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Dossier coordonné par Stéphane Dudoignon.

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Ulan Bigozhin

Beket Ata: Reimagination of Sainthood in Contemporary Kazakh Hagiographies

This ethnographic study is based on two field trips to the Aqtau area, West Kazakhstan Region, in September 2018 and March 2019¹. During visit, I did participant observation at the shrines of two modern Muslim saints, Beket Ata and Shopan Ata, and in the city of Aqtau. Interviews were conducted with locals and pilgrims; books and booklets that document contemporary hagiographic processes on the two saints were collected from local bookshops at both sites. These oral and written materials have allowed me to question three different issues.

The first consists of revisiting Beket Ata as a “tribal saint”, specific to the Aday tribe, through a study of his cult both within and beyond the Manghïstau Peninsula. If this cult is based on a patron-client system of relations, relying on local notables of the Aday tribal group, the attendance of his holy site by pilgrims coming from other, sometimes remote regions suggests the ongoing transformation of his status from a tribal to a regional saint revered within multiple populations (including Muslim Tatars but also... Orthodox Russians) on the northern shore of the Caspian Sea.

Our second argument is on the exceptionality of Beket Ata – not as just another Muslim saint venerated as a model of piety but, precisely, as a warrior saint or fighting man of God, reminiscent of the premodern Central Asian figures of Islamic sainthood characteristic of times of conversion or of Islamisation (DeWeese, 2008: 293-307; *eod.* 2018; 1993). Among the Aday tribe of Manghïstau, Beket’s sainthood resulted from his participation in *ghaza*’ – the armed struggle for the defence or enlargement of the territory of Islam – and from his single combats with diverse enemies – mostly Turkmen nomads of the southern part of the region.

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the “Tribes and Scribes” Project supported by PSL University and the TEPSES Programme of Excellence (Paris), as well as to the Atlas short-term post-doctoral grant of FMSH, Paris.

Third, if holy narratives about the sanctuary (*mazar*) of Beket Ata continue to develop among Adays, legends become diffused through modern philanthropy from diverse origins and a variety of media, including the social networks, the irruption of which in post-Soviet Central Asia has further limited the possibility of censorship and multiplied the protagonists of hagiographic processes – bringing about a new typology of *manaqibs*, *i.e.* the *vitae* of distinct Muslim saints, a genre recording the merits and miraculous doings of a sacred person and of her spiritual lineage (Hermansen, 1988: 167). The present work focuses on two recently printed *manaqibs* of Beket Ata: the first, simply titled *Beket Ata*, by Rahat Qosbarmaq; the second, *The Miracles of Beket Ata (Beket Ata Keremmetry)*, by Anuar Amir Khanov. These two hagiographies were written in modern Kazakh in the Cyrillic alphabet and published by Kazakhstani private publishing houses. These *manaqibs* are an attempt by local intellectuals to collect and keep widespread stories of Beket Ata that are circulating across the Manghïstau area.

About Beket Ata

Beket Ata Murzagul-Ulu (1750-1813), or Beket Son of Murzaqul, is also known as Pir Beket, Ata, or *aulie* (from Arabic *awliya*, or Muslim saint; the Persian term *pir*, “elder”, designates a spiritual master). He belonged to the Aday tribe, a part of the Baylı confederation of the Junior Kazakh Horde. The Kazakh Junior Horde, to which the Adays belong, were officially under Russian rule from 1731 onwards. Indeed, the concept of tribe itself as a kinship unit has been criticised by historical anthropology (*e.g.*, Godelier, 1973) and it remains, by and large, difficult to apply to Kazakh society. Anthropologist David Sneath, for instance, has been questioning the colonial notion of tribalism, which to his eyes brought about misconceptions of nomadic societies as “kinship societies” (Sneath, 2007). As a matter of fact, if the European term “clan” translates to some extent the Kazakh terms *ru* and *el* as a community or lineage, with its dimension of kinship, it does not take into account at all this word’s strong political contents, perceptible in the hagiography that developed on Beket Ata.

Beket’s genealogy (Ar. *shajara*, Kaz. *shezhere*) starts from the legendary founder of the Aday tribe, Aday Ata, according to the lineage: Aday Ata → Kelimberdi → Munal → Zhaulı → Qosqulaq → Zhanal → Murzagul → Beket (Sabıtoı, 2019; Ablanova, 2010). Beket’s genealogical tree goes back to the “semi-mythical ancestor” Aday Ata, whose golden-domed mausoleum is located at Otpan Tau (the Manghïstau Peninsula’s highest spot) and whom Adays consider their common ancestors (Totaro, 2018). The genealogy of Beket is proudly displayed to pilgrims in the form of a white tree on large posters on the walls, which attest to his ascent. For the Adays themselves, this printed genealogical tree is one among many visual forms that remind themselves of Beket Ata as their holy ancestor.

The twentieth century, especially the Soviet era, witnessed political turnouts and a massive sociodemographic engineering that ultimately led to the quick formation of the Kazakh nation (Olcott, 1996; Hirsch, 2005). However, the sentiment of belonging to a certain lineage or a group of lineages did not vanish under Soviet rule. Large numbers of Kazakhs, urban and rural, cultivated collective memories of their former nomadic subgroups. And if modern-day Kazakhs identify themselves as members of one imagined Kazakh nation, many also underline a tribal origin.

For the Adays, the remembering of Beket Ata's deeds and the overall veneration of the main Muslim saint of the Manghïstau Peninsula express a sense of religious and emotional attachment to the region's sacred landscape, and for many, it is a sense "to be" an Aday Kazakh. Beket Ata, as an Aday saint, embodies a sense of Muslimness. For many Western Kazakhs, with or without Aday ancestry, Manghïstau is a sacred territory and home to 363 (336 in some sources) holy Islamic graves. Beket's figure and symbolic power have with time become so important that his name became the Adays' distinct battle cry (Ablanova, 2010: 211).

Modern sanctification narratives insist on the quantitative aspect of this territorial hagiography, characteristic of a society of cattle breeders and traders. It can be found reflected in nineteenth-century Russian ethnographic accounts. For example, in *Predaniia adaevtsev o sviatykh, sekty khanafie, zhiivshikh i umershikh na Mangyshlake*, in the early 1870s, that "after the death of Khwaja Ahmad [Yasawi, the twelfth century saint of Turkestan], his *murids* [disciples] spread in different directions, three hundred sixty-three coming to Mangyshlak [Manghïstau] where they have passed away; they are all venerated as saints, as well as their graves, although their names remain unknown" ("Predaniia adaevtsev o sviatykh", 1873: 6).

This narrative on Manghïstau as the land of 363 saints is nowadays widespread in West Kazakhstani oral traditions. Some of our informants even told us that in Aqtau, the regional capital, people compete to get car plates with the number 366 or 363, as an element of prestige and a vector of holy protection. Locally, the veneration of Beket's spirit and the cult of his burial complex are markers of Aday identity. Even if some among the tribe do not identify with Beket, the majority of the population participates in this worship: no cult of Beket without the Adays and no Adays or Aday identity without Beket.

The Junior Horde (*Kishï Zhus*), to which the Adays used to belong, occupy territories situated in modern-day West Kazakhstan, where the Manghïstau Peninsula is located. They are often praised in Kazakh popular sayings as the horde who produced many gallant knights (*batïrs*, from Mongolian *bahadïr*) and Muslim saints (Ar. *awliya*). Beket himself was an *er*, or warrior, as shown in the next section. Aday *batïrs* often appear in regional historical sources (Ablanova, 2010: 211).

Aday territory overlapped with present-day Northwest Turkmenistan, which had a large Kazakh population. In the Soviet period, Kazakhs and Turkmens used to compete for scarce resources, for water and pastures notably, which led to multiple conflicts (Kalshabaeva, 2010: 146 *sq*). This competition is reflected in the post-Soviet hagiography of Beket Ata (*e.g.* Amir Khanov, 2017; Qosbarmaq, 2015), as well as in the religious interactions between local Kazakhs and Turkmens. For example, at the Oghlandi shrine complex, located by the parking lot of the current shrine complex of Beket Ata, one can hear the legend of a Turkmen boy who had found Beket Ata's sacred stick (Ar. *'asa*). These interconnections between the cults of two saints' graves can be better understood if we take into account the veneration of Beket Ata as a warrior saint, as shown in the next few paragraphs. This example can provide some reflection on the competition between Turkmen and Kazakh dwellers, however, it also shows the connection between tribes based on the phenomena of sainthood. For example, one of the contemporary *manaqibs* of Beket Ata, written by Qosbarmaq, has two stories where Beket Ata is also shown as a patron of some Turkmens (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 137).

Indeed, not all Adays feel directly connected to Beket Ata, especially those established in Turkmen land, and many cultivate other affiliations. During fieldwork in March 2019, I met Kazakhs who had migrated from Turkmenistan at the turn of the twenty-first century. They mentioned two saints "of their own lineages" whose graves they used to visit before moving to Western Kazakhstan: Gozli Ata or Kozluk Ata, from Khwarezm, south of the Aral Sea (DeWeese, 2018), and some saint named as Qozha Ata, a man of God of *khwaja* ancestry buried not far from Aqtau Airport. None of them are connected with Beket Ata. In Central Asia the Persian term *khwaja* designates notably sacred lineages of alleged descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions (*e.g.* Dudoignon, 2020b: 259).

Beket Ata and the Sacred Lineages of Central Asia

Today, the descendants of Beket Ata and keepers of his shrine enjoy a privileged status among the Adays – as they would do in other tribes. However, their status cannot compare with that of more prestigious religious aristocracy, whose families – of *khwaja* (*Qoja* in Kazakh) ancestry among Kazakhs especially – have been playing, even during the Soviet period, decisive roles in a long succession of Islamisation (or re-Islamisation) movements². However, Amir Khanov's and Qosbarmaq's *manaqibs*, as well as many informants across Kazakhstan, use the terms *seid* and *qozha* synonymously, without distinguishing between *qozhas* and *sadat* (sing. *sayyid*; *seid* or *seit* in Kazakh: a term of Arabic origin designating the descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his cousin 'Ali and his daughter Fatima).

2. See the respective works by DeWeese, Privratsky, Dudoignon, Muminov, Tasar, etc.

According to Amirkhanov, the author of one of the two post-Soviet *manaqibs* studied here, Beket’s mother was of *qoja* or *sayyid* descent, and she even came from a lineage renowned for miracles of domesticating wild animals – such as milking antelopes in the steppe, a common feature of classical Islamic hagiography. Such narratives were widespread in Manghistaу where, according to the *Predaniia adaevtsev o sviatykh, sekty khanafie, zhivshikh i umershikh na Mangyshlake*, the legendary saint Qoshqar Ata would call and tame wild deer that were voluntarily approaching him and he would slaughter them for food (“Predaniia adaevtsev o sviatykh”, 1873: 18).

The practice of milking wild antelopes or more generally, the interaction of saints with wild animals is also part of the Central Asian Muslim tradition (Franck, 2022). Marvels linked with Beket Ata’s sainthood and shrine are connected with antelopes and argalis. Nowadays for instance, during escalations up the hill where the holy man’s tomb is located, a pilgrim’s encounter with an argali signifies a good omen and a blessing by the spirit of the saint. Argalis are widespread near the funerary complex and their hunting is unofficially, but strictly, prohibited due to their saintly status.

The historian Ashirbek Muminov writes that in the Kazakh world, “belonging to any status group (*juz, el, ru, taypa, ata*) is one of the real factors that determines the place of an individual or of a family in society” (Muminov, 2011: 8). From his father’s side, Beket Ata was descended from the bellicose Aday tribe and on his mother’s side, he was a *qozha* or *sayyid*. Beket Ata’s legacy, lineage, and status as a saintly figure added to create his “tribal” origin.

His association with the Prophet’s lineage connects Beket Ata with the larger Central Asian tradition of saintly families. Khwaja Ahmed Yasawi’s mausoleum, located in the city of Turkestan, the former Yasi in Southern Kazakhstan, is associated by the Kazakhs with *awliya* of Qozha origin but is active in the southern part of the country. This association connects the Kazakh saints with Muslim Central Asia at large (Bigozhin, 2018). We can see the geographic Qozha phenomena in DeWeese’s examples on a smaller scale that connects with the sacred lineages of Khwaja (DeWeese, 2008). According to the ethnographic data collected during the author’s fieldwork in Aqtau in 2018-2019, sacred families are venerated by the local Aday population, as connected to “a person who brought [them] religion”, in the words of one of my informers³.

Matrilineal Qozha ancestry (*nagashi* in Kazakh) holds a strong symbolic meaning among former Kazakh nomads. Kazakh nomads maintain a particular belief system of traditional forms of understanding blood ties and the role of kinship, in spite of their sedentarisation during the Soviet period. In the Kazakh nomadic worldview, reflected in a number of sayings and proverbs, young men of good education owed their background to their *nagashi*, their

3. The word *din*, or Arabic origin, designates *par excellence* Islam.

maternal parents (Saltanat, 2020). For the locals, Beket's sainthood is partly due to his blood ties with the Qozha ancestral status. This is why, in the hagiography by Amirkhanov (as well as in Qosbarmaq's *manaqib* and local oral traditions), the story of Beket's maternal ancestor through his *nagashi*, Nazar Qozha, appears at the beginning of the narrative.

According to Amirkhanov, Nazar Qozha was from the Quraysh tribe of Seit Qozhas who, at a young age, had come to Manghıstau from the Khanate of Khiva, south of the Aral Sea (Amirkhanov, 2017: 6). Nazar Qozha had become a prominent intercessor to the divine for travellers on the route from Khiva to Manghıstau, renowned for miracles such as the milking of antelopes. Visiting the encampment of an Aday notable, Almembet, Nazar Qozha had healed his sick daughter and married her. His descendants had been designated as "antelope milking Qozhas" (*kiik saughan qozhalar*) or as "brown yurt Qozhas"⁴ (*qonur uyli qozhalar*).

Typical of the area, a marriage narrative connects a sacred lineage with origins in a Central Asian oasis state with a powerful steppe tribal leadership – a pattern reflected notably in multiple ethnographic data on Kazakh Qozhas (Bigozhin, 2018). Zhanya, the daughter of this marriage, later became the wife of Qosqulaq and mother of Beket Ata. In his own *manaqib*, Qosbarmaq confirms that the name of Beket's mother was Zhanya, and that she was from this sacred lineage of Seit Nazar Qozha (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 199).

A Combination of Charismas

Beket Ata is additionally connected to a *batır* genealogy. According to Amirkhanov and Qosbarmaq, one of Beket's older *nagashi*s (*kari nagashi*s), or *nagashi*s of his father, was Batır Eset Kokiulu (c. 1669-1757), from the Tama tribe. In other words, Beket Ata came from a well-established and well-rooted Aday lineage, particularly respected in the Manghıstau Peninsula. Sayings such as "Eset is the bravest of *batırs*, Beket is the strongest among *pirs*" (*Eset erdin soni, Beket pirdin soni*) continue to circulate among my Aday informants.

As suggested before, the Qozhas are revered as belonging to the people who "brought Islam" to the region. The modern leadership of the tribe underlined the superiority of Beket's charisma with the supernatural powers of the Qozhas. The modern hagiographer Amirkhanov, in his "Miracles of Beket Ata", tells a story on how he miraculously healed a Qozha after having punished him for questioning his authority (Amirkhanov, 2017: 25).

Beket's lineage is also connected to the genealogy of the Prophet and to Muhammad's Companions through initiation or a master-disciple relationship. In his hagiography, Amirkhanov, on p. 3, attempts to link

4. According to an interview with Said Omar Sattrov (b. in 1943), who is one of the few remaining Kazakh experts on sacred genealogies, Almembet gave Nazar Ishan a brown yurt as a wedding gift, while white yurts were traditionally given. The descendants of Nazar Ishan are still known as "brown yurt Qozhas".

Beket to the Khwarazm Sufi tradition and relies on the *Khalwat-i Sufiha*, a manuscript written in 1813 in Khiva by an unknown author translated into Russian by the historian Bakhtiyar Babadjanov. Amirkhanov gives a short genealogy based as he claims on p. 11 of the *Khalwat-i Sufiha* where he gives in order names such as Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret, then Muhammad Sultan Khazret, and then Mullah Mohammad Mana (who is in fact Muhammad-Panah according to *Khalwat-i Sufiha*) and then Beket Ata. In Babadjanov's translation I found a piece, where these names are given: Muhammad-Baqir, Muhammad-Sultan, Muhammad-Panah but instead of Beket there is the name of a certain "Sufi of the time" Bik-Turdi (Babadzhanov, 2000: 132-133). The characters named above according to *Khalwat-i Sufiha* have been designated as followers of the Naqshbandi Sufi community and proponents of *mahfi* or silent zikr. The grave of Bik-Turdi (*markad*) according *Khalwat-i Sufiha* was located in the territory of Manghistaу Peninsula (*Ibid.*: 140). It is difficult to know who this prominent Sufi Bik-Turdi was, but a character whose name is similar to Bik-Turdi is mentioned in Amirkhani's hagiography as being of Turkmen origin Bekdurdy Ishan (Amirkhanov, 2017: 29-30). According to Amirkhanov, Bekdurdy was a prominent hero who fought against the Adays who moved to the Manghistaу Peninsula in his time. Beket Ata and Bekdurdy met in one of the many small battles between Turkmens and Adays, where the former won in hand-to-hand combat and then two of them made a peace agreement with the "touch of the Quran by their foreheads" (*Ibid.*: 29). And then, according to Amirkhanov, the warrior Bekdurdy became a Bedkdurdy Ishan, later he (Bekdurdy) built a mosque in Kyzylkum region, and started to spread the religion among his people and became a prominent Sufi figure.

Bik-Turdi in *Khalwat-i Sufiha* and Bekdurdy in Amirkhanov's hagiography could be totally different characters, but there are certainly similarities such as the name of the hero (Bik-Turdi and Bekdurdy), the location-Manghistaу Peninsula, and then the religious titles such as Ishan and Sufi. But what is important is that Amirkhanov's story shows an aspect of Beket's sainthood, which will be discussed in more detail below in the paper, namely that Beket is reimagined as a warrior-saint, who actively fights the enemies of the Aday tribal group. Both Amirkhanov and Qosbarmaq mention that Beket Ata studied in Khiva and that his spiritual master was Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret without providing direct historical evidences (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 39). So, it is not clear whether or not Beket actually travelled to study in the madrasas of the Khwarezmian oasis city. However, for an eighteenth-century Kazakh nomad of sacred ancestry, it was customary to study in a major Central Asian urban centre such as Khiva, Bukhara, or Samarqand. In his study of the Tatar manuscripts on the Kazakhs, especially the *Tarikh-i Barangavi* [Barangavi's Chronicle], Allen J. Frank shows the author of this work meeting Kazakh students in Samarqand (Frank, 2013: 333). For the Adays, Khiva was just the closest centre of learned culture, and a Turkic-speaking city contrary to the highly Persianiased Samarqand and Bukhara. Along with Muhammad

Baqirzhan Khazret, Beket Ata's authority is connected to another religious leader of the region: Shopan Ata, a legendary "disciple" of Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi and spiritual mentor of Beket Ata. The dates of birth and death of Shopan Ata, as well as his history, are unknown, but he definitely did not live at the time of Beket Ata. According to Amirkhanov, Shopan Ata suggested to Beket Ata to follow the path of Islamic sainthood through *Uwaysi* initiation (at a distance, through dreams). However, Amirkhanov does not use terms such as *Uwaysi* initiation through dreaming, because such Sufi terms do not circulate in the contemporary religious landscape of the Kazakhstan. Amirkhanov just described the processes of initiation through Beket's sacred dreams. But what is important is that Amirkhanov's story about Beket Ata and Shopan Ata shows that the memories of *Uwaysi* tradition, its legacy and traces are still partially alive (Amirkhanov, 2017: 13-14).

However, the narratives on both Beket Ata and Shopan Ata are tightly intertwined, and their respective shrine complexes interconnected. Present-day pilgrimages to Beket are inseparable from *ziyarat* (visit, pilgrimage) to Shopan Ata. According to Amirkhanov's *manaqib*, at the age of fourteen, Beket asked his parents to study at the madrasa and they permitted him to do so. Before his long trip to the madrasa, Beket received a blessing from the spirit of Shopan Ata. For this, Beket travelled to the shrine of Shopan Ata and spent four nights there. On the fourth, Shopan Ata appeared in Beket's dream and, according to Amirkhanov, told Beket:

Spirits (Ar. *arwah*) cannot not be *pir* for living beings. Go to Khiva. Baqirzhan Hajji [i.e., Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret], a scholar of great sainthood, is staying there in a madrasa. Stay near him. Your Buraq [Qur'anic mystic steed] which will give you a ride to Khiva is already waiting for you beside your house (*Ibid.*).

When Beket woke up, he saw the Buraq – the marvellous mount on which Prophet Muhammad is said to have ridden on his night-time journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, the *mi'raj*: an animal between a mule and an ass according to Muslim mystics that have provided descriptions of it (*Ibid.*: 576-577), waiting for him near the door, and in a matter of seconds the Buraq brought Beket to Khiva where Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret was already waiting for him and sent him to the Shir Ghazi Madrasa. This piece of hagiography displays several important elements. The first is the presence of a sacred *khwaja* lineage embodied by Muhammad Baqirzhan, designated by the spirit of Shopan Ata, and the blending of two different kinds of initiation (*Uwaysi* and through a living master).

The second element is the spirit of Shopan Ata, appearing through the dream. In *Dreams and Dreaming in Islam*, Marcia Hermansen writes that in Islamic religious tradition, "a significant role given to dream content as reflecting both spiritual and real-world truth and in establishing the connection of everyday reality to another dimension often reflected to as the *ghayb*, the absent or unseen realm" (Hermansen, 2001: 73-74). According to Bruce Privratsky, in Kazakh religiosity the *ayan* complex (from Arabic *ayan*,

a personal revelation via a dream) “persists strongly in Kazakh religion as a popularisation of the illuminationist tradition of the Sufis” (Privratsky, 2001: 119).

Local *manaqib* traditions mention that Shopan Ata kept reappearing to Beket through *ayans* throughout his whole life. Qosbarmaq’s “*ayan*” narrates the story of how Shopan Ata came to Beket when Beket was occupied with building the mosque that later became his *mazar* (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 128-129). In this *ayan*, Shopan Ata shows Beket the place where to dig and retrieve fresh water. Today, this fresh-water well is still venerated as the source of sacred water (*kieli su*). In other words, Shopan Ata was Beket Ata’s lifelong *Uwaysi* guide.

Beket Ata also appears to pilgrims in *ayan* dreams. An Aqtau I interviewed a pilgrim who in the interview that an *ayan* can motivate a pilgrimage. Additionally, during the author’s fieldwork on the road to the shrine, Zhanar, a Kazakh woman in her mid-forties, said him that she had seen Beket in an *ayan*; a native of Aqtau and member of the Aday tribe, she had been a regular visitor to the *mazar* but had stopped coming for a while, and for her the *ayan* had been a “reminder” sent by the saint.

Another important moment in the revelation dream is the mention of Buraq (here, Piraq). The appearance of Buraq, in connection with the legends about Beket’s mysterious flights between Manghıstau and Khiva or Urgench also connect him with Muhammad. It is after one of these mystical travels to Urgench that Beket Ata is said to have become a disciple of Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret, whose role is highlighted in the saint’s *manaqibs*. In recent *vitae* of Beket, it is just after the young man’s arrival to the Shir Ghazi Madrasa and his acceptance as a student by Baqirzhan that he began to show the supernatural powers of a saint, performing different types of miracles such as walking on the surface of the Amu Darya River (Amirkhanov, 2017: 14-17).

After years of studies, he returned to his family, who were leading a nomadic lifestyle near the Emba (Kaz. *Zhem*) River. Muhammad Baqirzhan sent him his marvellous ‘*asa* (stick), promising that an *oghlan* (“boy”, in Turkmen) would find and keep it for him. The narrative is not a new one: it is present in life stories on Ahmad Yasawi, his ‘*asa* and his legendary *murid* Shopan (“Predaniia adaevtsev o sviatykh”, 1873: 12). According to Beket’s new *manaqibs*, the ‘*asa* story lies at the origin of the Oghlandi Mosque and Mazar near the saint’s main shrine. Stopping there on the way to the shrine is seen today as a pilgrim’s duty.

According to Amirkhanov, Beket received the Sufi dignity of *pir* and his “licence” (*ijaza*) to have his own disciples from Muhammad Baqirzhan. He was forty years old and his master was ageing. The ceremony took place after Ramadan during a large gathering of mystics and clerics. Receiving his master’s blessing, he became Pir Beket and as such returned home. Amirkhanov writes that it is afterwards that local people started to add “in Manghıstau, Pir Beket” to the adage “In Madina, Muhammad, in Turkestan, Qozha Ahmad” (Amirkhanov, 2017: 26-25).

Along with a possible connection to Khiva through a pir such as Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret, and a *Uwaysi* style initiation, Amirkhanov gives an important story of Beket's early life, entitled "How Beket arrived to tauba" (Taubaga kelu). Taubaga kelu is still a widespread phenomenon among Kazakh Muslims, with the Kazakh term tauba coming from the Arabic tawbah, which means repentance, turning to God and asking for forgiveness (Frank and Mamatov, 2002: 163). According to Amirkhanov, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, Beket, who lived in poverty, stole a white horse that was grazing from some Aday settlement and was chased by a group of angry horse owners (Amirkhanov, 2017: 12-13). During the chase, they captured Beket and he asked God for help and support. And miraculously, the owners did not recognize the colour of the horse, or the horse changed its colour, which is clearly expressed in the text. So, Beket was saved by God's support from the horse owners and then, while he was riding the same horse through a water source, he saw a finger coming from the water, then after some time five fingers appeared on the surface of the water, and a bit later he saw forty fingers. The explanation of these miraculous fingers coming out of the water, according to Amirkhanov, is as follows: "One finger [means] that one should not forget One God, five fingers means that one should do five daily namaz prayers, forty fingers means that one should follow the forty required obligations [for Muslim] paryzdar" (*Ibid.*: 13). And after that, according to Amirkhanov, Beket started an honest life and never took anyone's property. This topic of tawbah has at least two important points: first, it touches on the idea of raiding and horse stealing, which was also considered among the nomadic communities of Central Eurasia as an act of youthful bravery. The practice of raiding at the early age is a widespread feature in the biographies of many Central Asian rulers, for example Temujin (Gengis Khan) or Temirlan (Amir Timur) and others.

Secondly, we can see how the local narrative constructs the stages of Beket Ata's sainthood; how, from the stage of raiding young Aday Kazakh men, Beket slowly transforms into a pious Muslim and then into a saintly person. The sin, a horse stealing, pushed Beket to *tawbah*, to do the act repentance and turn to God. However, for example, in the hagiographical story about Bekdurdy, it was visible that Beket kept his warrior spirit and continued to take part in war actions or, at least, to support Aday raids despite his saint status. Pir Beket's legacy and authority rely on three key components of modern-day Muslim sainthood as seen by the local population of Western Kazakhstan: a matrilineal blood connection with a sacred lineage; the presence of an *Uwaysi* guide such as Shopan Ata; and the presence of a religious teacher, such as Muhammad Baqirzhan from Urgench. As shown next, the saint's warrior-like character also explains the charisma that he enjoys today among locals in the Manghistaу area.

A Warrior Saint

If we refer to oral traditions (epics such as the “Forty Aday Gallants”), music, street-names or monuments, the Adays see themselves as brave descendants of the *batırs* of the past (Totaro, 2018). The stories on Beket Ata describe him as a warrior: according to Amirkhanov for example, at the age of nine, he was already leading *ghaza* campaigns against the Turkmens and the Kalmuks, with the warfare knowledge of an elder (Amirkhanov, 2017: 8-9). One of Beket’s enemies, the Turkmen chief Bek-Durdu Bahadır, reportedly agreed to a truce and peace treaty after their confrontation, followed by his dedication to religion under the name of Bek-Durdu Ishan, and by his building a mosque.

Beket’s epic is connected through various narrators with a wide history, including even reference to Napoleon’s Russian campaign of 1812. The short account, “The Neighbouring Nation” (*Korshi Khaliq*), in Qosbarmaq’s *manaqib*, recalls that in the years before his death in 1813, the saint announced that the Russians “will suffer and have a lot of issues soon: a nation who lies behind Russia will attack her and its people will suffer a lot” – proclaiming: “The right of a neighbour is sacred so we must support him and collect alms (*sadaqa*) for him” (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 147).

Qosbarmaq interprets this as a prediction of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812. In Soviet times, the memory of the “Patriotic War” of 1812 against the *Grande Armée* was highly praised in history textbooks, and a vector of nation-building (Raeff, 1991). This modern element of Beket’s *manaqib* results perhaps from Soviet history teaching in the schools and universities where his current hagiographers have been educated before specialising in the writing of saints’ *vitae*. At the same time, what is observed here is Beket portrayed as a peaceful mobiliser of help for the Adays’ distant Russian neighbours.

Warlike accounts of him are more often saturated with battlefield prodigies like raising fog or clouds of dust that allowed the Adays to look more numerous than they were in reality, scaring their enemies. In fact, the miraculous ability of saints to create illusions of numbers for their troops is a widespread Central Asian Muslim tradition: it is encountered in early modern accounts of the legendary figure of Khizr (Ar. al-Khadir), in his remit as protector of the city of Sayram:

After hearing the Imam Ra’is al-Din’s reassurance, the people of Sayrām found that the infidel troops were fleeing, and captured one of them to bring before the Imam. He asked why they had run away, and the infidel explained: his army numbered 50,000, he said, but when they had entered Sayrām, they had seen a very tall person leading 100,000 troops, each armed with immensely long lances; “their lances reached us, ours did not reach them, and so we fled”. The tall person was Khizr, and the explanation again rehearses the blessings and protections provided to Sayrām by so many prophets (DeWeese, 2000).

Khizr is shown in this historical document as a saint who miraculously wins battles by creating images of the large number of troops. The contemporary narrative about Beket Ata has similarities with this ancient Central Asian narrative about saints, as characters involved in war or war actions and who win through different miracles. Amirkhanov in his story, “What Beket Told to the Warlord”, recalls that one day, an Aday warlord approached Beket Ata and asked to join a raid against the Kalmuks (Amirkhanov, 2017: 33). Beket replied: “I was in many war parties, now I am done with them.” The warlord frowned, Beket added: “Please, don’t be angry! Listen, attack the enemy during the afternoon.” Whether the warlord listened to Beket or not is unknown, but the Adays returned victorious. His interlocutor flung to Beket: “We have won without you!” Beket went to the Kalmuk captives and asked them: “How did you lose?” They replied: “After noon, a big army showed up. We understood that fighting is useless and decided to surrender.” Beket asked the warlord: “So, who has shown smart enough to tell you to attack after noon, which would make ten of you look a hundred, and a hundred look a thousand?” Ashamed, the Aday chief is said to have begged Beket for forgiveness.

The construction and perpetuation of war miracle stories on Khizr and Beket Ata, since the eventful eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, suggest the great fertility in this matter of Central Asia as a whole, especially in a frontier region such as the Manghīstau Peninsula. What suggests Beket’s *vita* is also that he was a raider and warrior before becoming a saint, but that his quality as a warrior helped him reach sainthood. His role as holy protector of the Adays is well documented throughout the short twentieth century. According to the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan, more than 1,400,000 citizens of this former Soviet Republic served in the Red Army during World War II, equalling to twenty-five percent of the country’s total population at the time (“Kazakhstan v period”, 2013). Indeed, we find Adays among them, some at the core of new *manaqibs*. Amrenov, for instance, provides the story of an Aday soldier repeating an invocation under heavy bombing, explaining to a Russian comrade that the name that he is repeating belongs to a “substitute of God” (Rus. *zamestitel’ Boga*). Beket appears here in his remit as protector of the Aday tribe’s men in the Red Army. The promotion of a local saint as the intercessor *par excellence* for a given community is not a rare phenomenon in the Islamic world, Sunni or Shia. What modern-day Aday hagiography offers here is a case of permanence, if not reinforcement, of a tribal feature throughout the upheavals of the Soviet period.

War stories mentioning Beket’s support of the Adays’ fighting spirit continued to flourish in the Soviet period. Amirkhanov mentions several World War II stories in which Aday soldiers of the Red Army were spared on the frontline by simply mentioning Beket Ata’s name (Amirkhanov, 2017: 60).

Indeed, the figure of the warrior saint is no innovation in Muslim Central Asia. Devin DeWeese, as we have seen, has analysed fourteenth century Turkic texts by the Yasawi *shaykh* Khwaja Ishaq B. Isma‘il Ata, who had announced the arrival of two heroes of Islam, Ishaq Bab and ‘Abd al-Jalil, to

the Ferghana Valley and Syr Darya River basin four centuries earlier. These two figures, endowed with sacred genealogies, were known to have spread Islam by sword. What is interesting though is that this intertext, nourished by classical models and modern history, emerged in the present-day *manaqibs* of the Manghīstau saint.

Beket Ata: from Tribal to Global?

The significance of Beket Ata as a symbol of Aday spirit appears in pilgrimage practice itself. It is true that Aday tribesmen make up about ninety percent of the population of Aqtau and Manghīstau (Sabitov, 2019). Few of them make a distinction between Aday identity and belief in Beket's protection: for them, the saint is their intercessor *par excellence*. In a half-joking tone, some pilgrims even confessed to me: “We don't always pay attention to whom we mention first in our prayers and invocations, Allah or Beket.” Some even told that they invoke “*ya Beket*” in all situations of stress, convinced that his *arwah* (spirit) will assist them.

The population of the Ustyurt Plateau tends to legitimize in confessional terms the peculiar status they give to the region. Particularism, here, is based on the idea that Manghīstau is sacred land, left pure, intact by successions of invaders and intruders. Local people claim it a true “Kazakh” and “Muslim” land. Many Adays see their tribe as true Muslims whose ancestors successfully defended their territory from non-Muslims and “wrong” Muslims (especially from the Turkmens), thanks to the supernatural support carried through the tribe's connections to the divine. Aday Kazakhs look at their past as an embodiment of nomadic virtue, especially during the nineteenth century anti-Russian and anti-Khivan uprisings in which Adays, more than once, have played a central role (Pankratova, Abdykalykov and Dmitrova, 2011: 410-416).

The Aday saints' veneration shows how contemporary Kazakh nationalism mixes with a premodern sense of attachment to Muslim saints as part of Manghīstau's sacred landscape. The common Aday historical narrative relies on the idea that the tribe's ancestors defended and preserved Kazakh traditions, rituals, and their imagined fatherland, Kazakhstan. During recent fieldworks, pilgrims used to speak of Manghīstau with pride, as an ancient territory where “seven nations had preceded the Adays”. The peninsula is evoked as a land of rich heritage though with a harsh environment where only tough people can survive and live well.

During my observations of pilgrimages to Beket Ata, people often expressed their pride of being an Aday or a native of Manghīstau. Doing so, they tried to distinguish themselves from visitors from other parts of the country. In a conversation between three female Kazakh pilgrims, two Adays and one from Northern Kazakhstan, the former asked the latter where she came from and, when they heard that she is from Petropavlovsk, near the border between Kazakhstan and Russia, they shook their heads and answered her: “Oh, dear,

you are probably all Russified there, and have forgotten all Kazakh traditions!” Many Adays share the same kind of stereotype about Southern Kazakhs too who, in their eyes, “have become Uzbeks”. As a geographical isolate, the Manghistaу Peninsula can be regarded as a cultural reserve of sorts.

Indeed, it would be reductive to see Beket Ata solely as a tribal saint. In September 2018, I interviewed a group of female pilgrims who had travelled to Beket’s sanctuary from as far as Astrakhan in the delta of the Volga River, around a thousand kilometres north of Aqtau. They had travelled by minibus and one had said that they used to come annually. Some in the group had visited Beket Ata up to six times. Groups of female pilgrims often practiced magical healing in connection with the sanctuary under Russian colonial rule. Saduaqas Ghilmani (1890-1972), a Kazakh Muslim scholar and local government officer, notes that in the early twentieth century Russian peasants would bring mentally sick people to Kazakh *pirs* (Ghilmani, 2018: 139-40).

Tribal Sainthood in Present-Day *Manaqibs*

During my doctorate fieldwork from 2012 to 2014, I witnessed the growth of the production of hagiographies on saints in the Kazakh language (sometimes with chapters in Russian). Edited locally at small print shops, these texts were usually printed for special occasions, such as the saint’s jubilee or for the commemoration of other *awliya* (Bigozhin, 2018). This literature is now widespread over Central Asia (e.g. Dudoignon, 2020a). These books offer collections of stories on miracles, biographies of the saint’s descendants, pictures of shrines and photos of current shrine keepers. Their authors are often local scholars, former school or university teachers and professors, journalists, or Soviet-trained medical workers and engineers.

Here I would like to get back to two abovementioned *manaqibs*, purchased in the bookstores of Aqtau. The first is Anuar Amirkhanov’s *Miracles of Beket Ata*, published in 2017. This work is based on post-Soviet hagiographic works by Islam Qazi Murzabekulu and mass media materials such as articles from Kazakh newspapers. The second, the book by Rahat Qosbarmaq entitled *Beket Ata*, and published in 2015, is based on press materials and personal testimonies.

Amirkhanov’s work contains seventy-six stories on miracles made by Beket Ata and his descendants. Written in Cyrillic, it was published in Almaty by a private company, M-Talant, with only five hundred copies printed – whereas this publishing house prints books on Kazakh ethnography and history intended for schools. The text is divided into two parts: a *vita* of Beket, and a part on his descendants. In the former, Amirkhanov proposes a narrative in chronological order, in form of short stories on the saint’s origin, his studies in Khiva, his action as a *pir* in Manghistaу and his miracles; in the latter, he provides eighteen stories on miracles by Beket’s descendants.

Rahat Qosbarmaq’s *Beket Ata* is similarly organised in two parts. However, the text appears more academic and scholarly. In the first part, “Pir Beket in

Manghıstau”, Qosbarmaq displays lengthy quotations of academic works translated long ago from English to Russian, such as J. Spencer Trimingham’s *Sufi Orders in Islam* and studies by the Turkish historian Fuad Köprülüzade, as well as late Tsarist and early Soviet Russian classics such as the historical studies on Sufism in Central Asia by Vassili V. Barthold and by Alexander N. Samoilovich. At the same time, he refers to local informants who have shared stories with him and to the local press, as well as publications of local lore and encyclopaedias.

His goal is to portray Beket Ata as an embodiment of the Central Asian Sufi master (Qosbarmaq, 2015: 35). Through the saint’s own Khivan master Muhammad Baqirzhan, Qosbarmaq connects Beket to Sufi tradition and to figures such as the mediaeval propagators of Islam, Yusuf Hamadani and Ahmad Yasawi. This insistence on Sufi connections reflects the importance of Sufism in general in the Russian Orientalist studies on Islam in Central Asia, and the impact that the latter have exerted on locally produced non-academic literature during the early post-Soviet period. In such a discursive context, highly characteristic of the 1990s-2000s in Central Asia as a whole, the enhancement of Beket’s historical significance – so important for the Aday readership – passed through the inscription of his *vita* in Sufi historiography.

The second part of Qosbarmaq’s *manaqib*, “The last *Pir* Is Beket”, provides forty-five stories of miracles by the saint, ordered chronologically, beginning with Beket’s prediction of a hostile raid when he was nine-year-old. Just as Amirkhanov’s one, Qosbarmaq’s *vita* relies on oral traditions of Beket and his descendants. It offers more information on the early and late periods of the saint’s life, on paraphernalia such as his sacred stick (*asa*, a key asset of prophecy and sainthood in Abrahamic religions). It also takes into account data published in the local press on Beket’s posterity up till the post-Soviet period.

However, Beket’s *vita* did not wait for the end of Soviet censorship to develop in printed form. In 1983 already, a Soviet Kazakh poet, Ghafu Qairbekov, published a poem entitled “The Legend of Beket Ata” Qairbekov praises Beket’s supernatural powers, evoking for instance the time when Beket miraculously saved a friend from a fall off a cliff (Qairbekov, 1983: 14-16). How could such *manaqibs* appear and develop in late Soviet Central Asia? A first explanation of this phenomenon is the gradual opening of the economy in the 1980s, bringing about the appearance of private publishing companies for whom the command of printed texts in praise of local notables quickly became an important outlet. In late Soviet and present-day Kazakhstan, the writing of monographs of modern saints has been a rewarding occupation for many retired white-collar workers, as it would increase their personal status as hagiographers and would provide them with an additional income through financial support by powerful sacred holy lineages.

Indeed, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that *manaqibs* of Kazakh saints have become mass literature already during the last decade of the Soviet period. Even now, their usual print run does not exceed one thousand copies and a majority of these items never reach the city bookstores, even less

libraries. Most are written and published for special occasions like jubilees and commemorations, as for those written about the nineteenth-century saint ‘Isabek Ishan in present-day Northern Kazakhstan (Bigozhin, 2018).

As Thomas J. Heffernan points out in his *Sacred Biography*, “the lives of the saint were sacred stories designed to teach the faithful to imitate actions which the community had decided were paradigmatic” (Heffernan, 1988: 5). The present-day *manaqibs* of Beket Ata are designed to teach faithful Kazakhs actions perceived as religious practices. Against this overall background, the present *manaqibs* on Beket show him as an embodiment of the virtues associated by post-Soviet Kazakhs with the pre-Soviet elites of the nomadic world: a blend of chivalry and mediating skills with an emphasis on masculinity and bravery.

The Adays, in almost everyday conversation, mention how brave and strong they were in the past and now, especially when they talk about the historical past and current politics. During my field research in Manghıstau, one of the bus drivers who proudly told me he was a “true Aday”, at the beginning of the visit to the Beket Ata’s shrine, on the way to Beket Ata, in a voice that did not conceal an overtly masculine pride, pointed to a group of camels grazing on the side of the road, practically in the middle of the Ustyurt desert and said: “Only camels and Adays can live here”. This sentence from one of the representatives of the Aday tribal group says a lot about how the Aday Kazakhs constantly mention and reimagine themselves (practically on a daily basis) as a group of Kazakhs who fought against nature (the desert) and against various enemies such as Turkmens, Russians and others, and even as a belligerent Kazakh tribal group that opposes the central state of Kazakhstan. Beket Ata is their Aday warrior-saint, and the image of Beket Ata contains several major virtues for Aday Kazakhs, such as bravery and masculinity.

The *vitae* of Beket Ata carry out numbers of adoptions from more ancient narratives, reflecting a patrimonialization characteristic of the transition period opened in the USSR in the early 1980s. Here, Sufi stories on the Manghıstau saint’s ability to turn into a bird and fly have been finding themselves mixed up with *rivayats* (legendary accounts) on the miraculous salvation of Red Army soldiers in World War II and with prodigies attached, since the end of Soviet times, to Beket’s sanctuary. These combinations of heritages and present-day attestations cast light on an agile, dynamic, and adaptable hagiographic experience, centred on the reconstruction of a historical continuity of the long twentieth century, over the disruptions of the Soviet period.

This is why present-day hagiographers such as Amirkhanov and Qosbarmaq, themselves of Aday origin, have been trying to sanctify the tribe and the Manghıstau Peninsula itself, through the presence of the figure of a regional saint embodying Aday virtues. Intended for the young generation, their *manaqibs* are textbooks of ethics that propose a cult of ancestry channelled by a modern Islamic shrine and pilgrimage. As classical hagiography, a heterogeneous genre if any, they combine elements of the

sacred and of the profane, intermingling pre-Soviet regional heritages and Soviet modernity, against the overall background of the socioeconomic transition of the past three decades.

This hagiographic experience does not appear as the simple product of a sponsor/author relationship in which the former – often local elite and rich business classes – would be the holy descendants of a particular saint. Fieldwork inquiries developed in 2013-2014 and 2018-2019 suggest a more dynamic picture of *manaqib* patronizing. First, collections of stories come to the light in local newspapers and other regional media, or poems in locally distributed anthologies, after which families of a saint's descendants invite their authors to special celebrations and feasts, and exhort them to publish more. The direct sponsoring of this literature is attested elsewhere in Kazakhstan – as for the commemoration (Kaz. *as*) or jubilee (Kaz. *toy*) of such a man of God as 'Isabek Ishan, in 2012, the year when a hagiography printed in 2,000 copies was published, which endeavoured to sanctify his Pavlodar region (Bigozhin, 2018).

The materiality of a hard-bound printed copy widely distributed at a regional scale enhances the social prestige of an author, especially in a context characterised at the same time by the Soviet heritages of mass literacy and valorisation of book culture and by the gradual but deep transformation of the national book market since the 1980s. Rare, under Soviet rule, during which history writing had become a monopoly of patented professional historians (Khalid, 2004), the possibility offered to average persons to have a monograph published under her signature encourages hagiographers and their patrons to subsidise their publishing activity. A Kazakh respondent from the region of Almaty, a retired teacher in her sixties, spoke sarcastically about this whole process of de-professionalization, deriding “unprofessional”, “tribalist books” (*traibalistkie knigi* in Anglicised Russian), “written for utilitarian goals” (*paida ushun zhazylghan kitaptar* in Kazakh) – which did not prevent her, however, from taking pride in the biography of one of her own ancestors, “a famous tribal leader of the nineteenth-century”, written and edited in the 2000s by a member of her family.

Conclusion

The veneration and followers of Beket Ata have become part of being Aday and Kazakh. Beket Ata retains his place as a prominent sacred figure of the Manghīstau Peninsula in Western Kazakhstan among many Kazakhs. Part of the regional pantheon and sacred landscape, his legacy has been reinvented since the 1990s through pilgrimage, donations and the publication and diffusion of *vitae* or *manaqibs* counting his *karamat*. Historically, Beket is connected with the sacred status group of the Qozhas of Manghīstau via an Islamic genealogy, both spiritual and genetic, which strengthened his status as a Muslim saint for the local population. He was linked, or his figure was reimagined, to the great Sufi centres of the oasis-city of Khiva, as a *murid*

of Muhammad Baqirzhan Khazret and, according to local *manaqibs*, he also had an *Uwaysi* style master, the legendary Shopan Ata. Simultaneously, Beket Ata embodies the ideal type of the warrior saint of tribal extraction – one of many in Muslim Central Asia, where they have become particularly common in the troubled eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. According to his *manaqibs*, as an Aday leader, Beket actively participated in raids, before providing them with a standard as the Elder and tutelary saint of the Adays. His memory remained long connected with the theme of war – from echoes to Napoleon’s Russian campaign of 1812 to stories on Aday soldiers serving in the Red Army during World War II.

Beket’s saintly figure is also facing a transformation from the local scale to the global. Now, pilgrims from neighbouring states of Russia and Uzbekistan regularly visit his shrine. Along with this growing popularity abroad, Beket’s saintly figure is attracting Kazakhstani pilgrims from all over the country, up to thousands of kilometres away from Manghïstau.

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Beket Ata: Reimagination of Sainthood in Contemporary Kazakh Hagiographies

This article is an ethnographic study focused on the figure of Western Kazakhstani (Manghïstaw) Kazakh Muslim saint Beket, via participant observation of pilgrimage to his shrine and via gathering printed materials documenting of the ongoing hagiographic process. This present research offers one of the first systematic studies of Kazakh contemporary manaqib tradition (legendary narratives about the life and deeds of a specific saint), where the author argues that: first, in hagiographic texts since the early nineteenth century, Beket Ata appears as a warrior and a model of masculinity for periods of high conflictuality: among the Aday tribe of Manghïstaw, of which he took his origins, he is praised for his miracles and struggles against the Turkmen established south of Aday Kazakh territory. Second, generations of notables of the Adays have shown instrumental in the construction of the successive versions of the saint's vita; they have also developed his shrine – now a major pilgrimage place (mazar) of Western Kazakhstan. Third, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, pilgrims have been flocking to the mazar from areas wider than the Aday territory, as far as Southern Russia and other Central Asian states.

Keywords: shrines, saints, Islam, Kazakhstan, nomads, warriors.

Beket Ata : réimaginer la sainteté dans les hagiographies kazakhes contemporaines

Cet article est une étude ethnographique centrée sur la figure de Beket, saint musulman de l'ouest du Kazakhstan (Manghïstaw), via une observation participante des pèlerinages vers son sanctuaire et la collecte de documents éclairant le processus hagiographique en cours. Cet article propose l'une des premières études systématiques de la tradition kazakhe contemporaine du manaqib (récits légendaires sur la vie et les actes d'un saint spécifique). Il défend d'abord que, dans les textes hagiographiques depuis le début du XIXe siècle, Beket Ata apparaît comme un guerrier et un modèle de masculinité pour les périodes de forte conflictualité: au sein de la tribu Aday de Manghïstaw, dont il est originaire, il est loué pour ses miracles et ses luttes contre les Turkmènes établis au sud du territoire kazakh des Aday. Il montre ensuite que des générations de notables Aday se sont révélées déterminantes dans la construction des versions successives de la vita du saint; elles ont également développé son sanctuaire – aujourd'hui un lieu de pèlerinage majeur (mazar) du Kazakhstan occidental. Il souligne enfin que, depuis la dissolution de l'Union soviétique, les pèlerins affluent cependant au mazar depuis des régions plus vastes que le territoire Aday, s'étendant jusqu'au sud de la Russie et à d'autres États d'Asie centrale.

Mots-clés : sanctuaires, saints, Islam, Kazakhstan, nomades, guerriers.

Beket Ata : reimaginación de la santidad en las hagiografías kazajas contemporáneas

Este artículo es un estudio etnográfico centrado en la figura del santo musulmán del oeste de Kazajistán (Manghístaw) Beket, a través de la observación participante de la peregrinación a su santuario y de la recopilación de materiales impresos que documentan el proceso hagiográfico en curso. La presente investigación es uno de los primeros estudios sistemáticos sobre la tradición contemporánea kazaja del manaqib (narraciones legendarias sobre la vida y los hechos de un santo concreto). En primer lugar, el autor sostiene que en los textos hagiográficos desde principios del siglo XIX, Beket Ata aparece como un guerrero y un modelo de masculinidad para periodos de alta conflictividad: en la tribu Aday de Manghístaw, de donde viene, es alabado por sus milagros y luchas contra los turcomanos establecidos al sur del territorio kazajo de Aday. En segundo lugar, defiende que generaciones de notables Aday han demostrado ser decisivas en la construcción de las sucesivas versiones de la vida del santo; también han desarrollado su santuario, que ahora es un importante lugar de peregrinación (mazar) de Kazajstán occidental. Sin embargo, desde la disolución de la Unión Soviética, los peregrinos acuden al mazar desde zonas más amplias que el territorio de los Aday, hasta el sur de Rusia y otros estados de Asia Central.

Palabras clave: santuarios, santos, Islam, Kazajstán, nómadas, guerreros.

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