

Shrine Pilgrimage among the Uighurs

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The practice of shrine pilgrimage has long been prominent on the global Islamic landscape. Its significance has been noted by many scholars (Hawley 1987; Werbner 2003; Kieckhefer and Bond 1990; Tyson 1997). People across the Islamic world go on pilgrimages to fulfill a wish expressed in the name of a saint or to seek the blessing of a particular shrine [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Shrine pilgrimage in Xinjiang. Except as noted, all photographs in the article are © 2009 by the author.

In Xinjiang, there are numerous such shrines (mazars). Some of the earliest evidence about mazars in Xinjiang is that left by foreigners from various European countries and Japan in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They came to this area as travelers, scholars, diplomats, and missionaries and have provided us useful information related to the historical situations, shapes, locations and legends of some of the mazars of that time. Also, under the Qing Dynasty, Chinese scholars or rulers recorded important information on mazars.

However, since 1949 there have been few ethnographic studies of shrine-centered religious activities in Xinjiang (for recent publications in Western languages see Harris and Dawut 2002; Sawada 2001a, 2001b; Zarccone 2001, 2002).

Chinese scholars have tended to be more interested in the historical aspects of Islam among the Uighurs, while researchers from other countries have often encountered difficulties in gaining access to rural areas in Xinjiang. An examination of current Uighur pilgrimage practices, coupled with knowledge of religious behavior in the region from a historical perspective, will demonstrate that that shrines have long been critical focal points of Islamic practice among the Uighurs (cf. Tyson 1997).

In this paper, I shall draw on information obtained from fieldwork and written resources to provide insight into the mazar culture among the Uighurs by exploring the classification, distribution and physical evidence for rituals of worship at mazars. Of particular interest is the way this material suggests a relationship between Islamic mazar culture and pre-Islamic traditions, including those of Buddhism and shamanism.

In the Uighur language, *mazar* means "tomb" or "shrine." It often refers to the burial place of a saint or a place where miracles are believed to have occurred. Mazar pilgrimage refers to the practice of making journeys to the tombs of saints, which are scattered around the deserts and towns of Xinjiang. The mazars are the sites of pilgrimage in part because they are believed to have the power to cure infertility and diseases and avert natural or other disasters. In principle, mazar worship involves the activities of worship: reading of the Quran, prayers, offerings of sacrifices and other rituals for the purpose of securing the divine protection of the mazar [Fig. 2]. Mazar worship is popular among the broad

Fig. 2. Praying at the mazar in Pichan. Photo © Zulpiye Zumratshah.



masses of the Uighur people, and has become an inalienable part of their religious belief. Worshipers at the mazars pour out the sorrows and bitterness of their hearts and use different forms to express their needs and wishes. Some pray for revenge on people who had done them wrong, some for protection from disaster or for material wealth. Still others pray for harmony in marital relationships or for an ideal marriage partner. Others pray for financial security in old age or for relief from extended drought. People look on the mazar as a place which can protect them from disaster, where they can pour out their innermost feelings, where they can seek cure for diseases, where their souls can be saved, and also as a place where they can seek pleasure. Therefore, whether in extreme cold or heat, regardless of how dangerous or difficult the journey, people will make pilgrimages to mazars. Some will not stint their fortune to offer sacrifices at the mazar in order to gain its divine protection. There are individuals who hold mazar worship to be of equal importance to a pilgrimage to Mecca. Many local cemeteries have a shrine around which people of the community are buried. In the course of several years' fieldwork I have documented more than seventy in the Khotan region alone (Dawuti 2001).

The types and geographical distribution of mazars

The most common pilgrimage sites, which attract the greatest number of worshippers, are the tombs of kings, Islamic missionaries and Islamic martyrs (*shehit*) killed in *jihād* [holy war] against the Buddhist kingdoms of Xinjiang. Major sites of pilgrimage include the tomb of the founder of the Qarakhanid¹ empire Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan,² and the Ordam Padishah [Fig. 3], "Court of the Emperor" (located about 24 km. southeast of Harap county in Yengisher prefecture), which is reputed to be the shrine

Fig. 3. The Ordam Padishah mazar.



of Sultan Ali Arslan Khan, grandson of Satuq Bughra Khan. Shrines of Sufi leaders are also quite common, but their rituals are more localized. The most widely known are the tombs of the Khoja rulers of Kashgar including that of Afaq Khoja and the "fragrant concubine" Ipar Khan.³

Although they are considered an Islamic phenomenon, many sites of worship are not directly linked to Islam. The tombs of philosophers and writers have in the past been important sites of pilgrimage for students at Islamic schools. Most famous of these are the tombs of the prominent 11th century Uighur scholars, Yusuf Khas Hajib, author of "Wisdom of Royal Glory" (*Qutadgu Bilig*), and Mahmud Kashgari, author of the "Compendium of the Turkic Dialects"



Fig. 4. The Büwi Märyäm mazar.

(*Divanu Lughat-it-Türk*). The tomb of the first is in Kashgar city, the second in the village of Upal some 50 km. to the south. Other sites of pilgrimage are the tombs of craftsmen, which are believed to be effective in healing specific ailments such as skin diseases. Many tombs of female historical figures are sites of pilgrimage for women, especially those who seek to have a child. The most famous of these is the tomb of Büwi Märyäm (located in Beshkerem county near Kashgar) [Fig. 4], also of the Qarakhanid dynasty. According to local legend, Büwi Märyäm was a sister of Ali Arslan Khan, and grand-daughter of Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan, founder of the Qarakhanid dynasty.



Fig. 5. The Hazriti Beg mazar, Yengisar, Kashgar prefecture.

Most mazars in Xinjiang are concentrated in the south and east, although there are some in the north, in the Ili River valley. The distribution of the mazars is uneven; some mazars are situated in traffic hubs and densely populated areas, while others are in remote areas [Fig. 5]. Especially in the Khotan area some mazars are located on the edges of the Taklamakan Desert or even farther out in the desert. Although such mazars are far from any community, their surroundings are scenic, with a water source and shady trees, and mosques, hanikas, inns, and similar affiliated constructions.

Travel on the ancient Silk Road meant following paths which led from one oasis to another in order to reach a remote destination, the mazars often serving as road markers. Between the oases are either the barren gobi, mountainous paths or dense forests. In the southern parts of Xinjiang, many mazars have

the name of *langar* which literally means “station” or “inn” in Uighur. Mazars located at traffic hubs and way-stations usually have caretakers and adjoining inns and are situated in quiet and elegant surroundings with springs and trees. While resting there, travelers can recover from the weariness of the journey and can also pray at the nearby mazars for blessings and protection for the remainder of their trip.

However, most mazars do not have caretakers or inns to shelter the travelers, but rather are mainly burial sites even if the sites of some mazars are not really suited for burials. They may be marked by piled up stones or earth and the usual mazar sign of poles with colorful flags on them. On the poles and the trees near the mazar will be found many strips of cloth, and on the graves will be placed the horns of cows or sheep [Fig. 6].

The geographical location and form of such mazars suggest that they have the obvious characteristics of the shamanist *obo*. Sacrificial activity at an *obo* is an integral part of shamanist religious rituals, and played a very important role in the religious life of the ancient nomadic peoples of northern China. With the decline of shamanism and its absorption into Lamaist religious ritual among the Mongolian and Yugu nationalities, the *obo* has gradually lost its original significance and is retained merely as a symbol of the sacred ground for sacrifices. However, for the Uighurs, probably in conjunction with the concept of worshiping saints in Islam, in certain sacrificial rituals the *obo* continues to play a role in mazars. Indeed, there is much evidence

to suggest that the shrine tradition is not purely Islamic but has roots in a variety of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices (Dawuti 2001). Many shrines are named after animals and plants, such as Üjmä (Mulberry) mazar, and Ghaz (Goose) mazar.

Some sites of pilgrimage were also formerly Buddhist sites of worship (Dawuti 2001). It is well known that after the advent of Islam, in Central Asia and other regions local Buddhist and Zoroastrian temples and Chris-



Fig. 6. Offerings at the Akhterek Khojam mazar in Pichan, Turpan. Photo © Zulpiye Zumratshah.

Fig. 7. The Toyoq mazar near Turpan.

tian churches were converted into mosques. However, it was rare that Buddhist temples and caves be transformed into Islamic sacred ground such as mazars. Some mazars which we can document today are near the locations of Buddhist sacred sites recorded by Buddhist monks such Faxian (early 5th century) and Xuanzang (7th century). When Aurel Stein was looking for Buddhist ruins in Khotan, he first looked for local mazars. He believed that if one wanted to look for ancient Buddhist or Hindu holy sites, all he needed to do was to look for an Islamic mausoleum (Stein 1994, p. 129; 1904, pp. 180-181).

An example is Toyoq mazar near Turpan [Fig. 7]. The Toyoq Ravine was one of the important holy lands of Buddhism and Manichaeism before the advent of Islam. Not far from the eastern side of the mazar and on the left bank of the stream are the famous Toyoq Thousand Buddha Caves. The ninety-four caves contain some of the earliest and most significant Buddhist murals in the Turpan area and are the location of important discoveries of early Buddhist manuscripts. Worship at the mazar here centers on a cave as it does in Khotan's Kokhmarim (Snake Mountain) mazar, where people go to pray for rain [Figs. 8 and 9].⁴ The local population com-



bined local history and custom with the legend of the Seven Sleepers (*Ashāb al-kaḥf*) in order to transform the Buddhist holy land into an Islamic one and in the process greatly increase the influence of the mazar.

Even before the advent of Islam, the worship of saints was central to the religious system of the local people, because Buddhism, in which their world outlook was anchored, began with the worship of a holy one. Buddhists not only worshipped the saint himself but also worshipped any holy article connected with him — his remains, articles that had been used by him, and so on. In addition, places which had once housed the holy one or any of the saints, individual buildings, the places to which they traveled, bushes and groves, trees, etc., are all revered by devotees. Analogous to this phe-

Figs. 8 (below) and 9 (right). The cave and offerings at the Kokhmarim mazar near Khotan.



nomenon of saint worship are local beliefs in ancestor worship.

The activities at mazars not only adapted their form and content from Buddhism but also adapted the form of the offerings. Excavation of Xinjiang Buddhist ruins has uncovered small flags, strips of cloth, copper coins and other items left by worshippers as offerings. To pray to the gods for their protection, the devout believers placed such offerings in the base of the stupas or nearby, and also offered oil to light the lamps of the temple. Similar forms of offerings are commonly seen in mazar worship, where flags or strips of cloth hung near or on burial sites to mark Islamic sacred ground have become symbols of mazars in the southern parts of Xinjiang [Fig. 9, previous page]. The offerings and ritual practice will be discussed in greater detail below.

Even the architecture of the mazars may reflect the influence of Buddhism. The most prominent feature of mazar architecture of Central Asia, Xinjiang, and Turkey is the domed top and gumbaz, and most of the exterior of the construction is carved with niche-like decoration [Fig. 10]. The most likely source for these architectural forms is the Buddhist stupa. However, Buddhist architecture has considerable regional variation in Uighur territory, where the Gandharan and Bamiyan styles were of particular importance. Mazar architecture in its turn displays regional variations and changed over time, adapting the styles of local ancestral graves and temples to create a new synthesis.

Apart from the connection of mazar location and worship with pre-Islamic Buddhist traditions, many scholars have emphasized the importance of Shi'a religious practices among the Sunni Uighurs. After the advent of Islam, Shi'ite worship of saints was rapidly accepted by the Uighur people, and consequently many pseudo-saint mazars appeared, a phenomenon closely related to the local people's traditions. Almost every county in the Khotan region boasts tombs of one or another of the twelve Shi'ite imams, who historically never came close to Xinjiang. There are many mazars which are worshiped mainly because a certain saint had stopped there for a rest. Some mazars even

have rocks with symbolic footprints. The worship of a saint's footprints was especially popular in Buddhism.

The calendar of mazar visitation

In the southern part of Xinjiang most villages have a mazar, and the bigger mazars usually have an attached mosque. In the villages, people usually pray at the mazar mosques on the two important traditional Islamic holidays a year. On the 17th and 27th day of the month of Ramadan, people will go to the nearby mazars to pray through the night. Following longstanding tradition, many Muslims go to the mazars



Fig. 10. The Habib Ejem mazar in Atush.

to pray on the 15th day of the 8th month according to the Islamic calendar, the month of Barat, which means Atonement. On that day, which falls before the month of Ramadan, Muslims pray to Allah that He forgive the sins which they have committed in the past year; angels in heaven write down the charitable and sinful doings of the people on earth. In the evening children will hold a lighted gourd lamp hung from a pole, singing Ramadan songs in a parade or singing songs while begging from door to door. Some will pour oil into a gourd lamp, light it, and hang it on a tree near the mazar where they gather for prayers. The most influential mazar activity is called the Ordam, which is held in the month of Barat and on the day of Ashura. Ashura falls on the 10th day of the month of Muharram, according to the Islamic calendar. On that day the Shi'ite Muslims remember the

martyrdom of Hussein in the battle of Karbala. And Ordam is remembered for the martyrdom of the Qarakhanid general, Ali Arslan Khan, in the battle with the Khotan Buddhists.

Aside from special occasions, more people than usual go to the mazars to worship on Thursdays. For example, major mazar activities of the Khotan area are held on Thursdays. Many people gather at the mazars for activities that day, stay overnight, and then participate in the mazar mosque worship on Friday before returning home. According to legend, Thursday is a day of rest in Paradise; so all the souls of the buried dead return to their resting place on earth that day to hear the prayers and supplications of the people. The worshippers can pray directly to the dead, thus assuring that their prayers will be answered (Ma 1983).

While some Uighur visits to mazars take place according to a regular calendar of important dates, there are also irregularly scheduled visits for important events or personal needs [Fig. 11]. My data indicate that the mazar activities of the Khotan and Kashgar areas are of the former kind while those of the Turpan and Kumul areas belong to the latter. Given the deep roots of mazar locations in popular tradition, an interesting question concerns why there has developed a tradition of fixed itineraries of worship at certain mazars. There are two major "circuits," one centered around Kashgar, the other around Khotan. Each year, at fixed dates, people worship in sequence at mazars which are mutually connected along the route. Indeed, because of its many mazars and the prominence of the rituals at them, Khotan is sometimes referred to as the "Holy Land" [Fig. 12]. The mazar activities of Khotan are connected specifically with local seasonal changes and are usually held between the months of March and October.

Fig. 11. Pilgrims praying at a mazar.



Fig. 12. The Imam Asim mazar in Khotan.

Before the 1950s, the majority of the Uighurs in the Kashgar region participated in large-scale mazar visiting activities such as the *Hez-*



ret seylysi at the Apak Khoja mazar in the city of Kashgar and the *Ishqol seylysi* at the Uchtur Halipe mazar of Yarkand County. Such activities, usually held in Spring and Autumn, were mass gatherings of people to pray for good fortune and protection from disaster, for favorable weather, and also for a bumper harvest.

Prior to the advent of Islam, regular and fixed dates for sacrificial activities and prayer rituals had already existed amongst the Uighurs (Geng and Ayup, 1980). So it is reasonable to assume that the timing of mazar visits not only manifests the different Islamic memorial activities, but also would have a close connection with local primitive religious activities. Whether there may also be a connection with patterns of pre-Islamic Buddhist pilgrimage is an interesting question deserving of further study. Quite apart from any specific religious tradition and practice, such activities also express the people's wishes in life, in combination with their physical and psychological need for entertainment, leisure, and relaxation.

The offerings at mazars and their significance

In Uighur folk belief, many material objects are used to express ideas; there are specific regional characteristics, all of which have symbolic meanings. The use of symbolic material things to give expression to people's various needs and wishes is especially evident in Uighur mazar worship. Several important questions arise in examining this phenomenon: What is the origin of these symbolic objects? What kind of cultural data can they impart? And what are their regional characteristics? To answer these questions, let us examine the objects which are placed around the mazars, either as expressions of faith or with a utilitarian purpose.



Fig. 13. Ritual offerings at a mazar.

One of the most conspicuous phenomena of the mazar is the different sacrificial offerings which are placed around it. Some of these objects have become the symbols, or markers, of certain local Islamic sacred places, the mazars. Some objects express the wishes of the pilgrims or are the expressions of gratitude for prayers answered, while other objects are expressions of the continuation of traditional rituals. These sacrificial offerings are objects hanging on poles and objects with figurative meanings, such as a cradle, a piece of stoneware, a lantern, a doll, and others. To hang some sacrificial offerings on poles erected around a mazar is a custom most commonly found in the Khotan area of Xinjiang [Fig. 13; also Fig. 9 above]. It also exists in different degrees in the neighboring areas of Kashgar, but is hardly ever seen in the eastern or northern parts of Xinjiang.

In Khotan, there are generally three different types of mazar structures: 1) a simply built mazar inside a flat-roofed house, with the poles erected outside the house; 2) a mazar surrounded by a wall or a fence, with the poles erected inside the wall or fence (or the sacrificial offerings hanging from the wall or fence); 3) a mazar constructed of earth to form a distinct hill or a sand dune surrounded by a barren landscape. In this third type, poles for hanging the sacrificial offerings are erected next to the mazar.

The objects hung from such poles are varied, including strips of cloth, banners, chicken or bird heads, tails of a sheep, cow or horse, ram and cow horns, or a sheep or chicken that is stuffed with hay, carved wooden decorations, and triangles sewn with colored cloth and filled with cotton or hay and strung together. The number of erected poles and selection of objects will differ at different mazars. If there are trees around the mazar, one or more of the trees may be viewed as "sacred" and used instead of a pole to hang the various offerings [Fig. 14, facing page]. The most expressive of the hanging objects is the sheep or chicken which is stuffed with hay. From afar, it seems that the object is flying in the air. According to the local inhabitants, immediately after a religious ritual at the mazar they will hang the skin, head, wool or tail of the sacrificed animal on a tree or on an erected pole, and place the head and horns of the animal on the mazar or on the wall or fence surrounding the mazar. It is more



Fig. 14. A "sacred" tree.

common to see flags, or banners strung on the erected pole or poles which surround the mazar or directly on the mazar itself [Fig 12 above; Fig. 15]. The flags are usually of bright, solid colors such as red, white, black, blue, or green. Many are edged with saw-toothed designs of very brightly contrasting colors: for example, a black flag might have white edging.

Fig. 15. Offering flags at the Qadam Jay mazar, Maralbeshi, Kashgar. Photo © Zulpiye Zumratshah.



If erecting the poles and hanging some of the objects on them are the efforts of the men, then the objects decorating the surroundings of the mazar are the artistic creations of the women. Among those making vows at the mazars are many women who want children. They pray before the mazar, pour their hearts out, tie strips on cloth on the erected poles or trees, embrace the "sacred tree" and scatter grain on the mazar, throw coins and agate in the spring near the mazar, light lanterns around the mazar and give alms in the hope that the holy one in the mazar will grant them their wish. The mazars known for granting children to the barren are especially sought after by women who long for offspring. In the Kulja area there is the custom of offering a simulated cradle to the mazar to pray for offspring [Fig. 16]. Women leave a symbolic doll in the cradle and put it near a mazar or hang it from a "sacred tree." This custom is rare in the southern parts of Xinjiang where there are mazars with names like Cradle Mother (*Böshük ana*). Local inhabitants think that objects from caves called Cradle Mother not only have the power to grant children to women, but also have the power to cure sickness and grant physical health and are especially effective for the healing of sick children. In southern Xinjiang, those praying for offspring frequently



Fig. 16. Miniature cradle with a "baby" in it, Sultan Uwayis mazar, Kulja. Photo © Tamar Mayer.

put a doll near the mazar [Fig. 17, next page]. Among the Uighurs there is a close connection between the belief in mazars which specifically grant fertility and the age-old belief in the "God of Reproduction" and "God of Protection" of pre-Islamic times (Dawuti, 2004).

The desire for a happy marriage is also a prominent reason for offering sacrifices at a mazar. In the Khotan and Kashgar regions we often



Fig. 17. Symbolic doll left at a mazar.

see symbolic stoves made with small pieces of stone or bricks and containing firewood, leaves and kindling. Placing at a mazar two pieces of stone which have been tied together expresses the wish of becoming a pair with someone whom the heart desires. A custom in Yengisar and Yarkand counties of

Kashgar is to make a small symbolic arrow and place it at a mazar in the hope that the arrow will hit the heart of one's beloved. Such customs which reflect the idea of "using similar behavior to achieve similar results" are to a great extent very much like a practice in witchcraft (voodoo).

The custom of offering sacrifices in mazar worship has very deep historical and cultural roots. Mazar worship can be traced back in history at least to the times of the Turk Khaganate. According to *Legends of the Turks*, recorded in *Zhou Shu* (annals of the Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581 CE) and *Sui Shu* (annals of the Sui Dynasty, 581-618 CE), after a Turk's death, the relatives of the deceased slaughter sheep and horses for sacrifices. "After the burial, stones are erected as markers. The number of stones depends on the number of people the deceased had killed during his lifetime. The heads of the sacrificed sheep and horses are hung on the stone pillars" (Wu 1991). The Uighur historical epic *Oghuznamä* records that at the hero's triumphal return from war, the cheering crowds welcomed him at the square where two poles had been erected. On one was hung a golden cock and tied a white sheep; on the other was hung a silver cock and tied a black sheep (Geng and Ayup 1980, p. 39). The scene bears a remarkable resemblance to the Khotan custom of hanging a chicken from a pole.

Obviously, the Uighur custom of hanging sacrificial objects from an erected pole is closely

connected with a custom of their Huihu ancestors and other nomadic tribes of the steppe who practiced shamanism. Erecting a pole on which to hang sacrificial objects is a legacy from shamanism which the Uighur people have embraced for a long time. The appearance of this custom is closely connected to the worship of sacred trees, the worship of Tengri and many other kinds of beliefs. Although these beliefs appeared in pre-Islamic times when the slaughtering of animals for sacrifice was forbidden by Buddhism, even in Khotan where Buddhism had a stronghold this custom was not eradicated. The fact that this custom has continued to the present demonstrates that the dissemination and acceptance of foreign religions very much depends on the degree to which they accommodate local beliefs which are maintained even in the face of substantial pressure to accept an alien culture.

Another kind of offering at shrines is a flag [Fig. 18]. According to local inhabitants, the origin of the custom of erecting flag poles can be connected with the religious wars of the Qarakhanid Dynasty, with the flags seen to symbolize the military banners of its army. The custom of erecting flag poles is quite common in Kho-



Fig. 18. Flag at Qadam Jay mazar, Maralbeshi, Kashgar. Photo © Zulpiye Zumratshah.

tan and the Ordam Mazar of the Kashgar area — that is, the main battlegrounds where the Qarakhanid army fought the infidels of Khotan. In Islam, those martyred in a holy war are accorded very high positions. When members of the Qarakhanid army died in battle, it was pos-

sible that they were buried locally, and a flag which represented their army was erected on their burial ground as a symbol of respect for the dead and as a grave marker for the martyrs.

It is quite common for the believers in shamanism, Buddhism and Islam to mark a holy place with flags. The believers in shamanism and Lamaism among the Mongols, Yugu and Tibetans hang flags at obos and as sacrificial offerings in other activities. Archaeologists working on the Buddhist ruins of Xinjiang have uncovered many triangular banner head pieces left behind by pilgrims who had paid visits to former Buddhist holy sites.

Conclusion

In short, analysis of the various sacrificial offerings at the mazars demonstrates that mazar worship of the Uighurs is not merely an Islamic religious activity. Studying it from another point of view shows that it is a blend of many different cultures and religions, the most important influence being that of shamanism. Although the Uighurs had at different times embraced Buddhism, Manichaeism, Eastern Christianity and Islam, and there were great differences between these religions and shamanism, shamanism had always remained a part of Uighur life and customs. Its undiminished vitality is especially evident in the obo-like forms of many mazars and in the rituals of mazar worship involving sacrificial objects hanging from poles. Belief in shamanism and witchcraft (voodoo) transcends time. It has continued throughout history down to the present. Later, "artificial" religions such as Buddhism, Islam and others, all treated shamanism with tolerance; in fact, those religions even blended their own beliefs with shamanism in order to facilitate the spread of their own beliefs among the local people.

Prior to the advent of Islam into Central Asia, including Xinjiang, idol worship was a well-established religious tradition. Therefore, it was difficult for the converts to Islam to accept the worship of an abstract, formless concept of Allah. When their existing idols (Buddhist statues) were destroyed and the temples were torn down, they searched in their traditional culture for something that would make Islam more concrete and nearer to their former belief, and yet not clash with Islam. Thus they turned their attention to the mausolea of their ancestors.

Ancestor worship has always been an important part of the shamanist belief in spirits which was either passed down individually or in combination with other religious forms. In various pre-Islamic religions, a belief that the soul does not die combined with the social custom of praying to the ancestors for blessings. After the conversion to Islam, the people combined the worship of Islamic Shi'ite saints with the local ancestral veneration and thus created a mazar worship with local characteristics. The concept of the worship of saints in Buddhism and other religions, its form, and rituals of offering helped to promote the integration of mazar worship into the practices of the new faith.

According to Islamic belief, worshipping any person other than God is unacceptable; there is no intermediary between man and God. Muslims must express their hopes, requests, and confessions directly to God. In Islamic law the creation of grand tombs, the worshipping of graves, and the holding of large ceremonies in graveyards is forbidden. For this reason the original Arabic meaning of the word *mazaret* is "a place that is visited," not "tomb of a saint" or "place of worship." Nonetheless, religious activities intended to meet one's needs are held at mazars in many Islamic countries. People believe those buried at mazars to be close to God, and think the dead will convey their hopes and requests to God. The formation of this concept of "saints" and "sages" in Islam is in fact related to comparable ideas in Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism. After the formation of Islam, the creators, disseminators, and martyrs of Islam took on a saintly character. This is especially evident in the development of mazar beliefs among the Uighurs, a process in which Shi'ite and Sufi Islam played an important role.

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Scholarship from the Institute of Ismaili Studies (2007) supported research for this article. In 2008 she received grants from the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Royal Anthropological Institute. Apart from the titles listed below, her publications include: *Weiwuerzu maza chaobai yanjiu* [Research on Mazar Worship among the Uighur] (Xinjiang University Press, 2002); *Uyghur mazarliri* [Introduction to Uighur Mazars] (Xinjiang People's Press, 2002); "Shrine Pilgrimage and Sustainable Tourism among the Uyghurs: Central Asian Ritual Traditions in the Context of China's Development Policies," in: Ildiko Beller-Hann et al., eds., *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia* (Ashgate, 2007). E-mail: <rahiled@gmail.com>.

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Notes

1. The Qarakhanid empire was established in the mid-9th century and lasted for 150 years. In 1041

the Khanate divided into a western and an eastern part. The western part occupied the territory between the Amu Darya in modern Uzbekistan eastwards to the Ferghana Basin, with the capital at Bukhara. The eastern part was ruled by Hasan Bughra and his descendants from Balasaghun, while Kashgar served as an important religious and cultural center. The Qarakhanid empire was the first Muslim empire of the Turkic peoples.

2. Satuq Bughra Khan is reputed to have been the first convert to Islam among the Central Asian Turkic peoples. His shrine is located three km. southwest of Atush city. For details on his mausoleum and cult, see Hamada 2001.

3. Ipar Khan is considered by many Uighurs to be a Uighur heroine. There are controversies around this historic figure. Chinese historians call her Xiang Fei, the "Fragrant Concubine" of the Manchu Emperor Qianlong. For a discussion of the way her history has been treated, her tomb and its political implications see Millward 1994 and Zarcone 1999.

4. This was a famous Buddhist site before Islam. Here too, Buddhist ruins can be seen near the shrine. For detailed discussion see Dawuti 2001.



The Mazar of the Seven Girls, Turpan.