

INTRODUCTION

The crimes of 20th century Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism enveloped a vast portion of the globe, inflicting mass arrests, enslavement, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and generalized terror and social disruption on diverse populations, communities, and cultures. Among Western historians in particular, the experience of Muslims with totalitarianism, especially during the Second World War, is most commonly addressed with respect to colonized populations. The interactions between Nazi Germany and the Islamic world are often depicted as continuing the Imperial German policy of encouraging Muslims under French and British colonial rule to rebel against their overlords, or otherwise assist in the German war effort.¹ Similarly, we have studies of how the British and French governments, both perpetrators of atrocities in their own Muslim colonies during the Second World War, managed their Muslim subjects, as well as the propaganda threats emanating from Nazi Germany.² If we take into account the relatively limited, and – in contrast to the 21st century experience – benign, wartime interactions of the United States with the Islamic world during the Second World War, it is not surprising that from the vast literature on the social impacts of Nazi and Stalinist crimes, one is left with the impression that Muslims escaped relatively unscathed, if only thanks to geography.³ Muslims, however, made up a significant proportion of the Soviet Union’s citizenry, and like every other ethnic or religious community in that country, suffered severely under Stalinist rule. These include Muslim communities in the Crimea, the

¹ Nazi-Muslim relations are the topic of the following recent monographs: David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War*, (Belknap Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 2014); Stephan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, (Belknap Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 2014); Francis Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marko Attila Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: a History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² See, Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War: the British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Annie Rey-Goldzeighuer, *Aux origines de la guerre d’Algerie: de Mers-el-Kebir aux massacres Nord-Constantinois*, (Paris: La Decouverte, 2002).

³ For some discussions of religious policy towards Muslim communities under Japanese occupation, see Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945*, (The Hague and Bantung: Van Hoeve, 1958); Abu Talib Ahmad, “Japanese Policy towards Islam in Malaya during the Occupation: A Reassessment, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33/1 (2002), 107–122.

Caucasus, the Volga-Ural region, Siberia, and above all, Central Asia, the region on which this study is focused. In the broad and often quite excellent historical literature devoted to the Gulag, and its impact on Soviet society, the Muslim perspective, and especially the Muslim religious perspective, is largely or entirely absent. One of the goals of this work are to consider this religious facet of Soviet Muslim society, as well as to take into account the experience of totalitarianism for Muslims outside of the Middle East, and the French, British, and Dutch colonies.

To the degree that studies of Stalinist atrocities against Muslim populations in the Soviet Union have been the topic of scholarly study, historians have generally examined them through a secular lens. Scholarly approaches that are sensitive to the religious interpretations of totalitarian crimes are far more evident in studies of Christianity, and especially Judaism.⁴ Religious interpretations of the Holocaust as it was experienced by Jewish religious communities, particularly the Hasidim, are relevant to this study, because of some similarities in conceptions and manifestations of religious authority between Hasidism and Sufism, and also due to similarities in the narrative traditions of both communities. Publications of Hasidic tales, a vital compositional genre that serves some of the same didactic and biographical functions in Hasidism as the Sufi hagiographies discussed in this study – and that also share some of the latter genre’s demotic qualities – have permitted a broader public to gain insights into religious interpretations of the Holocaust beyond more abstract theology and moral philosophy.⁵ In studies of Soviet Muslim communities, the privileging of an ethno-national over a religious conceptual representation is, ironically, at least partially conditioned by Soviet ideology. A secular orientation is no less evident in examinations of earlier

⁴ For an introduction to the Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust, see: Steven T. Katz et al. eds. *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, (New York: Oxford University press, 2007). Beyond the vast number of works devoted to specifically Christian theological, philosophical, and political responses to the crimes of Stalinism and Nazism, there is also some scholarship on popular religious responses. For example, for the development, among Russian Orthodox communities, of shrines and pilgrimage on the sites of former Gulag prison camps in Siberia, see Galina Liubimova, “Sibirskaiia traditsiia pochitaniia sviatykh mest v kontekste narodnoi istoricheskoi pamiaty,” *Studia Mythologica Slavica* XVI (2013), 27–45; Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, “The Gulag Reclaimed as Sacred Space: Negotiation of Memory at the Holy Spring of Iskitim,” *Laboratorium* 1 (2015), 51–70.

⁵ Yaffa Eliach, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); for an introduction to Hasidic tales as a compositional genre, see Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: the Early Masters*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1947).

episodes of massive state violence directed against nomads. Such an approach, originating in Cold War Sovietology, continues to generate an ever-growing literature devoted to the deportation of various Muslim nationalities of the Crimea and the North Caucasus.⁶ There is an even wider literature, primarily in Russian and Turkic languages, on the persecution of the national – and basically secular – elite: nationalist figures, intellectuals, scholars, the bourgeoisie, etc. These are important studies, that emphasize the personal tragedies of individuals, and sometimes evaluate Stalinist repression more broadly, as it affected Muslim *nations*, either through mass deportations of entire ethnic groups, or the metaphoric decapitation of the nation by the elimination of its supposed national elite.⁷ The imposition of secularism on the populations of the former Russian Empire, including its Muslim subjects, was a declared goal of both Soviet cultural policy, and of local elites in varying degrees. In this, the Soviets were largely successful, in part thanks to social disruption brought about through the massive application of state violence. Tellingly, during the Cold War, anti-communist critics discussed Muslim communities and Islam almost entirely within a framework of Soviet definitions, and this framework has by no means lost its appeal, if not its fashionableness.⁸ However, as with all cultural policies in the Soviet era, even

⁶ Aleksandr Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples*, (New York: Norton, 1981); Robert Conquest, *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*, (New York: MacMillan, 1960); Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers*, (London: MacMillan, 1970); Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, (Palo Alto: the Hoover Institution, 1978); G. Uehling, *Beyond Memory: the Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

⁷ A few examples of the vast literature devoted in large measure to the secular elite in Turkic communities include, Rafael Khakimov, *Repressiyalängän tatar ädipläre*,” (Kazan: Tatar kitap năshriyäte, 2009); Bolatbek Năsenov, *Khaliq zhauları: keng dalanıng kiyreui* (Almaty-Novosibirsk: n.p., 2006); Bolat Zhünisbekov ed. *Alash-Alzhir II* (Almaty: Sariarqa, 2011); Makhmud Dudov et al. *Pravozashchitniki repressirovannykh narodov*, (Moscow: n.p., 1996); Svetlana Alieva, *Tak eto bylo: national'nye repressii v SSSR 1917–1952 I-III*, (Moscow: Insan, 1993); A. T. Orymbaev, *Deportatsiia chechenskogo i ingushskogo narodov v Kazakhstan v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny i ikh polozhenie v poslevoennye gody*, (Astana: Parasat älemı, 2006); Zukhra Borlakova, *Deportatsiia i repatriatsiia karachaiskogo naroda*, (Moscow: Reglant, 2005);

⁸ The influential studies of Alexandre Bennigsen and his circle illustrate this tendency very clearly. The most relevant of these works for our study is Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, (London: C. Hurst, 1985); Devin DeWeese had characterized this approach as “Sovietological Islamology.” For an informed critique, see, Devin DeWeese, “Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: a Review Essay on Yaacov Roi'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13/3 (2002), 298–330.

secularization was in some important ways negotiated, and achieved on the ground with a degree of compromise, despite the Soviet state's ability and willingness to unleash violence to achieve its goals. Absent from these studies of the Muslim experience of Stalinism is the religious dimension, and religious responses of the Muslim community.⁹ The religious, Islamic, aspects of the topic are relevant to the study of Stalin-era crimes against Soviet citizens because the repression of Islamic institutions and religious figures was a very public aspect of Soviet cultural policy. The destruction of "religion" or "religious institutions" was also explicitly conjoined with the suppression of older, religiously conceived, relationships, forms of identity and cultural practices.¹⁰ In addition to banning Islamic education, and closing down mosques, the Soviet authorities targeted religious leaders of the Muslim community, including the *'ulamā'*, but also expressly Sufi *ishans*. Not only were religious leaders targeted, but their families were, too, threatening the survival of the lineages themselves. Given the existence of strong religious bonds between *ishan* lineages with non-holy descent groups (evident among the Kazakhs in particular, but also among the Turkmens and Uzbeks), violent repression directed against these *ishan* lineages affected rural Kazakh society in profound ways, even beyond the immediate catastrophes of mass famine and collectivization.

⁹ Stalinist violence against Soviet Muslims has been the subject of a substantial literature in Russian and in various Turkic languages of the former Soviet Union, as well as several monographs in Western languages; see, Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera: Collonizzazione agricola, sterminio dei nomadi e costruzione statale in Asia central (1905–1936)* (Vicenza: Viella, 2009), Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: the Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin*, (New York: The Rookery Press, 2006); Isabelle Ohayon, *La sédentarisation des Kazakhs dans l'URSS de Staline*, (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2006); Robert Kindler, *Stalins Nomaden: Herrschaft un Hunger in Kasachstan* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2014), Valeriy Mikhailov, *The Great Disaster: Genocide of the Kazakhs* (London: Stacey, 2014); Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001). Keller's emphasis is on the "Soviet Campaign," rather than "Islam."

¹⁰ There are, nevertheless, some works devoted to the repression of the *'ulamā'*, and sacred lineages; see, Nodirbek Abdulakhatov et. al., *Farghona azizlari taqdiri*, (Tashkent: Abu Matbuot-Kansalt, 2012); *Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo i vlast' v Tatarstane (1920–1930-e gg.* (Kazan: Akademiia Nauk Respubliki Tatarstan, 2006); M. K. Koigeldiev, *Stalinizm i repressii v Kazakhstane 1920–1940-kh godov*, (Almaty: Zerde, 2009), 194–311.

SOVIET ISLAM

The purpose of this work is two-fold. On the one hand, I seek to explore the experiences and responses of Muslim religious communities under totalitarian oppression, in this case looking at Kazakh holy lineages during the Stalin era. On the other, I hope to challenge, or at least qualify, some of the commonly-encountered ideas that dominate much of the discussion of Islam in the Soviet Union, namely, that the Soviet era severed the link between the Muslim community and Islamic knowledge, that Islamic knowledge was relegated to the “family” sphere, and that, effectively, because of Soviet policies, Islamic knowledge could no longer be transmitted in the communal sphere.¹¹ This line of thinking, most prominently argued by Adeeb Khalid, holds that Central Asians’ understanding of Islam became less a universal body of ethics, relationships, and rituals, than an “ethno-national” conception incubated within the family environment.¹² The Kazakh environment, with its kinship-based social structures, provides good ground to challenge these hypotheses.

While this book focuses in particular on the interpretation by Muslim religious communities of their own experience of Stalinism, including the Gulag experiences of their leaders and ancestors, it is also looks at the collective survival of several Muslim religious communities in Kazakhstan, as narrated in their own treatises. The study highlights 1) the continuity of conceptions and practices rooted in medieval Sufism, 2) the role of these Sufi ideas in maintaining the cohesion of these communities against the challenges of state-imposed secularism and Stalinist repression, and 3) the ways in which Stalinism, and the Soviet system more generally, influenced these selfsame Sufi practices and conceptions. All of these questions are relevant to understanding how these Sufi communities dealt with Stalinist repression, how they adapted to it, and how they survived it.

This study is based primarily on Kazakh-language sacred literature produced by and for Muslim holy lineages. These include hagiographies embedded within genealogical treatises, and shrine catalogs published in independent Kazakhstan. The sources are Kazakh variations of a well-established Islamic compositional genre firmly linked to Sufism, and dating from the 11th century CE. These sources require us to qualify much that has

¹¹ This argument is inspired particularly by Paolo Sartori’s article, “Of Saints, Shrines, and Tractors: Untangling the Meaning of Islam in Soviet Central Asia,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2019), 1–40.

¹² Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2007), 82, 104.

been written about Soviet and Post-Soviet Islam, where the apparent success of a type of secularization is thought to distinguish the former Soviet Union from the supposedly insufficiently secularized parts of the Islamic world that remained outside of the Soviet Union. But these sources equally demonstrate that, in keeping with the holy lineages' role in their societies as "Islamizers" and bearers of Islamic norms of behavior and morality, elements of Soviet secularism could become objects of Islamization, even during the Soviet era. In any case, it is evident that older conceptions and expressions of sacred communal affiliations derived from Sufism, from Islamic ideas more broadly, and from Inner Asian social structures, survived the Soviet era, reemerged after 1991, and, remain relevant. On the one hand, these hagiographies and the stories they contain are documents of independent Kazakhstan, and of modern Kazakh society. On the other, as collective documents of Kazakh historical tradition that memorialize older religious sensibilities and historical judgments, they are also *public* documents of descent groups and religious communities, and as such, represent collective understanding and memory. Being historical works, they are informed by the documentary methodology of Kazakh oral tradition, derived in part, from hadith methodologies, with its documented chains of transmission (*isnad*). Such elements are strongly evident in Kazakh Islamic historiography composed before and during the Soviet era, and remains evident particularly in genealogical publications in independent Kazakhstan. To dismiss these accounts as "merely" post-Soviet writings that have no authority for the period they describe would be a failure to appreciate the role and evolution of these narratives in their communities, their historiographical context, and their collective, public nature.

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the use of hagiographies as a source for the social history of Central Asia and the Volga-Ural region. To provide an example of fully fledged hagiographical tradition, and the application of hagiographies to social history. The chapter then looks at the inclusion of hagiographical elements in a broad range of compositional genres, demonstrating the breadth of hagiography, and its literary and social function in Central Asia and the Volga-Ural region. Here we find hagiographical elements in a wide array of compositional genres, including local and regional histories, genealogical charters, travel literature, epic poetry, and others. Finally, in this chapter we discuss the development of hagiography in independent Kazakhstan, tracing its connections to older compositional genres, and the emergence of new ones, and the social function of hagiography in Kazakh society.

Chapter 2 examines Sufi communities and the meaning of miracles, using hagiographical works as sources for the social history of sacred lineages (*khojas* and others) in Kazakhstan. First, we identify and outline four of the sacred lineages whose members appear repeatedly in our study. These lineages claim descent from Shāh-i Aḥmad as-Şābawī (1812–1878), Maral Ishan Qūrmanūlī (1782–1841), Isabek Ishan Mūrātūlī (1792–1871), and Ayqozha Ishan (1773–1856), looking at their biographies, and the dynasties they established in various regions of the country. The chapter also discusses how these sacred lineages are treated in Soviet and “Sovietological” sources. The discussion then shifts to the Sufi dimensions of these sacred lineages, their social functions in Kazakhstan, and the basis of religious authority for these sacred descent groups. These 19th and early 20th century communities are discussed in the context of Devin DeWeese’s theory of the “disordering” of Sufism, while at the same time, acknowledging the social and religious significance of the master-disciple metaphor in social relations between sacred and “non-sacred” lineages. The next part of the chapter is devoted to the role of miracle stories in these hagiographies, and their meaning in the Kazakh social context. This discussion is above all informed by the writings of Devin DeWeese on the rhetorical and social significance of miracles. Here examples from Kazakh hagiographical literature reveal miracles to be central narrative elements in defining the creation of a religious community. Anticipating the Stalin era, the final portion of the chapter looks at the relationship between sacred lineages and the state, and the depiction of saintly ancestors in their relations with Muslim and infidel rulers before the Soviet era.

Chapter 3 examines how the historical relationship – between Sufis and Sufi communities on the one hand, and the various states on the other that ruled the Kazakh steppe from the 18th century down to the Soviet era – is reflected in the hagiographical sources. The sources depict relations with the Russian authorities as generally hostile, and the anti-religious campaigns of the Stalin era are described as part of a continuum with the Imperial Russia era. The sources also describe the strategies undertaken by the holy lineages to resist persecution, and continue their task of serving as religious examples to their communities.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the depiction of Stalinist collectivization, famine, and repression in Kazakh hagiographies, and the effects of such policies on sacred lineages. First, it provides a timeline of legal and policy measures that lead to the persecution of Muslim religious leaders in general. Then, it examines, based on hagiographical treatises, how Stalinist repression was implemented, how this repression, and the experience of the Second World

War, affected members of sacred lineages, and the strategies they implemented for their survival. The chapter next addresses the significance of the widely encountered phenomenon of “Gulag miracles” – accounts of miracles that saints were said to have performed in the Stalinist prison system. It also looks at the role of sacred relics in these accounts, in conjunction with the “Gulag miracles,” and their way these stories of miracles assert the relevance and holiness of these lineages.

The final chapter looks at how, following the Second World War, these lineages accommodated Soviet rule, and how this accommodation was reflected in these hagiographies. It examines the Soviet career paths favored by members of these lineages, parallel with the maintenance of their sacred authority, and their continued relationship with Kazakh kinship groups. In this period, we see new miracles emerge, showing saints using their miraculous powers to intercede with Soviet industrial technology, such as tractors, to benefit their communities, and maintain their status. It also notes the role of sacred lineages in the official Soviet Islamic religious bureaucracy – the Tashkent Muftiate, and as “official” Soviet Muslim clerics. Finally, it examines appraisals of the Stalin era found in these hagiographies.