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« Holy Virgin Lands ? Demographic Engineering, Heritage Management and the Sanctification of Territories in ex-Soviet Central Asia, since WWII »

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Summary

This chapter analyzes different types of embedment of religious practices and identities, in the former Soviet South, in contexts impacted since after WWII by massive population resettlements of the late 1940s and by the creation, within collective farms, of territorialized population units. It focuses on sanctifications of these territories, through Muslim hagiographic experiences developed locally during the 1990s–2000s.

By hagiographic experiences, we mean combinations of instruments—textual, monumental, ritual—of the worship of men of God active, often, in Soviet times in their recognized attributes as modern community founders. Another character of this modern Islamic sainthood is the Muslim saints' alleged rebellion, if not against the Soviet order itself, at least against Russian *kul'tura* as it had been imposed on Central Asian societies.

As in the Caucasus, confessional and national values have often merged, in a politicized religious field characterized by the confrontation, from the early 1990s to the early 2010s, of sacred lineages of tomb keepers with newcomers educated abroad—the former playing the custodians of local tradition, through a patrimonial relation to Islam largely borrowed, in fact, from specifically Soviet reappraisals of cultural 'heritages'.

The scene took place on the main avenue of Dushanbe, the former Lenin Perspective, on a late afternoon in July 2006. I was busy shopping in the mini-markets that had flourished, for a decade since the end of the civil war of 1992–97, around the square in front of the National Opera House, a lofty Stalin-time building, when a small car stopped suddenly a few meters away, in a squeal of tires. In front of the speechless onlookers, the driver jumped out, a gray bearded man, all smiles, who shouted: “Stéphane, I've got something for you!” I recognized the grandson of an herbalist and healer from the Qarategin Highlands, a local figure of the Naqshbandi Sufi Path. Eight months earlier, he had honored me in the family home of the upper valley, where had attracted me the fame of his paternal grandfather. What had he kindly got for me? Paper prints of color photographs of his ancestors' seals and a brand new *silsila* (chain of initiation) of his forebear and his heirs, with some still penciled cells—all documents on the existence of which I had asked him questions on our first meeting. Our street interview and document photo session, that July day, would not have impressed me so much, would it not have cast a crude light on the complex, essentially interactive relationships in which, as a regionalist historian and occasional hagiographer, I found myself involved for a few years, in Tajikistan. This was before the authoritarian turn of the 2010s made more difficult the kind of investigation that I was then carrying out on the relationships to the past developed locally by former Soviet societies, and on the local and regional protagonists of history reconstruction and of the promotion of emerging remembering realms.

Since 1989, the quick escheat of the East/West polarity had undermined many of the landmarks that used, since after WWII, to situate the collective identities in all industrialized

societies. Both East and West of the fallen Iron Curtain, numbers of new formulations had been proposed. New cleavages had made their appearance, too, opposing order to movement, endogenous traditions to emerging pluralism. Against this background, made still more dynamic by the digital revolutions of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, religion, a conservatory par excellence of models of identity, had been (and largely remained) frequently mobilized, while the politicians showed often unable to propose languages for on-going reconstructions.¹ If the opening of the Iron Curtain often appeared to chroniclers as a rupture, equivalent to what the turning point of 1917 had been for the short twentieth century, very few observers highlighted the passion for historical continuity of the baby-boomer generation of memory builders active, in the former East Bloc especially, during slightly more than two decades between the late 1980s and the early 2010s. Even fewer questioned the sense of these continuities themselves, in a period when the diverse social forces hostile to cultural and/or political diversification were trying hard to stabilize the points of reference available, making religion a field of expression of permanence on territorially redefined spaces, and more and more within ethnically defined groups.

Against the backdrop of what local populations perceived as general deficiencies of politics and of politicians (despite the popularity, in the East Bloc as well as in the West, of many an alternative political movement and organization in the late 1980s and early 1990s), religion came to be mobilized as a major cluster of symbolic resource. This mobilization reflected no real “revival” of religion against backgrounds of “ideological vacuum” (contrary to what was highlighted by part of the social-science literature produced in the same years, on the former USSR especially). Instead, it exposed ways for believers of resorting to the “legitimizing authority of tradition.”² Eminently malleable, this symbolic raw material could easily be included into much larger constructions, those in particular involved in the fabrication of communal identities, in general contexts characterized by the weakening of the historical religions’ organizing capacity.³ These overhauls of the global relationship to religion—confessional affiliation going together with the identification to specific heritages—came to appear as a major feature of the period of deep transformations of 1989 and thereafter. Still uncertain, for the historical sociology of religion, remains how the short twentieth century had paved the way to these changes, most notably through the final transformation, sketched in nineteenth-century Europe, of hagiographical discourse into a genre distinct from historiography, and through this genre’s association with the celebration of specific terroirs, the consequence of a demographic engineering particular to the Soviet Union and its successor states.

Hagiography: A Modern Heritage?

In the late-twentieth-century Muslim-majority societies of Northern Eurasia (a rather wide continental continuum, admittedly, from the Balkans to Northwestern China, exposed for various lengths of time to equally varied Communist rules), one finds, at the forefront of this double phenomenon, groups of interconnected lineages of holy tomb keepers, in their remit as promoters of hagiographical processes—ritual, monumental, and/or literary at the same time.⁴ (Although, for the sake of the specific role of these protagonists as memory builders,

¹ Cf. Patrick Michel, *Politique et Religion: la Grande Mutation*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1994, pp. 14–16.

² Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La Religion pour Mémoire*, Paris: Cerf, 2008 (1st ed. 1993): 121.

³ *Ibid.* 228–37.

⁴ I borrow this term from Farooq Hamid, “The Hagiographic Process: The Case of Medieval Chishti Sufi Farīd ad-Dīn Mas’ūd Ganj-i Shakar (d. 664/1265)”, *The Muslim World* 90/3–4 (2000): 421 – 38.

and their interaction in this process with ranges of actors, the term of hagiographic experiences should be preferred.) More often than not, in a wide area and in a long historical period characterized by their extreme diversity, these experiences were borne by protagonists of the baby-boomer generation endowed, most of the time, with modern educational backgrounds and familiarity with communist ideology. As a result, modern hagiology has been nourished, in late-twentieth-century Central Asia especially, by borrowings from modern scholarship and exchanges with locally produced histories of regions and places deeply transformed (when they were not created), from the mid-1940s onwards, by the massive demographic engineering and contrasted regionalized economic development that remained so characteristic of Soviet management.⁵ As a result, these rapidly developing hagiographies have been evidencing the specific sainthood of holy men (more rarely women) of *local* dimension active during precisely the short twentieth century.

Why men, with whom exclusively I will be dealing here? Because, contrary to what has been observed in other religious systems present in the USSR,⁶ in Muslim Central Asia these processes concern much less often women whose role, however decisive in the transmission of religious learning, sharply contrasts with their quasi absence in the worship of saints.⁷ A possible reason for this gendered distribution of imagination is that the regional cult of female characters such as “Lady Tuesday” (Bibi Seshanbe), the archetypal female mediator in Tajik and Uzbek societies, refers to a mythical universe,⁸ while on the side of male heroes and saints predominate historical and memorial dimensions through the celebration,

⁵ Aspects introduced in my article “Le Gnosticisme pour Mémoire: Déplacements de Population, Histoire Locale et Processus Hagiographiques en Asie Centrale Postsoviétique”, in A. Caiozzo & J.-C. Duchêne, ed., *De la Mongolie à l'Asie Centrale: Identités Nomades et Organisation de l'Espace*, Valenciennes: Presses de l'Université de Valenciennes, 2020, pp. 261–93; and in my communication “Holy Virgin Land: Population Resettlements, Sacred Territories and Muslim Shrine Culture in the Former Soviet South”, at the Ninth European Congress of Iranian Studies, Berlin: Free University, 10 September 2019.

⁶ On Orthodox Christianity, see in part. Elina Kahla, *Life as Exploit: Representations of Twentieth-Century Sainly Women in Russia*, Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2007.

⁷ On the role of traditional-background female Muslim scholars in the transmission of ethical and religious learning in Soviet Central Asia, see the seminal historical study by Annette Krämer, *Geistliche Autorität und islamische Gesellschaft im Wandel: Studien über Frauenälteste (Otin und Xalfa) im unabhängigen Usbekistan*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2002, esp. 263–81 (on the book-based knowledge conveyed by these teachers locally designated by the Tajik and Uzbek terms of *atun/otin*, of Hindutani origin, and *khalfa*, of Arabic provenance). To be completed, on the Russian imperial period, by Agnès Nilufer Kefeli, “Une Note sur le Rôle des Femmes Tatares Converties au Christianisme dans la Réislamisation de la Moyenne-Volga, au milieu du XIX^e Siècle”, in S. A. Dudoignon, D. Is'haqov, R. Möhämätchine, eds., *L'Islam de Russie: Conscience Communautaire et Autonomie Politique chez les Tatares de la Volga et de l'Oural, depuis le XVIII^e Siècle*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1997: 65–74; ead., *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

⁸ For ethnographical and anthropological approaches to the figure of “Lady Tuesday”, see Ravšan Rahmonī, “Traces of Ancient Iranian Culture in Boysun District, Uzbekistan”, *Asian Folklore Studies* 60/2 (2001), 295–304; Krämer, *Geistliche Autorität*, 258 sq.; Deniz Kandiyoti & Nadira Azimova, “The Communal and the Sacred: Women's World of Ritual in Uzbekistan”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10/2 (2004): 327–49; Raziya Sultanova, “Female Celebrations in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan: The Power of Cosmology in Musical Rites”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 40 (2008): 8–20; Maria E. Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, Richmond: Routledge, 2007, 154–66; Bozor S. Safaraliev, “K Istorii Muzhskikh i Zhenskikh Ob'edinenii u Tadzhikov” [Contribution to the History of Male and Female Unions among the Tajiks], *Aktual'nye Problemy Gumanitarnykh i Estestvennykh Nauk* 2011/4: 269–76; Anne Ducloux, “Cendrillon au Royaume de Tamerlan: La ‘Grand-Mère du Mardi’ Triomphe de la Belle-Mère, à Samarcande”, in A. Caiozzo & N. Ernoul, eds., *Femmes Médiatrices et Ambivalentes: Mythes et Imaginaire*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2012, 73–84; Svetlana A. Peshkova, “Leading against Odds: Muslim Women Leaders and Teachers in Uzbekistan”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 31/1 (2015): 23–44. On some Central Asian holy places associated with female figures pertaining to mythical pasts, see for instance Gulnara Aitpaeva, *Sacred Sites of Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam*, Bishkek: Aigine Cultural Research Center, 2013, 120–22.

notably funeral, of a number of men of God active precisely under communist rule. Rather common in the worlds of Islam, this gendered distribution of sanctity can be explained, here as elsewhere, by the profiles of heroes and by the dimension if not of political leaders (as in the Middle East today), at least of community builders that has been recognized by their posterity, direct or indirect, to many Muslim saints of the Soviet period.⁹ Rightly or not, these saints are often perceived, too, in retrospect, as rebels to the Soviet order and, as such, venerated today in large numbers in the former Soviet South.¹⁰ At the same time, their cult echoes the figures of mass saints that were widely present in Soviet official culture, in an essentially masculine form.¹¹ The abundance of these saints in Central Asia, comparable to what can be observed in the North Caucasus, the Balkans or Xinjiang, actually characterizes the religious field of many ex-popular democracies¹²—a field that has quickly become competitive again, in ex-Soviet Central Asia, since 1989. Here, traditional lineage-based (Pers. *intisabi*) authorities, long sheltered from competition by the Iron Curtain (and still, after 1991, by the legal limitations often set up on religious proselytizing), have had thereafter to face the irruption of new actors, granted with modern theological backgrounds and pedigrees of professional (*iktisabi*) preachers. Highly politicized, already, under the imperial Russian and Soviet dominances (by quick alternations of censorships and state mobilizations, often prolonged after the dissolution of the USSR),¹³ the religious field of the region was made more conflictual by this new competitiveness. Against such a background, religious and national or ethnic, if not ethno-social values have often come to be confused—a situation illustrated, in Eastern Europe, by the worship given a time, after his death in 1984, to the figure of the

⁹ On the modern Middle East, see the critical overview by Mohamed Kerrou, “Autorité et Sainteté: Perspectives Historiques et Anthropologiques”, in M. Kerrou, ed., *L’Autorité des Saints: Perspectives Historiques et Socio-Anthropologiques en Méditerranée Occidentale*, Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1998: 11–38. See also Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, “Grands Hommes, Héros, Saints et Martyrs: Figures du Sacré dans le Moyen-Orient au XX^e Siècle”, in C. Mayeur-Jaouen, ed., *Saints et Héros du Moyen-Orient Contemporain*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2002: 5–36; John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood*, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 2008, esp. pp. 260–3.

¹⁰ On the predominance of anti-Communist fighters among mid-twentieth-century Muslim saints venerated by the Uyghurs, in Xinjiang or in the diaspora, and of the association of rare female figures of Islamic sainthood with the memory of these heroes, see notably Thierry Zarcone, “Le Culte des Saints au Xinjiang, de 1949 à nos jours”, *Journal d’Histoire du Soufisme* 3 (2002): 133–72, esp. 143–4, 146–7 (in part. 143, on Khelichi Khan, a female disciple of the mid-1950s faith-fighter Ishan ‘Abd al-Hamid of Khotan).

¹¹ E.g., Anna Navrotskaya, “Aleksandr Nevskii, Hagiography and National Biography”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 46/1–2 (2005): 97–34; on the specifically gendered behavioral models of the Soviet era, cf. Brigitte Studer, “La Femme Nouvelle”, in M. Dreyfus et al., ed., *Le Siècle des Communismes*, Paris: Éditions de l’Atelier & Éditions Ouvrières, 2004 (1st ed. 2000): 565–81, esp. 567–72.

¹² On the Balkans, see for instance Nathalie Clayer, “Saints and Sufis in Post-Communist Albania”, in K. Masatoshi, ed., *Popular Movements and Democratization in the Islamic World*, London – New York: Routledge, 2006: 33–42; on the Caucasus: Vladimir Bobrovnikov, “Izobretenie Islamskikh Traditsii v Dagestanskom Kolkhoze” [The Invention of Islamic Tradition in a Dagestani Kolkhoz], in V. Bobrovnikov & A. Alikberov, ed., *Dagestan i musul'manskii Vostok*, Moscow: Mardzhani, 2010. On the People’s Republic of China, on Gansu for instance: Marie-Paule Hille, “Le Maître Spirituel au Sein du Xidaotang: Enquête sur la Reconnaissance d’une Autorité Sainte en Islam Soufi Chinois (Gansu)”, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 173 (2016), pp. 179–99; Alexandre Papas, Wei Ma, “Sufi Lineages among the Salars: An Overview”, in M.-P. Hille, B. Horlemann, P. Nietupski, ed., *Muslims in Amdo Tibetan Society: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 109–34.

¹³ On this alternation of phases of repression and mobilization in the People’s Republic of China since 1949, and on the parallel impacts of Uyghur Islamic reformist trends, see the respective views by Zarcone, “Le Culte des Saints au Xinjiang”, esp. 143–4; and by Paula Schrode, “The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Uyghur Religious Practice”, *Die Welt des Islams* 48/3 (2008): 394–433.

Polish Catholic priest Jerzy Popieluszko, celebrated after his assassination as a hero and a martyr of the workers' struggle and of the Polish national cause.¹⁴

In Muslim Central Asia, what the hagiography characteristic of the 1990s–2000s has proposed was, via the cult of saints and of heroes of the Soviet era, the sanctification of territories and human groups profoundly marked, when not fully defined, by the ethno-demographic and socioeconomic change imprinted on the region during the decades between collectivization (1929) and the gigantic hydrographic works of the 1960s and 1970s. During this period of quick and deep, often brutal transformations, the south of this wide area (as well as the Northeast Caucasus, west of the Caspian Sea) witnessed major population resettlements, brutally accelerated from the mid-1940s onwards, from the demographic reservoirs of the highlands of the pre-Pamir (and of Dagestan, as far as the North Caucasus is concerned) to various cotton-growing flatlands.¹⁵ Provoking the appearance of a number of modern settlements in the lowlands of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia, in the coastal plain of Dagestan in the Caucasus, these migrations were long perceived, until the mid-2010s, as a major founding drama by part of the Central Asian and Caucasus populations native of the mid-1940s to mid-1950s, at a time when the memory of the Second World War, for long the main cement of Soviet identity, was beginning to fade away.¹⁶

Under pressure of the populations who resulted from these rural/rural mass migrations characteristic of the mid-twentieth century, new collective memories have emerged, conveyed by a generation of baby boomers often born in the years 1947–49 (a period of accelerated population resettlements and of the creation of new rural communities), who later came to assume responsibilities at a young age during Perestroika, in the early independence period and during the conflicts of the 1990s. Marked by the experience of migration of those still often referred to, here and there, as “Mountaineers”, these collective memories exalt local and regional, sometimes ethnic identities. Such is the case among Avars, displaced towards Kumyk-peopled lowlands in the North Caucasus, and among the Tajik populations displaced from their highlands towards cotton-growing flatlands dominated by Uzbek-speaking or bilingual Uzbek/Persian political, economic and even religious personnel, often coming themselves from rural satellites of the cities of the Fergana Valley. Whatever limited and oftentimes short-lived, the liberalization of the press and publishing in the south of the USSR

¹⁴ Cf. Magdalena Zowczak, “Un Héros de l’Ombre: Le Père Jerzy Popieluszko”, in P. Centlivres, D. Fabre, F. Zonabend, ed., *La Fabrique des Héros*, Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1998: 203–10, esp. 205–7; Patrick Michel, *La Société Retrouvée: Politique et Religion dans l’Europe Soviétisée*, Paris: Fayard, 1988: 222–7. On Southeast Europe, see Nathalie Clayer & Alexandre Popovic, “Balkans”, in H. Chambert-Loir & C. Guillot, ed., *Le Culte des Saints dans le Monde Musulman*, Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 2005: 335–66; Gianfranco Bria, “Construction Hagiographique d’un Saint Patriote: Dervish Luzha entre Sainteté Supra-Locale et Locale en Albanie”, paper to the workshop *Une Légende Rouge Dorée: Hagiographie et Culte des Saints Musulmans du XX^e Siècle en URSS et dans les Démocraties Populaires*, II^e Congrès du GIS Moyen-Orient & mondes musulmans, INALCO, 7 July 2017. On the Southern Caucasus, see notably Silvia Serrano, *Quand le Religieux Devient Politique: Orthodoxie, Pouvoir, Identités en Géorgie Soviétique et Actuelle*, Paris: Karthala (Meydan), 2017.

¹⁵ Historical overview and elements of bibliography in Stéphane A. Dudoignon & Christian Noack, “Introduction”, in *ibid.*, ed., *Allah’s Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s–2000s)*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2014: 47–122.

¹⁶ On Tajikistan, see especially Botakoz Kassymbekova, “Humans as Territory: Forced Resettlement and the Making of Soviet Tajikistan, 1920–38”, *Central Asian Survey* 30/3–4 (2011): 349–70. On the memory of WWII and its instrumentations in post-Soviet Central Asia, see notably Timur Dadabaev, *Identity and Memory in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Uzbekistan’s Soviet Past*, London & New York: Routledge, 2015, 64–72 ; *ibid.*, “On Oral History of the Soviet Past in Central Asia: Re-Collecting, Reflecting and Re-Imagining”, in B. Schlyter, ed., *Historiography and Nation-Building among Turkic Populations*, Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2014: 13–30; Michael Denson, “The Art of the Impossible: Political Symbolism, and the Creation of National Identity and Collective Memory in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan”, *Europe-Asia studies* 61/7 (2009): 1167–87.

from 1987 onwards, until as late as the early 2010s in a country such as Tajikistan, have encouraged the written fixation of these memoirs, and their dissemination in the form of local historiographies of local commission, either public or private, linked to the migratory routes of after WWII.

Essential to this historiography, often written or commissioned by local political authorities and notables who have survived the late Soviet period, is systematic search for chronological continuity between the pre-Soviet era and the present, beyond the tragedies of the short twentieth centuries—this edifying history attesting to the preservation of local Islamic culture, if not of the true faith itself.¹⁷ It is in close connection with this specific historiography that the development of hagiographical discourses related to the sanctification of peculiar places and groups has been observed, from the early 1990s to the early 2010s. Written by semi-professional authors working on the commissioning of sacred lineages of holy tomb-keepers of *sadat* or *khwaja* ancestry (i.e., respectively, descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law ‘Ali, or from such or such of the Prophet’s Companions),¹⁸ these discourses responded, first, to the Islamic reformist ideas conveyed, in Soviet times, by the Muslim religious bureaucracies inherited from imperial Russian and Soviet rules (the Spiritual Assembly initially opened in 1789, followed after 1943 by the regional Muslim Spiritual Directorates commonly known as Muftiates).¹⁹ From the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, these discourses also sought to contrast Salafism and Islamic transnational missionary movements through the defense of a model of “traditional” religiosity, deeply permeated by Central Asian Sunni religious culture. After the rediscovery by international research, during the past decades, of the region’s more ancient Muslim sanctuaries and pilgrimages, and of their role in the preservation and the reconstruction of collective memories,²⁰ we shall examine here, in the light of current debates among hagiographers on holiness (in Tajik Persian and Uzbek: *waligi*, a term derived from Arabic *wali*, designating

¹⁷ Comparative prospects, with a critical overview of the history of the discipline, in Jérémie Foa, “Histoire du Religieux”, in C. Delacroix, et al., ed., *Historiographies: Concepts et Débats*, Paris: Gallimard, 2010, 1: 268–81, esp. 270–1.

¹⁸ Cf. Devin DeWeese, “Foreword”, in A. von Kügelgen, ed., *Islamization and Sacred Lineages in Central Asia, 2: The Legacy of Ishaq Bab in Narrative and Genealogical Traditions*, Almaty – Bern – Tashkent – Bloomington, IN: Daik Press, 2008: 6–33.

¹⁹ Cf. Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia*, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2017: 153–61, 305–21; and the examples provided by Michael Kemper & Shamil Shikhaliev, “Administrative Islam: Two Soviet Fatwas from the North Caucasus”, in M. Kemper & A. Bustanov, ed., *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012: 55–102; and by B. M. Babadzhanov, A. K. Muminov, A. von Kügelgen, “Religioznye Teksty Sovetskogo Vremeni” [Religious Texts of the Soviet Period], in eisd., ed., *Disputy Musul'manskikh Religioznykh Avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke*, Almaty: Daik Press, 2007, 10 sq.

²⁰ See, for Tajikistan, the works by historian Hamza Kamal and my reviews of them in *Central Eurasian Reader* 1 (2008): 400–1 and 406–7; see the folklorist approach developed by Benjamin Gatling, *Expressions of Sufi Culture in Tajikistan*, Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018, esp. 74 sq. On the interaction between oasis cities and the steppe, see Ashirbek Muminov, “Veneration of Holy Sites of the Mid-Sirdar’ya Valley: Continuity and Transformation”, in M. Kemper, A. von Kügelgen, D. Yermakov, ed., *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the 20th Century*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996: 255–68; Jeanne Féaux de la Croix, *Iconic Places in Central Asia: The Moral Geography of Dams, Pastures and Holy Sites*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016, esp. 114–20. See also: Gulnara Aitpaeva, “The Dispute on Pilgrimage to Sacred Sites among Kyrgyz Muslims”, in ead., ed., *Sacred Sites of Ysyk-Köl: Spiritual Power, Pilgrimage, and Art*, Bichkek: Aigine Cultural Research Center, 2009, 224–36; Minoru Sawada, “Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in the Taklamakan Desert: Shrines of Imams in Khotan Prefecture”, in A. Papas, T. Welsford, T. Zarccone, ed., *Central Asian Pilgrims: Hajj Routes and Pious Visits between Central Asia and the Hijaz*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2012: 278–94; Thierry Zarccone, “Pilgrimage to the ‘Second Meccas’ and ‘Ka’bas’ of Central Asia”, in *ibid.*, 251–77; Paolo Sartori, “Of Saints, Shrines and Tractors: Untangling the Meaning of Islam in Central Asia”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 30/3 (2019): 367–405.

men and women reaching a high degree of closeness to the divine), the existence of present-day Muslim hagiographic experiences and constructions particular to the ex-Soviet space.

Trying to avoid confusing hagiography with sanctity—even if our aim is not to separate history from myth, the mutual intermingling of which remains constitutive of hagiographical experiences—we will approach the former as an essentially dialectical and dynamic process. We will examine, notably, the reasons for the abundance of hagiographical literature in the Soviet South, until the restrictions observed in the 2010s on public Muslim religious practice and censorship on “religious” literature. We shall see, in particular, how Soviet modernization ultimately strengthened the place of saints among heroes venerated today, and to confer on them a mixed authority, nourished by both modernism and tradition. These saints have sometimes come to exercise a monopoly of sorts in local memory, in the absence of heroic martyrs: while the memory of the dead of the Second World War was rapidly fading in post-Soviet Central Asia, with the demise of the last veterans, such was the case also of the fighters fallen during the civil war of Tajikistan in 1992–97. The recent association of the figure of the martyr fighter with Jihadism as practiced by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Organization favored the oblivion of the victims of the conflict, and the valuation of local tradition against transnationalism, reinforcing identification, in many successor states of the USSR, between the national or the ethnic, on the one hand, the religious on the other. (In Afghanistan during the same period, the dead mujahids of the anti-Soviet struggle were quickly falling, too, into general oblivion.)²¹ This association *shahid*/jihad also strengthened the local popularity of typically Central Asian figures such as those of the gyrovague (Hindustani & Pers. *malang*), of the religious panegyrist (Ar. & Pers. *maddah* or *qawwal*), of the ascetic (Ar. & Pers. *zahid*), even such as the “possessed” or “delighted” (Ar. & Pers. *majdhub*) or still antinomian (Ar. & Pers. *ibahi*) Sufis, who all had disappeared gradually since the mid-twentieth century from the bazaars where they used to gather,²² although several remained documented in remote areas of the “Mountain” until the very end of the Soviet period. (Several figures of *ibahi* Sufis, especially, are still attested to until the last years of the Soviet era in the highlands, of the Zerafshan River especially, as for the former Tajik SSR).²³

As the reader has guessed, most of the examples that have nourished this reflection are borrowed from Tajikistan. Firstly, because this country was, until the authoritarian turn-out of 2009 and of the following decade, one of the rare countries of the region where systematic research on modern-day Islam, combining public archive exploration and oral history, was just conceivable. And if it happened more than once, in the 2000s, that the then Director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in Dushanbe threw at my head his permit for access to the country’s Central Archives, shouting: “I don’t need your Islam!”, at least the document was duly signed and stamped, a thing much less conceivable during the last ten years. Secondly, because the impact on Muslim hagiography of the brutal post-WWII resettlements of mountain populations—from Qarategin in particular (renamed Rasht in the 1990s), the upper valley of the Wakhsh River, a tributary of the Amu Darya—towards the cotton plains of the Tajik SSR offers us comparative material with other regions of the Soviet

²¹ Cf. P. Centlivres, M. Centlivres-Demont, “Les Martyrs Afghans par le Texte et l’Image (1978–1992)”, in Mayeur-Jaouen, ed., *Saints et Héros*: 319–34.

²² Cf. Alexandre Papas, “Antinomianism”, in K. Fleet et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edition, Leiden: Brill, 2014 (BrillOnline). On the *qawwals* of Southern Tajikistan in the mid-twentieth century, and the relationship to them of the local population, between emulation and stigmatization, see Stéphane A. Dudoignon & Ariane Zevaco, “Sur le ‘Mail des Rhapsodes’: Sociabilités Traditionnelles, Groupes de Statut, Ethnies Minoritaires en Asie Centrale Soviétique”, *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 63/2 (2009): 273–322, esp. 301–14.

²³ See for instance my notice on “Ishan Majnun”, in S. M. Prozorov, ed., *Islam na Territorii Byvshei Rossiiskoi Imperii*, Moscow: Nauka, vol. 3, forthcoming.

South: the Northeast Caucasus, especially, where analogous phenomena have been observed, sometimes together with the translation of relics and the development of modern shrines and pilgrimages (Ar. & Pers. *mazar*) on the “virgin lands” of the agricultural colonization of the late Stalin and Khrushchev periods.

Transformations like these have deeply affected the emergence of a typology of saints as founders of communities, at the same time discoverers of springs, drillers of irrigation canals and bearers of know-how, horticultural in particular, inherited from mountain orchard cultivation. (The apology of mountain orchard cultivation we shall find in Muslim hagiology as well as in the memoirs written, during the same 1990s and 2000s, by many a former local civil servant or representative of the CPSU.) Another interest of this specific area lies in the valorization, through local historiography and hagiography, of a specifically Central Asian Sunni Tajik Persian-language culture. Moreover, the civil war of Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997, the demographic upheavals that the conflict brought about, and the period of relative political openness that lasted in the country from 1997 to 2009 have brought various actors to seek for justification or legitimacy, precipitating memory processes that have more often remained in a state of latency in other regions of ex-Soviet Central Asia. These processes were all the more alive, of course, among networks and lineages characterized by the little number of their members and their intense mutual connections.²⁴

Conscious of the complexity of these developments, and of their connection with specific geo-historical realities, I have implemented a dual approach, nourished by successive readings in the sociology of religion. By chance, Tajikistan used to offer, during more than two decades from Perestroika to the political stiffening of 2009 and thereafter, rare opportunities for a combination of public archival research with the study of nascent narrative traditions. The former helped identify several figures of “informal” Islam active in the Tajik SSR through their interaction, as for 1943, with the confessional establishment of the Central Asian Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims (SADUM in Russian acronyms), in Tashkent, and of the Qaziyyat of the Tajik SSR—the confessional bureaucratic apparatus created in the USSR in 1943 for mobilization among the country’s Muslim populations. The study of nascent traditions was expected to provide ethnographical experience and material through the collection, begun in 1989,²⁵ of locally produced literature, of limited print run most of the time, available on bazaar book markets and on the stalls of booksellers at the entrance of mosques and holy sites of varying significance, with special interest in pamphlets devoted to specific places and figures of the history of Central Asian Islam. This collection was completed by oral inquiries that rapidly focused on the Qarategin and Zerafshan River Valleys and on their Muhajir populations in the country’s cotton-growing flatlands (in the Qurghan-Teppa area, especially, in the southwest of the country, and in and around Dushanbe). Taking with time the form of less and less directive interviews, these inquiries, implemented from 2004 to 2011,

²⁴ Cf. Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1997 (1st ed. 1950): 129. “The ideal of perfect sanctity”, wrote once Marguerite Yourcenar in her meditation on early Christian sainthood, “could only be realized as completely as possible in these small societies of spiritual assistance”: “Essai de généalogie du saint”, *Revue Bleue* (June 1934): 460–6, reedited in *Essais et Mémoires*, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1991: 1678–88).

²⁵ Interrupted between 1996 and 2001, and again since 2011, this collection was completed by the consultation of local newspapers, of the organs of the Islamic Revival Party between 1997 and 2009, and since the mid-2010s by the regular attendance of the blogs and webpages of a range of local history writers. This collection has been helped, too, since the same years, by the occasional sending of materials by Tajikistani colleagues, project partners and students: all my deep thanks to all of them, whom I cannot name here.

relied in part on questionnaires aimed at documenting the life and work of personalities active in the Soviet period, collected from their continuators—offspring and disciples—, mostly in those places where these masters had been active and near which they had their grave.

The goal of these document collections and oral inquiries was to highlight the discursive and other specificities of nascent traditions, oral and written, manuscript and published, on Soviet Muslim saints, through the identification of their sponsors and authors; through a reconstruction of the special interaction between hagiography and local lore in a peculiar post-Soviet socioeconomic context; and via the extraction of elements of intertext that related this Islamic discourse to late Soviet culture—most notably to the Soviet management of cultural heritages since after WWII. If in Christian Europe, in the Orthodox world among others, modern hagiology could develop as a genre of its own since the nineteenth century, through detachment from devotion, this development drove to growing combinations with academic disciplines such as philology, history or ethnography—which served to make the genre more heterogeneous.²⁶ In the world of Islam in general and in Muslim Central Asia most particularly, hagiology remained characterized until the mid-twentieth century by stronger connections between individual texts, distinct sanctuaries, rituals related to the latter and the expression of a people’s sacred origins and, hereby, invocation of communal solidarity.²⁷

As we shall see here, despite the role of Sufi sociability, ritualized or not—of the *mahfil* (circle) of a master especially, often followed by a *dhikr* in the company of his/her disciples—in the composition and re-composition of traditions on modern saints, this interconnection as well as the devotional aspect of the hagiographic experiences seemed less systematic at the turn of the century. Instead, the wide resort of holy dynasties to the publication of texts on their great ancestors, edited by local literati endowed with a Soviet academic background, often with the support or active participation of a local political authority, favored double identifications. First, between these traditions about a modern saint (or group of saints), on the first hand, and on the other hand a particular socioeconomic group, sometimes defined in ethnic or subethnic terms. Second, between this group and a trans-historic Tajik nation defined by the preservation of combined legacies by resilient communities. Taking refuge since 2009 in local lore and regional historiography (one of the many side effects of growing censorship), this semi-popular literature could go as far as to develop subversive dimensions, providing social groups in quest of political recognition with resources to resist the “natural leaders” promoted by the civil war and their growing control²⁸—a subversive discourse which has deserted religious literature, except only in quickly expanding social networks.

²⁶ See in particular the comparative study between 12th and 19th century Western European Christian hagiology by Felice Lifshits, “Beyond Positivism and Genre: Hagiographical Texts as ‘Historical Narratives’”, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1994): 95–114; on the Russian Orthodox world, see notably Margaret Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, esp. 247–9.

²⁷ See in particular Zayde Antrim, *Routes & Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2012, and the comments on this work in the next paragraphs; on medieval and modern Central Asia, see especially Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994: esp. 516–32; Jeff Eden, *Warrior Saints of the Silk Road: Legends of the Qarakhanids*, Leiden: Brill (HdO), 2019: esp. 89 sq.; Allen J. Frank, *Gulag Miracles: Sufis and Stalinist Repression in Kazakhstan*, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press (Studies and Texts on Central Asia, 2), 2019: esp. the historical introduction pp. 17–32; and the earlier syntheses by Jürgen Paul, “Hagiographische Texte als historische Quelle”, *Seculum* 41/1 (1990): 17–43, esp. 18–21; “Hagiographic Literature in Persia and Central Asia”, in E. Yar-Shater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 11, New York: The Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2002: 536–9.

²⁸ Cf. Jean-Michel Sallmann, “Sainteté et Société”, in S. Bosch Gajano, ed., *Santità, Culti, Agiografia: Temi e Prospettive*, Rome: Viella, 1997: 327–40, esp. 330; Aviad Kleinberg, *Histoires de Saints: Leur Rôle dans la Formation de l’Occident*, transl. from Hebrew by Moshe Meron, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque des Histoires), 2005: 347–8; on the class aspects of the struggle for the preservation of the cult of Saint Ambrosio in late medieval and early

Elements of Context

A difficulty, here, as far as the hagiographic discourses are concerned, was to identify their intertexts, in a complex, intermingled stratigraphy of genres—ancient and modern, Soviet Russian as well as Islamic Persian. Actually, Muslim hagiographic experiences developed in the south of the USSR, in the 1990s–2000s, on a multi-layered discursive background. A background impacted, notably, by practices particular to the Soviet period since the 1940s. One of these practices consisted of a succession of state-sponsored processes of patrimonialization of national cultures. The phenomenon could be observed, in the Tajik SSR, from before WWII to national independence, in several periods of ideological remobilization, like: just after the Terror of 1937–38 and during WWII; immediately after de-Stalinization; in the early Brezhnev period; and during Perestroika. The public actors of culture (beginning with the Writers' Unions set up in federated republics from 1934 onwards, in association with national academic institutions) were mobilized for the rehabilitation of areas of national cultures first neglected or vilified by the Soviet power, as “national” precisely, before being dealt with as acceptable “legacy” (Ar. & Pers. *mirath*).²⁹

In Dushanbe, a key figure of these sometimes short-lived experimentations was the writer Satim Ulughzada (1911–97), the acclaimed author of several historical novels on Central Asia's Iranian and Persian past. Just before and during WWII, during de-Stalinization again and in the following decades until independence, Ulughzada participated in the gradual historical reconstruction of nineteenth-century movements of Islamic reform, through selective rehabilitations of individual Persian-language Central Asian Muslim scholars, teachers and philanthropists. Introducing himself as an heir of these movements, in a first volume of memoirs published for an international Persian-speaking audience, five years after Stalin's demise, Ulughzada played a key role in the formulation of the essentially patrimonial relationship of the Tajik SSR to its Islamic past, mediaeval and early modern.³⁰ A relationship made of literary valuations of Islamic *adab* (the ethical teaching and code of deportment classically conveyed by Persian didactical literature) and of the historical revision of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century movements of modernization (which, under the label of

modern Milan, and the etymology of liturgy as “the people's work”, cf. Patrick Boucheron, *La Trace et l'Aura: Vies Posthumes d'Ambroise de Milan (IV^e-XVI^e Siècles)*, Paris: Seuil, 2019: esp. 292–5.

²⁹ See in particular Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan*, Washington, DC: John Hopkins University Press, 1970; ead., “Patterns of Political Change,” in A. Bromke & T. Rakowska-Harmstone, ed., *The Communist States in Disarray, 1965-1971*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1972: 323–50. One motive of disagreement with this author is that, if chaotic and marked by numerous setbacks, the succession of experiences tempted, in cultural heritage management, from WWII onwards does not always correspond with periods of mobilization and/or loosening of censorship.

³⁰ Satim Ulughzada, *Subh-i Jawani-i Ma* [The Daybreak of Our Youth], Stalinabad [Dushanbe], Nashriyat-i Dawlati-i Tajikistan, 1957: esp. 331–45 (in Arabic script); on his work, see notably Seraj al-Din Emam-'Ali, *Satim Ologhzade va Farhang-e Melli* [Satim Ulughzada and National Culture], Tehran: ECO, 1397/2019, passim; on the association of the Tajik Writers Union, Academy of Sciences and Tajikfilm Studios in the rehabilitations implemented in the de-Stalinization period and thereafter in the Tajik SSR, see my articles “Djadidisme, Mirasisme, Islamisme”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 37/1–2 (1996): 13–40; “Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientology: In the Soviet South after Stalin”, in F. Pouillon & J.-C. Vatin, ed., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations*, Leiden: Brill, 2014: 121–33. On the international-relations issues of these reappraisals for the USSR from the 1950s onwards, see Eren M. Tasar, “Soviet Policies towards Islam: Domestic and International Considerations”, in P. E. Muehlenbeck, ed., *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt, 2012: 158–81; on the case of the Tajik SSR: Hanna E. Jansen, *People's Internationalism: Central Asian Modernisers, Soviet Oriental Studies and Cultural Revolution in the East (1936–1977)*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2020: esp. 122–6.

“Jadidism”, were introduced as a secularizing school reform). This insistence on a double heritage of Persian-language *adab* and of autochthonous modernization seen as rationalization, popularized in the 1960s to 1980s by the historical novel, theatre and epic cinema, fitted the pedagogical efforts of SADUM and of its Tajik branch for their struggle against “obscurantist” Islamic practices such as the veneration of holy graves, in the name of “authentic” Islam.³¹ It paved the way for the later rediscovery of such Persian-language “Jadid” writers as Tawalla (1882–1939) or more famous ‘Ayni (1878–1954, long a major exportation author of the USSR, to the world of Islam especially) in their capacity as promoters of a modern, rationalized teaching of Islamic ethics.³²

Indeed, this national heritage management went through many diverse phases between the late 1930s and the early independence period, according to political contexts, both domestic and international, of the USSR (the requirements of Soviet cultural diplomacy showing often decisive in the post-WWII decades). This management paved the way, however, to the rediscoveries of the late Perestroika and early independence periods—by the monthly magazine *Farhang* [“Culture”] for example, in the early 1990s, published by a public foundation of the same name.³³ Ulughzada was surrounded, in the magazine’s board, by young and

³¹ Cf. Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*, esp. 124–9, 153–61. For an early example of the contemporary insertion of Islamic reform as legacy into Soviet Tajik official historiography, see the work by the multi-awarded historian Zarif Rajabov (1906–90)—e.g., *Iz Istorii Obshchestvenno-Politicheskoi Mysli Tadjikskogo Naroda vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX i v Nachale XX vv.* [Of the History of the Public and Political Thought of the Tajik People in the Second Half of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century], Stalinabad [Dushanbe]: Tadjikskoe Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1957, esp. 437–45. From the mid-1950s onwards, the SADUM officials’ criticism of Sufism went farer than the condemnation of the wandering *maddahs* and *qalandars*. Although himself a disciple of the Naqshbandi guide Bashir Khan Tura, the late Soviet Qazi of the Tajik SSR, Mirza ‘Abd-Allah Kalanzada, condemned the pretensions to supernatural powers expressed by the hagiographers of many modern saints (Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation”, 62; Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*, 154).

³² Among the multiple Cyrillic-script brochures published officially in the early independence period, in Dushanbe but also in Tashkent, in neighboring Uzbekistan, one finds Persian-language manuals of ethics by such early-twentieth-century polygraphs as Tashkent-based Tawalla (penname of Tulagan Khujamyar) or ‘Ayni (penname of Sadr al-Din Sayyid Muradzada, who, born before Stalin, managed to survive him, and presided over the young Tajik Academy of Sciences during the last years of his life)—e.g., Sadriddin Aini, *Tahzib-us-Sibion* [The Education of Boys], Dushanbe: Maorif, 1994 (1st ed. 1910) [Maorif was the publishing house of the Soviet and post-Soviet Tajik Ministry of Education]; Tavallo, *Ravnaq ul-Islom* [The Splendor of Islam], Tashkent: Öbekiston Respublikasi Fanlar Akademiasining “Fan” Nashrioti, 1993 (1st ed. 1916). Among the texts rediscovered in the same years by the philologists of the State University and of the Academy of Sciences was the *Tufaf-i Ahl-i Bukhara* [“Souvenirs for the People of Bukhara”, Tashkent, 1912] by Bukharan cotton producer, traveler, physician and polygraph Mirza Siraj al-Din “Hakim” (1877–1914). Reedited in Cyrillic in 1992, by the philologist Payvand Gulmurod, a specialist of “Jadid” literature at Dushanbe State University, the *Tuhaf* is a string of libels against the dynasties of grave keepers, in terms that were to be remobilized, from the mid-1950s onwards, by SADUM against the cult of Muslim saints (French translation of the *Tuhaf* by the present author, *Souvenirs de voyage pour les gens de Boukhara*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1999).

³³ Inspired by the Znanie (“Knowledge”) public foundation active at the all-Union scale during the last decade of the Soviet period, the foundation’s and its magazine’s name was not chosen by accident. The Tajik Persian term used during most of the Soviet period for “culture” was *madaniyat* (маданият), a word of Arabic origin related to the interconnected notions of urbanity/civility/civilization (Ar. *tamaddun*). *Farhang* was gradually preferred from the late 1980s onwards. The arguments in favor of this choice were the word’s Middle Iranian origin, as well as its early Persian content of transmission of pre-Islamic Iranian culture under Arabic Muslim domination, in the tenth-century CE *shu‘ubiyya* movement of the eastern regions of the Abbasid Empire, and in early Persian poetry as in the “Book of Kings” by Firdawsi. (*Shu‘ubiyya*, for that matter, became a central theme in Tajik short stories in the late 1980s and early 1990s, by writer Muhammad-Zaman Salih among others, a disciple of Ulughzada’s, in the columns of the literary monthly of the Writers Union, *Sadoi Sharq* [“The Voice of the East”]; see notably the historical overview by Z. Ulmasova, “Ba’ze khususiathoi paidoishu tashakkuli romani ta’rikhi dar adabiyoti muosiri tojik” [Some Peculiarities of the Appearance and Development of Historical Novel in Modern-Day Tajik Literature], *Nomai Donishgoh* (Dushanbe), 2014: 10–22.)

popular wordsmiths of the Writers Union, by researchers of the Institute of History such as the *mazar* specialist Hamza Kamal, and by the young Qazi of Tajikistan, Hajji Akbar Tura-janzada (1989–92), the organizer of a first massive Tajik hajj in July 1990. The intense public sociability of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period of endless banquets and day and night get-togethers in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, facilitated such rapprochements. So did, too, the organization of public round tables with participation of diverse trends of the Islamic clerisy—from city imams to leaders of the Islamic Revival Party.³⁴ Islamic revival or reform (Pers. *nahzat-i islami*) remained a sporadic theme of these tribunes, associated with the notion of an historical continuity of the struggle of intellectuals for social change, inherited from “public thinking” (Rus. *obshchestvennaia mysl'*) as it developed into a discipline of the humanities during the last decades of the Soviet period. The debates of the time, however, was focusing now on the “quest for authenticity” (Taj. *justujui asolat*), national/cultural/religious, associated with the incantation of rurality.³⁵ Another legacy of the late Soviet period, this new orientation was informed, in particular, by the antimodernist “village prose” trend represented in the Russian literature of the 1960s to 1990s by such authors, then popular and edited at gigantic print runs, as the Siberian writer Valentin Rasputin (1937–2015).

Against an all-Soviet backdrop characterized, from the 1980s onwards, by urban shortages and a growing dependency on the countries, this growing interest in rurality had been triggered locally, in the previous decades, by the quick development of folklore collection and the publication of regional anthologies of Tajik Persian verse dealing, especially, with classical metric poetry produced in the upper valleys of modern-day Tajikistan between the late eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.³⁶ Strongly represented at the Writers Union, where they were replacing the first Soviet Tajik intelligentsia from Samarqand, Bukhara and

³⁴ See for instance the long debate hosted in the late autumn 1991, in the very first months of Tajikistan’s independence, by the head of the foundation, Gulrukhsar (b. 1947), a poetess laureate from Qarategin: “Darki tamaddun” [Interpreting “Civilization”], *Farhang* 1991/12: 35–50. Among other speakers, Mulla Muhammad-Sharif Himmatzada (1953–2010), a founding father and future chair of Tajik IRP, praised “ancestral values” (Taj. *arhishhoi niigon*) and the necessity for the Tajiks to take “pride from their own past” (*iftikhor az guzashtai khud*: p. 41).

³⁵ As shown by the contributions of other participants in the same meeting, insisting on the “preservation of the authenticity of national culture” in the village—notably by the Zerafshan-born influent philologist and critique ‘Abd al-Nabi Sattarzada (b. 1941), a figure of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan in the 1990s, and of the economist Tahir ‘Abd al-Jabbar (1946–2009), the founder of the *Rastakhez* nationalist movement: *ibid.* 47–9.

³⁶ See notably the popular anthologies of Persian didactic poetry published in Cyrillic, during the last two decades of the Soviet period, by the philologist Amirbek Habibov (or Abibov or Habibzada, 1916–98), on the basis of manuscripts and of early-twentieth-century lithographed editions, as well as of the collection of oral traditions implemented by individual scholars of the Tajik Academy of Sciences from the early 1970s onwards: *Ganji Badakhshon* [The Treasure of Badakhshan], Dushanbe: Irfon, 1972; *Ganji Pareshon* [The Treasure in Dispersion], Dushanbe: Adib, 1984; *Doirahoi Adabii Bukhoroi Sharqi (Asri XIX va Ibtidoi Asri XX)* [The Literary Schools of Eastern Bukhara (Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries)], Dushanbe: Donish, 1984; *Ganji Zarafshon* [Treasure of the Zerafshan], Dushanbe: Adib, 1991. Dedicated mainly to Darwaz and Qarategin, *Ganji Pareshon* gives large room to works by local Naqshbandi gnostic and didactic poets such as ‘Abd al-Hayy Sahibzada Mujakharfi, alias Majnun or Farhad (c. 1867–1931). The continuator until after collectivisation of a local tradition of imitation of Hafez in Qarategin, rediscovered in the mid-1970s thanks to folklore studies partly published in the local daily, *Haqiqati Komsomolobod* (*Ganji Pareshon*, pp. 207–16), Mujakharfi was to become an icon of Qarategini culture, and an embodiment of the pre-Soviet social and cultural order, during Tajikistan’s early independence period (see the presentation by Benjamin Gatling, “Abdulhai Mujakharfi and the Contemporary Perception of Pre-Soviet Tajik Poetry”, in M. De Chiara & E. Grassi, ed., *Iranian Languages and Literatures of Central Asia, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2015: 207–31, esp. 216).

the cities of the Ferghana Plain,³⁷ such highlands as the Zerafshan and Qarategin Upper Valleys (as well as the less peopled Khawaling, Darwaz and Badakhshan in the south) became central as symbolic resources for Tajik national discourse.³⁸ Local writers and polymaths played a decisive role in the discourses of valuation of a combined regional heritage, marrying reference to medieval Persian high culture, to Islamic reform developed in nineteenth-century Bukhara and to the didactical verses produced more locally by non-professional poets until collectivization.³⁹ Their rediscovery, as such, was greatly helped, too, by the growing mobilization of the essentially composite field of local lore—a set of disciplines more directly involved in the development of present-day Muslim hagiography.

Sometimes based on the methodology and contents of the study of local traditions (Rus. *kraevedenie*, lit. “studies of territories”, a set of scholarly practices inherited from local history, ethnography and Russian folklore studies of the Tsarist and Soviet periods),⁴⁰ local and regional historiography has accompanied the reappearance of a Muslim hagiography which it has both integrated, in the form of numerous biographical notes of men of God, and influenced, in particular by its scientific claims to “objectivity”.⁴¹ Produced in a country, Tajikistan, still deeply marked by a rurality that was accentuated, in the early twenty-first century, by a phase of de-urbanization,⁴² this local historiography, oriented towards the apology of specific terroirs, keeps deep traces of the *kraevedenie* of yesteryear which still constitutes its model. Combining a variety of literary genres, these writings are the work of amateur writers from a local intelligentsia⁴³ of teachers, librarians, agronomists and other civil serv-

³⁷ On this demographic turnout, characteristic of the late Soviet period in the Tajik SSR, see the pioneering historical study by Parviz Mullojonov, “Réflexions sur Quelques Effets du Passage de Génération dans l’Intelligentsia Contemporaine du Tadjikistan”, *Cahiers d’Études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien* 18 (1994): 27–36.

³⁸ See for instance the chronicle of a meeting set up, during the short coalition government of spring 1992, at the Tajik Writers Union with Ishan ‘Abd al-Khalil-Jan b. Mirza Ibrahim (b. 1936), the son of a calligrapher from Komsomolabad, in the Qarategin Valley, exiled to Stavropol in Southern Russia from 1931 to 1946: “Khusnavisi bolotarin hunar ast” [Calligraphy Is the Supreme Art], *Farhang* 1992/5–6: 59–64.

³⁹ A phenomenon illustrated in the 2000s by the continuation of the Soviet practice of name-dropping by the religious poet ‘Abd-Allah Gha’ibzada Khayyal (b. 1977) from Fayzabad, in the lower part of the Qarategin Highlands: *Ruboiyot* [Quatrains], Dushanbe, s.n., 2009, for instance p. 24 (where classical Persian poets Hafez, Sa’di, Khayyam, Jami and Bidel are associated with nineteenth-century Qarategini didactical poet Mawlana Jununi and with nineteenth-century Bukharan reformist ‘alim Ahmad Makhdum Siddiqi, alias Danish).

⁴⁰ On the evolution of *kraevedenie* as a discipline in the Russian and Soviet world since the end of the Tsarist period, cf. Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, esp. 155–82. On the combination between the secular and religious dimensions, and between the local, regional and national scales in *kraevedenie*, see Catherine Evtuhov, “Voices from the Regions: *Kraevedenie* Meets the Grand Narrative”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13/4 (2012): 877–87; Milena Benovska-Sabkova, “Church *Kraevedenie*: The Politics of Memory and Religious Revival in Post-Soviet Russia”, *Narodna umjetnost* (Sofia) 46/1 (2009): 121–32.

⁴¹ For a recent example of this literature, see Mullojon Amirbekov, *Farzandoni Rashtonzamin* [The Sons of the Land of Rasht], Dushanbe: Er-Graf, 2015. The volume is opened with the evocation of Persian didactical and gnostic literature in the Qarategin Valley since the fifteenth century, followed by a succession of portraits of local men of God active in the Soviet period, among whom the herbalist and healer Ishan Malih of Askalan, on whom we will get back on the next paragraphs.

⁴² In the early twenty-first century, the country’s population was still at more than 75 percent rural: Richard H. Rowland, “National and Regional Population Trends in Tajikistan: Results from the Recent Census”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 46/3 (2005): 202–23; Jean Radvanyi, “Le Tadjikistan”, in eod., ed., *Les États Postsoviétiques: Identités en Construction, Transformations Politiques, Trajectoires Économiques*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2011: 224–35.

⁴³ In the late Soviet meaning of this term, of “employees in intellectual work, with specific education and knowledge in different fields of science, technology and culture”: Sergei I. Ozhegov, *Slovar’s russkogo iazyka* [Dictionary of Russian Language], Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1982: 223.

ants of the former kolkhoz administration, with Soviet school and university training, sometimes joined by semi-professional authors. Indeed, in the Tajikistan of the first twenty years of independence, the sacred lineages of tomb keepers⁴⁴ of the main Sufi Paths (mainly, branches of the Naqshbandiyya Khufiyya) did not hesitate to call upon university philologists for the writing of the commissioned *vitae* on one or several of their holy forebears. So did in 2003 the sons of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan “Awliya” (1920–91, a Mujaddidi Naqshbandi spiritual guide from the upper Qarategin valley, venerated along the banks of the Wakhsh River inhabited by migrants displaced from the highlands since the late 1940s. His tomb in the middle of the valley became in the 2000s a place of pilgrimage from the whole area.⁴⁵

Commissioned by private, public or semi-public (often local) authorities, this hagiography draws attention to the continuity, if not of a Muslim cult, at least of the transmission of a Muslim ethical, religious and gnostic culture throughout the short twentieth century, highlighting the role of particular sacred lineages of spiritual guides.⁴⁶ As in Orthodox Christian Russia under Vladimir Putin,⁴⁷ this hagiography has been, at least for a time, encouraged by many local and regional political authorities who resulted from the dissolution of the Soviet system, before the adoption by Tajikistan, from 2009, of restrictive measures on the publication of “religious” literature. (Since that date, as we shall see, hagiographical literature has tended to find refuge in the pages of an important local historiography nourished by *kraevedenie*, still strengthening the regionalist dimension of this discourse of holiness). Situated, therefore, at an intersection of initiatives from above and below at the local, regional and national levels, without it always being easy to disentangle what belongs to one and the other, this hagiographical literature is also developing in a context of confrontation of memories. Characteristic of the aftermath of the civil war of 1992–97, the edifying stories that it conveys mix the local and the national, the religious and the secular, the local sometimes appearing as the quintessential national, through the preservation of a cultural “heritage” (Ar. & Pers. *mirath*) by small groups of men of God—groups which, until the late 1980s, hardly exceeded half a dozen disciples, often members of the same kinship, gathering around the same master.⁴⁸ This is why a saint such as the Mujaddidi guide Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja, venerated today along the Wakhsh River Valley, appears as an incarnation of gnostic traditions specific to Qarategin, but also as a Tajik saint par excellence, as a patron of the populations displaced over a large area in the years that followed WWII.

⁴⁴ Employed in Central Asia as a title, the Persian term of address *ishan* refers, at the same time, to descendants of sacred lineages going back to Prophet Muhammad and to the tomb keepers of the sanctuaries of these holy dynasties. For this reason, it is often synonymous to Arabic *sayyid*.

⁴⁵ Sh. Q. Darvozī & M. Badalipur, *Zindaginomai hazrati eshoni Abdurahmonjon ibni Eshoni Porsokhoja* [Life of the Venerable Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja], Dushanbe: s.n., 2003. On this figure and his posterity until the 2010s, see my articles “‘Abd-al-Rakhmān-Dzhān Avliiā”, in S. M. Prozorov, ed., *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii: entsiklopedicheskii slovar’*, Moscow: Nauka, 2, 2018: 21–23; “From Revival to Mutation: The Religious Personnel of Islam in the Tajik SSR, from De-Stalinization to Independence (1955–1991)”, *Central Asian Survey* 29/4 (2011), 53–80, esp. 66–8; Gatling, *Expressions of Sufi Culture*, esp. 33–34, 54–56.

⁴⁶ See also Sayyid Ahmad Qalandar, *Az Madina to Gilkand (shajarai muboraki hazrati eshoni Naqshbandkhon ibni Sohizoda Foruqi)* [From Medina to Gilkand: The Sacred Genealogy of the Venerable Ishan Naqshband Khan b. Sahibzada Faruqi], Dushanbe: Sunnatullo, 2004—a book dedicated to the lineage of Naqshbandi master Ishan Miyan Fazl Naqshband Khan (c. 1898–1977), whose dynasty settled down in the region of Hisar, in the heart of present-day Tajikistan, in the early twentieth century. See also my review of it in *Central Eurasian Reader* 1 (2008), notice 490.

⁴⁷ Benovska-Sabkova, “Church *Kraevedenie*”, 124.

⁴⁸ Interview with Ishan ‘Abd al-Hashir, the elder son of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, at the family’s residence in Dushanbe, 2 November 2005.

What we deal with here is an illustration of the role of geographical imagination, central throughout the Middle East since at least the literary crystallizations of the twelfth century, in debates over religious and political authority. Has not an essential function of the “discourse of place” developed in texts dedicated to the praise of the “merits” (Ar. *fada’il*, Pers. *faza’il*) of a city or country of Islam been, up to the present, to exclude (or to value) heterodox beliefs and particularisms, while making the territory an object of desire as much as a category of belonging?⁴⁹ Within Central Asia, modern periods of instability (from the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, for instance, or between the mid-1910s and the mid-1940s, or in the 1990s as far as Tajikistan is concerned) have placed the production of local and regional identities at the center of literary and religious life. The arch-classical genre, in the lands of Islam, of the catalogue of mausoleums has for long combined history and sacred genealogy, by affirming the continuous presence and protection offered locally, through their mausoleums, by multitudes of saints.⁵⁰ In Soviet and present times, this ancient association, permanently revitalized since the eighteenth century, between local historiography and hagiographic production, has been continued in oral traditions on the gnostic masters active during the short twentieth century.

A disciple (*murid*) of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, the scholar Makhdum Hajji Sultan of Shingilich (b. 1938), the descendant of a double lineage of male and female ‘*ulama*, worked to perpetuate the memory of his native town in Qarategin in the foothills of Hasanabad, a land of equine breeding located south of Dushanbe. Destroyed successive earthquakes and landslides in 1946–47, followed by the immediate deportation of the survived population towards Hanasabad, Shingilich was celebrated in the early twenty-first century, in Persian verse in the banquets Makhdum Sultan used to honor by his presence, as one of the centers of Islamic theological and gnostic education in Qarategin and, as such, a melting pot of modern Tajik national identity.⁵¹ Ignored by Soviet ethnography, neglected by Islamology, domestic and international, this form of orature⁵² made by legendary narratives (Ar. & Pers. *riwayat*) sanctifying a place—here, a whole valley, the Wakhsh River constituting the demographic backbone of present-day Tajikistan—flourished again in the 1990s–2000s. Marked by the territorial upheavals of the decades that followed, from 1929 onwards, the collectivization of agricultural lands, its declamation occupies a significant place in local gendered sociability, especially in the meetings of the men (or of the women) of the same *qawm*, a solidarity network endowed with strong territorial dimensions.⁵³

⁴⁹ Cf. Antrim, *Routes & Realms*, 6–8.

⁵⁰ Cf. Devin DeWeese, “Sacred History for a Central Asian Town: Saints, Shrines, and Legends of Origin of Sayrām, 18th-19th Centuries », *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89-90 (2000): 245–95.

⁵¹ On Makhdum Hajji Sultan and his links with Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, see Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation”, 67–8. On the present cultivation of the memory of the madrasas of Qarategin, of Shingilich especially, see the column dedicated to them in 2015, in an official Tajik newspaper, by the journalist and writer Dilovar Mirzo (b. 1956), a eulogist of Qarategin as a melting pot of traditional Tajik culture: “Dargohi ma’rifat dar Rashtonzamin” [A Palace of Learning on the Land of Rasht], *Sadoi mardum* (9 September 2015: <http://sadoimardum.tj/maorif/dargo-i-ma-rifat-dar-rashtonzamin/>, consulted on 2018/02/18).

⁵² Orature designates a heritage transmitted by word of mouth without recourse to the written word. Its composition, immediate or deferred, uses memory engraving, and its performance implies interaction with an environment (e.g., an audience). Finally, its mode of transmission is specific: orature is constituted in variation. The term was coined by ethno-linguist Rémy Dor, “Orature du Nord-Est Afghan”, *Turcica* 8/1 (1976): 87–116; 9/1 (1977): 30–97.

⁵³ See for instance the collection proposed, on the Tajiks on the Surkhan-Darya Valley, in the south of Uzbekistan, by folklorist Rahmon Rajabi, *Namunae chand az Folklori Tojikoni Shahrisabzu Kitob* [Some Samples of the Orature of the Tajiks of Shahrisabz and Kitob], Dushanbe: Pazhuhishkadai mardumshinosi, 2001, and my review of this book in *Abstracta Iranica* 26 (2005), notice 408.



Figure 1: Makhdum Sultan Shingilichi declaiming a poetry in praise of Shingilich as a center of Islamic learning, Hasanabad, 29 July 2004 (all the photos are by the author).

The strong communal dimension of the neo-traditional get-togethers (*mahfils*, *majlises*) of the kolkhoz universe of the Wakhsh Valley explains the role that a Makhdum Sultan could play, as custodian of the *qawm*'s memory. A communal dimension largely conditioned by the demographic engineering of the post-WWII decades. In recent years, historians and sociologists have uncovered the role played in Soviet Central Asia by an entity such as the kolkhoz brigade (Rus. *brigada*, a production unit of varying size, often consisting of a population of the same ethnic and/or regional origin) in the redevelopment of Islamic religious activity in the decades following the Second World War. Beyond this particular reterritorialization of Central Asian Islam in the world of collective farms,⁵⁴ the sociological study of the hagiographic processes observed in the region since the 1980s reflects a will to sanctify a specifically Soviet Islam around the nascent cult, encouraged by certain administrations—local, regional and national—of Muslim saints of the short twentieth century.

Redefined in territorial terms, the communities reconstructed within the kolkhoz world through the celebration of common guides put down their roots in the short twentieth century and in the long history of Central Asian Islam. We have seen them trying to regain lost connectivity with an imbrication of geographical spaces: a specific valley along which the history of “Migrants” or “Mountaineers” has been stemming since the mid-1940s; Tajiki-

⁵⁴ On this overall phenomenon, see in particular Dudoignon & Noack, ed., *Allah's Kolkhozes*, op. cit., esp. the articles by Dudoignon & Sayyid Ahmad Qalandar and by Beate Giehler, respectively, on the Tajik SSR (pp. 67–74 and 127–130, in particular), and by Bakhtyar Babadjanov on the Uzbek SSR (pp. 222–8 especially).

stan as the cradle of a modern Sunni Persian-language identity; the Persianate world of modern Naqshbandi networks; and, beyond, the umma as a whole. (For this, the role of hub played by Eastern Iran since the 1990s, for the redeployment of the Central Asian Naqshbandiyya at continental scale, has been instrumental.)⁵⁵ It should be noted that the relative protection that these lineages enjoyed during the last decades of the Soviet period, sheltered by the impassable borders of the USSR, also made this period, for the baby-boomer generation born just after the mass population resettlements of 1946–7, a kind of golden age of Central Asian Islam, often remembered to until the mid-2010s with paradoxical (for an external observer) nostalgia.



Figure 2: Tajikistan, physical, with the distinction of the Zerafshan, in the north, and of the Wakhsh, in the south, River Valleys (source: Elizon Maps)

In Tajikistan, but also in Dagestan, in the North-Eastern Caucasus (two former Soviet republics with lowlands marked since after WWII by the development of cotton farming, made possible by the orographic and demographic resources of their upper valleys), many of these large families and communities in search of sanctification have been finding, as suggested above, their origins in the massive population displacements of the 1940s to 1970s. In Tajikistan, these displacements, accelerated by several earthquakes accompanied by massive landslides between 1946 and 1949, emptied of their populations the uplands of the Zerafshan River in the north and of the Wakhsh River in the south. The latter, which until after WWII was home to a substantial part of the population of the Tajik SSR, has come as a result to constitute the country’s orographic and socioeconomic backbone. During the Brezhnev years (1964–82), it was greatly impacted, too, by the edification of the Narak (Rus. Nurek) hydraulic

⁵⁵ Examples in Stéphane A. Dudoignon, “Iran, an Unexpected Sunni Hub between South Asia and the Gulf”, in C. Jaffrelot & L. Louër, ed., *Pan-Islamic Connections: Transnational Networks between South Asia and the Gulf*, London: Hurst, 2017: 177–94, esp. 184–5.

dam on the middle course of the Wakhsh River, between 1961 and 1980.⁵⁶ In both Central Asian and Caucasian cases, in both Tajikistan and Dagestan, this succession of rural/rural population resettlements particular to the Soviet South have enabled, among a range of other side effects, the spread of modern branches of Sufism to new, sometimes unoccupied before or deserted, territories.⁵⁷

In Central Asia, from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, a lineage based Islam carried by Muhajirs (a term of Arabic origin granted with religious connotations, since connected to the Hijra or Hegira of Prophet Muhammad leaving Mecca for Yathrib/Medina in 622 CE) came to face, in the cotton-growing lowlands of the Tajik SSR, SADUM's officially accredited (Rus. *zaregistrovannye*) staff. The religious bureaucracy of the "Muftiate" installed by Stalin in 1943 was then dominated, in the Tajik SSR, by Uzbek-speaking or bilingual staff often originating from the cities of the Fergana Valley and their rural satellites. (Until the appointment in 1989 of Qazi Akbar Turajanzada, born of a dynasty of Qadiri guides coming from the Higher Zerafshan Valley, the chancellery of the Qaziyyat continued to be held in Chaghatay Turkish.⁵⁸ Leading imams of Qurghan-Teppa, in the south, and of Khujand in the north claimed distinction through the cultivation of Chaghatay-language gnostic verses, by eighteenth-century poet Sufi Allah-Yar especially.⁵⁹ From the mid-1980s onwards, the glorification of a Persian-speaking Migrant or Mountainous Islam spurred the protest movement known after 1986 as "Young Mullahs". Born in the Muhajir kolkhozes of the Qurghan-Teppa district, in the south (peopled by Qarategini migrants), and of the Charkuh enclave, in the north (colonized by cultivators from the Zerafshan Valley), the movement became the cradle of an Islamic Renewal Party which would come out of the underground in summer 1990.⁶⁰

As we have seen at the meetings of the Farhang Foundation in the early independence period,⁶¹ a distinctive moto of the Islamic Revival Party—if compared with many other Muslim-Brother-inspired movements of the same years—was an incantation of the heritages of Sunni Muslim Persian-language Central Asia. A position in sharp contrast with the apology, by SADUM's local officers, of the "pure" Islam of the Prophet's time. Colliding with the Muftiate on the definition of "authenticity", the Muhajirs' Islam, framed by Sufi teaching qualified by Muslim-Brother influence, opposed later, in the 1990s–2000s, the spread of Islamic transnationalism, Arabic-speaking, tinged with Salafism, which developed north of the Amu-Darya River from the end of the Soviet era. It is against the historical background of these Kulturkamps that the Muslim hagiographic experiences discussed here developed—marked by the emergence of modern shrines that permitted the construction of local and regional cultural spaces animated, gradually, by the mobility of pilgrimages.

⁵⁶ On the ecological and socioeconomic history of the Wakhsh River Valley from WWII to the end of the Soviet era, see notably Kh. Abdunazarov, *Vakhshonzamin* [Wakhsh Land], Dushanbe: Sharqi ozod, 2003: 96–113; M. Hamroev, *Ta'rikhi ob'iorii vodii Vakhsh (solhoi 1930-1990)* [A History of the Irrigation of the Wakhsh River Valley, 1930–90], Dushanbe: Irfon, 2003: 110–14.

⁵⁷ On Dagestan, see the seminal studies by Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Withering Heights: The Re-Islamization of a Kolkhoz Village in Dagestan, a Micro-History", in Dudoignon & Noack, ed., *Allah's Kolkhozes*: 367–97; and Shamil Shikhaliev, "Downward Mobility and Spiritual Life: The Development of Sufism in the Context of Migration in Dagestan, 1940s–2000s", in *ibid.* 398–420.

⁵⁸ Elements of history in Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union, from WWII to Gorbachev*, London: Hurst, 2000: esp. 135–40; Dudoignon, "From Revival to Mutation", 59–61; ex. in Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*: 257.

⁵⁹ By eighteenth-century gnostic poet Sufi Allah-Yar, in particular: "From Revival to Mutation", 69–70.

⁶⁰ Elements of historical sociology of Tajik IRP in Stéphane A. Dudoignon & Sayyid Ahmad Qalandar, "They Were All from the Country': The Revival and Politicisation of Islam in the Lower Wakhsh River Valley of the Tajik SSR (1947–1997)", in Dudoignon & Noack, eds., *Allah's Kolkhozes*, 47–122, esp. 86–95.

⁶¹ See *supra* note 34.

Memorial Architecture

The most spectacular of these experiences in present-day Tajikistan has been the restoration of ancient pilgrimage places, of the Muslim sanctuaries called by medievalists “memorial architecture”.⁶² The most famous and the most visited since the late 1980s are no doubt those, built up mainly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, of great figures of Central Asian Sufism. The Timurid period (in Transoxiana, from 1369 to 1500) had witnessed the organization of Sufism in the hierarchical and centralized structure that became dominant in the region—in parallel with its antinomian denegation—until the beginning of the Soviet period. The first of these figures, as far as Tajikistan is concerned, is one of the first developers of the Naqshbandiyya, Mawlana Ya‘qub Charkhi (c. 1360-1447), successor to Baha’ al-Din Naqshband at the head of the *tariqa* that would soon take the former’s name.⁶³ Mawlana Ya‘qub has his tomb in a suburban village located south-east of the Tajik capital Dushanbe, on the territory of the former “Lenin” (now Rudaki) District.

As surprising as it may seem, this holy place, which adjoins an important hypostyle mosque, enjoyed from the mid-1980s onwards a vast restoration campaign, becoming thereafter one of the Tajik SSR’s main Islamic pilgrimages.⁶⁴ Patronized by the Qaziyyat under the leadership of Qazi Mirza ‘Abd-Allah Kalanzada (1925–2005, *qazi* from 1968 to 1989), this campaign was supervised, among others, by Damulla Sharif Hisari (c. 1899–1991), a Naqshbandi guide of *sayyid* ancestry who showed extremely active, in his old age, as intermediary between Soviet Tajik authorities and the population.⁶⁵ It is not uncommon to see Mirza ‘Abd-Allah and Damulla Sharif, the second to the right of the first, in group portraits of the Qaziyyat, or in videos of the mid-1980s in which they were taking part together to justify, Islamically, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The existence of such sermons suggest, in retrospect, the poorly documented restoration of the shrine of Mawlana Ya‘qub Charkhi as the result of a tradition, set up during WWII, of mutual compromises between the political and religious authorities of the Tajik SSR.⁶⁶

The regions, however, were not outdone, and several provincial capitals soon followed the example of Dushanbe. Another great historical figure of Central Asian Sufism, the thirteenth-century Naqshbandi guide Shaykh Maslahat al-Din has his mausoleum, erected two centuries after his death, opposite the great Monday (Panjshanba) Bazaar in Khujand, an ancient caravan city on the left bank of the Syr-Darya River, at the western gate of the Fergana

⁶² E.g., L. Iu. Man’kovskaia, “Memorial’noe zodchestvo Srednei Azii” [The Memorial Architecture of Middle Asia], in L. I. Rempel, ed., *Khudozhestvennaia Kul’tura Srednei Azii, IX–XIII veka* [The Artistic Culture of Central Asia, Ninth–Thirteenth Centuries], Tashkent: Izdatel’stvo Literatury i Iskusstva Imeni Gafura Giliama, 1983: 30–48.

⁶³ Elements of history of the Naqshbandiyya in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Hamid Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order”, in M. Gaborieau, A. Popovic, T. Zarccone, ed., *Naqshbandis: Cheminements et Situation Actuelle d’un Ordre Mystique Musulman*, Istanbul & Paris: Isis, 1990: 3–44, esp. 4–16.

⁶⁴ Still closed in 1983 (cf. Alexandre Bennigsen & Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Le Soufi et le Commissaire: Les Confréries Musulmanes en URSS*, Paris: Seuil, 1986: 210), the shrine did not raise the interest of international research: Ro’i for instance (*Islam in the Soviet Union*, 376–80), remains silent on its reopening). On the late Soviet restoration campaign, see notably the collection of testimonies by Tuichi Mirzod, “Ruzgori Mavlono Iaqub Charkhi” [The Destiny of Mawlana Ya‘qub Charkhi], *Merosi Niiogon* 1995/2: 59–62.

⁶⁵ Most of my first-hand retrospective information on Damulla Sharif and on his participation in the restoration of the shrine comes from interviews with his son Ishan Khalifa (in Hisar, on 16 October 2005), with the then Imam of the shrine’s mosque, Damulla Isra’il (at the shrine, on 14 October 2005), and with the faithful of the Masjid-i Mahiyan in Hisar, on 16 October 2005.

⁶⁶ Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation”, 68.

Valley.⁶⁷ This masterpiece of Timurid funerary architecture was restored, too, during the last years of the Soviet period. Yet another figure from Central Asia's Islamic past is a major *'alim* and *'arif* of the Kubrawiyya, Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani (c. 1314–84), who is buried in Kulab, erstwhile Khuttal, a former caravan crossroads on the present Afghan border.⁶⁸ A regional center of cotton production since the mid-twentieth century, Kulab has been experiencing a revival of its traditional literary and gnostic societies since the 1970s.⁶⁹ The town has adopted Mir Sayyid 'Ali as its tutelary saint in the mid-1980s and highlighted this protection after the victory of the pro-communist "Kulabi" militias in the Tajikistan civil war and the accession to power in 1992 of President Imam-'Ali Rahman, a native of the region.⁷⁰

The restoration of the mausoleum of Mawlana Ya'qub Charkhi found immediate echoes in the politically rival regional capitals of Khujand in the north and Kulab in the south, with support of local authorities. All these work sites had important national as well as regional dimensions. National, on the one hand, since they allowed Dushanbe (which, from 1929 to 1961, had been called Stalinabad) to showcase architectural as well as religious, gnostic and literary legacies specifically Persian, in front of the claims to cultural hegemony of a neighbor, Uzbekistan, heir to ancient metropolises such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent and the ancient caravan cities of the Fergana Valley.⁷¹ Regional too, by offering symbolic resources for affirming, in front of Dushanbe, seniority, otherness and autochthony: for Khujand, a major industrial center from WWII to the 1980s, and for long a cradle of political and economic staff for the Tajik SSR; in Kulab, a cotton production center of more modest dimensions, exposed during Perestroika to a major "purge" of its political apparatus, but from which many leaders of independent Tajikistan came after the civil war of 1992–97.

In spite of the rivalries between these different localities, whose interrelations remain affected by the memory of the bloody conflict of the 1990s, the valorization of ancient holiness, with assistance of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan and of the National Service of Historical Monuments, had the advantage of a relative consensus. This consensus is easier to achieve, at least, than the activation of the remembrance of contemporary men of God, associated with the memory of living historical cleavages (from the 1917–21 civil war in Central Asia to the conflicts of the 1990s, including the Soviet waves of repression). The dissenting potential of contemporary sanctity, however, could not prevent the great public restorations from the 1980s to the present from doubling, during the same period, the construction, on local private initiatives, of numerous shrines dedicated, for the most part, not to a small number of great saints of the pre-modern past but to Soviet figures of Islam in Central Asia. The high wave of these building sites lasted

⁶⁷ On Maslahat al-Din Khujandi and his legacy, see Devin DeWeese, "Stuck in the Throat of Chingiz Khān: Envisioning the Mongol Conquest in Some Sufi Accounts from the 14th to the 17th Century", in J. Pfeiffer & Sh. A. Quinn with E. Tucker, ed., *History and Historiography in Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East (Studies in Honour of John E. Woods)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, esp. 34–35. On his mausoleum and the historical context of its construction, see notably R. S. Mukimov & S. M. Mamadzhanova, *Zodchestvo Tadjikistana* [Ancient Architecture of Tajikistan], Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990: 87–9.

⁶⁸ On the history of the Kubrawiyya in Central Asia, see notably Devin DeWeese, "The Eclipse of the Kubrawiyah in Central Asia", *Iranian studies* 28/1-2 (1988): 45–83.

⁶⁹ On it, see Dudoignon & Zevaco, "Sur le 'Mail des Rhapsodes'", esp. 290–301.

⁷⁰ See for instance the encyclopedia article by Iu. Ia'qubov & Z. Hasanov, "Maqbarai Mir Saiid Alii Hamadoni" [The Mausoleum of Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani], in Iu. Ia'qubov, ed., *Kulob: entsiklopediia* [Kulab: an Encyclopedia], [Dushanbe]: Sarredaktsiia ilmi Entsiklopediia millii tojik, 2006: 283–5; on late Soviet and early-independence restoration campaigns: N. N. Negmatov & S. M. Mamadzhanova, "Mavzolei Mir Saiida Hamadoni v Kuliabe", *Merosi Niogon* 1995/2: 3–5.

⁷¹ See my article "Changements Politiques et Historiographie en Asie Centrale (Tadjikistan et Ouzbékistan, 1987–1993)", *Cahier d'Études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien* 16 (1993): 84–135, esp. 90–92.

for some twenty years, starting in 1989 and characterized by the opening of the southern borders of the former USSR, the diversification of a religious field that had suddenly become competitive again, and a short-lived liberalization of the legislation on religious institutions. In Tajikistan, this period lasted until the re-establishment, from autumn 2009, of increasingly tight censorship on the country's religious institutions, media and societies.⁷² These measures were distinguished, on the one hand, by the gradual banning of transnational Muslim missionary movements as diverse as the Turkish Kurdish Nurcus and the Indo-Pakistani Tablighi Jama'at (a ban launched by Russia, followed by the countries of the former USSR, after the beginning of the Second War of Chechnya in 1999) but also by restrictions on the construction of new places of worship (although sanctuaries were initially exempted from the measures taken against mosques and madrasas).

The buildings, yet often modest, which proliferated in the 1990s–2000s, were erected in many rural areas of Tajikistan. In almost all cases, they owe their existence to direct descendants of the locally honored saint. These include, for example, his grandsons and great-grandsons in the case of the Naqshbandi master and renowned herbalist Ishan 'Abd al-Rafi' b. Ishan Muhammad-Zahir, alias Ishan Malih (c. 1871–1959) of Askalan, in front of the district capital Gharm (today Rasht), in Qarategin. Honored by a *mazar* since the late 1990s, Ishan Malih was celebrated locally from Perestroika onwards for his practice of herbalism and of Galenic medicine, for the protection that his lineage used to offer to the poor, and for . . . his personal participation in the Sovietization of Gharm (as a tax collector, notably during the civil war of 1917–21).⁷³ For such a figure of modern sainthood, the role played by direct heirs, by his household especially, but also (as in the case of Ishan Malih, as well as of the aforementioned Ishan 'Abd al-Rahman-Jan b. Parsa-Khwaja), the privileged listeners (sometimes members of the Tajik Communist Party and/or Writers Union) of their gnostic commentary sessions on some of the great classics of didactic Persian poetry, Mawlana Jalal al-Din or 'Attar, is key in their posterity. In a period of sharp debates, triggered by the SADUM's ex-officers, on the religious lawfulness of the decoration of tombs and of the visitation of cemeteries, the role of holy lineages remained instrumental: an overwhelming majority of the figures celebrated by the funerary architecture that developed during this period belong to them.

This “topography of artefacts in the making”⁷⁴ provides local populations with geographical markers that relate the present to the yet unwritten history and counter-history of the Soviet century (two categories mutually reverted since independence), the continuity of which can be re-established beyond the violence of regime change in 1917–20, of Stalinist terror, of the population resettlements of the 1940s and of the antireligious repressions of the late 1950s and mid-1980s. This sacred topography combines the diverse scales represented in the sometimes extensive personal clientele of a renowned man of God (as for such

⁷² On the issues of this political turn-out and, against the backdrop of the utilization by Central Asian states of the Islamic State's menace, see John D. Heathershaw & Sophie Roche, “Islam and Political Violence in Tajikistan: An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge”, *Ethnopolitics Papers* 8 (2011), esp. 13–17. See also the chronicle by Heathershaw & David W. Montgomery, “How Big a Threat Is Islamic State in Central Asia?”, *www.theconversation.com* (11 April 2016).

⁷³ The dates of birth and dates mentioned on his tombstone in the 2000s were 1873–1959. My information on him relies partly on two interviews with his patrilineal grand-son Ishan Muqtada Khwaja b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja, in Askalan on 28 September 2005 and in Dushanbe on 21 July 2006. See also the pioneering paper by Ahror Jamoliddin and the abovementioned (note 51) writer Dilovar Mirzo, “Hakimi buzurg” [A Great Physician], in the local newspaper, *Qarotegini Soveti*, of 26 January 1990, p. 4; and the biographical sketch by a local historiographer of Askalan, Muhtaram Hotam, “Eshon Malehi Qarotegini”, in Amirbekov, ed., *Farzandoni Rashtonzamin*: 115–20.

⁷⁴ Maria-Katharina Lang, “A Topography of Artefacts and Perceptions of the Sacred Landscape in Mongolia”, in Caiozzo & Duchêne, *De la Mongolie à l'Asie Centrale*: 107–24.

a famous herbalist and healer as Ishan Malih Askalani between Qarategin and the Kolkhozabad flatland, in the lower Wakhsh River Valley, with patients reputedly coming from the neighboring Uzbek SSR). These combinations of scales, precisely, and the celebrity that some enjoyed in their lifetime throughout Soviet Central Asia, seem to have become a special concern, from the 1960s onwards, for the soviet institutions in charge of antireligious struggle.⁷⁵ At the same time, the numerous rural chain migrations characteristic of the late Stalin and Khrushchev eras (from a mountain village to a lowland kolkhoz or kolkhoz brigade) favored identifications between the graves or groups of graves of a lineage with particular *qawms* scattered in newly colonized lowlands.

If in pre-modern Central Asia, major shrines were to be found in caravan cities or near crossroads, the Soviet period resulted in the religious marking out of many Central Asian “virgin lands”. With the massive population resettlements of the mid-twentieth century and the human colonization, under Stalin and Khrushchev, of territories uninhabited or deserted by their population during the civil war of 1917–21, with the demographic growth of the post-WWII decades, Soviet modernization allowed for the diffusion of Islam and Sufism to new territories. (And as political scientist Alexander Smolnar suggested that, ultimately, “Communism has Christianized Poland”,⁷⁶ we could conclude that it has Islamized Central Asia.) Many of the *mazars* built up in the 1990s–2000s along the resettlement roads of the 1940s–70s are related to the founding figures of modern-day communities, former cotton kolkhozes or kolkhoz and sovkhoz brigades situated in the foothills colonized by the Mountaineers.

This explains, perhaps, the narratives on the discovery or development of clear water sources, or of the digging of irrigation or diversion canals, common in the legends on Tajik Muslim saints of the Soviet period, based on rhetorical canvas attested to, in Muslim hagiology, since the twelfth century CE.⁷⁷ The recalling of such actions became, in the first two decades of national independence, a characteristic of the hagiography of several Qarategini saints. We find it, for instance, in *riwayat* on the community founder Ishan Shahab al-Din b. Isma‘il Khwaja (c. 1883–1965) of Fayzabad, a county town situated at the entrance of Qarategin, where Shahab al-Din has his tomb. Frequent in Tajikistani hagiology, such narratives develop regional models—present, for example, in traditions that developed in the mid Zerafshan Valley and in Qarategin on a local eighteenth and nineteenth-century thaumaturge, Khalifa Hasan, whose domed *mazar* can be admired on the outskirts of the city of Penjikent. A native of the village of Zidi near Gharm, and a former boarder of the abovementioned Shingilich Madrasa, Khalifa Hasan is celebrated today as the borer of several major irrigation canals in Middle Zerafshan, on behalf of the first Manghit Emirs of Bukhara. Thanks to the many journeys that took him from the Hijaz to Kazan and Punjab, he is credited of disciples as far as the Middle Volga, to whom local tradition attributes the erection of his tomb, restored by his descendants at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ On Tajikistan, see for instance Ro‘i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, 396–7.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Michel, *Politique et Religion*: 58.

⁷⁷ Cf. Devin DeWeese, “Wālī – 5. In Central Asia”, in P. J. Bearman et al., ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 2002: 115–8; Jürgen Paul, “Hagiographic Literature in Persia and Central Asia”, in E. Yar-Shater, ed., *Encyclopaedia iranica* 11 (5), New York: The Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2002: 536–9.

⁷⁸ Interviews of the author with Ishan Sa‘id Khan b. Ishan Shahab al-Din, Fayzabad, 16 July 2009 and, about Khalifa Hasan, with ‘Abd al-Salim Isma‘ilov, Penjikent, 4 August 2006. On Khalifa Hasan, see the commemorative article by local writer Muhammad Saydar with Sh. Rabe‘dukht, “Shaikh Khalifa Hasan Qarotegini”, in Amirbekov, ed., *Farzandoni Rashtonzamin*: 90–112.



Figure 3: Ishan Sa'id Khan and the local religious poet 'Abd-Allah Gha'ibzada Khayyal at the holy source of Ishan Shahab al-Din, in the courtyard of the latter's mosque, Fayzabad (July 2009; on Khayyal, see supra note 39)

Sometimes, these new sanctuaries sprang up in *kolkhozes*, on the territory of those brigades made up of Muhajirs who had come down from one mountain village to populate a land uninhabited and inhospitable. So did the tomb of the Naqshbandi guide and healer Ishan ‘Aziz Khwaja of Qizil-Qal‘a (1888–1976), in the cotton plain of Qurghan-Teppa in Southwestern Tajikistan.⁷⁹ Some developed on road junctions, such as the frequently visited grave (as evidenced by the knotted pieces of cloth, or *lata-bandis*, which adorn the trees of its forecourt) of Sang-i Kulula (c. 1884–1964), on the highway from Dushanbe to Kulab, in the south of the country.⁸⁰ Sometimes also and significantly, these holy tombs are located at an interface between the upper valleys that provided cotton labor and the low plains that were receptacles for the great migration of the mid-twentieth century. It is here, not far from the important rural town of Fayzabad, that one finds, for instance, in addition to the grave of Ishan Shahab al-Din, the sepulcher of the Mujaddidi master Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, the heir of a prestigious dynasty of Dahbidi spiritual guides who takes their origin in a suburban village of sixteenth-century Samarqand.⁸¹ Visited by pilgrims from the lower Wakhsh River Valley and from the capital Dushanbe, it is located at the lower entrance to Qarategin. Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, a posthumously renowned copyist and commentator of the classics of Persian didactic poetry, came down here to establish a modest *dargah* (a hostelry, which became the seat of a madrasa in the early 2000s) in the last years of his life, in order to get closer to the Migrant populations who had one down to the lowlands of the Wakhsh from 1946 onwards.

Indeed, shrine construction also developed during the 1990s–2000s in the upper Qarategin Valley, at bigger distances from Lower Wakhsh, but a majority of them concern divines active in the first half of the twentieth century. One is the shrine of Ishan Malih, just met in Askalan near Gharm, the district capital. Another, the most monumental funeral complex dedicated to the Naqshbandi *murshid* (of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, notably) and gnostic Persian poet Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat Ilaqi (c. 1881–1947), completed by his heirs in 2003 in the village of Ilaq. Mausoleums of later saints from the valley will tend to be at lower altitudes. This gradual shift, from the middle of the century onwards, of Soviet Muslim saints’ tombs from the high valleys to the lowlands is a phenomenon found in several southern republics of the USSR, federated or autonomous, which were demographically transfigured by the mass population resettlements of the mid-1940s and subsequent decades, before the re-colonizations of the 1980s and thereafter. From this viewpoint, the developments in the Tajik SSR can be compared to those in Dagestan (or even in Chechnya), in the North Caucasus: first, top down with the translation of relics, since the late twentieth century, from the Avar highlands of Dagestan to ethnic Avar settlements of the cotton-growing coastal plain, where the Avars have spread since the 1940s the Sufi sociability of the Naqshbandiyya Khalidiyya; bottom up, too, with the re-colonization, real or symbolic, of the Chechen upper valleys brutally deserted in 1944, and with the development there of Islamic funerary and pilgrimage architecture since the end of the Soviet period.⁸²

It is noteworthy that through their historicism, in stylistic grammars varied but intended to show Central Asian, these nascent sanctuaries seek to approach, typologically, great ancestors of a remote past, among which the more famous Mazar-i Sharif of Baha’ al-Din Naqshband in Bukhara. Among other attributes borrowed from this prestigious past: the

⁷⁹ On him, see my articles “From Revival to Mutation”, 61–4; “Īshān ‘Azīz Khvādzha”, in Prozorov, ed., *Islam na territorii*, vol. 2, 39–42.

⁸⁰ On Sang-i Kulula: “From revival to Mutation”, 62.

⁸¹ Hamid Algar, “Dahbīdiya”, in E. Yar-Shater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 6, Costa Mesa, CA: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1993: 585–6.

⁸² See respectively Shikhaliev, “Downwards Mobility”, 404–10; and Mairbek Vachagaev, *Sheikhi i Zīaraty Chechni* [Shaykhs and Ziyarat of Chechnya], Moscow: s.n., 2009, esp. 39 sq., 89, 93, 97 121, 130–1.

use of *tughs* (standards often bearing, in Central Asia, a horsehair banner) which are found, for instance, in the tomb of aforementioned Khalifa Hasan near Penjikent.⁸³ This reuse of the *tugh*—a standard of possible Chinese origin and an emblem of sovereignty under the Chaghatay rulers of Eastern Turkistan and, thereafter, of the Khanates of Transoxiana—shows “popular” Islam, conveyed by the *turuq*, seizing a funerary legacy, dressing it with heritage value and Islamic sainthood. In post-Soviet Central Asia during the first decades of independences, we see it interpreted as the symbol par excellence of the restoration of Islamic sovereignty—an interpretation exemplified by the legendary accounts of the planting of *tughs* at the shrine of Khwaja Baha’ al-Din Naqshband in Bukhara in 1965 already (i.e., in the middle of the Brezhnev era. . .) that we find in the oral *vita* of the Naqshbandi master of Qizil-Qal’a, Ishan ‘Aziz Khwaja, as transmitted by his sons and successive tomb keepers, Ishan Hamid Khwaja (1925–2003) and Ishan Ayyub Khwaja (b. 1962).⁸⁴

A Post-Soviet Discourse of Islamic Sainthood

Many features of Islamic gnosticism as it developed during the short twentieth century were reflected by the sanctuary builders of the 1990s–2000s. One is the insistence on the practice by Soviet Muslim men of God of various forms of eremitism, in sharp contrast with the privileges enjoyed by the religious *nomenklatura* of the Qaziyyat. Under influence of decades of polemics with SADUM, whose fatwas used to condemn the cult of saints and its legendary and marvelous aspects, Tajik Persian hagiographic literature of the 1990s–2000s shows restraint when evoking the prodigies (Ar. & Pers. *mu’jizat*, *karamat*) attributed to their heroes.⁸⁵ At the same time, nascent oral traditions, less constrained by the prerequisites of a formal publication, were then giving more room to marvelous narratives: Among the *karamat* associated with saints active during periods of repression of religious practice, one finds stories on their miraculous ubiquity, or their capacity to move through the air, on the model of the *mi’raj* of Prophet Muhammad. Marginalized, criminalized under Stalin, Khrushchev or Andropov and Gorbachev, religion compensated for the loss of its traditional space by its speed of movement, and by the surprise effects of his reappearances.⁸⁶

These oral traditions, sometimes fixed in written form in the hagiographic literature briefly evoked above, insist more on other aspects of holiness—in the first place, on the great austerity of morals, symbolized by the quilted-cotton shepherd’s tunic that, according to their respective sons, Damulla Sharif Hisari and Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan would never have parted with. Another attribute of many a Soviet Muslim saint’s life story, in the 1990s–2000s, was his assiduous practice of “quarantine” (Pers. *chilla*). This retirement (Ar. & Pers. *khalwat*), which could last from three to forty days according to oral testimonies collected from offspring and disciples, was most often practiced (as in the first decades of the nineteenth century by Khalifa Hasan in Penjikent, whose descendants have kept the pillow of granite)⁸⁷ in a separate room or pavilion of the household, deprived of opening—a memory of the more prestigious *chilla-khanas* that can be found in madrasas and shrines of Transoxiana such as the tomb, famous throughout Tajikistan, of Shaykh Muhammad Bashara (built up between

⁸³ On the symbolism of the *tugh* in premodern Muslim Central Asia, see notably Zarcone, “Le Culte des Saints” 151–3; Bakhtyar Babadzhanov & Elizaveta Nekrasova, “Tug”, in Prozorov, ed., *Islam na territorii*, vol. 1, 2006: 384–6; Alexandre Papas, “Le Tugh dans l’Islam au Xinjiang”, in M. Espagne et al., ed., *Asie Centrale: Transferts Culturels le Long de la Route de la Soie*, Paris: Vendémiaire, 2016: 343–50.

⁸⁴ Dudoignon, “Īshān ‘Azīz Khvādzha”, 42.

⁸⁵ On Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, cf. Darvozi & Badalipur, *Zindaginomai hazrati eshoni Abdurahmonjon*, esp. 39–56.

⁸⁶ Michel, *Religion et Politique*, 60.

⁸⁷ Interview with ‘Abd al-Salim Isma’ilov, Penjikent, 4 August 2006.

the twelfth and fourteenth centuries) at Mazar-i Sharif, some thirty kilometers upstream from Penjikent on the middle course of the Zerafshan.⁸⁸

Despite the insistence of the lineages of builders on the significance of the tombs built to the glory of their pious forefathers, not all of them—far from it—have become objects of pilgrimage. Their frequentation at the turn of the century seems to have depended as much on the existence of a nascent and popular hagiographic tradition as on the more or less favorable location of the tomb. We have briefly mentioned the small domed shrine with trees decorated with *lata-bandis* left by visitors in search of intercession, erected on the Dushanbe–Danghara road for Sang-i Kulula, a locally renowned saint active in the second third of the twentieth century, whose grave was visited in the 2000s by many travelers rarely aware of the name of the saint, who then remained deprived of a textual hagiography. It is, on the contrary, the existence of widely circulated *vitae* that distinguishes Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan and, together with him, several figureheads of the same Dahbidi lineage (among whom another saint from Qarategin, Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat Ilaqi, whose gnostic poems have been published in 2000).⁸⁹



Figure 4: Erected since 1995, the shrine complex of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat, in Ilaq, developed in a remote area thanks to the Muhajirs’ partial recolonization of their highlands quitted since 1947 (photo of late October 2005).

The sepulcher of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan might seem exceptional by its larger num-

⁸⁸ On it, see Mukimov & Mamadzhanova, *Zodchestvo Tadjikistana*: 86–7; R. Mukimov, “Mazary Severnogo Tadjikistana” [The Mazars of Northern Tajikistan], *Merosi Niogon* 1992/1: 36–40.

⁸⁹ Cf. M. Badalipur, “Peshguftor” [Foreword], in Shaikh Abdurrahim, *Kashf-ul-Asror: Gulchini Ghazaliot az Devoni Abdurrahim Davlat* [The Unveiling of Secrets: A Collection of the *ghazals* from the *Diwan* of ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat], [Dushanbe]: Humo, 2000: 3–5.

ber of regular visitors, despite its location in the Qarategin Highlands. This would be forgetting that this commentator and calligrapher of the poetic work of Mawlana and ‘Attar settled successively, in his lifetime, in lower and lower parts of the upper valley, making himself accessible to the Muhajir populations established in the Wakhsh River’s cotton-growing lowlands. Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman ended his life in Qal‘a-yi Naw, in the district of Fayzabad, which has more recently become a stopping place for those farmers and capital dwellers of Muhajir ascent who, from the mid-1970s onwards, have launched a backward colonization (sometimes called *bazgasht* in Tajik Persian) of the highlands that their fathers had had to abandon just after WWII. Highly significant in the first years of national independence, this gradual recolonization of several places destroyed by the earthquakes and landslides of 1947 to 1949, and the open conflicts that it entailed sometimes with the local Party apparatus were chronicled in the early 2000s, in several instances by retired civil servants of the regional administration with support of regional figures of the state apparatus. (As in Hayit, a former market town, during thirteen years from its sovkhos reorganization in 1975 to the proclamation of the state of war in the district in 1988).⁹⁰ Facilitated since the mid-2000s by the Beijing-financed re-asphalting of the roads that connect Dushanbe to the Chinese border along the upper reaches of the Wakhsh River, this territorial reappropriation made possible in the 2000s the rapid development of the *mazar* of Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, as well as the maintenance, upstream in the Qarategin Highlands, of older but more and more visited shrines such as the tomb of ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan’s own master, Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat, in Ilaq.⁹¹

Biographical accounts on these past figureheads insist on two aspects of their action. The first is their specific role as a substitutes for princes and khans of yesteryear and, as such, holders of the heritage of an aulic culture that collapsed brutally in the 1920s, combined with the spiritual “refinement” (in Arabic and Persian: *zarf*) peculiar to Islamic gnosticism and with extreme austerity of morals. This combination of virtues were embodied in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century hagiographies by such figures as Sang-i Kulula in the plain of Hisar, celebrated as a crafted horseman in the *riwayat* performed at local mosques, or as Ishan Malih in Qarategin, remembered by his folks as a connoisseur of falcon hunting.⁹² Another feature of their specific holiness, intimately related to the demographic engineering of the Soviet period and the current remigration phenomena, is the representation of the saint as a horticulturist, holder of the specific traditional skills of a society of mountain farmers. Celebrated in 1987 by the local newspaper as a hero of “red” Qarategin and the embodiment of traditional medicine (which was then presented in the Tajik media as complementary to its Soviet counterpart), Ishan Malih Askalani has been revered in his lineage less for his religious teaching (according to his grandson Ishan Muqtada b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja, he declined any responsibility as an imam and has had no disciples), than as a transmitter of horticultural

⁹⁰ See the local lore sketches by a retired housing services officer: Ergash Ibrohim, *Sarnavishti Hoiti Bostoni* [The Destiny of Ancient Hayit], Dushanbe: s.n., 2002, esp. 341–43 (on the earthquakes of 1949 and their tragic consequences for the town); eod., *Ehioi Hoiti kuan* [The Resurrection of Old Hayit], Dushanbe: s.n., 2006, esp. 57–75 (on the conflicts of 1975 to 1988 in Hayit) and 77 (on the support granted after independence by Sayd-Allah Khayrullaev, a Qarategini figurehead of the regime in place since 1992). See also the anonymous call “Hoitro obod gardonem!” [Let’s Develop Hayit again!], published twenty years earlier in the journal of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, *Merosi Niiogon*, 1992/1: 11–12.

⁹¹ On the *mazar*’s recent development, see for instance the pilgrimage account by the scholar Sultan Hamad on his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ruzgor> (9 June 2017).

⁹² On these peculiar dimensions, see my article: “A Surrogate Aristocracy? Sufi *Adab*, Modernity, Rurality and Civilisation in Ex-Soviet Central Asia”, in C. Mayeur-Jaouen, ed., *Adab and Modernity: A Civilising Process? (Sixteenth–Twenty-First Century)*, Leiden: Brill (Islamic Literatures: Texts and Studies), 2020: 527–51.

knowledge of the upper Tajik valleys.⁹³ During the family's decades of displacement in the cotton district of Kolkhozabad, in the south-west of the Tajik SSR, between 1962 and the outbreak of Tajikistan's civil war in 1992, his son Parsa Khwaja adapted and disseminated this knowledge to these lowlands, until the family's seasonal relocation in Askalan in the early 1990s, its redeployment in the cultivation of orchards and the parallel development of the sanctuary of the "clan" (Ar. & Pers. *qabila*) now visited, says its present keeper, by pilgrims from Kolkhozabad.⁹⁴

The close association, traditional in Central Asia, between textual and monumental hagiography, through the declamation and discussion of the saints' *vitae* on the occasion of a range of ritualized sociability, strengthened the territorial dimension of this sanctification process. Many of the *riwayat* that have been nourishing the hagiographical processes studied here are produced orally within Sufi formal sociability. Especially worth mentioning among these occasions are the evening get-togethers (Ar. & Pers. *mahfils*, *majlises*) that often precede, in the house of a master or of his son or grandson and *khalifa*, the *dhikr* vigils of a singular *tariqa*. Often neglected by observers, these gatherings have been, at the turn of the century, the place and the moment par excellence where the exemplar narratives on a community's founding figure could be exchanged by his *murids*, before taking sometimes the form of written texts closely associated, too, with the memory of a place: in the shape, first, of inscribed tombstones (a practice inherited from Soviet tradition, as for Ishan 'Aziz Khwaja in Qizil-Qal'a, whose first Persian-language stele was erected by his son Ishan Hamid Khwaja in the last years of the twentieth century); second, as a booklet or monograph, printed in Cyrillic for wider circulation (at least until the restrictions imposed in Tajikistan, from 2009 onwards, on "religious" literature). In the 1990s–2000s already, this literature used to focus on the sanctification of the particular territory on which a celebrated lineage had been active in the twentieth century. As suggested above, this association was to further strengthen during the 2010s—a period when, as a result of growing censorship, this apologetic literature had to shelter in the pages of local lore, or *kraevedenie*.

We have seen, too, that commissioned hagiographies could take the form of an interaction between the descendants and disciples of saints, in their remit of purveyors of narratives, on the first hand, and on the other hand hagiographers endowed, sometimes, with an academic background. An Islamologist and a frequent partner of the present author for some of the fieldworks that led to the present study, Sayyid Ahmad Qalandar (b. 1947) worked for the family of the Naqshbandi guide of Dahbidi ascent Ishan Naqshband Khan, in Dushanbe. A native of Shingilich, the son of a religious bookseller of the late Soviet period, this specialist of Makhdum-i A'zam worked to value, during the two exceptional decades considered here, the memory of Qarategin as the cradle par excellence of the Islamic "revival" (Pers. *nahzat*) of the late 1980s to our days in ex-Soviet Central Asia. His role completes the more modest contribution of numbers of local erudites, ex neighborhood or village teachers, kolkhoz functionaries and engineers, the key actors of a rhetoric hagiographic experiences closely linked with the valorization of regional heritages. It should be noted, on this aspect, that the benevolence that the present author enjoyed himself, for almost a decade of regular fieldwork in the Tajik highlands and cotton plains, from many informers can be explained by the status as

⁹³ It is in this capacity that he has been immortalized by some works of Soviet ethnography: see in particular Nikolai N. Ershov, "Narodnaia Meditsina Tadzhikov Karategina i Darvaza" [Popular Medicine among the Tajiks of Qarategin and Darvaz], in *Istoriia, Arkheologiya i Etnografiia Srednei Azii*, Moscow: Nauka, 1968: 349–57; *ibid.*, "O Tabivskoi Meditsine na Pamire" [On the Medicine of the *Tabibs* in the Pamir], *Biulleten' Uzbekskogo Instituta Eksperimental'noi Meditsiny* 14 (1939): 40–8.

⁹⁴ Interview with Ishan Muqtada b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja b. Ishan Malih, Askalan, 28 September 2005 (who mentioned the influx of visitors by the thousands).

a regional historian and, as such, the servant (*mukhlis*) of distinct lineages and the bearer of their peculiar traditions, which was most of the time spontaneously recognized to him.⁹⁵

From this viewpoint, it can be said that “genealogical” Islam, as promoted during two decades of hagiographic creation of exceptional density, reflects a religion strongly tinged with local color. To this day, its great figures appear as living elements of a “heritage” simultaneously national and regional if not local, between the defense of Tajikness (yesterday against the “Uzbek” imams of the Qaziyyat, today against transnational Salafi trends), the apology of particular highlands (Qarategin especially, an orographic and demographic backbone of modern Tajikistan), and the promotion of ethno-social identities typical of the former Soviet South—such as the peculiar Muhajir identity developed among the listeners, patients and disciples of such mutually related shaykhs of Dahbidi ascent as Ishan Malih of Askalan, Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahim Dawlat of Ilaq, Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan b. Ishan Parsa Khwaja, Ishan Naqshband Khan b. Ishan ‘Abduh Khan or, still, Ishan ‘Aziz Khwaja of Qizil-Qal‘a. A Muhajir identity expressed, especially, in the valorization by the hagiography developed at the turn of the century of the talents of horticulturist, canal digger and/or spring discoverer found in the *vitae* of more than one Soviet Muslim man of God from Qarategin.

These were virtues in the statement of which one was tempted to see an alternative “collective heroisation”⁹⁶ of twentieth-century pioneers. These were significant assets at a time when, since the late 1990s, Tajikistan was exporting substantial part of its labor forces (nearly 20%, according to the official statistics of the time) to the Russian Federation, where these economic migrants were exposed to transnational currents of Islam perceived, in the political and religious milieus of Dushanbe, as politically harmful. The link that many of these migrants used to maintain—and have often preserved till the present, despite the repressions—with their spiritual masters (through mobile phone and smartphone technology, specially),⁹⁷ and the activism of many *murshids* on the Internet have enabled Tajik authorities to take profit of the strength of the *pir-murid* link (Ar. *rabita*—the name, by the way, of a Tajik mobile phone company of the early 2010s), so decisive in the Naqshbandi tradition, to strive at counterbalancing the spread of neo-Salafism, which was clearly identified since the turn of the century as the leading new *bête noire* of Central Asian states.⁹⁸

Conclusion

A quarter of a century ago, Devin DeWeese was writing: “Despite the ‘successes’ of the Soviet era in diminishing ‘religiosity’ and in creating (on purpose or ‘reactively’) a ‘de-Islamized’ intelligentsia, it seems likely that for most ordinary people the virtually indivisible connection between ‘Islamic’ and ‘communal’ (the latter term still more appropriate than ‘national’) identity has remained dormant only out of necessity, and will again become one of the central

⁹⁵ Surprise being expressed, from time to time, by insistence to obtain precisions on such or such aspect of the hagiography in gestation. “It’s you again!”, exclaimed one day Ishan ‘Abd al-Hashir b. Ishan ‘Abd al-Rahman-Jan, catching sight of me among the guests of Ishan Naqshband Khan, the day after a long meeting with him and his brother at the family house in Dushanbe.

⁹⁶ According to a formula borrowed from Daniel Fabre, “L’Atelier des Héros”, in Centlivres et al., ed., *La Fabrique des Héros*, 268–9.

⁹⁷ Studied on the markets of Moscow by anthropologist Sophie Roche: “The Role of Islam in the Lives of Central Asian Migrants in Moscow”, *CERIA Brief 2* (2 October 2014, <http://centralasiaprogram.org/blog/2014/11/18/islam-and-migrants-in-moscow/>).

⁹⁸ On this aspect, see my article “Cyber Sufism”, in A. Knysh et al., *Handbook of Sufi Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2020, in print.

‘givens’ shaping their political attitudes and responses.”⁹⁹ It is indeed still too early to measure whether localized Islam and the cult of saints promoted by the *turuq* in the 1990s-2000s, with the assent and sometimes support of President Imam-‘Ali Rahman until the repressive turnout of 2009 and thereafter, will suffice, here as elsewhere in the former Soviet South, to temper the spread of Islamic political-religious movements and currents of protest or dissent.

What is more certain is the weight that the particular demographic and economic history of the Soviet century, combined with the ideological demands of the period from the opening of the Iron curtain to the aftermath of the Arab Springs, will have exerted on this hagiographic moment. The combination of Soviet legacies with present-day expectations have permitted the emergence of a culture of Soviet Muslim sainthood, nourished and organized during a short period—two creative decades—in which they could enjoy political toleration if not encouragement A culture of sainthood nuanced by processes of orthodoxization and of smoothing of rituals, under pressure of Soviet modernism and of the respective reformist trends of the Muftiate of Central Asia, from the mid-1950s onwards, and of grassroots Salafism, today. It is perhaps no coincidence that, in this succession of contexts, the typology of miracles (Ar. & Pers. *karamat*), in the literary hagiography co-produced, in Tajikistan, by sacred lineages and by professional writers granted with a Soviet academic background, beared the imprint of a rationalist critique with insistence on the saints’ piety and overvaluation of their practice of retreat (*khalwat*)—one of those practices that could survive, in the post-WWII decades, the prohibition of public forms of religiosity in the USSR (and, more recently, the current limitations to expressions of public religiosity in several Central Asian countries, Tajikistan included since 2009).

An essential feature of this set of processes is that the traditions that were in gestation during these two exceptional decades have been relying on heterogeneous sources. The result of multiple interactions between communities of amateur scholars and professional writers, between private and public if not state sponsorships, between institutions and pressure groups of varying scope, some born of the sometimes brutal demographic engineering of the USSR, these traditions blended characteristics of scholarly and popular culture against an ancient regional backdrop of cultural legacies and social debates. One of their rare vectors of unification was literary, consisting of an intertext where classical Persian didactic genres have been intersecting with Soviet *kraevedenie* and ethnography. In the double, essentially heterogeneous lineage of premodern authors of anthologies of quotations mentioning the *faza’il* (merits) of a city or region and the specialists of local lore who succeeded them in Central Asia in the twentieth century, the current authors of the mixed historiography that developed in the 1990s–2000 along rural migration routes of the mid-twentieth century approach their territories from a holistic perspective. Don’t we see them implicitly questioning (as do the authors of the work often quoted here on the “Sons of the Land of Rasht”)¹⁰⁰ the way in which a particular society, region or valley follows a distinct development, building a specific destiny, character and role for itself?¹⁰¹ The gradual restriction of religious freedoms observed in Tajikistan since 2009 further encouraged, too, historians, writers and religious thinkers to express themselves more readily as specialists in local lore, a field in which they know how to enjoy greater freedom than in a press or in academic journals that, over the same period, have been gradually reduced to the bare essentials. As suggested by its evolution in other parts of the former Soviet world, *kraevedenie* is also an area in which anti-centralist

⁹⁹ *Islamization and Native Religion*, 532.

¹⁰⁰ *Supra* note 41.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Antrim, *Routes & Realms*, 35–43; DeWeese, “Sacred History for a Central Asian Town”, *passim*; Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*, 217–8; Féaux de la Croix, *Iconic Places in Central Asia*, 207–10.

feelings and the defense of local identity if not initiative can be expressed at lesser risk.¹⁰²

One postulate of Soviet studies of the Cold War period was that the resilience offered by Islam had allowed, in the countries of a Central Asia still predominantly rural until after the independences of 1991, a resistance to change and Sovietization, the fall of the Iron Curtain finally creating the conditions for a return to the pre-1917 situation. What the social history and religious sociology of a variety of communities and networks of practitioners in the Muslim-majority South of the USSR, in the North Caucasus as well as in Central Asia, have suggested for a quarter of a century is a much more nuanced landscape, deeply affected by the transformations of the short twentieth century, combined with an exceptional porosity, typical of popular democracies as a whole, between a religious and a political fields which end up constituting only one—Soviet practice itself allowing religion to play the special role that it has come to have in this part of the world.¹⁰³ Organized by the geste of dynasties of *ishans* featured as “re-Islamizers” and living bonds to the pre-Soviet past, the sanctified territories inherited from Soviet demographic engineering and its contests from the mid-1970s onwards, along the Wakhsh River Valley, testify of the “meaningful continuity” of Sunni Tajik Persian culture on the orographic and historical backbone of what was once the Tajik SSR.¹⁰⁴

Finally, it should be stressed that the role played by the rural elites of Muhajir-background populations of the Qarategin or Zerafshan Highlands in these Sunni-Persian hagiographic experiences, centered on the historical *туруқ*, tends to cast into the shadows entire groups of people, like any memory process. The special importance taken, in particular, by Qarategini Migrants in the current celebration of some interrelated lineages of the Dahbidi tradition originating in sixteenth-century Samarqand, and the very insistence of President Imam-‘Ali Rahman to defend this specifically Tajik Persian-language heritage in the context of the permanent reconstruction of a Tajik nation-state, have relegated many Turkic-speaking populations of the country to oblivion. Among them: large communities such as the Laqay, Barlas or Qataghan horse breeders of the center and south of the country, originating from modern and contemporary pastoral nomadism, who have sometimes exchanged their lands with Mountaineers from 1947 onwards. Many find themselves now confined, in present-day Tajik hagiographic discourse, to a posture of disciples of Tajik Persian-speaking masters, beside whose grave keepers some have been perpetuating Turkic-language gnostic literatures. The Laqays in particular, deemed politically unreliable by the Soviet and post-Soviet powers since the early 1920s, still provide us today, in more than one respect, the arch-typical figure of a Soviet “punished people”.

¹⁰² Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*, 221.

¹⁰³ Michel, *La Société Retrouvée*: 237–8; *ibid.*, *Politique et Religion*: 51.

¹⁰⁴ Frank, *Gulag Miracles*, 117.



Figure 5: Aman Laqay, a disciple of Ishan 'Aziz Khwaja of Qizil Qal'a, performing the Hikmat of Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi, Uyali (Northwest of Qurghan-Teppa), July 2006

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