

# RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

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## Introduction

*(H.-J. Klimkeit)*

Although cultural and religious life along the Central Asian Silk Route was determined both by various indigenous traditions, including Zoroastrianism, and by the world

religions that expanded into this area from India and China as well as from Syria and Persia, we can detect certain basic patterns that recur in different areas and situations.<sup>1</sup> Here we mainly wish to illustrate that there were often similar geopolitical and social conditions in various oasis towns. The duality of such towns and the surrounding deserts, steppes and mountains is characteristic of the basic situation. Nomads dwelling in the steppes had their own social structures and their own understanding of life, which was determined by traditions that spoke of forefathers and heroes of the past who had created a state with its own divine orders and laws. The Old Turkic inscriptions on the Orkhon river in Mongolia are a good case in point. The main concern reflected here is the life of the ethnic group, its preservation and the enhancement of its vital force. This is achieved by submission to the divine ruler and the divine laws, the ruler guaranteeing and enforcing these, as is emphasized, for example, in the Turkic Kül Tegin inscription of Bilge Kaghan.<sup>2</sup>

In the city-states it was not a tribal, but a universal type of religion that determined the life of the people, and of the individual who gained greater prominence in view of his ethnic group. This was not only true of the universal religions, Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity, but to a certain degree of Zoroastrianism, which by its structure is universalistic, although it remained confined to the Iranian peoples because of its traditions. The universal religions addressed the individual rather than the tribe or ethnic group, although it was certainly the case that the individual found his place within the ranks of an extended family. It is noteworthy that, of the many documents found on the Silk Route, almost all religious texts can be associated with a world, or universal, religion. Oral traditions of the ethnic religions probably survived, but they were not reflected in the religious texts under consideration here, even though these could incorporate older traditions. The universal religions were concerned, not with maintaining the well-being of the ethnic group, but with the personal salvation of the individual, whose condition tended to be regarded as woeful, at least in Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity. It is understandable that Buddhism especially, with its teaching on suffering and the personal striving for *moksa* (salvation), gained the most adherents in the city-states along the Silk Route. But the other religions mentioned, including Zoroastrianism, also offered a personal weal or salvation.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the manifold religious worlds we encounter on the Silk Route, three types of questions pertaining to the individual become apparent. These are, first, questions pertaining to personal life and death; the problem of death, especially, comes to the fore in

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<sup>1</sup> For such patterns, see Klimkeit, 1990a, pp. 220–8.

<sup>2</sup> Tekin, 1968, pp. 261 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> See Mensching, 1976, pp. 55 et seq.

religious consciousness. Second, there are questions pertaining to the afterlife in the next world, an issue that was of less weight in the ethnic religions, where man could find his fulfilment within the scope of his tribal group. And third, there are, of course, the questions pertaining to life itself, to its meaning and to the control of it.

In so far as the consciousness pertaining to death is concerned, we are at times reminded of ancient Egyptian religion. For the prevalent geographic conditions can be compared to the land of the Nile, where the zone of life was sharply demarcated from the zone of death. In Central Asia, the oasis, with its natural and artificial irrigation, stands opposed to the deserts and steppes outside, which for the oasis-dweller had something uncanny about them. Here lurked dangers of all kinds, either in the concrete form of nomadic thieves and robbers, or in the more intangible form of demonic forces at work. (The descriptions of the travels of Chinese monks on their way to India clearly bring this out.) Thus for the oasis-dweller, the situation of the sheltered town and the open, dangerous steppes corresponds to the duality of order and chaos, of life and death. It seems that the Uighur Türks, after leaving the steppes and settling in the towns, assumed a completely different attitude to that sinister region 'out there' that had formerly been their home, as has been illustrated by the case of the Uighur Türks settled in the kingdom of Kocho in the Turfan oasis.<sup>4</sup>

As in the ancient Near East, the desert surrounding the towns was the place where the dead were buried, for this was the arid zone of death. But where there was water, there was life. The importance of Bactrian, Khwarazmian and Sogdian river goddesses attests to this connection between water, life and the presence of the gods. This can be substantiated by the documents of the various different religions represented along the Silk Route. Thus an inscription in Surkh Khotal tells us how a Zoroastrian sanctuary was abandoned because of the break-down of the water supply, whereupon a certain Nokonzoko built an aqueduct, thus restoring the water-supply, in the hope that the gods would then return.<sup>5</sup>

In the Christian documents, the connection between water, life and God's grace is also explicitly expressed,<sup>6</sup> and in the Manichaean texts, biblical water imagery is frequently used. But in accordance with the living conditions on the Silk Route, new expression is also given to the water imagery. Thus in a hymn commemorating Mar Zaku, a church leader who had died around 300, there is an invocation of that leader which says: 'O Living Sea that has dried up! The course of the rivers is obstructed, and they no longer flow.'<sup>7</sup> In the Parthian Hymn-Cycles, a life separated from God, from the Father of Light, and from the

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<sup>4</sup> Gabain, 1959, pp. 30–62.

<sup>5</sup> Henning, 1960, pp. 47–55, esp. p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Pigoulevskaya, 1935–40, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Klimkeit, 1993, p. 87.

saving deities, is compared to living in a desert: ‘[It is] dry from drought, and parched by hot winds. Not one golden drop [of water] is ever [found] there.’<sup>8</sup>

Buddhism, which had its origin in India with its many rivers and streams, did not make the connection between water and life and a religious theme, as the religions in the Near East had done. But the Buddhists could speak metaphorically of the Buddha’s Law as of a cloud that brings the desired water to the parched earth (see the *Lotus Sūtra*, Ch. V). Accordingly, in a Buddhist Chinese temple inscription from Turfan, the Law of the Buddha is referred to as ‘the dew of immortality’ and the Buddha appears as one who, by his teaching, assuages the thirst of living beings.<sup>9</sup>

It is quite in accordance with life on the Silk Route that the saviours – Jesus, Mani, Buddha – would be hailed as the great caravan leaders. In a Manichaean text, the teacher Mar Zaku is even commemorated as such a one, his death having left his people destitute. He is invoked with the words: ‘O zealous Caravan leader who has left his caravan behind in deserts, wastes, mountains and gorges.’<sup>10</sup> This leads us to the theme of death, and life after death. The ossuaries of Khwarazm and Sogdia testify in their own way to the hope of a life beyond, since one bears this inscription: ‘This chest is the property of *Sraw-yōk*, the son of *Tiṣ-yān*. May their souls rest in the eternal Paradise.’<sup>11</sup> The Chinese sepulchral inscriptions from Astana in the Turfan oasis usually look back at the life of the deceased, but they can also express the hope for a further life in simple words. Thus one inscription reads: ‘He [the deceased] has gone forth from here and has come to another world.’<sup>12</sup> In a Christian sepulchral inscription it says of the preacher Shelicha: ‘May our Lord unite his illuminated soul with the righteous and the fathers; may he participate in all glory.’<sup>13</sup> And in eloquent words, a Buddhist donor at Turfan gives expression to his hope that the good deed he has done by having a book copied will result in his ultimate salvation. He says: ‘By virtue of this good deed may we meet with the Buddha Maitreya, may we receive from the Buddha Maitreya the prophecy of blessing [to attain] Buddhahood, may we be redeemed from *Samsāra* [the circle of rebirths] and may we quickly reach the peace of *Nirvāna* [the quenching of the fires of greed, hate and delusion].’<sup>14</sup> The fact that the dying Buddha, gently smiling and thus overcoming death, is depicted in the most holy spot of the sanctuary is indicative of the importance of everything connected with death in the Buddhist architecture of the Silk Route.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Kern, 1965, pp. 118–41; Franke, 1907, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Klimkeit, 1993, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Henning, 1965a, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Stein, 1921, repr. 1980, p. 986.

<sup>13</sup> Chwolson, 1890, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> Hazai, 1976, pp. 274 et seq.

But there was not only a yearning for the other world and for a life beyond. This life, too, had to be mastered. And in mastering life, and giving meaning to it, the world religions played a decisive part. Though life in the oasis towns was not as rough and difficult as it was in the steppes, it was constantly endangered from without. Thus there is an awareness of the fragility of life and of its fleeting character. The volatility of life was constantly obvious to the oasis-dweller, who depended on so many factors: the continued supply of water, the continued open passage to other towns and the continued peace that could suddenly be shattered by forces from 'out there'. The protective deities played their role in every religion. In Buddhism it is mainly the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who is repeatedly solicited for aid and protection. In Manichaeism, the 'spirits and heavenly powers' (*qut vaxsiklar*), including the archangels of Judaism and Christianity, fulfil this task. Christians, too, had their helpers in need, the foremost being St George, who, in a Turkic text, expresses his willingness to help all in distress.<sup>15</sup> But the religions not only had such auxiliary functions as warding off danger and preserving well-being. Basically, they endowed life with meaning. As opposed to the attitude of the nomads of the steppes, which is characterized by an orientation towards the great heroes of the past who themselves are models for present existence, man in the oasis towns is very much aware of his limited capabilities and the fact that his life depends on divine powers. These limited possibilities, and especially the short-comings, are expressed religiously in terms of sin. Hence we have a wealth of confessional prayers among the documents from the Silk Route. A major theme – and one that occurs repeatedly – is that here, in life, it is still possible to confess one's misdeeds, whereas afterwards it will be too late.

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<sup>15</sup> Bang, 1926, pp. 41–75.

## Part One

# RELIGIONS IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN ENVIRONMENT

(*R. Meserve*)

## Turkic and Mongol beliefs, the Tibetan Bon religion and shamanism

The indigenous religion in Central Asia developed along two lines: the popular or folk religion was an unorganized system of beliefs held by the common people, whereas the 'imperial' religion belonged to the aristocracy and was more organized. While specific aspects of the indigenous religion could vary from tribe to tribe, among clans or even by geographic location, there were many common features throughout Central Asia. The more the various tribes came into contact with the civilizations surrounding the region, the greater the influence of foreign religions, which often lessened the importance of the indigenous religion over the passage of time but never entirely eliminated its underlying presence.

### TURKIC AND MONGOL BELIEFS, INCLUDING SHAMANISM

The popular religion was characterized by shamanistic practices, totemism, polytheism and animism; the focus was of a practical nature born out of the necessities of everyday life. The shamans, or tribal priests, intervened between man and the spirit world for good or evil. The degree to which shamans entered a state of ecstasy or trance might vary, but their function remained the same. They had power over the weather, forecast the future and were called upon to cure diseases in both humans and animals. Sacred lands and water (*idug yer sub*), zoomorphic and anthropomorphic idols, often referred to by their Mongol name, *ongons* (totems), were of primary importance. Cults grew up around natural phenomena, especially mountains and trees, animals (such as the wolf among the Türks or the equestrian gods of the Mongols) and elements such as fire. Animal sacrifices, and occasionally human ones,

were made. Spirits or powers resided everywhere and were taken into consideration by man before any act, however simple, from preparations for hunting to war, from birth to marriage to death.

The ‘imperial’ religion tended to oppose shamanism and totemism; it was centred more upon myths of origin and the cult of ancestors, often with divine births and superhuman qualities attributed to the founder of the tribe. Early Chinese sources, for example, report at least three legends of origin for the Türks of the sixth to the eighth century, strongly suggesting the confederate make-up of their empire. The heritage passed down through rulers and their clans, and the ceremonies surrounding their burial and the preservation of their memory became part of the tribal identity and often an indicator of political legitimacy. Funerary statues (*babas* and *balbals*) were erected to memorialize victories over slain enemies and keep princes of the past among the living. The cult of the ancestor, less developed among the Turkic peoples, became more important under the Kitan and especially with the Mongols, culminating, perhaps, with the cult of Chinggis Khan. The ‘imperial’ religion was more monotheistic, centred around the all-powerful god Tengri, the sky god. The cosmological scheme of sky, earth and later an underworld added to the order as did a concern for directional orientation. This more orderly world often put the ruler in direct competition with the shamans and their ability to intercede with the spirit world.

## TIBETAN BON

More difficult to define, the early use of Bon meant the ‘invoking’ priest as opposed to the priest who carried out sacrifices (*gShen*) at tombs as a part of the ‘sacred convention’ (*lha-chos*), not the ‘human convention’ (*mi-chos*). A religion of the Tibetan aristocracy, it especially supported mountain deities and recognized the divinity of kings. The common people, like the rest of Central Asia, had an active folk religion with a multitude of ‘gods of the everyday world’ (*jig rten pa*). After Buddhism became the state religion in 779, Bon followers were persecuted during the eighth and ninth centuries. In the early eleventh century, gShen-chen Klu-dga (996–1035) claimed the rediscovery of texts (*gter-ma*), establishing a Bon canon. This organized Bon evoked the past through the legendary figure of gShen-rab, who propagated Bon before Buddhism and became the key figure in devotions. The fourteenth century brought written texts and Bon’s own Kanjur and Tanjur; by the early fifteenth century monasteries were being established. A dynamic religion, Bon constantly borrowed and adapted itself to both the indigenous folk religion and Tibetan Lamaism to remain an active Tibetan religion (see further on Bon in Chapter 1, Part Three, above).

## Religion among the Uighurs, Kyrgyz and Kitan

### THE UIGHURS

According to the Uighurs' legend of origin, at the confluence of two rivers a mound of earth formed between two trees and, like a pregnant woman, gave birth to five male children, one of whom was chosen to become the Khan of the Uighurs. Later a maiden came down through the smoke-hole of his tent and during the last night of her many visits, she laid the boundaries of his kingdom from east to west and bade him care for his people. The indigenous religion already in existence among the Türk tribes remained. The multiplicity of supernatural beings allowed outside influence to penetrate and gain acceptance. Although both Manichaeism and Buddhism had been present in the Türk empire, which was continued by the Uighurs (743–840), only Manichaeism would gain a prominent position among the Uighurs of the Mongolian steppe, when their ruler Mou-yü (759–90) converted to Manichaeism in 763 and made it the state religion.

When the Uighurs were forced to abandon the Mongolian steppe for the Chinese borderlands and the Tarim basin, Buddhism came to have a much greater impact, as also did other cultures and religions. Especially in the Uighur kingdom of Kocho (850–1250), a cosmopolitan society flourished due to the extensive contact with foreign peoples, religions and ideas that were spread along the Silk Route of Central Asia. Religious tolerance permitted the penetration, to varying degrees, of Manichaeism, Buddhism and Christianity, which lasted to the end of the kingdom of Kocho. Subsequently, Islam spread widely among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, not only in its institutionalized forms but also penetrating even to the nomads of the Dasht-i Kipchak steppes with the rise of the Sufi orders at the end of the fourteenth century.

### THE KYRGYZ

After the Uighurs were ousted from the Mongolian steppes in 840 by the Kyrgyz, the region was not again dominated by a single tribe or confederacy until the Kitan occupation in the tenth century. Less sophisticated than the Uighurs, the Kyrgyz had little contact with foreigners and their ideas, as reflected in the old forms of their religion. One legend of origin for the Kyrgyz from a Chinese source relates that they were descended from a child born from the union of a spirit and a cow and that he lived in a cavern. Muslim sources have offered a quite different origin, combining the legends of peoples issued from the sons of Noah and Central Asian steppe wars.

Contemporary accounts of the Kyrgyz from Muslim geographers and travelling merchants, in addition to the records of the T'ang dynasty in China, have provided the earliest



descriptions of shamans (*qams*) in trances. At a set time during the year, the shaman would be called upon to foretell the future, including weather conditions, and success or failure for crops or battles. The Kyrgyz burned their dead and used fire for purification. Animal worship existed, as did tree worship, and there was a concern for elements other than fire, especially the wind.

### THE KITAN

The Kitan, especially during their rule over northern China during the Liao dynasty (907–1125), came more under the influence of Chinese religion and ethics derived from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, while Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity were of only minor importance; these served only to complement the indigenous religion of the Kitan. There was a division between the religion of the shamans who practised for the people and that of those who held political power, especially the emperor. The popular religion emphasized a multitude of gods and spirits and ‘powers’, often embodied in trees; mountains and stones; animals; the cosmic bodies of Heaven, Earth and Sun (but not the Moon); the Sacred Fire which was probably the forerunner of Mongol fire ceremonies; and even banners, magic arrows and drums. Through the aid of professional shamans and numerous other religious figures, the supernatural was summoned for the good and invoked to ward off danger or evil, to foretell the future, to change the weather and so on. Sacrifices, divination, scapulomancy and exorcism were all practised. The souls of the dead were now far more important than in early Turkic popular religion. The cosmological orientation was to the east, which had an almost magical power. For the leadership, the tribal ancestors – a woman in a cart pulled by a grey ox and a man on a white horse – and spirits of the imperial clan played a major role in establishing the legitimacy of the rule and increasing its strength. The ceremonial of the enthronement of an ‘emperor’ involved his rebirth and recognition prior to investiture. For state decisions, the emperor often invoked the aid of the supernatural, thus functioning as a kind of high priest, like the Kitan tribal chieftains who had in the past also performed a religious role.

## Part Two

# MANICHAEISM AND NESTORIAN CHRISTIANITY

(*H.-J. Klimkeit*)

## Manichaeism

The career of Mani and the early history of his faith have been described in Volume III, Chapter 17, Part Two. When Islam became the ruling religion and overarching political authority in Iraq and the East, the numbers of Manichaean believers steadily declined. Ibn al-Nadim, writing in the tenth century, speaks of just a few Manichaeans still living in the Baghdad of his time. On the whole, Manichaeism was never a threat to Islam, which did not have to ward off a dangerous heresy, as did the Western Church; hence the Islamic sources on the Gnostic religion are on the whole more objective than the writings of the Christian Church fathers, though they are not always accurate.<sup>16</sup>

It seems clear that the eastern Manichaeans, who used Middle Persian and Parthian as their ‘church languages’, but who also created a literature in Sogdian, Uighur (Old Turkic) and even Chinese, remained faithful to the basic tenets of Mani’s teachings, in spite of all the adaptations to Buddhism in the outward presentation of their teaching. This process of adaptation had already set in with Mar Ammo, the disciple Mani sent to eastern Iran. It is he whom the eastern Dinawariyya school of Manichaeism saw as its founder, though the actual founder was the teacher Shād Ohrmazd in around 600. The eastern Manichaean documents we possess stem from this school, which grew as refugees from the Sasanian and then the Islamic lands moved east to other communities of brethren in the faith. Here, in spite of the high esteem in which Mar Ammo was held, it was Mani who became the central figure in the religion he founded. He was virtually deified, called upon as a Buddha, the ‘Buddha of Light’, and he was celebrated as a central redeeming God. An indication of this is that, as in the west, the Bema festival, which commemorated Mani’s death and his return into the World of Light from which he came, remained a central ceremonial occasion of the

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<sup>16</sup> On Manichaeism in Islamic sources, see Colpe, 1954; Browder, 1992, pp. 328–33.

church. It was increasingly described in terms reminiscent of Buddha's entry into Nirvana, and a whole cycle of hymns attests to this fact. Besides Mani, Jesus, the Bringer of Saving Knowledge, also had an important role in eastern Manichaeism. Though the Manichaeans distinguished between the transcendent bringer of gnosis, Jesus, and the historical Jesus, called 'Jesus of Nazareth', the lines of distinction are often blurred, especially when he is called 'the Messiah Jesus', the 'Buddha Jesus' or the 'Messiah Buddha'.

It was mainly the Sogdians, living outside their original homeland and engaging in trade along the Silk Route up to China, Mongolia and even Siberia, who were instrumental in spreading Manichaeism, as well as Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity, to peoples of Central Asia such as the Türks. The Sogdians created literatures for these religions, and it is particularly in the Turfan oasis that many Sogdian Manichaean texts have been found.

The presence of a Sogdian Manichaean community in China after the appearance, at the Chinese court, of a high Manichaean teacher in 694 was to be of decisive importance for Central Asia. For when the king of the Uighur Türks, who was later to assume the title Böğü Khan (or Bilgä Khan; Chinese, Mou-ye) and whose empire spread from the Mongol steppes to the oasis towns of the northern Silk Route, met Manichaean 'elect' (i.e. monks) in the Chinese city of Lo-yang in 762, he was converted to their faith and made Manichaeism the state religion of his kingdom.<sup>17</sup> A Uighur manuscript from Turfan (TM 276), written by Manichaean 'elect', makes it clear that the king came under pressure from Manichaean Sogdian circles when he started to waver in his new faith because of opposition from the nobility, but that he finally accepted the religion 'anew', also urging his people to embrace the Manichaean faith. The opposition, led by an unnamed *tarxan* (high official), seems to have won the day for a short while until Böğü Khan and his family, as well as a number of his followers, were slaughtered in 789 and another ruler, Tegin (Chinese, To-lo-ssu), who did not identify with the Manichaean cause, assumed power. But from 795 onwards power was assumed by rulers whose titles, so far as they are preserved in Turkish, reveal their Manichaean inclinations, deriving their 'charisma' (*qut*) either from the sun god (i.e. the Manichaean 'Third Messenger') or the moon god (i.e. the Manichaean Jesus) or from both.

Around 840 the kingdom of the Uighur Türks was destroyed by the Kyrgyz, the traditional enemies of the Uighurs, who lived further to the north.<sup>18</sup> Some Uighurs fled to the south-east, to the Kansu (Gansu) province of China, where their descendants still exist, being known as the 'Yellow Uighurs'. They soon turned to Buddhism, and eventually to the Lamaistic form of this religion. Others fled to the oasis towns of the northern Silk Route,

<sup>17</sup> Schlegel, 1896, pp. 49, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Golzio, 1984, p. 63, gives the date of the destruction of the Uighur empire as 848.

notably to Turfan, where a Uighur kingdom was established around 850 and continued in existence until about 1250; this was the Uighur kingdom of Kocho. Up to the beginning of the eleventh century, many of their kings professed Manichaeism, although apparently not to the exclusion of Buddhism, which increasingly gained in importance.

A number of prayers for the Uighur ruler and the royal family have been preserved,<sup>19</sup> and this is indicative of the good relationship between the religious institution and the state at that time. Both were regarded as supporting each other, and a repeatedly used formula describing this relationship speaks of ‘the religion within’ (i.e. the inner side of life) and ‘the state without’ (i.e. the outer side of life). The strong position of the Manichaean clergy is highlighted by an officially stamped charter drawn up for a Manichaean monastery, which regulates life in the monastery, where the ‘elect’ (referred to as ‘lords’, *tängrilär*) have servants of various orders at their disposal and where monastic lands and gardens are rented out to farmers and peasants.<sup>20</sup>

The Manichaean literature from Turfan and Dunhuang edited so far is wide-ranging and varied. Besides the Chinese texts mentioned, it includes hymns of various types (on the chief Manichaean gods, on Mani and Jesus, on church leaders and fathers of the church, on the plight of man and his salvation) as well as confessional texts, liturgical formulae, prayers, invocations and incantations, parables, narratives, legends and historical texts. There is a noticeable absence of polemics against the Buddhists, although we do meet with the censuring of idol worship. We can detect in this literature an increasing use of Buddhist terminology and imagery; whereas the Middle Persian literature lacks such aspects, Buddhist terms do occur in the Parthian texts and they can become quite prominent in Sogdian, in Uighur and particularly in Chinese Manichaean literature. Thus Mani is repeatedly referred to as a ‘Buddha’ (*burxan*), as are his forerunners in the repeated revelations that the ‘Realm of Light’ imparts to man prior to his time. The knowledge Mani reveals leads to the Realm of Light, which is equated with the Buddhist Nirvana, or Parinirvana (highest Nirvana), and so on. As has been explained, despite such borrowings, the Manichaeans remained faithful to the basic tenets of their religion, for such terminological borrowings imply the mere use of Buddhist terms, their contents being Manichaean. Even when Buddhist and other foreign narratives are taken up and employed – and this was done on a wide scale – the stories become parables, which are given a Manichaean meaning.<sup>21</sup> The same is true of artistic forms adopted from Buddhism.

<sup>19</sup> Klimkeit, 1993, Ch. XIV.

<sup>20</sup> Klimkeit, 1993, pp. 352–6.

<sup>21</sup> Schmidt-Glitzner, 1987b, pp. 79–90; Bryder, 1985; Asmussen, 1966, pp. 5–21.

The demise of Manichaeism in Central Asia is difficult to trace. The extant literature gives little indication of the reasons for this decline. It must have set in after the period covering the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh, when three kings, who are mentioned in the postscripts to the Manichaean texts of Turfan, ruled successively.<sup>22</sup> Texts with late linguistic features often express the hope for a renewal of the Manichaean church and faith. One late Uighur document (M 112) tells us that a Manichaean monk experiences ‘deep distress’ at the destruction of a Manichaean monastery, the ornamentation (*itig*) of which was removed and used for the embellishment of a Buddhist *vihāra* (monastery) at the command of ‘the crown prince’. He partially restores the images, hoping that ‘coming living beings may like it’. The text, though fragmentary and very difficult to read, gives us a hint of what one of the reasons for the decline of Manichaeism may have been: the leading political authorities leaned increasingly towards Buddhism or were won over to that religion by the Buddhist community. The Manichaeans suffered a decline in their worldly support, on which they depended. A Manichaean centre at Sängim near Turfan gives the impression of being almost a fortress; hence the community of faithful ‘elect’ would have retreated to bastions and points of withdrawal such as Sängim and Toyuk, near Turfan, where they would have held out as long as possible, increasingly taking up elements of the Buddhist faith, which became ever more dominant. As early as the tenth century, a Chinese envoy to the Turfan region, Wang Yande, who visited Kocho in 981, speaks of more than 50 Buddhist monasteries in the region.<sup>23</sup> Archaeological evidence also shows how the Buddhists triumphed. Originally, Manichaean caves were fitted with walls to cover the old Manichaean murals, and on these, then, Buddhist scenes were depicted, as in various instances at Bezeklik. The exact date of such changes is difficult to determine, but we can assume that this would have occurred after the last flowering of the Manichaean faith at the beginning of the eleventh century.

As indicated, the Manichaeans who survived seem to have been open to very syncretistic forms of religion, increasingly adopting Buddhist forms of expression in literature and art. Probably the last strains of Manichaeism in Central Asia simply merged into Buddhism, gradually losing their own identity.

In China, even after the great persecutions of foreign religions in 845, Manichaeism continued to exist in the southern coastal province of Fukien, appearing at times as a subversive cult, at times in the garb of Taoism or other religions. Here it lasted until the sixteenth century, 1,000 years longer than in the Roman empire.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Zieme, 1992b (n. 19), pp. 324 et seq.

<sup>23</sup> Geng Shimin and Klimkeit, 1985, pp. 7–10.

<sup>24</sup> For the history of this development, see Lieu, 1992, Ch. IX; Klimkeit, 1986, pp. 113–24.

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# Nestorian Christianity

## EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN IRAN

The history of Christianity in Sasanian Iran, and from there, its extension into Central Asia and beyond, has been given in Volume III, Chapter 18, Part One. This eastward spread of Christianity was determined by the directions taken by the Silk Route. Especially from Merv, Nestorianism spread to Sogdia, to the Türks and the Sogdians between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) and to adjacent areas. In Sogdia proper, especially in the cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and so on, there was, however, a revival of regional Zoroastrianism between the sixth and the eighth century, and traces of a Nestorian presence are scant here, though not altogether absent.<sup>25</sup> We hear of a Nestorian metropolitan in Samarkand in the eighth century, but it is difficult precisely to date the beginnings of Christianity in that city, as it is in the other cities of the area.

It seems that it was mainly the Sogdians living outside their homeland, in other words traders and settlers at major points along the Silk Route, who turned to the world religions of Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity. In West Turkistan, the western part of Central Asia, there were apparently various Turkic tribes who converted to Christianity. It is clear that the Nestorian mission gained new impetus under the Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I (eighth century), who had monks systematically trained, including in the knowledge of languages, for missionary purposes. He tells us in one of his letters that ‘a king of the Türks’ has been converted, and he even speaks of Christians among the Tibetans and the Chinese.<sup>26</sup>

Contiguous to Sogdia was Semirechye, the ‘Land of the Seven Rivers’, the area south of Lake Balkhash. It is in this area that two extensive Christian cemeteries have been found; they contain hundreds of gravestones, depicting crosses and inscribed with Syriac writing. Although the language of the inscriptions is mainly Syriac, there are also Turkic inscriptions, written in Syriac script.<sup>27</sup> The dates of the inscriptions range from the mid-ninth to the mid-fourteenth century, showing that Nestorianism was still alive at the time of the Islamic domination of this area. It also becomes clear that the plague which raged in Central Asia during the first half of the fourteenth century was one of the reasons for the decimation of the Christian community. Shorter Turkish inscriptions in Syriac script have also been found in Inner Mongolia.<sup>28</sup> The tombstone inscriptions of Semirechye are

<sup>25</sup> Klimkeit, 1994, pp. 477–88.

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, 1992, pp. 362–8, esp. pp. 366 et seq.; Hage, 1978, pp. 364 et seq.

<sup>27</sup> Chwolson, 1886; 1890; 1897; Saeki, 1951, pp. 408 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> Groenbech, 1939–40, pp. 305–8.

supplemented by various archaeological finds, among them the remnants of a Nestorian church from the eighth century in Ak Beshim (Suyab) in the Ferghana valley.<sup>29</sup>

In the eastern part of Central Asia, in East Turkistan, Nestorian Christianity was well established in such oasis towns as Turfan. The remnants of a Nestorian church have been found in the ancient Turkish city of Kocho, capital of the kingdom of Kocho (*c.* 850–1250). Even some paintings from the church walls, including what is referred to as a ‘Palm Sunday scene’, are preserved.<sup>30</sup> Remains of a monastic library have been found at a site called Bulayik, north of the ancient city of Turfan, including documents in Syriac, Sogdian and Old Turkic (Uighur).<sup>31</sup> They include not only translations (in Syriac and Sogdian) as well as bilingual biblical texts (Syrian/Sogdian), but also liturgies, portions of a church history, legends about martyrs and various works from the wide range of Syriac and even Coptic literature.<sup>32</sup> In addition to Turfan, the presence of Christians is attested in such towns as Aksu, Bai and Hami. Of course, Dunhuang has also preserved a number of Christian documents, notably in Chinese. We shall return to these at a later point. In Inner Mongolia, the ancient Tangut capital of Karakhoto, a centre of Tangut Buddhism, extending over the eleventh to the thirteenth century, was also inhabited by Nestorians, as is revealed by documents found at the site. The Christians among the Tangut (whose capital was Karakhoto) are described as deeply religious and earnest by two Turkic Nestorian travellers who passed through the area on their way to Jerusalem, the monk Marc and the learned Rabban Sauma.<sup>33</sup>

With respect to Mongolia, where remnants of a Nestorian church have been found at Olon Sume in the Onghot area, it is difficult to ascertain how long Christianity remained alive among individual tribes and in particular cities. Of the ethnic groups attracted by Nestorianism, certain basically Turkic tribes were notable.<sup>34</sup>

Two originally Turkic tribes that were Mongolized over time were the Kerait (Kereyit) and the Naiman, living south of Lake Baikal, and these were to be of great importance in the influence of Nestorianism on the Mongols. The Kerait seem to have been converted at the beginning of the eleventh century, the Naiman probably shortly after that time.<sup>35</sup> Contemporary Western travellers to the centre of Mongol power in the steppes of Central Asia tell us of the position of Nestorians among the Mongols. It appears that they played a vital

<sup>29</sup> Clauson, 1961, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> LeCoq, 1979, Table 7.

<sup>31</sup> Asmussen, 1982, pp. 11–29; Sims-Williams, 1992, pp. 43–61.

<sup>32</sup> For a survey of the Syriac texts, see Maróth, 1991, pp. 126–8.

<sup>33</sup> Budge, 1928, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup> For detailed reports on areas, tribes and places where there are testimonies of Nestorian Christians, see Sachau, 1919; Hage, 1977; Hunter, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Hunter, 1989–91, pp. 142–63; Taube, 1989, pp. 104 et seq., 141 et seq.

role in the history of the Mongol empire, both in Central Asia and in China. Besides being priests and monks, the Nestorians also followed worldly callings, being respected physicians and civil servants, scholars, artists and craftsmen. The wives of several prominent Mongol rulers are known to have been Nestorians.

### THE NESTORIANS IN CHINA

The presence of Nestorians in China is mainly confined to two periods, the T'ang and the Yüan or Mongol period. According to the bilingual (Chinese/Syriac) inscription of Si-an-fu, dating from 781, the first Syrian monk, named A-lo-pen, arrived in China in 635. The Chinese part of the inscription gives us a survey of the history of Nestorianism in China during the previous one and a half centuries. It becomes obvious that the western religion was tolerated, and even promoted to a certain degree, by early emperors of the T'ang dynasty (618–907). It also becomes clear that a monastic type of Christianity had spread in China by the time of the inscription. On the whole, however, Nestorianism remained a religion for foreigners. Nevertheless, a list of writings given in the inscription, and also manuscripts of important Nestorian texts found at Dunhuang, make it clear that a Chinese Christian missionary literature was created at this time, including translations of the Gospels. This first phase of Nestorianism in China came to an end in the middle of the ninth century, when an imperial edict, issued in 845, sought to eliminate all foreign religions. Although this was mainly directed against Buddhism, the edict had drastic effects on Nestorianism, which lost its basis once the monastic centres and churches were closed, so that monks who were sent to China by the Catholicos-Patriarch in Iraq in the second half of the tenth century no longer found Christians there.

It was not until the advent of the Mongols that a second period of Nestorian expansion in China began. As mentioned above, whole tribes subjugated by the Mongols or integrated into their confederacy were Nestorian, and prominent Nestorian laymen (often people of Turkic race and language) played an important part in several walks of life. At the time of Qubilay Khan (1260–94), the first Mongol emperor to rule over China, there were influential Nestorians among the high officials of the court. Qubilay, like his brother Möngke, had a Nestorian mother. Christians, like the adherents of other religions (Buddhists, Manichaeans, Muslims), profited from the fact that the Mongols, originally adherents of a shamanistic type of religion, were tolerant towards other religions and even held discussions at their courts by representatives of various faiths. In this atmosphere, we have signs of various types of syncretism. In the Dunhuang texts, the contents of the Christian faith are expressed in Buddhist and even Taoist terms, and there are signs of an amalgamation of Nestorian and shamanistic practices. Furthermore, Nestorian gravestone inscriptions



from central and southern China may be accompanied by Christian and Buddhist or Taoist symbols, the symbol of the cross often being connected with the lotus, and at times with clouds, rocks and so on. The language used here is often Turkic, written in Syriac or Uighur letters, but we also find bilingual inscriptions written in Chinese and Turkic.<sup>36</sup> A highlight of eastern Nestorianism was the fact that a young monk of Turkic origin, who had studied with the venerable Nestorian sage, Rabban Sauma, at Khanbalik (Peking), was elected Catholicos while on a pilgrimage to the Near East, adopting the ecclesiastical name of Yaballaha III.

The end of Nestorianism in China came with the collapse of Mongol power there in 1368. Though professed not only by monks and clerics but also by men of diverse professions, Nestorianism had not really taken root in Chinese soil to the extent that it could survive the anti-foreign reaction that came with the expulsion of the Mongols.

## Zoroastrianism

For the history of the faith of Zoroaster in Iran and such eastern fringes of the Sasanian empire as Bactria, Sogdia and Khwarazm, see Volume III, Chapter 17, Part One. The fact that Zoroastrianism spread to China, where it found adherents mainly among foreign traders, does not necessarily mean that it gained a foothold along the Silk Route in places between Sogdia and China. Of the many Iranian manuscripts found at Turfan and Dunhuang, virtually all are Manichaean, the one exception being a fragment of the Sogdian version of the Rustam legend, and even this story could also have been used by the Manichaeans to illustrate their own religious truths. A connection between Zoroastrians in Sogdia and Iran proper in early Islamic times is, however, indicated by a source from the Muslim period, which tells us that the Sogdians from Samarkand asked their co-religionists in the Iranian centres of their faith for advice on the disposal of their dead; it is improbable that such connections only existed at the time of Islam.

At the time of the Indian king Ashoka (265–232 B.C.), the teaching of the Buddha spread from the central Gangetic plain as far as Ceylon to the south and Kandahar in today's Afghanistan in the north-west; for the subsequent history of Buddhism in Central Asia, East Turkistan, Bactria and Gandhara, see Volume III, Chapter 18, Part Two.

Hsüan-tsang, a Chinese Buddhist monk of the early seventh century, reports on the other Bactrian centres of Buddhism. Some of these we know from archaeological remains, such as Bamiyan and the monastery of Hadda near Jalalabad. Other centres he mentions – such

<sup>36</sup> For inscriptions in southern China, see Enoki, 1984, pp. 45–71; Murayama, 1964, pp. 394–6; 1984, pp. 77–81.

as the monasteries at Balkh, where there were, according to his report, 100 establishments with 3,000 monks – have not been preserved, so far as is known. This ancient Bactrian capital was even called ‘little Rājagriha’, as opposed to the Rājagriha of Magadha, which was a focus of the historic Buddha’s activity.<sup>37</sup>

West of Bactria lay Iranian Parthia, essentially Khurasan and the Caspian region. The fact that there must have been a Buddhist influence on this region, although limited, is evidenced by the use of Buddhist words borrowed from Sanskrit in Parthian Manichaean texts. But there is also some archaeological evidence for a certain Buddhist penetration into Parthia; thus remnants of a monastery, with stupa, have been found at Merv. The most celebrated representative of Parthian Buddhism was a Parthian prince who had grown up in Bukhara, converted to Buddhism and gone to China, where he translated a number of Indian Buddhist scriptures into Chinese; his name is given in Chinese as An-Shih-kao (second century).

The Sogdians of Transoxania never had a united kingdom of their own, but the Sogdian city-states were able to maintain a considerable amount of freedom and independence, even under foreign suzerainty. Sogdians were among the first to translate Indian Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. The Sogdians, being a people with far-reaching commercial contacts, had colonies of traders all along the Silk Route as far as Mongolia and China. In the Old Turkic inscriptions from Mongolia, stemming from the eighth and ninth centuries, there is reference to Sogdian settlers in that region. There is a bilingual Sogdian/Sanskrit inscription of Bugut, which speaks of erecting ‘a great new *sangha* [community of monks]’. Unfortunately, the accompanying Sanskrit text, written in Brāhmī letters, is too damaged to be legible, but the inscription undoubtedly points to the fact that Sogdians living outside their homeland not only had contact with Buddhism but had to some extent even converted to the Indian religion. This is quite opposite to the situation in Sogdia itself, where, as noted above, a regional form of Zoroastrianism maintained itself until the advent of Islam in the eighth century, even experiencing a certain revival between the sixth and the eighth century. It is only on the fringes of the Sogdian homeland such as in Ak-Beshim in the Ferghana valley and Ajina-tepe in the Wakhsh valley that remnants of Buddhist establishments have been found,<sup>38</sup> although the Sogdians traded in the upper Indus valley, as inscriptions show,<sup>39</sup> and such Indian motifs as stories from the *Mahābhārata* [Great Epic of the Bharatas] are depicted in the Sogdian art of Panjikent.

<sup>37</sup> Beal, 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Clauson, 1961, pp. 1–13, esp. p. 3; for Ajina-tepe, see Litvinsky and Zeimal, 1971.

<sup>39</sup> For the Sogdian inscriptions in the upper Indus valley (fifth-sixth century), where the names are of Zoroastrian rather than Buddhist provenance, see, for instance, Humbach, 1980, pp. 201–27.

It was mainly the Sogdians abroad, then, who adopted Buddhism. Thus a number of Sogdian Buddhist texts were found in the oasis towns of Turfan and Dunhuang, although these are documents translated from Chinese in the T'ang period, and no earlier Sogdian Buddhist texts are extant.<sup>40</sup> (The earliest Sogdian texts that we possess, those of Sogdian traders found near the Great Wall, reveal Zoroastrian names.) The Sogdian Manichaean texts contain Indian words borrowed from Buddhism, a fact which could point to the existence of a Buddhist literature in Sogdian, perhaps even before the T'ang period. The reason why Sogdia itself did not adopt Buddhism may be that, as in other Zoroastrian regions, it was wedded to a national religion that was basically optimistic and world-oriented, hence the Buddha's message of the fleeting character of the world, and of suffering, would not have taken root here.

As noted in Volume III, Chapter 18, Part Two, in East Turkistan, with its southern and northern routes circumventing the arid Taklamakan desert, most settlements on these routes had an outspokenly Buddhist culture. Thus to the east of Yarkand is the oasis of Khotan, with its various satellite sites such as Dandan Oiliq. According to tradition, Khotan was Buddhicized by Ashoka's missionaries, but that probably antedates the actual introduction of Buddhism, which could have occurred in the first century B.C. In the first centuries A.D. the Buddhist schools of the Sārvāstivādins and Mūlasārvāstivādins are attested, as well as the Dharmaguptas. Not much later, Mahāyāna Buddhism was introduced, and this is the type of religion which the Chinese traveller Fa-hsien met when he visited the oasis in around 400. At a later period (seventh–eighth century), Vajrayāna also left its marks on literature and art. Besides the Gāndhāri language that was used by the Dharmaguptas and the Sanskrit that was employed by the various schools mentioned above, a literature in the regional language was created, i.e. in Khotanese Saka. This includes not only translations from Sanskrit but also indigenous compositions and poems on Buddhist themes.<sup>41</sup> Archaeological and artistic remains from Khotan reveal that this centre of Buddhist culture developed its own, indigenous forms, even when it was drawing on common Buddhist themes.

Of special importance were the Buddhist centres along the northern route. Of these, including Kucha, Tumshuq, Shorchuq, Karashahr and Turfan,<sup>42</sup> the first and the last are actually the most significant, both in terms of manuscripts found and archaeological remains preserved.

<sup>40</sup> For Sogdian Buddhist literature, see Utz, 1978.

<sup>41</sup> Emmerick, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> These are dealt with in Yaldiz, 1987, Chs. IV–VII.

Kucha and Karashahr were Tokharian regions, those of the ancient Indo-European people who adopted Buddhism so completely that virtually no trace of their pre-Buddhist religion remains. As opposed to Khotan, Kucha and Karashahr were focuses of Hīnayāna Buddhism represented by the Sārvāstivāda school, though Mahāyāna gained ground in Kucha during the fifth century. The main cultural achievements of the Kucheans were artistic in the widest sense. Their music was particularly appreciated at the Chinese court; musicians are frequently depicted in the paintings of Kizil and Kumtura near Kucha. The artistic tendencies that come to the fore in the paintings of these places are also remarkable. While incorporating Indian and Iranian elements, they reflect the development of an independent style of painting and sculpture that lasted up to 640, when a Chinese army took over the city. From that time onwards, strongly Sinicized forms appear in the art of the major monasteries, although Indian-oriented Tokharian Buddhism remained alive long after this date and the continued knowledge of a wide range of Buddhist literature is reflected in the later works of art. It must have been around 1200 that Islam took over Kucha and Karashahr, and with its arrival, the Buddhist era came to an end there.

In the Turfan depression, Buddhists lived side by side with Manichaeans, Nestorian Christians and later, increasingly, Muslims, so that Turfan was a microcosm reflecting a greater, pluralistic world. Here documents in 16 different languages, written in 25 different types of script, were found by German expeditions that worked in the area between 1902 and 1914; the Buddhist texts stem from a period of about 1,000 years, from the fourth to the fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> It was only at the end of the fifteenth century that the ruler of Turfan became a convert to Islam.

In the heyday of Turfan Buddhism, Chinese, Sogdians, East Tokharians and, increasingly, Turkic Uighurs confessed the faith, both in its Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna forms. Many Uighurs settled in the Turfan basin, especially after their kingdom had been destroyed in the Mongolian steppes in 840, establishing there the little kingdom of Kocho (c. 850–1250). The rulers of this kingdom were at first Manichaeans, and then, increasingly, Buddhists. Rich donors, often portrayed in the cave paintings of the Turfan area, supported the literary and artistic work of the Buddhist monks, reflecting a rich literary and artistic tradition that continued up to Mongol times (thirteenth–fourteenth century).

Finally, of especial importance for our knowledge of the faiths of the Tarim basin is Dunhuang, situated at the point where the southern and the northern routes converged at the eastern end of the basin in the Lop Nor region. For travellers coming from the west, it was the gateway to China, the route from here leading eastwards through the Gansu corridor to the Chinese homeland. It is understandable that in this precariously isolated situation it

<sup>43</sup> Fuchs, 1926, pp. 124–66.

was necessary to keep the roads to that homeland open. Yet due to its geographic position and to the fact that it was never taken over by any Islamic power, there are preserved here paintings and scriptures mirroring 1,000 years of religious and cultural history from the fourth century onwards.

## Hinduism

Many Hindu deities (*devas*) are referred to in Buddhist texts, including those from Central Asia, written in Sanskrit (and hence originally stemming from India) as well as in Central Asian languages. But the functions of the Hindu deities, including Indra and Brahma, differ when depicted in the Buddhist texts. They become subservient to the Buddha and his teaching. They live in the realm of the gods, which is just one of five or six areas of rebirth, besides the areas of men, of hungry spirits (*pretas*), of animals and of beings from hell. Sometimes the area of the demi-gods is referred to as a sixth realm. At some point, even the gods will have to leave their heavens and be reborn in another form of existence, hence they are bound to the cycle of rebirth, of *samsāra* (literally, ‘wandering’, the continuous process of birth and death for life after life in the various forms of existence), like all other living beings.<sup>44</sup> Hindu deities appear in the Manichaean art of Central Asia, being depicted prominently in two miniature paintings.<sup>45</sup> In one of these (IB 4979), they can be clearly identified as Shiva (with a third eye), Brahma, Vishnu (with a boar’s head, as *varāha*) and Ganesha.<sup>46</sup> These probably represent protective deities of the type often invoked in the colophons to Uighur Buddhist works.<sup>47</sup> Quite in accord with these texts, the colophon of one Uighur Manichaean text invokes protective deities, adding in typical Buddhist fashion: ‘by virtue of this meritorious good deed [of having a text copied, etc.]... may their divine powers and their communities increase’.<sup>48</sup> This, then, is the wish also expressed, implicitly or explicitly, when Hindu deities are invoked in Buddhist colophons. Thus in a colophon to the *Maitrisimit* (ninth century), the Hindu gods Brahma and Indra, as well as the four Lokapālas (the guardians of the four quarters), Vishnu, Maheśvara (Shiva) and Skandha-Kumāra, are called upon,<sup>49</sup> and in a colophon to a text on Avalokiteśvara, a whole series of Hindu deities and spirits are invoked: Brahma, Indra, Vishnu, Maheśvara, Skandha-Kumāra, Kapila and Manibhadra. Quite in accord with this usage is the fact that the gods of the Indian type, with multiple arms and heads, appear not only in the Buddhist art of

<sup>44</sup> Schlingloff, 1988, pp. 167 et seq.

<sup>45</sup> Klimkeit, 1980, pp. 179–99.

<sup>46</sup> Banerjee, 1970, pp. 17–23.

<sup>47</sup> Zieme, 1992b, pp. 322 et seq.

<sup>48</sup> Clark, 1982, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> Tekin, 1980, pp. 25 et seq.

East Turkistan (third–thirteenth century), but also in the Sogdian art of local Zoroastrianism (sixth–eighth century).<sup>50</sup>

Apart from a presence in Kushan Bactria, Hinduism, unlike Buddhism, seems to have made little inroad into Central Asia north of Bactria. Even when Brahmins are depicted in the art of Central Asia, this is within the setting of Buddhist art, where we can even observe a tendency to present such figures as caricatures,<sup>51</sup> quite in line with the criticism of them in the Buddhist scriptures.

It was in the regions north of Gandhara that there seems to have been a last flowering of Buddhism, possibly to the disadvantage of Hinduism, in the eighth century, as Türks, having come from Central Asia proper, fervently adopted that religion. This is the impression we gain from the travel account of the Korean monk Huei-ch'ao, who travelled from India to China in the years 723–9. He is very informative on various aspects of life in the countries through which he passed or that he heard about; he speaks of Hindus ('Brahmins') in Gandhara, but makes no mention of them with respect to areas further north.<sup>52</sup>

## Part Three

# THE ADVENT OF ISLAM: EXTENT AND IMPACT

(*E. E. Karimov*)

As the religion of Islam, brought by the Arabs, penetrated the Central Asian region, it began to influence the development of indigenous religion and itself absorbed some of the earlier cultural traditions of Central Asia. Islam was incorporated into the life of the local peoples, and as the religion of the conquerors, it became the local religion in a lengthy process that was not without its difficulties; but this process enriched Islam and provided an impetus for its subsequent development.

As noted in Chapter 3 below, scholars from Khurasan and Transoxania made a great contribution to the understanding of the Qur'an and its interpretation, i.e. commentaries on

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Azarpay, 1981.

<sup>51</sup> Gabain, 1979, pp. 247 et seq.

<sup>52</sup> See Fuchs, 1938, pp. 425–69. Huei-ch'ao's reports of the flowering of Buddhism among the Türks of what is now Afghanistan are confirmed by Wu-k'ang, who travelled to India in the years 751–90, but he has nothing to say on Hinduism.

the Qur'an, and to the study of *hadīth* (Islamic tradition). The region under consideration produced the celebrated traditionist Muhammad al-Bukhārī, compiler of the collection of sound *hadīths*, *al-Jāmi' al-sahīh* [The Sound Collection] (usually abbreviated to *al-Sahīh*), which became regarded as canonical and second in importance only to the Qur'an for most Sunni Muslims; and other authors of the six compilations of *hadīth* recognized as the most authoritative in Islam, such as Muhammad al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) and al-Nasā'ī (d. 915).

The study of Muslim jurisprudence, or *fiqh* (lit. knowledge), was also developed greatly in Central Asia, as is detailed in Chapter 4 below. The convergence between Islam and the indigenous theological substrata was a process effected both by *the faqīhs* (Islamic lawyers and legal experts) and by the Sufis or Islamic mystics, and it was thanks to their efforts that there was an 'internal' Islamization of the peoples of Central Asia, who had formally converted to Islam.

Two significant events should be noted in the expansion of Islam in Central Asia during the late Umayyad period: the uprising in Samarkand in 728; and the movement of al-Hārith b. Surayj in Khurasan and Transoxania in the years 734–46, this second movement being discussed in detail in Volume IV, Part One, Chapters 1 and 2.

The Samarkand uprising was preceded by the sending of groups of missionaries to Transoxania (727–9) by the governor of Khurasan, Ashras b. 'Abd Allāh al-Sulamī, for the purpose of converting the local population to Islam. The group was headed by a *mawlā* (a freedman or a client of non-Arab origins), Abu 'l-Saydā' Sālih b. Tarīf. This last was highly successful in Transoxania and many local inhabitants accepted Islam. However, Ashras was worried by the declining receipts of his treasury and went back on his promise not to levy the *jizya* (poll tax on the *ahl al-dhimma*, or 'People of the Book', essentially Jews and Christians) on the inhabitants of Samarkand who had embraced Islam. This caused the uprising, in which the Muslim missionaries also joined. According to the report of the historian al-Tabarī, two of their number, Abu 'l-Saydā' Sālih and Thābit Qutna (a well-known poet, brave warrior and adherent of the Murji'ites), were arrested for being active supporters of the uprising. The anti-government movement headed by al-Hārith b. Surayj which broke out in eastern Khurasan and Transoxania in 734 and was a continuation of the events in Samarkand included in its ranks members of Arab tribes dissatisfied with the policy of the caliph's governor and also proselytes from among the local inhabitants. As a result of the events described above, Murji'ite ideas spread widely among the Muslims of Khurasan and Transoxania, especially as the leader of the movement, al-Hārith b. Surayj, was himself a Murji'ite and his personal secretary was Jahm b. Safwān (d. 745), the leader of the Khurasan Murji'ites, who first appeared in the neighbourhood of Termez.



The politico-religious movement of the Murji'ites had arisen in the latter half of the seventh century. Information on its basic tenets is given by the heresiographer al-Shahrastānī and may be summarized as follows: first, a refusal to pass judgement on who had been in the right in the struggle for power and the civil warfare of early Islam, °Alī or Mu°āwiya, the rival contenders for supreme power; second, recognition that an outward profession of faith was sufficient for an individual to be regarded as a believer; and, third, a moderate attitude towards transgressors (in contrast to, for example, the Kharijites), since the Murji'ites did not regard such individuals as non-believers and trusted in the divine forgiveness of their sins.

The Murji'ite movement in Central Asia in the eighth century was associated with the struggle of the indigenous new converts to Islam for equality with the Arabs and their freedom from having to pay the *jizya*. On the doctrinal level, this found expression in an external profession of faith (recognition of the truth of God and of His Prophet Muhammad) being regarded as the main criterion of a Muslim, and observance of the religious duties as secondary. Thus, theoretically, Murji'ite tenets enabled people who had been obliged to forsake the religion of their forefathers and who were insufficiently acquainted with the requirements of the new religion to enjoy the status of Muslims without observing the religious duties.

We are told by al-Tabarī that participants in al-Hārith b. Surayj's movement had links with the eminent *faqīh* from Kufa, Abū Hanīfa, although this was subsequently denied by devout Sunni authors like al-Shahrastānī. Shi'ite heresiographers like al-Nawbakhtī subdivided the Murji'ites into four categories and placed Abū Hanīfa in one of them, that of the Iraqī Murji'ites. Certainly, people from eastern Khurasan, especially from Balkh, who went to study in Iraq were in the main students of Abū Hanīfa, and c. 800, when the main religious and legal schools of thought were taking shape in Sunni Islam, Balkh became a centre for the development and study of the Hanafite sect in the East. In Khurasan and Transoxania, Abū Sulaymān al-Jūzjānī (d. 823) and Abū Hafs al-Bukhārī (d. 832) began to expound the main writings of Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybānī (d. 805), whose writings set out the basic tenets of the Hanafite law school.

Following the establishment of the Samanid state (see Volume IV, Part One, Chapter 4), local Hanafite schools arose in its two main centres, Samarkand and Bukhara. Study of the *isnāds* (chains of authority supporting a *hadīth*) set out in the works of al-Kafawī provides evidence of the influence exerted by Baghdad and Balkh on the formation of the local schools in Bukhara and Samarkand. The doctrine of local theologians that arose in the struggle against 'unjustified' trends in Samarkand was later associated with the name of the scholar Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944–5). The appearance at the end of the tenth century



of such eminent jurists as Abu 'l-Layth Nasr b. Muhammad al-Samarqandī (d. 983) and Abū Bakr Muhammad b. al-Fadl al-Bukhārī (d. 991) testifies to the high level of development reached by the Transoxanian school of jurisprudence.

A different religious and political situation came about in Central Asia as a result of the conquests of the Karakhanids. Transoxania was to some extent cut off from Khurasan, where Islam was already fairly deeply rooted, and incorporated into a state embracing the territory of the Semirechye ('Seven Rivers') region and East Turkistan, where conversion to Islam was only in its early stages and accordingly superficial. The decentralized rule established by the Karakhanids stimulated a development of local urban life in these regions, where the *faqīhs* became spokesmen for local, public opinion, as also for the rural populations. Hence we find *fatwās* (legal opinions) from these *faqīhs* on the most varied matters, such as commercial and property questions, family and conjugal relations, and the correct performance of the Muslim cult. Such judgements of the *faqīhs*, which essentially reflected the realities of life in Transoxania in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, were embodied in more than 60 compilations on the *furūc al-fiqh* (the branches of jurisprudence), one of the best and most renowned being the *Kitāb al-Hidāya* [Book of Guidance] of Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 1197). A school of philology and theology also flourished in Khwarazm during the twelfth century with such outstanding members as Mahmūd al-Zamaksharī (d. 1144). A Mu<sup>c</sup>tazilite theologian and Hanafite jurist, he was particularly famed for his Qur'an commentary, *al-Kashshāf* [The Unveiler], which became celebrated throughout the Islamic world; see further on it in Chapter 3, Part Two, below.

The overall picture of Islam in Central Asia was thus complex and heterogeneous, reflecting the linguistic, religious and cultural variety of local society. In early Islamic times, numerous heterodox sects and protest movements had arisen in Khurasan and Transoxania, some of them combining ancient religious currents from the eastern Iranian world such as Zoroastrianism and Mazdakism with the new faith of Islam, and others expressing sectarian Islamic beliefs, often in extremist forms, such as Kharijism and messianic Shi<sup>c</sup>ism; for these, see Volume IV, Part One, Chapters 1 and 2.

In Seljuq and Karakhanid times, Sufism began to play an increasing role in the religious and social life of the Islamic East. On the northern fringes of Transoxania, a Turkish holy man named Ahmad Yasawi (d. 1166) founded an order which came to embrace syncretistic currents from the older shamanistic background of the Türks (see on this, pp. 77–8 above). Much of Khurasanian and Central Asian Sufism, however, had close links with Sunni orthodox teaching and practice. This closeness was to be especially true of the later Naqshbandiyya order, whose founder in Transoxania, Khwāja <sup>c</sup>Ubayd Allāh Ahrār (d. 1490), related how, when a young child, he was profoundly disturbed by a dream in which

the eminent Shafi<sup>c</sup>ite scholar Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshi (d. 976) appeared before him and gave him instructions. As a young man, Khwāja Ahrār passed the long night hours in meditation at Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl's *mazār* (shrine) in Chach.

The Mongol period was a watershed in the history of Central Asia in general and of Islam in Central Asia in particular, one that altered the trend and the nature both of the social and political development and of the religious and ideological development of this region. With the arrival of the conquerors, the old machinery of the Perso-Islamic state fell into the background as did the *faqīhs*, the official representatives of Islam, who had defended that machinery of state and ensured its functioning. Many *faqīhs* and other scholars migrated to the lands of Islam further west, such as western Iran and Anatolia.

As noted above, Sufism, a more popular, more adaptable and all-embracing Islamic phenomenon, began gradually to play a more active role in the social life of the region. Its representatives prepared the ground for the restoration of a more formally organized state with Islamic forms of government based on the *sharīʿa* (religious law). A definite stage in this process is represented by the activity of Sayf al-Dīn al-Bākharzī (d. 1261), credited with the conversion to Islam of Berke Khan of the Golden Horde; of Husām al-Dīn al-Yāghī and Shaykh Hasan (whose names are mentioned in connection with the acceptance of Islam by the Chaghatayid Tarmashirīn Khan, d. 1334); and of Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, Shams al-Dīn Kulal and others. All the above were representatives of *tasawwuf* (Sufism or the mystical path), and following the unification of the Central Asian region under Timur (Tamerlane) in the 1370s, the position of the Sufis became even more influential.

This does not signify that the representatives of what may be termed 'official' Islam yielded up their positions. They still had great prestige and were involved in affairs of state. Thus the *shaykh al-islām*s (spiritual heads) in Samarkand continued to carry out their role. The *shaykh al-islām* under Timur was <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Malik, a descendant of Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī, the author of the *Hidāya*. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Malik was an admirer of Nūr al-Dīn Basīr (d. 1249), known as a representative of the Sufi school of al-Suhrawardī, and a supporter of open *dhikr* (spoken recounting of the divine names). The next *shaykh al-islām* was <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Awwal, the twin brother of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Malik, who during the reign of the Timurid Khalīl Sultān attempted to persuade his rival Pīr Muhammad to submit to the authority of Khalīl Sultān. Later, at a decisive moment in the internecine struggle, when Khalīl Sultān was about to be defeated, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Awwal handed over power in Samarkand to Sultan Shāh Rukh (1404–46).

<sup>c</sup>Abd al-Awwal was succeeded as *shaykh al-islām* by his nephew, the son of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Malik, <sup>c</sup>Isām al-Dīn, who held office under Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg (1394–1449). The *muhtasib* (market inspector) Sayyid <sup>c</sup>Āshiq at one point spoke out in public against

him, accusing °Isām al-Dīn of departing from the *sharīʿa*. °Isām al-Dīn was succeeded by his son Burhān al-Dīn. Following the murder of °Abd al-Latif, the Timurid throne was occupied by Mīrzā °Abd Allāh, who was strongly opposed by Burhān al-Dīn. After °Abd Allāh's defeat in a struggle for power in the summer of 1451, Burhān al-Dīn hurriedly departed from the capital of Transoxania, without waiting for the new ruler to ascend the Timurid throne, and fled to Abu 'l-Qāsim Bābur. In 1456, however, at the invitation of Abū Saʿīd, the ruler of Samarkand, he returned and attempted to regain his former position at court in a struggle with Khwāja °Ubayd Allāh Ahrār.

To sum up, the essential features of the Islamic faith were maintained over a period of comparative stagnation resulting from the Mongol conquest. During the fifteenth century, there was a reduction in the role of the *faqīhs* in the life of Central Asian society and an increase in the part played by the representatives of Sufism. Henceforth, this form of popular mystical Islam was to become the main vehicle for the Islamic religion in Central Asia.

## Part Four

# NON-ISLAMIC MYSTIC MOVEMENTS IN HINDU SOCIETY

(C. Shackle)

In keeping with the predominantly esoteric or devotional nature of the mystic movements generated within the Hindu society of northern India during the period under review, the detailed evidence necessary for their precise historical reconstruction is generally unavailable. The various movements are united only in their rejection of the ritualistic formalism of Brahminic orthodoxy so successfully formulated in the reconstitution of classical Hinduism in the Gupta period, which was to survive even the immense challenge to its values posed by the extension of Muslim imperial power from the eleventh century onwards throughout the region. While some of the later mystic movements may be regarded as having been partially prompted by this challenge, in particular the wide spread of popular Sufism, the astonishingly fecund variety of the perpetually self-renewing Hindu tradition itself is generally sufficient to account for the essentially indigenous character of

all these movements. Very often, however, both their chronological origins and their socio-logical development must remain obscure, since we have only devotional and hagiographic texts as guides. While these, quite apart from their spiritual importance, are valuable as early records of the local Indo-Aryan vernaculars (deliberately preferred to Sanskrit, the literary vehicle of orthodox learning), they remain true to the Hindu tradition in being better records of names than of places or dates.

## The *Hatha-yoga* movement

Although themselves theologically neutral, the varied cultic associations of the formidable physical techniques of *Hatha-yoga* ('yoga of force') in different periods of the religious history of India have tended to be determined by the predominant orthodoxies or heterodoxies. Thus, in the latter part of the first millennium A.D., when north Indian Hinduism had a pronounced Shaivite emphasis, *Hatha-yoga* was particularly associated with the Shaivite Tantra which was notably cultivated in Kashmir, where it continued to flourish after contracting in the face of the *Vaishnava* challenge in the northern plains. This discipline receives its most vivid vernacular expression in the Kashmiri verses of the fourteenth-century *yoginī* Lal Ded.

It was, however, the teachings based upon *Hatha-yoga* attributed to the Nāths (Sanskrit *nātha*, 'lord') which for a while represented the mainstream of mystical heterodoxy over much of northern India. Drawing upon the earlier traditions of Buddhist Tantra notably cultivated in Bengal, which had largely escaped the intensive re-Hinduization of the central Gangetic region, this *Nāth-yoga* too has Shaivite affiliations, since the list of the nine great Nāths begins with Shiva himself, from whom the first great adepts derived their doctrines. Hardly to be reconstituted as historical personages (*c.* twelfth century?), these mythologized figures are Machchhendranāth, associated with Nepal, and his disciple Gorakhnāth, whose origins the confused later tradition places anywhere from Bengal to Panjab. It is doubtful if Gorakhnāth himself is the author of the crabbed early Hindi verses known as the *Gorakh-bānī* (dating from *c.* 1350), the principal vernacular texts of *Nāth-yoga*.

The goal of *Nāth-yoga* was the liberated state called *sahaja* (ease), to be experienced through the immortal body generated from the physical body through the practice of *Hatha-yoga*. Since all rituals and scriptures were regarded as irrelevant to this end, it was the yogis themselves who formed the focus of the cult. Revered for the *siddhis* (magical powers) thought to be conferred by an asceticism demanding the painful splitting of the ears as an initiation (hence their title of *Kānphat*, or 'Split-ear'), the *Nāth-yogis* commanded from their *maths* (monasteries) widespread awe and devotion, often being regarded in

contemporary literature as a community distinct from Muslims and Hindus alike. Only from the sixteenth century did their fearsome prestige begin to fade in the face of a rapidly growing allegiance to less forbidding mystical cults.

## The *bhakti* movement

The period 1300–1500 marks the true beginnings in northern India of the age of *bhakti* (devotion), when the way of salvation came increasingly to be defined as a following neither of the ritualistic prescriptions of orthodoxy, nor of the fierce techniques of *Hatha-yoga*, but of the practice of loving meditation upon God, whether He was conceived of as having the form (*sagun*) of a particular god or as formless (*nirgun*). Although by no means absolute, this theological distinction has its sociological correlate. While *sagun bhakti*, directed towards a manifestation (*avatār*) of Vishnu, especially to Krishna, tends to be associated with a Brahminic élite and social conservatism, *nirgun bhakti* largely stems from and looks towards the lower castes. To some extent, therefore, both may be regarded as typically stratified Hindu responses to the implantation of Islamic Sufism, then at its most vital, as a major presence in the spiritual life of northern India. It is, however, less helpful to search for direct Sufi influences and parallels in the formation of northern Indian *bhakti*, which more obviously derives from the earlier revival of Vaishnavism in South India, even if the chronology and precise routes of diffusion are still matters of considerable contention.

As often, literary expression generally precedes sectarian organization in the *sagun bhakti* focused upon Krishna. Jayadeva's very popular Sanskrit poem, the twelfth-century *Gītagovinda* (based upon that core Vaishnava text, the South Indian *Bhāgavata-purāna* of c. 900), or the Krishna songs composed in Maithili by Vidyāpati (c. 1400), both the work of Brahmins, are early testimonies to the erotic appeal of the Krishna cult, centred upon the loving contemplation of the god as the divine cowherd sporting with Rādhā, chief of the *gopīs* (cow-maidens), on the banks of the Yamuna in the sacred territory of Vrindavan near Mathura (south of Delhi).

The formal organization of devotional sects (*sampradāys*) closely associated with formal cults physically centred on the sacred sites of Vrindavan is a later phenomenon, dating from the work of two Brahmins, almost exact contemporaries at the end of the fifteenth century. From the Bengali Chaitanya (1486–1533) stems the Gaudīya *sampradāy* particularly widespread in Bengal, while from the South Indian Vallabha (1479–1531) derives the *Pusti mārg* ('Path of Grace'), whose various branches soon became the chief organizing factors in the devotionalism of northern and western India. Typically rather conservative

in social teachings, themselves amply expounded in Sanskrit treatises by the learned leadership of the sects, the communal life of this devotionism was centred upon the temple with its images of Krishna, and the singing of vernacular hymns in his praise (*kīrtan*).

While *sagun bhakti* typically coexisted with, even gave fresh life to Hindu orthodoxy, this latter was openly challenged by the *nirgun bhakti* teachings expressed in the vernacular verses and hymns of the lower-caste, often illiterate, saint-poets collectively known as the Sants. While the links between them are often tenuous, and almost by definition they constitute no ordered school of thought, the Sants articulated through their often rough-hewn verses a popular message of salvation open to all. Expressly rejecting the claims of Brahmins, yogis or Muslim clerics to a monopoly of religious insights (whose falsity was tellingly demonstrated by continual observations of these specialists' marked failure to practise the most basic ethical principles), the Sants' powerfully monotheistic vision was of a God who might hope to be known by any believer, irrespective of social origins, not via the image of some *avatār* but through His immanent presence in the human soul, often conceived as the True Teacher (*satiguru*). It followed that only a loving meditation on the Divine Name (*nām*), supplemented by the singing of hymns in *kīrtan* (coupled, naturally, with leading a 'good life'), could offer salvation from the cycles of transmigration.

Scattered widely in place and time, the leading Sants naturally display their individual emphases in their expression of these core ideas. In the Marathi and Hindi hymns attributed to Nāmdev (d. c. 1350?), a cotton-printer from Maharashtra, there is a strong Vaishnavite tinge. By contrast, the immensely popular and influential Hindi verses of the greatest of all the Sants, Kabir of Benares (d. c. 1450?), show a much greater affinity with *Nāth-yoga*. The futility of both Hinduism and Islam is also a central theme of Kabīr, born into the Julāhā caste of weavers, one of those artisan groups converted *en masse* to Islam, who was consequently himself at least a nominal Muslim. Although also from Benares, the tanner Ravidās, apparently a younger contemporary of Kabīr from an even lower social background, devotes fewer of his verses to such social criticisms, preferring to hymn the beauties of mystical devotion.

## Birth of the Sikh religion

Sectarian groupings, usually termed *panth* (path), came to be formed around several of the Sants, but their organization was much feebler than that of the typical Vaishnavasampradāy. The oral transmission of the Sants' hymns certainly guaranteed their wide circulation, but only at the price of much accretion and corruption. Our knowledge of the Sants is consequently in large measure due to the preservation of their hymns in the *Ādi granth* [First

Book] (1604), the scripture of the Sikhs, who represent the one religious tradition connected with the Sants which developed sufficiently strong institutional structures to preserve its autonomy.

While the history of the formal organization of Sikhism largely lies outside the period under review here, the potential for its emergence was certainly inherent in the work of its founder and first Guru, Nānak (1469–1539). Born south-west of Lahore in Panjab, Nānak was the son of a village accountant. As a member of the Khattrī trading caste, Nānak's family status was considerably higher than that of the earlier Sants, and as a young man he was employed as the steward of a local Muslim landowner until induced to abandon his profession by an overwhelming mystical experience, from which he is said to have emerged uttering the famous phrase *nā ko hindū nā ko musalmān* ('There is no Hindu, and there is no Muslim'). The remainder of his life was spent first in a series of wanderings, then in a settled community in Panjab where he guided his Sikhs (Sanskrit *śishya*, 'disciple'), before entrusting their leadership to one of them, who succeeded him as the second of the ten Gurus of Sikhism.

Nānak himself proclaimed the source of his inspiration to be the inner divine *satiguru*, rather than any human teacher. While later Sikh tradition has naturally preferred to emphasize the uniqueness of Guru Nānak's message, most of its elements undeniably resemble those to be found in the verses of the earlier Sants. What distinguishes his thought from theirs is above all the clarity of its organization and the power of its expression, as recorded in his matchless Panjabi and Hindi hymns preserved in the *Ādi granth*. More than a simple matter of emphasis, this distinction is to be regarded as fundamental and qualitative. From the disciplined majesty of Nānak's *Japjī*, designed not for performance in *kīrtan* like most of his poetry but for daily private meditation, to such simple formulations of doctrine as *nām dān isnān* (literally, 'the Name, giving, bathing'), the formula encapsulating the triple requirement on the believer to meditate upon God while living a life of charity and personal uprightness, Nānak's message provides a total programme for salvation in a fashion never achieved by such figures as Kabīr, for all the profundity of their insights. Taken in conjunction with his careful foundation in later life of a core community of followers, largely drawn from a similar middle-caste background to himself, Nānak's power to articulate an enduring message of wide subsequent appeal, at least in Panjab, is revealed by the fact that Sikhism, alone of all the mystic movements in the Hindu society of the period, continues (though much changed by later developments) vigorously to maintain its unique identity.