

A MUSLIM SHAMAN OF AFGHAN TURKESTAN

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FULL TEXT

A Muslim Shaman of Afghan Turkestan¹

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During field work in 1968 in the town of K in northern Afghanistan (cf. Centlivres 1971) the authors attended a therapeutic seance performed by a *baxši*² or shaman with the aid of a *qobuz* or horsehair fiddle. Both the *baxši* as a healer and his *qobuz* have long been observed among the Kazakh and Kirghiz, but their presence in Afghanistan was, to the best of our knowledge, first reported by Slobin (1969). This paper will therefore deal primarily with the performance, role, and status of the *baxši* in Afghan Turkestan.

THE *Baxši* IN CENTRAL ASIA

In Central Asia, particularly among the Turkic peoples, two categories of individuals are called *baxši*: (1) a healer, generally regarded in the literature as a type of Central Asian shaman, who operates in a trance and makes use of the *qobuz*, and (2) a singer of epic poetry or folk songs, who may be accompanied, particularly among the Turkmen, by a *qobuz* or a *dutar* (a type of lute). The Great Soviet Encyclopedia cites the term *baxši* only in the latter sense. The ethnogeographic distribution of the various types of *baxši* may be summarized as follows:

Among the Kazakh, according to Levchine (1840), Radloff (1870, 1893), and Castagné (1930), the *baxši* is primarily a healer and exorcist. He works with the help of a *qobuz* decorated with pieces of iron or small bells, or sometimes with a stick, called *asa*, decorated with iron clasps.

Among the Kirghiz, the *baxši* is known both as an epic singer (Chadwick 1969: 25, 214) and as a healer who works with a *qobuz*. This instrument may be either a horsehair fiddle, as among the Kazakh, or a type of shaman's drum.

Among the Uzbek, according to Castagné (1930: 59), the term *baxši* means a shaman, doctor, savant, sage, or scholar, and the *qobuz* either may or may not be used. In the Khiva area *baxši* also has the meaning of minstrel (Chadwick 1969: 214; Zhirmunsky 1969: 325). According to Snegarev (1969: 44), the term is little used among the Uzbek of Khwarizm, who prefer the terms *perixān* (from *peri*-fairy and *xān*-sing) and *falbin* (fortuneteller).

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Among the Turkmen, the *baxši* is known only as an epic or folk singer; he lacks magical powers and today uses the *dutar* rather than the *qobuz* (Kruger 1963: 88; Chadwick 1969: 214), although earlier Turkmen bards did play the *qobuz* (Beliaev 1962: 138).

Among the inhabitants of the oases of Eastern Turkestan, the term *baxši* is attested by Sykes (1920: 314) for Kashgar and by Skrine (1926: 186) for Yarkand, and is defined by Jarring (1964: 46) as "conjurer, magician, witch doctor, strolling minstrel, inspired bard, pretending to receive inspiration from supernatural beings, shaman." The *qobuz* is not used. Findeisen (1951) reports the term *perixān* with the meaning of fortune-teller and healer.

Among the peoples of the oases of Afghan Turkestan, the *baxši* as a magician is mentioned only by Jarring (1938) and Slobin (1969).

In general, the *baxši* as a magician working with a *qobuz* seems to be linked primarily with the Kazakh and the Kirghiz, seminomadic peoples of the steppe, despite some extension into adjacent regions. Their presence among a predominantly Tajik population in northern Afghanistan poses problems of origin and diffusion.

The *qobuz* is both an instrument for lay music, used to accompany epic recitations and folk songs, and a sacred, magical instrument used to accompany a *baxši's* trance. It is not necessary, however, to distinguish sharply the *baxši* as a magician and the *baxši* as a minstrel. As Zhirmunsky (1969: 334) says, "The word *bakshy* is used in Central Asia to designate both professions, and we know of epic singers who in former times used to unite them in practice." Both types of *baxši* can be considered as having supernatural inspiration, for the incantations of the magician are generally rhythmic pieces which refer to the legendary characters of epic poetry. The present paper will be concerned only with the *baxši* as a fortuneteller and healer.

In Central Asia the *baxši* is primarily an exorcist. He is supposed to drive away the evil spirit which has possessed a patient and thereby caused his illness. During a trance, brought about by playing the *qobuz*, he first transfers the evil spirit and then expels it. The transfer may be into himself, into an organ (e.g., the lungs, liver, or heart) of a sacrificed animal (e.g., a goat, sheep, or chicken), or into an inanimate object such as a torch (*alas*) which is then gotten rid of. The spirit may also be expelled directly through incantatory formulas, shouts, ventriloquism, or the imitation of animal cries, or, even more directly, by striking the patient with the hand, a whip, or the bow of the *qobuz*. The spirit which possesses the patient, as well as the helping spirits who assist the *baxši* (Islamic saints in some cases), are sometimes called by name. The *baxši's* ecstasy may also be attested by an ordeal, such as touching a red-hot iron, striking himself with a stick, or trampling on a sharp knife without bodily injury (Zelenin 1952: 250; Snesarev 1958: 9). According to Radloff (1870: 60), the act of licking a hot iron can signify the *baxši's* assumption of the patient's illness.⁸ Among the techniques used one may also note the role of burning wicks, which may simply burn during the cure or which the *baxši* may revolve around

the head of the patient. Snesev sees in this the distant influence of ancient Iranian religion.

A Kazakh *baxši*, through a trance induced by playing the *qobuz*, is also able to produce rain, to recover camels or other lost animals (Castagné 1930: 20-21, 1932), and to perform feats of divination. In addition, he exercises a number of medical functions, such as bloodletting and cupping (Castagné 1930: 143). The *baxši* is generally paid only if the patient is cured, but in any case he is entitled to the skin and part of the flesh of the animal sacrificed at the beginning of the cure, as well as to the patient's clothing (Castagné 1930: 107).

The transmission of the *baxši's* calling is usually hereditary. According to Radloff (1870: 60), however, a neophyte must be initiated by an experienced *baxši* and cannot practice until he receives a benediction which confers this right. In East Turkestan, the possession of a set of formulas in a catechism (*risāla*) permits cures and legitimizes the activities of the *baxši*.

The relationship of the *baxši* among the Islamized Turks of Central Asia to the shamans of Siberia has long been recognized on the basis of geographic proximity and resemblances in their therapeutic procedures and equipment. Since Radloff (1870), the *baxši* has been regarded as a kind of lesser shaman. The essential social and religious prerogatives accorded to the shaman in Siberia have been reserved in Central Asia for the orthodox Islamic clergy, particularly the mullahs, leaving to the *baxši* only the marginal and sometimes clandestine activity of working cures in a trance. People consult him secretly in cases which baffle the official doctors or Koranic amulets. Unlike the Siberian shaman, the *baxši* does not pretend to search for the wandering soul of the patient, nor does he claim that his supernatural helper undertakes a voyage to another world. That the *baxši* and his activities represent a residual, underground, and marginal activity in Islamic countries is supported by such facts as the following: (1) the mistrust of the orthodox mullahs, sometimes expressed in verbal condemnation, toward the *baxši* and his practice; (2) the mockery commonly exhibited by the male population toward such practices (Radloff 1893: 63; Findeisen 1951: 1), at least to strangers, even though they may secretly have recourse to them when the need arises; and (3) the fact that the clientele of the *baxši* is mainly female (Skrine 1926: 186; Snesev 1958: 9).

THE *Baxši* IN AFGHAN TURKESTAN

Afghan Turkestan presents a complex mosaic of peoples and cultures. From an ethno-linguistic point of view, it is composed of Indo-Europeans (Tajik and Pashtun), Turkic peoples (Uzbek and Turkmen), and Semites (Arabs). From the point of view of mode of life and institutions, its oases and their surroundings are inhabited by coexisting livestock breeders, peasants, and urban dwellers, who form hierarchical social and economic groups. In such a milieu, para-religious functions (such as fortunetelling and exorcism) and medical functions (such as healing and bonesetting) are understandably also complex, each responding to a specific category of

needs and a different clientele. The *baxši* constitutes only one element in the category of fortunetellers and healers. As compared with the Kazakh *baxši*, at least prior to 1917, his role is considerably diminished, his activity reduced, and his clientele more limited.

In the general category of fortunetellers, the term *falbin* (seer) applies to all those who employ divination; it includes the *baxši* only to the extent that he practices this art. The *talajabin* or *tala'bin* is one who predicts the future in a more restricted sense by observing the ripples in a basin of water (Jarring: 1938: 161n). The *ramal* or *ramalbāz* operates with dice, which are joined by a metal shank and which, after manipulation, form combinations of numbers that are interpreted according to a book of divination (Massé 1938: i, 247). The *jogi*, a term for wandering Gypsies, reads the future from the shoulderblade of a sheep.⁴ The *munajim*, or astrologer, predicts changes in the weather by observing the stars.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between healers and exorcists. The *duaxān* (lit. prayer reader), sometimes also called *šeix mohamad*, sells formulas which are believed to have a protective value, e.g., against the evil eye, as well as specific therapeutic powers, e.g., against toothache or sterility. He may be simply a mullah versed in Koranic knowledge but is more often a *seyyed*, a presumed descendant of Mohammad. In the same group are *darviš*, *malang*, or *qalandar*, itinerant holy men loosely affiliated with an order of dervishes who have a reputation for sanctity. The *isfanči* wanders through the bazaars with a censer in which he burns grains of *esfend*, wild rue (*Perganum harmala*), to assure protection against the evil eye. The *qasidaxān* is called upon, often by the *baxši* himself to assist in his diagnosis, in certain illnesses which have resisted all the usual remedies and charms. He is generally a mullah who operates by means of Koranic formulas or incantations called *mantar*.

The *mārgir* or snake charmer also works with a set of *mantar* compiled as a *risāla* or treatise. He treats not only the bites of snakes and other venomous animals but also various abscesses and swellings. There are three *mārgir* in the town of K; two of them are blacksmiths, and the third is an oil merchant (a denigrated occupation). Other specialists make use of the *qārd-i jawardār*, a kind of damascene knife believed to be endowed with special powers. They treat rheumatism and swellings by reciting *mantar* and making passes with the knife, to the cuts of which they declare themselves to be insensible. There is one such specialist in K and another in S, another town in Afghan Turkestan; both are *atār-banjāra*, who combine the functions of druggist, herbalist, and haberdasher. Both the *mārgir* and the *atār-banjāra* claim to have acquired their gift of healing by studying for a number of years under a master and receiving his benediction, which is required to render their cures legitimate and efficacious. This type of initiation corresponds to that of the *baxši* himself among the Kazakh (Radloff 1870: 60n). Other doctors who use the techniques of the Kazakh *baxši* (cf. Castagné 1930: 143), but lack supernatural powers, include the *šekastaband*, a bonesetter, and the *dalaq*, a barber (a denigrated profession) who performs cupping and bloodletting.

The above personages and their activities, though unorthodox from the point of view of Islam, fulfill recognized needs and have a positive connotation. The only specialist with a strictly negative connotation is the *jādu* (Jarring 1938: 162n), a black magician who creates *tumār-i badi* ("talismans for evil") by making a figurine of a person out of sheep fat, earth, and wax, piercing it with needles, and throwing it into fire or boiling oil. The other exorcists and healers are known and established practitioners who can be consulted at home or in their shops. The *jādu* is not known. Secrecy is the condition for the success of his operations, and we were unable in K to have any such practitioner identified for us. We were told that he may be either a neighbor or a stranger. He is an anonymous malign influence who becomes manifest only through his work, and in fact he may not necessarily exist at all.

The Male Baxši

The *baxši* is distinguished from other healers and fortunetellers by specific traits that appear during the course of his cure, which may last several days. When a patient suffers from an ailment of unknown origin which has resisted the usual charms and medications, his family may summon the *baxši*, who arrives at sunset with his *qobuz* wrapped in soft flannel. The *baxši* begins the seance with the sacrifice of a *ḡabut* (bluish) goat. A portion of the meat is consumed the same evening, but the best pieces belong to the *baxši*, who removes them the next morning.⁵ The meat that is eaten immediately is boiled in a closed pot; when it is cooked, the *baxši* lifts the lid and distributes the pieces. He spends the night in the patient's house unless his own home is nearby. During the night he receives a dream. This and the chewing of the goat's flesh, according to our informants, has a divinatory value which enables the *baxši* to diagnose the ailment and select the appropriate therapy. Not until the next morning does he actually enter the presence of the patient.

The *baxši* makes his choice from among three possible therapies: (1) the *alas* (lit. torch, live coal), which may be performed either by the *baxši* himself or by a *malang* whom he has summoned for the purpose; (2) the *qasida* or incantation, for which he calls a *qasidaxān*; or (3) the *baxšibāzi* or "baxši's game," his own specialty, which only a *baxši* can undertake, and which is resorted to if the other treatments are deemed insufficient. Each will be examined in turn.

For the *alas*, the patient, clad in a *čapan* or full robe, is dragged outside, possibly to a nearby cemetery and preferably near running water. The *baxši* arms himself with a freshly broken willow branch, which is wrapped with a cotton wick at one end, dipped in mutton fat, and lighted. With this improvised torch he circles the patient's head several times and utters incantations in the name of the spirit of the *arwa*, or *pir*, who is usually an Islamic saint, and in the names of Musā (Moses), Ibrahim (Abraham), and Suleiman (Solomon). He repeats this operation three times and sprinkles the patient's face with a mixture of ashes, bran, and water. Sometimes he strikes the patient lightly with the flat of his hand, or pulls his ear. He

may terminate his therapy by prescribing dietary recommendations or abstinence,⁶ after which he throws the torch away into the running water. According to a *baxši* informant, the words he utters during the *alas* call for the expulsion of the *djinn* which has caused the illness or, more precisely, for its transfer into the *alas*, which is then discarded. This method of therapy is not restricted to *baxši* but may be employed within his own family by anyone who knows the formula; it is more efficacious, however, when performed by the *baxši* himself.

The *qasidaxān* performs the *qasida* at home, preferably in the evening or at night. He offers *mantar*, which may be repeated by the patient, and gives the latter a *tawiz*, a written formula in a leather case which is worn by the patient to banish the evil spirit.

The *baxšibāzi* can be performed only in semi-darkness, usually in the evening. The *baxši* removes his turban, shoes, and clothing, keeping on only his pantaloons, and covers his naked chest with a *čapan*. The patient and spectators divest themselves of all the *tawiz* and *tumār* they may be wearing, as well as all metal objects (weapons, utensils, jewelry) and anything connected with gambling (e.g., cards or dice), for to the *baxši* such objects may represent a force opposed to his own power. The seance we attended was held in the daytime, contrary to common usage. The patient (our servant) lay on his back covered entirely by a white cotton sheet. A plate filled with rice and pieces of reed, into which wicks dipped in oil were inserted, was brought in. At the *baxši's* request we sprinkled the plate with coins. At the last moment he replaced the horsehair strings of his *qobuz* with nylon cord bought in the bazaar.⁷ He lighted the wicks and began the seance by reciting a Koranic benediction with his hands open and his palms raised. Then, sitting cross-legged with the *qobuz* between his knees, he began to play. The instrumental and vocal aspects of the seance fell into a number of characteristic phases, which exhibited the following pattern.

Phase 1. The *baxši*, while seated, played his instrument and offered invocations consisting of short repeated phrases. His play was jerky and was interrupted by shaking the *qobuz* to agitate the metal pendants on its peg box. His voice was altered, turning nasal and tense though low in register. His invocations, which were interrupted by coughs and guttural noises, consisted of appeals to the *arwa*, the spirits of *pir* (patron saints and Koranic personages), which he summoned to his aid.

Phase 2. The chanting became continuous, and new melodic elements were introduced. The playing of the *qobuz*, which consisted only of hard sawing on the open strings, diminished, and its rattles were shaken more frequently.

Phase 3. The *baxši*, who was now in a trance, arose, brandished the *qobuz*, and uttered groans and inarticulate cries. He struck himself and the patient with his instrument and imitated animal cries, especially those of the dog and the bull. From time to time he leaned the *qobuz* on various parts of the patient's body as he played it.

Phase 4. The *baxši* sat down and repeated the music of phase 1, then that of phase 2, and returned to the melody of phase 1.

Phase 5. Injuries were now apparent on the *baxši's* chest, where he had struck himself with the heavy wooden *qobuz*. The music, which resembled that of phase 3, included some playing of the *qobuz* toward the end. The opening benediction was repeated to end the seance, and the *baxši*, exhausted but in his normal voice, bade the patient: "Arise!"

For this seance the pay of the *baxši* consisted of the rice and coins on the plate, the piece of cloth which covered the patient, the clothing which he wore, and 600 afghanis (about U.S. \$8). According to our informants, the gift of the patient's clothing is a condition for the success of the cure.

Two distinct musical components were associated with this seance: the horsehair fiddle (*qobuz*) and the *baxši's* chant itself. Slobin (1969: 148-149) has summarized the use of the *qobuz* as follows:

It should be noted that the *qobuz*, in one form or another but under the same name, is played by the Qaraqalpaqs of northwestern Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks of the Surxandarya and Kashkadarya Regions near the northern border of Afghanistan. The latter locale gives the most probable point of connection of the [K] specimens with those of Trans-Oxiana. Beliaev (1933: 53) states that the *qobuz* was still in use among the Uzbeks of the Ferghana region and even in Buxara at the time of writing . . . the *qobuz* is yet another example of an instrument relating directly to Central Asian traditions which is in highly restricted use in northern Afghanistan.

The chant can be separated into the text and the melody. The most prominent feature of the text is its arcane nature. In contrast to the performances of Kazakh and Kirghiz *baxši* (Castagné 1930), who chant long texts with a cohesive content in their own languages, the healer we observed sang almost exclusively in a nonsense language of his own. The principal exception consisted in the inclusion of certain words of obvious Islamic origin (also used by Kazakh and Kirghiz shamans), notably, *Muhamad rasul* (Muhammad the prophet), *mullāh*, *Allāh*, and *bismillāh*. Short phrases apparently in Persian can also be detected at times; thus *mullāh komak kard* ("the mullah helped") crops up twice in the examples shown in Figure 1. The bulk of the text, however, consists of the incantatory syllables *wa-ya-ga-ma*.

Figure 1 presents three excerpts from a tape-recording of the ceremony we observed in K. Example 1 shows the basic style of the first phase of the ceremony; it is marked by clear syllabic singing with well defined pitches. In Example 2, taken from the second phase of the ceremony, an entirely different style comes into play, based on long legato phrases and less clearly intoned pitches, and the chain of nonsense syllables has vanished. Neither example is musically identical to the scalar structure or melodic patterns of the music commonly found in the K area or in northern Afghanistan in general. Particularly striking is the whole-tone scale of Example 2, which we heard nowhere else. The tritone relationship featured in Example 1 is also something of a rarity.

Of particular interest is the fact that the music of the K *baxši* is so different from that transcribed from Central Asian and Siberian shamans.

Figure 1: Musical Examples from Baxsi Suances.

Ex. 1. Male baxsi

Ex. 2. Male baxsi

Ex. 3. Kazakh shaman (after Castagné 1930)

Ex. 4. Female baxsi

Ex. 5. Female baxsi

Ex. 6. Male baxsi

Example 3 in Figure 1 is excerpted from the transcription of a Kazakh *baxsi's* chant published by Castagné (1930: plate 6). It shows two short melodic phrases which recur throughout Castagné's transcription and bear little relationship to the two examples cited from K. The transcription of a Kazakh *baxsi's* song in Erzakovich (1967: 102-103), like that in Castagné, consists of phrases characteristic of the ordinary Kazakh song style. The music of a Tuvian shaman cited by Aksenov (1964: 24), which includes seven distinct melodies for various parts of an evening's ritual, seems unrelated to that of the *baxsi* of either K or the Kazakh. Thus, while

procedural details and the musical instruments used may unite various regional shamanistic rites of Central Asia and Siberia, the data available indicate scant musical connection.

Our informants in K told us that a *baxši's* cure may extend over several evenings. Sometimes a lamb must be sacrificed and its blood daubed on the afflicted parts of the patient's body. Apparently the *baxši* can also carry a red-hot piece of iron in his mouth during his trance—a frequent occurrence in shamanistic seances in Central Asia and Siberia (cf. Eliade 1968: 371).

The states of the *baxši* during the cure is called *masti* ("drunkenness"). While in this state it is believed that he is assisted not only by the aforementioned spirits of the *pir* but also by other spirits (*ax jin gerefta*, seized by spirits) over which he exercises a certain amount of control and whom he must get rid of toward the end of the cure when the patient is liberated from the evil spirit possessing him. We were unable to ascertain whether the *djinn* whose groans and animal cries emerge from the mouth of the *baxši* are those which have possessed the patient or those collaborating with the *baxši* in the expulsion. In any event, the treatment is called *kučira*, or transfer.⁸ According to the participants, the evil spirit or demon passes from the body of the patient into another body, animate or inanimate.

In K the acquisition of the *baxši's* calling is not hereditary. A neophyte must display a certain predisposition, e.g., through dreams or melancholy, and he must be instructed by another *baxši*. Of the three *baxši* with whom we were acquainted, none received his instruction from his father or any other member of his family. One of them was instructed by a *seyyed*. Before a *baxši* can work independently he must undergo an act of initiation (*čamarbandi*, belting), which has the same name as the rite of passage by which an artisan advances from an apprentice to a master. This gives him the authorization (*ejāza*) to proceed on his own. On this occasion the master presents him with a *risāla* (in this context a set of formulas). This is a type of catechism similar to the *risāla* of guilds, which outline the religious and moral code of a particular craft.⁹ Like artisans and merchants, the *baxši* has a patron saint in whose name the *risāla* is written. The protector in this case was one Ataturk Qāwat (*qāwat*, power).

The illnesses treated by the *baxši* include well defined cases of melancholy, languor, epilepsy, madness, and certain internal pains of unknown origin. He works only three or four times a year and is thus unable to live by his profession alone. Of the three *baxši* interviewed, one was a gardener who lived in the suburbs, and the other two were peasants residing in the oasis. All three declared themselves at first to be Tajik (the majority ethnic group), but two of them later admitted that they were in fact Arabs. The appearance of Arabs in K dates from the conquests of the eighth century, and today they are represented by small farmers and agricultural workers who form the population of a few villages in the oasis. At first it seemed astonishing that an activity so manifestly linked to the Turkic culture of Central Asia should be practiced here by such a different ethnic group. However, in many areas of daily life the Arabs of northern Afghanistan act as preservers of traditional elements in the local culture, which is

largely Uzbek. They form a poor group which is little esteemed socially and is marginal to urban life and modern forms of economy. To the extent that the *baxši* practice an anachronistic, disparaged, and marginal activity, it is perhaps not surprising that they are recruited from an alien ethnic group.

The Female Baxši

The term *baxši* is also applied to a woman who specializes in predicting the future, recovering lost objects, and diagnosing and treating illnesses. One of them, who was studied by the female co-author of this paper, is an Uzbek widow about 45 or 50 years of age. She is sometimes also called *maj mulla* (a term for a traditional Uzbek tutor) or *ferešta* (angel). On Mondays and Wednesdays she receives patients at her home, which is situated in the midst of a large garden in an area far from the center of the town. On a particular day from 30 to 50 women foregather there, along with perhaps fifteen infants and young children. Two rooms of the house are open to the visitors. One is an alcove facing Mecca, with a niche for a wick dipped in oil; when the patients arrive it is covered with a *jūnamāz* or prayer rug. The second room is a small platform of wood covered with a cushion.

At the beginning of the seance the *baxši* is dressed like a woman of the urban middle class. Although the seance does not commence until after noon prayers have been offered, the women arrive in the late morning and sleep, chat, smoke a water pipe, or eat provisions which they have brought with them. From time to time a woman goes into the second room to consult the *baxši* in behalf of herself or her child. If the child is sick, the *baxši* touches it and prescribes a treatment, which may take the form of a dietary prescription or of massages or manipulations to be performed at the ensuing seance. She may resort to divination to determine her diagnosis. She performs examinations for women who wish to know whether they are pregnant or, if so, what the condition of the fetus is.

Shortly before the noon prayer the *baxši* enters the larger room, dressed in a long robe of white cotton, and unfastens the prayer rug. The women remove their shoes, outer clothing, and amulets, which are taken out of the room. During the prayer each woman deposits the sum of one to three afghanis at the base of the niche. Some of the children examined in the morning are now brought forward to receive the prescribed treatment. After various manipulations the *baxši* passes each small patient between her legs several times and applies ashes of burnt cotton to its cheek.

In preparation for the seance proper the *baxši* wraps a cord around her waist and neck, slips a whip into her belt, and is joined by an old woman, also clad in white, who is called *kāgard* (assistant, apprentice). The cotton wick is lighted in the niche, and the two women kneel, invoking the spirits of their patron saints. The women in front of them begin to rock rhythmically. After perhaps fifteen minutes one of them is seized with convulsions and writhes on the floor, perspiring freely. Her neighbors, realizing that she is possessed by a *djinn*, seize her, slap her, and shake

her rhythmically. A couple of other women fall into trances, perspire, and foam at the feet of the *baxši*, who strikes them with her whip "to drive out the *djinn*" that possesses them. The two leaders, still kneeling, chant their incantations more and more loudly as they rock to and fro. Suddenly they rise to their feet with a cry and push back the spectators. The *baxši*, her helper, and the women in a trance grasp each other by the shoulders, form a circle, and set themselves in motion, chanting *la ilā illā allāh* ("there is no other God than Allah") and *hai allāh* without ceasing their rocking, and other women join them. This phase of the seance is called *sobhat kardān*, or conversation (with the spirits).

Veils and hats fall. The *baxši* begins to foam and gnash her teeth. She hits the women closest to her with her whip and finally tosses this into the audience. The round dance begins again with new participants. The rhythm accelerates, and the pitch rises. After another stop, the *baxši* moves convulsively, arches her back, and climbs on the shoulders of one of the women. The others applaud at seeing one of their number chosen as a mount. The *baxši*'s back becomes completely stiff and tense, and some of the women support her head and shoulders. Others leave the circle, break off fragments of earth from the wall, and rub these into their genitals. (This reveals the strength of the sexual component of the seance, with its stress on fertility.) The same sequence is repeated several times during the course of approximately two hours.

At the end the *baxši* sinks exhausted on the prayer rug at the foot of the niche and recites a prayer. The women seeking advice concerning their future now approach her, placing ten afghanis each before her, and present their cases. The *baxši*, still in ecstasy, murmurs in a deep voice the cause of their trouble and the appropriate remedy. The prescribed cure may involve an *alas* (torch ceremony), a pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint, or a diet. The seance comes to an end at about 5 P.M. The women visit the *baxši* without the knowledge of their husbands, who return from the bazaar shortly after five o'clock—an indication of the urban and occupational status of the clientele.

In contrast to the male *baxši*, the pay of the female healer continues throughout the performance. It includes ten afghanis for consultations, one to three afghanis during the noon prayer for participation in the seance, and ten afghanis for fortunetelling, as well as various gifts, such as chickens, fruit, or embroidered hats, when the cure succeeds.

The striking procedural differences between the ceremonies of the male and female *baxši* carry over into the realm of music. Two distinct musical elements can be isolated in the tape-recording of the ceremony described above. The first (see Example 4 in Figure 1) consists of an initial phrase uttered by the leader and repeated countless times by the audience. Unlike the music chanted by the male *baxši*, this female tune fits neatly into the musical patterns of northern Afghanistan—so much so, in fact, that the phrase could be mistaken for a snatch of the popular songs sung by women at weddings.

The second example (the fifth in Figure 1) is somewhat more revealing.

The text, *la-il-lā ei il-lā lā*, as noted earlier, clearly relates to the standard Muslim *shahada* (confession of faith), and its incessant chanting, building up to a mood of ecstasy, resembles the "hypnotic" incantations of dervish and Sufi orders across the Near East and North Africa. Particularly revealing is a comparison of the same text as sung by male and female *baxši*. Example 6 in Figure 1 comes from the performance of the former (phase 5), and its scalar construction and legato style contrast sharply with the concise syllabic statement in the female *baxši*'s rendition.

Thus, while both types of healers employ music to engender and regulate the mood of the ceremony, leading to an ecstatic trance, there are substantial basic distinctions between the two types of performance, which may be summarized as follows:

Unique features of the male baxši rite

- Solo performance only
- Instrumental musical accompaniment
- Musical traits atypical of the region

Unique features of the female baxši rite

- Call-response and choral performance
- No instrumental accompaniment
- Musical traits characteristic of the region

Similarities

- Use of Muslim words in the text
- Two types of musical phrase employed

Other differences between the two types of *baxši* may be noted. In the female seance, both the *baxši* and her clientele belong to the middle class of generally prosperous artisans, urban merchants, and suburban owners of orchards. The assistants participate actively in the female rite, in contrast to the male rite. The trance is to a considerable extent collective in the female rite, and the role of the *baxši* is to sustain and direct it; for the cure to succeed a state of trance is necessary for both the *baxši* and the participant. The clientele is stable and regular. All these conditions for the female seance can be found in different parts of the Islamic world, particularly on the periphery, as in the *zar* cult of the Ethiopians of Gondar (cf. Messing 1958; Leiris 1958) and in the *sekr* of Tashkent women (Troickaja 1929).

With the male *baxši* the case is quite different. Here we are dealing with an exceptional cure, held nocturnally for specific instances, where the *baxši* alone is an active agent and the relatives of the patient are only spectators. Among the various practitioners of divination, exorcism, and healing the *baxši* appears to be the most marginal, the least commonly used, and the most derided.

The female *baxši*, on the other hand, enjoys a fairly elevated social status. Moreover, in feminine society she combines most of the functions of curing, divination, and exorcism, as well as obstetrics. Her popularity is associated with the fact that, in a society which is culturally dominated by males, women have no social life outside the company of kinswomen and no access to the economic life of the marketplace. Thus the *baxši* seances not

only play the role of group therapy but also serve as an outlet for social life which is otherwise denied to women. They are a substitute reserved for them, and one in which they can play an active role. Under these conditions it is not surprising that, while organized religion and government tolerate these practices, though ostensibly censuring them, the husbands and brothers who "own" the women are distrustful of the seances and generally oppose their wives' participation. This doubtless explains, to a considerable extent, the difference in status and function between male and female *baxši*.

There is, nevertheless, a profound analogy between the practitioners of both sexes, which explains why they carry the same name. Unlike other fortunetellers and healers, they serve as the medium through which supernatural beings manifest themselves. The diagnosis and cure of the *baxši*, whether he is a man or a woman, proceed from trance and ecstasy. Owing to their status in countries that have long been Islamized, both operate in private, secretly. The practices of the female *baxši* and her patients reflect psychological and social motivations widely found in countries with traditional Islamic values, which explains their widespread occurrence. The male *baxši*, on the other hand, represents, in a varied constellation of male fortunetellers and healers, only a rare and censured resource who is turned to for precise and limited reasons. It is understandable that these underground practices, often derided and sometimes feared, should be performed by an individual whose social and economic status is equally low and despised.

NOTES

1. Preparation of this article was facilitated by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.
2. Also spelled *baqsha*, *baqshi*, *baqsa*, *baxes*, *batchi*, *baqca*, etc. According to Menges (1968: 168), "*baxsy*-teacher, from Chinese." The term was applied by the Chingisids to higher Uighur functionaries and literati in general. It was also mentioned by Marco Polo and Rashid ed Din (see Roux 1958 for references). The most essential and accessible sources on the *baxši* in modern times are Levshine (1840), Radloff (1870, 1893), Castagné (1930), Findeisen (1951), Chadwick (1969), Zhirmunsky (1969), and Snesarev (1969).
3. Findeisen (1957) has demonstrated a link between the role of iron in shamanistic cures and the role of the blacksmith in Central Asia. Iron is also found in the crotals and metal rings of the Siberian shaman's drum and of the *baxši's gobuz*.
4. Among the Kazakh, according to Castagné, this role is played by the *yaxunči*.
5. In general, goat meat is hardly eaten except by poor peasants when they are engaged in heavy labor.
6. The traditional diet is based on the classification of foods into hot *vs.* cold and wet *vs.* dry. The efficacy of a remedy similarly rests on the principle of opposites. For example, hot and dry foods are prescribed for an excess of cold and dry "humors" in the patient.
7. All the stringed instruments of northern Afghanistan are strung today with nylon instead of the traditional horsehair, gut, or silk. It is interesting to note that even the classic horsehair strings of the *qobuz* have undergone this change.
8. The term *kučirma* is used in the sense of transmigration in the shamanistic cures of Khwarizm described by Snesarev (1969: 54). Informants in A, another town of Afghan Turkestan, told us that local Uzbek healers are called *kučirmači*.
9. For the latter see Gavrilov (1928); for the *baxši's risāla* see Findeisen (1951: 2).

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