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Transnationalism in Kyrgyz and Turkmen sacral sites: Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya Mausoleum and Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra Mausoleum

Keywords: transnationalism, sacral sites, UNESCO World Heritage, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan

Mots-clés : transnationalisme, lieux sacrés, patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO, Kirghizistan, Turkménistan

Study of the worship of saints in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan

A significant number of sacral sites exist in Central Asia. This article focuses on the two Muslim pilgrimages in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The first is the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya in Osh, in Kyrgyzstan. The second is the mausoleum of Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra in Kunya-Urgench, in Turkmenistan. By comparing two mausoleums, the paper will analyze similarities and differences between them with regards to the sacral sites themselves, to the types of visitors and the roles they perform. Through the application of Erving Goffman's frame analysis¹, this study aims to find out to what extent the both mausoleums are involved in the transnational space. The main hypothesis is that the conjunction of tourist, religious, local, regional and national frames influence the mausoleum interpretation as transnational space.

*Zyýarat*² or *зыярат*³ - pilgrimages to local sacred sites, have resumed and been observed in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan since the 1990s. In regards to Turkmenistan, this phenomenon, as well as the local shrines themselves, are represented in the works of the Soviet ethnographer Sergei Demidov.⁴ Based on his own many years of research, Demidov presented the most important of the local pantheon of saints revered by Turkmen pilgrims. Continuing the theme of sacred places in Central Asia, the authoritative work "The Worship of Saints in Islam" by Vladimir Basilov, a representative of the Soviet ethnographic school, explores the veneration of saints in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.⁵ The worshipping of saints is analyzed here as the main element of the adaptation of Islam to local conditions, concluding that local saints were still venerated as a part of daily Muslim life in Soviet Central Asia. Despite the oppression of sacred places during the Soviet era, the treatises of Basilov and Demidov do not hide the persistence of worship as a part of Soviet Muslims' lives, thereby showing the continuity of the tradition of honoring local shrines in Turkmenistan. The extensive volumes on the sacral sites of Kyrgyzstan, edited by Kyrgyz scholar Gulnara Aitpayeva, encompass data on several thousand saints (kyrg. *ыйык*) and sacred

¹ Goffman Erving. Berger Bennett. 1986. Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. Boston : Northeastern University Press.

² Turkm. Pilgrimage.

³ Kyrgyz. Pilgrimage.

⁴ Demidov Sergei. 1988. Legendy i Pravda o «svyatykh» mestah. Ylym: Ashgabat;

Demidov Sergei. 1978. Sufizm v Turkmenii. Ylym: Ashgabat; Demidov Sergei. 1990. Istoriya religioznykh verovaniy narodov Turkmenistana. Ylym: Ashgabat; Demidov Sergei. 2002; Postsovetskiy Turkmenistan. Moscow; Demidov Sergei. 1992. Verovaniya, obryady i obychai turkmen: istoriko-etnograficheskie issledovaniya. Ylym.

⁵ Basilov Vladimir. 1970. Kult svyatykh v islame. Mysl : Moscow.

(kyrg. *касуетмүү*) locations in Kyrgyzstan.⁶ These works, based on field research, have collected descriptions of sacred places, suggesting how they should be classified. Additional sources of information are provided by Soviet ethnographer and religious scholar Gleb Snesev and Russian anthropologist Sergei Abashin. Geographically, the cores of their treatises are devoted mainly to Uzbekistan, which makes it possible to draw parallels between places of worship from other parts of the region and reveal peculiar features of reverence for shrines and pilgrimages in Central Asia. Furthermore, some of their research is devoted to sacred places in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.⁷ Lastly, monographs and papers that highlight the sacral sites presented in this study has been included.⁸ Due to extensive factual and field material, all the above research is of undeniable value for studying sacral geography and pilgrimages to the local shrines of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. While identifying common components of local/regional pilgrimage practices and exploring the history of shrines, existing studies on Central Asia do not consider sacral sites as a component of transnational space. Therefore, the works were referenced that examine other regions, in particular the North and South Caucasus,⁹ Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁰

The above treatises, together with the author's field expeditions to sacred places in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, provide information and data that allow us to analyze the transnational significance of the mausoleum of Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra in Turkmenistan and the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya in Kyrgyzstan. Serving as sources for this research were the author's field materials (AFM) from September-October 2017 and from April-July 2018, including visits to shrines, participation in pilgrimage ceremonies, as well as conducting interviews and discussions with pilgrims, tourists, and representatives of the museum of the Kunya-Urgench State Historical and Cultural Park and the Sulaiman-Too Museum Complex. The paper represents the initial stage in the study of sacral sites in Kyrgyzstan and in Turkmenistan, which the author intends to continue.

Typology and space of sacred places

⁶ Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed). 2013. Sacred sites of the Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam. Bishkek; Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed.) 2015. Svyatyte mesta Severa Kyrgyzstana: Priroda, Chelovek, Duhovnost. Kulturno-issledovatel'skiy zentr Aigine: Bishkek.

⁷ Snesev Gleb. 1969. Relikty domusulmansih verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Khorezma. Nauka: Moscow; Snesev Gleb. 1983. Khorezmskie legendy kak istochnik po istorii religioznyh kultov Sredney Azii. Nauka: Moscow; Abashin Sergei. 2013. Mazars of Boboi-ob: Typical and Untypical Features of Sacred Places in Central Asia // Muslim Saints and Mausoleums in Central Asia and Xinjiang .Y. Shinmen, M. Sawada, E. Waite (eds.). Paris: Jean Maisonneuve Successeur; Abashin Sergei 2001. Potomki svyatyh v sovremennoy Sredney Azii // Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. № 4; Abashin Sergei. 2014. Prayer for Rain: Practicing Being Soviet and Muslim // Journal of Islamic Studies. Vol. 25. No. 2, pp. 178–200.

⁸ Muradov Ruslan. 2016. Kultovye sooruzeniya i svyatyte mesta//Dubova N., Bayliev A.T. (eds.) Turkmeny. Nauka: Moscow, pp. 394-406; Muradov Ruslan 2014. Kultovye mesta v doline Murgaba. Sarianidi V.I (ed.) Trudy Margianskoy Arheologicheskoy ekspeditsii. T.5., pp. 39-56; Ogudin Valentin., Abashin Sergei. 2003. Takht-I Sulaiman // Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoy imperii. Issue. 4. Moscow, pp.76–79. Terlezkiy Nikolay. 2014. Sulaiman -Too v fotokollektsiyah MAE.// Illustrativnye kollektsii Kunstkamery(Sbornik MAE, t. 59). Spb., pp. 287-308.; Tyson David. 1997. Shrine pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a means to understand Islam among the turkmens. Central Asia Monitor. No.1. Pp. 15-32.

⁹ DarievaTsypylma, Mühlfried Florian, Tuite Kevin (eds.). 2018. Sacred Places, Emerging Spaces. Religious Pluralism in the Post-Soviet Caucasus. Berghahn.

¹⁰ Valenta Marco. Strabac Zan. 2016. The dramaturgical nexus of ethno-religious, tourist and transnational frames of pilgrimages in post-conflict societies: The Bosnian and Herzegovinian experience// Tourist Studies. Volume: 16 issue: 1, pp. 57-73.

More than 700 holy places are found in Turkmenistan¹¹, and in Kyrgyzstan - about 1176¹². In reality, the number of Turkmen *öwliýä*¹³ (in Arabic *awliya* -saints, patrons) or Kyrgyz *ыйык жер*¹⁴ can be higher or lower. With respect to both cases, the term *mazar* can be used.¹⁵ According to Aitpaeva, *mazar* means different places “having a sacred character in people’s minds”¹⁶.

The first attempt to classify the *mazars* of the region was undertaken by Gleb Snesev in 1969. He separated them according to their patron saints: 1) “the holy image of which is uncertain” and not having “elementary hagiography and its own name”; 2) “characters from the Bible and the Qur’an,” including saints “from the early history of Islam”; 3) “medieval Sufi saints”; 4) “representatives of local rulers” whose mausoleums “by inertia became objects of worship”¹⁷.

Presumably based on the classification of Snesev and greatly supplementing it, Sergei Demidov believes that a significant portion of the holy places are found in cemeteries. He divides this group into additional subgroups, one by affiliation: 1) to extraordinary religious figures; 2) to representatives of the clergy of a more recent time; 3) to secular authorities. The second group consists of objects of natural origin (sacred springs, trees, stones, mountains), classified as places of pre-Islamic veneration, which later became “islamified.”¹⁸ The third group includes sacred places in honor of the martyrs for the faith - the *shehidlik* (in Arabic *shahid*, who died for the faith); the fourth includes *öwliýä* relating to the saints who are buried at other locations¹⁹ The latter group is divided into sacred places associated with saints who had never been to Turkmenistan, with saints buried elsewhere in Turkmenistan, and *öwliýä* with a missing burial plot²⁰. The fifth group includes places of mixed types, where several of the above elements coexist.

Classification of sacred places can be made on the basis of how they originated, their period of emergence, and their functionality.²¹ They can be of natural origin and created by man, if having both characteristics of mixed origin; by periods of emergence are divided into mythological/prehistoric, historical and modern²². Functionality is explained by the influence that the place and the patron saint can have on pilgrims. Visiting the mausoleum of Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra is recommended for those who wish to improve their health and find happy family life, to improve their affairs, and in general for “all Muslims” [AFM, Kunya-Urgench Historical and Cultural Reserve, October 2017, May 2018]. At the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya eyes are healed²³. According to pilgrims, visiting the shrine has a beneficial effect on health and helps one to find success in life. [AFM, Sulaiman-Too, September 2017, July 2018]. Field studies in sacred places in the Balkan, Dashoguz, Mary provinces in Turkmenistan and in Issyk-Kul, Osh, and Chui oblasts in Kyrgyzstan show the multifunctionality of sacred places, that at one shrine the pilgrims can ask for happy family life, financial well-being, and for career, health and other numerous

¹¹ Demidov Sergei. 2001. *Ovliya// Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoy Imperii*. Vypusk 3. «Vostochnaya literatura» RAN: Moscow, p.76

¹² Aitpaeva Gulnara (ed). 2015. *Svyatye mesta Severa Kyrgyzstana: Priroda, Chelovek, Duhovnost*. Kulturno-issledovatel'skiy zentr Aigine: Bishkek, p.8

¹³ Turkm. holy place.

¹⁴ Kyrgyz *ыйык* depending on context, can be translated as ‘saintly’ or ‘holy’.

¹⁵ *Mazarlyk, mazarçylyk, mazarystan* and *öwliýä* – mean cemetery in Turkmen.

¹⁶ Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed). 2015. *Svyatye mesta Severa Kyrgyzstana: Priroda, Chelovek, Duhovnost*. Kulturno-issledovatel'skiy zentr Aigine: Bishkek, p.6

¹⁷ Snesev Gleb. 1969. *Relikty domusulmansih verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Khorezma*. Nauka: Moscow, pp. 277-279

¹⁸ Demidov Sergei. 2001. *Ovliya// Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoy Imperii*. Vypusk 3. «Vostochnaya literatura» RAN: Moscow, p.76

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid, p.77

²¹ Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed). 2013. *Sacred sites of the Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam*. Bishkek, p.7

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, p. 76

favors. In Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, there are sacral sites dating from different epochs. The most ancient places are of natural origin. Determining the exact date for many sacred places of mixed and natural origin is difficult due to the lack of written sources.

In the context of this study, it is also proposed to classify sacred sites by whether they belong to a UNESCO World Heritage site. Assignment of these categories is based on the supposed difference in the perception of sacred places and monuments having or not having World Heritage site status. Both mausoleums being studied belong to a UNESCO World Heritage site. Pursuant the classification of Snesev, the mausoleum Najm ad-din al-Kubra refers to the *mazars* belonging to the “medieval Sufi saints”; according to Demidov, it belongs to the third group, that is, constructed “in honor of martyrs of the faith”; according to Aitpaeva’s classification, the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya is regarded as man-made and is of a historical time period²⁴.

The main element of the mausoleum (Kyrgyz *сүмбөз*, Turkmen *kümmet*) is the brick structure. The monuments are rectangular in shape, crowned with a dome, with an alcove soaring into the sky. In the vicinity of the Turkmen mausoleum there are several other structures, as well as the historical building of the madrasah “Daşmetjit”²⁵ (XX century), which now houses the folk crafts museum of the Kunya-Urgench State Historical and Cultural Park. The mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya is located at the foot of Sulaiman-Too mountain and next to the Sulaiman-Too National Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex. In addition to the mausoleum, the sacral space includes distinctively laid out piles of stones, stone boulders, trees and shrubs. Many of these elements are included in the Sulaiman-Too space and the territory of Kunya-Urgench, within which the mausoleums of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya and Najm ad-din al-Kubra are located.

As a rule, a cemetery (Turkmen: *gonamchylyk*, Kyrgyz: *көпүстөн*) is located near *mazars*. According to legend, the saint will help everyone who is buried nearby to go to heaven²⁶. In the immediate vicinity of the mausoleum of Najm ad-din al-Kubra there are relatively recent burials (AFM, the State Historical and Cultural Park Kunya-Urgench, October 2017, May 2018). It should be noted that among the local people, the territory of the complex is considered to be a sacred necropolis and is called “360 Saints” (Turkm. *Üç ýüz altmyş*) for the saints who died there. The cemetery has spread out to the slopes of Sulaiman-Too, and at some distance from the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya.

Shrines and monuments - pilgrims and tourists

Transnationalism is defined as a concept which “broadly refers to the multiple ties and interactions linking people or organizations across the borders of nation-states.”²⁷ This part explores the links between the given frames, visitors’ experience and the sacral places.

Within the Kunya-Urgench space, where the mausoleum of Najm ad-din al-Kubra is located, a series of mausoleums and *mazars* attract a significant number of pilgrims on an almost daily basis. The founder of the Sufi order of the Kubraviyah, Ahmed Ibn Omar, Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra al-Khivaki al-Khorezmi (1145-1220) was born in the Khorezm city of Khivak²⁸. He brought Islam to Egypt and Iran. In Gurgandzh (Urgench), Najm ad-Din founded the *khanaka*, with which the history of the brotherhood of the *Kubraviyya* began. Among the famous sheikh's students are the

²⁴ Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed). 2013. Sacred sites of the Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam. Bishkek, p.7

²⁵ Turkm. stone mosque.

²⁶ Basilov Vladimir. 1970. Kult svyatyh v islame. Mysl : Moscow, p.81

²⁷ Jackson Peter, Crang Philip, Dwyer Claire. 2004. Transnational Spaces. London: Routledge.

²⁸ Snesev Gleb. 1983. Khorezmskie legendy kak istochnik po istorii religioznyh kultov Sredney Azii. Nauka: Moscow, p.144;

Saad Ad-din Hamuya, Majd ad-Din Baghdadi and Najm ad-Din Daya Razi²⁹ . The sheikh himself died during the conquest of Khorezm by the Mongols. There are several legends connected with the tragic event. According to one of them, the al-Kubra refused to leave the city before the mass slaughter and died in battle; according to another, “when the sheikh’s head was cut off, he grabbed it with one hand, and with the other grabbed the killer, Hulagu's son, by the hair so tightly, that it was impossible to separate them.”³⁰ The mausoleum was erected over the burial location of the sheikh between 1321-1333.³¹ . On the territory of the Kunya Urgench are also situated the minaret of Kutlug-Timur (11th century), the mausoleum of Turabek-khanym (14th century), the Tekesh mausoleum (12th century), and the mausoleum of Il-Arslan (12th century). Pilgrims pass by almost all of these sacred places, starting from the mausoleum of Najm ad-Din al-Kubra, which is located in the center of the city of Kunya-Urgench.

After walking around the shrine several times, they respectfully touch the door. This ritual is repeated at other monuments in the complex, along with requests and prayers, and monetary donations and items are left. If one is asking for the birth of a child, a model of a cradle (turkm. *salanchak*) is brought, in which a ragdoll is placed; for success in one’s studies, pencils are brought; if one wants to buy a new house or car, keys are left (AFM, the State Historical and Cultural Park Kunya-Urgench, October 2017, May 2018). Pyramids of stones are laid out around the shrines and strips of cloth are tied to the branches of trees and shrubs. Similar practices are typical for sacred places in other parts of Central Asia, as well as in the North Caucasus³² .



**Mausoleum Nadjm ad-Din al-Kubra,
the State Historical and Cultural
Park Kunya-Urgench, October 2017**



**Informational sign, the State
Historical and Cultural Park Kunya-
Urgench, October 2017**

²⁹ Renard John. 2009. The A to Z of Sufism. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., p.140

³⁰ Basharin Pavel, Averiyanov Yuriy. 2014. Sufizm sredi tadjikov // Tadjiki: istoriya, kultura, obshestvo. MAE RAN: Spb, p. 169

³¹ Pugachenkova Galina. 1967. Iskusstvo Turkmenistana. Iskusstvo: Moscow, p.154

³² Aitpaeva Gulnara. (ed), 2013. Sacred sites of the Southern Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Manas, Islam. Kulturno-issledovatelskiy zentr Aigine: Bishkek; Bobrovnikov Vladimir. 2014. Gibridnaya religioznost v kultaх svyatyh i musulman Yujnogo Dagestana: rutulskiy sluchay//Vostokovdtcheskie Issledovaniya na post-Sovetskom prostranstve. MGU: Moscow, pp.122-135

Nothing of the kind was recorded near the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya and on the territory of the Sulaiman-Too complex, with the exception of carefully laid out handkerchiefs on the floor of the sacred cave on top of the mountain and two pieces of white cloth on the floor of the Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya mausoleum [AFM, Sulaiman-Too, September 2017, July 2018].

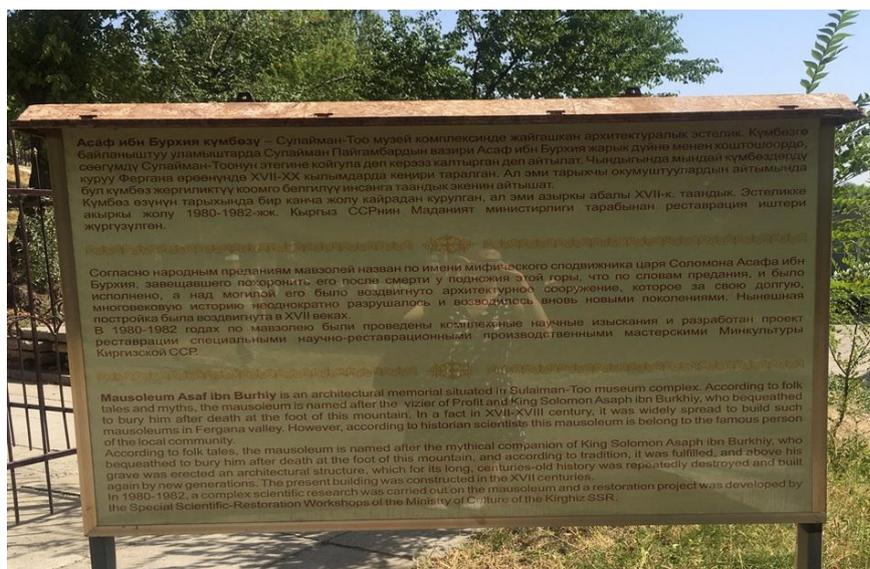
The mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya is located at the foot of Sulaiman-Too. It is known that Asaf ibn Burkhiya was a confidant of the legendary prophet Suleiman (Solomon). The ring of Solomon, engraved with the name of God, has a magical power that obeys Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya. By means of the ring, the legendary vizier transported the throne of Bilkis from Sheba to Jerusalem in the twinkling of an eye³³. The mausoleum acquired a modern look in the XVIII century³⁴ and today it stands as a rectangular structure with sides of length 7m and 9m and a dome with a diameter of 4.5m. The entrance alcove is decorated with a rich decor, and the inner room measuring two meters square has an octagonal shape. Underneath the foundation of the building, remains were found of a funerary structure of burnt bricks, characteristic of the 11th-12th centuries.



Mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya, Sulaiman-Too, July 2018

³³ Walker John, Fenton Paul. 1997. Sulayman b. Dawud // Encyclopaedia of Islam. (Eds. Bosworth C.E., Van Donzel E., Heinrichs W. P., Lecomte G. Brill : Leiden, p. 823.

³⁴ Terlezkiy, Nikolay, 2014. Sulaiman -Too v fotokollekziyah MAE.// Ilustrativnye kollekzii Kunstkamery(Sbornik MAE, t. 59). Spb., p. 290.



Informational sign, Sulaiman-Too, July 2018

Arriving at the sacred complex Sulaiman-Too, which also includes a mountain and its five peaks, caves, Babur's House, stones, and printed footprints, pilgrims mostly ignore the mazar of the vizier of Solomon. The few pilgrims that were met spent only a few minutes at the mausoleum. They reported that they had come to Osh from Jalal-Abad, exclusively to tour the “sacred mountain of Suleiman” and visited to the mausoleum because it is located on the way. The pilgrims could not identify the name of the mausoleum. It should also be noted that the location or the name of the mausoleum is not well known to all residents of Osh. [AFM, Sulaiman-Too, Osh, September 2017, July 2018]. However, from the conversation with the ticket clerk and the guard of the mausoleum, Saturdays and Sundays have the highest attendance of pilgrims. The guard of the mausoleum mentioned that most of the pilgrims and tourists climb the sacred mountain, moving in the direction of Babur's House. Indeed, the number of visitors to the mountain is several times greater than visitors to the mausoleum. The conducted conversations and observations seem to testify to the fact that worship of the prophet Sulaiman has definitively surpassed worship of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya [AFM, Sulaiman-Too, Osh, September 2017, July 2018].³⁵ However, it's not worth rushing to conclusions. According to the security guard at the mausoleum, pilgrims visit the mausoleum about once a week in order to conduct a ritual of worship and for which he reads prayers. On Sunday, there were slightly more visitors at the mausoleum, but still their number was significantly less than the number of visitors to the sacred mountain. Quantitatively, a greater number of pilgrims visit the mausoleum of Najm al-Din al-Kubra.³⁶

Several pilgrims from neighboring Uzbekistan were met at Sulaiman-Too. At Kunya-Urgench Uzbek pilgrims were also met, but only those from Dashouguz.³⁷ As is known, the ethnic Uzbek minorities reside in the territory of the Dashoguz and Osh regions, where the mausoleum of Najm al-Din al-Kubra and the mausoleum Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya are located, respectively. Residents of Western Europe, East Asia, and North America were encountered touring the Kyrgyz and Turkmen sites.

³⁵ Terlezkiy, Nikolay, 2014. Sulaiman -Too v fotokollekziyah MAE.// Ilustrativnye kollekzii Kunstkamery(Sbornik MAE, t. 59). Spb., p. 290.

³⁶ The given comparison is based on the author's data from visits to the shrines in May-June 2018 and September-October 2017.

³⁷ The author was said that pilgrims from neighboring Uzbekistan also visit the sacred sites of Kunya-Urgench.

Pilgrims visit museums located at Sulaiman-Too and Kunya-Urgench. The “Halk Hünärleriň Muzeýi Daşmetjit” museum of the Kunya-Urgench State Historical and Cultural Park and the Sulaiman-Too Museum Complex feature numerous historical artifacts and various thematic expositions. Inside and outside the museums, the author was informed that visiting the shrines of Sulaiman-Too as well as the *öwliýä* of “360 Saints” is equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mecca. [AFM, Kunya Urgench, Dashoguz, October 2017, May 2018; Sulaiman-Too, Osh, September 2017, July 2018]. Tourists also visit the museums, since both sites are popular tourist destinations in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, a visitor’s status can vary from a tourist to a pilgrim and vice versa, as several researchers have noted³⁸. A pilgrim at the mausoleum can tour the museum, and a tourist who visits the sites can experience pilgrimage practices such as sliding down the polished stone of Sulaiman-Too, or by making a wish and putting together a pyramid in Kunya-Urgench.

Likewise, one should stop at the informational plaques to read about the monuments being part of a UNESCO World Heritage site. Those who notice them say that the status of being a UNESCO site raises the value of monuments. The words of one of the pilgrims of Kunya-Urgench sum up the general impression: “If our Turkmen monuments are among the world's historical and cultural monuments, it means that they are of great importance not only for Turkmen but for the whole world” [AFM, the State Historical and Cultural Park Kunya-Urgench, October 2017]. Since the information provided on the signs is brief, it seems that the official interpretation in both cases is limited to exposition in the museums of Kunya-Urgench and Sulaiman-Too.

There are no interpretive materials at the mausoleum of Najm al-Din al-Kubra, and at Kunya Urgench the few informational signs only provide a brief mention of the name and date of the construction. The signage of the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya is also brief, indicating the time period of the construction, when restorative work was carried out and the affiliation of the monument. Other objects at Sulaiman-Too are also presented in a similar vein. The secular nature of the information does not affect the pilgrims in any way, as popularity among local or regional pilgrims works to keep attendance up at the sacred places. Foreign tourists view the mausoleums as tourist attractions, and are comparatively more aware of them because of their World Heritage site status than because of their sacral significance. [AFM, Sulaiman-Too, September 2017, July 2018; the State Historical and Cultural Park Kunya-Urgench, October 2017, May 2018].

Conclusion

The two mausoleums contain many similar features: both combine the status of a sacred place, a local landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site that, taken together, stimulate interest among pilgrims and tourists. The collected data helps to identify the main differences. The Kyrgyz mausoleum seems to be engaged in transnational space through pilgrim and tourist interactions. This assumption arises from the significant number and various origins of tourists and pilgrims to Sulaiman-Too. Despite the mausoleum of Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya is not attracting many visitors, the proximity to Sulaiman-Too ensures a minimum regularity. The mausoleum Najm ad-din al-Kubra appears to surpass the mausoleum Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya in the frequency of attendance by local pilgrims. However, the regional pilgrims were not observed there. It should be acknowledged that the number of foreign tourists to Kunya-Urgench and Sulaiman-Too is almost equivalent.³⁹ The cultural and historical space of both monuments is an active place for intercultural and international exchange. The interaction of local pilgrims and foreign tourists⁴⁰ contributes to the increase in the importance of and transformation of sites from local to transnational. The pilgrims’

³⁸ Vukonic Boris. 1996. *Tourism and Religion*. Oxford: Pergamon; Stausberg Michael. 2011. *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters*. Routledge: NY.

³⁹ This field research took place in the tourism off-season, so it's presumable that the data would differ in other months.

⁴⁰ Tourists aren't necessarily foreign, for at both monuments local tourists were met as well.

belief that visiting a certain combination of sacral sites is equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mecca, or is desirable for “all Muslims,” completes the picture of the transnational space at the Kyrgyz and Turkmen mausoleums. Thus, through the official and State-guided inscription into the UNESCO World Heritage List, and on the other hand through the informal and pilgrim-interpreted inclusion into the global Muslim space, the mausoleums of Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra in Turkmenistan and Asaf-ibn-Burkhiya in Kyrgyzstan become transnational. While representing a historical-cultural attraction for domestic and international tourism, both mausoleums are perceived as sacral and Muslim by the local and regional pilgrims.

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