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THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN KAZAKH-DZUNGAR (OIRAT) RELATIONS

Abstract. The Kazakh-Oirat relations, spanning several centuries, represent a complex and multifaceted historical phenomenon, in which political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects were intricately interwoven. One of the key factors that significantly influenced the dynamics of these relations was religion. The Kazakhs, adherents of Islam, and the Oirats (Dzungars), followers of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, were in constant interaction, which frequently escalated into conflicts driven by differences in religious beliefs and policies. Religion played a crucial role in shaping the identity of both groups. For the Kazakhs, Islam served not only as a spiritual foundation but also as a unifying element in their struggle against external threats. The Oirats, in turn, regarded Buddhism as an instrument for strengthening their statehood and expanding their influence in Central Asia. The religious factor was often employed as an ideological justification for military campaigns and diplomatic initiatives. The study of the religious dimension in Kazakh-Oirat relations provides a deeper understanding of not only the history of these two peoples but also the broader patterns of interaction between the Islamic and Buddhist worlds in Central Asia. This aspect also sheds light on how religion influenced the formation of political alliances, conflicts, and cultural exchanges in the region. Both Kazakh and Oirat historiography assert that their religion played a crucial role in preserving their cultural identity.

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Introduction

The religious factor in Kazakh-Oirat relations was merely a continuation of the confrontation with the Yuan Empire and Jochi's Ulus, but on a significantly smaller scale and with far less ambitious goals. The Oirats were also formally allies of Jochi's Ulus, as Berke Khan supported Ariq Böke, who was also backed by the Oirat tribes against Kublai. After the disintegration of the Mongol Empire, the four sons of Genghis Khan, including the Oirats, served Hulagu in his struggle against the Arabs. The Oirats found themselves in a state of confusion, and internal contradictions within their ranks only intensified. A shared language and genetic heritage did not necessarily translate into unity in worldview and ideology. The Oirats of the Ilkhanate were undeniable adversaries of the Ulug Ulus in the early stages, as fate had separated the Oirats from the tribes of Jochi's Ulus.

One of the most renowned Oirats in the Ilkhanate, Nawruz, played a pivotal role in the Islamization of the Ilkhanids. Following his religious policies, Nawruz was a fervent proponent of Islam. According to historical accounts by the Nestorian Bar Sauma, the Oirat emir Nawruz zealously fought against Nestorian Christians (Khanbaghi, 2006: 69]. Once Islam was established as the state religion in Hulagu's Iran, Nawruz also ordered the destruction of Buddhist and Christian temples (Borbone, ed, 2021: 150), demonstrating even an intolerant attitude toward Abrahamic faiths. Nawruz was a fanatical Muslim, even more devout than his kinsman Khan Berke of the Ulug Ulus, and pursued a highly reckless policy. Ultimately, Nawruz met a tragic fate – by the order of Qutlughshah, his head was severed and displayed at the gates of Baghdad alongside those of his brothers Buluk and

Haji (Grousset, 1970: 380). Nawruz was straightforward in his ways, which led to his downfall in 1297.

Another Oirat, Kitbuqa al-Adil, who became the Sultan of Egypt, fell into disfavor and was dethroned by his own emirs due to his generous patronage of Mongol-Oirats and his lavish gifts to them (Waterson, 2022). The Oirat sultan retained a strong awareness of his Mongol lineage, and his generosity toward fellow Mongols fueled public resentment. Nevertheless, Kitbuqa was an astute strategist and knew when to retreat. The rebel emirs in the citadel recognized Sultan Lajin as the new ruler of Egypt. This episode underscores the local Egyptian population's bias against Mongols due to their origins.

Jabaghin noted the genetic proximity between the Kazakhs of the Junior Zhuz and the Oirat-Bayats (Zhabagin, 2017: 54). This suggests that Muslim Oirats were present in the Iranian Ilkhanate and Egypt and also shared genetic ties with the Kazakhs of the Junior Zhuz. Despite Oirats often being associated with Buddhism due to their strong connections with Tibet, the majority of those carrying Oirat genetic markers today adhere to Islam. Jumabayeva wrote that Sultan Baybars was a Kazakh from the Junior Zhuz, belonging to the Alshyn-Birish tribe (Zhumabaeva, 2010: 237), but Jabaghin's genetic research contradicts this claim. It is more likely that the conditionally "Oirat" Sultan Kitbuqa al-Adil had closer genetic ties to the Alshyns.

From a population perspective, Muslim Oirats proved more successful in terms of numbers than Buddhist Oirats. However, while Muslim Oirats were more numerous, they also lost their Mongol-Oirat language and assimilated into Kazakh, Hazara, and other Islamic communities.

Research materials and methods

The analysis of the religious factor in Kazakh–Oirat relations is based on an interdisciplinary approach incorporating historical-analytical, comparative religious, sociocultural, and discourse analysis methods. The historical-analytical method was applied to written sources, including chronicles, diplomatic correspondence, and Muslim historiography, in order to determine the role of religion in interethnic conflicts. The comparative religious method enabled the examination of dogmatic and ritual differences between Sunni Islam and Tibetan Buddhism, identifying religious distinctions as a factor in political and cultural self-identification. Sociocultural analysis was used to interpret folklore, ethnographic data, and popular narratives that reflect religious perceptions of “self” and “other.” Discourse analysis was employed to study the language of the sources and explore how religious rhetoric was used in mobilization strategies, enemy image formation, and the legitimization of military actions. This integrated approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the religious component as a key element in the Kazakh–Oirat confrontation. A methodologically sound analysis of Kazakh–Oirat relations requires taking into account the Oirat perspective as well. Incorporating Oirat sources—such as texts in *todo bichig*, legal codes, monastic records, diplomatic correspondence, and Qing archival materials on Dzungaria—makes it possible to reconstruct the Oirats' own motivations, institutions, and political practices, rather than reducing their role to that of a reactive “other.” This approach mitigates the one-sidedness of a purely national narrative and offers a more balanced picture of conflict and cooperation, the economy of pastures and transit trade, as well as border management and diplomacy.

Research results

The Kazakh-Oirat conflict can be interpreted as an echo of an earlier confrontation between Jochi's Ulus (the Golden Horde) and the Yuan Empire—a conflict that was not only political but also cultural and religious. This divide was rooted in differences in religious preferences and political alignments within the two factions of the former Mongol Empire, akin to Berke's opposition to Kublai. However, the descendants of both sides eventually became victims of two dominant political powers—the Russian Empire and the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty. Pressured from both sides, the Oirats and Kazakhs clashed over limited food supplies, the waning significance of the Silk Road, and

economic resources. Without a doubt, one of the key factors was the harsh climate of Central Asia, while religion merely served as a tool for legitimizing warfare.

J. Elversky wrote that in economic terms, this conflict influenced the Oirats' abandonment of Islam in favor of Buddhism, as "being Muslim was seemingly a hindrance in dealings with China at the time" (Elverskog, 2010: 340). Kalmyk scholar Ts.D. Nominkhanov noted that the Turks began calling the Oirats "Kalmyks" solely because the Oirat-Mongols did not adopt Islam and instead remained Shamanists or Buddhists (Nominkhanov, 1958: 100).

The Mongol Muslims, proud of their Islamic faith and relying on their large numbers, scornfully referred to the Mongol Buddhists as "Kalmyks," meaning the remainder of the Mongols who had not embraced Islam. In other words, they were those who did not follow the path of the descendants of the elder sons of Juchi and Chagatai.

However, the Oirats also extended their patronage to Muslims. Muhammad Haidar Dughlat wrote in *Tarikh-i Rashidi*: "The Khan of the Mughals [Tughlugh-Timur], at the age of 16, was brought from the Kalmyks by Amir Bulaji; at the age of 18, he became Khan. At 24, he converted to Islam and died at 34. He was born in 730 AH (1329–1330)" (Dulati, 1996: 38).

One of Esen's sons, Ash-Temur—identified by H. Serraris as Amasandji Taishi (Serruys, 1977: 366, 375)—married the daughter of the ruler of Kashgar (Moghulistan) on the condition that their children would adopt Islam. Later, the Oirat-born Ibrahim and Ilyas led the Oirat Elut tribe westward, which resulted in conflict with Ash-Temur's father due to religious differences (Batur Ubashi, 1969: 37).

In his article, Kitinov examined how the Muslim Oirats of the Elut tribe were exterminated by Alachi Ahmad Khan, who harbored prejudice against the Oirats due to their non-Islamic origins. He sought to avenge the death of his father, Yunus Khan (Kitinov, 2017: 375). While Islam does not encourage the killing of fellow Muslims, some Muslim rulers did not always adhere to theological principles, opting for harsher policies toward the Oirats instead (Kitinov, 2017: 378).

The Ilkhanid Oirats, in contrast, became zealous Muslims, while the Oirats of Central Asia turned to Buddhism for solace. A brief overview of the Oirats from the Hulaguids' lineage suggests that Kazakhs and Oirats became adversaries primarily due to geographic conditions. The Kazakhs were influenced by the southern Sufi orders of Islam, whereas the Oirats were guided by Tibetan monks. The Kazakhs were also under strong Turkic influence, shaped by the Khorezmians in the south and the Turkic-speaking Bulgars in the north. The Hulagu Oirats and those in Egypt were closer to the Kazakhs in faith and ideology than the Oirats of the Yuan Empire, from which they had separated.

The tensions between the Ilkhanid Oirats and Jochi's Ulus gradually dissipated, and by 1304, the Ilkhanids and Jochi's Ulus had reached a reconciliation (Trepavlov, 2016: 323). This was largely due to the Ilkhanids abandoning their reliance on Buddhism and integrating into the Islamic world. However, the most crucial reason for this reconciliation was the vast territorial expanse, where conflicts began to subside as both the Ilkhanate and Jochi's Ulus shifted focus to internal matters.

The first significant tensions with the Kazakhs emerged under the Uzbek Khan Abulhair. He suffered defeat at the hands of Uz-Temir Taichi. The ruler of the nomadic Uzbeks framed his military campaigns against the Oirats as jihad. Chroniclers of the time depicted his victorious army as "defenders of Islam" (Molla Alim, 1969: 426). Before their mass conversion to Buddhism, the Dzungars largely adhered to Genghis Khan's Yassa. However, their subsequent commitment to Buddhism further deepened their isolation.

Kazakh-Oirat relations remained weak during the early Kazakh Khans. At the height of Kasym Khan's power, the Oirats lost influence, while the Khalkha Mongols, under Dayan Khan's leadership, unified the Mongols and became a significant threat to the Ming Empire, defeating its armies [Chaliand, 2017: 102].

During the reign of Dayan Khan's grandson, Altan, the Mongols began to gravitate toward Buddhism. The authoritative monk Sonam Gyatso declared Altan Khan to be the reincarnation of the

Buddhist monk who had converted Kublai Khan to the faith (Thomas, 2006: 146). From this period onward, the Oirats began their mass conversion to Buddhism.

It is difficult to determine unequivocally how Buddhism affected the Oirats, but it undoubtedly played a role in shaping the negative perception between the Kazakh Khanate and the Oirats in later years. During Dayan Khan's reign, the Mongols were primarily focused on their wars against the Ming Empire, treating the western front as secondary. For Dayan Khan, restoring Mongol prestige and reviving a full-fledged Yuan Empire was paramount, while Buddhism served as a means of legitimizing his rule over China. However, under Eljei Khan, the Mongols weakened under the Manchu onslaught, allowing the Oirats to reclaim their influence.

On one hand, the Oirats' excessive devotion to Buddhism contributed to their decline, as the Manchus pursued a more cautious religious policy. The Manchu emperors employed a multilayered approach to religion, blending their ethnic traditions with elements of Chinese and Tibetan culture. This strategy helped them maintain power and legitimacy in their vast, multiethnic empire.

Despite certain noble motives, the Dzungars' conflict with the Kazakh Khanate on religious grounds significantly weakened the Dzungar state, which also faced increasing pressure from the Manchus. Moreover, the Manchus themselves were not considered devout Buddhists: "The Manchus have no law of their own and no lamas among them" (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, 1731: 62/1). Ultimately, the Oirats' excessive religious isolation and lack of strong allies—except for Tibet—led to Dzungaria being surrounded by enemies. Even their relationship with their fellow Buddhists, the Khalkha Mongols, failed to develop positively.

Nurtazina wrote that Kazakh Khan Esim (Yeshmukhammad) gained renown in the struggle (ghazawat) against the Kalmyk-Oirats. He maintained close ties with the Sufi khwajas of Kashgar and Central Asia, basing his legal code on Sharia law (Nurtazina, 2009: 55–56). The Islamic consciousness of the Kazakh elite is vividly emphasized in the words of Tauke Khan, addressed to Barak Khan: "We are both descendants of Genghis Khan, bound by kinship. Moreover, we are both Muslims, brothers in faith. Give me your support, and together we shall avenge the infidels" (Klyashtorny, Sultanov, 1992: 287). Esim Khan was the most enlightened of the Kazakh khans and the first to espouse Pan-Islamic views.

According to the testimony of historian Miller, Khan Kuchum, his father Murtaza, and part of their retinue were of Kyrgyz origin. Thus, the first clashes with the Russians began during the time of Yermak and the initial stages of the conquest of Siberia. However, after the Kyrgyz embraced Islam, their alleged natural predisposition toward raiding was, as the source claims, compounded by "Mohammedan fanaticism" and hostility not only toward Christians but also toward Buddhists. As a result, according to the source, continuous predatory wars ensued: in the west against the Kalmyks, in the east against the Dzungars, and in the north against the Russians (Zavalishin, 1867: 134). Such an interpretation, which reduces multifaceted military-political conflicts solely to religious motives, constitutes a significant oversimplification. It overlooks a broad range of factors, including economic interests, competition for resources, geopolitical ambitions, and dynastic rivalries. Religion undoubtedly played an important role in these processes, but it was merely one component within a more complex constellation of causes underlying historical confrontations.

Both the Kazakhs and the Dzungars increasingly used religion as a tool of political struggle. Buddhism, being a non-Abrahamic religion, differed significantly from Islam, exacerbating tensions between the two sides. The religious factor intensified hostilities, making any political union between the two nomadic nations impossible. Marital alliances among the aristocracy rarely led to long-term cooperation.

Nazira Nurtazina cites the poetry of one of the Kazakh ideologues, Kozhabergen Zhyrau, who wrote:

*"Cease your prayer, my comrades,
If my words hold meaning for you.
The khwajas, mullahs, and ishans—they are but fleeting,*

*Let them set aside their Sharia teachings.
If you pray, the enemy will strike,
Crushing you with cannons and fire.
If you kneel on your mat in devotion,
Wicked men will seize and enslave you.
Yet if your faith is pure before Allah,
You shall find your place in paradise,
And the prayer you missed will be forgiven"* (Isabay, Baizhan, 1996: 16).

It is difficult to verify whether these verses genuinely belong to Kozhabergen Zhyrau, as they originate from folklore. Oral tradition may have altered their transmission, and there are no reliable sources confirming that the Dzungars specifically targeted Kazakhs during prayer. Nomadic peoples likely performed the prayer (namaz) only superficially or neglected it altogether, either due to everyday indifference or a lack of theological knowledge. Consequently, claims that Kazakhs were specifically attacked during prayer are not supported by reliable historical sources. Such assertions are more likely later folkloric constructions, emerging from a tendency to idealize the past and elevate the image of the Kazakh people.

In Ubaydullah-nameh, the Dzungars are described as follows:

"But the unfortunate infidel Kalmyks, like ants and locusts, having cleaned the hooves and tails of their horses, first descended upon the tribes and clans of the Kazakh people, plunging everything into fire and plunder; a great many Kazakh tribes and lineages were taken captive by the infidel robbers, Gog and Magog (in the text, Yajuj and Majuj, corresponding to the biblical Gog and Magog). We, their servants, have heard that the Kazakhs and the Karakalpak tribe, fearing the countless army of infidel Kalmyks, abandoned their ancestral yurts and sought refuge in the fortifications of Tashkent" (Amin Bukhari, 1957: 163).

Thus, religious and ideological differences not only hindered political alliances but also deepened mutual alienation and hostility between the Kazakhs and the Dzungars.

Erofeyeva attributed the conflicts to the Dzungar ruler's zealous devotion to Buddhism (Erofeeva, 2010: 495). However, she provided no evidence that Tsewang Rabdan sought to mass-convert the Kazakhs to Buddhism. Bergoltz also identified religion as one of the causes of the Kazakh-Dzungar wars [Bergholz, 1993: 522].

The Kalmyk historian Kukeeyev cites Erofeyeva, who in turn quotes P. P. Ivanova's work, published in the Turkestan Oriental Institute Collection in Honor of Professor A. E. Schmidt (1923): "When Sayram was still a great city, a mighty ruler known as Khuntaiji appeared in its surroundings. He sought to eradicate Islam in Turkestan and replace it with paganism. Upon reaching Sayram, Khuntaiji demanded that the elders force the people to renounce Islam and place idols in their mosques. No one agreed. Then Khuntaiji decided to seize and plunder the city. The residents turned in prayer to the founder and protector of Sayram, the prophet Idris, pleading for salvation from their enemies" (Kukeev, 2011: 113-115).

Since Idris lived in the Middle East and is a prophetic figure in Islamic tradition, he could not have been the founder of Sayram or an object of worship.

In the summer of 1684, another campaign against Sayram was carried out, culminating in the city's capture. Notably, the Dzungar army was led by Rabdan, as documented by Zaya Pandita's biographer, Radnabadra (Radnabadra, 2003: 478).

Galdan Boshugtu received his khanate investiture from the Dalai Lama as a devoted propagator of Buddhism (Pochekaev, 2013: 21). His title emphasized his role as a leader striving to convert neighboring peoples to the "Yellow Faith."

The Dzungars, leveraging the authority and decrees of the Dalai Lama, consistently launched incursions against the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Buddhism served as a fundamental pillar for legitimizing their foreign policy expansion.

In March 1691, the envoys of Galdan reported to the Irkutsk voivode regarding the causes of

the war with the Kazakhs: "Boshokhtu Khan dispatched emissaries to the Kazakh Horde, urging them to unite and adopt the same faith as him, the Kalmyk Boshokhtu Khan, and his allied hordes under a single Lama. However, they refused to believe in the Dalai Lama as the Kalmyks did, and this disagreement escalated into a significant conflict, leading to fierce battles..."

Martynov subsequently commented that the Dzungars indeed aspired to convert the Kazakhs to Buddhism on a large scale. Moreover, according to historical records, the Dzungars captured one of Tauke Khan's sons, named Solton (possibly a title meaning "Sultan" rather than a personal name), and sent him to Lhasa to the Dalai Lama (Moiseev, 1991: 51–52). These accounts underscore the religious dimension in Kazakh-Dzungar relations, though the claim of large-scale forced Buddhist conversion remains a subject of debate.

Galdan Boshokhtu's religious fervor can be attributed to his early education—he had been tutored by Lamas in Lhasa from the age of seven (Bawden, 2013: 64). Such an upbringing profoundly shaped his worldview and deep commitment to Buddhism. Research suggests that religious teachings can positively influence children's psychological development, strengthening their moral and spiritual values (Crystal Amiel, 2019: 63).

The religious policies of Dzungaria were largely contingent on the personal disposition and rhetoric of individual rulers. Not all Dzungar khans were zealous Buddhists, and their approach to religion varied. For instance, in a Qing imperial letter from 1698, Emperor Kangxi criticized Galdan's religious stance. In one of his correspondences, Kangxi wrote to Galdan: "In your letter, you claim that your actions are guided by the teachings of Tsongkhapa. However, I have consistently supported the teachings of Tsongkhapa, defending and propagating them... The Dalai Lama is well aware that I am a patron of Tsongkhapa's teachings, and thus, he regularly informs me of all matters, ensuring that diplomatic exchanges between us have remained uninterrupted for many years. Meanwhile, the Khalkha and Oirats merely profess adherence to Tsongkhapa's teachings and the Dalai Lama's instructions in words, yet secretly violate them. This is widely known across all lands..."

Kangxi further accused Galdan Boshokhtu of using religion as a political tool, even alleging that he had covertly converted to Islam: "

«Outwardly, you claim to uphold the teachings of Tsongkhapa, yet in reality, you have turned to Islam and oppose my efforts to foster the prosperity of Tsongkhapa's doctrines and the Dalai Lama's influence» (Martynov, 1978: 153). The accusation leveled against Galdan Boshoghtu reflects not so much his actual religious affiliation as it does the political rhetoric of the Qing dynasty, aimed at discrediting him in the eyes of the Tibetan clergy and the broader Buddhist public. In reality, Galdan Boshoghtu did not attempt to convert Muslims to Buddhism, nor did he pursue a policy of religious coercion; instead, he exhibited a consistent attitude of religious tolerance. He consciously avoided open conflict with the Islamic world, recognizing the importance of maintaining peaceful trade and economic relations with the Muslim regions of Central Asia. At the same time, Galdan remained faithful to Buddhism and actively cultivated ties with Tibetan religious authorities, indicating his intention to balance religious devotion with political pragmatism. Thus, his actions were driven more by economic interests and geopolitical considerations than by religious fanaticism.

Although Galdan had already perished in 1697, having taken poison in despair after his defeat by the Qing forces (Hummel, 1943: 266), his legacy remained a subject of intense scrutiny. The Qing emperor's accusations suggest that some Oirat rulers exhibited a degree of tolerance toward Islam, blending it with Mongol traditions and Tibetan Buddhism. Such an approach enabled them to maintain flexibility in their interactions with various ethnic and religious groups.

Kitinov noted that among the Dzungars and Kalmyks, there were also Muslims, primarily the offspring of mixed marriages, known as Tomuts. These individuals adhered to Islam but continued to identify as Oirats. Chinese sources referred to them as tuokemu-ti, while Mongolian texts used the terms tongmong or tokmok (Kitinov, 2019: 46). It is likely that the Oirats intermarried with Turkic-speaking Muslims.

With the ascension of Tsewang Rabtan in 1698, a new wave of Kazakh-Dzungar conflicts

erupted. Addressing this situation, Tsewang Rabtan wrote a letter to the Qing emperor Kangxi, stating:

"I did not enter into war with the Kazakh Horde of my own volition, but out of grave necessity. The cause of this conflict is as follows: previously, the son of the Kazakh Khan, known as Tauke, was captured by Galdan and sent as a gift to the Dalai Lama. Tauke then appealed to me, requesting his son's return and promising that he would henceforth remain in alliance and concord with me."

Tsewang Rabtan retrieved Tauke Khan's son from Lhasa and, accompanied by a detachment of 500 warriors, sent him back to his father. However, he lamented in his letter: "Yet Tauke, instead of expressing gratitude for my benevolence, slaughtered every last one of my men. He then killed my subordinate, Urkhedei Batur-Taiji, and, after pillaging his people, took them captive."

Kazakh forces also ambushed a wedding procession traveling from Kalmykia to Dzungaria, in which Tsewang Rabtan's betrothed, the daughter of the Volga Kalmyk Khan Atyuka Seterjab, was being transported. Additionally, the Kazakhs carried out raids against Oirat subjects, looted Dzungar trade caravans, and attacked the Uriankhai people. Tsewang Rabtan justified his military response by stating:

"Since these Kazakhs have repeatedly plundered, murdered, and inflicted untold devastation upon me through their incessant raids, I am compelled to retaliate with force and wage war against them." (Moiseev, 1991:, p. 61).

The son of Tauke, who had been held captive by Boshokhtu Khan, remained in Dzungar captivity from 1691 to 1698 before being liberated by Tsewang Rabtan. If the child was of a tender age during his captivity, he may have lost his native language and assimilated certain aspects of Buddhist teachings. However, Buddhism does not endorse forced conversion.

For the Kazakhs, the adoption of Islam among the Dzungars was improbable not only due to geographical constraints but also because of linguistic barriers between the Kazakh and Dzungar languages. Only Turkified Oirats were more likely to embrace Islam compared to Oirat-speaking Mongols. The decline or weakening of the Oirat language accelerated the Islamization of the Oirats in regions such as Iran and other Mongol-ruled territories.

Hafizova wrote that under Galdan Boshokhtu, an integration model of "Muslims and Mongols" was being developed. The Dzungars referred to Muslims as khotons, meaning townspeople. Through this policy, Galdan sought to maintain control over key Muslim centers and urban populations in Central Asia—Kashgar, Samarkand, Bukhara, Sayram, and Turkestan (Hafizova, 2012: 64).

The war was also exacerbated by famine in Dzungaria. Tsewang Rabtan sought to alleviate his people's suffering by waging war against the Kazakhs (Batir Ubashi, 1969: 37). This occurred during the Little Ice Age, a period marked by lower-than-average temperatures.

Barthold remarked that the 18th century signified an era of political and economic decline across the entire Muslim world (Bartold, 1963: 164). Tauke Khan incorporated Sharia doctrines of Islam into the Jeti Zhargy. There is an opinion that the Kazakh code of laws was copied from the Oirat Ikh Tsaz law. It is possible that Tauke Khan, inspired by the Oirats' reforms, recognized the necessity of updating Kazakh laws. That is, Tauke adopted the idea of legal modernization from the Oirats but did not produce an identical copy of Ikh Tsaz in terms of content. For example, under Tauke's laws, insulting a khoja (religious scholar) or a sultan carried a fine of nine livestock, while physical assault resulted in a penalty of 27 livestock (Sultanov, 1982: 95). Tauke Khan took into account the religious characteristics, mentality, and lifestyle of the Kazakhs, adapting Jeti Zhargy to their realities.

Certain provisions of Sharia law were incorporated into Jeti Zhargy, including measures to protect Islam, as well as penalties for blasphemy and conversion to Christianity (Sultanov, 1982: 74).

Thus, Tsewang Rabtan and Tauke were not driven by religious motives; their conflict was

rooted in political and economic factors, particularly raids and plundering. Imam Ibn al-Humam al-Hanafi stated:

"If a Muslim enters enemy territory as a merchant, he is not permitted to seize their property or harm their lives." (Sharh Fatkh Kadir).

Similarly, Imam al-Sarakhsi emphasized:

"Muslims must act with sincerity when entering the lands of unbelievers with their permission. If this pledge is violated and foreign property is seized, the Muslim is obligated to restore justice." (Al Mabsut).

Imam al-Nawawi, in his treatise Rawd at-Talibin, wrote:

"A Muslim who returns to his land with another's property must restore justice by returning the stolen goods." (Raudatu talibin).

Tauke Khan condemned the actions of his subjects—Kazakh and Karakalpak warriors led by Sultan Kazy—who attacked Russian settlements in Siberia (Istoria Kazakhstana, 2005: 400-402). However, by Tauke's time, centralized power had weakened, and individual Chinggisid princes sought easy wealth. It is likely that Tauke Khan relied more on leniency than on harsh punishments, contributing to the further decentralization of the Kazakh Khanate.

Russian historiography attributes the Kazakh-Oirat conflict to religious warfare. However, the war also had significant political and economic dimensions. There are no reliable sources confirming that Kazakhs were forcibly converted to Buddhism. Kazakh Chinggisids such as Abulkhair Khan and Abylai, despite being held captive, were not forcibly converted, though circumstances may have exposed them to Buddhist teachings.

At that time, the Russian envoy I. I. Neplyuev, stationed in the Junior Zhuz, used the death of Barak as a pretext to sabotage the marriage between Abulkhair's daughter and an Oirat khan. He told Nuraly: "Your father, Abulkhair Khan, was a true Muslim and would not wish for you to give his daughter—your sister—to an idolater." (Moiseev, 1991: 207–208). Translator Ya. Gulyaev strategically employed Islamic theological knowledge to prevent a marriage between a Kazakh Chinggisid woman and an Oirat prince. Clearly, Russia, appealing to the religious sentiments of the Kazakhs, sought to obstruct a Kazakh-Oirat alliance.

Catherine II remarked: "The Kyrgyz-Kaisaks adhere to the Mohammedan law, and since there are many Mohammedans both in Siberia and the Orenburg province, they should be considered even more dangerous than the Zhungar people."

Kitinov emphasized that Catherine II feared Muslims more than Buddhists (Kitinov, 2004: 44-45). This perception allows modern historians to argue that her policies—as a woman of deep piety and favor toward Buddhists—were unfavorable to Islam (Islam in Russian Empire, 2001: 41). Catherine II considered Muslims a greater threat due to their large numbers, whereas Kalmyk Buddhists were significantly fewer.

In the Oirat written source The Genealogy of the Torgut Khans and Princes, it is emphasized that, according to Oirat politico-historical tradition, a special status was accorded to lineages descending from the closest relatives of Chinggis Khan. These included the lineage of Khabutu Khasar, the lineage of the strongman Belgütei, the lineage of Aragtömör, the lineage of Ochintai-baatar, the lineage of Shara-taishi, as well as the lineages of the seven grandsons of these four brothers. The Oirats regarded the descendants of these lineages as legitimate holders of authority over the peoples among whom they resided, grounding this claim in their blood relationship to Chinggis Khan. Sources indicate that members of these lineages formed the ruling stratum of the taijis of the

Black Horchin (hara horchin), who constituted the core of the 49 khoshuns of Inner Mongolia, as well as the elites of Bukhara, Kokand, Badakhshan, Yarkand, Kashgar, Hami, Kulja, Turfan, Kyrgyz tribes, and Kazakh zhuzes (Tepkeev, 2016: 193). Oirat sources explicitly state that the descendants of Chinggis Khan's closest relatives ruled over the Islamic Muslim peoples of Central Asia. This position reflected the conviction in the universal nature of Chinggisid aristocratic authority, which maintained its dominance over multiethnic and multiconfessional communities regardless of their religious affiliation. This demonstrates that the Oirats perceived the peoples under the rule of the descendants of Chinggis Khan's relatives as being in a special kinship and historical connection with them, including the Kazakhs. Such a perception reinforced the idea of political unity and the continuity of the Mongol imperial tradition, within which the authority of the Chinggisids extended over a broad spectrum of ethnic and confessional communities.

It should be noted that among the peoples subordinated by the Oirats, Muslims generally predominated in terms of religious affiliation. While tensions on religious grounds did occur between them, these were typically limited in scope and did not escalate into religious wars. Islam was never persecuted in Oirat states (nor, indeed, was any other religion that did not attempt to spread among the Oirats themselves). Oirat khans valued the education and enterprise of Muslims highly and often entrusted them with important responsibilities (Kitinov, 2004: 137). This demonstrates that the Oirats retained the Mongol tradition of tolerance toward adherents of other faiths.

In a letter to the Ottoman ruler dated 1125 AH, Kaip Khan wrote that due to Kalmyk Ayuka's violation of the treaty, the Kazakhs were twice forced into military action. Particularly noteworthy is Kaip's and his younger brother, the Tatar Khan's, readiness to "ignite the flame of faith" (the sword of Islam), apparently to counter the Kalmyks and Russians (Miktsa, 2011: 276).

While held captive by the Dzungars, Abylai Khan gained an in-depth understanding of Buddhism and familiarized himself with its core principles, which he later applied in his political strategies. Qing envoys reported that in 1755, Abylai feigned enthusiasm for the emperor's measures to promote and strengthen Buddhism in Dzungaria. He even appealed to the Qing emperor for clemency toward Amursana, invoking Buddhist precepts that forbid taking life and advocate mercy. Abylai likened Amursana to "a bird trapped in a dense forest" and urged the emperor to "open the snares" and release him (Hafizova, 2011:483).

Levshin noted that Abylai, Khan of the Middle Zhuz, provided refuge to fleeing Oirat princes, who then allied with him in their quest for vengeance. These exiled Oirats launched attacks against their adversaries and used any opportunity to counteract Dzungar raids, justifying their actions as aiding the oppressed (Levshin, 2011: 480-486).

The Quran, in verse 6 of Surah 9, states: "And if one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him asylum so that he may hear the word of God." Abylai may not have been driven by theological motives, but rather by noble intentions in supporting Amursana. On the other hand, the Kazakhs recognized that the expanding Qing and Russian Empires would inevitably seek to colonize Kazakh lands. Despite religious differences between the Kazakhs and Oirats, numerous intermarriages occurred, suggesting that the Oirats regarded Kazakhs as kindred and equal, despite some distinctions.

Bichurin noted that the word Oirat means "ally," "close," or "confederate" (Bichurin, 1834: 36). The Oirat military campaigns aimed to unite all kindred peoples with the Oirats, both genetically and culturally.

Studies of the baptized Kalmyks, Nagiyevets, and the Islamized communities of the Aiyukins conducted by S. Djundzhuzov and S. Lyubichankovsky have revealed the key role of Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) in preserving the ethnic identity of the Kalmyk people. The younger generations of underev regarded it as the religion of their ancestors. If Buddhism helped the Kalmyks maintain their identity within Russia, Islam played a crucial role in the adaptation of the Kazakhs in Central Asia. Islam contributed to the strengthening of moral foundations in society, such as caring for the poor, obedience to the Amir, and a negative attitude toward alcoholism. Additionally, the

religion facilitated diplomatic and trade relations with Muslim states of Central Asia.

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Conclusions

Among the Kazakhs, there were no imams-ideologists, Islamic leaders, or spiritual mentors who systematically directed religious struggles or provided guidance. However, the zhyrau (traditional poets and singers) could call for a holy war against the Oirat, relying on their eloquence, the influence of the khans, and their clan significance. Their theological education, however, remained limited.

The Kazakh Khanate possessed a weak Islamic theological school, which was unable to effectively present Islam to the Oirat. In turn, the Oirat were also unable to utilize Buddhism in the war due to the protracted nature of the conflict and the intransigence of both sides. Both parties considered the imposition of their faith to be futile and ultimately abandoned these efforts.

Oirat rulers were likely more educated in Buddhism than Kazakh Muslim leaders were in Islam. Kazakh Chinghizids were not trained in religious centers of the Arab world, which affected their knowledge. Sometimes, it seems that Buddhist rulers of the Oirat were more guided by Islamic principles than the Kazakh Muslims themselves.

Ordinary nomads, both among the Kazakhs and the Oirat, due to their harsh way of life, poorly adhered to religious prescriptions, except for the educated aristocrats on both sides. Despite religious doctrines, both the Kazakhs and the Oirat continued to practice shamanism and ancient beliefs.

The weak theological education of the Kazakhs in Islam traces back to the Ulus of Juchi, where Islam syncretized with shamanism, and pagan elements were perceived as part of the cult of worshipping Allah. The Oirat had their own religious ideology based on the teachings of Zaya-Pandita, an Oirat from the Khoshout tribe. Among the Kazakhs, there were no such national religious figures; they relied more on the teachings of Ahmed Yasawi and the Naqshbandi order, which were not of purely Kazakh origin.

Kazakh-Oirat conflicts can be more accurately characterized as a series of episodic skirmishes rather than a full-scale and formally declared war. These confrontations may be viewed as a continuation of the broader rivalry between the successors of the Jochid Ulus and the Yuan dynasty, shaped by the struggle for control over key zones of the Eurasian steppe. Both the Kazakhs and the Oirats maintained close ties with powerful sedentary civilizations—primarily Islamic and Buddhist—which influenced the ideological framing of their opposition. Although religious rhetoric was employed to legitimize hostilities, in practice it played a secondary role. The primary drivers of the conflicts were pragmatic concerns: control over nomadic routes, pastures, and political dominance. While the religious factor was present, it functioned mainly as an ideological instrument within the broader context of geopolitical and socio-economic rivalry.

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ҚАЗАҚ-ЖОҢҒАР (ОЙРАТ) ҚАТЫНАСТАРЫНДАҒЫ ДІНИ ФАКТОР

Аңдатпа. Бірнеше ғасырды қамтитын қазақ-ойрат қатынастары – саяси, экономикалық, мәдени және діни аспектілері тығыз тоғысқан күрделі әрі көпқырлы тарихи құбылыс. Бұл қатынастардың динамикасына айтарлықтай әсер еткен негізгі факторлардың бірі – дін болды. Исламды ұстанған қазақтар мен тибет буддизмінің Гелугпа мектебін ұстанған ойраттар (жоңғарлар) үнемі байланыста болып, олардың діни наным-сенімдері мен саясаты арасындағы қайшылықтар жиі қақтығыстарға ұласып отырды. Дін әрбір тараптың өзіндік бірегейлігін қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқарды. Қазақтар үшін ислам тек рухани негіз ғана емес, сонымен бірге сыртқы қауіп-қатерлерге қарсы тұруда біріктіруші күш болды. Ал ойраттар үшін буддизм — өз мемлекеттілігін нығайтудың және Орталық Азияда ықпалын кеңейтудің құралы ретінде қабылданды. Діни фактор көбінесе әскери жорықтар мен дипломатиялық бастамаларды идеологиялық тұрғыдан ақтау үшін қолданылды. Қазақ-ойрат қатынастарындағы діни өлшемді зерттеу – бұл екі халықтың ғана емес, сонымен қатар Орталық Азиядағы ислам және буддизм әлемдерінің өзара әрекеттесу заңдылықтарын

тереңірек түсінуге жол ашады. Бұл аспект сондай-ақ діннің аймақтағы саяси одақтар, қақтығыстар мен мәдени алмасулардың қалыптасуына қалай әсер еткенін ашып көрсетеді. Қазақ және ойрат тарихнамалары діннің өз мәдени бірегейлігін сақтауда шешуші рөл атқарғанын атап өтеді.

Алғыс: Осы зерттеу AP26103999 нөмірлі «Сарайшық ортағасырлық қалашығының тарихын кешенді зерттеу» гранттық жобасы аясында жүзеге асырылды.

Кілт сөздер: діни қақтығыстар, ислам, буддизм (ламаизм), Далай Лама, қалмақтар, Қазақ хандығы, Жоңғар хандығы, діни үгіт-насихат, сенім.

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РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ ФАКТОР В КАЗАХСКО-ДЖУНГАРСКИХ (ОЙРАТСКИХ) ОТНОШЕНИЯХ

Аннотация. Казахско-ойратские отношения, охватывающие несколько столетий, представляют собой сложное и многогранное историческое явление, в котором тесно переплелись политические, экономические, культурные и религиозные аспекты. Одним из ключевых факторов, оказавших значительное влияние на динамику этих отношений, была религия. Казахи — приверженцы ислама, и ойраты (джунгары) — последователи школы Гелугпа тибетского буддизма — находились в постоянном взаимодействии, которое нередко перерастало в конфликты, вызванные религиозными различиями и религиозной политикой. Религия играла важную роль в формировании идентичности обеих сторон. Для казахов ислам служил не только духовной основой, но и объединяющим фактором в борьбе с внешними угрозами. Ойраты, в свою очередь, рассматривали буддизм как инструмент укрепления государственной власти и расширения своего влияния в Центральной Азии. Религиозный фактор часто использовался как идеологическое обоснование военных походов и дипломатических инициатив. Изучение религиозного измерения казахско-ойратских отношений позволяет глубже понять не только историю этих двух народов, но и более широкие закономерности взаимодействия исламского и буддийского миров в Центральной Азии. Этот аспект также проливает свет на то, как религия влияла на формирование политических союзов, конфликтов и культурного обмена в регионе. Как казахская, так и ойратская историография подчеркивают, что религия играла решающую роль в сохранении культурной идентичности.

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Ключевые слова: религиозный конфликт, ислам, буддизм (ламаизм), Далай-лама, калмыки, Казахское ханство, Джунгарское ханство, религиозная пропаганда, вера.

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