

# Qsim Shaykh al-Qazn : a Muslim saint in Tatar and Bulghar tradition

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# QĀSIM SHAYKH AL-QAZĀNĪ

## A Muslim Saint in Tatar and Bulghar Tradition

Allen J. Frank

### *Abstract*

Qāsim Shaykh al-Qazānī is an elusive, yet central figure in the Islamic hagiography of Russia's Volga-Ural region. He figures prominently in locally-produced biographical dictionaries and shrine catalogs, as well as in oral traditions. In the welter of overlapping and contradictory oral traditions, recorded primarily in the nineteenth century, but certainly of older provenance, Qāsim Shaykh is identified as someone who flourished in the mid-sixteenth century. He is also associated with the city of Kazan and at the same time, identified as an ancestral figure to several Muslim villages on the western shore of the Volga. In the nineteenth century Islamic reformers, compiling biographical dictionaries, and "Bulgharist" chroniclers, compiling shrine catalogs, devoted attention to Qāsim Shaykh in their narratives and simultaneously sought to "rectify" the conflicting accounts in the older oral traditions. The Bulgharist compiler of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* created two separate Qāsim Shaykhs, one buried in the city of Kazan, and the other buried on the western bank of the Volga. The reformist Shihābaddīn Marjānī took the opposite approach, declaring the Volga-Ural Qāsim Shaykh to be a fraud, and identifying the "real" Qāsim Shaykh as a Central Asian figure.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed momentous changes in the political and religious consciousness of Russia's Volga-Ural Muslims, today known as Tatars and Bashkirs. Over the past decade, the intellectual aspects of these changes have been examined in considerable detail in numerous works, most significantly in studies addressing Islamic discourse.<sup>1</sup> One prominent feature in this discourse was the use, or even manipulation, of hagiographical traditions to redefine the historical, sacred, and geographical contours of the region's Muslim communities. Coupled with the "traditionalist" attempts to emphasize hagiographical traditions were reformist critiques of specific hagiographic narratives, and of local hagiographic tradition as a whole.<sup>2</sup> This paper addresses a

1 This body of recent works includes KEMPER, 1998; FRANK, 1998; NOACK, 2000.

2 Cf. FRANK, 1996; FRANK, 1998:149-157.

heretofore neglected case study of these processes, seeking to demonstrate the interaction between the older hagiographic legends and the attempts to recast the traditions in “traditionalist” writings, or to “explain them away” in the works of reformists. The figure of Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī illustrates these processes well. He is reasonably well documented in a welter of oral traditions identifying him with the city of Kazan on the one hand, and with a number of villages on the Right Bank of the Volga River, where he is venerated as a saint and communal ancestor. He is divided in Bulgharist historiography into two persons. Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī is identified as a Yasavian sufi identified with the city of Kazan. A second figure, Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, is identified as a Follower (*tābiʿ*) of the *ṣaḥābas* buried “in the Sviaga Valley.” Finally, in their own historical works, Muslim reformist historians deny his status as a local saint and establish his “actual” identity as a sixteenth-century Central Asian saint by the same name, buried in the town of Kermina, near Bukhara.

## 1. Qāsim Shaykh in Muslim Oral Tradition

Before examining Qāsim Shaykh’s place in the nineteenth century Muslim histories of the Volga-Ural region, it will be helpful to examine the sources of information these historians drew from. Until the rise of European-inspired critical historiography in the early twentieth century, that relied in large measure on Russian documentary sources, Muslim historians in the Volga-Ural region primarily relied on oral sources. This generalization applies equally to the “Bulgharist” historians and their Muslim reformer critics. While the oral traditions concerning Qāsim Shaykh were recorded relatively late, primarily in the late nineteenth century, they provide revealing data on popular beliefs and practices that certainly predate the nineteenth century.

Oral legends surrounding Qāsim Shaykh focus on three geographical regions. One body of legends associate him with the city of Kazan, placing him at the time of the Russian conquest of the Kazan Khanate, in 1552. A second cycle of legends identifies him as an ancestor of a number of villages on the left bank of the Volga River, along the Sviaga River, also at the time of the Russian conquest. Finally, a third set of legends, recorded not among Muslims, but among Christian Tatar communities, associates him with communities on the right bank of the Kama River. These Christian legends, however, are themselves likely

derived from the Bulgharist shrine catalogs, and will be addressed separately in that context.

*Qāsim Shaykh and the city of Kazan*

In the second half of the nineteenth century a series of Muslim authors recorded numerous oral legends concerning Qāsim Shaykh from the Muslim inhabitants of Kazan. These legends associated Qāsim Shaykh with various locales in and around the city. They also associate him with historical events during the time of the Kazan Khanate.

One such legend was recorded in 1881 by the Kazan historian Muḥammadjān b. Sulaymān Aitov (1823-1890), heard “from the ancestors of his father,” a merchant in Kazan.<sup>3</sup> The legend was first published in 1881, and reappeared in Russian translation in 1920, and again in modern Tatar in 1987. According to the legend, Qāsim Shaykh, or as he was also called, Qashim Shaykh, lived at the time of the Russian conquest of Kazan, in 1552. The legend relates that the site of Lake Kaban, a small lake located today within the city of Kazan, was originally a reedy swamp prone to flooding and inhabited by wild boars (*qaban*). When Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan, he prohibited the Muslims from living within the city proper, and the Muslims moved to a new settlement on the shore of this swamp. The oldest person among the settlers was Qāsim Shaykh. After they left Kazan, the women complained to Qāsim Shaykh, blaming him such for having brought them to a waterless and mosquito-infested place. Qāsim Shaykh heard these complains, and later, when a woman was going to the swamp to look for water, she saw Qāsim Shaykh perform his ablutions, and dip the bottom of his coat in the water. He carried the coat home, and water dripped from it. That water ran into the lake and eventually filled it, forming Lake Kaban. He then performed the morning prayer at the head of the lake, finishing it at the city of Bulghar. The midday prayer he performed in Bukhara, and never returned to Kazan.<sup>4</sup>

While this legend relates that Qāsim Shaykh eventually left Kazan, never to return, a number of other legends place Qāsim Shaykh’s tomb in that city. Iden-

3 The legend was originally published in 1881, and was republished in Russian by N. F. KATANOV in 1920 as "Tatarskie Rasskazy o Staroi Kazani" (KATANOV, 1920:287-300) and in Tatar in 1987 (in *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:67-68). On AITOV and his works cf. KĀRIMULLIN, 1962:5-6; ALISHEV, 1989:98-104.

4 KATANOV, 1920:296.

tification of Qāsim Shaykh's tomb in the city of Kazan is primarily encountered in Bulgharist shrine catalogs, which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, and which will be discussed in detail below. However, it is important to point out that a salient feature of the Bulgharist sacred historical narrative was the absence of any mention of the Russian conquest of Kazan. At least one small shrine catalog for the city of Kazan places Qāsim Shaykh's tomb near the site of the "Khans' Mosque" in the Kazan Kremlin, together with the tombs of all of the former khans of the Kazan khanate. While this shrine catalog first appeared in a Tatar publication from 1897, it also has come down to us in at least one manuscript variant from the early Soviet era, and represents traditions independent of, of probably predating, the Bulgharist tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The best evidence for the continued veneration of Qāsim Shaykh in Kazan and even his identification with that city was the presence of a family in Kazan claiming to be his descendants and receiving alms from amongst the local population. The Tatar historian Shihābaddīn Marjānī, who was imam in Kazan's First *mahalla*, where these descendants resided, left us with a brief account of their activity, evidently from first-hand observations. According to Marjānī, the descendants of Qāsim Shaykh, known as "Qāsim Shaykhlar," maintained a house, called the *Qāsim Shaykh yorti*, in the First *maḥalla*.<sup>6</sup> Muslims in Kazan would bring offerings to the descendants of Qāsim Shaykh. The oldest known descendant of Qāsim Shaykh was a certain Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm, who died in 1845, and he was "succeeded" by his younger brother, Yūsuf. The house became the property of Yūsuf's son, 'Abdalwalī, and of 'Abdulwalī's children, Aḥmad, Ṣāliḥ, and 'Ā'isha, who were the recipients of offerings made to Qāsim Shaykh.<sup>7</sup>

### *Qāsim Shaykh and the Sviiga Valley*

A separate cycle of legends connects Qāsim Shaykh with a number of Muslim Tatar villages in the Sviiga Valley, on the left bank of the Volga River, not far from the city of Kazan. These legends identify Qāsim Shaykh as an ancestral figure, and place his tomb among these villages. These legends place Qāsim Shaykh roughly around the time of the Russian conquest of Kazan. But at the same time the existing legends may have been conflated with earlier legends

5 For a discussion of this shrine catalog, cf. FRANK, 1996:284-285.

6 MARJĀNĪ, *Mustafād*, I:84-85.

7 MARJĀNĪ, *Mustafād*, I:84-85; KATANOV, 1920:296-297.

concerning local *ghazis* who fought against the Russians. Nevertheless, it is in the Sviiaga Valley that the most extensive legends regarding Qāsim Shaykh continue to circulate and where Qāsim Shaykh's tomb remains a locally significant pilgrimage site.

One cycle of legends, recorded first in a Russian provincial newspaper in 1873, and subsequently appearing in Tatar publications, identified Qāsim Shaykh somewhat differently, as 'Abdalqasim, or Ghabdelqasiym, in the modern Tatar equivalent. In this cycle of legends, 'Abdalqasim belonged to a family of saints residing near the village of Nurlat before the Russian conquest of Kazan. His grandfather's name was Dasmät, his father's name was Ülmäs Abiz, and his brother's name was Ghabdelkhaliq ('Abdalkhaliq). The legend had it that Ghabdelqasiym died while still a young man, but that his father and brother would miraculously transport themselves to fight in Kazan against Ivan the Terrible and at night would miraculously transport themselves back to Nurlat.<sup>8</sup>

However, substantial evidence from the Sviiaga Valley focuses more specifically on Qāsim Shaykh himself and on his ties with local communities. A genealogy of Qāsim Shaykh, associated with these villages, has come down to us, and is housed in Kazan University Library. This unpublished manuscript, according to a description by the Tatar historian Marsel' Akhmetzianov, traces five generations of descendants of Qāsim Shaykh. The genealogy begins with Qāsim Shaykh, unfortunately leaving us no indication of Qāsim Shaykh's ancestry, and has the following central line (according to Akhmetzianov's Russian rendering): Kasim shaekh, Aidar gazi, Miamka, Tuktash, Achka, Amin. It is not clear whether the descendants of Qāsim Shaykh resident in Kazan were associated with this particular genealogy.<sup>9</sup>

In the Sviiaga Valley Qāsim Shaykh is also regarded as an ancestor, a founder of villages and village names, and as a saint, whose tomb near the small village of Tatarskoe Islamovo (Tatar Islamī), continues to be a locally important shrine and pilgrimage site. The present author visited the tomb of Qāsim Shaykh in September of 1994, and recorded a legend there from a resident named Kadyr Qadyrovich Shaikhutdinov (b. 1903), who identified Qāsim Shaykh as Qāsim Babay and as having come from Kazan. According to Shaikhutdinov, Qāsim Babay is buried near Islamovo, along with seven of his descendants. When Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan, Qāsim Babay fled and founded the village of Qarashäm. His descendants founded the other surrounding villages. Another

8 KATANOV, 1920:297; *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:61.

9 AKHMETZIANOV, 1991:38-39.

legend, recorded by Akhmetzianov in 1972, credits Qāsim Shaykh with having lived in Qarashām and with having given that village its name. This legend also places Qāsim Shaykh's tomb near Tatarskoe Islamovo.<sup>10</sup>

The sources are unanimous in associating the shrine near Tatarskoe Islamovo with Qāsim Shaykh. Nevertheless, there is considerable variation in the oral and written sources regarding who is buried *with* Qāsim Shaykh. According to the account recorded by Akhmetzianov in 1972, the tombs of several other saints, named Ghayshābikā, Zöhrä tutay, and Äbelkharis babay (according to the modern Tatar orthography) are located at the same site.<sup>11</sup> In 1994 Shaikhutdinov mentioned six other saints buried at that site: 1) Abulkhaliq, 2) Abulkharis, 3) Shaykh Najmuddin, 4) Ulmäz Babay, 5) Kubur Babay, 6) Khusnut Totay Apay, 7) one unknown saint.

The most extensive lists, ultimately based on local oral tradition, but here probably derived from an earlier inscription, are engraved on two concrete tombstones erected at the shrine in 1981 by the "elders of Molvino" (Mulla Ile), according to the inscription. One tombstone lists six saints: Abulhaliq Babay, Abulharis Babay, Abulqasim Babay, Abulhasan Tuqay, Abulkabira Babay, and Shaykh Najmuddin Babay. An adjacent tombstone lists five female saints: Bibi Darman Bikä, Bibi Z.bär.j.kä Bikä, Bibi Hajat Bikä, Bibi Charshanya [sic] Bikä, and Bibi 'A'ishä Bikä. While the names of the male saints appear in the various legends collected in the Sviiga Valley, the names of the female saints suggest another connection with shrines in the city of Kazan proper, and with the time of the Russian conquest. The names of several of these female saints also appear at a shrine in Kazan's Öch Tiräk Cemetery, where seven female saints are said to be buried. While the inscription at the shrine in Kazan identify the seven girls buried there as daughters of the Prophet Muḥammad himself, another legend, recorded in 1977, relates that the girls died during the siege of Kazan in 1552.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the inscriptions on the tombstones at Öch Tiräk, which the author visited in 1994, identify Bibi Darmanda Bikä, Bibi Khajat Bikä, and Bibi Charshāmba Bikä among the seven saints. These names also appear in the shrine catalog for the city of Kazan, published in 1897 and mentioned above.

Thus, the oral traditions regarding Qāsim Shaykh, many of which served as sources in the shrine catalogs and biographical dictionaries of Muslim historians over the course of the nineteenth century, indicate that in the nineteenth century

10 *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:260.

11 *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:260.

12 *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:62.

legends and veneration of Qāsim Shaykh were focused in the city of Kazan proper and in the Muslim villages of the lower Sviaga Valley. In Kazan, Qāsim Shaykh was associated with specifically in the Old Tatar Quarter, where property owners claiming descent from Qāsim Shaykh supplemented their income with the offerings of pilgrims. Other traditions placed the tomb of Qāsim Shaykh in the Kazan Kremlin, together with the tombs of the khans of Kazan. Qāsim Shaykh was also the object of at least two cycles of legends in the Sviaga Valley, where local communities preserved at least one genealogy of Qāsim Shaykh and his descendants, and revered him as a Muslim saint as an ancestor; his tomb remains an active pilgrimage site today. However, even in the legends circulated in the Sviaga Valley, the historical person of Qāsim Shaykh was also strongly associated with the city of Kazan.

## 2. Qāsim Shaykh in Bulgharist Hagiolatry and Historiography

Several previous works have discussed the emergence of “Bulgharist” historiography among the Muslims of the Volga-Ural region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its place in the region’s Islamic discourse. Among the topics these works have examined has been the role of Bulgharist shrine catalogs in defining, in a manner meaningful to Volga-Ural Muslims, their community’s geographic and historical contours.<sup>13</sup> In compiling shrine catalogs that were meaningful to the Muslim communities scattered throughout the extensive territory of the Volga-Ural region, the authors of these Bulgharist shrine catalogs naturally referred to existing shrines that would have been well known to their readers. Qāsim Shaykh’s presence in virtually every Bulgharist shrine catalog, testifies to his familiarity to the region’s Muslims, and especially to Muslims in Kazan, when these catalogs were compiled in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The earliest known Bulgharist shrine catalog dating from the eighteenth century is entitled simply “*Tawārīkh*”, and is attributed to a certain Wali Muḥammad Ishan. Wali Muḥammad Ishan’s treatment of Qāsim Shaykh is laconic in the extreme, but manages to provide interesting information nonetheless. That compiler indicates that only Qāsim Shaykh was buried in Kazan at the Khan’s Mosque. Indeed, this brief note is our earliest mention of Qāsim Shaykh,

13 Cf. in particular KEMPER, 1998; FRANK, 1998.

but undoubtedly is based on local tradition, specifically on the traditions identifying Qāsim Shaykh with the city of Kazan and the era of the Kazan Khanate.<sup>14</sup>

*Qāsim Shaykh in the Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya*

The most well known and certainly the most popular history of Bulghar, the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya*, attributed to Ḥusāmaddīn b. Sharafaddīn al-Bulghārī, was compiled somewhat later, possibly around 1826. The work and its significance has been discussed in substantial detail in several studies.<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, suffice it to say that this history aimed at creating a sense of regional Islamic identity that united the Volga-Ural Muslim community on the basis of sacred history and the geographic contours were established by a listing of the regions Muslim shrines and an explanation of these shrines within the context of sacred history. At the same time, the compiler sought to define this community at a specific historical moment, when the Russian state organized and united the religious institutions of these same Muslim communities under a single nominally Muslim-controlled administrative system. There nevertheless remained the awkward fact, from a Muslim point of view, that a non-Muslim sovereign ruled this community. The compiler of the history deals with it by ignoring, or virtually ignoring, the fact of Russian rule. In the history Muslims are enjoined by the historical figure of Timur to refrain for all time from converting Russians to Islam. The work makes no mention of the Kazan Khanate or the Russian conquest of Kazan, although both phenomena were prominent in earlier oral traditions and even written histories.

The question arises: how did the compiler of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* handle a figure like Qāsim Shaykh, who was connected in oral tradition with the Kazan Khanate, and to whom multiple burial sites and legends were attributed? As we shall see, the compiler split Qāsim Shaykh into two different saints, both named Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm. One, a sufi affiliated with Aḥmad Yasavī and identified with the city of Kazan, and the other, a Follower (*tābi'*) of one the *ṣaḥābas* responsible for the conversion of the Bulghars, said to have occurred in the ninth year of the hijra. The tomb of the latter saint is placed in the Sviaga Valley. In this manner, the compiler “rectified” a seeming inconsistency, at least concerning Qāsim Shaykh’s tomb. He also managed to avoid associating Qāsim

14 SPbFRAN MS 3492, fol. 4b. On this work, cf. FRANK, 1996:282-284.

15 For a discussion of the dating of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya*, cf. KEMPER, 1998:351-352.

Shaykh with the Kazan Khanate. The account of the sufi Qāsim Shaykh that appears in the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* merits closer attention because it may not to have been made out of whole cloth, but was instead based upon earlier sources. Moreover, the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* itself became a source in its own right, “spinning off” oral traditions regarding Qāsim Shaykh and his *silsila*.

In most copies of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* the *silsila* of Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī is given as follows: Aḥmad Yasavī – an unidentified *murīd* – Hidāyatullāh Yārkandī – Idrīs b. Dhu’l-Muḥammad – Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī. Idrīs b. Dhu’l-Muḥammad, we are told, had studied in Yarkand and returned to the Volga-Ural region, where he was credited with bringing Sufism to the regions of Kazan, Tobol’sk, Ufa and Simbirsk (the names correspond to three Russian provinces under the authority of the Orenburg Mufti). His tomb is placed in the village of Tārberdi Challīsī, on the right bank of the Kama River. Idrīs’ *khalīfa*, we are told, was Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī, who is credited with teaching Sufism to many people and who is said to be buried in Kazan. Qāsim Shaykh’s *khalīfa* is identified as a certain Fayzallāh Afandī who came from Bukhara and taught Sufism for fifteen years, and who is also buried in Kazan.<sup>16</sup>

### *Qāsim Shaykh and the Krāshen Tatars*

Legends concerning Qāsim Shaykh have also been noted among the Eastern Orthodox Krāshen Tatars, known in Russian sources as the “Starokreshchenye,” or “Old Converts,” that is, the descendants of Tatar speakers converted to Christianity before the 1740’s. (Those converted after 1740 became known as Novokreshchenye, or “New Converts”).<sup>17</sup> The earliest reference to the existence of such legends among the Krāshens is attributable to Marjānī, who notes that Krāshens in the village of Tashkirmen, on the right bank of the Kama River, near its confluence with the Volga, used to make offerings to the spirit of Qāsim Shaykh.<sup>18</sup> A Russian archeological survey of the region, published in 1877, makes no mention of Qāsim Shaykh, but notes that in the nearby Muslim cemetery, venerated by Muslims and Krāshens alike, there was said to be the tomb of

16 FRANK, 1998:72-76.

17 On the Krāshens cf. WERTH, 2002:*passim*; WERTH, 2000.

18 MARJĀNĪ, *Mustafād*, I:84.

a saint.<sup>19</sup> We possess no details or no other accounts of the veneration of Qāsim Shaykh among these Krāshens, and therefore it cannot be further characterized. However, there was a cycle of legends among the Krāshens, concerning Qāsim Shaykh and his teacher, Idrīs, also known as Khalfā Babay, that was clearly derived from the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya*, and adds yet another non-Muslim dimension to the image of Qāsim Shaykh.

In addition to being an important text in the region's Islamic discourse, influencing the region's Muslim identity and its folklore, there is strong evidence to suggest that the contents of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* was also specifically aimed at Kriashen communities as well, hoping to re-integrate these non-Muslim communities by emphasizing the Islamic character of their ancestors, here identified as Bulghars, or other Muslims connected with Bulghar's religious authority. For example, in listing the tombs of the Followers along the Zay Valley, the names of three of the six Followers, Bayghul b. Aydaghul, Baydan b. Aldaghul and Ati b. Janti correspond to the names of three Krāshen villages in that very valley, Baigulovo, Baidankino, and Bol'shie Aty.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the sufis identified in the work, including Qāsim Shaykh and Idrīs b. Dhu'l-Muḥammad, are identified with areas of heavy Krāshen settlement, around the villages of Berdibiakovo and Staroe Tiaberdino, along the Kama River. It is perhaps not surprising that these sufis also appear in Krāshen folklore, predictably in the capacity of both ancestors and Islamic missionaries. This is certainly the case with Idrīs b. Dhu'l-Muḥammad, who appears in Krāshen (and Muslim Tatar) folklore as "Khālfā Babay". Providing a clear parallel to Qāsim Shaykh's role as ancestor and saint in the Sviiaga Valley, the Krāshen historian Maksim Glukhov identifies Khālfā Babay as precisely Idrīs b. Dhu'l-Muḥammad, and indicates he was known as a saint and as the founder of several villages in the area.<sup>21</sup>

Glukhov also indicates a figure from Krāshen folklore named "Kasimovskii Ibrai," whom he identifies as possibly descended from a "historical figure" known in Krāshen villages as "Shikh-Kasim bine Ibragim (according to Glukhov's Russian orthography). Kasimovskii Ibrai is said to be a "negative" figure who appears in satirical and comical folksongs and poems as a libertine and a

19 SHPILEVSKII, 1877:390-391; another legend, recorded in 1982, regarding saints associated with this shrine, places the saints in the "Bulghar" era; cf. *Tatar khaliq ijati*, 1987:36-37.

20 FRANK, 1998:87-91; for a partial list of Krāshen village names cf. GLUKHOV-NOGAIBEK, 1993:280-286.

21 GLUKHOV, 1997:159, 471-72.

drunkard, clearly distinct from the saint of Muslim tradition, but possibly reflecting some of the confessional tension between Muslim Tatars and Krāshens in the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Qāsim Shaykh in Reformist Tatar Histories

As we have seen, the compiler of the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* “resolved” the confusion surrounding the multiple legends and tombs of Qāsim Shaykh by creating two “historical” figures. One a Follower buried in the Sviaga Valley, and the other a Yasavian Sufi Shaykh identified with the city of Kazan. The welter of legends and traditions surrounding Qāsim Shaykh also challenged reformist Tatar historians in the latter half of the nineteenth century, who were compiling biographical dictionaries of the region’s Muslim scholars and notables, and seeking to document the dates and identities for these figures. These authors approached the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* with great skepticism, if not outright hostility, and clearly found handling legendary saints and ancestral figures such as Qāsim Shaykh to be difficult.

The key figure in this school of historiography was Shihābaddīn Marjānī, who as we have seen, is also an important source for the “cult” of Qāsim Shaykh in the city of Kazan in the mid-nineteenth century. Marjānī’s role in the development of Tatar intellectual history has been extensively examined, and the most informed evaluations depict Marjānī as above all an Islamic religious reformer, rather than a modernist.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, he was often hostile to local Islamic practices and conceptions, both in scholarship and in popular practice. This is certainly the case when we consider his evaluations of Bulgharist historiography and it is equally true in his evaluation of the traditions surrounding Qāsim Shaykh.

Marjānī’s discussion of Qāsim Shaykh is clearly intended to emphasize that the veneration of this saint in Kazan was a blatant example of uninformed superstition on the part of ordinary Muslims. He also depicts the collection of alms by the descendants of Qāsim Shaykh as a swindle. Curiously, he makes no mention of the veneration of Qāsim Shaykh in the Sviaga Valley. In fact, Marjānī argues that the historical Qāsim Shaykh had nothing to do with the city of Kazan, or

22 GLUKHOV, 1997:305.

23 Cf. KEMPER, 1996:129-166; on Marjānī and Bulgharist historiography see FRANK, 1998:149-157.

even the Volga-Ural region at all. On the basis of Tatar traditions placing Qāsim Shaykh in the sixteenth century he rather identifies Qāsim Shaykh as the historical Central Asian sufi Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān, whose tomb is located near the Central Asian town of Kermina. Evidently, the basis for Marjānī’s equation of Qāsim Shaykh al-Qazānī with Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān are Tatar traditions placing Qāsim Shaykh in the mid-sixteenth century and possibly the oral tradition whereby Qāsim Shaykh leaves Kazan for Bukhara after creating Lake Kaban. Furthermore, the *Tawārīkh-i Bulghārīya* is itself rife with Central Asian historical figures, including many sufis, “appropriated” by the Bulgharists and reportedly buried in the Volga-Ural region.

Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān was clearly an influential figure in nineteenth century Central Asia and beyond. According to the Central Asian biographical dictionary *Tuḥfat az-zā’irīn* of Naṣīraddīn Ḥanafī al-Bukhārī, covering the prominent sufis of Māwarā’annahr, Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān was closely associated with the sixteenth-century Shaybanid ruler ‘Abdallāh Khān II, and according to Naṣīraddīn’s account ‘Abdallāh Khān was able to fend off challenges from the sultans of Tashkent and the Dasht-i Qichaq, and defeat the rulers of Samarqand as a result of the direct intervention and blessing of Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān. Naṣīraddīn provides 989 AH (1581-82 CE) as the year of Qāsim Shaykh’s death.<sup>24</sup>

The tomb of Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān is generally identified with a mausoleum near the Central Asian town of Kermina, although his renown evidently spread as far as Western Siberia, where his tomb is identified in a Siberian Tatar shrine catalog as being near village of Vagaiskie Iurty.<sup>25</sup> In any case, it is the tomb in Kermina that Marjānī refers to, and Naṣīraddīn indicates that Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzān’s tomb was built by ‘Abdallāh II. The French ethnographer Joseph Castagné, who visited the shrine in 1916, transmitting information collected from the shrine’s caretaker, suggests that Qāsim Shaykh was a Turkmen, and that he died in 849 AH (1445-46 CE). Indeed, Castagné identifies a separate shaykh buried by the name “Azizan.” The confusion regarding Qāsim Shaykh’s identity, even (or especially) at his shine, should come as no surprise, since there actually existed a number of figures known in Central Asia by the name Qāsim Shaykh. Naṣīraddīn refers to a certain Qāsim Shaykh who was a *murīd* of Shaykh Imla, a prominent Central Asian Mujaddidiyya sufi active the late eight-

24 BUKHĀRĪ, 1910:133-134.

25 KATANOV, 1903:138-139; here the saint is identified in the Turkic form as Qāsim Shaykh ‘Azīzlar.

eenth century. To add to the potential for confusion, Naṣīraddīn identifies a certain Qāsim Shaykh Karmini, whom he describes as a Sufi licensed by a certain Muḥammadjān Kāhī.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Clearly there is no “solution” to the puzzle of Qāsim Shaykh. The oral sources, which we can confidently view as sources for the subsequent Bulgharist and reformist narratives, appear to conflate two or more traditions placing Qāsim Shaykh in the era of the Russian conquest of Kazan. Bulghar historiography, with its accomodationist agenda regarding Russian domination, suppressed any mention of the Russian conquest of the Kazan Khanate, and “rectified” the confusion in the oral sources by distinguishing two Qāsim Shaykhs, one Qāsim Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Qazānī, a Yasavian sufi, and the other Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, a Follower of a *ṣaḥāba* said to be buried in the Sviaga Valley. Finally, the reformist historians – equally accomodationist vis-a-vis the Russians – were keen to purge Volga-Ural society of supposedly locally-oriented hagiographical traditions, thereby removing one of the pillars of Bulghar identity. In their view, the legends identifying Qāsim Shaykh as a village ancestor, as well as with the era of the Russian conquest of Kazan, and as a sacred figure in Bulgharist narratives, were based on a misidentification of a sixteenth century Central Asian sufi by the same name buried in Kermina and probably unconnected with the Volga-Ural region. However, the reformists “solution” as to the “true identity” of Qāsim Shaykh is ultimately no more convincing, as there appear to have been several Qāsim Shaykhs in Central Asia, and indeed conflicting traditions exist even surrounding the identity of the Qāsim Shaykh buried in Kermina. Whatever Qāsim Shaykh’s historical deeds consisted of, and whatever the modern-day outcome of the historical debates he appeared in, it is clear that he continues to be revered today as an ancestral figure among the Muslims of the Sviaga Valley.

26 BUKHĀRĪ, 1910:94, 112.

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