Muslim Turkistan

Kazak Religion and Collective Memory

BRUCE G. PRIVRATSKY

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TURKISTAN

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Kazak Religion and Collective Memory

Bruce G. Privratsky

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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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PREFACE

Though this book is a traditional, empirical ethnography, the research and writing were for me an envigorating 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 Kazakstan. 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 Qasımjanov (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

ADLR: *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions.* Edited by Keith Crim. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1981.

CEI: *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam.* By Cyril Glassé. Second edition. London: Stacy International, 1991 [1989].

EI: *The Encyclopedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples.* Edited by M.Th. Houtsma, A.J. Wensinck, et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1913–36.

EINE: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition.* Edited by E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978.

KED: *Kazakh (Qazaq)-English Dictionary.* By Karl A. Krippes. Kensington, Md.: Dunwoody Press, 1994.

KEDS: *Kazakh-English Dictionary.* By Boris M. Shnitnikov. Ural and Altaic Series, Vol. 28. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

KTLS: *Karşılaştırmalı Türk Lehçeleri Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of comparative Turkish dialects]. By Ahmed B. Ercilasun et al. Ankara: Kültür Baskanlığı, 1991.

NSAK: *Narody Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* [Peoples of Central Asia and Kazakstan]. Moscow, 1962–63.

OEMIW: *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World.* Edited by John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

ORED: *Oxford Russian-English/English-Russian Dictionary.* 2 volumes. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, 1984.

PDI: *A Popular Dictionary of Islam.* By Ian Richard Netton. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992.

QDMES: *Qazaq Dästürli Mädeniyetining Entsiklopediyalıq Sözdigi* [Encyclopedic dictionary of Kazak traditional culture]. Edited by Ayubay Quralulı. Almaty: Sözdik-Slovar', 1997.

QTAPS: *Qazaq Tilindegi Arab-Parsı Sözderi: Tüsindirme Sözdik* [Arabic and Persian words in the Kazak language: Explanatory dictionary]. By E.B. Bekmuḥametov. Almaty: Qazaqstan Baspası, 1977.

QTTS: *Qazaq Tilining Tüsindirme Sözdigi* [Explanatory dictionary of the Kazak language]. 10 volumes. Edited by A.I. Isqaqov. Almaty: Qazaq SSR Ġılım Baspası, 1974–86.

QTTSK: *Qazaq Tilining Tüsindirme Sözdigi* [Explanatory dictionary of the Kazak language]. 2 volumes. Edited by Ī.K. Kengesbaev et al. Almaty: Qazaq SSR Ġılım Akademiyasınıng Baspası, 1959–61.

SPIKK: *Svod Pamyatnikov Istorii i Kul'tury Kazakhstana: Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya Oblast'* [Commemorative collection of the history and culture of Kazakstan: South Kazakstan Oblast]. Almaty: Glavnaya Redaktsiya Qazaq Entsiklopediyası, 1994.

TED: *A Turkish-English Dictionary*. By H.C. Hony and Fahir İz. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.

UED: *Uzbek-English Dictionary*. By Karl A. Krippes. Preliminary edition. Kensington, Md.: Dunwood Press, 1993.

NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

AS: *Ayġaq* [Shout]. Shymkent. 1996–.
AT: *Ana Tili* [Mother Tongue]. Almaty, 1990–.
ÄT: *Äzireti Türkistan* [Eminent Turkistan]. Turkistan. 1997–.
Bilig. Ankara, Ahmet Yesevi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitütü. 1996–.
Bitiğ: Türk Dünyası Dergisi [Journal of the Turkish World]. Haarlem. 1991–96.
EQ: *Egemen[di] Qazaqstan* [Autonomous Kazakstan]. Almaty, 1919–.
IA: *Īslam Älemi: Dinī-Mädenī Köpshilik Zhurnal* [World of Islam: Popular Journal of Religion and Culture]. Almaty, 1996–.
Īman [Faith]. Almaty, 1992–.
JA: *Jas Alash* [Young Alash Horde]. Almaty, 1921–.
JJ: *Jibek Jolı* [Silk Road]. Shymkent, 1989–.
JQ: *Jas Qazaq* [Young Kazak]. Almaty, 1995–.
KP: *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Almaty, 1920-.
QA: *Qazaq Ädebiyeti* [Kazak Literature]. Almaty, 1934–.
QZ: *Qazaq*. Orenburg, 1913–1918. Now republished as a book: Ü. Sūbḥanberdina, S. Däwitov, Q. Saqov (eds.). *Qazaq*. Almaty: Qazaq Entsiklopediyası Bas Redaktsiyası, 1998.
QE: *Qazaq Eli* [Kazak Nation]. Almaty, 1995–.
QÜ: *Qazaq Üni* [Kazak Voice]. Almaty, 1915–.
SK: *Shımkent Kelbeti* [Face of Shymkent]. Shymkent, 1990–.
SQ: *Sotzialistik Qazaqstan* [Socialist Kazakstan]. Almaty. 1919–.
TA: *Türkistan*. Almaty, 1994–.
TT: *Türkistan* (formerly: *Qızıl Türkistan* [Red Turkistan]). Turkistan, 1930–.
Türk Yurdu [Turkish Horde]. Ankara: Türk Ocağı Merkez Heyeti.
Yesevî [Yasawi]. İstanbul, 1994–.
ZG: *Zang Gazeti* [Law Gazette]. Almaty, 1994–.
ZK: *Zaman Kazakistan* [Times of Kazakstan, in Turkish and Kazak]. Almaty, 1992–.

INTERVIEWERS

BP: Bruce Privratsky
GS: Gaūhar Sızdıqova

TRANSLITERATION

Kazak Alphabet	Transliteration	Pronunciation Notes	Russian-Latin and Other Variants
А	a	(as in *father*)	
Ә	ä	(as in *cat*)	
Б	b		
В	v		
Г	g		
Ғ	ġ	(as in the guttural French r: *raison*)	gh
Д	d		
Е	e	(slightly palatalized: ye)	ye
Ё	yo		
Ж	j	(as in French *jeune*, English *pleasure*)	zh
З	z		
И	ıy	(schwa + ee as a back diphthong)	i
	iy	(short i + ee as a front diphthong)	
	ī	(as in feet, in words from Arabic)	
Й	y	(semivowel, as in *yes*)	i, j
К	k	(velar or soft k)	
Қ	q	(back-velar or hard k)	
Л	l		
М	m		
Н	n		
Ң	ng		
О	o	(with a glide in initial position: wo)	
Ө	ö	(as in German *schön* but with a glide: wö)	
П	p		
Р	r		
С	s		
Т	t		
У	ū	(as in *moon*, Turkish *su*)	u
	w	(in initial position, and in foreign words)	
Ұ	u	(very low, rounded back vowel)	û
Ү	ü	(as in German *für* but closer to ö)	
Ф	f		

Х	ḥ	(as in German *ich*)	kh, ch, h
Һ	h		
Ц	ts		
Ч	ch		tsch
Ш	sh		
Щ	sch		shch
Ъ		(Russian hard sign)	‘
Ы	ı	(schwa, as in Turkish *hanım*)	y
І	i	(shorter than English short i)	
Ь		(Russian soft sign)	’
Э	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 Shımkent or Chimkent, and Almaty instead of Almatı or Alma-Ata.

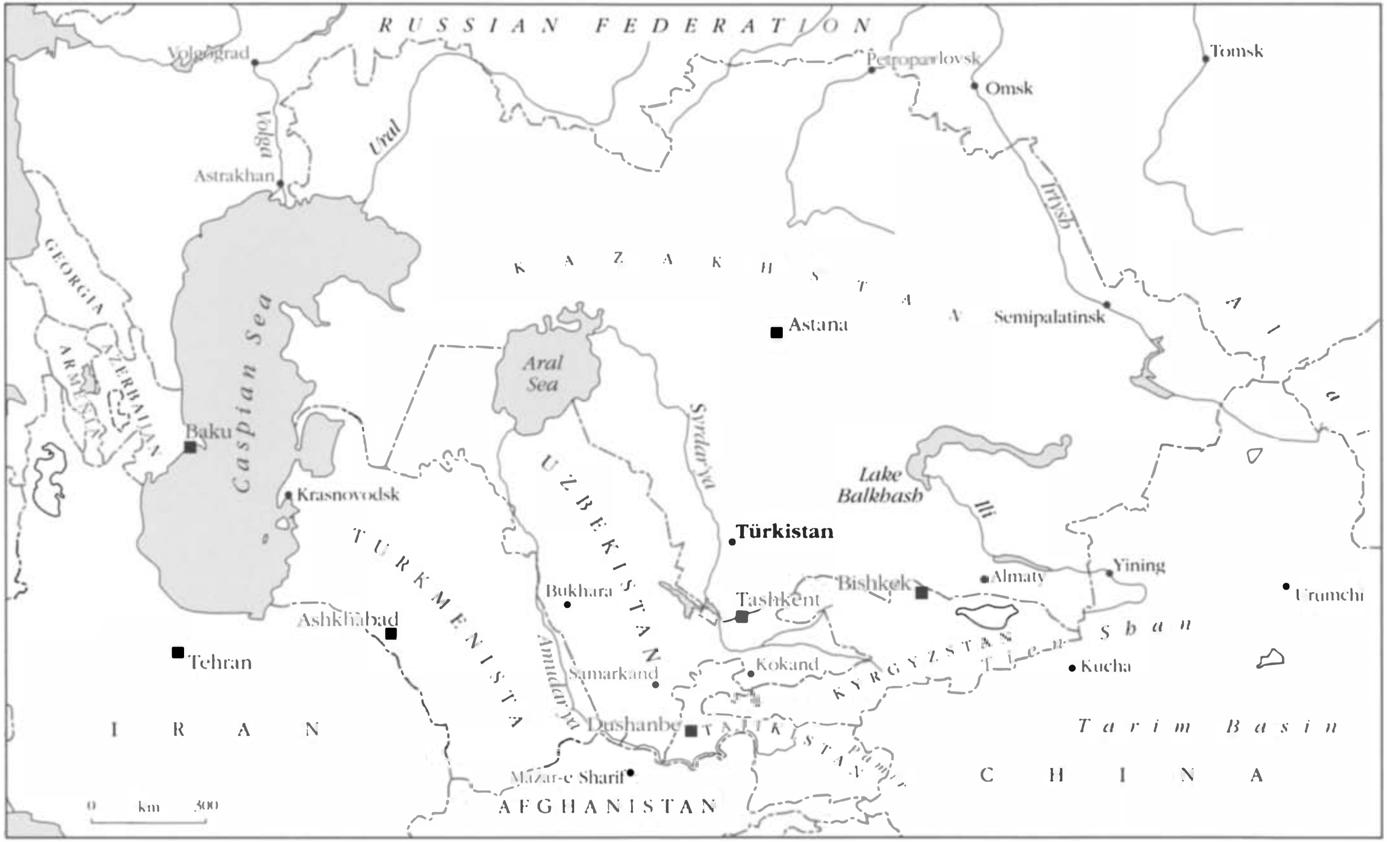
Despite a proposal for a common Turkic alphabet that leans heavily toward Turkish (Kaydarov 1997; Landau 1995:212; *KTLS*), Kazak has not yet been standardized with a Latin alphabet designed *both* for Kazak distinctives *and* for readability by speakers of Turkic and European languages alike. The transliteration 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 *ı*, which leaves the reader wondering where the vowels are in *tynyshtyk* and *ghylym*. Clearly *tınıshtıq* and *ġılım*, 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. “Ḳazaḳ” 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, 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 kratkoe*); so *shay* is pronounced like English shy, and *peyil* like pail. Depending on position and function, *ıy, iy* and *ī* replace the Cyrillic *i*, hence *tıyım*, *biy*, and *dinī*; likewise *w* and *ū* for Cyrillic *u*, as in *aūrū* and *täwip*. Blended consonants (*ch, ng, sh*) follow English and the new Uzbek, but dotted *ġ* and *ḥ* 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.


RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Volgograd
Petropavlovsk
Omsk
Tomsk
Volga
Ural
Astrakhan
Irtysh
GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
KAZAKHSTAN
Semipalatinsk
Astana
Altai
Aral Sea
Caspian Sea
Baku
Krasnovodsk
Syrdar'ya
Lake Balkhash
Ili
Türkistan
TURKMENISTAN
UZBEKISTAN
Bukhara
Tashkent
Bishkek
Almaty
Yining
Urumchi
Ashkhabad
Tehran
Amudar'ya
Samarkand
Kokand
KYRGYZSTAN
Tien Shan
Kucha
IRAN
Dushanbe
TAJIKISTAN
Pamir
Tarim Basin
Mazar-e Sharif
AFGHANISTAN
CHINA
0 km 500

Map 1: Central Asia.

Chapter One

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" (*kiyeli oshaq*) and the "axis" (*kindik*; Ar. *quṭb*) 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. *waqıp)* 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 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 *baqsı* (shaman) was a visible, but more and more marginal, figure in Kazak communities, his rhetoric Islamized, and his role as healer eclipsed by *täwips* (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 Qojas 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 Qojas had performed – Quran recitals, making amulets, healing in the Muslim way by breathing on the sick – were now taken up by *dümshe 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 Asia[2] 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

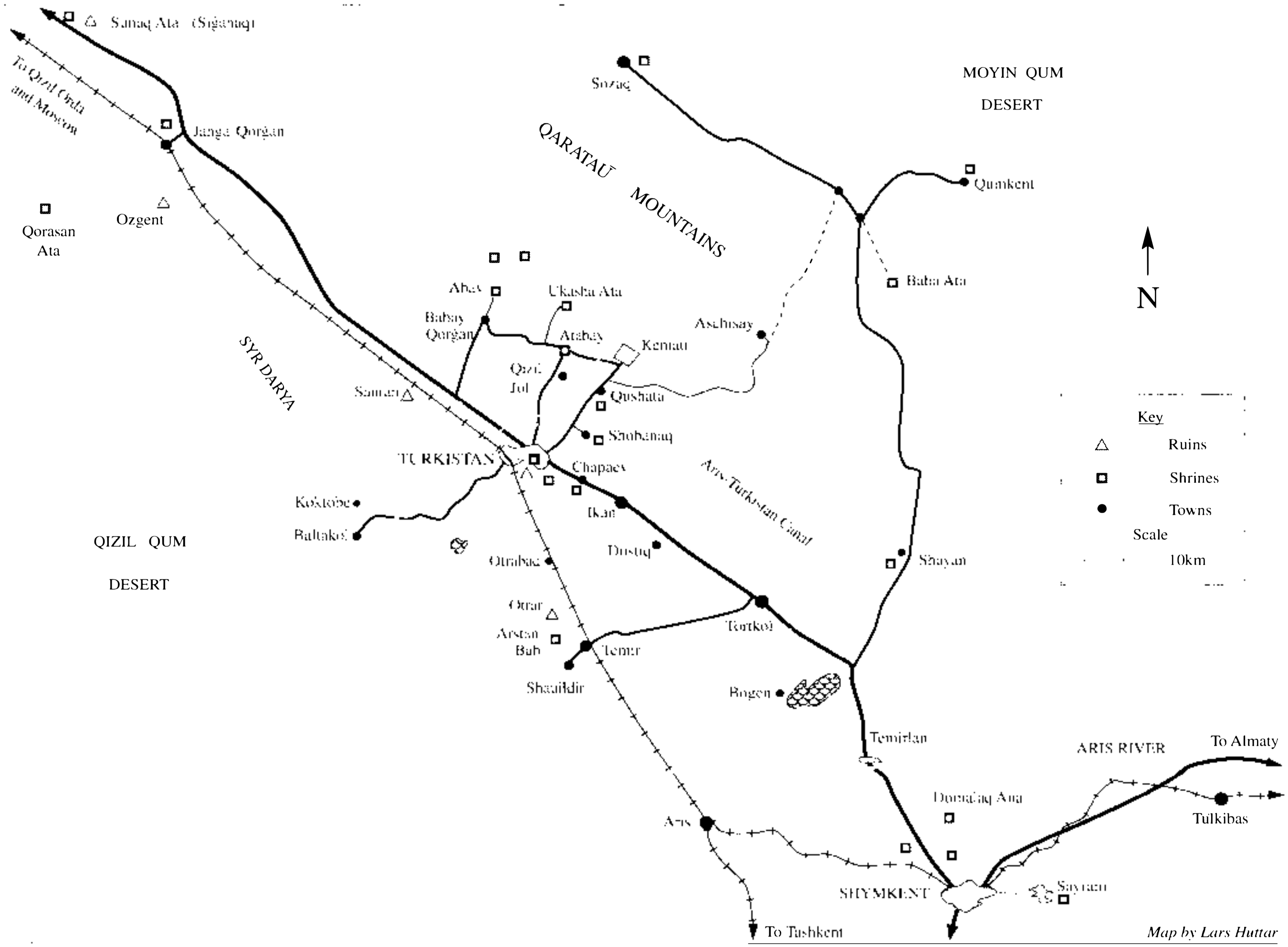
Kazak elders (including women) on behalf of their children, sheltered in the family life of a now wholly sedentarized Kazak society. The Qojas remain as a religious honor group with limited spiritual authority and often only a shadowy awareness of their own Sufi heritage.

Geography, Demography, and Political Culture

At least until the 16th century the town of Turkistan was called Yasi,[3] whence *Yasawī*, the Arabic *nisba*[4] for its Muslim saint, Ahmet Yasawi. He is formally called *Qul Qoja Aḥmet Yasawī*: Ahmet, the servant (*Qul*) of God, a descendent of the Arabs (*Qoja*), a man of Yası (*Yasawī*). Another popular title, Eminent Sultan (*Äziret 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 (Qarataū) 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 University[5] (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 Kazakstan, with its large Russian population, Soviet architecture, alpine scenery, and cosmopolitan ambience. A fertile crescent north of the Syr Darya and the Alataū (Tien Shan) Mountains, stretching 600 kilometers through a string of oasis towns from Qızıl Orda (Kzyl Orda) to Taraz (Dzhambul), is the historic heartland of Muslim culture at the northern edge of Central Asia (*cf.* T. Qongıratbaev 1996). Its spiritual center is the blue dome over the tomb of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi.

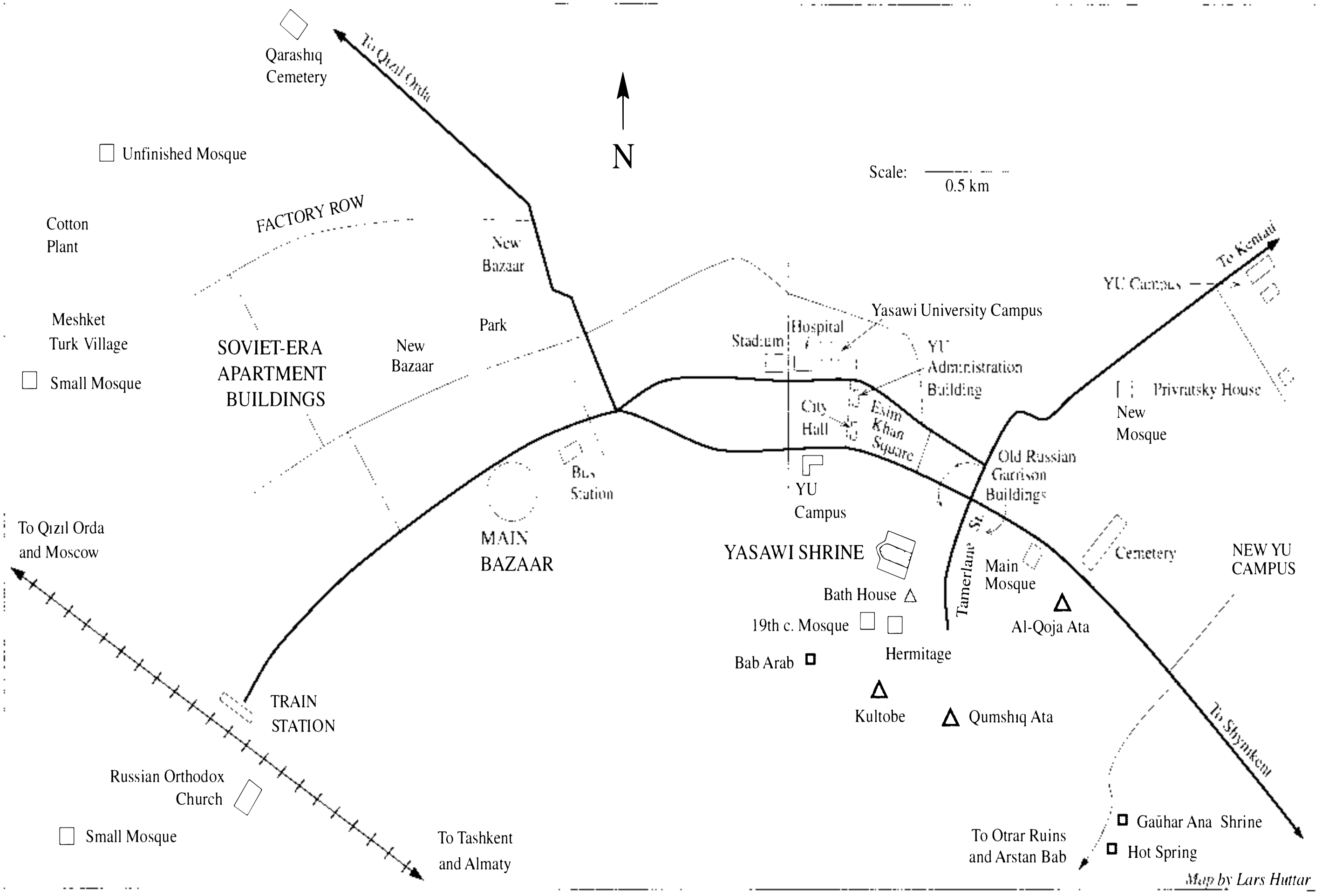
Overshadowed in the early medieval period by the important Syr Darya city of Otrar,[6] Yası grew into a commercial town where nomads and townsmen met at the bazaar around the Yasawi Shrine, built in the late 14th century by Emir Timür (Tamerlane). A century later the Kazak khans occupied it, and Esim (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



Sanaq Ata (Sïganaq)
To Qizil Orda and Moscow
Janga Qorgan
Qorasan Ata
Ozgent
Sozaq
MOYIN QUM DESERT
QARATAU MOUNTAINS
Qumkent
Baba Ata
N
Ahas
Ukasha Ata
Babay Qorgan
Atabay
Kentau
Aschisay
Qizil Jol
Qushata
Shobanaq
SYR DARYA
Sauran
TURKISTAN
Chapaev
Koktobe
Baltakol
Ikan
Arys-Turkistan Canal
QIZIL QUM DESERT
Otrabat
Dostiq
Shayan
Otrar
Arstan Bab
Temir
Tortkol
Shauildir
Bogen
Temirlan
Key
Ruins
Shrines
Towns
Scale
10km
ARIS RIVER
To Almaty
Domalaq Ana
Tulkibas
Aris
SHYMKENT
Sayram
To Tashkent

Map by Lars Huttar

Map 2: Southern Kazakstan


Qarashıq Cemetery
To Qızıl Orda
N
Unfinished Mosque
Scale:
0.5 km
Cotton Plant
FACTORY ROW
New Bazaar
To Kentau
YU Campus
Meshket Turk Village
Small Mosque
SOVIET-ERA APARTMENT BUILDINGS
New Bazaar
Park
Stadium
Hospital
Yasawi University Campus
YU Administration Building
Privratsky House
New Mosque
City Hall
Esim Khan Square
Old Russian Garrison Buildings
Bus Station
YU Campus
To Qızıl Orda and Moscow
MAIN BAZAAR
YASAWI SHRINE
Tamerlane St.
Main Mosque
Cemetery
NEW YU CAMPUS
Bath House
19th c. Mosque
Hermitage
Al-Qoja Ata
Bab Arab
Kultobe
Qumshıq Ata
TRAIN STATION
To Shymkent
Russian Orthodox Church
Small Mosque
To Tashkent and Almaty
To Otrar Ruins and Arstan Bab
Gaûhar Ana Shrine
Hot Spring
Map by Lars Huttar

Map 3: Türkistan

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 Kazakstan 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 Arıs-Turkistan Canal. The cotton processing plant is the town's chief industrial enterprise.

Nomadic lifeways and the pastoral trek between *jaylaū* and *qıstaū* (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 *kiyiz üy* (lit. felt house; yurt). One of our elderly Kazak informants remembered living as a child in a yurt in her father's village (*qıstaū*) 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 Kazakstan 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 Kazakstan.

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 Kazakstan, its Islamic heritage now claimed by the nation as a prized possession. The Yasawi Shrine is pictured on the banknotes of the Republic of Kazakstan, 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*, June 11, 1996).[7] 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 Äūliye Ata (Father Saint) became Dzhambul (Jambıl, 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.

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 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 *nanım* (traditional beliefs) and *ırım* (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"[8] 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 *musılmanshılıq* ("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. *turmıstıq*, 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 ḩalıq*), an ancient shamanism and their Muslim values (Valikhanov 1985 [1862–64]:197; Mıngjan 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") 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 *baqsı* performances (Divaev 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 (*batır*) as a worldly, military figure, and the Muslim saint (*äūliye*) in counterpoint as an ascetic who lives the pure life. Drinking *ayran* (watered yoghurt) instead of the more potent *qımız* (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 Dobrosmyslov 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.

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" (*sueberiya*), 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