

Devin DeWeese

ISLAMIZATION
AND
NATIVE RELIGION
IN THE
GOLDEN HORDE

Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam
in
Historical and Epic Tradition

*The Pennsylvania State University Press
University Park, Pennsylvania*

The Conversion of Özbek Khan in Islamic Sources

In narrative historical and biographical sources for the era of the Mongol successor states, the standard paradigm for the establishment of Islam in a particular region is that of "royal conversion" at the hands of a saint, usually a Sufi shaykh. As indicated above, the preliminary Islamization of the Golden Horde under the Khan Berke (c. 1257–1266) is ascribed to his conversion and training by the Khorazm shaykh Saif al-Din Bihavarī, and other Sufis are credited with the conversion of the Chaghatayid Tughlugh Temür and even of the Ilkhanid Chagatai. Most of the available accounts of Özbek Khan's conversion produced within the context of his political legacy—that is, among constituent elements of the Golden Horde—follow the same pattern.

In literary sources of Central Asian provenance, the conversion of Özbek Khan is ascribed to a saint of Turan. Image of the early fourteenth century known as Sayyid Ata. This figure is known from the famous Central Asian Naqshbandī hagiography, the *Rashaḥāt-i ʿayn al-ḥayāt*, completed at the very beginning of the sixteenth century as a biography of Khoja Aḥrār and his predecessors, as one of four disciples of the Sufi shaykh known as Zangī Ata, a disciple of Ḥakīm Ata, who was in turn a disciple of Khoja Aḥmad Yasavī. According to the *Rashaḥāt*, Sayyid Ata was a contemporary of the eminent shaykh of the "proto-Naqshbandī" school of the "Khorezmī," Shaykh ʿAlī ʿAziz al-Rawḥānī (d. 766/1365). Sayyid Ata and his companions—Uzun Hasan Ata, Saifī Ata, and Badr Ata—entered the service of Zangī Ata in Tashkent after their period of study in a Bukharan *madrasa*.⁷⁴

The *Rashaḥāt* tells nothing of Sayyid Ata's role in converting the Tatars (Qipchaqs) to Islam, but a roughly contemporary source does make this connection. The anonymous *Shajarat al-shaykh*, evidently based upon materials collected under the patronage of the Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg (d. 1447) but certainly edited into its extant form only in the early sixteenth century,⁷⁵ recounts Sayyid Ata's story along the lines of the *Rashaḥāt*, but

much more than the vast majority of fourteenth-century students of the Mongols (who were actually gone back at least as far as Genghis) who ascribe to the fourteenth-century Mongols the transformation from of religious "indifference" to a quality much nearer to modern who equate it with religious indifference), what is at work in Mongol attitudes toward religious such as Christianity and Islam is hardly "indifference" or evenness, and certainly not religious indifference, but an assumption that religion is above all a matter of practice and communal affiliation, not of "belief."

74. Cf. *Rashaḥāt-i ʿayn al-ḥayāt*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥajjār Maḥmūdī (Tehran, 2002–2003), I, pp. 25–26. On Sayyid Ata, see further my brief article, "Sayyid Ata," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 8, pp. 988–989.

75. On this work in general, in addition to the studies cited in the following note, see Henry

adds that he was sent from Tashkent by Zangī Ata to spread Islam in the Dasht-i Qipchaq. The account in the *Shajarat al-umrah* is not heavily documented, as it we learn simply that Sayyid Ata converted Qutub Khan, renamed him Muhammad Qutub Khan, and led those among the peoples of the Dasht-i Qipchaq who joined their khan in embracing Islam toward Turkistan. Those who accompanied Sayyid Ata, the story affirms, took the name Qutub, and this account was the basis for the most widespread popular understanding of the origin of the ethnonym "Qutub."⁷⁵ This latter feature of the account of Sayyid Ata already points to an important Inner Asian adaptation in understanding the process of Islamization, namely, the assimilation of the role of religious "founder" to that of ethnic or

Brugil, *RS*, II, pp. 175-176, and V. V. Bartold, "Uighur i ego vosto," *Sobremennik*, 85, pp. 140-141, and the English translation by V. and T. Minorsky, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, vol. II, "Uigh-Beg" (London: E. J. Brill, 1908), pp. 176-178. The *Shajarat al-umrah* has been extensively explored in studies of Uighur history, and to date there is no thorough historiographical analysis of the work and its relationship to the so-called "Tartar/ghaznawid" version of Uigh-Beg. The likelihood that the material presented in the *Shajarat al-umrah* was indeed gathered at Uigh-Beg's court is of some relevance for our purposes, since at his court were no doubt several people with important insight into the traditions about Qutub Khan's conversion. More precisely, two of Uigh-Beg's wives were apparently direct descendants of Qutub Khan through the wife named "Yaghshab" or "Yagshab," who was prominent at Qutub's court and whose figure in traditions about Sayyid Ata (see note, Robert B. Wines (see Wines, "The Tatars of Central Asia," pp. 41-42), was a daughter of Beg Jakh of the Qongirat tribe, while another wife, the *Shah* (see a Bartold's mention in *Uigh-Beg*, vol. II, pp. 176-178) was a daughter of Muhammad Tahir, who was in turn born to Tamer's son Jahangir and his bride Teren Beg, and Teren Beg was a daughter of the same Beg Jakh. Beg Jakh's brother, Ghaz Jakh, had arranged the marriage in 1712/1714, following Tamer's punitive expedition against Khwarezm. Ghaz Jakh had become ruler of Khwarezm when his brother Shams Jakh died during Tamer's siege of the city, and sought to restore peace with Tamer. It is possible, incidentally, that there were only two brothers, since the work of Chavush Beg (Taddei, *MS*, II, 176-178) refers to "my Shams, the son of the Qongirat Yaghshab," as ruler of Khwarezm. It is not clear whether the author means two divided one person into two, or the later source has combined two persons into one. In any event, the two or three "Jakh" brothers were sons of Yaghshab, according to two sources from the early Minorsky version, the work of Mirza al-Din Nizami (Minorsky, *MS*, vol. II, pp. 411, 412, of *The Beg*, 175, n. 2) and Ghaz al-Din Jakh of the Samarkand edition published by A. Chavush, *Shahshahin al-Tahir*, *Sobremennik* (Taddei, 1972), II, 176-178, of 1784, where Shams Jakh's father is called "Yaghshab"; Jakh writes that Teren Beg was Beg Jakh's daughter by a "daughter of Khan Qutub," and such a relationship is quite reasonable in view of the Bartold's testimony that the wife "Yaghshab," whom he met in the Khan's encampment, was the father of Qutub Khan's second Shams, Bahad. The links between Uigh-Beg and the family of the Khwarezmian "Qongirat Jakh" dynasty are clear, and these links in fact not only tie his court to the lineage of Qutub Khan, but do so through precisely the figure who in later traditions (see below) is said to accompany Sayyid Ata to Khwarezm following Qutub Khan's conversion, a figure who is at the same time probably identifiable with a close cousin of Qutub Khan known from the Bartold's manuscript report as deceased brother below.

75. For the account of the *Shajarat al-umrah*, cf. *The Beg*, pp. 206-207 (n. 1), 206 (text), 185 (note

donned the habit of a dervish, and departed from Balkh, heading for the Kafah. His wife and son went in search of Beshkir; they went to the Kafah and attained God's mercy there. And the youngest[est] son Adham chose the life of a dervish and left Balkh. However, Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī was not Sultan Beshkir's father; rather, he was a cousin of Sultan Beshkir.

And the story is well known that Sadr Ata, who is at present known by the laqab "Baba Tükles," took [in marriage] a fairy-girl [*pari qāri' alib-dār*]. Even if this story were confirmable, it would be possible, because in the *sharḥ*¹²⁵ it is appropriate for a man to marry a female-jinn.¹²⁶

All told, the Bābā had three sons. The name of his eldest son was Jalāl Bābā, [i. e. 294a] he was versed in theoretical and practical sciences, and the appellations "Shaykh" and "Ata" were left to him. He settled in the country of Khwarezm; and one son settled in Turkistan, and one of them was orphaned. And the Manghata looked after him; the name by which he is famous is Yāsar, who is the ancestor of all the saints among the Noghays. And God knows best the truth of the matter, and unto Him is the return and the power.

The poor wretch needed of God, Nūrullāh b. 'Ubaydullāh al-Jalīl al-Khwarezmī, produced this, [in] the year 1131 [24 November 1718–13 November 1719].

Commentary

Beyond the evident basis in oral tradition of this account's central point, as noted above, a number of other features are worthy of comment. Above all, this text evidences a much stronger Sadr "Yasar" than the account of *Chamsh-i Hayāt*; this is suggested not only by the author's evident familiarity with the hagiographical tradition surrounding Zangī Ata's disciples, but also (1) in the allusions to the famous Sadr Beshkir b. Adham and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, (2) in the mystical vision of the Kafah portrayed as pivotal in the conversion, and (3) in the affirmation that one of Baba Tükles' sons "inherited" his father's Sadr appellations of "shaykh" and "ata."

In the first regard, Nūrullāh Khwarezmī was clearly acquainted with the

[125] For further references on the question of the desirability of marriage with the jinn, see Ignace Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, tr. Arthur and Berthel Hammer (Provocton: Provocton University Press, 1967), p. 88, n. 88.

story of Zangī Ata's four disciples, as mentioned above, first recorded in the well-known early sixteenth-century hagiography, the *Rashaḥāt-i ʿayn al-ḥayāt*. The *Rashaḥāt* is, of course, only the earliest hagiographical source to include the story of the four disciples of Zangī Ata, a story it shares with the *Shajarat al-atrāk*, in which is found the specific element of Zangī Ata's instructions to his disciples to summon the peoples of the Dasht-i Qipchāq to Islam; as noted earlier, an account similar to that of the *Shajarat al-atrāk* is found in a seventeenth-century Khorezmian hagiography devoted to the life of one of Sayyid Ata's descendants, and the *Rashaḥāt*'s account of the four saints made its way into many hagiographical compendia produced in Central Asia and India from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, especially in the relatively few hagiographies devoted to shaykhs of Yasavī lineage.

We cannot say for certain which of these works, if any, was the direct inspiration for Nizadāh Khosrowī's identification of Balas Tūkhān as one of these four; nor can we do more than speculate, without a thorough study of the entire Central Asian hagiographical corpus, on whether other extant works may contain a similar identification, upon which Nizadāh might have drawn for his account.

In the absence of any other attestation of the identification of Balas Tūkhān with Sadr Ata, then, we must assign it tentatively to Nizadāh Khosrowī himself. But what is curious about our author's identification, whether his original contribution or a borrowing from some unknown source, is the choice of Sadr Ata as the saint to be identified with Balas Tūkhān. Of the four saints, only Sayyid Ata clearly remained a strong focus of legendary tales and genealogical ascriptions in Central Asia; his putative descendants may be traced at least down to the nineteenth century, and legends about his Islamizing role were circulated nearly as long. By contrast, we know almost nothing of any literary, spiritual, or familial legacy from the figure called Ulugh Hasan Ata, while the other two companions are only slightly better represented in later sources: descendants of Balas Ata living in Khosrowān are mentioned in the early sixteenth century by a Khorāzmi Sufi native to the region, while descendants of Sadr Ata are mentioned in the vicinity of Shahr-i Khayr, near Tashkent, in a hagiographical work from the latter fifteenth century.¹² Sadr Ata was also claimed as a seventh-generation ancestor by the sixteenth-century writer Hasan Nizadāh Bulkhārī, who notes also that most of the tribes of "the hills of Sadr Khan" – he uses the usual Turkic designation of Balas, and

[12] *Shahr-i Khayr*, MS 21420/12, fol. No. 1477 (248, 80, p. 275; Cat. No. 2482), I, 276.