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The Islamic High Culture of the Golden Horde

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Scholars of Islamic civilization like to note that the Arabic word for “civilization” (madaniyya) is related to the Arabic word for “city” (madina). The two concepts were inevitably linked in the Golden Horde as well, except that there was a new high culture created in the new cities of the riverine oases of the steppe zone. Henceforth, at least until the collapse of the Golden Horde, these would co-exist with the traditional centers of high culture in Xorezm, the Crimea, and the Volga-Kama confluence established earlier. The creation of a high culture in newly-established cities such as Saray and New Saray had many requirements that needed to be fulfilled. The first was that a formidable capital investment was required from whatever sources to create the infrastructure and offer the patronage necessary for supporting the development and practice of a high culture. Second, since the ruling Mongol elite was not heir to a significant high culture of its own and assimilated rapidly to the majority Turkophone population, it would have to develop this high culture at a moment when a Turkic high culture was still not fully developed in Western Eurasia or the Middle East. (In this period only the non-Islamic Uyghur literary tradition was fully developed, but that was limited to the Tarim Basin far to the east in present-day Xinjiang.) Finally, the fact that in this part of the medieval world knowledge was to be equated with religious knowledge, it would be necessary to create a new high culture on the basis of one of the great world religions with its own tradition of a high culture. This could only be accomplished by importing or attracting scholars versed in this tradition to its own territory. Even though Islam was not the only religion practiced in the territories of the Golden Horde, it ascended in the early 14th century to the status of a state religion. The Islamic Turkic high culture which developed slowly over the course of the 13th-14th centuries, indeed began to flourish in the mid-14th century, reflects a felicitous conjunction of several different facts: wealth, urbanization, Turkification, and Islamization.¹

Any consideration of the religious history of the Golden Horde, which is very complicated indeed—must begin with the traditional belief system of the local Turkic population,² that of the newly-arrived Mongols, the later multiplicity of

1. I have explored these issues more fully in my work The Golden Horde: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Western Eurasia, Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries (Madison: Turk-Tatar Press, in press).
organized world religions competing for official sanction, and finally the rise of Islam to a position as state religion of the Golden Horde. The traditional belief system of the Mongols may be described as animist, so consistent with the other traditional religions of Eurasia in which shamans served as media to invoke the spirits of natural phenomena. Certain aspects of Mongol religion can be seen in the descriptions of the Latin travelers in the 13th century and other sources, for example the purifying nature of fire. There is no evidence that there was any significant influence by the Nestorian Christian Mongols of pre-conquest times on the religious system of the Mongols of the Golden Horde, even though the European powers were mistakenly convinced early on that a great Christian king, Prester John, would be their ally in the east. The xans rapidly adopted various organized world religions in the Golden Horde and the other states of the Mongol World Empire; this phenomenon is most evident in the Il-khanate in Iran.3

The Golden Horde, like the rest of the Mongol World Empire, was tolerant of a variety of organized religions. There was no policy directed against Christians, even once Islam became the state religion under Özbek Xan. A variety of sources for the 13th-14th centuries, including translations of the *yiylag* of the Golden Horde rulers as well as the Russian chronicles (compiled, of course, by clerics) relate that the Orthodox Church was exempt from taxation.4 There is also significant evidence to suggest that early members of the ruling elite of the Golden Horde and their families came under the sway of Christianity, as will be seen below. Below the level of the ruling elite, there was a significant Christian population in the cities of the Golden Horde including both the local population and Christian clerics as well as merchants from abroad. The Kipchaks in the southern steppe were Christians in this period.5 Ibn Baṭṭūta also indicates that in addition to Muslim Mongols and As (Alans), the inhabitants of Saray also included Christian Kipchaks, Cherkes, Russians, and Greeks (Rūm).6 On the other hand, there is only limited evidence concerning Jews in the territories of the Golden Horde.7 As for Buddhism, the Mongols in the east became Buddhists too late for it to have any decisive impact in


the West, for which reason there are only traces of Buddhist relics in the territories of the patrimony of Batu”.

Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, Nestorian, and other Christian traditions were present in this territory and were competing for faithful from many of the same towns and cities. The Christian missionary activity emanating from the Crimea can be seen thanks in part to the famous Codex Cumanicus compiled by Italian and German missionaries in the Crimea, which is a handbook of the Cumans’ Turkic language (including translations of religious material) for use in their pursuit of new converts. The importance and success of Christianity in the territories of the Golden Horde can be seen from the series of official Christian institutions established there. The Orthodox bishopric of Saray was created in the 1260s and continued to exist through the end of the 15th century, though it does not seem that a bishop was always in residence in Saray throughout this entire period. This institution can be studied in some detail since the Russian sources offer extensive information on the bishops of Saray. In the second half of the 13th century the Franciscans also received privileges and protection for their work in the territories of the Golden Horde. By the end of the 14th century there were Franciscan convents and residences wherever merchants traveled, including Sokhaya, Kafa, Solagar (Qayr), and Qorgyër in the Crimea (later also at Cimbalo/Balaklava and Qarasu) and along the coastal towns of the Kuban River and Abxazia. The Franciscans were in Saray itself by 1286 and in Übek and Bifagar (the likely identification of Velor) by 1320. Other sites of Franciscan activity included Astrakan, Aqçaray (?), Urgenc, and points east on the road to China. Dominicans were active in Kafa, in Tana, and in other sites. The Catholic administration organized this area into the provinces of Vopros, Saray, and Matarga, with numerous bishoprics and an archbishopric in Saray. In many cases the purpose of these institutions was to promote missionary activity and serve the needs of itinerant merchants rather than to cater to the needs of a large community of believers.

The first high-ranking member of the Çingisid elite of the Golden Horde to express an interest in an organized world religion was probably Sartaq, since there was a belief that Sartaq was a Christian. This was also seen as the pretext for the possible murder of the first and probably only Christian xan of the Golden Horde.  

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since it was Islam that would achieve the status of dominant religion in this state. The first future ruler of the Golden Horde to accept Islam was Berke, and a number of scholars have already described the role played by the Central Asian Sufi leader Saif ad-Din Baxarzai of the Kubraviya order in this conversion.14 Of course this was not the beginning of Islam in the territories of the Golden Horde, since Volga Bulgaria had already converted to Islam by the early 10th century, and of course Xwarezm, which formed an integral part of the territories of the Golden Horde, was another important bastion of Islam from the pre-Mongol period.

It appears the rise of Islam as a political force and as a source of cultural inspiration in the Golden Horde took a very twisted path in subsequent years. It is possible that one of the subsequent rulers of the Golden Horde in the 14th century retired to a life of mystic contemplation after converting, if he was not actually killed. At the same time that certain sources portray some of the xans of the Golden Horde after Berke as distinctly uninterested in Islam, Christian sources portray them as interested in Islam. While it is difficult to clarify the contradictions in the sources for the second half of the 13th century, it is clear that Islam finally achieved the status of state religion under Özbek Xan. Although Özbek conducted a campaign against either animists or Buddhist priests, there is no evidence to suggest that he began any campaigns against the "People of the Book", as Muslims view Jews and Christians.15 The story of flourishing religious life in the Golden Horde under Özbek Xan is really the story of the integration of the Golden Horde into Islamic religious culture, both as a learned religion as well as on the level of popular Islam, and into a cosmopolitan civilization. Again, we know much of this thanks to the detailed unique information offered by the great traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.

During his travels through the territory of the Golden Horde circa January 1333, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa found mosques, religious judges, and Sufi hospices (zāwiya) to be ubiquitous. He found a mosque in Kaita; the town of Qırım, where he stayed in a hospice led by the sheykh Zāda al-Xurāsānī, had a chief religious judge (qādi) of the Hanafi legal school as well as religious judge of the Şafi'i legal school. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also met a number of learned scholars, including a jurist and professor who was an As (Ahn), in addition to the preacher (ṣafī) reading the sermon and the symbolically important blessing in the name of the caliph on Fridays in the congregational mosque. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentions a mosque built in Qırım in 1288 with the aid of the

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15. Özbeğ is reported to have killed a number of emirs and most of the bAŞiq and sorcerers (sahara) upon taking the throne. Mafaṣṣal, An-nad al-as-sī al-dawla al-‘am al-baṭṭūṭīt, ed. E. Zirinogzar, Shorūrat mawlād al-thawrāt al-kallim bi l-damār fī ṣulūk Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (Tehran, 1986), pp. 188/197. The term bAŞiq is understood to mean "Hama" by some scholars, though in the Later Golden Horde this term referred to the scribes who wrote down the correspondence. See M.A. Usmanov, Jadwannī akīt Ḏuṣqawī Ulūma X̱IV-XVII ss. (Kazan, 1979), pp. 125–131.
Egyptian ruler Baybars, but we also know of two other mosques, including the congregational mosque of Qūrm that Ĭzbeḵ had built in 1314. In Azaq (Azov) Ibn Baṭṭūṭa found a religious judge and students, and he witnessed recitations of the Qurʾan followed by a sermon and blessings. There was also other kinds of religious singing in Arabic which were then translated into Persian as well as into Turkic. In Maṣar the traveler stayed at the hospice of a pious sheikh from Iraq and also visited a mosque with a preacher from Buxara. In Saraych he saw a hospice belonging to a pious Turk of great age called Arat and where he also met a religious judge. Later in Kāf he also met a religious judge there together with the pious and devout sheikh Maḥmūd al-Xiwaqī.

In the great traveler’s description Saray Berke was an exceptional city for its religious life as well. Saray had 13 mosques for Friday congregational prayers, including one for the Sāfī school, and there were many more smaller mosques. He met the Sāfī scholar Ṣadr ad-Dīn Sulaymān al-Lakzī (of the Lexī of Daḡistān), the Mālikī scholar Ṣams ad-Dīn al-Miṣrī, an Egyptian, the religious judge of Saray, Badr ad-Dīn al-ʿArāʾī, who was considered one of the best in his profession, and other religious scholars. Every Friday, the Muslim day of rest, Ĭzbeḵ Xan would visit the hospice of the learned congregational preacher (imām) Muḥammād ad-Dīn al-Xwārizmī, “one of the eminent šaikhs and a man of fine character, generous in soul, of exceeding humility but also of exceeding severity towards the possessors of this world’s goods”. Although this sheikh would humble himself before poor brethren, the needy, and travelers, his conduct towards Ĭzbeḵ was the opposite. On the other hand, we might note from our modern perspective that the same individual also presented Ibn Baṭṭūṭa with a Turkish slaveboy.

In Xwārizm the great traveler found a great center of Islamic religion and learning which neither Saray Batu nor the more recently-established city of Saray Berke could possibly rival. Here Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the congregational mosque and the college, this college and its dependencies were endowed by the great emir of Ĭzbeḵ named Qutluq Temūr, and the mosque was built by his wife, the pious Fatimah Turābak. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and his traveling companions stayed in another newly-built college. He describes meeting a series of scholars of the Muʿtazilite school of Sunni theology. Since Ĭzbeḵ Xan and the great emir Qutluq Temūr were adherents of orthodox Sunni Islam, these scholars did not make open display of their adherence to the Muʿtazilite school. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also describes the unique custom in Xwārizm of allying the Muslim inhabitants to the approaching hour for prayer. There was a whip in each mosque for beating any person who did not attend communal prayers, and that person was also fined 5 dinars, which was used to help maintain the


Ibn Battūta also described various details of his meeting with the religious judge Abu Hafs ʿUmar al-Bakrī, known by the title of ṣādīr, and his assistants. This judge was an individual endowed with great wealth and landed property whose sister-in-law was married to Qutluq Temür. His house was furnished with rich carpets, cloth hanging on the walls, and vessels of silver-gilt and Iraqi glass in the large number of niches built into the walls. He also mentions that there are a number of admonitory preachers and revivalists in the city, and that the preacher (ṣāhib) at the Friday services, Mawlawī Zayn ad-Dīn al-Maqdisī is one of the four greatest preachers that he has ever heard. Ibn Battūta further describes that it was one of the regular practices of the emir that the religious judge visit his audience hall daily. One of the great emirs sits there accompanied by eight of the great emirs and sheikhs of the Turks called yaṭqūṣ (arguṣ). People with disputes within the jurisdiction of the religious law (i.e., the ṣariʿa) have their disputes settled by the religious judge, and the emirs settle the other disputes.29

There are very important insights to be gained from the information for which Ibn Battūta is a unique source. We might conclude that in Xwarezm and in Bulgar (the latter probably not visited by Ibn Battūta), Islamic devotion continued—we might say from the perspective of the 1330s without serious disruption—throughout Sino-Mongol times, though the Mongol conquests helped create important martyrs, especially among the leaders of Sufi orders in Xwarezm and elsewhere in Central Asia. It is difficult to know how old the Islamic infrastructure in the centers visited by the great traveler in the North Caucasus foreland and the Crimea might have been. What was spectacular, however, was the rapid development of orthodox Islamic institutions in Saray within the space of decades or possibly even just years. Equally spectacular by the time of Ibn Battūta’s visit was the full participation in religious life by the highest levels of the ruling elite, including Özbek Xan’s humiliation before an ascetic religious leader. Nor should we underestimate the role of the Sufi orders in promoting Islam among broader segments of the population throughout the religious frontier areas of the Golden Horde. As in the conversions of Berke and Özbek to Islam, the Sufi leaders must have participated in missionary activity among broader segments of society as they did in other periods. Perhaps it is already possible to speak of a missionary Islam propagated by Sufi orders in the territories of the Golden Horde in the time of Berke Xan. There can be no question that there was such a missionary Islam by the time of Özbek Xan, since the hospices described by Ibn Battūta were

by their very nature intended to serve as nodes in an Islamic religious and missionary network throughout the territory of the patrimony of Batu.

Özbek Xan, Qutluq Temür, and other leading officials and their families invested huge sums of money to establish mosques, religious colleges, and the complexes usually associated with them. They or some other individuals must also have contributed heavily to pious foundations (Arabic waqf, pl. waqāf), endowments whose income (often controlled by members of the family of the endower for their own gain) would support and maintain these important Islamic institutions on a continuing basis, just like anywhere else in the Islamic world.21 In Khwarezm participation in religious life even extended to marital alliances between the ruling Çingisid elite and the religious elite, which may have been seen as an important new form of legitimacy supplementing the Çingisid claim to sovereignty.

It is also clear that there was a tremendous investment in a newly-expanded religious class to staff the newly-built institutions of the new cities. A large proportion of the religious scholars identified by Ibn Battūta had immigrated to the Golden Horde from other centers of Islamic civilization in the Middle East and elsewhere as indicated by their names (the nisba adjective indicated geographical origin, Mislī for example indicating an Egyptian origin). In fact, the Golden Horde was home to both Sunnis and Shi‘is, and to all four orthodox Islamic legal schools representing Islamic legal practices from around the world. (Today the Sunni Turks of Western Eurasia, including Anatolia, follow the Hanafi legal school; only the Azerbaijanis of the Transcaucasus and Iran are Shi‘is, consistent with their Iranian cultural environment.) This reflects the close ties between the capitals of the Golden Horde and the major centers of traditional Islamic learning throughout the Islamic world of that time and that representatives of all these different groups came to the Golden Horde. This is yet one more indication of what the vast wealth of the Golden Horde elite could achieve in a relatively short period of time.

Not all of the scholars, however, came from abroad. Some of these religious scholars were from indigenous ethnic groups such as the Iranian As (Alans) or from the traditional pre-Mongol Islamic centers of the Golden Horde, primarily Khwarezm. Although the Golden Horde capital cities Saray Batu and Saray Berke obviously had not had earlier institutions devoted to training Islamic clergy, by the time of Ibn Battūta’s visit in 1333 some of the religious scholars of the Golden Horde could have been trained in Saray, whether the sources mention separate religious colleges or not. After all, the mosques as centers of religious life led by scholars could have served this purpose equally well. Certainly training was in progress in some of the other southern centers of the Crimea and North Caucasus foreland that he visited. Thus, the rulers not only created cities with their steadily increasing wealth, they endowed buildings dedicated to religious practice and learning and filled them with Islamic scholars. Even the new urban centers of the Golden Horde, including the capital cities, could now claim to be cosmopolitan centers of Islamic learning with

the ability to preserve and teach Islamic knowledge in order to reproduce a religious learned class as well as to disseminate this knowledge to the new converts, a process which as Bulliet has shown could take generations.  

What has this enormous investment in cities, an Islamic religious infrastructure, and human capital contributed to world civilization, and what is there of this contribution, if any, that can be called characteristic of the Golden Horde? It is true that the destruction and slaughter accompanying the Mongol conquests caused a serious disruption in intellectual life, perhaps permanently in some areas. At the same time, grievous misconceptions have clouded the general view of high culture in the Golden Horde over the entire period of the 13th-14th centuries and beyond. The only satisfactory answer for the period through the end of the 14th century is that the Golden Horde made significant contributions to the continuation of traditions of civilization that had already existed in its territories, to the flow of knowledge between its own centers and centers outside of its own boundaries, and to the development of new traditions of civilization in its own territories. This can only be understood properly, however, if we endeavour to understand the sources for the civilization of the Golden Horde and place the Golden Horde within the appropriate context of cultural development in both time and space.

I have already noted that knowledge in this period was equated with religious knowledge, and that we must look to the religious centers for production of all categories of works relating to high culture. It is likely that most, or all of the centers of sedentary Islamic civilization in the Crimea, the North Caucasus foreland, the Volga-Kama confluence, and Xorazm described earlier continued a role that was established sometime before the Mongol conquests. Pritsak has pointed out that the Crimea has served without interruption as a center for many civilizations in many languages, which is why Cyril and Methodius, among others, went there in the 9th century. It is difficult to be sure just how active the centers of the North Caucasus were in the period immediately preceding the Mongol conquests compared to the active religious and cultural life there in the 14th century. Volga Bulgaria had an


23. The standard works on the Golden Horde, including Spuler, have generally remained silent on the issue of high culture. The following statement reflects a particularly high degree of misinformation: “The Mongols were surely writing in Arabic in the fourteenth century—literature, poetry, religious expositions—but unfortunately none has survived. Tatar writers in the fifteenth century began producing literature in a new dialect: Chagatai Turkic. Certainly it was not the poverty of the Golden Horde’s culture that kept Russian culture free of Mongol influences.” See C. Helperin, Russia and the Golden Horde. The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History (Bloomington, 1985), p. 123. On the other hand, the archeologists Fedorov-Davydov has show at least an awareness of the existence of an Islamic Turkic literature in the Golden Horde. See G.A. Fedorov-Davydov, The Culture of the Golden Horde Cities, British Archeological Reports International Series 198 (Oxford, 1984); and G.A. Fedorov-Davydov, Stelle der Goldenen Horde an der mittleren Wolga, Materialien zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie 22 (Munich, 1994).

active intellectual life in the 10th-12th centuries as reported by a number of sources; this is the center most likely to have suffered a major cultural setback as a result of the Mongol conquests. Xwarezim, on the other hand, continued as an important center of Islamic learning with probably only minor interruption.

Before the 13th century Arabic was the major language of Islamic civilization (the traditional periodization divides Arabic literature into a so-called Golden Age lasting 750-1055 and a so-called Silver Age lasting 1055-1259). A Persian high literature came into its own only in the 11th-12th centuries. While Arabic was used as a literary language in Bulgar in the north before the 13th century, Persian was more important in the southern areas of the territory of the future of the Golden Horde; after all, the peoples of Central Asia had spoken Iranian languages before they became speakers of Turkic languages. As is clear from a variety of sources, during the 13th-14th centuries important works would continue to be produced in Arabic and in Persian on the territories of the Golden Horde. On the other hand, there was only a limited tradition of original works written in Islamic Turkic languages before the 13th-14th centuries. The first Islamic Turkic work, the major work of the so-called “Qaraaxanid” literature of Balasağun (and Kağar), was written only in the 1060s continuing the pre-Islamic traditions of the Turkic-speaking Uyğurs of this same region. There were only a few additional works written anywhere in Eurasia, including Anatolia, in a Turkic language using the Arabic script during the 12th century. The collected wisdom of the Central Asian Sufi poet Ahmed Yesevi, later known as the Dīvān-i bīknet, goes back ultimately to the 12th century, as may a few other works. The dating of another work from Central Asia, Ahmed Yîkii’s didactic composition entitled the Atabêt il-haqa’iq, is not certain, though it may also have been written by before the 13th century. It is clear that there was as yet no firmly-established tradition of an Islamic Turkic literary language in the territories of the Golden Horde at the time of its establishment.

The core group of the Chingissid ruling elite that came to the Volga River spoke a language that we call Mongolian, though this is to oversimplify the complex linguistic situation in Inner Asia in the 12th century and the interplay between speakers of languages belonging to the Mongolian, Turkic, and other families. There are very few examples of written Mongolian from the patrimony of Batu in the 13th-14th centuries. There are references in Arabic sources to documents having been written in Mogoli, but there is a debate over whether this meant in the Mongolian language or documents written in some other language in the Mongolian script (such as Uyğur, from which the Mongolian script is derived). All the edicts and diplomatic correspondence collectively known as yarhs are survive in original Turkic

25. On Volga Bulgarian authors cited by Ibr Ildân, Garnâq, and other sources see Tatar adabiyyatı tarixi (Kazan, 1984), pp. 84-96.
versions only from the end of the 14th century (1398). More significantly, it seems that the translated documents from the 13th-14th centuries were in all likelihood based on a Turkic original. Other references in the sources suggest that the ruling elite of the Golden Horde must have Turkified rather quickly, since they were surrounded by and intermarrying with Turkic speakers.

What is less well understood, however, is that beyond the *yarlags*, more than one Islamic Turkic literary language emerged or developed in the territories of the Golden Horde over the 13th-14th centuries. The first of these that I would like to discuss briefly is Volga Bulgarian, an unusual written language known only from Arabic-script funerary inscriptions found at the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers. While the Arabic language had been used on coins minted in Volga Bulgaria as early as the 10th century C.E., the earliest funerary inscriptions in Volga Bulgarian date only from the 13th century. The earliest tombstone in the city of Bulgaria itself dates from 1271, while the last ones date from 1356. There are no further funerary inscriptions nor other datable written monuments of the Volga Bulgarian language after this date. The few Turkic funerary inscriptions found in the Middle Volga region after 1357-1358 are written in Standard Turkic. In addition to Volga Bulgarian (a language whose closest modern relative is Chuvash, meaning that it is strongly divergent from the other Standard Turkic languages), there were also funerary inscriptions in a Standard Turkic dialect which may be considered an ancestor of modern Kazan Tatar in this same area. Yakimyanov has considered


31. See Röns-Tas and Fodor, *Epigraphica bulgarica*, pp. 38-40, on the dating of Arabic-script inscriptions in this area. See also Muxamadov, *Volgskie bolgarskaia monatnaya sistema*, pp. 22-40 on Volga Bulgarian coinsage.

32. D.G. Muxametjan and F.S. Yakimyanov, *Epigraphische pamyatnyki vostoka Bulgarii* (Kazan, 1987), p. 120.

33. See for example the two inscriptions dated 1382 and 1399 in Yakimyanov, *Epigraphische pamyatnyki Volgskoi Bulgarii*, nos. 18, 19.


that Volga Bulgarian, which ceased to be a written language after 1358, may have served the function of a sacred language that may not have been spoken by this late date.  

Considering these various arguments, I have suggested that Volga Bulgarian came to a sudden end as a result of the Black Death. The important point for our discussion here, however, is the use of one Islamic Turkic written language documented in Volga Bulgaria as early as 1271, and the introduction of a second one over the next century. These funerary inscriptions reflect greater wealth from commerce, perhaps greater technical skill, and the cultural ties of Volga Bulgaria to the rest of the Arabic-speaking Islamic world, since parts of the inscriptions are in Arabic. This is another one of the innovations of the Mongol period in the sphere of Islamic Turkic written languages that should be considered by historians.

More important from the point of view of the development of a high culture is the production of a number of bellettristic and religious works in an Islamic Turkic written language (or languages, as some linguists would insist) in the territories of the Golden Horde. These works allow us to speak of a literature of the Golden Horde written in an indigenous language representing the development of a literary language beyond the levels of the 12th century. This language has been described variously by Turkologists as the language of the Golden Horde, the language of Xwarzam, or by other terms. Works from earlier in the 14th century include Rabguzi's Qisas ul-Emira' ("Tales of the Prophets") and the Mu' in ul-Murid. Works from later in the century include the romantic poem Xusro u Shiri'in.  

36. See the discussion in D.G. Muxametov and F.S. Yakimyanov, Epigraficeskie pamyatniki goroda Bulgara, pp. 120–126, especially 123; and Yakimyanov, Epigraficeskie pamyatniki Voloskovo Bugara, pp. 3–13, especially 14.


40. An edition of this work has been announced by Prof. Andras Bodroghczi.

41. For the publication of the facsimile and text of the only extant manuscript (copied in Egypt) see A. Zajacezkowski, Najstarsza wersja turecka 'Husre u Shiri'n Qubah, i. Prace orientalistyczne 6 (Warsaw, 1938). The text has also been published in an edition by M.N. Hacceminoglu, Kithbin Husro u Shiri'n ve iki blassiyetleri (Istanbul, 1968). See also Eckmann, "Die kipchakische Literatur. I: Die Literatur von Chwaremz und der Goldenen Horde", pp. 280–285.
Xorezmi's romantic poem *Maḥabbetname* (or *Muhabbetname*),\(^{42}\) and the religious treatise *Nebe ʿil-ferādis*.\(^{43}\)

Certain of these works as well as others in other languages are clear evidence of patronage of literature by the ruling elite of the Golden Horde, assuming as I think we may that dedication is to be equated with patronage. After all, this process no different from the endowment of religious complexes was essential to the productivity of littérature. Rabiguzi's *Osas al-ebriyā* is a collection of stories concerning the prophets up through Muhammad and other early Islamic figures composed around 1310 in Ribat-i Qozurg in Türkistan for a local bey Nasiruddin Tugba. The *Maʿīn al-murid* was a short religious work composed in Urgunc in 1313. The contents of this work reveal it to have been intended for aspirants in a Sufi order because of its heavy emphasis on the practice of mystic Islam.

The earliest major work to be connected with the court of the Golden Horde was Quth's *Xusraw u Şirin* ('Chosroes and Shīrin') dedicated to Timbek Xan (r. 1341–1342, who is described as the ruler of the 'White Horde' as described in the Introduction) and his wife Melike xaratun.\(^{44}\) Although modern Tatar scholars have gone through great defiances of logic to explain how Timbek could have been in the White Horde (which they took to mean the eastern patrimony of Orda), a recognition of the simple fact that the patrimony of Coq or Batu was never called the Golden Horde allows us to recognize the simple fact that this work was written for the ruler in New Saray.\(^{45}\) Xorezmi's *Maḥabbetname* ('The Book of Love') was written on the banks of the Sir Darya (or the Azov) in 1353 and dedicated to one Muhammad Xocabek.\(^{46}\) The circumstances surrounding the composition of religious treatise *Nebe ʿil-ferādis*, subtitled in Turkish 'The Clear Path to Heaven', are more complicated. At any rate it does not appear to have a dedication, in part because it was a pious religious work. It is worth examining *Xusraw u Şirin* and *Nebe ʿil-ferādis* in somewhat greater depth below as classic representatives of the high culture of the Golden Horde.

The romantic poem *Xusraw u Şirin* is a reworking of the famous romantic poem *Xusraw u Şirin* (1180), one of the five great 'treasures' of the great Persian poet


\(^{44}\) See Quth/Haceminoglu: 191–195.

\(^{45}\) See *The Golden Horde: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Western Eurasia, Thirteenth–Fourteenth Centuries*, Introduction and Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion of "Golden Horde" and other names for this state, as well as the significance of Quth’s statement.

\(^{46}\) See Xorezmi/Nadjîp, text p. 36f/strans. p. 77; see also pp. 15–16.
Nizâmi (b. ca. 1138–1140/d. ca. 1174–1222). The reworking of great earlier epic works was one of the standard tests of the skill of a great literary figure, and just as Nizâmi had reworked earlier themes, others such as Fuzûlî and Navâi would continue this same tradition later. Qâbî’s version therefore was neither a slavish translation nor an effort that is to be viewed negatively. Qâbî himself notes that the purpose of this work was to translate the Persian language of the work in the name of his xan. His version elevated the Turkic language of the Golden Horde to a literary standard following the orthographic conventions first established in the 11th century under the influence of the Uygur literary language (though with certain linguistic changes). It also relied on metric forms used first in the earlier “Qaraxanid” literature of Balasagun. This work further reflects a close familiarity with, and perhaps even a fancy for, Persian high culture at the court of the Golden Horde. This can also be seen from the mysterious toponym Gûlûstân mentioned earlier, since this was the title of the well-known Persian work, Sâ’îd’s Gûlûstân (“Rose Garden”). This same work was later reworked by Seyf-i Sarayî, a native of Saray, as the Gûlûstân bi-t-türkî in Mamlûk Egypt in 1391. It has survived in a 14th-century copy made by a kipchak in the service of a ruler in Anatolia.

Although the content of this work has been ignored in all studies of this period except for those devoted exclusively to literature, there are many important statements in this work that diverge from Nizâmi’s original text and reflect the author’s experience in the Golden Horde beyond just the dedication of the work to Timbek Xan and his wife. Most works of this sort begin with a profession of the greatness and unity of God, followed by the positive characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad, and praise of the four companions of the Prophet (also known as the four orthodox caliphs, referring to Abû Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Umar, and ‘Ali). Qâbî’s praise of the four companions (resûl ‘âleyhi s-selâmîn tört yanı ögütü) describes them as the four heads of affairs (tört iş baş) who would look after the Prophet and carry out all of the desires that the Prophet expressed, and that together they could enter the seven climes.

I would argue that this work is offering in its own way a precedent or religious explanation/rationalization of the relationship between the xan and the four tribal leaders, a political system I have described elsewhere. Perhaps it can even be seen as a religious prescription for the tribal leaders continuing their loyalty to the xan.

50. For the publication of the text of this work see Seyf-i Sarayi, ed.-trans. A. Bodrogligezi, A Fourteenth Century Turkic Translation of Sâ’îd’s Gûlûstân (Seyf-i Sarayî’s Gûlûstân bi-t-türkî) (Budapest, 1969).

212
We may note several other interesting changes which Qutb introduces over Nizâmi's version. One is the organization of society before the xan. First were all the beys, second were the warriors (babadurs), third were the wealthy, fourth were the poor, fifth were the needy, followed at the end by the countless slaves, plus others. A comparison with Nizâmi's original reveals that Qutb understood who his patrons were. In a similar vein, it is the ilah beys, the wives of the ruling elite (the nûmans) and the notables of the land that are seen as spreading wealth, which may have also had the character of a suggestion! These members of the elite are not mentioned in Nizâmi's original version, nor would we expect to find them there. Finally, whereas Nizâmi's description of a banquet includes foods that would be familiar to his own audience, Qutb's version refers to the sacrifice of cows, sheep, horses, geese, chickens, and ducks for his version of the banquet. In this manner Qutb's inclusion of these and other details informs us about his time and place, while at the same time lending additional evidence to the argument that this was a work supported by the patronage of the xan and written with a conscious awareness of how the court might react. In other words, the xan and his court understood a poetic language that was not identical with the vernacular of the time, could appreciate Persian literary genres, and follow the storyline set in ancient Iran. There can be no doubt that this was, indeed, a high culture.

While Qutb's Xusrev ü Şirin was not totally devoid of moralistic and religious lessons for the court, this was not the purpose of that work. A very different kind of literature is represented by the Nebî il-ferâdi, which was intended as a pious work. Already in the 19th century Şihâbeddin Mârcani described a manuscript of the Nebî il-ferâdi (now lost) copied in Saray in 749/1358. That manuscript attributed the work to one Muhammed born in Buluş, who found refuge in Saray, and whose family name (nisba), Kerdâr, linked him with the city of Kerdâr in Xwarezn. Another manuscript says that the author died three days after March 25, 1360. The manuscript edited by Eckmann et al. was completed on 6 Cümâ 1, 761/March 25, 1360, indicates the various sources on which it was drawn, and finally refers to the author as Muhammed b. Muhammed b. Xusrev el-Kerdâr. This work is divided into four parts of ten chapters each. Part I, "The Positive Characteristics of the Prophet Muhammed", is a detailed account of his life, the revelation of Islam, the Hibâra from Mecca to Medina, the miracles surrounding his life, his return to Mecca, the Prophet's ascent to heaven in a dream, an explanation of heaven, the battle of Huneyn, and his death. Part II, "The Positive Characteristics of the Orthodox Caliphs, the Prophet's Family, and the Four Imâms", includes accounts of the first four caliphs (Abû Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmân, 'Ali), the Prophet's wife Fâtimâ, the two sons Hasan and Husayn of 'Ali (who are seen as martyrs by the Shi'ites), and the imâms who founded of the four major legal schools (the greatest imâm Abû Hanîfa, imâm

53. Nizâmi/Masû: 143; Qutb/Haceminoğlu: 350-351.
54. Qutb/Haceminoğlu: 421.
55. Nizâmi/Masû: 143; Qutb/Haceminoğlu: 352.
57. Bembaci, Histoire, p. 95; Nebîi il-ferâdi/Eckmann et alia, p. 309.
Šāfiʿi, imām Mālik, imām Ahmad Hanbal). Part III, “An Explanation of the Virtuous Deeds Bringing One Close to God” explains the virtues of praying five times a day, giving alms, fasting during Ramadan, making the pilgrimage to Mecca, treating parents with respect, eating religiously-pure (ḥalāl) food, proper etiquette (including distinguishing good from evil), devotion at night, and patience and contentment.

Part IV, “An Explanation of the Evil Deeds Distancing One From God”, explains the evils of spilling blood unjustly, fornication, drinking alcoholic beverages, haughtiness, lying, loving this world, hypocrisy and dissimulation (riyā ve semʿa), malice and envy, hubris and neglect, and the hope of a long life.

How should the character of this work be understood? I would suggest that the contents of this work reveal it to have been a work of an orthodox Sunni character simply describing the basic knowledge and precepts that one needs to be a good Muslim. It includes balanced information on all the Muslim legal schools, reflecting the composition of Sunni legal scholars in the cities of the Golden Horde as described by Ibn Baṭṭuta as we have already seen. If I may judge based on the recent publication of handbooks for Sufi orders in this period, this work was not specifically designed for a murād, an aspirant in a Sufi order. The existence of both traditions beg the question of whether there might have been any tensions between these two separate views of religion. After all, orthodox Islam was apparently dominant in the cities of the Golden Horde along the Volga, while in Kwarezm and elsewhere in the south there was a strong Sufi tradition that had even served a prominent role in the conversion of Berke Khan to Islam. We cannot know whether the Nebi il-farādis was intended to serve as an educational purpose or if it was simply a pious act on the part of the author. There is one further observation that I would offer in this regard, namely that there was an increase in a desire to learn about how to get to heaven, if we may recall the subtitle to this work. This could be a function of the fact that the number of converts to Islam was increasing. As will be discussed in the next chapter, however, this was also the period of the ravages of the Black Death through the territories of the Golden Horde. As in Western Europe, the Black Death must have had a profound impact on society in these territories as well. In Western Europe, one of the responses was an increased religiosity, a greater concern with death and the punishments brought down by God in art and literature. There is no doubt in my mind that the population of the Golden Horde had many reasons to be concerned about whether it got to heaven or not, and that this work was connected with that fear.

What I have offered above is a rather brief and incomplete survey of the rise of an Islamic Turkic high culture in the Golden Horde. A closer examination of these works beyond what I have described – especially a comparison of the contextual information offered by Ibn Baṭṭuta with the content of the Nebi il-farādis – can offer significant insights into what Islamic doctrine and practice might have been in the Golden Horde. The Volga Bulgarian tombs offer their own contribution to our understanding of what Islamic practices were like in the Middle Volga region. Taken together, it is a powerful statement of the Islamic Turkic cultural synthesis that was achieved in the territories of the Golden Horde in the 13th-14th centuries


214
before the arrival of the Black Death. As I have tried to show, this synthesis was of tremendous importance from point of view of the development of both Islamic and Turkic civilizations.

At the same time, the picture of the Islamic Turkic culture of the Golden Horde that I have offered above could not be further from the situation described in Devin DeWeese’s Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde. It cannot be my goal here to offer a critical review of this work, but I believe it would be appropriate to highlight several crucial methodological issues that are raised by this work. The first is that DeWeese’s work treats “not ‘what happened’, but ‘what people say happened’, and considers the available ‘historical’ accounts on the ‘event’ that is the subject of our conversion narrative, the ‘winning’ of the ruler Özbek Khan to Islam. We will then discuss the ‘new’ source that provides our conversion narrative.” 69

In other words, the powerful lens of his critical inquiry focuses exclusively on the history of the story of the conversion of Özbek Xan, the context offered by native religion, the involvement of Sufi orders, and its subsequent cultural artifacts.

Second, because of this focus, DeWeese’s work does not include a narrative description of Islam as a religious phenomenon within the Golden Horde (except the act of conversion of its rulers). Even though it includes a detailed overview of the political history of the Golden Horde in the 13th-14th centuries, considers the ‘presence’ of Islam in the Jochid ulus, 61 and extends as far as collections of oral literature from the 19th century, it does not consider any of the cultural products of Islamic Turkic civilization in the Golden Horde. For this reason DeWeese cites Eckmann’s article on the literature of the Golden Horde only once, 62 nor does he find it appropriate to include a consideration of the Nehi al-faradis or the major edition of its published since Eckmann’s article (1964). 63

Third, DeWeese focuses on conversion narratives that are clearly linked to the traditions of the Sufi orders. Although there is ample contemporary external evidence that the Sufi orders were actively involved in such activities, the conversion narratives that DeWeese studies are arguably of later origin. One of the questions that remains unanswered and requires further study is whether such narratives are historical in origin, or whether they are simply elaborations or even inventions which serve the interests of the later Sufi orders. 64 While historians of religion accept such later sources at face value, this cannot be acceptable to the historian, for whom such sources introduce anachronism and ahistoricity when not handled properly (including dismissal if necessary). DeWeese’s work raises for the historian as many questions as it proposes to resolve, but it does offer many useful insights for those who wish to consider the the works written by Muslims in the Golden Horde as primary sources for the study of Islam in the Golden Horde.

63. Prof. DeWeese is no doubt aware of this work since I presented him with a copy of it in 1988.
64. Unfortunately such an argument remains outside the scope of the present essay.