

Publishing as a Tool for the Formation and Accumulation of Symbolic Capital in Russia: The Medina Publishing House

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Abstract

Medina Publishing is one of the oldest and largest Islamic publishers in Russia in terms of volume. This article examines its evolution from a project publishing work on local history and the Nizhny Novgorod Tatars to a publisher of modern theological literature written by representatives of the Renovationist movement. *Medina* characteristically distributes most of its books, newspapers, and magazines free. Its core aims are educational, image-building, and ideological in nature. This article looks at *Medina's* role as a tool for the formation and accumulation of symbolic capital by one of Russia's Islamic religious organisations (muftiates), the *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation* (DUM RF). The author notes *Medina's* unique position in the Russian publishing market as a publisher focused on literature for the educated reader with special knowledge in the fields of religious studies, philology, etc. *Medina's* publications encourage readers to believe that the centre of Islamic theological thought in Russia is at DUM RF, legitimating the claims of the muftiate and its leader to spiritual leadership of the Russian ummah. Both DUM RF and *Medina* focus their efforts on building the profile of intellectuals as people government officials, as those whose decisions govern the fate of religious associations in Russia, can work with rather than as representatives of an alien, incomprehensible, and hostile force (which is how bureaucrats in Russia have viewed Islam for centuries).

Key words: *Medina Publishing*, Damir Mukhetdinov, Islamic Renovationism, muftiate, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF), *Iman Publishing*.

Introduction

As the Soviet era came to a close in the late 1980s and early 1990s, publishers specialising in Islamic literature began to appear in different regions of the USSR. They were not created by publishing professionals but by enthusiasts whose main goal was the religious enlightenment of Muslims in the former Soviet republics. High levels of consumer demand provided an incentive to saturate the market with Islamic literature quickly, but few publications of the 1990s were of high quality. They were often unedited translated texts or poor-quality reprints of pre-revolutionary and Soviet-era books. Ordinary readers were, however, satisfied with such literature, as it allowed them to get to know certain basics of Islam and take pride in earlier scholars.

In the early 1990s, Islamic publishers did not engage deeply with the content of the literature they were publishing, printing instead anything on the topic of Islam they found of interest. As a result, they published, without comment or preface, works by authors of fundamentally different viewpoints on issues of Islamic doctrine.

As Muslim publishing enthusiasts in Russia acquired more knowledge about Islam, they increasingly appreciated the need for care in picking manuscripts for publication, which in turn required clear and considered publishing policies.

Salafi publishing houses (e.g., *Santlada*, *Badr*,¹ etc.) were the first to formulate and implement such policies, while publishers with no direct association with a specific religious or political group retained what can only be called a pluralistic approach to their publishing plans into the late 1990s.

Iman Publishing, active in Kazan, played a significant part in the revival of Islamic knowledge there. Developed in 1990 out of the *Iman Youth Centre for Islamic Culture*, it quickly became an independent publishing structure distributing product throughout the Russian Federation. *Iman* initiated its publishing program with an eponymous newspaper in 1990, first issued as a supplement to the *Tatarstan yashlare* (*Youth of Tatarstan*) newspaper and then as a separate sheet.² Many other Islamic publishers in Russia would follow a similar pattern, starting off publishing periodicals for a Muslim public organisation.³

Between 1990 and 2011, *Iman* published 1,119 titles, 627 of them in Tatar.⁴ The focus was initially on translations of Salafi-oriented authors, with funding from Arab charitable foundations. As the views of the founder and the head of

1 For a brief overview of some of *Badr's* books, see Rushan Abbyasov and Arslan Sadriev, "Obryadovaya skhologiya radikalizma", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27 October (1999), https://www.ng.ru/world/1999-10-27/sch_radikalizm.html, accessed 12 November 2021.

2 A newspaper called *Vera* was published in Russian and Tatar. Each edition had its own editorial board. See Interview with Nail Garipov, 29 May 2018, the author's fieldwork materials.

3 One of the best known examples is *Medina* itself, whose history started with the *Nur al-'Im* newspaper.

4 *Katalog knig izdatel'stva 'Iman'* (Kazan, Iman, 2011), p. 2.

the publishing house, Valiulla Yakupov (1963–2012), evolved from Salafism to “traditional Islam”,⁵ the repertoire changed. During the 2000s, *Iman* shifted to publishing classical works by Tatar theologians and books on the history and culture of the Tatar people. After Yakupov’s death in 2012, *Iman* remained active but proved unable to maintain the status of largest Islamic publishing house in Russia (by number of titles issued and geographical distribution) that it had held in the 1990s and for most of the 2000s. Even in Tatarstan, *Iman’s* position came under pressure from *Khuzur Publishing*, established in 2013 by the *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan* (DUM RT).⁶ By the mid-2010s, there were hardly any Islamic publishing houses in Russia that were not either subordinate to or at least cooperating with the official Islamic religious organisations or muftiates⁷ active at federal and regional level and under full state control.⁸

Islamic publishing houses here refers to publishers who produce exclusively or predominantly theological literature. Such large houses as *Mardjani* or *Sadra* (both in Moscow) cannot be fully characterised as Islamic in this sense, as they specialise in academic Islamic literature.

Some *Medina* publications are difficult to place by genre, including some books and articles by the publisher’s founder and *de facto* head, Damir Mukhetdinov. Academic in structure, they nonetheless aim to spread and popularise theological and legal ideas.⁹ One of the largest Islamic publishers in recent Russian history, the unique thing about its position was that it put out both theological and academic literature on Islam from the start.

This article is not focused on how *Medina’s* publishing plans developed, however. Rather, the intention is to use *Medina* as an example of what happens when an Islamic publishing house plays a significant role in the formation and accumulation of symbolic capital by the spiritual administrations (muftiates). Symbolic capital is here understood, after Pierre Bourdieu, in terms of positive reputation and so of an image that opens up opportunities for an individual or legal entity and can help it accumulate other types of capital, whether economic, social, or

5 For more on the concept of traditional Islam, see *The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia*, Renat Bekkin (ed.) (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2020).

6 For more on *Khuzur Publishing*, see its official website: <https://khuzurshop.ru>.

7 In Russia and certain other countries, a muftiate (synonym: spiritual administration of Muslims) is a collegial body that acts as an official representative of Muslims in their relations with other confessions and the state and performs certain administrative functions (e.g., for the Muslim communities under their jurisdiction). See further Renat Bekkin, *People of reliable loyalty...: Muftiates and the State in Modern Russia* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2020).

8 The *Ummah* publishing house, established in 2002, is an exception. *Iman*, although not the official publishing house of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, has nonetheless published materials for the muftiate since 1998.

9 See Renat Bekkin, “The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam”, in *The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia*, Renat Bekkin (ed.) (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2020), pp. 87–114.

cultural.¹⁰ Given the evolution of the range of books it has published over the years, one can trace *Medina's* trajectory from a publishing initiative driven by the Nizhny Novgorod Tatars and specialising in local history to one producing books addressed primarily to a professional academic and expert readership and Muslim graduates. Acting as a major source of information in Russian on Islam and Muslim culture in Russia, *Medina* has shaped for itself a loyal audience that includes Muslim intellectuals and influential academicians, experts, officials, and figures influential in the implementation of confessional policy in Russia and responsible for relations with the various religious associations in the country. The following text therefore looks at *Medina's* various functions (commercial, educational, ideological, and image-building) and notes their impact on the formation and multiplication of symbolic capital for the various muftiates overseeing the publishing house at different times.

This article is one of few academic publications on the topic and deploys the example of *Medina*, one of the largest Islamic publishing houses in post-Soviet Russia, to understand publishing activity by Muslims in Russia. No claim is made to cover all aspects of *Medina's* activities. Organisational and financial aspects lie outside the scope. Such questions might afford us a better understanding of why the publisher is not more focused on the commercial aspect of its operations, but the opacity of *Medina* and its leadership render it impossible to treat the topic in any real way.

Nor is the issue of cooperation with other Russian publishers touched upon. *Medina* was one of the first Islamic publishing houses to engage widely in joint publishing ventures with other publishers (*Sadra*, *Mardjani*, etc.). This policy has served more than just *Medina's* commercial purposes (viz., sharing risks related to preparation and publication). Partnership projects with other publishers have also allowed *Medina* to expand its readership and increase not only its own symbolic capital but also that of the structures with which it is associated.

Medina Publishers: a brief history

According to its website, *Medina* was officially registered in 2007, but the catalogue released for its 5th anniversary contains titles published before that date (going back to the mid-1990s), when not even a plan for the publishing house existed.¹¹ From a legal point of view, no such expansive interpretation of its

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sotsiologiya politiki*, transl. into Russian by N.A. Shmatko (Moscow: Socio-Logos, 1993), p. 56.

11 *Katalog izdatel'skogo doma 'Medina'. 2007–2012 gg.* (Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod: *Medina*, 2012), available at <http://idmedina.ru/photos/extra/file/katalog.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2021. It is worth noting that the publishers' books are referred to as "printed and electronic products".

publishing activities can be correct, and, although *Medina* is repeatedly indicated as the publisher in the catalogue, the books' *impressa* carry quite different names.¹²

From the perspective of ideological continuity, it is quite appropriate to accept the thematic and meaningful continuity between the first books published under the *Medina* logo and the publishing activity previously carried out under the auspices of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Nizhny Novgorod region between 1995 and 2006. The books published before 2007 may be considered as belonging to two major thematic areas: local literature (the history of Tatar villages in Nizhny Novgorod and other regions)¹³ and theological publications.¹⁴

A focus in both these areas continued to be pursued after *Medina* was formally established as a publishing house. The local studies thematic area was enriched with research by authors not just from Nizhny Novgorod but from other regions of Russia too. As the Russian historian Marat Safarov has noted, these local history publications were extremely important for the self-definition and self-esteem of Mishar Tatars,¹⁵ who tended to consider *Medina* "their" (i.e., a Mishar) publishing house and one where they could not just get literature of interest to them but also publish their own academic works.¹⁶ What is more, *Medina's* list of publications made clear to readers that the Mishars included amongst their number many outstanding figures, including prominent scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, etc.¹⁷

At the same time, the author list included many Kazan Tatars (Azat M. Akhunov, Ilshat F. Gimadeev, Aidar Khairutdinov, Aidar N. Yuzeev, Aidar Y. Khabutdinov, etc.) without whom *Medina* would not have the status of a nation-wide publisher. The reason was that there were no Islamic Tatar scholars in Nizhny Novgorod capable of translating Arabic manuscripts written by Tatar scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries or of commenting on them. Interest in Mishar Tatar spiritual heritage prompted the publication of such works by Tatar theologians and works on the Hanafi *madhhab*, the historically dominant school among the Turkic Muslims of Russia.

12 E.g., see Olga Senyutkina, *Pervyi s'ezd musul'man Rossii (k 100-letiyu provedeniya)* (Nizhny Novgorod: "Makhinur", 2005) and idem, *Tretiy s'ezd musul'man Rossii (k 100-letiyu provedeniya)* (Nizhny Novgorod: "Makhinur", 2006).

13 Umar Idrisov et al., *Iz istorii nizhegorodskikh musul'manskikh obshchin v 19–30-ke godakh XX vv* (Nizhny Novgorod: Publishing House of the NNSU, 1997); Ryashit Bayazitov and Valeriy Makarikhin, *Nizhegorodskie tatarsy mishari v novoe vremiya* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 1996); Ryashit Bayazitov and Valeriy Makarikhin, *Vostochnaiya Meshchera v srednie veka: etnogenez tatar v Nizhegorodskom krae* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 1996).

14 Abu Hanifa Numan ibn Thabit, *Traktaty* (Nizhny Novgorod: DUMNO, 2001); Rustam Batrov, *Musul'manskiy post* (Nizhny Novgorod, DUMNO, 2001); Marat Khairutdinov, *Tseli i sposoby dzhikhada* (Nizhny Novgorod: Research Institute named after Kh. Faizkhanov, 2005).

15 Mishar Tatars are a sub-ethnic group of the Volga-Ural Tatars living in the Sergachsky district of the Nizhny Novgorod region, as well as in other regions of Russia. They speak the Western (Mishar) dialect of the Tatar language.

16 Interview with Marat Safarov, 10 December 2020, author's fieldwork materials.

17 Despite this, most of the periodicals issued by *Medina* have been and continue to be in Russian.

By the mid-2000s, *Medina* was publishing on general Islamic issues and hosting events on an all-Russian scale, first in Nizhny Novgorod and then in Moscow and other cities. These included the Muslim International Forum (since 2004), the Faizkhanov readings (since 2004), the Fakhretdin readings (since 2009), etc. Reports presented at these events increasingly promoted the ideas of Renovationism in Islam and books by Russian authors who would later describe themselves as Muslim Renovationists (*obnovlentsy*) were launched.¹⁸ The leader of this group within Russian Islam is the *de facto* head of *Medina*, Damir Mukhetdinov.

Muslim renovationists are not a single rigidly structured group with a common ideology. Most renovationists share a critical approach to the Sunnah and a desire to revise provisions of Islamic dogma and law that are based on what they consider unreliable hadith and subsequent tradition. Unlike the Qur'anites, however, Muslim renovationists in Russia do not completely deny the Sunnah.¹⁹

Promotion of the religious and philosophical views of the Russian Renovationists has become one of the main pillars of *Medina's* publishing activity since the early 2000s. Like Mukhetdinov, the other stalwarts of the publishing house, Rustam Batrov (Batyр)²⁰ and Tawfiq Ibrahim, are also leading ideologists of Russian Renovationism in Islam.²¹

Medina's publishing activity includes another area of focus that deserves mention, viz., reference literature. In 2007, the house released a series of dictionaries on "Islam in the Russian Federation". The purpose was to "study the problems of the emergence, formation, and development of Islam in Russia".²² This series allows us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the publishing house.

On the one hand, the dictionaries were one-of-a-kind publications that presented the history and current situation of Muslim communities in various regions of Russia (the Nizhny Novgorod region, Moscow, St. Petersburg, etc.) in a comprehensive form. On the other, they received well-deserved criticism for unprofessionalism.²³

18 Tawfiq Ibrahim, *Na puti k koranicheskoj tolerantnosti* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007); Rustam Batyr, *Vmesto reform* (Nizhny Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007); Damir Mukhetdinov, *Islam v XXI veke: programma obnovleniya: sbornik dokladov* (Moscow: Medina, 2016); Damir Mukhetdinov, *Rossiyskoe musul'manstvo: tradicii ummy v usloviyah evrazijskoj civilizacii* (Moscow: Medina, 2016).

19 See further Renat Bekkin, "The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam", in *The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia*, Renat Bekkin (ed.) (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2020), pp. 87-114.

20 Rustam Batyr, *Vmesto reform* (Nizhny Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007); Rustam Batrov, *Abu Hanifa: zhizn' i nasledie* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007).

21 Tawfiq Ibrahim, *Na puti k koranicheskoj tolerantnosti* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007); Tawfiq Ibrahim, *Koranicheskiy gumanizm* (Moscow: Medina, 2015).

22 Series of encyclopedic dictionaries, "Islam in the Russian Federation", <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/encyclopedia/?260>, accessed 12 November 2021.

23 See, e.g., Renat Bekkin and Almira Tagirzhanova, *Musul'manskiy Peterburg. Istoricheskiy putevoditel'. Zhizn' musul'man v gorode na Neve i v ego okrestnostyakh* (Moscow and Saint Petersburg: Institut Afriki RAN, 2016), pp. 17-19; Roman Silant'ev, "Islamskiy slovar' ne otlichaetsya entsiklopedichnost'yu", *NG-Religii*, 6 December 2017, https://www.ng.ru/printing/2017-12-06/15_433_tatarstan.html, accessed 12 November 2021.

The series also revealed the limits of *Medina's* ability to attract new authors and collaborators. As already noted above, from its first years, the publisher had drawn on authors and editors from Kazan and other cities for the preparation of its academic programme, as there were no scholars in Nizhny Novgorod who specialised in Islamic and Turkic studies. When it attempted to broaden its coverage to other Muslim regions of Russia, *Medina* faced problems. This was true not just of the North Caucasus but even of the neighbouring Republic of Bashkortostan. It became clear that *Medina* could successfully coordinate projects on Tatar issues but go beyond that only with difficulty.

The publisher's website mentions that the following dictionaries were planned for 2013–2014: *Islam in Dagestan, Islam in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Ossetia, Islam in North West Caucasus*.²⁴ None of them has yet been published. We can only speculate as to why *Medina* had difficulties cooperating with authors and editors from other regions. One cannot exclude the possibility that local muftiates in the North Caucasus actively opposed the implementation of such projects among the communities under their jurisdiction by a publishing house that belonged to a rival spiritual administration. The conflict over the *Salam* newspaper, published by the Muftiate of Dagestan, offers vivid illustration of how seriously the Russian muftiates take the problem of competing Muslim religious organisations distributing printed materials on their turf.²⁵

By the end of the 2010s, the number of book titles being published by *Medina* had narrowed significantly. Most were now works of theology, whose covers bore the names of mufti Ravil Gaynutdin or his deputy Damir Mukhetdinov.²⁶ In 2020, the publishing house released series on “Revival and renewal” and on “Islamic thought in Russia: revival and reinterpretation.” According to Mukhetdinov, in 2021 “the plan is to publish at least 50 books, including academic translations of the works of Musa Bigeev, the works of Rizaetdin Fakhretdin, and local and foreign thinkers into modern Russian and Tatar.”²⁷ As of September 2021, not even a quarter of the planned books had been published.

24 ‘Islam in the Russian Federation,’ dictionaries, <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/encyclopedia/?260>, accessed 12 November 2021.

25 Arthur Priymak, “Koordinatsionnomu tsentru Severnogo Kavkaza nekogo koordinirovat”, *NG-Religii*, 5 April 2017, https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2017-04-05/12_418_kavkaz.html, accessed 12 November 2021.

26 Ravil Gaynutdin, *Islam: verouchenie, poklonenie, npravstvennost', zakon* (Moscow: Medina, 2020); Damir Mukhetdinov, *Sovremennye islamskie mysliteli* (Moscow: Medina, 2020).

27 Damir Mukhetdinov, *Otvetstvennyi sekretar' MMF Damir Mukhetdinov vystupil na onlain konferentsii, posvyashchennoi 145-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya vydavushchegosya dzhadida Makhmudkhodzhi Bekhbudi*, Muslim International Forum, 2 December 2020, http://muslim-forum.info/happening/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/otvetstvennyy-sekretar-mmf-damir-mukhetdinov-vystupil-na-on-layn-konferentsii-posvyashchennoi-145-lel/?sphrase_id=1031, accessed 12 November 2021.

Medina's functions as a publishing house

A traditional publisher is a commercial enterprise that buys the rights to publish books, prepares them for the press, and prints them at its own expense, paying the author a fee (usually in the form of royalties). Some publishers, which one may think of as commercial middlemen between the author and the printers and so term intermediary publishers, print books at the authors' expense. Such publishers still have an interest in obtaining income from the sale of books and related products, but, in contrast to the first case, any commercial risk has been minimised. The intermediary publisher does not bear the risk of the book, in which funds have been invested, not paying off, whether fully or even partially. As a rule, such books, whose preparation and printing is financed by the authors, are published in small runs, so that the publisher does not incur major costs for storage of unsold copies.²⁸

In this regard, one may ask how correct it is to refer to an enterprise as a publishing company if it has no intention of gaining from the sale of copyrighted materials, of publishing books for a fee, or of paying royalties or any other remuneration to authors? Obtaining income from books sales and other print products is not such a subsidised publishing house's main goal (or priority). It is a major feature of any publishing house that it publishes books and other printed materials. How the publisher finances the production and printing of its products does not affect the essence of its activities. Including manuscripts in the publishing plan that are promising from the point of view of reader-demand increases the chances of receiving funding from sponsors.

Any publishing house can perform four main functions: commercial, educational, image-building, and ideological. One can combine all four of these functions, but at any given stage, one of them will dominate.

We will now look at these four functions with reference to the example of the *Medina* publishing house.

1) *The Commercial Function.* *Medina* cannot be called a commercial project. From the mid-1990s to the present day, the publishing house has distributed its products free of charge. Publication of its books has and continues to be at the expense of sponsors. Initially, these were private patrons, but *Medina* later began to receive funding from state programs, including, more particularly, a training program for specialists with an in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam.²⁹ Sponsorship

28 The classical publishing house was an intermediary, not only between the copyright holder (author) and the printing house, but also between the author and the reader. The publishing house offers authors channels for marketing their books. This is the major advantage for most authors when choosing between an intermediary publisher and a self-publishing system.

29 A plan to train specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam in the Russian Federation began to be implemented in 2005. Several pairs of partner universities have taken part, each comprising a secular university and a religious institute. The program does not provide funding for the publication of books but does allow for funding to be allocated for the preparation of monographs and textbooks.

funds from abroad have been received for projects related to Islamic studies and education since 2007 through the *Fund for the support of Islamic culture, studies, and education*.³⁰ Unfortunately, the present researcher has not been able to access any information related to the financial activities of the publishing house, rendering it extremely difficult to estimate the role of the various sources of funding in the publishing house's finances.

Up until the mid-2010s, the main distribution channel for *Medina's* products was the free distribution of literature at various events held by three muftiates, who facilitated and continue to facilitate *Medina's* work: the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Nizhny Novgorod region (DUMNO), the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF).³¹ Each conference participant was given a bag with several *Medina* publications as well as the conference program. Some of the literature was posted on the official DUMNO website and later on the website of the publishing house. The HTML format of the materials on these sites could not fully compete with the paper literature distribution channel, but, since the mid-2010s, most of the publications are published in pdf-versions via the *Medina* website.

Thus, the publishing house has never faced the problem of recouping costs. Moreover, the website states that the publisher “provides a full range of printing services, starting from prepress preparation of the publication (typesetting, design, lay-out, and publishing), and including all types of typesetting and processing services.”³² In other words, the publisher also prepares and prints books for authors at their own expense, which means, it is a hybrid publishing house (combining the functions of a traditional publisher and an intermediary publisher). Unfortunately, I have no information as to how many of *Medina's* books have been published in either way.

2) *The Educational Function*. The *Medina* website vision section (it is the publisher's own text) states that “In future, the *Medina* website plans to publish not only our own publications but also works that have already become a bibliographic rarity, provided they contribute to our goal, which is to promote inter-faith tolerance, encourage enlightenment, and lead those seeking knowledge along the path of faith and progress.”³³

In the preface to the publisher's catalogue, Mukhetdinov says that “The main goal in creating it [the publishing house – R.B.] was enlightenment. We see enlightenment through sermons, newspapers, and books as the most effective method of

30 For more information on the Fund, see <https://www.islamfund.ru/>

31 Initially under the auspices of DUMNO, *Medina* later became the main publishing house of SMR and DUM RF.

32 For the services offered by *Medina*, see <http://idmedina.ru/services/>, accessed 12 November 2021.

33 For the vision statement or concept page on the *Medina* website, <http://idmedina.ru/about/concept/>, accessed 12 November 2021.

Calling [to Islam] (*da'wah*). Our goal has been to return Nizhny Novgorod residents, and later all Russian Muslims, to their roots."³⁴

Education is thus not for *Medina* an end in itself but a tool for *da'wah*. The problem is that such literature is completely different in format and written according to different genre rules from those applied in *Medina* publications. Even such books as do fall under the category of theological literature address well-educated secular Muslims or non-Muslims interested in Islam. Apologetic works that provide a comparative analysis of religions and polemical materials would be better suited to the purpose of calling to Islam (at least in terms of academic or popular literature). Critical editions of various translations of the Qur'an (with commentaries) and collections of *hadith*³⁵ can also be used to contribute to the goals of *da'wah*. Such publications were being issued at the time by Islamic publishers like *Ummah*, *Ansar*, etc.³⁶

3) *The Ideological Function*. The vision statement of the *Medina* website also states that "at the forefront of its activities the *Medina* publishing house initially put the promotion of a tolerant and, for Russian Muslims, traditional legal school of Islam, the *madhab* of Abu Hanifa."³⁷

As noted earlier, enlightenment is not an end in itself but is focused on achieving a goal, namely *da'wah*. This is, in actual fact, not so much the "Call to Islam" itself as the popularisation of certain ideas. At an early stage, this was the concept of Misharistan, coined by the historian and regular *Medina* author Damir Khayretdinov, who promoted the idea of the Mishars' significant contribution to the Islamic culture of Russia.³⁸ To this end, *Medina* published literature on the history of the region and biographies of prominent Nizhny Novgorod Tatars. This ideology allowed the Mishar wing to strengthen their position in two of the above-mentioned muftiates, viz., the SMR and the DUM RF. Thanks to *Medina's* publications, Mishars became active participants in Islamic discourse in Russia.

The success of the "Mishar project" contributed to the transformation of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Nizhny Novgorod region into one of the most authoritative Islamic religious organisations in Russia. *Medina's* publishing

34 *Katalog izdatel'skogo doma 'Medina'. 2007–2012 gg.* (Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2012), <http://idmedina.ru/photos/extra/file/katalog.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2021.

35 In 2015 *Medina* published a Russian translation of the Tafsir of the Qur'an by Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali. In a speech at a forum on "Islam in a multicultural world", Damir Mukhetdinov announced plans in the near future to publish "an 8-volume encyclopedia of hadiths, an 8-volume encyclopedia on "Islam in the Russian Federation," an 8-volume encyclopedia of the Qur'an, as well as a series of books on *falsafa*, *kalam*, *tasawwuf*, *fiqh*, history." (Damir Mukhetdinov, X Mezhdunarodnyi forum 'Islam v mul'tikul'turnom mire'. Vystuplenie D. Mukhetdinova na plenarnom zasedanii, *Muslim International Forum*, 25 December (2020), <http://muslim-forum.info/happening/deyatelnost-mmf/kh-mezhdunarodnyy-forum-Islam-v-multikulturnom-mire-vystuplenie-d-mukhetdinova-na-plenarnom-zasedanii/>, accessed 12 November 2021.

36 For more details on these publishers see: Vyacheslav Danilov, "Osnovnye kanaly rasprostraneniya musul'manskoi knigi v Sibiri (konets XX – nachalo XXI v.)", *Bulletin of Omsk University*, 4 (2008), pp. 88-94.

37 See <http://idmedina.ru/about/concept/>, accessed 12 November 2021.

38 Interview with Marat Safarov, 10 December 2020, author's fieldwork materials.

policy helped the muftiate, which operated in a region with a small Muslim population, to acquire symbolic capital amongst adherents of Islam living outside the Nizhny Novgorod region.

The authority of a particular muftiate today is determined not only by the number of communities it covers as by the ideological influence it exerts on other regions. For example, the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT) includes only communities within Tatarstan, but its influence extends to communities in other regions too. An effective tool of this influence is the muftiate's publishing activity, exercised through the *Khuzur* publishing house, mentioned above. In the autumn and winter of 2019, DUM RT presented a series of translations of the meanings of the Qur'an into Tatar, prepared by Islamic scholars from Tatarstan. The translation aroused great interest not only among the Tatars but also among representatives of other Muslim peoples of Russia.³⁹

After Mukhetdinov moved to Moscow and began working at the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European part of Russia (since 2014, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation) as a deputy mufti, *Medina* was assigned other more ambitious tasks. By the mid-2010s, Mukhetdinov's religious credo had been finally formed. He began to promote the idea of Renovationism in Islam. This is an ideology that, if not fully shared, is at least supported by mufti Gaynutdin, Mukhetdinov's chief.

The core idea of Renovationism is not limited to theological and legal discussion in Muslim print or electronic publications. The administrative position of the Renovationists as officials in Muslim religious organisations means that their texts have become a part of official discourse. Renovationism, as promoted by Mukhetdinov and his associates (R. Batrov, A. Sadriev, et al.), is a secularised version of Islam, attractive not only to some secular Muslim intellectuals but to politicians with a role in regulation of the confessional sphere. Since the first days of its existence, *Medina's* publications have always served as a platform for Russian renovationists.⁴⁰

In recent years, *Medina* has paid much attention to the publication and propagation of the views of foreign supporters of Renovationism in Islam. This is because of the goal Mukhetdinov has been pursuing over the past five years: breakthrough of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation to the international level and promotion of the muftiate as an instrument of

39 See, e.g., Alfred Muhametrakhimov, "U sunnitskikh musul'man svoego perevoda ne bylo: novyi knizhnyi bestseller ot DUM RT", *Biznes Online*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/449291>, accessed 12 November 2021.

40 Renat Bekkin, "The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam", in *The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia*, Renat Bekkin (ed.) (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2020), p. 96.

citizen or people's diplomacy in the Western world. Renovatism is seen as a convenient model for European Islam, through which a common language can be sought with Muslim and non-Muslim politicians and public figures in European countries. The *Islam v sovremennom mire* (*Islam in the Modern World*) journal serves these goals. Its editor-in-chief happens to be Mukhetdinov. A significant number of the journal's publications are devoted to analysis of the views of foreign Renovatists.⁴¹ Another journal published by Medina, *Minaret Islama* (*the Minaret of Islam*), has similar content, but, unlike *Islam in the Modern World*, it is a popular academic journal addressed primarily to Muslims.

It is no coincidence that *Medina* has published hardly any "practical" literature, viz., texts on liturgical practice in accordance with the Hanafi *madhhab* (e.g., execution of the religious rituals prescribed by Islam, Islamic ethics, education, etc.).⁴²

Thus, we see that, throughout its history, *Medina* has served an ideological program set by the management of the publishing house to address specific political tasks.

4) *The Image-building Function*. This function is closely related to the preceding one. Given how closely *Medina* was related as a project to the personality of Mukhetdinov, it has worked primarily on his image as organiser, educator, and researcher. The growing symbolic capital of Nizhny Novgorod as a centre of Muslim social and academic and cultural activities influenced the career development of the head of *Medina*. He proved useful on the staff of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in the European part of Russia.

Mukhetdinov is considered the author of the project to reform the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR). As a result, this interregional muftiate, which had existed since 1996, ceased *de facto* to exist as a horizontal structure or umbrella organisation for the regional spiritual administrations of Muslims.⁴³ Instead, there was a strengthening of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF), which had previously been the key muftiate within the structure of the SMR. DUM RF has turned into a muftiate with a rigidly built vertical axis of power. Ravil Gaynutdin has come to be known in all DUM RF documents as the "spiritual leader of the Muslims of Russia". Theological works had to be published under Gaynutdin's surname to confirm this status. It is no accident that increasing attention has been paid in recent years to publishing theological texts by Gaynutdin and

41 This peer reviewed journal also publishes articles and reviews by well-known Russian and foreign orientalists. Reviews of *Medina's* own books are published in almost every issue.

42 At present, such literature is mainly published by *Islamic Book*, a publisher working under the auspices of the Council of Muftis of Russia. The head of this muftiate is, as noted above, Ravil Gainutdin, the mufti of the DUM RF.

43 Renat Bekkin, *People of reliable loyalty. ...: Muftiates and the State in Modern Russia* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2020), p. 248.

Mukhetdinov.⁴⁴ In 2020, the publishing house released new series on “Revival and renewal” and on “Islamic thought in Russia: revival and reinterpretation.” The former was opened by Gaynutdin’s *Islam: doctrine, worship, morality, law*; the latter by Mukhetdinov’s *Modern Islamic thinkers*.⁴⁵

Through its quasi-academic publications, *Medina* has thus introduced and continues to promote the idea that the centre of Islamic theological thought in Russia lies at DUM RF, providing support to the muftiate and its leader’s claims to spiritual leadership in the ummah of Russia. Both DUM RF and *Medina*’s efforts are aimed at building an image of educated intellectuals with whom government officials, who decide the fates of the religious associations in Russia, can work rather than of representatives of an alien, incomprehensible, and hostile force (which is how bureaucrats in Russia have seen Islam for centuries).

Medina actively publishes books, articles, and conference proceedings by Russian Islamologists. As a result, Mukhetdinov is treated as their peer. It is a mutually beneficial strategic alliance. Islamologists can publish their works in *Medina*, while Mukhetdinov increases his symbolic capital among his fellow Muslims by entering the circle of academic scholars. Lacking any previous experience at a secular University, he was nonetheless appointed professor at the St. Petersburg State University, one of the leading universities in Russia. Following his appointment, Mukhetdinov has created a talent pool of young Mishars from Tatar villages of the Nizhny Novgorod and Mordovia regions who have enrolled on a Master’s program at the Faculty of Oriental Studies there. Mukhetdinov supported their admission to the Master’s program and then promoted their appointment to administrative positions in the regions as heads of the *muhtasibat*.⁴⁶ of the DUM RF. In fact, the Faculty of Oriental Studies has turned into a personnel forge for the administrative unit of DUM RF.

Thanks to *Medina*’s connections with centres of Oriental Studies, a number of Mukhetdinov’s staff and associates have enrolled on postgraduate programmes. In 2020, Mukhetdinov himself successfully defended his dissertation for the degree of doctor of theology on “The Islamic renovationist movement from the end

44 Mukhetdinov has repeatedly been accused of not being the author of academic works published under his name. So far no such charges have been proven or refuted. See, for example: “Kto pisal za Damira Mukhetdinova ego doktorskuyu dissertatsiyu po islamskoy teologii?” *Telegram channel ‘Secrets of Lake Kaban’*, <https://t.me/thesecretsoflakekaban/247>, accessed 12 November 2021.

45 According to Mukhetdinov’s statement of December 2020, there are “21 books by the theologian Musa Bigiyev” and “10 works by mufti Rizaetdin Fakhretdin” in print (Damir Mukhetdinov, X Mezhdunarodnyy forum ‘Islam v mul’tikul’turnom mire’. Vystuplenie D. Mukhetdinova na plenarnom zasedanii, *Muslim International Forum*, 25 December 2020, <http://muslim-forum.info/happening/deyatelnost-mmf/kh-mezhdunarodnyy-forum-Islam-v-multikulturnom-mire-vystuplenie-d-mukhetdinova-na-plenarnom-zasedani/>, accessed 12 November 2021.

46 Muhtasibat – an administrative unit within the structure of the Muftiates in the USSR and the Russian Federation which unites several Muslim communities (*mahallabs*). A *muhtasibat* is headed by a *muhtasib*, who is appointed by the mufti.

of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century: ideas and prospects” at the St. Petersburg State University. The dissertation board included established Russian Islamologists.⁴⁷

The image-building function has thus turned out to be the main one for *Medina*. Neither putting profit first or considering education a self-sufficient task, the management of the publishing house has instead focused on the image-building and ideological functions. As a result, not just the publisher but the muftiates that have supervised its activities at different periods have acquired social capital.

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Izdavaštvo kao instrument stvaranja i akumulacije simboličkog kapitala u Rusiji: izdavačka kuća Medina Publishing

Sažetak

Medina Publishing je, po broju objavljenih publikacija, jedan od najstarijih i najvećih islamskih izdavača u Rusiji. U ovom članku se ispituje njegov razvoj, od projekta izdavačke djelatnosti u lokalnoj historiji Tatara Nižnjeg Novgoroda do izdavača savremene teološke literature koju pišu predstavnici renovacionističkog pokreta. Značajno je što *Medina Publishing* većinu svojih knjiga, novina i časopisa najčešće distribuira besplatno. Po karakteru, glavni ciljevi ovog izdavača su obrazovni, ideološki i izgradnja imidža. U ovom članku se razmatra uloga *Medine* kao instrumenta za stvaranje i akumuliranje simboličkog kapitala jedne od najvećih ruskih islamskih religijskih organizacija (muftijstava), Duhovne uprave muslimana Ruske Federacije (DUM RF). Autor ukazuje na jedinstveni položaj *Medina Publishinga* na ruskom izdavačkom tržištu, kao izdavača fokusiranog na literaturu za obrazovanog čitatelja koji posjeduje posebno znanje iz područja religijskih nauka, filologije, itd.. Izdanja *Medine* podstiču kod čitatelja uvjerenje da je DUM RF centar islamske teološke misli u Rusiji, čime legitimiraju pravo ovog muftijstva i njenog lidera na duhovno vođstvo ruskog *ummata*. I DUM RF i *Medina Publishing* svoje napore usmjeravaju na izgradnju profila intelektualaca kao funkcionera narodne vlasti, kao onih čije odluke upravljaju sudbinom religijskih udruženja u Rusiji, sa kojima se može saradivati, a ne kao nekog ko predstavlja tuđinsku, nerazumljivu i neprijateljski nastrojenu silu (kako su stoljećima birokrate u Rusiji doživljavale islam).

Ključne riječi: *Medina Publishing*, Damir Muhetdinov, islamski renovacionizam, muftijstvo, Duhovna uprava muslimana Ruske Federacije (DUM RF), *Iman Publishing*