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To cite this article: Rachel Harris & Rahilä Dawut (2002) *Mazar* festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam and the Chinese State, British Journal of Ethnomusicology, 11:1, 101-118, DOI: [10.1080/09681220208567330](https://doi.org/10.1080/09681220208567330)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09681220208567330>



Published online: 31 May 2008.



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## ***Mazar* festivals of the Uyghurs: music, Islam and the Chinese State**

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*Mazar in Central Asia are the tombs of Islamic saints, mythical or real, whose protection the Uyghurs (Turkic Muslims of China's northwestern Xinjiang Autonomous Region) invoke against drought, for a good harvest, for the birth of a son, and so on. Several hundred of these tombs are scattered around the deserts and oases of Xinjiang, mapping out a sacred landscape whose paths Uyghur peasants follow yearly on their pilgrimage journeys around the tombs. Some mazar, like the tomb of the eleventh-century Sultan Bughra Khan who fought a holy war to bring Islam to the region, are the sites of annual festivals which may be attended by thousands. The performance of music – the “classical” Muqam tradition, dastan (story-telling), drum-and-shawm dance music, Sufi zikr rituals – is an essential component of these festivals, used both for entertainment and with ritual meaning. The Uyghur mazar festivals are increasingly caught in the struggle between the Chinese State and rising Islamic fundamentalism in the region. This paper discusses the role of music in popular Islam in Central Asia, and Chinese Communist Party strategies of control and manipulation of popular religion, in terms of contesting the symbolic landscape and soundscape.*

It is summer 1995 and tens of thousands of people are gathering at the *Ordam Padishah Mazar* in the middle of the Taklimakan Desert near Kashgar. The majority are poor peasants. They come, some from far away, on trucks or donkey carts or on foot. The temperature soars to over forty degrees during this three-day festival. They come to celebrate and mourn the saint. Old men come to dance; young people come to the *Ordam* to meet each other; women come to pray to the saint for a child. The sick come to bury themselves in the sand around the site, which is thought to have healing powers. At this Islamic festival music is everywhere: *dastanchi* singing tales of local heroes or famous lovers; *muqamchi* playing the *tämbür* five-stringed long-necked lute and singing the *Muqam*;<sup>1</sup> *mäddah* telling religious stories accompanying themselves on

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<sup>1</sup> The Uyghur *Muqam* (from the Arabic *maqām*) are large-scale suites consisting of sung poetry, stories, dance tunes and instrumental sections. Contemporary scholars refer to several

the *rawap* shorter plucked lute,<sup>2</sup> and many *ashiq*, religious mendicants, singing *hökmät*,<sup>3</sup> accompanying themselves on *sapaya* percussion sticks.

In the Uyghur language *mazar*<sup>4</sup> means tomb, and it refers to the practice of pilgrimage to the tombs of saints which are scattered around the deserts and towns of Xinjiang. These tombs are sites of pilgrimage in part because they are believed to have the power to cure infertility and disease, and to avert disasters, natural or other. Pilgrimage also serves as an assertion of religious faith. The major *mazar* are served by a *sheikh* who is influential in the local community, and the tomb's upkeep is paid for by the community. Most of the smaller *mazar* have no fixed date for worship, people go when they are in need (*mazar tawabiti*: worship). A few of the major *mazar* hold big annual festivals (*mazar säylisi*: pilgrimage) to honour the saint and mourn his death.

The *Ordam*, Xinjiang's largest *mazar* festival, is held at the tomb of the eleventh-century martyr Ali Arslan Khan of the Qarakhan empire, the region's first Islamic empire, who died during the fifty years' war against the neighbouring Buddhist kingdom of Khotan. Historical reports of *mazar* festivals are rare, but the Swedish scholar Gunnar Jarring visited the *Ordam* in 1929 (though sadly not during festival time). He gives descriptions of several pilgrimage sites in the region east of Kashgar (Jarring 1935:348–54), and his brief hearsay account of the *Ordam* festival accords well with contemporary practice:

During the prescribed time for pilgrimage, Kashgar's religious population, tens of thousands of men, women and children, went to the desert to visit the tombs. They walked in long processions, carrying flags and banners and rags attached to long poles of poplar. They shouted and sang and praised and honoured the holy men.

(Jarring 1986:112)

The practice of pilgrimage and holding festivals at the tombs of saints is widespread across Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Slobin gives a description of the *Mazar-i Sharif* which is believed to be the tomb of Ali, son-in-law of Mohammad, and the main religious attraction of Afghanistan, with its shrine dating back to the twelfth century. A New Year pilgrimage (*ziyârat*) was traditionally held for the raising of the *janda*, Ali's standard, and the festivities lasted for forty days, with music, other entertainment and the granting of miracles (Slobin 1976:144). Baily discusses the festivals (*melé*) held at the tomb of Abu Walid in eastern Afghanistan during the 1970s, where a wide range of

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(continued from previous page) distinct regional traditions maintained by the Uyghurs, but the most widespread and prestigious are the *Twelve Muqam* of the Kashgar-Yärkänd region. See During and Trebinjac (1991) for a detailed study of the Twelve Muqam.

<sup>2</sup> Here specifically the Kashgar *rawap*. At around 90 cm long, the instrument has a small bowl-shaped body covered with skin, five metal strings which are plucked with a horn plectrum, and is decorated with ornamental horns (*möngüz*). There are several different types of Uyghur *rawap*, but they all belong to the *rubāb* family of double-chambered lutes found in Iran, Central Asia and Northern India.

<sup>3</sup> From the Arabic, lit. "pieces of wisdom".

<sup>4</sup> Arabic: *mazâr*, "place to visit".

musical activities might take place, including *zurna-dohol* shawm-and-drum bands, Herati popular songs and the Afghan *rubāb* (1988:136–9).<sup>5</sup> The practice of pilgrimage is also referred to in anthropological and historical studies of Uzbekistan (Baldick 1993; Poliakov 1992; Zarcone 1999) and among Uyghurs in Kazakhstan (Beller-Hann 2001b). Levin mentions pilgrimages to the famous tomb of Sultan Uways al-Qarani in Karakalpakstan, where during festivals in the 1950s forty to fifty sheep were slaughtered each day to feed the pilgrims (1996:182–3).

In Xinjiang such *mazar* are very numerous. In the course of several years' fieldwork one of us (Dawut) has documented the existence of over two hundred around the region, but her findings should not be considered exhaustive (Dawuti 2001<sup>6</sup>). The most widespread, and those which attract the greatest number of worshippers, are the tombs, like the *Ordam*, of kings and transmitters of Islam, and martyrs (*shehit*) killed in battle against the Buddhist kingdoms of Xinjiang. Also numerous are the tombs of leaders of Sufi orders (*silsilah*), whose cults are more localized. More widely known are the tombs of the Khoja rulers of Kashgar.<sup>7</sup> Although they are thought of as an Islamic phenomenon, many sites of worship are not directly linked to the religion. In the past, the tombs of philosophers and writers have been important sites of pilgrimage for students of Islamic schools. Most famous of these are the tombs of Mahmud Qashghāri, author of the "Dictionary of the Turks" (*Diwan-i loqhatit Turk*) and Yusup Khas Hajip, author of "Joy and Wisdom" (*Qutatqubiligh*),<sup>8</sup> both situated in Kashgar. Other sites of pilgrimage are the tombs of craftsmen, which are thought to be efficacious in healing specific diseases such as skin complaints. Many tombs are sites of pilgrimage for women, especially those who seek a child. The most famous of these is the tomb of Maryam of the Qarakhan dynasty.

Dawut's research on the Uyghur *mazar* suggests that many sites of pilgrimage were also formerly Buddhist sites of worship.<sup>9</sup> *Tuyuq Mazar* near Turpan, for example, is surrounded by caves containing Buddhist murals (though now largely destroyed by earthquakes). Worship here centres on one of these caves, as it does in Khotan's *Kokhmarim* (Snake Mountain) *Mazar*, where people go to pray for rain. This commonly found use of animal or plant names, such as *Üjmä* (Mulberry) *Mazar* and *Ghaz* (Goose) *Mazar*, points to the pre-Buddhist roots of many of these pilgrimage sites<sup>10</sup> and suggests that the *mazar* tradition incorporates a variety of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices (Dawuti 2001). Also apparent is the influence of Shi'a traditions on the popular religious practices of the Sunni Uyghurs. The region of Khotan boasts the tombs of the twelve

<sup>5</sup> See also Baily's film "The annual cycle of music in Herat" (1981) for footage of this festival.

<sup>6</sup> Since Rahilä Dawut's article is published in the Chinese language, her name is transliterated here according to the Chinese pinyin: Dawuti.

<sup>7</sup> A Naqshbandi Sufi dynasty that ruled the region now known as southern Xinjiang from 1679 to 1759, then as vassals of the Qing empire until the twentieth century.

<sup>8</sup> Transliterations given here are according to contemporary Uyghur convention.

<sup>9</sup> Also noted by Poliakov writing on the tombs of Uzbekistan (1992:99).

<sup>10</sup> Veronica Doubleday notes that the site of Ali's tomb at *Mazar-i Sharif* was formerly the site of the cult of the goddess Anahita of the river Oxus (1999:130 fn.19)

Imams, central figures in the Shi'a tradition, who historically never came anywhere near Xinjiang.<sup>11</sup> Shi'a influence is particularly evident in the *Ordam* festival, whose saint Ali Arslan Khan is in many ways conflated with Ali, son-in-law of Mohammed, key figure in the Shi'a tradition and also popularly known as Arslan (The Lion). Also noteworthy is the fact that the *Ordam* is held on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, coinciding with the major Shi'a festival of Ashura, which commemorates the killing of Ali's son Hussain.<sup>12</sup>

A Persian text, "History of the Uwaysi" (*Tadhkira-yi Uwaysiyya*), written in 1600 by Ahmad Uzgani, contains many references to Xinjiang's *mazar*. The book contains the biographies of forty male mystics and thirteen women mystics, including the saints of several major sites of pilgrimage for contemporary Uyghurs. It recounts that the tenth-century founder of the Qarakhan empire, Satuq Bughra Khan, converted to Islam aged twelve after a miraculous encounter with a hare, thus becoming the region's first Muslim ruler. His daughter Alanur Khanim is said to have given birth to a son by the angel Gabriel who appeared to her as a lion, and so her son was named Ali Arslan (The Lion) Khan. The tale of Maryam of the Qarakhan dynasty, the daughter (though some sources say sister) of Ali Arslan Khan, recounts that she was martyred in battle after killing 60,000 infidel.<sup>13</sup>

The English translator of this text, Julian Baldick, links the Central Asian tradition of *mazar* worship directly to the Central Asian tradition of Uwaysi<sup>14</sup> Sufis, who do not belong to any recognized order but are said to receive spiritual instruction in their dreams from dead saints. Although Baldick claims that in nineteenth-century Xinjiang tales from the "History of the Uwaysi" were commonly told in the bazaars (1993:9), Uyghur scholars in contemporary Xinjiang are not familiar with the term Uwaysi. Sufi lodges of the Naqshbandi, Qaderiya and Chishtiya orders are active in contemporary Xinjiang,<sup>15</sup> and their members do attend *mazar* festivals and perform their rituals there (see description below), but for the majority of pilgrims to the *mazar* the Sufi links are far less clear-cut. Ildiko Beller-Hann stresses the "deeply Islamic nature" of such popular religious practices amongst the Uyghurs while also recognizing their syncretic nature, integrating Sufi traditions with Buddhist and other pre-Islamic ritual practices (Beller-Hann 2001a:10).

<sup>11</sup> Beller-Hann also refers to a *mazar* in Keriya in southern Xinjiang, believed to be the tomb of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, who in fact died and was buried in Medina (2000:33).

<sup>12</sup> The culminating ritual of the *Ordam*, the *tugh körüshürüsh* (meeting of the flags), involves a procession of flags to the tomb. The ritual is said to enact the bringing together of the head and body of Ali Arslan Khan after he was decapitated in battle. This same story of decapitation in battle and bringing together of head and body is an important theme in the story of Hussain, the son of Ali.

<sup>13</sup> From the translation by Baldick (1993). The book is also known as *Tadhkira-yi Bughra Khan*. See DeWeese (1993:7–10) for a succinct discussion of the text. For a critique of Baldick's work see Schoeler (1985 and 1989).

<sup>14</sup> After the saint Uways whose famous tomb in Karakalpakstan is mentioned above.

<sup>15</sup> See Zhou (1999) for background information and a first-hand account and musical analysis of an Uyghur Qaderiya *zikr* ritual.

These tombs and the paths between them, which criss-cross the Taklimakan desert, trodden and re-trodden by pilgrims on the annual round of festivals, serve to map out a sacred landscape which is marked only in the minds of the Uyghur pilgrims; it is one very different from the printed maps of Xinjiang, which display the new roads and railways and are imbued with a different kind of power.<sup>16</sup>

### Music at the *Mazar* – snapshots of the *Ordam*<sup>17</sup>

Late at night in the courtyard of the mosque attached to the tomb, a crowd is gathered to listen to a group of musicians perform the piece *Tashway*. The piece is attributed to a nineteenth-century *ashiq* named Tash, a religious mendicant and player of the *rawap* plucked lute, favourite instrument of the Uyghur narrative singers. The piece is associated with mourning and believed to have been played at Tash's funeral, and is thus suited to the *mazar* context.<sup>18</sup> Beginning the performance, an elderly *imam* wearing a turban recites from the Koran. The crowd makes the movement of ritual cleansing and gives a drawn-out cry, "*La illahi ilallah*". A young man wearing a flat cap plays the *rawap*. He is accompanied by several men playing *sapaya* percussion sticks and one *dap* frame drum. The musicians all seem slightly tranced. The *rawap* player sings the opening free-rhythm section in a raw voice full of emotion. He is on the edge, but his playing is precise. The percussionists chime in with long cries at the end of his phrases. The large all-male audience is quiet and calm, seated, smoking cigarettes. A smoky fire lights the players. The percussionists are now deeply tranced, the drummer makes his *dap* leap in the air, one man twitches as he plays. They move into the metered section, singing together led by the *rawap*. The action and intensity of the musicians contrasts with the calm of the crowd. The rhythm of the drum changes, the percussionists give a rhythmic "*Woy! Woy! Woy!*" They play with theatrical movements, up, left, right, rocking side to side. A long virtuoso section on the *rawap* follows, to an insistent drum beat. The piece comes to an end and the whole audience gives a long cry, and several men offer prayers blessing the festival.

People are moving towards the tomb of Ali Arslan Khan, holding large coloured flags. This is a huge crowd, gathered for the culmination of the festival. Several *naghra sunay* bands are playing. These kettle drum and double-reed shawm bands are thought to have played the early Islamic kings like Ali Arslan Khan into battle, and may have been introduced into Xinjiang during the Qarakhan period alongside Islam.<sup>19</sup> Many men in the crowd hold huge *dap* frame drums, over 50 cm in diameter (Figure 1). The gathered crowds are climbing up the sand dunes towards the tomb in a long procession. There are five hills to cross.

<sup>16</sup> See Feuchtwang (1992:21–3) for an exposition of the concept of sacred landscapes in China.

<sup>17</sup> These scenes were observed and videoed in 1995 by members of the Xinjiang Arts Research Unit.

<sup>18</sup> A professional stage version of *Tashway* has also been developed. A short piece composed for solo, virtuoso *rawap*, the professional version is very different from this performance at the *mazar*.

<sup>19</sup> Although there is a school of thought which places the arrival of the *sunay* in the region much earlier (cf. Han 2000).



Figure 1 *Dap* players process towards the tomb at the *Ordam* festival, 1995 (Rahilā Dawut)

Women may climb the first two, then they roll down again, cleansing themselves of evil influence. The men continue towards the tomb, processing in village groups with their flags, led by *dap* players constantly beating out rhythm. A man deep in trance runs before one group, half dancing, half urging them on; several others seem semi-ecstatic. A mountain of flags, twenty metres high, is being raised above the tomb; the flags are pink, blue, red and white with black fringes and tufts of black fur, reminiscent of Tibetan prayer flags (Figure 2).

*Sunay* and *dap* are being played and men are dancing. The drummers are competitive, displaying their skills: they hold the drums high above their heads and give theatrical flourishes. The tranced dancer twitches and moves his hands and legs in awkward shapes. He raises the cry "*Allah*", and all join him. He weeps and shakes, kneels and speaks of his troubles, half frenzied. Others kneel and listen with respect, hands cupped. Some weep at his words and make the movement of ritual cleansing. One man sobs and breaks into song, a free recitative with long drawn-out notes in a high, hoarse voice; others make short speeches. In the crowd a young man plays a slow introductory section of a *sānām* dance piece<sup>20</sup> on the *sunay*. Other *sunay* and *dap* players join him for the dance section.

<sup>20</sup> From the Arabic: "carved image". Suites of between six and thirteen folksongs played usually for dancing. Each oasis town has its own distinctive *sānām* in the local singing style, but they are all related rhythmically, beginning with a moderate four-beat dance rhythm and moving gradually towards a faster four-beat. *Sānām* are often played in a purely instrumental version by the *naghra sunay* bands.



*Figure 2* A flag mountain being raised at a *mazar* near Khotān (Rahilā Dawut)



### Snapshots of Imam Hasim *Mazar*<sup>21</sup>

Another major *mazar* festival is held in May during the mulberry season at the tomb of Imam Hasim, another eleventh-century martyr who died in battle with Khotan. A big Sufi *zīkr* ceremony was videoed at this festival in 1997, held in the middle of the day in the open air, with hundreds of men gathered in a circle. The practice of *zīkr* is described by Jean During as the practice of invocation through the repetition of a sacred word or formula. It may be silent or voiced, individual or collective. It is accompanied by rhythmic movements and special ways of breathing which are meant to circulate the body's energies<sup>22</sup> (During 1989:136). In Xinjiang *zīkr* ceremonies are termed *hālqā-suhibāt*<sup>23</sup> (lit. circling and talking). Many of the songs (*hökmāt*) which they sing to accompany the rhythmic chants express mourning, often for the founder and former leaders of their Sufi lodge. At the centre of this group at the *mazar* festival are mainly older men, dancing, the rest gathered around in a tight circle, swaying to the beat, chanting. One of their melodies is familiar: the revolutionary folksong *Yasha Gongchandang* (Long live the Communist Party), originally a *hökmāt* melody, borrowed and adapted to new revolutionary lyrics in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> Across the way a smaller group of *Büwi* Sufi women, their shawls covering their whole heads, are conducting their own ritual, voices raised as if in competition with the men. The *Büwi* in Xinjiang conduct *zīkr* ceremonies similar to the men's, where a singer maintains the melody of the song while the gathered women dance and give the rhythmic chants such as "*Allah hu*". Exclusive to the women are the *monajat* songs,<sup>25</sup> considered to be very beautiful and associated with grief and mourning. When they are sung, the women at the ceremony weep openly.

### Music and the spiritual in Central Asia

In the Central Asian context the ambivalent relationship between Islam and music has been discussed by several ethnomusicologists (Baily 1988; 2001; Doubleday 1999; Sakata 1986). There are several excellent studies of Sufism

<sup>21</sup> These scenes were observed and videoed in 1997. Videos held by Rahilä Dawut.

<sup>22</sup> Many Uyghurs who spoke of the practice of *zīkr* associated it with health, as in: "the reason why my grandfather lived to be 120 years old is because he practised *zīkr* every week and ate mutton every day".

<sup>23</sup> Baldick translates the Uzbek *suhbat* (Uyghur, *suhibāt*) as "remembrance of god, poetry" (1993:Glossary).

<sup>24</sup> The appropriation of ritual songs by the Communist Party for reworking as revolutionary songs is not uncommon in Xinjiang. It seems that cultural workers were not troubled by the idea that old associations may cling to the melody when new lyrics have been affixed. See Harris (2000) for the history of a revolutionary shaman song in China. This Sufi chant, with its rhythmic stepwise melody well suited to group singing, was eminently suitable material for reworking as a revolutionary song.

<sup>25</sup> During and Mirabdolbaghi describe *monajat* in Iran as "prayers of supplication", chanted especially during the festival of Ramadan (1991:22).

and music, such as Regula Burckhart-Qureshi's study of Qawwali in Pakistan and India (1986) and During's study of Sufis and music in Iran (1989). During argues that music has frequently been linked to the unconscious and to pleasure, and hence to the baser instincts. Thus, attempts to condemn it have been made by theologians within Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism as well as Islam. But music is also regarded in Islamic culture as a science and as an abstract mathematical study. And it is also presented as an esoteric theory, as a transcendent, divine revelation (During 1989:21–2). The relationship, or rather relationships, between Islam and music have varied widely over time and space depending on the way the religion has adapted to the local culture and the way it has been interpreted by ruling powers. In reports from early twentieth-century Xinjiang both sides of the debate are represented in popular thought. One strand of thought holds that the hair of the ass of the Antichrist is made from the strings of musical instruments, which will entice people to follow him on the Day of Judgement, while Uyghur musicians defend themselves with the belief that the prophet David was the inventor of music.<sup>26</sup> However the presence of so much musical activity at these tombs of Islamic saints is particularly interesting because orthodox Islam forbids the performance of music at funerals or near big tombs, and forbids gatherings and entertainments at these places. As Baily has recently pointed out, in Afghanistan one reason given by the Taliban for its ban on music was that the nation was deemed to be in mourning as it continued to suffer under civil war (Baily 2001:40). At the Uyghur *mazar* festivals, in contrast, many musical forms – not only the purely vocal, which are less likely to be considered to be “music”, but also instrumental pieces (*nāghmā*) – are specifically linked to mourning, such as the piece *Tashway* described above, many Sufi *hökmät*, and *Büwi monajat*.

The majority of the musical styles, instruments and genres described above are not exclusive to the *mazar* festivals. The *Muqam* are played informally at parties, and on the stage they are performed by professional state-supported troupes; beggars play on the streets and in the bazaars; *Büwi* are invited into peoples' homes to recite the Koran and they sing at funerals. *Naghra sunay* bands play for festivals, weddings and other celebrations – even, in towns, to celebrate the opening of a new shop. There is cross-over between the spiritual and secular too in the lyrics of the songs sung at the *mazar*, many of which are to do with romantic love. But there is also ambiguity implicit in the lyrics, where romantic love may serve as a metaphor for the longing for the divine. This is most clearly heard in the case of the *muqāddimā* free-rhythm opening sections of the *Muqam*, whose lyrics are attributed to the great poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who wrote in Chagatay, the early Turkic

<sup>26</sup> Jarring (1979; Prov.464.12R, Jarring Collection, Lund University Library). Quoted in Beller-Hann (2000:41). Cf. Baily's study of popular attitudes to music in Afghanistan (1988:146–53).

literary language. Take this excerpt from *Özhal Muqam muqäddimä*, attributed to Höwäydä:

*Yar käydi qizil änglini ziba boylin döp  
 Aläm anga köz saldi tamashsha qilyin döp  
 Ot yaqti jahan mülkigä ghävgha qilyin döp  
 Mändäk bir divaninä Höwäydä qilyin döp  
 Khänjär qolida Mäshräpni ölturigili kaldi  
 Ghävghayu qiyamät män shayda qilyän döp*

My darling wears red clothes to make herself beautiful  
 The world's eyes are upon her and they are pleased  
 Fire has burned up the world's riches making a great tumult  
 Can a beggar like myself become like Höwäydä  
 They have come with daggers to slay Mäshräp  
 The tumult of Judgement Day threatens to intoxicate me<sup>27</sup>

During, writing on music and mysticism in Iran, notes the great variety of musical forms found within Sufi ceremonies, and he traces musical links between the chants of Shi'ite dervishes, classical song, popular esoteric religion, *monajat* prayers of supplication and Koranic recitation (1989:22–6). Such detailed studies of cross-over between secular and sacred musical repertoires are complemented by evidence of overlap in popular attitudes. Hiromi Lorraine Sakata discusses the example of an Afghan folksong popularized in the 1960s which mingles love lyrics with reference to the New Year pilgrimage to *Mazar-i Sharif*:

Come, let's go to the Mazar, Mullah Mohammad Jan  
 To see the wild tulips, oh, dear sweetheart  
 We will weep around Sakhi Jan's shrine ...

Sakata concludes that "the notion of music in Afghanistan, like other cultural expression, is inextricably intertwined and based on religious meaning and interpretation" (1986:39). Levin, writing on Uzbekistan, has also remarked on the many connections between music and the spiritual. Musicians in Uzbekistan and Xinjiang also commonly serve as poets, philosophers, comedians or mullahs. Among the Uyghurs, Beller-Hann suggests that musicians (and this is particularly true of the *mäddah* narrative singers of Islamic tales) act as mediators between orthodox religion and popular magical practices (Beller-Hann 2000:39). Levin suggests that for the Uzbeks music not only crosses the boundaries but actively links the sacred and secular, as in the saying *Bir gâh xudâi rasuldan, bir gâh ghamzai usuldan* (Once for Allah and the prophet, once for merriment (lit. "a seductive wink") and dance) (1996:63–4).

<sup>27</sup> Lyrics as sung by Abdulla Mäjnun of Khotan, translated by Yasin Mukhpul and Rachel Harris.

One of the very few historical sources on music in Xinjiang aside from Chinese imperial records makes clear the broad connection between music and spiritual power. This is the nineteenth-century "History of musicians" (*Tarikhi musiqiyun*) by Mulla Mojizi,<sup>28</sup> a series of biographies of the famous musicians of Central Asia going back to Kharz, descendant of Noah, the mythical creator of music, and up to the poet musicians of the Chagatay era – the best known of whom is probably Ali Shir Nawayi (1439–1502) of Herat – who are attributed as the creators of the *Muqam*. The book records many miraculous tales, linking music-making with the state of ecstatic union with God. The biography of Mawlana Sahib Bālikhi (d. 1440), musician at the court of Babur Shah in Kabul, is a typical example. Mojizi records that one day as Bālikhi played *Chol Iraq Muqam* at a *majlis* festival at Babur's court, a nightingale perched on his *tāmbur* plucked lute and began to sing. All the people who heard began to shout and weep; they rolled about and fainted. Then they were afraid and they stoned the nightingale, and when the bird died, Bālikhi died. Mojizi also quotes from al-Farabi, the influential theorist: "If you pray for a hundred years and do not receive abundance, take it from the strings of my *qānūn* [zither]". As Nathan Light points out in his discussion of the "History of musicians", al-Farabi is certainly not well-known for his discussions of music and spirituality, but Mojizi's attribution places him firmly in the Central Asian Sufi tradition (Light 1998).

The contemporary political ramifications of the impossibility of separating the sacred and the secular are illustrated by a current argument over the *Muqam*, the twelve musical suites which are commonly held up as the jewel in the crown of Uyghur national culture. The final *māshrāp*<sup>29</sup> sections of the *Twelve Muqam* are musically closely related to the *hökmāt* prayers of the Sufis and the *ashiq* religious mendicants. This causes considerable conceptual problems for some Uyghur nationalist intellectuals, who virulently oppose the Sufis – blaming them for downfall of the sixteenth-century Yarkand Khanate, which is considered to be the last great Uyghur kingdom – but raise up the *Muqam* as symbol of all that is great and good about Uyghur culture (cf. Light 1998). The way out of the dilemma, naturally, is to ignore these inconvenient links. The lyrics of the *māshrāp* now sung in professional performance have been changed to minimize the religious content; the repeated refrain "Allah", for example, has been changed to "*dostlar*" (friends).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> A copy, made in 1919, was found in Khotan in 1950 and has since been translated into modern Uyghur and published in Xinjiang. Excerpts have been translated into English by Light (1998), and into French by Trebinjac (2000).

<sup>29</sup> *Māshrāp* (lit. gathering) – several faster sung pieces in 2/4 or sometimes 7/8 rhythms, consisting of folk love poetry. This section of the *Muqam* is for dancing. Usually the lyrics of the first *māshrāp* are attributed to a famous poet.

<sup>30</sup> The process of revising the *Twelve Muqam*, begun in 1978 under the aegis of the Twelve Muqam Research Committee (*On ikki muqam tātqiqat ilmiy jamiyiti*), has given rise to a series of high-profile conferences, publications (OIMTIJ 1992) and recordings (OIMTIJ 1997), and is ongoing. Published versions of the revised lyrics (cf. Barat 1986) are hotly contested within professional musical circles. Djumaev, writing on Soviet Uzbekistan, also

The *mazar* festivals of Xinjiang serve as a focus for prayer and for the out-pouring of personal grief. Jarring describes during his 1929 visit to the *Ordam* a typical pilgrim group of women with a mullah, sobbing and singing and reciting prayers, "going through their routine of misery and woe" as he puts it (1986:120). But equally the festivals are an important opportunity for leisure, for people to have fun, to experience the "wink and dance" aspect of music and life. Many of Xinjiang's *mazar* festivals are held just before the busy planting season, or after the harvest. A small industry springs up every year at festival time to cater to the needs of the pilgrims. Ma Binyan, writing in 1983, records that 238 stalls were set up at the *Ordam*, and 350 horses took part in games of sheep polo (Ma 1983). Jarring writes that in 1929 "a couple of hundred souls" were permanently based at the *Ordam* making their living catering to pilgrims (1986:120). Another important aspect of the festivals is the ritual communal meal. Some food, either a sheep to be slaughtered or rice or fruit, is brought by each visitor, offered to the sheikh, cooked together in a huge pot, the "golden bowl" (*altun dash*), and shared out amongst the crowd.<sup>31</sup> Jarring (1986:122) writes of the "horrible stench" of the room containing the golden bowl, which was used both for cooking and slaughtering the animals. At *mazar* festivals many practices normally considered immoral are permissible. Women may remove their veils; a special space, the "golden room", is set aside for smoking hashish and for lovers; other people indulge in gambling; all are permissible within the special ritual space of the *mazar*. Much of this is familiar from numerous accounts of festival behaviour around the world and, to give a specific example from within China, parallels recent accounts of the numerous *Hua'er* festivals held in the northwestern province of Gansu (Yang 1994; 1998). These festivals, attended by Han Chinese and Muslim Hui, combine the worship of local deities with public joking and flirting between the sexes through the singing of *hua'er* songs.

### **Mazar and political authority**

Historically, the *mazar* tradition has been treated by ruling powers across Central Asia as both source of political legitimacy and potential threat. Thierry Zarcone writes that rulers of Xinjiang have allied themselves to the *Ordam* and its saint in order to legitimate their power (1999:229). The rulers of the sixteenth-century Yarkand Khanate were closely allied to Naqshbandi Sufi orders and were influenced by Uwaysi traditions. For non-Muslim rulers of the region the relationship has been rather different. Under the Manchu Qing dynasty's imperial rule of Xinjiang many Islamic texts, including the "History of the Uwaysi", were banned (Baldick 1993:215). Suspicion has often been allied to fear. Jarring says of 1920s pilgrims to the *Ordam*:

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(continued from previous page) notes the substitution of new texts in the *Shashmaqam* where the lyrics were considered to be too religious (1993:45).

<sup>31</sup> Levin also notes the communal meals of *shurpa* and *shavla* pilaf at the festival of the tomb of Sultan Uways al-Qarain (1996:182).

They were so fanatical that non-believers had to keep out of the way ... a foreign consul who wanted to visit the tombs was provided with an escort of Chinese soldiers, even though it was not pilgrimage time. The Chinese governor in Kashgar did not want to run any risks.

(Jarring 1986:112).

This comment possibly says more about attitudes of the contemporary Chinese authorities than the actual demeanour of the pilgrims, and it is echoed in dire warnings made privately to the first author by Chinese friends in Xinjiang in recent years.

Across the border in the former Soviet states, *mazar* have been regarded with suspicion under both Soviet and post-Soviet rule. A study by the Russian writer Poliakov notes the "anti-Soviet nature" of the *mazar* tradition, citing the example of the tomb of Enver Pasha, the Turkish Basmachi leader who died in Tajikistan in 1922 fighting against the Russians (1992:100). Another tomb, that of Baha' al-Din Naqshband in Bukhara, was the site of an anti-Russian demonstration in 1868 which called for the abdication of the emir, who had accepted Russian protection, and for a holy war against Russia. This tomb was dismantled under the USSR (Zarcone 1999:226). Levin notes that the tomb of Sultan Uways al-Qarani was closed during the anti-religion campaigns of the 1970s (1996:183). The Soviet authorities attempted to oppose institutional Islam to popular Sufism, instating officially approved mullahs in the mosques and suppressing popular ritual practices. However, as Alexandre Bennigsen argues, these efforts were frustrated by the complex interlinking of these twin poles of religious expression (Bennigsen and Wimbush 1985:40).

Under the People's Republic of China (PRC), *mazar* worship and especially the big festivals have also been regarded with suspicion by the Xinjiang authorities, but, unlike the situation in the USSR, tombs and their cults have not been systematically attacked except under the extreme policies of the Cultural Revolution. Here, as in the former Soviet Union, the fate of the *mazar* tradition has rested to a certain extent on definitions. The Chinese constitution enshrines the right to religious worship within the framework of the five acknowledged "systematized religions" of Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam. Hand-in-hand with this goes official intolerance of "illegal religious activities" (*feifa zongjiao huodong*) and "feudal superstition" (*fengjian mixin*), which are consistently linked in state propaganda to the "backward" and "uncivilized" and to social disorder. In practice, state intervention in ritual practices has ranged from the violent anti-superstition campaigns of the Cultural Revolution period, waged within the framework of class warfare, to more moderate strategies of propaganda and re-education (Anagnost 1994:227). Writing on Xinjiang, Beller-Hann (2001a:9) has drawn attention to the problematic nature of many popular Islamic ritual practices that fall between classification as "feudal superstition" and the politically neutral category of local "folk customs" (*minsu*).

The uneven situation across Xinjiang suggests that local decisions, rather than consistent state intervention, control the *mazar*. Zarcone has described

government attempts to minimize the potential political threat of the *mazar* through limitation of their influence and manipulation of their symbolism<sup>32</sup> (1999:234). Some of the major pilgrimage sites based in towns, for example, have been renovated and opened as tourist attractions, with ticket prices which are too expensive for most locals to afford and written introductions to the site in Uyghur, Chinese and English that offer officially approved versions of the region's religion and history. This strategy enables the government to publicly demonstrate its support for Islam while limiting aspects of religious practice considered inimical to the state. Referring to our earlier remarks about the sacred landscape mapped out by the *mazar* and pilgrimage routes in Xinjiang, it is possible to read the development of tourist sites in Xinjiang as a contesting of the symbolic landscape.<sup>33</sup> In a recent article on the writing of the history of Xinjiang, Gardner Bovingdon recounts a poignant tale of a group of young Uyghurs who lost their way in the desert searching for a tomb and stumbled on a newly built tourist site commemorating the exploits of the Chinese general Ban Chao (2001:95). Bovingdon focuses on the historical import of these changes wrought upon the landscape. Equally, listening to the loudspeakers blaring out "Xinjiang folksongs" set with Chinese lyrics and a disco beat, which are so much a feature of the new tourist sites, one might refer to a redrawing of the region's soundscape.<sup>34</sup>

In contexts less visible to the outside world, particularly in the case of the large-scale *mazar* festivals, policy has become more hard-line in recent years. The *Ordam* festival was first banned under the PRC in 1958 following the national anti-Rightist campaign, a time when traditional cultural activities across the country but especially in Xinjiang began to be strongly circumscribed. The festival was revived after the end of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s, and at its high point in the mid-1980s it was attracting some 20,000 people each day. However as Xinjiang's political situation became increasingly tense during the 1990s, policy towards the *mazar* festivals became caught up in fears of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and Uyghur separatism, which are regularly equated in government terminology with violence and terrorism. This problem was undoubtedly instrumental in the new ban on the *Ordam* imposed in 1997.

In other parts of Xinjiang local authorities have preferred to implement policies of regulation and support, ensuring a degree of government control over the festivals. In Khotan the Imam Hasim *Mazar* festival has from 1997 and continuing up to 2001 been regulated by the local government. A new road to the tomb has been built, pilgrims are sold tickets for entry to the festival and

<sup>32</sup> Zarcone (1999) discusses the case of the Afaq Khoja *Mazar* in Kashgar, tomb of the kings of the Khoja dynasty. The Chinese refer to this site as the tomb of the fragrant concubine (*xiangfei mu*), a princess of the Khoja dynasty who was sent to the imperial Chinese court.

<sup>33</sup> Anagnost similarly discusses the ritual revival and government attempts to control popular ritual practices in southwest China in terms of a contesting of symbolic space (1994:222).

<sup>34</sup> Typically the songs of the ubiquitous song writer Wang Luobin. For an account of the controversy surrounding his work see Harris (forthcoming).

local police oversee security. The festival is held annually in May, running from Wednesday to Friday for five weeks, with a total of some 20,000 people attending. The experiment appears to model policy on the *Hua'er* festivals of Gansu, which have been regulated and supported by the local government over the last 20 years and are regarded as opportunities to promote commerce and tourism, as well as to demonstrate official support for local "folk customs".

The links made by the authorities between "fundamentalism" or "Wahhabism"<sup>35</sup> and the *mazar* are ironic given orthodox Islamic opposition to the popular *mazar* traditions, and they are expressive of the lack of knowledge of local religious customs among local officials. In 1999 Xinjiang newspapers reported that "Wahhabis" had burnt down a shrine in Kashgar where women went to pray for children. One of the present authors (Dawut) encountered a woman at the Imam Hasim *Mazar* festival in 2000 making a long speech to a crowd of onlookers, saying that *mazar* worship was the worship of human beings and against proper religious teaching.

The introduction to this volume spoke of the preoccupation of Communist states, and more generally of modern nation states, with order. The Xinjiang authorities, sensitive to national perceptions of the region as backward, chaotic and wild, have been particularly concerned with presenting a respectable face to the world at large. Arguably, official opposition to the *mazar* lies in the sphere of aesthetics rather than politics. It is less any real political threat that the *mazar* festivals might pose, and more the "disorderly" nature of their sights and sounds, which prove so alarming to the authorities. A few Uyghur scholars have recently dared to suggest that the banning of the *mazar* festivals fuels popular resentment against the authorities (cf. Roberts 1998) and have called for a redrawing of the line between "illegal religious activities" and the "folk customs" of the Uyghurs. There is currently little space for debate of such issues in Xinjiang and, sadly, it appears increasingly likely in the international climate at the time of writing, following America's declaration of a "global war against terrorism", that the space for such debate will become yet more limited.

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<sup>35</sup> "Wahhabi" is the Central Asian catch-all term for orthodox Muslims. The term is derived from the Wahhabi cult of Saudi Arabia, which has undoubtedly become increasingly influential in Central Asia in recent years, but is generally used in a rather loose way equivalent to the Western use of the term "fundamentalist".



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