

*Devin DeWeese*

ISLAMIZATION  
AND  
NATIVE RELIGION  
IN THE  
GOLDEN HORDE

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Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam  
in  
Historical and Epic Tradition

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*Et miror quis diabolus portavit illuc legem Machometi...*

—William of Rubruck, 1255

...and so those [Tatar] infidels have taken possession of the Northern Country. And since they have taken control of it they have not forced change upon the Community of this [final] Prophet, nor do they order the people to alter their religion; for there is no religion among them that requires this. Thus the people of this Community remain in their country as they were, except that dominion alone has departed from them. So there is benefit in those infidels for the Community of this Prophet (may God bless and keep him); and this is so because *they have no religion that is incompatible with the religion of this Community*, and their intermingling with this Community is what is inducing [those infidels] to enter into it. And so, after all, they are reckoned among its people, and lands of other infidels are being added to those countries they have already conquered. Therefore, in the end, the lands of this Community have expanded. . .

—Ibn an-Nafīs, 1270

Among the instruments of Muhammadan propaganda at the present time, it is interesting to note the large place taken by the folk-songs of the Kirghiz, in which, interwoven with tale and legend, the main truths of Islam make their way into the hearts of the common people.

—T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, 1896



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## Religion / Asian Studies

"This is an original and distinctive contribution to the fields of history of religions, Central Asian studies, and Islamic studies. There are no comparable studies. It comes at a time when Central Asian studies after years of relative obscurity is now very much in the limelight. The issue of Islam and its relationship to ethnicity and nationalism is of central significance. DeWeese demonstrates a command of the body of relevant sources and in fact adds to it significantly. There is a mine of new information accompanied by a fine summary of the state of the art. The combination of the author's methodology, materials, and quality of analysis has produced a study that is distinctive in extending the frontiers of scholarship."

—John L. Esposito, Georgetown University

This book is the first substantial study of Islamization in any part of Inner Asia from any perspective and the first to emphasize conversion narratives as important sources for understanding the dynamics of Islamization. Challenging the prevailing notions of the nature of Islam in Inner Asia, it explores how conversion to Islam was woven together with indigenous Inner Asian religious values and thereby incorporated as a central and defining element in popular discourse about communal origins and identity.

The book traces the many echoes of a single conversion narrative through six centuries, the previously unknown recounting of the dramatic "contest" in which the khan Özbek adopted Islam at the behest of a Sufi saint named Baba Tükles. DeWeese provides the English-language translation of this and another text as well as translations and analyses of a wide range of passages from historical sources and epic and folkloric materials. Not only does this study deepen our understanding of the peoples of Central Asia, involved in so much turmoil today, but it also provides a model for other scholars to emulate in looking at the process of Islamization and communal religious conversion in general as it occurred elsewhere in the world.

Devin DeWeese is Associate Professor of Central Eurasian Studies and Assistant Director of the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies at Indiana University.

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*Cover illustration:* Adapted from a miniature of Muḥammad Siyāh-qalam dating to the 14th or 15th century, MS Topkapı Hazine 2153, f. 85a

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