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

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## General Conclusion

Soviet Orientology in Kazakhstan was strongly dependent on the scholars from Moscow and Leningrad. This Leningrad connection provided a huge impetus for developing research on Oriental manuscripts, history and archeology on and in Kazakhstan. Especially the philological projects conducted by Leningrad colleagues were of high scientific quality. Archeological projects were most fruitful; this might have to do with the visibility of the sites, and their easy appropriation for national identity-building; accordingly, they were generously supported.

Still, with hindsight one cannot but conclude that the attempts to establish Orientology as an academic discipline in Kazakhstan largely failed. All attempts of using the huge manuscript heritage in Kazakshtan failed; individual scholars started manuscript expeditions but these were soon closed down because of political sensitivities. Among the most tragic failures of Kazakh scholarship was the negligence and then loss of a huge archive from the Yasawī shrine. Many decisions with regard of Oriental and Islamic Studies in the Kazakh SSR were made only on paper. Numerous institutional reincarnations of the discipline in the framework of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR did not improve the state of art.

The most successful period of Kazakh historical Orientology were the years of Nusupbekov and Dakhsheiger, two managers at the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography. Between the 1960 and 1982 they managed to gather a strong team of specialists in source studies on the history of medieval Kazakshtan. Still this administrative tandem was only successful as long as it was directly linked to Leningrad, especially the Sector of Turkic and Mongol Studies and its chief Sergei G. Kliashtorny. The group of young Orientalists that appeared in these twenty years should therefore be regarded as a branch of the Leningrad school of philological Orientology. In the first half of the 1980s this group gradually disappeared, and after independence Kazakh Orientology basically had to start again from the scratch.

In the field of teaching Oriental languages Kazakh scholars remained completely dependant on Leningrad and Tashkent. During the whole Soviet era there was no educa-

tional institution in the entire Kazakh republic which produced professional Orientalists. Oriental Studies were not represented at any level of high education in the Kazakh State University, pedagogical universities, and there was no PhD track for Orientology at the Kazakh Academy of Sciences.

These ups and downs in the development of Oriental Studies in the Kazakh SSR reflected general political changes in the whole country. The process of national delimitation deeply affected the whole style of history writing in Central Asia; histories and meta-histories were created on political demand. The introduction of the concept of Kazakh settlement civilization has to be seen as a result of the Soviet developmentalism and specifically of collectivization and sedentarization campaigns. Under Khrushchev we see the expansion of Soviet Orientology over the Union, obviously stimulated by Khrushchev's breaking out the Stalinist self-isolation of the Soviet Union, and particularly his turn to the Third World and Asia. For the Kazakhs the promise of establishing a centre of Oriental Studies remained unfulfilled; the only branch of philological Orientology in Kazakhstan (perhaps outside of Kazakh linguistics) that developed a profile was Uighur studies because of the political interest in neighboring Eastern Turkestan and competition with China. After WWII it was politically important to prove the autochthonous character of the present-day population in Semirech'e in order to defend this territory from Chinese claims. This instance on autochthonous origins united all studies of the Kazakh past by textologists and archeologists. The concept of autochthonism, i.e. an eternal belonging of territory to a given nation, was an ideological argument for the isolation of national histories from each other and for the rejection of regional approach. In fact this legitimized the national demarcation of the 1920s-1930s.

In the post-war period re-edition of the works of 'bourgeois' Orientalists with regional approaches created optimal conditions for training a new generation of Soviet Orientalists. In Kazakhstan this trend was appropriated in a national colour, by focusing on Chokan Valikhanov's oeuvre. This means that the regional approach was downplayed.

In the 1970s the development of Oriental Studies in Kazakhstan has to be seen in the context of the rise of nationalism. Specifically, this inspired restoration of historical monuments and a turn towards the sources of tribal identity (*shajara*). As a reaction to this national trend Moscow tried to impose a new project of writing regional histories instead

of national ones. This new directive failed: obviously, Moscow was not anymore in a position to induce a cardinal change of perspective.

### **Politicization of Philology**

National delimitation in Central Asia was not simply an expression of divide and rule politics because the Soviet did not invent something new, but supported one of the trends in expression of identities in Central Asia that existed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, the national delimitation with all its political consequences mobilized the Kazakhs for participation in the Soviet projects. Thirdly, 'creation of nations' in Central Asia was rather a complex and multi-sided process which included not only the drawing of political borders but also the codification of history, language, and national symbols.

Here the classical Orientalists, both philologists and archeologists, played a very important role: historical, archeological and philological initiatives which I brought together under the term of Oriental projects created strong walls between previously interconnected populations and therefore contributed lot to the delimitation of histories of Central Asian peoples.

The source edition projects of the 1930s divided the classical historical narratives of medieval Islamic authors into national pieces, identifying which parts of these texts relate to the history of a particular nation. In the 1940s this selective set of fragments became the basis of republican history writing. Central for national historiography was the issue of ethnogenesis, which was regarded in the fashion that legitimized the modern state borders.

The systematic Soviet-style study of written sources was started in Leningrad. The instrument of setting up huge brigades for carrying out scientific work was regarded as highly successful. Taking together, philological projects lasted over almost the whole Soviet period, starting in 1932 and stopping in the 1980s. Whily first publication of sources in 1932 still kept the regional view, later collective works became the major vehicle of national delimitation. The national method was implemented since 1934 in edition and translation projects of what Oriental sources had to say on individual nations (Turkmens, Kirgiz, Kazakhs). Even the edition of Rashīd ad-Dīn's *World History* was legitimized by selling it as a product useful for production of national historiographies; and again the whole

project was also ment as a manifestation of the successful and strong Soviet scholarship against the West.

While the first experience of conducting philological projects was carried out in Leningrad (with the exemption of the irrigation project which required close collaboration with Tashkent), after WWII several important projects were fully conducted in the national republics. What we observe in setting up local projects is that the latter did not follow the same direction. While the publication of sources on the history of the Kazakh Khanates continued in the Leningrad tradition, the manuscript expeditions for gathering Kazakh genealogies were ment to produce an alternative vision of history, and would therefore contradict the highly dogmatic official meta-histories produced by the Institute of History. Kazakh genealogies had a more of regional focus and would therefore ignore the national delimitation. Concequently, the project was abandoned.

The instrument of Oriental projects combined various functions. Oriental projects guaranteed the existence of stable research centres which provided many young Orientalists the best part of their professional training. Common Oriental projects of metropolitan and republican academic institutions contributed to the building of local research.

All philological, archeological and historical projects went through particular procedures at the Academy of Sciences of the Union or republican level. The initiative for individual projects came either from political circles (as in the case of writing regional history in 1974), or from particular scholars who used the existing administrative system for implementing their scholarly plans, and who understood that this or that topic was suitable in the context of contemporary politics (Rashīd ad-Dīn's project by Evgenii E. Bertel's, the *shajara* project by Begedzhan Suleimenov, the excavations of the Otrar oasis by Kimal' Akishev). The idea was usually formulated in a separate document which contained the clarification of actuality of this topic, its political relevance, goals, research staff, time schedule, and expenses. This proposal was ratified by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences or by the administration of a particular Institute.

### **Oriental Projects as a Means of Settling Nomadic History**

Archeological projects in Soviet Kazakhstan were represented by three long-lasting programs: the establishment of the Kazakh archeological expedition in the 1930s, excava-

tions in the Otrar oasis in the 1960s-80s, and the restoration and archeological investigation of the Yasawī shrine in the 1970s-80s. Archeological studies were nationally oriented and were to result in the gradual transmission of authority from Leningrad, with its State Academy of the History of Material Culture (GAIMK), to the local Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography in Alma-Ata. Archeological projects concentrated on issues of urban culture and ethnogenesis of the Kazakh people in Southern Kazakhstan. In this respect they were strongly dependent on the evidence from written sources that were established by philological projects: the archeologists needed descriptions of the cities as well as data on political history and historical geography.

The Southern Kazakhstan expedition was directed by archeologists (A.N. Bernshtam, K.A. Akishev and K.M. Baipakov), but many specialists from other disciplines were involved in the projects as well: anthropologists, biologists, and art historians. The Yasawī shrine occupied a special place because of the inter-disciplinary approach chosen for its restoration. All findings of archeological investigation, which was mainly concentrated in Southern Kazakhstan, were used for building a concept of the Kazakh urban culture. This paradigm was first brought up by Leningrad scholars and then further elaborated by national cadres who had studied in Leningrad. Since the 1970s there was a trend towards a regional approach in the archeology of Central Asia, through common conferences and publications. However, this was an artificial enterprise, because only archeologists from the centre paid much attention to regional developments, while local specialists largely continued to work in national, republican frameworks.

Soviet Oriental Studies attempted to change the image of the Kazakhs as only nomads. The early authors, such as Sandzhar Asfendiiarov, Mikhail Viatkin and Aleksandr Bernshtam had not yet established a link between the presence of ancient cities on the territory of the Kazakh SSR with the existence of Kazakh urban culture. Moreover, Aleksandr Bernshtam opposed the view of Al'kei Margulan, who for the first time claimed that the cities in Southern Kazakhstan go back to the medieval Kazakhs. Viatkin treated this problem not yet in national but in geographic terms; he distinguished between the 'progressive' southern territories where the powerful civilizations of their neighbors left their impact, and the 'primitive' northern lands with their overwhelmingly nomadic population whose history is rarely mentioned on the pages of historical narratives.

However, since the mid-1950s the concept of Kazakh urban civilization became stronger. It was supported by Bernshtam's students and by Kimal' Akishev, who initiated the large-scale archeological investigation of the Otrar oasis. In collaboration with his disciple, Karl Baipakov, Kimal' Akishev discovered the world of Kazakh medieval cities in Southern Kazakhstan and Semirech'e. These urban studies were initially started by Leningrad specialists (Iakubovskii, Bernshtam) in the 1920s-30s and developed in close connection with the Leningrad center after the 1950s, when many Kazakh archaeologists studied archeology in Leningrad where they got acquainted with the specific archaeological methods (large-scale excavations) as well as with the leading specialists in the field, such as Mikhail and Vadim M. Masson, Aleksandr I. Belenitskii and others. Akishev and Baipakov established their own school of medieval urban archeology in Kazakhstan, which still continues its work in the same regions and from similar scientific positions.

### **Regional vs. Republican Approaches in Nation Building**

Since the national delimitation there had always been a competition of regional and national approaches in Central Asian historiography, both of which drew from the works of Vasilii V. Bartol'd. The regional view regarded Central Asia as a cultural, geographical and historical entity without taking into account national borders. The republican approach was a result of the national demarcation and was based on Oriental sources that had been published since the 1930s. The first attempts of writing Kazakh Soviet national history go back to individual scholars (Asfendiiarov, Viatkin); in 1943, when many scholars were evacuated from central Russia to Kazakhstan, a new collective approach was started under supervision of Anna Pankratova, in collaboration with local scholars. Meta-historical projects were aimed to compile the general history of the republic since time immemorial up to the modern Soviet period. Unlike the philological and archeological research, these conceptual meta-histories were to be broadly disseminated over the whole Union; such textbooks were always written in consultation with the centres in Moscow and Leningrad.

The several redactions of the *History of the Kazakh SSR* (1943, 1949, 1957) reflect the many changes of the Party line and the heated discussions on the crucial topics of republican history, which focused on questions of statehood, modes of production, the evaluation of the Russian conquest, and the very principles of the periodization of history.

These discussions around the national histories revealed that the Soviets perpetuated the concept of Russia's 'civilizing mission' of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; also the Soviets aimed at bringing modernization to the backward population of Central Asia. While scientific problems were solved under strong political pressure by the Communist Party, some scholars were able to maintain their theoretical positions and to even keep their institutional positions and authority (Anna Pankratova, Aleksandr Semenov, Sergali Tolybekov). The main goal of these debates was to formulate the proper official version of a particular national history.

Though it were central institutions that promoted the republican approach in history writing, the regional view on the Central Asian past had always been present in Leningrad and Moscow, where scholars proudly claimed that they did not take those national borders in the region seriously, in spite of their participation in the writing of national histories. Meta-historical projects demonstrated the competition of regional and national approaches: while the re-publication of classical works of Russian Orientalists can be regarded as a sign of a unifying tendency towards regional perspectives, the works of Chokan Valikhanov (1835-1865) were used in late Soviet Kazakhstan as a symbol of native scholarship. The huge project of regional histories for the whole Soviet Union initiated by the Moscow Institute of History in 1974 was aimed to unite in a single narrative all the results of previous research on individual Central Asian nations. This attempt was aborted, because national intelligentsias did not want to share their pasts, and the authors simply continued their previous research lines.

### **The Role of Islam and Islamic Scholars**

Among the main aims of Kazakh Oriental Studies was research on the Soviet Orient to defend the priority of Soviet culture over the 'backward' Islamic way of life, but during the Soviet times Islam in Kazakhstan did not become a topic of in-depth study. Still, many authors commented upon issues connected to the Islamic religion. All of these notes, except for those of Asfendiiarov, pointed at the superficiality of Islam among the Kazakhs, thus paving the way for the cliché that pre-Islamic beliefs and religious syncretism had always prevailed over Islam. Before the 1980s Islamic Studies in the Kazakh SSR (as well as in the Soviet Union) in general existed only in the form of philological studies. Islam

was neglected by the scholars and, just like the nomadic way of life, was regarded as a remnant of the feudal past.

The study of Islam in the Kazakh SSR was not institutionalized. Only some ethnographers of the late Soviet era were interested in the topic, basing their research on such misconceptions as ‘survivals’ (*perezhitki*) and ‘the cult of saints’ (*kul't sviatykh*). No basic repository of Oriental manuscripts for academic Islamic studies was set up, because the old pre-revolutionary premise that the Kazakhs are ‘bad Muslims’ was still in force. This premise was not even given up after historiography and archeology established the image of the Kazakhs as city-dwellers.

Important in this respect is the transition of authoritative knowledge about Islam from the *‘ulamā*’ to the trained Orientalists. The anti-religious repressions of the 1930s forced the learned Muslims to transfer their manuscript collections to the state archives (above all to the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies). Many religious scholars perished in the labor camps or were executed. After the 1950s some former Mullahs returned home, and a few of them entered scientific institutions; there they were employed for describing and copying Islamic manuscripts. Also in the Kazakh SSR some former students of Islamic schools were hired as employees at the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography. At the same time, some secular Soviet Orientalists originated from the families of Islamic scholars; one of these was Arabist Bulat Kumekov, whom the Alma-Ata *qāḍī* Sa‘d Waqqās Ghilmānī at one point invited to become his successor in office.

### **Triangle: Moscow – Leningrad – Tashkent**

Relations between centres and peripheries played a crucial role in the history of Soviet Oriental Studies. In particular, Kazakh Orientalists found themselves in a triangular relationship of academic networks between Moscow, Leningrad and Tashkent. Each of these centres was important for Almaty, for different reasons. Moscow, as the political and scientific centre of Soviet scholarship, was the place from where directives of the Party and Presidium of the Academy of Sciences were sent to the republican research institutes. Moscow as well as Leningrad had a long tradition of teaching Oriental languages and history and therefore were the main places for acquiring basic professional skills. However,

very few Kazakhstani Orientalists graduated from Moscow and Leningrad universities. Rather, Kazakh students obtained education in these centres through prolonged internships, which sometimes comprised several years. The main goal of this wide-spread practice of sending students from the peripheries to the main academic centres was to raise local cadres that were equipped with the necessary methodology. Since the establishment of the system of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1930 and the centralization of the main scholarly institutions, many leading specialists in the humanities were concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad. Moscow was foremost important as the source of authority which provided local scholarship with established dogmas through the Party and academic channels.

In this triangle Tashkent occupied a special place. Before the Revolution Tashkent was a regional centre of Russian culture, and it was in Tashkent that the new academic discipline of Turkestani studies (*turkestanovedenie*) came into being, with active support by Bartol'd. With the establishment of Soviet rule Tashkent first became a place of refuge for 'non-conformist' scholars, including Aleksandr Shmidt and Aleksandr Semenov. In the early Soviet period the long distance from Moscow enabled scholars in Tashkent to maintain their own views. As the capital of the Uzbek SSR, in 1943 Tashkent was granted its own Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies, which became the main regional repository of Islamic manuscripts – and therefore the main Oriental Studies institution in the whole of Central Asia. Tashkent was also a significant educational centre: the Central Asian University (SAGU) welcomed students interested in the region's past, including archeology, from all neighboring republics. In the war years Tashkent became a huge laboratory where many evacuated scholars continued their work. However, with the expansion of Soviet Oriental Studies after WWII, each republic of Central Asia received its own group of Orientalists or historians of the pre-revolutionary period, leading to a decline of Tashkent's significance as a regional center. Still, for Kazakh students Tashkent retained its significance in the educational sphere until the end of the Soviet Union, since the Kazakhstani State University in Alma-Ata did not provide courses on Oriental Studies (Iudin's classes being an exception).

But the central place in respect of classical Oriental philology and archeology was occupied by Leningrad. It were not only rich collections of Islamic manuscripts and artifacts gathered during the Imperial and early Soviet periods that attracted scholarly attention

from all over the country, but foremost the first-rate specialists in their particular fields, whom I called ‘monopolizers of science’. These specialists established close and stable links with the republican academics, so that Kazakhstani Oriental Studies became, in fact, a branch of the Leningrad school.

Networks of scholars enabled mobility inside of this triangle: young scholars visited the centres for study period, and later they continued to attend scientific conferences in Moscow and Leningrad, notably the All-Union conference *Bartol'dovskie chteniia*. Moving from the centre to the periphery and the other way around always meant a change of perspective. Nastich and Sultanov, who moved from Alma-Ata to Moscow and Leningrad in the 1970s and 1980s, disagreed with the national approaches of their fellows in Alma-Ata, including those who had studies in Moscow (Pishchulina).

I argue that the ethnic and religious identities of the individual actors did not have much influence on their careers during the Soviet period. Dakhshleiger, obviously of Jewish background, was the grey eminence of Kazakh Orientology for two decades. Conversely, Suleimenov's project on the Kazakh genealogies was closed down although he was a Kazakh, because his project would have compromised the established version of republican history. Also Veniamin P. Iudin found itself out of the discourse not because of his non-Kazakh identity, but his views on Kazakh history differed from the broadly accepted ones. That nationality did not play a big role can also be seen from the fates of those who moved to the centres: Tursun I. Sultanov enjoyed a position at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies and after the fall of the Soviet Union he became a chair of the department of Central Asia and the Caucasus at the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University; he fully integrated himself into the Leningrad school of Orientology. The collective of scholars at the Institute of History in Alma-Ata was truly international, and authority was not concentrated in the hands of a particular ethnic group which would have played the role of an ‘oppressor’ in republican scholarship.

## **Power and Scholarship**

This dissertation is about relations between power and academic life. The system of scholarship that the Soviets had established imposed very strong rules which determined the whole intellectual work from the writing of a research proposal to the final results in

the form of publications, exhibitions, or monument restorations. Scholarship in the Soviet Union lost the aristocratic, elite character that it had in Tsarist times.. Academic study was not anymore an enterprise of a single intellectual but was concentrated in scientific institutions with a solid collective. The idea was to bring the forms of scientific work closer to the modes of industrial production: the products of scholarly work should be delivered according to a rigid schedule, they should correspond to established quality standards and be broadly applicable in practice. Everything depended on the resources that the state provided: money, time (enclosed in five-year plans), and labor force. When scientific endeavours found support of the state, impressive results could be booked. But in the Soviet Union there was always a political motivation behind the state interest in scholarship. Oriental studies were used in nation building, in the creation of national symbols, and in the strengthening of mental and state borders. Moreover, academics reshaped the perception of the people's past, turning it from predominantly nomadic and 'barbaric' to a more 'civilized', settled image of the nation.

Many scholars in the Soviet Union were quite aware of their position in state service. Some of them accepted this and were successfully integrated into the Soviet system of academic life, others did not and sought to find various forms of 'resistance'. With this 'resistance' they tried to maintain some sort of agency for themselves. Yet the fates of the very few who openly raised their heads against the imposition of dogmas and the politicization of science usually ended tragically: they were taken out of the dominant scholarly discourse and their careers became rather problematic. Academics took refuge in studying the remote past (hoping to escape the politicization of the modern period) and in annual archeological expeditions with their romantic, freedom-loving spirit. However, as it was shown in my dissertation, even this seemingly 'non-political' occupation was strongly bound to the current political demand.