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## **Islam, the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective**

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Islam has a history of well over a millennium in Central Asia – that part of the Eurasian landmass that is bordered to the north by Siberia, to the east by China, to the south by the Indian subcontinent, to the west by Iran and, across the Caspian Sea, by Transcaucasia. Not surprisingly, given this long span of time, and this huge expanse of territory, with its great variations in human and physical geography, and the heterogeneous cultures around its periphery which frequently exerted an influence on the interior, there have been considerable differences in local responses to Islam. Nevertheless there are certain common characteristics, as will be discussed below. As a working framework the Islamic experience in Central Asia may be divided into three periods, here provisionally labelled ‘Islam Triumphant’ (eighth–nineteenth centuries AD), covering the introduction, consolidation and indigenisation of the religion; ‘Islam Shackled’ (nineteenth century to mid-1980s), the period of Islam under foreign rule (first tsarist, then Soviet); and finally, ‘Islam Resurgent’ (mid-1980s to mid-1990s), namely, the reemergence of Islam as a religious as well as a socio-political force in the region. The aim in this article is to try to identify underlying trends and patterns of behaviour. In a study of this length it is not possible to do more than scratch the surface of a vast and extremely complex subject. Moreover, it must be acknowledged from the outset that current scholarship on all three periods is uneven in quality and far from comprehensive in coverage. Conclusions that are presented here must therefore of necessity be regarded as tentative. Nevertheless, even under these conditions it is an exercise which needs to be undertaken, since without an attempt at diachronic analysis discussion of Islam in Central Asia, especially as related to the recent past, all too easily becomes mired in facile political arguments that are constructed more to buttress a particular ideological stance than to elucidate the role of Islam in the region. The approach adopted here will, it is hoped, advance the discussion by providing some insights into the historical relationship between religion and society in Central Asia. To this end the present article focuses on two themes: Islam and the state (using the term very loosely to include pre-modern ‘tribe states’ as well as state formations of the modern period) and Islam and ethnic identity, self-perceived as well as ascribed by others. A summary of the main historical developments is included in order to set these issues in context.

### **Islam Triumphant**

Islam penetrated Central Asia gradually, and by different means in different areas.

Moreover, the cultural and ethnic heritage of the local population differed very considerably from one region to another. This was to result in a diversity of attitudes to the religion and to significant divergences in the ways in which it was practised. The chief distinction was between the sedentary population of the oasis belt and the nomads of the steppes and deserts. The peoples of the high mountains and valleys (nomadic or settled) represented yet other trends; however, they were numerically few in number and had little direct contact with the peoples of the plains, and hence played no part in the main cultural, social and religious developments in the region. Here, therefore, they will be mentioned only in passing.

### *Islamicisation of the Oasis Belt*

In AD 622, the year of the *Hijra* (Muhammed's flight from Mecca to Medina and the accepted commencement of the Muslim era), the population of the oasis belt of Central Asia (corresponding approximately to much of the territory of present-day Uzbekistan and to those parts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that lie within the Ferghana Valley and beyond this, eastwards into Xinjiang) was mainly of Iranian origin. However, Turkic tribes from the north-east had been migrating southwards and westwards since the sixth century and were already in control of the principal fiefdoms in the oasis belt. There was by this time a well-established urban tradition in the region, with sites such as Merv (modern Mary), Samarkand and Bukhara having a history of some 1000 years of continuous settlement. Irrigated agriculture was practised wherever water resources permitted and crafts, functional and decorative, were highly developed. There were lively trade contacts with China, the Indian subcontinent and Iran; more extensive networks (the so-called 'Silk Roads' of antiquity) linked this part of Central Asia to the Middle East, the Black Sea littoral and parts of Europe. The main religions of the oasis belt were Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Manichaeism. There were Nestorian Christian communities in several of the cities (a bishopric was established at Merv in the fourth century, another at Samarkand in the sixth century)<sup>1</sup> and a significant Jewish presence in the Samarkand–Bukhara area. In the south-west (modern Turkmenistan) there were traces of Hellenistic cults (Alexander the Great had conquered the region in 330 BC; thereafter, it was ruled by the Seleucids, then the Graeco-Bactrians).

The Arab invasion of Central Asia began with the conquest of Khorasan in the mid-seventh century. Merv became the chief administrative centre of the region. In AD 667 (AH 45) an expeditionary force penetrated the lands further to the east, crossing the Amu Darya (Oxus) for the first time. Subsequently a number of other sorties were made, in the course of which Bukhara, Samarkand and other oasis cities were attacked. Legend has it that Qutham ibn Abbas, the cousin of the Prophet, was killed in one such battle at Samarkand in AD 673 (AH 53);<sup>2</sup> the supposed site of his grave was later embellished by a beautiful mausoleum that came to be known as the Shah-i Zinda (Living Shah). However, the Arabs did not devote serious attention to the conquest of Transoxiana until they had fully consolidated their position in Khorasan. This was accomplished by the end of the century. In AD 705 (AH 86) Qutayba ibn Muslim became governor of Khorasan, with his principal seat at Merv. Until his death in AD 714 (AH 96) he energetically pursued the subjugation of Transoxiana, undertaking repeated campaigns across the Amu Darya, into the Ferghana Valley as far as the borders of China, and possibly to Kashgar and beyond. Khwarezm (the kingdom on the eastern shore of the Aral Sea) was captured during this period, as were cities such as Shash (modern Tashkent) and Khojend, in the

valley of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes).<sup>3</sup>

It was under Qutayba that the Arabs initiated a major effort to convert the local population to Islam. At first the new religion was imposed by force, sometimes with great brutality and the wholesale destruction of monuments and the cult objects of other faiths, especially those of Zoroastrianism. Later, however, more moderate policies prevailed. The incorporation of Khorasan and Transoxiana into the Caliphate strengthened not only administrative and political links with the lands of Islam but also helped to foster cultural and commercial contacts. These encouraged and underpinned the spread of the new faith. By the beginning of the ninth century the region had been so thoroughly integrated into the Muslim <sup>world</sup> that Caliph Mamun made Merv instead of Baghdad his capital from AD 813 to 817 (AH 198–202). Towards the end of the ninth century the first independent Muslim dynasty of Central Asia was founded at Bukhara by Saman (reputedly a convert from Zoroastrianism), who had previously governed Khorasan in the name of the Caliph. Saman's line remained in control of Transoxiana and Khwarezm until the turn of the next century, when it was overthrown by the Karakhanids of eastern Turkestan. Turks who had been converted to Islam some time previously, the Karakhanids brought new fervour to the task of propagating the faith. Further to the south, across the Amu Darya, another Muslim Turkic dynasty, that of the Ghaznavids, was likewise actively engaged in promoting the cause of Islam (as well as in establishing an empire in southern Central Asia and northern India).

Thus as a result of the efforts of, firstly, the Arab invaders, then of local Muslim converts, Islam had been firmly established in the main urban centres of the oasis belt by the mid-ninth century. The form of the faith practised here was orthodox Sunni Islam, of the Hanafi school of law. The institutional infrastructure had been set in place, in terms both of buildings such as mosques, *madrassah* (religious colleges) and libraries (those at Merv were particularly famous),<sup>4</sup> and of trained religious functionaries. Central Asian scholars travelled widely throughout the Muslim world, studying at leading centres such as Mecca, Baghdad, Damascus, Nishapur, Basra and Kufa. A number of them made major contributions to the development of applied and theoretical sciences as well as to Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence. They assimilated into the Islamic world so thoroughly that they are known to history by the Arabicised forms of their names. They include al-Bukhari (compiler of one of the fundamental collections of the Traditions of the Prophet, still revered and consulted today), at-Tirmizi, al-Farghani and al-Khwarezmi of the ninth century, and al-Farabi, al-Biruni and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) of the tenth century.

Islamic learning and culture in the oasis belt survived the Mongol conquest. Despite the disruption caused by the widespread damage to cities and irrigation systems wreaked by the invading armies during the initial campaigns the economic and intellectual life of the region quite soon began to recover.<sup>5</sup> The new masters of Central Asia were themselves converted to Islam (prior to this they had been shamanists) and became increasingly turkicised. The ruling elites in the oasis belt, as well as those in the nomad lands to the north, were henceforth to be drawn from the House of Genghis Khan, and were thus of Mongol descent, but in language and culture, by the mid-fourteenth century they were virtually indistinguishable from the local population.<sup>6</sup> There was a last great flowering of Islamic scholarship during the Timurid period, the most notable exponents of which were the astronomer-ruler Ulugh Beg (reigned in Samarkand from 1409 to 1449) and the poet Alisher Navoi (1441–1501). Thereafter Transoxiana was wracked by dynastic struggles and rapidly fragmented into a number of smaller, semi-independent khanates. Of these, Bukhara,

and later Khiva and Kokand, were to emerge as the most powerful states. They were not, however, able to regain the cultural, economic and political preeminence of the earlier periods. From the sixteenth century onwards, after Shiism was adopted as the state religion of Iran, and after the capture of the Volga region by the Russians, it became difficult to perform the *haj* (the prescribed annual pilgrimage to Mecca). Contacts with the rest of the Islamic world diminished accordingly and Transoxiana was reduced to the status of a remote provincial backwater.

### *Islamicisation of the Steppes, Deserts and Mountains*

From time immemorial, the steppes and deserts that flanked the central oasis belt of Central Asia to the north (modern Kazakhstan) and the south (modern Turkmenistan), and the lower ranges of the mountains in the north-east (modern Kyrgyzstan), had been the domain of nomadic pastoralists. By the sixth century AD (or possibly earlier) these were predominantly Turkic-speaking tribes. Like the Mongols, they were shamanists, with strong animist beliefs. At the centre of their religious world was the cult of the sky god (Tengri); the sun, moon, stars, thunder and lightning were also revered as manifestations of this central divinity. Earth, water and fire were likewise venerated. Certain sites (e.g. groves, springs, rocks and cliff faces) were regarded as sacred places.<sup>7</sup> The spirits of the dead were believed to have power over the living. They were therefore treated with respect, and graves were marked and tended. Shamans mediated between this world and the supernatural world. They were credited with magical powers and were believed to have gifts of healing and prophecy.

Islam took far longer to influence these peoples than it did the sedentary population of the oasis belt. This was partly owing to the nature of the nomadic way of life, which precluded the establishment of fixed, centrally located institutions; partly, too, to the enormous distances involved and the difficult terrain. The decisive role in the conversion of the nomads was played by Sufi missionaries (see below), who travelled from one community to another spreading the new faith. The islamisation of the nomad regions closest to the oasis belt to the north and the south was probably completed by the mid-tenth century, albeit superficially. The leaders (*khan*) of the nomad tribes were the strongest supporters of the new religion. They generally had Muslim teachers and scribes in their retinue. Eventually they began to send their sons to study in the madrassahs of Transoxiana. The outlying regions, however, were scarcely affected by Islam until some time later. The faith probably did not penetrate the mountains of the north-east (modern Kyrgyzstan) much before the eighteenth century, when the region came under control of the khans of Kokand.

In the high mountains and valleys of the south-east (Badakhshan, part of modern Tajikistan) the tiny, scattered Pamiri tribes were of Eastern Iranian origin, thus ethnically and linguistically different from the peoples of the oasis belt, who were of Western Iranian origin. The Pamiris had limited contact with the neighbouring regions, although they were frequently under the nominal suzerainty of Darwaz or Kunduz. Most of the mountain-dwellers were converted to the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam, which spread northwards from centres in Afghanistan and India from the late eleventh century onwards. A few groups, however, adopted Sunni Islam. Until the establishment of Soviet rule in the twentieth century the Pamiris were almost entirely isolated from the Muslim communities of the Central Asian lowlands, from the nomads as well as the sedentary population.

*Sufism and Ishanism*

Sufism, the mystical aspect of Islam, began to penetrate Central Asia in the immediate aftermath of the Arab invasion. The first centres appeared in Balkh and Nishapur in the eighth to ninth centuries. Later, Merv, Bukhara, Khwarezm and other cities in Transoxiana became bastions of Sufism. The early adepts were disciples of the Baghdad school of mystics. Indigenous Central Asian orders began to appear towards the end of the twelfth century. Ultimately they all traced their spiritual origins back to the Prophet through a linked chain of authorities (*silsila*). The essential goal of all the Sufi orders was the same, namely, union with God. The differences between them lay in the 'path' (*tariqa*) they followed to achieve this end.<sup>8</sup>

The first major figure in the development of Central Asian Sufism was Yusuf Hamadani (*b.* AD 1048 near Hamadan, Iran, *d.* AD 1141 near Merv). After a period of study in the major centres of the Middle East he moved to Central Asia and spent most of his adult life there; he established a *khanaka* (Sufi monastery) in Merv that came to be known as the 'Kaba of Khorasan'.<sup>9</sup> Two parallel chains of authority were derived from him, one of which led to Ahmad Yasavi (*d.* mid-twelfth century, buried at the town of Yasi, later known as Turkestan, near the Syr Darya), who crystallised the spiritual legacy that had been bequeathed to him into the 'path' of the Yasavi order; the other, to Baha ad-Din an-Naqshbandi (AD 1318–89, buried near Bukhara), who formulated the 'path' of the Naqshbandi order. Both these orders were to expand far beyond the confines of Central Asia. The former attracted adherents throughout the Turkic-speaking world, while the latter spread to India and China, as well as to the Ottoman Empire and, in more recent times, to Western Europe. The chief distinction between the Naqshbandis and the Yasavis was that the former practised a 'silent' or 'hidden' (*khafiya*) *zikr* (set of devotions), the latter a 'vocal' or 'loud' (*jahriya*) *zikr*. The Yasavi *tariqa*, which contained elements of ritual that were reminiscent of shamanistic practices, was particularly successful among the Turkic-speaking nomads of the steppes and deserts;<sup>10</sup> the Naqshbandi *tariqa* tended to appeal more to the sedentary, Iranian-speaking population. However, there was no rigid boundary between their different spheres of influence; the Naqshbandi order, for example, had many adherents among the nomads.<sup>11</sup> Two other great orders which attracted a substantial following in Central Asia were the Kubrawiyya, whose 'path' was crystallised by Najm ad-Din al-Kubra (AD 1145–1221, buried near Khiva), and the Qadiriyya, who traced their 'path' to Abdul Qadir Gilani (twelfth century, Baghdad).<sup>12</sup>

The term 'ishanism' is sometimes used to describe Central Asian Sufism in general, as distinct from other forms of Sufism, but sometimes, also, to distinguish between the major orders described above and the largely autonomous, local networks of mystics whose activities were mainly associated with 'popular' (i.e. folk, lay) religion. To add to the confusion, the term '*ishan*' (lit. 'they') has traditionally been used in Central Asia as an honorific for any revered religious teacher. Here, for the sake of clarity, 'ishanism' will be reserved for the 'little' tradition of the local mystics. It should be noted, however, that for the early period the distinction is perhaps an irrelevance: it is difficult at this distance of time to determine whether or not semi-legendary figures such as Hakim-ata, Gözli-ata, Zengi-baba or Chopan-ata were fully-fledged initiates of a Sufi order.<sup>13</sup> Later, however, there does appear to have been a divergence. By the early nineteenth century this resulted in the proliferation of local *ishans*, each of whom, in effect, established his own 'tariqa', with a personal circle of devotees.<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon was most widespread in rural areas, where

every village or nomad community sought to secure the presence of an ishan of their own; allocations of free land and water were set aside for this purpose.<sup>15</sup> Often, ishans would have charge of a particular shrine or holy place, which gave them added legitimacy and authority. The fact that they generally had a modicum of education also helped to enhance their standing amongst their neighbours, most of whom were illiterate. The duties of an ishan included a variety of social as well as quasi-religious, quasi-magical functions: they dispensed protective amulets and healing potions, gave counsel and comfort, and conducted prayers, rituals and ceremonial invocations for divine assistance and protection. There was a strong dynastic element in ishanism. In several areas there existed whole clans of 'holy' families; strictly endogamous, they traced their lineage (not necessarily reliably) back to Arab forebears.<sup>16</sup>

### *Islam and the State*

From the inception of the Islamic era in Central Asia religious authority and state power were closely intertwined. Islam does not separate the spiritual and the civil spheres: in a theoretical sense, they are merely different facets of a unified system of belief, epistemology and practice. Nevertheless, there was in the Central Asian context (as elsewhere in the Muslim world) a conventional division of functions and it is therefore possible to make a diagrammatic distinction between manifestations of state (civil) authority and manifestations of religious authority.<sup>17</sup> A further distinction may be made between the different types of religious authority: between that of the *ulama* ('the learned doctors', i.e. the clerics who constitute the formal hierarchy of Muslim functionaries, with responsibility for regulating the life of the community in accordance with sharia law),<sup>18</sup> and that of the heads (*sheikh*) of the Sufi orders. Again, this is a classification of convenience rather than one that is grounded in any intrinsic opposition between the two: indeed, the Naqshbandi order was noted for the importance it attached to strict observance of the sharia,<sup>19</sup> and in Central Asia, on a number of occasions, Naqshbandi sheikhs held high office amongst the *ulama*. However, in practice, especially in later periods, the Sufis and the *ulama* often represented rival power blocks.

The most influential tariqa in Central Asia, in terms of political weight, was that of the Naqshbandi. The foundations of their control over state affairs were laid during the Mongol period, when they played a pivotal role in the conversion of the conquerors to Islam. Since the Mongol khans not only became rulers of Transoxiana but also assumed leadership of the tribal confederations of the steppes the Naqshbandi order acquired a privileged position amongst both the sedentary population and the nomads. They consolidated their position under Tamerlane, who was himself possibly a *murid* (disciple) of one of the teachers of Baha ad-Din an-Naqshbandi.<sup>20</sup> He did, however, also show the Yasavi signs of favour, notably by the construction of a superb (and materially well-endowed) mausoleum over the tomb of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan. This city was later captured by the Kazakhs; thereafter its religious leaders, both the *ulama* and the Sufis, came to exert a strong influence over the nomad khans and sultans. Several Kazakh nobles were buried near the tomb of Yasavi, thus emphasising the nexus between the spiritual and secular (i.e. tribal) sources of authority.

In the fifteenth century, under Tamerlane's successors, the Naqshbandi sheikh Hoja Ahrar (*b.* 1404, near Tashkent), a 'figure of awesome political as well as spiritual attainment',<sup>21</sup> came to prominence; after the assassination of Ulugh Beg, Tamerlane's grandson, he wielded such power that for the next 40 years he was in effect 'the uncrowned ruler' of Samarkand.<sup>22</sup> Other leading Naqshbandis of the day

included the poets Navoi and Jami. Hoja Ahrar's son and spiritual heir fell out of favour with the founder of the Sheibanid dynasty that succeeded the Timurids in the early sixteenth century, but his family subsequently regained its former preeminence under later Sheibanid rulers.<sup>23</sup> Another Naqshbandi line which also derived its spiritual authority from Hoja Ahrar, though it was not related to him by physical genealogy, was that of the Juibari sheikhs. Throughout most of the sixteenth century they acted as kingmakers, playing off one pretender to the throne against another.<sup>24</sup> However, their influence began to wane in the next century under the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. This decline continued under the next line of Bukharan rulers, the Manghits (reigned 1753–1920), who were powerful enough to arrogate to themselves both the throne and the highest religious office. They assumed the title of 'Caliph' and styled themselves 'Commander of the Faithful'; it was they who now appointed the senior religious functionaries in the Bukharan state.<sup>25</sup> The Sufi sheikhs, though still not a force to be ignored, were by no means as powerful as they had been previously. Elsewhere in the region the Naqshbandis still retained considerable influence, especially in the comparatively young Khanate of Kokand in northern Ferghana.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, here too the structure of power was changing and by the mid-nineteenth century the Sufi sheikhs were no longer in the ascendancy. As their role in the civil affairs of the state declined they began to constitute a focus around which other disaffected elements could unite. At first this opposition was directed against local rulers,<sup>27</sup> subsequently against the Russians. It did not constitute a serious military threat to either, but it was a potentially disruptive element, and as such a cause for concern, especially towards the end of the century.

There were a number of reasons for the Sufi sheikhs' dominant position in the political life of Central Asia during the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. Firstly, they had a strong spiritual hold over the civil rulers, who were often their personal murids, and thus bound by strict obligations of obedience and submission. Secondly, the sheikhs were able to bestow a mystical benediction on their chosen candidate, and by extension to offer him the assurance of divine protection. Thirdly, through their vertical chains of allegiance and their extensive networks of devotees, they were able to mobilise popular support and thus to reinforce the authority of the civil ruler; this could be of crucial importance when rival claimants to the throne made a bid for power. Fourthly, their status as holy men gave them immunity in times of war; consequently they were often used as envoys and sent to parley with the enemy. Given the almost constant dynastic struggles, this was an extremely important and prestigious function. Finally, in gratitude for their services and good will, incumbent rulers would frequently reward the Sufi sheikhs with extravagant generosity. Some, such as Hoja Ahrar, became great magnates. They possessed huge tracts of agricultural land; urban settlements, together with the attendant income arising from the dwellings, crafts and trade that were located on such land; luxury goods such as costly textiles and robes; and vast hoards of silver and gold coins. Many shrines, madrassahs and other religious foundations attached to the Sufi orders were also given rich *vaqf* (charitable trusts granted in perpetuity). Thus both Sufi communities and individual heads of such communities had very great economic power. The position of particular Sufi dynastic lines was further underpinned by intermarriage with the ruling families. This not only gave them added influence but also ensured that they had a vested interest in protecting the fortunes of the house with which they were associated.<sup>28</sup>

The influence of the Sufi sheikhs on civil affairs waned in proportion to the increase in power and authority of the temporal rulers. This was facilitated by the rise of a new wave of nomad-dominated elites in Bukhara, and later Khiva and Kokand,



who were strong enough in their own right not to have to rely on the additional support provided by the religious establishment. This change in political status was matched, and hastened, by a decline in the economic power of the Sufis. The new rulers were not so liberal in their gifts and endowments as had been their predecessors. Moreover, when individual sheikhs fell from favour their land and other possessions were confiscated. Thus from the mid-eighteenth century onwards their sphere of influence was steadily eroded. By the time of the Russian conquest in the nineteenth century they had already been largely marginalised, their activities, for the most part, circumscribed to the socio-religious field rather than, as previously, constituting a dominant force in the affairs of state.

### *Indigenisation of Islam*

Islam, in the form that it was first brought to Central Asia by the Arabs, retained its orthodox, doctrinally regulated character in the learned institutions in the cities, but elsewhere it was gradually indigenised, assimilating local traditions and beliefs and adapting to local environmental conditions. Consequently the nature of Islamic beliefs and practices came to differ very considerably from one area to another, depending on the previous religious background as well as other local factors. In some areas, for example, Zoroastrian practices were absorbed into so-called Islamic rituals, while in others, traces of Buddhism, Manichaeism or Hellenistic cults became embedded in local Islamic beliefs and observances; shamanism and pantheism provided an even broader substratum of pre-Islamic references.<sup>29</sup>

Amongst the most tenacious of the ancient customs was the cult of 'saints' – the veneration of figures who were regarded as protectors and intercessors. They may or may not have had identifiable historical antecedents, but in any case they were the focus of cults that usually had ancient, non-Islamic origins. Such figures were often associated with a number of widely scattered sites, and specific biographical details varied accordingly. The best known included *Burkut-baba*, who was regarded by the Turkmen as having the power to ensure rain; *Chopan-ata*, widely regarded as a protector of sheep; and *Kanbar-ata*, regarded as a protector of horses. Individual saints (usually inherited from pre-Islamic traditions) were associated with particular crafts and occupations. Fertility cults, especially those connected with the annual farming cycle, were also preserved in one form or another; *Dikan-baba* (*Bobo-Dekhon*), for example, revered among the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmen, was almost certainly an ancient agricultural divinity who was islamised during the early medieval period.<sup>30</sup> Shrines to such individuals were to be found in many parts of the region; these were often associated with much older forms of faith, now reinterpreted within the framework of Islam. As in the more distant past these places were often located by springs, caves, trees or cliffs. It was common practice (and has remained so up to the present) to visit these holy places to pray for assistance and good fortune. Generally this act of supplication was sealed with the ritual sacrifice of an animal (usually a sheep) and by lighting candles or leaving scraps of material tied to twigs.<sup>31</sup>

Another common feature of Islam in Central Asia, especially in rural areas, was respect for the dead; reminiscent of the pre-Islamic ancestor cults, this was very deeply ingrained. The healing and soothsaying arts of the shamans also continued to be practised beneath a veneer of Islamic justification. In various other aspects of popular culture too, such as folk tales, sayings and traditions, non-Muslim elements were preserved. Thus although in time virtually the whole of Central Asia was converted to Islam, it was an Islam that was permeated with a multitude of other influences.

## **Islam Shackled—1: Tsarist Rule**

The northern rim of Central Asia (northern Kazakhstan) was brought under Russian control towards the end of the eighteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century Russian rule was rapidly extended southwards to the basin of the Syr Darya; Ak-Mechet' (Kzyl-Orda) was taken in 1853, Turkestan (burial place of Ahmad Yasavi) and Chimkent in 1864, Tashkent in 1865. Thus within little over half a century the conquest of the nomad lands of the north had been accomplished and the Russians were already pressing on the margins of the khanates of the oasis belt. The subjugation of these states was completed within less than a decade. Bukhara and Khiva retained some degree of autonomy as Russian protectorates, albeit after ceding a portion of their lands to the newly established Governorate-General of Turkestan; the Khanate of Kokand was, however, abolished in 1876 and its lands brought under direct Russian rule. The southern deserts (Turkmenistan) were added to the possessions of the tsarist Empire in the early 1880s; in 1899 the administration of this region (Transcaspia) was incorporated into that of the Turkestan Territory, which now encompassed the whole of the southern tier of Central Asia with the exception of the semi-independent Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. The northern tier constituted a separate administrative unit, that of the Steppe Territory.

### *Tsarist Policies Towards Islam*

Tsarist policies towards Islam fell into two categories: those employed among the nomads (particularly in the steppe region) and those among the sedentary population of Transoxiana. The nomads of the northern tier (Kazakhs and Kyrgyz) had been converted to Islam several centuries before the region came under Russian control. However, they were highly syncretic in their beliefs and practices and, to those familiar with more conventional forms of the faith, appeared to be 'Muslim only in name'.<sup>32</sup> The tsarist administration deemed it politic to show good will and even support for Islam in order to win the loyalty of the Kazakh aristocracy, who were strongly Muslim in their convictions, if not always in their practices. It is also possible that the Russians conceived of Islam, a 'religion of the book', with which they had already had long experience in other parts of the empire, as a means of civilising the nomads. At first, therefore, they took steps to consolidate the faith amongst the outlying nomad tribes. Tatars from the Volga region (under Russian rule since the mid-sixteenth century) who, like the Kazakhs, were Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, were encouraged to inculcate Islamic orthodoxy in the steppes. In 1788 a muftiate had been established by the tsarist authorities at Ufa in Bashkiria. This served as a convenient base for Tatar missionary activities. The tsarist authorities allocated funds for the construction of mosques in the steppes (prior to this the Kazakhs had possessed very few mosques, and those only in their winter grazing grounds); also for the printing of Muslim literature.<sup>33</sup> The Tatars were at first much resented by the nomads, who were accustomed to a much freer, more heterodox interpretation of Islam. Educated, urbanised Kazakhs such as Shokan Valikhanov (1835–65) and Ibrai Altynsaryn (1841–89) were also deeply disturbed by the Tatars' attempts to spread a form of Islam which they perceived to be narrowly dogmatic and, moreover, alien to Kazakh tradition. Nevertheless, the zealous proselytisers from the Volga gradually succeeded in introducing a more orthodox element into local worship. This was accompanied by a shift in the nature of religious authority. Formerly this had been provided by the itinerant ishans, who were as lax in their

observance of Islamic precepts as were their devotees. Now the *ishans* were overshadowed by clerics of the official religious hierarchy, represented here mainly by *mullah* (lower-grade preachers and teachers), who steadily gained the ascendancy.

In the mid-nineteenth century Russian policy towards Islam in the steppe region began to change. Possibly the administration was dismayed by the fervour of the Tatar missionaries – there had always been reservations in some quarters as to the wisdom of promoting Islam rather than Christianity. Belatedly, a campaign was launched to convert the Kazakhs to the latter faith; however, it met with little success. At the same time, measures were introduced to curb Muslim activities. The interface between Islam and the Russian administration was brought under the jurisdiction of the tsarist Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Provisional Statute of 1868 specified that there should be only one *mullah* per *volost'* (rural district), that he had to be a Russian subject, and that his appointment had to be confirmed by the provincial government. Mosques and other Muslim educational establishments could be opened only with official sanction; the bestowing of *vaqf* endowments and the collection of religious dues and alms (*zakat*, *sadaqa*) was prohibited.<sup>34</sup> Yet even under these conditions the network of formal Islamic institutions continued to expand. In 1895, for example, there were only 31 *mekteb* (primary schools) in the Steppe Territory, but by 1913 this number had increased to 267. There were also *madrassahs* in most of the bigger cities.<sup>35</sup>

In Transoxiana the situation was somewhat different. The main urban centres fell to the tsarist troops comparatively quickly (the khanates were too engrossed in local wars to be able to offer an effective resistance, and in any case they lacked modern military technology).<sup>36</sup> Thereafter relations between the Russians and the local population were remarkably amicable. Eugene Schuyler, an American official who made an extensive visit to the region in 1873 with the express aim of studying the social and political situation, commented, 'what was strange for Mussulmans, [they] spoke in the highest terms of the Russian Emperor. The conduct of General Tcher-naief made a most favourable impression upon the natives and from that time on there was not the slightest trouble of any kind on the part of the native population.'<sup>37</sup> Schuyler was particularly struck by the proclamation which 'the Mussulman authorities of Tashkent of their own motion' prepared, in Turki, for General Chernayev ('Tcher-naief'). It stated, amongst other points, that:

By order of the great white Tsar ... we hereby declare to the inhabitants of the city of Tashkent that they must in everything act according to the commands of almighty God and the teaching of the orthodox religion of Mohammed, on whom and on whose descendants be the blessing of God, and to the laws established by him, not departing from them one iota ... Let them say everywhere their prayers five times a day, not passing by the appointed time an hour, or even a minute. Let the Mullahs constantly go to their schools and teach the laws of the Mohammedan faith ...<sup>38</sup>

The new governor-general showed great courtesy to the Muslim dignitaries and honoured those warriors who had distinguished themselves by their bravery in the defence of Tashkent against the Russian onslaught. The institutional framework of Islam in Transoxiana was more formal and better organised than in the Steppe Territory, hence more comprehensible to the Russians. The existing religious administration was retained, although the highest offices of the *ulama*, those of the *sheikh-ul Islam* and *kazi kalan*, were later abolished.<sup>39</sup> The *sharia* courts continued to function, albeit under the nominal control of colonial officials and with some restriction

of their powers; the most serious crimes had henceforth to be tried according to Russian law. Islamic education at mekteb (primary) and madrassah (secondary) levels was provided as previously, although gradually, and to a limited extent, alternative forms of schooling became available (principally, the Russo-Native schools and the reformist 'new method' Muslim schools). Christian institutions began to appear, but they were few in number and served the needs of the immigrant population; missionary work was virtually non-existent (and initially specifically prohibited). One Islamic obligation that became easier to observe under Russian rule was the hajj: the tsarist authorities organised special travel facilities for the pilgrims and made provision for consular support, quarantine requirements and other such needs; by the end of the century some 20,000 'Russian' Muslims, mostly Central Asians, were making the annual pilgrimage.<sup>40</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Russian conquest the income that the larger religious foundations received from their vaqf endowments was somewhat curtailed, since some of their possessions were now divided between the Turkestan Territory, under Russian jurisdiction, and the nominally independent Emirate of Bukhara. It became increasingly difficult to collect dues from across the border in either direction and eventually this practice was prohibited for all except the most powerful institutions. Vaqf holdings within the Turkestan Territory, however, were left intact until 1886, when the colonial administration introduced measures to limit the economic power of the religious foundations. The most significant innovation was the transfer of settled lands to the ownership of those who worked them; in turn, these new owners became liable for civil taxes. However, the religious authorities were not entirely bereft of income from this source, since the state assumed responsibility for providing them with means (assessed on the basis of their former income) for the upkeep of the mosques, madrassahs and holy graves (*mazar*) which had been entrusted to their care.<sup>41</sup>

In Transcaspia, tsarist policies regarding the propagation of Islam among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkmen tribes were similar to those used in the Steppe Territory. At the time of the Russian conquest the institutional base of Islam amongst the Turkmen was rudimentary. Like the Kazakhs, they had few mosques and were lax in their observance of Quranic precepts. The chief centres of religious learning were located outside the region, in Bukhara and Khiva, Merv having long since lost its preeminence in this field. Islamic guidance and authority were provided primarily by local ishans. Even these, however, were relatively few in number. The ulama were mainly represented by semi-literate mullahs, who were in general held in lower esteem than the ishans. Under tsarist rule, however, it was the former group that was favoured and gradually came to predominate. They propagated sharia-regulated, mosque-centred Islam, in contrast to the 'heathenish practices' of the ishans, which frequently incorporated local, pre-Islamic elements.<sup>42</sup> As elsewhere in Central Asia, it was the ishans who formed a persistent, albeit disorganised and inconstant, opposition to the established administration. Yet their position was now under a double challenge, from the Russians as well as from the 'orthodox' clerics. They continued to enjoy popular support, but were under constant pressure from these two sources.

#### *Muslim Leadership in the Tsarist Period*

There were three potential sources of Muslim leadership in Central Asia under tsarist rule: the ulama, the 'mystics' (i.e. Sufi sheikhs and ishans), and the reformers. As has already been indicated, the ulama were largely coopted by the colonial administra-



Map of Modern Central Asia

tion. They were treated with respect and despite some limitation of their powers their authority was upheld and even enhanced. In return they showed themselves to be loyal servants of the imperial throne. This fostered a harmonious relationship between the Russian officials and the ulama, which in turn did much to maintain stability in the region. The non-confrontational policy of the ulama undoubtedly facilitated the preservation of Islamic institutions in Central Asia, and may thus be considered a positive contribution to the life of the Muslim community. However, as a group the ulama do not appear to have provided much spiritual or intellectual leadership. The majority were ultra-conservative in their outlook and, if contemporary accounts are to be believed, they were also venal, ignorant and dominated by superstition. The Bukharan reformist thinker Fitrat, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, commented despairingly that 'Holy Bukhara, which reared 400,000 scholars and sent them to all the ends of the earth .... Now, alas ... this sun of education, this well-appointed home of the sciences of the world, this auditorium of knowledge ... has become a country ringed round by mountains of stupidity and enmeshed in chains of contempt!' He described in bitter detail the libraries denuded of books, the use of unqualified students as substitutes for teachers too lazy to carry out their appointed (and lucrative) duties, the misappropriation of waqf income by the ulama and, above all, the lack of the most basic religious knowledge: 'We have special

schools to teach the reading of the Quran, but in all of Bukhara there is not a single person who will not pronounce the holy word *Allah* either as *Avah* or as *Ablah* (i.e. distort it).<sup>43</sup> Fitrat was by no means the only one to hold a low opinion of the level of Islamic scholarship in the region at that time. Schuyler, for example, recounts how the ulama in Samarkand 'of their own accord' sold the Othman Quran, a superb early copy of the Holy Scripture, to the Russians, apparently unaware of or uninterested in its significance, since 'when the Russians occupied Samarkand there was not a single learned native able to decipher it.'<sup>44</sup> It would, however, be wrong to accept such comments as representing the whole truth: Fitrat held partisan views and deeply disapproved of the ulama, while Schuyler had only a partial knowledge of the situation. There were undoubtedly many shortcomings in the Central Asian madrassahs, but they did nevertheless continue to provide access to a high level of education, producing scholars of some distinction.

The Sufis and ishans, another possible source of leadership, were also in some disarray by this period. The major Sufi orders were well represented in the larger cities; Schuyler reports that in Tashkent there were communities of 'Nakshbandi, Hufiá, Jahriá, Khodrié and Tchistia, the last, however, being chiefly followed in Hodjent and Kokand'; in Samarkand he noted a 'Jahriá' brotherhood located at the entrance to the Shah-i Zinda mausoleum, doubtless not the only one in the city.<sup>45</sup> The Sufi orders conducted their services daily at set times. Non-Muslim visitors were able to attend quite freely ('and not even requested to take their boots off'). Schuyler gives useful descriptions of the rituals of the various brotherhoods.<sup>46</sup> He was, of course, an outsider and his view of these activities inevitably records only the external impression, not the internal experience. Nevertheless, while it is important to bear this reservation in mind, his account is valuable since it has the authenticity of direct, first-hand observation. What seems to have struck him most forcibly at these ceremonies was their social character, the emphasis on a communal physical performance rather than on a spiritual exercise. Speaking of a 'Jahriá' service he comments, 'When the cries were loudest and the motions most violent he [i.e. the presiding adept] seemed quite content, and even asked if we were pleased by it; yet this is the most fanatical sect of Muslims in Central Asia'; and he later adds: 'Much has been said of the fanaticism of Central Asia, but the fanaticism seems to me more apparent than real.'<sup>47</sup>

The Russians viewed these Sufi gatherings, like the regular mosque services, with equanimity. They were considerably less sanguine, however, about the activities of the bands of wandering dervishes (*kalendar*), who were suspected of spreading sedition and stirring up 'hatred and hostility to the infidel'. For this reason the dervishes were forbidden to preach or to recite prayers in the cities, although they were allowed to enter the cities to collect alms.<sup>48</sup> How dangerous they might have been if allowed greater freedom is difficult to say: whether it was indeed the result of the strict law and order regime, or whether, as the dervishes themselves claimed, they had no ill intentions towards the Russians, or whether they did not have the power to organise any significant degree of popular resistance, the fact is that there were very few instances of instances of serious civil disorder.

The ishans in rural areas, especially among the nomads and semi-nomads, had considerably greater influence. Moreover, there appears to have been a higher level of disaffection; and in addition, already prior to the advent of the Russians, some ishans had served as a focus of opposition to the ruling faction. Even so, cases of armed insurrection were comparatively rare and until 1916, the eve of the collapse of the Russian Empire, almost without exception of low intensity. One of the two most significant incidents was the so-called Andijan Uprising of 1898. Under the leadership

of Madali Ishan a mixed Kyrgyz–Uzbek force of some 2000 lightly armed men carried out a night raid on the nearby Russian army base. The attack, which was easily repulsed after the initial shock, lasted approximately 15 minutes and resulted in the deaths of 22 Russians and a somewhat smaller number of rebels; a few of the ring-leaders were subsequently executed, the others released after a period of detention. The motives for this adventure are far from clear: although Madali Ishan declared it to be a *jihad* (holy war) it seems likely that he was merely a pawn in a local power struggle.<sup>49</sup> The incident received much attention at the time, not so much because of its military importance, which was negligible, but precisely because, in the light of the previously relatively good relations between the colonisers and colonised, it was so unexpected. In this sense it may be compared to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, although that very comparison – the respective size, ferocity and duration of the two events – provides a telling gauge of the level of stability in Central Asia, in contrast to that in British India.

The only other notable case of armed conflict occurred somewhat earlier, during the Russian advance into Transcaspia. In 1881 the Ahal Tekke, one of the largest of the Turkmen tribes, made a last stand against the tsarist troops at Geok-Tepe (most of the other Turkmen tribes had already come to terms with the invaders). Despite some initial successes the Tekke were no match for the Russians, equipped as they were with modern weapons (including 52 cannon and 11 Hotchkiss machine guns).<sup>50</sup> An estimated 9000 Tekke were killed in this battle; the remainder were put to flight, their morale broken, their arms scattered and rendered useless. One of the leaders of this desperate defence was the ishan Kurban-myrat. He is generally credited with being the driving force behind the Tekke action. However, he appears to have abandoned the struggle before the first bout of fighting and, having thus escaped the carnage that ensued, made his peace with the Russians, eventually, in calmer times, to die a natural death in his own bed. The legend of his heroic exploits was kept alive by subsequent generations of Turkmen and his grave became a place of pilgrimage.<sup>51</sup> However, neither he nor his compatriots engaged in further acts of resistance until the eve of the end of the Empire, by which time many other factors were involved, not least the transfer of power from tsarist to Soviet rule.

The third potential source of Muslim leadership was that of the reformists. Never very numerous, they constituted not so much a group as a broad trend, individuals united by common convictions and aspirations rather than by set programmes (although distinct clusters did eventually emerge, including some with specific socio-political agendas). The aim of the reformists was to modernise Central Asian society, without, however, abandoning the Islamic framework. The first to propound these ideas were Kazakhs such as Ibrai Altynsaryn (1841–89) and Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904) in the mid-nineteenth century. Later, in Transoxiana, Bukharans such as Donish (c. 1828–97) and Fitrat (1886–1938) began to follow a similar line of thought.

The reformists, especially in the early period, were drawn mostly from wealthy merchant families and/or the local aristocracy. They were familiar with traditional Muslim scholarship and also, either through further study in Russian institutions or through travel and personal contacts, had some knowledge of European culture. This dual experience on the one hand gave them a great admiration for western science and technology, but on the other strengthened their faith in Islamic values. They were particularly concerned to modernise the system of education in Central Asia by introducing western-style methods of teaching (*usul-i jadid*, ‘new method’: hence the term Jadidist by which they are often known). However, they were interested in a

wide range of social and political issues; some were remarkably radical in their views.<sup>52</sup>

The reformist movement in Central Asia, particularly in Turkestan, was greatly strengthened by the influx of Muslim activists from other parts of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since the concept of modernisation within Islam was already far better established in intellectual circles in the Volga region, Crimea and Transcaucasia. The incomers, especially the Tatars, played an important role in establishing a local, independently-owned press, and in implementing educational innovation. They also gave a certain impetus to the politicisation of the Central Asian reformists. Some of these joined Tatar-dominated Muslim political groupings, some moved closer to the liberal Russian Constitutional Democrats ('Kadets'), and some were drawn to the socialists, and later to the Communist Party.

The significance of the reformist movement in Central Asia lies more, perhaps, in the fact that it appeared at all than in any specific achievements. Similar trends were emerging at the same period in other parts of the Muslim world, notably in Turkey, India and Egypt. In Central Asia the process was more difficult, fraught with greater obstacles. First, there was the physical remoteness of the region, which hampered the development of links with like-minded thinkers elsewhere; some contacts were established, but for the most part they were sporadic. Second, the reformists were frequently under pressure from the ulama. A few members of the ulama were sympathetic to reformist ideas, but most were bitterly opposed to any form of innovation. The conservative faction was particularly powerful in Bukhara, where it had the support of the emir. In the Turkestan Territory, which was under Russian rule, the situation was somewhat easier, though even here the colonial administration was careful not to offend the ulama. More surprisingly, in the Steppe Territory, where the ulama were not very powerful, the Russian authorities were nevertheless reluctant to support reformist trends, even though the original inspiration sometimes came from Russian sources (e.g. in education);<sup>53</sup> again, the motivation seems to have been the preservation of a known structure rather than the encouragement of new, untried ideas. Given these conditions, as well as such practical problems as huge distances, scattered settlements, poor communications, a very low level of literacy and very few printing facilities, it is not surprising that the reformists made little impact outside a relatively narrow circle of urban intellectuals. This might have changed had they had time to build up a broader base: had the history of Central Asia been very different, the reformists here, like those elsewhere in the colonial world, might have played a significant role in shaping the modern political development of their region. As it was, the Muslim reformist movement was abruptly terminated once Soviet rule was established.

### *Islam as Ethnic Marker during the Tsarist Period*

For many centuries the Muslims of Central Asia were almost entirely surrounded by other Muslims, and hence Islam did not constitute an ethnic boundary marker (although there were divisions within Islam itself which did act in this way, namely between Shias and Sunnis in Transoxiana and between Sunnis and Ismailis in Badakhshan). The only exceptions, and then but intermittently, were the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who in the eighteenth century were subjected to the incursions of the Mongolian Jungars. It was the Russian occupation of the region that brought the Central Asians into direct and prolonged contact with a non-Muslim culture. There was little direct interaction between the two communities, but nevertheless the



Central Asians were exposed to an ever-increasing range of new institutions, technology, norms of behaviour, styles of dress, foodstuffs, urban landscapes and types of transport. This did not, in general, arouse resentment – rather, curiosity and often admiration – but it did serve to define the contours of ‘us’, i.e. ‘this is how we are’, as opposed to ‘them’, i.e. ‘this is how they are’. ‘Islam’ came to be used as a generic term to refer to everything that was perceived to be local, not foreign. This gave rise to such expressions as *musulmon tili* ‘Muslim language’, used for any local language, to differentiate it from Russian, the language of the foreigners; or *musulmon kuinak*, ‘Muslim shirt’, a traditional, collarless style of shirt, as opposed to a western-style shirt worn with a tie.<sup>54</sup> The tsarist authorities (and likewise the Soviet, in the first years after the revolution) also used the term ‘Muslim’ as a loose, collective ethnonym for the indigenous population. Religion itself does not appear to have been an issue. In fact, what struck Schuyler most forcibly was ‘the spirit of indifference’ that the Muslims showed in matters of religious observance.<sup>55</sup> In Bukhara, under the rule of the emir, there were special officials (*reis*) whose duty it was to compel the population to attend services at the mosque; in Tashkent, under the rule of the Russians, the office of *reis* was abolished and consequently, according to the local *kazi* (judge), ‘not half so many people go as formerly ... many never think during the day of making their ablutions or of saying their prayers.’<sup>56</sup>

### **Islam Shackled–II: Soviet Period**

In mid-1916 a major insurrection engulfed the Steppe Territory and parts of the Turkestan Territory. The primary causes were the hardships imposed on the local population arising out of the Russian war effort. These included additional taxes, massive state requisitions of animals, fodder and other strategic supplies, and compulsory community service (e.g. repairing roads). The final straw was the mobilisation of Central Asian men between 18 and 43 years of age for home-front work in other parts of the Empire, as a result of which their own flocks and farms were deprived of vital manpower. In the north in particular there was also resentment towards the Slav settlers who since the end of the last century had been moving into the region in their tens of thousands and appropriating the nomads’ grazing lands. The rebellion was suppressed rapidly and with great brutality, but in some areas it merged into the much wider revolutionary struggle of 1917, which ended in the dissolution of the tsarist Empire.

Soviet rule was first established in Tashkent in September 1917 and shortly after it was extended to the industrial centres of the northern tier. The Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), encompassing the tsarist Turkestan Territory, was created in April 1918 as an administrative unit within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR); however, civil war broke out immediately and it was not until the autumn of the following year that Soviet forces regained control of Turkestan. In 1920 the emir of Bukhara and the khan of Khiva were deposed and their states transformed into the nominally independent People’s Soviet Republics (PSR) of Bukhara and Khorezm respectively (the Khanate of Kokand had ceased to exist in 1876, when it was incorporated into the Turkestan Territory). In the north, there was likewise a struggle between rival forces (nationalist, interventionist, White Army and Red Army) and Soviet power was not firmly reestablished until 1920; the ‘Kyrgyz’ (the term then used by the Russians for the Kazakhs) ASSR was created within the RSFSR in August 1920, corresponding approximately to the tsarist Steppe Territory. In 1924 the People’s Republics of Bukhara and Khorezm

were formally annexed and the whole of Central Asia was repartitioned into five administrative units, the forerunners of the independent states of today, namely, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

### *Soviet Policies Towards Islam*

Soviet policies towards Islam went through a number of different phases; moreover, they were often not implemented uniformly, much depending on local conditions at any given time. This apparent lack of consistency may be ascribed to the fact that such policies were motivated not solely by the desire to eradicate the religion, but more broadly to secure the triumph of socialism and victory in the class war.<sup>57</sup> Thus it was not simply Islamic beliefs that were under attack but Islam as an entire social system. As Lenin recognised early on, this was a task that would require skill, patience and flexibility. This was most clearly reflected in the first years of Soviet rule (1917– ca. 1925), when pragmatism, more often than not, prevailed over ideology. The two main priorities during this period were to break the power of the religious leaders and to win the loyalty of the masses. This required a tightrope walker's sense of balance, since no matter how exploitative and corrupt individual clerics might have been, they were nevertheless important members of the community and as such commanded respect and allegiance. Had the Bolsheviks taken precipitate action against them they would have risked alienating the very people whose support they were aiming to attract. The situation was rendered yet more delicate by the fact that until the early 1920s the Bolsheviks were far from securely established in the region; and moreover, the counter-revolutionary forces in various parts of Central Asia (*basmachi*) were using religion as a means of rallying support, calling themselves the 'Army of Islam' and claiming that they were defending the faith against the infidel.

The opening salvo of Soviet policy in conciliatory mode towards Islam was Lenin and Stalin's famous and oft-repeated appeal of November (December) 1917 'To all the Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East', assuring them that from that day forth their 'beliefs and customs, national and cultural institutions would be free and inviolable'.<sup>58</sup> Measures were initiated to win the confidence of the Central Asians. In March 1919, at the Second Conference of the Communist Party of Turkestan, a Muslim Bureau was created for the express task of carrying out agitational work amongst the indigenous population. Material was prepared in the local languages and services at mosques, which brought together large numbers of people, were used for spreading communist ideas. Believers were admitted to the Party and for some years thereafter constituted a significant proportion of the membership. Muslim trade unions were set up for local craftsmen (e.g. tanners, cobblers); so too were soviets of Muslim deputies and soviets of Muslim workers.<sup>59</sup>

In January 1921 Friday was officially sanctioned as the weekly day of rest in the Turkestan Republic. Special provisions were made for leave of absence for the celebration of Muslim holidays (with no loss of pay). A Spiritual Board (*Mahkama-i sharia*) functioned in Tashkent, headed by members of the ulama.<sup>60</sup> It had a secretariat and was empowered to deal with matters relating to, for example, education and inheritance issues. It was also concerned with the training, appointment and registration of clerics. This last feature was a new development, a portent of future state control: traditionally, the functionaries of local mosques had been elected by the community concerned, with no external regulation. However, at this stage the

emphasis was still on cooperation. As a symbolic gesture of reconciliation, in 1923 the Soviet authorities ceremonially returned the historic Othman Quran to Central Asia, to the safekeeping of the Hoja Ahrar mosque in Tashkent.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, the social, legal and economic basis of Islam was being systematically dismantled, to be replaced by Soviet institutions. From 1918 to 1924 a number of laws and decrees were put in place that established the legal framework for the secularisation of society. These included laws on freedom of conscience, on the separation of church and school and on marriage and the family. In 1921, at the Tenth Party Congress, a resolution was passed calling for the launch of a comprehensive antireligious campaign. However, in the Turkestan and Kirghiz/Kazakh ASSRs conditions were still too unstable for decisive steps to be taken in this direction. In 1919 attempts had been made to close down Muslim schools and courts and to confiscate vaqf lands, but this had aroused such anger amongst the local population (not to mention giving a tactical advantage to the basmachis) that in 1922 these measures were somewhat relaxed.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, it became increasingly difficult for the Muslim schools and courts to continue to function and their numbers fell rapidly.<sup>63</sup>

By 1925, after the basmachi threat had been largely contained and the National Delimitation (i.e. the territorial-administrative reorganisation of the region) completed, the government was in a strong enough position to take a much firmer line towards Islam. This was symbolically signposted by the removal of the Othman Quran from the Hoja Ahrar mosque to a state-owned museum. The vaqf lands were nationalised at about this time as part of the Union-wide land and water reforms. Muslim schools and courts were phased out by 1927–28.<sup>64</sup> The Arabic script, which had been used in Central Asia for over a thousand years and was, moreover, the script in which the Holy Quran was written and therefore of great religious significance, was abolished in favour of the Latin script (in turn to be replaced by the Cyrillic in 1940); the whole world of Muslim scholarship was thus effectively rendered inaccessible to future generations of Central Asians. The campaign for the emancipation of women, which was intensified during these years, was likewise used to undermine Islam by portraying the religion as a source of ignorance, oppression and social injustice.<sup>65</sup>

Atheistic propaganda was intensified in the late 1920s. Republican branches of the Union of Atheists, later named 'Militant' Atheists, were set up at this time and large quantities of antireligious materials (books, journals, brochures, posters, etc.) were produced in the local languages. Outreach activities (e.g. lectures and discussion groups) were used to underline and amplify this message in schools and the workplace, in social and professional organisations. Women, who were generally more devout than men, were singled out as special targets for anti-Islamic propaganda; wherever possible they were drawn into atheistic work.<sup>66</sup> From 1925 onwards discriminatory legislation was introduced to limit the rights of religious functionaries of all faiths. Initially, clerics were deprived of the right to elect, or be elected to, soviets. Later measures imposed restrictions which made it difficult for such individuals to find housing or employment. The 1929 Law on Religious Associations (which remained in force until 1990) made such activities as the provision of religious education for minors, proselytising and fundraising for religious purposes illegal. From about 1930 the antireligious campaign merged with those of collectivisation and dekulakisation ('confiscation of the wealth of the richer members of society') and the political purges. Arbitrary arrests and executions were used to eliminate Muslim leaders who refused to cooperate with the authorities; Muslim literature, or indeed any material at all in the Arabic script, even if non-religious, was liable to be confis-

cated and the owner severely punished. All but a few mosques were closed. Some were destroyed, some used for other purposes, often of an emphatically antireligious nature (e.g. bars or atheistic museums). Very little detailed information is available for this period (the 1930s). No contemporary documents have as yet been published; Soviet scholars were mostly silent on the subject. All that is clear is that the institutional base of Islam was largely destroyed. A hundred or so mosques seem to have remained open for worship out of the many thousands that existed during the tsarist period; all the madrassahs were closed. A core of ulama survived, but what functions they fulfilled is not known. No religious literature was published. The annual haj was suspended (in the mid-1920s?) and contacts with foreign Muslims virtually ceased.<sup>67</sup>

After the outbreak of the Second World War there was an abrupt change of policy: the repression of the 1930s was suddenly replaced by a spirit of cooperation. In Central Asia an official Muslim Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan (MBCAK) was established in Tashkent under the chairmanship of a mufti. This body was given responsibility for the administration of Muslim affairs in the region, including the upkeep of mosques and the appointment of clerics. A council of ulama issued *fatwa* ('legal-religious opinions') on matters of current importance. In 1944 the haj was officially reinstated, though only a very small and select group of clerics were able to benefit from this. The following year a single madrassah, the Mir-i Arab in Bukhara, was reopened, thus making available again the facility for training Muslim scholars, albeit on a very limited scale. The number of functioning mosques was slightly increased, and the public celebration of religious ceremonies became a little easier. Moreover, the loyalty of the Muslim community and their contribution to the Soviet war effort was acknowledged in the central press, a clear indication that Islam was no longer regarded with the categorical disapproval of the 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

This trend towards greater accommodation continued in the postwar period, despite renewed bouts of religious persecution in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. In 1971 another madrassah was opened in Tashkent, the second in the Soviet Union. In 1974 it was officially named the Ismail al-Bukhari Institute, to commemorate the 1200th (AH) anniversary of al-Bukhari's birth. The motivation for this policy was not born of a greater degree of tolerance towards Islam, but rather of a desire to present the Soviet Union in a favourable light to the developing world, particularly the oil-rich Arab countries of the Middle East. This entailed creating at least a facade of acceptance of Soviet Islam. To further this aim, selected students from the madrassah were allowed to go to Islamic universities in Egypt and other Arab countries to complete their Quranic studies and to perfect their Arabic. A small number of religious publications were permitted to appear, including several editions of the Quran and a journal, *Muslims of the Soviet East*, originally printed in Uzbek and Arabic versions, later in several other languages.<sup>69</sup> These publications were intended for the ulama and for foreign Muslims, not for local distribution.<sup>70</sup>

During this period the restoration of major Islamic monuments in Central Asia was undertaken and Muslims from abroad were encouraged to visit the region, though in official delegations with set programmes rather than for private, individual purposes. Soviet Muslims became regular participants in international Islamic conferences and hosted similar events in their own republics.<sup>71</sup> They also played a prominent part in the international Peace Movement, acting as mouthpieces for the Soviet government's views on such issues as nuclear disarmament, 'Washington's official "policy of neoglobalism"', the Middle East conflict and 'the Zionist policy of aggression and genocide in respect to our brothers – Palestinians and other Arabs'.<sup>72</sup> Their contributions, skilfully pointed with liberal quotations from the Quran, emphasised both their

mastery of Islamic exegesis and their loyalty to the Soviet state. This deployment of Muslims in the service of Soviet foreign policy goals reflected a shift from a preoccupation with the domestic position of Islam to an awareness of its significance in the international arena and consequently the need to manage it with greater finesse. Nevertheless, the overall ideological position remained the same: Islam, like all other religions, was regarded as inimical to progress. The only question was whether it should be actively suppressed, as during the 1930s, or whether it should be allowed to 'wither away' of its own accord. By the late 1970s the second approach had come to prevail, and although atheistic work was still pursued quite vigorously, there was in general less pressure on believers. It was still necessary to exercise a degree of circumspection, but within certain recognised limits it was possible to observe most religious precepts.<sup>73</sup>

### *Muslim Leaders in the Soviet Period*

Of the three groups of actual or potential Muslim leaders that existed during the tsarist period, during the Soviet period it was the ulama who were the most visible and possibly the most influential source of Islamic authority. Very little is known of the role of the ulama in the early years of this period beyond the bare fact that some of its members supported the Bolsheviks, while others opposed them. Soviet writers focus almost exclusively on the former, western writers on the latter; without more detailed, balanced information it is impossible to gain a clear picture of the relative strength of the two factions. On balance, however, it seems likely, given the past history of the region, that the majority would have supported the incumbent authority whatever its political complexion. Certainly in the first decade of Soviet rule there was some collusion between clerics and party activists. Attempts were made by both sides to find points of compatibility between Islam and communism. Arguments from the sharia were used to condemn the basmachis and some of the trials of basmachis were held in mosques. The Holy Scriptures were also used to justify campaigns such as the expropriation of the property of rich landowners. In some places mullahs draped red banners bearing slogans such as 'Long Live the Land Reform' outside their mosques. Those who were found guilty of concealing their wealth were dubbed 'enemies of God and of the Great Prophet and Friend of God'.<sup>74</sup> Mullahs were also used to help explain to women that they had certain legal rights and that these did not conflict with Quranic teachings.<sup>75</sup> Since mosques were often the only community centres, especially in rural areas, they provided convenient bases for group activities connected with the new regime such as the distribution of seeds and tools, the holding of discussion groups and census surveys. Even the documents of the local soviets were sometimes kept in the mosque.<sup>76</sup>

Moves such as these helped to reassure the population by establishing a working relationship between the state and Islam. This point was further emphasised at the numerous conferences and meetings that were held during these years in an attempt to win the support of the local population and to turn them against the basmachis. One of the most important of these events was the All-Lokai Meeting, held on 23 December 1923, at which all the mullahs of the Lokai tribe unanimously came out in favour of the Soviet government, claiming that it did not contravene Islamic principles and that consequently the basmachis could not be said to be fighting in defence of religion. Similar meetings were held in other parts of eastern Bukhara, the basmachis stronghold, in 1924. The ulama of the Bukharan PSR also adopted an anti-basmachi stance, calling on the populace to reveal the rebels' hiding places and their

arms caches so as to hasten 'the return to peace, order and an honest life'.<sup>77</sup>

By the mid-1920s the support of the religious leaders was no longer of such vital importance to the state. They were subjected to increasing discrimination and eventually outright persecution. The number of mullahs fell rapidly, first in the towns, later in rural areas too. Nothing is known to date of the fate of the Mahkama-i sharia and the ulama who were connected with it. However, it is noteworthy that in 1943 there were enough known and trustworthy Muslim scholars for it to be possible to form the MBCAK and to furnish teachers for the Mir-i Arab madrassah. The first mufti of the MBCAK was Abdulmajidkhan Babakhanov, scion of a long and eminent line of Tashkent scholars. He is said to have donated his personal library to the new foundation: how he had managed to preserve these books through the 1930s is not clear, but the fact remains that they did survive and formed the basis of an important collection of religious works for the use of future students of Islam. Abdulmajid Babakhanov was succeeded on his death (in 1957) by his son Ziyautdinkhan, and later, following Ziyautdinkhan's death (in 1982), by the grandson, Shamsutdinkhan. Others who studied at the Mir-i Arab, and subsequently at the Imam al-Bukhari madrassah, also often seem to have come from known dynastic lines of Muslim scholars.

The number of graduates from the Mir-i Arab madrassah was very small: in all it used to have on average 70 students at any one time, spread over a 7-year course.<sup>78</sup> The curriculum included the recitation of the Quran, the Hadith ('Traditions of the Prophet'), sharia law, the history of Islam, general history, geography and the Uzbek, Persian and Arabic languages. The Imam al-Bukhari was a more advanced institute which provided a further four years' study in such specialised subjects as *tafsir* (exegesis of the Quran), *tawhid* (divine unity) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence), as well as secular disciplines such as the history and economic geography of the Soviet Union, international relations, Arabic literature, Russian and English.<sup>79</sup> Graduates from these institutions, who were drawn from all the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union, were appointed to posts in the official Islamic administration throughout the country, for example as heads of mosques or as functionaries in the regional Muslim Boards.

The Soviet ulama occupied a position midway between the government and the general public, linked to both yet also apart from both. Non-Soviet writers have often dismissed them as mere figureheads, but they fulfilled two important functions: first, they kept 'educated' Islam alive, preserving high standards of formal scholarship, albeit amongst a very select few; second, the very fact that after 1943 they held a recognised position in the Soviet hierarchy and were treated with respect (even if, on a personal level, this was always conditional on good behaviour) meant that the existence of the Muslim community as a whole was formally acknowledged and accepted. They did not play a pastoral role, but neither was this expected of them: traditionally, the ulama had always collaborated with the ruling elites and it was a matter of pride for most Central Asians that even in an atheist state 'their' representatives should be accorded status and visibility.

Moreover, by working with rather than against the secular authorities the Soviet ulama were eventually able to reestablish something of the institutional base of Islam. This provided believers with the possibility, however limited, of making a public avowal of their faith and engaging in a structured form of worship. The functioning mosques were regularly packed to capacity on Fridays and feast-days (though it should not be forgotten that even in the 1970s in Central Asia there were only 200–300 such mosques, for an area almost eight times the size of France, with an adult male population of approximately 5 million). The services were conducted in Arabic, following the standard pattern, except for the sermon (*hutba*), which was in

the vernacular. The topics chosen by the preachers were always politically correct, but this did not preclude some interesting attempts to look at the teachings of Islam in relation to the modern world (e.g. the Muslim position on the role of women). Also, although it is easy to scoff at the ulama's transparently pro-Soviet line on issues such as nuclear disarmament and world peace, nevertheless these are legitimate topics for religious leaders to consider; rereading some of their addresses in the post-Soviet world of today one is struck by the fact that they are by no means as banal as those who criticised them during the Cold War were wont to imply.

So far as the second potential source of leadership was concerned, that of the 'mystics' the major Sufi orders, already in a state of decay during the tsarist period, seem to have disappeared soon after the Bolsheviks came to power. In published material relating to the 1920s no reference has been found to the existence of Sufi khanakas. The heads of such establishments, like the ulama, would have had to decide whether they were for or against the new regime; in either case, it is unlikely that many would have escaped the purges of the 1930s. Later, especially in the somewhat freer climate of the 1980s, some individuals claimed to be Sufi adepts, generally of the Naqshbandi tariqa. There is, however, little to suggest that they belonged to the 'great' mystical tradition, as represented by the classical orders. Some western authors were tempted to posit the existence of 'underground' Sufi groups during this period.<sup>80</sup> This hypothesis was based partly on conclusions drawn from incomplete data, partly on analogies with supposedly similar situations elsewhere (e.g. the role of Sufi movements in other parts of the colonial world), partly on wishful thinking (e.g. a source of indigenous resistance to Soviet rule). At the time there was no way of either confirming or refuting such speculation. Today, with the benefit of better firsthand knowledge of the region, it seems that in Central Asia during most of the Soviet period the Sufi tariqas, in any formal sense, were notable for their absence.

At a more informal level, the *ishans* fared better, especially in rural areas. Some threw in their lot with the *basmachis* and eventually either were killed in action or fled abroad; others made whatever accommodation was necessary in order to survive. They seem to have all but ceased to function in the 1930s, but to have reemerged quite strongly in the postwar period.<sup>81</sup> By this time the number of ulama had been drastically reduced and there were very few people who could read the Arabic script, let alone understand the language of the Quran. The *ishans*, too, generally had very little formal knowledge of the scriptures, but they were perceived by the local population to possess *baraka* ('divine blessing') and were thus able to sanctify and give the appropriate sense of dignity to life-cycle rituals as well as to the small ceremonies of everyday existence. Several had hereditary followings, the chain of allegiance handed on from one generation to another among both the devotees and the 'master'.<sup>82</sup> It is widely reported that some such groups assembled from time to time to conduct semi-ritual, semi-social functions. In times of distress the *ishans* conveyed reassurance and comfort. They also practised healing, and sometimes soothsaying. These activities aroused the indignation of the more 'rational' members of the public, who regarded the *ishans* as charlatans intent on making money by hoodwinking the gullible and the weak.<sup>83</sup> This reaction is understandable, not only because of the political climate of the day, but also because of a general rejection of the concept of the paranormal at that time. It should not be forgotten that in most parts of the western world such phenomena as parakinesis, faith healing and other forms of alternative medicine used to be regarded with suspicion, if not outright disbelief. Today there is a greater acceptance, if not understanding, of these matters and it is easier to entertain the possibility that some of these individuals did indeed possess exceptional

skills. Those who frequented them certainly believed in them and their popularity grew rather than waned in the postwar period.

The contribution of the *ishans* to maintaining knowledge of the practices and precepts of Islam was much more equivocal than their social role. Given that most of them had no more than a rudimentary grasp of the basic principles of the religion, and that their knowledge of the Quran was confined to a few disjointed phrases, it is not surprising that they were unable to make a significant contribution as religious educators (a role which, in any case, they had never fulfilled before). In the post-Soviet period, when it was easier for foreigners to travel and to make direct contact with Central Asians, it became clear that this aspect of the *ishans*' activities had been vastly overestimated by those who had had little first-hand experience of the region. The level of knowledge about Islam amongst the population at large was infinitesimal, even though by this time (the early 1990s) a resurgence of interest in the religion had already been under way for some ten years.<sup>84</sup>

The group that had constituted the third possible source of Muslim leadership in the tsarist period, that of the modernising reformists, suffered the most under Soviet rule. Many of the activists eventually joined the Bolsheviks and some (e.g. Fitrat) held high office under the new regime. They saw this as the best – or only – way in which to achieve their goals. Perhaps they realised early on that this was a vain hope and that all they could do was to point out the harmful effects of the new policies. This had little effect. They were soon branded 'bourgeois nationalists' and forced either to recant their views or to fall silent. Most were executed around 1937. The spirit of reformism survived – and then but ambiguously – only in the ranks of the Soviet *ulama*.

#### *'Parallel Islam' or Islam as the 'Parallel Dimension'?*

The Soviet policies of the 1920–1930s were aimed to bring about the radical transformation of Central Asian society. They included positive measures such as the introduction of mass literacy and compulsory education, the provision of social welfare services and the emancipation of women, as well as measures specifically aimed at destroying the legacy of the past, such as the purges and the antireligious campaigns. They were implemented with such force and speed that they could not but have an impact. Consequently a significant level of modernisation was achieved in a very short space of time. One aspect of this was a marked degree of external secularisation (though this should be seen in the context of the 'spirit of indifference' towards formal religious observance noted by Schuyler some 50 years earlier: possibly the change in this respect was not so great as has sometimes been assumed). It is impossible, given the lack of objective contemporary information, to chart the internal secularisation of society. Some of the older generation certainly continued to perform the prescribed ritual prayers and other obligations in private throughout the Soviet period. Younger members of the family (it was not uncommon for three or even four generations to live together) learnt by example and out of respect for their elders tried to keep these practices alive. However, the meaning underlying the words and the gestures was gradually forgotten and by the 1960s even those who considered themselves to be devout were often reduced to the mechanical repetition of incomprehensible formulae, fulfilling an exercise akin to that so evocatively described, albeit in a different context, by Conan Doyle in *The Musgrave Ritual*.<sup>85</sup> Muslim students from Asia and Africa who visited the region at this period, sometimes spending several years studying there, invariably commented on the absence of



any sense of a shared Islamic heritage, of any familiar chord in local society. Scarcely anybody, other than the ulama and religious trainees, knew even the basic Muslim attestation of faith ('There is no God but God, and Muhammed is His Prophet').

Western writers, especially in the 1980s, often made a distinction between so-called 'official' (ulama-led) and 'unofficial' or 'parallel' (Sufi/ishan-led) Islam.<sup>86</sup> The latter was supposed in some way to be more 'genuine'. The majority of Central Asians do not appear to have subscribed to this categorisation. On the contrary, those who attended the mosque might also be in contact with an ishan and *vice versa*. Moreover, some members of the ulama were from Sufi/ishan lines; they too kept alive some beliefs and practices, even if largely in a private, personal capacity.<sup>87</sup> Religion here, as elsewhere, represented a continuum of shades of belief: at one end of the scale it was predominantly concerned with affective mechanisms (e.g. the wearing of amulets, repetition of pious phrases, performance of ritual actions to protect the individual from harm) and with integrative mechanisms (e.g. communal celebrations and memorial services) to bind society together, fostering a sense of shared identity. At the other end, it was a spiritual and intellectual relationship with God, framed within a formal system of beliefs, regulated by prescribed norms, which served as a practical guide for the individual as well as a source of inspiration and inner strength. Those who incline towards mysticism would add a further stage, that of union with God through the pursuit of esoteric disciplines.

In Central Asia after the establishment of Soviet rule large areas of this continuum of belief were blocked out. Consequently the balance tipped sharply in favour of the affective/integrative functions of religion. Arguably the greatest tragedy for Islam during this period was not the closure of mosques – this disrupted the rhythm of communal worship, but did not necessarily have an adverse influence on the faith of the individual – nor the abolition of the sharia courts – this altered the socio-legal framework of society, but did not necessarily destroy its ethical values – but the closure of religious schools and colleges. This meant that the great majority of the population no longer had the possibility of gaining any sort of formal knowledge of Islam. This was a marked contrast with the tsarist period, which had seen a great expansion of the educational base of Islam. By the early twentieth century there was a mekteb within geographical reach of virtually every Central Asian. The level of training in such establishments may have been no more than rudimentary, but it at least provided an introduction to the basic tenets of the religion and conveyed some awareness of the wealth of Islamic learning. Those who so desired could pursue their studies to as advanced a degree as they wished. Contacts with other parts of the Muslim world were being reestablished at this time (late nineteenth century) and this was just starting to fuel a reawakening of Islamic self-confidence and commitment. Under Soviet rule this process was reversed, resulting in a chronic impoverishment of the religious experience. The attack on the intellectual base of Islam was rendered doubly effective since at the same time that religious education was being destroyed there was a steep rise in general educational standards. This inevitably had the effect of undermining the intellectual impact of Islam, giving substance to the impression that the religion was nothing more than a set of primitive superstitions and prohibitions.<sup>88</sup>

Commentators on Soviet Islam tended to regard the maintenance of certain observances as specific and exclusive manifestations of religious allegiance, overlooking the fact that for most Central Asians such activities had a predominantly ethno-cultural significance. Thus it often seemed to outsiders (Soviet Russian as well as

western) that the performance of rites that were Muslim in origin (e.g. those connected with burial or commemoration of the deceased) must have been an act of defiance against the Soviet system, or at least a deliberate act of hypocrisy. Central Asians themselves, however, do not appear to have perceived such clear-cut distinctions. The Uzbek scholar Tolib Saidbayev, possibly the best informed and certainly the most perceptive commentator on Islam in Soviet Central Asia, described this phenomenon as living in 'two dimensions':<sup>89</sup> in the one, relating to the public sphere, Central Asians were thoroughly Sovietised in their attitudes, values and loyalties; in the other, relating to the private sphere, they retained a largely traditional outlook, their world shaped by customs and preconceptions that were rooted in Islamic practice. This in turn was increasingly understood as being synonymous with the 'local' or 'national' heritage rather than the strictly religious. A Kazakh succinctly summed up this interplay between religion and ethnicity by explaining: 'I am an atheist but also a Muslim, because all Kazakhs are Muslims and I cannot deny my forefathers.'<sup>90</sup> The Soviet antireligious campaigns were almost entirely without effect when it came to modifying traditional patterns of behaviour since they were, in a sense, directed at the wrong target – at Islam as a belief system – whereas in fact, after the first decade or two of Soviet rule, what mattered most to people was Islam as an expression of ethnic identity.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, it was largely because Islam was perceived by the Central Asians to be part of their traditional heritage, and hence not an ideological rival to Marxism–Leninism, that there was so little friction apparent between the 'two dimensions'. Thus not only did the authorities in Central Asia know full well that certain rites and traditions were being maintained, but senior party officials would themselves not infrequently take part in them. This comfortable accommodation was only occasionally – and temporarily – disturbed by political pressure from Moscow.

The observances that were most persistently maintained were those connected with rites of passage: male circumcision, marriage ceremonies (though these came to be somewhat influenced by European/Christian practices) and above all, burial services. The obligation to honour the deceased took precedence over almost all other considerations, to the point even of jeopardising career prospects, since it was seen not only as a mark of respect to the dead, but also as an affirmation of membership of the community. Social customs such as the payment of *kalym* (in Islamic legal terminology *mahr* i.e. dower, or bride price paid by the groom) and, to a lesser extent, polygamy and under-age marriage of girls, although forbidden by law, continued to be practised surreptitiously. Dietary prohibitions regarding the consumption of pork and alcohol were observed unevenly. The pressure on men to conform to standard Soviet norms was far greater than on women, since the latter tended to live and work in environments that were more culturally homogeneous and thus less vulnerable to external influences.

Group outings to holy places, especially mazars, remained popular, but in general were regarded as social occasions, without any specific religious significance. Several other traces of religious practices, reinterpreted as folk tradition, persisted throughout much of the Soviet period. One of these was the blessing given, in some traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, carpet-weaving), by the 'master' to the 'freed' apprentice, as a sign that the latter's training was complete.<sup>92</sup> Another example was the performance of a repetitive group dance, thought to be derived from the *zikr* ceremony, a custom which was popular in Turkmenistan well into the 1970s.<sup>93</sup> More obviously religious practices, such as the performance of the ritual prayer five times a day, the keeping of the fast of Ramadan and the giving of religious alms, were observed

mostly by the elderly, and mainly in rural areas.<sup>94</sup> It is of course not possible to generalise about people's motives for performing these actions, or about the significance that they ascribed to them. However, conversations with individuals who did maintain such traditions frequently indicated that what was important to them was the sense of continuity and, as they would put it, of 'doing what is right, what our forefathers did'. It might be inferred from this that they were perhaps acting more out of loyalty to tradition than out of an active commitment to the faith.

### **Islam Resurgent**

The resurgence of Islam in Central Asia began in the early 1970s with the emergence of a small-scale revivalist movement in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>95</sup> The Soviet press referred to its adherents as *Wahhabi*, implying that they were backed by foreign sponsorship (presumably from Saudi Arabia), but there is no evidence to indicate that they received either external influence or support at this period.<sup>96</sup> It is possible that the movement drew its inspiration from an ascetic sect that was active in the area at the beginning of the century.<sup>97</sup> It is more likely, however, that it was a spontaneous, grass-roots reaction against the relentless materialism of Marxism–Leninism and its sterile doctrine of 'scientific atheism'. Similar developments were to be observed in many parts of the Soviet Union at that time, both amongst followers of the major religions (Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism) and amongst converts to 'new' religions (e.g. Hare Krishna). These 'revivalist' Muslims learnt about Islam from members of the older generation, from copies of religious texts that had somehow survived, and even from antireligious literature which, paradoxically, often contained a great deal of information about Islam (in order, of course, to refute it). First-hand reports from the region indicate that the Central Asian revivalists did not call themselves 'Wahhabis' and that few had even heard of the term. Their self-definition appears to have been simply 'Muslim'. Locally they were usually known as *qara sakal* ('black beard'), owing to their habit of growing their beards, in accordance with the tradition of the Prophet. Unlike the *ulama* these revivalists distanced themselves as far as possible from the Soviet state. They supported themselves by religious duties such as preaching, teaching and officiating at family ceremonies, supplemented by 'informal' jobs such as gardening and casual labour.<sup>98</sup> They were known as people of upright character, given to abstinence and hard work. Although they had few adherents outside the Ferghana Valley their moral stance aroused the admiration of some of the urban intellectuals, especially in Tashkent. This gave the movement a higher profile than its numbers (estimated at some 8000–10,000 by the late 1980s)<sup>99</sup> alone would have merited.

Another and stronger impetus for the reintroduction of Islamic values was provided by a sudden shift in government policy: whereas previously Islam had been blamed for impeding social and economic progress, from 1989 onwards a more conciliatory approach was adopted. This was to some extent the result of greater tolerance towards religion throughout the Soviet Union, but more specifically it was an attempt to combat the perceived threat of Iranian-style Islamic revolution by bolstering a sense of pride in indigenous Islamic traditions. The change of policy was marked by a change of leadership. Mufti Shamsutdinkhan Babakhanov was abruptly removed from his position as chairman of the MBCAK, ostensibly in response to the demands of the Muslim community: dubious photographic evidence of his apparently dissolute way of life had suddenly found its way into the public domain, causing a furore amongst the believers. They came out onto the streets in what was claimed to be a spontaneous, and was certainly an unprecedented, demonstration of public opin-

ion. A more probable reason for his departure from office was that he and his family were too closely associated with the policies of the past, especially of the 'period of stagnation' under Leonid Brezhnev.

A new face was required to give credibility to the government's change of approach. The choice fell on Muhammad Sadyk Muhammad Yusuf Hoja-ogli, who for the previous two years had been rector of the Tashkent madrassah. His election met with general approval: young (born in 1952, Andijan region), well-educated (a graduate of the two Soviet madrassahs, followed by a period of study in Libya) and highly respected for his personal integrity and piety, he was in truth an excellent candidate for the delicate task of recalibrating the balance between the state and Islam. He was an energetic and persuasive proponent of government policies, but also worked hard to improve conditions for the practice of Islam. His avowed aim was to provide every Muslim family in Central Asia with a copy of the Holy Quran. His efforts met with official approval and he received substantial support from the authorities, who not only gave him a prominent role in public affairs but also made several concessions to the Muslim community, such as permission to open more mosques, the relaxing of restrictions concerning the pilgrimage to Mecca and the increased provision of religious literature. The symbolic seal of approval on his appointment was the return of the Othman Quran to the safekeeping of the MBCAK. These measures generated a surge of gratitude to the state, and specifically to President Gorbachev, the architect of this new liberalism. There was a genuine sense of satisfaction that the validity of Central Asian culture had been recognised and was finally being accorded proper respect. For the great majority of the population this was sufficient: at this stage there were few who were in favour of religion assuming a more dominant role in society.<sup>100</sup>

The manner in which, at the end of 1991, the Central Asian states acquired independence – without warning and without preparation – created a psychological vacuum that threatened to cause society to implode. The ruling elites (who had all come to power under the patronage of the Soviet system) moved swiftly to promote Islam as the basis of the new 'state ideologies', while Soviet doctrine was dismissed as an enforced and temporary aberration that had corrupted the moral fibre of the region. Public opinion was mobilised through articles in the press and the pronouncements of leading public figures: these emphasised the need for a return to Islamic ethics. President Akayev of Kyrgyzstan and President Karimov of Uzbekistan took their respective oaths of office on both the Quran and the Constitution to underline this point. The following year President Akayev proposed that the new Kyrgyz Constitution should reflect the moral values of Islam.<sup>101</sup> High-ranking government officials in all the republics, until recently models of Soviet anticlericalism, suddenly began to stress their Muslim credentials. The agenda was set by the presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, who performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. There was a new sensitivity (at least in public) regarding the observance of dietary prohibitions; Islamic gestures (e.g. the downward stroking of the face) and pious utterances, once confined to the private sphere, became a regular feature of public discourse. During Ramadan it was now acceptable to admit to keeping the fast. Islamic-style ornamentation and Arabicised forms of the Cyrillic script (then still the official script) began to appear on public notices, street signs, letterheads and other such vehicles for the projection of a self-image. In the Ferghana Valley an unofficial move to reintroduce the Arabic script produced a rash of shop signs in that script, especially over food shops, where it served as an indication that the wares on sale were *halal* (ritually pure).

Reestablishing a network of mosques became a priority. In Turkmenistan, for example, there were only four mosques open for worship in the 1980s; by 1994 there were 181 and 100 more were at the planning stage. In Uzbekistan, there were 300 in 1989, but by 1993 over 5000.<sup>102</sup> In Tajikistan, in the period 1989–91, 2000 mosques were opened, including 130 large Friday mosques.<sup>103</sup> In Kyrgyzstan there were over 1000 mosques by late 1995; in Kazakhstan, 4200.<sup>104</sup> Schools and voluntary bodies had for some time been running courses to teach the Arabic script and give instruction in reading the Quran. Opportunities for more advanced Muslim education were provided by the numerous madrassahs and Islamic centres which began to appear throughout the region. Thus in Kyrgyzstan, where there were formerly no madrassahs, by 1994 there were eight. Particular attention was paid to the provision of training for girls. In Uzbekistan three women's madrassahs were opened and courses at some men's madrassahs began to accept women students; in Kyrgyzstan by 1993 there were departments for female students at the three main Islamic institutes.<sup>105</sup>

Much of the finance for these institutions comes from the local communities, occasionally supplemented by contributions from the district authorities. There is, however, a significant input of human and material resources from Muslims abroad, both from governments and from private foundations. Saudi Arabia has been particularly generous in this respect, according to local sources. During the latter years of the Soviet period good (though carefully monitored) relations were maintained with Muslim universities in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Jordan; Central Asians who were marked out for senior positions in the official religious hierarchy were sent to these institutions to complete their studies. Many more students, both men and women, are now being sent abroad for higher Islamic education.<sup>106</sup> The Central Asian states have joined such bodies as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) and this has facilitated the development of cultural, political and economic links with Muslim countries. On a more personal level, thousands of Central Asians are now able to participate in the haj and through it to experience a cathartic regeneration of membership of the world-wide Muslim community.<sup>107</sup> In Badakhshan, after decades of isolation, religious training and organisational links have finally been reestablished with the international body of Ismailis and with the spiritual leader of the community, the Aga Khan, who has himself now visited the region (in May 1995).

The resurgence of Islam in Central Asia has not, however, been a simple, monolithic process. To date, it has encouraged atomisation rather than unification. One reflection of this is the translation of the Quran into the local languages; this has made it more accessible to the population at large, but has also served to create a sense of national exclusivity. Another symptom is the dismantling of the unified Islamic administration (MBCAK) that existed under the Soviet regime. As a result of this process, which began shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all five states have now established separate, 'nationalised' Muslim organs.<sup>108</sup> The primary function of these post-Soviet bodies is (as previously) to serve the interests of their respective governments. They are not free to pursue independent policies to promote pan-Islamic or even regional Islamic solidarity. This scission along state lines has made of Islam in Central Asia an adjunct of nation-building, thereby counteracting the supranational appeal of the religion.

The current phase of reislamisation incorporates some traditional Central Asian features, but exogenous influences often prove more powerful. Muslim missionaries from abroad, representing a variety of orthodox and unorthodox sects (and not infrequently involved in advancing the interests of their country of origin) are introducing

new, more 'correct' interpretations of Islam. The activities of some of these missionaries, several of whom are able to buttress the spiritual content of their message with financial subventions and other such blandishments, are causing deep rifts in society. It is now not unusual to find mutually hostile Muslim factions, each with their own mosque, in a single village. There is a revival of interest in Sufism, but this too is largely inspired by external influences.<sup>109</sup> The same is true of the tendency among younger women to assume a higher profile in religious affairs. Significant numbers now attend services in the mosque, whereas traditionally Central Asian women worshipped at home. Fledgling 'Leagues of Muslim Women' have been established in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. A few female university students (still very much a minority) have taken to wearing the *hejab* (Islamic-style head scarf). This is a new fashion, in that the style of head-covering is not traditional to the region, but is imported from abroad.<sup>110</sup>

However, attitudes towards Islam are still in flux. The extraordinary proliferation of mosques and other Islamic institutions over the past few years has not been driven by renascent religious sentiment alone. One powerful motivation has undoubtedly been the desire to find new, non-Soviet expressions of national identity. The mosques and related social and educational establishments provide a dramatic contrast, real as well as metaphorical, to the office blocks that housed, and also symbolised, the Soviet administration. It thus became a matter of prestige for a community to acquire this means of signalling the break with the preceding regime. In fact, many of the mosques that were originally projected have still not been completed or have assumed a much more modest form. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the attendance at services in the existing mosques: there was a sharp rise in 1990–92, followed by a noticeable slump from 1993 onwards, when the novelty of religious freedom had worn off.<sup>111</sup> Statistics on levels of enrolment at madrassahs can also be misleading. Some entrants are undoubtedly motivated by a desire to pursue their religious studies; others, however, are more interested in enjoying free tuition in Arabic and other languages, hoping thereby to acquire valuable linguistic skills to further their career in business or other secular profession at some later date.<sup>112</sup> The decades of secularisation have left their mark, and there are today many, especially in urban areas, who despite the fact that they respect and take pride in their Islamic heritage are opposed to the imposition of what, for them, are now alien norms. This dichotomy sometimes results in what appear to be contradictory, indeed schizoid, attitudes towards Islam. The self-same individuals will, in one context, applaud the reislamisation of society, but, in another, will reject it. A distinction is frequently drawn between 'good Islam' and 'bad Islam'. This 'à la carte' approach is based on the assumption that it is possible to pick and choose between those elements of the faith which will be 'useful' to society and those which will be 'harmful'. There is, however, little public or private debate as yet as to how, or by whom, the boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable should be set.

### *Politicisation of Islam*

Islam was coopted by the Soviet state as a political tool in the development of its relations with countries of the developing world. In the postwar period, particularly the 1950s–1970s, much was made of the fact that the Soviet Union had one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, as well as possessing on its territory major Islamic monuments. This was used as a basis on which to construct an image of the Soviet Union as a state which, though not Islamic, was, nevertheless, a part of the

Muslim world and thus had a special understanding of Muslim affairs, especially on an international level. However, in the 1970s–1980s Soviet Muslims began to reclaim their religious heritage and likewise to explore the possibility of creating an independent political identity, based on Islam. It was as a result of this movement that in 1990 the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) was founded in Astrakhan'. Its aim was to forge a united Muslim opposition to Soviet rule throughout the Union. In fact it never succeeded in establishing the required infrastructure and has functioned instead as a symbolic umbrella organisation for a number of independent regional groupings. In Central Asia there are currently two main centres—one in the Ferghana Valley (mostly in Uzbekistan, but with branches in southern Kyrgyzstan) and the other in Tajikistan. In both cases the available evidence (admittedly anecdotal) suggests that they are loose networks rather than formally constituted bodies with coordinated command structures.

In Tajikistan the IRP enjoyed a brief period of legal recognition from late 1991 to March 1993, but was banned after the outbreak of civil conflict.<sup>113</sup> Tajik opposition leaders of various persuasions have from time to time made tactical alliances with the movement, although few of them appear to share its more extremist views. It is difficult to gauge how much popular support the IRP enjoys, but reports from those who have first-hand knowledge of the situation suggest that it is mostly confined to the south-west. In Uzbekistan the movement has always been proscribed. It does, however, have a following, mainly in the Andijan–Namangan area. There is undoubtedly a stronger sense of Islamic identity here than elsewhere in the region and a few local mosques are focal points for so-called 'fundamentalist' tendencies. There are occasional displays of animosity towards non-Muslims and strict public adherence to Islamic codes of dress and behaviour is deemed advisable; some local women don the full head-to-toe veil when they go out of doors. Nevertheless, for the most part, the emphasis is on higher standards of personal morality rather than on revolutionary zeal to change society as a whole. Amongst the younger generation, the chief consequence has been to stimulate discussion of such topics as the evils of alcohol and narcotics abuse.<sup>114</sup> A smaller group named *Adolat* (Justice) began to attract a following in the Ferghana region in 1991–92, but in its ideological approach it did not appear to differ significantly from the IRP. In Kazakhstan the xenophobic nationalist group *Alash* (named after the legendary forefather of the Kazakhs) advocated a return to Islamic precepts; however, it found few supporters and by 1995 had all but ceased to exist.<sup>115</sup>

The post-Soviet state authorities have responded with suspicion and hostility to these nascent signs of independent Islamic political awareness, fearing that they may lead to opposition to their rule. Since 1992 the fiercest reaction has been in Uzbekistan. Suspect religious groups are kept under close surveillance by the security services. Some have been accused of spreading anticonstitutional propaganda and of stockpiling arms in preparation for an Islamic revolution. Several *Adolat* and IRP members have been arrested and some have been given long prison sentences. Provincial governors, who in the past frequently turned a blind eye to the activities of Muslim leaders, are now held personally responsible for their conduct. The post-Soviet Committee for Religious Affairs, attached to the Cabinet of Ministers, has been given such sweeping powers that it effectively destroys the independence of religious institutions. Over the past couple of years over 50 foreign Muslim missionaries are reported to have been expelled; more stringent visa requirements have been introduced, also restrictions on mosque building. Mufti Muhammad Sadyk, once the embodiment of the optimism engendered by perestroika, was finally ousted from office in the spring of 1993. The ostensible reason was corruption in the higher eche-

lons of the religious administration, but there were also hints that the mufti had fundamentalist leanings;<sup>116</sup> he is now in voluntary exile in Saudi Arabia. As an Uzbek academic commented, henceforth 'Islam in Uzbekistan will be what the president wants it to be'.<sup>117</sup> On the surface, attitudes towards Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are somewhat more liberal. Here too, however, there is considerable concern about the increase in religious activities. Official government spokesmen, especially in Kyrgyzstan, are outspoken about the dangers of so-called 'Wahhabism'. There is, however, little hard evidence to indicate that 'fundamentalist' Islam is indeed on the increase in these states. This instinctive fear of Islam is to some extent a legacy of Soviet indoctrination. Given the extraordinary pace of change during the past few years it is perhaps understandable, though not necessarily justified. The exaggerated nature of some official statements, moreover, cannot but create the impression that such attitudes are being manipulated in order to distract attention from other domestic problems such as, for example, the current economic crisis.

### **Summary of Historical Developments**

The history of the relationship between Islam and the state in Central Asia as discussed above may be summarised as follows: stage one (eighth to twelfth centuries): approximately equal distribution of power between civil authorities, ulama and Sufi sheikhs; stage two (thirteenth to eighteenth centuries): in Transoxiana, Sufis become a dominant power in state affairs; amongst the nomads, tribal leaders and Sufi sheikhs are mutually supportive; stage three (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries): in Transoxiana, the Sufi sheikhs lose influence in direct proportion to the growth of power of the emergent khanates; amongst the nomads there is little change; stage four (nineteenth to early twentieth centuries): coopting of the ulama, among both the nomads and sedentary population, by the tsarist administration and marginalisation of the Sufi sheikhs; stage five (Soviet period): the ulama, greatly reduced in number and entirely dependent on the goodwill of the state, become both agents of the state and the only visible source of Islamic authority; ishans active on the fringes of popular culture; stage six (post-1991): ulama still tied to the respective state governments, but expanding in numbers and in diversity of views; Islam reemerging as a social and a political force.

The relationship between Islam and ethnicity, meanwhile, has evolved through the following three phases. Initially: assimilation by means of adaptation and syncretisation; then (nineteenth century onwards): boundary marker between the indigenous population and the colonising immigrants; eventually (Soviet and post-Soviet periods): nationalisation, i.e. reinterpretation of the Islamic legacy as part of the historic national heritage of the titular ethnic groups of the region.

### **Future options**

Central Asia today is in the throes of a radical economic and social transformation, a process made all the more difficult and traumatic by the fact that it was triggered unexpectedly, by a set of wholly unforeseen circumstances. The situation is still in such a state of flux (at the time of writing, only just over four years have elapsed since the collapse of the Soviet Union), and there is still such a dearth of reliable information that it is impossible to predict with any degree of certainty the likely course of future events.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that whatever direction this may take, Islam will be of some significance. That being so, it is worth reviewing the vari-



ous trends that might, in theory, emerge; also the factors that, in practice, are likely to influence the outcome.

There are three main directions in which Islam in Central Asia might develop:

- Islam could become a political force; this could take the following forms: (a) the creation of Islamic states, regulated as far as possible by sharia law (no modern Islamic state has as yet wholly achieved this, but there have been a number of attempts to realise this ideal, most notably in Iran); (b) the use of Islam as a legitimising or mobilising force by the ruling, basically secular, elites (cf., for example, the present situation in Iraq); (c) the use of Islam as a voice of protest by alienated, disadvantaged groups who have no other way of expressing their despair and anger, and no other means of regaining hope, dignity and the will to use self-help to better their lot.
- Islam could become an ethnic identity, compounded of respect for the historical legacy, observance of the main feast days and ceremonies, and some limited use of associative symbols, but with little active religious content. This trend towards the secularisation of religion is already well attested in many parts of the modern world in a variety of formerly religion-based cultures; the closest analogues for the current, and possibly future nature of Islamic observance in Central Asia are to be found amongst Jewish, and to a lesser though increasing degree, Muslim communities in Europe and America.
- Islam could become a religious identity, the focus of a process of spiritual renewal (using the term in the sense in which it is used in contemporary debates amongst Christians to denote not a backward-looking revival, but a forward-looking rediscovery of faith as a vital component of human existence).

The factors which will influence the development of Islam in Central Asia include the following. Firstly, the Soviet experience had a homogenising effect, reducing former nomads and settled peoples alike to the same level of secularisation, the same level of ignorance regarding Islam. Consequently, today, Kazakhs, for example, are as likely to undergo a religious renewal as are Uzbeks (as indeed is proving to be the case). While it is quite likely that the Central Asian states will follow different paths of religious development, the reasons for this are more likely to be rooted in local socio-economic conditions, including the ethnic balance, between immigrants and indigenous Central Asians in a given region, rather than in the supposed degree of orthodoxy that prevailed in the community over a century ago.

Secondly, during the Soviet period the institutional framework of Islam was all but destroyed. Crucially, opportunities for studying the doctrine and the law were so drastically reduced, and so tightly controlled, that the ulama were fatally weakened, in terms both of numbers and of influence. The Sufi orders suffered even more severely, the esoteric teachings and disciplines of the great masters reduced to a distorted, illiterate echo of the original. Thus not only was the power of Islam as a belief system undermined, but the infrastructure of what is essentially a law-based religion was almost completely demolished.

Thirdly, Central Asia today is no longer the closed society that it once was. It has a very high rate of literacy (virtually 100 per cent) and, compared with the developing world (including most Muslim countries), there are good transport and communications networks and a large number of mass media outlets. This allows ideas to be disseminated quite rapidly, although, equally, it allows for a high degree of state censorship. Nevertheless, whatever level of control might exist, there are many other sources of information that are functioning relatively freely in most areas. These

arise out of contacts with foreigners through such channels as joint ventures, training and technical assistance programmes, radio and television transmissions from abroad, international conferences and student exchanges; the process has been facilitated by a huge enthusiasm for learning foreign languages, especially English. In addition to this, there are many religious organisations working in the region, not only Muslims of various affiliations (including very active Ahmediyya missions), but also Roman Catholics, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Hare Krishna followers, Baha'is and many others. Their services are open to all and they distribute their literature very widely; some of the more conservative evangelical Christian groups, in Tashkent at least, have taken to handing out highly tendentious anti-Islamic tracts.<sup>119</sup> Thus while there is undoubtedly a considerable increase in the activities of Muslim missionaries, they are not only divided amongst themselves, representing different factions and sects, but also challenged by representatives of many other faiths, as well as by material, secular attractions of all descriptions.

Fourthly, the fact that there are now many different Islamic communities in the region, clustered around mission centres (some local, some foreign), individual preachers and mosques, madrassahs and other such institutions, has led to a fragmentation of leadership and sources of authority. Thus whereas at the end of the Soviet period there was a high degree of unity amongst Central Asian Muslims, and a general acceptance of the authority of such 'establishment' figures as Mufti Muhammad Sadyk (head of MBCAK) and Kazi Akbar Turajonzade (Tajikistan), there are now no longer any Muslim leaders who command such respect. Mufti Muhammad Sadyk and Kazi Akbar Turajonzade have been discredited in public opinion (with or without justification—the claims and counter-claims of wrong-doing are legion), and both have now sought refuge abroad. In Kazakhstan the mufti, Ratbek Nisanbai-uli, has been attacked not only verbally but also physically by dissident Muslims. Such incidents have undermined the population's confidence in the ulama, without, however, offering any valid alternatives. The emergence of Islamic political parties has not helped matters, since many Central Asians still feel that religion and politics should be kept apart; the leaders of such groups are generally regarded as adventurers rather than as sources of spiritual guidance. Few are known by name, let alone by teaching or by reputation for knowledge and piety, outside their immediate location.

Finally, throughout the region attitudes towards Islam are ambivalent. On the one hand, there is a general acceptance that it is part of traditional culture and must, therefore, have a prominent place in the independent post-Soviet states. Some see it as an important ethical force and hence a means of halting the moral collapse of contemporary society. At the same time, however, many urban dwellers regard it with an almost pathological fear, convinced that any rise in Islamic activities is inevitably linked to an upsurge in 'fundamentalism', that this in turn is synonymous with terrorism, and that the outcome must, therefore, be a total breakdown of law and order. The example of Tajikistan is frequently cited, especially in Uzbekistan, where 'Islamic fundamentalism' is usually held to be the principal cause of the current problems (the level of knowledge about events in Tajikistan is, however, generally exceedingly low, opinions being based largely on prejudice and misinformation). Such views are to some extent rooted in an amalgam of Soviet anti-Islamic propaganda and newly accessible western Cold War writings on the imagined 'Muslim threat' to Moscow. They also, however, represent a form of urban elitism, since the argument usually follows the line that 'we in the cities are sophisticated, cosmopolitan, we can cope with this sudden freedom of thought, but they in the backwoods are primitive, easily led astray, prone to unpredictable frenzies'. In fact, those urban

intellectuals who through work or family connections have firsthand experience of rural areas tend not to concur with this view: the most recent reports (1994–96) seem to suggest that even in the Ferghana Valley, often considered to be a hotbed of fundamentalism, there is a high level of secularisation, apathy over political issues, and nostalgia for the Soviet era. Without more detailed research it would be unwise to draw firm conclusions from this type of evidence, but it does suggest that there is a certain amount of gratuitous scaremongering at work.

The factors listed above, considered in conjunction with the historical background, provide a framework within which to evaluate the likelihood, or otherwise, of the realisation of the possible trends of development posited at the beginning of this section. So far as the politicisation of Islam is concerned, the first option, that of the creation of an Islamic state in any of the five Central Asian republics, seems improbable in the foreseeable future: the principal reasons militating against this are, as already indicated, first, the lack of a strong and independent ulama; second, the high level of secularisation and concomitant lack of knowledge of basic Islamic precepts among the population at large; third, the lack of any convincing precedent for such a state in Central Asian history over the past two hundred-odd years (even the khanates were autocracies rather than theocracies); fourth, the fact that all these states are, in varying degrees, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional. It has sometimes been suggested that it would be possible for a 'foreign state' (Iran? Saudi Arabia?) to impose a strictly Islamic regime on one or more of the Central Asian republics. Given the extremely weak indigenous Islamic base, for this undertaking to succeed the 'foreign state' would need to deploy law enforcement agents equivalent in numbers and efficiency to those of the KGB (or the emir of Bukhara), not to mention a full panoply of Muslim administrators; it would also have to be able to offer social and economic rewards of sufficient magnitude to secure the loyalty of local elites, again on a scale comparable to that provided by the Soviet system (or now by the emergent market economy). This scarcely seems a realistic proposition, even without the prospect of the imposition of all manner of retaliatory sanctions by powerful members of the international community if these newly emerged states were to adopt Islamic regimes.

Other forms of politicisation are more likely. The use of Islam by the incumbent ruling elites as a means of legitimising their authority, as well as providing the basis for a new state ideology, is already in evidence in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent in Kazakhstan; in Tajikistan the situation is more ambiguous, owing to the regional/ideological groupings in the current struggle, but even here the present leadership is prepared to play the 'Islamic card' when necessary. Another possibility, that of the use of Islam as a vehicle for socio-political protest, is beginning to emerge in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, but in a very weak form and so far with little apparent success. This trend may become more pronounced in the future, but this will depend in considerable measure on the extent to which the respective governments allow a genuine public debate to emerge on policy issues; also on the success or failure of their economic reforms, which in turn will determine the level of material well-being of the population.

Islam as an ethnic identity is already well-established. Over the past few years it has been given greater public visibility in, for example, official ceremonies, references and citations in formal speeches and the celebration of religious holidays. The role of Islam as a value system is also being emphasised. At the same time, there are qualifications in the public presentation of Islam, aimed, it would seem, at preserving a balance between socio-cultural practices and overtly religious manifestations. This also appears to be the predominant pattern in the private sphere. However, there are

indications that this could change. Islam is beginning to reemerge as a religious identity. The materialism of the Soviet era and the recently discovered consumerism of the West have created in some, especially the young (notably students and young professionals), a hunger for more spiritual values. They are beginning to find answers in Islam. Others, especially of the older generation, have found themselves disoriented by the loss of Marxism-Leninism (which, for all its shortcomings, offered ideals and moral guidelines); they, too, are seeking a new ideological base and are beginning to turn to Islam. This nascent process of religious renewal is in some ways reminiscent of the reformist movement of the tsarist period, in that the 'new' believers of today, as then, are approaching the religion in a more intellectually rigorous manner than 'traditional' believers. It is still at a very early stage, however, and at present it is impossible to predict whether or not, or how deeply, it will take root.<sup>120</sup>

The one development which might accelerate the reislamisation of one (or some, or all) of the Central Asian states would be the emergence of a charismatic leader who was capable of using Islam as a tool of mass mobilisation. Yet this could happen only under certain social and economic conditions, most probably arising out of a prolonged economic crisis, resulting in widespread pauperisation and loss of morale. Also, and vitally, there would already need to be in existence a critical mass of believers amongst the urban middle classes who would support such a leader, as well as a body of educated Muslim scholars with a thorough knowledge of the law who could provide the necessary theoretical/doctrinal base for such a regime. Neither of these conditions is as yet in place. Revolutions, as opposed to local insurrections caused by specific grievances, such as food shortages, are rarely, if ever, brought about by peasant uprisings. Central Asia has not, to date, shown itself to be an exception in this respect. Rather, the emphasis has tended to be on allegiance to the incumbent authority. The chances of a charismatic leader emerging in Central Asia are much the same as in other parts of the world. In the USA, for example, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a representative of the religious right could come to power; in India, Hindu extremists; in Israel, ultra-conservative Jews. Likewise, in the Central Asian states, such a possibility exists, but it is by no means inevitable or even, at present, very likely.

Central Asian societies, settled as well as formerly nomadic, have very particular histories and cultures, but they are not peculiar in the sense that they function in a wholly irrational way: on the contrary, they have exhibited a remarkable degree of continuity, despite huge societal upheavals. In order to understand the present, therefore, it is important to try to analyse the past: it will not provide an infallible guide, but it is likely to be more helpful than a random rehearsal of atavistic fears and prejudices. Viewed in this perspective, it seems more probable that religion in general, and Islam in particular, will play a growing role in public and private life in all the Central Asian states. It will help to shape the moral outlook of society and contribute to the creation of the post-Soviet system of ethical values. For some individuals—perhaps even, eventually, the majority—it might come to constitute the basis of their personal spirituality. It is unlikely, however, that Islam will become a state religion in a formal sense. It is also unlikely, in the light of the historical heritage of the region, that it will assume a fanatical aspect to any significant degree. There are conditions, as indicated above, in which the influence of Islam might be activated in such a way as to acquire a more dominant role, but such conditions do not exist at present and there is no indication that they will arise in the foreseeable future.

## Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> L. I. Zhukova, *Iz istorii drevnikh kul'tov Srednei Azii: Khristianstvo* (Tashkent, 1994), gives a good overview of the history of Christianity in Central Asia; see especially pp. 8–24. Also V. V. Bartol'd, 'O Khristianstve v Turkestane v domongol'sky period,' *Sochineniya*, vol. II, part 2 (Nauka, Moscow), pp. 265–302, 315–19.
- <sup>2</sup> I. M. Muminov (ed.), *Istoriya Samarkanda*, vol. 1 (Fan, Tashkent, 1969) p. 79. See also D. Sinor (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge University Press), esp. pp. 313–16, 329–35, 352–54.
- <sup>3</sup> The classic study of this period is H.A.R. Gibb, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia* (Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1923). See also F.H. Skrine and E. Denison Ross, *The Heart of Asia* (Methuen, London, 1899), pp. 37–55; Sinor, *op. cit.*, pp. 343–70.
- <sup>4</sup> There were twelve public libraries in Merv, according to the thirteenth-century Arab geographer Yaqut, one of which possessed 12,000 volumes. For a history of the libraries of Merv in the early Islamic period see A. Yazberdiyev, 'Srednevekovyye biblioteki Merva', *Izvestiya AN TurkSSR*, no. 5, 1988, pp. 5–16.
- <sup>5</sup> V. V. Bartol'd, *Sochineniya*, vol. V (Nauka, Moscow, 1968), pp. 154.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 161–63. Amongst the Kazakhs the ruling elites of Mongol descent were termed *ak sujek* ('white bone'), in distinction to the lower-ranking, non-Mongol commanders and commoners who were known as *qara sujek* ('black bone'). For the social structure of the Kazakhs see B. Suleimenov (chief ed.), *Kazakhstan v XV–XVIII vekakh* (AN KazSSR, Nauka, Alma-Ata, 1969), pp. 160–68.
- <sup>7</sup> S.P. Tolstov (chief ed.) 'Narody Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana', vol. II (AN SSR, Moscow), p. 344; M. Auezov *et al.* (eds), *Istoriya Kazakhskoi SSR*, vol. I (AN KazSSR, Alma-Ata, 1957), pp. 103, 187. The terms 'natural religion' and 'Tengrism' are sometimes used for the complex of animistic beliefs and rites that were practised by the Turkic and Mongol peoples. See A. Molnar, *Weather Magic in Inner Asia* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington), esp. p. xiii.
- <sup>8</sup> J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1971), pp. 1–5. In subsequent chapters this work gives a good account of the beliefs, practices and history of the main Sufi orders.
- <sup>9</sup> H. Algar, 'A brief history of the Naqshbandi order', in M. Gaborieau *et al.*, *Varia Turcica, XVIII* (Isis, Istanbul-Paris, 1990), p. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Elsewhere in the present issue of *RSS* the paper by I. Mélikoff explores this theme further.
- <sup>11</sup> Algar, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- <sup>12</sup> For detailed genealogies of the Sufi tariqas see Trimingham, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–30; Qadiriyya, pp. 40–44; Kubrawiyya, pp. 55–58; Yasaviyya, pp. 58–62; Naqshbandiyya, pp. 62–64.
- <sup>13</sup> The most historically reliable identification appears to be that of Hakim-ata, generally believed to be synonymous with Suleiman Bakyrqani (*d.* 1166/67), a disciple of Yasavi (Bartol'd, *op. cit.*, vol. II, part 2, pp. 361, 532).
- <sup>14</sup> T. Saidbayev, *Islam i obshchestvo* (Nauka, Moscow, 1984), p. 79. The Hungarian orientalist and traveller A. Vambéry, who visited the region in the second half of the nineteenth century, described ishans as 'secular priests' (*Sketches of Central Asia* (Allen and Co., London, 1868)), p. 10.
- <sup>15</sup> S. Demidov, *Sufizm v Turkmenii* (Ylym, Ashkhabad, 1978), pp. 110–20.
- <sup>16</sup> S. Demidov, *Turkmenskiye ovlyady* (Ylym, Ashkhabad, 1976) provides a detailed study of this subject, based on extensive field research.
- <sup>17</sup> As P. Bannerman points out, 'one of the most hotly debated – and most confused – issues in Islam is the question of authority and sovereignty.' For a succinct survey of the main arguments, see P. Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (Routledge, London, 1988), pp. 60–82.
- <sup>18</sup> 'All jurists are agreed that the *shari'a* (literally "the path") comprises the entire corpus of divinely revealed law, but there is no agreement on the precise contents of that corpus.' Bannerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–59, reviews theory and practice regarding this complex topic.
- <sup>19</sup> Algar, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.
- <sup>22</sup> A.N. Boldyrev, 'Yeshchse raz k voprosu o Khodzha-Akhrare', in G. F. Kim *et al.* (eds), *Dukhovenstvo i politicheskaya zhizn' na blizhnem i srednem vostoke v period feodalizma* (Nauka, Moscow, 1985) (hereafter *Dukhovenstvo*), p. 59.
- <sup>23</sup> See B. Kazakov, 'Synov'ya Khodzha Akhrara i posledniye Timuridy', in *Dukhovenstvo*, pp. 80–91.
- <sup>24</sup> Good studies of this period are provided by B.A. Akhmedov, 'Rol' Dzhuibarskikh khodzhei v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni v Srednei Azii XVI-XVII vekov', in *Dukhovenstvo*, pp. 16–31, and G. A. Dzhurayeva, 'Mir-i Arab i politicheskaya zhizn' v Bukhare v XVI veke', in *Dukhovenstvo*, pp. 74–79.
- <sup>25</sup> Muhammad Sheibani had used the titles *imam* and *khalifa* (R. G. Mukminova, 'Dukhovenstvo i vakfy v Srednei Azii XVI veka,' in *Dukhovenstvo*, p. 141), but the Manghits took this process further, concentrating temporal and spiritual powers yet more firmly in the hands of the emir.
- <sup>26</sup> T. K. Beisembiyev, 'Dukhovenstvo v politicheskoi zhizni Kokandskogo khanstva v XVIII–XIX vekakh', in *Dukhovenstvo*, pp. 37–46.
- <sup>27</sup> Beisembiyev, *op. cit.* pp. 40–43.
- <sup>28</sup> Dzhurayeva, *op. cit.*; Akhmedov, *op. cit.*
- <sup>29</sup> V. Basilov, 'Doislamskiye verovaniya v soznanii i povedenii sovremennykh veruyushchikh, in *Islam: proiskhozhdeniye, istoriya i sovremennost'*, Nauchny ateizm no. 11 (Znaniye, Moscow, 1984), pp. 30–47. See also Irène Mélikoff's article in this issue of *RSS*.
- <sup>30</sup> Basilov, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 33–36.
- <sup>31</sup> S. Demidov, *Legendy i pravda o 'svyatykh' mestakh* (Ylym, Ashkhabad, 1988), pp. 54–6. These practices were noted by several nineteenth-century visitors to the region. See, for example, H. Landsell, *Russian Central Asia*, vol. I (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1885), p. 366.
- <sup>32</sup> Sh. Valikhanov, *Sobraniye sochinenii*, vol. IV, (Kazakhskaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, Alma-Ata, 1985), p. 99; see also on this subject E. Schuyler, *Turkistan*, vol. I, 3rd ed. (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1876), p. 37.
- <sup>33</sup> *Istoriya Kazakhskoi SSR*, pp. 390–400.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 400.
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 546.
- <sup>36</sup> J. Popowski, C. E. D. Black (ed.), *The Rival Powers in Central Asia*, translated from the German by A. B. Brabant (Archibald Constable, London, 1893), pp. 32–50; D. MacKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of General M. G. Cherniaev* (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Ga, 1974), pp. 34–66.
- <sup>37</sup> Schuyler, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- <sup>38</sup> *loc. cit.*
- <sup>39</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–23.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 124–25.
- <sup>42</sup> Demidov, *Sufizm*, p. 124.
- <sup>43</sup> Abdarrauf Fitrat, *Razskazy indiiskogo puteshestvennika: Bukhara, kak ona yest'*, translated from the Persian by A.N. Kondrat'yev (Mahmud-Hoja Begbudi, Samarkand, 1913), pp. 23–26. O. A. Sukhareva, in *Bukhara XIX–nachalo XX v.* (Nauka, Moscow, 1966), drawing on a variety of contemporary sources, lists quite fully the mosques, madrassahs and mazars (pp. 64–84) and the religious hierarchy (pp. 287–311) in Bukhara at the turn of the century.
- <sup>44</sup> Schuyler, *op. cit.*, p. 257; see also pp. 163–64.
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 158, 235.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 159–61. See also Sukhareva, *op. cit.*, pp. 305–8.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.
- <sup>49</sup> Beatrice Forbes Manz, 'Central Asian uprisings in the nineteenth century: Ferghana under

- the Russians, *Russian Review*, no. 46, 1987, pp. 267–81, explores this subject in some detail.
- <sup>50</sup> Skrine and Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 293.
- <sup>51</sup> Demidov, *Sufizm*, p. 147.
- <sup>52</sup> See further Sarfraz Khan's article on Fitrat in this issue of *RSS*. This period is now beginning to attract much scholarly interest. A good selection of recent papers on the subject is presented in *Le reformisme musulman en Asie Centrale*, in the series *Cahiers du monde russe*, vol. 37, nos 1–2, 1996.
- <sup>53</sup> Altynsaryn, for example, had little official support for his efforts to open secular schools for Kazakh children. For a review of his career see M. S. Burabayev and O.A. Segizbayev, *Ideinyye svyazi obshchestvenno-filosofskoi mysli Kazakhstana i Rossii* (Nauka, Alma-Ata, 1987), pp. 91–124.
- <sup>54</sup> Even in the 1980s, in rural areas, the author encountered examples of this usage.
- <sup>55</sup> Schuyler, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 162.
- <sup>57</sup> Filimonov *et al.* (eds), *Islam v SSSR* (Mysl', Moscow, 1983), p. 13.
- <sup>58</sup> Full text reproduced in B.A. Tulepbayev *et al.* (eds), *Preodolevaya religioznoye vliyaniye Islama* (Alma-Ata, 1990), pp. 17–18. This valuable collection of decrees and other official documents provides an illuminating insight into the secularisation campaign of the 1920s, with special reference to Kazakhstan.
- <sup>59</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–39.
- <sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159. This was the first administrative organ for the regulation of Islamic affairs to be created in Central Asia. It is not clear to what extent it was subordinate to the muftiate in Ufa.
- <sup>61</sup> The Othman Quran was first sent to the muftiate in Ufa in 1917; it was held there for 5 years, until on 18 August 1923 it was ceremoniously returned to Tashkent (Z. Babakhanov, *Islam and the Muslims in the Land of the Soviets* (Progress, 1980), p. 49).
- <sup>62</sup> *Islam v SSSR*, p. 13.
- <sup>63</sup> In Ferghana, for example, within this period the number of Muslim courts fell from 343 to 71 (*Islam v SSSR*, p. 15).
- <sup>64</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
- <sup>65</sup> See, for example, Sh. M. Masharipova, *Raskreposhcheniye zhenshchin Khorezma i voylecheniye ikh v sotsialisticheskoye stroitel'stvo* (Fan, Tashkent, 1990), p. 7.
- <sup>66</sup> D.A. Alimova, *Resheniye zhenskogo voprosa v Uzbekistane 1917–1941 gg.* (Fan, Tashkent, 1987), p. 55.
- <sup>67</sup> It appears that from about 1907 it had been becoming increasingly difficult for Central Asian Muslims to undertake the haj owing to disturbed conditions along the route (personal communications to the author by a group of elderly Central Asian Muslims in 1996, based on the accounts of their grandfathers). In 1926 Rizayeddin Fahreddin (*b.* 1859, Chairman of the Ufa muftiate 1922–36) headed a delegation of Muslims from the USSR to participate in an international Islamic conference in Mecca (Mahmud Tahir, *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1989, p. 113). This is probably the last time Soviet Muslims went abroad with official blessing until the postwar period. Anecdotal evidence tells of lone individuals making the pilgrimage illegally up to 1927.
- <sup>68</sup> Sh. Burkhanov and V. Gusarov, *Soviet Power and Islam* (Novosti, Moscow, 1984), pp. 30–31; Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 188–90. Yaacov Ro'i's article in this issue of *RSS* documents some of the obstacles that still remained, however. At the same time, some care needs to be exercised when using official Soviet reports on so-called 'Islamic activities'. Different phenomena were often lumped together indiscriminately under this heading. It was, for example, implied that female self-immolation was in some way 'Islamic'. This is certainly not so.
- <sup>69</sup> *Muslims in the USSR*, handbook published by the Muslim Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, translated by O. Svetlov (Novosti, Moscow, 1989), is one of several official publications that gives a survey of these various activities.
- <sup>70</sup> It is noteworthy that the Uzbek edition was printed in the Arabic script, abolished for general use in Uzbekistan in 1930.

- <sup>71</sup> E. Lazzarini, 'Through the contact lens darkly: Soviet Muslims and their co-religionists 1926–86', in S. Akiner (ed.), *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia* (British Academic Press, London, 1994), pp. 153–74, gives a chronology of delegations and conferences which brought Soviet Muslims into contact with foreign Muslims. For the period 1926–70 only 6 events are noted; for 1985–86 (August), 28.
- <sup>72</sup> See, for example, the proceedings of the Baku conference 'Muslims in the Struggle for Peace' (Baku, October 1986).
- <sup>73</sup> Personal communications and observations of the author.
- <sup>74</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
- <sup>75</sup> D. A. Alimova, *Zhensky vopros v Srednei Azii* (Fan, Tashkent, 1991), pp. 69–70.
- <sup>76</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 160–62; see also Burkhanov and Gusarov, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–23.
- <sup>78</sup> In the 1950s there were in all some one hundred students at the madrassah, but in the early 1960s numbers fell to about 70 (personal communications to the author in 1996 by the mufti of Kyrgyzstan, who had been a student at the Mir-i Arab during the 1960s).
- <sup>79</sup> J. Thrower, 'Muslim theological education', in *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia*, p. 179; in 1986 there were about 45 students in all at the al-Bukhari institute.
- <sup>80</sup> See, for example, A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire* (C. Hurst, London, 1985), pp. 21–23.
- <sup>81</sup> Demidov, *Sufizm*, p. 154. Yaacov Ro'i's paper elsewhere in this issue of *RSS* would seem to confirm this, although the interpretation given here is somewhat different.
- <sup>82</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
- <sup>83</sup> Demidov, *Sufizm*, pp. 136–44, exemplifies this approach.
- <sup>84</sup> Booklets showing the basic prayer postures and ritual ablutions were much in demand in the early 1990s, indicating that the great majority of the Central Asian population did not have even this very rudimentary degree of knowledge of Islamic rituals.
- <sup>85</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Musgrave ritual', *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, 1st edn 1893), pp. 113–33.
- <sup>86</sup> See, for example, J. Soper, "'Unofficial" Islam: a Muslim minority in the USSR', *Religion in Communist Lands* vol. 7, no. 4, 1979, pp. 226–31. Post-Soviet writers sometimes repeat such views uncritically. Now that it is possible to work in these areas more freely than in the past it is important that more attention be paid to empirical research. Fortunately, this is already happening, although still rather slowly. See, for example, N. Lubin's extremely interesting work, referred to in note 120 below.
- <sup>87</sup> Personal communications to the author by members of the ulama, including Shamsutdinkhan Babakhanov, 1985–90.
- <sup>88</sup> There was a curious convergence in the views of Soviet and western commentators on the subject of Islam in Central Asia; both tended to elevate the importance of traditional rituals and practices to the exclusion of any deeper understanding of Islam as a moral philosophy. The impression that was thus conveyed was that Islam was devoid of any serious spiritual or intellectual content. It is interesting to note that such commentators frequently ascribe great religious significance to the very practices that Muslim reformers in Central Asia in the pre-Soviet period deplored, regarding them as blind superstition and contrary to the spirit of Islam. See further Sarfraz Khan's article in this issue of *RSS*.
- <sup>89</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 237, 265. Apart from having good access to archival sources, Dr Saidbayev has the great advantage of knowing the region thoroughly. His observations can usually be confirmed by field work. This comment on the 'two dimensions' does not apply only to Muslims. It was not uncommon for those who came from a traditionally Christian background similarly to retain certain religious practices and beliefs. For example, even party members would sometimes have their children secretly baptised. See H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 134.
- <sup>90</sup> Personal communications to the author in Xinjiang in 1982; such views, however, were common throughout the region and many Soviet Central Asians made similar comments to the author.



- <sup>91</sup> Efforts were, of course, made to inculcate Soviet 'traditions', rituals and holidays. (See L. A. Tul'tseva, *Sovremennyye prazdniki i obryady narodov SSSR* (Nauka, Moscow, 1985), for an optimistic assessment of this process, using material from all over the Soviet Union. However, they met with relatively little success in Central Asia.
- <sup>92</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–6.
- <sup>93</sup> Demidov, *Sufizm*, p. 98.
- <sup>94</sup> Saidbayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 213, 252–65.
- <sup>95</sup> The ideas in this section are developed more fully in S. Akiner, 'Post-Soviet Central Asia: the Islamic factor', in Uwe Halbach (ed.), *The Development of the Soviet Successor States in Central Asia* (Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, Cologne, 1995), pp. 47–54.
- <sup>96</sup> The use of the term 'Wahhabi' is in itself an indication that the movement could not have originated with genuine members of the sect, since the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab call themselves *muwahhidun* ('Unitarians'). 'Wahhabi' is the designation given to them by westerners; Muslims dislike it and do not normally use it.
- <sup>97</sup> An Arab from Medina, Sayed Sharie Mohammed, established so-called *Wahhabi* communities in Tashkent and the Ferghana Valley in about 1912 (A. Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia* (Zed Books, London, 1994) p. 44).
- <sup>98</sup> There are reports that they had established an active Muslim underground network by the mid-1980s. See, for example, Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, 'Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan' in D.F. Eickelman (ed.), *Russia's Muslim Frontiers* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993), pp. 81–90. How effective this was in practical terms is not clear, however.
- <sup>99</sup> Personal communications to the author made in Uzbekistan in 1989 by Uzbeks from the Ferghana Valley.
- <sup>100</sup> Personal communications and observations by the author and other visitors to the region at this period.
- <sup>101</sup> *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, 8 December 1992, p. 1.
- <sup>102</sup> *Aziya*, 11 June 1994, p. 24; *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 January 1994, p. 3. Both estimates reaffirmed in 1996 by official Turkmen and Uzbek representatives.
- <sup>103</sup> Conference communication by Dr. V. J. Boushkov (Mafraq, Jordan, April 1996).
- <sup>104</sup> Conference communications by Cholpon Akmataliyeva (Kyrgyzstan) at a conference on 'Islam, Ethnicity and Secularism in Central Asia' (Tsar'skoe Selo, October 1995) and Professor M. Kozybayev (Kazakhstan) at a conference on 'Regional Security in Central Asia' (Tehran, January 1996) respectively.
- <sup>105</sup> A. Tabyshaliyeva, *Vera v Turkestane* (Bishkek, 1993), p. 123; *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 30 November 1993, p. 3.
- <sup>106</sup> In 1996, for example, from Kyrgyzstan alone 25 students were studying in Egypt (men and women), and 70 (all male) in Turkey (communication to the author by Mufti Kimsanbai Abdurahmon, Bishkek, March 1996).
- <sup>107</sup> Saudi Arabia provided financial support for Central Asian pilgrims in 1990, 1991 and 1992. Thereafter they had to cover their own costs (estimated at US\$ 1500–2000). This severely reduced numbers. In 1996, 4000–5000 were expected to make the journey.
- <sup>108</sup> The Kazakhs were the first to leave, establishing a separate muftiate in January 1990; R. Altoma, 'The influence of Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan', in Beatrice Forbes Manz (ed.), *Central Asia in Historical Perspective* (Westview Press, Boulder, Col., 1994), pp. 171–72, discusses the causes for the split, one of which was undoubtedly Uzbek–Kazakh rivalry. The other republics established separate muftiates some time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in about 1993.
- <sup>109</sup> The chief activists appear to be from Turkey, from the Naqshbandi order and the Zaman group. However, there is a great demand for any type of information on this subject. The author has more than once been asked to send copies of such standard western works as Trimingham's *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. It is worth remembering that during the Soviet period the western media made considerable efforts to disseminate Islam in Central Asia.

According to one estimate, 90 per cent of the Central Asian language broadcasting of Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe and Voice of America were devoted to this subject. (I. Belyayev, "Islamskiye igry" protiv Sovetskogo Soyuza', *Argumenty 1988* (Pol. Literaturny, Moscow, 1988), pp. 103–27, esp. p. 118.).

- <sup>110</sup> In April 1994 in the course of one day the author observed some six female students wearing the *hejab* in the Tashkent Institute of Law. The traditional Central Asian covering was a type of head-to-toe cloak (*paranja*) and a separate horse-hair veil over the face (*chachvan*). This is occasionally seen today in the Ferghana Valley. More common, though, especially in urban areas, is a simple scarf covering the head, shoulders and upper body, leaving the face open. This is worn by Muslims in many parts of the modern world, including European countries.
- <sup>111</sup> Personal observations; also interviews with local Muslims as well as with foreign visitors. The paper by Dmitri Trofimov elsewhere in this issue of *RSS* gives valuable information on the main mosques in Central Asia; it should be noted, however, that attendance figures do change. Ongoing monitoring is required if a meaningful picture is to be provided. Also, it would be helpful to have greater analysis of the socio-religious setting. Amr Sabet's paper in this issue of *RSS* sets out a thought-provoking research agenda for understanding the role of religious dynamics in the shaping of social reality. His focus is Iran, but the same approach could be rewarding for the study of contemporary Central Asia.
- <sup>112</sup> Personal communication to the author by madrassah students in 1996.
- <sup>113</sup> A full account of the history of the IRP in Tajikistan, based on field research, is given by D. Mikul'sky, 'Islamskaya partiya vozrozhdeniya Tadjikistana', *Vostok*, no. 6, 1994, pp. 47–58.
- <sup>114</sup> Personal communications made to the author during a visit to the Ferghana Valley in April 1994.
- <sup>115</sup> R. Abasov, 'Islamskoye vozrozhdeniye v tsentral'noaziatskikh novykh nezavisimyykh gosudarstvakh', *Polis*, RAN, no.3 (27), 1995, pp. 61–67 mentions 20 'Islamic political and politicised organisations in the Central Asian newly independent states'. However, he gives almost no information on the size, structure, origin or aims of these groups, also no sources or references as to how he learnt of their existence. Under these circumstances, his comment that of these organisations '7 (35%) are found in Uzbekistan ... 2 (10%) in Tadjikistan' is not very enlightening, since it is impossible to gain an idea of the relative strengths of the different groups.
- <sup>116</sup> *Moskovskie novosti*, 23 May 1993.
- <sup>117</sup> A. Abduazizov, dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Tashkent State University, quoted by L. Usmanov in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 January 1994, p. 3.
- <sup>118</sup> Several books and articles on Islam in Central Asia have appeared over the past five or six years. Most of these contributions, however, serve to mystify rather than enlighten the reader. Frequently, sweeping and dogmatic statements are made with no form of referencing, and hence it is impossible to understand the basis for the author's claims, i.e. whether they are based on an extensive body of research or whether they are idiosyncratic personal opinions. Key terms are often not defined: this is particularly confusing when the terms in question have an established usage elsewhere in the world (e.g. 'Muslim brotherhoods'), since it is not clear whether it is being suggested that exactly the same phenomenon exists in, say, Kazakhstan as in Egypt (which is scarcely credible), or whether a much vaguer parallel is intended. The use of Soviet-style pseudo-scientific statistics, especially percentages of unspecified totals, is also not helpful since, taken out of context, with no elaboration or explanation, this device amounts to little more than stylistic rhetoric. At this early stage of research into a highly complex and obscure subject it is surely better to be as specific and precise as possible.
- <sup>119</sup> See, for example, Abd al-Masih, *Islam Under the Magnifying Glass* (n. pub., Villach, Austria, n. d.), handed out by Christian missionaries of unknown affiliation in Tashkent in 1996.
- <sup>120</sup> Recent sociological surveys have shown that reislamisation appears to be proceeding far

more slowly among the younger generation than has sometimes been supposed. See, for example, N. Lubin, 'Islam and ethnic identity in Central Asia: a view from below' in Y. Ro'i (ed.), *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies* (Frank Cass, Ilford, Essex, 1995), pp. 53–62.