

Creating knowledge about Islam of the Kazakh steppe: The Steppe, the Empire, and the Outsider

HST 499: Capstone Project

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Introduction

Thesis: The depiction of Islam that the Qazaqs practiced during the 19th and early 20th centuries differed hugely in the accounts of the outsiders and insiders. The first group, which included colonizers and foreigners, had specific purposes while creating accounts of this religion. One of the primary aims was, as Edward Said puts it, to justify their colonial presence in the region and oppressive policies toward these nomads. They depicted the Qazaqs as backward, uncivilized, and uneducated subjects who did not believe truly in Islam and were not true Muslims¹. Christian missionaries were present in the steppe and tried to convert the locals into Christianity. They believed blindly that they could convert the locals to Christianity, but after a couple of attempts failed and the tsarist government just decided to use Islam as a tool to control the locals by sending Tatar Muslims to the steppe and assigning them into positions of the steppe religious community before 1868. In 1868, Qazaqs were excluded from the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly. On the other hand, the insiders like Abay Kunanbayev, Ibrai Altynsarin, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, and others assumed that the nomads were also old in the religious education and other spheres, that they did not follow the laws of sharia' and mullahs played a fake role in their communities. Though they did not follow all the norms of Islam, they still believed in Allah, which can be seen from their oral literature that they passed down to the next generations by word of mouth. Thus, this research project will argue that there were huge differences in the depiction of Islam in the different accounts of both insiders and outsiders. Varying negative description of the representatives of the local Muslim workers can illustrate the way how the outsiders and insiders illustrated the state of affairs of Islam in the steppe. The next thing is connected with the way the tsarist government used the Muslim scholar and clerics and the construction of mosques as the means of promoting imperial goals in the region. All of this influenced the way they described Islam in their works.

¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 11.

In contrast, this paper will state that the insiders described the religious part of the ordinary people as being sincere and devoted to their motherland and Islam, and could not state that the Qazaqs were lacking traits that Muslims should have. Religion was in their hearts and souls, the insiders wholeheartedly illustrated religion in their works as something sacred and personal. The paper will also argue that the Qazaq Islam that the nomads had professed was a kind of protection against Christianization policies and overall colonial politics and the goals of the imperial government toward the steppe. Though the imperial efforts (full colonization and use of the steppe's resources) failed as their reforms and Christian missionaries could not find support among the nomads.

The overall pattern of connection of Islam with the locals' life is also deeply connected with the other beliefs that the nomads professed. There was a mix of religions across the steppe. The past of the steppe dwellers shows that there were a couple of religious and spiritual currents (shamanism, Tengri, Umai, etc.) that were present in the steppe before the advent of the colonizers. It is important to mention them because they played an important role in their lifestyle and adherence to Islam - added value to their existence and could affect their beliefs in Allah. In the past, they practiced *shamanism* (beliefs in spirits) and *tengrianstvo* (the term appears later, which means belief in the Sky - Tengri). During times of Russian presence on the steppe, there were attempts to convert the locals to Christianity, which failed², and then there was a wave of Islamization, which stopped later. It was first identified by Ilminskii (1822-1891), a Russian Turkologist, who stated that there was a danger of Pan-Islamic unity among the Muslims of the whole Russian empire³. That was a real danger for the empire because it could damage its plans (extraction of resources for enriching its economy) towards the steppe. Overall, an insider Chokan Valikhanov (famous Qazaq ethnographer) argued that Qazaqs were not Muslims because he witnessed that Qazaqs do not

² Malikov, Y. (2013). *Disadvantaged neophytes of the privileged religion: why Qazaqs did not become Christians* (pp. 181-212). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 185.

³ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals in the Tsarist Period: Sharī'a, Secularism, and Ethics* (pp. 95-118). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 102.

really believe in Allah, they did not pray 5 times per day, and others⁴. Nevertheless, it is stated that that was just the projection of the colonizers' point of view, an external outlook at the deep problem of illiteracy of the local religious representatives (from their viewpoint), corruption, laziness and cruelty of the ruling elite. Ordinary Qazaqs had different beliefs in their hearts and souls, they were not external Muslims – they were deep believers, which the insiders tried to show in their oral works. Overall, the outsiders and insiders of Islam usually look at the representatives of the religious community, their level of education, and the religiosity of the nomads (whom they believed).

2. Context of economic, social, and religious affairs of the steppe region during the Imperial Russian Rule

2.1. The overall trends before the advent of Russians

This section will help to put the whole main arguments into the context of what was happening before the advent of Russians and during their presence in the steppe. It is important to connect what happened before Russians, as it will be possible to observe their changing policies towards Islam. This, in turn, will influence how the outsiders and insiders will describe the religion respectively. Though the state of affairs of Islam did not change radically during both periods, certain trends were evident - will be discussed below.

Life during the whole period of obeying the Russian empire was full of different difficult events that the steppe nation had to go through. It was an unusual time when people had to survive the turning points of their history. Before entering into the Russian empire there had already been many social, economic, and religious problems. The most devastating ones were pursuing wars between native clans over land, horses, and women and poverty of the major part of the population

⁴ Valikhanov, C. (1984). *Sobranie sochinenii v pyati tomah* (Vol. 4). Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk Qazahskoy SSR.

– *sharua* (ordinary people). Qazaqs were envious of each other and frequently spread rumors.

Unfortunately, these are the bad fruits of the prolonged struggle to resist the invasions of numerous enemies like the Persian empire, Arabs, Mongols, Christians from the West, who tried to convert them into Catholicism, and oirats with dzhunghars from the Chinese border in 1642. The only state that did not try to invade the steppe was the Russian empire from the northern part of the Eurasian continent. The Qazaq ruler of the Kishi Orda (Small Orda) applied to the Russian empire for help to resist the dzhunghars from the east. The danger was so tremendous that the Abul'khayr khan asked Empress Anna Ioannovna for assistance in fighting this stubborn enemy⁵. The reason for it was the disunity of the Qazaqs as a nation – they were weak and at war with each other and could not take steps towards the unification of their nation. Imperial Russia was the last chance for the Qazaqs to save their country from foreign invasion.

Poverty as a socio-economic stagnation factor in the society and problems associated with it

The socio-economic state of the steppe khanates was also quite weak. There was a large gap between poor and wealthy people called *bais*. Life on the steppe was not comfortable compared to Italy and Greece peninsulas, where the weather conditions were more favorable to exist. In contrast, the climate here was unpredictable. There may be snow, rain, or heat. Thus, the lifestyle of the steppe dwellers was nomadic, they moved from one place to another in search of the best land with good weather and pastures⁶. Their main source of food was their animals, especially horses, their major friends in fights against rivals. There were rich people with numerous herds, but there were also very poor people, who could not make their ends meet. This could be seen in

⁵ Suleimenov, B. (1981). *Kazakhstan v sostave Rossii v XVIII-nachale XX veka*. Ripol Klassik, 6.

⁶ Potapov, L. (1954). *O sushnosti patriarhal'no-feodal'nih otnosheniy u kochevnykh narodov Sredney Azii i Qazahstana.*, 73.

the cases when poor families sold their children to other families so that they could buy livestock for their other children and survive this severe weather⁷.

History of the steppe education and associated problems in this sphere

The locals also could not receive satisfactory education, as there was a lack of people who could teach; they usually bought lessons from the teachers⁸. Elementary and secondary education were the maximum that children could receive for quite a big amount of money. Higher education was available only for affluent families, like that of Abay Kunanbayev or Chokan Valikhanov. These individuals received comparatively good education through their families (grandmothers and mothers). In the case of Abay Kunanbayev, a famous Qazaq thinker and founder of the Qazaq literature, he gained good instruction from his family members like his grandmother, whose name was Zere. She was a very intelligent person with a kind soul and open mind, keen on telling stories and teaching her grandson various disciplines. Similarly, Chokan Valikhanov comes from a rich family, to be precise, *ak suyek*, which means descendent of Chinggiskhan, who was already considered to be the richest clan in the whole Qazaq shezhire (genealogy of family members), overall society. These people had their origins in the great Mongolian khan, who once defeated almost the whole of Eurasia in the past. Overall, not all people were literate as we are now, and they accumulated the basics of literacy in their homes, to be precise, *families*. Fathers and mothers passed down their knowledge to their children and that was the beginning version of education that they could acquire in those conditions.

There were *mektebs* and *medreses*, which Qazaqs inherited from the Arabs, who came to the steppe to spread Islam over the locals. In fact, Arabs helped them to build such educational

⁷ Naganuma, H. (2015). *Islam, society and states across the Qazaq Steppe (18th–early 20th centuries)*, 582.

⁸ Abdigapbarova, Z. (2017, February). “*Oyan, Qazaq*”: *A Challenge to Colonialism*. Global Art Publications, 4th International Symposium on Asian Languages and Literatures: Understanding Culture (ADES-IV), Aurangabad, INDIA, 369.

confessional institutions. They managed to build a few such places, where children learned *Arabic* and *Quran*, a Holy Book in Islam. In fact, there were few such available places across the steppe, they were present in big cities like Sauran, Sairam, Turkestan, Taraz, and others. The teachers were educated in these big cities like Bukhara and Samarkand medreses⁹. Students learned different subjects connected with Islam, they were enlightened by the very presence of the Quran in their studies, the teachers studied in Mecca, Medina, Turkey, Egypt, and other places and came back to their home towns and taught the locals the basic subject and more advanced subjects in medreses and universities. Such was the state of affairs in the religious area starting from the 9th century with the advent of Arabs to the steppe. The great Sasanid empire came to the steppe approximately near that time and strengthened its influence across the steppe by building new schools and accepting local intellectuals to their native educational institutions. However, there was a lack of printed books and a lack of smart hard-working people, who would be interested in teaching others. If there were such, then they would rarely prefer to share their knowledge with others, because of their laziness, which was the biggest challenge on the way of the progress of the Qazaq society. The local mullahs (Muslim religious leaders) were not properly educated, could not possibly educate the new generations. What they could teach others, if they were themselves superstitious and fanatical¹⁰.

Laziness as a sign of degradation of the Qazaq society and one of the most influential factors in the development of societies

⁹ Adilcanov, G. (2004). *Islam as a part of the Kazak identity and Chokan Valikhanov* (Doctoral dissertation, Bilkent University),19.

¹⁰ Awezov, M.O. (2014). *Shygarmalarynyn elu tomdyk tolyk zhinagi. Makalalar, zertteuler, piesa (1943-1946)*. Awezov atyndagy Adebiet zhane oner instituti, 243; Sanbayev, S. (Ed.) (1983). *Slova Nazidaniya of Abay (Words of Wisdom of Abay)*. Almaty: Zhaly Press, 16.

Unfortunately, there were many Qazaqs, who made zero contributions to their own existence¹¹.

There are many sources that point out this disadvantage. For example, in his works Abay Kunanbayev puts emphasis on this negative psychological trait of a person. His *Slova-nazidaniya* (Words of Wisdom) clearly showed this common drawback. Writing about own nation, he expressed disappointment and regrets; he explicitly showed this contagious sin. In addition to this, he made it clear that Qazaqs lost their true innate traits like honesty, passion for work, honesty, and ability to progress. They became lazy and unworthy of existence on the territory of his homeland. It is a sin, which is bad and destructive. It is commonly the reason for many wars and the reason for the existence of inequality between people of different classes. In Quran, it is a sin, a major enemy of a person. Abay's *Words of Wisdom* show such a trend, and many times repeat this statement about laziness being the destructor of nations.

Cruelty, greediness, and robbery as a poison for both rich and poor people

Cruelty was a main decisive ingredient for the allocation of resources between clans. The tribe leaders were deaf and cruel towards enemies and their own people. They pretended to be generous and kind towards others just to conserve their place under the sun. They did not pay attention to the real problems of their tribes.

They were greedy and eager to expand their territories and herds. For example, barympta was a salient example of the cruelty and greediness of the locals (Januszkiewicz). Not only the rich people were outstanding examples of these detrimental traits, but ordinary people were also likewise. They obeyed their *bais*, to be precise, masters, and robbed them, if they had an urgent or ordinary need for their possessions. Overall, this is an additional example of the gap between social classes. Poverty often brought about cruel behavior, inequality, crimes, and misery of the thousands of laypeople. The rulers were like examples to their people, and the last ones usually

¹¹ Sanbayev, S. (Ed.) (1983). *Slova Nazidaniya of Abay (Words of Wisdom of Abay)*, 11.

preferred to act as their masters. They committed crimes relentlessly and frequently. Though the reasons for such crimes differed. The ordinary people resorted to them due to the necessity to survive those harsh times, while the rich ones – to satisfy their appetite and routine days of painless existence. They did not see and understand how their people lived and, thus, were falsified judges of their fates. How could such people rule and contribute to the prosperity of their clans? That is the question that is deeply rooted in their religious beliefs. Similarly, their beliefs differed: the majority of bais did not truly believe in *allah* (God in Islam); they thought that they were the divine rulers, that God gave them the right to rule¹². God gave them the privileges of the heavenly princes. In fact, that was just an illusion.

In Quran, everyone is equal in front of allah. He does not have any favorites like in the usual harem or schools. At the end of their lives, he will decide who will go to paradise or hell. However, bais tended to forget it, while lay people tried to pray to God and ask for remedies for their miserable existence. They had to kill or rob others, though such explanations should not be considered as a credible justification for their sins. Abay's *Words of Wisdom* clearly mention such clarifications and it seems that he overthought them, while sitting in a warm yurt. He referred to the upper social class, as it was previously mentioned. There was hunger, poverty, unequal distribution of resources, and a lot of misery. His open-minded vision pointed out at the weak features of the state and the whole society.

Superstitions

When it comes to superstitions, there is a long story to be told about them. Before the advent of Arabs, the locals believed in many things. They found many reasons to believe in *Ten (sky)*, *Umay (mother)*, and *the spirits of their ancestors* – main idols. On the one hand, they called to them

¹² Sanbayev, S. (Ed.) (1983). *Slova Nazidaniya of Abay (Words of Wisdom of Abay)*, 26.

through *shamans* and asked for help in harsh situations¹³. There were many *emshiler* (traditional medicine healers) and sacred places, where they could treat themselves through the connection to God. They lived in harmony with nature and did not try to damage it consciously. Though there were a plethora of superstitions, which contributed to their fates and harmonious existence with the surrounding clans¹⁴. For example, throwing bread and other products into the trash could damage their lives and bring some sort of chaos or bad luck to their families and later descendants. Of course, there were other interpretations of this example, but in most cases, people believed them. Nowadays we still have such superstitions and people readily trust them. Such beliefs in extraordinary cases survived and are remembered by many Qazaqs. If they remember them, then there is some truth about them. Many outsiders think that these superstitions were a sign of backwardness and proposed that the locals were just like kids who need to be civilized. Thus, different theories (Sabol and Said will be discussed a bit later) arose during the active colonization of the third world to justify metropol's imperial rule as it was in Great Britain, Denmark, Spain, Italy, and Portugal. Overall, superstitions were like a tool to create knowledge about locals and especially about Islam, as this knowledge would help the colonizers to dictate the conditions of life in colonized nations.

2.2 Trends during the rule of Imperial Russia

The conditions that were prior to the advent of Russians were the same even during Imperial Russia, they even exacerbated "a little bit". There was a strong misunderstanding between Russians and the steppe dwellers. The first ones wanted to use the last ones for their own benefit and extract as much profit from them as they could like in business processes. A similar position was held by Great Britain and others: they wanted to colonize less powerful nations and use them

¹³ Vámbéry, Á. (1868). *Sketches of Central Asia: additional chapters on my travels, adventures, and on the ethnology of Central Asia*. Wm. H. Allen & Company, 291.

¹⁴ Валиханов, Ч. Ч. (1984). *Собрание сочинений в пяти томах* (Vol. 4). Изд-во Академии наук Казахской ССР, 49.

as a source for their own businesses. However, Russian colonial politics differed hugely from that of the metropolises. The last ones fully exploited the “barbarous” nations and treated them as real slaves, while the Russian colonial administration was instructed to adhere to less strict instructions. The more active colonization of the steppe occurred during the beginning of the 1800s with the first travelers – ethnographers – who went to Central Asia and collected all available information on the steppe and made notes on locals’ traditions, lifestyles, religious beliefs, geography, and other topics. Levshin and Semenov-Tyanshanskiy were vivid examples of travelers, who underwent a journey there and created travelogs about locals. They wrote down everything that they saw, they could not derive knowledge from the local sources, as there was not enough information about them. The steppe did not give birth to a huge number of intellectuals, but there were still those, who could share their wisdom with others. However, such people preferred to hide in their *yurts* (round houses) because they were lazy or afraid of censorship and exile to Siberia. Nevertheless, Chokan Valikhanov emerged along with Abay Kunanbayev, Ybyrai Altynsarin, Dulat Babataiuli, Shortanaby Qanaiuli, Mashhur Zhusip, and Shakarim Kudaiberdiyev.

Some of those Qazaq intellectuals stayed devoted to their homelands, while others became fully imperial servants. They described Islam from different angles depending on their background, subsequent careers, and surroundings. But the conditions of their steppe, a common home, remained the same. The steppe tribes were deeply fragmented, poverty, corruption, laziness, and cruelty flourished as it was before the Russians. The latter ones only contributed to the division between those who support the imperial regime and those who neglect it and support traditional lifestyles – nomadism.

Additionally, Christianization took place in the beginning of active colonization. Russians and outsiders naively considered that they could easily convert Qazaqs into their religion. But the steppe showed resistance to them and conserved their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, some Qazaqs

changed their religion, as they wanted to gain higher positions in the colonial bureaucracy and were considered poor “neophytes” , who were restricted even more than before Christianization¹⁵. Later, as Malikov states, the colonial council began active Islamization of the locals to make them obey and educate them. However, Qazaqs adhered to Islam even before this disinforming politics. It is possible that the empire just wanted to sedentarize (make them sedentary dwellers) Qazaqs and make them loyal subjects to his or her Imperial Majesty. Thanks to Catherine the Great, “toleration of all religions” took place and many lives were saved in contrast with the West, which persecuted heretics for centuries before and years to come¹⁶.

The common problem that existed during those harsh times was the illiteracy of the religious elite – *imams, hodjas, and others*. They could poorly read Quran and take advantage of those, who applied to them for help. Additionally, their service to the Russian empire put them in the position of *parasites*, who depended on the colonizers. They worked as religious leaders just to earn money for their families and pretend that they were like *bais* or even higher and stronger than the previous ones. They also imagined that they were divine workers, who derive power from the God and are allowed to work and disseminate justice and kindness. However, that was not a case, some of them were corrupt, dishonest, did nothing to deserve the right to connect people with the God.

At the end of the nineteenth century, there was a new movement of Tatar Muslims, who wanted to modernize the existing Islamic community. They aspired to catch up with the latest trends of the West in terms of science. It was called *jadidism*, a new term, which became popular among many enlightened *imams and hodjas*¹⁷. They went to the steppe to spread a word about this and

¹⁵ Malikov, Y. (2013). *Disadvantaged neophytes of the privileged religion: why Qazaqs did not become Christians*, 182.

¹⁶ Fisher, A. W. (1968). *Enlightened despotism and Islam under Catherine II*. *Slavic Review*, 27(4), 542-553, 543.

¹⁷ Ivanovna, K. S. (2015). The spread of Jadidist ideas in the Kazakh steppe (Second half of the of the XIX–early XX centuries). *Вестник Ленинградского государственного университета им. АС Пушкина*, 4(4), 76-83, 77.

encouraged the locals to develop themselves. The imperial government was afraid that such a trend would harm their relations with the locals, that the Islamic community would become stronger than before. Thus, they put even stronger censorship on all social classes, so that they could easily persecute and kill those who were against their main mission – to explore, colonize, and extract. Getting rid of “too smart” and sending them to Siberia was a smart step, which worked poorly. Instead, they put their own people in the places of the nomads. The locals were angry and did not respect the newly assigned Russians on the territory of the steppe.

3. Theoretical frameworks

A) Sabol on internal colonization of 2 indigenous cultures: Sioux and Qazaqs

The life of the Sioux and Qazaqs fell into oblivion with the advent of the American and Russian colonial administrations. Both metropolises viewed them as ‘uncivilized’ entities, which need some divine help from them in terms of different areas, especially concerning religious practices¹⁸. The colonizers thought that the locals were barbarous and backward just because they were less developed than them. In both cases, Sabol also considered their sedentarization policies pointing out the obsolescence of their nomadic lifestyle and the necessity to launch agricultural practices there¹⁹. Nevertheless, it seems that they used sedentarization policies to fully colonize them and use them as slaves for their own imperial purposes²⁰.

Islam was also a part of that story. Similarly, to the previous statement, they used it as a tool to exercise control over the colonized nomads and did not consider their desires and rights. The outsiders like Sabol stated that these two societies were similarly oppressed indigenous cultures²¹. Furthermore, they underwent a series of harsh policies, which included forced Christianization and

¹⁸ Sabol, S. (2017). “The touch of civilization: comparing American and Russian internal colonization.” *University Press of Colorado*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 143.

²¹ *Ibid*, 20.

Islamization. Americans and Russians thought that they were doing good things to the locals, but instead, they applied tough policies and did not allow the voices of their cultures to become salient and available to other people (Sabol, 189). However, there were locals that could speak up about their views on Islam. But before doing that, they accepted the culture and education of the metropolises and then could voice their opinions to the public. It seems that they learned how to speak respectfully about the imperial administration and thus, became respected members of the Russian organizations like different geographic societies and political organizations. The vivid example of this could be Chokan Valikhanov. Sabol states that he became a fully assimilated and civilized Qazaq²². There were not so many cases like that, but they were much larger in size than simple insiders like Abay Kunanbayev and Ibirai Altinsaryn, who argued that Qazaq steppe is a huge source of wisdom, but the locals forgot about that. Overall, the time and place of the two similar trends in America and Russian empire was not a coincidence. Russia supported the Western cause on the right to civilize underdeveloped societies and proclaimed that Qazaqs need to follow a new way of lifestyle – sedentarized and civilized way of life.

B) Edward Said and Orientalism

A famous literature professor from Columbia University, a brilliant intellectual, and a person who founded the academic field of “postcolonial studies”, Edward Said, proved in his work *Orientalism* another theory on how to view the Orient (East). His main argument was the Orient (East). His main argument was about the way the West viewed the “backward” East and how they construct knowledge about it. According to this theory, western construction of knowledge about the Orient was like a “tool of domination”, a “helpful means to achieve metropolises’ goals and way to justify their conquest of the “uncivilized” nations, which they need to “educate”²³. He also made it clear

²² Sabol, S. (2017). “The touch of civilization: comparing American and Russian internal colonization.” *University Press of Colorado*, 155.

²³ Said, E. W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 11.

that this theory is “nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths”, which was told to the colonized nations²⁴. This allowed, in turn, the indigenous populations to view their history and overall picture of their lives through the lens of the colonizers. This was a kind of indirect influence on them, the passive way of dominating them and making them do what the metropolises wanted from them. Being an Arab, Said explained the rationale behind the aims of the colonizers in a more objective way. His theory is in some ways similar to that of Sabol: they both state that the west was very ignorant of the ‘backward’ nations. They both discussed religion as being a mere tool of domination. Islam was used to make the indigenous nations subjugate them more easily. Overall, the theory is applicable in terms of the way how it explains the methods and rationale behind using religion as a source of power: creation of knowledge about Islam as a way to persuade the colonized people that they are “backward, uncivilized, and uneducated” and that they need “the touch of civilization”.

4. Dialogue between insiders and outsiders

A founder of Qazaq literature and a brilliant philosopher Abay Kunanbayev described Islam in his own ways. He was among the first people, who recognized the obsolescence of the existing social, political, and religious spheres. His biographer, Mukhtar Awezov, a Soviet Qazaq writer and scientist, wrote down his life and managed to preserve many of his works. He contributed greatly to the development of the overall Qazaq literature, though his works had to undergo censorship from the side of the Soviet administration. He possibly had some personal intentions in describing the Abay’s works like desire to illustrate his points from good sides. Maybe he was motivated by his enormous talent and wanted his works to remain in the history of the nomads. But due to censorship and bad intentions of the tsarist Russian administration in combination with the illiterate local elite, a large part of them faded away. Abay was considered as an enemy to the

²⁴ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, 14.

colonizers and local feudal elites, but not to the poor ordinary people, who loved him and considered him a genuine creature, who deserves a special note in the whole Qazaq historical heritage.

When talking about Islamic educational institutions like spiritual medreses, he pointed out at their suffocating and cruel nature and the fanaticism of the religious leaders²⁵. Abay also criticized the meaningless learning of the Quran²⁶. According to him, the sincere belief in Allah lies not in the external prayers, cleaning, and other religious procedures, but in the sincere connection with the Creator and showing true love to him. His words can be proved to be credible, because he received satisfactory religious education from his grandmother, Zere, and mother Ulzhan. At an early age, he managed to learn Arabic and the dogmas of Islam in detail. Mrs. Zere contributed to the nurturing of an outstanding figure; she was a keeper of live Qazaq folklore, tales, legends, songs (*kuis*), and proverbs, which significantly affected the development of such a brilliant mind²⁷. Instead of the dark swamp of fanatical subjects of the medreses, he dived into folk and classical literature of the East along with Russian literature and culture²⁸. This may resemble Chokan Ualikhanov, who similarly seriously considered such works as tremendous pieces of art, which need special attention.

The context of his art is surrounded by the inner battles among Qazaq ruining feudal elites for land, money, and affection from the Russian colonial council²⁹. This is also true about the envy of the local elites, *starshinas*, local *biis*, *mullahs*, and *hodjas*. They heavily hated him, as he laughed at them using his talents in writing different rhymes, stories, and others using literal means and his

²⁵ Awezov, M.O. (2014). *Shygarmalarynyn elu tomdyk tolyk zhinagi. Makalalar, zertteuler, piesa (1943-1946)*. Awezov atyndagy Adebiet zhane oner instituti, 229.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Awezov, M.O. (2014). *Shygarmalarynyn elu tomdyk tolyk zhinagi. Makalalar, zertteuler, piesa*, 229.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 230.

own talent. Abay derived wisdom from many previous generations not looking at their nationality, as he thought that ideas matter more rather than prejudices towards nationalities. Going through different sources he came across the root cause of the many miseries of his nation: tsarist cause, as it contributed to the quarrels among local leaders³⁰. They carried out the politics of “divide and conquer” for their own reasons like the quick extraction of natural resources and minds for their shaky monarchical system.

Overall, his views on Islam were positive, though he was an ardent hater of the local religious elites, who used Islamic knowledge for their own reasons: to receive better salaries, appraisal, and respect from tsarism. He struggled against not ordinary people, but against elites, which possessed a plethora of sins like greediness, illiteracy, cruelty, and bad intentions. He made it clear that the conditions of the life of laypeople were devastated not because of true Islam faith, but because of the same Qazaqs and tsarism. Outsiders, who participated in the blackening of Islam in the steppe, were wrong, as they pursued their own goals like enriching the encyclopedias of the Russian and foreign colonial administrations. In contrast, he wanted progressive growth for his own people³¹. His major enemy was the obsolescence and backwardness of the existing systems, which were present in many countries, which became colonized by the stronger nations. As it was previously mentioned, Russia carried out politics of Christianization and then Islamization along with sedentarization and civilization of the ‘backward’ nomad nation³². There are no simple explanations for such politics: everything is interconnected, which means that if you touch one topic, you will immediately touch the other topics unconsciously.

³⁰ Ibid, 232.

³¹ Ibid, 244.

³² Frank, A. (2003). *Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742-1917: Toward an Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule*. na, 286.

Here is where the theories of Sabol and Said can be applied. According to them, the steppe is viewed as something that needs education and civilization³³. Said's Orientalism theory hugely explains why outsiders viewed Islam in the steppe in negative ways. As was previously mentioned, there was a need to justify their colonial expansion. They wanted to cover their sinful motives and exploitation; it was also possible that they wanted to make it clear to other nations that they are the only civilized nations, that others needed to remember them as good examples to follow. Thus, they wanted to seem like divine states, that their touch of divinity can transform backward nations into progressive sources ready to be exploited. Writing about Islam and steppe dwellers in a negative way, they benefited from it, as they could without any extra power submit new territories to them and remotely control them without 'any effort'.

Metropolises even created the class of 'involuntary orientalists'³⁴, who followed their instructions and kept them in fear of death, if they tried to break their contract. They used these poor exiled foreigners like Polish, Ukrainians, and others to explore the steppe: its land, natural resources, people, and their weak sides so that later they could benefit from such data. Many such orientalists wrote that Qazaqs are not real Muslims, that they do not adhere to its religious canons and dogmas. Among such people was Januszkeiwitz³⁵, who was sent to the steppe and served as an imperial servant like Chokan Valikhanov³⁶. The former had a mixed attitude towards Qazaqs and Islam. On the one hand, he criticized the very religious attitude of Qazaqs towards the religious dogmas and rituals by stating that they did not follow its basic rules and were full of "superstitions and

³³ Sabol, S. (2017). "The touch of civilization: comparing American and Russian internal colonization." University Press of Colorado, 19.

³⁴ Murphy, C. (2019). *Involuntary Orientalists: Polish Exiles in the Russian Empire as Scholars and Administrators of the Kazakh Steppe and Turkestan*. In *The Imperial Gaze: Eastern European Conceptions of the Non-European World*, 50.

³⁵ Ibid, 54.

³⁶ Ibid, 51.

prejudices”³⁷. But if one looks closer at this statement, one can find that he visited a limited number of Qazaq families, usually the affluent ones, where he spent much of his time. He saw what was happening and wrote that down with some fake information just to avoid problems with censorship and persecution. Furthermore, he provides good examples of unfairness of Kazakh *shariat*, which was again adopted to the interests of locals (case with pregnant bride and her marriage problems)³⁸.

On the other hand, he recognized the positive sides of Qazaq culture: their good attitude towards guests, their kind character, and some unique traditions like big *tois* (weddings), etc.. Overall, his conclusion about the steppe people is quite positive: Kazakhs are no worse than other subjects. Other lower classes of the empire would look much worse compared to them³⁹. He got acquainted with the local people and found out Polish nation has a lot of similar traits to Qazaqs: they were treated in the same way, like they are involuntary slaves. Both of them had to follow strict rules of censorship, and obey the tsarist administration without expressing any complaints on their miserable fortune. Overall, they had to go through all of this, to get civilized, as their masters decided.

Nevertheless, they continued to live during these harsh times and support each other within their nation and other colonized and exiled people. Some Qazaqs even said that Polish orientalist treated them much better than Russian or Qazaq servants⁴⁰. They exchanged information between each other and made a valuable contribution to the development of ethnography of the Qazaq steppe. But the question arises: whether the Russian colonizers knew that both nations, Polish and Qazaqs, would express affection to each other, which could be obviously a facilitator in the

³⁷ Januszkiewicz, A. (1966). *Diaries and letters from a trip to the Kazakh steppes*. Alma Ata. 1803-1857, 54.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 54.

⁴⁰ Januszkiewicz, A. (1966). *Diaries and letters from a trip to the Kazakh steppes*. Alma Ata. 1803-1857, 54.

collection of raw data about the steppe for the Imperial Council. Russians could possibly know that these two devastated nations would understand each other and help each other. Usually, those who experience the same difficult conditions, try to get along with each other and share their miseries. Getting closer to each other of Polish and Qazaqs would benefit the colonial administration in the gradual colonization of the steppe region.

Taking the previous information into account, there were other people who also served the Russian empire like Chokan Valikhanov, a popular insider who worked as an Imperial servant. He is also considered to be a good source of ethnographic knowledge about the nomads and Islam in the steppe. Sometimes he was right when stating that Qazaq did not adhere strictly to the norms of the religion. In fact, he had two contradictory perspectives on nomads: they had “really shamanistic nature” and at the same time, “fanaticism” was present among them⁴¹. Furthermore, McKenzie argued that Chokan’s views were largely supportive of the Russian empire, as it helped the nomads to develop and protected them from foreign invaders⁴². In another source *A Biography in Motion: Chokan Valikhanov and His Travels in Central Eurasia*, Bailey argued that many researchers underestimated him and stated that he was a “spy”, which is a stereotype that they unfairly attribute to him. He explained that he was only a human who had the right to tell the truth about his nation⁴³. He just used the privileges that he was given by his birthright and pursued his research interests⁴⁴. The premise upon which he built the ethnographic research was that he did not

⁴¹ Frank, A. (2003). *Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe*, 285.

⁴² McKenzie, Kermit E. (1989). “Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and scholar”. *Central Asian Survey* 8(3): 1-30, 23.

⁴³ Bailey, S. C. M. (2009). *A Biography in Motion: Chokan Valikhanov and His Travels in Central Eurasia*. *Ab imperio*, 2009(1), 165-190, 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

want to waste his precious time and for the sake of fulfilling his own intellectual curiosity⁴⁵. He just used the advantages of his position and pursued the career of the “Russian scholar-traveler”⁴⁶. It is also important to note that he was considered a “detached observer”⁴⁷. In other words, he tried to describe objectively the events that were happening around him during his expeditions to the steppe and other lands. However, that should not be viewed as a complete fact because he was attracted to the Russian administration and served its interests in collecting information about the steppe for the empire. Perhaps, he supported mostly the Russian side as he thought that it had more educated people and means that could help to dive into academia. In his *Sobranie Sochinenii*, when it comes to the religion, he showed clearly that there was shamanism present in the souls of the locals⁴⁸. In addition, this account is the direct evidence of the religious beliefs of Chokan – he was an atheist and was notoriously known for his absolutely negative perception of the teachings of Islam. This can be seen from his assertion that the steppe dwellers mostly believed in Tengri (sky) but not in Allah⁴⁹. According to Chokan, the Mohammedan faith, as a monotheistic religion, failed in the abolishment of the beliefs in the power of spirits (both good and evil)⁵⁰. In fact, he was partly right because, being a native Qazaq, he could understand his people comparatively more than outsiders and, thus, create more objective accounts of Islam. He created numerous works about the steppe, which greatly contributed to the development of ethnographic knowledge about the locals and their religion. This was a great achievement and thanks to him, the contemporary Qazaqs have a great deal of precious knowledge about their history.

Going back to the outsiders, the works of Eugene Schuyler, a linguist, translator, a writer and social scientist from Northern America, are also valuable sources of information on the Russian

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 167.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 174.

⁴⁸ Валиханов, Ч. Ч. (1984). *Собрание сочинений в пяти томах* (Vol. 4), 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 277.

empire and its colonial politics in the steppe region. One of the most prominent - *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara and Kuldja*. He was one of the first researchers to enroll on a diplomatic mission to the Russian Empire and Central Asia. Being on the side of the colonizer, he argued that the Russian empire, thanks to the expeditions and researchers, identified that there were a lot of resources that the empire could extract from the steppe. If the Russians did not know about that, then they would not go deeper into the steppes⁵¹. Thus, there were reasons to pursue their colonial interests such as active colonization, extraction, and subjugation of the locals to their ‘material’ will using available means: religion, education, and others. The account also clearly demonstrates the empire had to spend enormous amounts of money on the exploration and extraction of resources of Central Asia, and that it was highly unlikely that it would withdraw from the steppe⁵². According to him, there were some benefits for the locals from such an imperial endeavor. He argued that the “Russian rule, on the whole, is beneficial to the natives, and it will be manifestly unjust to withdraw her protection and leave them to anarchy and unbridled rule of fanatical despots”⁵³. This reminds the theories of Sabol and Said in the way that it justifies the presence of the Russian metropole in the steppe region. All these researchers explained why the Russian government should be present there: it is because of the need to “civilize” the “barbarous” indigenous people. Only they could make it, as they are the master of the fortunes of these people – only they could turn them into progressive nations. Consequently, the knowledge production about steppe was hugely integrated into their colonial agenda, and they did it well as the locals themselves blindly believed in what the metropolises were saying about them. This also includes the topic of religion as it is not possible to talk about Qazaqs without touching it.

⁵¹ Schuyler, Eugene. (1876). *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara and Kuldja*. Vol. 2. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 387.

⁵² *Ibid*, 389.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 388.

Looking at another outsider, Levshin, a Russian traveller, ethnographer, publicist, was similar to Januszkiewietz and Valikhanov in this way. The style of his writing reminds the works of these two ethnographers in the way that all of them write about Muslims on the steppe in a negative way. They state that they do not adhere to the religious tenets and do not pray five times per day⁵⁴. Such negative illustration of the affluent and ordinary Muslims may be the evidence of the protracted censorship and envy towards them for being too friendly and right in their own lifestyle. According to Murphy, “Levshin, for example, promoted the notion that Kazakhs remained nominally Muslim and, more importantly, constituted a wild, ungovernable people”⁵⁵. Such negative approach to the representatives of the Muslim community was possibly motivated by the aim to impose the imperial tone on the knowledge about Islam and Muslims in the steppe. He possibly supported his motherland’s intentions to colonize and extract resources from the colonies, and he contributed to it by being a scholar-traveler, who collected necessary information for his country.

In fact, the understandings of civility in both West and East differed tremendously. The first ones believed that there is a need for “enlightenment” and a cause for “reason” to make an obsolete group of people a “civilized” nation. In contrast, the second one believed that society should not be ruled by mere reasoning and enlightened thinkers. They considered that a literate society should follow traditions and believe in God, a Creator of everything in this world. According to them, they are to follow the basic rules of ethics such as respecting the elderly people (*aksakals*) and giving help to each other in crisis situations. At least, such a system was present among a limited number of *auls* (villages), where the Russian government did not spoil the locals with its “touch of civilization”. In such villages, there were real people, who could still feel life with their own five senses. Though there were still those who could rob, beg, and deceive others. It is considered that a

⁵⁴ Levshin, Alexei. “Opisaniye Kirgiz-Kazach’ikh, ili, Kirgiz-Kaysatskikh ord i stepey.” *Istoricheskaya izvestiya* (1832) (1798-1879), 54.

⁵⁵ Murphy, *Involuntary Orientalists*, 55.

society without such people would fail to exist because without them there would not be a balance of “yin and yan” (“light” and “darkness”). No one can notice the dark without having a light bulb or sun, and no one can recognize the light if there is no darkness around. That is the basic statement of the basic formula of wise Chinese historians and philosophers, who accumulated a huge amount of knowledge over the past centuries.

Going back to the insiders, there was a unique poet and Islam biographer in the steppe who originated from the Middle Horde – Mashhur Zhusip⁵⁶. He mostly wrote works on Islam during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Allen Frank managed to interpret his works in one work called *Sufis, scholars, and Divanas of the Qazaq Middle Horde in the works of Mäshhür Zhüsip Köpeyülï*. Here, he described him as someone who appreciated the “nomadic dimensions of the region’s Islamic history”⁵⁷. Zhusip was considered to be the first to “write down Qazaq historical and genealogical traditions in his region”⁵⁸. It is interesting to note that this outstanding figure was interested in the “oral epics” and he conserved the “poetry of earlier *akins* (*poets*) and *zhiraws* (*bards*)” that were circulating across the steppe in the form of oral tradition⁵⁹. It is also important to note that he “wrote many verse works devoted to the Islamic sciences of *adab* (Islamic etiquette), *tafsir* works, praise poems for local figures, and travel or pilgrimage poems”⁶⁰. From this, it can be seen that he may be considered a reliable source of knowledge about religion, as he managed to take care of the many valuable sources that the Qazaq nation has nowadays. The local folklore would fade away unless this person did what he did. Additionally, Frank asserts himself that the modern scholars should be encouraged to look at Qazaq nomads as a clearly self-aware Muslim society, and that although their practices and customs might diverge

⁵⁶ Frank, A. J. (2013). *Sufis, scholars, and Divanas of the Qazaq Middle Horde in the works of Mäshhür Zhüsip Köpeyülï* (pp. 213-232). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 214.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 215.

from the “conventional” Arabic/Muslim world - it is by no means an excuse to misrepresent the perceptions of the local population on their identities⁶¹. In fact, that was a rather justified point, as many foreigners and even insiders tended to view the Qazaq people with some prejudice. This, in turn, created a distorted picture of the Qazaq steppe reality and contributed to the formation of further stereotypes and false judgments about them.

Another salient example of an insider, who fully understood the conditions of Islam and people on the steppe, was Dulat Babatayuli (1802-1874) and Shortanbay (1818-1881)⁶². Both were excellent poets that clearly showed the state of affairs of Islam in their poems. Similarly to the previous insiders like Abay Kunanbayev and Chokan Valikhanov, Shortanbay rejected the local Qazaq administrators and Russian administration⁶³. Dulat also stated that Qazaqs did not follow the Islamic law *shari'a* and that they decided to take the law of “kafirs” (non-Muslims) into account and adopt their practices in their daily lives⁶⁴. Additionally, Uyama argued they both praised Islam and Qazaq true rulers, *khans* and compared them to the cruel Russian administration and Qazaq imperial servants⁶⁵.

After 1860s, Russians became hesitant about the spread of influence of Islam across the steppe⁶⁶. They thought that Islam could hinder their colonization politics and they rarely tried to take into account the religious needs of Qazaqs. However, Ibirai Altynsarin had other thoughts about it. In contrast, he wanted to “promote these needs”⁶⁷. He was a respected individual even among the Russian Imperialist Geographical Society, and his works were published in different languages. He had an “extremely nuanced outlook” on different topics including Islam. In his work *Ocherki*

⁶¹ Frank, A. J. (2013). *Sufis, scholars, and Divanas*, 224.

⁶² Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 97.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 98.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 101.

obychaev pri svatovstve i svad'be kirgizov Orenburgskogo vedomstva, his vocabulary was largely affected by Islam, when he was describing sharia' law and traditions⁶⁸. He also clearly showed the extent to which Islam was incorporated into the Qazaq community⁶⁹. Similarly to Abay Kunanbayev and Mizhakup Dulatov, he was fully aware of the Qazaq *narodnost'* (customary traditions), which allows him express a more objective view on the state of affairs of Islam in the steppe. In the year 1884, his “first Qazaq-language book on Islamic dogma: *Sharayit al-Islam* (Norms of Islam)” was published⁷⁰. This book was a good source for those who wanted to learn the basics of the religion and the rules according to which a Muslim should live.

It is interesting to note that before Altynsarin, there was no single book on Islam in the Qazaq language. The question arises: “Why no one attempted to translate the Quranic literature into Qazaq, so that more people could understand?”. It seems that Qazaqs passed down their knowledge mostly via oral methods like tales, legends, proverbs, etc. There was no point for them to translate the Arabic and Tatar books into Qazaq, as they had already had the conserved sources of precious knowledge from the previous generations. This may remind us of the way the Greeks and Romans passed their history down to the later generations – funeral orations, legends, and many other types of genres. Public speaking was a very developed area of their societies, which is quite like the *akyns and seriler* (*singers and musicians*) of Qazaqs. Before the coming of Abay, there were already piles of oral knowledge that Qazaqs used to deliver to their children. They did not need any other sources of information, their own database of it was full of interesting works of art like that of Mahambet Otemisuly (1804-1846), Suyinbay Aronuly (1815-1898), Zhayau Musa Baizhanov (1835-1929), and many others. Mahambet Otemisuly was a very wise musician and

⁶⁸ Altynsarin, I. *Ocherk obychaev pri svatovstve i svad'by u kirgizov Orenburgskogo vedomstva. Zapiski Orenburgskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obschestva*. Imperatorskoe Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obshestvo. Kazan': Universitetskaya tipografiya, 1870, 117.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 118.

⁷⁰ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 101.

poet, who created numerous poems and songs, where he expressed his incredibly well-constructed works. In his song *Baimagambet sultanga aitkan soz* (*The word told to Baimagambet sultan*), they reflected skillfully his deep belief in the Creator, his strong love towards his nation and deep mourning towards the unfair and difficult times that his people had to go through. Below is the excerpt from it⁷¹:

*To the front of the door
Bringing without beating -
Do you have a dream for God -
Like Makhambet had?!*

Though it is interesting to note how, in the case of Abay and other Qazaq intellectuals, did they manage to express their voices in the native Qazaq and then translate foreign books into Qazaq, if the imperial government did not allow to print books in the Qazaq language? It is possibly due to the great power of writers' voices and their oral capabilities. Qazaqs were strong orators, they had great abilities in expressing the voices of the ordinary people and could deliver their thoughts very easily and clearly. However, only a minority of them did not fear the imperial council and could speak up in spite of the danger of getting into exile. Abay and others managed to spread the word in Qazaq and show the true sides of Qazaqs, despite censorship.

When it comes to Altynsarin, he was, considered as a "Christian missionary" by many, but in fact, he was a willing defender of Islam⁷². Many researchers concluded that he was on the side of the Russian empire, though he only served the interests of his own nation. Additionally, he "accused some schools of teaching the Bible and serving pork to children"⁷³. He devoted his life to teaching children and creating several precious books so that ordinary boys and girls could foster their mental development. In his books, he clearly shows how religion was so deeply embedded in the

⁷¹ Otemisuly, M. *Baimagambet sultanga aitkan soz*, (n.d.)

⁷² Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 101.

⁷³ Ibid.

life of laypeople. For example, in his work *Kirgizskaia khrestomatia*, he expressed a negative attitude toward the language of many books for the locals⁷⁴. They were written in only Arabic or Tatar, not Qazaq. The point that I am trying to make is that there was the prevalence of Arabic and Tatar Islam in the maktab and medreses and a lack of Qazaq Islam there. There was a kind of loss of the local identity, which can be seen from the same books that children learned without any awareness of what they needed to study. There was vagueness in the minds of children and from this, the misconceptions could flourish, and stereotypes prosper. This again can remind us of the strict censorship that existed in the region: people were afraid of the Russian persecutors to defend their identities because they were scared of what would happen if they protested against the Russian authorities. The Russian empire possibly deliberately sent Tatar Muslims to the steppe so that the locals would become more ‘civilized’ and ‘religious’.

It is interesting to note that, firstly, Russians ‘respected’ Islam and contributed to its development with the help of Tatars, but then became scared that there would be too much influence of Tatars and their Islamic propaganda in the region. According to Ilminskii, there was a threat of “Pan-Islamic unity under Tatar leadership”⁷⁵. Indeed, the Tatar propaganda of Islam in the steppe was accelerating during the end of the nineteenth century. There was such a movement called *jadidism*, whose religious leaders argued for the modernization of Islam to catch up with the West in the areas of sciences⁷⁶. Jadids were a part of intelligentsia which was aware that Tatar Islam should become the single authority for all Muslims. This strengthening of the Tatar religious community could damage the interests of the colonial administration in the region by contributing to the development of the rebellions against their rule. If the tsarist council did not stop it, there would be

⁷⁴ Ibid, 102.

⁷⁵ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 101; Frank, A. (2003). *Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe*, 285.

⁷⁶ Ivanovna, K.S. (2015). *The spread of Jadidist ideas in the Kazakh steppe* (Second half of the XIX-early XX centuries). *Vestnik Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta imeni AS Pushkina*, 4(4), 76-83, 78.

more chaos than there, the locals would stop fearing their rule, and join forces with Tatars against *tsar*. Thus, it is understandable why Ilminskii noticed the tendency of the religious policy to go out of control.

Altynsarin was acquainted with Ilminskii and both respected each other. The last one even recommended Altynsarin's work *Sharayit al-Islam* to the imperial council "as the sole suitable book for teaching Islam in Qazaq schools, because it was written in a sober tone, in contrast to legendary embellishments and fanaticism found in the Tatar books"⁷⁷. This attention to him was really worth it, as he contributed to the spread of credible information in Qazaq about Islam in the steppe. This was done by widespread publishing of Islamic literature in Kazan and other cities⁷⁸. In fact, that was an entirely "common task for both Russian-oriented and Islamic-oriented intellectuals" to make the Islamic knowledge available to the lay people so that they could read the books and understand them (ibid). This was a great achievement of Altynsarin which cannot be forgotten and must be appraised by the whole Qazaq community. Another great work of Altynsarin was the poem called *Kel, balalar, okulyk!* which means "Let's learn, children!" There he demonstrated to the local children the necessity to learn in mektebs and medrese. The poem also includes the information about Allah which shows his great respect and love towards him, an all-powerful Creator, whom Altynsarin praises and masterfully connects with the need to get an education. This can be seen from the following excerpt⁷⁹:

*The sad and difficult day will come,
when the cattle will run out.
When the elderly will run out of cattle,
your studying will remain as the reliable basis,
and the need will not enter your silent house.*

⁷⁷ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 102.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 102.

⁷⁹ Altynsarin, I. (n.d.). *Kel, balalar, okulyk!*

*The parents are not tired to pray for their son and his becoming a human,
But if they do not wait for the good from children,
then what is the point to ask for them from God?
Let's study, children,
and weave the light ropes of knowledge in our grateful memory!*

The aim of writing this masterpiece was worth all hardships that he went through to create it. His work was published in Qazaq which is a great achievement; it was a good source for the Islamic education of children. It contained less biases than that of Tatars, who also tried to improve their school education. Altynsarin managed to connect past Qazaq knowledge with the modern Western trends in education with less distortion, which was a rare phenomenon during those times.

Nevertheless, there were even more books in Russian that were circulating across the steppe. Being a Russifier, Abay noted that Qazaqs need to study Russian themselves in the Russian schools⁸⁰. According to him, they would become equal to them and could defend their interests⁸¹. He also stated that “good knowledge is also useful for religion”⁸². From this one can see the level of the beginning of the development of the Qazaq thought and own written literature on Islam. The book that the Russians wrote and their translations into the Qazaq language by Abay were very thought-provoking. In addition to the home, maktab and medrese education children could acquire secular knowledge on different topics. This was a beneficial trait of this trend during the end of the nineteenth century, which resulted in the creation of the strong Qazaq intelligentsia - those who created Alash Orda (first official Qazaq union): Akhmet Baitursynov, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, Alikhan Bokeikhanov and others. These individuals were the eager representatives, who protected the interests of the laypeople. 1917 was a decisive year when the Russian monarchy ceased to exist⁸³.

⁸⁰ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 99.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ascher, A. (1994). *The revolution of 1905: Russia in disarray* (Vol. 1). Stanford University Press, 6.

Nicholas I was dethroned⁸⁴ and then several revolutions followed afterward, some of which reached their goals – the creation of the Soviet Union ruled by communist dictators like Lenin and later Stalin. Before the foundation of the Soviet Union, there was some flexibility for locals in expressing their views. Censorship⁸⁵ was not that strict compared to the Soviet era. People were not persecuted for their beliefs, even though life was also difficult during the pre-soviet period. Overall, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is commonly known as the time of the Qazaq national awakening, during which the Alash Orda came into existence through the common efforts of the previously mentioned insiders⁸⁶.

The cause of such awakening was the awareness of the “Qazaq backwardness”. “Qazaq awakening” was similar to jadidism, which was taking place during the same period⁸⁷. Mirzhakyp Dulatov (1885-1935) was among those founders of the Alash Orda, who knew that Qazaqs fell behind not only in terms of religious matters but also in political and socio-economic affairs. Similarly to Abay and Chokan, he was discontent with the existing Muslim community in his homeland and especially hated *mullahs* for being ignorant of their own responsibilities. His work is called *Oyan, qazaq!* was a precious source of knowledge about Islam and religious practices of the Qazaqs. It carefully observes the issues connected with “*shari’a*, mosques, madrasas, and mullas, and ways to reform religious institutions”⁸⁸. His book was also written in the style of “*nasihat (admonition), munajat (prayer), and waz (sermon)*”⁸⁹. In this work, he tries to explain the Islamic dogmas in a more proper way compared to mullahs. His approach to Islamic education of the masses was similar to Altynsarin and Kunanbayev. He advocated the necessity to simulate West and Russia in the areas of education: Qazaqs need to introduce reforms to Islamic education -

⁸⁴ Ibid, 107.

⁸⁵ Stelmakh, V. D. (2001). *Reading in the Context of Censorship in the Soviet Union. Libraries & Culture*, 36(1), 143-151, 143.

⁸⁶ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 102.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Dulatov, M. (1909). *Oyan, qazaq!*

⁸⁹ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 103.

introduce secular subjects in madrasas and teach Russian there⁹⁰. The style of writing of this individual was tentative and showed his true belief in Islam. This can be seen from the following lines of *Oyan, qazaq!*:

*The whole war started this year,
killed all young people.
Wake up, Qazaq, do not stay idle,
turn your horse into a dark cloud.
The Russians invaded the Qazaq land,
turned the boundless land, males and females into slaves.
We will not give away our winning independence,
wake up, Qazaq, my boundless country.
I know that it is not too late,
If we are late, then the Russians will set traps on our whole land.
Qazaqs are not willing to retreat,
All people see the sun through their work.*

Here he criticized the Russian government for being cruel to Qazaqs and their current way of life and called for a general “awakening” of their minds. His way of writing was a unique one: it intelligently said that his nation was a special one, expressed the necessity for independence. His tone was inspiring and optimistic about the future of his nation. This is exactly what the Qazaqs needed to understand that their future was in their own hands. As a Muslim, he did not intend to distort information about his religion, as he wanted prosperity for his country and its people. Religion was something sacred that people were not allowed to damage.

Another representative of the insider was Shakarim Qudaiberdiev, Abay’s nephew. He was also a genius thinker and writer, who “inherited his religious thought”⁹¹. In his work *Iman ibadat* (“Faith and worship”) of 1911, he argued that “although God does not punish people who do not pray, one

⁹⁰ Ibid, 105.

⁹¹ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 109.

should pray for one's soul"⁹². He wisely contemplated God and his attitude and plans towards people. Similarly to Abay, Altynsarin, Dulatov, and Chokan, he praised the Western thinkers. In his case, he respected and cited the writings of "Pythagoras, Mesmer, Comte, Darwin, and Spencer" and that of Russians like Tolstoy and others⁹³. He argued that there is a need to accept only those words from *hadith* (*sayings of prophet Mohammad*) from *mullahs* that are "reasonable to accept"⁹⁴. Like Dulatov, he protected the reasonable attitude to religion and described it as something that should be respected and treated very tentatively. Religion cannot be a source of power or serve those people with bad intentions. It is something that people should respect and protect themselves, it is like a gift from God, who is, according to the Quran, generous and loving. According to Uyama, he often used "mystic metaphors" to deliver his thoughts to the audience and argued that "all religions were roads to the truth"⁹⁵. In fact, that was true as they are the key to understanding almost all phenomena in the world. Religion is like an enormous sacred book delivered from God straightly to the people to teach them and direct them during hardships. Such books like Torah, Bible, and Quran were sent to people from the Creator and there were prophets that could explain what was written in these divine Providences. However, the history of humankind is full of those who tried to use religion in their own favor. Take for example the Russian empire: they used Islam to facilitate control over the newly acquired territories and justify their rule there just like the Western states used religion to state that they are divine people who could educate "backward nations". It is also well-known that both colonizers thought that they were the only ones that could make the lives of the colonized better and more "civilized". In fact, that were only bold statements, such claims were only justifications for their presence in new regions. They were like masters who brought "civilization" to the "third world" and extracted their

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 110.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 111.

resources for their own purposes like enriching their economies and thinking that they were “divine” nations, kissed by God⁹⁶.

Turning back to Shakarim, he was the follower of Abay in terms of “integrating his complicated approach to heart, reason, and practice by espousing the simple words of “honest labor”, “pure heart”, and “clean reason”⁹⁷. In other words, people should behave themselves according to these virtues which were already discussed by the ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others, the bearers, and stars of the classical world. Overall, Shakarim was a wise philosopher and believer who managed to explain a plethora of religious doctrines in a simple language to the steppe dwellers. He seemed to be a truly devoted person who loved his motherland and tried to express gratitude to it by explaining the Quran and other religious literature to the ordinary people who lived in the steppe.

Turning back to the times of the Qazaq “awakening”, there were a number of outstanding individuals who represented the voices of laypeople after the abolition of monarchy in the Russian empire in 1917 after the socialist revolutions led by the proletariat (working class). Besides Dulatov, there were Baitusinov and Bokeykhanov, who published their thoughts in the commonly widespread newspapers *Ay-qap and Qazaq*. For example, Bokeykhanov was ardent of the religion which can be seen from the religious freedom that he cherished and thought that it was a “civil right” of every person who lived in the realm of Qazaq steppe⁹⁸. He also called for the separation of Islam from the sphere of administration⁹⁹. These were just claims that were introduced to the main pre-Soviet council. Moreover, in his letter to his mother, Baitursynov describes the unfair treatment of the Russian administration and his imprisonment in Semey’s jail based on no

⁹⁶ Dzhamgerchinov, B. (1959). *Znachenie i zadachi izucheniya problemi etnogeneza kirgizshogo naroda*. In Debez, G.F. (Ed.). *Trudi kirgizskoi arheologo-etnograficheskoy ekspedizii (Vol.3)*. SSSR: Izdatelstvo akademii nauk kirgizskoi SSR, 10.

⁹⁷ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 111.

⁹⁸ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 113.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

grounds¹⁰⁰. There he openly criticized the government and explained why he was innocent. He also wished the government to be “Umitsiz shaitan bolsyn”, which meant the following: “Let the government be a devil without a hope”¹⁰¹. This work of art was the evidence that he was a true believer, who respected God and treated him respectfully. There is also another song that is in honor of Baitursynov, which also describes him as an intelligent and sincere person, who loves the Creator. There is mention of Allah and his true thoughts that could not be expressed in other ways better than Qazaq songs and poems¹⁰². According to Sisekenuly, Akhmet was very humane, he loved his people, and wanted the best for his nation. This is evident from the following lines about him¹⁰³:

Saint genius! My thirsty spring.

A light from God.

He saved his precious nation for his heart

Those were, of course, not the single words that writers wrote about him. There are many others like that of Gabiden Kozhahmet’s *Alashtyn asyldary* (*precious people of Alash Orda*). There the author writes about Alikhan, Mustafa, Akhmet, Mirzhakyp as “being nation’s sunny happiness” and those who “did not sell their nation’s dignity”¹⁰⁴. Such depiction of these people is the clear evidence of them being devoted to the creation of the common good for their people and a true illustration of the situation of Islam on the steppe. It is highly unlikely that they lied to Qazaqs while singing the songs of their people.

¹⁰⁰ Baitursynov, A. (1872). *Anama hat*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Sisekenuly, Lukpan. (n.d.). *Akhmet Baitursynov*.

¹⁰³ Sisekenuly, Lukpan. (n.d.). *Akhmet Baitursynov*.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

The first years of the pre-Soviet Union were distinguished by fair treatment of all the republics in it, but later it turned into the dictatorship of a single person, there was a *cult of vozhdya (ruler)*¹⁰⁵. During the first years, the propositions were accepted, but later others were rejected, which ended in the disintegration of the Alash Orda. The duration of its existence was quite short - 1917-1920 - only a couple of years and it was liquidated by the pre-Soviet council, to be precise, pre-Soviet dictator, who was against any sort of fair democratic existence of the minorities. Overall, the role that the representatives of the Alash Orda played in the accumulation of knowledge about Islam was unprecedented. Although they did not often discuss Islam in their agenda, in 1917 they made it clear that there is a need for solving the “issue of spiritual administration”¹⁰⁶. In these newspapers, they called for political and administrative reforms and solving land problems¹⁰⁷. The question arises why the pre-Soviet administration declined their proposals. It is interesting to note that they did not seriously consider the opinions of the Qazaq minority and other minorities. It seems that they had already had a plan for every autonomous republic. Bolsheviki (the party that won the election for ruling the Soviet Union) were a radical proletariat, who had their own vision of the Soviet Union which would be founded in December of 1922¹⁰⁸. Of course, there were other parties like mensheviks and others but they did not have such influence as the bolsheviki did.

Overall, the propositions of Alash Orda were rejected and it ceased to exist in 1920: only a couple of years of existence - such a short period which saw the arousal of the distinguishing Qazaq national identity. Religion was a part of it. Bolsheviki did not take into account the lives of the ordinary Qazaq people which can also be seen in other minority republics. It was assumed that

¹⁰⁵ Kolonitzkii, B. (2017). *Tovarish Kerenskii: antimorhicheskaya revolutsia i formirovaniye kul'ta “vozhdya naroda” (mart-iun' 1917 goda)*. Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Uyama, T. (2013). *The Changing Religious Orientation of Qazaq Intellectuals*, 113.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Kolonitzkii, B. (2017). *Tovarish Kerenskii: antimorhicheskaya revolutsia i formirovaniye kul'ta “vozhdya naroda”*, 769.

“religion was an opium for the masses”¹⁰⁹ - famous words of Lenin, the first Soviet ruler. Thus, religion was not so respected and the next part of the twentieth century did not see the construction of the mosques and development of the Qazaq community. Censorship became so integrated in Soviet society that any sign of *inakomysliya* (*thinking differently*)¹¹⁰ was suppressed strictly. Knowledge about Islam was distorted, it was not allowed to teach Qazaq at schools, arising intellectuals, who were not ready to serve the Soviet government, were sent to exile like it was during Imperial Russia. Overall, there was a new reality that the republics needed to adapt to survive.

Conclusion

After analyses of the sources created by insiders and outsiders on Islam, it became clear that there were huge differences in their opinions. Overall, this paper showed that there was an artificial creation of knowledge of Islam on the steppe. This was done through the lens of outsiders, who projected their collected material into our minds and beliefs. Though there were people, who managed to portray Islam with less prejudice: insiders like Abay Kunanbayev, Ibirai Altinsaryn, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, and others. They were recognized by outsiders, but censorship damaged their works of art and made them unavailable to ordinary people. The views of both outsiders and insiders were similar on some points: poor functioning and illiteracy of the local mullahs, hodjas, and imams. Those, who had been already present on the steppe (not colonial servants), were lazy and distorted some information about the Quran and their religion was present – similar to Catholicism in medieval Europe. While others – imperial subjects – tried to transform the existing religious and educational sphere (jadidism), and at the same time devastated the locals’ knowledge of Islam. They were playing with the local believers devotedly serving his Imperial Majesty.

¹⁰⁹ Boer, R. (2013). *Lenin, religion, and theology*. Springer, 14.

¹¹⁰ Oustinova-Stjepanovic, G. (1968). *One is the biggest number: estrangement, intimacy and totalitarianism in late Soviet Russia*, 23.

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