

## An Encounter with a Kyrgyz Dervish in the Talas Valley

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I have been doing research on the spiritual traditions of Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples since 1994. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz are two traditionally nomadic groups that emerged from among the Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes of the Mongol Empire (Jochi Ulus/Golden Horde and Chagatai Ulus/Mogulistan). After the acceptance of Islam by the local ruling elite in the fourteenth century, Islamization of the nomadic peoples also started. In the result, pre-Islamic spirituality was replaced by Muslim traditions, especially by Šūfī practices (e.g. the *dhikr* and *djābr* rituals). Only some remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs can be detected in their nomadic spirituality, e.g. Umay (women's protecting spirit) and *kut* (spirit of luck). There were various spiritual specialists in nomadic societies, like the *baqšī* (sorcerer) or *balger* (fortune-teller), but the Kyrgyz *dubana* or Kazakh *diywana* (dervish) was one of them that had the strongest links with Šūfī practices.

During the Soviet times these dervishes almost disappeared from Soviet Central Asia, so I was quite surprised when during my fieldwork in October, 2008 in the Talas Valley of Kyrgyzstan I had the opportunity to meet a real *dubana*. Atamkul Ismailov (born 1940) from the Bagysh clan was 68 years old at the time of our meeting. I visited him at his house in the village of Chong Kara-Buura (Kara-Buura district, former Kirov) not far from Sheker, where the famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov was born. He performed his spirit-chasing song and showed me his magic staff (*asa*) too.

The Kyrgyz word *dubana* (Baialieva 1972: 121; Basilov 1992: 242) comes from the Persian word *dewāna* (Steingass 1892: 555; the Persian word itself is a derivative from *dew*, *dīw* 'devil; demon' (Steingass 1892: 554). The original meaning in Persian is 'a person possessed by a demon'. In Central Asia, people usually believe that mental illnesses

are caused by demons. The Arabic equivalent of this word is *jinnī* (possessed by a demon; made crazy by a *dzinn*). The *dzinns* are evil spirits that some people believe to be part of *Šaytān*, so Muslims usually reject them, but the Iranian *dew* is quite different (Basilov 1992: 238–42). It is not obviously a malicious spirit, but more ambivalent. It can cause harm, but can also help human beings similar to the spiritual being *parī* (fairy). That is the reason that people use the compound *dew-parī* for these ambivalent spirits (Divaev 1899: 324). In Central Asia it is quite common that certain religious specialists are possessed or helped by demons. Some *Šūfī* ascetics are called *darweš* ‘poor, indigent’ (Steingass 1892: 516) in Persian, especially those practiced their ascetic rituals while travelling from place to place (Brown 1868). When people saw these rituals with religious ecstasy they thought that the dervishes were possessed by these spirits. Even though *dzinnī* and *dewāna* has the same etymology the latter was used in the context of dervishes, members of the *Šūfī* order (*tarīqa*).

Because dervishes (*dewāna*) used to travel a lot, wandering across regions and countries, they usually carried a big staff, called *asa* in Kyrgyz, being a loanword from Arabic ‘*asā*’ (Baialieva 1972: 58; Basilov 1992: 76). They had their special robes too with big hats. People believed that their rituals (*dhikr*) helped them to chase away evil spirits (Snesarëv 1969: 41) similar to other spirit-invoking specialists, like the Kyrgyz *baqšī*, the Uzbek and Uighur *baxši*, or the Persian *parixān*, the Karakalpak and the *Türkmen porxan*. So some religious specialists in Central Asia started to legitimize their activity by copying these dervishes *dervishes*. Their main activity was not performing *dhikr* rituals, but visiting places and houses cursed or possessed by demons and driving them away. They were similar to the demon chasers (Kyrgyz *kuuču* or Kazakh *kuwginši*, see Baialieva 1972: 96). The *dewāna* (Kyrgyz *dubana* or *dumana*, Kazakh *diywana*) specialists wandered around villages (*kışlag*) and nomadic camps (Kazakh *awıl*, Kyrgyz *ayıl*) with their magic stick and performed spirit-chasing rituals. They received food and other gifts for their services. These wandering dervishes quite often appear in photographs taken at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in bazars and at places of pilgrimage (Almásy 1903: 271, fig. 1) in Central Asia.



Fig. 1. A Kazakh dervish in the bazar of Karkara (Almaty province, Kazakhstan) in a picture taken by György Almásy in 1900.

But, let us get back to my encounter with the Kyrgyz dervish in the Talas Valley. Before the ritual Atamkul put on his light yellow coat (*ay sari ton*) to which six rattles (*šıldırak*) were attached. He went outside his house which he built specially for himself (fig. 2). The house was round like a felt house which he used to perform rituals. He was dancing around the house singing his song and shaking his staff (fig. 3). As he was shaking his staff the rattles were making a sound that accompanied his singing. Atamkul explained that the sound of the rattle invokes his helping spirits that are mentioned in the song. Atamkul

learned his profession from his grandfather who, despite the prosecution of the communist authorities, performed some demon-chasing rituals in villages in his childhood in the 1950s. In the 1970s Atamkul had some mental problems and started to wander around singing the songs he learned from his grandfather. He said he could feel the evil spirits who possessed some of the houses and caused illnesses and bad luck to the people who lived there. When he realized that he could chase them away by his song he made a staff (*asa-tayak*) to accompany himself. By the 1980s local authorities began to apply a milder policy towards local folk healers so he could start to perform some spirit chasing rituals openly in the villages. People do not call the dervish to chase away the evil spirits. He feels an urge to leave his house and starts to wander around. His helping spirits lead him to the houses that are possessed by the demons. The owner of the house is sometimes unaware of the fact that the house is possessed by demons. The dervish approaches the house singing his song and shaking his magic staff. When he enters the house the demons flee from there (this is expressed in his song, lines 9–10).<sup>1</sup>

### *The Song of Atamkul dubana*

(1) *Tögöröktün tört burçun  
tört aylangan dubana  
Dubana özü bir adam,  
atın satkan ming adam  
(5) ming adamdan bir adam  
çigat eken dubana  
Asa tayak şar kuru,  
ay sarıdan ton kiygen  
Dubana kelding eşikten,  
(10) baleket çiksin teşikten  
Alda iy dep sayragan  
dubananın saltı eken  
Ilgerten kalgan nark eken,  
Ata-baba nark-nuska,  
(15) aytpay kaysok bolo-bu,  
Kayda jürsö jol açık,*

*Baabedindin közü açık.  
La illahu illalaa,  
Baadedinim kayrulla  
(20) Allah iy, Allah iy.  
Özön tolgon tali bar  
Oysul-ata piri bar,  
oluyası dagı bar  
Çalkalğan jeri bar,  
(25) aynalayın Çak mazar  
Kabilan, jolbors, şeri bar  
Arasınan karasang  
jalğiz ayak jolu bar.  
Nari betin karasang,  
(30) kelin taşı dagı bar  
Keng jayloo, Çong mazar  
ıdıragan baskan jol,*

<sup>1</sup> Aitpaeva (2007: 321), also published a short extract from Atamkul's song.

*küdirip neçen ötkön jol  
La illahu illalaa,  
(35) Baadedinim kayrulla  
Allah iy, Allah iy.  
Bu dünüyö amanat,  
Musaka öttü, kim kalat?  
Çar dünüyö amanat,  
(40) Čaldiyar öttü, kim kalat?  
Sizip akkan suu kalat,  
sıdırıp ötkön tal kalat.  
Aram menen adaldan  
jıynagan düynö mal kalat.  
(45) Azabına, agayın,  
bir çimınday jan kalat  
Ayal kalsa bay tabat,  
bala kalsa mal tabat  
Azabına agayın  
(50) bir çimınday jan kalat  
Kari da bol, jaş ta bol,  
kadırlaşkan tirüüdö  
Kalat go bir kün altındar  
Kazılğan kördün tübündö,  
(55) kırkka çikkan tal kalar  
Kiyamdaş akkan suu kalar,  
Kil köpürö Kiyamat  
Tar jay ötsö kim kalar?  
Jakası jok, jengi jok  
(60) uzun köynök kiyersing  
Eşiği jok, törü jok  
karanggi üygö kirersing  
O dünüyö beybapaa  
ötörsüng da ketersing  
(65) Üngkür-Mangkir surasa  
başing salıp turarsing  
La illahu Illalaa,  
Baadedinim kayrulla  
Allah iy, Allah iy.*

*(70) Dünüyögö berilgen,  
özümün dep kerilgen  
Künü-tünü aldanggan  
insan anda kalbagan  
Kapa kilip koygonu,  
(75) diline kayğı tolgonu  
Jakin kelse ajalı  
kalbay kalat amalı  
Malıngdı berseng iyılaba  
Jaratkangga jalınsang da  
(80) janıng aman kala-bı?  
Almaday başing şalk etip,  
jüröktön janıng bilk etip  
Aldadan kelse bir buyruk  
keterbiz bir kün şilk etip  
(85) Ak söök bolot kabırgam,  
al jerde kalat tabılğan  
Kök söök bolot kabırgam,  
köp jerde kalat tabılğan  
Engkeyişke barganda  
(90) neçen pirim koldosun!  
Oykoyloşup sayrasa,  
Oysul pirim koldosun!  
Şamal kubat eselep,  
jaan jaayt sebelep  
(95) Dubana kirse eşikten  
balaketti tebelep  
La illahu Illalaa,  
Baadedinim kayrulla  
Allah iy, Allah iy.  
(100) Paygambar öttü, sap öttü  
baykalbay neçen jil öttü  
Oluyang öttü, pir öttü  
Doomattuu dalay jil öttü  
Jilang aylak, jilang baş  
(105) Baabedin sayrap bul öttü  
Jübüt kızı Bulkaaki  
Jügünüp jürüp bul öttü*

Dubandan čikkan Duldulday  
 Uyadan ućkan bulbulday  
 (110) Alistan kelip sayrayt ko  
 Dubana baykuš bulbulday  
 Bozorup atkan tang menen  
 Boz torgoy sayrayt šang menen  
 Boz torgoy sayrap til katar  
 (115) Boz Dubana til katar  
 Kökölöp turup sayrasa  
 Kanatı talip konboy-bu?  
 Kündö kakšap sayrasa  
 Dubana baykuš talbay-bi?  
 (120) Boz torgoy ućat jel üçün  
 Boljolu jok jel üçün  
 Kündö kakšap sayrayt ko  
 Dubana baykuš el üçün  
 La illabu Illalaa,  
 (125) Baadedinim kayrulla  
 Allah iy, Allah iy.

Kün čigışta jatkamın  
 Kündö kakšap baskamın  
 Oozum aćsam jel čigat  
 (130) Ördök uća köl kalat  
 Dubana mına keldi dep  
 Agayın tuugan el kütöt  
 Kündö kakšap sayrasam  
 Kaygı menen zar bütöt  
 (135) Karagan beleng, tal beleng?  
 Kaygı menen zar beleng?  
 Kündö kakšap sayrasam  
 Tügönbögön ken belem  
 Kündö tokup minerge  
 (140) Dulduulu bolsom beyiştin  
 Kündö kakšap sayragan  
 Bulbulu bolsom beyiştin  
 Añıdar taš baskanım  
 Aradan ötüp ketkenče

(145) Atagıngdı dangktadım  
 La illabu Illalaa,  
 Baadedinim kayrulla  
 Allah iy, Allah iy.

Zamana akır, jer takır  
 (150) Kolunda jok el jakır  
 Zamanam keldi zakındap  
 Ay menen künggö jakındap  
 Köriip kelgen kiši  
 Özöndöp akkan suu okšop  
 (155) Ömürüng ötör zakındap  
 Kim bilet kimdin armanın  
 Tarazi bilet salmagın  
 Kıl köpörü kiyamat  
 Tar jay bilet ar jagın  
 (160) Barıp körgön kiši jok  
 Baylıgı menen iši jok  
 Köriip kelgen kiši jok  
 Al jakta kanday jašarın  
 Ötkön adam kele-bi?  
 (165) Ömürüngdö kördüing-bü  
 Ošol jaktan kelgendi?  
 Bakıt menen iriški  
 Birge jüröt turbaybi  
 Biri kelse biri jok  
 (170) Bilinbey ötöt turbay-bi  
 Salamat bolsun janingüz  
 Salamat esen turunguz  
 Bakıt konsun üyünggö  
 Baktıluu bolup turunguz!  
 (175) Sandalıp turgan dubana  
 Sayrap keldi debengiz!  
 Aldanın kılğan jumušun  
 Atkarıp keldim agayın  
 La illabu illalaa,  
 (180) Baadedinim kayrulla,  
 Allah iy, Allah iy.

Üyüing üyüing üy eken  
 Üyüing tokoy čirpigi  
 Malım, malım deersing  
 (185) Malıng tokoy čirpigi  
 Čirpigi üyüing biyerde,  
 činigi üyüing tiyerde  
 Čirpiging sinsa tal bolboyt  
 Čındap ajal kelgen song  
 (190) Tim koyboyt bizdi bul jerge  
 Üyüing üyüing üy eken.

(1) The four corners of world  
 Four times orbited by the dervish  
 The dervish is a man,  
 Thousands claim to be one  
 (5) But only one out of a thousand  
 Can become a dervish  
 With his staff, tight belt  
 He wears a light yellow coat  
 The dervish came to the door,  
 (10) Calamity should leave from  
 holes  
 Allah, hey, singing is  
 The custom of the dervish  
 A gift given long time ago,  
 The teaching of forefathers  
 (15) Can we stop singing it?  
 Wherever he goes the way is clear,  
 Bahā-addın's eyes are open.  
 There is no god but Allah,  
 Bahā-addın is the gift of Allah  
 (20) Allah hey, Allah hey.

Üyüing čiydin tübü eken  
 Kündö kakšap sayragan  
 Dubananın ünü eken  
 (195) Jergem tal menen kubargan  
 Čirpigi sinip mungaygan  
 Adamday pende bar beken?  
 Armanın aytıp mungdanggan  
 La illabu Illalaa,  
 (200) Baadedinim kayrulla  
 Allah iy, allah iy, Hakk.

The valley is full of willow trees  
 Oysul-ata is their helping spirit  
 It has other helping spirits  
 It is always swaying  
 (25) Dear Chak Mazar<sup>2</sup>  
 There are spirits of heroes, pan-  
 thers, tigers and lions  
 If you look around  
 There is a narrow road  
 If you look from the other side  
 (30) There is a wives' stone  
 A wide pasture, Big Mazar  
 There are many tracks around,  
 Tracks of people walking by  
 There is no god but Allah,  
 (35) Bahā-addın is the gift of Allah  
 Allah hey, Allah hey.

This life is a gift from God,  
 Musaka<sup>3</sup> passed, who will remain?  
 The whole world is a gift,  
 (40) Chalđiyar<sup>4</sup> passed, who will  
 remain?

<sup>2</sup> Chak Mazar is one of the holy sites visited by the dervish (the *mazar* is a Muslim saint's tomb, a site of pilgrimage).

<sup>3</sup> Musaka was a local Muslim saint.

<sup>4</sup> Chalđiyar was a local Muslim saint.

The fast flowing water remains,  
And the shaking willow trees  
remain

By *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl*<sup>5</sup> ways

Gathered Livestock will remain  
(45) In the suffering, my relatives,  
Just the leaving soul<sup>6</sup> remains  
If wife remains she remarries,  
The children take the livestock  
In the suffering, my relatives,  
(50) Just the leaving soul remains  
Whether you are old or young,  
Be happy that you are alive!

You will lose the gold you have  
At the bottom of the tomb,  
(55) There will be a forty-year-old  
willow<sup>7</sup>

The noisy flowing water will remain  
Through the narrow bridge of  
Judgment Day<sup>8</sup>  
Who will pass?

No collar and no sleeves,  
(60) You will wear a long shirt<sup>9</sup>  
No door and no main place,  
You will enter a dark room  
To the unavoidable other world  
You will encounter

(65) When Mangkir and Üngkür<sup>10</sup>  
Judge, you will bow your head.

There is no god but Allah,  
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

(70) Anyone who lives  
Says it is me proudly  
None of the people  
could avoid the deception  
[of Šaytan].

He was offended  
(75) His heart is full of sorrow.  
If his death comes, he cannot do  
anything.

If you sacrifice your livestock  
Do not cry about it!  
Even if you worship God,  
(80) One day you lose your life!  
Your small head falls,  
And your soul leaves your heart.

If Allah makes his order,  
One day we leave from here  
(85) My ribs will be white bones,  
They will be found there  
My ribs will be blue bones,  
They will be found everywhere

When I will go down  
(90) All my spirits should help me!  
When they are crying,  
Oysul pir should help me!

Wind blow strongly,  
It rains gently  
(95) The dervish enters the door  
And tramples the bad spirits  
There is no god but Allah,  
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

(100) There were prophets and  
saints  
So many years have passed unnoticed  
There were *oluya* and *pir* saints  
So many years of trouble have  
passed

Bare feet and uncovered head  
(105) Baha-eddin used to sing  
[*dbikr*]  
Jübüt's daughter, Bulkaaki<sup>11</sup>  
She used to bow her head  
Like the Duldul horse<sup>12</sup> from that  
region  
Like a nightingale flying from the  
nest

(110) Coming from afar he sings  
Poor dervish like a nightingale  
When the dawn is lighting up  
The grey lark sings in a nice voice  
The grey lark sings using it tongue  
(115) The poor dervish also uses his  
tongue

If the bird sings flying in the sky  
Will its wings get tired and will it land?  
If he sings all the time every day  
The poor dervish also gets tired  
(120) The grey lark flies with the  
winds  
With the unpredicted wind  
Everyday all the time he sings  
Poor dervish also sings for the  
people  
There is no god but Allah,  
(125) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

I was living in the East  
Singing all the time I was walking  
If I open my mouth wind comes out  
(130) When the duck flies the lake  
remains  
The dervish is coming!  
The relatives are waiting  
If I am singing all the time every  
day  
Sorrow and pain will disappear  
(135) Were you a pine or a willow  
tree?  
Were you in sorrow and pain?  
If I am singing all the time every day  
I am an endless source of good  
Every day wearing a saddle

<sup>5</sup> The words *aram* (Arabic *ḥarām*) and *adal* (Arabic *ḥalāl*) and are terms in Islam meaning allowed and prohibited by Islamic law.

<sup>6</sup> The expression *āmīnday jan* is a term for the soul that leaves the body when a person dies.

<sup>7</sup> He suggests that the coffin will be made of a forty-year-old willow tree.

<sup>8</sup> *Qiyāmat* is the Muslim term for the Judgment Day symbolized by passing a narrow bridge.

<sup>9</sup> He talks about the shirt that is put on a dead person before the burial.

<sup>10</sup> Üngkür and Mangkir are the corrupt form of the Arabic names for angels (*malā'ika*) of Munkar and Nakir.

<sup>11</sup> Jübüt's daughter, Bulkaaki is a Jewish *peri* (spirit), *jübüt* is from Arabic *yabūdī* 'Jewish'. There are different types of *peri* spirits, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and pagan (Kyrgyz *kaapyr*).

<sup>12</sup> In the Kyrgyz tradition, Duldul is a swift horse, or a stallion, but originally it was the name of Caliph 'Alī's grey mule.

(140) I am like the Duldul horse  
from heaven  
Singing all the time every day  
I am like a bulbul from heaven  
The dragon steps on the stone  
Before I leave this world  
(145) I am praising your name  
There is no god but Allah,  
Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

During the last days the World will  
be empty  
(150) People will be poor, they will  
have nothing  
My time has come like a mirage  
Getting closer to the Moon and the  
Sun  
One who travelled there and  
returned  
Is like a flooding river  
(155) Your life passes like a mirage  
Who knows what other people want  
Scale knows the weight of things  
Judgment Day is like a narrow  
bridge  
That narrow place decides what lies  
further  
(160) Nobody ever returned from  
there.  
No one knows what riches it has  
Nobody ever saw that place  
How people live over there

Anybody who died will he return?

(165) Did you see in your life  
Anyone who returned from there?  
Luck and blessing are  
Related to each other.  
Sometimes one of them is lacking  
(170) It passes without noticing,  
May your soul be safe.  
May you be healthy always,  
The luck should descend on your  
house<sup>13</sup>

May you be lucky always!  
(175) The wandering dervish  
Do not say that he is just singing!  
The order by Allah  
I am fulfilling now, my relatives  
There is no god but Allah,  
(180) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

Your house is indeed a house.  
Your house really worth nothing  
[like twigs]  
You are worried about your live-  
stock.  
(185) Your livestock really worth  
nothing [like twigs]  
You have a twig house here,  
your real one is there [afterlife]  
If your twigs are broken, your tree  
dies [life ends]  
When death really comes  
(190) It will not leave us in this life

<sup>13</sup> The expression *baxt qon*- 'luck descends' comes from Persian and it means that luck can descend from heaven as a bird. Its Turkic counterpart *qut* 'spirit of luck and happiness' in pre-Islamic belief was sort of spirit or soul that could leave a person's body. In Central Asia *qut* is just a synonym of the Persian word *baxt*.

Your house is indeed a house.  
Your house is covered with needle  
grass  
Singing every day all the time  
The sound of the dervish  
(195) My place is full of dry trees

Their branches are sadly broken  
All humans are sinners,<sup>14</sup>  
And they tell about their grief.  
There is no god but Allah,  
(200) Bahā-addīn is the gift of Allah  
Allah hey, Allah hey.

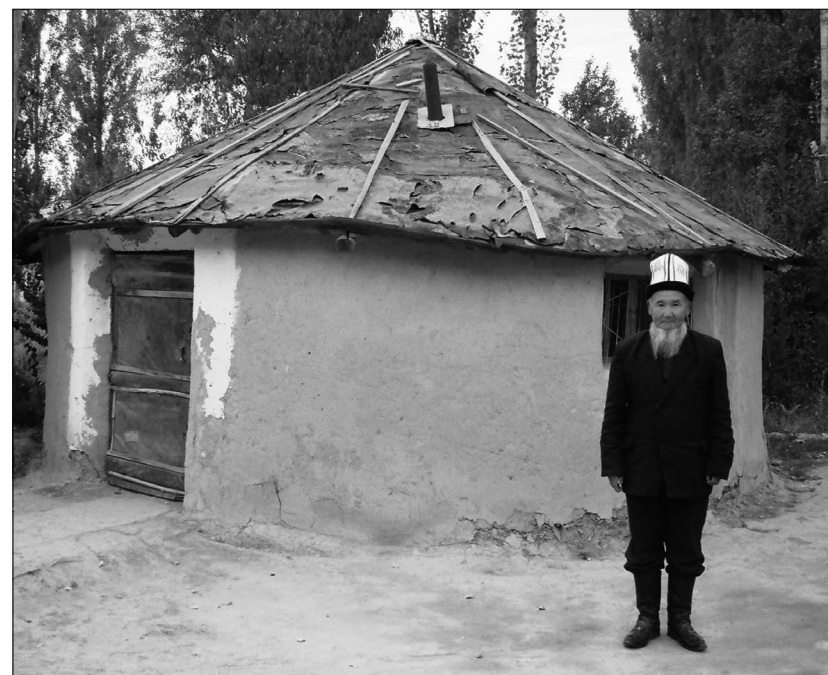


Fig. 2. Atamkul in front of his round-shaped house (Chong Kara-buura village, Kara-Bura district, Talas, Kyrgyzstan). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2008.

Atamkul refers to Baabedin many times in his song, which is the Kyrgyz form of the name of *Kh<sup>w</sup>ādja Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband* (1318–89), a famous Muslim scholar and *Šūfī* from the fourteenth century. He lived in Bukhara and founded the famous and very influential *Naqshbandiyya*

<sup>14</sup> Kyrgyz *pende*, from Persian *panda* 'slave'.



Fig. 3. Atamkul in front of his house (Chong Kara-buura village, Kara-Bura district, Talas, Kyrgyzstan). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2008.

Šūfī order (*ṭarīqa*). His tomb is the most famous pilgrimage site in Central Asia 12 kms from Bukhara in his native village of ẖasr-i Hinduwān (now in Kāgān District).

Actually all of Atamkul's song testifies a strong link to Islam mythology and Šūfī philosophy. He talks about the vanity and idleness of this temporal world. He also talks about the Judgment Day (*qiyāmat*) and that all souls will be judged by Allah. He mentions the two Angels (Üngkür and Mangkir, from Arabic Munkur and Nakīr), who question the dead person's soul that lies in his grave about his faith. If the dead gives the right answer the soul will live a nice life until *qiyāmat* and their body might be resurrected. Atamkul also mentions his helping spirits as *oluya* and *pir*. These are Muslim terms also denoting Šūfī and other Muslim saints. Kyrgyz *oluya* comes from Arabic *awliyā* plural for *walī* (friend of Allah). The word *pīr* in Persian simply means 'old'. It was used among Šūfī followers as a respectful title for their leaders or masters.

He also mentions the *mazār* tombs or holy places that some people visit during a pilgrimage (*ziyārat*). Wandering dervishes also spent a lot of time visiting these holy sites and asking the help of the spirits of those tombs.

The only character that is not well known in Šūfī practice is Oysul *pir*, a mythological Muslim saint. The Muslim nomads believe that all four types of livestock (*tört tülik mal*) are protected by a Muslim saint (*pir*): the horses by Kambar-ata, the sheep by Čolpan-ata, the cattle by Zenggi-baba and the camels by Oysul-kara or Oysul *pir*. By invoking the *pir* of the camels the dervish expresses the popular belief of the nomads that some spirits of the Muslim saints appear in the form of a camel.

Nowadays the Šūfī orders have lost their influence in Central Asia and the dervishes have nearly disappeared from the region. Atamkul must be one of their last representatives. But some of their attributes, like his magic staff, is used by other types of spiritual specialists (e.g. *bakši*, *biübü* and *balger*) and certain beliefs linked to their activity are also preserved in the modern spiritual life of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh (e.g. the veneration of Muslim saints). Modern religious movements nowadays unfortunately are against the veneration of saints and invocation of their spirits. As a result traditional spirituality is gradually disappearing in the region and it is replaced by fundamentalist Muslim ideology. In the meantime many popular beliefs are being adopted by esoteric healers and practitioners who mix various ideologies and spirituality.

Although the dervish is a religious specialist coming from the Šūfī Muslim tradition, modern fundamentalist Muslim movements look at it as a

sort of shaman, as that was suggested by Soviet scholars (Basilov 1992; Baialieva 1972). These scholars argued that many of the religious and spiritual tradition practiced by the nomad Kyrgyz and Kazakh were the remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs, although nobody really knows what those beliefs were or when the Islamization of these nomadic societies occurred.

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