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The Publication History and Socio-Philosophical Significance of Ahmad Donish's Scientific and Literary Heritage

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Abstract: Ahmad Donish (1827–1897) is regarded as one of the most versatile and intellectually inquisitive thinkers who emerged during the final century of the history of the Bukhara Emirate. This article reconstructs the publication history of his principal works—Navādir al-Waqāʾiʿ, Meʿyār al-Tadayyun, Risāla dar Nazm-i Tamaddun va Taʿāwun, as well as his astronomical treatises—and analyzes the ideological circumstances under which these works were interpreted in Soviet scholarship. Drawing upon early editions and post-independence reassessments, the article argues that the philosophical essence of Donish's legacy has not yet been fully liberated from the accumulated layers of Marxist-Leninist interpretations. Furthermore, the study examines the thinker's writings within the intellectual environment of nineteenth-century Central Asia and demonstrates that his reformist ideas were shaped at the intersection of religious traditionalism, dynastic authority, and the influence of Russian scientific culture.

Keywords: Ahmad Donish, Navādir al-Waqāʾiʿ, Risāla dar Nazm-i Tamaddun, Meʿyār al-Tadayyun, Manāẓir al-Kawākib, Risāla fī Aʿmāl al-Kura, Bukhara Emirate, Central Asian Enlightenment, Islamic reformism, Tajik-Uzbek literary tradition

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1. Introduction

Upon approaching Ahmad Donish's legacy, one is first struck by its sheer scale. It is difficult to expect such a systematic creative output from a person who spent his entire life within the courtly environment of the Bukhara Emirate, serving as a mudarris and secretary. At the same time, his works are not confined to a single subject.[1] Political analysis, religious and ethical reflections, astronomy, and history complement one another and form a unified intellectual system. A. M. Bogoutdinov's characterization of Donish as "the only scholar of the second half of the nineteenth century who addressed the fundamental questions of philosophy" aptly conveys his significance. [2]

The enduring scholarly interest in *Navādir al-Waqāʾiʿ* over many decades demonstrates the continued relevance of this work. Researchers have not limited themselves to a single reading and interpretation of the text. Instead, they have repeatedly returned to it, producing new commentaries and translations. This phenomenon is explained not only by the richness of the themes addressed but also by Donish's distinctive mode of thinking, the depth of his evaluations of social phenomena, and the ability of the work to reveal new layers of meaning with each subsequent reading.[3]

2. Methodology

Ahmad Donish began writing *Navādir al-Waqā'iʿ* in the 1870s and completed it over approximately fifteen years. The work consists of a preface and twenty-three chapters. During the author's lifetime it circulated in manuscript form among teachers and scholars and significantly contributed to the spread of his scholarly and literary reputation.[4] Ibrahim Muminov described the work as "a major literary-philosophical and publicistic work created in Central Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century" and later noted that it "exerted a considerable influence on the development of Tajik and Uzbek literature" [5]. This assessment highlights two principal dimensions of the work's impact—literary and socio-political.

The first complete official edition of the work was published in Uzbek in Tashkent by the Fan Publishing House in 1964. In 1988–1989, the Donish Publishing House in Dushanbe issued a two-volume Tajik edition. In 2017 and 2018, a more comprehensive Tajik edition was published. Prepared by J. Narziev, B. Mirzoev, and I. Mirzoev, this critical edition stands out as the version closest to the original text. The inclusion of commentaries, a glossary, and indexes elevated the publication from a reading edition to an important source for scholarly research.[6]

Donish's work *Me'yoru-t-tadayyun* ("The Measure of Piety") was written in a directly polemical manner. For this reason, the official ulama of Bukhara and members of the emir's court regarded *Navodir-ul-vaqoe* as a harmful work and even accused Donish of irreligion. According to N. Hotamov, "their unfounded attitude led to the emergence of another work by Ahmad Donish — *Me'yoru-t-tadayyun*. The author wrote this treatise around 1894 as a response to his ideological opponents" [7].

In fact, the very act of composing such a response was a strategic move. In this treatise, Donish employs the principles of Islamic ethics and justice in the very language used by his opponents, thereby offering an internal critique of the administrative system of the emirate.[8]

Another important work by Donish, *Risola dar nazmi tamaddun va taovun* ("Treatise on the Organization of Civilization and Cooperation"), was written between 1870 and 1873. Hotamov describes it as "a program for reforming the system of state administration" and notes that "the author set forth his views on justice and the principles governing the administration of the state and society. In essence, this treatise represents a program for the profound reform of the state structure and social foundations of the Bukhara Emirate" [9].

For a scholar living in nineteenth-century Bukhara, committing such ideas to paper required considerable intellectual courage. Nevertheless, this treatise has yet to receive a comprehensive analysis from the perspective of contemporary political philosophy.[10]

3. Result

Astronomical Works in Donish's Intellectual Legacy

Ahmad Donish's astronomical writings have received less scholarly attention than his socio-political treatises. However, these works are no less important for understanding his intellectual world.

One of these works is *Manozir-ul-kavokib* ("The View of the Stars"), written in 1865 and dedicated to a friend. The treatise systematically discusses the positions and movements of celestial bodies, as well as various astronomical phenomena associated with them [11]. F. Sh. Sibagatov's study examines this work within the context of the Muslim scientific tradition and demonstrates the coexistence of Islamic and rationalist elements in Donish's interpretation of natural phenomena.

The history of the composition of *Risola fi a'moli-l-kura* ("Treatise on the Use of the Globe") contains an interesting detail. According to available sources, the Russian captain Streomukhov presented Donish with two globes, after which the thinker recorded his reflections on the universe and geography [12]. When read alongside Donish's impressions of Russia described in *Navodir-ul-vaqoe*, this episode helps clarify which elements of the two civilizations he accepted and which he rejected.

In the treatise *Ta'oduli hamsai mutahayyira* ("The Motion of the Five Planets"), written in 1883, Donish explained methods for calculating the movements of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. This work demonstrates the practical application of his astronomical knowledge [13].

Historical Writings and Their Publication History

A major work that Ahmad Donish began in his later years but never completed is known among scholars by several titles, including *Tarikhcha*, *A Brief Account of the History of the Manghit Dynasty*, and *Biographies of the Manghit Emirs*.

The fact that the work remained unfinished is not surprising. Written approximately a decade after *Navodir-ul-vaqoe*, the treatise appears to have been known only to those within Donish's closest intellectual circle. This suggests either that he did not intend to disseminate the text widely or that he was unable to complete it and prepare it for publication.

The publication history of this work is noteworthy. Its Russian translation, entitled *Istoriya mangitskoy dinastii* ("History of the Manghit Dynasty"), was published in Dushanbe in 1967. New editions appeared in Tajikistan in 1992 and 2010, with the latter surpassing the earlier edition in both scope and completeness. In 2014, the historian A. Mirzoev translated the work into Uzbek and prepared it for publication.

These editions have made it possible to study the history of the Manghit rulers through Donish's own perspective, although this opportunity has not yet been fully utilized by researchers.

Soviet and Post-Soviet Interpretations of Donish's Heritage

Publications issued during the Soviet period played an important role in introducing Donish's works to a wider readership. At the same time, this process unfolded within a framework of ideological constraints.

The introductions and scholarly studies accompanying these editions often attempted to portray Donish through the prism of class struggle, while his religious-ethical and reformist ideas were interpreted according to materialist principles. As a result, many concepts that originally stemmed from Islamic notions of justice were reinterpreted as being closer to the framework of "scientific materialism."[14]

Consequently, contemporary researchers using these editions should treat their introductory essays not as objective sources of information but rather as reflections of the ideological environment in which they were produced.

During the years of independence, the dissemination of Donish's works in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan accelerated considerably. New translations appeared, additional editions were published, and in Tajikistan efforts continued to transliterate texts written in Arabic script into Cyrillic. Nevertheless, the task of studying Donish's philosophical worldview free from ideological pressure and within the cultural and religious context in which it emerged remains incomplete.

This issue is particularly relevant with regard to *Me'yoru-t-tadayyun*. Against the backdrop of contemporary religious currents entering the region, Donish's reflections on Islamic ethics and governance continue to offer important insights.[15]

4. Conclusion

Ahmad Donish was a thinker who approached knowledge in a genuinely scholarly manner, yet never confined himself solely to academic pursuits. *Navodir-ul-vaqoe* represents the pinnacle of his literary and philosophical thought, and the series of editions published between 1964 and 2018 testifies to the continuing dialogue between the text and successive generations of readers.

Me'yoru-t-tadayyun and *Risola dar nazmi tamaddun va taovun* reveal a thinker capable of maintaining a delicate balance between political reformism and religious argumentation. His astronomical treatises complement this portrait by demonstrating both his commitment to the natural sciences and his independent engagement with Russian scientific culture.

Moving beyond the ideological shadow of Soviet interpretations does not mean rediscovering Donish; rather, it means attempting to understand him on his own terms. Studying the history of the Manghit rulers through Donish's perspective, reconstructing a theory of Islamic governance from *Me'yoru-t-tadayyun*, and analyzing his astronomical writings within the history of scientific thought in Central Asia each constitute research agendas worthy of separate monographs. The present article merely seeks to identify and formulate these tasks.

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