *selsovet*, put forward by the poor, was rejected.

When the *zavoblzhenotdel* asked her relatives: "Why are you persecuting Zaleikha?" they replied: "She should not be active. She should not interfere in the work of the *selsovet*, the co-operative and the [Party] cell. She should stop her work among the women. She should sit at home! She brings shame on our family." This was the reply not only of the non-Party members but also of the Communists.

Now the affair of this outrageous persecution of the poor social activist Plieva is being investigated by the heads of the *Oblast* party and state organisations. A commission sent by the *oblprokuror* [the *Oblast* Prosecutor] is now working in the village of Plievo.

The *kulaks* and their assistants as well as their advisors—the Mullahs—will now get their due retribution for persecuting the woman Mountaineer social activist.³⁴

Later in her life the entrance to the world of *jins* was opened to Zaleikha and she inherited her father's ability to communicate with them. She received the power to heal and started to produce amulets and talismans (*zhey* in Ingush). She came to belong to that category of people known as '*hama khowsh yolu sag*' (a person who knows the fate) or '*daaq'a danna sag*' (a person who received power).

The violent eviction of the Vaynakhs to Central Asia on 23 February 1944 and the abolition of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR caused incorrigible losses to their spiritual culture. On their return home, in 1957, they found no surviving mosques—all had been destroyed—nor surviving libraries—all book and manuscript collections, both mosque and privately owned, were destroyed on purpose in bonfires. Batal Hajji's library was also burned.

Under the most brutal anti-religious propaganda in the 1960s, Shaykh Batal Hajji's *murids* had the courage to promote the traditions of Islamic beliefs and education among the republic's population. Thus, for example, 'Umar Kholukhoyev from the village of Ekazhevo taught children the *Qur'an* and the basics of religion, while Hakyash Tochiev worked a private radio channel throughout his neighbourhood and each evening after sunset he transmitted tapes of sermons that he had recorded.³⁵ Such manifestations of religious devotion were exposed and condemned by the Party organs, while 'activists' were persecuted and punished.

In those years the activities of the Batal Hajji brotherhood were described as 'exceeding the framework of religious rites. Throughout the entire period of its existence it has been connected to grave crimes against social order and Soviet law.' Its leadership, it was claimed 'used religion for its own selfish aims and personal profit'.³⁶ The grandsons of the Shaykh were kept under close attention by the 'organs of law enforcement': 'Abdul Majid was sentenced for 'anti-Soviet activity'; Jabra'il, Ahmet, Mustafa, Maksharip, Huseyn and Sultan were all killed in 'exchanges of fire with the *militsiia* [police]'.³⁷

In the early 1990s old mosques started to be rebuilt and new ones to be constructed. Islamic educational institutions were opened and international ties with the centres of the Arab-Islamic culture were reinstated. Young people enjoyed the opportunity to study in Islamic centres abroad, while believers could now

perform the *hajj*. Various Islamic parties and movements were established and the norms of *shari'a* started to be introduced into legal practice.

At present the brotherhood of Shaykh Batal Hajji is large and very influential. It plays an important role in the socio-economic and political life of the Republic of Ingushetia.³⁸ From among all the Qadiri and Naqshbandi *virids* operating in the Caucasus that of Shaykh Batal Hajji is the most exclusive and cohesive.

Unlike other Qadiri groups, which accompany the *dhikr* with expressive movements, the *murids* of Batal Hajji form a circle, the old ones sitting and the young—standing, and perform the *nazms* swinging slightly, clapping hands and repeating the *tawhid* formula (*la ilaha illa'llahu*—‘there is no God but Allah’). The members of the *virid* do not condemn polygamy, but women are forbidden to marry followers of other Shaykhs.³⁹ The wedding (*lowzar* in Ingush) is not accompanied by music and in general it is not acceptable to dance and be merry.

The ‘holy’ *ustaz* is thought to be the patron and protector of the believers; he is responsible to God for the faith and moral character of his *murids*. The tomb of Batal Hajji is endowed with God’s protection and blessing and is a place of pilgrimage.

Nowadays a memorial complex is being constructed near the cemetery of Surkhokhi. Its centrepiece is the *ustaz*’s *ziyarat*, which ‘wallows in granite framing and shines with gold’ and the mosque, which ‘has no equal in the entire Northern Caucasus in its monumental and original architectural performance’.⁴⁰ Near the mosque a museum is planned where the Shaykh’s personal effects and documents relating to his life and religious activity will be displayed. The project, conceived by Batal Hajji’s grandson Ya‘qub Belhoroyev and his brother Sultan, is being realised through the direct support and participation of the Shaykh’s followers. Each day volunteers arrive to help with the work. The forthcoming opening of the complex is awaited with the hope that this good deed ‘will bring this bustling world of ours by one step closer to the High one’s revelation and God’s intention’.⁴¹

Acknowledgement

The author thanks Mahomed Dakiyev and Adam Mal’sagov for their interest and help in this study.

Notes and references

1. Ingush: ‘A name, having become famous throughout the entire world, will not be forgotten’.
2. Kl. I. Borusevich, ‘Sektantstvo sredi ingushei’, *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, Vol 18, No 3 (1893), p 144.
3. A. M. Tutayev, *Reaktsionnaia sekta Batal-Khadzhi* (Groznyi, 1968); M. Mustafinov, ‘Sovremennye techenia zikrizma i ikh ritual’nye obriady’, *Izvestiia Checheno-Ingushskogo nauchno-issledovatel’skogo instituta istorii, iazyka i literatury*, Seriya 2, *Sotsiologiya, ateizm, religiya*, Vol 2 (1976), pp 124–126; J. Meskhidze, ‘Batal-Khadzhi’, in S. M. Prozorov, ed., *Islam na teritorrii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii. Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’*, Vol 2 (Moscow, 1999), pp 15–16; J. F. Baddeley, *The Rugged Flanks of the Caucasus*, Vol 1 (London, 1940), pp 260–262, 264–267; A. Bennigsen and Ch. Lemerrier-Quelquejais, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (London, 1967), p 181.
4. Ch. Akhriev, ‘Ingushi: ikh predaniia, verovaniia i poveria’, *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh*, Vol 8, No 1 (1875), p 20. The shrine of Tkhoba-Erdy is dated to approximately 830 in the 12th century, under the Georgian queen Tamara it was re-built as a Christian shrine.

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5. For Abu Muslim, see V. Bobrovnikov, 'Abu Muslim', in Prozorov, op cit, Ref 3, Vol 2, pp 5 – 8; Vladimir Bobrovnikov, 'Abu Muslim in Islamic history and mythology of the Northern Caucasus', in Moshe Gammer and David J. Wasserstein, eds, *Daghestan and the World of Islam* (Helsinki, forthcoming).
6. Dj. I. Meskhidze, 'Iz ingushskikh skazanii: "Kurmakh iz roda Kureishitov"', *Kunstkamera. Etnograficheskie tetradi*, Vol 10 (1996), pp 332–338. According to a correction by Bersnako Gazikov, the story was recorded by F. Gorepekin and not by N. F. Iakovlev as stated in the article.
7. Akhriev, op cit, Ref 4, pp 18—25; 'Barkim i syn Timura', in I. Dakhkil' gov, ed., *Ingushskie skazki, skazaniia i predaniia* (Nalchik, 2002), pp 373–374; Baddeley, op cit, Ref 3, pp 213–215.
8. See J. Meskhidze, 'Borg'a Kash', in Prozorov, op cit, Ref 3, Vol 1, pp 19–20.
9. At the present only one resident has remained in the village of Shoan.
10. F. Iu. Albakova, 'Rol' zhrechestva v dukhovnoi kul'ture ingushei', *Novoe v arkhologii i etnografii Ingushetii* (Nalchik, 1998), pp 87–88.
11. A. Bazorkina, 'Elmarz Hajji Khautev—poslednii zhrets Ingushetii', *Serdalo*, No 189, 21 December 2002, p 3.
12. According to a Daghestani source Kunta Hajji's ancestors came from the Andi village of Gunkha—M. Aglarov, *Andiitsy* (Makhachkala, 2002), p 120.
13. A. K. Alikberov, *Epokha klassicheskogo islama na Kavkaze: Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi i ego sufiiskaia entsiklopediia "Rathan al-khaka'ik (XI–XII vv.)* (Moscow, 2003), p 686.
14. At that time the place was inhabited by the Merjoy, Zechoy, Galay, Bulguchoy and Belkharoy kins, each living in a separate hamlet.
15. M. S. Mal'sagov, 'Drevo zhizni', in *200 let Sviatomu Ustazu Kishi Khadzhi* (Nalchik, 2000), p 28. The village used to be called Ovlur-Yurt before. At the present its name is poselok Krepost'.
16. A. M. Garasaev, 'Iz chechenskogo religioznogo poeticheskogo nasledii: nazmy—dukhovnye pesneniia v obriadovoi praktike sufiev', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Serria 13, Vostokovedenie*, 1998, No 4, pp 75–83.
17. Vahit Akaev, *Sheikh Kunta Khadzhi: Zhizn' i uchenie* (Groznyi, 1994), pp 35, 42.
18. About Kunta Hajji, see V. Kh. Akaev, *Sheikh Kunta Khadzhi: zhizn' i uchenie* (Groznyi, 1994); *200 let sviatomu ustazu Kishi Khadzhi*, op cit, Ref 15; J. Meskhidze, 'Kunta Hajji', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii*, Vol 1, pp 61–62.
19. The Orstkhoy (Arstkhoy/Arshtkhoy/Orstkhoy/Orshtkhoy) are an ethnic group within the Nakhs. Geographically they occupy the space between the Ingush and the Chechens, their dialect has some specific peculiarities, they have maintained a separate ethnic identity and have their own *ta'ips*—'Akkhoy, Merzhoy, Orstkhoy and Ts'echoy. During the Soviet period they were written down as 'Ingush' in the internal passports. See N. G. Volkova, *Emonimy i plemennye nazvaniia Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow, 1973); N. G. Volkova, *Emicheskii sostav naseleniia Severnogo Kavkaza v XVIII—nachale XIX veka* (Moscow, 1974); M. Iusupov, 'Orstkhoitsy: Kto oni?', *Biuletten Seti etnologicheskogo monitoringa*, 1999, No 26, pp 60–61. For their language, see Z. K. Mal'sagov, 'Ocerk akkinskogo (aukhovskogo) iazyka', *Izvestiia Checheno-Ingushskogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta*, Part 1, Vol 4 (1936); I. A. Arsakhanov, *Akkinskii dialekt v sisteme chechno-ingushskogo iazyka* (Groznyi, 1959); I. A. Arsakhanov, *Chechenskaia dialektologiiia* (Groznyi, 1969). In the latest census of the Russian Federation (2003) they were not counted as a separate group. According to unofficial data, however, they number about 70,000 people. Near the village of Lower Bamut, in the gorge of the river Jova were (at least until the Chechn war of 1994–1996) the ruins of a tower of the legendary owner of the local salt water sources, Belkharoy.
20. Borusevich, op cit, Ref 2, pp 139–140. These remarks seem at least untrue, since not visiting relatives would mean the breaking off of kin ties, which was hardly possible, while leaving a greeting unanswered, at least on the ritual level, was totally impossible.
21. One should add that all the time that his guests ate the Shaykh kept away from his house.
22. Baddeley, op cit, Ref 3, p 264.
23. *Ibid*, plate XXI, p 266.
24. *Ibid*, pp 266–267.
25. About *jins*, see D. B. Macdonald, [H. Massé], 'Djinn', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, Vol 2, pp 546–548; M. B. Piotrovskii, 'Dzhinny', in *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 1991), p 66. The views of the Vaynaks regarding *jins* include both elements from their pre-Islamic complex of popular beliefs and the Islamic tradition. Like other Caucasian peoples, they have books, which are believed to have been written in cooperation with *jins*. The most famous of these is *Sedien Jayne* ('The Book of Stars' in Chechen-Ingush).
26. *Prikaz po Terskoi oblasti*, No 1217, 20–28 August 1912 g., gor. Vladikavkaz, Terskii oblastnoi nachal'nik, [*Prikazy po terskoi oblasti*] (Vladikavkaz, 1912), pp 9–11.
27. *Ibid*, pp 12–14.
28. S. Khamchiev, 'Rytsari svobody', *Vestnik Sunzhi*, 27 March 1997.
29. 'Surkhokhinskoe delo', *Groznskii rabochii*, No 159 (4343), 20 July 1936, pp 3–4.

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30. Ibid.
31. V. Garin, 'Surkhokhinskoe delo', *Groznenskii rabochii*, No 160 (4338), 14 July 1936, p 3.
32. V. Garin, 'Surkhokhinskoe delo', *Groznenskii rabochii*, No 165 (4343), 20 July 1936, pp 3–4.
33. 'O lishenii grazhdanskikh prav', *ibid*, p 3.
34. *Revoliutsiia i gorets*, 1929, No 5 (7), pp 79–80.
35. Tutaev, *op cit*, Ref 3, p 23.
36. *Ibid*, p 27.
37. *Ibid*, p 8.
38. The Law of the Russian Federation of 4 June 1992 acknowledged *de jure* the 1991 *de facto* separation between Chechnya and Ingushetia. The Constitution of Ingushetia was approved on 27 February 1994.
39. The same rule is kept also by the *murids* of Shaykh Vis Hajji. The other Qadiri *virids* allow such marriages and only warn the young couple that since in the Day of Judgement each person will follow his/her Shaykh, such mixed couples will have to separate.
40. K. Latyrov, 'Vo imia dukhovnosti', *Serdalo*, No 127, 6 November 2004.
41. *Ibid*.