

Powers and Authority of Sufis Among the Kashmiri Muslims in Tibet-
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According to medieval Muslim beliefs, the ultimate authority on any given territory, and on the people who inhabit it, belongs to Sufis saints: they are indispensable intermediaries between men and the only God, Allah; the same Arabic word, *wilaya*, means both sainthood and the territory on which a given saint exercises his authority. Saints are therefore regarded as the natural protectors of the local Muslim communities: this was true not only of countries like Northern India or Central Asia which were under the political domination of Muslim dynasties; it was all the more true of areas where the Muslims were in a minority, such as in Southern India, Nepal or Tibet, where a particular need of supernatural protection was felt.

This paper, which sums up the main findings of a longer article in French (Gaborieau 1989), is devoted to the last mentioned case of the Muslims of Central Tibet. It concentrates on one of their communities which has been best studied: the Kashmiris of Lhasa (Peter of Greece and Denmark 1962; Gaborieau 1973 and 1988; Jest in this volume). They were called Kha-che (from Persian Khwaja, a respectable man, a rich merchant); they came from Kashmir either directly via Ladakh, or more often through the large network of Kashmiri merchants settled in the Indian town of Lahore (now Pakistan), Delhi, Banaras, Patna, Dhaka (now Bangladesh) and later Calcutta; they entered Tibet via Kathmandu (Nepal) which shelters an old Kashmiri community (Gaborieau 1977, pp.31-41 and 223-231). They settled in the main Tibetan towns (e.g. Kuti, Shigatse and Gyantse) on the way to Lhasa and beyond Lhasa they traded upto

Sining on the Chinese border. Their presence in Lhasa is well attested by the Christian missionaries from the first half of the 17th century. The oral traditions of the Lhasa Muslims place the foundation of the Kashmiri community in the same period, during the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama (1642-1682). The main feature common to the various versions of these oral traditions is that they picture a saint as the intermediary between the Muslim merchants and the Dalai Lama. This paper will study the roles of this saint in order to understand the beliefs of the Tibetan Muslims about Sufis.

POWERS OF THE SAINTS

To interpret the traditions which are analyzed below, it is necessary to outline the main beliefs of the medieval Muslims. For them, although Allah is (in the last resort) the point from whom everything comes and to which everything returns, He does not administrate the universe directly. He has chosen for that role men who are his friends and are very near to Him; they are known by the Arabic word wali (plural auliya) which means both friend and governor, and which we translate into English as saint.

For God

has made the Saints the governors of the universe... through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven, and through the purity of their lives the plants spring up from the earth. said Al-Hujwiri (died 1072, Lahore), the first great theorician of Sufism in the Indian subcontinent (Al-Hujwiri 1936, pp.212-213). An equivalent of wali, the Persian word pir, is the most usual word in India, Nepal and Tibet to designate a saint. These saints are mystics, and like the Hindu Yogis or the Buddhist monks, they acquired miraculous powers while travelling along the mystical path. In particular they are able to perform miracles. Muslim theology classifies miracles into three

categories: mujizat performed by the prophets to prove the truth of the revelation they received from God; karamat performed by the saints; and istidraj (literally: deception) performed by non-Muslims to deceive Muslim believers (Subhan 1938, pp.108-111). We will presently encounter the last two categories in the contest between the Saint and the Dalai Lama; it should be emphasized that the differences between these various categories do not concern the nature of the miraculous powers, but the aim for which they are used. Muslims believe that both non-Muslims and Muslims really have the power of flying in the air, being changed into animals, appearing in several places at the same time, knowing the invisible world and acting on it

SAINTS AS INTERMEDIARIES

MEDIEVAL BELIEFS AND LOCAL HAGIOGRAPHY

Muslims believe that there is an invisible hierarchy of saints "whom God has chosen to be the governors of his kingdom" (Al Hujwiri 1936, p.212), i.e. of the cosmos. One is the pole (qutb), around whom the universe revolves; he has many subordinates and delegates for the directions of the universe, the continents, the countries, and finally the towns and villages; even the smallest places have a saint as their protector. These places of various size are the territories, wilaya, of these saints. Big or small, they act as intermediaries between, on the one side, the Muslim communities who people these territories; and, on the other side, various natural and supernatural forces these communities have to confront.

A study of the traditions of the local communities enables us to make an inventory of these forces. Several versions of the traditions of the Lhasa Kashmiri Muslims have been published in the last 30

years (Peter of Greece and Denmark 1962; Gaborieau 1973, pp.17, and 115-119; Abu Bakr Am1 ru' d- Di rr1 979,pp.94-97 and 117-118). They all name as an intermediary a saint who is variously known as Pir Pora ola, Khairu'd-Din or Ya qub. He was an intermediary between the Muslim merchants and the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious authorities.

A 20TH CENTURY VERSION

According to the most recently published version, in the Kashmiri cemetery of Lhasa there are several very high tombs and other old monuments which Tibetan Muslims consider as the tombs of Saints of old (...) who preached Islam and converted many people. One of them is Pir Pora' ola (...) Few people know his name. Since he had a very dark skin, he was called pora'o. Nobody knows when he arrived, nor from where he came. Our forefathers have transmitted about him a story from generation to generation. He used to remain completely silent, absorbed in his thought of Allah. It is told that he had never seen Lhasa town. he stayed on a rock which is situated at a certain distance from Lhasa, and is known as the Dargah [the tomb of a Muslim Saint in Persian]; one still finds there old monuments, including a prayer place cut in the rock; cellars to store cooking utensils and other things have been cut in the rock. Muslims used to go often to this place for pilgrimage and to recite there their supererogatory prayers with two prostrations. This Saint used to perform miracles (karamat); for this reason, the adepts of the two religions [Muslims and Buddhists] venerated him and used to come to him to ask for favours. Whenever he saw many people around him, he used to teach them how to perform prayer and to give them many exhortations and advice. There is a famous anecdote about him. The rosary of the famous magician Ne Chun

Chhuchun had disappeared and the whole town was disturbed. As it had not been possible to find it, some people came to see the Saint and asked for help. He put it as a condition that nobody would enquire about the name and the description of the thief. He closed his eyes and recited a few formulae. Then he declared that the rosary was in such and such a quarter, in such and such a house of Lhasa on the walls of which cow-dungs had been stuck to dry, and that the thief had hidden the rosary under one of these cow dungs. The cow-dungs were unstuck and the rosary was found. Further in the book, while describing the cemetery of the Kashmiris, the same writer narrates how a saint - who seems to be the same as in the foregoing anecdote - obtained from the Dalai Lama the land to establish this cemetery: In Tibetan the name of this place, Gyank Dah Gan, means "A territory, the limits of which have been marked with arrows;" old people tell that, in the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, Muslims had not yet got a cemetery; they used to bury their dead behind the Winter Palace (called Zhiptala) of this Dalai Lama. When the Dalai Lama was informed of this state of affairs, he was worried. At that time a Saint used to spend his time, absorbed in the thought of Allah, on top of a mountain which faced his palace. Every time the Dalai Lama looked in this direction, he saw a man absorbed in the thought of Allah. One day he sent his servants with a horse to call for this man. When the servants arrived near him and asked him to come with him, he told them: "Go back alone! I am going by myself." The servants answered : "The road is bad, dangerous and tiring. That is why we brought a horse who is tied down below." The saint told them to take the horse. They went back to the Dalai Lama; while they were telling him what had happened, the Saint appeared before them, without a horse or any other conveyance. When he saw these miracles (karamat), the Dalai Lama asked the saint to talk to him. The Saint described to him in details the religion of the Muslims; he

explained to him their problems of cemetery. A few days later, the Dalai Lama shot four arrows on the four corners of a flat plot of land; he then said to the Muslims; "Take for your cemetery all the land situated between these four arrows." From that time on, this land is owned by the Muslims (Abo Bakr Amiru'd-Dtn 1979, pp.116-118).

A 19TH CENTURY VERSION

A Kashmiri merchant of Kathmandu, Khwaja Ghulam Muhammad (1857- 1928), while trading in Lhasa in 1882-1883, collected a more detailed version. He preserved it in Urdu in his autobiography written around 1904, which I have edited and translated. Here is the translation of the main part of this story: North of this valley [which is situated five miles to the South of Lhasa) there is a place which is well known among the Muslims under the name of Dargah [the tomb of a Muslim Saint in Persian]; the northern slope of this mountain faces Lhasa. It is well known that Saint called Khairu'd-Din, a Kashmiri from Patna, resided in Lhasa, dressed as a merchant He used to be transported miraculously to this place to recite his prayers. It is also reported that several hundred years back, the Dalai Lama of that time saw him performing his prayer from the Potala Palace which faces this mountain; and, by the means of his mystical exercises, he recognized him. Finally, after enquiring about him, he sent a messenger to ask him to come and meet him. But he refused. The Dalai Lama then sent a second message : "Well: I come myself to meet you." But the Saint refused again. The noon prayer had just been recited when the Saint saw the Dalai Lama coming. He miraculously transformed himself into a pigeon and flew toward his country (Patna). The Lama realized what was happening, and by the means of his mystical exercises and of his miraculous powers (istidraj) he turned himself into a hawk and pursued him; at about the time of the prayer of the end of the afternoon, they both

reached the Yanglakot mountain fifteen or sixteen leagues to the North of Nepal.

The Saint turned towards the Dalai Lama and said: "You have reached your limit [i.e. the limit of your territory; turn back, otherwise your strength will vanish." The Dalai Lama stopped. The Saint recited in this place the prayers of the end of the afternoon; he then flew towards Patna. At the same time, in the monastery (khanqah) of his spiritual master (murshid), the Sufis were preparing for the sunset prayer. The masters said to the prayer leader (imam): "Please prolong a little the first prostration: a guest is arriving." Finally the saint recited the sunset prayer in the monastery of his Master. When the prayer was finished, and after he had kissed the hands of his master, the latter said: "A great error has been committed: if you had met the Dalai Lama, he would have perhaps converted to Islam. And through his conversion, the whole country would have become Muslim. But God's will prevailed." The Saint wanted to go back to Lhasa but his master told him: "The time has gone." Therefore he died in Patna; his tomb is in the quarter called Shah-ki imli,:(Gaborieau1973, pp.114-117).

There are still other versions (Peter of Greece and Denmark 1961. pp.235- 240; Gaborieau 1973, pp.17-18). In some of them, the epilogue is changed: the Dalai Lama converted to Islam, but for fear of his government he had to keep his conversion secret; it was because he had converted that he was so kind to Muslims.

COMMON STRUCTURE OF THE LEGENDS

Whatever the epilogue, all the versions have common features: the Kashmiris are primarily identified not by their trade but by their religion, and a saint endowed with supernatural powers is the

intermediary between the Muslims and the local forces represented here by the Dalai Lama.

To interpret what the Dalai Lama stands for in these

legends, we have to compare them with the mainstream of Sufi hagiography in India. There, among the numerous stories narrating the establishment of Sufis on a given sacred site, stands out a class of "anecdote of magic contest and conversion which have a regional significance, in that the Jogi is displaced as the locum tenens of a sacred or otherwise desirable site by the Sufi Shaykh" (Digby 1970 p. 7). The most complete legend in this class is that of Mu'inu'd'Din Chishti (d. around 1235), who managed to control the site of Ajmer in Rajasthan and became the protector of the whole of Muslim India. According to late hagiography (Subhan 1938, pp.200-206; Digby 1970 p. 14; Digby 1970, 6p. 73), he "triumphs over three separate adversaries, a local deity or dev, the Jogi Ajay pal and the Chauhan ruler Rai Pithaura" (Digby 1970, p.14). He first subdues the deity in whose temple he establishes his monastery; he then defeats the Jogi in a magical contest which includes a flight in the air; he finally causes the fall of the king by attracting Muslim armies who defeat him and found the Delhi sultanate.

The traditions of the Kashmiris of Lhasa seem first to mention only one adversary of the Saint, the Dalai Lama. But this is an illusion: the Dalai Lama in fact embodies three distinct roles: he is a reincarnate deity, a magician and a king. The whole story of the saint- in the version of Khwaja Ghulam Muhammad last quoted - is built on the model of the class of anecdotes I have just defined: entering into competition with the Dalai Lama who has a triple role, he is fighting simultaneously gods, magicians and political authorities. In the contest. magical means are used (including a flight in the air);

however, instead of using a flying carpet as in the Indian stories, the contestants have turned themselves into birds. Is this purely local invention? No. As has been shown, association of holy men with birds are very common in both Muslim and pre- Muslim traditions; flying contest area familiar theme in religious legends (Digby 1990).

One should emphasize that the stake of the contest is the same in the Lhasa tradition as in the Indian anecdotes: the aim is not only to control a site but to convert the Dalai Lama, to bring Tibet to Islam. This aim is near at hand: the Patna master of the Saint reproaches him for not having met the Dalai Lama or not having tried to convert him; in some oral traditions it is even said that the Dalai Lama was secretly converted.

Finally, the only difference between the North Indian and the Tibetan anecdotes lies in the epilogue: the former records a complete victory of the Saint; the latter stops short of a victory; local forces are not subdued and Muslims have to remain as a religious minority without political power.

Tibet is therefore best compared with other areas where Muslims were in a minority situation, the most obvious case being that of the Kashmiris of Kathmandu. As I have shown elsewhere (Gaborieau 1977, pp.33-34; Gaborieau 1989, pp.221-222), they have kept similar traditions according to which a local Saint called Ghyasu d-Din subdued local deities, defeated magicians and obtained land from the king to establish a mosque, a cemetery and a Sufis monastery. Further down, in South India, Sufi Saints also appear as intermediaries between the Muslim merchants, and local Hindu gods, magicians and kings (Bayly 1986, pp.41-58).

Two conclusions emerge from the foregoing analysis of the traditions of the Kashmiris Muslims of Lhasa. The first is historical: these

legends are not purely local inventions; they are built on hagiographical models which are widely attested in Nepal and India, and even in Central Asia (see paper by Thierry Zarcone in this volume). My second conclusion is about the content of these traditions: they provide an illustration of the Sufi belief according to which saints are indispensable intermediaries between the Muslim community and the local forces (gods, magicians and kings). By using their authority and powers to confront these forces, they appear as the founders and the protectors of the local Muslim communities.

SUFIS, YOGIS, AND MONKS

Nowadays in India communalism is rampant: after the 1947 partition and after the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992, the Hindu-Muslim confrontation came to the foreground. In Ladakh antagonism between Buddhist and Muslims is also mounting. In contrast to these conflicts and their political exploitation, the traditions we analyzed above stress (through the medium of mystics) features which are shared by Muslims, Buddhist, and in the Indian context, Hindus. Let us, as an epilogue to this paper stress these common features.

The anecdotes used here put the emphasis on personages who stand apart in the three religions as renouncers, i.e. as people who have renounced the world to devote all their time to religious pursuits. They all practice mysticism through which they obtain magical powers. Among Muslims they are called Sufis; among Hindus, as portrayed in Indian Sufis hagiography, they are represented by the Yogis (Jogis); among the Buddhist they are represented by the monks who are in many respect similar to Yogis. In Sufis literature from India, the non-Muslim is usually represented by the Yogi, but what is

said about him can be generally said about him can be generally said about the Buddhist monk.