

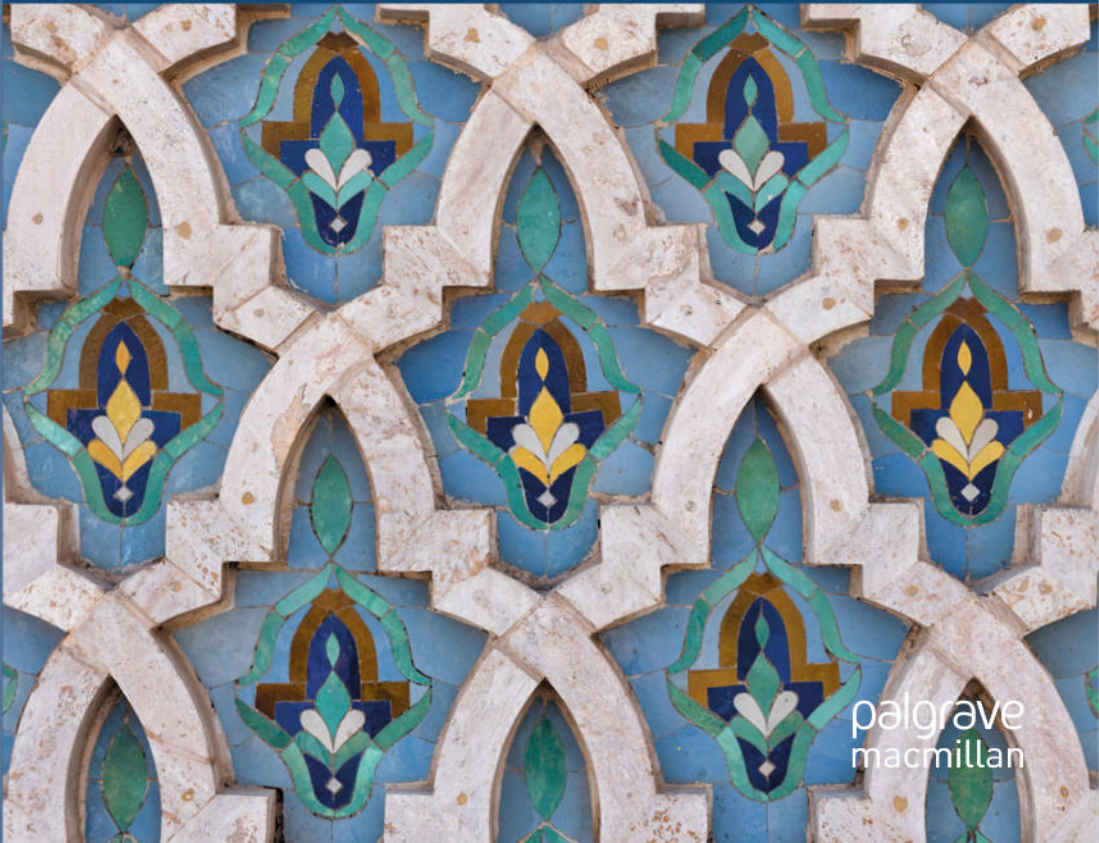


ISLAM AND GLOBAL STUDIES

# 'Pre-Islamic Survivals' in Muslim Central Asia

Tsarist, Soviet and Post-Soviet  
Ethnography in World  
Historical Perspective

R. Charles Weller



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R. Charles Weller

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in World Historical Perspective

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“A critical, deeply researched work on a long and still debated theme within and beyond Kazakh scholarship. Weller’s book is an erudite exploration of Tsarist, Soviet, Western (European and American), Turkish and modern Kazakh writing on the spread and role of Islam and other religious systems in Kazakh society. As such, it is essential reading for all who are interested in the history of religion in Central Asia and in particular of Islam in Kazakhstan.”

—Peter B. Golden, *Professor Emeritus of History, Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies, Rutgers University*

“This the first book-length study of the concept of ‘pre-Islamic survivals’ among the Kazakhs and other Muslim societies of Central Asia. Weller’s painstaking research draws on medieval and modern primary sources, including twenty-first century developments. ...Focused primarily on the Kazakhs, the book opens doors to a broader discussion of Muslim populations of Central Asia and the former Russian Empire in the context of colonial scholarship and the global reach of knowledge production.”

—Marina Tolmacheva, *Professor Emerita, Middle Eastern & Islamic History, Washington State University and President Emerita, American University, Kuwait*

“Weller’s study of the concept of ‘pre-Islamic survivals’ in Central Asia is an erudite and thought-provoking book. On the basis of wide-ranging research and deep engagement with Kazakh-language sources, he argues that the paradigms through which a number of (especially Western) scholars have—implicitly or explicitly—understood religiosity in Central Asia do not adequately explain Central Asian religious beliefs and customs. His arguments merit careful study and engagement by scholars of Central Asian history and the history of religion alike.”

—Ian W. Campbell, *Associate Professor of History, University of California-Davis, California*

“A comprehensive volume which offers fresh perspectives and ideas... Scholars of Islamic, religious, cultural and historical studies will find much of interest on the problems of ‘syncretism’ and ‘conversion,’ especially in relation to the study of religious identity in Central Asia and its developing trends.”

—Ainura D. Kurmanaliyeva, *Professor & Department Chair,  
and Nurlykhan K. Aljanova, Senior Lecturer & Vice-Chair  
on Science and International Cooperation, Department  
of Religious & Cultural Studies, Al-Farabi  
Kazakh National University (Almaty)*

“This is an insightful work, rich in detail; scholars from many disciplines will benefit from it.”

—Razia Sultanova, *Research Fellow, Cambridge Muslim College, UK,  
and Visiting Professor, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*

*For my mother, for all her years of love & care,  
an inspiration for, and positive influence upon my life in immeasurable  
ways.*



## PREFACE

This study<sup>1</sup> is closely tied to an article I published in the *Journal of Islamic Studies* in 2013–2014 treating “Religious-Cultural Revivalism as Historiographical Debate: Contending Claims in the Post-Soviet Kazakh Context.”<sup>2</sup> That article emerged from a number of years of prior research which were eventually given significant shape during my visiting fellowship at Yale University (2010–2011) when I lectured on the topic at both Yale and Princeton and then again, in revised form, several years later at UCLA. I have drawn from the introduction and conclusion to that article in framing the introduction, conclusion and other select parts of this work. The main body of that article, in revised and expanded form, is also included as a final chapter in Part Three of this present book. Various portions of the material in Chapters four, five and six were also presented at two different annual conferences of the Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) in 2016 and 2018, with particularly helpful feedback from the discussant for the 2016 panel, Tomohiko Uyama (Hokkaido University). Appendix One represents a revised, updated paper presented at the annual conference of the World History Association (WHA) in 2015. That chapter treats the late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century historiographical debate between two members of the Orenburg Scientific Archival Commission—the Orthodox church historian and missionary N.M. Chernavsky and the colonial administrator and veterinarian A.I. Dobrosmyslov—addressing the question of the impact of Catherine II’s policies of religious toleration on Kazakh Islamic

history and identity. All of the material has been reworked across the years and fit together within the context of this present study.

This volume is dedicated to a foundational, prolegomenous topic within the study of Central Asian religious history and identity. As a history of a central ethnographical and theoretical construct (or concept) within the study of Central Asian religious-cultural history, and the related historiographical debates which emerged across the late Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, this study provides an essential backdrop to more straightforward religious-cultural histories.

Although the subtitle of this book employs only the term “ethnography,” cultural anthropology and historiography are also in view. Attempting to squeeze all such terms into not only the title, but every sentence in which one or the other of those terms appears would not have been reasonable, so the reader should, as a general rule, understand all three terms to be in view on most occasions when any one of those terms is employed. This remains true for ‘cultural anthropology’ in particular, even though I typically limit my choice of terms to either ‘ethnography’ or ‘historiography’ throughout. Although I have training in theology, philosophy, religious-cultural studies and anthropology, history is my primary field. ‘Historiography’ is, therefore, my main interest. I define that term here for purposes of this study as ‘the construction of historical narratives,’ with a view to understanding and analyzing their underlying assumptions and implications. Inasmuch, however, as ethnography, cultural anthropology, theology and religious-cultural studies, among much else, all contribute essential source material as well as theoretical orientations and approaches which shape the construction of historical narrative, there remains a close, overlapping and reflexive relationship between them all.

I do not intend this book as the, or even a, final word on this otherwise very complex and much debated topic. I am deeply indebted to the very rich and pioneering scholarship of many others in various relevant fields, even those whose positions I may at times critique. It should also be borne in mind that whatever points of critique I do raise pertain only to the specific, limited points raised and not the vast, rich entirety of any particular scholar’s contributions to the field. As the late UNESCO-honored nineteenth-century Kazakh Muslim reformer, Abai Kunanbaiuhli (1845–1904), put it: “study with clear and noble aims, not to acquire learning so as to be able to argue with other people. Now,

arguments within reason help to strengthen one's convictions, but, excessive zeal for them can only spoil a person."<sup>3</sup> My aim, as always, is to contribute collegially and respectfully to continuing dialogue and, where needed, debates on particular issues which I attempt here to bring into sharper focus. I can only hope the work will be received in that spirit and make some small contribution toward that end.

Pullman, USA

R. Charles Weller

## NOTES

1. I acknowledge that my system of transliteration throughout the volume is not entirely consistent. This has to do with several factors, some of them historical, which I will not take time or space here to justify. I will only note that I was originally planning to convert all the transliteration of Kazakh and Russian to Cyrillic or the recently adopted Latin script, but have only done so for the bibliography, not all of the endnotes. I accept that this is perhaps an academic 'sin' or 'crime' of some sort on my part, albeit hopefully only a misdemeanor in the eyes of most. I can only regret whatever minor inconvenience it might cause; it should not otherwise impact the study in any significant way. Those who know the languages should readily be able to understand the transliterations within context. The transliterated citations within the endnotes are all keyed to transliterations of the author's last names in parentheses within the bibliography at the head of the citations in order to ensure clear reference/connection between them, and between references and bibliographies within other studies.
2. "Religious-Cultural Revivalism as Historiographical Debate: Contending Claims in the Post-Soviet Kazakh Context." *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 2014): 138–177. DOI: 10.1093/jis/ett058 (Published online Nov 12, 2013. <http://jis.oxfordjournals.org/content/25/2/138>).
3. Abai Kunanbaiuhli (c. 1900), "Word Thirty-Two," in *Book of Words*, Leneshmidt Translations Resource Library (URL: [http://www.leneshmidt-translations.com/book\\_of\\_words\\_abai\\_kunanbaev\\_english/32.htm](http://www.leneshmidt-translations.com/book_of_words_abai_kunanbaev_english/32.htm)). Cf. Garifolla Yesim ([1994] 2020), "Word Thirty-Two: The Requisites of Learning," in *An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh Nation: Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbaiuhli (1845–1904)*, tr. and ed. R. Charles Weller (Boston, MA: Asia Research Associates), pp. 211–212.

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I likewise owe a debt of thanks to Peter Golden, Marina Tolmacheva, Stefan Berger, Razia Sultanova, Richard Foltz, Ainur Kurmanaliyeva, Nurlykhan Aljanova and Tomohiko Uyama for reading through (various parts of) the manuscript and offering their endorsement and/or critical feedback. Their suggestions have likewise been invaluable in helping to improve the quality of this study, though I of course remain responsible for the final content and views expressed herein. Blind peer reviewers at the *Journal of Islamic Studies* along with Geoff Humble, Will Tuladhar Douglas, Willard Sunderland, Nathaniel Knight, Michael David-Fox,

Colum Leckey and Jonathan Bone have all made helpful suggestions on various portions of this study across the past five or so years, including some of the primary and secondary source material, for which I am likewise thankful. Beyond this, I am of course indebted to all those whose scholarship I have drawn on, past and present, in order to produce the present study.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Mohammad Ghaedi and Abdollah Ghaffari for their research assistance with Persian-Iranian Farsi sources, both classical and modern. Dr. Ghaedi's assistance along these lines has been particularly noteworthy. Christopher W. Card also deserves thanks for his research assistance in locating select sources relating to Nauryz (Nowruz) and Islam in particular.

I am grateful always for the ongoing support of al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KNU, Almaty, KZ) and Washington State University (WSU, Pullman, WA, USA), especially the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies within the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science at KNU and the Department of History within the College of Arts and Sciences at WSU. Special thanks are, likewise, due to both the KNU and WSU libraries and their staff for helping to locate and supply an essential wealth of primary source material, without which this study would not have been possible, particularly during the pandemic.

And finally, the support of a number of family, friends and colleagues for this work has meant a great deal. There are too many to name here, though I will make special mention of Viveka Raol, Shiv Rajurs, David Kalivas and, organizationally, the World History Association, among a good many others.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Framing the Study</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Background and Context</i>	1
	<i>The Question of Kazakh Religious-Cultural History and Identity: An Illustrative Case Study</i>	2
	<i>Concluding Reflections and Overview of Chapters and Sections</i>	9
	<b>Part I Historical Sources of Tsarist ‘Survivals’ Ethnography</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Religious-Cultural ‘Survivals’ in Euro-American and Euro-Slavic Christian and Secular Sources</b>	<b>15</b>
	<i>E.B. Tylor and Protestant Anti-Catholic Polemicists as Sources for Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography?</i>	15
	<i>Tylor and ‘Survivals’ Historiography in the Nineteenth-Century: Monotheistic Degenerational versus Evolutionary Developmental Theories of Early Human History</i>	16
	<i>‘Survivals’ Historiography in Seventeenth-Century German Enlightenment Sources</i>	20
	<i>Hebrew-Jewish and Christian Sources of ‘Survivals’ Historiography</i>	22
	<i>Nineteenth-Century Romantic Nationalism and the Russian Orthodox Tradition of ‘Dual Faith’</i>	26
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	31

<b>3</b>	<b>Middle Eastern and Central Asian Islamic Sources of ‘Survivals’ Ethnography</b>	<b>33</b>
	<i>Qur’anic and Middle Eastern Islamic Sources</i>	33
	<i>Eleventh-Century Karakhanid and Other Turkic Sources</i>	35
	<i>Sixteenth-Century Central Asian Sources</i>	42
	<i>Western (Christian) Orientalist Scholarship</i>	45
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	46
<b>4</b>	<b>‘Pre-Islamic Survivals’ Among the Kazakhs in Tsarist Russian and Kazakh Colonial Ethnography, 1770–1917</b>	<b>49</b>
	<i>Early Tsarist Colonial Ethnographers of Kazakh Religious Identity, 1770–1860</i>	50
	<i>The First Kazakh Colonial Ethnographer, Shokan Ualihanubli (1863–1865)</i>	55
	<i>‘Remnants’ Historiography and ‘the Kazakh of Kazakhs,’ Abai, in the Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries</i>	59
	<i>The Terminological Shift to ‘Perezhitki’ in Early Twentieth-Century Writings of Tsarist Russian Missionaries</i>	61
	<i>Part One Conclusion: Summary of Tsarist Historical Sources</i>	63

## Part II Historical Sources of Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography

<b>5</b>	<b>Sources and Aims of Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography in Its Initial (Pre-World War Two) Phases</b>	<b>67</b>
	<i>The Persistence of ‘Survivals’ Ethnography in Russian Orthodoxy</i>	68
	<i>‘Survivals’ Ethnography in Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin</i>	68
	<i>Tylor, Frazer and Other Euro-American Sources of Influence</i>	72
	<i>Early Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography of Kazakh and Central Asian Islamic History, 1920s–40s</i>	74
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	80
<b>6</b>	<b>Transformations in Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography in the Post-World War Two Period</b>	<b>83</b>
	<i>Soviet ‘Theoretical and Practical Narrowness in Evaluating the Beliefs and Rituals of the Peoples of Central Asia’?: G.P. Snesev’s Late-Coming Challenge</i>	83
	<i>Revisiting the Marxian-Engelsian Framework</i>	86

	<i>The Curious Absence of Concern for ‘Pre-Islamic Survivals’ in Soviet Anti-Islamic Propaganda Literature in the Pre-World War Two Period</i>	88
	<i>Snesarev and the Soviet Deployment of ‘Pre-Islamic Survivals’ for Renewed Anti-Religious Propaganda Efforts in the Post-World War Two Period</i>	94
	<i>Clarifying the Chronological Frame of Soviet ‘Survivals’ Ethnography</i>	98
	<i>The Importance of Kazakh Nomadic Steppe Culture in Snesarev’s Understanding and Deployment of ‘Pre-Islamic Survivals’ Among Other Central Asian Muslim Peoples</i>	101
	<i>Part Two Conclusion: Summary of Soviet Historical Sources</i>	102
<b>Part III</b>	<b>Historiographical Constructions of and Debates Over Kazakh Religious History and Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Kazakh Scholarship</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>The Framing of Kazakh Religious History and Identity in Post-World War Two Soviet Kazakh Publications</b>	107
	<i>Kakimzhanov, About the Reactionary Essence of the Religion of Islam (1953)</i>	108
	<i>Bisenov, The Origin of Islam and Its Class Significance (1955)</i>	113
	<i>Duisenbin, About the Religion of Islam and Its Current State (1961)</i>	121
	<i>K. Mashrapov Devotion to Islam—A Detrimental Survival (1962)</i>	124
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	125
<b>8</b>	<b>Religious-Cultural Revivalism as Historiographical Debate: Post-Soviet Kazakh Perspectives on Their Past</b>	129
	<i>Framing the Essential Issues</i>	131
	<i>Tengrist Historiography</i>	132
	<i>Islamic Approaches and Christian Interludes</i>	140
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	157



**Part IV International Post-Soviet ‘Survivals’ Scholarship  
in Global Historical Perspective**

<b>9</b>	<b>Divergent Views on the Historical and Present Relation of Shamanism and Islam in International Post- Colonialist Scholarship</b>	163
	<i>Sultanova, Zarcone and Hobart on Female Musical and Healing Traditions in Post-Soviet Studies of Shamanism and Sufism</i>	164
	<i>Deweese’s Critique of Turkish, French and Soviet Scholarship</i>	166
	<i>Revisiting the Evidence from Privratsky, Muslim Turkistan Historically Interactive and Transformational</i>	168
	<i>Understandings and Definitions of ‘Islam’ and ‘Shamanism’</i>	173
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	177
<b>10</b>	<b>Retrospect and Prospect: Situating Post- Soviet “Survivals” Scholarship Within a World Historiographical Frame</b>	181
	<i>Post-Colonialist Agendas and the Historian’s Task</i>	181
	<i>Debates Over Terminology: Beyond ‘Syncretism’ and ‘Pre- Islamic’ Constructs?</i>	184
	<i>Continuities and Discontinuities in Colonialist vs. Post- Colonialist Historiography</i>	187
	<i>In Search of the Historical End Point of Conversion</i>	189
	<i>Distinguishing Historical Fact from Fiction: Description vs. Analysis vs. Thesis</i>	190
	<i>Historiographical Trends in the Post-World War Two Era</i>	193
	<i>‘Survivals’ as Historical Heritage, ‘Remnants’ of Crosscultural Contact and Exchange</i>	197
	<i>‘Religious Survivals’, ‘Dual Faith’ and “Integral” Religious Identities</i>	201

<b>Conclusion: A Summary of the Main Points of the Study</b>	205
<b>Appendices</b>	211
<b>Notes</b>	243
<b>Bibliography: Primary Sources</b>	347
<b>Index</b>	385



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Framing the Study

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Studies of Central Asian religious history and identity are enmeshed in a complex web of religious, cultural, linguistic, economic and political dynamics taking shape in the international arena, particularly those triggered by the Soviet collapse, the post-911 ‘War on Terror,’ the rise of China and the reassertion of expansionist ambitions in Russia, most recently in Ukraine. Closely related to or emerging from these large-scale developments and trends have been the rise of ISIS as well as the Ukrainian ‘Orange,’ Georgian ‘Rose’ and Kyrgyz ‘Tulip’ revolutions together with related confrontations in a ‘New Great Game’ or ‘neo-Cold War’ involving Russia, China, the North Atlantic (cf. ‘Western’) world and Turkey over Crimea, Ukraine, the Uighurs, Chechnya and other Central Eurasian regions, resources and peoples. Central Asian religious identity and its developing trends remain therefore, as they have throughout their history, intimately tied to broader Central Eurasian and Middle Eastern Islamic ones.<sup>4</sup> And this long-time transregional exchange goes on both reflexively shaping and being shaped by the dynamics of the broader Asian and international worlds.

Against this more complex transregional and international backdrop, the historical formation of Central Asian religious identity in relation to its emerging trends today remains, as it has from at least the early nineteenth century down to the present, deeply debated. Concerning

questions of Islamic identity in particular, Devin Deweese, in his detailed study of *Islamization and Native Religion* among the Central Asian peoples, noted “a persistent fear and hostility toward Islam...combined with general unfamiliarity with the Inner Asian world” which resulted in “contradictory dismissals of Islam as either ungentle or uncivilized.”<sup>5</sup> Preoccupation in the West with Islam as a potentially violent religion reinforce this dichotomist approach, leaving little room for normalized conceptions of Muslim faith and practice. A long history of alleged ‘clashes’ between essentialized constructions of Western and Islamic ‘civilizations’ traced as far back as the very rise of Islam serve, within Western historiographical interpretations, as grounds for perpetuating such views. The rise of ISIS provides the latest proof for this paradigm. Islam remains primarily a ‘security’ issue for the Western, Russian and Chinese (cf. also Israeli) powers. Representatives of both the business and religious missionary interests of these world powers share that concern and, therefore, also desire to stem Islamic influence across not only the Middle East and North Africa, but Central Asia and the broader world. It is within this regional and global context<sup>6</sup> that the nearly two-centuries-old debates over religious history and identity in Central Asia take on renewed though transformed meaning and urgency. These debates concern, at their heart, the question of the historic and present relation of Islam to ‘pre-Islamic’ traditions within Central Asia. Although Islam is clearly the predominant faith tradition of all the Central Asian peoples, questions as to how that predominance has been achieved and maintained, and how it relates to ‘survivals’ of various ‘pre-Islamic’ traditions, remain front and center.

### THE QUESTION OF KAZAKH RELIGIOUS-CULTURAL HISTORY AND IDENTITY: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDY

While the question of ‘pre-Islamic survivals’ has remained relevant among the Uzbeks, Tajiks, Tatars and other Central Asian peoples to varying degrees, debates over the issue in relation to the Kazakhs (and Kyrgyz) have received fairly sustained and notable attention, both in national- and foreign-language scholarship, from at least the early nineteenth-century onward. My own domain of linguistic expertise also resides in Kazakh. I thus focus my main attention within this study on the question in relation to the Kazakhs, though highlight other Central

Asian peoples at key junctures along the way. Much of the deeper history of historiography and ethnography covered in the main chapters of Part One, in particular, also pertain to all of the Central Asian peoples in general, so that my focus upon the question in relation to Kazakh religious history and identity occurs primarily in Parts Three and Four as well as here in the Introduction to the volume. The question of Kazakh religious history and identity serves as both a topic of specialized focus and an illustrative case study within the broader field of Central Asian studies.

Discussions of Kazakh and broader Central Asian religious-cultural identity must be understood against the backdrop of a complex religious-cultural history involving multiple traditions emanating from both within and beyond Central Asia. Some of the most prevalent traditions which preceded Islam by many centuries and remained for long centuries beyond its initial spread into the region include Shamanism, Tengrism (indigenous ‘Sky-God’<sup>7</sup> worship), Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism and Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

From the Tsarist through the Soviet and on into the post-Soviet periods, questions have typically focused on just how genuine Kazakh Muslim identity and practice has been: Were the Kazakhs introduced to Islam early or late in their history and, relatedly, should they be counted ‘true, devout’ or only ‘casual’ Muslims ‘in name only’? Tursin Hafiz Gabitov, a professor of religious, cultural and philosophical studies at al-Farabi Kazakh National University,<sup>9</sup> in his discussion of “Relational Dynamics of Religious Systems among the Kazakhs,” overviews the main, competing perspectives as follows:

1. “The Kazakhs accepted Islam formally only late in their history, and it had a negative impact on the national culture” (missionary point of view);
2. “In traditional Kazakh culture the influence of shamanism, Zoroastrianism, and Tengrism is more predominate than Islam, so these earlier religions need to be revived anew” (archaistic [cf. ‘venerer’] point of view);
3. “Though Muslim mentality is predominate in the south of Kazakhstan, in other regions Islam was not spread so widely; some of the people of those regions are even the descendants of Buddhists, Nestorian Christians, and Manicheans” (separatist point of view);

4. “Kazakhs accepted the religion of Islam under the influence of people of Central Asia [i.e. Uzbeks in the south] and those along the Volga River [i.e. Tatars from the north]” (the theory of outside influence); and
5. “The religion of the Kazakhs has never gone beyond the level of ancient mythology and ritual” (myth-ritual [cf. ‘venerer’] point of view).

Among recent Muslim scholars located in the West, one of the more prominent writers on Islamic history in Central Asia, Adeb Khalid, holds that “the Islamization of the Kazakhs was...completed only in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>10</sup> While he does not explicitly state that the Kazakhs held to ‘pre-Islamic’ beliefs and practices up to this point, it is clearly implied. Among Western and presumably non-Muslim scholars continuing to locate primary religious identity for the Kazakhs in various ‘pre-Islamic’ religious-cultural traditions, Richard Foltz, in his study of *Religions of the Silk Road*, considers Islam a shallow overlay covering deeper historical traditions. He, thus, suggests that “[t]o this day among the Kazakhs one can find shamans who perform traditional shamanistic rituals using the Qur’an, Arabic letters, and such.”<sup>11</sup> In similar fashion, James Thrower, in his study of *The Religious History of Central Asia from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, holds that “[t]he Kazakhs, who were not finally converted to Islam until well into the nineteenth century, are the least Islamicised of all the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, continuing to observe much of their traditional religion even to the present-day. ...It was, in fact, the Russians who encourage[d] the Kazakhs to become Muslims...”<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Ira M. Lapidus, within his original as well as recently revised study of the history of *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century*, advances the view that among the Kazakhs, “Islam...probably made little headway until the eighteenth century, when Tatar merchants, missionaries, secretaries, and teachers helped construct mosques and schools” and even then “[t]heir practice of Islam...merged ancient folk beliefs and traditions with new religious practices.”<sup>13</sup>

These serve as just a few examples from several prominent scholars writing on Central Asian religious history.<sup>14</sup> All of these works, it should be noted, are general introductions or broad surveys, not specialized studies of Kazakh religious history and identity. Thrower’s work provides the most comprehensive coverage—though broadly of Central Asia, not specifically the Kazakhs. Even more, it is a draft manuscript published

posthumously on his behalf by a colleague. It relies heavily on secondary Russian and English sources. And Thrower's main expertise was Soviet atheism and its historiographical and ethnographical treatment of early world religious history, not Central Asian religious history.

Following trends in post-colonialist historiography, other Western scholars have assessed these inherited Tsarist- and Soviet-influenced perspectives more critically. They counter by defending an authentically (cf. "integral") Islamic identity for the Kazakhs, albeit one still often distinguished as a unique but genuine expression of Islam which preserves and integrates numerous Central Asian religious-cultural traditions. Chief among these is Devin Dewese. His primary works treat issues of religious conversion and identity among Central Asian Muslims in the Mongol and post-Mongol periods, preceding but historically related to the later rise of the Kazakhs. In his study of *Islamization and Native Religion*, Dewese denounces "a litany of uncritically accepted pronouncements on Islamization" as "clearly flawed by a remarkable misunderstanding both of the nature of Islam and of the indigenous religious conceptions that preceded Islamization" while "at the same time" being "patently uninformed by any of the conceptual tools developed over the last century for the humanities and social sciences by the field of *Religionswissenschaft*." This is, Dewese insists, largely because scholars "have rarely looked further than nineteenth-century descriptions, and, more important, have never 'listened' to indigenous accounts of intertwining religious and ethnic identities." For Dewese, "[i]t is the critical value of such indigenous accounts of conversion that must be stressed" because they provide "our *only* access to the *meaning* of conversion for those peoples."<sup>15</sup>

Deweese expresses concern that Central Asian "historical identities" have never been "seriously examined in [their] historical context." One should not think because of this, however, that he is concerned with the actual history of conversion as it took place. In his view,

even a thorough reconstruction of the historical setting and events that occurred, and even a precise description of 'what happened' could not convey the *significance* of the conversion understood and felt, religiously, by the adherents of the new faith and their communal heirs. The 'conversion' happened, and had historical antecedents and consequences, but in and of itself was at the same time beyond the ken of historical constructions.<sup>16</sup>

Correspondingly, his work is not a history of Islamization in Central Asia, but an in-depth analysis of one particular conversion narrative—namely Otemish Hajji’s mid-sixteenth-century account of the early fourteenth-century conversion of Ozbek Khan of the Golden Horde, its “meaning of conversion for those peoples,” and “its many echoes” among various Central Asian Muslim peoples across the ages.<sup>17</sup> Dewese’s study follows the comparative history of religions school epitomized by Mircae Eliade<sup>18</sup> as well as the ‘cultural turn’ in historiography pioneered by Clifford Geertz and other anthropologists in the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> It is vast and rich, thoroughly informed and persuasive, a monumental and impressive contribution to the field. Certain of his comparative interpretational suggestions, however, driven as they are by foundational assumptions and goals shaped by the post-colonial, particularly post-Soviet debates he is addressing, raise important questions about his thesis.

Following Dewese, and completing his doctoral work under him, Allen J. Frank has done more than any other scholar to-date to address issues of religious history and identity among the Kazakhs (as well as certain other Central Asian Muslim peoples). Particularly noteworthy here would be, first, his chapter on “Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742–1917: Toward an Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule.” He also published a volume titled *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780–1910*. It is a study “based primarily on a single manuscript...written in 1910” by a Muslim scholar of the time. Beyond this, he worked with Mirkasyim A. Usmanov to produce a co-edited volume titled *An Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe, 1770–1912* which, with an introduction, provides a translation of a 1912 manuscript originally published by another Muslim scholar of the time. Along with his chapter surveying developments between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, Frank (with assistance from Usmanov) provides an enormous wealth of detail to help clarify major gaps as well as correct Tsarist and Western misrepresentations of the crucial period covered. At the same time, crucial questions are raised by uncritical dependence on certain of his sources as well as his attempts to make broad, sweeping generalizations about issues of broader religious history and identity based on the limited, local historical sources and periods he treats.

Heavily influenced by the work of both Geertz and Dewese, Bruce G. Privratsky produced an in-depth study of *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak*



*Religion and Collective Memory* (2001). Privratsky, like Deweese and Frank, takes up the cause of answering Tsarist, Soviet and Western approaches which deny the essential “integrity” of Kazakh Muslim identity. He thus makes his main aim to defend “the premise that the Kazak ancestors were Muslim.” However, whereas Deweese takes a cultural and comparative history of religions approach centered in the post-Mongol era, and Frank, methodologically and disciplinarily, a more conventional historical approach concentrating on the late Tsarist age, Privratsky utilizes the tools of cultural anthropology to demonstrate the authentic and integral Muslim nature of Kazakh religious identity and practice in the post-Soviet period, interspersing within the first two chapters limited critical discussion of the nineteenth-century historiographical paradigms he seeks to set straight. Privratsky’s work, like that of Deweese, follows the ‘cultural turn’ in anthropological and historical studies (see Chapter 10, Conclusion). In doing so, he walks a very fine, ambivalent line between downplaying the need for “a religious ethnohistory [to] be reconstructed in detail” and “cultural pressures, whether native or foreign, demanding that a people build its identity honorably from genuine historical sources.”<sup>20</sup>

Three additional works which have followed Privratsky’s anthropological approach and carry the discussion beyond the Kazakhs to other Central Asian peoples, particularly the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, are, first, Maria E. Louw’s 2007 study of *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. In a review of the work published in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Deweese commended Louw’s work for being, in his own estimation, “free of the influence of interpretative models entrenched during Soviet times, and gratifyingly unsullied by the unfruitful approaches to religion, and especially the focus on political Islam, characteristic of the Sovietological literature on Islam in Central Asia.”<sup>21</sup> Louw foregrounded the ‘Muslim’ identity of her subjects over and above their ethnic-national or cultural identities. She drew her primary anthropological data from observations and interviews conducted in and around Bukhara, where a ‘Bukharan’ identity is still emphasized in large measure among both Uzbeks and Tajiks living there, over against their distinct ethnic or national identities, harkening back to the Bukharan Emirate, as a means of maintaining peace, harmony and friendship. The latter reflects ongoing influence of Soviet concerns reappropriated in a post-Soviet context. A shared history, together with a shared territory and a shared ‘Muslim’ identity, all serve as focal points of their shared and thus harmonious

identity.<sup>22</sup> How these historical-cultural, linguistic, religious and geo-political factors influenced the outcomes of Louw's study are not clear. Neither are they grappled with in Deweese's review, which praises her for prioritizing 'Muslim' over cultural, ethnic and/or national identity.

In contrast, David Montgomery's 2016 study of *Practicing Islam: Knowledge, Experience, and Social Navigation in Kyrgyzstan* aimed to construct an 'anthropology of religious knowledge,' yet insisted that it is misleading to use any one "common denominator," including religious (particularly 'Muslim') identity, to describe how various people understand themselves and navigate everyday life accordingly. When 'Muslimness' played a role in his 'informants' lives, he highlighted various understandings of 'Islam' among even family members and friends, definitions and understandings which almost always involved their own personal as well as local-regional contexts. Though focused on Kyrgyzstan, particularly the regions of Osh and Naryn, Montgomery's work includes ethnic Uzbeks living there. He conducted his fieldwork on various visits between 1999 and 2013, with particular emphasis given to an extensive survey conducted in 2005. It should be noted that elsewhere, in his chapter on "Religion" within his edited volume on *Central Asia: Contexts for Understanding* published in 2022, Montgomery asserted that "[r]emnants of the earlier traditions are largely that: remnants. Islam remains the most prevalent of the confessional traditions..."<sup>23</sup> While he clearly minimizes "remnants" (cf. 'survivals') within post-Soviet Central Asia, he does not dismiss them entirely, and does not offer any indication of what he perceives the balance between "the earlier," i.e., 'pre-Islamic,' "traditions" and Islam to be.

One year after Montgomery, Julie McBrien published a study titled *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*. She was concerned with elucidating both the distinction as well as intersecting relations between secularism, religion and national identity from a uniquely post-Soviet as opposed to Eurocentric point of view. She teased out tensions which have developed as post-Soviet approaches to Islam grounded primarily in 'belief' have confronted former Soviet communal emphases of religious-cultural identity. She drew primarily from fieldwork conducted in 2003–2004 in the Ferghana Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan where the encounter of these approaches was particularly noticeable.

All three of these works lack deeper historical grounding, though they provide varying limited measures of broader historical context. Like

Privratsky, they follow a cultural anthropological approach which concerns itself more with self-understandings of ‘Muslim’ identity and practice in the present, i.e., the post-Soviet context in this case, rather than conclusions drawn from a more thorough-going historical study based in all the available historical sources, primary and secondary. In this respect, they are concerned more with ‘history as (collective) memory,’ or ‘history and (collective) memory,’ than with actual history. They thus yield understandings of and implications for ‘Muslim identity’ which have more psychological-social than historical groundings. While these types of studies are certainly important and have their own validity, the distinctions remain necessary and significant.

With a view to more conventional historical scholarship, two other works merit mention here in closing out this overview: First, an edited volume on *Kazakhstan: Religions and Society in the History of Central Eurasia* which features various contributions from noteworthy Central Asian as well as Western scholars.<sup>24</sup> It covers the earliest beginnings down to the mid-twentieth century, supplying, among much else, new archival research on Kazakh and Central Asian Muslim identity in the post-Mongol period within a framework emphasizing religious pluralism in the heartland of the ‘Silk Roads.’ Finally, Robert D. Crews’ chapter on “Nomads into Muslims” in *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* is probably the most fair and balanced treatment to-date of the debate over Kazakh religious history and identity in nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia.<sup>25</sup> He offers in-depth analysis of the views of Levshin, Malov, Babadzhanov, Valihanov and other key voices of the age adorned with liberal quotes from their works, wisely and skillfully leaving the ‘critical tension’ inherent in the debate unresolved, as indeed it was and remains.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS AND SECTIONS

All of the works highlighted above grapple with the question of ‘pre-Islamic survivals’ among the Central Asian peoples—the Kazakhs in particular—and the role that Tsarist and Soviet ethnography played in shaping the interpretations of their religious identity in direct connection to those alleged ‘survivals.’

Because of their centrality in the study of Kazakh and broader Central Asian religious history and identity, this work is concerned with understanding, first, the origins and aims of both Tsarist and Soviet historiography and ethnography of Central Asia. Of particular interest is their shared focus on ‘pre-Islamic survivals’—or ‘remnants,’ ‘vestiges,’ ‘traces,’ ‘relics,’ etc. cf. also ‘remains,’ ‘ruins’; Russian: остатки, следы, пережитки, реликты; cf. also сохранили; Kazakh: сарқыны, қалдықтары—and their distinctive appropriations of those interrelated constructs (or concepts) for religious missionary, social-legal, political identity and other imperial purposes. When, why and how did the Tsarist and Soviet ethnographic traditions each begin distinguishing between ‘pre-Islamic’ and ‘Islamic’ identity in Central Asia via the conceptual apparatus of ‘remnants/survivals’ and what is the historical relation between these two historiographical/ethnographic schools, as well as the historical relation of each to other European, Middle Eastern and Central Asian traditions of both religious and secular historiography? As the ensuing study will demonstrate, the answer to these questions involves placing Tsarist and Soviet scholarship within a broader global frame of ‘remnants/survivals’ historiography and ethnography tracing its roots back to Hebrew-Jewish, Christian and Islamic sacred texts and the cultural-civilizational traditions which they helped shape.

Parts One and Two (Chapters 2–6) of this study thus trace the historical roots of the conceptual lens of ‘survivals’ from the late nineteenth-century theories of E.B. Tylor, James Frazer and others, in debate with monotheistic ‘degenerationists’ and Protestant anti-Catholic polemicists, back to their origins in Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions—inclusive of Russian Orthodoxy—as well as later more secularized forms in the German Enlightenment and Romanticist movements, down to their appropriations by both Tsarist and Soviet ethnographers of Muslim Central Asia for their respective religious missionary, social-legal, political identity and other imperial purposes. A close, careful reading of these chapters reveals that what may appear on the surface (by way of a more cursory reading) as various, disparate historiographies are, in fact, historically interconnected strands all tying into Tsarist and Soviet appropriations of ‘pre-Islamic survivals’ within their respective historiographies and ethnographies of the Central Asian peoples.

Part Three (Chapters 7 and 8) moves on to analyze historiographical depictions and related debates over Kazakh and broader Central Asian religious identity among Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakh (as opposed

to Russian) sources in particular. Once again here, though the primary focus is upon the Kazakhs, the historiographical depictions and related debates contain both reference to and relevance for other Central Asian Muslim peoples. While the phrasing “pre-Islamic survivals” is not always explicitly employed in all the historiography covered in Part Three, the question of “pre-Islamic survivals” in relation to Kazakh (and other Central Asian) Islamic identity is always central.

Parts One and Two are thus concerned with the history of the concept (or construct) of “pre-Islamic survivals” while Part Three is focused upon the resulting historiography, where the concept is not always explicitly employed but is always nonetheless implicitly present. Appendix One ties in closely with Part Three inasmuch as it covers a historiographical debate between two late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century Tsarist figures over the question of Kazakh religious identity in relation to the impact of the late eighteenth-century liberal Enlightenment policies of Catherine II on their Islamization.

Part Four (Chapters 9 and 10) of the volume addresses the central issues raised in the volume by revisiting the problem of “pre-Islamic survivals” in post-Soviet international scholarship. It raises critical points about some of the more influential Western scholarship in particular, in direct relation to Central Asian national sources. Picking up from especially Chapters 7 and 8, Chapter 9 pays special attention to the problem of “Shamanism and Islam.” Chapter 10 then expands the discussion by highlighting the complexity of the overall problem of “pre-Islamic survivals” within broader world historiographical trends, both those emerging and taking shape within the Western world in the post-World War Two era as well as Turkish and Iranian traditions grappling with some of the same points of debate over the question of “pre-Islamic survivals.”

The study includes comparative analysis of Edvard Westermarck’s 1933 study of *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, historiographical debates over “pre-Islamic Survivals” among Black African and South Asian Muslim Peoples, and critique of the legacy of Clifford Geertz and Western post-colonialist scholarship in relation to diverging trends of historiography in the post-World War Two era, particularly UNESCO’s “History of Humanity” project. The latter intentionally aimed to counter the exclusivist-oriented nationalist and racist historiographical trends which fed into Nazi Germany and the resulting Holocaust, Apartheid South Africa and the segregationist United States, along with other colonialist-imperialist projects.

Drawing from European, Central Asian, Middle Eastern and world history, the fields of ethnography and anthropology, as well as Christian and Islamic studies, this volume contributes to scholarship on ‘syncretism’ and ‘conversion’; definitions of Islam; history as identity and heritage; religion, ethnicity and nationalism; pluralism and multiculturalism; interreligious relations; crosscultural contact and exchange in world history; and more. It adds to discussions taken up by L.R. Rambo and C.E. Farhadian, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (2014), A.M. Leopold and J.S. Jensen, eds., *Syncretism in Religion* (2014), W.H. Harrison, *In Praise of Mixed Religion: The Syncretism Solution in a Multifaith World* (2014), Elana Jefferson-Tatum, “Beyond Syncretism and Colonial Legacies in the Study of Religion” (2020), S. Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2015), L. Stenberg and P. Wood, eds., *What is Islamic Studies? European and North American Approaches to a Contested Field* (2022), J.H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (1993), J.T. Davidann and M.J. Gilbert, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Modern World History, 1453-Present* (2018), S. Berger, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (2015), UNESCO’s *History of Humanity* project (1946–2009) and more.

This marks the first extended study of “survivals” to-date as it pertains specifically to Tsarist and Soviet historiographical and ethnographical traditions within Central Asia. It is one of the few studies to focus on ‘survivals’ as a conscious conceptual lens for the study of human history and culture since Margaret Hodgen, *The Doctrine of Survivals: A Chapter in the History of Scientific Method in the Study of Man* (1936). It builds upon the seminal work of Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: ‘Double Belief’ and the Making of an Academic Myth* (2007), along with foundational inquiries into Tsarist and Soviet ethnography of Islamic Central Asia by Francine Hirsch (2005), Vladimir Bobrovnikov (2011), Devin Dewese (2011), John Schoeberlein (2011) and S.S. Alymov (2013). It adds significantly to the historical depth and scope of these investigations while also revising certain suggestions advanced within their seminal scholarship. It is carefully grounded in original research based on primary source material, interacting with relevant secondary scholarship in various fields, including a wealth of Kazakh and other Central Asian national scholarship.