

ANR 'RedGold' Project (2021–26)

Δ A Red Golden Legend?

Hagiographic experiments in the (post-)communist worlds

Seventh international workshop, October 20–22, 2025 – Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Vasari Room, Paris

Religion and spirituality in the sacred geography of the (post-)communist worlds

Programme

Opening session: Monday October 20, 9.00–9.45

Welcome address & Keynote speech

- 9.00 Stéphane DUDOIGNON (*CNRS/GSRL*) & Marie-Paule HILLE (*EHESS/CCJ, Paris*) Welcome address
- 9.15 Patrick BOUCHERON Keynote speech
Collège de France, Paris

Session 1: Monday, October 20, 10.00–13.00

The Periphery as a metonymy of the of Whole

Chair: Marie-Paule HILLE (*EHESS/CCJ, Paris*)

- 10.00 Pascal BOURDEAUX A historical reflection on the gradual reintegration of religious South Vietnam into Vietnamese national discourse since the end of the war in 1975
EPHE/GSRL, Paris
pascal.bourdeaux@ephe.psl.eu

By announcing the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976, the Vietnamese Communist Party proclaimed its definitive victory over the U.S. imperialists and the puppet regime in Saigon. It endorsed a clear reunification of the temporarily divided nation and found itself in a position to claim sole sovereignty — a sovereignty that had been lost by the last Nguyen emperors in the mid-19th century. A long process then began to establish, according to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, a centralised state and a reunified nation. The religious question, which had been partially resolved since 1954 in the north of the country, was raised again at the end of the war to replace the countermodel of religious pluralism that pre-existed in the south. Taking into account both the *de facto* asymmetry of religious situations and the fracturing of memories, this communication will aim to analyse the process of political and symbolic reintegration of the multiple South Vietnamese religious communities into state institutions and the national narrative. To this end, it will question the representativeness of South Vietnamese religious figures in the country's pantheon of heroes and revolutionaries. It will also show how new places of memory have partially restructured the traditional religious spaces of the Mekong Delta to better integrate them into the crucible of a revolutionary and national history.

10.30 NAKANISHI Tatsuya
Kyoto University,
Institute for Research in Humanities
tachey82@hotmail.com

**Khaṭā'ī sanctifies Khaṭāy:
The Hui legend of 'Alī Bābā and the Forty Mendicants**

This presentation suggests how the contemporary Huis of Northwest China have been sanctifying the country's whole territory as a land of Islam, through a story spun off from an epic in verse, by a Pseudo-Khaṭā'ī ('Chinese'), that relates the Prophet's ascent (*mi'rāj*) to the heaven. Adopting the same pen-name as the founder of the Shia Safavid dynasty of Persia, Shāh Ismā'īl I (r. 1501–10), this enigmatic poet writes that forty persons led by 'Alī, the Lion of Allāh, had enlightened the Prophet Muhammad, who joined their mystical gathering after his celestial journey. The Bektashis and Alevis of modern Anatolia attribute the root of their important ritual of *āyīn-i jam'* to this legendary tale. Meanwhile, the Shia Forty are retold among Huis in Northwest China as forty or forty-one mendicants (*qalandars* or *faqīrs*) buried in various sites of China after their preaching Sunni Islam there. In short, the Hui narrative on the Forty implies that Chinese Islam is the authentic one, originating from sacred missionaries who included 'Alī. Moreover, the Huis represent all China as a unified Islamic sanctuary while locating its holy centre on the northwestern 'periphery' of this nation state.

11.15 Nodirjon ABDULAHATOV
Ferghana Pedagogical Education Centre
an_igp@mail.ru

Resurrecting and nationalising Muslim sainthood in the Ferghana Valley, since 1991

In Soviet Central Asia, Sunni Muslim rituality had passed from mosques to cemeteries and holy graves. This explains, to some extent, the importance taken by local pilgrimages in post-Soviet religiosity, informal or official. After the destructions of the short 20th century, followed by the rehabilitations of the 1970s–80s, independent Uzbekistan promoted shrines and saints as vectors of national values. In Ferghana alone, state mobilisation, private sponsorship and volunteer work (Uzb. *hashar*) for the local communities permitted the restoration of dozens of pilgrimage sites. Sacred lineages of descendants of Sufi guides encouraged hagiographic writing, sometimes by lay scholars and human scientists. On May 18, 1990 a meeting of *sayyids* (descendants of Prophet Muhammad) from Ferghana was held at a shrine near Marghilan, for the encouragement of genealogical expertise. Regional historians played a decisive role in the integration into hagiographic literature on modern saints, whose life story was connected with struggles for independence — such as Nāṣir-Khān Tūra Kāsānī, a figurehead of the Kokand Autonomy of the winter 1917–18, executed by the Soviet power in 1931. At the same time, the popularity enjoyed by these marvellous narratives, and by the pilgrimages linked with them, has been triggering public quibbles between conservative Hanafi Sunni scholars, on the first hand, and on the other hand the so-called ‘Wahhabis’, radically hostile to the veneration of saints as intercessors between the human and the divine. Due to the sensitivity acquired by this issue of sainthood, in a current context of brutal socioeconomic changes, maintaining a middle ground has become a challenge for both religious and political authorities.

11.45 Aurore DUMONT
EHESS/CCJ, Paris
auroredumont@gmail.com

Negotiating territorial and ethnic belonging, through the construction and worship of sacred sites in Inner Mongolia

Oboos (cairns for Buddhist or shamanist worship) and *shindans* (shamanic burial sites) are ubiquitous features of the sacred landscape among the ‘ethnic minorities’ living in Hulun Buir, a peripheral zone of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region situated in a corner between China, Russia and Mongolia. *Oboos* and *shindans* are not only ritual sites; they also function as territorial and ethnic markers, highlighting how local history and collective memory are embedded in a particular place. Based on local

histories and regular ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2025 among the different Tungus and Mongol groups living in Hulun Buir, the present presentation will tackle the relationship between a sacred site, its territory, its people and the way it is inscribed within legal and sacred geography. More precisely, it will show how the various local societies of Hulun Buir have negotiated their territorial and ethnic belonging through the construction and worship of sacred sites throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

12.15 Benoît FILOU
EPHE, Paris

benoitfilou1991@gmail.com

Absheron, from periphery of Shia Islam to centre of Azerbaijani national identity?

Famous for its oil fields, the Absheron Peninsula is also a key centre of Azerbaijani Shia Islam, with important tombs and religious shrines (Nardaran, Pir Hasan, Bibi Heybat). Although the region is marginal regarding Shia geography (far from Mashhad, Qom or Najaf), it is home to a range of practices and beliefs expressed in pilgrimage sites, consecrated during the Soviet period and after independence. Rooted in Islamic culture, they are often described as places of spirituality, open to all, but also as symbols of the national identity of a population presented as tolerant and attached to secularism. This paper will deal with the sacralisation of Absheron, showing how the independent Azerbaijani state was able to support this process in order to promote 'traditional' spiritualities that did not conflict with the officially promoted vision of national identity. It will also show that this process is in part beyond the control of the state — which shows reluctant to allow civil society to express itself — and that these sacred sites also allow for the expression of a local culture largely determined by its relation to Shia Islam and which may come into conflict with the national identity of Azerbaijan.

13.00: Luncheon

Session 2: Monday, October 20, 14.30–17.00

The society vs. the state? Undergrounds revisited

Chair: Thierry ZARCONE (CNRS/GSRL, Paris)

14.30 Valeria GAZIZOVA
Ruprecht-Karl University, Heidelberg & GSRL

**Memories of the Soviet Buddhist (under)ground:
New Kalmyk hagiographies encoded in the land**

lerrka2022@gmail.com

The sanctification of influential religious figures of the 20th century, not least those who were active in the post-Stalin USSR, has been a vivid tendency across the former Soviet space. In Kalmykia (a historically Buddhist territory in the southwest of Russia, with a titular population of West Mongol origin), emerging hagiographies of Buddhist ex-monastics and ritual healers of Soviet times have become instrumental in reconstituting what is locally defined as ‘the endangered ethnocultural heritage’. The incorporation of the Soviet past into the Kalmyk Buddhist cosmology and ritual landscape has been generating, thereby, new sites of pilgrimage and healing. Organised around diverse meanings (literal and metaphorical) of ‘underground religion’ during the late Soviet era, the talk will illustrate how narratives of sacred places and life histories of sanctified people can become intertwined in collective imaginaries and serve as mutually constitutive in layered hagiographic representations.

15.00 Jeanne (Zhanna) KORMINA
Erevan Centre for International Education
kormina.jeanne@gmail.com

**Taming charisma:
The post-Soviet life of Orthodox Soviet saints**

During the early 1990s, a period of hagiographic experimentations, a distinctive type of saint began to emerge within Russian Orthodoxy: the *starets* or *staritsa* (holy elder). Such saints, during their lifetimes, remained typically outside the institutional Church hierarchy and remained largely invisible beyond a small circle of devoted followers. After their death however, a sacred geography began to take shape — comprising places associated with their life, death, relics and miraculous events attributed to them. Alongside this, hagiographic literature authored by their followers emerged. However, despite numbers of grassroots efforts to glorify saints of this kind, only a small number have reached formal canonisation, whether at the local or Church-wide level. This paper examines the spatial and temporal dimensions generated by these saints through three case studies: Matrona of Moscow, Theodosius of the Caucasus, and Nikolai Guryanov.

15.30: Coffee break

15.45 Yulia SAVOSTINA
University of Bern
liakchova@gmail.com

**Politicising sacred space:
Legends and political life of the Amarbayasgalant Monastery**

Monasteries, alongside *ovoos*, worshiped mountains, rivers and lakes inhabited by *luses*, have always formed a vital part of the Mongolian sacred and political (cosmopolitical) landscape. This presentation will focus on the history and contemporary life of one particular monastery, Amarbayasgalant, located in Selenge Province. One of the oldest functioning monasteries in Mongolia, Amarbayasgalant survived the communist period and experienced a revival after the democratic revolution. The revival came together with the increasing politicisation of the monastery, fuelled by the presence of the controversial protector deity Dorje Shugden in it. This presentation will examine the political and cosmopolitical instrumentalization of sacred spaces in Mongolia using Amarbayasgalant as a case study. The ongoing tensions between Tibetan influence and the Mongolisation of Buddhism, between the authority of the Dalai Lama and Chinese power, and between the continuation of tradition and adaptation to new conditions — all contribute to further politicise a place that already had a deep political significance. The study is based on the fieldwork conducted in Amarbayasgalant Monastery in 2018 and 2021, and in other Mongolian monasteries and among lay people in 2018–2022.

16.15

Agnieszka HALEMBA

Institute of Archaeology & Ethnology, Warsaw
a.halemba@uw.edu.pl

Degrees of martyrdom, degrees of holiness:

The underground Greek Catholic Church and the cult of martyrs in Ukrainian Transcarpathia

The biographies, including the political views of the Greek-Catholic priests working underground in Ukrainian Transcarpathia during Soviet times, are extremely diverse. The author will present several biographies of such priests, some of whom are included in the official beatification processes conducted by the eparchy today; others are considered martyrs on the eparchy level, but no efforts are made to support their recognition beyond its borders; still others are not included in any official processes at all, despite possessing a strong cult and following among the faithful. She will reflect on the reasons for this diversity, how the biographies and their perceptions have been presented and changed over the years — focusing on, among others Ivan Marhitych, Petro Oros and Pavlo Madjar.

17.00: Closure of the session

19.30: Dinner

Session 3: Tuesday, October 21, 10.00–13.00

Hagiography as competition for space

Chair: Tommaso PREVIATO (*Friedrich-Alexander University of Nuremberg–Erlangen*)

10.00 Tomas KAČERAUSKAS
Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
tomas.kacerauskas@vilniustech.lt

Vilnius saints from anthropological and phenomenological points of view

This presentation considers sainthood in a city by reference to both urban anthropology and phenomenology. Beside this, it appeals to borderland area studies while analysing clashes between different confessions in such a frontier city as Vilnius. It asserts that the phenomena are real if they fall within the human (visual) experience, whether individual or social. In the paper, the theses are developed as follows. 1. As with phenomenology, anthropology deals with the emergence of visual phenomena instead of refusing the miracles as unscientific. 2. The saints also represent the symbolic walls or religious borders inside a city, inside a state and inside a region. 3. The life of a saint should be extraordinary and provoke changes in the social order or, at least, misunderstandings. 4. The canonisation process is like a narrow gate, not as much for the people as for the nations endowed with political-religious weight. 5. The public cult of the saints is inseparable from the identity of a particular city or state. 6. The declaration about the secular democratic state is double-dealing and leads to clashes between public and private spheres. 7. An anthropological approach means the way through heteronomous phenomena, instead of from generalisation and unification. 8. Anthropological analysis of the saints in a city integrates different approaches including the visual one.

10.30 Thierry ZARCONE
CNRS/GSRL, Paris
thzarcone@wanadoo.fr

Sainthood and oasis identity: Sufi dynasties and late-20th-century saint veneration in Yarkand

The purpose of this paper is to examine the situation of Sufi lineages and saint veneration in the Yarkand oasis, towards the end of the 20th century. It aims to demonstrate the persistence of religious beliefs and practices specific to this oasis. It will rely on a rare xeroxed and illicitly distributed document: a short manual of devotion dedicated to 37 major Sufi saints and *shaykhs* of the Muslim world

and Xinjiang. The text shows that late-20th-century Yarkandis favoured the Sufi branch called ‘Black Mountain’ (Qarātāghliq), or Naqshbandiyya-Ishāqiyya (from Ishāq Wālī, d. 1599), based in this oasis and patronised by the Sa‘īdiyya Khanate (1514–1680). However, the Qarātāghliq or Ishāqiyya was eliminated at the end of the 17th century by the ‘White Mountain’ (Āqtāghliq) or Naqshbandiyya-Āfāqiyya (from Āfāq Khwāja, d. 1694), which was then established in the whole of the Tarim Basin and ultimately contributed towards the collapse of the Sa‘īdiyya Khanate. Surprisingly, Āfāq Khwāja, since the 17th century the most prestigious figurehead of Sufism in the Tarim Basin, is not even mentioned in the manual. The text rather highlights a local Sufi dynasty whose *shaykh*, Miyān Shāh Bīg (1752–1821, a descendant of Aḥmad Sirhindī), was especially influential in the oasis, as his own descendants: we find four of them among the 37 saints celebrated in the manual. In Xinjiang, localism and ‘oasis identities’ have left a strong imprint on the social, political and religious life of individual cities, as in Yarkand up to the late 20th century. These identities are nourished by a city’s special heritages (the veneration of its own saints, its own pilgrimages), but also by competition with Sufi leaderships of neighbouring oases — as for Yarkand, those of Kashghar. The author’s conviction, until recently, was that oasis identities had subsequently declined and disappeared in the mid-20th century, with the development of transportation infrastructures and means of communication but, as far as Yarkand is concerned, the manual of devotion under study just demonstrates the contrary.

11.00: *Coffee break*

11.15 Sergei SHTYRKOV
Erevan Centre for International Education
shtyrkov@gmail.com

Saint Anastasia of Vladikavkaz:

Memory of a Russian holy fool in a Soviet and Post-Soviet Ossetian city

In the 1920s, a *yurodivaya* (holy fool) named Anastasia lived in Vladikavkaz (known during the Soviet era as Ordzhonikidze). She was, in a sense, a remnant of the Orthodox Church, which had been almost entirely destroyed by that time by the Soviet state. Left homeless after the closure of the monastery where she had previously resided, she, like many other holy fools, became widely known throughout the city for her eccentric behaviour and prophetic gift. When she died in 1932 and was buried in one of the city cemeteries, her grave became a site of pilgrimage. Today, a small chapel stands over it and local residents visit it in the hope of receiving the saint’s intercession. However, different pilgrims

interpret her charisma in different ways. For observant Orthodox Christians, Anastasia appears as a senior and spiritually experienced member of the extended family. For secular individuals — who also turn to her in moments of distress — she represents a force that is utterly alien, even dangerous and, therefore, effective. The veneration of Anastasia of Vladikavkaz thus offers an important contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding the phenomenon of so-called ‘shared shrines’.

- 11.45 Virginie VATÉ
CNRS/GSRL, Paris
virginie.vate-klein@cnrs.fr
&
Marie-Amélie SALABELLE
(independent scholar)

Herman of Alaska: A Saint at the Heart of Multiple Claims

The monk Herman (1751/60–1836/7) was one of the first Russian Orthodox missionaries sent by Empress Catherine II to Alaska, arriving there in 1794. Canonised in 1970, Saint Herman is a central figure in Alaskan and North American Orthodox Christianity. He is regarded both as the patron saint of Orthodox Christians in America and as the protector of Alaskan indigenous people. About a decade ago, Herman began to garner interest in Russia as well, where he has been presented as the ‘baptiser’ (*krestitel’*), exemplifying the missionary role of the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, Herman is a saint deeply rooted locally, in Alaska; but he also displays wider national and international dimensions. In short, Saint Herman lies at the centre of competing interests among various Orthodox actors who claim legitimacy and authenticity for their own institutions within the wider Orthodox community. This paper will explore the spatial aspects of Saint Herman’s hagiography, its rootedness in various places and how this link to specific historical territories creates a multifaceted aura of legitimacy.

- 12.15 Stéphane DUDOIGNON
CNRS/GSRL, Paris
dudoignon@aol.com

‘Discourse of place’ as a polyphony: Muslim sanctuaries in Tajikistan’s post-Soviet local lore

Since their independence in 1991, the ex-Soviet Central Asian countries in general, Tajikistan especially after its civil war of 1992–97, have witnessed an unprecedented development of local lore. On the one hand, this literature tentatively sacralises geographical spaces (regions, cities, river valleys, collective farms. . .) deeply affected by the Soviet sociodemographic engineering, from which they sometimes originate (as for kolkhozes, in particular). On the other hand, this scholarly literature often reflects the antagonistic ‘remembering realms’ (P. Nora) or ‘discourses of place’ (Z. Antrim) promoted by the very diverse authors and protagonists of this historiographical process — a process deeply impacted, in peculiar areas of Tajikistan, by the civil war and by the memory of a Muslim-Brother-inspired political party that was officially active in 1990–92 and 1997–2014. The presentation will focus on the respective

agendas of these different actors, their mobilisation of the most diverse symbolic heritages (Islamic, Persianate and Soviet) and these heritages' complex combinations in a post-Soviet genre par excellence: local encyclopaedias.

13.00: Luncheon

Session 4: Tuesday, October 21, 14.30–17.00

The 'Soviet century': a spiritual one?

Chair: Timothy GROSE (*Rose Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, MN*)

14.30 Marie-Paule HILLE
EHESS/CCJ, Paris
marie-paule.hille@ehess.fr

**Re-sacralising territory:
Spatial transformations and Sufi heritage in post-Mao China
(through a Sinophone Muslim community of Southern Gansu, 1979–2014)**

In the context of the post-1980s reform and opening-up era, alongside the broader revival of religious practice in China, Sufi Muslim communities in the northwestern regions have undergone a significant reconfiguration of their sacred geography. This talk focuses on the case of a minority Sufi community, established in the late 19th century, and examines the long-term processes of re-sacralisation, sanctuarisation and patrimonialisation of a religious territory between the 1990s and 2014. Special attention will be given to the processes through which a complex religious landscape — comprising a place of worship, sacred sites and functional religious buildings — was progressively sanctified. The analysis highlights two key sites that have been subject to substantial transformation: a cave where the founding master is said to have undertaken a decade-long spiritual retreat, and the tombs of local saints, which have become central to renewed practices of veneration and heritage-making.

15.00 Clément JACQUEMOUD
(GSRL, Paris)
clement.jacquemoud@gmail.com

**The divine Altai or the Earth-Water:
The construction of a sacred territory in the early Soviet period**

The creation in 1922 of the Oyrat Autonomous Province (which became the Oyrat Autonomous Region ten years later, then the Upper Altai Autonomous Region in 1948, before becoming the current Altai Republic in the Russian Federation) was based on a sacred perception of the territory. This perception

originated in the representations of the indigenous messianic millenarian movement Ak Jang ('White Way'). For its followers, Altai is a sacred homeland populated by spirits, but also a spiritual super-entity called 'Khan Altai'. The autonomists and indigenous intellectuals of the post-Civil War period drew on these new representations of the territory to unite the Altai space and give it a political dimension. It was primarily the indigenous activist and painter Grigorij Choros-Gurkin (1870–1937) who, by merging the entities T'er-Suu (the 'Earth-Water' of ancient Turkic shamanism) and Khan Altai, contributed from 1917 onwards to giving a spiritual dimension to this political utopia. What shifts did Choros-Gurkin make that allowed him to combine the perception of an ancestral sacred territory with the vision of a communist paradise? This presentation will retrace the biography of this major player in the construction of an indigenous Altai identity, and will return to the representations on which he relied to make Altai an autonomous entity, administrative but also spiritual, in the new Soviet Russia.

15.30: Coffee break

15.45 Dmitriy OPARIN
Montaigne University of Bordeaux
dimaoparin@hotmail.com

**Memories of Shamanic miracles in Soviet Chukotka:
Ritual fragmentation and nostalgia in the post-Soviet era**

In the first half of the 1970s, in the predominantly Yupik (Eskimo) coastal village of Novo-Chaplino (Chukotka, Russian Arctic), a shaman named Ag'lu, passed away — a man remembered vividly by his contemporaries. Ag'lu is, on the one hand, a figure of contemporary myth and, on the other, a character rooted in the relatively recent Soviet past. He is remembered as a respected shaman, the embodiment of tradition and the miraculous gift attributed to certain Yupik individuals. At the same time, he is recalled as a trickster, a hustler, a drinker constantly in need of money to cure his hangover. Recollections gathered in the winter of 2020 — of underground shamanic séances held in the postwar period, and of the anecdotal miracles performed by Ag'lu — are examined here in the context of contemporary reflection on 'the old life' and post-Soviet nostalgia for a sense of community and ritual intensity that defined that era. Why was Ag'lu called 'the strongest shaman', while later knowledgeable Yupik figures were no longer referred to as shamans? What do these shamanic memorates tell us about ritual dynamics in coastal Chukotka? Can we speak of the disappearance of shamanism among the Siberian Yupiks, or is the burial of this tradition premature?

16.15 Jesko SCHMOLLER
Humboldt University, Berlin
jeskoschmoller@gmail.com

**Garifulla Kiekov (1861–1918) on the screen:
A nationalist reading of the Bashkir Muslim sacred landscape**

This presentation is concerned with yet another representation of the Kiekov family from Starochukurova, a village nowadays located in the border region of Bashkortostan and Perm Territory, in the Urals region of the Russian Federation. In previous papers, were discussed representations of the poet and Sufi master Muḥammad-‘Alī Chuqūrī that were informed by specific conceptualisations of space. This time, the focus lies on his son Garifulla Kiekov and his relevance for Bashkir identity politics. In a TV documentary from 2023, the historian and journalist Salavat Hamidullin stresses the role of Kiekov for the Bashkir nation but, by doing so, he also contributes to a process of sacralising the territory of the current Republic of Bashkortostan. In contrast with the other accounts discussing the heritage of the Kiekov family, what emerges from the documentary is a nationalist interpretation of the Bashkir sacred landscape.

17.00: Closure of the session

19.30: Dinner

Session 5: Wednesday, October 22, 10.00–13.00

Sainthood in the move

Chair: Stéphane DUDOIGNON (CNRS/GSRL, Paris)

10.00 Anne DALLES-MARÉCHAL
Jean Monnet University of St Étienne & GSRL
dallesanne@gmail.com

**Conversion of places and circulation of religion:
Religion and territory in Russian-speaking Evangelical Churches of the Amur region**

Since the 1990s, various Christian movements have established themselves in the Amur Region, in the Far East of Siberia. Pentecostal and charismatic Evangelical churches carry out missions among the local populations, notably the Nanai, one of the region's ethnic minorities, but also among Russians who define themselves as Orthodox or as 'atheists'. These movements are established in a geography

meant to reflect the stages and challenges of conversion. This presentation will first focus on how these places seem to undergo a conversion similar to that of new Christians. Secondly, it will focus on the perception of territory in migration discourses, whether it concerns the emigration of Evangelical Russians to North America or the immigration of Christian missionaries to the Amur region. To conclude, it will examine the incorporation of Christian imagery into certain indigenous myths relating to territory. This exploratory presentation aims to study the relationship between geography and religion from an anthropological and diachronic perspective. It is based on fieldwork conducted between 2011 and today in the Amur region and in Canada with Russian-speaking Evangelical communities, as well as on work in Catholic and Protestant missionary archives.

10.30 Tim GROSE
R. Hulman Inst. of Technology, Terre Haute, MN
grose@rose-hulman.edu

Re-consecration after revolution:

Building and restoring sacred Islamic space in the Uyghur homeland during the Reform Era

Currently, the Uyghur homeland is witnessing the destruction and closure of Islamic sacred places at a rapid pace. These Party-state policies — officially described as efforts to combat extremism — are not, however, without precedent. In fact, during the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966–76), mosques were closed and destroyed, religious clerics were persecuted and public expressions of faith largely eliminated. Yet, during the subsequent Reform Era, a period from roughly 1978 to 2010, Islam, relatively speaking, flourished in the region. Not only were mosques rebuilt, but new mosques exceeded pre-revolution levels across the region. Drawing on Uyghur-language primary and secondary sources, along with oral histories, this paper will trace the literal and symbolic process of rebuilding Islamic infrastructure in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Preliminary findings suggest that, during the period, the central government encouraged Uyghurs to build and rebuild mosques and to look towards efforts undertaken by Hui communities in central and eastern China as blueprints to re-sacralise their homeland.

11.00: *Coffee break*

11.15 Aleksandr LVOV
Independent researcher, Jerusalem

From sacred text to sacred site:

Descendants of Russian Judaisers from Azerbaijan in search of a usable past

al_lvov@mail.ru

In the 19th century, the village of Privolnoye in southern Azerbaijan became a place of exile for Russian peasants from the sect of Judaizers. During the Soviet period, the local kolkhoz Red Partisan provided a cover that allowed the religious textual community of Judaizers to survive into the late 20th century. After the collapse of the USSR and the migration of Privolnoye's residents to Russia, a digital diaspora emerged. This paper draws on materials from a dedicated website and Telegram chat created by former residents of Privolnoye to analyse their attempts to construct a usable past, as well as the specific difficulties these efforts encounter.

The absence of institutionalized memory and identity was a paradoxical feature of Judaizer textual communities, distinguishing them from contemporaneous groups such as the Molokans and Doukholders. An intense reliance on sacred texts freed these communities from the need to develop stable narratives about the origins of the movement or its 'saints'. However, after the collapse of these textual communities in the post-Soviet period, it became evident that the descendants of the Judaizers find themselves in need of the very kinds of narratives their ancestors had never developed. They now attempt to connect their limited communicative memory with broader post-Soviet discourses — historical, scientific, literary — but without arriving at a shared understanding of their past. The difficulties they face have heightened the symbolic significance of their ancestral village. Privolnoye has become not only a focal point of nostalgic memory, but also a symbolic site — a place that has taken on a quasi-sacred role as the imagined repository of their absent collective memory.

11.45 Detelina TOCHEVA
CNRS/GSRL, Paris
detelina.tocheva@cnrs.fr

**Saint Seraphim the miracle worker of Sofia:
At the crossroads of clashing spiritual-political agendas**

In 2016, Bishop Seraphim (Nikolai Sobolev, 1881–1950) was canonised as an all-Russian saint by the Russian Orthodox Church (Patriarchate of Moscow). Born in Ryazan, in the Russian Empire, he acquired solid theological education. He fled from the upheavals of the Bolshevik Revolution and in 1921 settled in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital city, where he spent the rest of his life as a bishop, head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Bulgaria. Buried in the crypt of the so-called Russian church in Sofia, whose community Seraphim led for several decades, his cult began long before his canonisation. As it often happens with saints, Saint Seraphim's afterlife is rather complex. Every day, an uninterrupted flow of people pray at his tomb and write letters demanding for the saint's support. Besides popular veneration,

12.15

Shamil SHIKHALIEV

Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

shihaliev74@gmail.com

different religious and political actors claim the saint by expressing what they consider his real message. This paper will focus on two diverging interpretations of this message: by a small group of clergymen and believers belonging to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and by the Patriarchate of Moscow whose views of the saint have been recently expressed in iconography and the material rearrangement of the saint's tomb. The differences stem from two conflicting spiritual-political agendas.

Muslim sacred geography and its transformation in post-Soviet Daghestan

As part of Soviet resettlement policies, many a mountain village in the Autonomous Republic of Daghestan — in the North-East Caucasus, home to well-developed Sufi networks — was relocated to the republic's cotton-growing lowlands, where Sufi traditions had largely declined. This contributed towards a revival of Sufi practice in the coastal plain of the Caspian shore. In 1992, one year only after the dissolution of the USSR, leading figures of the Maḥmūdiyya branch of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi rule assumed control of the Muslim Spiritual Administration of Daghestan (established in 1943, as part of a system of regional boards, intended initially for facilitating the mobilisation of the Muslim population for the conflict against Nazi Germany). So doing, they mobilised public resources that facilitated the expansion of this previously marginal Sufi branch. Their preaching efforts and control over Islamic education transformed the area's Muslim sacred geography: While during Soviet times, shrines had been concentrated in the region's upper valleys, the post-Soviet period witnessed a shift to the lowlands, especially around the graves of recently deceased *shaykhs* who had lived in resettled villages. While highland shrines were declining, pilgrimages extended beyond the republic with the development of holy sites in Astrakhan (in the Volga River's delta), as well as in Chistopol (in the Middle Volga region) and in Troitsk (in the south of the Urals). This presentation will explore the factors that shaped this reconfiguration of sacred space in post-Soviet Daghestan.

13.00: Luncheon

Session 6: Wednesday October 23, 14.30–17.00

Nature, Supra-Nature

14.30 Tommaso PREVIATO
Friedrich-Alexander U., Erlangen–Nuremberg
tommaso.previato@icloud.com

**Lunar asterism, self-purification and immortality
in the mystical poetry of a Chinese branch of Qadiri Sufism**

This presentation explores the hermeneutics of self-purification practices among the Chinese Sufis of the Qadiri *da gongbei* (lit. 'great shrine'), through selected poems from the night-vigil genre, revealing corporeal geographies, notions of inner pilgrimage and envisioned pathways to immortality. The vocabulary used to describe these practices borrows extensively from non-Sufi liturgical traditions, primarily Daoism and Buddhism, both of which conceptualise the human body as coexisting with the outer cosmos. Inspired by Quanzhen ('Complete Reality') monastic literature and circulated in unofficial self-printed form until the post-Maoist Islamic revival, when they began to gain broader recognition, the poems provide a template for night meditation, linking the practitioner's ascetic journey with the five lunar phases (Ch. *wugeng yue*), sequences of Yijing ('Book of Changes') hexagrams, and letters of the Arabic alphabet alongside their numerological values (Ar. *'ilm al-ḥurūf*). These symbolic frameworks map the practitioner's spiritual progression through various mystical stages, ultimately leading to his unification with the divine. The many parallels with the Daoist quest for eternal life, Buddhist beliefs in soul transmigration, and the bodyscapes of *neidan* ('internal alchemy') doctrines attest to the diverse influences that have shaped Qadiri practices of self-purification since their first inception in Northwest China in the late 17th century. While examining the textual origins of this hybrid system of knowledge and macro-to-microcosmic correspondences, the presentation aims to shed new light on the hidden dimensions of pilgrimage, in which the practitioner engages in nocturnal battles against the *nafs* ('[egoistic] self'), circumambulates the temple of his heart (Ar. *ka'ba*, 'house of God') and, thereby, cleanses it of worldly desires, attachments and defilements.

15.00 Isabelle CHARLEUX
CNRS/GSRL, Paris
isacharleux@orange.fr

**New rituals in contemporary Mongolian pilgrimage:
Harnessing *Energi* from natural elements**

Following the collapse of the communist regime in 1990, a majority of Mongolians self-identified as Buddhists often consult shamans for personal concerns and engage in the communal worship of their homeland's sacred mountain. In recent decades, new ritual practices have emerged at pilgrimage sites

across Mongolia, accompanied by a terminology derived from electricity introduced during the communist era by Russian New Age movements. A central focus of these practices is the harnessing of ‘energy’ (*energi*) from natural elements — such as the sun, wind, mountains and homeland — which supplanted Buddhas, bodhisattvas and shamanic deities. Pilgrims report ‘recharging their batteries’ through the earth’s magnetic energy by lying on sacred ground or their birthplace, ‘absorbing the energy of the wind’ and even ‘transmitting the earth’s energy to distant relatives via mobile phone’. At a Mongol pilgrimage site located in China, Han Chinese practice qigong, which is believed to be more effective due to the site’s reputed energetic properties. The term *energi* has gained widespread currency among pilgrims and often supplants traditional Mongol concepts of vital force (*hüimor*, *süld*) and good luck (*hishig*, *buyan hishig*), as well as the Buddhist notions of merit (*buyan*) and blessings (*adistid*).

This paper presents two case studies of such ‘energy centres’. The first, the ‘Shambhala Energy Centre’ in the Gobi Desert — established in 2006 by a lay Buddhist — annually attracts over 50,000 visitors, including Mongolian Buddhists, ‘atheists’, Shambhalists (followers of Nicholas Roerich’s Agni Yoga), North American Buddhists and mindfulness practitioners. Pilgrims engage in newly devised rituals, recharge their *energi* by lying on the ground, and pray to a sacred mountain believed to grant all wishes. The second case examines Shiliin Bogd Mountain in eastern Mongolia, which gained national fame thanks to a popular film. The unique power of this extinct volcano is attributed to the belief that it is directly connected to the Earth’s core. Shiliin Bogd is also believed to collect powerful flows of energy (*energiin ursgal*) from all other sacred mountains in Mongolia via the wind. Thousands of pilgrims ascend Shiliin Bogd during the coldest month of winter, lie on the ground, raise their hands to the wind to harness its energy and pray to the rising sun. While the first case mostly has Buddhist references since the pilgrims pray to be reborn in the kingdom of Shambhala, the second has witnessed local resistance to efforts at Buddhist appropriation.

15.30: Coffee break

15.45 Allen J. FRANK
Independent scholar, Takoma Park, MD
afrank7129@yahoo.com

Mari sacred groves, deforestation and forced labour during the Second World War

The Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 is widely recognised today as a period of revival for both religious institutions and public religiosity in the Soviet Union. This is well documented among all of the major religious denominations in the USSR. This generalisation applies equally to the Finno-Ugric and Turkic communities in the Volga-Ural region whose social and economic structures over history were based around the veneration of forests and trees, and communal ceremonialism performed in sacred groves. From 1700 until 1917, deforestation and Christianisation went hand-in-hand as a way to desacralize the forest and to Russify these communities culturally and economically, symbolised by the destruction of sacred groves. Desacralisation of forests and the destruction of sacred groves continued into the first two decades of the Soviet era, albeit on a different ideological basis. With the advent of WWII, grove ceremonialism, including collective prayer sacrifices, reemerged as a means of popular mobilisation for the war effort. However, this period was also marked by massive deforestation through the use of conscripted indigenous peasant labour. The paper examines the paradox of grove ceremonialism and the indigenous sacralisation of forests, on the one hand, with the mobilisation of indigenous peasant labour to conduct massive wartime deforestation.

16.30: Closure of the workshop