Settling the past: Soviet oriental projects in Leningrad and Alma-Ata

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Chapter IV:  
The Soviet Oriental Archeology:  
‘Sedentarization of the Past’

“The archeology of Central Asia is developing as a historical discipline, appropriating the best traditions of Russian and Soviet Oriental studies.”

Aleksandr Bernshtam (1949)

4.1. Soviet Oriental Archeology

The pen of Orientalists was one of the most prominent tools in the hands of political elites. As we have seen, various groups of scientists participated in what I call Oriental projects. Some of them contributed to the formation of atheistic ideology and the transformation of religious life in the region. Others were involved in the grandiose program of creating histories, languages, and Central Asian nations. The participation of science in these processes had a complicated character; it included not only vulgar ideological works but also academic studies based on seemingly nonpolitical historical, philological and archeological approaches.

As research over the last twenty years has clearly demonstrated, also archeological practice has always been connected to state policy. Though there is much work done on archeological practice under repressive regimes and in political contexts in general, also in the Soviet case, there are few studies of the archeology – power connection in Central


Asia, to say nothing about the Kazakhstani case which has so far been completely ignored in this debate. In the following, I will investigate how the image of nomadic societies evolved during the unfolding of archeological investigations in the Soviet republic of Kazakhstan.

The phenomenon of nomadic society, its statehood, class structure and socio-economic characteristics were the main subjects of debates in Kazakh Oriental Studies during the whole Soviet epoch. In this context specialists debated the history of Central Asia from different perspectives. Soviet archeological expeditions were characterized by their interdisciplinary character (*kompleksnost'*), i.e. they united specialists from different scientific areas who worked on various aspects of the human past at the same sites. It was very common to invite biologists, anthropologists, soil scientists to take part in archeological expeditions. On the basis of the archeological finds and ancient inscriptions and miniatures, archeologists provided narratives of national history.

The origins of Central Asian Oriental archeology can be traced back to Leningrad. Vadim M. Masson (1929-2010), a well-known Soviet archeologist and son of the even more eminent Soviet archeologist Mikhail E. Masson (1897-1986), wrote that the Leningrad school of Oriental archeology was connected to the scientific traditions of Vasilii Bartol’d, and that Oriental archeology was set up by Orientalists such as Aleksandr Jakubovskii, Aleksandr Bernshtam, and Mikhail D’iakonov. Oriental archeology as a scientific discipline was born in the State Academy of the History of Material Culture (*Gosudarstvennaia akademiiia istorii material’noi kul’tury*, GAIMK) in the 1920s. This Academy initiated active expedition work in Central Asia; its field work blossomed especially in the 1930s. As Sergei Tolstov stated, before the Revolution “our knowledge about Central Asian archeology (except works on medieval Muslim architecture) was confined to

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717 This organization was previously called the Imperial Archeological Commission (1859-1917), then the Russian State Archeological Commission (RGAK, 1918-1919), the Russian Academy of History of Material Culture (RAIMK, 1918-1926), the State Academy of History of Material Culture (GAIMK, 1926-1937), the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (IIMK AN SSR, 1937-1945), the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (LO IIMK AN SSSR, 1945-1991), and finally again the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of Russia (IIMK RAN, 1991-present). On these organizational transformations in regard to the study of Central Asia and Caucasus see: V.A. Alekshin, “Sektor/otdel arkheologii Srednei/Tsentral’noi Azii,” 10-92.
accidental finds and primitive excavations by dilettantes.\textsuperscript{718} This changed profoundly in the 1930s.

In this chapter I would like to address the following questions. What was the connection between Central Asian archeology and the St. Petersburg / Leningrad tradition of classical Oriental Studies? What were the national and regional approaches of those who conducted fieldwork and of those who later on interpreted it? How was the 'settling of the past' legitimated in archeological terms and how was it connected to national politics in the Kazakh SSR? What was the fate of Islamic architecture and places of veneration under Soviet rule and how were the meanings of these monuments (especially of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawi’s mausoleum) redefined in the Soviet agenda?

These questions will be situated in the general pattern of how Central Asian archeological sources (in the broadest sense) and architectural monuments were studied and represented during Soviet times. It should be mentioned that I am far from reasoning that this pattern was set up by Soviet officials or academic bureaucrats at only one given point in time. Rather, the pattern was in development over the whole Soviet era, because interpretations of the significance of historical treasures were subject to significant change over time. The scheme that I propose here can be described as follows.

Each of the Central Asian Soviet republics received an individual archeological expedition (sometimes several, working in different provinces) conducted by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in close collaboration with local cadres (later these expeditions were taken over by local institutes). This process took place in the 1930s and the 1950s, when expeditions to Khwarezm, Southern Kazakhstan, Turkmenia and Tajikistan were established. Even though these expeditions were given names that reflected only the specific territory on which the work was conducted, their output can be interpreted also in national/republican or regional frameworks. In turn, each expedition concentrated its intellectual efforts, finances, and material forces on a particular archeological site; as a rule this was an ancient city or a system of cities. This city became a matter of national pride for the individual titular nations, shaping the national consciousness of the republic as a whole, since these sites came to be regarded as the places of origin for the respective people. In the best case the site demonstrated local history in as much depth as possible, displaying all significant steps of ethogenesis of a particular nation and, at the same time, allowing for region-

al, interethnic comparison and for creating national unity. At these archeological sites the institutes set up what is called ‘a basic site’, ‘a permanent camp’ (*stationary*); these camps were located in the vicinity of a shrine or another sacred place. How these shrines were interpreted as an architectural object and as part of national cultural heritage varied from republic to republic, but there were clear similarities in their interpretation.

The general pattern of Central Asian Oriental archeology thus consisted of three elements: archeological expedition – basic site – mausoleum. In the Kazakh case all elements of this scheme comprised the following places: first, the Kazakhstan archeological expedition (since 1947 the South Kazakhstan expedition and some others); second, the city of Otrar with the system of settlements on the Middle Sir Darya River; and third, the shrine of Khwāja Ḥmad Yasawī. The institutional, the archeological, and the architectural aspects — all of them being rather different symbols of national culture — constituted the discourse of Central Asian Oriental archeology, as a whole, and contributed to the turn of nomads into city-dwellers in the past as well as in the present. Needless to say, scholarly networks (personal rather than institutional) provided for the circulation of ideas among the specialists through conferences, correspondences, the common educational background (long- or short-term studies in Leningrad), and sometimes also through joint expeditions.

As in previous chapters, my focus will be on those medievalists who dedicated their lives to studying the history of Islamic Central Asia.

In my dissertation I follow the history of Oriental projects since their ‘birth’ until their end, so that very often we have to go back to the early Soviet period in order to detect the roots of concrete scientific enterprises. The pattern of archeological studies which I have described above shaped the architecture of this chapter: I will first address the general history of comprehensive academic expeditions in the region, then I will turn to the myth of the ‘Otrar catastrophe,’ and finally I will proceed to the fate of ʿAlībī’s shrine. The history of Soviet archeological expeditions in Kazakhstan (thus, the first step in this pattern) can be divided into chronological periods on the basis of changes in the methodology of research: 1) 1867-1918, comprising the Tsarist era as a period characterized by the general search for antiquities only; 2) the 1920s – 1936, as a period of transition to Marxist methodology, achieving the identification of the most interesting sites and regions; 3) from 1936 to the 1950s, witnessing the institutionalization of archeology in Kazakhstan and finalizing the preliminary identification of ancient sites; 4) the 1950s-80s, in which time
Kazakh archeology obtained its emancipation from Leningrad, with the excavation of large areas and specifically the Otrar campaign.\(^{719}\)

I am not alone in considering archeological and architectural sources in a strong interconnection, because “simultaneous and parallel investigation of architectural and archeological monuments by the same authors was one of the main characteristics in the study of Central Asian antiquities.”\(^{720}\)

4.2. Cultural History and the Study of Ethnicity in the Past

Over the last thirty years science-power relations in archeology have become an object of much interest in academic research. Special attention has been paid to the position of archeologists under totalitarian regimes, with fascist Germany as the best-researched case. In particular, the ideas and writings of German archeologist Gustaf Kossinna (1858-1931) became central in the study of the history of archeology in Germany. Kossina’s so-called settlement-archeological method formed the ground for nationalist interpretations of history. In his book *The Origin of Germany: On the Settlement-Archeological Method* (1911), Kossinna for the first time stated that “sharply defined archeological culture areas correspond at all times to the areas of particular peoples or tribes,”\(^{721}\) hence identifying a clear link between a modern nation with its territory and archeological culture, as a tool for tracing the historically known peoples to supposed origins.\(^{722}\)

The chronological and spatial systematization of archeological cultures was central to cultural history since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^{723}\) In the first half of

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the twentieth century the cultural history paradigm dominated the theories of archeological schools throughout the world. According to S. Jones, the main assumption of this paradigm was that:

“bounded uniform cultural entities correlate with particular peoples, ethnic groups, tribes and/or races. (...) It is assumed that culture is made up of a set of shared ideas or beliefs, which are maintained by regular interaction within the group, and the transmission of shared cultural norms to subsequent generations through the process of socialization, which, it is assumed, results in a continuous cultural tradition. (...) Bound-ed material culture complexes are assumed to be the material manifestation of past peoples, who shared a set of prescriptive learned norms of behavior (...) [A]s in the case of contemporary claims concerning the relationship between nations and cultures, the relationship between archeological cultures and past peoples is based on teleological reasoning in that culture is both representative of, and constitutive of, the [contemporary] nation or people concerned.”

The main problem encountered by scholars in this regard was that no expression of national consciousness can be found in artifacts. It is impossible to judge on the ethnic self-expression of peoples of the past. Only written sources contain data which might be interpreted in national terms. As the relics of material culture are silent about national attribution, they leave a broad space for interpretations by archeologists, who “may not be able to find a reflection of past ‘ethnic entities’ in the material record.”

It is also commonplace for national historical accounts to produce a myth of origin of a particular ethnic identity by tracing it back to a perceived Golden Age, to construct a continuous track of cultural development. In other words, the relationship of archeological practice and national politics is universal.

An attempt to overcome the empiricist German school of cultural history has been undertaken by British and American researchers in the 1960s-70s. This trend was strongly influenced by social anthropology and marked a departure from problems of ethnicity to-

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725 Ibid., 72.


wards broad socio-cultural issues, focusing on processional and functionalist analysis rather than on a descriptive chronological approach.

The case of Soviet and post-Soviet archeology has been studied extensively, but with little or no attention to Central Asian republics, though general trends were identified there as well. As S. Jones rightfully stated, “irrespective of whether or not explicit reference is made to past peoples or ethnic groups, the same basic paradigm which was used in Nazi Germany has also formed the rudimentary framework for archeological enquiry worldwide.” This statement also holds true for Soviet archeology, in spite of the Soviets anti-fascist and anti-bourgeois rhetoric. In the following I will argue that Central Asian Oriental archeology in its Kazakh branch fully remained within in the framework of ethnically colored descriptive cultural history.

4.3. Tsarist Archeology in Transition: Early Expeditions in Kazakhstan, 1867-1918

Orientalists very soon realized the substantial lack of knowledge about the ancient history of Central Asia, which was known prior the revolution mainly from written sources. Even for the medieval period it was not clear whether the reports of Arabic, Turkic, Persian, and Chinese authors correspond to archeological realities or not. Attempts to verify manuscript data on the ground were conducted in the second half of the 19th and in the early 20th century. Yet before the Bolshevik revolution the large Central Asian territories were poorly studied archeologically, and only few attempts were undertaken to investigate ancient cities and architecture. The excavations that were indeed carried out in different plac-

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729 S. Jones, The Archaeology of Ethnicity, 5.

730 S.P. Tolstov, Po del’tam Oksa i Iaksarta (Moscow, 1962).
es were generally of amateurish quality. Among the most prominent pioneering Central Asian archeologists were Petr I. Lerkh (1828-1884), Vasilii V. Radlov (1837-1918), Nikolai N. Pantusov (1849-1909), Aleksei Selivanov (1851-1915), Nikolai I. Veselovskii (1848-1918), Valentin A. Zhukovskii (1858-1918), Vasilii V. Bartol’d (who modestly claimed to be rather a ‘cabinet’ scholar than an archeologist and a number of other scholars. These first studies supplemented the history as it was known from manuscripts, mapping Central Asian settlements, collecting material findings, and in this way connecting the word and the object.

Was this prerevolutionary Central Asian archeology a colonial one, in the sense of using the colony as a source of cultural treasures for the metropolis? On the one hand, yes, the Tsarist-era archeology had indeed a colonial character, but not because of the low methodological level and the sheer hunt for ‘treasures’ but rather because the research trips were undertaken only on occasion, from time to time, by scholars from the metropolis, who used natives only as black-workers, and finally because findings were usually transported to the State Hermitage and not intended to be displayed to the indigenous population. This transfer of objects was even laid down in the statute of the Imperial Archeological Commission established by the Tsar Alexander II in 1859. However, Vera Tolz in-

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731 P.I. Lerkh, Arkheologicheskaia poezdka v Turkestanskii krai v 1867 godu (St. Petersburg, 1870).


735 For an overview of pre-revolutionary archeological excavations in Central Asia with very interesting photo-illustrations from the Photographic Archive of the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences (St. Petersburg) see: G.V. Dluzhnevskaia, L.B. Kircho, “Imperatorskaia arkheologicheskaia komissia i izuchenie drevnostei Srednej Azii,” 783-812.

736 Imperatorskaia arkheologicheskaia komissia (1859-1917): K 150-letiiu so dnia osnovaniia, 11.
sisted that already in the 1870s Russian archeologists tried to achieve local preservation of all discoveries, because of a lack of money for bringing everything to St. Petersburg but also to promote a ‘native homeland’ (rodina), for strengthening a pan-national identity of Russia. Moreover, this circumstance was actively used by Russian Orientalists to show their superiority over ‘vandal’ European counterparts who sought only to enrich their museums. Nevertheless, in Central Asia this practice did not find wide spread until the first Soviet complex expeditions (first Imperial museums were mainly located in Tashkent). On the other hand, the Russian colonial society in Central Asia, especially in Tashkent, conducted the first steps toward the institutionalization of archeological science in the region.

The establishment of the Turkestan Circle of Amateurs of Archeology (Turkestanskii kruzhok liubitelei arkheologii, 1895-1917) in Tashkent resulted from the cooperation between Bartol’d and local scholars, Nikolai Ostroumov (1846-1930) being the most prominent among them. The Society focused on the study of the role of the Aryan sedentary population, regarding it as the only civilized in the region. The Imperial Archeological Commission had a similar vision. By request of the Commission, Nikolai Veselovskii excavated the site of Afrasiyab near Samarkand over several months in 1885, and Valentin Zhukovskii spent a season on the ruins of ancient Marw in 1890. Both archeological sites were widely known centers of Iranian culture. Interestingly, Bartol’d’s colleague, Ol’denburg, “began presenting European archeological practices as a manifestation of Western colonialism in the ‘East’ and generally criticized Western scholarship for plunder-


739 B.V. Lunin, Sredniaia Azia v nauchnom nasledii otechestvennogo sostokovedeniia (Tashkent, 1979), 44-51.

ing Oriental societies for their cultural treasures.”\(^{741}\) Before the revolution, however, also Russian archeology was largely preoccupied with plundering.

With the creation of the Academy of History of Material Culture in 1919 a special Middle Asian Archeological Office (*Razriad arkheologii Srednei Azii*) was established there. Bartol’d headed this office and he recommended to continue the work on Marw because Marw was “the only place in Central Asia well-known from historical accounts,”\(^ {742}\) as well as on Afrasiyab and Khiva. In this context Bartol’d raised the question whether the Iranians were the original inhabitants of Central Asia or whether they immigrated from elsewhere. He also underlined that “the exaggerated perception of the cultural achievements of the Aryans and of the barbarism of the Turks inevitably influenced the understanding of Russia’s scholarly tasks in Turkestan.”\(^ {743}\) However, the Civil War (1919-1921) prevented intensive work in this direction. Individual scholars were only occasionally sent to the region in order to conduct excavations.

### 4.4. The Iranian Roots of Central Asian Cities (1920s)

In spite of the political storms that shook the former Russian Empire, a new generation of scholars continued archeological travels to Central Asia, leading to the transition from the research methods of the Tsarist time to Marxist methodology. In this paragraph I would like to address views of three outstanding representatives of this transition, namely Pavel P. Ivanov (1893-1942), Aleksandr A. Semenov (1873-1958), and Aleksandr Iu. Iakubovskii (1886-1953), whom we have already met in the context of philological and historical projects. In the 1920s all of them studied the ancient cities on the territory of the Kazakh SSR from the viewpoint of the Aryan/Iranian theory of their origin, supported by Vasilii Bartol’d, but later they changed their perceptions in response to the demands of active nation building in Central Asia.

Pavel Ivanov, whom we briefly discussed in the first and second chapters, was born in a Siberian village. In his childhood his family moved to Tashkent, where he learned both

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\(^{741}\) Cited in: V. Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*, 56 also 101.


the Uzbek and Farsi languages.\footnote{744} In 1919-1924 Ivanov was a student of Iranian studies at the Turkestan Oriental Institute in Tashkent. In 1920 and 1924-1926 Ivanov regularly visited Sayrām,\footnote{745} located near Chimkent, which is one of the ancient cities on the middle Sir Darya and known from narrative sources as Isfījāb/Ispījāb. As a result of his works, Ivanov published two articles, in one of which\footnote{746} he revealed his close relationship with Aleksandr Semenov, who also lived in Tashkent at that time; Ivanov’s second article was dedicated to Vasilii Bartol’d.\footnote{747}

It is not clear why Ivanov’s choice fell on Sayrām, because this place was not very well known to Arabic geographers (the first short notes go back to the 9\textsuperscript{th} century). Besides that, being an object of constant attacks by the nomads, Sayrām lost almost all of his historical monuments. However, Sayrām has always been a popular place for religious pilgrims, because numerous sacred graves are located inside the city, and they are strongly connected to the neighboring shrine of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī in Turkestan.\footnote{748} Ivanov underlined the fact that the main feature of this region was its location on the border of settled and nomadic worlds and its independence from both of them.\footnote{749} In his outline of the history of Sayrām, Ivanov started his narrative in the time of the Samanid dynasty (819-1005), when Sayrām was a frontier town. Acknowledging the fact that already in 1512 the Kazakh Khan Qasim captured Sayrām, Ivanov stated that ‘the Kazakhs’ settling in the north-eastern outskirts of the agricultural part of Central Asia (Tashkent region) was a ra-

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{744} Ivanov’s friend and colleague Iakubovskii wrote a comprehensive and very sensitive necrology about him: A.Iu. Iakubovskii, “Pavel Petrovich Ivanov kak istorik Srednei Azii,” in: \textit{Sovetskoie vostokovedenie}, vol. 5 (Moscow, Leningrad, 1948), 313-320.
\item \footnote{745} Sayrām was also visited by archeologist Mikhail Masson, whose article remained to me unavailable. M.E. Masson, “Staryi Sairam,” in: \textit{Izvestiia Sredazkomstarisa}, vol. 3 (Tashkent, 1928), 23-42.
\item \footnote{746} P.P. Ivanov, “Sairam: istoriko-arkheologicheskiy ocherk,” in: \textit{Al-Iskandarīyya, Sbornik Vostochnogo Instituta v chest’ professor A.E. Shmidt} (Tashkent, 1923), 46-56 (reference to Semenov on p. 55, footnote 3).
\item \footnote{747} P.P. Ivanov, “K voprosu ob istoricheskoi topografii starogo Sairama,” in: \textit{‘Iqd al-Jumān, V.V. Bartol’du – turkestanskie druz’ia, ucheniki i pochitateli} (Tashkent, 1927), 151-164. An off-print of this article which I used in the library of Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg (No. 25729) bears Ivanov’s autograph: “To V.V. Bartol’d as a token of great respect from the author, 30.03.28. Frunze.”
\item \footnote{748} For a full catalogue of mazārs in Sayrām see: D. DeWeese, “Sacred History for a Central Asian Town: Saints, Shrines, and Legends of Origin in Histories of Sayrām, 18\textsuperscript{th}-19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries,” in: \textit{Figures mythiques des mondes musulmans} (Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée, 89-90), ed. D. Aigle (Aix-en-Provence, 2000), 245-295.
\item \footnote{749} P.P. Ivanov, “Sairam,” 46; P.P. Ivanov, “K voprosu ob istoricheskoi topografii,” 151.
\end{itemize}

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The late enterprise, which began not earlier than in the first half of the 16th century when the central part of Central Asia had already been populated by the Uzbeks (...). The political transfers of power from Uzbeks to Kazakhs and the other way around in the 16th-18th centuries did not seriously change the ethnic map of the region: the Angren River [south of Tashkent – A.B.] was the southern border for the Kazakh population. By saying this, Ivanov took sides in the then burning debate between the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks over the Tashkent region, and he included the latter into the field of Kazakh ethnic influence. Unfortunately, besides collecting data from written sources about Sayrām (mainly from the Kokand historiographical tradition) and a description of the city’s fortification and mazārs, Ivanov was not able to do much for archaeological exploration of the city.

Aleksandr Semenov, stemming from a baptized Tatar family from the Kasimov Khanate, was born in a family of merchants of the first guild in Tambov region. Since his childhood he knew the Tatar language and dreamt about the mysterious Orient, therefore in 1895 he entered the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow (the fore-name of the Narimanov Institute of Oriental Studies). After studying Arabic, Persian and Turkic languages there, in 1900 Semenov went to Ashkhabad and spent the rest of his life in Central Asia. In 1902 he met Bartol’d when the latter visited Ashkhabad. It was a very significant meeting, because they continued to exchange letters and books and to keep friendship until Bartol’d’s death in 1930; moreover Semenov, in fact, became one of Bartol’d’s most successful students and continued to adhere to Bartol’d’s scientific principles even when this became politically dangerous.

In the 1920s Semenov was among other topics interested in Central Asian archeology and architecture in their relation to data from manuscripts and epigraphy. In 1922, together with Aleksandr Shmidt and other colleagues, Semenov visited the mausoleum of Khwāja Ahmad Yasawī in Turkestan and read its inscriptions. During 1925-1928 Semenov stud-


752 Ibid., 40.

ied several important architectural monuments in Tashkent and Marw. Semenov expressed his opinion on the cultural ‘possession’ of the main architectural masterpieces in Central Asia in his article *Material Remnants of Aryan Culture* (1925). Briefly reviewing numerous medieval monuments from all over the region, Semenov claimed that all of them belonged to the Aryan legacy. The Tajiks are descendants of Aryans, whose cultural influence went far beyond the borders of the modern Tajik ASSR: according to Semenov, one can observe its traces in each Central Asian republic. Peculiar to mention is that this idea of Tajik cultural predominance in Central Asia, and therefore Semenov’s regional view of Central Asia from the Tajik position, were later inherited by the author of *Tojikon* (“The Tajiks”) Bobojan Gafurov (1908–1977), the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (1946–56) and later the Director of Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow (1956–77). In this context the link between Semenov and Gafurov (through archeologist Boris Litvinskii and Semenov’s disciple and Litvinskii’s wife Elena Davidovich) seems obvious, because Semenov was the Director of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Tajik Academy of Sciences in 1954–58, when Gafurov was still in Dushanbe and then moved to Moscow.

Semenov’s article on Aryan culture in Central Asia was published in a volume that was called *Tajikistan*, and thus devoted to one of the newly-appeared national republics. Still, in his article Semenov underlined that he did not use the framework of national delimitation, but that his starting point was that whole space between Semirech’e and the border with Afghanistan was one cultural area. Here Semenov was a Bartol’dist and an adherent to the regional ‘Turkestani’ approach towards Central Asian history. With regards to the territory of the modern Kazakh SSR in Semirech’e Semenov discussed the ancient towers in Burana and Uzgend, further westwards he talked about the city of Ṭarāẓ with the mausoleums of Qaratā Khān and ‘Āyisha Bībī (all of these monuments were dated from the Qarakhanid era), and on the middle Sir Darya he introduced the city of Sayrām, as well as Turkestan with its shrine as a unique masterpiece of the Tīmūrid era, and finally he also


756 For more details on Gafurov’s regional perceptions see the PhD project *From Gafurov to Primakov: The Politicization of Academic Oriental Studies in Moscow and Leningrad/St Petersburg since 1950* by Hanna Jansen (University of Amsterdam).
discussed Otrar. From his analysis of epigraphic material and manuscripts Semenov concluded that “The settled Aryan population of Central Asia, being a medium of high culture in pre-Islamic times, kept its cultural traditions during the Islamic period, therefore all great buildings of that time were built either by the local Aryan population, or with the participation of Persian masters, or through cultural influence [from the Persian world].”

Here, too, Semenov was a true Bartol’dist; already in 1898 Vasilii Bartol’d maintained that “the farmer culture in the Chu valley existed already in the 7th century and was brought by migrants from Mawarannahr, like [agricultural] colonies set up by the Kokand Khanate in modern times.” Thus, the settlements north of the Sir Darya were established by Soghdian, i.e. Iranian, colonization.

Although Semenov’s views became an object of harsh critique by his colleagues, he did not change his mind. When his article Material Remnants of Aryan Culture was republished in 1944, Semenov only changed ‘Aryan’ in the title to ‘Iranian’. Semenov, an outstanding scholar with rich pre-revolutionary bureaucratic experience in Ashkhabad and Tashkent offices, was repeatedly accused and prosecuted. In 1932-34, when the Oriental faculty of the Central Asian State University had been closed down, Semenov was forced to move to Kazan’, from where he however soon returned back to Tashkent. In 1949 he was accused of being ‘a rootless cosmopolitan,’ in the last big Stalinist campaign of political intimidation and terror. However, Semenov was not repressed and peacefully moved to Dushanbe where he found much glory and the post of Director of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography.


758 Ibid., 118.


760 A.A. Semenov, Material’nye pamiatniki Iranskoi kul’tury v Srednei Azii (Stalinabad, 1944). Critique against Semenov included the article of L. Bretanitskii in Voprosy istorii 7 (1947), 128-131 and protocols of the meeting about ‘true’ history of the Uzbek SSR: O marksistsko-leninskom osveshchenii istorii i kul’tury narodov Uzbekistana. Stenograficheskii otchet rasshirennogo zasedaniia otdeleniia gumanitarnykh nauk AN Uzb. SSR, 21-27 aprelia 1949 (Tashkent, 1951).

761 S. Gorshenina, Galina Pugachenkova (Tashkent, 2001), 111; B.A. Litvinskii, N.A. Akramov, Aleksandr Aleksandroovich Semenov, 100.
One of the most prominent and controversial Orientalists of his time whose life and work reveal the whole complexity of the transition from Tsarist times to the Marxist order was Aleksandr Iu. Iakubovskii. A true student of Vasilii Bartol’d, Iakubovskii however strongly criticized his teacher of neglecting Marxist methodology. Eventually, Iakubovskii became an outstanding example of a Soviet Orientalist who yielded enormous ideological influence on the newly-built national republics of Central Asia. In the second chapter I already pointed out his role in the drawing up of the Soviet concept of ethnogenesis in Central Asia as well as his participation in early Orientalist projects on source editions; Iakubovskii was of similar centrality in the field of archeology.

In 1925, on invitation of Vasilii Bartol’d, Aleksandr Iakubovskii was employed in Leningrad at the State Academy of the History of Material Culture (GAIMK) led by Marr, where his task was to analyze pictures of Central Asian architecture. This was the start of his career. After Bartol’d’s death in 1930, Iakuboskii took his place in the Central Asian Sector of GAIMK and simultaneously became Head of the Oriental Office at the State Hermitage (until 1936). In 1929-1941 Iakubovskii also worked as docent and professor of Leningrad University; and in 1933-1938 he was Research Associate at the Institute of Oriental Studies. During these fifteen years of work Iakubovskii enjoyed professional recognition as a leading specialist in Central Asian history. Together with historian Boris Grekov he authored a book that became a milestone of the Soviet historiography of the Golden Horde and its relations with the Ancient Rus’. As the Tashkent historian Valerii Germanov rightfully mentioned, in the 1930s and 1940s “nobody could be celebrated as a genius without Stalin’s approval.” Being able to combine encyclopedic knowledge of the Central Asian past with fervent adherence to Marxist ideology, Iakubovskii enjoyed considerable authority in scholarly circles all over the Union. His concepts were recognized as groundbreaking in many fields, the most visible of them being the concept of ethnogenesis in Central Asia. Already Edward Allworth heavily criticized Iakubovskii’s closeness to political authority.

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Of our concern here is that one of Iakubovskii’s first research trips in Central Asia was to Sīghnāq, the ancient capital of the Aq Horde, the eastern part of the Dasht-i Qipchāq, in the first half of the 14th century. Known from written sources since the 10th century, Sīghnāq was linked to the urban networks of the Mid-Sir Darya River with Otrar as its epicenter. As in other cities of the area, Sīghnāq’s inner city (shahrīstān) was surrounded by magnificent walls (which were, however, erected in the post-Mongol epoch). Such dignified ancient constructions with many towers inevitably attracted the attention of archeologists.

The only instrument that Iakubovskii had at his disposal when visiting the ruins of Sīghnāq on the order of GAIMK in 1927 was his photo camera. Not able to do any excavations, he was limited to taking notes on the city plan and some ancient buildings, and he came up with a hypothesis on the origin of the city. Pointing out the information provided by Faḍlallāh b. Rūzbihān Isfahānī in his Mihmān-nāma-yi Buxhārā (The Book of Bukhara’s Guest, 16th century) that since the 15th century Sīghnāq served as an aristocratic necropolis for the Uzbek Khans “of Shaybanid origin”,765 Iakubovskii suggested that the Kūk Kesene shrine and its surroundings near Sīghnāq were nothing else but those graves of the Uzbek and later Kazakh khans.766 This hypothesis is closely connected to Iakubovskii’s idea that the cities on the middle and lower Sir Darya emerged as bazars of Muslim merchants (perhaps he intended to imply: Iranian speaking?), which only later developed into the real cities that connected the Steppe with the Central Asian urban world. Here one might mention the influence of Bartol’d, whose views on the origin of Central Asian cities were cited above. Besides this aristocratic cemetery, Iakubovskii explored the mausoleum of the local saint Ḥusām al-Dīn Sīghnāqī and a Sufi lodge (khānqāh), probably built by Urus Khan in the 1370s.

Still, what was important to him was that these cities and constructions were erected not by Turks but by Iranian colonists from the south. These cities belonged to the Turkic rulers and played a significant role in the history of the Kazakh Khanates in the 16th-17th centuries.767 That is, in 1927 Iakubovskii did not yet attribute the ancient cities on the terri-

765 Here he meant the descendants of the fifth son Chingiz Khan, Shībān, not the dynasty of Sheybanids in Transoxania (1500-1598).


767 Ibid., 6, 23.
tory of the Kazakh SSR to the Kazakh people in the sense of developing urban culture: to
govern a place does not mean to live there constantly and to contribute to urban civilization. Even though Iakubovskii did not mention the question which language those ‘Muslim merchants’ might have spoken, there is little doubt that he favored an Iranian version of the origin of cities in the region. It could not be otherwise, because we know that Bartol’d read and approved the draft of Iakubovskii’s article. Only in the 1940s Iakubovskii changed his views, criticizing the ‘Pan-Turkism’ and ‘Pan-Iranism’ of his colleagues and claiming the cultural priority of the peoples of Soviet Central Asia over their Muslim neighbors. He would then claim that not the Iranians brought civilization to Central Asia, but that the Central Asians brought the epos, architecture and other aspects of cultural life to Iran.

To sum up, all three scholars who visited Sayrām, Turkestan, and Sīghnāq — Semenov, Iakubovskii and Ivanov — agreed that these cities and its architecture reveal strong Aryan/Iranian influences. This assumption goes back to the prerevolutionary search for signs of Aryan culture in Central Asia and to the immigration theory that explained cultural development by movements of population. There can be no doubt that Bartol’d was a promotor of this theory among these scholars through his editing of their articles and through consultations. To put it shortly, in the 1920s the cities in Southern Kazakhstan were still regarded as part of Iranian, not Kazakh, culture.

4.5. *Awqāf, Irrigation Systems, and Archeology, 1935-1936*

Archeology in Central Asia was connected to irrigation and to the cotton production. Already the Tsarist administration enlarged cotton fields in the region, but it was the Soviet transformation of Central Asia into a monoculture economic region that led to the great shortage of water, to ecological problems (the Aral Sea disaster being the most striking example), to the spread of diseases among the population, and the economical dependence from other parts of the Soviet Union. As Adeeb Khalid rightfully mentioned, this is the most evident argument for the colonial character of the relationship between Soviet Russia

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Ibid., 51.

and Central Asia. Since the 1920s the Soviet program of ‘cotton independence’ presupposed the construction of large irrigation networks throughout the region. The Great Ferghana Canal was built by prisoners in 1939; many other canals were opened later. In this context it was deemed useful to study the peculiarities of the centuries old system of irrigation in Central Asia. As early as in 1934 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Uzbek SSR set up a team of scholars to publish several of old waqf documents related to irrigation. Another initiative goes back to the year 1935, when the Central Asian Irrigational Institute in Tashkent (the Sazgiprovod) in collaboration with GAIMK initiated a project for collecting and analyzing Arabic-script materials for a monograph entitled The History of Irrigation in Central Asia. For these purposes six specialists were brought together in a work-group (brigada). Historian Malitskii was responsible for writing a history of the development of Central Asian hydro-resources; the Arabist Aleksandr Shmidt, who was living in Tashkent at that time, was to translate the notes of Arabic geographers as well as other Arabic sources on the topic; the Iranist Aleksandr Semenov intended to translate and annotate waqf documents and other sources on the region of the Sir Darya Basin; comrades Kats, Saidzhanov, and Vasilii Shishkin (1894-1966) were instructed to translate and provide annotations to sources on the Zarafshan Basin and to work in the archives of Samarkand and Bukhara.

The intensive correspondence between the Sazgiprovod and participants of the project (Semenov being the most active correspondent) reveals more details on this initiative, which was, according to the authors, on the border of archeology with textual studies, and

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773 RA NA IIMK, F. 2, Op. 1, № 32, Sbor materialov po istorii irrigatsii Srednei Azii, 1936 god, f. 43.

774 It seems that Shmidt did not produce anything for this project. It is not surprising, because the task was too ambitious.

775 A waqf (Arabic, Pl. awqāf) denotes a pious endowment, usually a building or land, for religious or charitable ends. For the study of the waqf system in Central Asia, see: R.D. McChesney, Waqf in Central Asia: Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1480-1889 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1991).

which was therefore close to the series of analogous projects that we analyzed in the first chapter of the present dissertation. As in other Oriental projects, the irrigation project was outlined in a short working plan. This plan was signed by a certain Rakhib MBAEV, the Director of Sazgiprovod, and sent to N.A. Paskutskii, the Head of the Main Cotton Office of the USSR in Moscow. The text of the project was the following:

“In 1935 Sazgiprovod allocated 30 thousand rubles and signed a contract with GAIMK for a compilation of the history of Central Asian irrigation. The necessity of such work is obvious, because besides Bartol’d’s small book,\textsuperscript{777} which is already outdated and incomplete, there is no other general outline of the irrigational history in Central Asia. According to the contract, during 1935 and in early 1936 GAIMK is obliged to collect and systemize texts from various historical documents, in particular to study the writings of all Arabic geographers, all (sic! – A.B.) Persian historical-geographical literature,\textsuperscript{778} and to study a serious amount of old waqf documents preserved in the archives of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara. It is planned that in 1936 GAIMK will start a series of publications on the history of irrigation in particular regions of Central Asia, especially the Ferghana, Chirchik-Angren, and Murghab. (...) As the importance of this work goes beyond the actual demand of Sazgizprovod, it might be good to obtain financial support from other institutions.”\textsuperscript{779}

The irrigation project was of importance not only for the Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik SSR, but also for the Kazakh SSR, because its southern territories (the middle Sir Darya) were historically tied to the common Central Asian system of irrigation. However, the project was rather regional in its scope and approach, because it disregarded republican borders while accenting historical regions of irrigation.

While the mid-1930s were a period of severe state persecution against religious authorities, in 1936 GAIMK sent a letter to Musa Iuldashevich Saidzhanov, a religious authority in the Ṭillā Kārī Madrasa in Samarkand, asking him to help with the translation

\textsuperscript{777} [V.V. Bartol’d, “K istorii orosheniia Turkestana [1914],” in: V.V. Bartol’d, Sochineniiia, vol. 3, Raboty po istoricheskoi geografii (Moscow, 1965), 97-233.]

\textsuperscript{778} [Which would have been impossible, since there were no guidebooks for such a task. Krachkovskii produced his general outline of the history of Arabic geographical literature only in the 1940s, and Story’s survey of Persian literature became available in Russian translation only in 1972. I.Iu. Krachkovskii, Arabskaia geograficheskaia literatura (Moscow, Leningrad, 1957); Ch.A. Stori, Persidskaia literatura, 3 vols., translated into Russian by Iu.E. Bregel (Moscow, 1972).]

\textsuperscript{779} RA NA IIMK, F. 2, Op. 1, № 32, Sbor materialov po istorii irrigatsii Srednei Azii, 1936 god, f. 6.
and annotation of waqf and other documents from the Samarkand archives. Unfortunately, we do not know whether Saidzhanov agreed and contributed to this project.

In January 1936 Vasilii Shishkin reported from the Bukhara archive to GAIMK that he identified about 2.5 thousand documents related to the history of irrigation. It was clear to him that the task to translate them all by 1st February was ‘mission impossible.’ Similar complaints were brought forward by Aleskandr Semenov who carried out his part of the project in the large Tashkent archives: “It is impossible to translate and compile an annotated list of waqf documents on the Sir Darya Basin before 1st February, because there are about 2.5 thousand texts. (...) Some of these documents have several meters in length, they are damaged by dampness, and therefore it will take a lot of time to analyze even one of these documents.”

Important for the history of archeological studies in the Kazakh SSR is that Semenov found and translated several excerpts from manuscripts on the irrigational system in the Otrar region in the 14th century, but it seems that his work remained unpublished. Already in March 1936 Semenov submitted to GAIMK his work *Materials on the History of Irrigation in Central Asia: the Sir Darya Basin in the Waqf Documents.* Obviously this report contained information on the lands that had recently (1924) been incorporated into the Kazakh SSR, namely the southern part of Kazakhstan. The scholar also wrote from Tashkent to his Leningrad colleagues that he started working on the waqf documents on the Ferghana Valley and intended to proceed with a collection of texts on the Samarkand region. The part on the Ferghana Valley was finished and sent to Leningrad in May 1936. Semenov asked GAIMK to send him his materials back after copying, but there is no evidence that he ever used his first excerpts in his later writings. According to Boris Litvinskii and N.M. Akramov, Semenov’s biographers, the reports and translations of the documents prepared for the irrigation project were once located in the Central Ar-

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780 Ibid., f. 43.


783 Ibid., f. 8.

784 In total Semenov prepared four folders with excerpts from the awqāf documents. Ibid., f. 4.

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chive of the Tajik Academy of Sciences. Litvinskii and Akramov give a short description of Semenov’s notes.  

In June 1936, i.e. two years after its start, GAIMK and Sazgiprovod stopped the project, because “everybody had received their money and the contract was over.” Semenov however believed the project remained unfinished. Most probably the reason was that Sazgiprovod did not succeed in attracting additional financial help for the project, which, therefore, did not go beyond its preparation phase. The start of political repressions may, of course, also have influenced the situation around the project, but this cannot be supported by evidence from the available documents.

The need of scholarly work in the regions where massive construction projects were going on remained topical also in the following years. The government generously allocated money for urgent archeological investigations before any major construction. For example, in early 1936 Evgenii Masson, in a note to colleagues, reported that for the 1937 season the financial support for excavations in the Tashkent region amounted to 350 thousand rubles.

The irrigation project reveals the important link between Soviet cotton policies, irrigational systems, documentary sources in Arabic script, and archeological investigations in Central Asia. As was the case with Semenov’s translations on the history of the Kazakh SSR, also his writings on the history of irrigation remained in the archive. Only in the 1960s did scholars in Kazakhstan return to the topics of irrigational history in South Kazakhstan in written sources.

4.6. The Central Asian Committee and the 1936 Plenum of GAIMK

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786 RA NA IIMK, F. 2, Op. 1, № 32, Sbor materialov po istorii irrigatsii Srednei Azii, 1936 god, f. 3.

787 B.A. Litvinskii, N.M. Akramov, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov, 102.

As in the field of textual studies, the mid-1930s were also a crucial period for the history of Central Asian archaeology. A few years after the reconstruction of Oriental textual studies in Leningrad the first large-scale archeological expeditions were set up. The demand to create national histories of Central Asian peoples required both the archeological investigation of the region and the exploration of numerous written sources preserved in the archives. In the Kazakh case it is known from archival files that around 1936 the government of the Kazakh SSR and the Kazakh Communist Party District Committee organization (the Kazkraikom) decided to compile the three-volume *History of the Kazakh SSR*. Therefore archeological studies in Kazakhstan received priority. The authorities in Moscow pressed for the establishment of well-organized archeology centers in each of the republics which would be intensively supported by experienced Leningrad scholars. As in the cases of source publications and the writing of national historical narratives, the republican governments officially asked Leningrad archeologists to manage archeological work in the region; and again, the republics were to cover the expenses. In the same year of 1936 the Central Asian Committee of GAIMK in Leningrad organized a meeting at which the Kazakh representative, a certain Almanov, announced the request of the Kazakh government to send two or three specialists from the metropolis to the republic in order to organize excavations. GAIMK was, according to this demand, asked to prioritize the various ancient sites, because “there are many unknown [archeological] sites on the territory of Kazakhstan. We receive reports on the newly found ancient places all the time.”

The early 1936 meeting of the Central Asian Committee at GAIMK is very important for understanding the first steps towards the subsequent large-scale investigations throughout Central Asia. This Central Asian Committee was established in 1935 and included such famous Leningrad scholars as Aleksandr Iakubovskii (who seems to have been a dominant figure in the Committee), Mikhail Masson (1897-1986), Aleksandr Iessen (1896-1964) and others. The aim of the Committee was to coordinate the work of GAIMK and local institutions on the republican level in archeological excavations in the regions of intensive irrigational works.

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790 Ibid.

At the meeting of the Committee Aleksandr Iakubovskii pointed out several important issues which were later to play an outstanding role in Central Asian archeology. First of all, he underlined the absence of any coordination between central and local institutions. Personal contacts with some scholars in Central Asia had already been established, but institutionally any joint enterprise was difficult to carry out. Coordination, in Iakubovskii’s mind, presupposed not only establishing stronger institutional ties, but also reviewing of what was already done in Central Asia; who was currently doing what and where in the field. This point obviously meant to institutionalize joint conferences on the related topics or a regular congress of Central Asian archeologists. Iakubovskii also identified the form of strengthening institutional contacts: collaborative and comprehensive expeditions, which should be carried out by GAIMK in close partnership with other institutions, mainly on the local, republican level. Here Iakubovskii mentioned the cancelled irrigation project as an example of a collaborative work initiative coming from a Central Asian institution, the Sazgiprovod. “We are able to organize a number of similar projects,” Iakubovskii claimed.

The following reveals that Iakubovskii and some of his colleagues (probably, Mikhail Masson among them) prepared the pattern of future studies very well. Aleksandr Iakubovskii voiced the idea to devote the upcoming, 16th Plenum of GAIMK completely to the history of Central Asia. It was planned to open the Plenum on 20 March 1936 with a general report on the main problems in Central Asian studies. This report was to be delivered by Iakubovskii himself.

The Committee also discussed the situation in Kazakh archeology. Iakubovskii demonstrated the lack of organization in common projects with the example of investigations of the Yasawī shrine in 1935. He complained to the Kazakh representative, the above-mentioned comrade Almanov, that an experienced co-worker of GAIMK by the name of Bachinskii, was forced to cancel his research trip to Kazakhstan because the

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793 Ibid., ff. 19-20.
794 On another occasion Iakubovskii characterized Bachinskii as a talented restaurateur of Central Asian monuments. According to Iakubovskii’s knowledge, Bachinskii worked on the restoration of the mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi in Turkestan in 1928 and 1929, and afterwards, in 1929-1934 he restored numerous badly ruined architectural monuments in Old Bukhara, some of which from the 9th century. In Iakubovskii’s words, “Many Bukharan monuments are indebted to Bachinskii for their survival.” RA NA IIMK, F. 2, Op. 1, 1935, № 243, Otzyvy o rabote sotrudnikov instituta s prilozheniem avtobiografii, f. 4.
Kazakh side unexpectedly realized that there was no money for his trip. Archival sources suggest that somebody on the meeting raised a methodological question: whether it was possible to select one particular archeological site as a basis for annual stationary works (in Russian archeological terminology: *statsionar*). Iakubovskii replied, quite correctly, that there were still many unknown settlements in the region, which made it necessary to first undertake broad archeological investigations to register the ancient sites over the vast territory, because only this type of work would provide the broad historical perspective and give a general idea of the dimensions of research. Also Aleksandr Iessen (1896-1964) was very cautious with regard to work in Kazakhstan. “Of course”, he said, “this is a very interesting territory for archeology, but first we have to arrange the training of young local specialists. As to the question of stationary work, it is too early to judge. The works of this year will reveal the most appropriate method.” As we see, in 1936 the scholars were still in search of the most suitable technique in both archeological investigation and its organizational framework.

Also Zeki Velidi-Togan believed it was impossible to identify a clear date when Soviet Oriental archeology of Central Asia was born; and he already pointed out that archeology emerged in the context of the program of creating republics’ histories in the 1930s. This is not an accident. The 1936 meeting on problems of Central Asian history and archeology at GAIMK in Leningrad identified that there were almost no publications of written sources on the period before the Arab conquest of the 7th-8th centuries. Therefore, in 1937 a number of academic (*akademicheskie*, i.e. organized by the Academy of Sciences) archeological expeditions were set up in different Central Asian regions. The linkage between the history of Oriental Studies and Central Asian archeology presupposed to combine the analysis of written sources with that of archeological material.

Archeologists faced a number of challenges: how to collaborate with local scholars? How to train ‘native’ specialists? How to excavate: in depth or over large territories? Which particular province of the Kazakh SSR deserved the main attention? As Evgenii

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795 Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Iessen was a specialist on the archeology of the Caucasus in the Bronze Age; he was working at GAIMK.


797 See, for example: S.P. Tolstov, *Po drevnim del’tam Oksa i Iaksarta* (Moscow, 1962), 5-6. For Togan’s critique of these works see: Z. Velidi-Togan, *Documents on Khorezmian Culture*, 23, 29-35.
Masson reported at the meeting, already two years before, i.e. around 1934, he compiled a plan of explorations in Kazakhstan, prioritizing the left blank of the Sir Darya River, i.e. the Otrar region in southern Kazakhstan. A similar project of archeological investigations was proposed by Aleksandr Bernshtam, who would later become the father of Kazakh archeology.

4.7. The Establishment of Archeological Expeditions in Kazakhstan

The lack of written sources on Central Asian history before the Arabic conquest became a good reason for the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences to organize several long-term academic archeological expeditions in Central Asia. During the 1930s expeditions in Pendzhikent (Tajikistan), Semirech’e (Kazakhstan), Khwarezm (Uzbekistan), and several other provinces were conducted. These three expeditions were directed by the most prominent Orientalists-archeologists who played a crucial role in the process of establishing local national schools. Among them were Aleksandr Iakubovskii (who worked in Penjikent, Tajikistan), Aleksandr Bernshtam (Kazakhstan), and Sergei Tolstov (Khwarezm, Uzbekistan).

All of these expeditions selected several basic ancient cities as the starting points of their investigation. The distribution of these activities clearly supported the cultural delimitation — the differentiation of the regional cultural heritage over the Soviet republics. Already after WWII Penjikent became a matter of pride for the Tajik people; and the legendary Khwarezmian expedition brought fame not only to Tolstov but also to the Uzbeks. However, these republican expeditions and later also the national scientific schools were usually not united in common projects. There were very few examples of collaboration among Central Asian colleagues, not only because each director of an expedition was a renowned scholar with encyclopedic knowledge, but also because the system was based on...
the division of Central Asia into republics, and on each republic’s individual orientation to Moscow.

The start of systematic archeological exploration of Kazakhstan is firmly linked to the name of Aleksandr Bernshtam, who first visited Semirech’e in 1936.799 Born in 1910, Bernshtam had studied ethnography at Leningrad University and worked at GAIMK since 1930. He obtained Turkological knowledge under supervision of Sergei Malov and Aleksandr Samoilovich and wrote his first dissertation on the ancient history of the Turks in 1935.800 Bernshtam’s doctoral dissertation on the history of the Kirgiz was defended in Tashkent in 1942. In his work Bernshtam supposed that the Kirgiz emerged as an ethnos by repeated migrations of Turks from Southern Siberia to the Tian-Shan Mountains. It was a result of long-standing conflicts between the native Iranian components and the immigrating Turks.801 His works written in 1930-40s demonstrated that the relations of nomadic and settled worlds were complicated and comprised much more than just wars. On this matter Iu.A. Zadneprovskii and A.G. Podol’skii, two biographers of Bernshtam, concluded that “Turkic peoples participated in the establishment of high civilization. It is incorrect [to assume] that Turks acted only as destroyers” 802. In other words, Bernshtam’s studies started to change the negative image of Turks. In 1947-49 Bernshtam led the South Kazakhstan expedition, but in 1950, in the course of the fight against Marrism and his followers, Bernshtam was blamed of idealizing the nomads and was fired from Leningrad University. Since that time he was not allowed to supervise any archeological expeditions. Bernshtam passed away soon after these witch hunts in 1956.803

Presumably in 1936, according to his disciple Kliashtornyi, Bernshtam gathered in Leningrad a team that comprised not only archeologists but also several Orientalists, namely Semen Volin and Aleksandr Belenitskii. Volin and Belenitskii were to translate historical Arabic-script sources into Russian, in particular texts related to the history of the Talas valley region, because this territory was on the agenda of archeological investigation. The envisaged book was not published because of WWII; later a part of these materials was included in the posthumously published works of Semen Volin. The latter publication, too, was connected to the needs of the Kazakh archeologists, who had used Volin’s work in typed manuscript form as a guide for the ancient settlements in the region. I was unable to find other materials related to the Talas project in the archives; probably only Volin finished his part of the joint work. Also, I was not allowed to work with Bernshtam’s personal archive in GAIMK, though an overview of related materials has been recently published by archivists.

The first academic expedition in Kazakhstan was undertaken by GAIMK in 1936, and Aleksandr Bernshtam led the expedition. On the basis of previous occasional research of his colleagues, Bernshtam in his preliminary plan of works for one season identified the city of Mirzoian (modern Ṭarāz) and its outskirts as the most interesting region for research. Bernshtam pointed out that this place was attractive in the context of research of medieval cities (the identification of ancient Ṭarāz) as well as in the context of the Turks’ interaction with Arabs, Iranians, and China. Even more promising in the Kazakh case was that, according to Bernshtam, southern Kazakhstan was the region where “the historical

804 Interview with Sergei G. Kliashtornyi by the author, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, 24 September 2009.


process of the nomads’ settling and their inter-relations with city-dwellers were the most
evident.”809 Yet it soon turned out that the central part of the city (shahrístān) is located
under the present-day bazar in the city of Mirzoian, therefore Bernshtam repeatedly asked
various state institutions to move the bazar to another place.810 Needless to say, the same
bazar, which was a historical monument in its own right, is still on the same place.

In the next year GAIMK was transformed into the Institute of History of Material
Culture (IIMK) of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and its research tasks were fur-
ther focused on archeology.811 Bernshtam compiled a plan of archeological work in Ka-
zakhstan for the 1937 season, which was included into the general three-year plan of ar-
cheological investigations into the history of the Kazakh SSR. Unfortunately, there is no
data on the other parts of the three-year plan, but Bernshtam’s idea was to proceed to the Ili
River and to the Trans-Ili Alatau in South Eastern Kazakhstan.812 This expedition included
four persons, with only Bernshtam himself being a professional archeologist. Therefore
Iakubovskii strongly advised Bernshtam to invite Aleksandr Belenitskii, who combined
knowledge of Islamic sources with archeological skills, and also to get acquainted with
Minorsky’s recent publication of the Persian manuscript Ḥudūd al-ʿālam,813 which might
include significant data on the region in question. Bernshtam took into account both of
these recommendations.

After two years of successful excavations in the Kazakh SSR, Aleksandr Bernshtam
submitted to GAIMK a short description of previous works and a prospect of future stud-
ies. First of all he pointed out that his archeological investigation, initiated by the Kazakh
Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, was conducted in the framework of a
three-year project on the compilation of an archeological map of southern Kazakhstan. As
Bernshtam reported, in 1936 they found and brought to the Oriental Office of the State
Hermitage a great amount of material findings, several perfectly preserved vessels of the

810 RA NA IIMK, F. 2, Op. 2, 1936, № 392, Materialy kazakhskoi arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii. Dnevnik,
plan rabot. 1936-1951, ff. 4-9.
811 S.S. Alymov, “Na puti k ‘Drevnei istorii narodov SSSR’: maloizvestnye stranitsy nauchnoi biografii S.P.
813 Hudūd al-ʿĀlam: The Regions of the World: a Persian Geography, 372 A.H. - 982 A.D., transl. and
explained by Vladimir Minorsky; with a preface by V.V. Barthold (London, 1937).
Qarakhanid epoch (the 11th-12th centuries) being the most valuable among them. Bernshtam’s expedition identified about four hundred ancient monuments; most importantly, it localized the medieval city of Ṭarāz, that had been known from Byzantine sources since the 6th century and which reached its peak of cultural development in the Qarakhanid era.\(^{814}\)

In contradiction to the main theory of Tsarist and early Soviet times on Central Asian cities as primarily a product of Aryan culture and supporting Bernshtam’s specialization on the Turkic peoples of Eurasia, the newly discovered settlements, including Ṭarāz, were defined as cities of a local Turkic population.\(^{815}\) What was the meaning of this switch from ‘Iranian’ to ‘Turkic’ origin? No doubt it was the beginning of the Soviet autochthonism concept which interpreted the heritage of all previous epochs as possessions of the titular nation of the republic, yet in this case not yet to the Kazakhs but to the Turkic peoples in general. Thereby Bernshtam followed the path of archeologist V.I. Ravdonikas (1894-1976) who argued for an autochthonous evolution of the population in the Crimea, rejecting a previously accepted identification of the Goths with the ancient Germans.\(^{816}\) Later, in 1949, the idea of an independent and self-sufficient history of the peoples of the Soviet Union was addressed by Sergei Tolstov in a collection of articles devoted to the 70th anniversary of Iosif Stalin: “The works of Soviet archeologists rejected the idea [of the historical predominance of Europeans]. (…) These works demonstrated that ancient cultures of the Soviet peoples, even though they developed in close connection with other cultures of West and East, are not reducible to ‘influences’ and ‘derivations’ and are not a pale mirror of so-called ‘chosen peoples’ — Greeks, Romans, and Persians. All Soviet peoples had their own trajectory and influenced the culture of surrounding peoples.”\(^{817}\)

The tricky aspect was that this autochthonism was legitimated through cultural traces of other civilizations. If Bernshtam saw the main result of the 1936 expedition in the detec-
tion of links between the Turkic world and the Soghdian and Islamic cultures, the 1937 season was aimed to search for connections of the Turks with the Chinese world in eastern provinces of the Kazakh SSR, i.e. in Semirech’e, close to where also the republican capital Alma-Ata was located. The financial expenses were covered jointly by central research institutions, namely GAIMK and the State Hermitage, and by republican organizations, such as the Scientific Office at the Party Committee (Otdel nauki kraikoma) and the Scientific Committee at the TsIK of the Kazakh SSR. Here we observe the transition from a colonial style of archeology to the cooperation between the metropolis and local centers. Even though all findings were transported to Leningrad, the Kazakh side organized a protected area on the territory of historical Ṭarāz, and also the establishment of the local museum was planned.

By 1937 two areas were of special archeological interest in Kazakhstan: one in southern Kazakhstan and another in Semirech’e. As we have seen in the discussion of the national delimitation in Central Asia (in the second chapter of the present dissertation), both regions were initially not part of the Kazakh SSR, but after their integration they served as the main source for constructing the national historical memory. The two areas were of special importance for the ‘sedentarization of the past’, that is, for the replacement of the nomadic stereotype by the new dogma that the history of Kazakhstan was determined by the long development of cities that were inhabited by Turkic-speaking populations.

In 1937, after preliminary archeological travels, Bernshtam proposed a larger plan of works in Kazakhstan and even recommended to formulate, in accordance with the Soviet plan system, a five-year plan of archeological works in Central Asia in which he clearly identified the individual expeditions and their supervisors as well as the required results. This was probably a first sign of the emerging system of republican expeditions: in the late 1930s each national republic of Central Asia received its own expedition which interpreted the discoveries in a national light. Bernshtam underlined his confidence that “South-Eastern Kazakhstan is the first-rate region for understanding the ancient and medieval history of the Kazakh republic; here one can check the reports of ancient Arabic and Chinese

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authors that are so important for historical topography." Not surprising is therefore that Bernshtam focused the research plan on the Talas river and Ṭarāz, because exactly this territory provided visible and powerful historical monuments and was well covered by various written sources. The Steppe regions of Kazakhstan did not completely vanish from the research agenda, however. It was exactly in 1936 that the so-called Karasakpian inscription was discovered on a stone near the city of Dzhezkazgan in Central Kazakhstan. This Arabic-Turkic inscription was performed by the order of Amir Tīmūr in 1391 during his war against the Golden Horde’s Khan Tokhtamysh (d. around 1406). As could be expected, the stone was brought to the State Hermitage and is still preserved there. However, this occasional discovery did not inspire active research in Central Kazakhstan. Besides Ṭarāz as ‘a stationary point’ in the south, Bernshtam also raised the question of the city of Balasagun, the capital of the Qarakhanid Kaganate, which he believed was located near the village of Krasnaia Rechka in Kirgizia, and Bernshtam suggested to organize a second ‘stationary point’ there.

In order to understand the tasks of academic expeditions in Central Asia it is interesting to look at a similar five-year work plan written by Aleksandr Iakubovskii for the Soghdian-Tajik expedition in the Tajik SSR, which was jointly organized by the State Hermitage and the Institute of History, Language, Literature, and Art (IIIaLI) of the Tajik Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. This text goes back to the year 1946, but it clearly corresponds with what Bernshtam proposed in 1936-1937. I therefore suppose that the general setting for all expeditions was prepared already before WWII.

In his 1946 plan for the Soghdian expedition Iakubovskii, first of all, claimed that Tajikistan was the most poorly studied territory of all Central Asia. After that he moved to the problem of the very sensitive distinction between the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, making

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821 This hypothesis was disputed by Kazakh archaeologists, who identified a site called Aq Tobe in Western Kazakhstan as the historical Balasagun: U. Shalakenov (Balasaguni [sic!]), Gorod Balasagun v V-XIII vv. (Almaty, 2009).

clear that “the Tajiks are descendants of the Soghdians, Bactrians, and Kushans,” whereas the Uzbek of Zarafrshan region and those of the cities of Tashkent, Margelan, and Shahrisabz are mainly turkicized Tajiks or Sarts, as they were called in sources of the 16th to early 20th centuries.” From this passage the national context of archeological excavations becomes very clear: Iakubovskii tended to level ethnic differences between Tajiks and Uzbek claiming the common heritage to be Tajik. Later on in the document Iakubovskii defended the concept of autochthony, and he singled out two historical regions which, just like in the Kazakh case, were to be studied because they represent the general image of the country: “The population in Tajikistan has its local roots and an autochthonous origin. One part of the Tajik population was historically connected with Soghd, i.e. northern Tajikistan, whereas the other part had roots in the Bactrian culture in the south-eastern part of the country. These provinces were the most culturally developed, hence they should be studied in the first place.”

Iakubovskii’s account of the tasks of the Tajik expedition resemble the goals and techniques of other expeditions not only in the Kazakh republic, but also in other Central Asian republics: 1) the archeological expedition aimed to study the ‘darkest’ epochs and ‘white spots’ that were poorly known from written sources, i.e. the ancient and medieval periods in the history of the Tajik republic and Tajik people “on the territory of this republic.” This means that the republican expeditions were mainly isolated from each other by the existing republican borders (I use here term ‘republican’ here only in the territorial sense. Institutionally, until the 1960s these expeditions remained rather centrally organized with only slow tendency towards their ‘nativization’ in the republics); 2) to study the historical topography of the region on the basis of texts in ‘Oriental’ languages, and to conduct archeological studies in the vicinity of the cities and along the roads between them; 3) to localize ancient cities that were so far known only from old texts, and then to start stationary work there; 4) to register all architectural monuments on a systematic scale; 5) to

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823 [This is inaccurate, because the modern Tajiks speak a Western Iranian language, whereas ancient Central Asian population used Eastern Iranian. See: P. Bergne, The Birth of Tajikistan. National Identity and the Origins of the Republic (London, New York, 2007), 3-6].


825 Ibid., f. 5.
add to the excavations a study of the history of the same region on the basis of written sources. In fact, all of these tasks had to deal with Oriental Studies.

Close connections with Oriental studies made it possible to investigate historical processes from a complex perspective. This methodology combined archeology with source studies, especially with numismatics and epigraphic studies, because the Arabic and Persian terminology is crucial for identifying the structural elements of medieval cities.

4.8. The Institutionalization of Kazakh Archeology in the 1940s-1950s

Archeological expeditions in the Kazakh SSR were interrupted by the war, but in 1945 a very intensive institutional development of Central Asian archeology began. Since the appearance of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography in 1945, a number of provincial expeditions were organized in Central, Eastern (Semirech’e), and Southern (the Sir Darya valley) parts of Kazakhstan. The Central Kazakhstan expedition was the first expedition established by the Sector of Archeology, which existed since the first day of the Institute’s life. Both the Sector and the expedition were directed by the native Kazakh historian Al’kei Margulan. Margulan was the first scientist to interpret archeological findings in Kazakhstan in national terms.

Al’kei Khakanovich Margulan was born in Pavlodar region in 1904. As Margulan wrote himself in his autobiography, his parents were from the working class. When aged six to twelve Margulan studied in his village with local Islamic teachers, following the traditional system of education and learning of classical texts by heart. Obviously, this

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826 Ibid., ff. 9-11.


way Margulan learned how to read texts in Arabic script. In 1921 he went to Semipalatinsk where he studied for five years in the local Pedagogical College. After graduation he was sent to Leningrad, where he spent the years from 1925 to 1938. Being the first Kazakh scholar to go through the Leningrad school of Orientology, Margulan wrote that he benefited a lot from the classes of Bartol’d, Marr and Meshchaninov. In 1931-1934 he was an aspirant at GAIMK, studying the history of Central Asian material culture and art, but then he got sick and returned to work only in 1937. In the meantime the topic of his dissertation was changed to The Khan Yarlïqs. I have not been able to find the original text of this dissertation, but fortunately a review on this dissertation by Pavel Ivanov did survive in the Archive of Orientalists, hence we get an idea of what kind of scholarship Margulan represented in Leningrad.

According to Ivanov’s critical review Margulan had attempted a combination of philological and historical approaches towards primary sources. This resulted in many desperate and superficial claims, e.g. in Margulan’s explanation of the terminology in Mongol official documents (such as tamgha, süyürghāl, and tarkhān). Ivanov’s general conclusion was that Margulan did not know the literature on the topic, and that he even ignored the collections of Mongol credential cards (paiza) preserved in the State Hermitage. Ivanov also pointed out Margulan’s problems with the Russian language and his arrogant attitude towards previous researchers, whose translations he high-handedly ‘corrected.’ Margulan, by contrast, maintained in his autobiographical notes that he possessed a good knowledge of Turkic languages and Russian, whereas he was not well acquainted with German, Eng-


830 A.Kh. Margulan, Avtobiografiia, f. 7.

831 Probably a copy of dissertation is preserved in Margulan’s personal archive, now in the possession of his daughter in Almaty. Excerpts from the dissertation were published only in 1980: A.Kh. Margulan, “K voprosu o sotsial’noi strukture tarkhannykh gramot i peize,” in: Istoriiia material’noi kul’tury Kazakhstana (Alma-Ata, 1980), 3-13.


lish, Arabic, Persian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian. In spite of all troubles, Margulan’s dissertation was eventually defended in 1943, during the Siege of Leningrad.

In 1939-1945 Margulan worked at the Kazakh Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, combining this duty with lecturing at the Kazakh State University. His studies in Leningrad had given him the reputation of being a good specialist in Central Asian archaeology and written sources, therefore the administration of the newly established (1945) Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography counted on him and entrusted him with the task of translating written sources on Kazakh history. However, Margulan’s work focused only on Kazakh archeology. In the Kazakh republic he was highly celebrated, and very soon he became a corresponding member (1946) and full member (1958) of the republican Academy of Sciences.

Together with other representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia Margulan became a victim of state repression of 1947, when he was largely criticized for a ‘perversion’ of Kazakh history and for promoting Pan-Turkism. In January 1947 the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the Kazakh SSR issued a decree On the Rough Mistakes of the Institute of Language and Literature, claiming that the studies of Kazakh folklore were not a suitable topic of research. This was also the time when Ermukhan Bekmakhanov’s book on the Kazakhs in the 1820s-40s was under heavy fire. Being criticized for an idealization of the epic hero Edigei, Margulan was forced to leave his office in the Archeological Sector of the Institute of History, which he had held since the establishment of the Institute, and he was incriminated for ‘national distortions’. Already in the 1940s the expedi-


835 Al’kei Khakanovich Margulan (Materialy k biobibliografii uchenykh Kazakhstana) (Alma-Ata, 1984), 23.


839 OVA KN MON RK, F. 2, Otdelenie obshchestvennykh nauk AN KazSSR, Op. 10, D. 7, Sv. 2, Spravki, informatsiiia i dokladnye o khode realizatsii postanovleniia TsK KP(b)K ‘O grubeishikh politicheskikh oshibkah Instituta iazyka i literaturey AN KazSSR,’ ot 21 ianvaria 1947 g.; spiski sostochnykh rukopisei, kharniasmishchiiia v institute istorii AN KazSSR, retsenzii i zamechaniiia na nauchnye raboti, materially o
tion directed by Alkei Margulan had studied several ancient cities in Central Kazakhstan and the Sir Darya Valley. Despite the 1947 troubles, Margulan wrote a book on the history of settlement civilization in Southern Kazakhstan, published in 1950.  

There were three main arguments which Margulan addressed in his monograph. Relying on the works by Tolstov, Iakubovskii, and Bernshtam, he strongly criticized Semenov’s adherence to the Aryan theory of origin of the Central Asian cities. According to Margulan, Semenov denied the existence of urban culture and monumental architecture among the nomadic Turks, i.e. the Kazakhs, whom Semenov had called in 1940 ‘the Steppe predators.’ By contrast, Margulan had proven that high urban culture existed on the territory of the Kazakh SSR not only in the southern regions, but also northwards, in Central Kazakhstan, where he identified the existence of an irrigational system and a number of settlements. In his discussion of the previous historiography Margulan pointed to the political significance of the topic, since he analyzed Kazakh culture as ‘national in form and socialist in content.’ With this statement he obviously hoped to be on safe ideological grounds. Hence Margulan’s conclusion that cities have always been present on the Kazakh territory and that there is a continuous development of settled civilization. Though there were wars with the Uzbeks for control over the Sir Darya region, “the basin of the middle and low Sir Darya River, with all cities around it, had always [sic!] belonged to the Kazakh territory. In the 16th-17th centuries Sïghnāq was the capital of the Kazakh Khanate.” Margulan did not discuss the ethnicity of those who populated the cities in question, but from the context the message is clear: the cities belonged to the Kazakhs; the Kazakh urban civilization unfolded largely on the territory of the present-day republic. Thus Margulan revised Bartol’d’s and Semenov’s concept by replacing the Iranian version of origin by a Kazakh national concept. Peculiar to mention that this turn coincided with the

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842 A.Kh. Margulan, Iz istorii gorodov i stroitel’nogo iskusstva, 4.
843 Ibid., 81.
writing of the first national historical narratives (the redactions of the history of the Kazakh SSR).

However, Bernshtam did not support Margulan’s desire to expand the urban culture of southern Kazakhstan northwards. Together with his disciples, whom he trained on his expedition (which was renamed as the Southern Kazakhstan expedition since the year 1947), Bernshtam continued working in the region after the war. Bernshtam rejected Margulan’s main argument that the archeological sites of Central Kazakhstan were testimonies of Kazakh urban and agricultural civilization. Instead, Bernshtam promoted the idea of a cultural influence from Otrar on northern territories. In 1947-48 Bernshtam explored the same territories that Margulan did and claimed that “Margulan tended to represent these rare and weak medieval settlements in Central Kazakhstan as something comparable to the cities of the Talas valley. This is his mistake. Even the settlements on the northern slopes of the Qaratau Mountains have a periphery character, they fully depended on Otrar. (...) Our investigation clearly demonstrated that there was no ancient agricultural civilization in Central Kazakhstan. There is no correlation between the irrigational system in the region and ancient sites. The two big settlements of Tasty and Qyzyl-Kurgan were set up [only] in the 19th century. The first one was a Kokandian fortress, while the second place was rather a caravanserai (...). Is it possible to compare a fence of thirty meters length with the cities of the Talas region?! Most probably, the irrigational system was organized by later Kazakh or Uzbek settlers. This area is only suitable for ‘nomadic agriculture’ and nothing more than that.”844 After thus reviewing Margulan’s conclusions, Bernshtam concluded that the Talas region and partly the northern slopes of the Qaratau were the northern border of agriculture in this border region with the Steppe. As a result of explorations in 1947, Bernshtam acknowledged that “no matter how strongly the region was devastated by the Mongols, economics proved to be more powerful than political events: life in the cities did not disappear.”845 This was against Margulan and his followers who, on the contrary, accentuated the disastrous consequences of the Mongol invasion.


They called this ‘the Otrar Catastrophe’: “Otrar underwent a terrible disaster from Chingiz Khan’s hordes during their invasion in Central Asia. A booming town was turned into ruins.”

We will return to the discussion of this myth around Otrar in a special section below.

Since 1947 archeological investigations in Southern Kazakhstan were continued by two of Bernshtam’s disciples, Geronim I. Patsevich (1893-1970) and Evgeniia I. Ageeva (1916-?). Geronim Iosifovich Patsevich was born in Belorussia; in 1914 he graduated from the Moscow Archeological Institute; in 1934-38 he worked as a scientific secretary of the Alma-Ata Museum of Kazakhstan, and in 1945-1955 at the Alma-Ata Institute of History. Ageeva graduated from the archeological department of the historical faculty of Leningrad University and since 1947 worked in the Alma-Ata Institute of History. The five-year research plan of the Institute of History proposed archeological work not only in Central Kazakhstan but also in the Sir Darya Basin, the region of the Talas and Chu rivers, and in the city of Saraichik, in north-western Kazakhstan. Peculiar to mention that also Aleksandr Jakubovskii is mentioned among the participants of these expeditions though there is no evidence that he actually participated in them.

The main goal of the South Kazakhstan Archeological Expedition (IuKAE) was to study Kazakh ethnogenesis. In September-October 1948 the expedition, including Bernshtam, Ageeva, Patsevich, Kliashtornyi and others, investigated the site of Otrar. Drawing attention to this place, Bernshtam wrote in his article that it is not the ‘Otrar catastrophe’ of 1220 and not the death of Timūr here in February 1405 that make Otrar so attractive for scholars, but rather the fact that this city was mentioned on the pages of almost all medieval Arabic and Persian historical narratives. In 1948 Bernshtam’s expedition finished its preliminary overview of the Otrar oasis and concluded that this was the

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846 A.Kh. Margulan, Iz istorii gorodov i stroitel’nogo iskusstva, 72.

847 This city was set up by Batu, a famous grandson of Chingiz Khan, and served as an important sacred place for the Mongol aristocracy. See: V.V. Trepavlov, “Saraichuk: pereprava, nekropol’, stolitsa, razvaliny,” in: Tiurkologicheskii sbornik 2001 (Moscow, 2002), 225-244.


major site on the middle Sir Darya that required to be studied in detail by a stationary expedition.

The Sir Darya Region eventually became the main object of interest for Kazakh archaeology since it was regarded as crucial for any investigation of Kazakh ethnogenesis and the process of sedentarization of the nomads. In one of her institutional reports Ageeva claimed that it was necessary to start active stationary works on Otrar itself. Because of the political significance of the region and the visible magnificence of the archeological sites of the middle Sir Darya Valley, since the 1940s the main efforts of Kazakh archeology were concentrated on the south. While Bernshtam worked on the middle part of the river, Sergei Tolstov with his Khorezmian archeological-ethnographical expedition took over its lower part, closer to the Aral Sea.

This is how Ageeva characterized the results of archeological investigations in the middle Sir Darya in the 1940s: “The work of archeologists finally solved the question of historicity (istorichnost’) of peoples in Kazakhstan. These peoples were rather subjects than objects of history and contributed much to the cultural treasures on global level. The works of archeologists [also] dispelled the myth that the Turkic world was characterized by unity. It was discovered that Central Asian peoples, while speaking Turkic languages, had each their own history, ethnos, and culture. The Pan-Iranist theory, which argued that in Central Asia and Kazakhstan nothing was produced by the indigenous population, and that everything was imported or influenced by the Persian people, was [also] defeated.” In other place Patsevich and Ageeva concluded that “the works of the expedition refuted the conception, rooted in archeological and historical literature, that the cities of the middle Sir Darya had been erected by Muslim migrants. On the contrary, the cities of the middle Sir Darya are the product of an independent development of the local society.” Ageeva not only fought the Aryan theory, but also attacked Pan-Turkism and the claim that no-

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851 E.I. Ageeva, Obzor arkhеologicheskikh issledovanii Syr Dar’i i Semirech’ia [not dated], in: AIA MON RK, D. 615, f. 38.

852 Ibid., f. 45.

853 [Here Patsevich and Ageeva cited Bartol’d, Ivanov, Masson, and early Iakubovskii].

mads were backward people. Ageeva and Bernshtam regarded all expeditions before 1950 as preliminary, aiming only at the identification of the main sites, whereas in 1951 stationary works began in the Otrar Oasis. It was these stationary research campaigns that allowed the Kazakh archeologists to claim that the cities on the territory of the republic appeared not in the 9th-10th centuries but much earlier, and that they were the result of an autochthonous development, not the product of influence from Transoxiana. The state provided the necessary financial support for archeological expeditions in the region because these expeditions were producing visible political and cultural capital, sedentarizing the Kazakh past and legitimizing the modern political borders. Ronald Suny is absolutely right when claiming that “[t]he efforts of historians, as well as ethnographic [and archeological – A.B.] expeditions sponsored by the state, aimed at ethnicizing the past of Kazakhstan, erasing its more multiethnic features, and establishing an ethnic Kazakh claim to territory. The experiences of pre-Kazakh Turkic tribes were assimilated into a Kazakh narrative.”


However, even after the expeditions of the late 1930s Bernshtam complained that the origin and character of such big cities as Otrar, Sïghnāq, and Sauran was still not clear. In contradiction to his students, Bernshtam assumed that the ways of urban development in the region probably differed from Semirech’e, where settlements appeared as ancient Soghdian colonies. According to Bernshtam, the investigation of this question would eventually determine the western border of Soghdian colonization. It was characteristic for Bernshtam to avoid the question of the origin of the Kazakhs, obviously in an effort to not get involved in the heavily politicized national discourse.

As we have seen, Margulan criticized Semenov for his Aryan theory, while Bernshtam demonstrated Margulan’s mistakes in his interpretation of ancient sites in Cen-


858 V.A. Shnirel’man, “From Internationalism to Nationalism,” 128-129.
tral Kazakhstan. In 1952 all of them were strongly criticized by the Kazakhstani historian Shakhmatov, who worked at the Institute of History at that time. Shakhmatov’s attacks were obviously part of the political struggle against “cosmopolitanism”. In his article Shakhmatov identified a number of systematic ‘mistakes’ in Kazakh archeology. In the general context of the political campaign, he blamed archeologists Sergei Tolstov and Aleksandr Bernshtam for following Marr’s Japhetic theory with its development of languages and cultures.\(^{859}\) Here the Aryan theory was again used against Bernshtam, Masson, and even Iakubovskii. Shakhmatov stated that their teacher and colleague Vasilii Bartol’d was a founder of the Soghdian theory of origin of the cities in Semirech’e and Southern Kazakhstan, which rejects the autochthonous character of the ancient cultures on Kazakh territory. According to Shakhmatov all these scholars, including early Iakubovskii, claimed that urban civilization in Kazakhstan was brought by foreign conquerors, Iranians and Arabs. Shakhmatov regarded this thesis as resulting from an exaggeration of the role of Soghdian colonization in the region. He found it disgusting that Tolstov, Iakubovskii and others considered all expressions of high culture as import from abroad: “Such claims lead to the theory of un-historicism of peoples in Kazakhstan [i.e., that the peoples of Kazakhstan have no history of their own - A.B.], to a differentiation of advanced and backward peoples in history.”\(^{860}\) This was however exactly the opposite of what Bernshtam had argued on the 1948 the GAIMK Conference, when he summarized the results of the previous ten years of Soviet archeology in the region. In his speech at the conference Aleksandr Bernshtam had argued that archeologists had in fact demonstrated the historicism of Central Asian peoples, had shown their centuries-old history as comparable to the history of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia.\(^{861}\) In an official letter to the president of the USSR Academy of Sciences the participants of the conference had rightfully claimed that the success of Soviet Central Asian archeology helped to write the histories of


Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgizia, Tajikistan, and, I would add, Kazakhstan. Now, by 1952, both sides used to claim that they were fighting against racist theories, against the concept of historical and ahistorical peoples, but all scientists were forced to recognize the local origin of Kazakh urban culture. Since the early 1950s nobody questioned this axiom anymore, because of Stalin’s remarks on linguistics which obliged archeologists to interpret findings in ethnic terms and establish close links between the modern nations and societies of the past: “One of the main tasks of archeology was to develop a way of identifying an archeological culture in ethnic terms.”

Bernshtam’s disciples accepted the rules: in the first comprehensive monograph on the cities of Southern Kazakhstan Ageeva and Patsevich concluded that the hypothesis of the Soghdian origin of the cities was wrong, and all archeological and narrative material that had been collected was interpreted as signs of an independent, continuous development of urban culture in the region since the first centuries CE. Though the cities emerged independently from Transoxiana, Ageeva and Patsevich agreed that the structure of the Kazakh ancient cities was similar to what was found in Central Asia, and they also conceded that the Soghdian language was widespread in the Kazakh cities.

The period of the 1940s-50s was a time of transition from the organization of field work by Leningrad specialists to a collaboration with local cadres, and then to the emergence of the Kazakh branch of Oriental archeology. Already Bernshtam transmitted his duties as head of the South Kazakhstan Archeological Expedition to his disciple, Evgeniia Ageeva. In 1955 Begezhan Suleimenov, one of the Institute’s historians, underlined that “we have to train here [in Alma-Ata] archeologists with excellent knowledge of Oriental languages, because otherwise they will be unable to solve topical scientific problems.”

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862 Ibid., D. 280. Rezoliutsia, primataia na plenume, posviashchennom arkeologii Srednei Azii i pis’mo k prezidentu AN SSSR ot 31marta 1948 goda, f. 4.


Formally, since 1951 the documentation of the South Kazakhstan expedition was administered by the Sector of Archeology in Alma-Ata, and no documents on this region were sent anymore to the archive of GAIMK. While institutionally Kazakh archeology had thus become independent, it still needed specialists from Leningrad to conduct at least part of the work and provide general methodological insights. Still, with the shifting of education and coordination from Leningrad to Alma-Ata we observe a full-blown nationalization of archeology, and since the late 1950s Kazakh archeology was getting more and more oriented towards the national discourse. Finally, in the 1970s it became possible to specialize in archeology at Alma-Ata State University.

4.9. Kimal’ Akishev and the ‘Otrar Catastrophe’

The ‘Otrar catastrophe’ became one of the most widespread myths in Central Asian historiography. The oasis of Otrar (Farab) comprises a large territory of about three hundred square kilometers at the confluence of the Aris and Sir Darya Rivers. The center of the oasis is located in the archeological site of Otrar-Tobe with its more than two hundred hectares. The main part of the city of Otrar (shahrīstān) rose from ten to eighteen meters over the neighboring landscape (see photo 4). This site is extremely rich in history and a visitor will detect countless remnants of artifacts still scattered over the place. It is not surprising therefore that the magnificent past of this area attracted the interest of historians and writers. The story of Chingiz Khan’s delegation to Inalchiq Ghayir Khan, the local ruler of Otrar, and its rejection, followed by the Mongol invasion, became the topic of a historical novel by the famous Uzbek writer Mirkarim Osim (1907-1984). The content of this narrative is that the city of Otrar was severely destroyed by the Mongols in 1219; this was the start of the Mongols’ war with the Khwarezmshah. For Soviet historians the major source on this was the thirteenth-century chronicle Taʾrikh-i Jāhāngūshāy (“History of the World Conqueror”) written by ʿAla ad-Dīn Aṭā Malik Juwaynī (1226-1283). Juwaynī wrote

866 M. Osim, Utror. Tarikhii povest’ (Toshkent, 1947). The novel was finished in 1944 and was largely based on Juwaynī’s account.

from the perspective of the Mongol elite, and being part of the Mongol bureaucratic apparatus he knew the early history of the Mongol Empire very well.

According to Juwaynī, after successful campaigns in Northern China and the lands of the Uighurs in 1218, Chingiz Khan dispatched two missions to Khwarezm: one of them with a diplomatic message, and another as a rich trade caravan. There is much discussion around the question of whether Chingiz Khan was intended to struggle with the Khwarezmshah ‘Alā ad-Dīn Muḥammad (1169-1220), but the missions were officially sent for the purpose of maintaining peace between the two rulers. The caravan was stopped in Otrar, which at that time was ruled by Inalchiq Ghayir Khan, a kinsman of the Khwarezmshah’s mother, Terken Khatun. As Juwaynī narrated, Ghayir Khan “placed them [the caravan and the diplomats] under arrest, and sent a messenger to the Sultan [Naṣr ad-Dīn?] in Iraq to inform him about them. Without pausing to think [whether] the Sultan

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Tikhvinskii (ed.), *Tataro-Mongoly v Azii i Evrope*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1977), 112-139. Petrushevskii called the capture of Otrar as ‘the Otrar incident’ and provided a very negative account of the Mongol invasion (p. 112).

sanctioned the shedding of their blood and deemed the seizure of their goods to be lawful, not knowing that his own life would become unlawful, nay a crime [i.e. that arresting the delegates would be a crime], and that the bird of his prosperity would be lopped of feather and wing.”\footnote{The History of the World-Conqueror by ‘Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini, translated from the text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini by John Andrew Boyle, vol. 1 (Manchester, 1958), 79-80.} the delegation was massacred, and this very soon became known to Chingiz Khan. The consequences for Otrar and the country were disastrous: the Mongol armies arrived in the region and besieged Otrar. After defeat,

“[A]ll the guilty and innocent of Otrar, both wearers of the veil and those that donned kulah and turban [i.e., the Muslim scholars], were driven forth from the town like a flock of sheep, and the Mongols looted whatever goods and wares there were to be found. As for Ghayir, together with twenty thousand brave men and lion-like warriors he took refuge in the citadel. (...) And so the battle went on for a whole month until only Ghayir and two others were left, and still he continued to do battle and would not turn tail and flee. (...) [Finally, Ghayir] was firmly bound and placed in heavy chains. The citadel and the walls were leveled with the street and the Mongols departed. And those of the common people and artisans that had escaped the sword they bore away with them, either to serve in the levy (hashar) or to practice their trade. As for Ghayir, they caused him in the Kök-Sarai to drink the cup of annihilation and don the garb of eternity.”\footnote{Ibid., 83-86.}

The Mongols used to destroy the walls of all newly-captured cities, to ease the control of the population and to make any rebellion futile. The same was done in Otrar: the Mongols destroyed the walls. Soviet historiography took Juwaynî literally and believed in a complete destruction of the city. At the same time it was acknowledged, however, that Otrar very soon restored its importance. Numismatic material demonstrates that Otrar was not leveled with the ground: scholars detected the circulation of coins in the region shortly after the Mongol invasion.\footnote{V.N. Nastich, “K periodizatsii monetnoi chekanki Otrara i ee roli v denezhnom khoziaistve goroda i oblasti,” in: Blizhnii i Srednii Vostok: tovarno-denezhnye otosheniia pri feodalizme [Bartol’dovskie chteniia 1978] (Moscow, 1980), 162-171; V.N. Nastich, “Novye fakty iz istorii monetnogo proizvodstva i denezhnogo obrashcheniia v Iuzhnom Kazakhstane (XIII-XVII vv.),” in: Srednevekovskaja gorodskaja kul’tura Kazakhstana i Srednii Azii: Materialy vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniia (Alma-Ata, 1983), 143-152.} Moreover, the archeological investigations on the Otrar site did not detect a stratigraphic layer with conflagration that could be associated with the
1219 assault. For comparison, such a layer of destruction of the early 13th century does exist in Bulghar, the capital of a pre-Mongol state on the Middle Volga River that was also captured, and obviously completely destroyed, by the Mongols. This brings up the question why the assumption of a complete destruction of Otrar was still maintained and how it was used in the Kazakh national discourse after WWII. This leads us to the work of Kimal’ Akishev (1924-2003) who at that time was the leading scholar of Otrar studies.

Kimal’ Akishevic Akishev was born in Pavlodar region in 1924. As his disciple Karl Baipakov remembers, “Akishev originated from famous Kazakh roots, he was a nephew of Kanysh Imantaevich Satpaev (Kimal’s mother was Satpaev’s sister). His family is from the north of the Kazakh lands known for its orientation on Russian culture. Kimal’s parents died of starvation in the 1930s. Kimal’ and his brother were taken from an orphanage by Satpaev. In fact, they grew up with Satpaev.” Satpaev (1899-1964) was a geologist, an academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1946), the first President of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, and he became famous for his discovery of copper in Dzhezkazghan. During the repressions of 1951 Satpaev was relieved of his directorship of the Academy, but in 1955, after de-Stalinization, he returned to his office. During his long academic career Satpaev contributed much to the organization of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences in general and to the development of geology in particular. To have him as his patron was certainly a crucial factor in Akishev’s biography. At the same time there can be no doubt about Akishev’s high personal qualities. As Baipakov continued,

“Kimal’ Akishev received a good education in Alma-Ata. At that time, before the war, education was generally quite good. In 1941 he graduated from high school and immediately went to the front. Akishev was proud that he participated in the war, and Stalin remained a hero for him. After the war he went to Leningrad, where he studied archeology with Mikhail Petrovich Griaznov at GAIMK. After defending his candidate dissertation Akishev returned to Alma-Ata and headed the Archeological Sector

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873 According to my Kazakh colleagues, a dissertation on the life of Kimal’ Akishev is currently being prepared in Astana.

874 Interview with Karl M. Baipakov by the author, Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Almaty, 16 June 2010.

875 M. Sarsekeev, Satpaev (Moscow, 1980).
at the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography, from 1954 until 1991 when the independent Institute of Archeology was set up. In 1995/96 Akishev went to Astana, where he opened a Centre of Archeology at the Eurasian University. 876

The ancient cities of Kazakhstan were the main object of Akishev’s interests. His choice of a southern direction in archeological work was not accidental: as Kazakh archeologists believed, “Southern Kazakhstan is the cradle of the Kazakh people.” 877

Karl Baipakov, the former director of the Margulan Institute of Archeology, shared with me some of his reminiscences on Akishev’s role in the investigation of Otrar:

“The Otrar expedition was established in 1969 and became the biggest in the whole Soviet Union. The archeologists submitted the plan of the expedition to [the then Secretary General of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan] Kunaev. At that time everything was decided only through the Party organization. Several times they sent the project there. They also repeatedly asked to establish an independent Institute of Archeology, but this initiative was stopped from above. Akishev was very clever and persistent. He was able to show that “not everything is quiet in the Kazakh kingdom,” because the Kazakhs were previously shown only as nomadic people, even though the [names of] cities of Otrar, Turkestan, and Ṭarāz had always been in the air. Akishev transformed the studies from the nomadic conception towards that of urban civilization. He spoke very well, his speech would intrigue everybody, he certainly had charisma, and he was an intelligent and decent person. It was a great pleasure to work with him. Kunaev was interested in excavations. He once visited the on-site museum in Shaulder [near Otrar]. We built something like a castle there. It was the time when excavations of Otrar were popular, and when the first books on the Kazakh urban civilization appeared. Of course, Kunaev was more interested in how corn grows, but the cultural program included the visit to Otrar”. 878

Akishev prepared the project of long-term excavations on the Otrar site very carefully. He understood the importance of this region for the Kazakh national identity. The first draft of the project goes back to 1965, when Akishev, being supported by the administration of the Institute of History (the director Akai Nusupbekov and his deputy Grigori

876 Interview with Karl M. Baipakov by the author, Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Almaty, 16 June 2010.


878 Interview with Karl M. Baipakov by the author, Margulan Institute of Archeology, Almaty, 16 June 2010.
Dakhshleiger) wrote a proposal to the Presidium of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences and also discussed it with Dinmukhamed Kunaev. The latter probably fully recognized the significance of the Otrar region for Kazakhstan and supported the project, which presupposed colossal assignations: a hundred thousand rubles for reconnaissance works, and then 500,000 rubles each year. In total Akishev indeed asked for ten million rubles to support twenty years of work. No doubt, serious political interests were at stake, and Akishev made perfect use of his talents to get the officials interested in seemingly purely scientific problems. To achieve success, Akishev referred to the world-wide fame of the Khwarezmian complex expedition that had discovered a magnificent ancient civilization.\textsuperscript{879} The author of the project argued that such an enterprise required a long period of work, a lot of money, and the optional concentration of labor forces. Under pressure of these arguments the Otrar project was supported at the highest academic levels in the Soviet Union: the Presidium of Academy of Sciences approved it in its resolution \textit{On the Main Research Trends and Means of Support for the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR} dated from 29 July 1966.\textsuperscript{880}

Using the popularity of Oriental Studies at the Kazakh Academia at that time, Akishev even spread a rumor, which was included in the project of the expedition.\textsuperscript{881} Reproducing a myth that had already been mentioned in the third edition of \textit{History of the Kazakh SSR} (1957),\textsuperscript{882} Akishev wrote that according to ancient Arabic sources (without mentioning individual authors), Otrar once had a great library of manuscripts that was comparable in the number of its volumes only with the legendary Alexandria library.\textsuperscript{883}

Until the present day, after more than forty years of excavations, no remnants or indica-

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\textsuperscript{880} Ibid., D. 771. Sv. 60. \textit{Dokladnaia zapiska i drugie dokumenty po organizatsii arkheologo-etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii v Otrarskom oazise}, 1969, f. 4.


\end{flushleft}
tions of this library have been found, but it was a good argument for seeking financing and the government’s attention. To be sure, in the 1980s a single fragment of a manuscript was discovered, which survived in the ground under a bronze plate. Arabist Vladimir Nastich, as he told me, identified it as a geographical treatise in the Arabic language written in the 14th century. However, this unique book has been lost somewhere; my colleagues in Almaty were unable to say where it ended up. In continuation of seeking arguments for the cultural significance of Otrar for the Kazakhs it was claimed repeatedly that the famous philosopher al-Fārābī (873-950) and even poet Aḥmad Yasawī were born there. Also in our days archeologists continue to gather information from old written sources to celebrate the uniqueness of Otrar, building new myths on top of the old ones.

Even though Otrar had already been in the focus of scholarly attention for quite some time, it took three years of preliminary works in 1967-1970 before stationary excavations were started on the Otrar site. On 24 December 1970 the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR officially organized the South Kazakhstan Complex Archeological Expedition (IuKKAE), which was aimed to study the past of the region from the Stone Age to the late Middle Ages. Archeologists started working on the large territories, also excavating extending dwelling areas (quarters) of the late 18th century. The large scale of these works made this expedition indeed the largest in the whole Soviet Union.

Already the first results of his expedition allowed Akgishiev to demonstrate the need to continue financing this initiative. He pointed to several important issues that had obvious political significance for the Kazakh authorities: 1) artifacts from Otrar proved the antiquity and independence in development of agriculture and city civilization in Kazakhstan. This thesis was extremely important for taking the republic out of the common Central Asian heritage and for rejecting the assumption of a shared origin of sedentary urban culture. 2) Otrar was given the status of a key region for explaining Kazakh ethnogenesis. Anthropological investigations here could also provide material for studying the formation


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of the Kazakhs’ physical outlook. This thesis should be based on the assumption that the whole territory of the Otrar region had always been populated by Kazakhs or at least by their ancestors who actively participated in the creation of Kazakh nationhood. 3) Otrar studies were important for detecting and investigating ancient systems of water management. 4) The new data from Otrar denounced the racist myths of bourgeois historiography on the supposed eternal backwardness and lack of history of the Kazakhs. 886

Although the South Kazakhstan Archeological Expedition became totally independent from the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archeology (the former GAIMK), the Leningrad archeologist Aleksandr Belenitskii was invited to take part in archeological investigations on the site to make some practical suggestions. Already Bernshtam, following Iakubovskii’s recommendation, had suggested Aleksandr Belenitskii for participation in the Kazakhstan expedition. As a specialist in Arabic and Persian textual studies he was important for the study of the mid-Sir Darya cities, and, as Bernshtam suggested, had the potential to become the leading scholar in this field. 887 Belenitskii indeed visited Otrar as a guest scholar and left some recommendations about how to conduct studies, but only as late as in 1972. He arrived in May 1972 and wrote a short report on the works on the Otrar site. First of all, Belenitskii underlined that before 1969 archeological studies on the object had a preliminary and exploratory character; the in-depth study did not reach the Otrar site itself. These works only demonstrated the general necessity and topicality of devoting more attention to Otrar. A photographic fixation of the topographical setting on the Otrar site in 1969 allowed archeologists to understand how the city was structured, including the location of irrigation systems. Belenitskii agreed that the site had great significance for studying the relations between nomadic and settled populations and for the analysis of the character of urban culture in Kazakhstan in the 16th-18th centuries. Belenitskii’s main recommendation was to reduce the scale of the planned excavations of the shahristān’s central part from 20 to 2 hectares. 888
On the basis of the achieved comprehensive archeological data Akishev and his colleagues wrote several monographs on the ancient history of Otrar and a huge amount of articles.\(^{889}\) Research done in Otrar allowed Kazakh archeologists to finally claim “a continuity of social development since the Stone Age. The discovery of Paleolithic artifacts demonstrated that Kazakhstan was one of the areas where the first humans on the Earth lived. Studies of Bronze cultures demonstrated a particular succession of cultures until the early stages in the history of the Kazakh people, which is an objective sign of its local origin.”\(^{890}\) Akishev maintained he was “against the theory of an indigenous origin in its ‘vulgar’ form and [instead] regarded the formation of the Kazakh people as a fusion of the indigenous Indo-European population with a newly arrived Turkic-Mongol population. On the other hand, Akishev assumed that there was ‘a significant proto-Turkic component in the local ethnic milieu.’”\(^{891}\)

The results of archeological works on the Otrar site were represented on two All-Union conferences, namely The Early Medieval Culture of Central Asia and Kazakhstan held in Penjikent (Tajik SSR) in August 1977, and The Problems of Studying Medieval Archeology of Kazakhstan and Central Asia in the 13\(^{th}\)-18\(^{th}\) Centuries organized by the Institute of History in Alma-Ata in May 1981. Even though each report at these conferences dealt with one particular republic, these forums were aimed to coordinate research on inter-republican level and to intensify contacts between republics on a regional scale.\(^{892}\) This has to be seen in the context of general attempts of the Soviet government to unify Central Asian republics in their history, promoting regional projects. And again, like the joint regional history overviews coordinated by Narochnitskii that we analyzed in chapter two, very little was achieved. Still, the participants of the conference admitted that Central


\(^{892}\) Rannesrednevekovaia kul’tura Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana (Tezisy Vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii v g. Pianzhikente Tadzh. SSR, 26-31 avgusta 1977) (Dushanbe, 1977); Srednevekovaia gorodskai kul’tura Kazakhstana i Srednej Azii: Materialy vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniiia (Alma-Ata, 1983).
Asian and Kazakhstan archeology “is closely related to the best traditions of Russian Oriental Studies and to the progressive elements of Turkestan studies (turkestanovedenie).”

It was also mentioned that the interest in the late medieval urban centers was common for many Muslim regions of the Soviet Union: Otrar in Kazakhstan, Khujand in Tajikistan, Bukhara in Uzbekistan, and the Golden Horde cities in the Volga-Ural region. Everywhere the organizational forms of investigation were the same: the Academy of Sciences established comprehensive archeological expeditions which conducted annual stationary works on the most important objects, concentrating there the best scholarly cadres of the region and becoming a true educational institution for a generation of new researchers.

Karl Baipakov is a representative of that generation. However, the effort to bring the republic’s archeologists together did not work — too entrenched were the national traditions that had developed over the preceding three decades.

After these conferences and the publication of a number of monographs the investigation of Otrar did not stop, but it slowly lost its former significance. Moreover, as I argued in the third chapter of my dissertation, after the death of the director of the Institute of History Akai Nusupbekov in 1983 and Kunaev's withdrawal from office in 1986, this period in development of Oriental Studies in Kazakhstan came to a close. The production of the Kazakh film The Death of Otrar (Gibel’ Otrara, 1991) as an artistic implementation of the Kazakh concept of urban civilization and the myth of ‘Otrar catastrophe’ in the Kazakh archeology, symbolized also the end of an epoch.

4.10. Kazakh Urban Civilization: Crystallization of the Concept

Urban studies combated the idea that Kazakh history was determined by the backwardness of the local population. Excavations at Novgorod determined similar processes were at work in Russia, when, after WWII, the scholars saw the widespread of literacy among the ancient Russians as a proof for their argument that Russian towns had appeared simultane-

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894 Margulan atyndaghy Arkheologiia institutyna 15 zhyl (Almaty, 2007), 45.

895 The film’s scenario was written by Svetlana Karmalita and Aleksei German, since the early 1970s a prominent figure of the Russian cinema of the Perestroika period.
ously with towns in Western Europe. Obviously, the successful works of the Novgorod Expedition (which had been started by Artsikhovskii in 1951) inspired urban studies in other regions, especially in the Volga-Ural Region and in Central Asia. The quintessence of Central Asian urban studies was represented in a collective work of Leningrad Orientalists by the title of *The Medieval City of Central Asia* (1973). One of the co-authors, Oleg Bol’shakov, spent years in the Penjikent expedition (Tajikistan), where he became a recognized specialist in Arabic epigraphy. At that time Bol’shakov was working at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archeology and produced dissertations about Arabic inscriptions on Central Asian ceramics from the 8th-12th centuries and about the phenomenon of the city in medieval Central Asia.

Bol’shakov mapped several regions of Central Asian urban civilization. His classification was determined by cultural similarity, but he also mentioned the influence of modern political borders. Among those regions Bol’shakov enumerated: Margiana (Southern Turkmenistan), Ancient Khwarezm (Western Uzbekistan/ Northern Turkmenistan), Tokharistan (southern regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), Ferghana (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirgizia), Southern Kazakhstan and Northern Kirgizstan. The junction of archeological and textual data was crucial for characterizing each of these areas. Bol’shakov mentioned that cities on the lower and middle Sir Darya river were established only in the 5th-6th centuries, i.e. later than Transoxanian settlements; however some of those cities, for example Sayrām, could be compared with the major towns of Khwarezm and Soghd due to their economic and political importance.

According to Bol’shakov, big and small cities of the Sir Darya valley and Semirench’e played a significant role in the history of Central Asian culture and economics. There was a centuries-old border between settlement civilization and the world of steppes. Taking into account the necessity to claim the autochthonous character of urban centers, Bol’shakov

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899 A. M. Belenitskii et al., *Srednevekovyj gorod Srednei Azii*, 8-12.
stated that these cities were not only merchants’ outposts for the exchange of goods, but they also resulted from the settlements of the native Turkic population.  

The Kazakh SSR was not the only one to use archeology and urban studies as an instrument of overcoming the stigma of backwardness. In the late 1970s urban studies had become topical for archeologists in another Central Asian republic with nomadic background – the Kirgiz republic. Kirgiz archeologist Valentina Goriacheva, the main specialist there, recognized the importance of this topic: “Large ancient cities which preserved the monuments of old architecture are impressive objects of demonstration. It should serve for the noble tasks of cultural and educational work among society. Academic research of the Kirgiz cities is a significant source for acquainting [the population] with the Kirgiz cultural heritage, their relationship with other peoples, and for patriotic and international education”.  

For example, in 1976 the government of the Kirgiz Republic and in 1977 the Scientific Council of the Academy of Sciences of USSR defined the ancient city Krasnaia Rechka as an object of mass tourism in Kirgizstan. Archeological investigations of this site were conducted in close collaboration between the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography (Almaty, the respective research group being directed by Karl Baipakov) and the Institute of History of the Kirgiz Academy of Sciences (Frunze, Valentina Goriacheva). This is one of the rare cases of inter-republican cooperation in the field of archeological expeditions in Central Asia. The Kirgiz and Kazakh cases of ‘a backward people’ were quite similar, though Kirgiz and Kazakh scholars, of course, had different opinions about who built these cities. 

In Kazakhstan investigations of the urban civilization were continued by Karl Baipakov, whose formulations finally entrenched the concept of Kazakhs as city-dwellers. Baipakov studied archeology at the historical faculty of Leningrad University and made a career from an ordinary researcher at the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography

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900 Ibid., 195.
901 Krasnaia Rechka i Burana (Frunze, 1989), 3.
902 Ibid. Asan Torgaev (the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg), one of my informants who lived in Kirgizia, remembers how he used to earn a considerable amount of money by organizing small touristic ‘tours’ to the tower of Burana.
903 V.D. Goriacheva, Srednevekovye gorodskie tsentry i arkitekturnye ansambl Kirgizii (Burana, Uzgen, Safid-Bulan) (Frunze, 1983); M.E. Masson, V.D. Goriacheva, Burana. Istoriia izuchenia gorodishcha i ego arkitekturnykh pamiatnikov (Frunze, 1985).

It was a great pleasure for me to meet academician Karl Baipakov in Almaty in the summer of 2010. At that time he had just been replaced as Director of the Institute of Archeology. At this point I would like to reproduce a larger part of what Professor Baipakov stated during our meeting, for his statements encapsulate the complete concept of Kazakh urban civilization:

“I come from a family of historians who worked in a high school in a small town called Talghar near Alma-Ata. In the city’s outskirts there is an ancient site with the same name Talghar. After visiting that place together with my school teacher, I began to read historical literature. This is why I went to Leningrad and entered the Historical Faculty of Leningrad University. There I specialized in archeology. It was the only place in the whole Soviet Union where specialized archeological training started not with the third year of study but right in the first year. My supervisor in Leningrad was Vadim Mikhailovich Masson. It was the time when our country was united, so that while specializing in medieval Central Asian archeology I was able to go to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan…. My master thesis was devoted to the archeological complex of Otrar. Three years later I defended my first dissertation and after twenty years the second one. What follows was, as usual, a career as Member Correspondent of the Kazakh Academy and then as academician.

A.B.: Some say that in Leningrad there was a school of Oriental archeology. What are the peculiarities of this school?

K.B.: This school was already formed in the times of the Russian Imperial Archeological Society (Russkoe imperatorskoe arkeologicheskoe obshchestvo). Among other things they were interested in Oriental antiquity. In Soviet times there were such scholars as Bernstam, Iakubovskii, and Belenitskii [who belonged to that school]. Before WWII there were big expeditions in Kazakhstan, for example the Semirech’e archeological expedition led by Bernstam. In the Institute of History of Material Culture [in Leningrad] there was a Sector of Central Asia and Caucasus. Nowadays there is no such sector, because all those who studied Oriental archeology have already passed away. This school is almost dead now, but its students [from Cen-

904 The Russian Imperial Archeological Society existed in St. Petersburg between 1846 and 1924 and was aimed to study archeology and numismatics on the territory of the Russian Empire.
tral Asia], who studied in Leningrad are still active [in the national republics]. We had close contacts with the Institute of Oriental Studies (Kliashtornyi, Bol’shakov) and the State Hermitage (Artamonov, Piotrovskii, Griaznov).

To the peculiarities of this school belonged its methodology, which had been elaborated in the Penjikent Archeological Expedition that was started by Iakubovskii and continued by Belenitskii. The methodology is called “excavations of broad areas”. This differs from the Western methods, according to which one prefers to make holes (Rus. shurf) on the site and then to compare the material. From the very beginning our methodology was distinct. Excavations of broad areas allowed for the revealing of the [entire] urban topography and its development.

A.B.: Why was the issue of Central Asian settled civilization so important?

K.B.: Urbanization is a global issue. All of us, historians, archeologists, and Orientalists have to deal with it. For example, why did the renaissance of the Oriental city precede [the rebirth of] the Western city? Why were [medieval] Oriental cities culturally more developed than European cities? Why did the development of the Oriental city ‘suddenly’ stagnate? Why did Europe go further? There are lots of questions and hypotheses. The urbanization of society is a natural process. For Kazakhstan it is especially important because previously it was accepted that this was a land of nomads. Yet on the contrary, since the Bronze Age we observe the development of pre-urban civilization in the region. At that time cities on the territory of Kazakhstan were centers of metallurgy and artisanship. Soviet scholars Griaznov, Zadneprovskii, and Chernikov had believed that since the 8th-6th centuries BC nomadism prevailed on the territory of Kazakhstan. Almost nobody said that both the Turks and the Saka had cities. Now we know that the Saka905 were a settled population, city-dwellers (…). These Soviet scholars claimed that the first Kazakh state [sic!] was the Turkic Kaganate. Kimal’ Akishev in his doctoral dissertation on the Saka has demonstrated that Saka society had all attributes of a state, with a writing system, a social stratification, and an ideology. The Usun represented the next step. The Chinese sources called them nomads, but we have recently discovered lots of Usun settlements near Almaty which go back to the 8th century CE. It had always been accepted that the cities on the Great Silk Road were set up by the Soghdians. Now we know that both the Turks and the Soghdians lived there from the very beginning. The Soghdians did not arrive to an empty space: traditions of urban life were already present there before them.

905 The Saka were an Iranian speaking people which lived in Kazakhstan and South Siberia between the first millennium BC and first centuries AD.
There were also the Kazakh cities. The cities on the Sir Darya River played a
grandiose role in development of culture, politics, and economics of the Kazakh
Khanate. [The city of] Turkestan was an ideological center. Numerous wars with the
Shaybanids in the 16th century were fought over the possession of the cities in the Sir
Darya region. This region was very important for the population, which at a certain
point [however] turned to the nomadic way of life. Of course, there were periods of
decline, for example after the Mongol invasion when the urban civilization in
Semirech’e simply disappeared. But here is Almaty, which is 1200 years old, accord-
ing to the coins.

A.B.: Can we link the interest in the urban topic with urbanization in Soviet so-
ciety?

K.B.: They [i.e. the Soviet authorities] tried to settle the nomadic part of the Ka-
zakhs by force, and to accumulate them in the kolkhozes. This attempt failed: many
people died or went away. Our predecessors (for example, Ageeva and Patsevich)
were thinking that the urban civilization in Kazakhstan developed only before the
Mongol invasion, afterwards there was a decline. There was no ideological pressure
with an aim ‘to elevate the Kazakh to urban society.’ On the contrary, when archeolo-
gists started to advance the claim that Semirech’e was an area of urbanization, then the
Russian population said that this is not true. By the way, in Soviet times we had a bet-
ter knowledge of Russian culture, the history of Russian cities [than of the Kazakh
ones]. Our ancient history was hardly known. This was the ideological pressure – to
show that there was ‘an older brother’ in the Union and the rest were just assis-
tants.”

Baipakov’s way of interpretation is interesting from two sides. First, it is anti-
Russian rhetoric which implied that Russian scholars opposed to see urban culture in Ka-
zakhstan, which not entirely correct taking in consideration a range of work produced by
Bartol’d, Iaukubovskii, Bernshtam and Ageeva. Still, within Kazakh CP this might have
been important. Second, it denies any political demand to show the Kazakhs as city-
dwellers. As we have seen, such claims are part of the game.

In his opus magnum Medieval Urban Culture of Southern Kazakhstan and
Semirech’e (1986) Baipakov drew conclusions from extensive data on historical geogra-
phy, social and political history. Baipakov suggested that Southern Kazakhstan and

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906 Interview with Karl M. Baipakov by the author, Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Almaty, 16 June
2010.
Semirech’e were two distinct cultural areas. In his mind, in the 6\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} centuries CE a unified cultural system of Soghdians and Turks in Central Asia came into being. “One of its characteristics is the uniformity of the urban civilization of Soghdiana, Mawarannahr, Southern Kazakhstan and Semirech’e”.\(^{907}\)

Even though a mosque was found in Otrar, Baipakov preferred to completely ignore Islam and to substitute it with the conception of religious syncretism: in his view Islam did not satisfy the peoples’ spiritual needs. Regarding the question of the so-called Sarts,\(^{908}\) i.e. the settled population of Central Asian cities, Baipakov incorporated them into the history of Kazakh ethnogenesis, claiming that the Sarts of Southern Kazakhstan were descendants of a local urban population that at a certain point lost its tribal affiliations under the influence of Islam and urban life-style. This allowed him to explain the particularities of the material culture of Southern Kazakhstan in comparison to the rest of the country, as well as the numerous similarities with urban centers of Transoxiana.\(^{909}\) To link the ancient population of the cities with the Kazakh tribes Baipakov turned to ethnographic realities. He identified numerous similarities between archeological remains and items from ethnographic research like the ornamentation of ceramics and \textit{tamghas} (property signs). According to archeologists ornaments on ancient items were identical to \textit{tamghas} of the nineteenth-century Kazakh tribes, leading then to the conclusion that representatives of these tribes had once inhabited cities.\(^{910}\) As the Kazakh historians believed, “many cultural achievements of the medieval epoch are buried in the ground of the Kazakh material culture.”\(^{911}\)

Excavations of broad areas also made it possible to conduct demographic research on the medieval population of Otrar. Taking into account the number of identified houses in the city, Baipakov suggested that in the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century, when the whole population of


the Kazakh Khanate (thus, without northern territories) was estimated at around a million, the urban population in the whole of Kazakhstan did not account for more than 70,000 people, or 7 per cents of the overall population.\footnote{K.M. Baipakov, \textit{Problemy arkheologicheskikh issledovanii}, 41.} This shows that Baipakov acknowledged the limited role of Kazakh urban culture. Still, the city issue continued to attract the main attention as it was crucial for national history.

For similar reasons the Kazakh archeologists (as well as their Central Asian colleagues) were also highly interested in ancient systems of irrigation in the Otrar oasis, Sīghnāq, and Sauran. The investigation of this topic also revealed that the ancient water management system in south Kazakhstan largely resembled that of other Central Asian regions.\footnote{K.A. Akishev, K.M. Baipakov, “Kiarizy Saurana,” in: \textit{Vestnik Akademii Nauk KazSSR}, 4 (1973), 76-78; V.A. Groshev, \textit{Irrigatsiia Iuzhnogo Kazakhstana v srednie veka} (Alma-Ata, 1985); T.V. Savel’eva, D.M. Kostina, \textit{Otrar, Otrarskiii oasis i Iuzhnii Kazakhstan, problemnye issledovaniia Iuzhno-Kazakhstanskoj kompleksnoi arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii. 1971-1985} (Alma-Ata, 1986), 21-22. For a general overview of water management on the basis of modern archeological data: D. Clarke, R. Sala, J.-M. Deom, and E. Meseth, “Reconstructing Irrigation at Otrar Oasis, Kazakhstan, AD 800-1700,” in: \textit{Irrigation and Drainage} 54 (2005), 375-388.}

City triumphed over tents: “the transition of nomads to city-dwellers and their ethnic interaction can be observed over the whole ancient and medieval history.”\footnote{K. M. Baipakov, \textit{Srednevekovaia gorodskaia kul’tura}, 187; T. A. Zhdanko, „Nomadizm v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane,“ in: \textit{Istoriia, arkheologiia i etnografiiia Srednei Azii} (Moscow, 1968), 279.} The archeological works of Akishev and Baipakov claimed that ancient cities of Southern Kazakhstan and Semirech’e were set up on the basis of an autochthonic development of Turkic tribes since the Bronze Age. Even though these cities were culturally linked to the rest of Central Asia, the region was firmly bound to the main Kazakh territories. With hindsight this appears as a teleological argument for the unification of the Kazakh people in one state, in the borders of modern Kazakhstan. All cities of the middle Sir Darya valley belonged to the Kazakh Khanate and nobody but the Kazakhs is entitled to call them their patrimony.

\subsection*{4.11. The Fate of Islamic Architecture: The Yasawī Shrine}

This paragraph was initially intended as an addendum to an article published by Devin DeWeese on the image of Khwāja Ṭahmāsib Yasawī and the \textit{Divan-i Hikmat} in Soviet
DeWeese focused his research on philological and historical studies around the personality of Aḥmad Yasawī and the collection of verses under the title of *Divan-i Hikmat* that are widely ascribed to Yasawī. DeWeese acknowledged the fact that Soviet scholarship put the main accent on the history of the mausoleum itself, i.e. on its architectural history, but he did not go into detail; therefore I will deal here with the research history of the shrine on the basis of archival and published sources as well as interviews. My thesis is that it was during the Soviet era that the mausoleum obtained its symbolic significance and visibility. The main question of interest here is how the mausoleum of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī was used in the national discourse.916

The shrine in the settlement of Yasī (later: Turkestan), after Yasawī as the “Pir of Turkestan”, was constructed in the 1390s, reportedly on the order of Amir Timūr (d. 1405) who had paid a brief visit to the assumed burial place of Aḥmad Yasawī. For centuries the mausoleum was in the hands of sacred Khwāja families that traced their real or mystified genealogies back to Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī and the Prophet Muḥammad. The large popularity of Aḥmad Yasawī as a great Sufi sheikh made his majestic tomb in the city of Turkestan a symbol of Islamic piety on the border between Transoxania and the Steppe region. In the tradition of the Yasawī Sufi brotherhood the Yasī shrine was a place of pilgrimage (ziyāra) and of various spiritual ceremonies. Yasawī’s great fame was reflected in the wide-spread saying that “in Mecca is Muḥammad, in Yasī is Aḥmad.”917 Yasawī hagiographies claim that seven pilgrimages to the shrine with the ritual circumambulation (tawāf) around the sarcophagus count as an equivalent to the hajj to Mecca. The sacred families which kept the mausoleum enjoyed large land ownership and also benefitted from the impressive amount of money that pilgrims brought every year as donations. Early on the sacred place became a subject of political and financial interests of various groups, including the rulers. In late Soviet times Kazakh historians began to claim that after the

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916 Transformations in the image of Aḥmad Yasawī and his shrine after the fall of the Soviet Union have been analyzed in details by Thierry Zarcone. See: T. Zarcone, “Ahmad Yasavī héros des nouvelles républiques centraasiatiques,” in: *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89-90 (juillet 2000), 297-323.

917 B. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan. Kazak religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, 2001), 3, 53. Yasī was the original name of city Turkestan.
construction of the shrine in the late 14th century, the city of Yasī (Turkestan) started to grow significantly, and became “an ideological centre of the region.”

Before the Russian conquest the city of Turkestan had found itself from time to time in the hands of the Kazakh rulers, who were in conflict with the various Uzbek dynasties over this region. The Kazakh Khans used the immediate vicinity of the mausoleum as a necropolis for their families. As a result, two types of sacredness were joint at the shrine.

Figure 5: The Yasawi shrine (photo by the author, summer 2010)

There have been speculations that the remnants of some rulers were even kept inside the building. Yet according to Erbulat Smagulov, the leading archeologist in the Turkestan region, “it is a rather questionable claim that there were any burials of the Kazakh aristocracy inside (bold is mine – A.B.) the shrine. The inscriptions on the stones in the mausoleum do not indicate any name of Kazakh Khans or Sultans. Claims that such graves have been discovered are simply political speculation. All reports on the graves of the Kazakh elite inside of the building are based on oral tradition. I am not sure that we can rely on oral tradition in this case.”

By contrast, the Kazakh anthropologist Orazak Smagulov (a full member of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences) claims that he identified the burial place of Ablai Khan inside of the mausoleum. The vicinity of the mausoleum certainly served as a burial place for the Chingizid dynasty; this seems to have started after the destruction of a previous sacred place in Saraichik, on the Iaik (Ural) river (South-Western Kazakhstan). In 1485 Rabi’a Sultan Khanum, the wife of Abu’l-Khayr Khan (1412-1468) and a daughter of Ulughbek (1394-1449), was buried in front of the Yasawī mausoleum; in 1524 Suyûnch Khwāja Khan, the ruler of Turkestan, was also buried in the neighborhood. In 1628 the Kazakh Khan Esim was buried behind the mausoleum. At the turn of the 16th-17th centuries the Kazakh sultans and khans used to be buried in Turkestan.

By the 19th century the mausoleum obviously needed restoration, especially after eleven artillery shots at the building during the capture of the mausoleum by the Russians. The Russian government even examined the possibility of a total destruction of the building, but fortunately, they preferred to spend money on its restoration (1872), and the shrine survived. This opened the long history of slow restorations of the building which is still continuing to date. In 1939 ustoty Kuli Dzhalilov, a master from Samarkand, was invited to carry out restoration work. It is said that Dzhalilov even received the Stalin Prize for his

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919 Interview with Erbulat A. Smagulov by the author, Margulan Institute of Archeology, Almaty, 5 May 2010. A similar opinion was expressed by art historian Elena Khorosh. Interview with Elena Kh. Khorosh by the author, Institute of the Problems of the Cultural Heritage of Nomads, Almaty, 22 June 2010.


works in Uzbekistan. In September 1947 the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR approved the document *On the Measures for the Protection of Architectural and Archaeological Monuments in the Kazakh SSR*. According to this law the mausoleum of Khwāja Ahmad Yasawī was taken under state protection. The Department of Architectural Affairs at the Cabinet was obliged to lead the restoration, investigation, and protection of the monument.

After WWII the party officials decided that once the restoration was completed an antireligious museum should be opened in the shrine. Yet nothing came out of this: the restoration works simply dragged on slowly. Most probably the funds for the restoration were largely used for non-productive ends or simply stolen. However, some archeological work around the shrine was initiated when a survey was made of the surrounding territory. When Khrushchev visited Kazakhstan in March 1961, he arrived to Turkestan after reviewing the Virgin Land projects. As Dinmukhamed Kunaev described in his memoirs, Khrushchev saw the shrine and asked Kunaev what that building was. Kunaev briefly told Khrushchev about the saint Aḥmad Yasawī, Tīmūr’s initiative to build the great shrine, and finally about the graves of Kazakh noblemen at the site. Yet Khrushchev’s curiosity did not result in any actions around the mausoleum.

In the early 1960s Kazakh officials were seriously worried about the religious situation in the southern regions of the republic. For 1963 documents mention that thousands of believers from the regions of South Kazakhstan, Tselinograd and Karaganda oblast’ continued visiting the shrine and regarded it as a sacred place. Therefore the Council of Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of the Kazakh SSR planned to enforce another renovation of the mausoleum and to re-open it as an atheistic, anti-religious museum in order to ‘enlighten’ the Soviet citizens about the true character of Islam. In general the authorities tried to fight the expanding “Islamic movement” through the closure of sacred places (mazar) and their transformation into museums. This strategy was not very successful, although many

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924 AIA MON RK, D. 475, 23 folios.

reports claimed that anti-religious lectures in museums (former mazars) indeed ended the veneration. For example, the shrine of Awliyā Atā Qarā Khān in Dzhambul (Ţarāz) was turned into museum. It was claimed that already in 1961 twenty two thousand people visited the new museum. However, these huge numbers of visitors show that veneration was not stopped, but that it simply took another form: the mazar keepers became museum employees, pilgrims were seen as visitors of the museum. Also in the shrines of Arīstān-Bāb and Aḥmad Yasawī veneration simply continued. That the closure of sacred places was only a superficial measure can also be seen in Sayrām, where the authorities closed the mazars of Ibrahim Ata and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and protected them as historical monuments. A special inspection discovered that the keys from the mazar had been handed over to two persons by the names of Asankhan Mansurov and Turakhan Usenkhodzhaev, whose family names already indicate that they claimed their origin from the saints – thus they were Khwājas. As hereditary keepers of the sacred place they organized the local pilgrimage and made money from it. In documents it is mentioned with indignation that several vagrant Mullahs had an impressive financial income from such veneration. Besides, also regular visits to living masters of the spiritual way were common in South Kazakhstan. As the Soviet officials pointed out, one Ishan Abdulvakhid Mukhamedshukurov (1875-1967), a local Sufi leader living in the Turkestan region, received visitors from many regions of Kazakhstan and even from as far as Tajikistan.

Authorities were helpless in their fight against the veneration of mazars. They tried to change at least the form of this phenomenon and put it under state control. Of course, the mausoleum of Aḥmad Yasawī was central in the process of antireligious propaganda.

Only in the late 1960s, simultaneously with Akishev’s Otrar project, the government understood the possibility to use the shrine as a popular place for tourism from all over the world and also as a symbol of Kazakh national identity. The Kazakh authorities realized that cultural heritage was used in the neighboring cultural centers of Tashkent, Bukhara,

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and Samarkand in the Uzbek SSR which were quite attractive for international tourists who longed for romantic pictures of a bygone Islamic Golden Age, embodied in the spectacular constructions of the Timūrid dynasties and later epochs.928 Very soon, the antireligious pathos of restoration works in the Yasaʿī mausoleum was replaced by a pragmatic touristic approach with the task to make this place more attractive for visitors on a large scale. While the campaign to turn shrines into museums can, a little provocatively, be seen as an indirect legalization of tomb veneration, then it was logical that the foreign tourists were meant to see a certain picture of past and present religious life and a benevolent official attitude towards the great Islamic monuments in the Soviet Union. The contacts with foreign delegations were carried out through a special organization in Alma-Ata called the Society of Friendship (Obshchetvo druzhby), which had been opened back in 1947 as the Kazakh Branch of the All-Union Society of Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries. It managed cultural relations with Oriental countries and organized mutual visits by scholars and artists. In 1958 special sections within this Society were established for China, India and Arab countries.929

Some scholars of the Institute of History were involved in the work of this society as consultants. The government was interested in the creation of an image of the USSR as country of the Friendship of Peoples. For example, in 1967 an Indian delegation visited a historical mosque in Alma-Ata and concluded (in words of their Russian translator) that “in our country we heard many times that the communists in the Soviet Union closed all mosques and killed all their preachers. Now we see with our own eyes that this was just anti-Soviet propaganda. On the contrary, only in your wonderful country ruled by the Communists there is a real religious freedom regardless nation or race.”930 The issue of Islam was also topical for Western European tourists. In 1972 visitors of the Alma-Ata mosque from Belgium asked their guides how many Kazakhs were believers, if there were any religious schools in Kazakhstan, whether the government spent money on the restoration of religious buildings, and whether there was any pressure on believers from the


state. The answers on these questions are, unfortunately, not preserved in the documents. There is no evidence that any delegations from Islamic countries (for example, Egypt) were carried to the Yasawī mausoleum at that time, most probably because of the slow speed of restoration. Usually delegations of religious personnel or of political representatives coming to Tashkent from the world of Islam were conducted to Central Asia’s main pilgrimage places.

From the late 1960s to 1972 restoration works at the shrine were entrusted to Lidia Man’kovskaia, an experienced specialist from the Tashkent Centre of Monumental Restoration, who belonged to the school of Galina Pugachenkova in Central Asian art studies. This Centre, which worked in close collaboration with native architects (usto), paid much attention to such great historical monuments as the complex of the Registan and the mausoleum Gūr-i Amīr in Samarkand. Man’kovskaia understood that the Yasawī mausoleum needed much more attention than it had so far received from the Kazakh government. According to her students, Man’kovskaia laid down the scientific principles of historical restoration for this monument, with minimal interference in the building and without any useless ‘reconstructions’. In 1968, according to the budget of scientific and architectural works on the Yasawī mausoleum, the direction of the restoration studio (restavratsionnaia nauchno-proektnaia masterskaia – RNPM) gave Man’kovskaia the order to write a guide book for the mausoleum. This book became matter of a scandal and did not see the

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931 Ibid., D. 464, Materialy po obsluzhivaniu zarubezhnykh delegatsii i turistov za 1972 god, f. 16.
932 We know that Arab visitors were brought to the kurgans of Saka.
933 S. Gorshenina, Galina Pugachenkova, 117.
934 Interview with Elena Kh. Khorosh by the author, Institute of the Problems of the Cultural Heritage of Nomads, Almaty, 22 June 2010.
936 This restoration studio was located within the institutional structure of the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR.
light, while two other guide books were published instead. Since Man’kovskai’a’s materials remained unpublished it is unclear if there was a violation of the copyright.

In a broader political context the emergence of the Yasawī shrine as a symbol of Kazakh identity was inspired by a decision of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 3 July 1970 to put the shrine under state protection. The draft of the law on the protection of historical and cultural monuments had been produced by the USSR Academy of Sciences. The final version of this document was to be applied in all republics of the Union. Already on 9 March 1971 the government of the Kazakh republic and the party officials set up the Society of Monuments’ Protection. This institution was to be led by historian Alkei Margulan whose life and work we discussed above. In 1972 it was decided to establish an independent Kazakh center for the restoration of historical monuments.

It was in March 1972 that the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR finally decided to use the mausoleum for nation building and international tourism. The decree On the Means of Improvement of Scientific, Design, and Restoration Works at the Architectural Complex of Khwāja Ahmad Yasawī obliged the Kazakh Academy of Sciences to begin the archeological study of the territories around the shrine, including the underground constructions (so-called khilvet) and the destroyed mausoleum of Rabi’a Sultan Khanum. This decree should be viewed in the context of a broader movement for the preservation of cultural heritage in the Soviet Union in the 1950-60. The program of restoration of historical monuments on the territory of the Kazakh SSR included the renovation of mosques in Semipalatinsk and in other places. In addition to these measures a collection of offi-

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940 Okhrana i ispol’zovanie pamiatnikov, 118-121.

941 N. Mitrokhin, Russkaia partiia: Dvichenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953-1985 gody (Moscow, 2003), 300-337. I am indebted to Christian Noack for this reference.

cial documents on the topic was published in the Kazakh SSR in 1979. The historical works at the Yasawī shrine were carried out by the employees of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography T.N. Senigova, O. Ismagulov, and N. Aldanberdiev, in collaboration with the Turkestan museum. Shortage of specialists was evident and Nusupbekov, the director of the Institute, complained to the Ministry of Culture that almost all archeologists in the republic were concentrated in the Otrar region and that he did not have enough people for work at the Yasawī shrine.

In 1974, shortly after the start of the works, Senigova claimed in a report at the Institute that “it was local masters who created this unique monument, the shrine of Ahmad Yasawī. Foreigners were called in only for furniture work on the domes, mihrab, and for the bronze boiler and lamps, objects on which they wrote their names.” The names of these masters are Ḥājjī Ḥasan from Shirāz, Šams ad-Dīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from Shirāz, ʿĪzz ad-Dīn b. Tāj ad-Dīn from Isfahān, Šuhrāw ad-Dīn from Tabrīz. Senigova’s attempt to make a national claim for cultural heritage is of dubious character, especially as the building was erected very fast and even without any fundament. Western observers, on the contrary, saw the name of the artist (Ḥājjī Ḥasan from Shirāz) and of other masters as well as certain architectural features of the building as clear indicators for a “Persian origin of the late Timur style,” and would not even discuss the possibility that local masters produced the edifice. This was also the opinion of early Soviet experts, when Iosif Orbeli, the Director of the State Hermitage, requested that a bronze cauldron and candlesticks from the Yasawī shrine be brought to Leningrad for exhibition at the Third Congress on Persian Art and Archeology in 1935.

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943 Okhrana i ispol’zovanie pamiatnikov.
945 Ibid., f. 43.
947 M.E. Masson, Mavzolei Khodzha Akhmeda Iasevi (Tashkent, 1930), 5-6.
948 E. Cohn-Wiener, Turan: Islamische Baukunst in Mittelasien (Berlin, 1930), 29.
From the very beginning scholars played with the idea to undertake an anthropological investigation of the numerous burial places inside the mausoleum. First of all they tried to systemize the gravestones, which had been chaotically relocated in the building in the course of the restoration works. Two specialists at the Institute, namely Viacheslav Shukhovtsov and Vladimir Nastich carried out the translation of inscriptions on the tombs. Central Asian archeology had already undertaken similar work in Gūr-i Amīr, the family necropolis of the Tīmūrids in Samarkand. The tombs there were disclosed in 1941. The Soviet anthropologist Mikhail Gerasimov (1907-1970) used the bones from Gūr-i Amīr as indicators of how these historical personalities looked like, and on this basis he produced sculptures of Amir Tīmūr and his relatives. These works were very successful and made it attractive for Kazakh anthropologists to investigate the physical outlook also of those buried in the Yasawī mausoleum. The Institute of History envisaged the identification and sculptural reconstruction of certain historical persons buried in the shrine, but they also understood that, by contrast to Gūr-i Amīr, “many Islamic preachers who are buried in the mausoleum of Khwaja Aḥmad Yasawī [still] regarded as saints, therefore a special resolution of the Kazakh government and the establishment of governmental commission are required.” Georgii Dakhshleiger, deputy director of the Institute of History, cautioned that without a decision of the government no anthropological investigation of the graves was possible. On one of Dakhshleiger’s letters to the Ministry of Culture I saw the order of a Deputy Minister of Culture “to plan the disclosure of burials,” which means that the government was obviously not against this idea and indeed found it attractive, because it could deconstruct ‘myths’ around the shrine. A special anthropological team under the leadership of Orazak Ismagulov elaborated plans to identify the most interesting shrines and to open the burial chamber (gurkhāna) of Aḥmad Yasawī; methodological questions


951 M.M. Gerasimov, “Portret Tamerlana (Opyt skul’pturnogo vosproizvedeniia na kraniologicheskoj osnove),” in: Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta istorii material’no i kul’tury 17 (1947), 14-21; M.M. Gerasimov, Vosstanovlenie litsa po cherepu (Moscow, 1955).


they discussed with colleagues in Samarkand. Yet, it seems that eventually the government did not dare to start these works, and after 1973 the question of opening Yasawî’s grave disappears from the documentation. As to the reason for the abortion of the plans we can only guess that the saintly status of the place, the ongoing veneration, and Yasawî’s enormous popularity among the local population prevented the government and the scholars from opening the gurkhâna.

Even nowadays very few people know that a whole archive of waqf documents has been discovered in the shrine. This is how Vladimir Nastich remembers this event:

“I found those documents together with my colleague, Shukhovtsov. Literally, we dug them out in one of the befouled and dusty rooms (ḥujra) of the mausoleum. After that we spent a lot of time with classifying [the documents] and even started research, but the research topic was not officially approved by the Institute. Unofficially it was recommended to us to drop this topic, because of the ‘inner politics of the Institute.’ Probably the administration wanted to take [Russian scholars] away from the documents and to give [the task of studying them] to the Kazakhs [at the Institute], but they did not find suitable candidates [for this job]. Later I left Alma-Ata… Everything what we were able to finish is our short report on the discovery, Shukovtsov’s article with my active participation, my report at the Bartol’dist conference in 1990, and some short references in other works. That is it. Of course, it is much better than nothing, but anyways… In theory, those document should today be located in the present-day Institute of History in Almaty.”

But in practice these documents got lost. To be sure, Leningrad specialists Anas Khalidov and Oleg Akimushkin in their overview of Islamic manuscripts from Kazakhstan mentioned “several hundred of documents dating from the 16th-20th centuries in Persian and Turkic (gathered mainly in the shrine of Aḥmad Yasawî),” but nothing can be found in the Almaty Institute of History today. According to the several short publications that Nastich mentioned, this treasure contained an archive of economic documents of the

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954 Ibid., ff. 3-4.

955 From a private letter to the author by Vladimir N. Nastich. 10 May 2011, Moscow.


mausoleum, worthy of course of a detailed academic publication and analysis. The scholars saw more than a thousand fragments and full texts in the Persian and Turkic languages. It was even claimed that somebody did indeed start with the cataloguing of this corpus of sources, but almost nothing was done in this regard. Still, this exceptionally important discovery demonstrated how promising the search for manuscripts in Kazakhstan can still be.

As to the inscriptions in the walls of the Yasawī shrine, initially the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR wanted to invite Oleg Bol’shakov from Leningrad for consultations in the reading of these inscriptions. Eventually the inscriptions were taken care of by the local scholars Viacheslav Shukhovtsov and Vladimir Nastich. The latter prepared the reconstruction of the Arabic inscriptions on the shrine’s frieze. This is what Nastich told me about the circumstances of this work:

“Together with Shukhovtsov we wanted to work on the epigraphy in the mausoleum, but they did not give us permission. There was a restoration studio Kazrestavratsiia (“Kazakh Restoration”) headed by Ms. Tuiakbaeva, an odious person. [We] Orientalists regarded her as an architect, because she did not know anything about Oriental studies, while architects thought that she was an Orientalist. With such a degree of knowledge she wanted to reconstruct the inscription on the frieze. What did they do? Only part of the [original] inscription survived, but they knew that it was a citation from the Qur’an. Therefore they started to add elements [of inscription] in the upper parts of the frieze, but without any idea about Arabic paleography. The result is many distortions in the outlook of the [badly restored] inscription, but the text itself was reconstructed correctly because it was from the Qur’an. However, in the end of the inscription they again made a mistake: paleographically there should be the year 800, but they made 800 and something. Together with Shukhovtsov we made our own reconstruction on a paper and suggested this variant, but they rejected it. Foreigners [from Arab countries], of course, were dissatisfied with this. It is obvious that the inscription and the whole restoration are just a remake. The constructors, in order to get

958 [For her work on the mausoleum see: B.T. Tuiakbaeva, Epigrafičeskii dekor arkhitektturnogo kompleksa Akhmeda Iasavi (Alma-Ata, 1989)].

more money, knocked out the original fourteenth-century seven-color glaze — I saw it on the ground — and replaced it with their three-color glaze. Tuiakbaeva claimed that she has discovered the secret of Samarkand glaze, but the opposite is obvious: the difference with the original glaze can be seen even from a distance. They simply destroyed the monument... Just to give you an example. In the dome there is a special hole for air circulation. Once a certain Kazakh official appeared and asked why there was a whole, it should be closed. They closed it and the monument started to collapse. When they opened the hole again, bricks flew out of it with a whistle. 

Indeed, in December 1976 Orientalists from the Sector of Ancient and Medieval History of Kazakhstan of the Institute of History in Alma-Ata, namely Bulat Kumekov, Vladimir Nastich, and Viacheslav Shukhovstov, wrote an expert resolution on the quality of the frieze reconstruction done by Kazrestavratsiia. They underlined that this work was conducted without the participation of qualified specialists in Arabic language and paleography and that this caused mistakes in the renovation of many places in the inscription. The Orientalists mentioned that the text was written in the thulth style, the rules of which were repeatedly violated by the restorers, especially in the western and northern parts. Next to many stylistic and graphic mistakes, the specialists from the Institute detected wrong readings like صدق رسول الله [“The Prophet of Allah says the Truth”] instead of correct صدق الله [“Allah says the Truth”], the year 807 (809) instead of 800, and the distorted name of master Ḥājjī Ḥusnullāh instead of the correct form Ḥājjī Ḥasan. 

The Kazakh government spent a lot of money on these restoration campaigns, and in spite of all scandals and struggles around the glorious past, the works of the late 1960s-70s achieved that the territory around the building became protected, that archeological studies could be conducted and that a historical museum was opened (1977), that “booklets” for

960 Interview with Vladimir N. Nastich by the author, Sector of Written Monuments of the Peoples of the Orient, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, 30 September 2009.


tourists (= legitimate guides for pilgrims) were published. In result the construction became a symbol of Kazakh national pride, the major historical monument in the whole Kazakh republic. This is also obvious from the budget: in the 1970s the Kazakh government spent on the mausoleum more than a half of the total sum devoted to the protection and restoration of all historical monuments. Pamphlets and souvenirs popularized the building and its saint, turning their fame to the profit of the Kazakh national pride. The city of Turkestan has been studied in the same way as Kazakh archeologists approached the sites of the Otrar oasis, working on wast territory and studying the phenomenon of Kazakh urban culture.

Since the 1970s Kazakh Orientalists studied the Yasawī shrine in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way: through the architectural restoration, the study of the epigraphic frieze, the aborted anthropological research of the human remnants in the graves, and through the failed publication of numerous Arabic-script sources related to the history of the shrine. Only the architectural restoration was carried out carefully. The rest of these initiatives, closely tied with tradition of classical Oriental Studies, unfortunately were characterized by grave mistakes.

**Conclusion**

The turn to urban studies in Soviet scholarship did stand in close connection to the social modernization of the former Russian Empire. Urban culture was regarded as progressive, whereas nomadic societies were understood as characterized by backwardness. The government tried to settle the nomads not only in the present but also in the past: it was important to show and prove their long sedentary history. The Kazakh scholars uncovered several ancient cities during their expeditions, and they described a continuous urban history in the region. This history of urban civilization was important for the Kazakh national identity and sometimes even in the interest of the state.

The first aspect is tied with the context of national demarcation and its results. Central Asian civilization as well as others ancient civilizations appeared on the banks of great rivers, in this case the Sir Darya and Amu Darya. Before the national demarcation, in the


borders of the Kirgiz (Kazakh) autonomous republic there were only steppe regions. Sedentary regions, the Sir Darya valley and Semirech’e were included in the Turkestan autonomous republic in 1918. Only in the end of 1924 these territories were transferred to Kazakh administration. Actually, these two regions (especially the Sir Darya Valley) have always been a matter of conflicts between the northern (‘the Kazakh’) and the southern (‘the Uzbek’) population. Until the 1950s archeology in Kazakhstan remained non-national, but between the 1970s and the 1980s the rise of nationalism requested that these territories be firmly bound to Kazakhstan. The large-scale archeological works in the Otrar oasis and historical studies of medieval Semirech’e proved the centuries-old possession of the regions by the Kazakhs. Even the origin of state and ethnos was now attributed to the southern provinces. All cities of Southern Kazakhstan became historically Kazakh cities. This national approach in archeology in the 1970s was supplemented by a regional view on the Central Asian urban civilization as a whole, which reflected the same attempt in history that we discussed in the second chapter. However, this regional aspect was rather weak in archeology, which proves S. Jones’s notion that “archeological knowledge is not only appropriated at an abstract level within nationalist and ethnic ideologies, but at a more pragmatic level it is being used in the determination of land claims and the ownership of cultural heritage.”

As to the cultural context, archeological investigations focused on changing the image of the Kazakhs as an exclusively nomadic society. After the rejection of the Aryan theory of origin of the cities, all cities were attributed to the Kazakhs and the regional settled civilization was studied in its continuous aboriginal development since the Bronze Age. Indeed, the southern regions also provided several grandiose cultural symbols which also became part of Kazakh national heritage as a result of archeological investigations. The Muslim scholar Abū Naṣr al-Farābī, who spent his life in Baghdad, consisted to have come from the region of Pārāb/ Bārāb/ Fārāb which was allocated by some Orientalists exactly in the Otrar Oasis. Accordingly, it was the Kazakhs who gave al-Fārābī to the world. Another example is the mausoleum of the Sufi master Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī in the city of Turkestan. When excavations of Otrar gave first fruits, the government initiated restoration and investigation of the shrine in 1972. The main goal was to organize international tourism that actually meant a legalization of the veneration of this sacred place by

\[965\] S. Jones, The Archaeology of Ethnicity, 136.
Muslims: the keepers of the grave (*shiraqchi*) became watchmen; the mausoleum itself was transformed into a museum. Afterwards Aḥmad Yasawī was nationalized and became a Kazakh poet and mystic. Moreover, like in the case of the Gūr-i Mīr mausoleum in Samarqand which was restored shortly after WWII, they even tried to undertake anthropological investigation of the graves located in mausoleum, particularly the grave of Yasawī himself, but eventually the Kazakh government did not dare to go that far.

Central Asian archeology in its Kazakh branch had been closely connected with the Leningrad center of Oriental studies. Relations between the academic metropolis and the province started from a colonial style of the Tsarist and early Soviet times, when all works were occasionally conducted by Russian scholars and all artifacts taken away to the capital. The second stage of relations was rather intermediary, because in the framework of comprehensive expeditions the local cadres slowly appeared and historical museums near important archeological sites were also established. Archeological works on Otrar in the late 1960s-80s manifested the independence of the Kazakh Oriental archeology, which fully served the process of nation-building. Kazakh archeology was nationally orientated and subordinated to writing of national history. This reflected in its achievements, and especially in its shortcomings and blundary.