CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIMS ON TIBETAN BUDDHISM, 16TH-18TH CENTURIES[1]

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Prelude

In his brief study of the *Ziyā' al-qulūb* ("Shining of the Hearts"), a collection of anecdotes from the life of Khoja Isḥāq Valī (d. C. 1600), Joseph Fletcher suggested that the "adversary" of Muslim missionary efforts among the nomads during the khoja's lifetime may have been "Buddhism imported from Tibet."[2] Khoja Isḥāq Valī, a son of Makhdūm-i A'ẓam, the prominent Naqshbandi shaykh from Samarqand, was the founder of the Black Mountain khoja sect in Yarkand. He is best remembered as one of the most active Sufis proselytizing in East Turkestan in the second half of the sixteenth century.

At first glance, Fletcher's idea seems peculiar – was Tibetan Buddhism such a major factor among the Turks in seventeenth-century Central Asia, centuries after its alleged disappearance from the region? While Turkic nomads – particularly, Kirghiz and Qazaqs – seem to have been favored targets for Muslim conversion activities, it is difficult, relying on the sources in our possession, to establish the nomads' religious affiliations and practices during that era.[3] What we can do, is to try and determine the image and reputation of alleged advocates of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporaneous Central Asian Muslim sources and to find out more about some of these diverse "frontier-zone" interactions and confrontations.

Among the most commonly known Muslim observations and historical reporting on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries we may note the writings of Kashmir's governor (and Bābur's cousin), Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dūghlāt, in the *Ta'rīkh-i rashīdī* (1540s) and the reports of Maḥmūd b. Amīr Valī, written in Balkh and recorded in the *Baḥr al-asrār* (1630s).[4] In addition, accounts of the alleged contacts in the 1670s and 80s of the Naqshbandi

1 A preliminary version of this article was read at an international workshop on 'The Tibetan Buddhist world and other Asian polities,' convened at UCLA's Asia Institute in May 2012. I am grateful to the workshop's participants – especially Johan Elverskog, Kurtis Schaeffer, and Gray Tuttle – for their comments.

2 Joseph Fletcher, "Confrontations Between Muslim Missionaries and Nomad Unbelievers in the Late Sixteenth Century: Notes on Four Passages from the 'Ḍiyā' al-qulūb'," in *Tractata Altaica*, ed. W. Heissig (Harrassowitz, 1976), 167-74 (169).

3 On the problematics of Inner Asian nomads' religious conversion, see Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 21-59.

4 Both works concern, for the most part, developments in so-called Little Tibet, also known as Baltistān (the area between Gilgit and Ladakh), and in Dūghlāt's case also the author's obsession – that was never fulfilled – to conquer Lhasa (Ursang). For the Islamization of Baltistān and Ladakh see Wolfgang Holzwarth, "Islam in Baltistan – Problems of Research on the Formative Period," in *Past in the Present: Horizons*

shaykh, Āfāq Khoja, with the Zünghar khan, Galdan Boshugtu, mediated, as it were, by the Dalai Lama and leading to the extension of Zünghar rule over the Tarim river basin until 1757, attracted much attention. But as will become evident below, the actual treatment of Tibetan Buddhism in these and other sources tended to be formulaic and mechanical and reveals little to no Muslim interest in Buddhism. Perceived adherents to Tibetan Buddhism were described in broad terms, typically quite negatively. Central Asian Muslim authors were much more concerned with the actual relations – at times productive, at times devastating – with the Zünghars, nomadizing between the Altai and the Tian Shan mountain ranges, and the Kalmyks, nomadizing east of the Volga. In essence, realpolitik trumped theoretical and doctrinal matters.

Central Asia in the 16th-18th centuries

'Central Asia' in this essay corresponds to the territories of the khanates of Khiva, Bukhara, and Khoqand in the nineteenth century. It extends to the Balkh area (northern Afghanistan) in the south and to East Turkestan in the east (Xinjiang, as far east as Turfan), and is framed in the north by the steppe belt (Dasht-i Qïpchaq).

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, massive migrations of Turkic nomads (Uzbeks and Qazaqs, governed by Chinggis Khan's descendants) from the steppes instigated considerable socio-political, linguistic and demographic changes in the region. Central Asia's *ancien régime* was dismantled and its most prominent representative – Ẓahīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur – was forced to leave in search of greener pastures; new Turkic and Chinggisid rulers pushed agendas and policies aimed at securing their positions and at cultivating alliances with emerging Sufi orders and other regional powers; they patronized new cultural projects, including the development of an extensive and multifaceted production of indigenous historiography in Turkic and Persian; the city of Bukhara developed into the most powerful and centralized sedentary center in the region. New boundaries – both real and perceived – between the region and other surrounding, expanding, foreign polities led by emerging dynasties (most notably, the Romanovs to the north, the Safavids to the South-west, the Mughals to the south, and later the Qing to the east) served to intensify Central Asia's distinctiveness.

The relative void in the steppe regions, formed by the disintegration of the political scraps of the former Golden Horde, the sizeable Turkic migrations to the south, and the expansion of the Russian Empire beyond the Urals into Siberia, was filled with mostly nomadic Turkic speakers, including Qazaqs, Tatars and Bashkirs. Mongolian-speaking peoples in the region were designated in the Muslim (and subsequently in the Russian) sources simply as Qalmaqs (Rus., 'Kalmyks'), to be found as far west as the Yayïq (Ural) River since the early seventeenth century.

In East Turkestan – or, Altïshar (Turk., 'six cities'), the six oasis "city-states" of Aqsu, Turfan, Khotan, Kashghar, Yarkand, and Kucha – the settled, Muslim Turkic population seems to have

of Remembering in the Pakistan Himalaya, ed. Irmtraud Stellrecht (Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1997), 1-40; for a somewhat challenging view of Holzwarth see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshiya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 247-55.

formed the majority. Between 1678 and 1759, they were governed by the Khojas, descendants of the Naqshbandi Sufi master from Samarqand, Makhdūm-i A'ẓam (d. 1542). The Khojas entertained political (and marital) connections with powerful Turkic military chieftains and the Chaghatayid ruling house. One of Makhdūm-i A'ẓam's sons, Isḥāq Khoja, set the foundations in the late sixteenth century for the formation of strong powerful networks (political, economic, and spiritual) in the region, and his descendants founded the Black Mountain (*Qarā-tāghliq*) faction of the Khojas, centered in Yarkand. Half a century later, another Makhdūm-i A'ẓam descendent, Khoja Muḥammad Yūsuf, would found the White Mountain (*Aq-tāghliq*) faction. Muḥammad Yūsuf wielded influence with the Chaghatayid khans in Kashghar and the faction was responsible for proselytizing missions in China from the mid-seventeenth century. More localized Sufi groups managed religious centers in other areas of the region. Muḥammad Yūsuf's son, Khoja Āfāq (also known as Hidāyat Allāh, d. 1694), who was married to a Moghul princess, convinced the Zünghar Galdan Boshugtu – with the aid of the Dalai Lama, according to a story in Muḥammad Ṣādiq's early nineteenth-century *Tadhkira-i 'azīzān* – to conquer Altïshar and install the White Mountain Khojas as governors of the territory of Khotan, Yarkand, Kashghar, and Aqsu.[5] The Zünghars, who had converted around 1615, were standing at the vanguard of Tibetan Buddhism at least since 1640 and remained in control of the area to the north. The Khojas paid the Zünghars heavy tribute and the latter held Khoja family members as hostages to ensure their cooperation.[6] Other forces in the region included powerful Kirghiz chieftains to the west and Qazaqs to the north-west. The Zünghar campaigns against the Qazaqs in the late seventeenth – early eighteenth century, and in particular, in the years 1722-23 resulted in what has been considered the worst disaster of the Qazaqs before the Soviet era, and had further blemished Zünghar reputation in the eyes of some of their Muslim neighbors (a reputation that was already not favorable given their "infidel" status).

Central Asian Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists

We have a great deal of information in Muslim sources about the political circumstances in Central Asia during the period under discussion, but much less materials that address clear Muslim–Buddhist, rather than, for example, political and economic Zünghar–Bukharan dealings.[7] Nevertheless, the purported Muslim–Buddhist interface has been attracting considerable (and a bit inflated, perhaps) attention recently.[8]

5 The story of the Dalai Lama's involvement (and even alleged conversion to Islam) has been dealt with by Robert Shaw already in the late nineteenth century in his "The History of the Khojas of Eastern Turkistan" (Calcutta, 1897). For a more recent treatment of this and other related stories, see Thierry Zarcone, "Between Legend and History: About the 'Conversion' to Islam of Two Prominent Lamaists in the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries," in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions Along the Musk Routes*, ed. Anna Akasoy et. al. (Ashgate, 2010), 281-92.

6 On the relationship between the Oirats and the sedentary realm in East Turkestan see David Brophy, "The Oirat in Eastern Turkistan and the Rise of Āfāq Khwāja," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 16 (2008/2009), 5-28.

7 It remains to be discussed whether such a distinction is useful.

8 For a summary of Tibet in Muslim sources see, M. Gaborieau et al, "Tubbat, Tibbat, Tibet," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), 10:576. For different discussions of Muslims (and Muslim "influences") in Tibet, see the recent

Although this paper sets as its title a supposedly clear-cut 'Tibetan Buddhism' versus an equally unambiguous 'Central Asian Islam', it is important to emphasize the fluidity of such terminologies. Central Asia at the time was the scene for constant competition between different representatives of Islam (and their diverse followers) who were struggling for material and spiritual resources and contesting each other's authority. Even with the ascent of the Naqshabandi Sufi order, one hesitates to speak of a definite, cohesive Central Asian Islam. It is unclear how coherent was a "Tibetan-Buddhist" world. Zünghars, Oirats and Tibetans seem to have been subject to mutual praise and criticism – not to mention (at times) widespread violent conflicts – regarding their practice and interpretation of Buddhist doctrines.[9]

At the same time, even if the tendency – if not the mission – of academic inquiry is to unearth the diversity of different phenomena, it seems that the representations of Buddhists that have been preserved in the Muslim sources were fairly one-dimensional. The internal debates, conflicts, and dissents within followers of Tibetan Buddhism neither reached nor seemed to be of interest to the Buddhists' Central Asian Muslim neighbors. Muslim authors and their sponsors continued to treat the entire Tibetan–Buddhist sphere as a relatively uniform being as late as the twentieth century, and stuck to characterizing it in the same manner they would typify other non-Muslim groups and individuals in the region.[10] Muslims referred to the Buddhists in generic terms – as they did other non-Muslims – as infidels (Arabic/Persian = *kuffār*, Turkic = *kāfirlär*),[11] or in a variety of other terms ranging from apostates or deniers (*munkir*) to sinners (*badkīsh*).[12]

Islam and Tibet. For an overview of the diverse meetings between Buddhism and Islam across the region, see Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

9 Regarding the Buddhists' internal "civil wars" see Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 217-226. Other instances, beyond the physical violence, included for example, the Torghuds of Xinjiang criticizing the Zünghars for being arrogant, excessively proud in their lineage, and fetishizers of the Vinaya to the point of blocking enlightenment (Todd Gibson, "A Manuscript on Oirat Buddhist History," *Central Asiatic Journal* 34, 1990, 84-97); The Dörböds of western Mongolia censured Galdan Boshugtu for placing temples in inauspicious places, which caused their sacking by the Qazaqs and ultimately brought about the Zünghars' ruin (this explanation was provided in the course of different attempts to explain the destruction of the Zünghars). The Tibetans, in turn, condemned Oirats for being "bigoted sectarians," oppressors of the Gelugpa, for excessive pride, and for forgetting the supremacy of the Tibetans (Christopher Atwood, "A New Source on Oirat History," a paper read at the 50th anniversary of the Mongolia Society Meeting, Bloomington, Indiana, July 2011.) On the other hand, in his treatment of portions of Jimbadorji's *Bolor toli* (1837) that seem to have been translated from an as yet unidentified Tibetan source, Atwood also finds a very favorable discussion of the Zünghars. The text praises their building of Buddhist institutions and likens the Zünghar rulers to the Tibetan kings of old in their practice (ibid.). Conversely, one finds also a Tibetan disapproval of Galdan Boshugtu in Zaya Pandita's biography (Radnabhadra, *Lunnyj svet*, translated from the Oirat by G. N. Rumiantsev and A. G. Sazykin, St. Petersburg, 1999).

10 One could embark here on a very different type of paper in line with Elliot Sperling's "'Orientalism' and Aspects of Violence in the Tibetan Tradition," in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*, ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (Wisdom Publications, 2001), 317-330.

11 This is also evident in other parts of Central Eurasia, for example, among the Tatars and the Bulghars. Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District & the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910* (Brill, 2001), 94.

12 For other unkind designations, see Alexandre Papas, *Soufisme et politique entre Chine, Tibet et Turkestan: étude sur les Khwajas Naqshbandis du Turkestan oriental* (Paris, 2005), 101.

Furthermore, in a late nineteenth-century Muslim work from the region, the designation "Qalmaq," used often to describe all Mongolian-speaking peoples in both Muslim and Russian sources, was also perceived as a religious category comprising all Tibetan Buddhists, including both Mongols (Oirats, Zünghars, Moghuls) and Tibetans (*Tibet Qalmūqlarī*).[13] "Qalmaq" thus signified not only an "ethnic" designation, but also a religious one, a designation that culminated in a recurring phrase in Muslim sources to describe Qalmaqs as the *ūrūgh-i kuffār*, namely, the clan of the infidels,[14] perhaps also in an attempt to distinguish them from other types of infidels (Russians, "shamanists") or worse, heretics (Shi'ites, Isma'ilis, etc.).

Islamic writing and surrounding cultures

Rashīd al-Dīn, the illustrious vizier of the Mongol Ilkhans in Iran in the beginning of the fourteenth century, seems to have produced the last comprehensive Muslim history that emphasized an interest in neighboring civilizations on a substantial scale before the twentieth century.[15] The Mongol courts also provided arenas for multi inter-religious encounters, encounters that yielded Muslim commentary on other religious doctrines and practices, such as 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī's deliberations with "*bakhshī*s" in Arghūn's court in the late thirteenth century.[16] And yet, to the best of my knowledge, there are no Central Asian Muslim accounts of what the "idolaters" did or thought, whether doctrine- or practice-related, from later pre-modern eras, comparable to the materials that had survived from the Mongol era.[17] Most of the Islamic sources in the following centuries would concentrate only on topics of immediate relevance to the Muslims and not a grander general exploration of their surrounding cultures.[18] Keeping this in mind, it is, perhaps, not surprising to find hardly any treatment of Tibetan Buddhism (or a Tibeto–Buddhist

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13 Allen J. Frank, "The *Monghōl-Qalmāq Bayānī*: a Qing-era Islamic Ethnography of the Mongols and Tibetans," *Asiatische Studien / Etudes Asiatique* 63/2 (2009), 323-48. We will return to this work below.

14 Muslim hagiographies in East Turkestan also relate the following maxim: "The Sufi has three enemies: the first is sleep; the second – woman; and the third – the Qalmaq." (Papas, *Soufisme et politique*, 100).

15 Cf. with Nathan Light's discussion of Muslim histories of China and the gap in the production of such histories between the fourteenth and the late nineteenth centuries. Nathan Light, "Muslim Histories of China: Historiography across Boundaries in Central Eurasia," in *Frontiers and Boundaries: Encounters on china's Margins*, ed. Zsombor Rajkai and Ildikó Bellér-Hann (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 151-176 (159).

16 About Simnānī, see Jamal Elias, *The Throne of God: The Life and Thought of 'Ala' Ad-Dawla As-Simnani* (State University of New York Press, 1995). Simnānī's debates with Buddhist monks from India, Kashmir, Tibet, and the Uyghur lands are detailed in a recent study by Devin DeWeese, "'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī's Religious Encounters at the Mongol Court near Tabriz," in *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer (Brill, 2014), 35-76 (esp. 63-72).

17 Rashīd al-Dīn's own efforts also seem to have been forgotten or disregarded by his intellectual successors, particularly between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. See my "Rashīd al-Dīn's Historiographical Legacy in the Muslim World," in *Rashid al-Din. Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran*, ed. A. Akasoy et. al. (The Warburg Institute, 2013), 212-23.

18 The ethnographically rich genre of Islamic travel literature does not contribute much to our understanding of such topics in Central Asia in the period under discussion.

"worldview") in the Central Asian Muslim sources in the period under discussion.[19] Most of the sources offer no descriptions of the social and religious institutions of the Tibetans or the Mongols (including Oirats, Zünghars, and Qalmaqs) and, as noted earlier, typically suffice with depicting them as "infidels" or "idolaters" without further qualifications.

Scholars like Allen Frank, for example, assumed that the cause for such perceived indifference was rooted in the political developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as more and more Muslim communities in Central and Inner Asia found themselves under non-Muslim rule with the growth of the Russian Empire, the Qalmaq momentum, and the later expansion of the Qing. Under such circumstances, Frank suggested, Muslims tended to limit their discussions to political circumstances and stay away from other, potentially more contentious issues.[20] This proposition would seem plausible had we had at our disposal relevant accounts from independent – and, in some cases, quite affluent – Muslim realms in the region. The problem is, we do not.[21] Interestingly, a parallel disinterest in Muslim neighboring cultures seemed to characterize contemporaneous Tibetan-language sources as well.

Moreover, even in areas with large concentrations of Buddhist communities, such as the Volga-Ural region, the Muslim trend to avoid any "ethnographic" descriptions of them persisted. The aforementioned late-nineteenth-century *Monghōl-Qalmāq Bayānī* seems to be an exception to the rule. Composed by Qurbān-ʻAlī, a Tatar resident of northern Jungaria (the area stretching between the Gobi and Lake Balkhash), the work relies heavily on accounts by contemporary Muslim merchants who had returned from the lands of the Qalmaqs, including Tibet. In explaining the usage of the term "Qalmāq" as a religious category comprising all Tibetan Buddhists, the author claimed that the term's etymology was based on a religious definition, and had been used historically among the Muslims to refer to Mongol and Tibetan Buddhists collectively. It was allegedly based on the verb "qalmaq" (Turk., 'to remain'), arguing that the Mongols' ancestors had been given the choice to convert to Islam and some chose to "remain" in the old faith.[22] Qurbān-ʻAlī 's discussion of Buddhism is detailed but often erroneous, conflating Buddhism with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, and the works that he claims as his literary sources have not been identified.[23] The *Monghōl-Qalmāq Bayānī* was a product of the late nineteenth century and remains unusual in the space allotted to discussing alleged Buddhist practices. Earlier considerations of the topic in Muslim sources from the region sufficed with generic allusions to "infidels," even if many of these "infidels" were not

19 The description of Tibet by Kashmir's governor Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dūghlāt (d. 1550-51), most recently treated in Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam*, 175-79, has been well-known and need not engage us here. To this account, we may add the *Dabistān-i madhāhib* (*School of Religious Doctrines*), the seventeenth-century Persian work, written in Hindustan, most likely in Zoroastrian circles, which included a short chapter about Tibetans (*Qarātabbatiyān*).

20 Frank, "The *Monghōl-Qalmāq Bayānī*," 324.

21 The reasons for such a lack of interest are beyond the scope of this paper. Frank's expertise in the Tatar-Muslim Volga-Ural areas under Russian rule may have shaped his hypothesis.

22 Frank, "The *Monghōl-Qalmāq Bayānī*," 329-30.

23 Ibid., 333 n. 29.

Buddhists but rather followers of other traditions, usually grouped together by scholars under the rubric "Shamanists."

The Buddhist "adversaries"

Let us now return to Fletcher's study of the *Ziyā' al-qulūb* and the idea that "Buddhism imported from Tibet" may have impeded or challenged Muslim missionary efforts among the nomads.[24] In this hagiographical source, readers are informed of Isḥāq Valī's campaigns among the Kirghiz and the Qalmaqs, where Isḥāq destroyed 18 *but khāna* (Fletcher translates this term as "idol sanctuaries")[25] and converted 180,000 *kāfir-i butparast* (Fletcher translates this term as "idol-worshipping infidels")[26] to Islam. One of Khoja Isḥāq's disciples, who had arrived from Kashghar to Samarqand, continued his master's activities and "converted 18,000 idol-worshipping infidels into Muslims and destroyed eight idol sanctuaries."

In another incident, four-hundred troops of a certain Kirghiz chieftain, having witnessed one of Isḥāq Khoja's miracles, converted to Islam by throwing away their idols (*buthā*). In a third passage, one of Isḥāq's disciples was sent to an ailing Kirghiz chief. The chief's men were trying to cure him by "offering food to a silver idol" hanging from a tree, with about one-thousand lesser idols of stone or wood around it.[27] Ultimately, all idols were gathered and brought before Isḥāq Valī; he and his disciples prayed for the health of the Kirghiz chief, who miraculously recovered, stood up, uttered the *shahāda*, and ordered all the idols to be destroyed (the silver was then shared with the Sufis).

Lastly, in an encounter between four of Isḥāq's disciples and some "fire-worshipping" Mongols (Qalmaqs), the Sufis were callously thrown into the fire. But then Isḥāq appeared, called upon Allāh, and a sudden gust of wind blew the fire in the direction of the Mongols and burned many of them to death. The rest converted to Islam.[28]

Can anyone argue, with any degree of certainty, that the "infidels" in this source were Shamanists or proponents of "Buddhism from Tibet"? The *Ziyā' al-qulūb* was studied by Devin DeWeese, but with an eye to exploring the meanings of literary tropes (competition, miracles, trial by fire, etc.) that had been part and parcel of conversion narratives in Muslim Central Asia.[29]

24 Fletcher, "Confrontations Between Muslim Missionaries and Nomad Unbelievers."

25 *But-khāna*, or "house of idols," or "house of the Buddha," became a generic term for any infidel temple with images of sorts. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa referred to Hindu temples in the fourteenth century as "*but-khāna*s." In the nineteenth century, pagodas and churches were described in the same manner as well. (As John Wood explained in his 1841 *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus*, his Muslim guide referred to the Greek-Orthodox churches of the Russians as "*but-khāna*s" because of the "number of pictures they contain").

26 *Butparast* was an idolater (but was used in medieval Persian poetry as a synonym to a "shaman").

27 That setting is described in the text as "the *but khāna* of the Kirghiz."

28 The Sufis, in turn, emerged unhurt from the fire (Fletcher, 172).

29 DeWeese, *Islamization*, 251. This perceived lack of attention to detail – or indifference – in the Muslim sources concerning concrete assessment of "infidels" seems to have led scholars to recognize and catalog literary topoi, mainly in the sphere of conversion, a dominant theme in the hagiographical literature. Here, again, the emphasis has been on the qualities of the convertor rather than those of the converted.

In a recent work, Alexandre Papas engaged Fletcher's suggestion,[30] first citing the Russian ethnographer Saul Abramzon, who had viewed these passages as proof of the Kirghiz "shamanic" and "fetishistic" tendencies. Papas noted that the territory that was, allegedly, the locus for the stories, had been the ancient seat of Buddhist presence before the region's Islamization, and that a small Uyghur Buddhist settlement had existed there as late as 1680. This may indicate, Papas suggested, that the idolaters' identity was indeed Buddhist. The conclusions remain unsubstantiated, but they are indicative of the kind of scholarly attempts to evaluate religious identities based on insufficient evidence. Other examples of converting – or simply, massacring – Zünghars were recorded in Muslim hagiographies from the region, with similar formulaic descriptions.[31] The emphasis in the hagiographical traditions rested on the converting saint and his virtues, and not on the specific characteristics of the converted.

The picture is somewhat similar in other types of sources from the region, sources that have been described, by and large, as epic traditions. In the legendary biographies of Tīmūr (Tamerlane), a corpus of extensive biographies in Persian and Turkic that emerged in Bukhara in the early eighteenth century, the Qalmaqs are sometimes presented as the Central Asian Muslims' most defiant enemies (together with different heretical sects within Islam, mostly Shi'ites and Isma'ilis).[32] The unknown compilers of the biographies often relied on older written traditions, sometimes very famous ones, and wove many of their protagonists into the tapestry of the old stories, giving them new meanings. Perhaps because of the Buddhist reputation of the Qalmaqs and the prominence of elaborate images in the process of worship – as opposed to the supposed denial of image-worship in Islam[33] – the Qalmaqs play a pivotal role in some of the stories. For instance, when Tīmūr embarks on a journey to locate certain artifacts or sacred sites, he is guided by Qalmaq infidels who take him to sanctuaries full of images of bygone kings. The assumption conveyed in the story is that only the heathen would know their own world well enough to guide the Muslim hero through it. Naturally, Tīmūr destroys the infidels once he is done with his tasks.

To this array of historiographical and epic materials, one might add oral traditions, recorded much after the events supposedly occurred. For example, in describing the colossal defeat of the Qazaqs to the Zünghars in 1722-23, later Muslim historians provided oral testimonies of the event that downplay any religious backdrop that the conflict may have had. Mullā Mūsā Sayrāmī, writing in the early twentieth century, noted: "About two hundred years ago the wicked Qalmaq named Khungtaiji suddenly appeared and captured and conquered Tashkent and Sayram, appointing in Sayram a Qalmaq leader and leaving some Qalmaqs as advisors, and

30 Papas, *Soufisme et politique*, 45-49.

31 See, for example, the story of the mass killings of infidels by Hasan Khoja in the *Hidāyat-nāma*, the most comprehensive eighteenth-century hagiography dedicated to Khoja Āfāq (ibid., 207).

32 Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heoric Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

33 See in this regard, Mika Natif, "The Painter's Breath and Concepts of Idol Anxiety in Islamic Art," in *Idol Anxiety*, ed. Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft (Stanford University Press, 2011), 41-55.

returned to Qulja. The inhabitants of Sayram killed those Qalmaqs and rejected obedience to Khungtaiji. After this, some people escaped and told Khuntaiji in detail what had happened, and he, uttering a solemn oath, returned to Sayram and mastered it again, killing many people and submitting the city to pillage."[34] Other testimonies speak in similar terms and make no mention of a religious divide between attackers and victims.[35]

Shrine and pilgrimage: The landscape of martyrdom

Similar to the earlier types of sources mentioned, evidence from shrines in the region – primarily from East Turkestan – suggests that it was not so much the encounter with actual Buddhists that rendered them somewhat suspect in the eyes of the local Muslim populations, but rather the legacy of the story of Islam's triumph over the Buddhists – and the many sacrifices that such triumphs entailed – that may have survived in popular imagination. Tales associated with such triumphs had been recorded in travel guides and in shrine registers, and made their way also into public celebrations and commemorations. In addition, many existing shrines and mosques that drew on and perpetuated such tales had been built on older Buddhist sites, thus granting the stories also a distinct material dimension. The sacred Muslim landscape thus dominated over the defeated Buddhist one and benefitted from its existence.

Among many such examples, the *mazār* (shrine) of Tuyoq Khojam near Turfan was built on an ancient Buddhist monastic complex and has been associated with story of the 'People of the Cave' and the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers' where (in this version of the story) Muslims found refuge from persecuting "infidels" (Buddhists).[36] Pilgrimage to this, and other shrines, was – consciously or not – an act of defiance against an imagined enemy from the past, but also against existing foes from the present (Zünghars, and gradually also Qing, and Han Chinese) and seems to have been sanctioned by Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*).

If the *'ulamā* disputed anything, it was neither the association of the infidels with Buddhism nor the necessity to commemorate the sacrifice of Muslim martyrs. Generally speaking, the *'ulamā* were not even concerned with approving or rebuking the alleged restorative, healing, and or sanctifying properties of the *mazār*s. The dispute was over the validity of pilgrimages to such shrines as substitutions for the more important pilgrimage to Mecca (the well-known *ḥajj*).[37]

Stories about historic *jihad*s against Buddhists were plentiful in East Turkestan, as Western travelers (Aurel Stein was probably the most famous of them) also attested.[38] They still abound in the

34 *Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv XV-XVIII vekov* (Alma-Ata, 1969), 486-87.

35 *Istoriia Kazakhstana v russkikh istochnikakh* (Almaty, 2005), 170-71.

36 Thierry Zarcone, "Pilgrimage to the 'Second Meccas' and 'Ka'bas' of Central Asia," in *Central Asian Pilgrims: Hajj Routes and Pious Visits between Central Asia and the Hijaz*, ed. Alexandre Papas et. al. (Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2012), 256.

37 As argued, for instance, by Mūsā Sayrāmī (ibid., 257). This is an issue that concerned the *'ulamā* in many other parts of Central Asia since the Mongol era.

38 Cf. with Minoru Sawada, "Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in the Taklamakan Desert: Shrines of Imams in Khotan Prefecture," in *Central Asian Pilgrims*, 284.

region today. The numerous shrines in Xinjiang (over 200, in some estimates) and the accompanying oral traditions, collected, for example, by the Uyghur ethnologist Rahilä Dawut,[39] portray a variety of sites of active pilgrimage dedicated to Muslim martyrs who had been killed, according to tradition, at the hands of Buddhists. Even if the majority of the battles commemorated allegedly occurred in the tenth century C.E., it is their surviving and developing reputation that needs to engage us here. For instance, the Töt Imam Mazar (Shrine of the Four Imams) introduces the story of four Muslims who had ventured from Bukhara to aid the Qarakhanid troops in their "holy war" against the Khotan kingdom only to be martyred by the Buddhist infidels.[40] Similarly, the nearby shrine of Imam Ghazzali maintains the story of the Imam, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, who had traveled from Arabia to help the Muslims, only to be martyred by their Buddhist enemies.[41]

Pilgrimage to such shrines has been associated also with the celebration of festivals. The Ordam, Xinjiang's largest shrine festival, is held at the tomb of ʻAlī Arslan Khan. This eleventh-century Qarakhanid martyr died during the long war against the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan and his martyrdom is still mourned and commemorated in the region today.[42] How far back does this tradition go? Dawut and Harris are unclear about the origins of the festivals, and suffice with citing Gunnar Jarring, the Swedish explorer and diplomat, who had described the Ordam back in 1929. However, we find that the Ordam was mentioned by almost every Western traveler to the region in the nineteenth century.

Accounts of what has been arguably the most famous conversion to Islam in the region, that of Satuq Bughra Khan in the eleventh century, have been persistently circulating in East Turkestan since the thirteenth century. The accounts themselves vary, but all include elements of physical battles against the infidels.[43] Ultimately, although identifying commonalities or mutual sources of inspiration between Islam and Buddhism in the region may serve some purpose,[44] it seems that for the Muslims communities in the region, the demarcation of boundaries was much more natural, evident, and significant.

Muslims and Buddhists in court-sponsored sources

Thus far, we have touched on hagiographical and legendary sources, as well as popular practice and imagination. These sources offer little by way of examining Buddhist social and religious institutions.

39 And published in her *Uighur Mazarliri* (Urümchi: Shinjang Khalq Nashriyati, 2001).

40 Sawada, "Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in the Taklamakan Desert," 286.

41 In 1874, Yaʻqūb Beg himself had dedicated a bronze cauldron to the shrine in honor of the late martyr (ibid., 287).

42 Rachel Harris and Rahilä Dawut, "Mazar Festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam and the Chinese State," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11/1 (2002), 102.

43 See my translation of the story from the thirteenth-century Arabic version in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela (Indiana University Press, 2010), 73-76.

44 For such a "syncretic" approach, see for example, Ildikó Bellér-Hann, "Making the oil fragrant: dealings with the supernatural among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang," *Asian Ethnicity* 2/1 (2001), 9-23.

What about the official, court-sponsored sources? Most sources from the khanate of Bukhara, for example, where the majority of texts were produced during the era that concerns us here, do not shed light on these issues. Some exceptions are found in the historiography from the khanate of Khiva.

Abū'l-Ghāzī, the khan of Khiva in the mid-seventeenth century (r. 1644-63), described two separate types of interactions with Qalmaqs. The first, during his sojourn with them in the course of his ten years of exile from Khiva, where he claimed to have learned Qalmaq customs and language. Abū 'l-Ghāzī mentioned this as a way to confirm his knowledge of Mongolian and give credence to his statement that only one such as he was capable of writing down the history of the Turks and the Mongols without distortion.[45]

The second interaction had to do with the military encounters with the Qalmaqs. When Qalmaqs invaded Khivan territory in the year 1652,[46] captured people and loot, and caused much damage, Abū'l-Ghāzī set out in pursuit of the invaders. He gave chase and finally managed to corner the nomads. Realizing that they had no chance, the Qalmaqs laid down their weapons and begged for mercy, claiming that they had arrived in Khiva by mistake. In response, Abū'l-Ghāzī admonished them, saying, "Your fathers and elder bothers had never been the enemies of our state." The Qalmaqs retorted that they did not know they were entering the lands of Abū'l-Ghāzī Khan and apologized for their error. The khan forgave them and sent them back to their lands loaded with gifts.[47] In these passages, the Qalmaqs are not spoken of as infidels or idolaters. The only thing that betrays some kind of a "clash of religions" is Abū'l-Ghāzī's report of the battle itself. Accordingly, when his men charged forward to attack the invaders, they cried out "Allāh" "Allāh" and this instilled fear in the hearts of the Qalmaqs.

Qalmaq (Kalmyk) relations with the Khanate of Khiva – the closest Central Asian sedentary state to them – were multi-faceted. For instance, the Qalmaqs assisted Yādigār Muḥammad Khan to conquer Khiva and restore his position as head of the khanate. As Yādigār himself wrote to Czar Peter the Great in 1712, when the exiled prince was returning to Khiva, having performed the *ḥajj* and having concluded his stay at the Ottoman court, he and his close retinue approached the lands of the Qalmaqs: "When we came to the country (*yurt*) of Ayuka Khan, he was properly obliging and sent us off, having placed at our disposal fourteen princes (*töre*) under a prince named Dorji, with numerous troops." This enabled Yādigār to retake the throne, and as he states: "It was in our ancestral country – the Dome of Islam, Khorezm… that the crown and throne of the caliphate were glorified by our person…"[48]

Qalmaqs were not only enemies or partners on the battlefield, but also occupied many other positions in the sedentary and nomadic Muslim realms. For instance, Qalmaqs were kept as slaves

45 Aboul-Ghâzi Bèhâdour Khân, *Histoire des Mongols et des Tatares par Aboul-Ghâzi Bèhâdour Khân*, ed. and transl. by Baron Desmaisons (St. Petersburg, 1871–74).

46 On the date see, Shir Muhammad Mirab Munis and Muhammad Riza Mirab Agahi, *Firdaws al-iqbāl: History of Khorezm*, translated from Chaghatay & annotated by Yuri Bregel (Brill, 1999), 563 n. 263.

47 Aboul-Ghâzi, *Histoire des Mongols*, Chaghatay text, 327.

48 Yuri Bregel, ed. and tr., *Documents from the Khanate of Khiva* (*17th-19th centuries*) (*Papers of Inner Asia* 40, 2007), 47-49.

in the khanate of Khiva, particularly in the capacity of slave bodyguards, and were referred to as *altun-jilaw* (lit. "[of] golden bridle")."[49]

Conversely, in the mid-eighteenth century, Qazaqs made use of Qalmaq services to correspond with the Qing authorities. Indeed, the first letters from Qazaq sultans to the Qing, dated as early as 1757, were written in "Oyirad," presumably by Qalmaq captives in Qazaq service. Much of the Qazaq communication with the Qing down to the early nineteenth century continued in Oyirad.[50]

The *History* of Churās: a neglected chronicle

Little is known of the author, Maḥmūd, a member of the Churās who had replaced the Barlas and the Dughlat as the leading tribe in the military elite of seventeenth-century Moghulistan. Maḥmūd, however, did not embark on a career in the military but remained in the administration, having acquired knowledge of Persian, Arabic, and the Islamic sciences (his native tongue was apparently Turkic).[51] The chronicle was written in the mid-1670s, as the power of the Khojas of East Turkestan was on the rise and Chaghatayid rule was on the decline, and sheds light on political circumstances in the region throughout the seventeenth century.[52] The work's patron, a Muslim Turkestani *amīr* by the name of Erke Bek, was a descendant of a long line of local governors of Sayram, going back to the late fifteenth century.[53]

In a biographical passage about his patron, Churās writes that when Erke Bek was twenty years old, he left Sayram and set out toward the Horde of the Khungtaiji[54] and Sengge.[55] At the time, Sengge gathered his followers and kinsmen and moved to wage war on the Chakhar.[56] After a six-months long journey, they reached their destination and fell upon the Chakhar. The description of the battle portrays Erke Bek's incredible bravery, where his "courage put to flight the Chakhar troops and reduced them to become one with the black dust." Churās explains that Sengge elevated Erke "from obscurity to prominence" and then sent him off – a Muslim Turk in command of (Buddhist) Qalmaq warriors – to raid Russian settlements, presumably in southern Siberia.

49 Other foreigners served in that capacity, as *altun-jilaw*, including Russians and Persians. In other words, the Khivan khans did not make a religious distinction other than a generic non-(Sunni) Muslims. See also, *Firdaws al-iqbāl*, 584, n. 381. Another way to relate to Qalmaq slaves was to refer to them as "Chinese-born" – they made for excellent gifts (*Firdaws al-iqbāl*, 180). Qalmaq slaves in other parts of the region are noted in additional sources.

50 With the Russians such communication was carried out in Turkic. See, *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Jin Noda and Takahiro Onuma (Tokyo: Research Center for Islamic Area Studies, 2010), 3.

51 The chronicle was written a rather simplified Persian dialect.

52 Shah Mahmud Churās, *Khronika*, ed. and trans. O. F. Akimushkin (Moscow, 1976).

53 Entries from the *History* of Churās in my translation from the Persian appeared in *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, 237-39.

54 A reference to the Zünghar Baatur Khungtaiji (1634-1653).

55 Baatur Khungtaiji's son.

56 Some elements of independent Mongols, probably in Qinghai.

When they reached Russian territory, Churās relates, Erke Bek left the camp at night with only twenty men, and raided his enemies with great success.

> And Erke Bek, trusting in the protection of the Glorious Lord, brought plunder upon the heads of his enemies. Having gained victory, he continued to raid and pillage his enemies. Several had surrendered before him, but the remaining were killed. Erke Bek's companions went to the Russian castle, while he set out in pursuit, on foot, of those who had fled, and having gained on them, made them one with the black dust. He then followed the Qa\lmaqs to the fortress, and saw that they were standing at a distance. He reprimanded and scolded them [for standing idle] and, assaulting the castle, reduced its inhabitants to naught.

Interestingly, in the service of the Qalmaqs, the actions (raiding and pillaging) usually attributed to them in the Muslim sources, were carried out by one of their Muslim protégés. Regardless, Sengge was so impressed with Erke Bek's deeds and with the amount of spoils from the Russian campaign that he decided to send a share of the spoils to China, with Erke as an envoy.[57] The biographical passage ends as follows,

> Sengge elevated Erke Bek to the highest rank. And God most High enthused light in Erke Bek's heart, so that at all times he strove to build the lands of Islam. In the year 1080 [1669-70], as he was building in the lands of Islam, the honorable *amīr* attained his greatest reputation. With praiseworthy and laborious good work, he repaired the way stations and the reservoirs and bridges and mosques that had fallen into ruin. And in this manner he renovated the kingdom. May the vestiges of that *amīr*'s good deeds remain forever and ever, if it pleases God."

Under infidel rule, a Muslim *amīr* was able to invest the most in the rebuilding of Muslim lands and in contributing to the success and flourishing of Islam. Throughout his *History*, Churās cites numerous episodes that contribute to our understanding of the complex relationship between the Muslims and their Qalmaq neighbors. Diverse examples attest to gory fighting and constant battles between Muslim troops and Qalmaq warriors, described as "infidels" (for example, "thanks to Ibrāhīm Sulṭān's courage, possession of Khotan was kept from the infidels");[58] but also of Muslim alliances with Qalmaqs against other Muslims (when, for instance, Tseren and Eldan-taishi of the Qalmaqs ally with Ibrāhīm Khan against 'Abdallāh Khan); and when one khan and his troops were overpowered by the Kirghiz, the chronicler concluded, "the army of Islam has been defeated."

One episode stands out, but unfortunately the text is unreadable. According to the story, that revolves around the disputed control over the fortress of Djalish,[59] Ibrāhīm Khan, Ismā'īl Khan and Eldan-taishi left the fortress in the direction of the outskirts of the province. 'Abdallāh Khan continued towards the fortress, when a man by the name of Shāh Bāqī Bek informed him that,

57 Churās concludes that, "Erke Bek, placing himself at the service of the Judge of the needs of mankind [i.e., God], performed the embassy, and returned safely and in full honor." Many other commercial enterprises of 'Bukharan' merchants under Qalmaq patronage are described in Audrey Burton, *The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550-1702* (St. Martin's Press, 1997).

58 Churās, *Ta'rīkh*, 69.

59 Djalish is Chalish or Qarashahr.

"a *lama* and several ___[60] were climbing up from the valley to the highlands of Djalish."[61] The khan dispatched Shāh Bāqī Bek with another person to meet them and in the commotion that followed, it turned out that Shāh Bāqī Bek and the other unnamed person had grabbed the lama's possessions and hid them. When subsequently the khan found the lama's possessions, he ordered to grab hold of them and keep them.[62] The author goes on to describe how the khan's troops became disorganized and unruly, with the implication that robbing the lama of his possessions was key to the misfortune. This seems to be the only incident of this sort reported by Churās. The usage of the word *lama* is also very rare in this text. The term was used also in Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dūghlāt's *Ta'rīkh-i rashīdī* in his discussion of Tibet. Since the *Ta'rīkh* of Maḥmūd Churās was originally intended to be a continuation of Mīrzā Ḥaydar's work (and the first half of the text is a reproduction of the *Ta'rīkh-i rashīdī*), Churās may have borrowed the term from his precursor, and therefore may have referred specifically to a Tibetan lama. However, this is the only occasion that lama appears in the *History*.

Conclusion

Central Asian Muslim textual sources from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries displayed a general lack of interest in and disengagement with the characteristics of religious institutions, doctrines, and practices of adjoining cultures. The diversity of source materials at our disposal does not contribute to a better understanding of such matters, and attempts to grasp the religions of non-Muslims based on generalized, disapproving stereotypes that the Muslim sources offer are usually destined to fall short. As shown in this essay, the postulation that "Buddhism imported from Tibet" somehow stood between Muslim missionary efforts and their proposed targets needs to be discarded. Similarly, the assumption that champions of Tibetan Buddhism (Zünghars, for example) somehow stopped, delayed, or suppressed the flourishing of Islam in Central Asia, is also erroneous. Just like most other periods in Islamic history, foreign ("infidel") rule usually contributed significantly (either in the course of said rule or subsequently) to the spread and growth of Islamic laws, customs, and practices in the governed areas and beyond. Relations among Muslims and Buddhists – both terminologies used here in their broadest sense – in Central Asia were complex and multidimensional, and ranged across shared and disputed political, economic, and cultural realms. Accounts of bloodshed, hostility and distrust on the one hand, and of alliances, collaboration and goodwill on the other, are abundant in the Muslim sources from the era. And yet, beyond commenting on utilitarian traits couched in a religious garb, the Muslim sources are tongue-tied. Given this reticence, this paper underscores the limitations of the Muslim hagiographical sources in offering helpful or reliable 'ethnographic' data. Above all, perhaps, this paper questions the usefulness of the analysis of this period in the region's history along supposed Muslim–Buddhist intersections.

60 The text here is entirely illegible.

61 Djalish is at an altitude of 3,000 ft.

62 Churās, *Ta'rīkh*, 80.