Satuq Bughra Khan and the Beginning of Islamization in the Tian Shan Region

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Abstract

Satuq Bughra Khan, having converted to Islam, started a new historical page for Islam and the Turkic tribes in the Tian Shan region. His conversion, historically, has aroused academic interest from both Chinese and overseas scholars but the documentation related to his conversion is rare and research on this is rather limited. This chapter provides an overview on the materials related to his conversion, especially the Tarikh-i Kashghar, points out some misconceptions and corrects the date of his conversion to circa 950 AD. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the historical context by emphasizing economic and cultural advancements and reconstructing the original context of the historical events in a way that lays a foundation for further research.

Keywords

Satuq Bughra Khan – Tian Shan – Islamization

It has been said that Islam was circulated among the Turkic tribes around Tian Shan after Satuq Bughra Khan converted to Islam; this event caught much academic attention in the late 19th Century. Henry Walter Bellew, in his report on Yarkand, published in Calcutta, used the fragmentary manuscript, Biography of Satuq Bughra Khan (Tazkirah Bughra Khan) to draw out his brief biography.\(^1\) Robert Shaw selectively translated Tazkirah Bughra Khan in

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his book. In 1881 AD, H.G. Raverty translated and made notes to *Tabakat-i Nasiri* and included some records about Satuq Bughra Khan from Gardezi’s *Zarn al-Akhbar*. In 1893 AD, Stanley Lane-Poole wrote *The Mohammadan Dynasties* and included the name of Satuq Bughra Khan though dates were unspecified. Two years after, Ney Elias, in his translated *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, made a lengthy footnote on Satuq Bughra Khan, “accordingly, he previously ruled over Turkistan with the borders edging towards China; before his death, circa the end of 10th Century AD, he further occupied Bukhara.” No doubt, Ney Elias referenced *Tazkirah Bughra Khan*. In 1900 AD, Fernand Grenard compiled some historical materials from Muslim and Chinese sources, translated them into English, and then carried out research on *Tazkirah Bughra Khan*, which he then translated, relying on early handwritten documents. Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross mention Satuq Bughra Khan in their writings. Nonetheless, these writings do not provide data on what happened before and after Satuq Bughra Khan converted to Islam and concerned scholars have only been able to rely on the text *Tazkirah (Satuq) Bughra Khan*, which is inconsistent with other sources and is overtly religious in its account.

In 1898 AD, the famous Oriental scholar, Vasily (Wilhelm) Barthold, when researching Satuq Bughra Khan, incorporated *Mulhaaat al-Surah* (*Sulahe cidian bubian* 蘇拉赫詞典補編) in his work, thereby laying the foundation for future studies on Satuq Bughra Khan. Barthold concedes that the above historical material related to early Kara-Khanids is conflict-ridden with

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4 Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Mohammadan Dynasties* (London: Routledge, 2000).