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## **Varieties of Islamization in Inner Asia**

The case of the Baraba Tatars, 1740-1917

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ALLEN J. FRANK

## VARIETIES OF ISLAMIZATION IN INNER ASIA

### The case of the Baraba Tatars, 1740-1917

THE PHENOMENON OF ISLAMIZATION HAS BEEN A CONSTANT FEATURE in the religious history of Islamic Inner Asia, and various communities of Russian subjects in Siberia and the Volga-Ural region converted to Islam during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, albeit under differing conditions. If Islamization under Russian rule was limited in terms of numbers involved, it was an ongoing process, and certain aspects of Islamization, especially the legal dimensions, are well documented. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Peter the Great, down to the First World War, primarily communities officially recognized as having “pagan” religious status, and living in proximity to Muslim subjects of Russia, were from time to time petitioning the authorities to recognize their communities as being Muslims. For the most part the territories where these sorts of conversions took place were in Siberia and the Volga-Ural region. In keeping with the de facto policy of internal self-administration granted Muslim communities, the authorities often did not categorically decline these petitions. In terms of numbers involved, the largest number of conversions were in the Volga-Ural region, where from the 1860’s until 1917 numerous Udmurt, Mari, and Chuvash communities formally became Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Islamization of a different sort,

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1. For a discussion of this process among the Udmurts of Perm’ province cf. Paul W. Werth, “Tsarist categories, Orthodox intervention and Islamic conversion in a pagan Udmurt village, 1870’s-1890’s,” in *Muslim culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the early 20th centuries*, Vol. 2: Anke von Kügelgen, Michael Kemper, Allen J. Frank, eds, *Inter-regional and inter-ethnic relations* (Berlin, 1998): 385-415; for a detailed missionary account of Islamization among the Maris of Bashkiria, cf. P. Eruslanov, “Magometanskaia propaganda sredi cheremis Ufimskoi gubernii (iz lichnykh nabliudenii),” *Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik*, 8, 9, 12-1, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 (1895).

involving formally Christian Kriashen Tatar communities whose ancestors had been Muslims, was also widespread at this time.<sup>2</sup>

Islamization in Siberia, whether within a Russian or Inner Asian context, is an issue that has on the whole received relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> The process of Islamization began already in the first half of the fifteenth century, if not earlier,<sup>4</sup> and continued after the Russian conquest and colonization of Siberia, ending, at least on the communal level, only in the second half of the eighteenth century, with the Islamization of the Baraba Tatars. In Siberia, as in the Volga-Ural region, Islamization under Russian rule involved not only Turkic communities, but Finno-Ugrians as well. While the issue of Islamization in Inner Asia, and especially native perceptions of Islamization, has only begun to be seriously examined,<sup>5</sup> the case of the Siberian Tatars is especially fertile soil for inquiry, since numerous Islamization narratives exist in printed and manuscript form, and because Siberian Tatar Islamization legends represent a unique narrative tradition.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the narrative traditions surrounding the Islamization of the Siberian Tatars, the historical, or “actual” conversion on the Siberian Tatars occurred relatively late. Although the core of Siberian Tatar communities located along the Irtysh and Tara Rivers were already Muslim before the Russian conquest, the process of

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2. On the Islamization of the Kriashen Tatars cf. Paul W. Werth, *Subjects for Empire: Orthodox mission and Imperial governance in the Volga-Kama region*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Michigan, 1996): 389-454; Agnès Kefeli, “Constructing an Islamic identity: The case of Elyshevo village in the nineteenth century,” in Daniel R. Brower, Edward Lazzarini, eds, *Russia’s Orient: Imperial borderlands and peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington – Indianapolis, IN, 1997): 272-291; I. K. Zagidullin, “K voprosu otpadeniia kreshchenykh tatar Kazanskoi gubernii v musul’manstvo 1866 goda,” in *Natsional’nyi vopros v Tatarii dooktiabr’skogo perioda* (Kazan, 1990): 66-78.

3. For the most part the issue of Islamization in Siberia has been limited to rather brief discussions; cf. Abdülkadir İnan, “Sibirya’da İslâmiyetin Yayılışı,” in *Necati Lugal Armağanı* (Ankara, 1968): 331-338; M. A. Usmanov, “Etapy islamizatsii Dzhuchieva ulusa i musul’manskoie dukhovenstvo v tatarskikh khanstvakh XIII-XVI vekov,” in *Dukhovenstvo i politicheskaia zhizn’ na Blizhnem i Srednem Vostoke v period feodalizma* (Moscow, 1985): 177-185; Foat Väliyev, “Seberdä Islam,” *Qazan utları*, 5 (1992): 153-157; F. T. Valeev, *Sibirskie tatory* (Kazan, 1993): 169-172; V. I. Sobolev, “Rasprostranenie islama v Sibiri,” in *Islam, obshchestvo i kul’tura: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii ‘İslamskaia tsivilizatsiia v preddverii XXI veka (k 600-letiiu islama v Sibiri)’* (Omsk, 1994): 140-141; in the latter collection see also S. S. Tikhonov, “Nekotorye aspekty islamizatsii narodov Sibiri,” 155, N. A. Tomilov, and F. T. Valeev, “Islam v Sibiri,” 163-165.

4. For a discussion of evidence of Islamization before the sixteenth century cf. Allen Frank, *The Siberian chronicles and the Taybughid Biys of Sibir* (Bloomington, IN, 1994): 18-20 (Papers on Inner Asia, 27).

5. Cf. Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and native religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and conversion to Islam in historical and epic tradition* (University Park, PA, 1994).

6. For publications and Russian translations of Siberian Tatar texts containing the Islamization legends of the Tobol’sk and Tara Tatars cf. N. F. Katanov, “O religioznykh voynakh uchenikov sheikha Bagauddin protiv inorodtsev Zapadnoi Sibiri,” *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo Universiteta* (1903): 133-158; N. F. Katanov, “Predaniia Tobol’skikh tatar o pribytii v 1572 g. mukhammedanskikh propovednikov v. g. Isker,” *Ezhedodnik Tobol’skogo Gubernskogo Muzeia*, VII (1897): 51-61; V. V. Radlov, *Obraztsy narodnoi literatury tiurkskikh plemen, IV (narechie barabintsev, Tarskikh, Tobol’skikh i Tiimenskikh tatar)* (SPb, 1878): 212-215, 217-220.

Islamization continued under Russian rule, among the Siberian Tatars' Finno-Ugric neighbors, as well as among various Turkic groups along the Ob' and Tom' Rivers (namely, the Ob' Tatars, Tomsk Tatars and Kalmaks), and in the Baraba steppe. For the Islamization of Siberian Finno-Ugrians we possess numerous, usually Russian, historical accounts noting this process.<sup>7</sup> It should be understood, however, that the Islamization of these Finno-Ugrian communities constituted the extension of an ongoing process into the period of Russian rule. It is evident from Siberian Tatar genealogical traditions that Islamization was part of a larger process of Turkicization, resulting in the gradual assimilation of Finno-Ugrian communities along the Ob' and Irtysh Rivers into the communities of Siberian Turkic Muslims.<sup>8</sup> In all of these cases, at the time of their conversions, these Finno-Ugrian and Turkic communities were formally "pagans," that is, adherents of their native religious tradition, at least as far as the Russian authorities were concerned, and were also the targets of Christianization efforts sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>9</sup>

If the Finno-Ugrians along the Ob' and Irtysh Rivers were linguistically and culturally assimilated into the larger Siberian Tatar community, in the case of the Baraba Tatars we have an entire community that became Muslim, and retained its cohesiveness, following their conversion. Furthermore, the case of the Baraba Tatars merits special attention for several reasons: 1) if we are to accept eighteenth-century Russian accounts, the Barabas represent the last occurrence of large-scale communal Islamization in Siberia, if not in Inner Asia; 2) in addition to these Russian accounts, there also exists a rich body of narratives recorded by and from the Barabas themselves, as well as from Volga Tatar migrants to the Baraba steppe and their descendants. An examination of these three accounts of the Islamization of the Barabas, Russian, Volga Tatar and native Baraba, demonstrates that in Inner Asia accounts of Islamization are very much a product of the eye of the beholder. As we shall see, the case of the Islamization of Baraba Tatars ultimately raises as many questions as answers, and demonstrates the difficulty in trying to distinguish the "real" Islamization of the Barabas from the "legendary" one. Indeed, in the limited published literature devoted to the Barabas, almost no attention has been paid to the Barabas as Muslims, which is unfortunate since nearly all of the information we possess concerning the Barabas, ethnographic and otherwise, was collected from a community that considered itself a Muslim one. This failure to see

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7. For some first hand accounts of Muslim "missionaries" active among the Voguls and Ostyaks in the early eighteenth century, cf. Grigorii Novitskii, *Kratkoe opisanie o narode ostiatskom* (Novosibirsk, 1941): 76, 87-88 and V. G. Kartsov, *Ocherk istorii narodov Severo-Zapadnoi Sibiri* (Moscow, 1937): 71-72.

8. P. Z. Sokolova, "Obskie ugry," in *Etnicheskaia istoriia narodov severa* (Moscow, 1982): 20, 37-38; N. A. Tomilov, *Tiurkoiazychnoe naselenie Zapadno-Sibirskoi ravniny v kontse XVI-pervoi chetverti XIX vv.* (Tomsk, 1981): 65, 98, 100-101, 118; N. A. Tomilov, "Povolzhskie tatary Zapadnoi Sibiri v XVI-pervoi chetverti XIX vv.," in *Etnokul'turnye protsessy v Zapadnoi Sibiri* (Tomsk, 1983): 178-179.

9. Cf. I. I. Ogryzko, *Khristianizatsiia narodov Tobol'skogo severa v XVIII v.* (Leningrad, 1941): 62-74.

the Barabas as anything but “superficial” Muslims is most unfortunate in the accounts of Baraba religious life.<sup>10</sup>

### Baraba native religious tradition

The Baraba Tatars are a rather small ethnic group in southern Siberia, today numbering perhaps around 8,000, and located for the most part in Novosibirsk *oblast'*. They speak a Qipchaq dialect of Turkic most closely related to similar dialects spoken by the Altays, a non-Muslim group inhabiting the Altay Mountains in South Siberia. At the time of their conversion, and well after it, the Baraba naturally retained most elements of their native religious practices, which were similar in many respects to the religious traditions characteristic to the native peoples of West and South Siberia, and to many steppe nomad traditions as well. Some of the better documented features of this religious tradition, that scholars of the Baraba unfortunately too often refer to as “pre-Islamic,” include “shamanism,” the use of anthropomorphic figures (*qurchaqs*) to represent ancestors and other tutelary spirits, burial rituals, and the Barabas' clan-based social structure. The idea, suggested by V. Diószegi, that before 1740 the Barabas practiced some “pure” form of native religion uncontaminated by Islam, unfortunately neglects not only the complexities of religious life and Islamization in Inner Asia, but also overlooks historical sources: according to them at least some Barabas were Muslims during the first half of the seventeenth century,<sup>11</sup> and Muslims may have been resident among the Barabas as early as the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In adopting Islam, there is no doubt that

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10. The main discussions of Baraba religious life have almost nothing to say concerning Islamic beliefs and institutions among this group; cf. A. G. Seleznev, *Barabinskije tatory: istoki etnosa i kul'tury* (Novosibirsk, 1994); Z. L. Titova, “Barabinskije tatory,” *Iz istorii Sibiri*, 12 (Tomsk, 1976): 108-147; V. Diószegi, “Pre-Islamic shamanism of the Baraba Turks and some ethnogenetic conclusions,” in *Shamanism in Siberia* (Budapest, 1978): 83-167. Diószegi's approach is to view Islamization as a sort of religious iron-curtain, after which “pure” Baraba native religion ceased to exist, thereby ignoring both the complexities of Islamization (he accepts the 1740's as the time during which this iron curtain of Islam descended), and possibility that subsequent generations of Barabas themselves may not have perceived the native religious practices as un-Islamic. Regrettably, this doubtful “Islamic vs. pre-Islamic” conception characterizes much of the more recent scholarship of religious life among Siberian Muslims; cf. I. V. Belich, “Priroda v doislamskikh verovaniakh Sibirskikh tatar,” in *Kul'turnye i khoziaistvennye traditsii narodov Zapadnoi Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1989): 133-140; G. I. Eremin, “Doislamskie verovaniia ‘Zabolotnykh tatar’ Zapadnoi Sibiri,” *Voprosy istorii SSSR* (Moscow, 1972): 409-439; F. T. Valeev, “Oberegi kak perezhitok doislamskikh verovaniia u Sibirskikh tatar (po dannym polevykh etnograficheskikh nabliudenii v raionakh Omskoi i Tiimenskoi oblasti),” *Iz istorii Sibiri*, 19 (Tomsk, 1976): 244-249; F. T. Valeev, “O religioznykh predstavleniakh Zapadno-Sibirskikh tatar,” in *Priroda i chelovek v religioznykh predstavleniakh narodov Sibiri i Severa* (Leningrad, 1976): 320-331; N. A. Tomilov, *Ocherki etnografii tiurkskogo naseleniia Tomskogo Priob'ia* (Tomsk, 1983); F. T. Valeev, B. F. Valeev, “O relikhtakh doislamskikh verovaniia v religioznom mirovozzrenii Zapadno-Sibirskikh tatar,” in *Mirovozzrenie narodov Zapadnoi Sibiri po arkhologicheskim i etnograficheskim dannym* (Tomsk, 1985): 38-40.

11. Cf. N. A. Tomilov, *Etnicheskaia istoriia tiurkoiazynchnogo naseleniia Zapadno-Sibirskoi ravniny kontsa XVI-nachala XX v.* (Novosibirsk, 1992): 142.

12. N. A. Tomilov, *Tiurkoiazynchnoe naselenie...., op. cit.*: 174.

some features of native religious life were displaced by practices the Baraba understood as normative and Islamic; however, this was probably a very slow process, and virtually all features of “pre-Islamic” Baraba religious life, that is, features recorded before the middle of the eighteenth century, appear in sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and including in the Soviet period.

Russian and European travelers who passed through the Baraba lands during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have left us numerous descriptions of Baraba shamanism.<sup>13</sup> According to these accounts, the Baraba shamans were called *qam*, and held shamanic seances with drums. Although no physical specimens of these drums have come down to us, numerous representations recorded by these travelers have.<sup>14</sup> As for the shamans themselves, the sources tell us only that the shamans performed at seances with a drum and special drumsticks. However, on the basis of his detailed examination of the Baraba shamans’ drums and the drawings that the Baraba shamans painted on them that are depicted in the eighteenth-century sources and then comparing them with better documented practices among other South Siberian Turkic and Ob-Ugric peoples, Diószegi concluded that the Baraba shamanic practices were in many respects similar to those common to numerous South Siberian Turkic groups.<sup>15</sup> Z. Titova has summarized Baraba shamanism as similarly sharing many elements with that of the neighboring peoples.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, shamans and their shamanic performances were conspicuous symbols of the Barabas’ old religious system, and the attention they received from eighteenth-century European travelers would support that conclusion. As a result, it would be natural to assume, as Diószegi has done, that Baraba shamanism was quickly displaced by normative Islamic practices following the Islamization of the Barabas. Indeed, there are no reports of shamans or shamanic seances among the Muslim Barabas (at least known to me). However, we have ample evidence among other Inner Asian peoples, who were Islamized centuries before the Barabas, that shamans and their seances were themselves Islamized, and continued as a consciously Islamic form of religious expression. Nowhere is this more evident with the Kazakhs, whose *baqsı* invoked Muslim saints as their tutelary spirits, including semi-mythical Islamizer saints.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the Kazakhs, these shamanic or semi-shamanic figures also appear among the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kirghiz, and Bashkirs. Among Siberian Muslims, as

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13. Most of these accounts are collected in the original German in Diószegi’s article, which deals primarily with the Baraba’s shamanistic practices.

14. For a discussion of Baraba shamans’ drums cf. S. V. Ivanov, *Skul’ptura altaitsev, khakasov i Sibirskikh tatar* (Leningrad, 1979): 140-151, Ivanov’s treatment of the Siberian Tatars is almost exclusively devoted to the Barabas; cf. also V. Diószegi, “Pre-Islamic shamanism,” *art. cit.*: 86-118.

15. V. Diószegi, “Pre-Islamic shamanism,” *art. cit.*: 128; it is, however, worth noting that some of the “Baraba” drums depicted in these eighteenth-century sources were mislabeled, and actually belonged to some of the Barabas’ Turkic neighbors; cf. S. V. Ivanov, *op. cit.*: 143-144; A. G. Seleznev, *Barabinskije tatory*, *op. cit.*: 110.

16. Z. L. Titova, “Barabinskije tatory,” *art. cit.*: 137-142.

17. Cf. D. DeWeese, *Islamization and native religion...*, *op. cit.*: 460.

late as the early twentieth century shamanic seances were still reported to be practiced among the Tomsk Tatars, who inhabit the lower Tom' valley whose ancestors were Islamized around the same time as the Barabas.<sup>18</sup>

Another feature of Baraba native religion that was evident well into the Soviet period, if not down to the present day, was the veneration of tutelary spirits and the fashioning of anthropomorphic figures that represented ancestors and other tutelary spirits, and that the Barabas called *ättäkäy*, *qurchaq* or *qungurchaq*. Eighteenth-century European travelers have left us numerous depictions of these figures, which the Barabas would keep in small cases suspended in a corner of their dwellings. These *qurchaqs* were typically fashioned out of wood and were dressed in cloth or skins; the Barabas would make offerings to them of milk or fat to enlist the tutelary spirit's help in hunting or fishing.<sup>19</sup> These *qurchaqs* were an important element in native religious beliefs throughout Siberia, including among Siberian Muslims, and were also noted among other Siberian Tatar Muslims down to the early twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> In addition, such "idols" were also observed among seventeenth-century nomadic Noghay Muslims in the Crimea.<sup>21</sup> In Baraba accounts from the twentieth century attitudes toward these *qurchaqs* were ambiguous. In a Baraba narrative recorded in the late 1960's one informant related that "the Barabas have been Muslims for a long time, yet prayed to these wooden 'dolls.'" <sup>22</sup> Speaking in more general terms, the Barabas' own historian, Aḥmad-Jân 'Izzatullîn, whose manuscript history is firmly planted in an Islamic historiographic tradition, notes the tendency of the Barabas to backslide into unislamic practices; but, he notes they have always returned to Islam. Furthermore, he notes in which villages there were those who venerated *qongurchaqs* (*qôngîrchâqqa tâbinûchîlâr*).<sup>23</sup>

Diószegi summarizes the eighteenth-century accounts of Baraba burial practices as follows:

"Some families had their own graveyards. With the deceased person they buried personal belongings (quiver, bow, arrows, kettle, ax, etc.) and a horse too. But they did not inter small children, but placed their coffins upon a post. They mourned over their relatives (kinspeople and pseudo-relatives alike) so that for a while (some for eight days, others for two weeks, and again others for four weeks) they scratched their cheeks until the blood came. It was usual also to 'feed' the deceased relative."<sup>24</sup>

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18. N. A. Tomilov, *Ocherki etnografii...*, *op. cit.*: 182.

19. Z. L. Titova, "Barabinskîe tatarî," *art. cit.*: 136. These "idols" are also extensively discussed in the impressions of Baraba native religion related by nineteenth-century Volga Tatar migrants to the Baraba steppe; see below.

20. S. V. Ivanov, *Skul'ptura...*, *op. cit.*: 139-141.

21. Cf. D. DeWeese, *Islamization and native religion...*, *op. cit.*: 41 n. 24.

22. L. V. Dmitrieva, *Iazyk Barabinskikh tatar: materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1981), Turkic text: 98-99, Russian translation: 99-100.

23. *Bârâbâ-Ṭûbîl Târikhî* (Kazan University inv. cat. no. 3413-T), fols. 28a, 29a.

24. V. Diószegi, "Pre-Islamic shamanism," *art. cit.*: 98.

In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century the burial practices of the Muslim Barabas on the whole appear to have changed relatively little from the “pre-Islamic” practices summarized by Diószegi, and it is worth noting that most of the Baraba burial practices categorized by Soviet and Russian ethnographers as “pre-Islamic” took place in a Muslim community. During the nineteenth century they continued to bury grave goods with the deceased, and occasionally would include a horse among the grave goods.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, the Barabas continued to practice burial rites that differed sharply from practices considered normative among, say, Volga-Ural Muslims. The Barabas would build log structures over the graves, place the dead facing east,<sup>26</sup> and hold sacrifices at the gravesite on the day of the burial.<sup>27</sup> These sorts of burial practices were not limited to the Barabas, but are documented among other Siberian Muslim groups such as the Tobol’sk, Tara, and Tomsk Tatars.<sup>28</sup> Despite widespread evidence that many Muslim communities throughout Siberia retained native traditions in their burial rituals, especially that of burying grave goods with the deceased, some archeologists have suggested that the presence or absence of grave goods in a specific burial complex can establish whether the community that performed the burial was or was not Muslim. For example, the archeologist S. S. Tikhonov, who excavated an eighteenth-century Tara Tatar cemetery in Omsk *oblast’* at a site called Bergamak-II, has suggested that his classification of the gravesite as a “pagan” tomb can allow historians to advance the date for the Islamization of the Tara Tatars.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, there is no reason to doubt that the burial practices evident in the tombs Tikhonov excavated did not reflect “normative” Islamic traditions; yet the people buried in the graves of Bergamak-II may nevertheless have been Muslims. As we shall see below, in Siberia, as elsewhere in Inner Asia, there was more than one way that an observer would define Islamization.

### Russian accounts of the Islamization of the Barabas (1740-1775)

Russian accounts of the Islamization of the Barabas place the conversion of the Barabas to Islam at various points between 1740 and 1775. These accounts for the

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25. Z. L. Titova, “Barabinskii tatar,” *art. cit.*: 131-132; L. V. Dmitrieva, *Iazyk Barabinskikh tatar*, *op. cit.*: 28-29.

26. One Soviet ethnographer has suggested that at one time the Barabas believed Mecca to have been located to their east; cf. N. A. Tomilov, “Sibirskie tatar,” in *Semeinaia obriadnost’ narodov Sibiri* (Moscow, 1980): 120.

27. *Ibid.*: 119-122.

28. For a discussion of Tara Tatar burial practices cf. I. V. Belich and V. B. Bogomolov, “Pogrebal’nyi ritual’ Kurdaksko-Sargatskikh tatar,” *Ekspperimental’naia arkhologiiia*, I (Tobol’sk, 1991): 158-178; S. N. Korusenko, “Ziariat derevni Intsiss (Murometskii r. Omskoi oblasti),” *Etnografo-arkheologicheskie kompleksy: problemy kul’tury i sotsiuma*, I (Novosibirsk, 1996): 117-148.

29. S. S. Tikhonov, “Nekotorye aspekty islamizatsii,” *art. cit.*: 155.



most part were recorded by Russian and German travelers and academicians who passed through the Baraba lands at that time. Von Strahlenberg's account, published in 1738, classifies the Baraba Tatars as "a heathen nation," however, according to a manuscript compiled by Jakov Lindenau, a translator who accompanied the Great Northern Expedition to Siberia from 1733-1749, by the 1740's all of the Barabas were already Muslims, but he added that they practiced their old "shamanistic" beliefs in secret.<sup>30</sup> Miller, who also was a member of the Great Northern Expedition noted that in his time many Barabas were still "pagans." Those who had been Muslims the longest had only accepted circumcision "a few years ago." These Barabas, Miller's account continues, had been secretly visited by the head of the Muslim clergy in Tara and Tomsk, and had become Muslims under duress.<sup>31</sup> In a Church memorandum dating to 1751, Sylvester, the Metropolitan of Tobol'sk, under whose auspices the Barabas fell, wrote the following to the military authorities in Siberia:

"One Baraba, having accepted Orthodoxy and having among the Barabas idolatrous kinsmen, heard in the Baraba *ulus* that many wanted to convert to Orthodoxy, if they could be freed from paying *yasaq* to the Jungar rulers. Furthermore, during his periodic visits to them, the Tatar *âkhûn* of Tara, Mulla Seltov [*sic*], has converted more than half of them to Islam, and having converted them, made them undergo circumcision. Some of the Barabas profess Islam, but many of them, not wanting to accept Islam, oppose the *âkhûn*, and in arguing, say, 'It is better for us to accept baptism and be converts rather than become Muslims.' These Barabas who have become Muslims annually collect from each *ulus* 10-20 rubles and give them to the *âkhûn* for the odious prayer that they request from the *âkhûn*."

Sylvester further called for the arrest of the Muslim missionaries active among the Barabas.<sup>32</sup> According to other Church sources from Tobol'sk, it was in 1754 that the Barabas became Muslim, despite the efforts of Orthodox missionaries to make them Christians.<sup>33</sup>

As late as 1775, during the reign of Catherine II, the Synod reported to the Senate in St. Petersburg that the Tatars and Bukharans of Tara were not only themselves not becoming Muslims, but were trying to convert recent converts to Christianity and idolaters (*idolopoklonniki*) on the Baraba steppe to Islam and to get them to accept circumcision. The Synod blamed this trend on Catherine's new policy giving Muslims more freedom to build mosques. The Archpriest of Tara confirmed that Tara Tatars were circulating among the Barabas telling them of an *ukaz* giving them permission to build stone mosques, and that this *ukaz* had been sent to Tobol'sk. In fact, the report continues, the Governor of Siberia declared that

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30. Z. L. Titova, "Barabinskii tatarski," *art. cit.*: 136.

31. G. Miller, *Istoriia Sibiri* (Moscow, 1937), I: 199-200.

32. G. Potanin, ed., *Materialy dlia istorii Sibiri* (Moscow, 1867): 36.

33. I. I. Ogryzko, *Khristianizatsiia...*, *op. cit.*: 68.

no such *ukaz* existed, but that permission to build mosques had to be received from the provincial authorities.<sup>34</sup>

It should be mentioned at this point that the Eushta Tatars, inhabiting the Tomsk area, formally became Muslims at approximately the same time as the Barabas, and under somewhat similar conditions. G. Miller, who visited the Tomsk region in 1734, writes:

“The religion of the Chat Tatars [a group neighboring the Eushtas] has been Islamic for a long time. The Eushtas used to be pagans who worshiped the Devil, but about twenty years ago they were converted to Islam by Said, the head of the Chat clergy in Tomsk district. The remainder, not agreeing [to convert] at that time, last year, in 1733, accepted circumcision, thanks to the activity of Said from Tara district (the son of the above-mentioned Said).”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, this handful of rather terse accounts of the Islamization of both the Barabas and the Eushtas, is credited (or blamed) on *sayyids* in Tara and Tomsk (the name of the *âkhûn* Mulla “Seltov,” is almost certainly a typographical error and should be read “Seitov.”) There is little reason not to take these accounts at face value, that is, accepting the middle decades of the eighteenth century to be when the Baraba community as a whole formally changed its religious status in the Russian Empire, and this would explain why this change of status attracted the attention of such Imperial institutions as the Synod in St. Petersburg and the Metropolitan of Tobol’sk. It was also at this time that the Barabas changed their political status as well. Throughout most of the seventeenth century, and until the 1750’s, the Barabas had been the subjects of the Jungars, and during the first half of the eighteenth century had been subjects of both the Jungars and the Russians.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the Barabas became Muslims at the hands of Tara *‘ulamâ* thus was probably not happenstance, since the Muslims of Tara, including that region’s wealthy Bukharan merchant community, were one of the most privileged communities in the Russian Empire and enjoyed exemption from military service and most forms of taxation.<sup>37</sup> Thus, by becoming both Russian subjects and Muslims at the same time, the Barabas could reasonably expect various fiscal privileges and protection from the raids of Kazakhs and other steppe nomads from the south. The conferment of

34. E. Malov, “O tatarskikh mechetiakh v Rossii,” *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik*, 1 (1868): 18-19.

35. A. Kh. Elert, “Istoriko-geograficheskoe opisanie Tomskogo uезда G. F. Millera (1734 g.),” in *Istochniki po istorii Sibiri dosovetskogo perioda* (Novosibirsk, 1988): 84.

36. The political status of the Eushta Tatars in the 1730’s differed somewhat from that of the Barabas. The Eushtas had been Russian subjects since 1604, when their leader Toyan submitted to the tsar. However, unlike the Barabas, who became Muslims virtually *en masse*, a portion of the Eushtas had become Christians already in the seventeenth century, and by 1805 about one third of the Eushtas were Christians; cf. N. A. Tomilov, *Tiurkoiazychnoe naselenie...., op. cit.*: 192, 193, 201.

37. There is a relatively extensive literature on the Siberian Bukharans; cf. especially O. N. Vilkov, “Bukhartsy i ikh torgovlia v Zapadnoi Sibiri v XVIII v.,” in *Torgovlia gorodov Sibiri kontsa XVI-nachala XX v.* (Novosibirsk, 1987): 171-214; Kh. Ziaev, *Uzbeki v Sibiri* (Tashkent, 1968).

political and economic advantages as a result of Islamization is no reason to doubt that their new formal status as Muslims was meaningful to the Barabas. As DeWeese has argued, the receipt of various benefits resulting from conversion, from the converts' perspective, could only add to the prestige of the new faith, and in no way detract from it.<sup>38</sup> In any case, the desire to acquire material and political benefits was clearly the motivation for a number of Barabas to convert to Christianity in 1751, when a number of Barabas sought to avoid paying tribute to the Jungars by becoming Christians, and it is perhaps worthwhile to note that for Metropolitan Sylvester this was apparently a suitable motivation.

### Baraba accounts of Islamization

In the Barabas' own accounts of Islamization no mention is made of the events discussed in the Russian sources mentioned above, and in fact they do not preserve any account of Islamization because they consider their community to have always been Muslim. In this respect, we are fortunate that the Barabas had their own historian, Aḥmad-Jân 'Izzatullîn (c. 1860-1933), who served as *mu'adhdhin* in the Baraba village of Qoshkul and whose manuscript history of the Barabas was written down during or soon after the First World War.<sup>39</sup> It bears mentioning that 'Izzatullîn includes the Ob' Valley, that is, the territory of the Eushta Tatars near Tomsk, within the boundaries of the Baraba country, and one of his sources for the religious histories of the Barabas is a certain Ḥabîb Mullâ, who resided in "in the Tomsk region" and whom 'Izzatullîn claims to have visited "around 1900," suggesting that some Baraba and Eushta Islamization legends may have been closely linked.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, we have seen above how the official adoption of Islamic status by both the Eushtas and Barabas took place around the same time, in the first half of the eighteenth century, and both involved *sayyids* from the city of Tara. Thus it should not be out of the question to see parallels, if not actual convergences, in how these two communities interpreted their Islamic status, and their religious and communal histories. In any case, 'Izzatullîn writes that there is no information concerning when and why the Barabas became Muslims, and what religion they practiced before their Islamization. However, he notes that this Ḥabîb Mullâ told him that the Barabas' ancestors had originated in the land of Fârâb, that is in Central Asia, and that they were already Muslims when they came to Siberia. 'Izzatullîn goes on to add that because so much time passed since their ancestors

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38. D. DeWeese, *Islamization and native religion...*, *op. cit.*: 56-57.

39. This uncatalogued work is generally known as *Bârâbâ-Ṭûbil Târîkhî*, but the section on the Barabas comes under the heading *Bârâbâ Īlî*. The manuscript is housed in Kazan University Library (inv. no. 3413T) and was obtained in 1961 in the course of an archeographical expedition in Siberia. For a detailed description of the manuscript cf. M. A. Usmanov, R. A. Shaikhiev, "Obraztsy tatarskikh narodno-kraevedcheskikh sochinenii po istorii Zapadnoi i Iuzhnoi Sibiri," in *Sibirskaiia arkheografiia i istochnikovedenie* (Novosibirsk, 1979): 85-103.

40. *Bârâbâ-Ṭûbil Târîkhî*, fol. 24b.

had come from Fârâb the Barabas occasionally reverted to unislamic practices, but nevertheless were all Muslims.<sup>41</sup> Before dismissing this tradition, one should be aware there is historical evidence that at least some Barabas may have been Muslims already before becoming Russian subjects. We know that at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Baraba chieftain Kugutai swore fealty to the Russians on the Qur'an, and when the Barabas rebelled against the Russians in 1628, one of their envoys was a *mullâ* named Arat Taryberdeev (*sic*).<sup>42</sup> Circumstantial evidence for a degree of Islamization before the eighteenth century exists for the Eushta Tatars as well. According to the Eushtas' own oral traditions, recorded by von Strahlenberg in the 1730's, their ancestors originally lived along the Irtysh River, near the site of the old Tatar capital of Isker. The tradition further states that Kuchum Khan drove their ancestors from that area to the east.<sup>43</sup>

The Central Asian origins of the Barabas are further articulated in a petition drafted in 1903 by the inhabitants of a number of Baraba villages, who were petitioning for the lifting of in-kind land taxes:

"The local authorities, mistakenly counting us as indigenous natives (*korennyim inorodtsam*) of Siberia, are wrongly applying to us the statutes of the Code of Natives (*Ustav ob inorodtsakh*), compared in the laws with the peasant population of Siberia. We beg to send to you some historical information for clarifying the issue. In ancient times migrants from Bukhara, numbering eight clans (*volosti*), settled in Kainsk *uezd* after having crossed the Kalmyk and Kazakh steppes. Despite the constant appeals of their countrymen to return to their homeland, and the raids of the Kazakhs, they remained within the borders of the Russian Empire, and swore their submission to it. As a result, our ancestors were called 'Baraba' by their kinsmen who had stayed in Bukhara, and under Russian rule came to be called Berdyzhnye *inorodtsy*, that is, those who voluntarily became Russian subjects."<sup>44</sup>

This petition, which was written with the clear intention of gaining privileges from the Russian authorities, and of being recognized as Siberian Bukharans, as we have seen, a very privileged community in the Russian Empire, is probably not entirely reliable as an example of a Baraba ethnogonic legend. Nevertheless, it appears to be more than merely a "great falsification," as N. Tomilov has termed it.<sup>45</sup> In fact, this petition bears within it elements from a number of Baraba ethnogonic traditions that seem to have been conflated into this petition. As we have seen from the account of Aḥmad-Jân 'Izzatullîn, legends concerning their Central Asian origins did exist among the Barabas, and possibly their conversion at the hands of eighteenth-century Bukharans from Tara reinforced that validity. Moreover, that

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41. *Ibid.*: fol. 28a.

42. N. A. Tomilov, *Etnicheskaia istoriia ...*, *op. cit.*: 142.

43. I. Miagkov, "Predanie o kniazhne Tome i Ushae," *Sibirskie ogni*, 3 (1926): 161.

44. N. A. Tomilov, *Tiurkoiazychnoe naselenie...*, *op. cit.*: 161-162.

45. *Ibid.*: 162.

proof of such origins could bring material benefits to the Barabas is no reason to suppose that such legends were without legitimacy and meaning to the Barabas; if anything such a situation would naturally have increased its meaning to the Barabas. In any case, given ‘Izzatullîn’s broad knowledge of Baraba oral tradition, there is little reason to doubt his statement that he possessed no information concerning the Islamization of his community, and it is unlikely that such legends explicitly describing their Islamization were in circulation by the early twentieth century. Finally, it should be noted that virtually all other Siberian Tatar communities, especially the Tobol’sk and Tara Tatars, claimed to have become Muslims at the hands of Khorezmian and Bukharan religious figures, a fact that ‘Izzatullîn himself noted in his brief history of the Tara and Tobol’sk Tatars, entitled *Ṭûrâlû-Ṭûbil khalqî*.<sup>46</sup>

The petition also alludes to other Baraba historical traditions that explain the origin of their name and why they ended up where they did. In one of these legends, recorded in the nineteenth century, the Barabas are said to be descended from seven brothers whom Kuchum, the Shībanid ruler of the khanate of Sibir’, sent to the Baraba steppe. They received the name “Baraba” or “Barama” when Kuchum was fleeing Siberia and going to Bukhara. Kuchum summoned them to return with him to Bukhara, and abandon the Baraba steppe, as they had agreed to do previously. However, the brothers changed their minds and decided to stay. As a result they received the name “Barama” (lit. don’t go).<sup>47</sup> V. Radlov recorded among the Tara Tatars similar legends concerning this origin for the Barabas’ names.<sup>48</sup>

### Volga Tatar accounts of Islamization

The Barabas, like many other native peoples in Siberia, were affected by the migration of peasants from European Russia to Siberia. The earliest settlers in Baraba lands were Russian peasants, who began arriving already in the seventeenth century. By early nineteenth century, Muslim peasants from the Volga-Ural region began settling among the Barabas. These peasants were Mishars and Kazan Tatars, and by the end of the nineteenth century Volga Tatar peasants made up a sizable proportion of the Muslim population in the Baraba steppe, and were having a strong influence on the religious life of the Barabas.<sup>49</sup> As with other native Siberian Tatar communities, however, the Barabas retained to a large degree a separate identity from these Muslim migrants. The Barabas retained a clan system that did not exist among the Volga Tatars, and remained divided in *tugums*, as these clans were called. In fact, the names of some of these *tugums*, such as *misher*, *chistay*, *nughay*,

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46. *Bârâbâ-Ṭûbil Târîkhî*, fol. 30a.

47. Z. L. Titova, “Barabinskîe tatory,” *art. cit.*: 115. For other variations of these legends cf. *Tatar khalîq ijatî: rivâyâtlâr hâim legendalar* (Kazan, 1987): 117-118.

48. V. V. Radlov, *Obraztsy narodnoi literatury*, *op. cit.*: 107-108.

49. Z. L. Titova, “Barabinskîe tatory,” *art. cit.*: 110.

and *bashqort*, suggest that the descendants of some Volga Tatar migrants became assimilated to a certain extent by the Barabas.<sup>50</sup>

These Volga Tatar peasants came from a region with a very large and well-traveled '*ulamâ* integrated within the Empire's Muslim Spiritual Assembly located in Ufa and headed by a *muffî*, and as such considered their practices to be normative and sanctioned within the Islamic tradition. In encountering the Barabas, they encountered a semi-nomadic community of stock-breeders, fishermen and hunters whose religious traditions were completely unrecognizable to these Volga Tatars as being Islamic.<sup>51</sup> Traditionally, the Barabas had always been far removed, if not isolated, from the centers of Islamic learning, including the *madrasas* of Western Siberia, and retained elements of religious practice typical of both steppe nomads and the hunters of the Siberian taiga. In the eyes of these migrants, the Barabas' impoverished state was compounded by the alien nature of their religious practices and may even have been a causal factor for their poverty. As we have noted, many Baraba religious practices differed sharply from the Islamic practices considered normative in the Volga-Ural region. The most egregious of these practices for Muslim observers from the Volga region, and other sedentary regions was the veneration of these *qurchaqs*, tutelary spirits in the form of small dolls or similar anthropomorphic images. Such a reaction on the part of Volga Muslim colonists is documented elsewhere in Siberia as well. During the late imperial period, in the mixed Siberian Tatar and Volga Tatar settlement of Instiss, in what is today Omsk province, the Kazan Tatar migrants and their descendants simply referred to the local Tatars as "*qurtsaqlar*," in reference to the anthropomorphic sculptures the Kazan Tatars came to associate with the Tara Tatars.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to these Baraba legends of origin and Islamization, the accounts recorded by Soviet linguists from descendants of Volga Tatar colonists in the 1950's and 1960's present a rather different picture, in which the Volga Tatar colonists play a central role in the Islamization and general "civilizing" of the indigenous Barabas. In one account we are told that before Kazan Tatars and Mishars came to the area in the sixteenth century (*sic*), the Barabas used to name themselves after animals. After the arrival of the "Russian" Tatars, they gathered the Barabas into villages, and gave the villages names. They taught the Barabas to build wooden houses, sow rye, practice agriculture and to make objects out of birch bark.<sup>53</sup> The Mishars also began to give the Barabas Muslim names and finally

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50. N. A. Tomilov, *Tiurkoiazychnoe naselenie...*, *op. cit.*: 161.

51. For a discussion of the Barabas' traditional economic pursuits at the time of Volga Tatar colonization cf. N. A. Tomilov, "Khoziaistvo Barabinskikh tatar v XIX-nachale XX vv.," in *Genezis i evoliutsiia etnicheskikh kul'tur v Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1986): 65-76.

52. S. N. Korusenko, "Sovremenniï etnicheskii sostav i nekotorye aspekty etnicheskoi istorii tatarskogo naseleniia Muromtsevskogo raiona Omskoi oblasti (po dannym genealogii)," in *Etnografo-arkheologicheskie komplekсы*, *op. cit.*, I: 186.

53. Interestingly, the Volga Tatars appear to have indeed taught the Barabas the art of working birch bark; cf. V. B. Bogomolov, "Izdeliia iz beresty Barabinskikh tatar," *Problemy proiskhozhdeniia i etnicheskoi istorii tiurkskikh narodov Sibiri* (Tomsk, 1987): 113-135.

*mullâs* came from among the Mishars, built mosques, and spread Islam.<sup>54</sup> These texts clearly illustrate how Volga Tatar migrants viewed the religious practices of the native Baraba Muslims, which differed sharply from those of the Volga Tatars, and these texts merit being quoted at length. One text, recorded in 1950, relates the Islamization of the Barabas in the following way:

“The Baraba were a very ignorant (*nadan*) people. They venerated dolls (*qurtsaqlar*) and worshipped them as gods. They offered sacrifices to them, including animals. They sprinkled the idols (*qongirtsaq*) with blood. When a Baraba would die, people would gather every year to put earth on his tomb. This was an expression of respect the Barabas had for the dead. This burial mound was called ‘*oba*’ or ‘*qurghan*.’ All of the deceased’s property was also buried with him; his knife, shovel, ax, bow, saddle, clothing and jewelry. When [Volga] Tatars came from Kazan they began to mix in with the Baraba and learned *shagirds* [*madrassa* students] began to summon the Baraba to Islam. And since that time the Barabas have been Muslims and have had *mullas*.”<sup>55</sup>

Another text, this one recorded in 1967-1968, outlines the differences between native Barabas and the Volga Tatar migrants in especially blunt terms:

“My great grandfather (*qart atamıng atası*) was Yunus Papay. He came from Russia with his six brothers. They settled in the village of Onar. The Barabas who lived there didn’t know anything, and were like savages (*diqargha okhshaghan polghannar*). When our ancestors performed the *namaz* or *adhan* they [the Barabas] became frightened and fled into their houses. Their walls were made of dung and their stoves of clay. They would mill grain by hand and would roast it. They made mortars out of logs. When a child was born they would take it outside, and the first thing they saw, so they would name the child, thus [they had names like] crow, mouse, swallow, etc. They knew neither books nor reading. They placed their idols (*qongırchaq*) under their houses. They would put food on napkins and put them under the house. Their children would often die and they would attribute this to the idols, whom they would feed all the more. When their children would keep on dying, they would move the whole village. Barabas were not conscripted.<sup>56</sup> My great grandfather served 25 years [in the army] under Nicholas I. When he returned the Barabas did not welcome him back. They were like wild animals.”<sup>57</sup>

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54. L. V. Dmitrieva, *Iazyk Barabinskikh tatar*, *op. cit.*: 16-17.

55. *Ibid.*: Turkic text: 28-29, Russian translation: 30-31; the Turkic text of the last sentence is as follows: “...uqimishli shäkärtlär paraba qalqın tingä ündägännär. Shul waqıtlardan alıp parabalar musulman tinindä polghannar häm mullaları polghannar.”

56. Unlike the Volga Tatar migrants, the Baraba Tatars were known as *iasashnye liudi*, and in lieu of an annual communal tax were exempt from military service. The granting of privilege by the tsar figures prominently in the Baraba narratives explaining their submission to Russia.

57. L. V. Dmitrieva, *Iazyk Barabinskikh tatar*, *op. cit.*: Turkic text: 98-99, Russian translation: 99-100.

A third text, also recorded in 1967-1968 is particularly revealing as it relates quite succinctly the impression of Volga Tatars upon encountering Baraba religious practices:

“The Baraba Tatars lived around the village of Qarsaq, and were severely oppressed by the Kazakhs. As a result, their population became very low. The Barabas, then, were in a very hopeless condition when Ibrahim Baba arrived. He was sixteen years old when he arrived in 1812. Ibrahim was fleeing conscription, and came from the village of Chimbilei in Simbirsk province. [...] The first Baraba family Ibrahim came to had no children, and he stayed with them. They lived in a windowless hut covered with mats and without doors or windows. There was a common pot in the middle of the floor from which everybody ate, and from which dogs ate leftovers at night. In the morning Märziyä [the wife] made cottage cheese from the milk in the pot. Ibrahim and Köchyigäch [the husband] went to the lake to check the nets. When Köchyigäch was cutting off the fish’s heads, Ibrahim asked why he did that, and he answered that it was forbidden to eat the fish otherwise. Later, Köchyigäch killed a bird and broke its neck. When Ibrahim asked why he did that, Köchyigäch answered that it was forbidden for birds to bleed on the boat. This was not in accordance with Ibrahim’s custom. Later, he saw Märziyä cut off a chicken’s head and throw away the chicken. Then she milked the cows and sprinkled cream on the wooden idols (*qongırchaq*). She said that these idols protected the house. Ibrahim lived there three years and returned to Russia. [...] Before he left, Ibrahim taught the Baraba that they need to bleed the birds they kill, and not cut off the heads of fish. After he returned from Russia, Ibrahim began to teach the faith to the Baraba, teaching children in his own house. The village grew, and as the boys grew up they would throw away the idols. Instead of saying *ättäkäy* [a term of address for the idols] they would say *qoday* [that is, *khuday*, synonymous with *Allah*]. But not all the Baraba would throw away the *ättäkäy*.”<sup>58</sup>

In these three narratives a number of basic elements are evident. First, when the Volga Tatars first come from Russia, they encounter people who, from the Volga Tatars’ perspective, could not in any way be considered Muslims. The Barabas could not be considered Muslims because they “knew nothing,” and as a result they are “ignorant people,” or “savages.” This conclusion is reinforced by revealing their lack of knowledge of the basic tenets of Islam, such as the *namâz*, the *âdhân*, the proper slaughter of animals, proper Islamic burial practices (i.e. without grave goods) and most obviously, from the Volga Tatars’ perspective, the veneration of “idols” and “dolls,” which represented the tutelary spirits of the Barabas. In dissuading the Barabas from these abhorrent practices, the Volga Tatar migrants conceived of themselves as “summoning” the Barabas to Islam, or more precisely to *tin* (i.e. *dîn*, or, a religious system), and as a result, turning them from “savages” into good Muslims;<sup>59</sup> in short, these Volga Tatar migrants saw themselves as

58. *Ibid.*: Turkic text: 84-88, Russian translation: 88-93.

59. For how the idea of *dîn* was expressed as “law” among Udmurt “pagan” petitioners seeking to become Muslims, cf. P. W. Werth, “Tsarist categories,” *art. cit.*: 403.



Islamizing the Barabas. Inseparable from the evaluation of the Barabas' religious ignorance and savagery is the evaluation of their material culture and habits. As we have seen, for these Volga Tatars the Islamization of the Barabas did not only entail introducing "proper" Islamic practices, but also changing the Barabas' material culture. This included building wooden houses in the Volga Tatars style, with windows and doors, planting crops, etc.

How the Barabas themselves perceived the influence of these Volga Tatars is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the integration of the Barabas into the Imperial Russian Islamic establishment, including the appointing of *'ulamâ* and the building of mosques was clearly one result of the migration of these Volga Tatars to the Baraba steppe. As Aḥmad-Jân 'Izzatullîn writes, in 1740 the Barabas had no official *imâms*, but that around 1800 the Barabas sent an educated and respected *mullâ* who had originally come from "Russia" to the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly in Ufa to be formally made an *imâm*. Soon, other Baraba settlements sent *mullâs* to Ufa who also were made *ûqâznî* (licensed) *imâms*. Around 1831, 'Izzatullîn continues, Ôngâr qârṭ (perhaps a reference to Yûnus Babay mentioned above) went to Ufa, passed the exam and became an *ûqâznî imâm*. Around 1850 he built the first mosque in the Baraba region, soon after which six additional mosques were built in the Baraba lands.<sup>60</sup> By 1883 there were 13 officially recognized mosques in Kainsk *uezd* and 10 *imâms*.<sup>61</sup> Thus, from the Barabas' perspective, while the influence of these Volga Tatar migrants did not make them Muslims (as we have seen, they considered their ancestors to have been Muslims before they came to Siberia) ultimately it did help to make the Barabas better Muslims. For the Volga Tatar migrants and their descendants, on the other hand, it is in a sense natural that they perceived their effect on the Barabas as that of Islamizers. In their view, they taught the Barabas how to pray, and how to slaughter animals properly, they convinced them to abandon the worship of idols in favor of worshipping Allah alone, they improved their standard of living by teaching them how to build houses and how to farm, and by integrating them into the Imperial Muslim administrative structure subordinate to the *mufî* in Ufa, they built the Barabas first mosques and supplied them with their first *imâms* and *mullâs*.<sup>62</sup>

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60. *Bârâbâ-Ṭûbil Târîkhî*, fol. 28b.

61. These mosques are listed in: *Alfavitnye spiski armiano-grigorianskikh tserkvei i magometanskikh mechetei v imperii* (Moscow, 1883).

62. So integrated into this Volga-Tatar dominated structure had the Barabas become by the early twentieth century that, in 1907, representatives of the militant "Bulgharist" Vaisi brotherhood came to recruit support among the Barabas, only to be turned in by two of the Baraba *imâms*; cf. "Dokumenty otnosiashchiesia k sekte Vaisovtsev," *Izvestiia Obshchestva Arkheologii, Istorii i Etnografii pri Kazanskom Universitete*, XXV/5 (1909): 155-156.

## Conclusion

The case of the Baraba Tatars is a useful example for demonstrating some of the complexities of Islamization in Siberia, and in Inner Asia in general. The three groups of sources we have examined, eighteenth-century Russian and German sources, Baraba historical legends, and accounts of Volga Tatars migrants to the Baraba steppe, all reflect each group's often differing conceptions of Islamization, yet simultaneously depict important aspects of conversion. In the official and semi-official Russian sources the process of Islamization is effectively reduced to the Baraba community's change of legal and communal status from a "pagan" community to a Siberian Muslim community; in the Volga Tatar narratives, the Islamization of the Barabas is depicted as resulting from their adoption of normative Islamic religious, as well as economic practices. Traditional Baraba religious practices are depicted as abhorrent and as unislamic, and it is only through the displacement of specific native practices by "normative" Islamic one that the community can become Muslim. The Barabas' own accounts correspond to the latter two conceptions of Islamization, but from a clearly native Baraba standpoint. One of the Baraba legends of origin, relating that their ancestors came from Central Asia as Muslims, reflects an effective adaptation to the Imperial Russian system of administration in Siberia. By convincing the Russian authorities that the Barabas were Muslims of Central Asian origin, rather than an indigenous tribal community, the Barabas could hope to gain some of the extensive privileges enjoyed by their Muslim neighbors, the Siberian Bukharans. From the internal perspective, self-identification as Muslims of Central Asian origin reinforced the Barabas' credentials as an Islamic community, establishing a perception of historical cohesion. At the same time, the role of Volga Tatar migrants is depicted by the Barabas' historian, Aḥmad-Jân 'Izzatullîn, a *mu'adhdhin* in the village of Qoshkul, as positive, since it made the Barabas better Muslims by integrating them into Imperial Russia's Muslim Spiritual Assembly, and the Islamic world as a whole, resulting in the construction of mosques and the appointment of learned *imâms* to serve the community. Thus, while the Volga Tatars did not make the Barabas Muslims, they helped make them better Muslims.

Each view of the Islamization of the Barabas, i.e., the Russian view, the Volga Tatar view and the Baraba view, reflects a different, but certainly "real," aspect of Islamization, and each view must be taken into account if we are to understand the ramifications of Islamization in Inner Asia. At the same time, the case of the Barabas should serve as a warning to those seeking to distinguish "real" Islamization from "superficial" Islamization, and the "Islamic" from the "pre-Islamic."

## APPENDIX

**Villages with mosques and *imâms* in Kainsk *uezd*, Tomsk *guberniia*<sup>63</sup>****Bergul'skie Iurty**

**Bilektinskie Iurty** (Bilektî) unofficial *imâms*: Nafi' Mullâ, Bashîr Mullâ,  
Shafi'ullâh Mullâ

**Kazarovskie Iurty****Kindirlin**

**Koshkul'skie Iurty** (Qôshkôl) official *imâms*: 'Abdal'azîz Mullâ, Yûnus Mullâ,  
'Aynaddîn Mullâ

**Kul'chin****Liubeiskie Iurty****Osinuevskie Iurty****Savkin**

**Tandovskie Iurty** (Tâmţâw) official *imâms*: Bikbâw Mullâ, Fakhraddîn Mullâ,  
Ĥusayn Mullâ

**Tibizskie Iurty** (Tibîs) official *imâms*: Muĥammad Raĥîm Mullâ, 'Abdarrashîd  
Mullâ, Ĥabîbullâh Mullâ, Ĥasan Mullâ

**Tormakul'ek** (Târmâ) unofficial *imâms*: Ibrâhîm Ĥaĥrat, 'Imâdaddîn Mullâ, Ilyâs  
Mullâ

**Ubinsk** (Ûmî) unofficial *imâms*: Mas'ûd Âkhûnd, Maĥmûd Mullâ, Nafiullâh Mullâ

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63. This list is compiled from mosques listed in: *Alfavitnye spiski armiano-grigoriânskikh tserkvei...*, *op. cit.*; the names of the *imâms* following the villages are taken from the *Bârâbâ-Tûbil Târîkhî*, fol. 28b.