Muslim Turkistan
This book is based on long-term field research in the city of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan, the site of the shrine of Ahmet Yaawi, a key figure in early Turkic Sufism. The work has a wide-angle view, describing the secularization of land and ethnic identity, including the revival of Pan-Turkic values after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“Studies of folk religion in Central Asia are rare. Of all the recent books on the Kazaks published in Western language, there is no study that can compete with this one when it comes to religion.” - Ingvar Samuelsson, Uppsala University

“This book is the first serious work on Islam among the Kazaks unhamppered by Soviet-era conceptual frameworks. Based on long-term field research in the Kazak language, Privratsky’s work is vital both for its rich new data, the like of which is unavailable elsewhere, and for its analytical approach, which is as yet unmatched. It is a new and convincing interpretation of Kazak Islam.” - David DeWey, Indiana University
MUSLIM
TURKISTAN
To my father and mother

George Privratsky
Grace Merz

And in memory of my grandparents

Anton Privratsky
Catherine Trinka
Leo Merz
Merle Grace Bacon
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ILLUSTRATIONS

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1 The Shrine of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi
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7 Alim Qoja
8 A mendicant mullah at the Yasawi Shrine
Though this book is a traditional, empirical ethnography, the research and writing were for me an enlivening exploration at the far reaches of faith and knowledge. I learned anthropology only in my 40s and finished this study after I was 50. Perhaps because my youth had expired I was never asked by anyone to join their school of thought, and this allowed me to avoid becoming a canonical anthropologist, a “worshiper at the shrines of Terminus, god of boundary stones” (Sahlins 1985:27). I have developed collective memory theory in a way that resonates both with my scientific interests and my theological training, freeing it, I hope, from the received tradition of postmodernist radicalism.

Chapters 2–6 are a description and analysis of Muslim life among the Kazaks in the small city of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan. Anyone with an interest in popular Islam will find them useful, along with the historical setting laid out at the beginning of Chapter 1. The rest of Chapter 1, and Chapters 7 and 8, are written for students of the anthropology of religion. I have felt an obligation to lay out the literature on Kazak religion (because it has never before been gathered in a single volume) and a good deal of comparative material (because it is largely unknown to Kazak scholars). Throughout the book there are many verbatim quotations of spoken Kazak, which will help Kazak scholars respond to my work and be of interest to Central Asia area specialists and students of Turkic languages. Parts of Chapters 1 and 2 appear as “Turkistan: Muslim Landscapes and Kazak Ethnicity” in the Journal of Central Asian Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1997).

I owe special thanks to Benita Howell, who taught me how to write ethnography and encouraged me to be true to myself as I wrote. William Y. Adams did a detailed critique of each draft chapter and helped me sort out Sufism in an anthropologically sensible way. Devin DeWeese was generous with his time and resources and influenced my understanding of conversion, syncretism, and the history of Inner Asian religions. Adams and DeWeese...
visited Turkistan while I was there. Ingvar Svanberg and Rosalind I.J. Hackett evaluated the penultimate version helpfully. Since this book began as my doctoral dissertation, it is a milestone in an academic life inspired by many teachers, scholars, and learned friends. Dale Walker and Filemon Bukit were colleagues in Indonesia who first encouraged me to study anthropology.

Field research was done between 1991 and 1999, during most of which time I taught at Yasawi University in Turkistan. I thank colleagues there who assisted and encouraged me, along with Ağın Qasımov (Kasymzhanov), Professor of Philosophy at the Kazak National University (KazGU), Almaty. The real specialists in their own culture, however, are the unlettered people of Turkistan, who graciously hosted this ungracious stranger.

Most of all I thank Emy, who grew broccoli and lettuce in the hard desert soil, conducted a competent and sensitive professional program of her own, and supported me in mine. Through it all our daughters ministered to us: Ada, who cheerfully helped us survive our first hot summer and very cold winter in Turkistan; Joanna, who learned from Kazak girlfriends how to take care of a mud-brick house and insisted we do it right; and Katherine, who became so utterly bilingual in Kazak that in the end she became, at 14, my live-in consultant and toughest critic on linguistic problems. Joanna and Katie made the first draft of the regional map, which was finished by Lars Huttar, who also produced the city map. He and Phyllis Hankins took two of the photographs. I am grateful to them for permission to use their creative work.

Long-term residence on the field was made possible by support from a program of United Methodist ministries in Central Asia established by the Holston Conference, Knoxville, Tennessee. I am committed to the contextualization of Biblical proclamation in a way that “looks for God’s revelation and self-manifestation within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a culture” (Bevans 1992:49; Donovan 1982; Sanneh 1989, 1993). Although I do not take up my contextualization agenda in this book, it is the personal background for the discussion of religion and science in Chapter 8, and the spirit that underlies the whole.

Studying Muslim life is controversial (Abdul Rauf 1985; Said 1978), but cultural systems are usually resilient enough that culture contact between honest individuals does not corrupt them (Hallowell 1955:316ff.). Ideally, it opens before them a world of intercultural understanding which should not be denied to them if they choose to have it. Post-colonial hegemonism is a continuing issue in the newly independent states of the former USSR, but Kazak culture has proven its resilience, and my Kazak friends and informants have not seemed to worry too much that I am a Christian studying them. If there are those who have, I trust that this book will reassure them.
Preface

As I neared the end of the work, a Kazak colleague told me how her grandfather had had to change their family name when her great-grandfather, a mullah, was denounced as an “enemy of the people.” It is grievous to have to confess to her that social scientists were participants in the persecution of honest believers. Whatever the ethnographic value of this study, I hope it will be received by her and Kazak friends as an apology from the profession and a tribute to their ancestors who suffered for their faith.
ABBREVIATIONS

Note: When reference works and newspaper articles are cited in the text, the author’s name is inserted in brackets after the reference. These articles are not listed individually in the bibliography.

REFERENCE WORKS


Abbreviations


NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

AS: Ayğaq [Shout]. Shymkent. 1996–.
AT: Ana Tili [Mother Tongue]. Almaty, 1990–.
AT: Azıretti Türkistan [Eminent Turkistan]. Türkistan. 1997–.
İman [Faith]. Almaty, 1992–.
JA: Jas Alash [Young Alash Horde]. Almaty, 1921–.
JA: Jas Alash [Young Alash Horde]. Shymkent, 1999–.
JA: Jas Alash [Young Alash Horde]. Almaty, 1995–.
KA: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. Almaty, 1920–.
QA: Qazaq Adebibi [Kazakh Literature]. Almaty, 1994–.
QE: Qazaq Eli [Kazak Nation]. Almaty, 1995–.
QÜ: Qazaq Üni [Kazak Voice]. Almaty, 1995–.
SK: Shymkent Kelbetti [Face of Shymkent]. Shymkent, 1990–.
SQ: Sotsialistik Qazaqstan [Socialist Kazakhstan]. Almaty. 1919–.
TA: Türkistan. Almaty, 1994–.
TT: Türkistan (formerly: Kızıl Türkistan [Red Turkistan]). Türkistan, 1930–.
Türkiye [Turkish Horde]. Ankara: Türk Ocağı Merkez Heyeti. 1999–.
Yesevi [Yasawı]. İstanbul, 1994–.
ZK: Zaman Kazakistan [Times of Kazakhstan, in Turkish and Kazak]. Almaty, 1992–.

INTERVIEWERS

BP: Bruce Privratsky
GS: Gauhar Slzdlq ova

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kazak Alphabet</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Pronunciation Notes</th>
<th>Russian-Latin and Other Variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>(as in <em>father</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Э</td>
<td>ä</td>
<td>(as in <em>cat</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Б</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>В</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Г</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>(as in the guttural French r: <em>raison</em>)</td>
<td>gh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Г</td>
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<td>Д</td>
<td>d</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Е</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>(slightly palatalized: ye)</td>
<td>ye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ё</td>
<td>yo</td>
<td>(as in French <em>jeune</em>, English <em>pleasure</em>)</td>
<td>zh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ж</td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>З</td>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>И</td>
<td>iy</td>
<td>(schwa + ee as a back diphthong)</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И</td>
<td>iy</td>
<td>(short i + ee as a front diphthong)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>І</td>
<td>ĭ</td>
<td>(as in feet, in words from Arabic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Џ</td>
<td>ĭ</td>
<td>(semivowel, as in <em>yes</em>)</td>
<td>i, j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>К</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>(velar or soft k)</td>
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<tr>
<td>К</td>
<td>k</td>
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<td>Н</td>
<td>ng</td>
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<tr>
<td>О</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>(with a glide in initial position: wo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>О</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>(as in German <em>schön</em> but with a glide: wö)</td>
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<td>П</td>
<td>p</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>У</td>
<td>û</td>
<td>(as in <em>moon</em>, Turkish <em>su</em>)</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>У</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>(in initial position, and in foreign words)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ў</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>(very low, rounded back vowel)</td>
<td>ū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ý</td>
<td>ü</td>
<td>(as in German <em>für</em> but closer to ō)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ф</td>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transliteration

X h (as in German ich) kh, ch, h
h h
Ц ts tsch
Ч ch sh
Ш sh shch
Я (Russian hard sign) ' Ь
Ы ш (schwa, as in Turkish hâm) y
І і (shorter than English short i) y
ь (Russian soft sign) ’
Ә e (unpalatalized short e in foreign words)
Ю yu
Я ya

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Ignoring Russian-English transliteration systems where they obscure Kazak distinctives, the transliteration used for Kazak texts carefully weighs the direct relationship between Kazak and European orthographies. In the English text I bow to common practice in a few special cases, e.g. Turkistan instead of Türkistan or Turkestan, Shymkent instead of Shlmkent or Chimkent, and Almaty instead of Almatl or Alma-Ata.

Despite a proposal for a common Turkic alphabet that leans heavily toward Turkish (Kaydarov 1997; Landau 1995:212; KTLS), Kazak has not yet been standardized with a Latin alphabet designed both for Kazak distinctives and for readability by speakers of Turkic and European languages alike. The transliteration used by the government of Kazakstan is mimicked by journalists despite its inadequacies. It relies too much on assumptions from Russian-English transliteration, such as the use of y for the Turkic short i, which leaves the reader wondering where the vowels are in tynyshtyk and ghlyym. Clearly tmshtq and gilm, following the Turkish pattern, are more readable.

Even the name of the country and its people cannot be written in English without controversy: “Kazakh” is based on Russian pronunciation; “Qazaq” represents the hard k accurately but looks funny in English; and “Kazak” means Cossack when transliterated back into Cyrillic characters, a politically sensitive confusion. “Kazak” as diacriticalized by Barthold (EI, II:836 [1927]) might assuage the political offense but is impractical. Svanberg feels that “Kazak” works best in most European languages (cf. Hudson 1938); so I have used “Kazak” in the English text, but Qazaq in italics when transliterating Kazak texts verbatim.

Although Turkish has a creative European orthography, its does not have enough characters for the Kazak vowel system. The new Uzbek alphabet is a better model, because it uses Turkish critically, introducing a few new characters and eliminating some others. Unlike Uzbek and Turkish,

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however, Kazak adheres strictly to Turkic vowel harmony (except in words of foreign origin). A good Latin orthography for Kazak will distinguish front and back vowels, making Turkic vowel harmony graphically obvious; so I have given diacriticals to all front vowels except e, and left all the back vowels bare. As in Turkish, I let y represent the semi-vowel jumsaq i (i kratko); so shay is pronounced like English shy, and peyil like pail. Depending on position and function, ny, iy and i replace the Cyrillic i, hence trym, biy, and dini; likewise u and ü for Cyrillic u, as in aürū and tāwip. Blended consonants (ch, ng, sh) follow English and the new Uzbek, but dotted g and h are retained for the gutterals instead of gh and kh.

For Russian words I have used standard transliteration, unless a Kazak speaker has kazakified them so colorfully that it is interesting to print the Kazak pronunciation. Foreign words that came into Kazak before the Soviet period have kazakified spellings in any case. Transliterations for Arabic and Persian words are given on first occurrences, but Kazak or English spellings are used thereafter, following OEMIW where possible.

In the glossary Kazak religious vocabulary is printed in Cyrillic characters alongside the Latin transliteration for the sake of comparison.
Map 1: Central Asia.
THE PROBLEM OF KAZAK RELIGION

What is horrifying in totalitarian regimes is not only the violation of human dignity but the fear that there might remain nobody who could ever again properly bear witness to the past.

– Paul Connerton (1989:15)

The Kazaks are a Muslim people in Central Asia among whom religious belief and behavior are mediated by a vibrant memory of their nomadic ancestors and the Sufi saints who nurtured them in the way of Islam. The dynamics of religion and ethnicity are nowhere more powerfully felt by the Kazaks than in their historic city of Turkistan,1 where the research for this study was conducted in the 1990s. A center of a religious life associated with the Sufi legacy, Turkistan is often described by Kazaks as the “holy hearth” (kīyeli oshaq) and the “axis” (kindik; Ar. qutb) of their culture. To call it a hearth is to summon the evocative power of Kazak domestic culture, and to call it an axis is to compare it to Mecca, where the Ka’ba stone is the Islamic axis mundi, the center of the world.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

Until 1930 public zikir (Ar. dhikr) or Sufi chant ceremonies were held on Fridays in Turkistan at the shrine of the 12th-century Sufi master, Ahmet Yasawi. The massive monument, preserved by the Soviet government as a museum, still dominates the old part of the town (see Plate 1). Families claiming Arab descent from Ali and Muhammad, called Qojas (Pers. khoja, master), were its traditional guardians and led the zikir and prayers there (Muminov 1998). “Pious endowments” of lands and enterprises (Ar. waqf; Kz. waqtp) provided the shrine’s economic infrastructure (cf. McChesney 1991), but their integrity had been eroded even before the Russian occupation of the town in 1864 (Gordlevsky 1932:63). They were
Muslim Turkistan

contested by various Qoja groups throughout the 19th and early 20th
centuries (DeWeese 1997b), and were finally seized by the Soviets.

Late 19th-century reports show that the Kazak baqši (shaman) was a
visible, but more and more marginal, figure in Kazak communities, his
rhetoric Islamized, and his role as healer eclipsed by tawips (Ar. tabib,
doctor) practicing Muslim healing arts. Then came the advent of the Soviet
medical system, accompanied by an attack on the old healing arts as
superstitious and unscientific. Although the Kazak shamans have left
behind no accounts of their suffering, it is clear that they were thoroughly
suppressed during the Soviet period.

When Stalin purged all nationalist and religious opposition in the decade
between 1927 and 1937, it was the public face of Muslim life that was
attacked. All mosques were closed for a time in Turkistan, as everywhere in
the USSR. One was allowed to reopen in 1943 when Stalin eased up on
religion for the sake of a unified war effort, and it remained the only
mosque in the city until after independence. Zikir was now done at home
instead of at the Yasawi Shrine, or it simply gave way to the less exuberant
household rites – Quran recitals, sacred meals, rites of passage – that have
always been the heart of Islamic practice.

Fearing arrest, many of Turkistan’s Qoja’s fled to Tashkent, where, it was
felt, they could hide among the Uzbeks and not be harmed. Turkistan was
left virtually without specialized religious leadership. The religious services
which the Qoja’s had performed – Quran recitals, making amulets, healing
in the Muslim way by breathing on the sick – were now taken up by
dünshe moldas (“mullah fools”), as the Kazaks called them. They were
simple men who lacked pedigree, sometimes knew only a verse or two of
the Quran, and were regularly suspected of pecuniary motives. Their
illiteracy was fodder for Soviet atheist propaganda. Some Qoja families
later returned to Turkistan when the heat was off, but by then the Kazaks
had learned to live without mosques or religious patrons.

The tumultuous transition of the 1930s is the baseline for most of the
diachronic comparisons that will be made in this study, not least of all
because it is as far back as all but a few of our informants can remember. A
deeper history of the city from medieval times will be included in DeWeese’s
work on the Yasawi Sufi tradition (forthcoming). Here I am most interested
in the Turkistan that is emerging now from the dramatic social changes of
the 20th century, laying hold again of a religious heritage that has been
tested and distended, but not destroyed.

The religion of the peoples of Inner Asia² is essentially a cult of the
household (DeWeese 1994:39ff.), and for the Muslim peoples this domestic
cult is in symbiotic relationship with shrines of the Muslim saints that dot
the landscape. Islam among the Kazaks is best understood not, as is
commonly supposed, in terms of a syncretic interaction between shamanism
and Sufism, but as a subdued Muslim piety practiced vicariously by the
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Kazak elders (including women) on behalf of their children, sheltered in the family life of a now wholly sedentarized Kazak society. The Qojas remain as a religious honor group with limited spiritual authority and often only a shadowy awareness of their own Sufi heritage.

Geography, Demography, and Political Culture

At least until the 16th century the town of Turkistan was called Yasi,3 whence Yasawi, the Arabic nisba4 for its Muslim saint, Ahmet Yasawi. He is formally called Qul Qoja Ahmet Yasawi: Ahmet, the servant (Qul) of God, a descendent of the Arabs (Qoja), a man of Yasi (Yasawi). Another popular title, Eminent Sultan (Aziret Sultan), indicates that he was renowned as a shaykh or founder of a Sufi community whose spiritual power (bereke; Ar. baraka) is believed to reside at the place where he is buried. Yasawi is not only a nisba for the man but also a toponym for the shrine and the city itself. To visit Turkistan is to make a personal visit (ziyarat) to Yasawi, a pilgrimage to the “Second Mecca” (ekinshi Mekke).

Located on a flat desert-steppe between the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) River and the Karatau (Qaratau) Mountains (see Map 2), Turkistan is a traditional Central Asian oasis town of sun-baked mud-brick homes. There are modern concrete buildings only along the main streets, in a decrepit Soviet-style housing project built in the 1970s and ’80s, and on the sparkling new ’90s-style campus of Yasawi University5 (see Map 3). Turkistan is five hours north of Tashkent by train or a two-hour drive northwest of Shymkent (Chimkent) on a two-lane highway that leads eventually to the Aral Sea, the Volga, and Moscow. Both culturally and geographically, Turkistan is far indeed from Almaty, the showcase of Soviet Kazakhstan, with its large Russian population, Soviet architecture, alpine scenery, and cosmopolitan ambience. A fertile crescent north of the Syr Darya and the Alatau (Tien Shan) Mountains, stretching 600 kilometers through a string of oasis towns from Qizil Orda (Kzyl Orda) to Taraz (Dzhambul), is the historic heartland of Muslim culture at the northern edge of Central Asia (cf. T. Qongiratbaev 1996). Its spiritual center is the blue dome over the tomb of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi.

Overshadowed in the early medieval period by the important Syr Darya city of Otrar,6 Yasi grew into a commercial town where nomads and townsmen met at the bazaar around the Yasawi Shrine, built in the late 14th century by Emir Timur (Tamerlane). A century later the Kazak khans occupied it, and Esim (Ishim) Khan made it his capital in 1599. In the 17th and 18th centuries the invasion of the Kazak steppe by Jungar Mongolian tribes brought devastation to the Syr Darya towns. After a short-lived revival of the Kazak khanate under Ablay (Abylai) in 1771, Turkistan was claimed successively by the Emirs of Bukhara and Khoqand, profited in the
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early 19th century from Khoqand’s expanded trade relations with Russia (OEMIW 2:430 [Bregel]), and experienced a half-century of direct Tsarist rule after the Russian conquest in 1864. It became a station on the new Moscow-Tashkent railroad line in 1903.

During nomadic times and well into the Soviet period only a small portion of the town’s population was Kazak: in the 1897 population of 11,253 there were only 1,415 Kazaks (Dobrosmyslov 1912:126). Though identified with the Kazaks since the early 16th century and included within the borders of Kazakhstan when the Russian Empire was reorganized into constituent Soviet “republics” in 1924, the town was dominated by Uzbek-speaking merchants. In the early years of the Soviet economic experiment, collectivization brought Kazaks to town, impoverished, their herds confiscated (Abdirayimov et al. 1991). A flourish of economic growth and the rekazakification of the city intensified in the 1950s and ’60s when a few factories were built. Cotton production was intensified at the same time by the building of the Aris-Turkistan Canal. The cotton processing plant is the town’s chief industrial enterprise.

Nomadic lifeways and the pastoral trek between jaylä and qistaü (summer and winter pastures) are now a romantic memory celebrated in song and poetry by the Kazaks, like tepees and buffalo hunts among the Plains Indians in America. Although Kazak nomadism still exists marginally in China (Hoppe 1988), very few Kazaks of Turkistan know any more how to erect a kiyız iy (lit. felt house; yurt). One of our elderly Kazak informants remembered living as a child in a yurt in her father’s village (qistaü) near Turkistan, and elderly Uzbeks remember when Kazak commerce was limited to visits to town to trade sheep on the hoof for flour and sugar. But today the Kazaks live in town and dominate Turkistan’s political and administrative functions, with growing economic clout alongside the Uzbeks (see Chapter 2). In 1999 Turkistan had a population 85,700, about 60 per cent Kazak. The city census figure represents a 10% increase during a decade in which Kazakhstan lost 9.5% of its total population and 11.5% of its urban population, mainly due to emigration to Russia. Turkistan thrives as a commercial entrepôt for the transfer of foreign goods from China, India, and Turkey to the villages and towns of southern and central Kazakhstan.

Kazakstan and Pan-Turkism

Two dramatic sociopolitical changes have impacted religion in Turkistan in the 1990s. The first is that the city is located in the newly independent Kazakhstan, its Islamic heritage now claimed by the nation as a prized possession. The Yasawi Shrine is pictured on the banknotes of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Turkistan is the only Kazak city that is “on the money.” It has been designated by UNESCO as a 1500-year-old historic site (KP,
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June 11, 1996. Now that Kazaks live in their own modern nation-state, Turkistan is acquiring an ethnopolitical meaning which is reshaping the religious meaning it had in the nomadic period.

Secondly, Turkistan has become a focus of the new Pan-Turkism (Landau 1995), which will be explored in Chapter 2. Turkish teachers, educational administrators, and construction engineers have come to work in Turkistan since 1993 and have brought with them a deep sense of Turkic identity. Kazaks hospitably encourage them to read an ethnic epic into the name of the city. In this intercultural negotiation Turkistan is romanticized as the original home of the Oğuz hordes who migrated westward toward Anatolia a millennium ago. The Turkish government and charitable foundations in Turkey are investing in the restoration of the Yasawi Shrine and building a modern campus for Yasawi University. The romantic name, Turkistan, frozen in place during the Soviet period, has become “hot” again.

When Moscow, in its fight against Pan-Turkism, erased the Turkestan Governorship of the Russian Empire and carved it up along ethnic lines into “autonomous soviet socialist republics,” it failed, for reasons that are unclear, to change the name of the city of Turkistan. Changing place names to suppress political and religious memories was Soviet policy: Aq Meshit (White Mosque) became Kzyl Orda (Red Center), and Āülüye Ata (Father Saint) became Dzhambul (Jambul, a Kazak bard who was an ardent Stalinist). Neither local informants nor historians shed any light on why Turkistan was allowed to keep its controversial name. The history of the city in the Soviet period has yet not been written.

PERSPECTIVES ON KAZAK RELIGION

Ethnic and Muslim Identities

For Kazaks, a Turkic identity is a Muslim one, and those who have one tend to have a strong sense of the other. In Almaty and the big cities of Kazakstan there are Kazaks who feel more like Russians than Turks and may even deny that they are Muslims, but from the perspective of the Kazak steppe, its towns and villages and vast reaches, such secular cosmopolitanism is an aberration, and there are very few Kazaks in Turkistan who fit this description. In Turkistan Muslim self-ascription is universal, but Kazaks also confess ignorance of Islam and laxity at religious performance. They frequently distinguish themselves from other Muslim peoples, especially the Uzbeks, whom they consider more proficient in the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam (cf. Altoma 1994:167). Religious ambivalence was a strategic advantage for the Soviet Kazaks, who could apologize to the Russians that, in comparison with the Uzbeks, they had never really been religious at all.
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The oppositional context required for the persistence of ethnic identity (Barth 1969; Spicer 1971) has been very strong in the Kazak case. It has been a prime factor in the formation of Muslim identity and the Islamization of Kazak religious conceptions and behavior. But discussions of the relationship between Kazak ethnicity and religion have a tortured history. The Russian Orientalist, V.V. Bartol’d (Wilhelm Barthold, d. 1930), believed that the Turkic peoples of Russian Asia lacked ethnic self-consciousness, thinking of themselves as Muslims in general or regional “Turkestanis” rather than as separate ethnic groups (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984:27). While national feeling in Central Asia was strongly energized in opposition to the eurocentrism of Russian immigrants (Abduvakitov 1993:94ff.), it is a mistake to say it did not exist before the Russians came. Shahrani (1984) argues persuasively that Barthold mistook Muslim solidarity over against himself, a Russian, for ethnic non-differentiation. Carrère d’Encausse (1979, 1988, 1990) argued that Soviet ethnic identities were strong and on this basis prophesied the collapse of the USSR more than a decade in advance (cf. Moynihan 1993).

The strength of Kazak ethnic identity over a period of 500 years is suggested by Kazak attacks on Uzbek cities in the 16th century, their resistance to Jungar incursions in the 17th and 18th, uprisings against Khoqandian and Russian rule in the 19th, anti-conscription riots against the Tsar in 1916, the Alash Orda government of 1917–20, and a series of revolts against Stalin’s collectivization program. Rebels from Sozaq attacked the Turkistan telegraph station as late as 1930. When Stalin was gone and national identities were again allowed limited expression in the 1950s and ’60s, an aggressive public resurgence of Kazak culture occurred, including the national reclamation of the Yasawi Shrine in Turkistan.

But does an intensification of ethnic values in religious terms really amount to religion at all? Krader and Wayne (1955:211) noted the cultural revival among the Kazaks in the 1950s but interpreted it as mere “nativism,” a revitalization movement with only limited religious substance:

But it is not the old religion which is being revived among the Kazakhs; rather, the old traditions are being treated in a religious fashion. These traditions become religion, and the renewed interest in them a religious revival.

In modernizing societies many individuals and groups will negotiate their religious values in non-controversial or cultural terms (in the West it is called secularization). This strategy was a comfortable one for Kazaks in their encounters with the Soviet system, but it is not the whole story. The revitalization model invoked by Krader was based on the religious upheavals among Plains Indians at the end of the 19th century (Wallace 1956; Kehoe 1989). The same conditions – the severe cultural pressure that
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brought on the Ghost Dance – cannot be said to apply to the Kazaks at the end of the 20th century. Indeed, they no longer applied in the 1950s, a time of widespread ethnic revivalist movements in the Soviet Union. Krader was dependent on Soviet sources and missed the complexity of Muslim life among the Kazaks. He was inclined to view ethnic and cultural processes themselves as “a kind of religion,” a model which, unfortunately, still influences those who have not seen Kazak religious life up close.

Popular Islam: “Great” and “Little” Traditions?

Today the Kazaks of Turkistan are increasingly aggressive in defending their Muslim identity. They do it in two ways. First, they insist that their indigenous “little tradition,” having been received once and for all from their ancestors, is *ipso facto* a legitimate expression of the “great tradition” of Islam which the ancestors also professed. Kazak language affirms this classical distinction of Evans-Pritchard (1949:63) and Redfield (1960:41ff.). In Kazak one uses the Arabic *din* for large-scale religions (*iri dinder*) as distinct from *nantm* (traditional beliefs) and *trtm* (magical beliefs and taboos). Secondly, Kazaks often argue that the flexible or tolerant Muslim values of the Kazak steppe are actually preferable to the legal rigidities and modern fundamentalisms they see in other Muslim societies.

Both tropes are imaginative defenses of what “normative Islam” calls innovation (Ar. *bid‘a*), and Western scholars call heterodoxy. The two strategies show that Kazaks value their particular appropriation of Muslim life and identity, which they call *musilmanshiliq* (“Muslimness”). This book is a study of Kazak “Muslimness” rather than of Islam *per se*, because in Turkistan the local tradition of Muslim ancestors and saints “is perceived by the local population as their ‘true’ Islam” (Muminov 1996a:356).

Kazak religion is usually categorized as “folk” or “popular” Islam in the West, or as “parallel” or “everyday” (Rs. *bytovoi*; Kz. *turmistug*, domestic) Islam by Soviet-era historians and social scientists (Mustafina 1992; Poliakov 1992). It is, in other words, less than “real” Islam, or, in the unfortunate categories of the political analysts, it is “ritual” rather than “doctrinal” (Olcott 1987:197, 251, 256) – implying that everyday religion has rituals but no teachings. In English-language ethnographies of the Kazaks (Murdock 1934:135–162; Hudson 1938; Krader and Wayne 1955; Krader 1963), their devotion to Islam has been dismissed with the problematic premise that its nomadic provenance makes it a marginal expression of Islam by definition (*cf.* Khazanov 1994; Barth 1961). Toward the end of the Soviet period Akiner perceptively noted that “anti-Islamic attacks in the Kazakh press would seem to indicate that, orthodox or not, they are still firmly Muslim” (1983:301), but the standard view has been that “the Kazaks were only superficially converted” (*OEMIW* 2:407 [Olcott]), except perhaps the nomadic “ruling elite” (Golden 1992:343).
The corollary thesis is that the Kazaks have retained “many pre-Islamic shamanist traditions” (Wixman 1984:99), including especially the “steppe spirit cult and practices” (Altoma 1994:167). Of necessity, such characterizations of the Kazaks have to be subjected to various qualifications, such as the observation that “indifference to Islamic practice and values” has planted “a seedbed for religious revivalism among the youth” (Svanberg 1990:205).

Influenced by learned analyses, Kazaks themselves may insist that they are a people of two syncretized religions (qosdindi halq), an ancient shamanism and their Muslim values (Valikhanov 1985 [1862–64]:197; Mingjan 1994:372–375). In doing so, however, they describe themselves in the light not so much of their own religious experience, but of the ethnographic literature about them. In Soviet times the Kazaks became a broadly literate people; so they reflexively absorb the things scholars and journalists say about them. In this way a questionable theory has taken on a life of its own. Even though there are very few or no traditional shamans any more and Kazak shamanism was moribund before the Soviet era (see Chapter 6), Kazaks believe they are shamanists because their ethnographers have told them they are.

In Kazak studies a core of primordial local values has been assumed to be capable of persisting indefinitely in a two-tiered relationship with “normative” Islam. For anthropologists the problem with this assumption is that a paradigm which assumes the preservation in perpetuity of archaic values is incapable of identifying a unitary religious system when one emerges. In Chapter 3 I will show how a model which acknowledges not only syncretism but “anti-syncretism” provides a better basis for understanding the Kazaks than the two-tiered paradigm of “great” and “little” traditions, which is too static to address changing religious configurations.

Like any religious movement, Islam undergoes reform and reaction; so it has not always been the Islam we know today. The Kazaks were only briefly touched by 19th-century Islamic reformism, called Jadidism in Russian Central Asia (Lazzerini 1992; 1994); and if there is superficiality in Kazak Islam, it is due to the limited extent of this exposure. In the mid-20th century the Kazaks were also cut off from the emerging post-colonial fundamentalisms of the modern states of the Muslim world. Until the advent of these powerful movements of reform and confrontation, “normative Sunni Islam was less known and [wide]spread than today [and] restricted to a limited number of Muslim communities and groups” (Vrijhof and Waardenburg 1979:367); in other words, local versions of “popular Islam” were once more “normal” and construed less pejoratively than they are today.

Thus, it is local, rather than “normative” Islam, that is traditional. Recently the latter has begun to proliferate by means of new communications media and culture contact initiated by reformist (“fundamentalist”)
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groups. This process will surely have more and more effect on the Kazaks, but the Kazak religion described in this study is not there yet. Instead, it is an awakened expression of pre-modern, “locally normative” Islam, not of the universalized and increasingly standardized modern version. As Kazak religion reshapes itself in the new millennium, it will turn out to be not so much a survival of shamanism as a survival of traditional Islamic localism.

Early Treatments of Kazak Religion

The evaluation of the Kazaks as marginal and syncretizing Muslims derives from Chokan Valikhanov, about whom I will have more to say later in this chapter. He was the first Kazak to make his people known to the world from an insider’s perspective, and his view has been repeated, not least of all by Kazaks themselves, ever since. Following Valikhanov, Tsarist-era students of Kazak religion were preoccupied with shamanism. They specialized in recording the discourse of baqṣī performances (Diyaev 1899; Castagné 1923, 1925, 1930) and in describing the Kazak spirit-world (Miropiev 1888; Castagné 1932).

Among the remarkable early chroniclers of Kazak life was Bronislav Zaleskii, a Polish soldier in the Russian Army. He visited the Caspian region in 1848 and drew valuable pen-and-ink landscapes, later published in Paris, that inform our understanding of Kazak cemeteries and Muslim shrines. He advanced the viable thesis that the Kazaks honor the ancestral hero (battr) as a worldly, military figure, and the Muslim saint (āuliye) in counterpoint as an ascetic who lives the pure life. Drinking ayran (watered yoghurt) instead of the more potent qömüz (fermented mare’s milk) was the gastronomic sign of the difference (1991 [1865]:121). Now 150 years later the symbiotic relationship between Kazak ancestors and Muslim saints has been an organizing framework for my own research. Zaleskii was disappointed that the Kazaks could tell him little about their Muslim saints (1991 [1865]: 121ff.), which was a mistaken impression, as I will show.

Mid-19th-century works by Bekchurin (1866), Pashino (1868), and others (summarized in Dobromyslov 1912:139ff.) offered brief descriptions of the Sufi leadership and ceremonies at the Yasawi Shrine, but they paid little attention to specifically Kazak ritual behavior. Conversely, Radloff, the most prolific 19th-century ethnographer of the Kazaks, worked for twenty years in the Altai region at the northern edge of Kazak territory, but had little to say about Turkistan in the south (Radloff 1893). Karutz visited Kazak and Turkmen auls in the Caspian region in 1909 and warned that it is a mistake to minimize the power of Islam among the nomads (1911:128). Reflecting the mores of his day, he tried to fit each detail of Kazak life into “pre-animistic,” “animistic,” “shamanic,” and “Islamic” periods – a classic evolutionary timeline.
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Castagné, a French ethnographer, wrote two major articles on Central Asian shrines and cemeteries, including Turkistan (1911, 1951), and discussed the funerary practices and pilgrimage customs of the Kazak nomads. Features of the Kazak funeral which differed from the Uzbek or Tatar pattern he attributed to shamanism (1911:69) – without, however, citing evidence that the practices in question had anything to do with shamanic performance. As it was for Valikhanov, “shamanism” for Castagné was a convenient religious gloss on the term “nomad.”

At about the same time Lykoshin (1916) spent an evening with Kazak pilgrims at the Yasawi Shrine and briefly described their “superstitions” (sübeberiya), which consisted in a Sufi zikir and a public meal (ḥalim) served by dervishes after the Friday prayers. This locates the Kazaks squarely within in the world of Islamic ritual performance. Unfortunately, however, Lykoshin failed to distinguish these events from the beliefs or ritual behavior of the sedentary ethnic groups: Qojas and Uzbeks go unmentioned.

In 1929 Gordlevsky carefully recorded another Sufi ceremony in Turkistan. His fine description in both German (1932) and Russian (1962 [1929]) is our last sympathetic and published testimony about Sufi institutions and rituals before they were suppressed. Like Semenov (1926:128), who had visited Turkistan in 1922, Gordlevsky was uninterested in ethnic variation in ritual behavior. Similarly, Masson’s article on the architecture of the Yasawi Shrine (1930) only briefly mentions pilgrimage and Sufi ceremonies and again ignores the Kazaks. Except in the case of Lykoshin, we sense we are reading descriptions of the Qojas, or of Uzbek and Kazak town dwellers, but nothing in particular about Kazak nomads and the special attraction which, according to Castagné (1911:52), Turkistan held out for them.

These works fell at the end of an era. The curtain fell on religious research in Turkistan after 1930. Notably, most of the pre-soviet works display weak or inconsistent knowledge of Kazak language. Castagné, for example, recorded Kazak oral texts in French transcription (1930), but he did not grasp the meaning of the basic Kazak term for ancestor-spirit (arūaq), mistakenly calling it a mysterious disease (1951:63). The exceptions are Divaev (1898, 1899), who was a Tatar and knew Turkic languages but was preoccupied with shamanism, and, of course, Valikhanov, a Kazak who, however, wrote in Russian.

Soviet interpretations of Islam in Central Asia were Marxist attacks on religious lifeways as “survivals” of obsolete social systems (Snesarev 1958, 1970–72, 1974; Sukhareva 1960; Basilov 1980; Poliakov 1992). Russian scholars have carefully studied the evolutionary meanings of shamanic experience (Basilov 1984a, 1992), but their work involves a bifurcationist analysis that does not engage Kazak religion as an integral or unified system. “Presentism” was the enemy of Marxist historical consciousness; religion was viewed as a repository of irrational values.
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from the past, and therefore as marginal to real life. As Gellner put it provocatively, Soviet anthropology was interested in the tail of the comet (1975:595), in religion as history rather than an energetic and viable cultural system.

There was a methodological problem as well. Tolmacheva has noted (1993:533) that Soviet ethnographies of the religion of the Central Asian peoples were always the work of short-term expeditions of imposing (usually male) ethnographic teams with an ideological axe to grind against the religious traditions of their (often female) informants (e.g. NSAK 1962–63). For example, the Kazak ethnographer Argmbaev’s work on the Kazak family (1996) includes a description of domestic religious rites but cites no literature except the reports of a series of such expeditions. These leave the reader wondering what was missed because of the heavy-handed approach. Until recently foreign scholars had to rely on this Soviet and Russian-language data which prejudiced the case against Muslim life. Not surprisingly under such conditions, the anthropology of religion in the West pretty much lost track of the Kazaks.

The Kazaks have a strong tradition of native ethnography. It was a fruit of the resurgence of national consciousness which was allowed after Stalin died, but its perspective was carefully circumscribed. An antiquarian focus that ignored contemporary lifeways was one strategy used to dance around the problem of religion. Turkic culture in remote periods could be assigned to primitive evolutionary pigeonholes to reduce the likelihood that an academic interest in religion would be interpreted as an endorsement of Islam. Margulan, the Kazak dean of Soviet-era ethnographic studies, specialized in epic history (1985), where he avoided suggesting that Islamic values have any significance today. Qongratbaev did excellent Kazak folklore studies (1987, 1991), which, however, lack a comparative perspective—a common weakness of native ethnography. The best work was done by Auezov in the 1940s; he produced a captivating portrait of Kazak life using the historical novel in a creative ethnographic strategy (1975 [1953]).

These men helped make Kazak studies an academic field, but they avoided facing the problem of Kazak religion in the ethnographic present. When the problem of religion was broached by Kazak scholars (Dastanov 1967; Shulembaev 1972, 1975, 1978, 1983, 1987; Saidbaev 1978; Amanturin 1977, 1985; Toleuabev 1991), the evolutionary and materialist paradigm was never absent, and it persists today. Captivated by the two-tier model, Kazak ethnographers still categorize heteroprax aspects of Muslim life in the 1990s as “pre-Islamic” (Toleuabev 1991; Mustafina 1992; Sizdiquova 1997) and insist that any other approach will be unacceptable in Kazakhstan.

Two things have been almost entirely missing from these studies of Kazak religion. First, there are no historical or contextual studies of Muslim-
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Christian relations in Kazakstan of the kind discussed by Bijlefeld (1995:16f.). The result has been that comments on the subject usually turn to polemic. For example, Mirzahmetov has published a conspiratorial theory that when Stalin made the Kazaks switch to the Russian alphabet, he was implementing the missionary dream he learned as a youthful seminarian (1993:34). He also believes that and that the Kazak pedagogue, Ibray AltmsarIn, a devout Muslim, was duped by the Russian seminary in Kazan to introduce the Cyrillic alphabet in his Kazak schools in the 1880s (1993:10ff.; cf. Kreindler 1969:164-169; 1983). Secondly, cross-cultural comparison of Kazak religion with Muslim lifeways elsewhere has not been attempted, a lacuna that can hardly be held against Kazak scholars, considering the isolated conditions under which they have labored.

Kazak Religion in Comparative Perspective

Scholars in the West have produced helpful studies of Muslim lifeways among the Uzbeks (Centlivres, Centlivres and Slocum 1971; Shalinsky 1980a, 1986, 1990; Akiner 1990; Chylinski 1991), the Kyrgyz (Shahrani 1979), the Turkmen (Irons 1975; Tyson 1997), the Uyghurs (Benson 1990), and the Tajiks (Rakowska-Harmstone 1983; Atkin 1989, 1992). Diaspora Kazaks in China and Turkey have also been studied (Benson and Svanberg 1988; Svanberg 1989), but without an in-depth engagement of religious life. We also have a political history of Soviet Kazakstan (Olcott 1987) and culture surveys of the Uzbeks (Allworth 1990) and of Central Asia in general (Allworth 1989). Taking Cold War conditions into account, we should not be surprised that no Western scholar produced a full-length study of the Muslim life of any Turkic people in Central Asia based on participant-observation research in the native languages. This paucity of valid data tends to nullify the usual dismissals of Islamic observance among the Kazaks.

If Kazak religion is to be understood, its similarities with and divergences from Muslim lifeways elsewhere must be engaged in detail. It is now well understood that “popular Islams” in various societies are comparable precisely to the extent that they find common ground in Islam itself. Gellner puts it this way:

[It] is only now becoming conspicuous, as a result of the accumulation of social anthropological research [that] it is not only the urban and literate Great Tradition which is significantly similar in Islam, [but] the rural and folk tradition also displays astonishing similarities. In the past, there was a tendency to explain this questionably orthodox Little Tradition in terms of local 'pre-Islamic survivals'. But it would be strange if the pre-Islamic stratum in, say, Southern Arabia and the Moroccan Atlas were as similar as the non-
orthodox elements of custom in these regions, and others, seem to be. Perhaps heterodoxy of practice was diffused like the orthodoxy of theory; or perhaps, as I am inclined to suspect, *the complex of cultural and organisational traits, great and little, formed one unity which*, if diffused at all, was *diffused as a whole*, and in which the less orthodox elements are a kind of *socially necessary complement* to the orthodox, and are *naturally engendered* by it. (1981:80f., italics added)

In Java as in Kazakstan, a woman holds her left hand behind her back as she sweeps with her right, and lays the broom flat on the floor instead of leaning it in a corner. It is inconceivable that these are independent pre-Islamic “survivals.” The only common variable in Javanese and Kazak culture is the Sufi tradition of Islam. The broom custom is one of many such signs of an Islamic conception of purity and cleanliness that diffused together with Islam, as surely as the Islamic confession and ritual prayers did (see Chapter 3). The down-to-earth spiritual life of the Kazak household owes a good deal to Islam (see Chapter 4).

Pre-Islam is, of course, an important issue in the history of the Islamization of any people or region, but two tendencies must be rejected: assuming that what *was* still *is* (survivals of shamanism, etc.), and that what *once* was new *still* is new (Islam as a foreign object poorly absorbed). This leads to a bifurcationist analysis that is unable to identify integral expressions of religious life. Most religious beliefs and customs in Turkistan are best understood as contextualizations of Islam, not as survivals of pre-Islam. As DeWeese argues, “what is distinctive in these phenomena . . . is not maintenance of conflicting sets of religious practices and views at the same time, but the thorough identification of the practices in question as part of the ‘Muslim’ way of life” (1997c). In the positivist language of the 19th century, Goldziher noted in the same vein that “one of the most curious phenomena in the development of Islam [is] the ease with which orthodox theology also adapts itself to the needs of popular belief, though this entails open contradiction to the unambiguous teaching of the Koran” (1971a [1890a]:261). Today we know that this process, far from being “curious,” is the essential nature of successful religious movements. Contextualizations, in Gellner’s words, are “socially necessary” and “naturally engendered” by the multicultural character of Islam.

Goldziher went on to answer his own objection to local beliefs as contradictions of the Quran by noting that the consensus (*ijma*) of local scholars is very strong in shaping the limits of acceptable applications of Islamic law. In Muslim societies religious authority is legitimately claimed by local groups of Quranic scholars (*'ulama*). Mosques, madrasas, and Sufi masters assume this authority when higher theological controls are missing or weak, and in Central Asia neighborhood mullahs assumed it when
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mosques and Sufi brotherhoods were suppressed. No Kazak says he adheres to the Hanafi school of legal interpretation (although technically he does), but he freely acknowledges the authority of local mullahs, and freely contests it. Islam is a diffuse religion, with variable local consensuses asserting themselves and elaborating the meaning of Islam.

The Sufi Heritage in Kazak Religion

Most Kazaks in Turkistan do not know what Sufism is. Kazak religion has an historically important but by now rather distended relationship with the Sufi tradition. This does not mean that Kazaks are always theologically illiterate, but that believers often do not know the academic language with which their historical experience is described. This is yet another confirmation that an error in the Western understanding of Islam, now widely recognized (Brenner 1993:26; Adams 1990:x; Gellner 1969:8), was introduced by Trimingham when he identified “folk Islam” with Sufism (1952, 1971).

The history and geographic diffusion of the Sufi movements is beyond the scope of this study (cf. Schimmel 1975; Trimingham 1971; for the Yasawiyya, DeWeese 1996a), but a distinction between several dimensions of Sufi experience is fundamental to the discussion of the Kazaks. The first two are the “wali complex,” i.e. the cult of Sufi saints, and the “tariqa complex” of Sufi orders or brotherhoods (W.Y. Adams, personal correspondence). I here propose a third aspect which I term the “ayan complex” (Ar. āyan, personal revelation). This is the illuminationist dimension of Muslim spirituality with roots in Sufi mysticism. It is this third aspect that persists most strongly in Kazak religion, where, however, it lacks the esoteric features of classical Sufism. Among the Kazaks it is sustained more simply in the elemental form of dreams and visionary experiences that impel religious behavior in the household (Chapter 4), at the shrines (Chapter 5), and in healing practices (Chapter 6).

There are no Sufi brotherhoods in Kazakstan, although a few Kazaks returned home from Sufi training centers in Pakistan and Turkey in the late 1990s. Except for scholars, Kazaks no longer recognize the Arabic word tariqa (way, Sufi order on brotherhood), although it was known in the 19th century (QTTS 9:24). Clearly Ahmet Yasawi was a Sufi, and one of the historic centers of the Yasawi Sufi movement was in Yasi/Turkistan (there were others in Turko-Persian communities in central Mawarannahr). But the Kazak Qojas, who have their roots in the Sufi brotherhoods, or at least in the administration of the shrines of Sufi saints, think of themselves simply as a sacred bloodline, not as a tariqa. The contemporary legacy of the Yasawi Sufis is to be found not in a Sufi organization but in what DeWeese calls “communal affiliations” (1995b; 1997b), i.e. the religious life of the household, neighborhood, and descent group.
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The “wali complex” occurs in Kazak religion in connection with the shrines of the āuliye (saints), which is the same word as wali. In Chapter 2 I will show how devotion to these saints has been “architecturalized” in Kazakhstan. Sacred space assumes the preeminence when sacred personages no longer administer it.

Shamanism and Valikhanov’s Theory of Kazak Religion

No study of Kazak religion can begin without an assessment of Shoqan Wālihanulī, (Chokan Valikhanov, d. 1865), the first Kazak ethnographer, whose statue stands in front of the Kazakstan National Academy of Sciences in Almaty (McKenzie 1989; Futrell 1979). In 1862 Shoqan began his work on the “Survivals of Shamanism among the Kazaks” (Valikhanov 1985:169–196) by citing a study of Mongolian religion by the Buryat scholar, Dorzhi Banzarov (1981–82 [1846]). Banzarov had “portrayed shamanism as a natural outgrowth of the nomadic way of life” and had assumed “a simplistic identity of nomadism with an unchanging shamanism” (Atwood 1996:113). Ever since, scholars of Inner Asian religion have followed Banzarov and Valikhanov. When Buddhism (in the case of the Mongols) and Islam (in the case of the Kazaks) are defined by their classical texts and doctrines, anything in religious practice that does not square with the Pali Canon and the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Shariah and the Five Pillars of Islam, comes to be identified with a lower stratum of pre-Buddhist or pre-Islamic shamanism. In this two-tier theory, separate layers of religious belief and behavior are thought to persist indefinitely within the same culture and, indeed, the same individual believer. The scholar gets the job of sorting them out.

Atwood has now shown that a serious problem arises for this theory when there is no actual evidence that the ritual practices in the lower or “shamanic” layer were ever performed by shamans themselves. Shamans have occupied only marginal corners of Mongolian culture since the 18th century, but scholars still give them credit for all “folk” beliefs and “popular” religious practices. Significantly, the fire ritual of the Mongolian household, usually ascribed to shamanism even though shamans never performed it, is identified by Mongols themselves with Buddhism (1996:124). For Atwood, domestic religion has little to do with shamanism and is better understood as a “chameleon” devotion whose purpose is “to identify the house with the powers that be” (1996:126).

Shamans have occupied a specialized religious niche in Turko-Mongolian culture, but “shamanism” was never a religion in and of itself (Humphrey 1996:183–260). Kazaks who intone Valikhanov’s ideas and claim that their old religion was shamanism are confusing it with their domestic cult of ancestor-spirits, for which the Kazak baqsl never took responsibility. Valikhanov failed to make this distinction.
Both Valikhanov and Banzarov were remarkable young men, the first scholars from among their people to be drawn into the world of Enlightenment rationalism. Though both died young, each made a lasting impact on the study of Inner Asian religions. They were both trained in Russian academies and imbibed fashionable evolutionary ideas. They learned from Max Müller that “the earliest level of religion existed as a direct and virtually pre-cultural response to nature,” which led them to conclude that shamanism is “a universal stage of religion that any nomadic people must adopt naturally” (Atwood 1996:130). For Valikhanov and Banzarov, shamanism was a “nature religion” which was natural to nomads, who were incapable of the “higher” religions by virtue of their primitive ecological adaptation. This theory has had enduring effect. To this day Kazak schoolchildren are taught that their ancestors believed in a “nature religion.”

In the West also the theory had far-reaching ramifications in religious studies and anthropology for more than a century. The essence of the religion of nomads, so the logic goes, is its “primitive” features, and wherever these surface today, they are assumed to be “survivals” of a primordial stratum of religious pre-history. Both Peters (1984) and R. Tapper (1984) have convincingly challenged the idea that tribal nomads are weakly religious; Tapper highlighted substantial variation in Islamic observance among three nomadic tribes in Iran. But such studies were unknown to Kazak scholars, who simply lined up behind Valikhanov and his evolutionary ideas about nomads and religion.

Valikhanov was an officer in the Russian Imperial Army and hoped his Kazaks would accept the benefits of modern life from the Russians, as he had. For this he was lionized by Soviet Kazaks as the first of the ağartuşiň (enlighteners), and his life and works became a grand object of academic study (Şoqantanu, Şoqan Studies). Valikhanov appears in his Russian Army uniform on the 10 тенге banknote of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the only figure in non-Muslim dress so featured. He was a progressive young man who thought of Islam as obscurantist, was worried by its expansion, and hoped his people would be able somehow to skip Islam and make a direct transition from primeval steppe culture into the modern world. Because he advocated russification, he tended to minimize evidence of Muslim behavior among the Kazaks; instead, he teased out connections between Kazak and Mongol nomado-shamanism, thus establishing a primordialist foundation for russification. His view became Russian policy with enduring effect (QÜ, December 1994, pp. 4–5 [Mübäräkqızı]), but the failure of the Kazaks to abandon Islam raises the question whether the policy’s ethnographic basis was well grounded.

Kazak religion is largely a pattern of culinary events and ceremonial meals where food and a Quran recital are dedicated to the ancestor-spirits (see Chapter 4). Studies of domestic religion show that such rites are usually
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autochthonous: they do not require specialists; so, wherever else they come from, they may not be laid at the feet of the very specialized shamans (DeWeese 1994:39ff.). Revising Heissig (1980), Atwood concludes that in Mongolia there has been “a remarkably complete replacement of the original shamanist rituals” and that “the categories of ritual found among most of the Mongols are largely comprehensible in terms of a multifaceted Buddhist tradition” (1996:136). He discovered that it is hard to find a Mongol who has seen or heard of a shaman, and the same may be said of the Kazaks today (see Chapter 6).

DeWeese’s studies of Islamization in Inner Asia argue persuasively that the two-tier model must be discarded. His major work on the “decisive Islamization of the Golden Horde” under Özbek Khan in the early 14th century (1994) – ascribed in hagiographic materials to an ordeal of fire between a group of shamans and the Muslim saint, Baba Tükles – lays to rest any notion of a residual shamanism in the central pattern of Inner Asian domestic spirituality. Our evidence also confirms that indigenous elements such as the offering of food to ancestors in the hearth ritual were long ago “encountered and overcome or assimilated” by Islam (DeWeese 1996b:113). Today it is the Islamic funerary cycle that sustains Kazak spirituality, because it coheres with their native valuation of the ancestor-spirits in social life. What matters most, as we shall see, is that the Kazak ancestors are thought of as Muslims.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND KAZAK RELIGION

Collective memory is a sociopsychological process that evokes a cultural present from its historical sources. Commemoration or “remembering together” is the public expression of the collective memory, but collective memory is a broader concept and runs deeper. It is a processing mechanism by means of which people reach back into their past, idealizing and criticizing it, and thus articulate a future for themselves. Collective memory is a theory of culture and enculturation that has particular value for the study of religion. It is especially helpful in explaining religious devotion that seeks “direct access to the sacred past [in order to] engage the holy in immediate time and space” (C. Taylor 1990:80).

Collective Memory and the Culture Concept

The history of psychological studies of memory is chronicled by Connerton in How Societies Remember (1989) and Fentress and Wickham in Social Memory (1992). The emphasis on society in these titles tells us that memory is more than a mental capacity or a personal affair. A person’s memory is social because it depends on having other people around as a context for recall and its articulation. Memory is also cultural in the sense that the
things it recalls are set in the context of the values, conceptions, and habitual practices which the person who remembers holds in common with others. To avoid confusion with Durkheim’s “collective representations” and Jung’s “collective unconscious,” Fentress and Wickham suggest “social memory” as a better term (1992.ix), but “collective memory” (Halbwachs 1925) covers both the social and cultural dimensions and so is retained in this study.

Fentress and Wickham postulate that “social memory identifies a group, giving it a sense of its past and defining its aspirations for the future” (1992:25). That which identifies a group is, of course, what anthropologists call culture; so collective memory theory shares ground with the culture concept itself (cf. Kluckhohn 1962:21–73) and helps define the anthropological problem of culture change and continuity.

In Kazak the term for culture (mädeniyet) is problematic as a category of ethnographic analysis, because it suggests culturedness (high culture) rather than lifeways. Nevertheless, Kazaks know that they remember things in common with others and know how to conceptualize the process. Collective memory can be rendered literally with the technical expression kollektivtik jad, or the less accurate but more familiar halqtaq sana (mind of the people). As a processual concept, collective memory suggests religious vitality better than the culture concept in both English and Kazak.

Religion as collective memory “reproduces the past” (Halbwachs 1992 [1925]:87) when the sacred appeared in illo tempore, “in that time” of origins, when foundational events were experienced as hierophanies, the eruption of the sacred into history (Eliade 1961:80ff.). The believing community thus lays claim to historical validity, permanence, and eternity. Collective memory in social theory embraces anamnesis, a theological conception, as well. Anamnesis is devotion, ritually enacted, and experienced as remembrance of the sacred past when the holy touched the human in a decisive way. It is when we are responding to a mandate from the distant past (“time immemorial”) that the future makes sense to us and its uncertainties are resolved. At its best, religion as anamnesis makes life less uncertain and precarious and so more livable.

Collective memory is a potent theory, because it spans the sociocultural, psychological, and theological frameworks in religious studies. Thus far, however, anthropology, social psychology and historical hermeneutics have used it primarily for radical postmodernist projects, which explain religion away as a social construction. The problem of the constructedness of history and religion will be dealt with in Chapters 7 and 8, where collective memory will be developed as a theory of religion per se. For now it is enough to warn the reader that I appeal to collective memory in a broader way than the postmodernists do, relieving it of its heavy deconstructionist baggage, and emphasizing four defining concepts.
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Four Parameters of Collective Memory

The following four statements limit the scope of collective memory theory as I use it here, and focus it on Kazak religion.

1 Collective memory is primarily affective, only secondarily cognitive

Since Halbwachs (1925) and Bartlett (1932) it has been understood that “remembering is very largely a matter of feeling or affect,” or, more particularly, that our memory depends on what the social psychologists Lakoff and Johnson call “image-schematisms” (Shotter 1990:122). This overturns the traditional theory of memory as recall, where memory is thought to pursue cognitive “traces,” however elusive they may be to pin down. Now we know that remembering is a process of attributing “shared sense” to individual feelings and only thus constructing or negotiating the past at a cognitive level (Shotter 1990:131). Our feeling that something “was” (the conviction that things are “facts”) is possible only to the extent permitted by an initial attitude which is formed and reformed in our interactions with others, as we observe their behavior, absorb their language, even feel their feelings with them. Commemorative events produce “a grip of virtuous emotion” that cements social bonds (Schwartz 1982:378).

For the Kazaks, these affective image-schematisms include such things as a dream in which one sees one’s mother or father or another ancestor, or a sense of warning or doom, or the emotion experienced when passing by a cemetery or shrine. Rather than knowledge of Islam, this kind of shared affectivity has provided the process by which Kazaks have identified with Muslim lifeways and preserved them. Theologizing and historicizing processes go to work only when allowed to do so by social feelings. The religious memory, in particular, may be quite non-specific, its symbols and their referents only weakly specified in cognitive terms. This is why religious belief can be both fervent and fuzzy about religious history.

Eickelman (1978, 1992) has shown that traditional Muslim education was a mnemonic experience of the oral text of the Quran (c.f. Lambek 1990) and that it was only post-colonial mass education that taught knowledge of Islam to the masses. In this sense Kazakhstan has remained a more traditional Muslim society than countries where the colonial occupation ended sooner. Only now are children again learning the meaning of Quranic verses.

2 Collective memory is “embodied”

Kazaks who are only minimally familiar with the Five Pillars of Islam will nevertheless open their hands automatically when an elder begins to say a
blessing (e.g. at the end of a meal), and then brush their faces when the blessing is done, a habit justified on the example of the Prophet Muhammad. This bet styiapu (“face stroke”) may happen without a word, the receiving of the blessing being implied in the act. Connerton calls it the “mnemonics of the body” revealed in “culturally specific postural performances,” because “the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body” (1989:72ff.). He argues that “in the cultivation of habit it is our body which ‘understands’” (1989:95). When a social group remembers in this way, it takes in its discourse and texts without a word.

Attacks on the “Cartesian captivity of the West” in postmodernist epistemologies are popular today. They seek to establish non-analytical or sensualist connections between affectivity and corporeality to the exclusion of cognition and rational discourse. But a balanced theory of collective memory does not demand a rigidly sensualist valuation of culture. I argue only that the affective “mnemonics of the body” have been one cultural mechanism for the persistence of Kazak religion. When science finds itself surprised that religion is still around after reason was supposed to have won the day, neglect of the affective dimension of culture is probably the source of the problem. In the Soviet period the Kazaks were at an advantage for having learned to live their religion at an affective and non-intellectual level. A mosque cannot function without an imam to read, preach, and lead the prayers, and an Orthodox Church cannot celebrate the liturgy without a priest or deacon, but the affective and “postural” Muslim life of the Kazak required few specialists and little Quranic knowledge.

3 Landscape evokes collective memories

Spicer listed land as the first symbol of identity in the persistent cultural systems of 10 severely enclaved ethnic groups (1971:397). Larcom discovered that the Mewun of Malekula (New Hebrides) value “place,” their spiritualized landscape, even when it brings economic disadvantage (1980, 1983). A hundred years ago Maurice Leenhardt found that spatiality was so strongly felt by the Canaques of rural New Caledonia that personal identity itself was weakly formed, overwhelmed by “cosmomorphism” (1979 [1947]). The evocative power of the religious landscape of the Kazak steppe, especially its Muslim shrines and cemeteries, is another example of how the land evokes collective memories.

Both when it was enclaved in the USSR and now that it has emerged as a nation-state, Kazakstan has been a powerful concept for Kazaks. “What becomes meaningful [as a symbol of identity] is probably a function of the oppositional process,” Spicer noted (1971:798). Widespread Kazak opposition to the privatization of land is due primarily to the fear that Russians and other foreigners – non-Muslims – will buy up Kazakstan. The defense of the Kazak Steppe has been such a serious challenge since the end
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of the 17th century – in opposition primarily to the Jungars and then the Russians – that Kazaks frequently express fear of extinction and lay charges of genocide. Ecological devastation in some regions of Soviet Kazakstan has contributed to these fears.

Landscape evokes dormant memories and reshapes active ones (Schama 1995; Halbwachs 1992[1941]:191–235; Coser 1992:10). Connerton (1989:87) notes that a chateau or manor house is not only a home but also a repository of cultural skills (bottling wine, fishing, gardening, hunting, etc.); so in 1789 the French nobles were defending both their property and, along with it, the collective memory of a social class. Similarly, the traditional mud-brick house (jer üy; jer tam) of the Central Asian sedentary peoples, often called a “Muslim house” (muslimansha üy), provided the Kazaks a stopping place between nomadism and urbanization, between the yurt (kiyiz üy; qara üy) and the apartment block (Rs. dom). The Muslim house models for the Kazaks a full range of Muslim cultural skills. In 1992 our family moved into such a house at the very edge of the city of Turkistan, with empty steppe beyond (see Map 3); by 1998 we were looking out on two kilometers of new mud-brick homes in various states of completion – a surge of home-building inspired by the desire of Kazaks to get out of Soviet tenements and into their own Muslim house. The delineation of sacred space can be as simple as building a house. Architecture enlivens the landscape and with it the religious memory.

4 Languages store collective memories

Discourse may be secondary to affectivity, but affectivity is commonly expressed in language. When a new generation learns less of the native language than its forbears, it is already remembering the past and anticipating the future differently (Padden 1990:191f.). As a consequence of language change, personal identities can change very quickly – within a single generation – and this in turn impacts religious values and behavior. By the end of the Soviet period Kazak was the language of preference for a smaller percentage of the younger generation than ever before. Then the tables were turned. The Kazak-speaking group now claims political (if not always economic) advantage. In Kazakstan Russian has always been thought of as a Western language, and Kazak as a “Muslim language.” This process makes the choice of language an avenue of access to the memory of religious things.

Any Kazak who so much as asks for the blessing (bata) of their father or mother will never hear such a blessing except in Kazak phrasings. An aversion to “going it alone” keeps these religious vistas open even for quite russified and secular Kazaks. Religious affectivity powers the collective memory of the mother tongue, and vice versa.

A “thick description” (Geertz 1973:3ff.) of Kazak religious language is attempted in this study. Ethnomethodology has taught us that semantics are
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an avenue of access to cultural affectivities, including, of course, religious life, because language is used to sustain felt-needs (Wardhaugh 1992:239,249–255). There is no ethnographic substitute for mulling over the meaning of words, and cross-cultural boundaries are crossed most efficiently by listening. My “lived experience” (Jackson 1989) among the Kazaks gives me an affective identification with them, but it is unrealistic to think that I can feel their culture better than I can hear it. I am more surely an outsider to their feelings than I am to their words and the cultural system they construct.

METHOD

It had been more than 70 years since the last foreign ethnographer had set up residence in Kazakstan. Castagnè lived 11 years “in the region of the Kirgiz [Kazaks]” (1923:309, n.1), working out of Orenburg and later Tashkent before the Soviet period. Hudson’s visit to Almaty in 1936 and Krader’s in 1956 were brief and had little to do with religious studies. Svanberg’s work on the Kazaks in the 1980s was done primarily in China and Turkey. When I came to Kazakstan in 1991 I began by noting that the semantics of Kazak religion had not been systematically explored since Valikhanov. I determined to find out how Kazaks describe and categorize religious things in their own language – the stuff of traditional ethnography.

The need for an intensive linguistic strategy became obvious as I reviewed the tortured historiography of Kazak religion. Olcott wrote as follows in her history: “All information supports the conclusion that until the first decades of the nineteenth century the Kazak masses were Muslims in name only, with no knowledge of Muslim rituals or beliefs” (1987:103; cf. Bacon 1966:41–44). The use of the word “masses” suggests that she has relied on Soviet sources, but she then concedes that the Russians “were unequipped to accurately record let alone evaluate the influence of Islam on the steppe.” After recording that Valikhanov reported Islamic “inroads” in Kazakstan in the early 19th century and proposing that Islam was strongest among the “aristocracy,” Olcott then makes the further concession that “some folksongs and even the spoken language of Kazakhstan of this period show signs of Islam’s influence” (italics added). If this is the case, then Islam had obviously taken root among the common Kazaks also, since they sing the same folksongs as the “nobility” do. In the end the whole line of argument for the late Islamization of the Kazaks collapses, because the sources are weak, and the semantic evidence has never been carefully considered. Even as a beginner in the Kazak language I could see that its religious vocabulary is thoroughly Islamic and is unlikely to have become so recently.

Therefore I adopted the following procedures for my research:
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- Long-term, part-time field research was conducted over seven years beginning in June 1991. I lived in Turkistan beginning in April 1992, teaching at Yasawi University, where my classroom duties were not strenuous and I was often free to do research. The bulk of the write-up also was done in Turkistan during 1996–98.
- I worked in the Kazak language, achieving professional fluency near Level 4 on the ACTFL scale (Hadley 1993:501–511; cf. Privratsky 1996). Because Kazaks instinctively speak Russian to European faces, I avoided learning much Russian to make them speak Kazak to me. It was a fair trade that colleagues sometimes had to translate for me when Russian was spoken and give me Kazak or English renditions of Russian literature unavailable in translation.11 Academic works, popular tracts, and newspaper articles in Kazak are cited throughout the study. Cheap newsprint booklets are especially salient for the study of Islam in local contexts, where tradition is no longer passed on primarily in oral form but by means of modern publicist processes (cf. Shahrani 1991).
- Semi-structured interviews were audiotaped with a purposive sample (Bernard 1988:97) of 37 Kazak and Qoj residents of Turkistan and one village nearby between January and June 1995. The transcriptions came to 2,400 pages of Kazak-Cyrillic text, written out longhand by four university students who were paid for their work.
- Gaïhar Sizdjqova, senior instructor in history at Yasawi University, was my unpaid research associate in the planning and interview phase of the research. Interviews were easier to conduct with her asking the questions we had designed. She appears as “GS” in dialogical quotations from the interviews and has written a separate analysis of our data in Kazak (Sizdjqova 1998).
- Fieldnotes reflect my friendships and professional contacts, which, though far from random, represent a socioeconomic cross-section of the Kazaks of Turkistan, and a few of our Uzbek neighbors. Of particular importance were conversations overheard and events serendipitously observed (some of these by my wife and children) in which my presence distorted the data little if at all (Kirk and Miller 1986:18,31). Classes I taught in religious studies and ethnology sharpened my emic analytical focus. An “eclectic strategy” of this type buys a high degree of internal validity (Bernard 1988:95; Pelto and Pelto 1978:34).
- I lived in Almaty for seven weeks in 1991 and in Kentau for six weeks in 1992. I made other trips to Almaty, Shymkent, and Tashkent and did observation and/or interviews in villages near Turkistan: Atabay (Karnak), Qiziljol, Chapaev (now called Intimaq), Törtkol, Otrar/Arstan Bab/Shäüildir,12 Otrabad, and the camel farm of Mansur Sizdjqov on the Syr Darya near Ars. Although urban and rural control groups were not systematically established, these trips provided comparative distance from the local context of Turkistan.
Spirituality and Ethnographic Method

Clifford’s book on Maurice Leenhardt (1982; cf. Crapanzano 1979) inspired me to attempt an ethnography-as-dialogical-encounter in the pre-Malinowskian tradition, when anthropology and theology could still be friends. Leenhardt, a French missionary-ethnographer, lived for 25 years at the beginning of the 20th century in New Caledonia, then succeeded to Mauss’ chair at the École Pratiques des Haute Études at the Sorbonne, and was in turn succeeded in 1951 by Lévi-Strauss. Both his descriptive work, based on a personally transformative experience of la vie profonde of Melanesian “cosmomorphism,” and his methodology for training native collaborators (theology students) to record the “undifferentiated” religious experience of Canaque dreams and visions, are applauded by Clifford as ground-breaking models for ethnography. It was a controversial proposal that was written off by others (Rabinow 1983), but I determined to make a personal investment in it to see whether I could adapt Leenhardt to the Christian-Muslim encounter. The fundamentals were long-term residence, language fluency, a spiritual devotion to science, and research collaboration with local people based on transparent religious commitment.

During 1993–94 Sziduqova and I discussed the possible conflict between my Christian identity and the Kazak feeling that Christianity is an enemy of their culture. To her own satisfaction she resolved the problem of her association with me, in spite of criticism from one or two colleagues, and in spite of the fact that she shares the Kazak fear of Christian encroachment. She liked that I distinguish my ethnographic “treasure hunting” from the “pearl merchant” approach of 19th-century Russian missions (Bevans 1992:49; cf. Batunsky 1994:216ff.). She decided that the opportunity to learn ethnographic methodologies and pursue her kandidat nauk degree would balance any difficulties of working with me.

Sziduqova introduced us to informants as believing scientists. She would then and announce self-confidently that it is good for science when a Muslim and a Christian work together. She soothed informants with the argument that belief in God makes science “clean” (tazə ǧilm), unlike Soviet ideology that contaminated it. In such an atmosphere of seeking after scientific openness on spiritual grounds, I felt free to object to informants’ statements on occasion, e.g. misunderstandings of Christianity, or anti-Semitic remarks. Suspicion, when it is modulated by faith and science together, may give way to dialogue, belying the nihilist premise that there is an “absolute difference” separating the Western visitor and the Muslim believer (Rabinow 1977:161). Instead, belief may meet belief and complement the meeting of science and religion, a matter I take up again in Chapter 8.

Ethnography in a spiritual mode produces rather different data than an “objective” sociological approach. Lubin’s survey of religious belief and
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practice in Central Asia included southern Kazakhstan, where she found that only 24.5% are “Islamic believers” and 49.6% are “non-believers” (1995:58). She admits that her Kazak sample was small. One must also ask whether she used adequate criteria for determining what an “Islamic believer” is. If the ability to recite the Shahada in Arabic is one of them, then most Kazaks fall short, but religion is more complex than facility with sacred texts.

Textuality and Reality

Because the semantics of Kazak religion have been neglected, this study features a strong dose of Kazak-language texts and lexical comments in Kazak-Latin transliteration. This reflects both a moral commitment to let Kazaks speak for themselves and a formal commitment to give area studies specialists, including Kazak colleagues, a solid basis for evaluating my sources.

I am not fascinated, however, by textuality in the postmodernist sense, where nothing is real except power, and words are fictions that cultures force on themselves or others. I believe that phenomena that are experienced religiously and observed scientifically are human (and possibly divine) realities, not mere social fictions. Therefore, the focus on language in the pages below is a traditional interpretive strategy that records the real words of real people attempting to make a real point about their social lives and spiritual realities. I have, of course, translated (and therefore “reconstructed”) their world in English and in the conceptual terms that I understand. To the extent that this is judged to have been a hegemonic exercise of crosscultural representation, other ethnographers (including, I hope, my Kazak colleagues and students) will want to deconstruct my work. Even then, however, a certain value attaches to the linguistic data and observations assembled here. Stocking's comment on the history of anthropology (1991:13n.) provides motivation for the ethnographic enterprise:

At the same time that one recognizes that much of what we deal with as historians is perhaps at some level irreducibly “mythistorical,” . . . ethnographies . . . are many of them at least as valuable and permanent contributions to our knowledge and understanding of the variety of humankind as the efforts of those who would deconstruct them.

Ethnographers describe things selectively and miss many things, but we get it right often enough. I learned this in Indonesia, where I was introduced to anthropology. After visiting a number of Karo Batak villages with my theological students, I found an ethnography of the Karos by Singarimbun (1975) and was thrilled that he described precisely what I had been seeing. It was a personal confirmation of ethnographic accuracy. I am not a Kazak
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as Singarimbun was himself a Karo, but in anthropology a stranger’s
description is a good way to begin a comparative reassessment of culture.

NOTES

1 Unless otherwise indicated, Turkistan refers to the city. More commonly it
designates the Inner Asian region inhabited by Turkic peoples, though the
precise referent has been variable. Turkistan was an administrative region of
the Russian Empire that included Central Asia and the Syr Darya and Jetisů
(“seven rivers,” Rs. Semirech’ e) regions of southern Kazakhstan. Earlier,
Turkistan was simply the northern steppe – roughly present-day Kazakhstan –
occupied by Turkic nomads, as distinct from the settled regions of
Mawarannahr and Khorezm (Transoxiana) to the south.

Turkistan is better spelled Türkistan, with an umlaut, emphasizing the Turkic
front vowels as in Turkish, which accurately transliterates the Kazak-Cyrillic
spelling. Bowing to common usage, I have eliminated diacritical markers from
some toponyms and common proper nouns in the English text. Turkestan with
an e transliterates Russian rather than Kazak spelling. On the spelling of Kazak
and Kazakhstan, see the note on transliteration on pages xx–xxi.

2 Inner Asia includes the Turko-Mongolian cultural region culture that is roughly
coterminous with Asian inland drainage. It is a broader designation than
Central Asia, which is the area of sedentary Muslim (Turko-Persian) culture
centered in Mawarannahr (Transoxiana), including southern Kazakhstan. The
city of Turkistan lies in the northern region of Central Asian culture. Soviet
Central Asia was a culturally problematic term for the four southern republics
of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan only, excluding
Kazakhstan (cf. DeWeese 1994:7ff.).

3 In the Oguznama, a legendary history of the Turkish Oğuz horde, the town of
Karachuk (Pers. Shavgar) is mentioned as an Oğuz center. Zikiryah Jandarbek, a
local historian, believes this town was Yas/lTurkistan. Karachuk (Kz. Qarashq)
is preserved as the name of a stream to the west of the town (see DeWeese,
forthcoming).

4 A nisba is a designation appended to a Muslim’s name indicating his home town
or region, e.g. Jalâl al-Dīn Rûmî, which means that the famous Sufi poet was a
man of Rum, the “Roman” region governed by the Seljuk Turks.

5 Founded in 1991, the university was re-organized in 1993 with an intergovern­
mental governing board composed of Turks and Kazaks and named the Hoja
Ahmet Yasawi Kazak-Turkish International University (Qoja Ahmet Yasawi
atndagi Halqaralq Qazaq-Türk Universiteti).

6 The mound of Otrar (Farab) near Turkistan is the biggest archeological site in
southern Kazakhstan (Nusqabayuli and Janibek 1997). The insult to Genghis
Khan offered by its Khorezmian governor was the proximate cause of the
Mongol invasion of Central Asia and the destruction of the city in 1219.
Smagulov suggests that the final demise of Otrar in the 16th century contributed
to the growth of Yasi (1991:11).

7 Recent excavations at the Kültöbe site near the Yasawi Shrine suggest Scythian
occupation as early as 2,000 years ago (İsabekov 1998), but the figure provided
to UNESCO was 1500 years, based on excavations during the Soviet period
(SPIKK 1994:268–271 [Smagulov]). Signs celebrating 1500 years appeared on
the streets of Turkistan in 1998, and a sesquimillennial celebration is planned for
October 2000.
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8 The term “normative Islam” is used here to characterize the Shariah, or Law of Islam, however variably interpreted by the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The English terms “classical,” “scripturalist,” “essentialist,” “official,” and “orthodox” have also been used to describe this central tradition of the Quran and hadith as interpreted by the ‘ulamā (Vrijhof and Waardenburg 1979). I retain the quotation marks throughout the study, because the terms are problematic. For anthropologists, local norms are normative in their own way, as distinct from the norms of universal ideology.

9 Valikhanov’s articles on Kazak religion (1985:169–202) were written between 1862 and 1864 (cf. editor’s notes in Valikhanov 1985:546,549).

10 Chagrined by the encroachment on Kazak culture of the Tatars and Sarts (Uzbeks), Valikhanov encouraged the Tsar to take subtle measures against them by allowing the title mullah on the Kazak Steppe only to the “Qojas of the Kazaks” (1985 [1862–64]:197–202). As an alternative to the Tatar madrasa schools (cf. Algar 1992), Shoqan urged the Tsar to establish government schools for the Kazaks like those the United States was providing for the Indians. The first such “Kirgiz[Kazak]-Russian school” in the town of Turkistan was opened in 1888. Shoqan would surely be surprised that the Kazaks, in spite of terrible suffering, emerged at the end of the 20th century with a more viable native culture than the Native American tribes he thought were being treated so well.

11 Though the highpoints are reviewed, a thoroughgoing appraisal of Russian studies of the Kazaks is beyond the scope of this study, which claims independent value, however, precisely for striking a new path. I trust that the Kazak linguistic detail presented here will provide a new basis for approaching the Russian and Soviet literature. Soviet-era assessments of Kazak culture might have been different had they been grounded in a linguistic method that did not privilege Russian over Kazak.

12 Cynthia Werner did a major research project in economic anthropology at Shāūildir during the time I was in Turkistan. Her work on agricultural privatization (1994) and feasting and gift exchange processes (1997, 1999) accurately describes Kazak culture in the ’90s.
References

TRANSLITERATION

Si
IlA