

Toward a Sacred Topography of Central Asia: Shrines,  
Pilgrimage, and Gender in Kyrgyzstan

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation explores the complex relationship that people have with shrines in southern Kyrgyzstan from the 1950s to the present. In particular, I look at how people, especially women, identify themselves as Muslims and how their religious beliefs and practices associated with shrines and pilgrimage have evolved in response to political, social, and cultural influences in the dynamic region of Central Asia. During both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, there has been ongoing change in how different members of Kyrgyz society have sought to demarcate Islam. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnographic and historic methodologies, I examine these contested negotiations and definitions of religious identities. The integration of a diverse range of sources—interviews, observations, administrative reports, newspaper articles, travel accounts, legends, and photographs—brings to light both individual and group perceptions of the central role of shrines to Islam as it is practiced in Kyrgyzstan.

My analysis reveals how seventy years of Soviet rule did, and did not, disrupt rhythms of shrine veneration through attempts to redefine the cultural and economic functions of

shrines. Through a series of four case studies, I investigate key themes associated with shrines: ethnicity, legends, gender, and health. The shrines of southern Kyrgyzstan are places that invite a multi-national and multi-ethnic base of pilgrims; however, recent attempts to limit pilgrims and visitors to those who regard themselves as Kyrgyz have had significant effects on certain shrines, like Sulaiman Too in Osh. Legends allow people to negotiate their community's relationship with the historic and imagined past, thereby allowing them to transform the mundane, such as through the legends of Arslanbob Ata. Shrines are key sites for women to express themselves as Muslims through ritual and requests. Many shrines, such as Safed Bulan in Jalalabad oblast, have spaces that are directly intended for female pilgrims. Health and healing are vital aspects of shrines in Central Asia both in terms of the miracles associated with shrines and the power that is believed to transfer between shrines and indigenous healers. The shrine of Hazrati Ayub, which is located on the grounds of the Jalalabad sanatorium, represents a shrine that is both well-known for its healing capacity and for its appeal to non-indigenous biomedical practitioners. By drawing comparisons between these shrines and other shrines from neighboring regions, I illustrate the intricacies of shrine practices in southern Kyrgyzstan and their pivotal role in ongoing debates about the proper place and definition of Islam in Central Asia. Furthermore, I demonstrate the connection between contemporary practices of Islam and those during the Soviet, and more distant, pasts.

*For my son, Emanuel*

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## Chapter One

### In Search of the Sacred: Time, Space, and Other Considerations

In 2006, during my first trip to Uzbekistan, my friend Gulnoz and her family introduced me to the mazar (shrine) of Baha al-Din Naqshband in Bukhara.<sup>1</sup> Family groups comprised mostly of women crowded the shrine complex. Those who had come for *ziyarat* (visits) prayed with mullahs in the same manner I had observed at two related shrines (the tombs of Naqshband's teacher (*pir*) and his mother) earlier that day.<sup>2</sup> At Naqshband's shrine I noticed something distinct. Pilgrims circumambulated, and crawled under the remains of a toppled tree, which lies in a central courtyard of the complex. The scene was even more poignant because some of these pilgrims were visibly pregnant and faced with the formidable challenge of maneuvering under the low-lying tree in order to satisfy the requirements of ritual. Over the next few years I would learn that this sort of pious act does not take place exclusively at Naqshband's shrine. Central Asia abounds with shrines of many sizes that present both natural and manmade points of worship.<sup>3</sup> My travels and research would take me back to Uzbekistan and later to

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<sup>1</sup> *Mazar* can be translated as shrine, tomb, or sacred place. See the introduction to Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite, eds., *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang* (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), xi. Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) is the founder and namesake of the Naqshbandiyya, which remains one of the most prominent Sufi orders today. He is buried in the region of Bukhara at a shrine complex that includes a working mosque and madrasa, an extensive museum, the mausoleum of Naqshband, and the tombs of other notables.

<sup>2</sup> *Ziyarat* can be translated as "visits" and is the term used to distinguish visiting local shrines from the al-Hajj, which is the great pilgrimage to Mecca. I use the English terms "pilgrimage" and "pilgrims" when referring to those who are making *ziyarat* to local shrines.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this project, Central Asia will be defined as the former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the bordering areas of Xinjiang Province in China and the bordering areas of Afghanistan especially in the Wakhan Corridor. The primary geographical region under consideration is the Ferghana Valley, which is part of a larger area that has been termed "Inner Asia," "Transoxania," "Turan," or "Mawaranahr." Currently all of the shrine sites that form my case studies are located inside the contemporary borders of the Kyrgyz Republic. For a critical discussion on the geography of Central Asia, see Yuri Bregel, "Notes on the Study of Central Asia," *Papers on Inner Asia*, 28 (1996), 1-61. For a thorough explanation of the types of natural

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Shrines are everywhere in Central Asia. Why are they so prevalent and what role do they play in people's lives today and in the past? These initial questions led me to my dissertation research, which considers the evolving role of shrines in the everyday religious practices and cultural identities of people in southern Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser degree, in other parts of Central Asia.

My dissertation examines Islamic practices and beliefs about pilgrimage, saints, and shrines in Central Asia with a focus on contemporary shrines in southern Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley (Figure 1.1). Even before the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in 1991, policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*' launched in the mid-1980s and the end of the Afghan-Soviet War in 1989 caused Central Asian republics to experience an influx of new ideas about Islamic piety. In many instances these ideas did not reflect the traditions with which people were familiar.<sup>4</sup> My research investigates the factors behind this apparent revival and questions its implications for the way people identify themselves as Muslims. How have the deep historical connections between Islamic shrines within the Kyrgyz Republic and with its neighboring states continued to shape patterns of social interaction between different ethnic groups and nationalities at shrines given the enforcement of national boundaries? Beyond this, how do shrines represent markers of gendered space, and why do people correlate good health—both spiritual and physical—with visiting shrines? I explore these processes through the collection and analysis of oral histories, ethnographic observation, local written sources such as pilgrimage pamphlets, and other documents such as newspaper articles, accounts of scientific expeditions, administrative reports

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features associated with shrines in Central Asia, see 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 State University Press, 1994), 42-50.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 23; and Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 153.

and rulings, travel literature, and photographs. An integrated analysis of these diverse documents reveals how official policies and lived experiences at shrines shaped people's perceptions of their religious and ethnic identities in Kyrgyzstan. My analysis also shows how Muslims in Kyrgyzstan have adapted to the shifting relationship between nationality, ethnicity, gender, and health at shrines in Central Asia from the 1950s to the present day.

This work contributes to the growing body of publications whose authors seek to apply methodologies for analyzing sacrality to shrines throughout the Islamic world.<sup>5</sup> While the study of saints, shrines, and pilgrimage is a well-established field for scholars of religion studies, history and anthropology, especially in Christian contexts, comparative work between religious traditions and in certain parts of the world such as Central Asia are recent developments.<sup>6</sup> Earlier studies of Islamic shrines in Central Asia have tended to either be primarily historical or anthropological in their methodological approaches. Robert McChesney's historical study on the *waqf* (endowment) documents of the shrine complex of 'Ali b. Ali Talib near Balkh traces 400

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<sup>5</sup> For recent examples, see *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, whose authors, trained in diverse academic settings in China, France, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan, offer an anthology that focuses on the Ferghana Valley and Xinjiang; and see Margaret Cormack, ed., *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) for a collection of studies that seeks through a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, to elucidate the range of interactions among Muslims and devotees of other religious traditions (primarily Christianity and Judaism) at places denoted as sacred. For a Russian-language volume that focuses on sacred places in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see S. N. Abashin and V. O. Borbikov, eds., *Podvizhniki Islama: Kul't sviatikh i sufizm v Srednei Azii i na Kavkaze* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia Firma "Vostochnaia Literatura" RAN, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> For the Christian context, see Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); on specific shrines, see Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Viking, 1999); on sacred space and geography, see Sabine MacCormack, "Loca Sancta: the Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 8-31; Bruce Berglund, "Drafting a Historical Geography of East European Christianity," in *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*, ed. Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 329-371; and on everyday devotion and the cult of saints in the Russian Orthodox Church, see Robert Greene, *Bodies Like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois State University, 2010).

years of the shrine's management and political maneuverings with regional rulers in post-Timurid Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> Similar studies by historians offer compelling arguments about the impact of Sufi brotherhoods through analyses of Islamic sources that include inscriptions, genealogies, hagiographies, and biographical compilations.<sup>8</sup> Because of the difficulty of accessing documents at or related to shrines, historians of mazars in Central Asia have often collaborated on projects intended to collect, categorize, and now publish many of the documents they have gained permission to view.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to these text-based historical studies, Bruce Privratsky takes an ethnographic approach in his study of the shrine of Ahmed Yasawi in the town of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan to explore what he concludes is a uniquely local Muslim identity.<sup>10</sup> A fellow anthropologist, Maria Elisabeth Louw, offers her assessment of *ziyarat* in post-Soviet Uzbekistan primarily based on traditional ethnographic methods of participant observation.<sup>11</sup> Some Islamic shrines, like Sulaiman Too in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, are the subjects of archaeological studies alongside analyses of pre-Islamic sites.<sup>12</sup> Descriptions of shrines, the perceived histories of the

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<sup>7</sup> Robert McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia: 400 Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1489-1889* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Ashirbek Muminov, "Die Qoʻzas. Arabische Genealogien in Kasachstan," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Vol. 2: Inter-Regional and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, ed. Anke von Kügelgen, et al. (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag), 193-209; Devin DeWeese, "The Yasavi Order and Persian Hagiography in Seventeenth-Century Central Asia: 'Alim Shaykh of 'Aliyabad and his *Lamahat min nafahat al-quds*," in *The Heritage of Sufism Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 389-414; and idem, "Sacred Places and 'Public' Narrative: The Shrine of Ahmad Yasavi in Hagiographical Traditions of the Yasavi Sufi Order, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 353-76.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Jun Sugawara, et al. ed., *Mazar Documents from Xinjiang and Ferghana* (facsimile), (Tokyo: Research Institute for Foreign Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2007-2010). This three-volume multi-national research project collected and scanned documents at mazars throughout Ferghana and Xinjiang.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Louw, *Everyday Islam*, especially Chapters Three, Five, and Seven.

<sup>12</sup> Valentin L. Ogudin, *Nizhnii Yarus Mirozdaniia, ili Kul'tovye Peshchery Fergany* (Bishkek: Raritet, 2013). Discussed in Chapter Two below.

shrines, and the practices associated with shrines also surface in the writing of promoters of the Soviet anti-religious campaign.<sup>13</sup>

The shrines of Central Asia reflect the type of sacred places that Peter Gottschalk refers to as “energized” so as to differentiate the sacrality associated with shrines (energized) from other places considered holy but not energized, such as mosques. A place becomes energized “when devotees recognize it as emitting a self-actualized power, either because of the location itself or some object present there.”<sup>14</sup> This energy is linked with the concept of *baraka* (blessing), which is associated with Muslim prophets, Sufi saints, shrines, and relics.<sup>15</sup> Gottschalk’s analysis of the difference between energized and non-energized sacred places suggests that transference of energy can occur through the performance of ritual. Following Jonathan Z. Smith’s definition of ritual as “first and foremost, a mode of paying attention...a process for marking interest,” Gottschalk aptly describes the rituals that occur at shrines as marking the aim of the supplicant to harness the power or energy or *baraka* of the place and the person or object that emanates that energy.<sup>16</sup> Gottschalk also points to the relevant feature of exchange that occurs at shrines, wherein through the prescribed rituals or offerings the energy is released to the devotee in the form of a granting of the devotee’s request and true intention (*ni’ya*).<sup>17</sup> Pilgrims who go to shrines in Central Asia often have very personal reasons prompting their visits, such as a recent death in

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Iurii G. Petrash, *Islam v Kirgizii: Rasprostranenie, evoliutsiia, sovremennost’* (Obninsk, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Gottschalk, “Introduction,” in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7. In the Islamic context, a mosque is where practitioners congregate to worship or conduct reverence but without the expectation of receiving anything from the actual location other than it drawing individual or communal attention to a superhuman agent.

<sup>15</sup> *Baraka* as a divine blessing can be transmitted through people (including things like sweat, spittle, or tears), objects, and places.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103; and Gottschalk, “Introduction,” 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> This element of exchange is also the backbone of religious rituals performed by women in private domestic settings in Central Asia. See Svetlana Peshkova, “*Otinchilar* in the Fergana Valley: Islam, Gender, and Power” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2006), 250.

the family, health problems, or trouble with managing the evil eye.<sup>18</sup> Other reasons for visiting include major life changes such as marriage, birth of a child, or the need for assistance with some other personal request or blessing.

Authorities on Islam such as representatives of the official Muftiate of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan Musulmandarynyn Din Bashkarmalygy) and other members of the *ulama* claim that going on *ziyarat* to make requests borders on polytheism in the sense that the supplicants ask for intercession through the saint or object that is perceived to emanate energy at the mazar. Some pilgrims circumvent this conflict by stating clearly that their requests go directly to Allah and not to some other intermediary. Other pilgrims specify that in visiting the shrine their motivation is not to make a request at all. Instead they visit the shrine for leisure and recreational purposes rather than religious ones. This is particularly apparent amongst the Kyrgyz today who connect visiting certain shrine places with their pastoral and nomadic past.

My project takes an interdisciplinary route. It investigates how some Muslims in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Central Asia define and articulate their identity as Muslims, designate and maintain sacred space, and satisfy the demands of a world in which the Muslim community both from within the borders of Kyrgyzstan and from abroad aim to demarcate Islam in ways that are often discordant with one another. What drives them to examine, negotiate, and redefine their traditional beliefs and practices? These dynamic processes cannot be analyzed successfully without a careful consideration of the Soviet past and the effect of Soviet

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<sup>18</sup> The evil eye is found in many cultures from the Mediterranean to South Asia. Someone consciously or unconsciously looks at someone else with aversion or envy and this subsequently brings misfortune or illness to the person under review. Different rituals can be performed to remove the effects of the evil eye and special amulets can be worn either to protect against the evil eye or help heal from its negative impact. See Louw, *Everyday Islam*, 88-96.

policies and ideologies on local Islamic traditions and people's identity as Muslims.<sup>19</sup> On a similar front, the very idea of Muslimness (*Musulmanchylyk*) comes into question in discussions about identity in Kyrgyzstan. Do some Kyrgyz understand their Muslimness differently from their Uzbek and Tajik neighbors? This question stems from the Soviet and non-native pre-Soviet formulations of religion and ethnicity in Central Asia. These formulations have deep roots and influence the way people identify themselves today.

What makes my project unique is that it integrates historical and ethnographic methodologies in one project to show how developments in the Soviet period continue to shape the social, cultural, and intellectual frameworks of Islam in Central Asia, not least those practices created and maintained by Muslim women during and since the Soviet period.<sup>20</sup> My work will contribute to fruitful comparative studies of Islam in practice, not only in Central Asia but also in other regions of the Islamic world, where local shrines and healing rituals remain pivotal for the definition of Islam and its relationship to the challenges of the modern world.<sup>21</sup>

Since the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the events of September 11, 2001, scholars, policy makers, and the general public have become increasingly engaged in efforts to better understand the Islamic beliefs and practices of the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia. Social scientists and historians have forged ahead in the realm of post-Soviet politics and political Islam. Some of these scholars at least reflect on the idea that in order to

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<sup>19</sup> Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2-3 and 24; and Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), xiii-xiv and 247-55.

<sup>20</sup> The editors of *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang* (xii) sought to integrate studies that utilized both historical and anthropological approaches to the study of shrines in Central Asia and noted the necessity for adopting interdisciplinary approaches in future studies.

<sup>21</sup> For parallels with studies on Islam in the context of South Asia, see Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, eds., *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

understand the present situation, they must also look to the past.<sup>22</sup> Adeb Khalid has raised the following questions: “how religious authority is constituted around Islam in a given society, how it interacts with other kinds of authority (that of the state, or of science or progress, and so on), how religious knowledge is produced and transmitted, and by whom.”<sup>23</sup>

Members of the general public and even some scholars, assume too often that the persecution of religion during the 70 years of Soviet rule had rendered the people of Central Asia as only having a superficial Muslim identity. They further believe that this superficiality left the post-Soviet states ripe for interference from the influences of homegrown and imported radical Islam.<sup>24</sup> These misconceptions are rooted in the work of Alexandre Bennigsen and other scholars who followed in his wake. Devin DeWeese refers to this line of reasoning as “Sovietological Islamology,” which emphasizes a distinct divide in Central Asian Islam into the categories of “official Islam” and “parallel Islam.” Official Islam includes activities and participants that function in communion with Soviet policies and organizations, while parallel Islam represents unofficial participation and practices that in some cases approach or form the basis for

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<sup>22</sup> In some instances, the Soviet / Post-Soviet divide is well-defined such as in Asel Murzakulova and John Schoeberlein, “The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft an Effective Nation-State Ideology,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61 (2009): 1233-1235. Murzakulova and Schoeberlein argue that because no analogous centralized ideology-producing institutions exist in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan that there is opportunity for a diversity of new voices. At the same time, the notion of needing a state ideology remains strong.

<sup>23</sup> Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 24. His view reflects the call from other scholars such as Shirin Akiner, who acknowledge that “[p]erhaps inevitably, attention is focused on the present situation. For the most part, there is little interest in exploring the historical background. Insofar as any reference is made to the Soviet experience, it is presented in simplistic and often misleading terms” in Shirin Akiner, “Between Tradition and Modernity: the Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women,” in *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 261-304.

<sup>24</sup> See T. Jeremy Gunn, “Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia,” *Sociology of Religion* 64 (2003): 390-1. Gunn offers a clear overview of this sort of reasoning that overemphasizes the success of the Soviet anti-religious campaigns, and bases the idea of Muslimness on what are considered the essentials of Islam as determined through the Western delineation of world religions.

radicalism, clandestine behavior, and opposition or resistance to the state.<sup>25</sup> Not only has the perpetuation of this dichotomy affected the way scholars view new developments in Central Asian Islam, but it has also tempered the way some scholars have conceptualized Islam in Central Asia during pre-Soviet times. This dichotomy also propagates the idea that Central Asians, especially those considered to have nomadic roots, never underwent a true conversion to Islam. This categorization becomes more problematic in light of Soviet anti-religious propaganda that delineated Islamic practices and beliefs through the lens of Christian terms, such as clergy and orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> The cultural anthropologist Morgan Liu, analyzing post-Soviet inter-ethnic relations in the city of Osh, explains that:

[o]ne must ask how multiple histories are layered into the present as Central Asians mobilize and reiterate “ethnic traditions,” Soviet assumptions, Inner Asian sensibilities, and Islamic knowledge in the service of transforming society toward stability and prosperity, toward even globally circulating ideals of “democracy” and “capitalism.” The results reveal vernacular idioms of understanding—decidedly Central Asian ways of looking at the world today.<sup>27</sup>

Liu captures the complexity of ideologies that drive the way people define themselves in Central Asia today. Although he is focused on the years since the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, he remains aware of the intricacies of studying a city in the heart of Central Asia.

On a related note, the study of everyday Islam in Central Asia and other parts of the Islamic world has gained in popularity, especially amongst anthropologists.<sup>28</sup> Anthropologists

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<sup>25</sup> For two prime examples of the French school of “Sovietological Islamology,” see Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier Quelquejay, *Islam and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1967), and Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Le soufi et le commissaires: les confréries musulmanes en URSS* (Paris: Seuil, 1986). See also, Devin DeWeese, “Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: a Review Essay on Yaacov Ro’i’s *Islam in the Soviet Union*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13 (2002): 298-330.

<sup>26</sup> DeWeese, “Legacy of Sovietology,” 299-300.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan Liu, *Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Elisabeth Louw, “Dreaming up Futures: Dream Omens and Magic in Bishkek,” *History and Anthropology* 21 (2010): 277-292; Julie McBrien, “The Fruit of Devotion: Islam and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan” (PhD diss., University of Halle-Wittenberg, 2008); David William Montgomery, “The Transmission of Religious and Cultural Knowledge and Potentiality in Practice: An Anthropology of

seek to define the practices and beliefs of ordinary people but also attempt to characterize outside forces that influence and change those everyday practices and beliefs. These outside forces can include anything from national or regional government mandates to educational or financial programs developed with international support. International funding for mosques and other Islamic institutions has played an important role in the evolution of daily Islamic practice in some parts of Central Asia. Johan Rasanayagam analyzes the morality of actions and the experiential aspects of Islamic life in Uzbek *mahallas* (neighborhoods).<sup>29</sup> Like Rasanayagam, Maria Louw has drawn connections between morality and ordinary people's ideas about what it means to be a Muslim. Svetlana Peshkova argues that the formation of Muslim identity on the individual level is informed by the sociohistoric context, but that individual beliefs about identity affect social change.<sup>30</sup> Like these anthropological studies of Post-Soviet Uzbekistan, this project seeks to understand the multivalent and often contested identities of people in Central Asia. I draw upon the work of Till Mostowlansky with his query over how different people evoke specific identity markers at different places and times.<sup>31</sup> Do people consider themselves Kyrgyz, Muslim, and Central Asian equally? Are there specific contexts in which people favor one of their identity markers over the others? What influences the characterization of these identity markers?

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Social Navigation in the Kyrgyz Republic" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2007); Elmira Kuchkumkulova, "Kyrgyz Nomadic Customs and the Impact of the Re-Islamization after Independence (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2007); and Irene Hilgers, *Why do Uzbeks have to be Muslims?: Exploring Religiosity in the Ferghana Valley* (Berlin: Max Planck Institut für ethnologische Forschung, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. 7-22. For another study that links morality, everyday Islam, and shrines, see Maria Louw, "Pursuing 'Muslimness': Shrines as Sites for Moralities in the Making in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 25 (2006): 319-339.

<sup>30</sup> Svetlana Peshkova, *Women, Islam, and Identity: Public Life in Private Spaces in Uzbekistan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Till Mostowlansky, "Kyrgyz—Muslim—Central Asian? : Recent Approaches to the Study of Kyrgyz Culture in Kyrgyzstan," in *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, ed. Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann (New York: Routledge, 2011), 291-305.

In contrast, historians of Central Asian Islam have tended to focus on the pre-Soviet and early Soviet past or rely on documents composed and preserved by Muslim or Soviet elites.<sup>32</sup> Robert Crews' notable study on tsarist Russia's ongoing attempts to establish imperial authority by way of religion charts how the tsarist regime used religion as a tool to help govern its vast empire. With the tsarist state's co-option of religious authority and toleration, Muslims, in turn, used the imperial courts and police for their own local purposes. Crews utilizes both central and regional archives that were unavailable before 1991 as well as sources written by Muslims to construct a picture of legislation and the result of that legislation in the borderlands of the Russian empire.<sup>33</sup> Alexander Morrison and Elena Campbell took the challenge put forth by Vladimir Bobrovnikov to address the lack of focused studies on Imperial Russian administration of Islamic institutions and imperial attitudes toward Muslims in nineteenth and early twentieth century Central Asia.<sup>34</sup>

By the early 2000s, historians began to heed the call to discuss the Soviet past in Central Asia with publications that detailed the early policies against religion in Soviet Central Asia.<sup>35</sup> While most historians of Islam in Central Asia focus on the earlier Soviet campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, Eren Murat Tasar's dissertation examines the effects of Soviet anti-religious policies in Central Asia from 1943 to 1991.<sup>36</sup> Adapting the framework developed by his academic

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<sup>32</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*; and Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> See Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Islam in the Russian Empire," in *Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), v. 2, 202-23; Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> In addition to Shoshana Keller and Douglas Northrup discussed below, see, for instance, Marianne Kamp, "Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (2002): 263-278.

<sup>36</sup> Eren Murat Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim: the Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-

advisor, Terry Martin, he analyzes the various policies in terms of hard-line, soft-line, and his additional gradation of moderate-line.<sup>37</sup> His evidence draws heavily from Soviet archival sources. My work builds on Tasar's scholarship in several respects. Like him, I examine Soviet policies and their repercussions through Soviet archival sources, but I add an ethnographic dimension through participant observation and interviews conducted at shrines to locate the voices of ordinary people. The ethnographic dimension is crucial for my project because it allows me to draw connections between the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in a way that integrates voices of those absent or minimally represented in the state-produced documents. It also enables me to better understand the local and enduring effects of Soviet policies and actions on people's lived experiences as Muslims.

Historians have faced challenges trying to locate the voices of non-elites and marginalized groups, especially in societies that emphasize oral traditions as well as written traditions.<sup>38</sup> This is often the case when historians seek to elucidate Muslim women's everyday lives.<sup>39</sup> Innovative methods have to be employed as a result, often drawn from the research methods of other disciplines to offer new ways to collect and analyze data from atypical archives. One technique, such as that employed by Marianne Kamp in her study of women and early Soviet policy in Uzbekistan, is to combine historical and ethnographic methods, highlighting the significant contribution of oral histories.<sup>40</sup> Douglas Northrup who, like Kamp, uses gender as a central analytical category, argues that the power dynamic between the Soviet state and the Uzbek

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1991" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> For a collection of essays that focus on the subaltern in the South Asian context, see Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London: Verso, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> See Habiba Fathi, ed., *Femmes d'Asie centrale genre et mutations dans les sociétés musulmanes soviétisées* (Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Institut français d'études sur l'Asie centrale, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Central Asia: Islam, the Soviet Project, and the Unveiling of Uzbek Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Kamp, "Three Lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek, Survivor," *Oral History Review* 28 (2001): 21-58.

people has repercussions for the way that people constructed their identities. He proposes that everyday lives and the voices of the sub-alterns can at times be found in the state-produced documents of the Soviet archives, but that one must read “against the grain of their intended purpose—ideally in combination with other forms of evidence.”<sup>41</sup> This dissertation combines elements of both of these approaches.

Scholars infrequently bridge the pre-Soviet, Soviet period, and post-Soviet eras because of methodological limitations that prevent them from conceptualizing how the effects of one era carry over into the next or by ignoring certain trends in scholarship. Some scholars place more emphasis on the events of 1917 or the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as the sole catalyst of new scholarly perspectives, neglecting that certain processes or changes in ideology and practice may in fact have roots before or after these ostensibly critical divides.<sup>42</sup> To understand contemporary Islamic beliefs and practices it is vital to look to the past and to identify processes during transitional phases, keeping in mind that those transitional phases might not be bounded by the years 1917 and 1991. The study of shrine sites in Kyrgyzstan and the people who visit, manage, and maintain them offers an opportunity to shed light on how the region’s Muslims are reviving and reinterpreting the practices that they perceive as traditional in dialogue with—and sometimes in opposition to—definitions formulated and sometimes imposed by the state, the intellectual elite, and foreign institutions. One must ask how Islamic practices and beliefs are being contested, negotiated, and institutionalized in Central Asia in dialogue with the Soviet past, both actual and imagined.

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<sup>41</sup> Northrup, *Veiled Empire*, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Glennys Young, “Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism,” *The Russian Review* 66 (2007): 95-122.

## **Timeframe and Sources**

The fieldwork for this dissertation began during a two-month research trip to Uzbekistan in 2006, and extended through subsequent trips to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan between 2008 and 2010. The majority of the fieldwork was conducted over the course of two extended research trips in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2011 and 2012. The Central State Archives and the Political Archives (Communist Party Archives), both in Bishkek, yielded documents that included official government correspondence, rulings, plans of action for managing religious groups, individuals, or properties, lists of individuals who professed certain religions, newspaper articles, explanations of ministerial duties and goals, guidelines for religious practice, and scientific and archeological accounts.<sup>43</sup> Some of these documents became a major part of the evidence upon which I base my arguments about the changes in religious and non-religious practices at shrines during the Soviet era. A collection of photographs detailing aspects of the Soviet anti-religious campaign in the Kyrgyz SSR of the 1950s – 1980s held by the Sulaiman-Too National Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex (Sulaiman-Too Uluttuk Tarykhyi-Arkheologiialyk Muzei Kompleksi), in Osh earned an important place in my analysis. Visits to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the Central Mosque, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs all in Bishkek led to informative interviews and the discovery of written materials that dictate how one should behave and believe as a Muslim.

In addition to these documents I gathered pamphlets and small books from shrine sites, mosques, and individuals that allow me to evaluate the meaning of shrines, legends about shrines, and the prescribed practices and beliefs associated with shrines. To complement these written and visual sources, I conducted individual and group interviews with pilgrims, shrine guardians, shrine caretakers, healers and other religious specialists, and other people involved in shrine

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<sup>43</sup> See Bibliography for a list of *fondy*.

management or preservation, which offered a unique set of sources as a basis for interpreting the diversity of beliefs about shrines held by people in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.<sup>44</sup> Shrine guardians, healers, and officials of the Muftiate, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, and the Osh Museum agreed to interviews. The pilgrims and local inhabitants of shrine communities agreed to be interviewed through oral consent; indeed many requested to tell their stories.

### **Research Methodology**

My main goal in conducting this research project was to understand the daily religious beliefs and practices of Muslims in Central Asia and how and why those beliefs and practices have transformed and adapted since Stalin's death in 1953. The state records now held at the Central State Archive of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central State Archive of Political Documentation, and the Sulaiman Too – National Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex reveal the reasoning behind the regulation and categorization of religious places, the actions of certain governing bodies and individuals, and to an extent, people's reactions to state policies. However, these records cannot tell us about the motivations behind everyday religious practices such as visiting shrines apart from the official interpretation. Claims that Muslims in Central Asia remained under the spell of backwards traditions and hoodwinking sheikhs often divulge more about the ideals of Soviet bureaucrats than about the men and women who visited shrines. These sources reveal most sharply the ways in which the state categorized and regulated religious institutions and practices. They likewise provide insight into the methods employed by

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<sup>44</sup> These interviews were conducted in Russian, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik depending on the language choice of the interviewee. Many conversations would transition between languages. An analysis of code shifting related to particular topics or with specific individuals could yield interesting points of analysis. However, I do not attempt such an analysis here. Although I have studied these languages extensively, my research assistant, Akmaral Choiunbek Kyzy, frequently accompanied me on interviews to facilitate discussion through clarification both for myself and for the interviewees. The recorded interviews, primarily in Kyrgyz language, were transcribed by Tynara Ryskulova and translated by Ajar Duishembaeva.

the state to dissuade people from participating in what they considered unofficial religious practices. These documents do little to illuminate the experience of individual pilgrims participating in *ziyarat* or shrine guardians.<sup>45</sup>

Standard survey methodologies favored by some social scientists are poorly suited for studying religious activities in Central Asia. Using survey methodologies and the subsequent statistical reviews to study religious practices is problematic because they suggest that religious beliefs and practices are static and thus, quantifiable. Perhaps due to the Soviet heritage, many people in Central Asia are suspicious of signing documents. As with many other personal beliefs, there are often not simple “yes” or “no” answers.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, to go to a sacred site as an outsider and assume that one can begin approaching potential participants to gather qualitative and ethnographic data is also problematic because it assumes that the researcher’s presence and research will not interfere with the pilgrims and workers.<sup>47</sup> In order to avoid disrupting shrine activities, I conducted interviews with people whom I had contacted prior to arriving at the shrine sites or with those who offered to speak with me out of curiosity once I was visiting the shrine. I waited for an invitation to speak with pilgrims, tourists, or anyone else at the shrines in order to minimize disruption. Participant observation also allowed me to collect valuable data without interrupting or overly-disrupting the activities of those around me.

With the assistance of a Bishkek-based non-governmental organization (NGO), Aigine Cultural Research Center (CRC), I established contact with the shrine guardians of three major sites for a preliminary study: Sulaiman Too in Osh, Manas Ordo in Talas, and Manjaly Ata on the southern shore of Issyk Kul (Ysyk Köl). I was able to call the shrine guardians before making

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<sup>45</sup> Some of the documents contained biographical information about those they had selected to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>46</sup> Hilgers, *Why do Uzbeks have to be Muslims?*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 6-8.

arrangements to visit the sites. I had varying success in talking with pilgrims at these sites. Pilgrims' time constraints created obstacles to my research. People often travel long distances over poorly maintained roads in cramped and uncomfortable transport to visit these sacred sites. Because they have a limited time to accomplish their prayers, it is not in their best interest to spend time talking with curious foreign researchers. This was not so much the case if the sacred site had a ritual house (*ashkana*) associated with it because then the pilgrims had more time to mingle with other pilgrims outside of their family group through the act of sharing food from their meals.<sup>48</sup>

Ritual houses are the area of the sacred site where pilgrim groups or family groups are able to make an animal sacrifice and prepare a meal with ingredients they have either brought with them or purchased locally. This meal is to be shared with other pilgrims and people who work at the shrine. If the shrine site is near a town or city, the food can also be shared with the local people who are in need. While I would arrive with my own offering for the shrine place in the form of food and small amounts of money, I was frequently invited to join groups of pilgrims for their offertory meal. This was the ideal time to discuss their motivations in visiting the shrine and the rituals that they would perform while there.<sup>49</sup> Because these meals I attended were ritual offerings and had anywhere from three participants to 25 participants it was often impossible to record my interviews for lack of sound quality, respect for the sacred and personal nature of the offertory meal, and the inability to ensure consent from all participants for use of the recorded

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<sup>48</sup> *Ashkana* (Kyrgyz), *ashpazkhana* (Persian), or *oshkhona* (Uzbek) are general terms used to describe the kitchen, a café, or generally anywhere that food is prepared. In Ottoman lands, it referred to the public kitchens associated with *waqf* or endowment properties. See Amy Singer, "Serving up Charity: The Ottoman Public Kitchen," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2005): 481-500. Here I have translated the term as "ritual house" because it is the area where animal sacrifice takes place and where offertory meals are prepared, distributed, and consumed. A related term, *langar khana*, which refers to the large cauldrons used for cooking, appears in the context of shrines in South Asia and Eastern Turkistan.

<sup>49</sup> This resembles Candace Slater's research experience in *Trail of Miracles*.

materials. There were also children and elderly persons present, who would have fallen outside of the purview of the verbal consent that I had established with other individual participants.

In ethnographic research – or even archival research for that matter – the researcher makes a difference in the types of sources that can be accessed, and those effects are not always immediately apparent when embarking on new field research.<sup>50</sup> I was a foreign woman in Central Asia, and during the research period I was in my late 20s and early 30s, unmarried, and working on a doctoral degree.<sup>51</sup> My status as an unmarried woman was particularly difficult for many whom I encountered. Even during my first trip to Uzbekistan at age 26 I was told that I looked young enough that the neighborhood matchmakers could easily find me a husband, but that we would have to act quickly. When I needed to maneuver through complicated social interactions I learned that evoking my father’s authority and preference was essential to justify my status and also to avoid any undesirable situations. Later I alternated between the wishes of my father or fiancé.<sup>52</sup> My status had two major repercussions. First, there were several occasions when I was not taken seriously. I was either denied access to documents or places and my research was brushed off as unimportant or precarious. (This also had to do with my topic and the mere fact that I was a woman – married or unmarried. I had to learn different ways to describe my research project depending on the company). Second, the fact that I was unmarried and childless was cause for suspicion and concern. If I told people I was younger this often

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<sup>50</sup> Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9-13; and Candace Slater, “Four Moments,” in *The World Observed: Reflections on the Fieldwork Process*, ed. Bruce Jackson and Edward D. Ives (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 18-31.

<sup>51</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic has different designations for degrees, and in the minds of my informants, a doctorate was not necessarily a rigorous program of study followed by exams and a long-term original research project that culminates in a dissertation. I began saying I was a professor or *kandidat nauk* in order to obtain entry to certain locations and establish my credentials when necessary.

<sup>52</sup> Ghannam (*Remaking the Modern*, 10) explains that she learned “the advantage of having the husband as an authority in the life of a woman and how that can be actively used to achieve certain purposes and avoid undesirable social obligations.”

allowed me to avoid uncomfortable conversations. One major benefit, however, at the shrines was that I was able to justify my presence by explaining that I was seeking marriage and hoped for children in the immediate future.

Visibly pregnant during my second research trip to the Kyrgyz Republic, I experienced a significant change in the way in which pilgrims viewed and approached me. Women, in particular, were very curious about my own situation, and would not hesitate to engage me in unsolicited conversation about the most private aspects of my life. Because of the pregnancy and because I had visited many sites that housed fertility shrines during previous research trips, I was perceived as someone who truly understood the miracles and power of shrines. People assumed that I had requested a child during the previous visits, and would confide in me that they, too, or their sister or their aunt, had done the same with successful results. In a sense I was treated as an insider. To strengthen the case, I was having a son. This was a clear sign that I had been blessed. There was no longer a fear of the foreign researcher, who could barely be considered to be a woman since she had not yet borne a child. They could relate to me, and through their curiosity, they welcomed the opportunity to share their personal experiences and legends and other details about the shrines.

At the archives, the work environment and the condition of document preservation were not ideal. Most disappointingly, part of a valuable collection of documents (fond 2597, opis 1s, “Upolnomochennyĭ soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR po Kirgizskoi SSR”) dealing with the official regulation of religion and the anti-religious campaign had become inaccessible at the Central State Archive. Luckily, Eren Murat Tasar, who was researching his dissertation on the administrative bodies of religious affairs in Soviet Central Asia and their policies, viewed the collection in 2009 and incorporated from the documents detailed

information into several of his publications.<sup>53</sup> When I first inquired about the collection, I was told that they were classified (*sekretnyi*). The violent ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 2010 had acted as a catalyst for this reclassification. But from a local contact who worked with the Bishkek Police, I learned that some of the Central State Archive's documents may have been destroyed by fire during the same time frame as the violence. Regardless, I was unable to access these potentially significant documents apart from the portions described by Tasar.

As during my ethnographic fieldwork, I found that my identity as a female researcher who was investigating the sensitive topic of Islam influenced my archival experience. Although there is a detailed bureaucratic system for gaining access to the Central State Archive, I faced challenges in establishing my position as a serious researcher. Even with official letters of introduction from my home institution and from the American University of Central Asia, I did not fit the imagined role of an older and male researcher whom the archive representatives had come to expect over the years. Once I had succeeded in obtaining permission to access the holdings of the Central State Archive, the woman in charge of the reading room tried to direct me away from my research topic and suggest that perhaps I might want to look at sources on entirely different subjects that did not involve the topic of religion. She also attempted to engage me in conversations about women's fashion and the Turkish *telenovela* in which she was currently engrossed. When I left the capital on trips to other parts of Kyrgyzstan she offered her unsolicited opinions on the various locations. This was one of my first windows into some of the common views of northerners about the south of Kyrgyzstan and its people as well as the strong pride that many Kyrgyz feel toward places such as Talas, which many consider the birthplace of Manas,

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<sup>53</sup> Tasar "Soviet and Muslim"; Tasar, "Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism in Postwar Kyrgyzstan" *Cahiers du monde russe* 52 (2011): 387-404.

the Kyrgyz epic hero. Many northerners feel that focusing on the northern areas would yield a better study without the constraints of perceived Islamic fundamentalists from the Ferghana Valley and the influences of Uzbeks. She had visited Talas the previous spring and praised me for going there to experience the foundation of Kyrgyz culture.

The discovery of the photographs of the Soviet anti-religious campaign happened after taking a tour of the main collection of the Sulaiman-Too National Archaeological and Historical Museum (Osh Museum) during which I came across several photographs that looked like pilgrims at different stations along the ridge of Sulaiman Too. One photograph that stood out was a striking image of the White House (*Belyi Domik*) or Takht-i Sulaiman. Due to its overexposure the White House glowed as the backdrop for the pilgrims who prayed there. All the photos were in black and white and had simple captions reading, “Palomniki. Sulaiman Gora” or “Belyi Domik.”<sup>54</sup> Later that day I asked Alimbek Hajji, the official mullah of Sulaiman Too (Chapter Two), if he knew anything about the photographs.<sup>55</sup> He replied that the photographs belonged to the museum and that there were more than those on display. I confirmed this information with one of the docents from the Cave Museum who also allowed me to look at the initial UNESCO proposal written by several scholars from the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. During a second trip to Osh I obtained permission from the director of the museum to view the documents, photographs, and other objects housed in the underground storage rooms of the museum.<sup>56</sup> Rather than witnessing a well-organized preservation of the items and the documents,

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<sup>54</sup> “Pilgrims. Sulaiman’s Mountain” and “Small White House.”

<sup>55</sup> In Kyrgyz language mullah is *moldo*. Local mosques appoint mullahs at prominent shrines in Kyrgyzstan. A mullah’s duties include reading the Qur’an and saying prayers for the pilgrims and performing ritual duties like animal sacrifice. Pilgrims leave small sums of money, food, or other goods such as textiles in return for the services provided to them. Shrine guardians, custodians, and caretakers may or may not be mullahs depending on the shrine.

<sup>56</sup> I had sought permission on the first visit, but after having climbed up the steep mountain of Sulaiman Too I did not look the part of a serious researcher nor had I brought the proper gifts.

I found several rooms filled with random boxes and objects, including stonewear and relics of the prehistoric past. I inquired about two specific parts of the collections: a facsimile of the letters of Kokand (the originals are in the Uzbek Academy of Sciences) and the photos I had seen on display upstairs. The Osh Museum's basement archive had three folders of photos and the box of disorganized negatives.<sup>57</sup> These became pivotal parts of my research.

These first trips to the south of Kyrgyzstan, along with my discoveries of the intricacies of the Soviet anti-religious campaign, catalyzed my decision to concentrate my efforts on several shrine places in southern Kyrgyzstan. I traveled by shared taxi to my destinations and was able to gain valuable insight from other passengers and drivers I encountered on my travels.<sup>58</sup> Sacred sites abound in Kyrgyzstan, and it was difficult to narrow down which shrines to emphasize in my study. I decided to concentrate on four shrines in the Ferghana Valley that caught the attention of the producers of the Soviet anti-religious campaign in Central Asia. Each of the four shrines exemplifies some of the most heated debates about the roles of ethnicity, nationality, gender, and health, both historically and today. Other shrines could also be used to explore some of these same trends. The Manas Ordo in Talas and Manjaly Ata in Issyk Kul, which I visited during initial investigations, faced some of the same challenges as the four I have selected. On the same account, the Soviet propagandists often identified the shrine of Idris Paygambar in the Chatkal region of Jalalabad oblast along with many other shrines in Osh oblast as focal points for problematic unofficial religious practices.<sup>59</sup> When applicable I will make references to these other shrines. This study does not claim to be exhaustive, but instead creates a foundation for how to approach the study of shrines in Central Asia from 1953 to the present.

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<sup>57</sup> For a full description of these folders, see the Bibliography. I. G. Petrash published some of these photographs in *Islam v Kirgizii* and it appears that he took many of them himself.

<sup>58</sup> See Slater, "Four Moments" and *Trail of Miracles* on discovery during the ethnographic process and Kamp, *New Woman*, on the use of "snowballing" as a way to find informants.

<sup>59</sup> Oblast (*oblast'*) is a large administrative-territorial unit.

## **Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation consists of an Introduction (Chapter One), four core chapters (Chapters Two—Five), a Conclusion, and an Appendix of Maps and Images. Chapters Two through Five each focus on a particular shrine (Sulaiman Too, Arslanbab Ata, Safed Bulan, and Hazrati Ayub) in the Kyrgyz Republic and concentrate on a major issue (ethnicity, legends, gender, and health) related to shrines in Central Asia. I selected the shrines under consideration for the following reasons: they represent examples of shrines that people link to the Arab conquest of Central Asia and pre-Islamic past; the Soviets regarded them as some of the most threatening places during their anti-religious campaigns; and they remain major points of interest both for pilgrims and tourists today. Each chapter builds on the previous chapter, comparing the patterns of ritual observance of the Kyrgyz shrines with analogous shrines in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Xinjiang.

Chapter Two focuses on Sulaiman Too (Soloman's Mountain) in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan. It is one of the few shrines for which it is possible to piece together a detailed history prior to the Soviet era through the analysis of diachronic documentation. Because of its location in the center of Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan, it has become one of the most well-known shrines in Central Asia and the focus of debates about history and religion. This chapter investigates questions about who preserves the past, which aspects of the past are preserved, and who controls access to the sacred. It also addresses how pilgrims have, and have not, reshaped their practices in the context, and perhaps as a direct result of, the ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter Three examines the shrine of Arslanbob Ata (Father Arslanbob), in the village of Arslanbob nestled in mountainous terrain of Jalalabad oblast. The legends about Arslanbob Ata reflect the aspects of everyday life that are meaningful to the people of the village of Arslanbob

through highlighting religious, economic, and environmental values. This chapter asks how local residents and pilgrims create meaning at shrines through dreams, legends, and prophecies. How does the retelling and modification of these legends affect the way people construct sacred space at and between shrines in Central Asia? This chapter analyzes how foundational myths link shrines to the historic or imagined past and how they create a network of shared meaning and ideology between shrines both in local and global contexts.

Chapter Four focuses on the shrine complex of Safed Bulan (White Bulan), also located in Jalalabad oblast along the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This shrine complex was once located along an important trade route, and is dedicated to a female Muslim saint. Local tradition at Safed Bulan only allows women to enter certain areas of the shrine complex. This is to honor and protect the virtue of Safed Bulan who died a virgin and was considered pure because of her actions. Pilgrimage rituals at Safed Bulan raise the following questions. Why are shrines especially important to patterns of female pious and devotional acts today and in the past? What role do female healers, guides, and caretakers play in the perpetuation of shrine practices and beliefs? This chapter treats Safed Bulan as a lens through which to observe how sacred space and rituals are gendered at shrines.

Chapter Five concentrates on the shrine of Hazrati Ayub, which is located on the grounds of a sanatorium, just outside of the city of Jalalabad. Hazrati Ayub marks the site of a famous mineral spring that visitors connect to the Prophet Job and the trials he suffered at the hands of Iblis. This chapter investigates beliefs about healing at shrines and the appeal of reconstituting certain shrines as medical institutions and resorts. How did the Soviet state and the sanatorium workers justify obstructing religious practices associated with Hazrati Ayub? They condemned anyone who believed the water was sacred, yet took full advantage of converting the former shrine into a medical facility and retreat center that has permanently altered the space.

These case studies illustrate the complexity of Soviet and post-Soviet responses to local practices at shrines. Shrines in Central Asia are places of worship, renewal, and contestation. They are a window into identifying local practices and beliefs and how those fit in with the rest of the Islamic world. The people I encountered on my travels in Central Asia often ask me the question, “Why study shrines?” In general, their perception is that these places are not significant in a way that merits scholarly attention. In the case of Central Asian Islam, studying shrines makes it possible to explore dimensions of Islamic practice and belief that may not be readily apparent. This is especially so in the case of women’s practices. The same local people who question why I study shrines, in general, follow this question with very strong reactions. They express how they personally feel about shrines. (Amongst the educated elite, this is often a very negative reaction.) On one hand, people do not want to be viewed as not modern. On the other hand, they are fearful of the constraints that they believe are the norm in correct Islamic practices. In the case of Central Asia, the older generations are also fearful or skeptical of discussing religious practices and beliefs because they have grown accustomed to keeping their views muted so as not to incur attention from officials. Others have been persuaded by the anti-religious viewpoints that permeated Soviet society.

In this dissertation, I seek to reveal the richness and variation of religious practices and beliefs at certain shrines in Central Asia. My research exposes the ethnic and religious debates that come to a forefront at shrines through questions of accessibility and goals for administration. These debates are not isolated within local populations but extend to participants on the national level (the Kyrgyz government including the Kyrgyz Muftiate, the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, and NGOs such as Aigine CRC) and within the international community (UNESCO and conservative Saudis and Turks), who have competing opinions about the way that Central Asian shrines should be characterized and preserved. Claims about the historic and present value of the

shrine sites, their religious, archaeological, and environmental significance, and the practices for management and preservation highlight larger trends in the way scholars understand Central Asia as an integrated region or a selection of independent states. Most decisively, the evolving shape and status of these shrines underscores fierce debate over appropriate religious and cultural activity in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia.

## Chapter Two

# Sulaiman Too: Locating the Past in Search of the Present

Sulaiman Too is the second Mecca. Its fame and importance are as vast as Mecca and Jerusalem.

—Alimbek Kultaev Hajji, Shrine Guardian of Sulaiman Too, interview, October 2011

For centuries the black shadow of Solomon's Mountain eclipsed the light of reason of the faithful.

—Iurii Gregor'evich Petrash, "Ten' Suleimangory," *Nauka i religiia* (Science and Religion, a Soviet journal), 1961

Just below the Soviet-constructed Cave Museum on one of the peaks of Sulaiman Too (Solomon's Mountain), a flight of stairs leads to a covered seating area where mullahs await pilgrims.<sup>1</sup> On a brisk October day in 2011 two mullahs, one of whom was Alimbek Hajji, the official shrine guardian of Sulaiman Too, received visitors while a massive wedding party with at

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<sup>1</sup> Sulaiman Too, Sulaiman Togh, Suleiman-gora (Solomon's Mountain), Takhti-Sulaiman (Solomon's Throne), and Sulaimanka are used interchangeably. This chapter does not trace the intricacies of how and when people use the different names, but such an investigation could potentially yield new insight about the way people relate to the site. I refer to Sulaiman Too as a shrine or mazar (tomb). Although many of my sources (both written and oral) refer to it as such, it may be valuable to consider Thierry Zarcone's recent claim that Sulaiman Too should be classified as a *qadam joi* or *qadam goh* (station or place of arrival) since it is not the site of an actual saint's tomb. Sulaiman Too is a model for other shrine places in the region. Removing the classification of mazar might add precision in a way, but it could be misleading for comparisons especially in the way locals and pilgrims refer to it. See Thierry Zarcone, "Atypical Mausoleum: the Case of the Solomon Throne (Kyrgyzstan), *Qadam-jāy*, jinns-cult and itinerary-pilgrimage," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 73-89.

least ten vehicles crowded the path in front of them.<sup>2</sup> Autumn is the peak of marriage ceremonies in Kyrgyzstan – and the rest of Central Asia for that matter – and this October day was no exception. A new bride in a billowy white dress and her husband in a formal suit emerged from one of the Mercedes, instantly surrounded by family members, other wedding guests, and photographers trying to catch them in front of this major Osh landmark (the Cave Museum).<sup>3</sup>

Alimbek Hajji sat on a bench cushioned with a thick hand-stitched blanket. He was wearing a long robe-like coat over his regular clothing and a *kalpak* (Kyrgyz wool hat) atop his head. The other mullah sat at the opposite end of the bench, and both administered prayers for pilgrims, wedding guests, and university students as requested.<sup>4</sup> Although in autumn Sulaiman Too does not witness a dramatic number of visitors as in the spring or early summer, the mullahs still received pilgrims and other visitors who had requests or who had returned after having had a request fulfilled. The mullahs took bread, money, and other offerings in return for their prayers.<sup>5</sup> Alimbek Hajji paused during one meeting with pilgrims to pray over and then process the chicken that they had brought with them. Even with the wedding photo session in full force, he simply stepped over the rail onto the slope of the mountain about two meters away from where the pilgrims sat to make the sacrifice.

On Sundays during the spring and early summer, pilgrims flock to Sulaiman Too. The landscape transforms from the dehydrated browns of autumn and chilling white of winter into

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<sup>2</sup> Alimbek Hajji's personal observations and experiences will be discussed at length throughout this chapter. See Chapter One, n. 55 above for explanations of shrine guardian and mullah. Hajji is an honorific taken by those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Kyrgyz it is pronounced "Aji," whose spelling does not reflect the original Arabic root.

<sup>3</sup> It is common practice in Central Asia as well as other post-Soviet states to have wedding photographs taken at major landmarks. This is a tradition that carries over from the Soviet period.

<sup>4</sup> This particular day was a holiday for the students at Osh University. On such holidays, students often take the opportunity to climb Sulaiman Too.

<sup>5</sup> The bread which is offered is not a typical Central Asian nan, but is instead a specially fried dough that is given in sets of nine pieces (*toghuz oimo*) and is believed by some to contain all the troubles and woes of those who offer it to the shrine and its spirits.

green meadows dotted with wild flowers of purple, white, and orange. Unlike autumn and winter days, when the students and wedding parties surround the most iconic landmarks of Sulaiman Too, the shrine's paths are filled with family groups with the majority being middle-aged and elderly women dressed in conservative long dresses and head coverings. Female religious specialists guide individual groups of pilgrims between the various stations of the sacred site and instruct them in rituals.<sup>6</sup> At each station a mullah awaits to lead them in prayer, hear their requests, and accept offerings. The change of seasons limits the pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too: in the winter and later summer, conditions become too extreme to allow visitors to climb its steep slopes. Just as the change of seasons is a constant, so, too, do pilgrims reproduce the beliefs and practices associated with Sulaiman Too. These beliefs and practices, however, take on new meaning as pilgrims adapt to their dynamic world.

In this chapter, I use Sulaiman Too as the focal point to investigate questions about who preserves and revises the past, which aspects of the past are preserved, and how the production of historical memory is used to control and limit access to the sacred. Set in the heart of the city of Osh in the foothills of the Pamir Mountains (Alai Mountain Range), the shrine of Sulaiman Too has captured the imaginations of residents and visitors alike since the late Bronze Age (twelfth –

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<sup>6</sup> Thierry Zarcone (“Atypical Mausoleum,” 82-5) provides an excellent account of the itinerary-pilgrimage at Sulaiman Too from May 1995 when he accompanied a group of female pilgrims from Andijon led by an otin (female religious specialist). On female religious specialists, see Annette Krämer, *Geistliche Autorität und Islamische Gesellschaft im Wandel: Studien über Frauenälteste (Otin und Xalfa) in unabhängigen Usbekistan* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002), 94-96; Krämer, “Crisis and Memory in Central Asian Islam: The Uzbek Example of the ‘Otin’ and ‘Xalfa’ in a Changing Environment,” in *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2001), 367-8; Habiba Fathi, “Otines: the unknown women clerics of Central Asian Islam” *Central Asian Survey* 16 (1997): 28; Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007) 154-66; and Chapter Four where I discuss the role of female religious specialists in more detail.

eighth centuries B.C.E.).<sup>7</sup> From the thirteenth century C.E. up to the present it has been one of the major Islamic pilgrimage sites in Central Asia. The shrine has been both a source of pride and the subject of ethnic and religious contestation as borders and identities have shifted in the Ferghana Valley.

Because Osh and its mountain are situated in the Ferghana Valley at a crossroad of trade routes and civilizations, they appear often in the historical record of Chinese, Islamic, and European sources. This gives different present-day stakeholders a wide spectrum of potential historical antecedents to justify their contemporary goals. These different stakeholders include the Kyrgyz state through the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences and Muftiate of the Kyrgyz Republic, regional government through the Sulaiman-Too Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex (Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum), and nationally based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like, Aigine Cultural Research Center (CRC), local religious specialists and residents, and pilgrims. The historical and political contexts in which people create historical memory play a critical role in the way that people interpret the contemporary site of Sulaiman Too. Certain stakeholders, especially those promoting a Kyrgyz national identity or *Kyrgyzchylyk* (Kyrgyzzness), look to the pre-Islamic past and emphasize the role Osh had in ancient cultures, Silk Road trade, Zoroastrianism, and Shamanistic practices. Others, who favor *Musulmanchylyk* (Muslimness), such as the pilgrims and religious specialists, point to both legendary and historic events related to the Arab conquest and subsequent Islamization of Transoxania to link Sulaiman Too with Islamic traditions. Vestiges of Imperial and Soviet influences on the way people conceptualize the past and the manner in which they apply their

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<sup>7</sup> Valentin L. Ogudin, "Tron Solomona: Istoriia formirovaniia kul'ta," in *Podvizhniki Islama. Kul't sviatikh i sufizm v Srednei Azii i na Kavkaze* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia Firma "Vostochnaia Literatura" RAN, 2003), 70. Soviet archaeologists believe the Eagle's Cave, which is the site of the current Cave Museum, served as a human dwelling even before 10,000 B.C.E.

version of the past to analyses of the present further complicate these contemporary views. As

Eric Davis explains in his study on modern Iraq:

Intellectuals will only be effective in transmitting new understanding of the past if these understandings resonate with existing patterns of thought. It is therefore problematic to view the role of intellectuals as “injecting” *de novo* historical consciousness into the populace at large. Instead their efforts should be viewed syncretically, as through them the state attempts to graft its own interpretations of the past onto changing patterns of historical consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Bearing in mind that the elite and the state do not create historical memory in a vacuum and that its generation requires compliance and agreement among the populace, I argue that certain constituencies of the contemporary Kyrgyz elite, including members of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and museum responsible for maintaining the shrine and its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, use strategies and arguments reminiscent of those of the Soviet anti-religious campaigns to disrupt certain Islamic activities and beliefs related to Sulaiman Too. As a counterpoint to this trend, there is another current, also pioneered by members of the Kyrgyz elite, which seeks to protect the shrine through close collaboration with the Muslim shrine guardians. I further argue that both of these groups overlook the needs of a considerable number of Uzbek and Tajik pilgrims who visit the shrine both from within Kyrgyzstan and from the neighboring countries of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which may also reflect Soviet strategies and agendas such as limiting access to the mountain and promoting urban planning that does not accommodate large influxes of pilgrims. The state of affairs for ethnic Uzbek pilgrims is made even more problematic in light of the inter-ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010 in Osh and other parts of Kyrgyzstan that resulted in many ethnic Uzbeks fleeing as well as the destruction of Uzbek neighborhoods and institutions.

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 19.

This chapter opens with a reconstruction of the history of the city of Osh and the shrine of Sulaiman Too prior to the Soviet period. I linger over some episodes in this history because of the unusual depth of historical documentation for this famous shrine, whereas many of the shrines explored in this dissertation have few, if any, references made to them prior to the Soviet period. Clues to Sulaiman Too's early history can be found in the descriptions of Arab geographers, travel literature, and the archaeology of the shrine. Sulaiman Too's conspicuous position rising out of the floor of the Ferghana Valley also warranted the attention of anyone who found himself / herself passing through Osh. Such observers included military personnel, ethnographers, and missionaries. Following this reconstruction, I provide a detailed analysis of the shrine during the Soviet period with special attention to the Soviet anti-religious campaign that labeled Sulaiman Too as a major target for religious practices. The chapter closes with a description of the shrine as it stands today in contemporary Kyrgyzstan, the role it plays in the religious lives of pilgrims, and the current debates surrounding the site's management, especially in terms of accessibility, preservation, and urban planning.

### **Crossroads of the World**

The mountain shrine of Sulaiman Too rises 175 meters above the urban landscape of Osh city, the second largest city in the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>9</sup> It consists of five peaks that run about two kilometers by 250 meters, known today as Buura Too, Shor Too, Rushan Too, Eer Too (*Kelinchek* - the bridal state), and Kekilik Uchar (Old-age end).<sup>10</sup> Over 400 Bronze Age petroglyphs remain at the site as evidence of the site's notoriety long before the arrival of Islam in

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<sup>9</sup> The city of Osh today and historically has been constructed right up to the slopes of Sulaiman Too. The city itself sits 1175 meters above sea level.

<sup>10</sup> For details on the five peaks see, Gulnara Aitpaeva, ed., *Osh togu iyik jerler jana el bilimi* (Bishkek: Aigine Cultural Research Center, 2011), 19-21.

the Ferghana Valley.<sup>11</sup> In 2009 the need to preserve these petroglyphs was an argument in the successful joint proposal by the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum to acquire for Sulaiman Too status as a UNESCO world heritage, which will be discussed in greater detail below.<sup>12</sup> Archaeologists consider these petroglyphs, many of which illustrate animals and hunting scenes, anthropomorphic images, and geometrical signs that include solar signs, to be an example of the Andronovan or Chust culture of the Ferghana Valley.<sup>13</sup> For many people who identify as ethnically Kyrgyz, evidence such as these petroglyphs offers an important link to the past, and for some of them, suggests that the modern Kyrgyz are direct descendants of the ancient peoples who had lived in the Ferghana Valley. The archaeologist Iurii A. Zadneprovskii led the Soviet Academy of Sciences' archaeological expedition (1974 - 84) that confirmed the presence of a Bronze Age settlement on the southern slope of Sulaiman Too. The evidence of settlements and ritual activities discovered by Soviet archaeologists at Sulaiman Too, prompted the city of Osh to celebrate its 3,000-year anniversary in the year 2000 C.E.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Barthold dates the completion of the conquest to the ninth century with the first Arab armies wintering in Central Asia between 681-3. C.E. See Vasilii Vladimirovich Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London: Luzac and Co., 1958), 160 and 463. See B. Amanbaeva and Ye. Devlet, "O Sulaiman-gore," in *Osh 3000* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2001), 24-32.

<sup>12</sup> "Sulaiman Too Sacred Mountain" earned its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009 based on the criteria which considers it a cultural landscape that "bear[s] a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;" and is "an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history" (categories iii and iv). UNESCO World Heritage Sites, The Criteria for Selection, accessed on March 19, 2015, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

<sup>13</sup> See A. H. Dani and V. M. Masson, eds., *The Dawn of Civilization: Earliest Times to 700 B.C., The History of Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1992), 339-42; and Amanbaeva and Devlet, "O Sulaiman-gore," v. 1, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Iurii A. Zadneprovskii, *The Osh Settlement: On the History of Ferghana in the Late Bronze Age* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, 2000). The Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences published this work in English. Zadneprovskii based this particular publication on 30 years of his research, which appeared mostly in Russian language in earlier publications.

Many Kyrgyz people link their current ethnic identity to key symbols from the past. Earlier cultures that inhabited the Ferghana Valley represent the idealized nomadic and pastoral lifestyle. For example, the famous blood-sweating horses of the kingdom of Dawan (fourth – first centuries B.C.E.) serve as examples of the accomplishments of animal husbandry, which the Kyrgyz esteem. According to the Han Chinese Chronicles, the kingdom of Dawan in the Ferghana Valley called its eastern capital Guishanch'en, which means, "highly-revered mountain," possibly a reference to the city of Osh.<sup>15</sup> This city remained prominent along the eastern boundary of Dawan until the fifth century C.E.<sup>16</sup> The kingdom of Dawan became well known for its "blood-sweating" horses which, as legend tells us, were interbred with "heavenly" horses. The kingdom was intersected by many of the routes that later became known as "The Silk Road," and petroglyphs depicting horses exist to this day at Sulaiman Too and in other parts of the Osh region.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of whether Osh was in fact a capital of Dawan, it was most certainly one of the 70 large and small cities mentioned by the Han chronicles based on its strategic location for trade and its accessibility for caravans to the mountain passes leading to the China from the Ferghana Valley.<sup>18</sup>

Osh and its mountain appear in the writings of Arab geographers following the Arab conquest of the Ferghana Valley and the establishment of the Samanid Dynasty (819-1005 C.E.). The mountain was a place that was easily noted as a reference point for the geographers, and because the Islamic geographical tradition privileges territories that are considered to be part of

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<sup>15</sup> Zadneprovskii (*The Osh Settlement*, 95) argues that Guishanch'en could not refer to Osh because there is no archeological basis for such a conclusion. However, Liudmila A. Borokova, *Запад тentralnoi Азии до II в. н.э. - VII в. н.э. Историко-географический обзор по древнекитайским источникам* (Moscow, 1989) believes that Guishanch'en does refer to Osh. For the account of Dawan, see Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, translated by Burton Watson (Hong Kong, New York: A Renditions – Columbia University Press Book, 1993), v. 2, 231-252.

<sup>16</sup> Ogudin, "Tron Solomona," 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ogudin, "Tron Solomona"; and Amanbaeva and Devlet, "O Sulaiman-gore."

<sup>18</sup> Zadneprovskii, *The Osh Settlement*, 96.

the Dar al-Islam, one can assume that Osh was already considered to have achieved that status. However, Sulaiman Too was at the edge of the Dar al-Islam and represented a strategic vantage point from the top of which one could survey the valley extending in all directions as well as the mountain passes. In the tenth century C.E., following the Islamic geographical tradition of Abu Zayd Ahmad b. Sahl al-Balkhi (d. 934), the Arab geographer, al-Istakhri (Abu Ishak Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Farisi al-Karkhi) describes Osh in his famous work, *Kiṭab al-Musalik w'al-mamalik*.<sup>19</sup> He notes that in the mountain near Osh guards were stationed to monitor the Turkish troops.<sup>20</sup> Osh was the third largest city in the Ferghana Valley at the time, and along with Uzgen it was one of the two most prominent border towns.<sup>21</sup> The border guards protected the oasis settlements against nomadic invaders and neighboring kingdoms. Another geographer, Abu'l Qasim b. Ali al-Nasibi ibn Hawqal, who traveled to Khorezm and Transoxania in 969 C.E., describes Osh as a “village adhered to a mountain surmounted by an observation post for Turks.”<sup>22</sup> While the Samanids benefited from Osh as a military outpost at the edge of the

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<sup>19</sup> André Miquel, “al-Istakhri,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2013). Al-Istakhri's biography is not well known, but later geographers familiar with his work confirm that he travelled through Transoxania suggesting that his description is a firsthand account and not simply borrowed from another source as was often the case with geographers and other travelers.

<sup>20</sup> Barthold points out that Ibn Hawqal also mentions a “Turkish” guardhouse on the mountain that monitored the local inhabitants for signs of preparation for holy war. Barthold is quick to clarify that it is unlikely that the mountain would have been under the control of the Turks, when the Samanids controlled the city which surrounded it. See Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 156.

<sup>21</sup> Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 156.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Hawqal wrote several versions of his own geography of the Islamic world, also titled, *Kiṭab al-Musalik w'al-mamalik* or *Kiṭab Surat al-ard* in 967, 977, and 988 C.E. His text closely mirrors that of al-Istakhri and, in fact, the author even openly borrows from it. However, he does make several changes in details based on his own observations. Ibn Hawqal met with al-Istakhri at some point during his travels, either in Baghdad or Sind. Most likely traveling with merchant duties and with the possibility of a religious agenda, he visited Transoxania as well as many other parts of the Islamic world. It appears that the goal of his work was to focus more on the writing and conveying his own style and opinion rather than to create a work that provided unique descriptions to accompany cartographical representations. André Miquel, “Ibn Hawkal,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2013). Ibn Hawqal, *Kiṭāb sūrat al-ard*, in *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M. J. Goeje, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1939), v. 2, 513. See also André Miquel, *Le géographie humaine du monde musulman* (Paris: Éditions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1980), v. 2, 263 and v. 3, p. 62. The Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi (al-Maqdisi), who is

Ferghana oasis, it also may have served as a religious site based on its dramatic form rising out of the valley floor and the archaeological evidence of people making burnt offerings. Tenth century graffiti in the Arabic script along one of the walls on the eastern edge of the mountain possibly highlight the region's growing connection to Islam. The inscription indicates the date 329 of the *hijri* calendar and the name of the Samanid Amir Nasr ibn Ahmed (r. 914-943 C.E.).<sup>23</sup>

In the thirteenth century the scholar and administrator of Turkestan under the Mongols, Jamal al-din Qarshi (b. 1230-1), is the first to confirm Sulaiman Too as an Islamic pilgrimage site. He describes many of the cities, including Osh, in his supplemental historical work, *Mulhaqat al-Surah*.<sup>24</sup> This mainly Arabic text (with some parts in Persian) remains one of the few sources about the region from this time period. He opens his description of Ferghana by praising it for having rich agricultural lands, with the best air, the most delicious waters, and the ability to cultivate and ripen fruits quickly. This reference to the fine natural qualities of the Ferghana Valley play an important role in the later lore about Sulaiman Too and its relationship to the prophets of Islam as aiding in the sedentarizing the local population and teaching them to cultivate crops. Besides this, Qarshi states that Ferghana is the site of the most holy of *ziyarat* (visits).<sup>25</sup> His portrait of the city of Osh indicates two mountains: Bara koh (Persian for beautiful

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best known for developing the genre of "Atlas of Islam," also describes the guardhouse on the mountain and Osh's prominent location as a border town.

<sup>23</sup> Ogudin, "Tron Solomona."

<sup>24</sup> Peter Jackson, "Djamal Karshi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2013) and Vasilii Vladimirovich Barthold, *Sochineniia, v. 9, Raboty po istorii vostokovedeniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1977), 594. Although Qarshi was stationed in Kashgar, he had the opportunity to travel throughout the western regions of Turkestan. His description of the region and of the ruling Qarakhanids and Chaghatai Khanate is extremely valuable.

<sup>25</sup> Djamal al-Qarshi, *al-Mulhaqat bi-s-surah*, in *Istoriia Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakh*, ed. M. Kh. Abuseitova et al. (Almaty: Daiuk Press, 2005), 149 (Russian translation) and CCI (Arabic text). *Ziyarat* can be translated as "visits" and is the term used to distinguish visiting local shrines from the Hajj, which is the great pilgrimage to Mecca. I use the English terms "pilgrimage" and "pilgrims" when referring to those who are making *ziyarat* to local shrines (Ch. 1, n.2)

mountain) and Hanaf.<sup>26</sup> A “holy and righteous” (*al-abrar wa al-sulaha*) mazar sits atop Bara koh, in addition to the tomb of Asaf b. Barakhya, the vizier of King Solomon b. Dawud.<sup>27</sup> Besides being the first to mention Sulaiman Too (Bara koh) as a pilgrimage site, Qarshi is also the first to draw a connection between the biblical / Qur’anic King Solomon and his vizier. Qarshi’s writings confirm that the Islamic pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too and the mountain’s connection with King Solomon’s vizier has existed at least since the thirteenth century.

One of today’s most celebrated moments of Sulaiman Too in the historic record appears in the memoir of the Mughal Emperor Babur who wrote briefly about the Ferghana Valley and Osh as he was leaving for the last time. After the fall of the Chaghatai Khanate in 1363, the Timurids ruled over the Ferghana Valley from their capital in Samarqand. Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur (1483-1530), the son of the ruler of Ferghana and a descendent of both Amir Temur and Chingiz Khan, faced difficulties holding on to his father’s kingdom with the impending threat of the Shaybanid Uzbeks. In 1514 he moved to Kabul and soon afterward began making raids in India eventually founding the Mughal dynasty.<sup>28</sup> His famous autobiography, the *Baburnama*, written in Chaghatai (Turki), opens in the Ferghana Valley with a description of Osh and Sulaiman Too. Babur’s description also contributes to the lore that surrounds Sulaiman Too because of the building he constructed on one of its peaks.<sup>29</sup> Babur depicts Osh as a heavenly city and catalogues the built structures at Sulaiman Too:

On the southeastern side of the Osh fortress is a well-proportioned mountain called Bara Koh, where, on its summit, Sultan-Mahmud Khan built a pavilion. Farther down, on a spur of the same mountain, I had a porticoed pavilion built in the year 902 [1496-97]. Although the former is higher up, mine is situated much

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<sup>26</sup> This name appears still today as *Buura Takht* (Kyrgyz) or *Barakukh* (Russian transliteration).

<sup>27</sup> Al-Qarshi 57-58, 149, XCIV-XCV, and CCI.

<sup>28</sup> Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Geographical Manual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 331-2.

<sup>29</sup> On the *Baburnama*, see Stephen F. Dale, “Babur,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*.

better because it overlooks the whole town and outskirts below... On the lower slopes of Bara Koh, between the town and the mountain, is the Gemini Mosque.<sup>30</sup>

During Babur's era Sulaiman Too was still called Bara Koh, which is the same name used by Qarshi in the thirteenth century. Babur describes three buildings, one of which he built during his stay in Osh. The two pavilions are most likely the sites of two buildings that the Soviets demolished in the 1970s and have since been reconstructed. The Gemini Mosque may have stood on the site of the sixteenth century mosque that remains at the base of the mountain. Known today as the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque, it escaped demolition proposed by Soviet authorities in 1961 through public petition.<sup>31</sup> It may be referring to a second mosque, however, that was destroyed. This second mosque stood approximately on the same territory as the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum near the tomb of Asaf b. Barakhya. Even though Babur reveals to his readers the presence of a mosque, he makes no mention of pilgrims as did Qarshi, and unlike the Arab geographers of the tenth century, he does not mention any troop garrisons on the mountain. The fact that Babur built a pavillion on the slopes of the mountain follows in the tradition of leaders patronizing important local religious centers.

Sulaiman Too may have taken on the name Takht-i Sulaiman sometime in the latter half of the fifteenth century. The Soviet scholar and propagandist, Iurii Gregor'evich Petrash, conjectures that the mullahs and sheikhs associated with the Uzgen Vizierate renamed Bara Koh in honor of their ruler, Sultan Ilik Mazi Sulaiman, who is said to be the first to establish residency on the mountain. Petrash claims that as time passed the name of the mountain was then conflated with the biblical King Solomon and thereafter legends about the biblical Soloman along with other prominent figures from the Hebrew Bible and later Qur'anic tradition began to

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<sup>30</sup> Babur, *Baburnama: The Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1996), 2b-3.

<sup>31</sup> Central State Archive of the Kyrgyz Republic (TsGA KR), f. 2597, op. 2, d. 57, l. 3-5.

surface amongst the local population and visiting pilgrims.<sup>32</sup> Sulaiman Too is not the only site to be honored with the name Takht-i Sulaiman. Several other architectural sites with the same name, such as those in Iran and Azerbaijan, bear the same name.<sup>33</sup> It may be that the significance and notoriety of these other locations influenced the renaming of Sulaiman Too or the other way around.<sup>34</sup> Archaeological evidence points to Sulaiman Too as an ancient cult center in the eastern Ferghana Valley with ritual practices for seasonal worship and sacrifice to Tengri (the god of heaven or open sky) and to fire and sun along the lines of Zoroastrianism. People built sanctuaries and created burial mounds on the slopes of Sulaiman Too.<sup>35</sup> The use of mountains as a pre-Islamic temple site draws a further connection between Sulaiman Too in Osh and its counterparts in Azerbaijan and Iran, both in terms of landscape and because of evidence that they had at one time been the sites of fire temples.

The legends about Solomon's and other Islamic prophets' connection with Sulaiman Too probably circulated first in oral form. Since Qarshi mentioned the connection between the mountain and Solomon's vizier it is possible that these legends first appeared sometime during or before the thirteenth century. Written versions of the legends survive in two nineteenth-century collections. The Russian linguist and ethnographer Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov published the first of these collections in 1885 in Tashkent, while a second collection is held in the Jarring Collection at Lund University in Sweden.<sup>36</sup> Both manuscripts were written in Chaghatai. L.

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<sup>32</sup> Iurii Grigor'evich Petrash, "Ten' Suleiman-gory," *Nauka i religii* 10 (1961), 42-44.

<sup>33</sup> See Tamoko Masuya, "The Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaiman" (PhD diss., New York University 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Masuya, 106, explains that there is no evidence to suggest that Takht-i Sulaiman in northwestern Iran had taken that name before the sixteenth century, which could leave the possibility that Osh's mountain took that name first.

<sup>35</sup> Zadneprovskii, *The Osh Settlement*, 81-83.

<sup>36</sup> "Ūsh shahrī khusūsīdaghī risāla," pub. Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov, in *Musulmanskoe skazanie o gorode Osh – Ūsh Shahrī Risālasī* (Tashkent: Tipo-Litografiia S. I. Lakhtina, 1885); Russian translation by L. Zimin, "Musulmanskoe skazanie o gorode Osh – Ūsh Shahrī Risālasī," in *Protokol Zasedaniū i soobshcheniū*

Zimin translated Ostroumov's collection into Russian and published it in 1913. The Swedish missionary Gunnar Jarring purchased the Lund University manuscript in Kashgar on January 14, 1930. Versions of the legends are mentioned by Armenius Vambery, the Hungarian scholar, by Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov, a Kazakh who worked as an ethnographer for the Russian Empire, and by Eugene Schuyler, an American scholar and diplomat. A partial translation of the Osh legends also appears in a Soviet archival document from the records of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC).<sup>37</sup> Several of my interviewees were familiar with variations of the legends and referred to them as the "Osh Legends."<sup>38</sup> The legends identify Sulaiman Too as a place for *ziyarat*. They also describe how King Solomon and other Islamic prophets including Adam, Abraham, and Muhammad traveled (or flew) there. With this in mind some believe that the "footprint of Solomon" is in fact the footprint of Adam or Muhammad. These legends speak to the idea of metaphysical transport that figures prominently in the lore of Central Asian shrines, creating direct connections between Central Asia and other recognizable nodes of Islamic geography.<sup>39</sup>

Ostroumov's publication of the "Osh Legends" is the earliest known written source to elaborate on the link between the shrine at Osh and the figure of Solomon. Valentin L. Ogudin conjectures that the appearance of written accounts of these legends in the nineteenth century reflect a need for such legends amongst the local peoples and indicates the rise in popularity of sacred places in the region. He also suggests that the advent of these legends coincides with the

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*chlenov turkestanского kruzhdka liubitelei arkheologii* (Tashkent, 1913), 3-16; The Jarring Collection, Prov. 407, Lund University, Sweden.

<sup>37</sup> For details about the partial translation of the legend found in the Central State Archive of the Kyrgyz Republic, see Eren Murat Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim: the Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 155 and n. 316.

<sup>38</sup> Alimbek Kultaev Hajji, Official Shrine Guardian of Sulaiman Too, interview by Jennifer Webster, Osh, Kyrgyz Republic, October 18, 2011; and Osh Museum Director, interview by Jennifer Webster, Osh, Kyrgyz Republic, October 19, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> This is one of the themes in Chapter Three.

change in the name from Bara Koh to Takht-i Sulaiman, which is further evidenced in that the city of Osh began to be known simply as Takht-i Sulaiman.<sup>40</sup> External influences such as the encroaching Russian and British empires may have influenced a desire to write down these legends. The transcription of the legends may have been a means of preservation. Alternatively, there may have been an increased demand amongst travelers, missionaries, and imperial officials who wanted to purchase manuscripts at local bazaars. The name change could have occurred anywhere from the latter half of the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century. It is not completely clear why the mountain took on a new name. Some local ruler named Sulaiman may have influenced the name change, but the connection with the biblical / Qur'anic Solomon is what pilgrims and local residents alike remember today.

The throne of Solomon and its relationship to King Solomon's vizier, Asaf b. Barakhya, also have a place in the Islamic tradition. After Solomon's favorite wife worshipped an idolatrous image of her murdered father (killed by Solomon in his battles to secure the lands that God had promised him), Solomon's minister gives a speech praising all of the prophets of Islam including Solomon during his youth. Solomon questions Asaf about why he does not praise his current deeds, and Asaf brings to his attention the recent 40 days of idol worship that happened under Solomon's own roof. As a means of punishing Solomon there are either 40 or 14 days during which he must relinquish his throne while he prays and repents for his egregious act of idol worship. In some accounts a demon disguised as Solomon takes a seat upon Solomon's throne, and Asaf and the other loyal ministers knowingly avoid following any of the demon's orders. In another account, Asaf, sits on Solomon's throne for fourteen days, and obligingly returns the

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<sup>40</sup> Ogudin, "Tron Solomona," 72.

throne to Solomon at the close of the allotted period of repentance.<sup>41</sup> The occurrence of these legends from well-known Islamic traditions intertwined with the specific legends of the shrines in Central Asia authenticates the shrines as legitimate sacred Islamic spaces. With subtle variations, the legends allow the greater Islamic tradition to be adapted to regional histories and local economic and social conditions. This phenomenon will reappear in Chapters Three, Four, and Five in the legends of Arslanbob Ata, Safed Bulan, and Hazrati Ayub through connections with the Arab conquest and Islamization of Central Asia as well as through links with the prophets of Islam

### **Through Foreign Eyes**

Beginning in the nineteenth century, descriptions of the city of Osh begin to appear in the accounts of foreign travelers from Europe and agents of European empires as they journeyed through Central Asia. In 1812 William Moorcroft, the superintendent of Pusa Stud, sent two agents of the East India Company to undertake preliminary explorations of Central Asia with the specific purpose of looking for quality horses. One of Moorcroft's agents, Mir Izzatullah, published a Persian account of his travels. In this text, Mir Izzatullah explains that pilgrimage to the shrine mausoleum of King Solomon's hypothetical minister, Asaf b. Barakhya, was well established.<sup>42</sup> Mir Izzatullah traveled again to Central Asia in 1820, this time with Moorcroft on a horse-purchasing mission, but the entire party disappeared in the Hindu Kush, never to be heard from again.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 266-79.

<sup>42</sup> Mir Izzatullah, "Travels Beyond the Himalaya," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 7 (1845), 14. He first travelled to Central Asia in 1812-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Bengal Army Stud Department, Copy Proceedings and Correspondence on the Mission of William Moorcroft, Superintendent to Central Asia to Purchase Horses, 1819 l/mil/5/378*: fols. 297-8. Cited in Monica Meadows, "The Horse: Conspicuous Consumption of Embodied Masculinity in South Asia,

In 1813-14, just a few years after the first travels of Mir Izzatullah, an agent of the Russian Empire, Filip Nazarov, described Sulaiman Too. Nazarov headed an exploratory and diplomatic mission to the Kokand Khanate, which governed Osh from 1798 until it was forcefully absorbed into the Russian Empire in 1876.<sup>44</sup> He remarks on the vast number of saints' tombs in Turkestan, the local custom of burying the dead near these tombs, and the propensity of the locals to venerate and pray at these places. His account of Osh closely resembled Mir Izzatullah's. He reports that the Kokand Khanate established a border checkpoint in Osh to collect duties from caravans as they left for and arrived from China, then ruled by the Qing Empire.<sup>45</sup> He also describes two ancient buildings on the side of a cliff, situated above a large cave. Nazarov's guide informed him that one of the buildings was the throne of Solomon and that every spring many locals went to worship at these places because they believed that Solomon's spirit resided at the sacred site. This reference is most likely to one of the Osh legends, which recounts the tale of Solomon's body being brought to the mountain for burial. Nazarov also exclaimed that no one actually lived in the buildings, which he may have noted out of surprise or cultural differences since earlier reports do not describe people living in the buildings on Sulaiman Too.

After these initial visits by foreigners, Osh received a flood of new travelers during the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century as the Russian and British

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1600-1850" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2013), 132-3.

<sup>44</sup> The previous year (1812) two envoys of the Kokand Khanate had died mysteriously while in Russia. Nazarov's mission, funded by Tsar Alexander I, was an attempt to mediate the situation and also to act as a means to collect information since this was the first official Russian mission sent to the Kokand Khanate.

<sup>45</sup> Filip Nazarov, "Zapiski o nekotorykh narodakh i zemliakh Srednei Azii (1813-1814)," in *Istoriia Uzbekistana v istochnikakh: Izvestiia puteshestvennikov, geografov i uchenykh XVI – pervoi poloviny XIX*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Lunin (Tashkent: Institut istorii Uzbekiston SSR fanlar akademiiasi, 1988), 171.

Empires extended their boundaries and sought to protect their holdings.<sup>46</sup> This was also a time of vigorous exploration and cataloging by European and American geographers, linguists, ethnographers, and other scientists.<sup>47</sup> One of the most famous of these travelers was Armenius Vambery, the eccentric Hungarian who disguised himself as a Hajji as a means of protection during his travels in the mid-nineteenth century. He draws an important connection between Osh and the town of Turkistan (in modern day Kazakhstan), the burial place of the Ahmad Yasawi to whom the Yasawi Sufic tradition is dedicated.<sup>48</sup> He compares Yasawi's tomb with Sulaiman Too in Osh, and follows with a description of Osh, which at the time was,

...known as Takhti-Suleiman – the Throne of Solomon. It is on the eastern border of the [Kokand] Khanate and is visited every year by a large number of pilgrims. A hill rising amidst the city attracts them [the pilgrims], where amongst the rubble of an ancient building which was built from a large four cornered stone and adorned with columns, the throne of Solomon and the place where Adam (the first prophet according to Islam) practiced agriculture. This fable was thought up deliberately, and was composed with the desire to promote farming as a religious obligation amongst the nomads.<sup>49</sup>

Once again, the fact that Osh is a border town is relevant to its description. It is clear from Vambery's account that Osh was renowned for the pilgrimage to the Throne of Solomon. The building that contains the Throne of Solomon “and the place where Adam practiced agriculture” alludes to the presence of the footprint of Adam inside the building.<sup>50</sup> Vambery is one of the first

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<sup>46</sup> For two popular accounts of the “Great Game,” see Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992), and Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Yasawi's tomb is also a major pilgrimage site in Central Asia, and along with the Naqshabandi tradition, the Yasawi tradition represent the most dominant forms of Sufism in the Ferghana Valley. For more on the shrine of Ahmad Yasawi, see Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Armenius Vambery, “Putishestvie do Srednei Azii vengerskovo orientalista (1863)” in *Istoriia Uzbekistana v istochnikakh: Uzbekistan v soobshcheniakh puteshestvennikov i uchenykh (20-80-e gody XIX v.)*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Lunin (Tashkent: Institut istorii (Uzbekiston SSR fanlar akademiiasi, 1990), 159-160.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Three.

to note the connection of the shrine with Adam, and it is particularly relevant because he links the legend to the idea of the origins of agriculture and settlement of previously nomadic peoples. At the time of his travels in the mid-nineteenth century, Osh was an oasis town of the Kokand Khanate with a vibrant bazaar. Its people experienced substantial interactions with the Kyrgyz tribes who lived around its perimeter.

Chokan Valikhanov, the Kazakh scholar and ethnographer who was appointed to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, led several important expeditions to Central Asia in 1855-6 and 1858-9 and wrote prolifically in the Russian language about his travels, including his visit to Osh. During his second expedition, he explained that in Central Asia one encounters many tombs of sufi saints, but that, “in the Kokand Khanate, specifically in the Ferghana Valley, there are a few mazars invented by the imagination of fanatical (*fanaticheskie*) Muslims or by the greed of the clergy (*dukhovenstvo*).”<sup>51</sup> For Valikhanov the shrines in the Ferghana Valley stood in contrast to other more reputable shrines such as those in Bukhara (tombs of Naqshband and Gudjvaini), Turkistan (tomb of Yasawi), and Urgench (tomb of Jamshi). In Valikhanov’s choice of the word *dukhovenstvo* in place of an indigenous term, we see an early example of the application of Christian terms to Islam and the resulting misconceptions. He identifies Sulaiman Too as one such shrine of ill repute:

Near Osh there is a stone called Takhti-Suleiman “Solomon’s throne,” the tomb of Asaf, who by Eastern tradition was the vizier of this prophet, and the tomb of the prophet Yunus [Jonah]. We read a book on the sacred places in the area around Osh for ourselves. From this book it is seen that Muhammad knew about the existence of this city and proclaimed to all of the faithful to visit the Osh sacred place at least once in their lifetime.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, v. 2 (Almaty: Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1962), 368.

<sup>52</sup> Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 2, 368.

Valikhanov clearly saw some version of a written account of the Osh legends. From the written account he learned about the way residents connected the city to the prophets of Islam and how highly they esteemed the pilgrimage to the mountain. This is the first time that the tomb of the Prophet Yunus appears in any account. Although later Soviet scholars and propagandists readily labeled the tomb of Asaf as dubious, Valikhanov acknowledges similar suspicions at this much earlier date. It is likewise clear that the idea of *ziyarat* to Sulaiman Too was already conflated with the idea of being a second Hajj, or even a valid replacement for the Hajj, in light of the comment about all the faithful visiting the site at least once in their lifetime.

Valikhanov continues with a critique that could well have been penned by a Soviet propagandist:

This tomb [of Asaf] is characterized best of all by a crude ignorance and superstition amongst Asiatic Muslims... The sheikhs of Osh were also numerous. Each year pilgrims come to worship at these sites with their kin from Kokand, Margilan, Andijon, and other cities of the Ferghana Valley.<sup>53</sup>

His assessment of the tomb and the sheikhs of the Ferghana Valley implies that the people who visit Takht-i Sulaiman are unaware of the correct practices of Islam and that they were somehow distinct from other Muslims. His account also indicates that the problem lies specifically in the Ferghana Valley and not in other areas of Central Asia. As we will see below, his words anticipate those of the Soviet anti-religious campaigns in Central Asia in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1958-1964, as well as contemporary reports that seek to direct Islamic practices in Central Asia.

Other explorers and scientists generally do not refer to Valikhanov's report about Sulaiman Too, whereas they recall the travels of Mir Izzatullah and Nazarov, which possibly explains why Valikhanov's reference to a written account in the 1850s is overlooked. Likewise, they highlight the writings of Aleksei Pavlovich Fedchenko and Karoly Jenő de Ujfalvy (discussed

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<sup>53</sup> Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 2, 368.

below) as potentially the most accurate accounts of the region. Valikhanov's reports were only published in 1962, unlike many of the other nineteenth century accounts that made their way into journals and popular publications (newspapers and books). Fedchenko, who traveled on the "first scientific mission" to Ferghana in 1870-1 with his wife as a representative of the Turkestan Governor General von Kaufman, provides details about Osh in an epistolary report to von Kaufman.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly he claims that, "all the buildings at Takhti Sulaiman are new and that the notorious seven great altars are no more than naked cliffs jutting out of the mountain."<sup>55</sup> Fedchenko's tone suggests that he had expected to see something different with more ancient buildings and a more impressive form. This disappointment seems to parallel Nazarov's confusion about why people did not live on the mountain.

While visiting the Kokand Khanate in 1873, Eugene Schuyler, an American diplomat and scholar, outlines the geography of the Sulaiman Too, its buildings, and current customs. He offers an interpretation of several of the Osh Legends, which he presumably had heard from his guide or other persons at the shrine:

This celebrated rock, *Takht-i-Suleiman*, is a bare high ridge of rugged stone, standing out of the midst of the plain, on the edge of the town, in a way not uncommon in Khokand. An old tradition represents it to be the place where the great Solomon once established his throne, to look over that part of the world. By a mixture of traditions Solomon is also said to have been killed here; though, probably, this Solomon was some local saint or hero who has become confounded with the Jewish King. A square, solid, ornamental *mazar*, or tomb, surmounting the very summit of the rock, is supposed to cover his body, and nearby are shown various round holes, such as are occasionally made in ravines by the action of loose stones and water, where the numerous black dogs, which he brought with him, are supposed to have drunk his blood and eaten his body. This rock has been a sort of stumbling block to geographers, owing to the exaggerated accounts of it which have come down to us.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Aleksei Pavlovich Fedchenko, *Puteshestvie v Turkestan* (Moscow, 1950), 188.

<sup>55</sup> Fedchenko, *Puteshestvie v Turkestan*, 188; and Ogudin, "Tron Solomona," 73.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), v. 2, 43-44.

Here Schuyler creates a portrait of the first peak, which holds the small building that earlier accounts described as situated high on a hill. This building is usually said to house the footprint of Solomon or Adam in contemporary accounts, and Schuyler references the legend that the mountain is considered the burial place of Solomon. Schuyler was aware of both Mir Izzatullah's and Nazarov's accounts since he quotes them. Schuyler adds his own firsthand assessment of the current state of Sulaiman Too and the stories that he hears from his local contacts. He also surmises that although Babur makes no mention of Solomon's Throne he was probably referring to it in his description of Barakoh. Schuyler's account echoes that of Fedchenko in his description of the buildings on the mountain, which he depicts as "small, utterly insignificant, and hardly more than a hundred years old, if as much."<sup>57</sup> Assuming he is correct, then the pavilion that Babur built no longer existed in its original form at the time of Schuyler's visit to Osh. Schuyler's portrayal of the buildings' he saw as lacking significance and being recently constructed is impossible to confirm. If he thought the buildings had little importance, it is unlikely that he would have inquired about them to confirm if his suspicions were true. Like Fedchenko, Schuyler had expected more than what lay before him. Schuyler discusses the area around the mountain:

Beneath the rock there is a large garden, containing two or three small mosques, the residence of a fraternity of recluses and their Ishan, to whom the pilgrim is expected to give a gratuity. After climbing the narrow and very steep path which leads to the top, I came to a large stone and brick platform, built out in front of the tomb, from which I had a magnificent view on every side of the whole valley, the river, the town, the roads leading in all directions with the villages along them, the narrow defile in the low hills through which the river passes, and the splendid panorama of the Alai mountains, in which I was shown the various passes leading to the south... On the other side [of the mountain] is the fortress, an insignificant building, and on this side was the large bazaar, which, as it was a bazaar day, was filled with people, although I saw nothing peculiar or remarkable there.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Schuyler, *Turkistan*, v. 2, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Schuyler, *Turkistan*, v. 2, 44-45.

From Schuyler's account, we get a good view of some of the prominent features of Sulaiman Too and its environment. One of the most significant addendums is that we learn about a *khanaqa* (or dervish lodge) at the base of the mountain where pilgrims leave some offerings. Also, for the first time we learn about the steep climb up the mountain that the author actually embarked on, unlike some of the earlier travelers, along with the accompanying views with which he was rewarded upon reaching the top of the mountain. Osh was still a thriving bazaar town, although maybe without such noteworthy commodities from the past like silk and steeds. The bazaar that he mentions may or may not remain today. At least one major bazaar exists beneath the slopes of Sulaiman Too today, but the largest bazaar in contemporary Osh has been removed from the mountain. At the time of Schuyler's travels, the Kokand Khanate still controlled Osh, but by its publication in 1876, the Russian Empire had annexed the whole of the Khanate and incorporated it into Russian Turkestan.

Osh became known as one of the final strongholds of the Kokand Khanate against the Russian Empire. In a subsequent expedition to Turkestan, Károly Jenő de Ujfalvy, a Hungarian scholar, led a joint French-Russian scientific expedition through Russia, Siberia, and Turkestan.<sup>59</sup> He traveled to Turkestan in 1876 soon after the Russians forcibly annexed the Kokand Khanate, and he wrote extensively about the Sulaiman Too in Osh. He describes a village near Osh as inhabited by Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Kashgarians, but later when considering the bazaar in Osh he contrasts merchant (settled) "Sarts" with (nomadic) Kyrgyz raiders. It is unclear if Ujfalvy uses the terms Sart and Uzbek interchangeably. This is significant because the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ethnographers and anthropologists set out to categorize the peoples of Central Asia into discrete groups that would later form the basis for

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<sup>59</sup> Ch. E. de Ujfalvy de Mëzo-Kovesd, *Le Kohiston, Le Ferghanah and Kholdja* (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1878).

Soviet *korenizatsiia* (indigenization).<sup>60</sup> Ujfalvy describes Osh city as “located on the slopes of a mountain” where all the roads are steep. Before giving a description of his ascent up Sulaiman Too he relays the existence of a “large and lively” bazaar where many Kyrgyz horses are for sale, the dominant position of a recently-built brick mosque (possibly a restoration or expansion of the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque at the base of Sulaiman Too), and the many Sart vendors who no longer have to fear raids from the pillaging Kyrgyz [*Kara-Kirghises*].<sup>61</sup> On the fourth of August, Ujfalvy climbed Takht-i Sulaiman with his wife and their acquaintance Mr. Mueller. Mueller provided Ujfalvy with a drawing of the House of Babur (Figure 2.1), which he says is called the Khodjamné-Djai, (Takht-i Sulaiman Mosque) as well as a meticulous description of the building.<sup>62</sup> The area around the mosque is flat and provides a place for pilgrims to gather and pray with the mullahs. This is the earliest account to mention the polished stones and marble in the building. Like Schuyler, Ujfalvy praises the views from the top of Sulaiman Too, which allow onlookers to see the high mountains before Kashgar, the Nookat Pass to Marghilan, and the way to Andijon. Ujfalvy is also the first to describe the legend of Solomon bringing the Ak Buura River to the people of Osh, another legend that tells of a hermit who dies in a small grotto where water drips, and the rituals performed by pilgrims to cure headaches and backaches. Finally he points out a large cave, but says that there is nothing remarkable at the cave compared to what they had already seen. The paths on the mountain were difficult to negotiate and the climb was steep for anyone who did not have a lot of strength.

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<sup>60</sup> Beginning in the 1920s *Korenizatsiia* policies promoted national languages and national elites as well as extraterritorial national minorities. See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 10-13; Hirsch, 101-4.

<sup>61</sup> Ujfalvy de Mëzo-Kovesd, *Le Kohiston*, 96.

<sup>62</sup> Ujfalvy de Mëzo-Kovesd, *Le Kohiston*, 97-100. Mueller dates the construction of the building to 1230 h. (sometime after 1814 C.E.).

Sulaiman Too is mentioned briefly in the accounts of those associated with the British Consul in Eastern Turkestan located in Kashgar. After the Russians annexed the Kokand Khanate and established Tashkent as the administrative center of Russian Turkestan, they extended the trans-Caspian railroad all the way to Andijon. Visitors to or passing through Osh traveling from Andijon had to take overland transportation from Andijon to Osh. Catherine Macartney, the wife of the British Consul, George Macartney, wrote about her travels to Kashgar in late October of 1887. C. P. Skrine, who took over Macartney's post, described the increasing Russian presence in the Osh region, establishing what might be a military outpost, and making marked improvements to the Osh-Kashgar route. Ella Sykes, the sister of the British Consul to Eastern Turkestan, Percy Sykes, took this route in 1915 to accompany her brother to Kashgar. As Russian rule transitioned to Soviet rule, the work of the Russian and French ethnographers and scientists become part of the foundation for ongoing Soviet expeditions and studies that would delineate the ethnicities and nations of the peoples of Turkestan.

### **A Soviet Experiment**

After the Bolshevik Revolution and the advent of the Soviet state, Central Asia became a battleground once again. On November 26, 1917 the Extraordinary All-Muslim Regional Congress held a meeting in Kokand with about 200 delegates from Turkestan to vote on the status of Turkestan. The Congress did not vote for independence from Russia, as had other former regions of the Russian Empire, but instead established a provisional government for Autonomous Turkestan.<sup>63</sup> This was a turbulent time, with the Petrograd Bolsheviks referring to the new government as the "Kokand Autonomy." In less than a few months, Autonomous

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<sup>63</sup> Sergey Abashin, et al., "Soviet Rule and the Delineation of Borders in the Ferghana Valley, 1917-1930," in *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, ed. Frederick Starr (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2011), 96-97.

Turkestan fell apart due to internal disputes and lack of military and economic support from beyond the Ferghana Valley.<sup>64</sup> In January of 1918, the Fourth Congress of Soviets of the Turkestan Region in Tashkent outlawed Autonomous Turkestan, had its leaders arrested, reclaimed its assets, and sent armed units from Tashkent to the Ferghana Valley.<sup>65</sup> This period of ferment in the Ferghana Valley resulted in the region being labeled a hotbed for anti-Bolshevik resistance with the term “basmachi” given to those who had formerly opposed Russian imperial rule and now opposed the Bolsheviks. During the 1920s the basmachi resistance used Sulaiman Too as a stronghold against the Bolsheviks, just as the Kokand Khanate had set up a resistance against the Russian Empire. The basmachi resistance prevailed until the late 1920s, but by the 1930s the remaining members of the resistance met their end through death or sentencing to the GULAG.

Although the Petrograd Bolsheviks had initially promised Muslims autonomy, religious networks were undermined over the first decade of the Soviet Union. Two early decrees that abolished private property (November 1917) and separated church and state (1918) directly led to protests by mullahs and increased armed violence between the Basmachis and Red Army in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>66</sup> Laws that tried to limit the power of Islamic courts and restricted new Islamic courts had varying success, and by 1927 Islamic courts were abolished in favor of Soviet courts.<sup>67</sup> In 1925 the Central Executive Committee of the People’s Commissariat created a law that set up a system for identifying, registering, and managing *waqf* (endowment) properties. The Islamic system of *waqfs* continued to function in the Ferghana Valley because they provided

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<sup>64</sup> Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 209-211.

<sup>65</sup> Abashin et al., “Soviet Rule and the Delineation of Borders, 98; Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 31.

<sup>66</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 80-1.

schools, which could not yet be replaced by Soviet-endorsed schools due to budgetary constraints.<sup>68</sup> By 1927 the desire to legally shut down Islamic institutions altogether came to the foreground.

Some relief from the oppression of public religious practices came during WWII when Stalin deemed it necessary to rally the people by softening some of the earlier violent anti-religious reforms. This relaxing of policy in the U.S.S.R. was most apparent in the reestablishment of the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943. That same year, two new organizations were formed to regulate religious practices in Turkestan, while simultaneously cultivating the ideals of a society moving toward atheism. The first organization, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), worked to create a program of enlightenment and modernization to bring the remaining believers out of their clouded beliefs through strict adherence to Soviet legality.<sup>69</sup> The second organization was the Central Asian Muftiate (SADUM), which oversaw all official religious practitioners, buildings, and activities. SADUM regulated all religious affairs and not just those of Islam. Some of the most notable changes these two organizations instituted immediately upon forming were to allow selected citizens to travel to Mecca for the Hajj, reopen a madrasa in Bukhara, and register religious officials and mosques throughout the region, including the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque at the base of Sulaiman Too. Often the officials selected for the roles in SADUM were from the Naqshbandi lineage. As mentioned above, many Muslims in the Ferghana Valley had strong ties to the Yasawi lineage, the major competitors of the Naqshbandis.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 87-9.

<sup>69</sup> Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 1-2.

<sup>70</sup> See Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quellejay, *Le soufi et le commissaire: Les confréries musulmanes en URSS* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986) for more on the rivalry between Naqshbandis and Yasawis. See Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 25, 28-31 for a detailed explanation of the formation of SADUM, its initial goals, and three prominent individuals in the management of CARC and SADUM.

SADUM sought to bring all religious activity under its control, but met with resistance from local Muslims who attempted to maintain control over the management of their communities both financially and ideologically.<sup>71</sup> Tasar argues that,

by any number of barometers, the vibrancy of Muslim life in the 1940s and 1950s may have no parallel in any interval of the region's history after 1928. These included not only popular / regional devotion to local 'ulama, but also the prevalence of master-disciple relationships and the colossal popularity of shrine pilgrimage.<sup>72</sup>

Not until the drastic measures of the anti-religious campaign from 1958-1964 would these activities be effectively curtailed.

Sulaiman Too became the primary target of anti-religious attacks both before and after the formation of CARC and SADUM. Although not the only shrine site identified as problematic, its highly conspicuous location in the center of the second largest city in the Kyrgyz SSR made Sulaiman Too a target in the state-sponsored repression. Another key factor was the enormous number of pilgrims that Sulaiman Too attracted each year from the Kyrgyz SSR and the bordering republics during the Islamic feast days of *Eid al-fitr*, celebrated at the end of Ramadan, and *Eid al-adha* (Kurban Bayram or the Feast of Sacrifice). On April 14, 1940, the Osh City Council declared the closure of the mosque (Ravat Abdullakhan) at the base of Sulaiman Too and the mazars on the mountain.<sup>73</sup> In keeping with Soviet anti-religious practice of replacing places of religious worship with scientific or educational institutions, they also made plans to install a meteorological station on one of Sulaiman Too's peaks at a mazar called "executioner's death." A resolution related to the closure posits a tsarist conspiracy where the tsarist autocracy and the Muslim "clergy" sought to keep the populace enslaved in the "darkness

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<sup>71</sup> Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 27.

<sup>72</sup> Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 24.

<sup>73</sup> TsGA KR, f. 1445, d. 11, l. 29.

of ignorance.”<sup>74</sup> One of the alleged consequences of this supposed oppression was that Sulaiman Too remained a “hotbed of religious fanaticism” that reached Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>75</sup>

The same resolution references another document that contains the testimony of five gravediggers who worked at Sulaiman Too. They “requested” that the state and the party tell the Muslims who insist on going to Sulaiman Too that the mullahs and sheikhs made up the legends about the mountain to make money. They wanted the pilgrims to recognize that the only place to find healing is at a hospital with the assistance of doctors.<sup>76</sup> Tactics like these co-opted and perhaps coerced people like the gravediggers to become witnesses for the state in efforts to uproot “religious fanaticism” at Sulaiman Too. Ironically, these reports, which were designed to chart the shrine’s decline, offer important evidence to its popularity at the time. According to these reports, “thousands of pilgrims” visited Sulaiman Too each year. They knew about the legends of the mountain, and visited well-established areas at the shrine for curing such ailments as headaches, rheumatism, and infertility.<sup>77</sup>

By the middle of the 1950s, local bureaucrats and academics called for more drastic measures to limit pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too. After 100,000 pilgrims gathered at the mountain during *Eid al-adha* (Kurban Bayram) in 1954 and 1955, SADUM recommended to CARC that Shafoat hoji Xoliqnazarov, the imam of the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque, be reassigned to SADUM’s headquarters in Tashkent since he appeared to draw the high number of pilgrims. CARC responded by stating that they did not believe that such a reassignment would decrease the number of pilgrims and that, “a reduction in activity can only take place when the relevant

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<sup>74</sup> TsGA KR, f. 1445, d. 11, l. 29.

<sup>75</sup> TsGA KR, f. 1445, d. 11, l. 32.

<sup>76</sup> TsGA KR, f. 1445, d. 11, l. 33.

<sup>77</sup> TsGA KR, f. 1445, d. 11, l. 32-33.

organizations undertake all-embracing scientific-atheistic propaganda.”<sup>78</sup> Strangely, this same imam who was touted as something like a living saint in 1955 had committed outrages against specific pilgrimage stations on the mountain only a few years earlier:

In 1951, he criticized the worship of saints, holy trees, caves, and stones. One year later he poured gas on the ‘holy’ rocks gathered by pilgrims at the shrine, setting them alight. Another account for the same year indicated that he smothered these stones in some sort of black cream, making it impossible for barren women to touch them and rub their eyes. In 1953 he arranged for the pouring of cement over space deemed sacred by pilgrims, and continued to expound upon the un-Islamic nature of pilgrimages in 1954.<sup>79</sup>

These acts were drastic and disruptive for the pilgrims. It is surprising that by 1955 people would suddenly esteem Xoliqnazarov as a living saint. 1954 and 1955 had the greatest number of pilgrims visiting the mountain, but maybe they came in defiance of the attempts to dissuade ritual practices on Sulaiman Too after praying at the mosque. The mosque was under the management of SADUM, but the rest of the mountain and the activities performed there lay beyond the mosque’s jurisdiction.

One side of Sulaiman Too was completely reconfigured to reflect its birth as a Soviet city. The city of Osh established state institutions at the base of Sulaiman Too. They refashioned the *mahallas* (neighborhoods) composed of traditional homes with courtyards where pilgrims would typically find accommodation in the city center with its multi-story buildings and straight roads. These buildings included apartment complexes, the library, and the Osh State Pedagogical Institute (Pedinstitute). In May of 1949, the Osh Museum of Local Lore opened in a prominent location at the base of the mountain not far from the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque.<sup>80</sup> Soviet

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<sup>78</sup> Cited and translated by Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim,” 95.

<sup>79</sup> Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim,” 200. All references from f. 2597, op. 1s (classified fond).

<sup>80</sup> The Kyrgyz SSR Communist Party Committee and the People’s Deputies Regional Committee opened the original museum. In 1978 the museum was renamed the Osh Regional Museum of Culture and History. In 1982 the museum underwent another name change when the geological reserve complete with ancient historic monuments was added to its management (Osh Incorporated Historical Cultural

archaeologists ran their surveys of Sulaiman Too and other regions of southern Kyrgyzstan from the museum. Today the museum maintains many of the artifacts unearthed by these archaeologists. Both the Pedinstitute and the Museum played a role in the anti-religious campaign of 1958-64. For instance, in March 1961 the Osh City Council slated the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque, along with several private domiciles (totaling 1.5 hectares), as the site for a new stadium for the Pedinstitute. Over the following year the “believers” of Osh petitioned to keep the mosque unharmed. Although CARC mediated the dispute ruling in favor of the Osh City Council and the Pedinstitute, the mosque remained intact as a building, but repurposed. The believers lost their access to the mosque until its reopening in 1990, and in the meantime some of the teachers at the Pedinstitute were compelled to hold classes in the mosque’s courtyard since some students and teachers objected to being told to conduct classes inside the mosque.<sup>81</sup>

The efforts to limit pilgrimage and root out unregistered sheikhs on Sulaiman Too did not end with closing the primary mosque at the base of the mountain. In 1963, the Osh City Council decided to refashion the mountain as a place of “cultural recreation.” They ruled in favor of demolishing the “white house” that the pilgrims associated with Babur.<sup>82</sup> A photo dated June 22, 1969 shows pilgrims praying at Sulaiman’s footprints in the open at the site of the former “white house” (Figure 2.2).<sup>83</sup> Ironically, in 1988, the photos of the “white house” from the earlier anti-religious campaign were the basis for its reconstruction (Figure 2.3). Compare the

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Museum Reserve). In 2004, under the Kyrgyz Republic President’s decree, it received on its current title of the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum or the “Sulaiman-Too” National History and Archaeology Museum Complex.

<sup>81</sup> TsGA KR, f. 2597, op. 2, d. 50, l. 1-16 and f. 2597, op. 2, d. 57, l. 3.

<sup>82</sup> TsGA KR, f. 2597, op. 2, d. 57, l. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum (Sulaiman-Too UTAMK), “Ateisticheskie materialy po antireligioznomu napravleniiu,” photograph 2.

earlier photograph of the “white house” from 1960 (Figure 2.3) with the rebuilt site from 2011 (Figure 2.4).<sup>84</sup>

The Soviet scholar and staunch leader in the anti-religious campaign, Iurii Grigor’evich Petrash, wrote prolifically in the popular press and academic journals about the dangers and “parasitism” at Sulaiman Too. He argued that the practices and beliefs associated with the pilgrimage at Sulaiman Too impeded Central Asians from overcoming their “primitive traditions” and embracing Soviet socialism. He would become a major proponent of the 1958-1964 Soviet anti-religious campaign, publishing prolifically about Sulaiman Too early in his career even when he was still an *aspirant* at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy – Atheism Sector. He published in local papers such as *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* and more broadly circulated journals such as the anti-religious publication *Nauka i Religiiia*.<sup>85</sup> After receiving his candidate degree he taught at the Osh Pedinstitute and created opportunities to lecture on the mountain to pilgrims about the “backwardness” of their traditions. He is depicted in some photographs of Sulaiman Too and other sacred sites giving lectures to pilgrims and working with teams of archaeologists. He authored some of the images that came to comprise a series of three folders now housed along with their negatives in a basement archive at the Osh Museum.

Evidence of the “superstitious” practices of pilgrims and the nefarious activities of unregistered sheikhs at Sulaiman Too was collected in a folder labeled “Atheistic Materials for the Anti-religious Campaign.” While the photos were intended as propaganda materials, they also depict many of the practices performed at the site as well as the state of various parts of the shrine. Some of the photos, like the one from 1960 of a drunken Sheikh Narbaev next to a

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<sup>84</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, “Sulaiman-Too, Osh,” photograph 2. The numbering system for the photographs is my own.

<sup>85</sup> For an excellent study on the 1958-1964 anti-religious campaign and the publication, *Nauka i religiiia*, see Virginia Smolkin-Rothrock, “The Ticket to the Soviet Soul: Science, Religion and the Spiritual Crisis of Late Soviet Athiesm,” *The Russian Review* 73 (2014): 171-197.

gravestone, may have been staged (Figure 2.5).<sup>86</sup> Captions written on the back of the photos offer a snapshot into the vision of the anti-religious campaign and often provide additional insight into the images (Figure 2.6).<sup>87</sup>

The Soviet embrace of atheism and subsequent policies that were intended to lead to the cessation of religious practices at shrines was complicated, dynamic, and sporadically successful. While the practice of Islam in Central Asia faced numerous and heavy restrictions during the 1920s and 1930s and again in 1958-1964, these restrictions did not remain steady throughout the Soviet period. Despite repeated attempts by official to impede them, pilgrims continued to visit Sulaiman Too from all over Central Asia. Numbers of pilgrims who visited Sulaiman Too diminished during the years with the most drastic anti-religious measures, but the numbers increased during other years (Figure 2.7).<sup>88</sup> The pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too replaced the Hajj for Central Asian Muslims during times of war and disquiet between Ferghana and the Hijaz when the safety of Hajjis was threatened or when it was impossible to gain the necessary permissions required to enter foreign kingdoms or exit and reenter the boundaries of their own lands. My informants explained that today many people in Kyrgyz Republic consider the pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too as a second Hajj and an equally pious act for those for whom it is not feasible to travel to Mecca. While the pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too never entirely ceased during the Soviet period, the shrine's pilgrims and religious specialists faced challenges through the 1980s. The remnants of the Soviet legacy of transforming the mountain through the destruction of older monuments, the refashioning of the urban landscape around the mountain,

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<sup>86</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Ateisticheskie materialy po antireligioznomu napravleniiu," photograph 25. For parallel tactics of depicting Orthodox clergy in the 1920s and 1930s, see Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 103 and 215, n. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Ateisticheskie materialy po antireligioznomu napravleniiu," photograph 26.

<sup>88</sup> Note the dramatic decline after 1954.

and the addition of irrigation pipes, concrete pathways and stairs, the Cave Museum, and non-native trees can be seen today in the mountain's appearance. Likewise the Soviet legacy remains in that the Osh Archaeological and Historical Museum, founded as Soviet institution, manages the contemporary shrine. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the Soviet legacy's manifestations at the post-Soviet shrine, as well as the ramifications thereof for a new vision for the future of Sulaiman Too.

### **Selective Remembering and Strategic Forgetting**

The approach to Sulaiman Too from any direction today shows visible traces of the Soviet period's refashioning of the mountain. From the northern side of the mountain, steep, concrete steps with guardrails built in the 1970s make the climb less treacherous as they suggest a specific trail for people to follow. A Soviet-era television tower soars upward from one of the peaks. Attendants man the gate at the foot of the mountain between the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum and the Ravat Abdullakhan Mosque asking visitors to pay 20 KGS as an entrance fee. From the southern approach, the Cave Museum looms above visitors with its two-story, colossal glass windows and cement platforms filling the space of the former sacred cave. Beggars select their daily posts near the gate to offer prayers to pilgrims and passers-by in exchange for small sums of money. As visitors climb the steps, every now and then additional dirt paths visibly detour from the primary, Soviet-engineered path. These paths lead to other parts of the mountain that few visitors frequent today, but prior to the construction of the concrete paths were widely used by pilgrims to reach other parts of the mountain and by locals who were climbing up from the *mahallas* below.

At the highest point of this main path there is a lookout space equipped with long distance observation viewers for tourists. Here visitors can easily enjoy a panorama of Osh. They

can also look down over the extensive cemetery at the base of the mountain and catch a clear view of the new, enormous mosque that is under construction just outside Sulaiman Too's fenced exterior. At the "White House," directly opposite the lookout, one mullah sits inside the building on prayer rugs and reads prayers for pilgrims. Sulaiman's footprint – an impression in the stone – is also inside the "White House." On spring days during the height of the pilgrimage season, a second mullah is usually available outside of this building seated on a bench as a way to accommodate the influx of pilgrims' requests. If there are pilgrims' shoes arranged outside of the "White House" then newly-arrived pilgrims can sit in the shade or pray with the second mullah while they wait to for their turn to enter the "White House."

At sacred sites throughout Central Asia, shrines often incorporate natural features that contribute to their veneration.<sup>89</sup> These features can include springs, caves, trees, rocks, peaks, and grottos. In the case of Sulaiman Too, the entire mountain is sacred and encompasses several large caves, important rocks, and a tiny grotto with internal water source.<sup>90</sup> Pilgrims and other tourists often leave offerings such as money, hair, or pieces of fabric or take small mementos such as rocks or clay dirt with them as they pass through the stations at Sulaiman Too. After leaving the elevated peak of Solomon's Throne, one rounds the corner and heads down the side of the peak where one has a bird's eye view of a large slab of stone called the *bel tash* (back stone) or *sigalchik tash* (slipping stone) where pilgrims slide - often seven times, which is considered an auspicious choice. Each time they slide down the slab they are granted an additional year of health. This rock is likely one of the smooth slabs of stone that Ujfalvy described in 1876, and there are also photos from the 1960s of pilgrims sliding their babies down the rock to ask for

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<sup>89</sup> 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 State University Press, 1994), 42-50.

<sup>90</sup> Zarcone, 2013. An irrigation system creates constant water at the site of the grotto. It is not a natural spring like those at other sites including Hazrati Ayub or Bibi Fatima, nor are any of the individual stations more important than the idea that the entire mountain is sacred.

protection against illness (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).<sup>91</sup> The rock has a nook where pilgrims then leave small sums of money after completing their round.

The path that continues beyond *bel tash* is made up of large stones weathered flat by the feet of pilgrims over the years. As pilgrims proceed down this path, there is a hole in the rock face called the *kol tash* (hand stone) where they can place their hands in order to cure arthritis and other hand ailments. As at the health rock, there is a nook where pilgrims leave small sums of money as offerings. The path curves and yields three more special locations. The first is the precarious *sirat* bridge, where pilgrims struggle to step over a gap in the stones. The second is an opening low to the ground where pilgrims must climb through into a second smaller, inner cavern, where water drips from the ceiling (in the Osh legends these drops are considered the tears of Solomon, which could cure eye diseases). If the water happens to fall on the pilgrims then their wishes are granted. Today this opening is intended for those who are asking for a long life. Those who contemplate their lives in this world are missing the point, and it is only those who ask to be brought to paradise in the afterlife who truly understand the shrine's power.<sup>92</sup> Farther up there is an alcove cut into the rock wall with the fairly recent addition of a water pipe that runs through the rock but is exposed in the center of the alcove. Women who hope to conceive go to this place and hang from the pipe. The pipes most likely were installed to irrigate non-native *karagach* (elm) trees about which the 2009 UNESCO report complains. It is unclear whether or not the pipes were part of the Soviet project to improve the sanitary conditions on Sulaiman Too in the 1960s and early 1970s. The pipes do not seem to appear in the photograph take by Thierry Zarcone in 1995. Since the pipes' installation, however, pilgrims have incorporated this alteration into their ritual. After women hang from the water pipe, they touch

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<sup>91</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Ateisticheskie materialy po antireligioznomu napravleniiu," photograph 18.

<sup>92</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, October, 2011.

their forehead to the *beshik tash* (cradle stone) below the pipe and declare their intention to become pregnant.<sup>93</sup> They can leave an offering of money or something else below. When a woman has given birth to a healthy child, she must return with her child to the shrine and leave another offering including locks of their children's hair (*niyaz chach*). Some variation of this practice occurred during the Soviet era as well, since a photograph taken in 1960 and included in the collection of anti-religious materials shows an accumulation of locks (Figure 2.10).<sup>94</sup> The belief that different parts of the shrine heal different ailments has endured to the present, but pilgrims have had to adapt the actual practices because of the Soviet project to modernize, sanitize, and convert the space into a “cultural recreational park.”

Pilgrims generally arrive in large family groups. Often these are groups with elderly female relatives from an extended family accompanied by a single male relative who acts as chaperone and driver. This is the norm especially among the Tajik and Uzbek populations. The weather during the autumn and winter months can become bitterly cold and snowy with little warning, while summers are severely hot. This leaves spring and early summer as the traditional and preferred seasons to embark on a pilgrimage; however, as we will see in the following chapter, the off year with heavy spring rains can dramatically impact the success of shrine places by making them inaccessible. It is also common to see Kyrgyz families travel to Sulaiman Too or other shrines with members of their extended family or simply as a nuclear family. Amongst the Kyrgyz, couples who are having trouble conceiving sometimes travel to this shrine without any additional family members.

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<sup>93</sup> This stone is also called the Sulaiman stone, which can cure headaches. See Zarcone, “Atypical Mausoleum,” 84.

<sup>94</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, “Ateisticheskie materialy po antireligioznomu napravleniiu,” photograph 15.

After the fertility shrine, there is a slight opening in the rock face through which pilgrims climb up to two large caves that face each other. It is also possible to climb over the small metal railing to paths that lead down to the cemetery. The steep path through the cemetery leads to the tomb of Asaf b. Barakhya and then to an area where pilgrims collect water. If one follows the designated path rather than descending into the cemetery, then one rounds the final bend arriving at the Cave Museum, which was constructed in the space of the largest of five caves. This cave is known as the Eagle's Cave, and is most likely the large cave that Ujfalvy dismissed as unremarkable in his account from 1876. By the 1970s the Eagle's Cave was one of the prominent sites for pilgrims to visit on the mountain. In 1973 the Soviets determined that they would convert this cave into a restaurant in order to deter pilgrims from entering it, but a public outcry in Osh from believers and non-believers alike resulted in them converting the space into a museum once construction ended in 1978.<sup>95</sup> This cave contained a red clay mud that was very popular for collection by pilgrims at least during the Soviet period prior to the construction of the Cave Museum.<sup>96</sup> It had curative properties when applied to the skin, but today this practice is rendered impossible with the Cave Museum in place.<sup>97</sup> Some people today consider the Cave Museum as a scar on the face of Sulaiman Too and others, like the newlyweds described above, believe it is the perfect "historic" landmark for the backdrop of their photographs.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, December 2011; Director of Osh Museum, interview, October 2011; and Sulaiman-Too UTAMK (Uluttuk tarykhyi-arkheologiialyk muzei kompleksi), accessed on March 19, 2015, <http://www.sulaimanto.org/en/?id=21>.

<sup>96</sup> The pre-Soviet visitors do not mention this practice although they do note the presence of the caves.

<sup>97</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, December 2011.

<sup>98</sup> For example, the UNESCO Advisory Board Report for Sulaiman Too of 2009 (24) describes the Cave Museum as "a visual scar on the mountain and visible from the plain. It would appear to be impossible to remove this fully without damaging the cave. Moreover, the eventual removal of this structure would not turn the cave back to its original state, as the ground floor has been considerably reconstructed, further spaces excavated and interior surfaces plastered with cement. Measures to reduce the visual impact would be desirable, although these will require careful consideration to ensure that the authenticity of the property is not further affected." The same report describes the Soviet era attempts to curb religious practices on the mountain led to it "non-authentic use as "a kind of public park" (21).

At the beginning of this chapter we encountered Alimbek Kultaev Hajji, the official shrine guardian of Sulaiman Too, at one of today's main prayer stations outside of the Cave Museum.<sup>99</sup> He was born in 1951 in Bazar Korgon, the second largest city in Jalalabad province. He studied at school, completing high school, but then opted to join the Soviet army rather than attend university. By 1975 he had left the army, and in 1977 began to work with a local mosque in Bazar Korgon. His father had not been a mullah because it was too difficult to work as a religious specialist during the earlier Soviet period; however, his grandfather and great grandfather had both been mullahs, thus giving him a hereditary claim to his legitimacy as a religious specialist.<sup>100</sup> When the Soviets first arrived in Bazar Korgon, Alimbek Hajji's grandfather gathered his family and retreated to a mountain cave, refusing to participate in the collectivization efforts of the communists.<sup>101</sup>

At age 61, Alimbek Hajji's official status as shrine guardian is evidenced by the nametag given him by the Osh Museum. He is available for prayer requests on a daily basis when he is in Osh. He does not live in the city of Osh, but travels there from the nearby town of Uzgen. He makes regular visits to Bazar Korgon and to the capital, Bishkek. He has even traveled internationally for conferences hosted by the Christensen Foundation where religious specialists from around the world are able to meet and discuss their views. He has recently written a book, which he intends to publish in Bishkek. During our first interview, Alimbek Hajji referred me to his book as the authority on many answers to questions that I had asked him. He recounted for me of some of the legends that described not just Solomon, but also Adam, Abraham, and Muhammad as having visited Sulaiman Too. His cosmology extends beyond the Osh legends

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<sup>99</sup> The Cave Museum falls under the directorship of the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum.

<sup>100</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, April 2012. Hereditary shrine guardianship is a customary Islamic practice at many shrines in Central Asia.

<sup>101</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, April 2012.

that connect the prophets of Islam with Sulaiman Too. He believes the Kyrgyz have bonds with the ancient Egyptians, Native American tribes, and Alexander the Great. Despite some of Alimbek Hajji's seemingly unconventional associations, he is very aware of many of the historic sources I described above. Most importantly he is a fount of knowledge for the recent history of the shrine. Because he is at the shrine nearly every day and because his family members have fulfilled the role of mullah, he is extremely well versed in the rituals (both permissible and questionable) that take place at the shrine and the current management of the site.

Alimbek Hajji's role at Sulaiman Too merges two of the major viewpoints about the mountain. He is an advocate for the ongoing, unhindered pilgrimage to Sulaiman Too. He supports changes that address the needs of pilgrims such as the construction of accommodations near the mountain, improvements that facilitate access to the shrine, and information that guides pilgrims explaining the significance of different areas of the shrine. Alimbek Hajji cooperates with workers of the museum by participating in the management structures suggested by the museum and the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. His willingness to collaborate with people who promote Kyrgyz heritage shows his dedication to seek assistance with preservation efforts from sources beyond the museum complex. Although the Soviet era has come to a close, the role of pilgrimage at Sulaiman Too persists as a point of debate at local, national, and global levels.

With the dismantlement of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Kyrgyz Republic as an independent state in 1991, Sulaiman Too has become the focal point for new debates about the role of Islam and *ziyarat* in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ferghana Valley. In 2007, the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and the Osh Museum initiated the process to have Sulaiman Too designated as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. The UNESCO Advisory Board Report from 2009 – the same year as the inception of Sulaiman Too to the World Heritage list – reiterates the nominators' motivation to preserve the site for both its Islamic and pre-Islamic elements. It

characterizes Sulaiman Too as an example of a “complete sacred mountain.” The 2009 UNESCO report acknowledges that:

Many visitors come to the mountain both from within Kyrgyzstan and from other countries. The local municipality is interested in encouraging tourism as a way of gaining income. The current paths and visitor facilities and guarding arrangements are inadequate for a major increase in numbers.<sup>102</sup>

This does not necessarily leave room for extensive numbers of pilgrims to move about freely on the mountain, and as of 2012, the implementation of the plan laid out by this report favors the shrine’s pre-Islamic past while marginalizing the contemporary Muslim pilgrims. Additional regulation of the pathways, charging entrance fees, and institutionalization of the role of religious specialists add a layer of monitoring to the pilgrims’ activities that had not been the case in the years since independence and possibly even earlier during *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The plan also outlines the necessity to curb planting of non-native trees on the mountain and seeks to limit urban growth especially in the form of multi-story buildings around the base of the mountain. The writers identify the new mosque being built near the cemetery as a particular concern because it changes the landscape of the mountain and detracts from the impact of the mountain rising up out of the adjacent valley floor.<sup>103</sup> Since Sulaiman Too’s inception into the World Heritage list, its slopes have been mapped and the legal status of the protected zones and buffer zones has been noted.<sup>104</sup>

Bakyt Amanbaeva, a Soviet-trained archaeologist of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, led the team that composed the report submitted to UNESCO. Her primary concern was to protect the pre-Islamic aspects of the shrine such as the archaeological remains and the petroglyphs, which had been badly vandalized and were in desperate need of preservation. The proposal was

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<sup>102</sup> UNESCO Advisory Board Report (2009), 25.

<sup>103</sup> UNESCO Advisory Board Report (2009), 24.

<sup>104</sup> See the 2009 maps of “Sulaiman – Too Cultural Landscape (Sacred Mountain) inscribed property” at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1230/documents/>

successful, and in 2009 Sulaiman Too was accepted in as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its archaeological and historic value. Amanbaeva is adamant about the direction of the site's management as stressing the importance of the ancient past. She is vehemently opposed to allowing people to come and go on the mountain in an unregulated manner.<sup>105</sup> Not surprisingly, she had worked with the other archaeologists, including Zadneprovskii, who had discovered and analyzed many of the ancient relics at Sulaiman Too. She stresses that she is a “real scientist,” and that the contemporary pilgrimage at Sulaiman Too is of little consequence compared to the goals of the preservation.<sup>106</sup> She does acknowledge, however, that the pilgrims' current rituals, in many cases, directly reflect evidence of similar ancient practices.<sup>107</sup>

In the years since Sulaiman Too's incorporation into the World Heritage list, members of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and the directorship of the Osh Historical and Archaeological Museum have tried once again to give the mountain a makeover. They have installed new signage to direct tourists in Russian, Kyrgyz, and English (Figure 2.11). While this is more inclusive than some newer monuments in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, that offer inscriptions in Kyrgyz only – reflecting a recent move toward a national Kyrgyz-centric language policy, – the choice of language on the new signage implicitly excludes the importance of the Uzbek and Tajik pilgrims. Alimbek Hajji grumbled about the new signs when I mentioned them to him. His frustration remained in the fact that the signs did not give detailed explanations to the pilgrims about the significance of the pilgrimage stations. He also complained that they did not provide information on Islamic history or how to advance through the pilgrimage stations.<sup>108</sup> The lack of explanations in Uzbek or Tajik languages despite the long history of pilgrims from both ethnic

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<sup>105</sup> Bakyt Amanbaeva, interview by Jennifer Webster, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, November 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Amanbaeva, interview, November 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Amanbaeva and Devlet, “O Sulaiman-gore,” 25.

<sup>108</sup> Alimbek Hajji, interview, April 2012.

groups at the shrine did not discourage Alimbek Hajji. The absence of Uzbek or Tajik information delineates a new vision for the mountain as part of a Kyrgyz cultural heritage site and not as an active and inclusive Islamic sacred site. Ultimately pilgrims who cannot read the signs still manage to locate and learn about the stations at Sulaiman Too because of the tradition of hiring guides to lead them through the stations. The religious guides and mullahs readily assist them. For visitors who arrive outside of the purpose of pilgrimage, the signs limit the type of information they receive and the languages in which that information is conveyed, which marginalizes the role of the mountain as a place of contemporary pilgrimage. According to Alimbek Hajji, Amanbaeva is responsible for the implementation of the signs.

The Osh Museum has incorporated Alimbek Hajji's role as mullah into its vision for the mountain. This fusion of local religious networks with the state and now internationally designated objectives illustrates an ongoing process of co-option of local traditions to reformulate the shrine in a way that points to the Soviet predecessors who likewise tried various methods to infiltrate and control the religious networks. With all the efforts to transform the actual mountain and control urban planning in Osh, the interior of the Osh Museum reflects very little of this transformation. The Museum's main installations represent the political history of the Osh region and the material cultural remains collected by Soviet archaeologists from southern Kyrgyzstan. Images from the 1960s remain on the walls with their former Soviet-era captions removed. It is as if the Soviet museum is frozen in time.<sup>109</sup> Regardless of the current status of the Osh Museum, its director and staff have jurisdiction over Sulaiman Too. The efforts to adopt new signage,

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<sup>109</sup> Morgan Liu describes the Osh Museum as "a nearly defunct Soviet institution to which no resident pays attention." See Morgan Liu, *Under Solomon's Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 36. Residents express similar feelings about the nearby Osh Library, another former Soviet institution at the base of the mountain. In May 2012 the interior of the Osh Museum was undergoing some renovations, perhaps as a complement to the revisions on the mountain.

regulate religious practitioners, limit access by visitors, control urban planning around, and map the paths on Sulaiman Too reflect intentions to monitor and manipulate the future of the site.<sup>110</sup>

In contrast to the goals of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and the Osh Museum, Aigine Cultural Research Center's (CRC) agenda reflects a different approach to delimiting sacred space in Kyrgyzstan. The founder and director of Aigine CRC, Gulnara Aitpaeva, formerly held the positions of professor and dean at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek. After serving as the vice president of AUCA for some time, she left her post and founded Aigine CRC, which now funds many Kyrgyz cultural projects such as the recording of Manaschis and traditional musicians.<sup>111</sup> One of Aigine CRC's first major projects was to create compendiums of shrine places in the Kyrgyz Republic (2005-2012). Staff members visited different regions of Kyrgyzstan and conducted interviews at local shrines. In many cases they appointed a local person as shrine guardian at particular shrines. Two noteworthy remarks must be made about their collection of information about shrines: They do not include maps in their publications, although they do offer photographs of some of the shrines. The lack of inclusion of maps reflects their goals to preserve and protect these places. Thus, they do not create guides intended for tourism—cultural or otherwise. Aigine CRC's projects emphasize all things considered culturally Kyrgyz. This emphasis on Kyrgyz ethnicity leads to the unintended consequence, or perhaps, active choice to exclude information about the prevalence of ethnic minorities who visit southern Kyrgyz shrines.<sup>112</sup> One could describe Aigine CRC's worldview as

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<sup>110</sup> UNESCO, Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain, Map, 2009, accessed on March 19, 2015, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1230/documents/>. The first map shows an overview of the mountain and identifies its main historical and archaeological features as well as the extensive paths that intersect the five peaks. The second shows an overview of a topographical map indicating the legally protected zones in the region around Sulaiman Too and the city of Osh.

<sup>111</sup> Manaschis perform the Kyrgyz oral epic, *Manas*.

<sup>112</sup> In the introduction to *Sacred Sites in Southern Kyrgyzstan's*, English edition, Aitpaeva notes that the ethnic clashes in the summer of 2010 disrupted Aigine CRC's research at southern Kyrgyz shrines

preferencing *Kyrgyzchylyk* over other potential identity markers like *Musulmanchylyk*. Nation-state building ideologies such as this are a direct reaction to the Soviet legacy and a byproduct of Soviet *korenizatsiia* policies.

Several movements that focus on the centrality of Islam have taken shape since Kyrgyz independence. The Muftiate of the Kyrgyz Republic seeks to regulate Islam through official and legal means, and is a direct outgrowth of SADUM. Other groups from the Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Switzerland (Aga Khan network) promote Islam in a way that is compatible with their own ideologies. Through the support of different organizations and funding construction of religious institutions such as mosques and religious schools, these foreign groups are making headway into regions that are farther from the control of the Muftiate, which is based in Bishkek. While individuals may identify themselves Muslim in one context, they may choose to identify themselves by their ethnicity in other contexts. At Sulaiman Too, pilgrims and religious specialists consistently identify themselves as Muslims first and foremost regardless of their ethnicity, but this did not prevent residents of Osh from engaging in destructive and violent behavior in the summer of 2010.

Attempts to reproduce these competing worldviews at Sulaiman Too manifest in the different ways people describe the significance of the mountain as well as in their purported aims for use, preservation, and management. Sulaiman Too has already undergone significant changes as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. What will these changes and the mountain's

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significantly (5-6). Also of relevance is that Aitpaeva acknowledges that “sacred sites unite people of different ethnic groups by being a common geographical and religious legacy of different people living in the south [of Kyrgyzstan]” (9). The English edition of *Sacred Sites of the Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam*, ed. Gulnara Aitpaeva (Bishkek: Aigine Cultural Research Center, 2013) is an abridged version of three much larger volumes written in Krygyz language that detail the sacred sites of Osh, Jalalabad, and Batken oblasts: Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aida Egemberdieva, eds., *Osh togu yiyk zherler zhana el bilimi* (Bishkek: Aigine madanii-izildöö borboru, 2011); Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aida Egemberdieva, eds., *Zhalal-Abaddagy yiyk zherler zhana el daanyshmandygy* (Bishkek: Aigine madanii-izildöö borboru, 2010); and Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aida Egemberdieva, eds., *Kasiettiüü Batken aimagy zhana el bilimi* (Bishkek: Aigine madanii-izildöö borboru, 2012).

delimited monitoring mean for the future of the shrine and for the pilgrims who visit Sulaiman Too? Beyond this, the ethnic violence of 2010 broke out after years of tension that had begun with earlier clashes in 1990. Before June 2010, Sulaiman Too's ethnic Uzbeks comprised the majority of pilgrims. After the violence, they seem to have all but disappeared. During the height of the pilgrimage season in 2012, some groups of Tajiks and Uzbeks, distinguishable by their dress and speech, visited the mountain on the regular Sunday pilgrimage days. Their numbers were in drastic decline from years past. Border conflicts, destruction of Uzbek neighborhoods, emigration, and fear are the major factors that have kept the Uzbek pilgrims from returning to Sulaiman Too.

Driving into Osh in the spring of 2012 I had hope for a city that had been devastated by violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. The burnt-out Uzbek *mahallas* showed signs of rebuilding, at least along the main road. Instead of the desolation and abandonment that dominated the horizon during the previous autumn, a newly constructed wall welcomed visitors with bright murals of sun symbols and Kyrgyz motifs. Some of the Uzbek population had returned from abroad. Individual and collective attitudes and feelings however, are still damaged, and any mention of 2010 or of ethnicity in general causes deep anxiety and pain for people regardless of their ethnic background. This period will be a clear time of transition for Sulaiman Too as a shrine place and as a marker of national, ethnic, and religious heritage. If the Soviet past is any type of lesson, however, pilgrims will adapt to both the changes brought by the UNESCO designation, the deeper regulation of the mountain in the name of preservation, and transitions in ethnic composition and demographics.

## Arslanbob Ata: Reaching Mecca from the Mountains of Kyrgyzstan

Anyone who tries to disturb Arslanbob Ata or do scientific research will be punished by Allah and the shrine itself.

— Muhammad, mullah (moldo) of Arslanbob Ata, interview, May 2012.

*Ziyarat* in Arslanbob is not permissible. It is better to go to natural places and thank Allah for the beautiful place.

— Gulmatov Rustambek, All-Kyrgyzstan Director of Local Mosques and Madrasas, interview, July 2012.

The pilgrims and local villagers at Arslanbob Ata, a remote shrine in the Ferghana Mountain Range of Kyrgyzstan's Jalalabad oblast, tell the following story: Every Friday Arslanbob Ata, the companion of the Prophet Muhammad and founder of the village of Arslanbob, climbed up a steep mountain path to pray at the *namaz tosh* (prayer rock).<sup>1</sup> While he daily prayed his afternoon *namaz* he found himself transported back to Mecca. During this act of faithfulness Arslanbob Ata could not protect his body, leaving him susceptible to physical harm. Eventually his vulnerability at prayer time became his undoing when, through a double-cross, his

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<sup>1</sup> *Arslan* (or *Arstan*) means lion in Uzbek and other Turkic languages. *Bob* means gate, but can also be a short form of *bobo* (or *buvi*) meaning grandfather. *Bobo* and *ata* together can suggest “ancestor” (ata-bobolar = ancestors).

enemies – the enemies of Islam – shot him with an arrow and killed him.<sup>2</sup> The stains of his blood remain visible on the sacred rock high above the village in the mountains today.<sup>3</sup>

In the legends that proclaim the great deeds of Arslanbob Ata we learn that he was a holy man and *ghazi* who brought Islam to the people of Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> He was a prolific forester who populated the mountains of Kyrgyzstan with walnut trees. At the Prophet Muhammad's command he brought seeds of fruit trees to Central Asia while on his Islamizing mission. Arslanbob Ata married a "Tatar" from a tribe whose members had yet to convert to Islam.<sup>5</sup> His wife, remaining loyal to her kinsmen, informed them of Arslanbob Ata's defenselessness while praying at the *namaz tosh*. Today Arslanbob Ata's tomb rests at the center of Arslanbob village in the Bazar Korgon region of Jalalabad oblast. Along with the tomb and sacred rock, the sacred "mirror lakes," two waterfalls (large and small), and a series of small caves interweave to form the sacred landscape of Arslanbob, which welcomes visitors during the warmer and drier months of the year.<sup>6</sup>

The legend of Arslanbob Ata, while fantastical in many respects, embodies two themes that remain critical to the people of Arslanbob in terms of their society and economy from the

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<sup>2</sup> In some people's retelling of the story, Arslanbob Ata is shot with a rifle. Sometimes the assassins are said to have shot Arslanbob Ata from horseback, a detail which reinforces the idea that horse-riding nomads were plausible opponents of Islamic piety. The enemies are called "Tatars," "*kafirs*" and "Russians" depending on who tells the story. In some variations of the legend, Arslanbob Ata is said to have lived for 400 or 950 years, which could explain the variety of ways in which he is killed.

<sup>3</sup> This version of the legend of Arslanbob is a synthesis of several versions told to me by pilgrims and locals in the village of Arslanbob during three separate visits to the shrine between October 2011 and June 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *Ghazi* means warrior with the sense of "warrior for Islam" and the process of Islamization.

<sup>5</sup> In some variations of the legend, Arslanbob is said to have married a Russian woman. The sentiment that his wife was a *kafir* or nonbeliever (non-Muslim) is significant regardless of the assigned ethnic identity marker. Tatar is a generic term applied to nomadic people, although it does represent a delineated ethnic group in the Soviet Union and today. The term used in the re-telling of the legend is used in its generic, pejorative sense rather than as a reference to the specific ethnic group, which makes up a minority population in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>6</sup> Typically Arslanbob receives the majority of its pilgrims in June and July; May is still too wet from rain and ice melts.

mid-twentieth century to the present: forestry and religion. These two themes intersect within the legend and point to the values of the community. The details of the legend vary, depending both on the narrator and on the context and time in which it is recounted. To some degree, however, the themes of forestry and Islam are ubiquitous in these accounts. Thus, the legend of Arslanbob hinges upon the environment of Arslanbob, especially its natural topography.

The people of Arslanbob have relied on their natural environment since the Soviet period to maintain their livelihood whether through tourism, forestry, religion, or most often some combination of these three. The legend of Arslanbob Ata reinforces the necessity to respect and preserve that natural landscape, which is evident in some local movements toward environmental protection, conservation, and respect for the land. Many residents of Arslanbob trace their family lineages to Arslanbob Ata, which adds an element of hereditary responsibility to participate in the conservation of the local natural landscape. These residents, in particular, are inclined to perpetuate the legend through repetition so as to reiterate the perceived historic value and inheritance of a communal duty to the place in which they live.

The sacred landscape of Arslanbob persisted as one of the targets for unregistered religious locations in the eyes of the Soviet anti-religious propagandists. In national newspapers, the works of Soviet anti-religious writers frequently mention the sacred sites of Arslanbob alongside Sulaiman Too.<sup>7</sup> In many of these articles the village of Arslanbob represents a bastion of anti-Bolshevik resistance surviving in local religious practices and managing to escape the regulations of Soviet administrative bodies that governed Islam.<sup>8</sup> The more recent accusation that the village of Arslanbob harbors ethnic Uzbeks who embrace anti-government and, therefore, anti-Kyrgyz sentiments, continues among the Kyrgyz population of southern

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<sup>7</sup> Iurii Petrash, "Pravda o 'sviatykh mestakh'." *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January 5, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Discussed below.

Kyrgyzstan and in the capital, Bishkek. After the violence of 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan the village remains somewhat isolated from the rest of the oblast, both because of fear generated due to its majority Uzbek population and because of challenging accessibility (a problem for many areas of Kryrgyzstan after difficult winters).<sup>9</sup>

This chapter explores how the people of the village of Arslanbob in the Kyrgyz Republic have used the legends of Arslanbob Ata to fortify communal values and demarcate sacred topography over time.<sup>10</sup> The activities and propaganda of the Soviet anti-religious campaign at least temporarily impacted the way some people envisioned their patron and his life. Other Soviet transformations of the landscape, such as the introduction of new forestry practices and the establishment of non-religious tourism around Arslanbob, initiated or perhaps necessitated adaptation of the legends of Arslanbob Ata. I argue that the retelling and modification over time of the legends of Arslanbob Ata reinforce both the changing economic and religious interests of the different segments of the community through references to ecology, forestry, and Islam.

Legends create networks of shared meaning between shrines in local, regional, and global contexts.<sup>11</sup> As a place of prayer and the site of martyrdom, the sacred rock plays a role in the

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<sup>9</sup> The mountains of Arslanbob were supposedly a hideout for Uzbeks fleeing from Uzgen (Osh oblast) after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

<sup>10</sup> For a study that analyzes the variation in epic legends associated with the Islamization of in Central Asia, see 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 State University Press, 1994). On the legends of Ismaili shrines in Tajikistan, see Jo-Ann Gross, "Foundational Legends, Shrines, and Ismaili Identity in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan," in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed., Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and on the legend of the seven holy brothers, see Sergei Abashin, "Sem' sviatykh brat'ev," in *Podvizhniki islama: Kul't sviatykh i sufizm v Srednei Azii i na Kavkaze* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia firma "Vostochnaia literatura," 2003), 18-40. For a study that seeks to understand the variation in legends as told by pilgrims and local residents in the context of a Catholic shrine in northeastern Brazil, see Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). For a comparative example on Syriac Christian legends in late antique Iraq, see Joel Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Ashirbek Muminov, "Sacred Places in Central Asia: Attempts at their Historical and Theological Interpretation," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru

imagination of the religious landscape of Arslanbob, uniting it with other Islamic holy sites in Central Asia and beyond. Does the legend of Arslanbob Ata's spiritual or metaphysical transport to Mecca every Friday affect the way that people understand their everyday Islamic practices and beliefs? How is meaning created through the construction and retelling of legends and prophecies? In what way do foundational legends about Arslanbob Ata and other shrines in southern Kyrgyzstan link these shrines to the historic or imagined past? By investigating the construction of sacred landscapes, this chapter seeks to understand how sacred space is produced and delineated through connections to Islamic prophets, warrior heroes, and Sufi saints.

This chapter opens with a description of the shrine of Arslanbob Ata and its environs, including an elaboration on the geography of the site which includes the sacred rock, the large waterfall, the small waterfall with adjacent caves, the tomb of Arslanbob Ata, and the ritual house (*ashkana*) near the mazar.<sup>12</sup> Following this description, I analyze the connection of the legend of Arslanbob with the village's main economic interests of forestry, *ziyarat*, and tourism. This includes a discussion of the Soviet and post-Soviet critiques of the practices and beliefs associated with Arslanbob Ata. The remainder of the chapter explores and clarifies the relationship of the legend of Arslanbob Ata within regional and global contexts, detailing the interconnections between this site and other sacred sites in the southern Kyrgyzstan and other parts of the Islamic world.

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Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 27-36; and Sergei Abashin, "Mazar of Boboi-ob: Typical and Untypical Features of Holy Places in Central Asia," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 91-105.

<sup>12</sup> I will discuss the role of ritual houses at shrine sites in greater detail in Chapter Four.

## Into the Forest

The village of Arslanbob has long been famous for the beauty and productivity of its walnut forests. During the Soviet period strict regulation of the walnut harvest in early autumn sustained the entire village through shared benefit from the collective profits.<sup>13</sup> Today individual families lease small plots of land from which they collect walnuts. The former collective regulation of the forests from the Soviet period has disintegrated, and forestry officials, who are managed now from Bishkek, do not have the resources to enforce strict limitations to buffer overharvesting. The population of the village of Arslanbob has doubled in the years since Kyrgyzstan's independence, which contributes to overgrazing by herd animals in the mountain forests and higher demands on the production of the forest for families to maintain their livelihoods. There are more people and therefore more herds with less pastureland and a overall greater impact on the forest. Overgrazing of cattle and sheep is especially problematic because walnut seedlings are in a precarious position with hungry grazers who pay little heed to what they eat or where they tread.<sup>14</sup> Development of winter sports such as alpine skiing have a similarly negative effect on the precious seedlings.<sup>15</sup> These seedlings are facing a sharp decline in the post-Soviet groves due to these mechanical challenges and also overharvesting of the walnuts, which could otherwise potentially grow into seedlings. While walnut production comprises the major

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<sup>13</sup> A. F. Zarubin, *Reclamation and Development of Walnut and Fruit Forests in Southern Kirghizia*, ed. V. P. Timofeev and trans. Raya Karschon (Jerusalem: Israel Programs for Scientific Translation, 1968): *Vosstanovlenie i razvitie orekhovo-plodovykh lesov iuzhnoi Kirgizii* (Moscow: Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1954); see also articles referencing Kirghizia and walnut production in the Soviet journal, *Lesnoe Khoziaistvo*.

<sup>14</sup> Smaller animals such as goats and domesticated birds can actually provide benefits for wooded areas by clearing diseased and decaying matter from the forest floor and providing natural fertilizer.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Meyer and Nurbek Mamatov, "Tourism and Forestry in Arslanbob, Kyrgyzstan: An Assessment of the Relationship between Tourism and Forestry in the Region of Arslanbob, Southern Kyrgyzstan, and Recommendations for Possible Linkage Between Both Sectors, with Special Focus on CFM," Practical Work for the Swiss Agency for the Development of Co-operation, Intero-operation (LES-IC), 2001.

livelihood for the population of Arslanbob, other forest products such as apples, plums, and honey are also gathered and sold to supplement incomes.

Despite the challenges of accessibility, the number of foreign tourists as well as visitors (from within Kyrgyzstan and from other parts of Central Asia) with the dual intent to perform *ziyarat* and enjoy the natural landscape increases each year. With its abundant forests and beautiful views of mountains, valleys, and rivers Arslanbob stands out even amongst other places in Kyrgyzstan. However, without knowledge of the local shared taxi routes in Jalalabad oblast, an unsuspecting foreigner will find themselves paying upwards of five-times the going rate to travel from Jalalabad city to the village of Arslanbob in the mountainous walnut forest of Bazar Korgon region.<sup>16</sup> Kyrgyz drivers profess fear of committing to such a drive because the population of Arslanbob village is 95% Uzbek and their vehicles may be insufficiently equipped to cover the questioned terrain that requires skill as well as luck to successfully navigate. The Kyrgyz government considered the village of Arslanbob a problem area to the extent that during the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 2010 the Kyrgyz military sent a special unit to extract a British woman who had been living in Arslanbob and helping out with the local Community Based Tourism (C.B.T.).<sup>17</sup> Such fears have historic roots with Arslanbob as a common hiding place for religious and political dissidents both at the advent of the Soviet Union and during the 1990 ethnic and economic clash in the Kyrgyz SSR. Apart from the fear of ethnic violence, Arslanbob's isolation at the end of the road in the mountainous area of its dense walnut forest contributes to issues with accessibility. The road conditions are generally poor, and in the spring after a severe winter and heavy ice melt the road washes out into the river resulting in piles

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<sup>16</sup> The people of Arslanbob profess that Alexander the Great's soldiers brought the first walnuts to Europe from Arslanbob, which is the largest walnut forest in the world.

<sup>17</sup> Hayat Tarikov, Director of C.B.T. Arslanbob, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011.

of rubble, rocks, and silty soil that are nearly impassible. This road does not top the national list for maintenance or repairs, which is the case for many roads throughout the Kyrgyz Republic after winter comes to a close. The poor conditions necessitate all-wheel drive vehicles. The locals and savvy pilgrims and tourists know better, and take a local shared-taxi to Bazar Korgon. They ask to be let out early at the crossroads to Arslanbob village. They then wait for cars with empty seats to stop for them and negotiate payment arrangements.

Rounding over the last hill to Arslanbob, one enters the village at its central square. Three roads lead out of the square to the main residential areas. A gated fence leading to the tomb of Arslanbob Ata is just off the central square. The wooden ritual house, open to all sides, stands to the left of the shrine path. It is large enough to accommodate 10-15 pilgrims at a time to gather under its roof. Beside the ritual house flows the Arslanbob River, which forms part of the upper Syr Darya. It descends from the large 80 meter high waterfall several kilometers above the village. Beyond the large waterfall, farther into the mountains, one can reach the sacred rock and the sacred mirror lakes. Usually the arduous journey requires guides with donkeys and horses to access these more distant locations. The summer months are certainly the safest times to make this trek, although the C.B.T. now offers alpine skiing excursions in the winter. If one continues up the rightmost road from the central square, the fork in the road leads to the small waterfall. This road is only manageable by all-wheel drive vehicles, by pack animal, or by foot. In the summer local vendors, whose stands are frequently overseen by young children, line the approach to the small waterfall. They offer visitors religious items, toys, jewelry, and food. Winding down the path to the small waterfall one passes several small caves that pilgrims use for ritual purposes, such as lighting candles. In the summer months, a female religious specialist sits in the entrance to one of the small caves to receive pilgrims and recite prayers. Erosion from spring flooding can make the caves nearly impossible to reach, and each year the trail requires

revision. The area around the small waterfall invites visitors as a popular picnic site with a designated place for animal sacrifice and meal preparation. This picnic area has been an active site of ritual since the Soviet period (Figure 3.1).<sup>18</sup> Locals tell of the belief that the 40 *houris* (or female angels) of paradise or *peris* (spirits or angels) of Arslanbob inhabit the small waterfall and the caves around it.<sup>19</sup>

Two mullahs maintain and watch over the shrine of Arslanbob Ata. They oversee access to the shrine, schedule the use of the ritual house and cooking area, and perform prayers and other rituals for the pilgrims.<sup>20</sup> The mullahs closely monitor the gate that leads to the mazar from the central square and keep the door to the mausoleum locked when they are not present. Each of the mullahs tells a history of the shrine if asked, and both are well respected by the local villagers and Mansurali Mallabaev Hajji, the imam of Arslanbob, who had a hand in appointing them. In the spring of 2012 a third mullah sat *en route* to the small waterfall. He explained that members of the local mosque had also appointed him to this position earlier in the year, and that watching over the safety of the pilgrims at the small waterfall was his primary charge. Even with the backing of the local mosque, some of the other residents of Arslanbob likened this new mullah to a charlatan, who had taken residence near the small waterfall to solicit donations from the pilgrims and tourists.

The residents of Arslanbob, although a tight-knit community that is predominantly Uzbek, do not always exhibit consistent behavior or express cohesive opinions. For example, the conservative members of the community pushed for a law that forbids the consumption of alcohol within the territory of the village. This law typically only extends to visitors and tourists,

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<sup>18</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, “Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva,” photograph 24.

<sup>19</sup> Buvi Hajji, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011. See A. J. Wensinck and Ch. Pellat, “Hūr,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2015 and “parī,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Glossary and Index of Terms*, Brill Online, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the rituals performed at the ritual house see Chapter Four.

however, and it is not uncommon to see intoxicated male residents openly under the influence around the village. The religious hierarchy condemns these men's behavior. Yet, others, who are sympathetic to the combination of economic hardship and the disease aspect of alcoholism, tolerate it. Another divide in the community exists between those who had the financial means to update their homes with the desire to join the Arslanbob C.B.T. The families that participate set themselves apart from other members of the community because they have an additional source of income from foreign tourists during the summer months. For those families that either cannot afford to make the necessary remodels to their homes or who are generally disapproving of the influx of foreign tourists and their potential for negative influences, the activities of the C.B.T. and the families that participate in it are blamed for any disruption caused by the tourists. Also, many of the senior residents (over age 50) of Arslanbob village have had the opportunity to go on the Hajj since Kyrgyz independence. This has not diminished the practice of *ziyarat* by locals, and if anything it has added a new dimension of local claims to religious authenticity. Most of the hajjis are quick to note, however, that pilgrims should only ask for blessings from Allah and not from Arslanbob Ata or the other spirits of the shrine.

### ***Ziyarat* and the “Truth about Arslanbob”**

According to Soviet anti-religious propaganda, the walnut forests around Arslanbob became a hideout for anti-Bolshevik resistance in the 1920s soon after the Soviet Union's formation:

The mullahs of Shakhimardan carried out the treacherous incitement of the heinous murders of one son of the Uzbek national writers and composers, Hamza Hakim-zade Niyazi. And when the Basmachi gangs were routed, many Basmachis found refuge for themselves in the walnut forests of Arslan-Bob. They committed outrages, robbed and murdered, and then prayed with great conviction in the

shady garden in front of the “holy” mazar receiving the mullah’s blessing for their banditry.<sup>21</sup>

The sentiment that the forests of Arslanbob housed anti-Bolshevik elements during the formative years of the Soviet Union would keep it on the radar throughout the Soviet period. The idea that subversive groups live in the forested mountains around Arslanbob has lingered and forms part of the perceptions about the residents of Arslanbob by outsiders who often characterize them as dangerous and untrustworthy.<sup>22</sup>

Arslanbob Ata became a focus for the Soviet anti-religious campaign especially from 1958-1964 along with other shrines in southern Kyrgyzstan. The residents of Arslanbob may have updated the legend of Arslanbob Ata during this time or during one of the earlier anti-religious campaigns to accommodate local interpretations of sanctioned Soviet narratives. Accordingly, Arslanbob Ata became the champion of the working class and the expeller of the exploiters. Arslanbob Ata’s industriousness as a forester would also be highlighted as opposed to his connections to Islam, and in this way appeal to the forestry collective (*leskhoz*). The anti-religious propogandists perceived such a narrative nuance, decried its falsehood, and sought to scientifically prove the true nature of the tomb of Arslanbob Ata. Several propogandists, including Iurii Petrash, set out to tell the “truth about Arslan-bob”:

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<sup>21</sup> Iurii Petrash, “Ten’ Suleiman-gory,” *Nauka i Religii* 10 (1961), 42-44. Hamza Hakim-zade Niyazi (1889-1929) was a Jadid (refomer) turned atheist activist, who famously destroyed the widely-known mazar of Hazrati Ali in the village of Shahimardan (today this an Uzbek enclave within Kyrgyz borders). A reactionary mob tore Hakim-zade’s body limb from limb, resulting in his canonization as a Soviet hero and champion of atheism. Thereafter, he became a household celebrity with his story added to school curriculum and theaters being named in his honor. See Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 186, n. 30 and 249.

<sup>22</sup> The mazar that is mentioned in this passage refers to the shrine of Arslanbob Ata, but there are other shrines on the outskirts of the walnut forests attributed to other Sufi pirs, such as Ibn Abbas.

[i]t is known that no saint was ever the intercessor of the people. The Muslim priesthood has invented much in order to prove the sainthood of Arslanbob. It has declared sacred places where he lived, walked, prayed and is buried.<sup>23</sup>

This was in response to the supposed narrative of Arslanbob Ata at the time that rejoiced in the claim that after, “[a]rriving in Central Asia [at the request of the Prophet Muhammad], he [Arslanbob Ata] became a forester and cultivated a magnificent forest. All his life he allegedly defended the interests of ordinary people and fought against the exploiters.”<sup>24</sup> The authors of “The Truth about Arslan-Bob” expressed concern for underrepresented people such as women, children, and the elderly, who they perceived to be particularly susceptible to the stories that the sheikhs chronicled. Petrash was perhaps the most unwavering advocate for educating the people of southern Kyrgyzstan about the folly of their beliefs in local saints and pilgrimage practices.<sup>25</sup> He remained thoroughly unconvinced by the reworking of the legend of Arslanbob Ata to fit into a permissible Soviet narrative. He wanted the people to know that the beauty of a place did not have to coincide with imagined tales.<sup>26</sup>

The Society on the Local Settlements launched a full scientific investigation to discover the truth about Arslanbob Ata. According to Petrash (at the time Candidate of Philosophy and Senior Instructor of the Osh Pedagogical Institute) and two of his colleagues, T. Gafyrov (Lecturer of the Osh Rural Oblast Commission of the Party) and V. Cheilytko (Archaeologist and Employee of the Osh Oblast Museum), who participated in the investigation and exhumation of Arslanbob Ata’s grave, “the tomb was built carelessly in a decadent style” and it did not possess any unique or interesting architectural features. They describe two inscriptions above the tomb

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<sup>23</sup> Iu. Petrash, T. Gafyrov, and V. Cheilytko, “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, November 1, 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Petrash et al., “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe.”

<sup>25</sup> For more on the phenomenon of seeking the “truth” or “reality” about shrines, see Muminov, “Sacred Places in Central Asia,” 27-29. See Petrash, “Ten’ Suleiman-gory.”

<sup>26</sup> Petrash et al., “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe.”

that read “[t]here is no God but Allah” and “[h]ere a pious man is buried.” Between the two inscriptions was a scratched-out date, which they claimed had been removed by those who were trying to hide that fact that the tomb was of recent construction. They argued that the date on the tomb could still be read with difficulty – 1300 of the Islamic calendar (1883 C.E.). The authors also claim that villagers must have begun associating the grave with Arslanbob only recently since the inscription did not mention the “pious man” specifically by name.<sup>27</sup>

This assumption about the dating of Arslanbob presented a challenge to villagers who possessed genealogies written under the Kokand Khanate or earlier that traced their own ancestry to Arslanbob Ata.<sup>28</sup> These *sanzhyras* or *nasabnamas* (genealogies) show anywhere from 30 to 50 generations of the families. *Nasabnamas* are a genre of Islamic writing that traces the ancestors of a family often to the Prophet Muhammad, a companion of the Prophet, or other important religious or political leaders. A famous regional saint is often found as an intermediary in *nasabnamas*.<sup>29</sup> Petrash and his colleagues contended that these genealogies could have been manufactured to show links to Arslanbob Ata. The copyists referred to Arslanbob, but this also did not necessarily refer to an Arslanbob Ata buried at the site in Kyrgyzstan. The commission found no signs of an actual body in the tomb during their excavation, and they recommended that something be built in its place, such as a library, in order to divert the pilgrims. They also

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<sup>27</sup> Petrash et al., “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe”; and see Chapter Four.

<sup>28</sup> Mansurali Mallabaev Hajji, Imam of the Arslanbob Mosque, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic May 17, 2012; and Rakhmanberdi Kamalov, resident of Arslanbob, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic, May 16, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Devin DeWeese, “The Yasavi Order and Persian Hagiography in Seventeenth-Century Central Asia: ‘Alim Shaykh of ‘Aliyabad and his Lamahat min nafahat al-quds,” in *The Heritage of Sufism Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, 389-414. Oxford: Oneworld, 1999; Abashin, “Mazar of Boboi-ob,” 102-103; and Muminov, “Sacred Places in Central Asia,” 28-30.

suggested changing the name of the village so that in time the memory of Arslanbob Ata would fade.<sup>30</sup>

The anti-religious propagandists' attempts to prove the falsehood of the legend of Arslanbob Ata and their determined attempt to demonstrate the dubiousness of his tomb was unsuccessful. The residents did not take issue with the dating of the tomb or the lack of a proper name in the inscription because Arslanbob Ata's age at the time of his martyrdom was flexible. *Sanzhyras* were the authoritative way of establishing a lineage, so they held more sway amongst locals than did the ramblings of the outsiders who sought to disrupt the village. After the commission finished its work, new developments in the legend of Arslanbob Ata included the belief that tragedy would befall anyone who disturbs Arslanbob Ata's gravesite or questions its authenticity. This theme of inviolability of tombs is widespread and could easily predate the Soviet attack. In the case of Arslanbob Ata, the locals have evidence that disturbing the tomb of Arslanbob Ata has serious consequences. Muhammad, one of the two mullahs of the Arslanbob mazar in 2012, disclosed the significance of the new twist in the legend. He explained that two soldiers had died during the excavation, and that their heads cracked open in the process of removing impossibly heavy stones. He also confided that the director of the Arslanbob *kolkhoz* had gone insane soon after the digging had commenced.<sup>31</sup> People from Arslanbob and other locations with shrines that faced a backlash from Soviet authorities now associate death, mental disability, and bad luck with the excavations of shrines sites in Kyrgyzstan including the tomb of the Kyrgyz epic hero, Manas, in Talas. These stories about the perils of exhuming the tombs of religious figures and heroes persist today as a way for local people to make sense of the disruptive elements of the Soviet anti-religious campaign. Many of the people who are now at the forefront

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<sup>30</sup> Petrash, et al., "Pravda ob Arslan-bobe."

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad, moldo of Arslanbob Ata, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic May 15, 2012.

of protecting the shrine of Arslanbob Ata, including the two mullahs of the mazar and the Imam of the last 20 years, Mansurali Hajji, were responsible for the reconstruction and renovation of the shrine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

During the scrutiny of Arslanbob in the late 1950s and early 1960s, SADUM (Central Asian Muftiate) appointed sheikhs under its authority to receive visitors at the mazar. A portion of the monies the sheikhs collected was designated for the state coffers. In contrast, in the popular press, anti-religious propagandists wrote disparagingly about the devious sheikhs who stole from the uninformed visitors.<sup>32</sup> The denunciation of mercenary and capitalistic practices of religions was a recurring trope that had first appeared in the anti-religious propaganda in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> For example, a 1962 newspaper article names two of these sheikhs and provides details about their earnings: “The Sheikhs of Arslanbob, K. Nishanov and A. Sultanov, who were sitting near the ‘sacred’ waterfall [small waterfall] from 7-10 in the morning received: the first one – 13 rubles, 89 kopeks and the second one – 20 rubles.”<sup>34</sup> Images from the anti-religious campaign also depict pilgrims visiting various sacred sites at Arslanbob, preparing ritual meals, and relaxing near the site of the small waterfall and its adjacent caves. Vendors display their wares along the approach to the small waterfall in much the same way that they situate themselves today during the high tourist season. Pilgrims concentrate their activities at the ritual house located next to Arslanbob Ata’s tomb and around the small waterfall. Only the more agile and adventurous attempt the hike to the large waterfall, prayer rock, and the sacred lakes (Figure 3.2).<sup>35</sup> The sacred topography of Arslanbob Ata is important because it protects the environment in which people live and make a living.

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<sup>32</sup> Petrash, et al., “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe.”

<sup>33</sup> Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 254-65.

<sup>34</sup> Iurii Petrash, “Pravda o ‘sviatykh mestakh’,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* (January 5, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, “Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva,” photograph 30.

Today, many people have outwardly replaced visits to shrine places for religious purposes with the camouflage that the visits are for the sole intent of tourism. Official state religious organizations such as the Muftiate of the Kyrgyz Republic maintain that visiting shrines for touristic purposes is acceptable, but that making a sacrifice to, or asking for a blessing, intercession, or cures from anyone other than Allah is blasphemous. They likewise condemn common shrine practices such as tying scraps of fabric or paper to trees, making sacrifices to feed the spirits (*jinn*) of a shrine, or crying for the dead.<sup>36</sup> The attitude of the Muftiate reflects its origins as a Soviet governing authority on religious affairs. However, the viewpoint of many conservative Islamic groups the world over share similarly negative views about harmfulness and blasphemy of Muslims performing *ziyarat*. In a way the stance of the Soviet anti-religious campaign and that of the conservative religious groups are compatible in their condemnation of many varieties of local Islamic practice.

### **Tourism and the Topography of Nature**

Because of the climate and elevation of Kyrgyzstan, the acts of pilgrimage and tourism tend to occur during the late spring, summer, and early autumn. The pilgrimage season in general occurs from around the middle of June to the middle of September, with the Arslanbob pilgrimage concentrated in the months of June and July. This is when the weather allows for travel. The end of September is already cold and by October there is snow.<sup>37</sup> Historically, pilgrimage went hand in hand with merchants traveling to various markets. Shrines offered stopping points along the trade routes. The availability of goods for sale at or near shrines was a

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<sup>36</sup> Gulmatov Rustambek, the All-Kyrgyzstan Director of Local Mosques and Madrasas, interview by Jennifer Webster, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic July 30, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Valentin Ogudin, *Nizhnii yarus mirozdaniia ili kult'ovye peshchery Fergany* (Bishkek: Raritet, 2013), 109.

part of the pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup> Pilgrims also had to purchase the animals for sacrifice, food for meal preparation, and any other necessary items they required to perform *ziyarat* but could not bring with them easily from home.

Central Asian shrines often function as places for relaxation and the enjoyment of nature. This practice may have its roots in the nomadic custom of moving from winter camps to summer camps that the semi-nomadic rulers in Central Asia and Persia later adapted for their courts. Ella Sykes observed a similar pattern in early twentieth century Eastern Turkestan when she had the opportunity to visit many shrines:

During the spring the Kashgaris make pleasure expeditions to the different shrines round the city, going rather to eat and gamble than to say their prayers. Bands of friends are in the habit of feasting with one another in turn in some garden, meeting four afternoons a week for the purpose...<sup>39</sup>

Today people in Central Asia maintain practices that resemble the tradition described above. Urban dwellers will go to the *jailoo* (summer pasture) to picnic and experience the natural beauty of their environment in the mountains and at lakes. Tourists combine these pleasure outings with gathering the fruits of the forest, swimming, resting, and paying a visit to a local shrine. People have specific shrines that they associate as the primary shrine for their individual family. Most often families will visit their favored shrine at least once during the year and sometimes more often if they live nearby and feel they have some need. These may or may not be the larger well-known shrines like Sulaiman Too. One of the families I interviewed in southern Kyrgyzstan lives in the city of Jalalabad, but Padishah Ata, the shrine their family visits annually, is located outside of the mother's native village, Kerben (Karavan, Ak Suu region of Jalalabad oblast). Now the family lives in Bishkek, but continues to visit the shrine of Padishah Ata at least once a year to

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<sup>38</sup> For an example of bazaars in the South Asian context, see Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 112-160.

<sup>39</sup> Ella Sykes, *Through Deserts and Oases of Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 92.

cook a sacrificial meal, make offerings to the shrine, recite prayers, and place requests. Other families from the village of Kerben will take a picnic to the *jailo* that is situated just outside of the gated grounds of Padishah Ata. These picnic outings are not necessarily religious visits, and can include consumption of vodka and revelry with their car radios blasting popular tunes. In early summer, one of the Kyrgyz families I interviewed at Arslanbob Ata had a similar explanation of their visit to Arslanbob. They visit once a year from their home in Kara Suu (Osh Oblast) to ask for blessings and to introduce their children (they had a son and a daughter) to the natural beauty of their country (Kyrgyzstan). Visits to shrines present opportunities to ask for blessings and make offerings but they also serve the function of bringing families together, and in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan offer people a chance to reconnect with the natural beauty and surroundings of the land, which has roots for some in their nomadic, semi-nomadic, or agricultural past.

The tradition of visiting shrines for both pleasure and pilgrimage was a commonplace practice in Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet Union. The opportunity to visit places like Arslanbob for officially-determined rest and relaxation offered the perfect cover for performing *ziyarat*. The area around Arslanbob, with its natural beauty, greeted crowds of visitors who spent their allocated holidays at the permit-only institutions (including resorts and camps) that the Soviets had built for such purposes. During the Soviet period a *pansionat* (resort hotel) existed just outside of Arslanbob village, which functioned as a place for families to spend their holidays.<sup>40</sup> This *pansionat* included a special play area for children and had activities dedicated to rest and rejuvenation. After fighting broke out in 1990 between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan, the *pansionat* closed. At this time the Uzbeks from Arslanbob and Uzgen (Osh oblast) fled to the mountains around Arslanbob even though during the preceding decades members of

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<sup>40</sup> For more on *pansionats* in the Soviet Union, see Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 2013), especially 206 and 273.

the two ethnicities had worked side by side and the *pansionat* had welcomed people from all parts of the Kyrgyz SSR. Today the dilapidated *pansionat* can be reached at the end of a steep and poorly maintained gravel (mud in the spring) drive, but with the current fear associated with Arslanbob there are no plans to launch a restoration of the facilities even with the upswing of tourism. Like the *pansionat*, there were additional camps (*lageria*) built near Arslanbob village, but today these also remain unused and falling into decay. However, in 2012 the Ministry of Culture sent employees to photograph Arslanbob and its notable sites, which suggests that the state is aware of the village's tourism possibilities. For the time being the Arslanbob C.B.T. and the families they hire as homestays for foreign adventure tourists are the main beneficiaries of tourism in Arslanbob, while the local mullahs benefit primarily from pilgrims who leave offerings at the shrine of Arslanbob Ata and the area around the small waterfall.

It is important to distinguish between the two types of tourists who visit Arslanbob each year, but equally necessary to realize that both types of tourists benefit from the preservation and perpetuation of the sacred topography of Arslanbob. The adventure seeking foreign tourists visit Arslanbob for hiking, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities. The C.B.T. incorporates the sacred topography around Arslanbob into the different tours that it offers. Foreign tourists are taken to these places, and told about the legends but more as a novelty. The reliance on these sacred sites for the development of touristic activities for foreigners, while upsetting to pious pilgrims, shows the early stages of commercialization of sacred sites that is prevalent at so many famous shrines.<sup>41</sup> There is a huge economic incentive for villagers to convert their homes with

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<sup>41</sup> Ruth Harris, *Lourdes* (New York: Viking, 1999). Compare the impact of tourism on Arslanbob with the impact of the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for sites such as Sulaiman Too. Tourism brings economic incentives and opportunities for renovation and preservation; however, there is a trade-off due to the impact of increased numbers of people visiting.

the required upgrades in order to earn extra income from hosting these foreigners.<sup>42</sup> The second type of tourist is the religious tourist, who also values the natural beauty as well as the sacred sites at Arslanbob. In many cases religious tourists do not clearly articulate their goals in performing *ziyarat*, nor is this a requirement. Sergei Abashin observed a similar sentiment amongst pilgrims at Boboi-ob, where the pilgrims' needs include a "complex and contradictory variety of motivations and perceptions, often not even clearly realized or expressed by the pilgrims themselves."<sup>43</sup> Both types of tourists bring money into the village and benefit the community economically. They expect to see natural wonders and the sacred sites, albeit with different intentions. The natural environment, the sacred sites, and the economic potential intertwine in a way that perpetuates the seasonal cycle of tourism. Each year Arslanbob receives thousands of tourists including many people from southern Kyrgyzstan and its newest group of mountaineering and adventure aficionados from Europe, the Americas, and Australia. Pilgrims from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan used to visit Arslanbob, but with border-crossing restrictions, these pilgrims have diminished in number.<sup>44</sup>

### **Collapsing Time and Space**

The residents of Arslanbob have adapted legends about Arslanbob Ata to their specific local situation and their perceived social and political needs. The propagation of legends about Arslanbob Ata draws connections between different parts of the shrine space, other regional shrines, and the Islamic world. The legend of Arslanbob Ata connects the village and its saint with the Arab conquest and Islamization of Central Asia.<sup>45</sup> The legend strengthens the residents

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<sup>42</sup> Hayat Tarikov, interview, October 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Abashin, "Mazar of Boboi-ob," 101.

<sup>44</sup> Muhammad, moldo, interview, May 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Muminov, "Sacred Places in Central Asia," 30-2.

of Arslanbob's claim to Islamic legitimacy and authenticity through connections with Mecca, in that the sacred rock acted as a portal to collapse great distances for Arslanbob Ata as he prayed. Other shrines in Central Asia, including Sulaiman Too, exhibit connections to Mecca either through legends or through communal beliefs about the relative status of a local shrine compared to Mecca. Legends about shrines in Central Asia often make direct references to the Islamic prophets or allusions to local conditions that are connected with the Islamic prophets. These connections with the Islamic prophets appear especially in the legends of Arslanbob Ata and the Osh legends of Sulaiman Too, where the Islamic prophets play a role in establishing natural resources, agricultural lands, and settlements. The reason why many shrines in Central Asia make explicit connections with Mecca is to add legitimacy to the local shrine and authenticate local Muslim identity.<sup>46</sup>

Legends consistently connect Arslanbob Ata with the Arab conquest of Central Asia and describe him as being betrayed by his wife and her relatives. When locals recount the legend, Arslanbob Ata dies at the hands of his enemies during prayer time at the *tamaz tosh* with his body later being brought and laid to rest at the site of his mazar in the village.<sup>47</sup> The legends identify

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<sup>46</sup> For a similar function of legends and relics at shrines throughout the Islamic world, see Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), especially 71-87 and 126-8.

<sup>47</sup> Arslanbob Ata is said to have had foreknowledge of his death. Before beginning his prayers, he warned his followers that he would be murdered and that there was no way around the death because he could not protect himself while praying. He instructed his followers that they must carry his body back to the village from the sacred rock. They would stumble three times, dropping the body, and on the third occasion where his body fell would mark his burial site. Interview, October 2011. As is the case with the legend of Padishah Ata, near Kerben in the Ak Suu region of Jalalabad oblast, the *ghazi* or *wali* forewarned his followers of his imminent death. In the case of Padishah Ata, he had instructed his followers not to set his body down while carrying it back to Mecca from Central Asia or they would not be able to pick it up again. Upon becoming fatigued, Padishah Ata's followers set down his body briefly, and that is where the boy remains today. Mullah of Padishah Ata, interview by Jennifer Webster, Ak Suu Region, Kyrgyz Republic, May 2012.

the figure of Arslanbob Ata with a variety of Islamic heroes.<sup>48</sup> In some variations the murdered saint is Abd al-Rahman, the Sufi saint and the son of Iskhich Baba, who was a direct descendent of Iman Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya.<sup>49</sup> Abd al-Rahman arrived during the first Arab conquest, participated in the conversion of local residents to Islam, fought as a *ghazi* against the Buddhists in Khotan, and was eventually killed by his enemies in the mountains around Arslanbob. Other versions of the legend consider him the companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Abd al-Rahman b. Auf. Still, others believe that Arslanbob Ata was the son of Khlida b. al-Walid.<sup>50</sup> Local residents of Arslanbob village and pilgrims remember Arslanbob's identity as an early Islamizer or *ghazi*, his connection to the Prophet Muhammad, and a *wali* (friend of God or saint). As I will demonstrate in the next section about regional connections of the legend of Arslanbob, other shrines dedicated to Arslan Ata in Kazakhstan and Eastern Turkestan have associated legends that parallel and overlap with the legend of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan.

Some of the distinguishing aspects of the legend of Arslanbob Ata include that he was a giant who lived anywhere from 400 to 950 years.<sup>51</sup> This reference to Arslanbob as a giant reflects similar ideas about the heroes of the Kyrgyz epic, *Manas*, who were also considered to be larger than average humans. The notion that Arslanbob Ata was a giant draws upon the widespread Islamic folklore that fashions the prophets, saints, and other heroic figures as giants. The length of Arslanbob Ata's lifespan also reflects the lifespan of heroes in the *Manas* and from tales of the early Islamic prophets. The variations in the length of life allow for reconciliations with the apparent discrepancies in the legend's timeline and with the dating of the mazar's foundation.

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<sup>48</sup> Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Muslim Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 55-6; and Ashirbek Muminov, "Arslan-bab," *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii, Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia firma "Vostochnaia literatura" RAN, 2001), v. 3, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Muminov, "Arslan-bab," 15.

<sup>50</sup> Muminov, "Arslan-bab," 15.

<sup>51</sup> For the giant tombs of many Islamic prophets, see Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 99-122.

The imam of the mosque in Arslanbob, Mansurali Hajji, noted that another shrine, by the name of Arslanbob, exists in Kazakhstan. Mansurali Hajji also pointed out that both the Kazakh shrine and the local shrine are connected with the famous Sufi, Ahmad Yasawi. He exhibited little concern over whether the shrine in Kazakhstan or the shrine in Kyrgyzstan was the true burial place of Arslanbob Ata. He knew of the Soviet endeavors to exhume the graves, and said that their findings were of little significance.<sup>52</sup> Mansurali Hajji is correct in saying that the shrine of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan is not the only sacred site to pay tribute to a person named Arslanbob. About 70 kilometers from the famous shrine of Ahmad Yasawi in Turkistan, Kazakhstan (also described as a second Mecca), the village of Otrar on the Uzbek border is the site of the tomb of Arslan-baba (or Arstan Baba). In the Kazakh version of the Arslanbob legend, Arslan-baba had been a companion to the prophet Muhammad, living some 400 (or 700) years. His most important task was to find Ahmad Yasawi and become his Sufi *pir* (teacher).<sup>53</sup> Although not of Arab descent, Arslanbob was associated with the Islamization of Central Asia and is described as returning to the land of his ancestors after spending his time as a companion of the Prophet Muhammad. Like the Kyrgyz variant, the Arslan-baba in the Kazakh version of the legend represents a key individual in the Yasawi Sufi tradition. In the Kazakh version of the legend, Arslan-baba is both Ahmad Yasawi's *pir* and the hereditary ancestor of Yasawi's *khalifas* (Mansur Ata and Zangi Ata).<sup>54</sup> As for the Kyrgyz version of the legend, Arslanbob Ata plays a major role in the Islamization of the region through his pious acts and teaching of what would become a predominately Yasawiyya area. Many local residents have or claim to possess

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<sup>52</sup> Mansurali Hajji, interview, May 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006), 20; and Devin DeWeese, "The *Masha'ikh-i Turk* and the *Khojagan*: rethinking the links between the Yasawi and Naqshbandi Sufi Traditions," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7 (1996): 188. Also see Safi's *Rashahat* for first mention of Ahmad Yasawi's connection with Arslan-Baba.

<sup>54</sup> See Thierry Zarcone, "Yasawiyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2015.

genealogies that trace their ancestry to Arslanbob Ata and to spiritual advisors to the Khans of Kokand.<sup>55</sup> Arslan-baba in the Kazakh version of the legend does not endure the same dramatic and conspiratorial murder as does the Arslanbob Ata of the Kyrgyz version.

The legend of another companion of the prophet, Ukasha Ata, whose tomb is on the Yasawi pilgrimage circuit, shares a similar fate to Arslanbob Ata of Kyrgyzstan. Privratsky describes the legend of Ukasha Ata: “The founding legend is that, like Achilles, Ukasha’s body was impervious to injury – except when he was praying; so one day while he was reciting the prayers, the enemies of Islam decapitated him. His head rolled down a hill and came to rest at the present site of the well.”<sup>56</sup> We cannot say for certain which of these legends developed first. It may be that the legend of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan developed as a composite of the legends of Arslan-bob and Ukasha Ata in Kazakhstan; one could argue that the legend of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan is a composite of these other well-known regional legends. The adoption of legends for local purposes was certainly not unheard of in Central Asia. Stewart Gordon explains this phenomenon as the “cognitive geography of routes,” where merchants, military personnel, and pilgrims transmitted knowledge through their memory of places along the routes they traveled.<sup>57</sup>

Like the shrine in Kyrgyzstan, the tomb of Arslan-baba in Kazakhstan fell under the watchful eye of the Soviet anti-religious campaign. On pilgrimage circuits in southern Kazakhstan the tomb of Arslan-baba is traditionally visited prior to the shrine of Yasawi in Turkistan.<sup>58</sup> Pilgrims spend the night at the shrine of Arslan-baba, make their requests at his shrine, and then expect to hear answers upon visiting the shrine of Ahmed Yasawi.<sup>59</sup> They

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<sup>55</sup> Mansurali Hajji, interview, May 2012; and Rakhmanberdi Kamalov, interview, May 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 164.

<sup>57</sup> Stewart Gordon, “Routes and Cognitive Geography: An Alternate Asian History, talk at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA: March 8, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 167.

perform an animal sacrifice with the preparation of an offertory meal.<sup>60</sup> They must buy the animal and the ingredients for the meal, which supports the local economy. The shrine place was converted into a museum, and to this day, visitors must pay a fee for an entrance ticket.<sup>61</sup>

Yet another well-known shrine dedicated to an individual named Arslan occurs in the village of Ordam Padshah, 50 kilometers south of Kashgar in Eastern Turkestan. This Arslan, however, is the tenth-century Ali Arslan Khan of the Qarakhanids who died fighting the Buddhists of Khotan in a manner more reminiscent of the Arslanbob Ata of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>62</sup> During the first ten days of Muharram thousands of pilgrims visit this shrine of Ali Arslan performing rites that incorporate elements of Shiism and shamanism.<sup>63</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the shrine of Ali Arslan received foreign visitors including Gunnar Jarring, Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein, and Ella Sykes. Below is Ella Sykes' description of the shrine during the time she spent in Eastern Turkestan from 1915-1917:

Sultan Arslan Boghra, the hero-saint, surnamed the Tiger for his bravery, who is honoured here, fought with great valour against the Buddhist inhabitants of Khotan who did not wish to change their religion for the tenets of Islam. He was one of the earliest Mohamedan conquerors of Kashgar, and it is recorded by Bellew that the pagan ruler of Khotan, who let his force against the Moslems, offered a large reward to the man who could compass the Sultan's death. At this time the Nestorian Church had its adherents throughout Asia, and the story runs that one of its priests counselled the Buddhists to fall upon their opponents at dawn, as they would then be engaged with their devotions and so would be taken unawares. The advice was followed, and in a great battle on the desert plain of Ordam-Padshah, some fifty miles south-east of Kashgar, the adherents of the Prophet were utterly routed and their gallant leader slain.

Ali Arslan's head was carried in triumph round the walls of Kashgar, into which the Moslems had retreated for the time, and it is supposed to be buried in the

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<sup>60</sup> Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 177-8.

<sup>61</sup> Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 166.

<sup>62</sup> Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Rahilä Dawut, "Shrine Pilgrimage and Sustainable Tourism among the Uyghurs: Central Asian Ritual Traditions in the Context of China's Development Policies" in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, ed. Ildikó Beller-Hann, et al. (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publications, 2007), 152-3.

shrine that we visited. His body, however, rests at Ordam-Padshah, and Sir Aurel Stein writes that a mound covered with pillars from which flutter rags is all that marks the grave of the saint, although it is a peculiarly holy spot and is annually visited by hundreds of pilgrims.<sup>64</sup>

The motives and tactics of Ali Arslan's assailants very much parallel those of Arslanbob Ata's enemies. In the Kyrgyz version of the story the deceptive Nestorian Christians correspond with Arslanbob Ata's foreign wife, while the Buddhists appear to represent the "tatar" or "kafir" murderous element. Both Ali Arslan, in Kashgar, and Arslanbob Ata, in Kyrgyzstan, find themselves most vulnerable at prayer time, and their piety becomes their undoing. Ali Arslan's decapitation by his Buddhist enemies during prayer time and partitioning of his body (head to Kashgar, corpse to Ordam Padshah), recalls some elements of yet another shrine legend. Safed Bulan (Chapter Four), in the Ala Buka region of Jalalabad oblast, contains two tombs dedicated to 2,772 fallen Muslim warriors who had been massacred by their enemies during prayer time. These warriors were decapitated, and one part of the shrine marks the burial place of their heads, while their bodies rest in a separate tomb. Just as at the shrine of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan, pilgrims visit the shrine of Ali Arslan to seek cures for various diseases (See Chapter Five below).

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<sup>64</sup> Ella Sykes, *Through Deserts and Oases*, 93-9. Sykes may have borrowed from the history of Dr. Bellow who accompanied Sir T. D. Forsyth on a historical and geographical expedition to Eastern Turkestan in 1873. However, as a woman, Sykes had interest in and access to women's worlds that was likely not the case for Forsyth and the fellow members of his expedition who were all men. If Sykes heard the story independently from the earlier report, this may speak to the relative high-profile nature of the shrine, which remains an active pilgrimage site today, especially for the annual pilgrimage during Muharam. Sykes reports on several other shrines she visited in Eastern Turkestan, the women she met, and rituals she observed. For the Forsyth report, see T. D. Forsyth, *Report on a Mission to Yarkund in 1873, under command of Sir T. D. Forsyth, K.C.S.I., C.B., Bengal Civil Service, with Historical and Geographical Information Regarding the Ameer of Yarkund* (Calcutta: Foreign Department Press, 1875).

Narratives that describe the heroic deeds of *ghazis*, such as Arslanbob, are part of a genre of epic called the *ghazawat-nama* or *jāng-nama*.<sup>65</sup> The subject of one such epic is the warrior Abu Muslim, companion of Prophet Muhammad, who is often associated with Arslan in Eastern Turkestan.<sup>66</sup> The shrine of Ali Arslan is the main shrine of a larger established shrine circuit, designated as the “Ordam-Padishah System” by the missionary Gunnar Jarring who described many pilgrimage sites in Eastern Turkistan in the early twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> The anthropologist Rahilä Dawut explains that two shrines dedicated to royal women are connected to Ali Arslan. Women seeking cures for infertility visit the shrines of Ali Arslan’s sister, Büwi Märyäm, and his mother, Alanur Khenim. According to Uighur oral narratives, Alanur Khenim received a visit from the angel Gabriel, who appeared to her in the form of a lion, and that is why she named her son Arslan (lion).<sup>68</sup> During his expedition in the 1850s, Valikhanov noted the pilgrimage to the shrine of Ali Arslan and to the other fallen *ghazis* in the areas around Kashgar and Yarkand.<sup>69</sup> The legend of Ali Arslan was well known throughout the region, leading to the dissemination of versions of the legend throughout Russian Turkestan and Eastern Turkestan.

The tensions between the Khanate of Kokand and the Begs of Kashgar in the mid-nineteenth century could have been the catalyst for establishing a separate pilgrimage site within

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<sup>65</sup> Karl Reichl, “Hero and Saint: Islamic Elements in Uighur Oral Epics,” in *Saints and Heroes on the Silk Road, v. 3 of Journal of the History of Sufism*, ed. Thierry Zarcone et al. (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2002), 13.

<sup>66</sup> For a contemporary description of the shrines, see Minoru Sawada, “Tarim Basin Mazars: A Fieldwork Report.” In *Saints and Heroes on the Silk Road, v. 3 of Journal of the History of Sufism*, ed. Thierry Zarcone et al. (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2002), 45.

<sup>67</sup> Minoru Sawada, “A Study of the Current Ordam-Padishah System,” in *Saints and Heroes on the Silk Road, v. 3 of Journal of the History of Sufism*, ed. Thierry Zarcone et al. (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2002), 89.

<sup>68</sup> Rahilä Dawut, “Mazar Pilgrimage Amongst Uyghur Women in Xinjiang,” in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 178.

<sup>69</sup> Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, v. 3 (Almaty: Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1962), 472.

the boundaries of the Kokand Khanate, especially with a similar legend that celebrated Arslan as a heroic *ghazi* and disseminator of Islam but with an identity not linked to a symbol of the Qarakhanid Dynasty. Further restrictions on travel between Russian Turkestan and Eastern Turkestan and later between the Soviet Union and China in the twentieth century may have facilitated additional localization of the legends. This is not to say that the shrine at Arslanbob village in Kyrgyzstan and its accompanying legend did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. The journey to Eastern Turkestan would not have been a simple excursion. The fact that all three of the shrines dedicated to Arslan in Kazakhstan, Eastern Turkestan, and Kyrgyzstan service devotees of the Yasawi order and the connections between the Khans of Kokand and the Khojas of Xinjiang suggest that a shared narrative of a saint or hero named Arslanbob could have been well established throughout the region. Even if the opportunity arose for pilgrims to reach the more distant sites, a local variation could provide a similar social and religious function for the immediate community. This could also explain the dating on the shrine of Arslanbob Ata as suggested by Iurii Petrash, et al.<sup>70</sup> The unknown pious and holy man buried in the village of Arslanbob may have taken on his new identity in order to accommodate the shifting political climate and local needs or to service an influx of new inhabitants who professed lineage to the Yasawi order.

The shrine of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan has clear connections to other regional shrines but it is also connected to more distant Islamic shrines. Local residents and pilgrims connect some Islamic shrines in Central Asia with other more widely known places in the Islamic world, especially Jerusalem and Mecca. The maintenance of these connections happens in several ways, primarily through the propagation of legends and the popular histories of the shrine places. In the case of Arslanbob Ata, the connection is two-fold through both a perceived

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<sup>70</sup> Petrash, et al., “Pravda ob Arslan-bobe.”

historical link of the years following the Arab conquest of Central Asia and the legend of Arslanbob Ata where Arslanbob Ata is transported to Mecca every Friday during his afternoon prayers at the *namaz tosh*. These connections both legitimize the Muslim identity of the local residents and pilgrims and create a strong foundation for the authority and infallibility of the shrine. Although the Arab conquest in Central Asia reached a high point with the Battle of Talas in 751 C.E, it would take several centuries before Islam gained a strong foothold in Central Asia supported through local patronage and widespread conversion. People in urban areas were the first to convert to Islam, and scholars continue to debate the impact of conversion on the nomadic peoples. The legend of Arslanbob Ata reinforces the difficulties faced by the early converts to Islam in Central Asia and exemplifies the perceived struggle between the pious Arslanbob Ata and nomadic groups in the form of the “tatar” or “*kafir*” enemies.

The perceived struggle against a formidable foe was translated into the challenges the villagers endured under the meddlesome Soviets. Likewise, this trope appeals to the local population of Arslanbob, which is mostly Uzbek, in the contemporary ethnic struggle between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, with the Uzbeks representing the sedentary and Islamized people championed by Arslanbob Ata and the Kyrgyz representing the nomadic or foreign enemies who refused to convert to Islam or had undergone false conversions. That being said, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks visit the shrine.

According to the legend of Arslanbob Ata, Arslanbob Ata’s Friday prayer at the *namaz tosh* allowed him to transport himself to Mecca. This weekly reminder of the connection between the sacred rock in the walnut forests of Kyrgyzstan with the Ka’ba in Mecca, the most holy of places in Islam, had supported the authority of Muslims inhabiting Central Asia. In Chapter Two I explained how Sulaiman Too is one of several prominent shrines in the Islamic world which hold the designation of being the “second Mecca” or second only to Mecca. While the

shrine of Arslanbob Ata does not have the same notoriety as Sulaiman Too, the connection between Arslanbob and Mecca through legend provides legitimization and authenticity to the sacredness of the shrine space.<sup>71</sup> With Kyrgyzstan's independence the restrictions against going on Hajj lifted. During the Soviet period people were infrequently allowed to even apply to go on the Hajj. Today, many of the elderly residents of the village of Arslanbob have had both the opportunity and means to go on the Hajj. The shrine of Arslanbob Ata continues to have significance despite the increase of locals who travel to the Hijaz for the Hajj each year. During one of my interviews, an elderly resident of Arslanbob dyed my hands with henna she had acquired during her pilgrimage to Mecca the previous year while recounting the legends of Arslanbob Ata and the significance of the network of sacred spaces in and around the village of Arslanbob. Her participation in the Hajj had not diminished her faith in the local legends, although she did remind us that prayers and petitions must be made directly to Allah rather than to any intermediary such a saint or companion of the Prophet.

The legends about Arslanbob Ata emphasize the hero's actions as a devout Muslim, but they also underscore his connection to forest ecology and the origins of the bountiful forest that benefit human settlement. Like the legend of Arslanbob Ata, the Osh legends connect the shrine of Sulaiman Too to the sedentarization of the people of the Ferghana Valley. This connection is supported through Islamic narratives about the prophet Adam, because like Adam, Arslanbob Ata brought seeds to Central Asia. In Islam Adam is associated with human settlements and agriculture. After God cast Adam and Eve out of paradise, Adam landed in India and Eve in Mecca.<sup>72</sup> At the time of their banishment, Adam and Eve were still the size of giants with their feet on the earth and their heads in the heavens. During the fall, the plants of paradise were part

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<sup>71</sup> Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 71-87 and 126-8.

<sup>72</sup> Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 15-35; and Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 85-7.

of the wreath that Adam wore atop his head, which allowed the earth to become populated with all sorts of heavenly fruits. On Adam's way to join Eve, everywhere his foot touched the ground human settlement formed and agricultural production took root and prospered. The areas between the footprints became desert and wasteland. In one version of the Osh legends, the footprint at Sulaiman Too is said to be that of Adam, and thus draws directly upon the idea of settlement and the establishment of agriculture for the people of the Ferghana Valley.<sup>73</sup> This story of Adam bringing agriculture to the Ferghana Valley is reminiscent of the way in which the Prophet Muhammad charged Arslanbob Ata with the task of bringing the seeds for the walnut and other fruit trees to the forests in the Ferghana Mountains. Pilgrims tell how Arslanbob Ata carried the seed in his mouth during his journey to Central Asia.<sup>74</sup> Some say that his head reached into the heavens and his body was one and a half times the size of a normal man.

Contemporary practitioners have set a precedent for modern tourism combined with pilgrimage that has roots in the nomadic past and had become normative as well as necessitated during the Soviet period. By collecting and analyzing the legends that people tell and record about Central Asian shrines, it is possible to draw clear connections between regional constructions of the history of Islam in Central Asia. The parallels between these regional legends emphasize a collective understanding of the modes of Islamization in Central Asia. The local versions of the legends show special accommodation to suit local needs and political situations involving economics and accessibility. Furthermore, the link between the legends of saints and shrines in Central Asia with the prophets of Islam underscores the value placed on authority within the Islamic tradition. Local inhabitants and pilgrims tailor rituals to their specific needs at shrines. They tell stories about the shrines to both assert themselves as part of an Islamic heritage

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<sup>73</sup> Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 15-35; and Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 78-80 and 95.

<sup>74</sup> Moldo of Arslanbob, interview by Jennifer Webster, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011.

that reaches beyond any borders and to adapt Islam to their particular needs and local situation. The legends of Arslanbob Ata allow local residents to link themselves to the earliest Muslims in Central Asia. These legends simultaneously promote Muslim identity and a variety of community values to elevate the economic and ecological interests tied to forestry and tourism.

## Safed Bulan: Discovering Women's Worlds at Shrines

When my special abilities were discovered we sacrificed a sheep and invited people from other villages. I received everyone's blessing.

— Gulshan Koichubekova, Healer, interview, June 2012.

Years ago I went to the shrine, bathed in the pool, and prayed. Now I know that I should only pray to Allah and that the shrine is for leisure.

— Nasiba, interview, July 2012.

In 656 C.E., the Caliph Uthman appointed Muhammad b. Jarir to lead an army of the faithful to Central Asia. After a series of successful conquests, the army set up camp in the northern part of the Ferghana Valley. 2,772 Muslim warriors paused from their daily activities to pray their Friday *namaz*.<sup>1</sup> Their enemies, who did not profess Islam, had discovered the *ghazis'* weakness in their ever-consistent prayer time.<sup>2</sup> These unbelievers descended upon the Muslim warriors while they bowed their heads in prayer and slaughtered them by decapitation. The field where the warriors had prayed ran red with blood. Bu Bulan, the betrothed of one of the slain martyrs, went to her beloved. She washed his head and prepared him for burial. She did not cease washing the heads of the martyrs (*shahīd*) until all 2,772 were cleansed and ready for entombment.

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<sup>1</sup> Some versions of this legend round the number of warriors or companions of the Prophet (*sahāba*) to 2,800 or 2,700.

<sup>2</sup> Note the parallels with the legend Arslanbob Ata (Chapter Three).

After this act of selfless piety, Bu Bulan, who is remembered in legend as “black” or having darker features, turned white from this tragedy of loss and remained a virgin until the day she died. She took the title “Safed” which means white in Persian. The color white has additional meanings including pure and wise – two attributes which Bulan embodied through the performance of washing the bodies of the dead martyrs.<sup>3</sup> After witnessing Bu Bulan’s act of piety and selflessness, the people of the region immediately converted to Islam. Women visit her tomb, remembering her deeds and asking for her blessing.

This chapter asks why and how a specific shrine became a gendered space. It also revisits the topic of ethnicity by examining the impact of international borders on pilgrimage routes where Safed Bulan is an example of a shrine that sits directly on an international border and was even jurisdictionally part of the Uzbek SSR for a brief period of time. A confluence of Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik ethnic identities exists at Safed Bulan, yet, just as in the case of Sulaiman Too (Chapter Two), women identify themselves foremost as Muslims when visiting the shrine complex. By analyzing the complex issues facing women who visit the shrine of Safed Bulan and other shrines in Central Asia, this chapter considers how women view and express themselves as Muslims, learn about Islam, and build communities of practitioners. Along with domestic settings, shrines become sites for women’s religious practices. Shrines are not visited on a daily

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<sup>3</sup> The shrine is also known as Ispid Bulan(d) in some sources, including Jamal al-Din Qarshi’s fourteenth century *Mulhaqāt al-Surāh*. Barthold argues that those who call the shrine “Safed” Bulan are incorrect. However, this is the name used by locals today. *Ispid* and *safed* both have the same meanings in Persian language. Some pilgrims I spoke with did not realize the significance of the meaning of the name since they were not familiar with the Persian terminology. See Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London: Luzac and Company, Ltd., 1958), 160. For an additional explanation, see Sergei Abashin, “Safid-Bulan,” in *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii, Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, 3* (Moscow: Izdatel’skaia firma “Vostochnaia literatura” RAN, 2001), 87-8. The version of the legend of Safed Bulan that I tell here is a composite of several versions of the legend as told by pilgrims, shrine caretakers, and printed sources. The people I interviewed at Safed Bulan all described the story of Safed Bulan turning white (either her hair or skin). Other sources describe her as washing the heads and mourning the dead martyrs, which causes her to turn pale with grief. Yet another version has Safed Bulan washing the heads of the slain to the point that she has rubbed her flesh down to the bone, and thus she appears white.

basis, but the timing of the visits can be predicted to some degree based on the events women value in their lives. However, not all women are in agreement about the proposed intention of visiting shrines or even whether they should visit them at all. For many, there is a dangerous element associated with shrines. This idea of danger stems from a variety of sources. These include ideas that remain as holdovers from the Soviet anti-religious campaign, the promotion of the viewpoint that a good Muslim does not visit shrines, and a genuine fear of the unknown that is associated with shrines and tombs such as evil spirits (*jinn*). This chapter also explores the role of female religious specialists, who assist people with life-cycle rituals, religious knowledge, and healing. This final section shares the life history of a woman who was called to become a healer. She explains that she draws her power from the shrine of Safed Bulan as well as six other regional shrines located in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>4</sup>

Today the shrine complex of Safed Bulan in Jalalabad oblast is situated along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border about 40 kilometers north of the city of Namangan, Uzbekistan. Safed Bulan's tomb rests in a room adjacent to the communal tomb for the heads of the deceased martyrs (Tomb of Heads or *kalla-khana*). Across a courtyard lined with manicured gardens is the Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil (built sometime after 1061 C.E.). This apparent Qarakhanid ruler and supposed son or grandson of the legendary Muhammad b. Jarir had patronized the site initially during his lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Shakh Fazil's mausoleum is one of the earliest examples of an Islamic tomb in Central Asia. Its architecture, decorative features, and inscriptions have been the

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term "religious specialist" as a general category that includes a number of different professions including those of mullah (alternatively – *moldo*), *tabib*, *bakshi*, *il'ty*, *otin* (alternatively – *otinchî*), *duwona*, and *domla*. There is no consensus on the exact meaning of these terms, nor are they used consistently from region to region.

<sup>5</sup> For additional details on legends of Muhammad b. Jarir and Shakh Fazil, see Sergei Abashin, "Safid-Bulan," 87-8.

subject of several studies.<sup>6</sup> Restoration of the Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil began in 1978, but has since ceased. The area surrounding the shrine complex includes an extensive ritual house with room for several groups of pilgrims to cook and consume food at one time, a mosque, cemetery, and a sacred hill (Archa Mazar).<sup>7</sup>

Pilgrims enter the shrine complex by proceeding up a small yet steep flight of stairs through an enormous gate connecting a high wall built from stones. As they pass through the gate they see an attendant booth to their left as well as a permanent map of the complex (Figure 4.1). Ahead and to the right is a large courtyard furnished with a semi-circle of benches, which can accommodate a single large group of pilgrims or several smaller groups of pilgrims at any given time as they gather to pray and receive blessings. Striking, tall birch trees with knots that look like eyes indicate the perimeter of this courtyard. A large, smooth stone where pilgrims go to lie down is at the far end of the courtyard. It is believed to cure back pains as well as other ailments. Female caretakers and religious specialists are available to answer any questions about the shrine, including its history, the recommended itinerary, and ritual procedures. They will also gladly recite the Qur'an, lead prayers, and assist the pilgrims with their requests for blessings.

After leaving the first courtyard, a path guides pilgrims up another short set of stairs to a second elongated courtyard that is enclosed by a brick wall. The scent of roses fills the air when one enters this second courtyard, and the main area is filled with a series of small garden plots of

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<sup>6</sup> Kufic inscriptions with Qur'anic phrases and the name of the deceased ruler line the interior walls of the mausoleum. There are both Arabic and Persian inscriptions as well as decorative motifs. For more on the inscriptions on the Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil, see Ernst Cohn-Weiner, *Turan: Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1930), 21 and plates XVII – XVIII; Cohn-Weiner, "A Turanic Monument of the Twelfth Century A.D.," *Ars Islamica* 6: (1939), 88; V. N. Nastich and B. D. Kochnev, "K atributsii mavzoleia Shakh-Fazil: epigraficheskie i numizmaticheskie dannye," *Epigrafika Vostoka* 24: (1988), 68-77; and Sheila Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Some people I spoke with say that this sacred hill represents Mount Arafat in Mecca. Those visiting the shrine climb to the top of the hill to ask for blessings. Some people draw connections between the 'Umra (off-season visit to Mecca) and visits to regional shrines such as Safed Bulan.

manicured trees and flowering shrubbery. At the far right of the courtyard is the entrance to the beehive-shaped mausoleum of Shakh Fazil (Figure 4.2). To the left is the entrance to the tomb of Safed Bulan and the tomb of the heads of the martyrs. To the side of these two tombs is another semi-enclosed area, lined with wooden benches, where pilgrims can pray with a mullah.

Upon entering the sanctuary of Safed Bulan's tomb, one is immediately aware of the calm that pervades the simple rectangular chamber. Even with large groups of pilgrims (usually older women or school-age girls) bustling in and out and sharing the tiny space for prayer, reflection, and memorial, the peacefulness endures. A magnificent and meticulously constructed quilt of *atlas* curtains the front of Safed Bulan's tomb (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).<sup>8</sup> One group of high school girls shuffled behind the screen to pay respect to Safed Bulan after praying in the main chamber covered by wool carpets. Upon moving behind the drape, there is an additional, brightly embroidered cover over the tomb. This second cover is meant to protect the pilgrims, whom some believe will be cursed or become impure if they disturb the protective shroud covering the tomb. Pilgrims sometimes leave offerings for Safed Bulan in front of her tomb, including flowers, written prayers, and small handcrafts.

After returning to the main courtyard, several steps lead down to a circular brick seating area. In the center, extending out of the ground is phallic-shaped fertility stone. Looking out from here another longer flight of stairs leads down to an extensive graveyard where local notables have found burial places since as early as the twelfth century. To the right beyond the graveyard is the Archa Mazar hill, which pilgrims believe will lead to a long life if they set the correct intention while climbing the path. At the far end of the graveyard is a recently constructed

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<sup>8</sup> This drape is replaced periodically (possibly once a year like the cover over the Ka'ba in Mecca) based on earlier images compared with the present quilt. Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva," photograph 34.

monumental gate that leads out to an undisturbed road. Outside of the main grounds of the shrine complex, on the slope of Archa Mazar, is the tomb of the martyrs' bodies (*tana-khana*).

The shrine complex of Safed Bulan doubles as a regional architectural and historical memorial complex.<sup>9</sup> The complex has written descriptions and memorial plaques, as well as explanations of the inscribed stones. Upon entering the tomb of the martyrs' heads (*kalla-khana*), one sees artifacts related to the early history of the region. Lining the walls along the floor of the chamber are artifacts such as old irons, a sewing machine, and other household items that people would have used in their homes around the turn of the twentieth century. These items appear to be strewn about at random, but may have been intentionally placed in their locations between presumably older earthenware jugs. This type of installation duplicates many of the displays at the Osh Museum where frontier household items found their way into the collection of ancient objects and stones from Osh oblast. There are official published documents about the site in Uzbek and Kyrgyz language available for sale.<sup>10</sup>

Several of the female caretakers expressed their eagerness to convert the shrine complex of Safed Bulan and Shakh Fazil into an UNESCO World Heritage Site. "The Cultural Landscape of Safid Bulan," along with five additional sites that form part of the northern Ferghana trade route, joined the UNESCO World Heritage Site "tentative list" in 2010.<sup>11</sup> A. T. Sulaymanova composed one of the initial reports on sculptures and wall paintings for Shakh Fazil and several other locations in the Kyrgyz Republic proposed as "Silk Road Sites in

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<sup>9</sup> Abashin ("Safid-Bulan," 87) refers to Safed Bulan as a "memorial complex."

<sup>10</sup> Erkin aji Begimkulov, *Sheüitter Mekenı: Safed-Bulan, Shakh-Fazl baiany* (Bishkek 2009); and Erkin xoji Begimkulov, *Shaxidlar Makoni: Safedbulon, Shox Fazl baioni* (Bishkek 2011).

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, "Silk Road Sites in Kyrgyzstan," submitted February 19, 2010, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5518/>

In 1962, at least four of the six sites nominated as part of the northern Ferghana trade route were identified as having "historic value" that warranted restoration and modification. In the Soviet period these "architectural" monuments were reenvisioned as anti-religious museums rather than religious spaces. TsGA KR, f. 2597, op. 2, d. 56 (December 12, 1962).

Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>12</sup> She explains the present difficulties in restoration and conservation of sculptures and wall paintings in the Kyrgyz Republic as well as the other Central Asian republics. During the Soviet period experts trained in the restoration and preservation of epigraphy traveled to Soviet Central Asia to assess monuments. If they determined that further analysis and restoration were necessary, they then removed objects or façades, transported them to Leningrad, and completed the repairs at their workshops located at the Hermitage. In 1978 the restoration of the Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil began, but the project was never completed. After the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, the archaeological division of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences remained intact, but there were no specialists of epigraphic restoration. Because of this, the restoration of Shakh Fazil came to a halt. In 2002 the United States Department of State’s Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) donated 24,000 USD to initiate a new restoration project at Shakh Fazil and three other sites in the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>13</sup> The scaffolding from their project was still in place ten years later, so it is unclear the extent to which this initiative was successful. With the absence of expert restorers, it may be that the work could not be satisfactorily completed.

The international attention that the complex of Safed Bulan received has prompted the Kyrgyz Ministry of Culture and the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences to take notice of the shrine. However, several factors may block the site from achieving the same level of attention as Sulaiman Too in Osh. The UNESCO board noted several features that warrant World Heritage

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<sup>12</sup> A. T. Sulaymanova, “On Analysis and Preservation of Medieval Wall Painting and Sculpture in Kyrgyzstan,” accessed March 16, 2015, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/sites/silkroad/files/knowledge-bank-article/3%20On%20analysis%20and%20preservation%20of%20medieval%20wall%20painting%20and%20sculpture%20in%20Kyrgyzstan.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> United States Department of State Cultural Heritage Center, The Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation, accessed March 19, 2015, [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/kyrgyzrepublic/19452/pdfs/afcp\\_eng\\_last.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/kyrgyzrepublic/19452/pdfs/afcp_eng_last.pdf)

status for the complex of Safed Bulan. The main reason it is under consideration, though, is that the Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil is unique for its dome structure and extensive epigraphy in this region and as an example of twelfth-century Islamic architecture. The challenges of restoration and preservation of this type of structure are particularly pronounced because of the lack of skilled specialists of epigraphy in the Kyrgyz Republic. The restoration of the Mausoleum has not been a priority even though it has been repeatedly identified as a historically and culturally valuable monument. In addition to the lack of specialists who could execute a restoration, the location of the complex of Safed Bulan far from the urban centers of the Kyrgyz Republic and its proximity to the Uzbek border are major deterrents for Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and Ministry of Culture, which are the two main groups that would normally facilitate such a restoration. In a reversal, it is the local (mixed Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik) people who push for international recognition for the site, hoping that with that recognition additional funding and support will be allocated to the restoration and preservation of the site.

### **Borders and Boundaries**

The road to the Ala Buqa region of Kyrgyzstan from Kerben weaves along the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Fields filled with flowers that would delight a honeybee on one side belong to the territory of Kyrgyzstan and on the other side to Uzbekistan. Landmines present a real hazard near the road's edge, and any attempts to cross the border may be met with armed Uzbek guards. A once vibrant overland trade route in the northern Ferghana Valley is now a reminder of the conflict between the nations of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan whose peoples find themselves at odds with each other over resources and territory. The international borders that dissect the Ferghana Valley provide tools for leaders to drive wedges between peoples through the politicization of ethnic, national, and economic divisions.

In 2006 I described my trip to Bukhara and the memorable visit to Baha al-Din Naqshband's shrine to an Uzbek scholar.<sup>14</sup> Her research focused on women and social issues; she had spoken with many groups of women from different regions of Uzbekistan. She told me about the popular practice of groups of women traveling together over the Uzbek border into the Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan to visit shrines. I thought this was fascinating because the borders of Uzbekistan are closely guarded and hazardous to cross. I also did not understand why so many people would elect to take such a huge risk to visit specific shrines when there was a seeming abundance of local shrines within the borders of Uzbekistan. Four years later, when I decided to focus my dissertation topic on shrines in Ferghana Valley, this account returned to me. After determining that I would do my research in the Kyrgyz Republic, I began my initial research by talking to as many people as possible about shrines to visit. The people I spoke with included my acquaintances, people in the markets, taxi drivers, and other passengers of shared taxis and public transportation. I asked them which shrines they consider the most prominent or important. Which shrines had they visited or heard accounts of other people visiting? What did they think about shrines? I selected shrines I would visit based on a combination of these initial conversations and also on the newspaper article published in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* and written by Iurii Petrash as well as other documents found in the Central State Archives in Bishkek.<sup>15</sup> Petrash listed several shrines as presenting the greatest challenge to the goals of the Soviet anti-religious campaign because of the sheer numbers of pilgrims that visited them each year. One of these shrines, I would later learn, had changed location several times due to its position near the border of Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. That shrine was the complex of Safed Bulan.

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<sup>14</sup> I have chosen to omit the scholar's name because of the current political climate in Uzbekistan.

<sup>15</sup> Iurii Petrash, "Pravda o 'sviatykh mestakh'," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* (January 5, 1962).

Shrines are one of the centers of women's religious activities in Central Asia, as opposed to the male-dominated spaces of mosques and madrasas.<sup>16</sup> In the capitals, more women are beginning to attend mosques. For the most part, however, and especially in rural areas, women do not participate in mosque activities. Shrines constitute a space in which women's beliefs and practices become publically visible, in contrast with women's practices in domestic settings, where their devotions remain more private. We know that shrines are a site of female Islamic devotion based on the accounts of travelers, missionaries, diplomats, and ethnographers. When authors describe shrines during the Soviet period, they also emphasize the presence of women and identify women and children as those who require the most education to correct their behavior and beliefs. We can make inferences from these sources and compare them with the contemporary situation to hypothesize how Muslim women have expressed their devotions at shrines in different eras.

While women comprise the majority of pilgrims visiting shrines in Central Asia and many shrine complexes feature areas that are specific to women's concerns such as fertility, there are often areas that remain restricted to men only and forbidden to women such as the innermost sanctuary of tombs. For example, at the well known tombs of Ahmad Yasawi in Turkistan, Kazakhstan and Mir Said Ali Hamadani in Kulob (Khatlon Province), Tajikistan shrine guardians permit women on the grounds of the shrines, but do not allow women to enter the inner sanctuaries that contain the tombs of these saints. A similar situation exists at the shrine of Arslanbob Ata in Kyrgyzstan. The mullahs who oversee the shrine allow women to enter the

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<sup>16</sup> Svetlana Peshkova, "*Otinchilar* in the Ferghana Valley: Islam, Gender, and Power" (PhD diss., Syracuse University), 239-52.

fenced-off area that surrounds the ritual house and mausoleum, but do not allow them to enter the building that contains Arslanbob Ata's tomb.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to the tombs mentioned above, the local tradition at Safed Bulan forbids men to enter certain areas of the shrine complex, especially the chamber with Safed Bulan's tomb. The exclusion of men from Safed Bulan's tomb honors and protects her virtue. A sign posted outside the door to Safed Bulan's tomb reads in Kyrgyz that, "It is not possible for men to enter."<sup>18</sup> The ritual house at Safed Bulan is also a predominantly female space. While one side of the ritual house area opens to the mosque grounds, the male superintendents do not venture near the groups of female pilgrims as they prepare and partake in the sacrificial meals that are organized by a female caretaker.

Many of the pilgrims visiting Safed Bulan are ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks visiting either from southern Kyrgyzstan or crossing over the border from Uzbekistan and less often from Tajikistan. Today people continue to exchange Uzbek currency with local merchants to use as offerings. Uzbek language is readily audible, and the written materials of the shrine are available in Uzbek (in Cyrillic script).<sup>19</sup> Here one can begin to identify the ways in which different generations understand their multivalent identities. At the shrine people identify as Muslim

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<sup>17</sup> On the initial occasion when I entered the fenced-in area of Arslanbob Ata, two Kyrgyz men accompanied me. The mullah allowed us to enter immediately and took us directly to the tomb, which he opened for us to look inside. The men entered the tomb and I remained outside but could see the inner sanctum. On another occasion, the other mullah told me as a woman I could not enter the fenced-in area without performing ablution first. I asked where I could do this, and he said there was no place for women to perform ablution. I explained that I had entered the sacred area previously and reassured him by reminding him that I already had my head covered and had performed ablution before arriving at the shrine. He allowed me to enter. He opened the door to the tomb and allowed me to photograph him holding the fossilized boot of Arslanbob Ata. He asked me expressly to not step too close to the tomb and certainly not over the threshold of the mausoleum. On this day the ritual house hosted a large group of female pilgrims, who invited me to join them.

<sup>18</sup> эркектер кирүүгө мүмкүн эмес (*erkektek kirüügö mümkün emes*).

<sup>19</sup> Begimkulov, *Shaxidlar Makoni*.

before all else, while identifying as Kyrgyz, Uzbek, or Tajik when discussing their daily lives or when they are not actually inside the shrine complex.

Ethnic and national identities do not necessarily coincide. On passports, people have two separate indicators: one for ethnicity and one for nationality. Depending on current political and social trends people may opt to reidentify as a different ethnicity. This can be used to their advantage and also for protection against persecution.<sup>20</sup> When someone has a mother who identifies as one ethnicity and a father from another, this facilitates the process of switching ethnicity. Above all, the women I met identify as Muslim. The challenges that many of them face in non-religious settings because they are women or because they belong to a certain ethnicity do not surface at the shrine. In a community with a diverse ethnic population like Safed Bulan, the shrine offers a place of unification in addition to sanctity. In 2013 Kyrgyz Public Television (KTRK) presented a promotional video segment about Safed Bulan's journey to becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The diversity of people at the shrine was apparent even with the careful placement of both men and women in "traditional" Kyrgyz costumes and the attention to using Kyrgyz language.

### **Gendered Space and Shrines**

Umid became a new bride (*kelin*) in 2001.<sup>21</sup> It is very important among ethnic Uzbek and Tajik women to conceive a child within the first year of marriage. Preferably the child would be a son. Umid and her husband tried to conceive a child with no luck. For seven years, they tried. She did not become pregnant, and her in-laws' concern grew day by day. She tried various treatments, and eventually visited a shrine, praying for the birth of a son. In 2012, Umid, her

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<sup>20</sup> David E. Merrel, "Normative Pluralism in Kyrgyzstan: National, Community, and Individual Perspectives" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Umid is a pseudonym. Also, I have chosen not to disclose the name and location of the shrine. Umid gave me verbal permission to print her story, but asked that I keep her personal information private.

female in-laws, and her three-year-old son celebrated by returning to the shrine they had visited years before to make an offering to the shrine as a thanks for receiving the blessing of a son. The women sat on the raised, open-air seating area (*topchan*) of the ritual house, where, nearby they prepared fried bread (*boorsok*) and a rice dish (*plov*). The mullah had already performed the ritual hair cutting of the toddler (*aidar chach aluu*). The hair would be left behind at the shrine and the boy would return to his community as a marker of the power of the shrine that had blessed his mother.

Umid's situation is not uncommon. Many women in Central Asia seek assistance at shrines when they have fertility difficulties. They will also visit shrines to ask for blessings if they experience some complication with their pregnancy or want to ensure that their unborn child is a boy. The birth of a child is a life-changing event for a woman that requires acknowledgement through ritual. Seeking a husband, overcoming fertility challenges, and alleviating financial, health, or other problems likewise indicate the need for ritual intervention when no other solution is in sight. Shrines are windows into these times of transition and transformation in the lives of Muslim women in Central Asia.

Scholars of Central Asia, local inhabitants of shrine places, and the historical record suggest that women comprise the majority of pilgrims going on *ziyarat* to mazars in Central Asia.<sup>22</sup> I have argued that shrine practices and *ziyarat* often replace other Islamic rituals for women in Central Asia. Devotions at shrines fulfill a variety of needs for women including providing a space for social interactions, family gatherings, and options for requesting

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<sup>22</sup> On women visiting shrines in the Ferghana Valley, see Nadirbek Abdulhatov, "Women's Mazars in the Ferghana Valley," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 156-73.

intercession and wish granting. Shrines also provide a backdrop for those who choose to pursue callings to become traditional healers or ritual specialists.

The ethnographer Rahilä Dawut writes about this phenomenon of women's pilgrimage as being predominant amongst Uyghur women in Xinjiang: "Shrine visits have historically been largely the domain of women, and in the case of shrine activity today, especially those aspects associated with actual rituals and veneration, Uyghur women are seen as the chief participants. Women visit not only mazars named after men...but also special mazars named after women; these mazars play an important role in women's social and religious life."<sup>23</sup> Dawut's insight into the shrines in Xinjiang as the domain of women reflects the situation in Central Asia where women often comprise the majority of pilgrims visiting all shrine places whether dedicated to a male or female patron. Dawut divides shrines dedicated to females into two main categories: "shrines of the women who belong to the imperial family of the Qarakhan Dynasty or were involved in significant events in Uyghur history" and "the mazars of unknown women."<sup>24</sup>

In his article about shrines named for women in the Ferghana Valley, Nadirbek Abdulhatov makes several important claims, but also misses a few of the nuances of *ziyarat*. Abdulhatov has conducted a survey of over 40 mazars dedicated to female patrons in the Ferghana Valley and has developed an anthropological analysis of this type of mazar based on interviews. His main goal is to note the customs, traditions, and religious perceptions of local people related to these types of mazars.<sup>25</sup> He divides his article into two sections. The first section describes the diversity of women's mazars, giving a full discussion of the types of names and titles applied to mazars and the features of the natural environment. While this type of categorization

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<sup>23</sup> Rahilä Dawut, "Mazar Pilgrimage amongst Uyghur Women in Xinjiang," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 178.

<sup>24</sup> Dawut, "Mazar Pilgrimage," 178-9.

<sup>25</sup> Abdulhatov, "Women's Mazars," 157.

may have aided the author in creating his compendium of women's mazars, it blurs the fact that shrines do not have to be dedicated to a woman to be recognized as a place that is primarily for women's *ziyarat*. His categorization also suggests that the natural features such as trees, rocks, springs, etc., are exclusive to mazars named after women.<sup>26</sup> The incorporation of natural topographic features at shrines is not so much unique to women-related mazars, but are commonly part of many types of shrines in Central Asia, whether they are large or small, have official guardians, or are named after women, men, or something else. As explained in Chapter One, Devin DeWeese includes these same natural features as part of the sacred complex and myths of indigenous religious traditions in Central Asia.<sup>27</sup> These natural features appear in various combinations at many shrine places throughout Central Asia and certainly are not exclusive to shrines named after women. Safed Bulan is a place that predominately receives female pilgrims, and has a restricted area where men cannot enter.

Abdulahatov correctly emphasizes the versatility of shrines' function for women, but still treats the women's activities at shrines as ill-informed, thus illustrating a broader conceptual problem that echoes the concerns of the Soviet anti-religious campaigns. Abdulahatov claims that,

...women are rarely interested in mazars' history, and indeed the true history of many mazars has been forgotten. What women are more interested in is the social function of mazars. On most days, women tend to visit mazars for the primary reason of fulfilling specific aims, so they seek mazars that can serve their own purposes. Women's spiritual needs have also changed with the passage of time. Take for example the women who ask at mazars for good scores on their children's college entrance exams, for their husbands' promotion, or for their husbands' bosses to treat them well.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Abdulahatov, "Women's Mazars," 159.

<sup>27</sup> 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 State University Press, 1994), 43-8.

<sup>28</sup> Dawut, "Mazar Pilgrimage," 184.

While the social function of shrines is extremely important to women, this does not mean that women do not value the history of shrines. They preserve knowledge of the histories of shrines through the retelling of legends. Female caretakers and ritual specialists safeguard these legends and convey them to their female clients. The caretakers, ritual specialists, and pilgrims remember the stories, which transform over time. The legends, whether reflective of actual historical events or not, have meaning and value for the people who maintain them. The “true history” of shrines is as evanescent as the “true history” of anything else.

The social function of shrines can include a number of different activities. Abdulahatov astutely acknowledged that sometimes these activities take on new meanings as women experience new social challenges and situations. During Dawut’s research period in Xinjiang Province, she noticed that,

[m]ost mazar custodians (sheikh) are men. They lead women in carrying out religious formalities, listen to women’s troubles, perform Qur’anic recitals, and accept the charity that women give to mazars, consisting of cloth, bread, cotton, money, and other things. Women usually learn the many customs and large amount of knowledge relating to mazar worship from the sheikh and then pass it on to other women. The sheikh also learns a lot of different rituals from women who come from different locations.<sup>29</sup>

Dawut’s assessment of the shrines in Xinjiang reflects the conditions in the Ferghana Valley to a certain degree. The shrine guardians and mullahs are men, but often the wife of the mullah or other women from the local community act as shrine caretakers or at least manage the ritual houses dealing with everything from scheduling pilgrims to cleaning. Ritual houses at Safed Bulan and Talas are both managed by women, and the wife of the mullah at Padishah Ata busily cares for the shrine and ritual house. When women travel to shrines in groups they will often hire a female ritual specialist or guide who is familiar with the shrine and the rituals at that shrine, either from their own community or a community nearer to the mazar. At Manjaly Ata,

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<sup>29</sup> Dawut, “Mazar Pilgrimage,” 184.

Sulaiman Too, and Safed Bulan, groups of female pilgrims hire female guides who lead them through the appropriate rituals at the shrine. Interestingly, all these shrines include multiple stations, each with their own specific requirements. Mullahs usually select a specific location within the shrine space where they wait to receive visitors, but the guides move throughout the shrine space with the pilgrims, which better allows them to direct the pilgrims both in the order of visitation and the appropriate rituals for each station. In this respect, guides function as the preservers of ritual and legendary knowledge about shrines. At smaller shrines, it is less imperative to employ a guide because the mullah may not have time to oversee all of the shrine activities from his stationary post.

Ritual houses and overnight accommodations for pilgrims play a vital role in the arrangement and functionality of shrine places. I explained in Chapter Two that ritual houses are usually the location where animal sacrifice takes place and certainly the site of meal preparation and distribution, and consumption. While ritual houses serve as the site for offertory meals, they also form the backdrop for important social interactions amongst pilgrims and between pilgrims and mullahs. In sharing portions of food with other groups of pilgrims, stories are exchanged and bonds formed between people without regard to ethnic or socio-economic status. The ritual house, like the shrine itself, is an equalizer and the identity that remains at the forefront is that of being Muslim.<sup>30</sup>

At the ritual house the shrine caretaker (often a woman) will impartially organize the order in which pilgrim groups may use the kitchen, where and when they will have access to a seating area(s), and collect a predetermined fee for the space and services such as cleaning and

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<sup>30</sup> For a comparison in the Christian context, see Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Nancy Louise Frey, *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Stephen Graham, *With Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1913).

lending of cooking utensils and caldrons. Shrine caretakers assist pilgrims with any questions or concerns that they may have while in the ritual house, and they may have detailed knowledge about the shrine itself and the pulse of pilgrimage.

The culinary aromas from the preparation of sacrificial animals – usually sheep and fattened chickens – and fried bread (*chosmo* and *boorsok*) nourish the spirits or angels (*peris*) who inhabit the shrine. Preparing and eating a meal forms one of the primary activities of the pilgrims. An act of exchange takes place in both the human world and the spiritual realm. Pilgrims exchange money and offerings such as food with the mullahs and other religious specialists to read prayers, perform ritual acts such as cutting the hair of toddlers (*aidar chach aluu*) if the mother conceived her child as a result of visiting the shrine, and to “rent” the use of the ritual house.<sup>31</sup> They exchange the scents of sacrificial sustenance with the spirits of the shrine in order to receive the blessings which they request or have already been granted. Many will explain, however, that their requests go directly to Allah, bypassing the local spirits in order to accommodate the widely pervasive view that prayers do not require an intermediary and that to assume such is blasphemy.

### **Female Religious Specialists**

Researchers of the imperial and Soviet ethnographic traditions infrequently mention female religious specialists. Emphasis is often placed on the male religious specialists, and this may be because male researchers would have had more opportunities to make contact with them. Chokan Valikhanov describes the *il'by*, or the female counterpart to the *baqshy*, or someone

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<sup>31</sup> Mullahs do not generally linger in the ritual house, but they perform the necessary rituals and return to their own activities.

who has spirits with whom they work.<sup>32</sup> He notes that the term *il-ty* comes from the Kazak word, *elty*, which means a complete state of ecstasy or intoxication, especially from hashish or opiates. The French ethnographer Joseph Castagné wrote extensively about the *baqshy*, the rituals they perform to heal their clients, and their invocations. Castagné observed a connection between *ziyarat* and the invocations made by *baqshis*. The *baqshis* named particular saints or places where saints had rested during their lives.<sup>33</sup> Some of these places remain as important as any of the saints' tombs.<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned above, few women in Central Asia attend mosque for Friday prayer, and those who do usually live in the capital cities. Shrine visitation or participation with other women in rituals that are performed within private domestic settings allows women to fulfill their religious duties. Women gather in homes to read certain texts such as *Bibi Seshanba* (“Lady Tuesday”) and *Bibi Mushkul Kushod* (“Lady Problem Solver”) and perform lifecycle and propitiatory rituals associated with those texts as a means to make a request of a higher power (Allah or the female saints in the texts).<sup>35</sup> As early as 1915, M. S. Andreev observed that women

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<sup>32</sup> Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, v. 3 (Almaty: Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1962), 116-118.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Castagné, “Le culte des Lieux Saints de l’Islam au Turkestan,” *L’Ethnographie* 46 (1951): 47; and on the incantations, see Castagné, “Magie et exorcisme: chez les Kazak-Kirghizes et autres peuples Turks orientaux.” *Revue de etudes Islamiques* 4 (1930): 54-156.

<sup>34</sup> Thierry Zarcone, “Atypical Mausoleum: the Case of the Solomon Throne (Kyrgyzstan), *Qadam-jay*, jinns-cult and itinerary-pilgrimage.” In *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed., Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 76-80.

<sup>35</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti and Nadira Azimova specify that *otins* perform all the readings in Uzbek except for the recitation of suras from the Qur’an, which are in Arabic. This may be the case for the rituals they witnessed in their fieldwork, which was conducted in the provinces of Andijan, Khorezm, and Kashkadarya. I have also seen the text printed with accompanying prayers in Tajik (Persian). Deniz Kandiyoti and Nadira Azimova, “The Communal and the Sacred: Women’s Worlds of Ritual in Uzbekistan,” *The Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* (10) 2004: 327-349; Annette Krämer, *Geistliche Autorität und Islamische Gesellschaft im Wandel: Studien über Frauenälteste (Otin und Xalfa) im Unabhängigen Usbekistan* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002), 200-206; Habiba Fathi, *Femmes d’autorité dans l’Asie centrale contemporaine: quête des ancêtres et recompositions identitaires dans l’islam postsoviétique* (Paris, France: Maisonneuve

gathered exclusively in an honorary reunion and partook of a meal called *Osh-i-Bibi Seshanbe* in honor of the saint, Bibi Seshanbe.<sup>36</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti and Nadira Azimova discuss the role of the *otin*, the religious ritual specialist who recites the Qur'an and reads prayers, in relation to the *dastarhanji* (lit. the person of the tablecloth), who is also a female ritual specialist.<sup>37</sup> The *dastarhanji*'s role is to ensure that the logistical aspects of the gathering go according to plan, rather like the shrine caretaker. She helps the hostess make sure that all the preparations for the guests and ensuing ceremony are in order. According to Kandiyoti and Azimova, both women are essential to a successful performance of the *dastarhan* (tablecloth) ritual. Habiba Fathi explains the close connection of the performance of these texts with key events in women's lives. *Bibi Mushkul Kushod* is more likely to be performed before a marriage while *Bibi Seshanba* is more likely to be performed after a marriage, thus making the texts complementary. In the past, it was common for one *Bibi Seshanba* to be recited on Tuesday and *Bibi Mushkul Kushod* on Wednesday. However, today in Uzbekistan, it is common for the two texts to be combined into a single day and often recited in conjunction with other sanctioned Islamic texts.<sup>38</sup>

Habiba Fathi discusses the role of *otins* based on her observations from a combination of fieldwork, personal visits, and Soviet and French scholarship. While some of her historiographical information is influenced by Soviet scholarly perceptions of Central Asia, she does provide the framework for understanding the role of *otins* during Soviet times and post-independence that has been adopted by other scholars, including historian Marianne Kamp and anthropologist

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& Larose; Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Institut français d'études sur l'Asie centrale, 2004); on life-cycle rituals, see also Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 94.

<sup>36</sup> Fathi, *Femmes d'autorité*, 212-13; and M. S. Andreev, *Po Tadjikistanu: kratkii otchet o rabotakh etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii v Tadjikistane v 1925 godu* (Tashkent: 1927), 60-76.

<sup>37</sup> Kandiyoti and Azimova, "The Communal and the Sacred," 329.

<sup>38</sup> Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007), 194, n. 4.

Svetlana Peshkova, who both investigate the roles of *otins* in Uzbekistan.<sup>39</sup> Fathi points out that the phenomenon of *otins* extends beyond the borders of the former Soviet republics, in particular, to Xinjiang province in China.<sup>40</sup> Fathi describes a traditional *otin* as:

a female Muslim dignitary who oversees on a daily basis the lives of other women believers. Responsible for the education of women from birth to adulthood... Even if they do not always possess a formal knowledge of Islam, they none the less wield real authority over the female population. Whenever there are celebrations of national, religious or familial importance, such as birth rituals, marriages or funerals, the *otines* are responsible for the recitation of prayers. In this way they fulfill the same function as mullahs, and are sometimes referred to as 'women mullahs.'<sup>41</sup>

Fathi outlines the specific duties of *otins*, focusing on their roles as educators who are closely linked to formal religious instruction for male children in *maktabs* (Islamic primary schools). She remarks that in several instances *otins* had to assume a clandestine existence in the *mahallas* (neighborhoods) because the *maktabs* for women (of which she has evidence for only two in Turkestan) came under the scrutiny of the Soviets. In fact it seems more likely that instruction appeared more often in the home than in a *maktab* even before the Soviets took notice of female religious specialists. Fathi explains that *otins* "were considered to be saintly individuals, and by virtue of their role as guardians of the faith they were held to be the most knowledgeable, and the best able to convey tradition."<sup>42</sup> According to Fathi, *otins* continue to hold a special place in Central Asian society in which they play a role as preservers of tradition and to "lead the way to the re-Islamization of society."<sup>43</sup> She lists Islamists as the *otins*' chief rivals. Fathi is one of the first

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<sup>39</sup> Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Central Asia: Islam, the Soviet Project, and the Unveiling of Uzbek Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006) and Svetlana Peshkova, *Women, Islam, and Identity: Public Life in Private Spaces in Uzbekistan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Habiba Fathi, "Otines: the unknown women clerics of Central Asian Islam." *Central Asian Survey* 16 (1997), 28.

<sup>41</sup> Fathi, "Otines," 30.

<sup>42</sup> Fathi, "Otines," 33-34.

<sup>43</sup> Other scholars maintain that the traditional *otins* and their specific duties within Islam never departed in the first place. Hence there is no need to "re-Islamize."

non-Soviet scholars to bring attention to the role of *otins* and their role in maintaining Islamic rituals in Central Asia, and her explanation of the *otins* has been amplified and further illuminated by works such as that of Annette Krämer, Marianne Kamp, Maria Elisabeth Louw, and Svetlana Peshkova.<sup>44</sup>

Marianne Kamp offers a more nuanced explanation of the role of *otins*, where they could fulfill two roles: the first was to provide proper religious instruction, the content of which mirrored the education that boys would receive in the *maktabs* (Qur'an recitation, etc.); the second, however, included the transmission of ritual practices and customs that were specific to the female and private spheres of life. After the Jadid movement gained momentum in the 1920s, the second role of the *otin* was discouraged.<sup>45</sup> *Otins* were forced to choose between their two roles, and either begin teaching in a *maktab* or remain in the home disseminating their traditions and avoiding the scrutiny of the new reformists. The situation became more complicated with the imposition of the Soviet ideal regarding women's education. The Soviet stance appeared to have similar goals to that of the Jadids; even though the framework for encouraging women's education disregarded and even discouraged the religious elements promoted by the Jadids. Soviet propaganda posited women as the being suppressed and attached to "backward" notions. A discourse developed that emphasized the need to "free" the Muslim women from their seclusion (*zatvornichestvo*) and patriarchal control.<sup>46</sup> In spite of this, *otins* who chose to keep their

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<sup>44</sup> Northrup cites Fathi's 1997 article as the source for his explanation of *otins*. However, he discusses *otins* in terms of their status as teachers within the secluded existence of the women of Central Asia. See also Krämer, *Geistliche Autorität*; Kamp, *The New Woman in Central Asia*; Louw, *Everyday Islam*; and Peshkova, *Women, Islam, and Identity*.

<sup>45</sup> For a thorough account of the Jadids, see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Bringing women out of seclusion was two-fold. First, the veiling practices of urban elite women came under scrutiny and reached full force during the *Hujum* (attack or assault), which began in 1926. Beginning with the party members, women were strongly encouraged to part with their "Islamic" styles of dress, especially the iconic *paranji* and *chachwon*. Second, women in Central Asia were seen as the underprivileged

practices less visible from the state apparatus were often able to continue their instruction precisely because the activities within the home and within the *mahalla* more easily avoid the direct gaze of the Soviet social agenda.

Soviet policy facilitated the integration of women at all levels. In the 1920s reformist (Jadid) maktab for girls functioned in the Ferghana Valley while other options existed for girls in Bukhara and Samarqand.<sup>47</sup> Primary education was made compulsory for boys and girls in 1930, and soon thereafter, women began attending programs for higher education. The lack of sufficiently trained teachers, social resistance, and other hurdles impede implementation of the new laws. Riots broke out in Syr Daria in 1931, when it was discovered that not a single girl was attending school.<sup>48</sup> Most women attained only a primary education, choosing to marry rather than remain in school.<sup>49</sup> Kamp suggests that women began, as she puts it, making their academic pilgrimages to sites of higher education at an earlier date in the 1920s.<sup>50</sup>

Although women were able to receive new forms of education during the Soviet period, some women perpetuated the rituals and religious teachings within the private spaces of the *mahalla*. Even today, some educated women choose to undergo the training of a religious

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class, in need of education that would ultimately bring them into the work force of equals with men. Patriarchal control was equated with Islam and the clan system. These two aspects of bringing women out of seclusion have become the focus of the works of historians especially since the 1970s when Gregory Massell termed the phrase “surrogate proletariat” to supplant the women of Central Asia as the missing working class necessary to move society forward. Since then, scholars have problematized these claims, especially in light of the fact that many women in Central Asia, notably the women from nomadic groups, did not wear veils or remain in seclusion. See Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 230. See also Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 115; Northrup, *Veiled Empire*; and Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Central Asia*.

<sup>47</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, 40 and 75.

<sup>48</sup> Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, 209-10.

<sup>49</sup> Shirin Akiner, “Between Tradition and Modernity: the Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women,” in *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 272.

<sup>50</sup> Marianne Kamp, “Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (2002): 263-278.

specialist. Women may follow the path of the *otin* or they may choose or be called to become healers, clairvoyants, or other ritual specialists. These professions or callings take many forms and are not consistent in the way they are named from region to region or amongst different ethnic groups.<sup>51</sup> Most of the scholarly literature about female religious specialists focuses on *otins* and the domestic setting in which they so frequently operate. These scholars emphasize the role of religious specialists in communities that generally live in the *mahalla*, which is primarily populated by Uzbeks and Tajiks. Overwhelmingly these studies concentrate on communities in Uzbekistan, probably because it was relatively easier to conduct research in Uzbekistan before the Andijon uprising in 2005.<sup>52</sup> The *mahalla* also provided an intimately defined space in which to conduct ethnographic research.

The following section traces one female religious specialist on her path to becoming a healer. She is Kyrgyz and chooses to live in a rural setting, unlike the religious specialists described above. However, she is a vital member of the rural community in which she lives. Her special abilities as a healer also cover a vast geographical territory, and exemplify the connection between religious specialists and shrines.<sup>53</sup> The activities of these ritual specialists and healers often take place at shrines. Even when rituals are performed in private domestic settings, ritual specialists often describe their abilities to heal, foresee the future, and act as intercessors as deriving from shrines or the saints, prophets, and spirits associated with shrines.

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<sup>51</sup> Tynara Ryskulova, interview by Jennifer Webster, Bishkek Kyrgyzstan, July 2012.

<sup>52</sup> In addition to the studies mentioned above, see the ethnographic film *Where the Eagles Fly - Habiba: a Sufi Saint in Uzbekistan*, Mystic Fire Video (1998).

<sup>53</sup> She also incorporates a wide range of healing services for her clientele. See Chapter Five.

## Dreams and the Unseen

Shrines are places of dreams, miracles, and spirits that remain invisible except under certain circumstances. For instance, residents of Arslanbob village tell about the 40 female angels (*houris* or *peris*) who guard the small waterfall and inhabit the caves and crevasses around it. According to residents, these spirits are visible only around twilight, even though they are always present. These spirits can pose a danger to people even though they are unseen by drawing away the attention of the person and making them forgetful of the passing of time. This fear intersects with the idea that it is dangerous for unmarried women to be out at twilight or at night unprotected.<sup>54</sup> There is danger because of the potential for illness or possession by an evil or dark spirit (*jinn*). People fear what they cannot see. Only a specialist can handle the unseen and for everyone else, the unseen poses a danger.

This element of the unseen extends to those who exhibit special powers and the ability to talk to spirits. Healers and other religious specialists describe their call to the profession as being visited by spirits who are invisible to others. This phenomenon has parallels in the way that many *manaschis* experience the call to their profession to recite the Manas epic. For example, Kamil Mamadaliev was visited in his dreams when he was a child of six by a long-deceased *manaschi*. The apparition explained that the visions he was having of battles were a sign that he must recite *Manas*. Today Kamil is the official *manaschi* at the Talas Ordo.<sup>55</sup> The dreams of people who are called to be healers or religious specialists are often preceded or accompanied by tragedy and illness.<sup>56</sup> The calling can happen at any point in a person's life, but often the people who experience a calling have some recollection of the indication of their powers even from

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<sup>54</sup> Buvi Hajji, interview, Arslanbob, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Kamil Mamadaliev, *Manaschi of the Talas Ordo*, interview by Jennifer Webster, Talas, Kyrgyz Republic, November 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Jipar Duyshembeyeva, "Kyrgyz Healing Practices: Some Field Notes," *The Silkroad Foundation Newsletter* 3 (2005): 38-44; and Tynara Ryskulova, interview, November 2011.

childhood. Like Kamil, many healers recall some sign from their childhood, such as dreams or an intense need to pray, that foreshadows their calling later in life. Those who do not embrace their calling immediately often endure additional suffering and sickness.

Gulshan Koichubekova was born in 1952, and as a little girl she prayed constantly, which her mother encouraged. In 1994, at the age of 42, Gulshan was struck by a red arrow. She saw it, like a beam of light, flying at her from the wall. She explains that an arrow appeared suddenly like a thunderbolt. “From that day on I was sick. After that incident my three brothers died. And I was told that one of us should take a responsibility. And my palms were hot.”<sup>57</sup> Two female tabibs (doctors or clairvoyents) from Uzgen had explained to Gulshan that she was the one who had to take responsibility. At that moment a white cloud approached her. The cloud appeared again many times and pressed down upon her. When this happened, she covered herself with her coat and asked her husband to beat her while shouting at the spirits: “Let go of my wife! Let go of my wife!” in an attempt to compel the visions to pass.

Eventually Gulshan became sick. She visited a hospital to try to discover why she had become ill. The physicians could not find any explanation for her state, and she was sent home. After elaborate attempts at self-cure, she accepted her calling on October 28, 1994. She wrote a letter affirming her acceptance of her new responsibility. She then had herself locked in a room for three days. In the room, she stayed in the company of a giant (*döo*) who was only visible to her. After her three-day seclusion, she was directed by another local female healer to go to a spiritual guide in the Ak Suu region – the region of her ancestors. Gulshan began studying with a man named Arstanbek uulu Zhengishbek, whom she describes as having trained in Tajikistan. Arstanbek trained Gulshan and many other women at Nur Ilim near the shrine of Idris

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<sup>57</sup> Gulshan Koichubekova, religious specialist, interview by Jennifer Webster, Mukur, Kyrgyz Republic, July 2012.

Paygambar in the Chatkal region of Jalalabad oblast.<sup>58</sup> Gulshan describes her mentor as a *baqshy* who is well known for clearing people's auras. According to Gulshan there are only 400 *baqshys* in Kyrgyzstan with this ability. Arstanbek requested that Gulshan join him in the capital, Bishkek, where he asked her to provide the start-up funds for a healing and fortune telling business in which they would be joint partners. Gulshan declined his offer, preferring to work out of her permanent residence in the village of Mukur.<sup>59</sup> Since accepting her calling, she has found her spiritual guide and spent many nights at the shrines from which she derives her power. While at these shrines, she communicates with their patron saints or prophets as well as the spirits of the shrines.<sup>60</sup>

Family and friends who knew Gulshan in her youth and early adulthood are shocked when learning that she has become a healer and a clairvoyant. She graduated as a nutritionist (*povar-tekhnolog*) from a technical college in Almaty, Kazakh SSR in the 1980s. Working as a dietitian, she had a successful career working at a military sanatorium at lake Issyk Kul. When she married, she moved to Mukur, a tiny village near Kerben in Jalalabad oblast. One of her sisters, who is a successful businesswoman, has difficulty fathoming how a modern and educated woman from her own family could choose to become a healer. For Gulshan, just as is the case for many other traditional healers, the decision to accept their calling saved them from illness and mishap.

The call to a particular profession such as a healer, clairvoyant, or *manaschi* often carries a set of specific conditions for the person being called. The first of these conditions is that the

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<sup>58</sup> In describing Nur Ilim, Gulshan says, "I graduated from Nur Ilim. Nur Ilim are the 18 thousand rays of the universe created by God ...The rays are called Ilim Taskhir. They say that it is possible to see the power of Ilim Taskhir."

<sup>59</sup> Gulshan refers to this residence as her *dacha* even though she and her family live there year round. The home is near to one of the shrines from which she draws energy and she has a steady clientele from the surrounding region.

<sup>60</sup> Gulshan Koichubekova, interview, July 2012.

person experience powerful visions or dreams that are not necessarily readily interpretable by the person experiencing them. Someone else who has already accepted that particular calling may have to assist in explaining the meaning of these dreams.<sup>61</sup> For Gulshan, the dream began with the red arrow and the cloud. The second condition is that if the person does not accept their calling, then illness or tragedy will befall them or those close to them. Gulshan underwent a difficult and undiagnosable illness until, at last, she had no other alternative than to accept her call to become a healer. Finally, after the point of acceptance, the person being called will have to seek out a teacher to guide them in developing their new gifts. Gulshan regularly consults other female healers and clairvoyants and still considers Arstanbek as her teacher (*pir*). It would be dangerous to not have an experienced spiritual guide once one accepts one's calling.

Gulshan made a choice to accept her calling. She heals women from the villages and settlements near her rural home. She goes on *ziyarat* when she has the means, staying overnight at shrines with other religious specialists. When she is unable to visit, she sends offerings of food and money with other pilgrims or with mullahs who work at the shrines. The shrine of Safed Bulan is one of the shrines from which Gulshan draws her energy. She has only visited it once, but her connection with the place is strong regardless of the time she has spent there physically. Wherever she goes she can see and talk with the spirits of shrines. Gulshan represents an individual who defies categorization. She is a Soviet-educated Kyrgyz woman who received her calling to become a religious specialist later in life. She lives in a rural setting and is reliant on the land (including a shrine on her property), but her network extends throughout Osh and Jalalabad oblasts, incorporating a number of shrines, especially Idris Paygambar and Safed Bulan.

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<sup>61</sup> For a parallel case in the vodou context, see Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Gulshan's story is representative of women's devotional practices at shrines in the Kyrgyz Republic today in that she values going on *ziyarat* and professes to be the beneficiary of the energy of the shrines and their spirits. Analysis of the account of her training reveals ideas about religious authority in contemporary Kyrgyzstan by illustrating a hierarchy that extends between the human realm and the realm of the unseen. Although she had a Soviet education and a successful career, she chose to accept a calling to become a healer in the midst of the transition of the Kyrgyz Republic becoming an independent state. Gulshan is not alone in her decision to transform her career. During my field research, I met a variety of other female healers who left previous careers to take on the role of *baqshy*, *tabib*, *otin*, or *bübü* in addition to their other roles as mothers, sisters, and workers. These women included a former German language teacher from Isyk Kul and a primary school teacher from Ala Buqa. These new callings may come with the women's increased age after retirement or as is often the case, when a woman turns toward religion; the flux of religious ideas from the late 1980s and beyond may also have catalyzed the ability for women to freely become religious specialists. On the other hand there may also be an increased demand for such female religious specialists in the last two decades. Women in Central Asia have had dual places of devotion in domestic settings and at shrines. Because of the existence of extensive shrine networks, if pilgrims found themselves barred or fenced off from one shrine, they can substitute another shrine. Many people patronize more than one shrine, and many believe that the powers of shrines are not restricted to the physical space of the shrine. Devotion happens cyclically (e.g., once a year) and has leeway in terms of when people can make offerings. The flexibility offered by this system of devotion allows people to accommodate their personal requirements and fulfill obligations.

Many women in Kyrgyzstan today choose shrines as places to publicly express their devotional practices through prayers, requests, and celebrations. Shrines are places where

women may define themselves as Muslims, leaving their ethnic and national identities to the space outside of the shrine and outside of *ziyarat*. Women empower themselves to overcome physical, financial, and political boundaries in order to visit shrines. In the areas of shrines that are designated as exclusively women's spaces, such as the tomb of Safed Bulan, women are guaranteed a sanctuary in which they express themselves as women and as Muslims. Religious specialists, such as Gulshan, draw their energy from shrines and engage in ongoing relationships with shrines as a way to nourish their abilities. They fulfill an important social role as healers and intermediaries between the struggles of everyday life and the unknown.

## Hazrati Ayub: Believing the Miracle of Healing Waters

People come here for *ziyarat*. There needs to be a local person here [to receive the pilgrims]. Not just anyone can serve here. This place is holy.

— Shrine guardian of Ayub-Bulak, interview, October 2011.

The clergy and pilgrimage of believers to “holy” places that are supposedly located at the resort often overshadow treatment.

— Z. Leiderman, vacationer, February 1965.

The Prophet Ayub (Ayyub; Job) suffered trial upon trial at the hands of Iblis as a testament to his unwavering faithfulness to Allah. Ayub underwent several of these trials while in Central Eurasia.<sup>1</sup> When the Prophet Ayub’s body was covered with worms, he ran away from his village and came here [Jalalabad]. Because the worms would not stop eating his body, he began reciting *namaz*. When the worms ate all of his body and he had only his tongue left, he asked Allah to spare his tongue at least so he could continue to pray. After that, Allah gave this water [the water from the Jalalabad spring (Ayub- Bulak)] to the Prophet Ayub. After drinking and

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<sup>1</sup> Two of these trials took place in Bukhara, one in Warakhsha, and one in Jalalabad. See Ashirbek Muminov, “Sacred Places in Central Asia: Attempts at Their Historical and Theological Interpretation,” in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 32. For more on the shrine of the spring of Ayyub in Bukhara, its architecture, history, see Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Ashirbek Muminov, and Elizaveta Nekrasova, “Le mausolée de Chashma-yi ‘Ayyûb à Bukhara et son prophète,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 5-6 (1998), 63-94; and Maria Louw, “Pursuing ‘Muslimness’: Shrines as Sites for Moralities in the Making in Post-Soviet Bukhara,” *Central Asian Survey* 25 (2006): 323-4.

bathing in the water the Prophet Ayub had a full recovery from his physical afflictions. “That is why this water [the water from the Jalalabad spring] is sacred.”<sup>2</sup>

What happens when a place that is considered sacred for the miracles that are believed to happen there, together with the real or perceived curative properties of the water, rocks, earth, and trees, are coopted in the name of science and biomedical practices? How do the people coopting the space and its benefits justify their claims and yet, at the same time, denounce the former beliefs and practices that people associated with that same space? The shrine of Hazrati Ayub and its sacred mineral waters at Ayub Bulak (Ayub’s spring) present just such a place.

The tenth century Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi mentions the healing waters at the shrine of Hazrati Ayub located outside of the village of Jalalabad, which provides precedence for Hazrati Ayub as a pilgrimage site from the medieval period.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the establishment of Russian Turkestan, Russian scientists identified the Jalalabad mineral springs as a viable location to establish a medical treatment facility for military personnel. Throughout the Russian imperial and Soviet periods the space that locals had long known to possess the curative waters went through a series of physical transformations. Today pilgrims who visit the shrine of Hazrati Ayub and the patients who seek medical treatment and other therapies at the Jalalabad Kurort (sanatorium) share the grounds and the healing waters.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shrine Guardian, Ayub-Bulak, interview by Jennifer Webster, Jalalabad, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011. Ayyub (the Biblical Job) is among the prophets of Islam and receives two mention in the Qur’an, Q21:73 and Q38:41. Islamic tradition presents Ayyub as the subject of Iblis’ jealousy. Iblis asks Allah to allow him to test Ayyub and take away his wealth, his family, and his health. The afflictions are eventually relieved as Ayyub drinks from and bathes in a sacred spring. See Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 157-60.

<sup>3</sup> “Al-Moqaddisi,” in *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, v. 3, M. J. Goeje, ed., (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1906), 46. For the life of al-Muqaddasi who lived at least until 990 C.E., see A. Miquel, “al-Muqaddasī,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> I use the terms kurort and sanatorium interchangeably to mean health spa, however, sometimes sanatoriums are distinguished by large hotels such as some of the sanatoriums in Sochi, Russia. The official name of the resort in question here is Kurort “Jalalabad.” Kurort is a loan word to Russian and Kyrgyz from German.

In this chapter I explore the complex ways in which people associate health (both good and bad) with shrines in Central Asia, and how, if at all, the ways in which they make these associations change over time. How do people attribute healing to shrines? Although shrines and other places with water that people consider sacred and beneficial to health exist throughout the Islamic world as well as in other religious milieus, the shrine of Hazrati Ayub offers a conspicuous example of a shrine that was refashioned through an imperial Russian agenda and then later through a Soviet agenda, yet survived as a place of active *ziyarat*.<sup>5</sup> Like many mineral springs located within the territory of the Soviet Union, the spring at Hazrati Ayub became the foundation for the development of a Soviet medical and resort facility. The Soviet anti-religious campaign decried the indigenous medical and religious practices that incorporated the waters of the spring, but at the same time these same waters were employed for treatments in the “modern” Soviet medical and resort facility. I argue that through a process of forgetting, the proponents of contemporary biomedicine seek to undermine indigenous healing practices, yet do not meet the needs of many people who continue to turn to indigenous healing practices and prayer for miracles when faced with the limitations of contemporary biomedicine.<sup>6</sup> With overlapping systems of medicine (biomedical and indigenous healing), patients may also readily mix and match therapies and procedures to accommodate their conditions and needs. This

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<sup>5</sup> Healing waters from mineral springs exist around the world. Some notable examples include the following: baths in Split and Bursa described by the Ottoman traveller, Evliya Çelebi, which were known for curing any number of skin diseases including leprosy, psoriasis, and scabies; the holy waters at Lourdes, France; and the Well of Zamzam at Mecca.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term “contemporary biomedicine” to refer to Western scientific-based medical practices and “indigenous healing” when referring to the medical practices performed by healers who received their training outside of formal medical institutions. The terms “modern” and “traditional” are problematic, but alternative renderings also have ample problems. For an example of an alternate way of demarcating these terms, see Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), in which the author chooses to use the terms “biomedicine” and “ethnomedicine.” Others employ terms such as “folk healing,” “alternative medicine,” or “sacred healing.” For a history of the use of the term “biomedicine” in the medical anthropology, see Atwood D. Gaines and Robbie Davie-Floyd, “Biomedicine,” in *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*, ed. Melvin Ember and Carol Ember (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 95-109.

chapter intersects with the emergent body of scholarly literature that seeks to understand the process by which the Russian and later Soviet cultural conceptions dominated the discourses of medicine, hygiene, and ethnic hierarchy in Central Asia through a process that referenced many tools of colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Political and medical institutions developed with these conceptions as their foundation, and the indigenous people often willingly or unwillingly accommodated them. The ongoing practices of *ziyarat* and indigenous healing, however, offered a counterpoint and, at times, a point of resistance to the imposed normative framework.

This chapter opens with a trip to the grounds of the Jalalabad Kurort and a description of the current state of its facilities and the shrine of Hazrati Ayub, which is located on the Kurort's grounds. Here too, I demonstrate the ubiquity of shrines as places where miracles of healing occur. This healing is often channeled through one or multiple natural features of the shrine and is guided by a mullah or other ritual specialist. The following two sections provide a history of Hazrati Ayub during the Imperial Russian and Soviet periods. In the final section I question the limits of contemporary biomedicine in Kyrgyzstan and more generally in Central Asia. I hypothesize that the ongoing pilgrimage to shrines and engagement in the rich and varied practices of indigenous healers expose a post-Soviet conundrum where many people's health needs are not being addressed sufficiently. Alternatively, the practice of *ziyarat* may attest to a belief that health concerns can only be fulfilled outside of biomedical treatments or through some combination of biomedical and indigenous therapies where in particular situations one type of treatment is preferable regardless of its outcome.

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<sup>7</sup> On the Russian imperial and early Soviet periods in Kazakhstan and the Kazakh context, see Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers*, on Kazakhstan and the Kazakh context; and on Russian Turkistan and Uzbekistan, see Cassandra Marie Cavanaugh, "Backwardness and Biology: Medicine and Power in Russian and Soviet Central Asia, 1868-1934" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001).

## Sacred Springs and Miracles

Driving outside of the city of Jalalabad, the road zigzags up into the rolling hills. At the end of the road is the main entrance to the Jalalabad Kurort, a Soviet era sanatorium that still functions as a medical facility and vacation destination today. The staff members of the sanatorium provide health evaluations for potential patients. There is a wide range of treatment options depending on the patient's diagnosis. The Jalalabad Kurort is well known for its geothermal waters, and many of the treatment options incorporate water therapy, through baths, alternating hot water and cold water therapy, steam, sauna, and the ingestion of water. Other treatments include prescribed exercise, nutrition recommendations, pharmaceutical therapy, mud treatments, massage therapy, and other types of bodywork. People travel to the Jalalabad Kurort from all over Kyrgyzstan and also from abroad, especially from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.<sup>8</sup> For those who travel longer distances, local accommodations allow the visitors to remain for several days, weeks, or even months at the sanatorium.

The grounds of the sanatorium include several *chaikhanas* (teahouses or restaurant-cafés). These are permanent structures, most of them built after the 1950s. They still reflect the decorative influences of the Soviet era (Figure 5.1).<sup>9</sup> The same food is served at all of the locations, and is limited to what is on hand in any given day – usually *shorpo* (soup), *nan* (bread), tea, and locally brewed beer. Paths wind around the structures where visitors can stroll or take their prescribed physical activity in the form of walking. The main building of the Kurort, which was built in the 1960s, houses the treatment rooms and hydrotherapy facilities. Several other

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<sup>8</sup> By the late 1800s the mineral spring in Jalalabad was well known and visited by people from all over Turkestan. See Diuishe Aitmambetov, *Kultura Kirgizskogo naroda vo vtoroi polovine XIX i nachale XX v.* (Frunze: Ilim, 1967), 241.

<sup>9</sup> The ceiling of this yurt-shaped permanent structure highlighted individual panels dedicated to the Soviet republics. Photo by author, October 2011.

smaller buildings, including the reconstructed tomb of Hazrati Ayub (2002), and a mosque, also exist on the grounds of the Kurort.

Throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus, people have revered the natural mineral waters of the springs that are fed from melting snow and underground sources. People associate these mineral water springs with curative properties. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have an abundance of such places, and even if the springs were converted into medical facilities and resorts under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, these places are often the home of active post-Soviet *ziyarat*. Each spring is characterized as having particular curative properties. For example, in the Wakkhan Corridor, there are a series of such springs. The Bibi Fatima spring is known for its ability to cure infertility. Auj Chashma (Zenith Spring), a spring that feeds a series of gender segregated pools, cures ailments of the eyes, and Garm Chashma (Hot Spring), a sulfur hot spring, is excellent for dermatological issues such as psoriasis. Near the Afghan border in Khatlon Province, Tajikistan the Chehel Chahor Chashma (44 springs) is a popular destination for both pilgrimage and relaxation. According to legend these 44 springs arose in the desert climate that surrounds the shrine at the request of Ali when his army found itself without water. Everywhere Ali took a step, water spouted out from the arid soil. Pilgrims believe in the curative properties of these waters and visit this site to make requests to Allah. Khatlon Province in Tajikistan also has numerous shrines that contain sacred waters that pilgrims visit because of the perceived curative properties.

Lake Issyk Kul in northeastern Kyrgyzstan is fed by a series of underground springs that increase in volume with the spring snow melts. The Soviets transformed many of these springs into sanatoriums and resorts, notably at Cholpon Ata (Aurora), Bar Bulak (near Karakol), and

Jeti Ögüz.<sup>10</sup> Cult places associated with both pre-Islamic and Islamic rituals and burials are located in the territory around the lake.<sup>11</sup> Manjaly Ata is one of the most famous of the shrines on the southern shore. At Manjaly Ata seven outlets of the same spring supply the waters for the different stations of this itinerary-pilgrimage shrine. Each separate outlet of the spring at Manjaly Ata is professed to cure a different health concern, including infertility, heart disease, and eye ailments as well as other illnesses.<sup>12</sup>

For the shrines that have been converted into medical and resort facilities, complete with accommodations, the sites of traditional healing and Islamic shrines have shifted their locations. For instance, at Garm Chashma near Ishkoshim in southern Tajikistan, the main area for bathing in the sulfur hot spring is regulated and is open alternatively to men or women on a rotating schedule each day. Not far away from the official bathing area is another outlet for the spring, where locals are able to obtain the same benefits of the waters without paying an entrance fee or adhere to the gender separation. At this outlet both men and women cover their bodies with mud, lie in the sun to let the mud dry, and then swim in the waters to remove the mud. Their purpose is to obtain the benefits for their skin just as was the goal of those who enter the official bathing area. This area of Tajikistan has an active rural shrine circuit that shares characteristics with the shrines around Issyk Kul and those in southern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Issyk Ata in Chui oblast is another notable example of a Soviet-developed kurort in Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>11</sup> For descriptions of the sacred places around lake Issyk Kul, see Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aida Egemberdieva, eds., *Ysyk Köldögü yiyk jerler: kasiyet, zyarat, önör* (Bishkek: Aigine, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> During the dry season, one of the local shrine guardians fills the springs from a bucket so that pilgrims can still perform their rituals. For another example, the irrigation system and natural water drainage pattern at Sulaiman Too in Osh oblast supplies the water that drips in the small grotto where pilgrims ask for long life or a good afterlife.

<sup>13</sup> Although she does not discuss the sanatoriums mentioned here, the historian Jo-Ann Gross brings to light the importance of shrine networks in the Gorno-Badakhshan area of Tajikistan and how shrines are integral to understanding the Ismaili identity of the people who visit and care for those shrines, maintaining them through integrated oral and written traditions. Jo-Ann Gross, "Foundational Legends,

Just below the Jalalabad Kurort, off the road that leads to it, is a second outlet of its spring. Part of this area contains the remains of Soviet-era picnic grounds with an official plaque explaining that the waters here are good for the heart. Just beyond this area is a small ritual house maintained by a mullah and his wife. The mullah receives pilgrims and presides over rituals, and his wife is the caretaker of the shrine, which includes management the groups of pilgrims and organization of the food preparation. Looping past the ritual house, pilgrims can visit another outlet to the Jalalabad spring. In gender-segregated groups, pilgrims cover their bodies in the mud made orangish-brown from iron deposits, wait for it to dry, and then rinse it off in the thermal waters. As at the Garm Chashma in Tajikistan, this spring is intended to cure dermatological conditions. Many of these springs and curative waters in Central Asia were well known prior to the arrival of the Russians. Some springs had established facilities and local representatives who received visitors. The Russian and other European empires began sending out exploratory expeditions to document everything from the geography and topography to the people and their customs. These expeditions often included medical doctors and other scientists.

### **The Russian Hospital**

As early as 1877, doctors and chemists of the Russian Empire became interested in the waters of Hazrati Ayub that locals had known about since medieval times. In 1877, a certain Andijon-based Doctor Mezdrikov introduced the spring of Hazrati Ayub to Russians when he wrote the first report that included a medical-topographical description of Jalalabad. Two years later in a lab in Tashkent, N. B. Tekhom conducted an analysis of the Jalalabad spring's waters

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Shrines, and Ismā'īlī Identity in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan,” in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 164-92.

with bottled water sent to him by Doctor Mezdrikov.<sup>14</sup> In 1885, a medical and pharmaceutical commission studied the waters on site.

As early as 1884, some 50 lower-ranking soldiers who had become ill or injured were treated at the Jalalabad springs. By the following year, the Russian army established an infirmary at Jalalabad to treat soldiers who were wounded in the fighting against the Kokand Khanate. At this point officers as well as lower-ranking soldiers received treatment at the sanitary-hygienic facilities and a makeshift hospital. News of the healing powers of the Jalalabad spring spread throughout the Russian Empire as more people received treatment there and as new reports surfaced about the therapeutic benefits of the thermal waters.<sup>15</sup> Local people continued to visit the spring during this period even with the establishment of the Russian facility. The conviviality at the Jalalabad springs appears to be in contrast with other parts of Russian Turkestan.

In the capital of Russian Turkestan, Tashkent, the Russians questioned the sanitation and hygiene practices of the local Sart population.<sup>16</sup> While working as a teacher in Tashkent, Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov wrote a monumental ethnography on the Sarts of Russian Turkestan.<sup>17</sup> Ostroumov describes what he considers to be the poor sanitary conditions of Sart settlements, including the nature of their homes, the close construction between buildings, the “narrow and crooked” streets that he claims do not accommodate sufficient air circulation, and the dirt and

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<sup>14</sup> Diuishe Aitmambetov, *Kultura Kīrgizskogo naroda vo vtoroi polovine XIX i nachale XX v.* (Frunze: Ilim, 1967), 240.

<sup>15</sup> Aitmambetov, *Kultura Kīrgizskogo naroda*, 241.

<sup>16</sup> Sart was a term applied to denote settled and urban-dwelling Turkic peoples primarily to distinguish them from nomadic peoples and sometimes to distinguish them from other settled Persian-speaking populations (Tajiks).

<sup>17</sup> N. P. Ostroumov, *Sarty: etnograficheskie materialy*, vol. 1-3 (Tashkent: *Izd. avtora*, 1890-95). For Ostroumov’s career and his views on Islam, see Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 275-6; and Elena Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 76-9 and 99-105.

dung-heaps left on the roads and in the yards.<sup>18</sup> Related to water sources and hygiene, he observes that, “the lack of clean drinking water, puddles and piles of stinking mud in autumn and spring, and contaminated ponds contributed to the spread of epidemics among the population [of Sarts].”<sup>19</sup> According to Ostroumov the lack of sanitation standards cultivated an environment that facilitated the spread of disease. He points out that, “[t]he proximity of clover and rice fields to the villages and towns of Sarts in turn supports a population of debilitating fever, as can be judged by the records of outpatient clinics.”<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, Ostroumov laments the fact that Russian doctors do not inquire more about Sart medical practices. He writes that “[a]s for traditional Sart medicine – on this special issue, I do not judge; Nevertheless, I have heard that Sart doctors successfully treat many diseases. Unfortunately, the Russian doctors and the native doctors are reluctant to approach each other.”<sup>21</sup> Although Ostroumov is skeptical of Sart practices in general and dislikes Islam, he still believes that Russian and Sart doctors might have something to gain in sharing their knowledge and methods of treatment. In the 1880s and 1890s both Russian doctors and locals sought cures alongside each other at the Jalalabad spring, but it is unclear if they interacted with one another as per Ostroumov’s suggestion, and if so, to what degree they collaborated.

After the Russian Empire defeated the Khanate of Kokand, it expanded its operations in the Ferghana Valley. By 1901 the Jalalabad infirmary consisted of two unfurnished rooms that contained a reception area, an examination room, and an understocked pharmacy. The facilities included barracks and yurts. The rooms were quite simple, unfurnished, and with no storage for the medical equipment. In 1902, 17 new cabins (mostly single-room) were built on the premises

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<sup>18</sup> Ostroumov, *Sarty*, v. 1, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Ostroumov, *Sarty*, v. 1, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ostroumov, *Sarty*, v. 1, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ostroumov, *Sarty*, v. 1, 53.

so that more patients could take advantage of staying at the infirmary. Along with this new permanent construction, up to 50 temporary yurts were added to the operation during the high season from July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> to accommodate the influx of patients.<sup>22</sup>

During this period the Jalalabad infirmary began to formulate itself as a Russian institution that incorporated locals to help assist with the quickly expanding operation. The Russian physicians managed the care of the military personnel but also took water to local residents who had fallen ill and offered medical advice to visitors whose numbers kept increasing. At this time the Russian infirmary primarily cared for patients on an outpatient basis.<sup>23</sup> Now the Russian infirmary had local employees and local patients. The new employees lived in the cabins and yurts, earning 5-10 rubles a month for assisting with the administration of the infirmary.<sup>24</sup> Both the employees and patients had to do their own cooking outdoors because of the lack of indoor facilities. During World War I, the military infirmary at Jalalabad continued to gain notoriety for treating soldiers who had been injured during active duty and brought from the front.

Apart from injuries received during military campaigns, it is likely that the Jalalabad infirmary treated other common diseases that circulated amongst the local people and visitors. Some of these diseases may have included the list of illnesses that Ostroumov pointed to as afflicting the sedentarized population in the region, which would have included the population of Jalalabad. He describes the following diseases as being prevalent in Russian Turkestan in the 1890s: “Sart” disease (*pasha khurba*) and leprosy (*mach*) in Tashkent; goiter in Ferghana; and

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<sup>22</sup> M. Rozhdestvenskii, *Khazret-Aiupskie teplye vody i Djalal-Abadskaia sanitarno-gigienicheskaia stantsiia: Ezhegodnik Ferganskoi oblasti* (Novyi Margelan: Vol. 1, 1902), 70-72; and Aitmambetov, 241.

<sup>23</sup> Aitmambetov, *Kultura Kirgizskogo naroda*, 241, n. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Aitmambetov, *Kultura Kirgizskogo naroda*, 241.

guinea worm in the Samarqand region.<sup>25</sup> The rising popularity of the Jalalabad spring would have advertised a potential solution to many of those afflicted with dermatological, rheumatic, and parasitic diseases. The perpetuation of the legend of Hazrati Ayub combined with the often distinct and potentially beneficial treatments by foreign Russian doctors would have drawn patients whose afflictions could otherwise not be diagnosed.<sup>26</sup>

### **A Soviet Sanatorium**

As the representatives of the Russian Empire before them, the Soviets admired the benefits of the mineral waters located within their territories and built a series of sanatoriums to harness the waters and utilize them for medical treatments. They constructed sanatoriums and resorts from the Black Sea coast to Central Asia, creating a network of facilities used by members of the Communist Party, trade union workers, the elderly, and the infirm.<sup>27</sup> Workers would obtain vouchers to stay at a particular vacation spot or medical facility for a predetermined

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<sup>25</sup> Ostroumov, *Sarty*, v. 1, 53. “Sart” disease may be what other contemporaneous authors referred to as the “Oriental sore,” which is characterized by painful skin ulcers. For a thorough list of variations on the name at the turn of the twentieth century, see Frank G. Clemow, *The Geography of Disease* (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), 540-3. Today the medical community knows that Leishmaniasis (“Sart” disease) is caused by a parasite, which uses a vector species to infect humans in tropical and sub-tropical climates. See <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/leishmaniasis/>. Nearly eradicated today, the illness caused by Guinea worm is caused by a parasitic worm in found in drinking water mostly in tropical climates. The worm re-infects water supplies when it prepares to exit its victims through their feet. The afflicted person will try to alleviate the pain by plunging their feet into water, thus re-infecting the water source. For a contemporaneous description see Clemow, 594-600.

<sup>26</sup> Consultation of contemporaneous indigenous medical treatises, handbooks on medicine, amulets, and prescriptions for various diseases could yield a more complex picture of indigenous medical practices, their compatibility with Russian medical practices, and the potential outcomes as too how much the two systems were complementary. These sources could also confirm Ostroumov’s and Russian scientific accounts of the pervasiveness and prognosis for various diseases. For the potential of these currently untouched sources, see Devin DeWeese, “Muslim Medical Culture in Modern Central Asia: a Brief Note on Manuscript Sources from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” *Central Asian Survey* 32 (2013): 3-18.

<sup>27</sup> For a thorough history of travel and tourism in the Soviet Union, see Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 2013). Koenker does not reference the Jalalabad Kurort, but (*ibid*, 229-30) does mention the increase in the promotion of tours in Central Asia in the 1960s.

amount of time. Members of the Communist Party and those with more prestigious positions stayed at more upscale facilities and received longer leave from work. Some of the more upscale facilities were located in Kyrgyzstan and included the Jeti Ögüz, Aurora, Issyk Ata, and the Jalalabad Kurort. A disparity between Russian and non-Russian nationalities was apparent in this highly regulated system as well, and few, if any of the local people would have taken treatments at these facilities.

The symbiotic relationship between the Russian imperial infirmary and the shrine of Hazrati Ayub fell to the wayside, however, and the Soviet vision for the Jalalabad spring grew to exclude any potential threats of local religious practices. The process to eliminate perceived religious threats from the grounds of the Jalalabad Kurort began after World War II and would reach its zenith in the 1960s. As Eren Murat Tasar acknowledges,

The methodology of closing a shrine and constricting the shaykhs became a difficult subject when the holy site in question concerned a spring releasing holy water. Both the Muslim population and the Party-state recognized the salubrious nature of these waters, but the latter stressed the harm caused by any association between their medical properties and belief in miracles or saintly intervention.<sup>28</sup>

The Party-state could not merely restrict people from the premises of the Jalalabad Kurort or tell the pilgrims that the mineral waters did not have curative properties when a prominent Soviet institution operated on the same territory as the shrine and utilized the same waters as the pilgrims for medical and therapeutic treatments. Furthermore, since the early 1900s the Russian infirmary, and, later, Jalalabad Kurort, first established in 1928, had employed local people to help manage the facilities and had not yet hindered the activities of the sheikhs who received pilgrims.<sup>29</sup> During the Great Terror many of these sheikhs were exiled, arrested, or removed

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<sup>28</sup> Eren Murat Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim: the Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 283.

<sup>29</sup> These sheikhs were part of a local hereditary lineage of *khojas* who had served Ayub-Bulak for centuries and had paid tribute to the Kokand Khanate. Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim,” 284.

from the premises to a neighboring *kolkhoz* (collective farm).<sup>30</sup> These sheikhs continued to serve the needs of the pilgrims after securing employment in the Jalalabad Kurort's "kitchen and in the grounds, maintenance, and waste removal departments."<sup>31</sup> In 1947 Hakim Abdullovich Akhtiamov, Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults's (CARC) representative in Kyrgyzstan, blamed World War II as the only reason why the Jalalabad Kurort had not seen the eradication of the *khoja* lineage of sheikhs at the shrine of Hazrati Ayub.<sup>32</sup>

The logistics of administering the Jalalabad Kurort in the 1950s included the oversight of an expansion of the facilities and an attempt to remove the unwanted religious practitioners from the site. By the 1950s, the Jalalabad Kurort was regularly identified as a priority resort place along with other high-profile sanatoriums, especially Jeti Ögüz and Issyk Ata. On August 24, 1955 Comrade G. S. Eremenko complained to the Ministry of Health's division of resorts, who oversaw the regulation of sanatoriums, that rural sanatoriums in Kyrgyzstan had received less attention than the Jalalabad Kurort, and that because of its proximity to an urban area (and thus closer to the administrative center) the Jalalabad Kurort was the only sanatorium that had submitted a two-three year plan. Part of that plan was to expand the outpatient sector by the following year (1956).<sup>33</sup> The plan for 1956 at the Jalalabad Kurort included an extensive construction project. The Ministry of Public Utilities was slated to erect a hotel with 50 rooms and the Department of Commerce had agreed to build a dining hall with a 100-person capacity.<sup>34</sup> Prior to this the Jalalabad Kurort hosted anywhere from 200-250 patients per month

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 284.

<sup>31</sup> Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 284.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 284.

<sup>33</sup> TsGA KR, f. 2627, op. 1, d. 13, l. 25.

<sup>34</sup> TsGA KR, f. 2627, op. 1, d. 13, l. 21.

with anywhere from 15-33 patients checking-in to the facility on any given day throughout the year.<sup>35</sup>

As for the eradication of the religious elements still pervasive on the grounds of the Jalalabad Kurort, the first step in 1951 was a failed proposal from CARC to replace the local workers with Russian workers. It was well known that the Kurort employed many of the sheikhs and that by employing them the Kurort was sanctioning their supplementary activities as sheikhs. However, at least one of the prominent sheikhs had worked on the grounds in the sole function as a sheikh and had no affiliation with the Jalalabad Kurort as an employee. Some of the activities that were deemed disruptive to the functionality of the Kurort included animal sacrifice (between five and ten animals daily – most likely sheep and chickens), the performance of other rituals associated with Ayub-Bulak, and the vending of religious items and sacred water both inside the Kurort and on the road that led up to its entrance.<sup>36</sup>

Nearly a decade later, in 1958-9, the directorship of the Jalalabad Kurort became more serious about disbanding the sheikhs and barring pilgrims for the premises of the sanatorium. The new measures included involvement of the police, restrictions on who could enter the grounds of the Kurort, threats of criminal prosecution, a shakedown of the Kurort's employees. Meanwhile, the tomb of Hazrati Ayub was covered with cement.<sup>37</sup> Yet some sheikhs still oversaw religious activities on the grounds of the Kurort and received pilgrims in 1960.<sup>38</sup> Figure 5.2 depicts a sheikh praying with pilgrims in a wooded grove rather than near or within any kind of edifice. However, over the next few years the directorship and medical staff of the Jalalabad Kurort witnessed a clear decline in the number of pilgrims visiting the shrine of Hazrati Ayub,

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<sup>35</sup> TsGA KR, f. 2627, op. 1, d. 13, l. 136-141.

<sup>36</sup> See Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 284, n. 620-2.

<sup>37</sup> Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim," 285.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, in 1960 evidence was collected regarding the ongoing, banned practices at the Kurort. Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva," photograph 1.

especially after the sheikhs were forcibly removed. This time of triumph was short lived, however, and within a year of the winding down of the anti-religious campaign, reports that pilgrims and sheikhs disrupted the rest and relaxation of the patients of the Jalalabad Kurort began to resurface. In a newspaper article from 1965 entitled, “Kurort or Mecca,” Z. Leiderman, a vacationer at the Jalalabad Kurort, explained that, “[t]he main purpose of the “Jalalabad” Kurort, as you know, is to restore workers’ health. And all the effort of its staff, from the nurses to the chief physician, is aimed at creating a positive environment for the patients.”<sup>39</sup> He is clear that he believes the Kurort’s medical staff is responsible for ensuring a quality experience in addition to the coordination of patient care. He goes on to describe the activities of the sheikhs and pilgrims that presumably had reemerged after their eradication in 1962: “Here [at the Jalalabad Kurort] from morning until late at night in different areas of the grounds, people recite prayers and perform ritual cleansing of children and adults.”<sup>40</sup> Leiderman is particularly concerned due to the potential hazard of water contamination. The pilgrims wash painful soars and ulcers on their bodies in the same sources that supply drinking water. Beyond the sanitation concerns, Leiderman is dismayed at the “insults and physical violence” paid to the sanatorium workers when they attempt to restrict the pilgrims’ ritual activities. Although there is a policeman on duty at the Kurort, he “cannot cope alone with the influx of believers,” and Leiderman places the blame on the inadequacy of local authorities in Jalalabad whom he claims have full knowledge of the situation but “do not take effective measures” and “fight back against the backwardness” of the masses. The lack of educational materials on Atheism at the Jalalabad Kurort and the fact that the local people and pilgrims do not differentiate between Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnicity further causes Leiderman to denounce the shortcomings of the sanatorium’s

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<sup>39</sup> Z. Leiderman, “Kurort ili ‘Mekka’,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, August 11, 1965.

<sup>40</sup> Z. Leiderman, “Kurort ili ‘Mekka’.”

staff and the community officials.<sup>41</sup> While many of these concerns are merely grounded in the themes of anti-religious propaganda developed in earlier Soviet anti-religious campaigns, certain sanitation practices may have been legitimately alarming.

The backlash against shrine places in Kyrgyzstan and the other Soviet Central Asian republics during Khrushchev's heightened anti-religious campaign may have been one of the most troubled times for pilgrims and people whose livelihoods depended on pilgrimage. Although this period saw the disruption of pilgrimage and the activities of local religious specialists, its effects were felt only temporarily. The sheikhs and pilgrims returned to the shrine of Hazrati Ayub, even with the oppositional attitudes like those espoused by the vacationer, Z. Leiderman (Figure 5.3).<sup>42</sup> The historic integration of the lineage of local sheikhs into the Jalalabad Kurort's operations was more enduring than the Soviet anti-religious campaign (Figure 5.4).<sup>43</sup> Even the sheikhs who oversee the shrine today claim descent from the same lineage of *khojas*.<sup>44</sup>

Similar attacks on the perceived health benefits of making *ziyarat* can be observed at other shrines in southern Kyrgyzstan during the anti-religious campaign of 1958-64. Iurii Petrash exclaims that "the sick and suffering will certainly not find liberation from their illness in the dust and soil" in referring to the pilgrimage practices at the shrine of Idris Paygambar in the Chatkal region.<sup>45</sup> At Safed Bulan, women were buying snail shells of different shapes depending on whether they hoped to have a son or daughter.<sup>46</sup> The mullahs at Sulaiman Too charged specific

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<sup>41</sup> Z. Leiderman, "Kurort ili 'Mekka'."

<sup>42</sup> In 1968 pilgrims returned to the Jalalabad Kurort in large numbers, even with the supposed closure of the shrine of Hazrati Ayub. Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva," photograph 2.

<sup>43</sup> Two sheikhs proudly posed for a photo in front of the mausoleum of Hazrati Ayub in 1967. Sulaiman-Too UTAMK, "Mesta religioznogo palomnichestva," photograph 29.

<sup>44</sup> Shrine Guardian, Ayub-Bulak, interview by Jennifer Webster, Jalalabad, Kyrgyz Republic, October 2011.

<sup>45</sup> I. G. Petrash, "Pravda o 'sviatykh mestakh'," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January 5, 1962.

<sup>46</sup> Petrash, "Pravda o 'sviatykh mestakh'."

amounts to read the Qur'an and to pray for a healthy child.<sup>47</sup> Echoing Leiderman's criticism, other anti-religious authors protested that these practices caused harm to children both in terms of their health and in that they detracted from a communist upbringing.<sup>48</sup>

The anti-religious campaign of 1958-64, while ultimately unsuccessful, certainly cultivated the seeds of doubt about the efficacy of pilgrimage and the activities related to pilgrimage in the minds of a large segment of the population. Questions about the permissibility of *ziyarat* in Islam, the treatments of healers and other religious specialists, and the rituals performed at shrines remain leitmotifs of the ongoing debates about shrines in Kyrgyzstan today.<sup>49</sup> However, insufficient answers to these questions, coupled with the limits of contemporary biomedical practices in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz Republic, may explain why people continue to practice *ziyarat*.

### **Limits of Contemporary Biomedicine**

Why do people continue to seek cures and blessings at shrines? How does the ongoing practice of *ziyarat* inform our understanding of current biomedical practices in the Kyrgyz Republic? What are the social and cultural pressures that influence individual choices about medical care? How do those making these choices then “represent” or construct what those “pressures” are? This section explores these questions by looking at the several factors that influence individual medical choices and, in particular, focuses on the topic of fertility, which is often one of the key components for women choosing to go on *ziyarat*. It is important to note the

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<sup>47</sup> G. Musipov, “Otdykh ili palomnichestvo?” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, October 13, 1960.

<sup>48</sup> Musipov, “Otdykh ili palomnichestvo?”; and Petrash, “Pravda o ‘sviatykh mestakh’.”

<sup>49</sup> Gulmatov Rustambek, All-Kyrgyzstan Director of Local Mosques and Madrasas, interview by Jennifer Webster, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, July 2012.

discrepancies between urban and rural access to medical care, socio-economic status, and patterns of religious practices.

In the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, the state assigns individuals to a particular physician. This process is determined by the person's address of registration. If one wishes to see a physician outside of one's residential zone, they can do so by making a private financial arrangement with a specific physician. People can elect to go to private clinics if they have the financial means. The disparity between the medical facilities and the quality of care between the public and private medical establishments is apparent. This does not mean that physicians who work for public clinics do not have sufficient training, but they do not have the resources, supplies, or equipment necessary to provide optimal care for all patients. The conditions in the rural areas of the country are even more limited, often consisting of undersupplied clinics.

Although there are shortcomings within the healthcare system in the Kyrgyz Republic, certain areas of maternal and infant healthcare have improved steadily since 1995.<sup>50</sup> These include reduced maternal death rates and improved infant mortality rates. There are private clinics and facilities operated by foreign organizations that provide prenatal care for women in Bishkek. The private clinic provides medical testing such as ultrasound and fetal monitoring. At the public clinics and at some of the foreign clinics fetal heartbeat and fetal development are detected using non-electronic methods. These methods are sufficient for straightforward cases but can lead to oversight in more complex cases. Blood work is collected at an independent facility that specializes in phlebotomy with the prescription of the doctor. The patient returns to receive the results, which the patient then conveys to their personal physician whether at a private or public institution.

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<sup>50</sup> World Health Organization has charted this progress.  
[http://www.who.int/gho/maternal\\_health/countries/kgz.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/gho/maternal_health/countries/kgz.pdf?ua=1) and  
<http://www.who.int/gho/countries/kgz.pdf?ua=1>

Congenital conditions such as uterine defects, failure to ovulate, adverse effects of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and reliance on induced abortions for fertility regulation can negatively impact a woman's fertility. Certain changes in social norms and in reproduction management patterns in Kyrgyzstan may contribute to an increased incidence of these complications. In the 1980s the Soviet Union legalized induced abortions as an elective choice for women who became pregnant. Prior to this law, since 1936, induced abortion had only been legal if the mother's life was in danger or there was some developmental risk to the fetus.<sup>51</sup> Although the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union experienced far fewer total induced abortions during the period following the change in law, induced abortion still became the primary method for fertility regulation. With fertility regulation being more common among the educated and urban elite, the prevalence of induced abortion among that population was prominent compared to other groups. Since independence the use of induced abortion for fertility regulation became more common among rural Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations.<sup>52</sup> In a biosocial science study, C. Shekhar, T. V. Sekher, and A. Sulaimanova explain that, "...excessive reliance on induced abortion affects a woman's health and her chances of further childbearing adversely, and contributes to maternal and perinatal mortality."<sup>53</sup> With the disparity between rural and urban health care and marked difference in quality of health care between public and private clinics, congenital conditions frequently remain undetected and access to alternative forms of contraception are often unavailable. Related to this, education about reproductive choices, contraception, and STDs is inadequate especially in rural areas.

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<sup>51</sup> See Michaels (*Curative Powers* 142-6), for a history of abortion in the Soviet Union from 1920, the decree of 1936, and prenatal propaganda.

<sup>52</sup> Chander Shekhar, T. V. Sekher, and Alina Sulaimanova, "Role of Induced Abortion in Attaining Reproductive Goals in Kyrgyzstan: A Study Based on KRDHS-1997," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 42 (2010): 477-492.

<sup>53</sup> Shekhar et al., "Reproductive Goals in Kyrgyzstan," 478.

If a couple is unable to conceive a child, it is usually left to the woman to seek assistance with fertility since she is the one with the assumed problem. There is a cultural stigma against men inquiring about male infertility, which includes both congenital and acquired conditions that can limit the success of conception. The idea the men could suffer from infertility is not generally acknowledged or even recognized as a possibility. Since as early as the nineteenth century, women in Central Asia were encouraged to become pregnant within the first year of marriage. The Russian official V. Nalivkin and his ethnographer wife M. Nalivkina describe issues related to pregnancy and childbirth of the Ferghana Valley in 1886 after living there for 40 years:

Religion and popular opinion see in progeny one of the nearest rewards for human virtue. For the same reason the barren woman, who is unable to have children, hears criticism and complaints everywhere about her husband's lack of offspring. Being called "barren" is almost the equivalent to a nasty name. Because there are cases when, not wanting to admit to barrenness, a woman says that she was pregnant, but that the fetus has caused an adhesion, so she cannot get pregnant a second time. Such a story about an imaginary undeveloped fetus is not uncommon.<sup>54</sup>

Not being able to conceive a child led to difficulties for the woman because the in-laws attributed the problem to the wife and did not even consider the possibility that there were other factors such as male infertility. If a woman failed to become pregnant she was at risk of being divorced and sent home to her natal family in disgrace. The man's family would arrange a new marriage with the idea that the first wife they had selected was to blame for the couple's inability to conceive. It was vital for a woman to become pregnant if she wished to remain married. Visits to shrines and to indigenous healers were means to improve fertility.

For women who are able to conceive, miscarriage, pregnancy complications, and stillbirth threaten her reproductive success. One woman I interviewed in Kerben, who was seven months'

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<sup>54</sup> V. Nalivkin and M. Nalivkina, *Ocherk byta zhenshchiny osedlogo tuzemnogo naseleniia Fergany* (Kazan: Tipografiia Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1886), 167-8.

pregnant, had lost a child during childbirth as a result of inadequate rural medical care and lack of equipment for fetal monitoring. Devastated at the loss and suspicious of her physician, she went to Sulaiman Too to pray for another child, who would be born without the misfortune she had experienced during her previous pregnancy.

Indigenous healers play crucial roles in the lives of women who do not have access to medical facilities or who have exhausted other medical avenues. Healers provide a wide range of services for their clients. Gulshan Koichubekova, the healer from Ak Suu (Chapter Four), receives many people who come to her for healing sessions. She helps them, among other things, with good wishes (*kaitartma*), getting rid of bad luck (*bak achuu* – opening happiness and *jol achuu* – opening the way), finding a husband, restoring bravery through lifting the heart (*jörük kütüröö*), treatment of women’s infertility, curing children, divination, energy healing, massage, healing with the hands, herbal therapy, special diets, healing with secret prayers, giving *tumar* (amulet), and healing with Allah’s 99 holy names.<sup>55</sup> The range of treatments that Gulshan offers is mostly for the benefit of women and children. Paula Michaels divides indigenous healers in Kazakhstan into several categories who perform distinctive services for their clients.<sup>56</sup> As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, the designations for different types of indigenous healers vary across regions and time, and their services are equally fluid.<sup>57</sup> According to Paula Michaels there are three primary categories of indigenous healers in Kazakhstan: shamans (*baqsy*), mullahs, and folk doctors (*darigerler*).<sup>58</sup> Shamans specialized in matters of the spirit realm and the performance of healing rituals. Mullahs served as healers through prayer for the sick, the offering of blessings, and the

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<sup>55</sup> Gulshan Koichubekova, religious specialist, interview by Jennifer Webster, Mukur, Kyrgyz Republic, July 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Michaels, *Curative Powers*, 24-35.

<sup>57</sup> As Michaels notes (*Curative Powers*, 30), “the Kazakh language is rich in terms for these types of medical practitioners (*darigerler*).”

<sup>58</sup> Ethnomedical practitioners.

preparation of amulets. Folk doctors relied on empirical knowledge that they had of their environment, including the curative properties of products derived from plants and animals. Michaels explains that, “folk doctors relied more on observation and experience than on faith in the spiritual world.”<sup>59</sup> In Michaels’ estimation there is a clear divide between indigenous healers who work with spirits or Allah and those who work with naturopathic remedies. Sixteen healers interviewed by anthropologist Johan Rasanayagam in Andijon and Samarqand in 2003 and 2004 differentiated themselves from those who employ the help of *jinn*s, which they consider evil or bad.<sup>60</sup> They generally believed that *baqshys* employed these evil spirits to do their bidding and that these *baqshys* neglected to articulate their healing practices as the work of Allah and in an Islamic framework.

Gulshan, the healer from the village of Mukur (Chapter Four), works with spirits (*azizder*).<sup>61</sup> She provides services that restore balance between the strength of the spiritual world and the human realm. Her healing repertoire includes the preparation of amulets and the offering of blessings; she attributes her powers to the spirits of shrines and as a gift from Allah, and she has a rich knowledge of the natural environment from which she creates herbal remedies and plans special diets for her clients.<sup>62</sup> She also performs divination or fortune telling. In reading *kaitartma* (good wishes), Gulshan combines several of these roles:

When you tell *kaitartma* it means that you are asking Allah to help with good wishes. For example, a person comes to us and we say, it is written here, “If one is having bad luck, if there is no happiness in their families, if a person suffers, Allah permits the reading of *kaitartma*.” One has to read Sura al-Fatiha one hundred and one times. *Kaitartma* is read in water, tea. If the person to whom *kaitartma* is

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<sup>59</sup> Michaels, *Curative Powers*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Johan Rasanayagam, “Healing with Spirits and the Formation of Muslim Selfhood in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12 (2006): 377-393.

<sup>61</sup> Gulshan calls her spirits *azizder* or dear ones, however, these fall under the category of spirits or angels (*peri*) that are either neutral or employed for good purposes.

<sup>62</sup> For a parallel ethnographic account from Isyk Kul, see Jipar Duyshembeyeva, “Kyrgyz Healing Practices: Some Field Notes,” *The Silkroad Foundation Newsletter* 3 (2005): 38-44.

supposed to be read is absent, we can use their photo. I call for the spirit of the person in the photo and say, “suf-suf,” and clear the person’s aura.<sup>63</sup>

The reading of *kaitartma* requires working with spirits and ensuring that Allah not only grants permission to perform the ritual but also is the source of the healing. Gulshan does make a distinction between her work and her powers compared to Mullahs. She explains that,

Mullahs reach Allah through education. They become closer to Allah by reading the Qur’an, praying five times per day, and saying prayers. But to some people Allah gives the ability to become closer to Him right away. I, for example, was given this ability in my sleep. How should one behave to win the favor of Allah? One has to be pure of soul, without any hatred. One has to have a pure heart. One has to be fair.<sup>64</sup>

For Gulshan, the distinction lies in how healing abilities are bestowed upon mullahs and other indigenous healers. According to her, mullahs must study and focus on the principles of prayer. For herself and for others like her, they received their abilities all at once and even while asleep. The person who receives these powers must have the precondition of a pure heart and soul, and be fair. She is very clear that this power emanates from Allah. Allah gives the power and the ability to heal.

Another religious specialist, Gulnara from village of Kimen, guides groups of pilgrims to Manjaly Ata on the southern shore of lake Issyk Kul. Like Gulshan from Mukur, the former German-language teacher was called to healing. She can read people’s auras as well as clear them, she opens the way (*jol achuu*), makes herbal remedies, says prayers, recites the Qur’an, and explains the rituals of the *ziyarat* to Manjaly Ata to the pilgrims she guides.<sup>65</sup> Gulnara navigates the spiritual and human realms for her clients, and looks to Allah as having imbued her with the ability to heal and guide her clients. On the day I met Gulnara, she had travelled from Kimen

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<sup>63</sup> Gulshan Koichubekova, interview, July 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Gulshan Koichubekova, interview, July 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Gulnara, shrine guide, interview by Jennifer Webster, Manjaly Ata, Kyrgyz Republic, November 2011.

with a group of women who had asked her to accompany them to the shrine of Manjaly Ata. In Aksu, Gulshan mostly performs her healing rituals in her home, but she also travels to shrines upon request.

In 1991, many of the social and medical services that had been standard in the Soviet Union fell into decay. The reality today is that many of the once progressive medical institutions from the Soviet period are run-down, lacking the financial means to replace, or update medical equipment, maintain the facilities, or offer the most advanced therapies available on the market today. Patients who have the financial means and social connections may elect to receive care at one of the private clinics in Bishkek or travel abroad for treatments and pharmaceuticals that are unavailable in the Kyrgyz Republic. Not everyone has this ability, however, and it is often the rural and economically disadvantaged whose medical needs cannot be met. Shrines and the treatments offered by indigenous healers fill a void in medical care. They provide an alternative means of therapy that is sought after by those whose needs are not met through contemporary medicine either because they suffer from an incurable illness, a condition that cannot be diagnosed, or because they cannot access certain services due to their economic or residential status.

The structure for indigenous modes of healing in domestic settings or at shrines is well formulated and has long-standing roots. Certain shrines are known for the positive effects and curative properties of particular conditions such as skin diseases, rheumatism, and infertility. Places like Hazrati Ayub have been known for their healing powers for generations, and the benefits of the healing water at Ayub-Bulak warranted close evaluation and application both during the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. In the Kyrgyz Republic, places such as Hazrati Ayub have maintained their notoriety and remain central to indigenous healing practices, *ziyarat*, and contemporary medical therapies. *Ziyarat* to Hazrati Ayub has survived countless transitions

and threats. As contemporary medical practices have developed and access to those services has changed, indigenous healing and visiting shrines have prevailed as alternatives or supplements to contemporary medical treatments. Indigenous healing and visiting shrines help people navigate their communication with Allah and the spiritual realm, overcome illness and other obstacles, and fulfill a unique function that intertwines religion and medicine.

# Conclusion

## **Forgetting, Accepting, and Envisioning: Forging a Post-Soviet Islam**

With the dramatic growth of Central Asian studies after the dismantlement of Soviet Union, scholars have found themselves confounded with what to make of Islam in Central Asia. Recent scholarship has underscored the problems of interpreting the history and culture of the region's Muslim population through essentialist frameworks that privilege patterns of Islamic behavior from the Middle East as normative.<sup>1</sup> The historiographical and ethnographical traditions of Russian scholarship also have their limitations; some European scholars have attacked Soviet scholarship, in particular, for the sterility of its research questions or the unreliability of its data sets. Recent work in the history of Islam both within and beyond Central Asia problematizes terms like official Islam, parallel Islam, and popular Islam and replaces these concepts with other terms like Orthodox Islam, radical Islam, and everyday Islam.<sup>2</sup> This terminology does not necessarily correct the issues of the older descriptive categories and in fact often creates new problems.

This dissertation avoids making any sweeping claims, therefore, about the nature of “folk Islam” or even “vernacular Islam” in Kyrgyzstan or Central Asia as a whole. Rather, I have explored how the evolution, character, and variety of Muslim shrines in Central Asia bring into focus the nature of Islamic practices by both women and men in this particular Soviet and post-Soviet context. Geography and history have given Central Asia a particularly complex and multifaceted set of cultural, social, and political forces that shape the conception and practice of Islam in the region today.

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<sup>1</sup> Devin DeWeese, “Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: a Review Essay on Yaacov Ro'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13 (2002): 298-330.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007); and Galina Yemelianova, ed., *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Shrines offer a powerful lens through which to study the diversity and intricacy of these beliefs and practices. The ubiquitous yet evolving presence of shrines in Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan suggests that they constitute a key node for understanding the ongoing negotiation and definition of Muslim identities in Central Asia. Through analyzing the patterns of devotion at shrines, I have identified individual and communal motivations for going on *ziyarat*. I have clarified how people have adapted their patterns of devotion to physical transformations of shrine places as well as to new political and cultural developments.

By combining ethnography with archival texts, photography, and the topography of shrine sites, this dissertation explores how individuals and communities in Central Asia have understood themselves as Muslims and what *ziyarat* means to them. In exploring the shrine of Sulaiman Too in Chapter Two I demonstrated how collective memory with its processes of forgetting and remembering has shaped the interpretation, monumentalization, and experience of shrines in the Kyrgyz Republic. In Chapter Three I illustrated how the legends of Arslanbob Ata are pivotal to understanding the communal values in a mountain village whose sacred topography encompasses the contributions of its namesake through elevation of Muslim identity and economic and ecological factors ranging from forestry to tourism. The story of the indigenous healer Gulshan, in Chapters Four and Five, provided a window into women's piety, indigenous healing practices, and the challenges that many people face during times of political and cultural transition. The shrine of Safed Bulan in Chapter Four exemplifies a type of sacred space that remains exclusive to female piety and is a reminder that biological and social roles of men and women in Central Asia is a division that has strong sway for many devout Muslims. Finally, the mineral waters at Hazrati Ayub embody the core question of how Muslims in Central Asia have adapted to both internal and external appeals for modernization and medicalization. The fact that pilgrims continue to go on *ziyarat* today is a testament to people's

ability to adapt Islam and indigenous healing practice to a society that is in flux as well as to overcome significant deterrents such as the Soviet anti-religious campaign during the Khrushchev era and continuing anti-religious pressures of the late Soviet period.

By analyzing patterns of *ziyarat* and the practices associated with local pilgrimage and indigenous healing one begins to see how at times individuals and institutions continue to promote in the post-Soviet context views rooted in the imperial Russian and Soviet agendas. The Soviet period with its anti-religious campaigns and efforts to destabilize indigenous patterns of Islamic worship at shrines and to discredit the activities of religious specialists and indigenous healers is a fading memory, but some of the tools used during these campaigns have not completely disappeared from post-Soviet attitudes, especially amongst those who seek to prioritize a particular ethnic or nationalistic agenda. Some of these tools include the language used to describe activities at shrines and the transformations of shrine places into other types of spaces, such as museums or cultural sites.

As people move forward as members of an independent political state, which aspects of their identities will be privileged over others? Will the desire of international notoriety and perceived protection through organizations such as UNESCO continue to cause people to redefine themselves in terms that are institutionally valued from the distant past with a focus on architecture, inscriptions, petroglyphs, and texts – privileging historical objects rather than living people with reasons that bring them to shrines today? The promoters of Sulaiman Too as a UNESCO world heritage site are well on their way to reconfiguring the entire shrine as a museum and memorial. In time we will know if Safed Bulan's UNESCO proposal will lead it in the same direction as Sulaiman Too, or if individual variations such as the population dynamics and the location (urban or rural) will have a significant impact. Tracking the patterns of *ziyarat* and tourism at Arslanbob Ata and Hazrati Ayub will also generate results in the diverse ways in

which Muslims in southern Kyrgyzstan adapt their local piety to the changing needs of their communities.

### **Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Kyrgyz Republic**

In this dissertation I have demonstrated the vital and multivalent roles that shrines play in the lives of Muslims in the Kyrgyz Republic. Through analyzing the implications of institutionalization, ethnic and nationalist policies, economic considerations, gender roles, and medical practices, I have exposed a variety of factors that shape contemporary views of shrines and their meaning to people. While rooted in centuries-old Islamic traditions of piety, individual and communal practices at shrines have been repeatedly challenged and shaped by the interventions of state power since the 1920s. As circumstances at shrines have evolved, so too have the practices and conceptual frameworks of the men and women who visit and dwell near these shrines. The integration of ethnographic and historical sources in this dissertation has opened up new possibilities for understanding the intricate and dynamic dialogue between place, memory, and piety in the lives of both Muslims and non-Muslims in Central Asia.

By collecting oral histories and ethnographic materials, I have created an archive of contemporary viewpoints about the significance of shrines, practices of *ziyarat*, and people's memories of the repeated Soviet campaigns against shrines and pilgrimage since the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> In the post-Soviet Kyrgyz Republic, new demands on defining one's ethnicity and religious beliefs have led to debates about the permissibility of *ziyarat* and the practices of indigenous religious practitioners. By focusing on the experiences of individuals and mini-biographies of a small number of pilgrims and shrine guardians, I have tried to convey the fundamental importance of shrines in the spiritual life of many Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks today. Interviews conducted on

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<sup>3</sup> By creating an archive of contemporary ethnographic materials and oral histories I have in a way transformed communicative memory into cultural memory.

site have helped me explore the meaning of shrines through the voices and perspectives of women and local guides who are largely invisible and silent in the textual record. This aspect of my work reflects Svetlana Peshkova's call to return agency to the individual.<sup>4</sup>

My analysis of the transformations in shrine topography, the shrines' political history, and the diverse factors behind their enduring popularity cautions against any simple scheme of classification. My work thus complements and extends the insights of scholars like Sergei Abashin, who entreats scholars to find new methods for analyzing shrines and their complex role in contemporary debates about Muslim identity in Central Asia.<sup>5</sup> People's reasons for making *ziyarat*, likewise, are multifaceted, often blurring the boundaries between secular and sacred frameworks. People's understanding of shrines regularly informs how they view themselves within Kyrgyz society. By delving into individual experiences and everyday lives, we begin to see how people envision themselves as men and as women, as members of different ethnic and national groups, and as Muslims. Shrines act as a lens to people's intentions and values and how those intentions and values adapt, and act as catalysts for change. Being a Muslim is the primary identity marker for many pilgrims while they visit shrines. In Chapter Two we saw how Sulaiman Too has long served as a focal point for expressions of religious identity and how now it has become central to discussions about ethnic and national identities. Pilgrims have visited Sulaiman Too since medieval times, seemingly overcoming any obstacles placed in their way by national and international endeavors to define the purpose of or restrict access to the site. In overcoming these obstacles, pilgrims have had to accept as well as take action at times.

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<sup>4</sup> Svetlana Peshkova, *Women, Islam, and Identity: Public Life in Private Spaces in Uzbekistan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 9-12 and 260-1.

<sup>5</sup> Sergei Abashin, "Mazar of Boboi-ob: Typical and Untypical Features of Holy Places in Central Asia," in *Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang*, ed. Yasushi Shinmen, Minoru Sawada, and Edmund Waite (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 2013), 104.

Adapting values and legends to suit immediate communal and individual needs has allowed Islam to develop into its unique manifestations in Central Asia. For instance, the people of Arslanbob village have adapted their local legends to suit their immediate economic and political needs. When they faced adversity during the Soviet anti-religious campaign of 1958-1964, they effectively reconfigured their local patron saint as a Soviet hero and worker. When recounting the legend of Arslanbob Ata, people can easily replace Arslanbob Ata's friends and foes with politically appropriate and opportune examples. The people of the Arslanbob have capitalized on their local saint and the topography of the sacred landscape in and around their village through tourism, yet they have also harnessed the legend of Arslanbob Ata and his connection to that same topography to reinforce communal values that protect the land and their livelihoods.

Throughout Central Asia, women regularly gather at shrines to pray, make requests, and celebrate their successes and good luck. Shrines offer an alternate – and sometimes complementary -- environment to the more private domestic settings in which they also gather, perform rituals, and participate in religious devotion. Shrines are frequently places in which women define themselves first as Muslims. At shrines like Safed Bulan, women have special spaces that are guaranteed for women only so that they can address needs that are particular to their roles as mothers, daughters, and sisters. In both the domestic settings and at shrines, women also have the opportunity to guide, assist, pray for, and heal in the roles of religious and healing specialists.

The healing powers of shrines and the miracles associated with them have a wide appeal even for societies that have developed biomedical regimes. The shrine of Hazrati Ayub has continued to bring together people from many backgrounds who seek cures through healing waters. The grounds of the Jalalabad Kurort have undergone numerous reconfigurations since

the arrival of Russian scientists in the end of the nineteenth century. The legend of the shrine of Hazrati Ayub remains loud and clear in the voices of the *khojas* who act as the shrine's custodians. Regardless of attempts to co-opt the healing waters and undermine the shrine, people retell the legends and come to Hazrati Ayub for *ziyarat* because indigenous healing and religious practices fill a void where contemporary biomedicine cannot reach. The advent of Soviet leisure and resort spas are not as incompatible with *ziyarat* and indigenous healing as they were presumed to be in the 1950s and 1960s.

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**Films**

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## Appendix

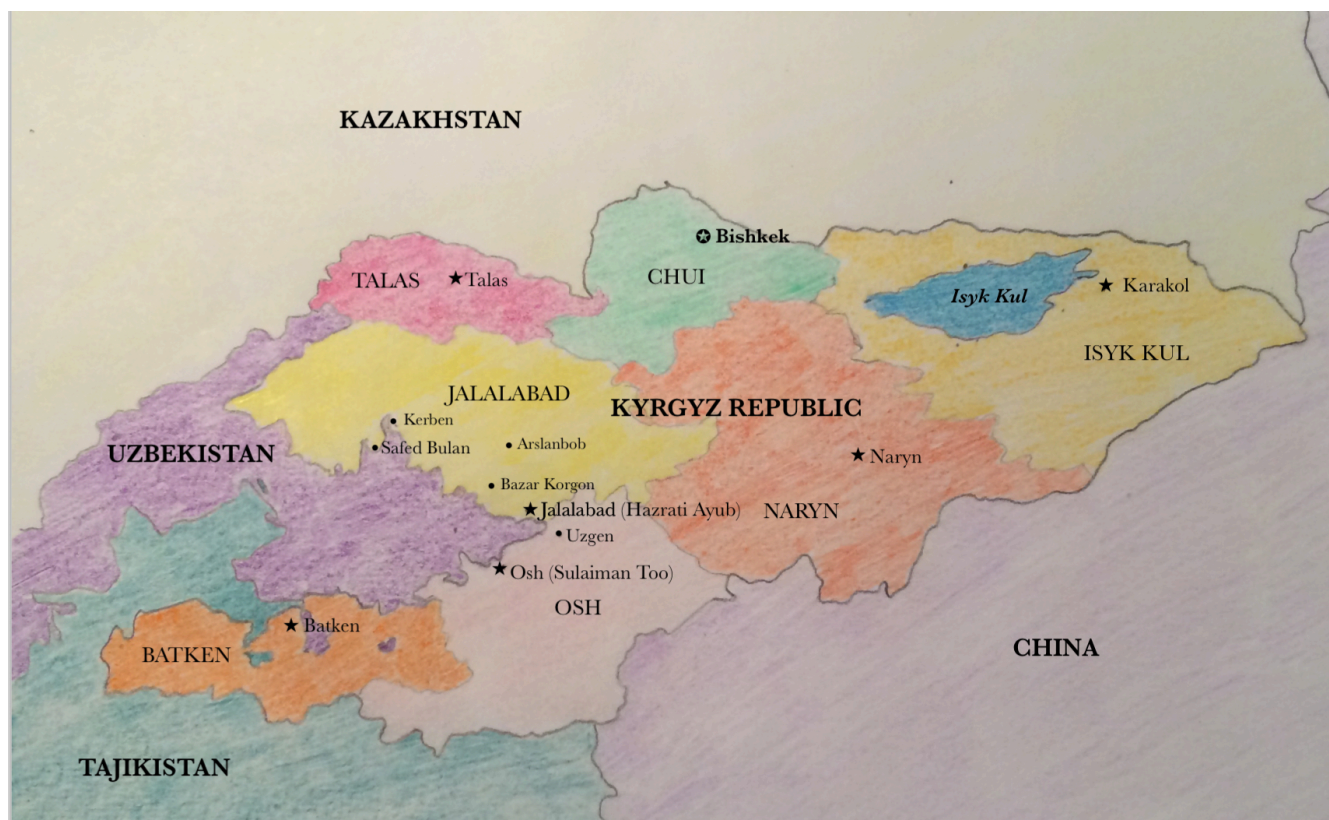


Figure 1.1 Map of Kyrgyzstan with notation of shrine sites.



Figure 2.1: Lithograph of the Mosque of Takhti Sulaiman (House of Babur) from Ch. E. de Ujfalvy de Mëzo-Kovesd, *Le Kohiston, Le Ferghanah and Kholdja* (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1878) 101.



Figure 2.2: Pilgrims praying at the “Footprints of Solomon” after the destruction of the building that housed them (June 22, 1969).



Figure 2.3: Sheikh praying with pilgrims outside *Belyi Dom* (1965).



Figure 2.4: Takht-i Sulaiman, 2011.

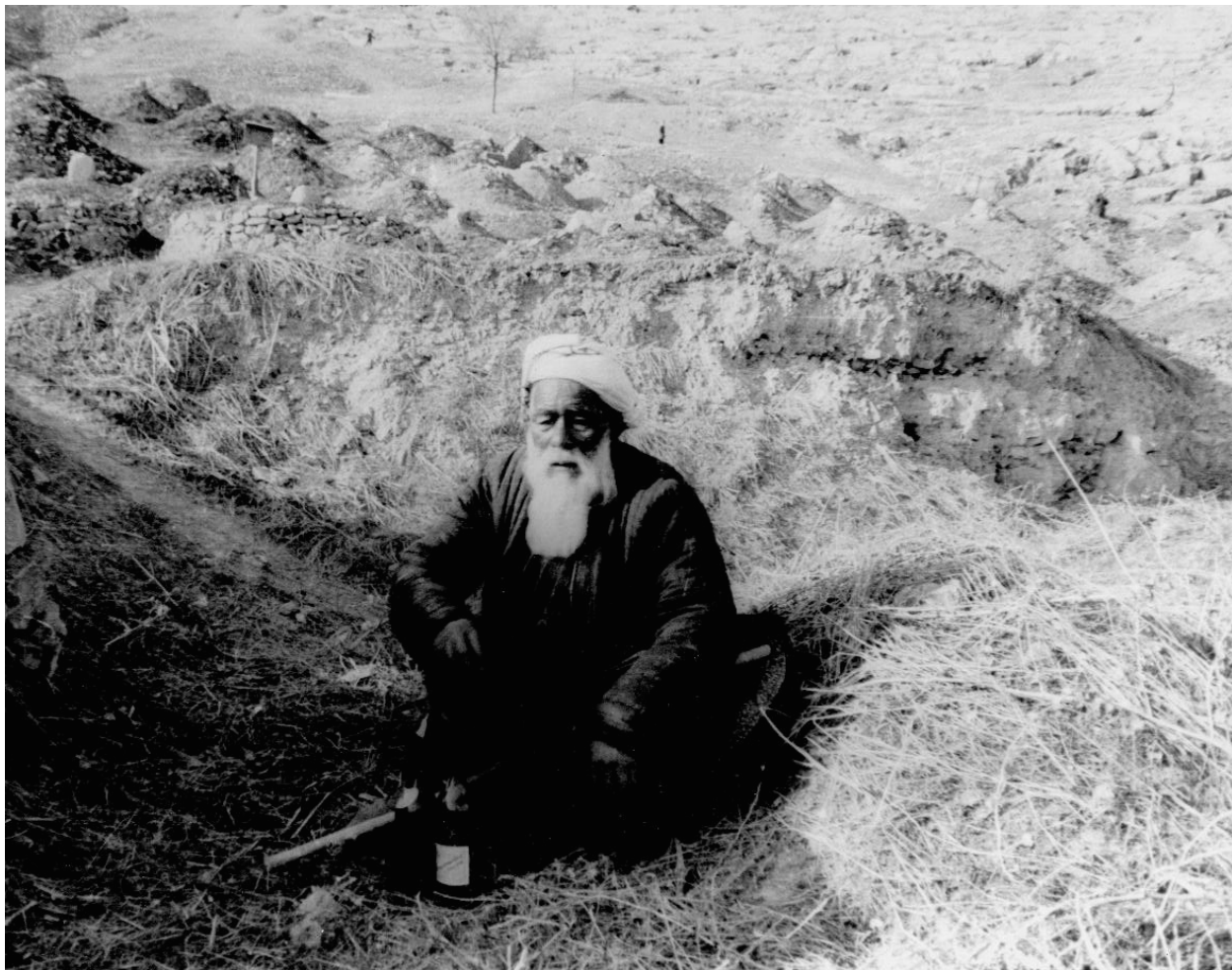


Figure 2.5: Earning holy prayers on Sulaiman Too, Sheikh Yu. Narbaev is secluded among the graves and poisons himself with vodka, Osh, 1960.



Figure 2.6: Holy places - not just a source of profit for the sheikhs, but also a haven for them. - In this photograph: a drunk sheikh awaits his next victim, Sulaiman Too. 1966.

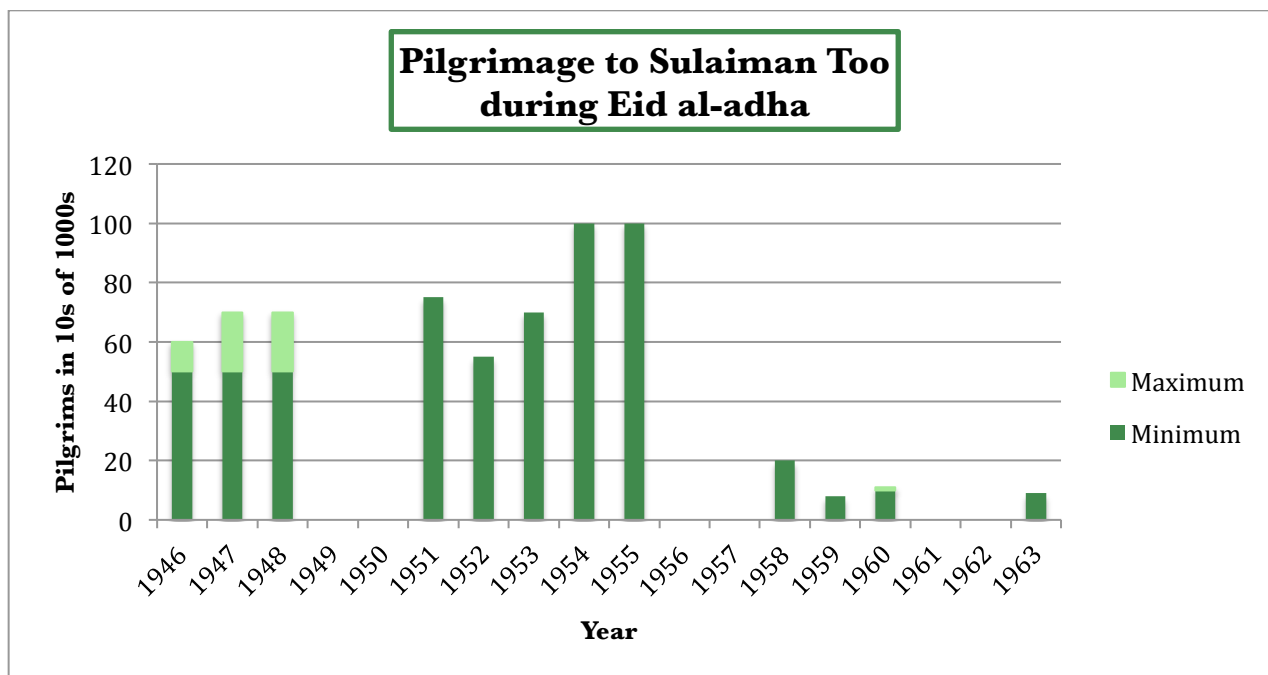


Figure 2.7: Number of pilgrims visiting Sulaiman Too during *Eid al-adha* from 1946-1963. Missing data from 1949-50; 1956-7; and 1961-2. Chart adapted from Tasar “Soviet and Muslim” 325.



Figure 2.8: “Sulaiman Too: Back Treatment, 1968. A believer in the magical power of stones treats his child with “smooth stones” at Sulaiman’s Mountain.”



Figure 2.9: Pilgrims at the *bel tash* in October 2011. Pilgrims slide down the rock to benefit from its curative properties.



Figure 2.10: Locks of hair at Sulaiman Too, 1960. These locks of hair were left by pilgrims after they performed ritual haircutting for their children.



Figure 2.11: New UNESCO signage at Sulaiman Too (April 2012).



Figure 3.1: “Children and adults going on pilgrimage to the [small] waterfall and “sacred” caves. Arslanbob Village, 1970.”



Figure 3.2: “‘Namazluk-Tash’ where, according to legend, the forestry prophet prayed and died. Arslanbob, 1960.”



Figure 4.1: Map of Safed Bulan



Figure 4.2: Mausoleum of Shakh Fazil.



Figure 4.3: “Drape, enclosing the tomb of the holy Safed Bulan from onlookers. Mazar Village, Ala Buka Region, 1982.”



Figure 4.4: Drape in front of the Tomb of Safed Bulan. Photo by author, May 2012.



Figure 5.1: The ceiling of this yurt-shaped *chaikana* highlighted individual panels dedicated to the Soviet republics. Photo by author, October 2011.



Figure 5.3: “Pilgrims with a sheikh in a ‘sacred’ grove at the ‘Jalalabad’ Kurort, 1960.”



Figure 5.4: “According to tradition pilgrims visit the former “Hazrat-Ayub.” Kurort Djalal-Abad, 1968.”



Figure 5.5: “Гробница Аюба. (Акт № 110 от 5.06.1967).” Ayub’s Mausoleum, Jalalabad Kurort.