Islam in Central Asia

In 1805, Eltüzer Khan, the reigning khan of Khwarazm, the oasis principality at the mouth of the Amu Darya, commissioned a history of his dynasty that would "place our august genealogy on a throne in the divan [chancery] of words and to set the names of our glorious ancestors into the seal of history." The resulting work was undertaken by a court historian by the name of Sher Muhammad Mirab Munis, and continued after his death by his nephew Muhammad Riza Agahi, who carried its account down to 1828. The work bore the appropriately grandiose title of *Firdavs ul-iqbâl* (The Paradise of Felicity) and gave an appropriately grandiose account of the achievements of the dynasty. The hefty text contains an enormous amount of information about the history of Central Asia, but perhaps more important is what it tells us about the mental universe of its author and intended audience and about the literary tradition from which it emerged. Like all traditional Muslim histories, it begins with an account of the origin of the community whose history it recounts. In this case, an account of Creation is followed by a short first chapter recounting the Muslim version of the descent of Adam to earth, his reconciliation with Eve, and the Flood. After the Flood, Noah had three sons, who later propagated the human race. The eldest was Japheth, from whose eight sons sprang all the peoples who inhabited Inner Asia (Turânzamin). The eldest of the eight was Turk, the eponymous ancestor of the Turks. The Turks lived peacefully under the sons of Turk, a series of model rulers, until corruption set in during the reign of

Alanja Khan. "The children of Japheth had been Muslims from the time of Noah until this time," but now they fell off the true path and ceased to be Muslims. Events came to such a pass that if a father heard of Islam, his son murdered him, and if a son understood anything of the faith, his father killed him. Then was born Oghuz Khan, who could speak at the age of one and whose first word was "Allah." He rebelled against his father, eventually slaying him, before embarking on a series of conquests that brought Islam to all of "Transoxiana and Turkestan." He ruled for 116 years, before passing away to the afterworld, whereupon his descendants split up. Eventually, one descendent called Jurliq Markan produced Qonghirat, who was the forebear of the Qonghirat tribe that ruled Khiva in the nineteenth century. Jurliq Markan's younger brother Tusbuday sired Qorlas, whose line ultimately produced Genghis Khan. Qorlas's descendants conquered the children of Qonghirat well before Genghis Khan appeared, and the children of Qonghirat were active participants in the rulership of Genghis Khan and his descendants. But during this time, the sons of Qorlas had fallen off the path of Islam again, until they were reconverted. Then the mystic Sayyid Ata, accompanied by Naghday, a Qonghirat notable, went to the court of Özbek Khan, the ruler of the Golden Horde, and brought him into the fold of Islam.[1]

Muslim belief holds that Adam and Noah were the first among a vast number of messengers that God sent to humanity as bearers of divine guidance. They were thus Muslims, part of a chain of divine intervention in human life that culminated with Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets." In Munis's account, then, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia appear as having always been Muslim. They might have fallen off the correct path, but local heroes always brought them back to it. Remarkably, the history makes no mention of the Prophet, the rise of Islam in Arabia, or the Arab conquest of Central Asia. In the text, Islam becomes completely indigenized, an innate part of the genealogical heritage of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. It is also intertwined with rulership: the Qonghirat dynasty that Munis and Agahi served bears an august lineage that goes back, through Oghuz Khan and Japheth, to Adam himself.

The story is obviously "legendary," and it is very easy to dismiss it as nonsense. But it tells us a great deal about how Central Asians related to Islam. For Munis, the origins of the community, and of the dynasty that ruled over it, were not a matter of explication through profane history. Rather, the origins were sacred, and only sacred history could explicate them. Other myths of origins connected cities and towns in Central Asia

directly to the origins of Islam. The celebrated thirteenth-century Arab geographer Yaqut quoted a hadith in which the Prophet reportedly said, "There shall be conquered a city in Khorasan beyond a river which is called the Oxus; which city is named Bokhara. It is encompassed with God's mercy and surrounded by His angels; its people are Heaven-aided; and whoso shall sleep upon a bed therein shall be like him that draweth his sword in the way of God. And beyond it lieth a city which is called Samarqand, wherein is a fountain of the fountains of Paradise, and a tomb of the tombs of the prophets, and a garden of the gardens of Paradise; its dead, upon the Resurrection Day, shall be assembled with the martyrs."[2] Numerous other hadiths connected lesser cities and towns to the Prophet and the very origins of revelation.[3] Such hadiths might be considered unsound by Muslim scholars of hadith and by modern historians, but they were a true measure of the Islamization of Central Asia, for they allowed local identities to be imagined in Islamic terms. Such accounts of divine or Prophetic intervention in local histories dissolved time and space and connected Central Asia to the core of the Islamic tradition. The local and the global were thus intertwined.[4]

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Before the Russian conquest, for the bulk of the population, being Muslim meant being part of a community that saw itself as Muslim. It had little to do with the mastery, by every individual, of the basic textual sources of Islam. The Qur'an is central to Islamic ritual: its recitation is a pious deed, its verses can serve as protection from misfortune, and the use of selected phrases from it in appropriate social contexts is the true measure of "comprehension." However, it was not central to the everyday conduct of Muslims. Not even the learned were expected to be able to explicate given passages of the Qur'an. Rather, communities asserted their Muslim identities through elaborate myths of origin that assimilated elements of the Islamic ethical tradition with local norms and vice versa. The account of sacred origins of local Muslim communities provided by *Firdavs ul-iqbâl* was replicated in other, more "popular" accounts. One of the most commonly disseminated myths was that of Baba Tükles, who converted Özbek Khan, the Genghisid ruler of the Golden Horde, to Islam by beating the khan's court shaman in a religious contest.

   The legend goes as follows: Four Muslim holy men arrived as Özbek Khan participated in a drinking ceremony at a sacred burial ground. In

the holy men's presence, the presiding shamans lost their miraculous powers. Impressed, the khan ordered the shamans and the Muslims to "debate with one another . . . ; whoever among you has the religion that is true, I will follow him." The two parties agreed to a trial by fire: one member from each party would enter an oven fired with ten cartloads of tamarisk, and "Whoever emerges without being burned, his religion will be true." When the time came, Baba Tükles, one of the Muslim saints, volunteered for the ordeal. He walked into the oven, reciting the Sufi *zikr* (remembrance) and survived; his counterpart, however, had to be forced into the oven and was instantly consumed by the fire. Seeing this miracle, the khan and all those present became Muslims.[5]

Baba Tükles was a "friend of God." Islam does not have officially canonized saints, but early on, Muslims came to accept that certain individuals have an intimate relationship to God and may intercede with him on behalf of ordinary Muslims. This cult of sacred persons replicated patronage networks that existed in society. Friends of God could be recognized as such in their lifetimes, and after their deaths, their mausoleums became shrines, places of pilgrimage, and foci of communal identity; their disciples, connected to them through chains of initiation, provided a living link to sacred origins. Many of these bringers of Islam were of foreign origin (usually they were ascribed Arab origins), but they were also fully indigenized as ancestors. Their successors were the living links to the community's sacred origins, whereas their shrines made the landscape itself sacred. It was these locally esteemed figures and their shrines that provided local communities with their links to Islam and to the rest of the Muslim world.

And the identity was communal. It was played out through the communal celebration of august ancestors, annual holidays, and life-cycle events. In turn, the community acquired a sacral aura, and its customs and traditions became "Islamic" in their own right. The veneration of shrines, codes of social intercourse rooted in local societies (showing respect for elders, the position of women, which could vary greatly across time and space, and obedience to those of higher social rank), or political authority could all be understood as Islamic. This dual process of localizing Islam and Islamizing local traditions led communities to see themselves as innately Muslim. Local customs were sacralized, and Islam was made indigenous. For most people, there simply could not be a distinction, let alone a contradiction, between Islam and local customs.

Such local ways of knowing Islam or being Muslim are hardly unique to Central Asia or to the past. Over the past few decades, anthropologists

have created a substantial literature documenting cases of "local Islam" in many places, from Bosnia to the Comoro Islands, from Morocco to the Philippines. The diverse ways in which Muslims relate to Islam tests our assumptions about the unitary or homogenous nature of Islam. Conventionally, there are two ways in which such diversity is explained. One explanation posits the existence (in this case) of a "Central Asian Islam" that is allegedly moderate or liberal. This Islam stands in contrast to a harsher and less tolerant (but perhaps "more real") "Arab Islam." This view thus connects the diversity of Islam to national or ethnic categories and makes it subordinate to them. However, these national categories are themselves of modern vintage, and in no case is each "national" version of Islam internally homogeneous. Instead, such categorization of Islam transposes ethnic for religious essentialization (thus, not all Muslims think or act alike, but all Central Asians or all Uzbeks do). As we shall see in chapter 7, current repressive regimes in Central Asia are quite fond of such arguments and put them to brutal use.

Another way of making sense of Islam's diversity is to argue that Islam "sits lightly" on communities where Islam is thus localized, and indeed, that Muslims who identify with Islam in this manner are not "real Muslims." Implicit in this argument is the notion that "true Islam" exists and that it may be seen in practice in certain Middle Eastern societies. This position is canonized by many Western experts. Bernard Lewis thus writes, "Great numbers of Muslims live outside the Middle Eastern Islamic heartlands—indeed, by now the Muslims of South and Southeast Asia vastly outnumber the Arabic-, Persian-, and Turkish-speaking Muslims of the Middle East. But they have developed their own political and other cultures, much influenced by those of the regions in which they live."[6] The assumption that certain societies lack any culture other than "Islam," whereas others have only local culture with a coloration of Islam is highly dubious. Ethnographies of Middle Eastern societies, for instance, show the same kind of melding of the local and the global that I describe for Central Asia above. Asserting that Middle Eastern societies exhibit "real" Islam in its purity renders Islam synonymous with a narrow part of the spectrum of its diversity and mischaracterizes this global phenomenon. The Middle East represents only a small proportion (between a fifth and a quarter, depending on one's definitions) of the total Muslim population of the world, most of which resides in Pakistan and points east. Finally, Lewis's argument echoes that of the more exclusivist groups of modern Muslims, for whom "real Islam" is a prescriptive, rather than merely a descriptive, tool.

Neither of these arguments helps us understand Islam as a phenomenon of this world. Islam takes many local forms, but none of them is stable or internally homogeneous. Perpetual tension exists within Islam, and all forms of Islam are open to challenge on "Islamic" grounds, from within the Islamic tradition. "Customary" or "local" understandings of Islam are countered by more "normative" versions of Islam that draw their authority from greater adherence to injunctions or strictures elaborated by scholars who specialize in fiqh or other aspects of Islam's normative tradition. This tension between different ways of understanding Islam creates the most characteristic inner dynamic in Muslim societies.

We should not assume, however, that "normative" Islam is any more stable or homogenous than "customary" Islam. Muslims can use the resources of the Islamic tradition to take any number of positions, including diametrically opposed ones, on questions that confront them. The absence of a churchlike hierarchy in Islam, which might have a monopoly over the determination of what is normative, complicates the situation further. The answer to the question of who speaks for Islam is that *any* Muslim may speak on behalf of Islam. Indeed, at any time in any society, there are competing claims to authority based on Islam. Ultimately, it is this contention over competing interpretations that defines Muslim politics. Totalizing statements about Islam, therefore, grossly misrepresent this reality. Characterizations that present Islam simply as wicked or tolerant are equally incorrect. Muslims can draw any number of lessons from Islam. The tradition is much too rich and diverse to be reduced to a single evaluative adjective.

The analytical task, then, is not to ask what Islam is or whether *it* is good or bad but to ask why certain interpretations of it are more compelling to some groups in society than to others and how views change over time? And we can answer these questions only by asking how religious authority is constituted around Islam in a given society, how it interacts with other kinds of authority (that of the state, or of science or progress, and so on), how religious knowledge is produced and transmitted, and by whom. What "Islam" or "real Islam" are and what they ought to be are thus questions not primarily of theology, but of cultural and social politics. The political implications of these debates depend on what historically contingent forces play a role (which groups in society have what vested interests) and by the historical baggage these groups bring with them. The burden of the past is absolutely crucial in defining the parameters of debate.

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Islam arrived in Central Asia with Arab armies at the dawn of the eighth century. Arab expansion had brought the armies of the caliphate to the banks of the Oxus (or Amu Darya) by the middle of the seventh century. "The land beyond the river"—*Mâ warâ al-nahr* in Arabic, Transoxiana in English—boasted an old sedentary civilization, Iranian in speech and predominantly Zoroastrian in religion, that sat at the crossroads of trade between India, China, and the societies of the Mediterranean. Although Arab armies had been raiding the region since the 670s, it was only in 709 that they captured Bukhara and incorporated it into the Umayyad caliphate. The conquest led to the conversion of many local inhabitants, although we have few concrete facts at our disposal about the pace of conversion. The Arab conquerors considered new converts to be their clients, *mawâlî,* whose conversion freed them from taxation but did not lead to equality with the Arab conquerors. The ethnic nature of the Umayyad polity changed with the coming to power of the Abbasid dynasty as Islam transformed into a universal religion, and the rate of conversion of the sedentary population probably picked up. By the ninth century, Muslim geographers considered Transoxiana to be an integral part of the Muslim world. Over the next two centuries, its cities became connected to networks of Muslim culture and of Islamic learning. Indeed, some of the most important figures in Islamic civilization came from Transoxiana. Sunni Muslims hold six compilations of hadith to be authoritative. Two of the six compilers, Abu Isma'il al-Bukhari (810–70) and Abu 'Isa Muhammad al-Tirmidhi (825–92) were from Transoxiana. The influential jurists Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi (d. ca. 944) and Burhan al-Din Abu'l Hasan al-Marghinani (d. 1197); the great scientist Abu Nasr al-Muhammad al-Farabi (d. ca. 950), known as "the second teacher" (after Aristotle); and the rationalist philosopher Abu 'Ali Ibn Sina (980–1037, known in the West as Avicenna)—figures of absolutely central importance in the history of Islamic civilization in its so-called classical age—were all born in the region. They were part of broader networks of travel and learning, which served to make the cities of Transoxiana part of the heartland of the Muslim world. This position was cemented by the emergence, at the end of the tenth century, of Bukhara as the seat of the independent Samanid dynasty, which patronized the development of "new Persian" (i.e., Persian as a fully Islamized language) as a literary language.

The surrounding steppe, with its largely Turkic-speaking nomadic population, remained a borderland. Many nomads entered the orbit of Muslim civilization and began migrating to the Middle East from the tenth century on, but conversion to Islam was a gradual process that lasted into the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, in the early thirteenth century, non-Muslim steppe nomads burst upon Central Asia in the form of the armies of Genghis Khan, and dealt a massive blow to the region. For their sheer ferocity, the Mongol conquests quickly became proverbial. For the contemporary Arab historian Ibn al-Athir, they were a "tremendous disaster such as had never happened before, and which struck all the world, though the Muslims above all. If anyone were to say that at no time since the creation of man by the great God had the world experienced anything like it, he would only be telling the truth."[7] The wholesale slaughter and eviction of populations from cities laid waste to whole provinces. Although the Mongols did not bear any particular animus toward Islam, their actions had a destructive impact on the religious and cultural traditions of Transoxiana. Islam was displaced from its position as the recipient of political protection or patronage, and its moral and ethical imperatives were subordinated to Mongol practices. For example, when Genghis Khan rode into Bukhara, he entered the main mosque, mounted the pulpit, and exclaimed to the assembled multitudes, "'The countryside is empty of fodder; fill our horses' bellies.' Whereupon," we are told by Ata Malik Juvaini, the Muslim historian in Mongol employ who is our best source on the events, the Mongols

> opened all the magazines in the town and began carrying off the grain. And they brought the cases in which Korans were kept out into the courtyard of the mosque, where they cast the Korans right and left and turned the cases into mangers for their horses. After which they circulated cups of wine and sent for the singing-girls of the town to sing and dance for them; while the Mongols raised their voices to the tunes of their own songs. Meanwhile, the *imams, shaikhs, sayyids,* doctors and scholars of the age kept watch over their horses in the stable under the supervision of the equerries, and executed their commands. After an hour or two Chingiz-Khan arose to return to his camp, and as the multitude that had been gathered there moved away the leaves of the Koran were trampled in the dirt beneath their own feet and their horses' hoofs.[8]

Though Transoxiana escaped more lightly than some other regions conquered by the Mongols, the damage to both its economy and its cultural traditions was great. The Mongols had their own code of law and ethics, the *yasa,* which they set against the shariat. Mongol rule thus undid the

hegemony of Islam in the political realm. The devastation also unleashed a lengthy period of religious change, in Central Asia and beyond. The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries witnessed numerous messianic movements in the Islamic East (Central Asia, South Asia, Iran, and Anatolia), one of which, the Safavids, ended up taking political power in Iran and imposing Shi'ism on the country. This period also saw the emergence of Sufi movements and their institutionalization in tariqats. The Sufis' attitudes varied enormously. Some were openly antinomian, seeing salvation only in the renunciation of the world. For such Sufis, norms of society had to be trampled; outrageous forms of social deviance (going around naked, consuming narcotics and hallucinogens, renouncing work and reproductive sexuality) became the ultimate measure of true devotion to God.[9] Other Sufi orders adhered more closely to the norms of society and of juridical Islam, and were intertwined with political power to different degrees. Many of the most prominent Sufi orders (such as the Naqshbandiya and the Kubraviya) originated in Central Asia in these centuries and then spread far beyond its boundaries.

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One of the enduring stereotypes of Islam is that religion and politics are intertwined in it. Unsympathetic observers in the West (who contrast the Muslim world unfavorably with the Christian West with its supposedly clear demarcations between the realms of God and Caesar) are not the only purveyors of this view; many contemporary Muslims, too, insist that "Islam is not just a religion, but a way of life." Historically, however, this is simply not the case. For the bulk of Islamic history, religious and political authority have lain in different hands, a division of labor that was often explicitly formulated by theorists. The earliest caliphs claimed both political and religious authority, but already by the beginning of the third Islamic century, the ulama had supplanted the caliphs as guardians of the faith. The political might of the caliphate, in contrast, disappeared with the rise of numerous independent dynasties, whose legitimacy came primarily from military conquest. The majority of the ulama came to accept the new political order, and they appreciated the security and order that the rulers provided. Indeed, the fear of anarchy, *fitna,* when the supposedly natural order of the social world would be rent asunder, was a fundamental stabilizing force and helped reconcile the ulama to the new order. As the fourteenth-century jurist Ibn Taymiya put it succinctly, forty years of despotism are better than a day of anarchy. But religion and

state—*din va davlat*—were distinct entities: "The state was not a direct
expression of Islam, but a secular institution whose duty it was to uphold
Islam; the real community of Muslims was the community of scholars
and holy men who carried on the legacy of the Prophet in daily life."[10]
The Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which predominated in Central
Asia, in particular, came to articulate an explicitly quietist attitude
toward political power, which in the colonial period led many ulama to
reconcile themselves to European rule.

Rulers, for their part, professed to uphold Islamic ethical norms and
to serve Islam through the patronage of Islamic learning and the con-
struction of mosques, madrasas, Sufi lodges, and shrines to significant
personages. But otherwise, the daily conduct of politics was dictated by
raison d'état. The practice of Muslim rulers—which included plenty of
war with other Muslim rulers—can seldom be explained by injunctions
laid out in the scriptural sources of Islam. Far more useful for under-
standing the political conduct of Muslim rulers are the numerous "mir-
rors for princes" and advice manuals written by literati over the cen-
turies. These writers took the model for the ideal ruler not so much from
the Qur'an as from pre-Islamic imperial traditions—Mesopotamian,
Iranian, Byzantine—important elements of which were fully assimilated
into the new Islamicate political order.

This process was particularly evident in post-Mongol Central Asia.
Over the course of the fourteenth century, the Mongol empire crumbled,
and its successors in Central Asia converted to Islam, which thus re-
gained its status as the religion of the ruling elite and the object of royal
patronage. But the descendents of the Mongols never renounced their
heritage. The principle that only true-blooded descendents of Genghis
Khan had the right to rule retained wide currency, and later rulers laid
their claims to legitimacy through a combination of Genghisid and
Islamic factors. In the late fourteenth century, a Turkic notable named
Timur established a major empire out of the chaos of feuding Mongol
principalities. Timurid culture was thoroughly Islamized. For all the vio-
lence of Timur's ceaseless military conquests, he and his descendents
presided over a period of remarkable cultural efflorescence. Samarqand,
Timur's capital, was adorned with numerous architectural gems, and the
Timurid court provided generous patronage for scholarship and the arts.
Timur sought to legitimate himself through both Islam and the *yasa*. The
Timurid empire lasted for several generations, but eventually Timur's
descendents were ousted from Transoxiana by the nomadic followers of
Shaibani Khan, a Muslim Genghisid prince who arrived from the north

to reestablish Genghisid rule in the region. Known as Uzbeks, these nomads sedentarized quite rapidly and established what became the khanate of Bukhara. Shaibani Khan's successor, Ubaydullah Khan (d. 1540), made a vow at the shrine of the Sufi master Ahmed Yesevi in the town of Turkistan (in the south of present-day Kazakhstan) that he would rule fully in accordance with the shariat if he were successful in battle against Babur, then allied with the extremist Shi'i Safavid dynasty in Iran. Upon gaining victory, Ubaydullah Khan commissioned Fazlullah Ruzbihan, a scholar from Shiraz in Iran who had found refuge in Samarqand from the Safavids, to compose a manual of governance for him. Fazlullah's *Sulûk ul-mulûk* (The Conduct of Kings) was one of the most comprehensive Islamicate manuals of governance written in Persian. It is largely a synthetic work that describes the consensus of Sunni ulama of the time. It also provides valuable insights into the assumptions that lay behind statecraft in Central Asia in the post-Mongol period.

Fazlullah starts with the assumption that political authority is an absolute necessity and therefore a religious obligation. "Man is social by nature, and bound to cooperate with human society in providing for himself. Because the capacities for lust and anger invite tyranny and conflict, it is necessary for a just ruler to remove [such] tyranny and create proportion and equality among things that are not proportionate."[11] The community of Muslims needs a leader, an imam, to act as a vicegerent of the Prophet "for the sake of establishing the faith and protecting the community's domains." Although Fazlullah cites several ways of choosing an imam, he also recognizes "domination and sheer exercise of power" as legitimate. A leader who becomes a ruler over Muslims through power and military force is legitimate, and it is incumbent upon Muslims to obey all his orders and prohibitions "as long as he does not oppose the shariat." More positively, the ruler has to undertake to "protect the shariat" which here means "the solicitude of the ruler that the laws of the shariat should be guarded and protected among the community, and no manner of rupture may occur in its fundamentals or its branches. It is possible to consider a ruler just only to the extent that he protects the divine decrees and the observance of its commandments." The ruler should fulfill this responsibility by appointing learned men to offices such as *shaykh al-islâm,* "the leader of Islam," and *a'lam al-'ulamâ,* "the most learned of the learned," and by patronizing the cultivation of religious knowledge and showing respect to the learned.[12]

In return, Fazlullah was willing to grant Islamic legitimacy to all the

royal pretensions of the rulers. A ruler who upheld the shariat could draw on the treasury for "anything needed to uphold the majesty of his rule." This practice was different from the precedent of the early years of Islam but necessitated by the new era. "Monetary allowances in our times differ from the days of the Prophet or the caliphs," Fazlullah wrote, "because the Prophet was victorious through the respect he inspired, and in the caliphal period, Islam was vigorous and young and people feared the rulers because of prophecy's lingering effects. Today, things have changed and hearts are no longer in their original place. Now if the imam does not undertake the ceremonies of houses, property, horses, and slaves for the sake of appearances, [and] chooses instead to follow the caliphs in his way of living, people would not obey him and all affairs of the Muslim community would come to a standstill."[13] Without social order, of course, there could be no hope for the maintenance of the shariat.

Fazlullah was not particularly original or unusual in presenting matters thus. His views represent a consensus that Sunni ulama of the region had arrived at by this time. The reconciliation of fiqh to the state ruled by military elites that acquired their legitimacy from conquest alone was of long standing. The events of the three centuries preceding Fazlullah, rife with political violence and religious experimentation, had only strengthened the ulama's faith in the necessity of order and of a harmonious relationship between themselves and the state. Indeed, the early sixteenth century saw the consolidation of stable empires throughout the Muslim world—the Ottomans, the Safavids, the Mughals, and the Uzbeks—that did much to curb the religious experimentation of the previous three centuries and establish a certain orthodoxy of state-ulama relations. In that sense, the Central Asian case is part of a much broader phenomenon.

The ensuing three centuries did see the emergence of an alliance between the state and the ulama along the lines indicated by Fazlullah. The sixteenth century saw the construction of several madrasas—places where knowledge could be transmitted to future generations and the ranks of the ulama replenished. Sufi hospices proliferated as well. Madrasas were funded through the institution of the *waqf,* property endowed in perpetuity for a given purpose. Waqf was a major institution in Muslim societies, anchored in fiqh and serving a host of purposes. The establishment of a waqf was a pious deed by the benefactor. If the latter were a ruler, then the act was part of his claim to being a just and legitimate ruler. The property thus endowed could take any form—agricultural land, shops, other forms of rental property—and was usually free

from taxation. The waqfs were under the supervision of trustees, who normally came from the ranks of the ulama. To a certain extent, then, waqfs gave the ulama considerable financial autonomy from the state.

Although it is hazardous to generalize about a period spanning three centuries, we can say that the post-Timurid period saw a resurgence of Islamic learning in the cities of Transoxiana. Samarqand, Tashkent, and the cities of the Ferghana Valley boasted numerous madrasas, but the pride of place went to Bukhara. Juvaini had described the city on the eve of its sacking by the Mongols as the "cupola of Islam" in the Islamic East, comparable to the very seat of the caliphate, Baghdad. "Its environs are adorned with the brightness of the light of doctors and jurists and its surroundings embellished with the rarest of high attainments."[14] That status returned to Bukhara in the post-Timurid period, when its madrasas attracted students from throughout Central Asia and beyond, from India in the south and Kazan to the north. The city became *Bukhârâ-yi sharîf,* Bukhara the Noble, the center of Sunni orthodoxy in the region.

This orthodoxy rested on a synthesis of juridical Islam with Sufism. Shariat and tariqat came to be seen as complementary sources of authority. All ulama had Sufi affiliations, and Sufism realigned itself to the norms of juridical Islam. Networks of scholarly and Sufi activity were indistinguishable from one another, and the same individuals offered instruction in both exoteric and esoteric sciences.[15] Therefore, we can speak of the ulama and the Sufis as a single group. The synthesis was also self-consciously a tradition of interpretation and as such, was quite conservative. As in the rest of the Muslim world, Central Asian madrasas were not formal institutions that admitted students or granted degrees. Rather they were places where students learned from masters, whose authority derived from their learning, piety, and reputation. The master-disciple relationship was an individual one, and it revolved around the study of a standard body of texts. Most of these texts were commentaries and supercommentaries on older works of law. The Qur'an and the hadith were not studied as such. The ulama of Central Asia had little recourse to the texts that we think of as the original sources of Islam. This fact strikes modern sensibilities as incomprehensible (and, as we shall see, the modernist Muslim critique of madrasa education focused on this point), but it made perfect sense within the logic of the tradition as it had evolved. *Tafsir,* the science of the explication of the Qur'an, was a high-stakes endeavor left to a few specialists. The task of the tradition of learning embodied in the madrasa was to conserve certain truths

revealed by God and the sciences elaborated by the masters. Furthermore, law was the central discipline in Bukharan madrasas of the post-Timurid epoch, and it could be mastered without direct recourse to the Qur'an and the hadith. Besides teaching the shariat as thus understood, madrasas taught "Arabic sciences," such as grammar, prosody, and history, and "rational" sciences, such as logic, philosophy, and metaphysics. Curious students could seek out professors with whom to read books in other disciplines as well.

The possession of Islamic knowledge gave the ulama immense prestige and status and turned them into a self-conscious elite. Nevertheless, the relationship between the rulers and the ulama was dynamic. In times when the state was weak, the ulama or the Sufis could exercise power in their own right. In fifteenth-century Samarqand, the Sufi sheikh Khoja Ahrar had played a significant role in the social and political life of the city, whereas in Tashkent, the ulama had ruled in their own right for much of the eighteenth century, when the city was a state unto itself. At other times, rulers honored the ulama and placed them in places of high influence, granting them tax exemptions as well as control of substantial waqf property and patronizing madrasas and khanqahs. This practice was especially common among rulers of the Manghit dynasty, which took over Bukhara in the late eighteenth century. The Manghits could not claim Genghisid descent and therefore had no choice but to assert their legitimacy through Islam. (For this reason, they could not use the title of khan and instead called themselves *amir,* which had strong Islamic connotations.) The first two rulers of the dynasty formed especially strong alliances with the ulama, even intermarrying with the more august families in their ranks. Such connections were mutually beneficial: they provided the amirs with legitimacy and access to august lineages while placing considerable authority in the hands of the ulama.[16]

Did this arrangement make Bukhara a theocracy? Contemporary Russian and other European observers and later Soviet-era critics thought so. The rulers conceived of rulership and politics in a conceptual framework that derived from Islam. The requirements for compliance with shariat were quite minimal. The ulama recognized the permissibility of *raison d'état,* and of the proclamation of non-shariat laws. The rulers of Bukhara, like all other rulers in the Muslim world, decreed all sorts of laws about extracting obedience and revenue on their own authority with the full approval of the ulama. The "Islamic" aspect of the governance of Bukhara was rulers' willingness to honor and hold in high esteem the carriers of Islamic learning, the ulama. The sources indicate

that the ulama themselves were believed that the affirmation of their elite status was the factor that made rulers just. (The notion of an Islamic state belongs to the twentieth century.) During the reign of Shah Murad, we are told, the son of an *âkhund* killed a shopkeeper who was rude to him. The victim's father petitioned the amir for justice, but the amir was so outraged by the temerity of the victim that he imposed a fine on the father instead, exclaiming that if the victim were not already dead, the amir would have had him thrown from the Minar-i Kalan, the tall minaret that overlooked the city and was used for executing criminals in this manner. "It is clear from the aforesaid," our source informs us, "how knowledge and its servants were in ascendance at that time, and how strong were the opinions of the ulama and the rulers."[17] The shariat was honored when its carriers were honored.

In the nomadic societies beyond Transoxiana, where the tradition of book learning in madrasas was practically nonexistent, access to Islam lay primarily through sacred lineages. Communities paid allegiance to individuals, usually Sufi shaykhs, who belonged to lineages that had "brought Islam" to the community. The Turkmens had been in the Islamic orbit since the tenth century, but the Islamization of the Kazakhs was a longer process, completed only in the late nineteenth century. In both societies, members of sacred lineages—the Qojas among the Kazakhs, the *övlad* among the Turkmens—had immense social prestige and often wealth, but political power remained in the hands of tribal chiefs. Power in nomadic societies was imagined in genealogical terms, and to the extent that state structures existed, they derived their moral authority from *âdat*, tribal custom and the traditions of the elders (who were Muslims by definition), rather than through the juridical tradition of the shariat as it was developed in urban societies by generations of ulama. Later, during the colonial period, the Russian state formalized the distinction between âdat and shariat by establishing sharply different administrative practices in areas governed by two variants of colonial law.