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SADRŽAJ
CONTENTS

Izvorni znanstveni radovi | Original scientific papers

5
LUKA BARIŠA, DARKO KOMŠO, NADIA DUNATO PEJNOVIĆ, IVOR KARAVANIĆ
Vergotinova pećina: rezultati izravnog radiokarbonskog datiranja ljudskih ostataka i revizije litičkog materijala
LUKA BARIŠA, DARKO KOMŠO, NADIA DUNATO PEJNOVIĆ, IVOR KARAVANIĆ
Vergotinova Pećina: results of direct radiocarbon dating of human remains and revision of lithic material

43
MATIJA BRLEK
Detektiranje centralnih naselja vinkovačke kulture u međuriječju Save, Drave i Dunava putem metoda mrežne analize
MATIJA BRLEK
Detection of central settlements of the Vinkovci culture in the Sava, Drava, and Danube interfluve using network analysis methods

79
SAŠA KOVAČEVIĆ
Nova arheološka istraživanja halštatskog razdoblja u Martijancu i okolici
SAŠA KOVAČEVIĆ
New archaeological research on the Hallstatt period in Martijanec and its surroundings

125
IGOR BORZIĆ
Posude Aleksandrijske grupe keramike tipa Gnathia iz nekropole gradinskog naselja Kopila (o. Korčula, Hrvatska)
IGOR BORZIĆ
Vessels of the Alexandria group of Gnathia ware from the necropolis of the hillfort settlement of Kopila (Korčula Island, Croatia)

153
PETRA PETKOVIĆ, SARA ESSERT, MLADEN PEŠIĆ
Arheobotanička analiza antičke luke Barbir (Sukošan) u Hrvatskoj
PETRA PETKOVIĆ, SARA ESSERT, MLADEN PEŠIĆ
Archaeobotanical research at the Roman-age harbour of Barbir (Sukošan) in Croatia

171 MIHAJLO N. DŽAMTOVSKI
STEFAN D. NOVAKOVIĆ
NATALIJA Z. BATOĆANIN
Two Roman-period sarcophagi from the Kosmaj Mountain area in Serbia: The Pavlovac Monastery and Stojnik/Zoroljin

MIHAJLO N. DŽAMTOVSKI
STEFAN D. NOVAKOVIĆ
NATALIJA Z. BATOĆANIN
Dva rimskodobna sarkofaga sa područja planine Kosmaj u Srbiji: Manastir Pavlovac i Stojnik/Zoroljin

Prikazi

Book reviews

205 DOMAGOJ BUŽANIĆ
Nova saznanja kroz najnovije rezultate analize ostataka rimske vojne opreme u političkom središtu provincije Dalmacije
S. Ivčević, *Rimska vojna oprema iz doba principata u međuriječju Krke i Cetine*, Katalozi i monografije 7, Arheološki muzej u Splitu, Split, 2024.

DOMAGOJ BUŽANIĆ
New insights from the latest analysis of the remains of Roman military equipment in the political centre of the Province of Dalmatia
S. Ivčević, *Roman Military Equipment of the Principate Era between the Krka and Cetina Rivers*, Catalogues and Monographs 7, Archaeological Museum in Split, Split, 2024

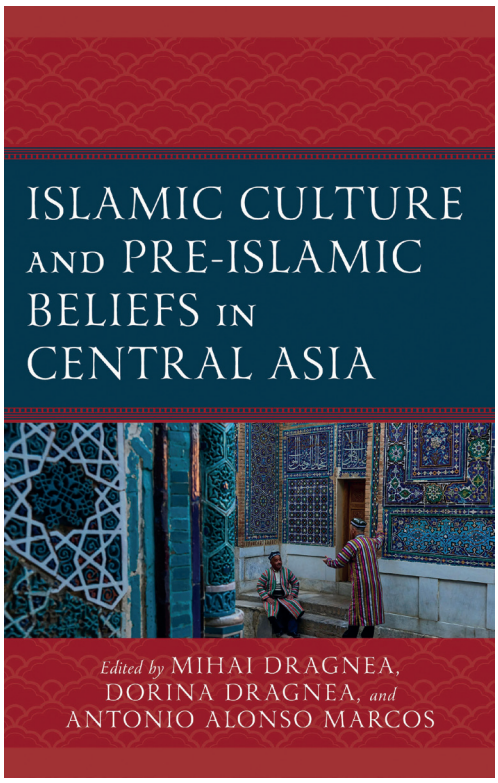
215 KATARINA BOTIĆ
***Islamic Culture and Pre-Islamic Beliefs in Central Asia*, Dragnea M., Dragnea D., Marcos A. A. (eds.), Lexinton Books, Lanham (MA) — London, 2024, 297 str.**

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Islamic Culture and Pre-Islamic Beliefs in Central Asia, Dragnea M., Dragnea D., Marcos A. A. (eds.), Lexinton Books, Lanham (MA) — London, 2024, 297 p.

225 **Upute autorima**

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ISLAMIC CULTURE AND PRE-ISLAMIC BELIEFS IN CENTRAL ASIA, DRAGNEA M., DRAGNEA D., MARCOS A. A. (EDS.), LEXINTON BOOKS, LANHAM (MA) – LONDON, 2024, 298 STR. / P.



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Urednička knjiga pod naslovom *Islamic Culture and Pre-Islamic Beliefs in Central Asia* (urednici: Mihai Dragnea, Dorina Dragnea i Antonio Alonso Marcos), objavljena 2024. godine, nastala je s ciljem promoviranja kulture srednje Azije među balkanskim znanstvenicima „povećanjem znanstvene i obrazovne suradnje privatnih i javnih institucija i organizacija na Balkanu i onih u Uzbekistanu, Kazahstanu,

Editorial book titled *Islamic Culture and Pre-Islamic Beliefs in Central Asia* (editors: Mihai Dragnea, Dorina Dragnea and Antonio Alonso Marcos), published in 2024, was created with the aim of promoting Central Asian culture among Balkan scholars "to increase scientific and educational collaborations between the public and private institutions and organizations in the Balkans, and those of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan" (Acknowledgements, VII). This project was initiated in 2022 by the Balkan History Association based in Bucharest (Romania). The book, in eleven detailed chapters, discusses various topics across multiple scientific disciplines, using a multi-method approach.

The goal of the project was to gain a detailed insight into the events in the region east of the Caspian Sea, namely in parts of present-day Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This is a fertile plain that stretches east to the Hindu Kush mountain range, south to the Persian Gulf, and northwest to the Aral Sea. Historically, these are the areas of expansion of the civilizations of Bactria and Sogdiana, between the Oxus (Amu-Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr-Darya) rivers, and due to their importance, they were the target of conquest by various peoples and empires. These civilizations left a strong influence on later beliefs and religions, up to the present day, which is precisely the focus of this book.

In the Introduction, titled *Introduction: The Religious Landscapes of Central Asia throughout*

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Open Access Ovaj rad dijeli se prema odredbama i uvjetima licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), koja dopušta neograničenu ponovnu upotrebu, dijeljenje i reprodukciju u bilo kojem mediju, pod uvjetom da je izvorno djelo ispravno citirano.

Kirgistanu, Turkmenistanu i Tadžikistanu" (Zahvale, VII). Ovaj projekt pokrenut je 2022. godine na inicijativu Balkan History Association sa sjedištem u Bukureštu (Rumunjska). Knjiga u jedanaest detaljno razrađenih poglavlja razmatra različite teme kroz više znanstvenih disciplina, koristeći multimetodološki pristup.

Cilj projekta bio je dobiti detaljan uvid u događanja u regiji istočno od Kaspijskog jezera, odnosno u pojedinim prostorima današnjih Uzbekistana, Turkmenistana, Kazahstana, Kirgistana i Tadžikistana. Riječ je o plodnoj nizini koja se proteže istočno do planinskog masiva Hindukuš i južno do Perzijskog zaljeva, a sjeverozapadno do Aralskog jezera. Povijesno gledano, to su područja rasprostiranja civilizacija Bakrtije i Sogdijane, između rijeka Oxus (Amu-Darja) i Jaxartes (Sir-Darja), a zbog svoje važnosti, bila su meta osvajanja raznih naroda i carstava. Ove su civilizacije ostavile jak utjecaj na kasnija vjerovanja i religije, sve do danas, što je upravo fokus ove knjige.

U Uvodu, naslova *Introduction: The Religious Landscapes of Central Asia throughout History* (Dragnea et al., IX–XXXVI), urednici detaljno opisuju pregled povijesnih zbivanja, uključujući prikaz povijesno uvjetovanog svojevrsnog religijskog sinkretizma i političko-religijsku spregu 20. stoljeća, većim dijelom iza Željezne zavjese. Dopunjen bilješkama i opsežnim popisom literature, uvodni dio knjige nužan je za razumijevanje ciljeva i svrhe pripreme ove publikacije, te strukture samih poglavlja. Ukratko:

> **„(...) u ovoj publikaciji, religija se ne razmatra s duhovnog gledišta, već iz materijalističke perspektive, *id est*, kulturnih ishoda (tradicije, nošnji, propisanih/zabranjenih ponašanja) koje su proizvele različite religije, načina i različitih sredstava[81] putem kojih ih je politička moć koristila, društvenih pravila koja su uspostavili itd." (Uvod, XXII–XXIII)**

Iako je primarni fokus ove knjige moderno doba i političke transformacije koje su utjecale na pojavu nacionalnih i vjerskih identiteta, najvećim dijelom tijekom 20. stoljeća, sadržajno ona obuhvaća povijesni pregled i arheološke potvrde zajednica i vjerovanja u prošlosti koja se još uvijek mogu nazrijeti u specifičnostima islamskog svijeta srednje Azije. Time pruža koristan uvid u duboke korijene modernog

History (Dragnea et al., IX–XXXVI), the editors provide a detailed overview of historical events, including a depiction of historically conditioned religious syncretism of a sort, and the political-religious nexus of the 20th century, largely behind the Iron Curtain. Complemented by notes and an extensive bibliography, the introductory section of the book is essential for understanding the goals and purposes of the preparation of this publication, as well as the structure of the chapters themselves. In short:

> "(...) in this volume, religion is considered not from a spiritual point of view, but from a materialistic perspective, *id est,* the cultural outcomes—traditions, costumes, behaviors proscribed/prescribed—produced by the different religions, the way the political power through various means[81] used them, the social rules established by them, etc." (Introduction, XXII–XXIII)

Although the primary focus of this book is the modern era and the political transformations that influenced the emergence of national and religious identities, mostly during the 20th century, its content includes a historical overview and archaeological confirmation of past communities and beliefs that can still be discerned in the specifics of the Islamic world of Central Asia. It thus provides a useful insight into the deep roots of modern times, without which it is difficult to understand the culture, language, religion and social events in this part of Asia, and it explains in more detail the phenomenon of the Islamic religion in the non-Arab region, its specificities with regard to cultural heritage and its role in creating intercultural and social connections.

After the introduction, the book is divided into five thematic sections: I Soviet religious legislation, II Political Islam and Islamic social and cultural reformation, III Pre-Islamic and early Islamic material culture, IV Sacred spaces and religious mobility, V Language and ethnic identity. The sections do not follow a chronological order of events; instead, they are grounded in a modern political framework, which is then supplemented and explained through historical events, material cultural heritage (movable and immovable archaeological finds), and intangible cultural heritage, including language, traditions, and identities.

vremena bez kojih je kulturu, jezik, religiju i društvena događanja u ovom dijelu Azije teško razumijeti, odnosno, detaljnije objašnjava fenomen islamske religije u nearapskoj regiji, njegove posebnosti s obzirom na kulturno nasljeđe te ulogu u stvaranju međukulturalnih i društvenih veza.

Nakon Uvoda, knjiga je podijeljena u pet tematskih cjelina: I. Sovjetsko vjersko zakonodavstvo, II. Politički islam te islamska društvena i kulturna reformacija, III. Predislamska i ranoislamska materijalna kultura, IV. Sveti prostori i vjerska mobilnost, V. Jezik i etnički identitet. Cjeline ne slijede zbivanja kronološkim redom već im je polazište suvremeni politički okvir koji je zatim dopunjen i objašnjen povijesnim zbivanjima, ostacima materijalne kulturne baštine (pokretnim i nepokretnim arheološkim ostacima) te nematerijalnom kulturnom baštinom koja uključuje jezik, tradicije i identitete.

Prva tematska cjelina obuhvaća tri poglavlja (1. – 3.). U prvom poglavlju *Communist Atheism Overrides Islam: The Soviet Movement for Religious Control in Central Asia (1930s–1960s)*, autor Rui Kai Xue opisuje povijesna zbivanja i uvođenje sovjetskih mjera kontrole religijskog života u vrijeme Staljinove vlasti, odnosno aktivne politike ukidanja vjerskih običaja i progon vjerskih vođa, te naknadni tolerantniji pristup religiji koji je započeo s Hruščovom, čime je islam doživio povratak iz ilegale.

U drugom poglavlju *Interpretation of the "Soviet Past" in Historical Policy: Newly Independent States of Central Asia*, autor Viachaslau Menkouski, navodeći povijesni kontinuitet kao dio političkog diskursa novonastalih neovisnih država srednje Azije, raspravlja o interpretaciji „sovjetske prošlosti" u povijesnim politikama ovih država. Sliku „sovjetske prošlosti", oblikovanu unutar složene strukture različitih razina povijesnog pamćenja, predvođene onima koje oblikuju „diskursi moći", autor dopunjuje stavom da je sovjetski odnos prema religiji dio kolektivnog pamćenja.

Autorica Shambhavi Thite u trećem poglavlju *Impact of Communal Identity on the Notion of States in Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan* opisuje sukob identiteta zajednica Kirgistana i Uzbekistana sa sovjetskom državom, koja je kroz pokušaj nametanja sovjetskog identiteta, uz suzbijanje tradicija, jezika i vjerskih običaja,

The first thematic section comprises three chapters (1–3). In the first chapter *Communist Atheism Overrides Islam: The Soviet Movement for Religious Control in Central Asia (1930s–1960s)*, the author Rui Kai Xue describes the historical events and the introduction of Soviet measures to control religious life during Stalin's rule, i.e., the active policy of abolishing religious practices, the persecution of religious leaders, and the subsequent more tolerant approach to religion that began with Khrushchev, which saw Islam return from illegality.

In the second chapter *Interpretation of the "Soviet Past" in Historical Policy: Newly Independent States of Central Asia,* the author Viachaslau Menkouski, citing historical continuity as part of the political discourse of the newly independent Central Asian states, discusses the interpretation of the "Soviet past" within the historical policies of these states. The author complements the image of the "Soviet past", shaped within a complex structure of various levels of historical memory, led by those formed by "discourses of power", with the view that the Soviet attitude toward religion is part of collective memory.

In the third chapter *Impact of Communal Identity on the Notion of States in Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan,* the author Shambhavi Thite describes the conflict between the identities of the communities of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and the Soviet state. The state's attempt to impose a Soviet identity, while suppressing traditions, languages, and religious practices, produced the opposite of the intended effect, as these communities' identities are deeply rooted in the past; yet the consequences of economic, cultural, and religious marginalization, as well as ethnic conflicts, are still felt today.

The second thematic section comprises two chapters (4 and 5). The author Antonio Alonso Marcos in the fourth chapter *Hizb ut Tahrir (HT) in Central Asia since 2000: A Political Party, a Terrorist Group or a Social Movement?* discusses the issue of religious freedom within the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. Although the prevailing opinion is that religious freedom is not allowed, different religions are to some extent present in society and have their roles, both public and private. The author also explains the problem of radicalization of certain groups with cultural differences – while tolerance is strength in the Western world, it is considered a weakness in

polučila suprotan efekt od očekivanog jer su identiteti ovih zajednica duboko ukorijenjeni u prošlosti, ali se posljedice ekonomskog, kulturnog i religijskog marginaliziranja, te etničkih sukoba osjećaju i danas.

Druga tematska cjelina obuhvaća dva poglavlja (4. i 5.). Autor Antonio Alonso Marcos u četvrtom poglavlju *Hizb ut Tahrir (HT) in Central Asia since 2000: A Political Party, a Terrorist Group or a Social Movement?* raspravlja o pitanju vjerskih sloboda unutar autoritarnih režima srednje Azije. Iako prevladava mišljenje da vjerske slobode nisu dozvoljene, različite vjere u nekoj mjeri jesu prisutne u društvu i imaju svoje uloge, kako javne, tako i privatne. Problem radikalizacije pojedinih skupina autor također objašnjava kulturološkim razlikama – dok je u Zapadnom svijetu tolerancija snaga, ona se u Aziji smatra slabošću. Stoga je pitanje autoritarnih režima i radikalnih skupina znatno složenije nego što na prvi pogled izgleda.

Peto poglavlje *Islam in Central Asia: Where Is Jadidism Today, and Is Neo-Salafism the New Jadidism?* posvećeno je razmatranju povijesnog nasljeđa jadadizma, jednog od islamskih reformskih pokreta s početka 20. stoljeća usmjerenog protiv ruske carske vlasti. Autor Dareg Zabarah-Chulak razmatra njegove osebujnosti, isprepeletnosti s drugim pokretima i položaj unutar suvremenih etno-religijskih diskursa središnje Azije i šire.

Treća tematska cjelina obuhvaća dva poglavlja (6. i 7.) koja su posvećena predislamskim i ranoislamskim ostacima materijalne kulture. Shoira Nurmukhamedova i Feruzjon Subkhonov u šestom poglavlju *Ancient Religions and Beliefs: Pre-Islamic Cult Architecture of the Ancient States of Central Asia* razmatraju arhitekturu od bakrenog doba do pojave islama, s posebnim fokusom na hramove povezane s kultovima vatre, vode i sunca. Naglašavaju složenost vjerovanja i njihov utjecaj na materijalnu baštinu svih razdoblja, te sinkretizam u kasnijim razdobljima koji je bio odgovor nomadskih zajednica na promjene vladajućih elita u prošlosti, prije pojava monoteističkih religija i carstava. Analizom arheoloških ostataka objašnjavaju kontinuitet tradicija mjesta i vjerovanja kroz prošlost.

Sedmo poglavlje *Heads or Altars: An Analysis of Religious Culture in Early Islamic Numismatics* posvećeno je numizmatičkim nalazima. Autor

Asia. Therefore, the issue of authoritarian regimes and radical groups is much more complex than it appears at first glance.

The fifth chapter *Islam in Central Asia: Where Is Jadidism Today, and Is Neo-Salafism the New Jadidism?* is dedicated to examining the historical legacy of Jadidism, one of the early 20th-century Islamic reformist movements directed against Russian imperial rule. The author, Dareg Zabarah-Chulak, explores its distinctive features, its interconnections with other movements, and its position within contemporary ethno-religious discourses in Central Asia and beyond.

The third thematic section comprises two chapters (6 and 7) dedicated to pre-Islamic and early Islamic remains of material culture. Shoira Nurmukhamedova and Feruzjon Subkhonov, in the sixth chapter *Ancient Religions and Beliefs: Pre-Islamic Cult Architecture of the Ancient States of Central Asia* examine architecture from the Copper Age to the advent of Islam, focusing particularly on temples associated with fire, water, and sun cults. They highlight the complexity of these beliefs and their impact on the material heritage of all periods, as well as the syncretism of later periods, a response by nomadic communities to the change of ruling elites that characterized the history preceding the rise of monotheistic religions and empires. Through the analysis of archaeological remains, they explain the continuity of site-specific traditions and beliefs throughout the past.

The seventh chapter *Heads or Altars: An Analysis of Religious Culture in Early Islamic Numismatics* is dedicated to numismatic finds. The author Jonathan Ouellet re-examines the prevailing view regarding the uniformity of the early Islamic Empire across the territory of the former Sasanian Empire, analysing the coinage of both empires and comparing it with that of Byzantium. The results point to a heterogeneous system of coin circulation, with coins serving as "repositories of cultural memory and political aspirations" (meanings they retain to this day), sometimes also carrying a less dominant religious meaning, as well as to a continuity in minting and administrative practices between the Byzantine and Persian Empires, and the early Caliphate; in other words, they highlight slow transformative processes rather than an abrupt break in cultural and ethnic traditions.

The fourth thematic section comprises two chapters (8 and 9) dedicated to holy sites and

Jonathan Ouellet preispituje uvriježeno mišljenje o ujednačenosti ranoislamskog Carstva na prostoru nekadašnjeg Sasanidskog, analizirajući kovani novac obaju carstava i uspoređujući ga s Bizantskim. Rezultati ukazuju na heterogenost sustava optjecaja kovanica koje su služile kao „riznice kulturnog sjećanja i političkih težnji" (značenja koja su zadržale do danas), ponekad noseći i manje dominantno religijsko značenje, ali i na kontinuitet kovanja novca i administrativnih praksi između Bizantskog i Perzijskog Carstva te ranog kalifata, odnosno, na spore transformativne procese umjesto naglog prekida u kulturnim i etničkim tradicijama.

Četvrta tematska cjelina sadrži dva poglavlja (8. i 9.) posvećena svetim mjestima i hodočašćim u Uzbekistanu. U osmom poglavlju *Islamic Shrines and Pilgrimage in Samarkand (1992–2022)*, autor Azim Malikov prikazuje islamska sveta mjesta i hodočasničke prakse u Samarkandu kao pokušaj legitimizacije predsjedničke vlasti, odnosno kao politički instrument nakon uspostave neovisnosti. Razmatra transformacijski proces nakon političkih promjena početkom 1990-tih i značenje koje svetišta danas imaju za lokalne zajednice: za jedne svetišta predstavljaju povijesno naslijeđe, dok su za druge izraz islamskog religijskog identiteta.

Autori Fahri Türk i Dolunay Yusuf Baltürk u devetom poglavlju *Sacred Sites in the Period of Religious Liberalization in Uzbekistan: The Case of the Seven Pirs Shrines in Bukhara* također naglašavaju politički pritisak na islamizaciju svetišta i vjerski život općenito u svrhu stvaranja nacionalnog identiteta, navodeći da su predislamska vjerovanja u religijskim praksama svetišta u Bukari još prisutna, ali da su zbog političkog pritiska u opadanju i to bez obzira na supanj liberalizacije nakon 2016. godine.

Peta i posljednja tematska cjelina također sadrži dva poglavlja (10. i 11.), u kojima autorice razmatraju vjerovanja i identitete nomadskih turkijskih naroda srednje Azije. U desetom poglavlju *The Semantic Analysis of Mythological Conceptual Units in Religious Discourse: A Case Study of the Karakalpak Language*, autorica Gulzira Kdirbaeva različitim metodama analizira semantičku složenost mitoloških konceptualnih jedinica unutar religijskog diskursa naroda Karakalpak, njihovo značenje i simbolizam

pilgrimages in Uzbekistan. In the eight chapter *Islamic Shrines and Pilgrimage in Samarkand (1992–2022),* the author Azim Malikov examines Islamic holy sites and pilgrimage practices in Samarkand as an attempt to legitimize presidential authority, or rather, as a political instrument following the establishment of independence. The author explores the process of transformation following the political changes of the early 1990s and the significance these shrines hold for local communities today: for some, they represent a historical legacy, while for others, they are an expression of Islamic religious identity.

The authors Fahri Türk and Dolunay Yusuf Baltürk, in the ninth chapter *Sacred Sites in the Period of Religious Liberalization in Uzbekistan: The Case of the Seven Pirs Shrines in Bukhara* also highlight the political pressure to Islamize shrines and religious life in general in order to forge a national identity, noting that pre-Islamic beliefs persist in the religious practices at the Bukara shrine but are declining due to political pressure, regardless of the degree of liberalization following 2016.

The fifth and final thematic section also comprises two chapters (10 and 11), in which the authors examine the beliefs and identities of the nomadic Turkic peoples of Central Asia. In the tenth chapter *The Semantic Analysis of Mythological Conceptual Units in Religious Discourse: A Case Study of the Karakalpak Language,* the author Gulzira Kdirbaeva employs various methods to analyse the semantic complexity of mythological conceptual units within the religious discourse of the Karakalpak people, as well as the meaning and symbolism of the language and rituals through which they define their spiritual identity. Through this analysis, the author identifies transformative processes within the religious discourse and observes that certain semantic aspects of mythological concepts have been forgotten and reshaped into new meanings, particularly in more recent times.

The final, eleventh chapter *Beliefs of the Semi-Nomadic Turkic-Speaking Ethnic Group in Iran, the Qashqais,* authored by Venera Mustafayeva, provides a detailed description of the Qashqai, a semi-nomadic Turkic group from southwestern Iran, covering their cultural practices and identity, including hypotheses regarding their origins, internal organization, way of life, and belief systems – traditional shamanism and the parallel development of beliefs within Islam.

jezika i rituala kojima definiraju svoj duhovni identitet. Putem ove analize, autorica identificira transformativne procese religijskog diskursa i uočava da su neki semantički aspekti mitoloških koncepata zaboravljeni i preoblikovani u nova značenja, posebno u novije doba.

Zadnje, jedanaesto poglavlje *Beliefs of the Semi-Nomadic Turkic-Speaking Ethnic Group in Iran, the Qashqais*, autorice Venere Mustafayeve, donosi detaljan opis Quasquais polunomadske turkijske grupe iz jugozapadnog Irana, uz opis kulturnih praksi i identiteta, uključujući hipotezu o njihovu podrijetlu, unutrašnju organizaciju grupe, način života i sustave vjerovanja – tradicijski šamanizam i usporedan razvoja vjerovanja unutar islama.

Posebnost ove knjige je njezina višeslojnost. Čitana iz perspektive društveno-političkih previranja modernog doba, ona pruža uvid u kompleksnost pitanja odnosa religije (u ovom slučaju islamske) i političkih elita, odnosno važnosti razdvajanja religije od njezine političke instrumentalizacije (Uvod, XXI). Svaka religija u rukama političkih elita potencijalno predstavlja instrument radikalizacije, sukoba i ograničavanja vjerskih sloboda, što je česta percepcija islama u neislamskim dijelovima svijeta, no često ne odgovara u potpunosti stvarnom stanju. Kompleksnost ove teme zahtijeva znatno dublje razumijevanje kulturno-povijesnih zbivanja u pojedinim regijama te društvenih transformacijskih procesa modernog doba u svrhu stvaranja pojedinih nacionalnih identiteta kako bi se mogla razumijeti.

Kao i svaka religija, islamska ima i duhovnu dimenziju, uz kulturnu i antropološku (Uvod, XXI–XXII). Čitana iz ove perspektive, knjiga daje uvid u specifičnosti vjerskog sinkretizma ovih prostora – islamska vjerska tradicija danas se miješa sa starim turkijskim tradicijama. Turkijski nomadski narodi, susrećući se s mističnom stranom islama u obliku sufijskog učenja, lako su asimilirali ovaj identitet zbog njegove sličnosti s predislamskim šamanskim vjerovanjima (Uvod, XII).

Čitanjem iz treće, povijesno-antropološke perspektive (Uvod, XXII), dobiva se uvid u povijesnu slojevitost religija i civilizacija ovog prostora. Služeći kao centar nekoliko značajnih civilizacija koje su za sobom ostavile impresivne materijalne ostatke, vjerovanja, znanja, ritualne i ceremonijalne prakse, ovaj geografski prostor također je služio kao prostor dugotrajnog očuvanja jezika i tradicija, od predislamskih do modernih vremena.

A distinctive feature of this book is its multi-layered nature. Viewed through the lens of the socio-political upheavals of the modern era, it offers insight into the complexities surrounding the relationship between religion (in this case, Islam) and political elites, i.e., the importance of separating religion from its political instrumentalization (Introduction, XXI). In the hands of political elites, any religion is a potential instrument for radicalization, conflict, and the restriction of religious freedoms, a perception often held regarding Islam in non-Islamic parts of the world, though it frequently fails to fully reflect reality. Understanding complexity of this subject requires a much deeper insight into the cultural and historical developments of specific regions, as well as the processes of social transformation in the modern era that shaped various national identities.

Like any religion, Islam possesses a spiritual dimension alongside its cultural and anthropological aspects (Introduction, XXI–XXII). Viewed from this perspective, the book offers insight into the specific nature of religious syncretism in this region, where the Islamic religious tradition blends with ancient Turkic traditions. Upon encountering the mystical side of Islam through Sufi teachings, Turkic nomadic peoples readily assimilated this identity due to its resemblance to pre-Islamic shamanic beliefs (Introduction, XII).

Reading from a third, historical-anthropological perspective (Introduction, XXII) offers insight into the historical layering of the religions and civilizations of this region. Serving as a centre for several significant civilizations that left behind impressive material remains, beliefs, knowledge, ritual and ceremonial practices, this geographical region also served as a space for the long-term preservation of languages and traditions, spanning from pre-Islamic to modern times.

The editor's desire to connect the Central Asian region with the geographical region of South-Eastern Europe, that is, the Balkans, was realized to a lesser extent. However, in the Balkans, unlike the region of Central Asia that is in the focus of this book, the heterogeneity of historical and cultural heritage (particularly regarding events following World War II) and the modern political situation following the transformations of the early 1990s, or rather, the situation in the "post-socialist Balkan

Želja urednikā da se srednjoazijski prostor poveže s geografskim prostorom jugoistočne Europe, odnosno Balkana, u manjoj mjeri je ostvarena. Međutim, na Balkanu, za razliku od prostora središnje Azije koji je u fokusu ove knjige, heterogenost povijesnog i kulturnog nasljeđa, posebno vezanog uz događanja nakon II svjetskog rata, te moderna politička situacija nakon transformacija početkom 1990-tih, odnosno situacija u „post-socijalisičkim balkanskim državama" (Uvod, XXIV), ipak se znatno razlikuju. Osim ovih razlika, treba uzeti u obzir i činjenicu da je prostor Balkana na razmeđi više religija, kultura i s njima povezanih identiteta i sustava vrijednosti, te da svoja raznolika društvena i kulturna nasljeđa duguje upravo toj činjenici. Jedina poveznica koja je danas u većoj mjeri prisutna, a naglašena je i u knjizi, jest jačanje instrumentalizacije vjere u rukama političkih elita.

Na kraju, no ne manje značajno, kroz sadržaj knjige provlači se važnost materijalnih dokaza prošlosti kao instrumenta legalizacije kulturno-povijesnih identiteta novih neovisnih država središnje Azije. Bilo da je riječ o jakoj prisutnosti ranokršćanskih zajednica ili još starijim religijskim praksama,[1] Sasanidskom Carstvu ili ranoislamskom Kalifatu,[2] materijalna baština, posebno arheološka nepokretna i pokretna građa, igra ključnu ulogu u razumijevanju identiteta i transformativnih društvenih procesa te je njihova najizravnija potvrda. Time arheologija stvara važnu vremensko-prostornu poveznicu s kulturnim, religijskim i jezičnim nasljeđem.

1 Nestorijanizam je kao oblik kršćanstva službeno prihvaćen u Perziji na sinodi krajem 5. stoljeća, a proširio se do Kine upravo putem središnje Azije (Uvod, XV). U Samarkandu je bio snažno prisutan između 10. i 13. stoljeća, a nestao je tek u 15. stoljeću tijekom progona (Uvod, XVII). U starom lučkim gradu Zayton (današnji Quanzhou, Fujian Provincija, južna Kina) pronađeni su arheološki dokazi o prisutnosti ranokršćanske zajednice nestorijanaca – riječ je o kasnijim nadgrobnim spomenicima s prikazom križa koji nosi par krilatih figura (ikonografski korijeni ovog prikaza sežu u helenističku i ranokršćansku tradiciju), a koji su bili kao spolije uzidani u gradski zid, srušen početkom 20. stoljeća, te su ikonografski slični ranijim fazama nestorijanske kulture u Kini iz razdoblja Yüan ere, odnosno dinastije Tang (618. – 907.) (Walker 2012: 189–190; Brown 2023: 21–23). Duga manihejska tradicija potvrđena je pronalaskom stotina ulomaka zdjela, korištenih u ritualnim obrocima, s identičnim natpisom koji spominje „Društvo učenja Svjetla", tj. „religije Svjetla" (Mingjiao hui), nazivom koji manihejci dobivaju u južnoj Kini u vrijeme dinastije Song (960. – 1279.); ulomci su pronađeni oko manihejskog svetišta Huabaio u blizini Quanzhou, podignutog 1148. godine (Walker 2012: 190). Prisutnost ovih zajednica toliko daleko u južnoj Kini povezuje se sa Sogdijancima (6. st. pr. Kr. – 10. st. po. Kr.), primjerice iz gradova kao što je Samarkand (Marakanda), koji su putovali kao trgovci, prevoditelji i diplomati šireći vjerske prakse manihejaca, zoroastrijaca i budista uzduž Puta svile (Uvod, X). Arheološki dokazi ne svode se samo na ove primjere (usp. Uvod, XVII–XVIII; Poglavlja 6 i 7).

2 Poglavlje 7 – posebna je važnost optjecaja novca u rekonstrukciji i praćenju sporih transformativnih procesa kulturnih i etničkih tradicija.

states" (Introduction, XXIV), are significantly different. In addition to these differences, one must also consider the fact that the Balkans lies at the dividing line of various religions, cultures, their associated identities and value systems, and that the region owes its diverse social and cultural heritage precisely to this fact. The common thread present to a significant degree today, and highlighted in the book, is the increasing instrumentalization of religion by political elites.

Finally, and no less significantly, the book highlights the importance of material evidence from the past as a means of legitimizing the cultural-historical identities of the newly independent states of Central Asia. Whether concerning the strong presence of early Christian communities or even older religious practices,[1] the Sasanian Empire or the Early Islamic Caliphate,[2] material heritage (particularly immovable and movable archaeological remains) plays a pivotal role in understanding identities and transformative social processes, serving as their most direct confirmation. In doing so, archaeology establishes a vital spatio-temporal link with cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage.

In conclusion, this book offers insight into the complexity of the cultural, religious, socio-political, and linguistic layers of Central Asia, their interaction, transformation, and

1 As a form of Christianity, Nestorianism was officially adopted in Persia at a synod in the late 5th century and spread to China precisely via Central Asia (Introduction, XV). It had a strong presence in Samarkand between the 10th and 13th centuries, disappearing only in the 15th century during a period of persecutions (Introduction, XVII). Archaeological evidence of an early Christian Nestorian community has been found in the ancient port city of Zayton (modern-day Quanzhou, Fujian Province, southern China); this evidence consists of later tombstones, featuring a cross borne by a pair of winged figures (the iconographic roots of this depiction trace back to the Hellenistic and early Christian traditions), that had been incorporated as spolia into the city wall (demolished in the early 20th century) and are iconographically similar to earlier phases of Nestorian culture in China dating to the Yuan era, i.e., the Tang Dynasty (618–907) (Walker 2012: 189–190). A long-standing Manichaean tradition is confirmed by the discovery of hundreds of bowl fragments, used in ritual meals, bearing an identical inscription mentioning the "Society of the Teaching of Light", or the "Religion of Light" (*Mingjiao hui),* a name bestowed upon Manichaeans in southern China during the Song Dynasty (960–1279); these fragments were found near the Manichaean shrine of Huabiao, erected in 1148 near Quanzhou (Walker 2012: 190). The presence of these communities this far south in China is linked to the Sogdians (6th century BC – 10th century AD), originating, for instance, from cities such as Samarkand (Marakanda), who travelled as merchants, translators, and diplomats, spreading the religious practices of Manichaeans, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists along the Silk Road (Introduction, X). The archaeological evidence is not limited to these examples (cf. Introduction, XVII–XVIII; Chapters 6 and 7).

2 Chapter 7 – the circulation of money is of particular importance in the reconstruction and monitoring of slow transformative processes within cultural and ethnic traditions.

Zaključno, ova knjiga pruža uvid u kompleksnost kulturnih, religijskih, društveno-političkih i lingvističkih slojeva središnje Azije, njihovu interakciju, transformaciju i asimilaciju kroz vrijeme i njihove tragove u modernom svijetu. Zbog specifičnosti nomadskog načina života, veća carstva u prošlosti nisu mogla nametnuti monoteističku državnu religiju, osim u pojedinim većim trgovačkim središtima koja su postala ishodišta kasnijeg Puta svile (Uvod, XXIV), a to se u nekoj mjeri očituje i danas. Autori pojedinih poglavlja multidisiplinarnim pristupom istražuju različite teme, od antičkog, preko predislamskog, islamskog i sovjetskog vremena do značenja islamske religije danas, pružajući rijedak uvid u regiju koja je zapadnim istraživačima uglavnom nepoznata. Značenje i važnost arheoloških ostataka materijalne kulture kao potvrde povijesnih previranja nisu u glavnom fokusu, no ova tema je dovoljno opširna za zasebnu publikaciju. Knjiga svakako daje originalan doprinos razumijevanju vjerskog života, povijesnih, političkih i društvenih pitanja, ne samo u geografskom prostoru središnje Azije nego i znatno šire, a kao rezultat napora više znanstvenih disciplina, ima potencijala postati referentno djelo kako za znanstvenike, tako i za širu javnost.

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assimilation over time, as well as their traces in the modern world. Due to the specific nature of the nomadic lifestyle, large empires in the past were unable to impose a monotheistic state religion, except in certain major trading centres that became starting points for the later Silk Road (Introduction, XXIV), and this is still evident to some extent today. The authors of the individual chapters employ a multidisciplinary approach to explore various themes, ranging from the ancient, pre-Islamic, Islamic, and Soviet periods to the significance of the Islamic religion today, offering rare insight into a region largely unknown to Western researchers. The meaning and importance of archaeological remains of material culture as confirmation of historical turmoil is not in the main focus, but this topic is extensive enough for another publication. The book certainly makes an original contribution to the understanding of religious life and of historical, political, and social issues, not only within the geographical region of Central Asia but also far beyond it, and, as the product of efforts across multiple academic disciplines, it has the potential to become a reference work for both scholars and the general public.

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