

BOOK REVIEWS

EPIC OF THE SAKHALIN NIVKH PEOPLE



Vladimir Sangi. *Poselenie bukhty Chernoi zemli. Epos sakhalinskikh nivkhov*. Moskva: IP M.A. Smirnova, 2013. 432 pp.

The book titled *Epos sakhalinskikh nivkhov* (Epic of the Sakhalin Nivkh people), prepared for publication by the famous Nivkh writer, poet, and well-known Russian political figure Vladimir Sangi, is unique in many ways. Nivkh epic (in East-Sakhalin dialect *ɲastund*, *ɲastur*, in Amur dialect *nyzytyndɟ*, *nyzit*) has been known in academia by retelling for more than a hundred years (Sternberg 1900; Materials 1908). Apart from L. Sternberg, Nivkh epic was recorded by B. Pilsudski (see, e.g., Pilsudski 1996, 1999, 2003), E. Kreynovich¹, and G. Otaina (Otaina 1993: 171–208; Nivkh Myths 2010: 67–113). However, this publication happens to be the first in which the epic is presented not in a brief prose retelling, the way it could be recorded by researchers before audio recording devices appeared, but in the form of decoded tales which are sung, namely as a poetic, versicular text. More than a hundred years before the publication of this book, L. Sternberg quite rightly wrote in his famous volume of specimens of the Nivkh epic:

There is nothing easier than to have a chance to listen to a Gilyak storyteller. But it is extremely difficult to record him. First of all, a Gilyak speaks extremely fast, and, moreover, the language of a storyteller is archaic – very different from the spoken one, and many Gilyaks themselves need clarification. In addition, there is a kind of poetry, so-called nastund, specimens of which are recited in ecstasy, often sung and with such a breakneck speed, howls, and modulations, that it is not only impossible to record, but often even to catch the general meaning of the sung text. (Materials 1908: x)

However, Vladimir Sangi managed to do it.

The epic text, *The settlement of the Black land's bay*, was performed by the Nivkh storyteller Hytkuk in 1974. The author of the recording does not tell the reader about the circumstances of the recording or of the storyteller herself, but from the introduction to the book we learn that Hytkuk's "[...] *nasturs* could last several days and nights with breaks for rest, eating, and sleeping. She kept in her mind all the minute details of an event, and revived them so authentically that the audience felt as if Hytkuk herself was a member of the action she was describing. She was so expressive in performing her songs that accompanied her words by emotions, particular facial expressions, hand gestures, exclamations, laughter, and sometimes by crying or long pauses [...]" (Gashilov

& Gashilova 2013: 14–15). What has been said one can experience deeply by listening to the nearly two hours of audio recording of the epic attached to the book on two CD-ROMs.

In our opinion, the composition of the book is commendable as well. It includes not only the original Nivkh text (4316 lines, pp. 20–147), but also a poetic translation of the epic into Russian, made by N. Tarasov (pp. 150–288), and an interlinear translation of the text, made by V. Sangi (4326 lines, p. 305–431). However, in this case, there is a lack of comments with regard to the principles of interlinear translation (taking into account different lengths of the original text and interlinear translation). Explanations concerning the principles of decoding of the sung text would also be appropriate. There is no doubt that the written text is authentic and lively: one can hear constant encouraging shouts from Vladimir Sangi on the record, but neither these shouts (except for a couple of shouts of “Khon!” in the very beginning (p. 20)²) nor the completely prosaic ending of the recording where Hytkuk is talking about herself, is mentioned in the published text.

The published epic text is certainly a fine example of the high epic style and is interesting also in its plot. In particular, we would like to mention the motif of the lonely hero, used in the unfolding of the epic story. The nameless hero is not just lonely. A small baby lies on its side on the main couch in the house, the length and width of which is eight fathoms, eats flies and spiders and defecates underneath him (pp. 305–314). Such exposure can be found in the epic traditions of different parts of the world, but in this case we would like to stress its absolute unity with the introduction of the *nyzit* of the Amur Nivkh people, recorded by G. Otaina:

A poor boy lived all alone in the house, eight fathoms wide and eight fathoms long. And he lay facing one direction only. There are lots of excrements behind him and urine in front of him. When a worm gets into his mouth he eats it instead of the meat of animals running around the ground; when a fly falls into his mouth he eats it instead of poultry meat. (Nivkh Myths 2010: 83)

It is unlikely that in this case one ought to talk about the fundamental difference between Nivkh Amur and Sakhalin folk traditions and specifically that “the folklore genre *nastur* exists only amongst islanders with a self-designation *nivgun*” (Gashilov & Gashilova 2013: 17), that is, only amongst the Nivkh people of Sakhalin. We believe we still know too little about the Nivkh folklore to be able to claim anything with full confidence.

In addition to the above-mentioned extra audio material, the book is also embellished with 16 magnificent colour illustrations drawn by Vladimir Sangi (pp. 289–304). They help to better understand the sometimes quite complex patterns involved in this epic.

This publication can hardly be called academic but, nevertheless, the book as a whole is highly commendable. It will be useful to all who are engaged in folklore and ethnography of the peoples of the Far East, especially linguists and specialists in the Nivkh language.

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Notes

- ¹ Recordings of E. Kreynovich are stored at the Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Science (The Pushkin House) in St. Petersburg. More about the Nivkh linguistic materials of Kreynovich, see Mamontova 2015: 187.
- ² An interesting fact is that in the interlinear translation this exclamation was given seven times at the beginning of the text, after which it was mentioned that the author gives no further references of this evidence of the live communication between the storyteller and the listener (p. 310).

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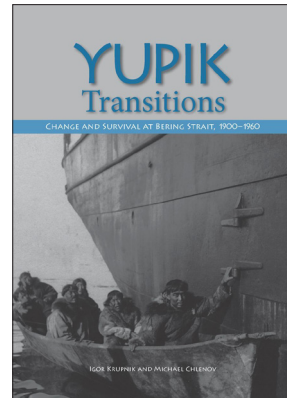
CHANGE AND SURVIVAL AT BERING STRAIT

Igor Krupnik & Michael Chlenov. *Yupik Transitions: Change and Survival at Bering Strait, 1900–1960*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2013. 391 pp.

The fundamental treatise, *Yupik Transitions*, written by Washington-based anthropologist Igor Krupnik and his Moscow co-author, anthropologist Michael Chlenov, is devoted to the history of the Asian Yupik society in the 20th century, more precisely 1900–1960. The book is mostly based on the research conducted by the authors in Soviet Chukotka between 1971 and 1990. Igor Krupnik and Michael Chlenov interviewed elders who remembered the 1910s–1950s. These informants had been actors and observers of crucial changes in coastal Chukotka. It is impossible to overestimate the value of the memories of these

Yupik elders, enabling the anthropologists to reconstruct not only such historic events as the onset of collectivisation, establishment of the Soviet socio-cultural system and relocations of the 1950s, but also the complicated cultural traits of a so-called contact-traditional society. An abundant collection of Yupik accounts gathered by Igor Krupnik was published in Russian in 2000.¹ Here the authors draw a fascinating picture of the pre-relocation society based on the interviews published in the former book.

The structure of the book under review is a little confusing and requires attention to understand its logic. The first chapter – *Contact-Traditional Society, 1900–1923* – is dedicated to the description of the Yupik-newcomers' relations in the first quarter of the 20th century; mostly interaction between the indigenous population and American



traders and whalers. It is a common strategy of the authors to destroy the most likely myths and stereotypes about the Yupik. The perception of their old society as a backward and untouched community (an idea that became popular during Soviet times) is proved to be wrong and far-fetched. The Asiatic Yupik were engaged in the American sphere of economic and cultural influence:

The image of the Russian Yupik around 1900 as 'primitive bands of half-savage aliens' was nothing but a myth [--] Perhaps the most compelling proof to the contrary came from the old garbage heaps that we examined at the abandoned Yupik sites from the same era. They contained a little of everything: shards of porcelain dishes, ruined American gramophones with broken records, remains of sewing machines, broken Winchester rifles, cartridge cases, bottles, American tobacco boxes, and a wide range of jars that once held various imported food, from biscuits to olive oil. (p. 4)

Before the 1930s, the Yupik experienced minimal Russian influence. If some of them could speak a language other than their own, that language was English. In the second chapter, *The "Olden Times", 1850–1900*, the authors trace the early history of Yupik communities, most of which were inhabited until the relocations that began in the 1930s and reached their peak in the 1950s. The core chapter, *The Yupik System: A Model*, is dedicated to the complicated social organisation of the Yupik. The authors examine such notions as locus, tribe, tribal group, clan, and lineage, and depict Yupik social system as adaptive to different ecological, economic and political changes. They deconstruct contact-traditional society, showing us the complexity, adaptability, and dynamics of a social system that was preserved to some extent into the 1950s. In the later chapters, the researchers provide the reader with post-trauma reflection of the elders on social losses, and show how a system once thought to be solid and flexible was destroyed by the dramatic Soviet reforms. The fourth chapter, *Along the Shores of Yupik Land in Asia*, is a valuable historic guide through the Yupik oecumene that contains social topography and explanations close to the domain of cultural ecology. In the next chapter, *Community Affairs*, the research focus is narrowed. Here the anthropologists examine the social architecture of the village, travelling patterns, contacts between communities, tribes, and relations with the Chukchi herders. The sixth chapter, *Family and Kinship*, examines family and marriage patterns as well as such social institutions as the boat crew and lineage. In the next chapter, *"Upstreaming": Lifetime of the Yupik Social System*, the authors go backwards and trace the recollections of early travellers back into the 18th century.

The three last chapters are of great ethnographic and historical value. They represent an elaborate investigation of the changes that occurred in the 1920s–1950s. Another myth is then clearly deflated: the 1930s–1940s that are fairly thought to be the most destructive years for the country turned out to be different for this small nation on the edge of the continent. The Yupik did not suffer terribly from the well-known Soviet social intrusions. It was the 1950s that proved most dramatic for Yupik society. By the late 1950s, nearly 70% of the Asiatic Yupik were forcibly relocated. The relocation destroyed their social system, ruined the established wildlife management, and indirectly caused the loss of language and self-identity crisis of this small-numbered Arctic people.

One of the distinctive features of the book is its focus on the social, cultural, and economic dynamic of the Asiatic Yupik society through the course of the 20th century. The research does not describe a stable situation within a short historic framework. It shows a society in transition (as the title itself implies). This methodology enables the authors to reveal the core features of Yupik society – adaptability and in some cases vulnerability, and a capacity to absorb and adjust various external influences. The investigation is far any mere case study or a piece of historic ethnography. The geographical and chronological scope and extent of elaboration are a clear evidence of this. The treatise embraces a range of contemporary anthropological domains – Soviet studies, colonial studies, anthropology of transition, anthropology of trauma, and human ecology.

I would like to finish the review by asserting the potential social impact and value of the book. In 2011 and 2012, I conducted research among the Asiatic Yupik in Chukotka. I was not surprised when I saw, in almost every house, Igor Krupnik's abovementioned collection of accounts by Yupik elders published in 2000 in Russian. This work has become a literal handbook of Yupik culture for present-day coastal villagers. Igor Krupnik managed to preserve the memory of a whole (albeit small-numbered) nation. The reviewed research behind this anthology could be of extreme importance and interest for the Yupik in Chukotka if translated into Russian.

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Note

¹ Igor Krupnik. *Pust' govoriat nashi stariki. Rasskazy aziatskikh eskimosov-yupik: Zapisi 1975–1987 gg.* (Let Our Elders Speak. Stories of the Yupik Eskimo, 1975–1987). Moscow, 2000.

ABOUT THE ETHNO-POLITICAL HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN



Dina Amanzholova. *Na izlome: Alash v etnopoliticheskoj istorii Kazakhstana*. Almaty: Taimas, 2009. 412 pp. In Russian.

The origin, development, and death of the Alash Orda movement in Kazakhstan is undoubtedly a burning issue of historical importance – and there is a reason for this. The attitude of the Soviets toward intellectuals was finally defined in the 1920s. The Soviets, having identified the Alash movement as a threat, started implementing tough socio-economic reforms in Kazakhstan that resulted in repressions of Kazakh intellectuals in 1926–1927.

According to the OGPU (Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie – State Political Directorate), on April 4, 1930, more than 40 Alash activists including

A. Baytursynov and M. Dulatov were arrested, exiled and put into jail for different prison terms. Following the OGPU's decision, M. Tynyshpaev, K. Dosmukhamedov, and more than 20 other representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia were expelled for a period of five years to the Voronezh region of Russia on April 20, 1932. Imposed by the OGPU, Zhumabaev, Auezov, and Ermekov were forced to make official statements saying that they rejected the ideology of the Alash party. As a result of the trials, a number of other Alash representatives (Aymaulytov, Adilov, Baydildin, and Yusupov among them) were sentenced to death, while the others died in prisons and labour camps.

The names and activities of the organisers and leaders of the Alash Orda were forgotten for years, yet their image of 'ardent nationalists', 'reactionary bourgeois politicians', etc., remained.

Researchers have many questions to answer as to how the Kazakh intelligentsia was formed and what the main factors were. Was the national Kazakh intelligentsia monolithic and unanimous in their views on the future of the Kazakh people? Why did the Soviet government so strongly repress the ideologists of the Alash Orda? Why were their works hidden for a century? And finally, why were their ideas so popular among the people, and how real are they today?

The referenced monograph of Dina Amanzholova has answers not only to these questions but also to some others. In the introduction to her work, the author immediately states her position. In the history of national movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the author sees the moral and political importance of the revolution and the Civil War. She quite fairly says that only a profound and objective knowledge of history will provide the patriotic view that fully identifies and consolidates the society and people, social optimism, and successful solution to the burning political, social, economic, and cultural challenges (p. 5). The author very carefully analyses each and every work of those related to the history of Alash. Her aim is to restore the main content of the key development stages as extensively as possible, to define the nature of the ideological and political orientation and the social base, to disclose the relationships with the political

forces and parties in the Russian pre-revolutionary period in 1917, in the context of the Civil War, to show the reasons for the defeat of the Alash Orda and its importance in the history of the Kazakh people. The main focus, as the author writes, is laid on the least-researched period of the Civil War (pp. 35–36). Thus, we can see that the author is puzzled by such difficult tasks.

D. Amanzholova shows the formation of the Kazakh national intelligentsia and its leaders in the chapter titled *The Birth of the Kazakh Opposition Movement*. Based on the examples of Russia and some other European countries provided by the experts, she comes to the conclusion that the Alash Orda followed the laws of the national movement objectively (p. 91). The author also pays attention to the position of the leaders of the national intelligentsia during the difficult period of 1916. The author believes that the integration of new territories into a common political and administrative territorial system was done differently as compared to the Russian policy, where the focus was laid on uniting the strategically important regions (p. 111). It is important to understand the content of the headquarters meeting materials dated 22 August 1916. Given the meeting's importance, the author provides its content in full (pp. 127–140). In addition, readers will find the answer to another important question: Where were the origins of the pacifist position of Alash activists during the events of 1916?

D. Amanzholova also discusses another aspect in the history of the Alash: Was the Alash Orda a party? In response to this question, having analysed plenty of material, the author comes to a very important conclusion. First, she states that the Alash party cannot be viewed as such in the classic sense of the word. Information about the Alash party's central committee and its constitution is not available yet. The draft of the party programme was not discussed or adopted. However, some local party bodies had gradually established themselves in the biggest administrative centres (pp. 183–184). It seems that the Alash had not developed as a party, says the author (p. 350).

The part of the monograph titled *Alash Movement and the Bolsheviks: From Compromise to Confrontation* has evoked the greatest interest among researchers (pp. 188–208). What is the essence of the conflict, we ask. The author answers it very clearly. Relations between the Bolsheviks and the Alash characterised the fundamental differences in the development of society, the incompatibility of the goals and methods of the parties, as well as dominance of an uncompromising approach in the political culture of Russian society (p. 188). Analysing the difficult relationship between the Alash and the Soviets, the author comes to another important conclusion: “the Bolsheviks' approach to the principles of establishing a federation and authority in autonomous regions was different” (pp. 197–198).

As to the chapter titled *Alash in Civil Confrontation*, the author reconstructs the Alash's activities in the local self-managed institutions. This story is quite justified, given the attention that was paid to those institutions in Kazakh newspapers. A large part of the work was devoted to the formation of Alash regiments. And the author is fair here. She notes that regiments were under the Siberian army commander's control, and were initially established as self-defence units (p. 223). The author describes the complexity of the issue and the people's attitude toward those regiments. The study also clearly shows that by December 1919 the manoeuvring and stand-by tactics that the leaders of the western branch of the Alash Orda used had proved ineffective.

Thus, we have developed a complete picture, full of drama, illustrating the complexities of difficult development stages of the Alash. Analysing the monograph, the reader can realise how difficult it was to make those decisions, how difficult was the path to achieve perfection, and how tragic was the fate of the Kazakh intelligentsia. One also understands how cynical and at the same time true Stalin's address to E. Stasova, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, on Akhmet Baitursynov, one of the leaders of the Alash Orda, as well as on the Alash movement as a whole, sounds: "I did not and do not consider him a revolutionary communist or a sympathiser thereof, yet we need his participation in the Revolutionary Committee" (p. 367).

When making this reference and analysing the material, it is difficult to do without emotions, and not to feel sorry for the Alash leaders.

Of course, one can finish the reference quite academically. In general, Dina Amanzholova's book is a fundamental monograph devoted to the fate of the Alash Orda, and could be of interest both to professionals and to those interested in the history of Kazakhstan. But at the same time it is unfair in regard to the author to view it only as such.

How can one evaluate the enormous hard work, relentless search for evidence in the archives, and maintenance of the material? After reading this monograph, you realise how truly and professionally it is written, and that you must have a big heart and plenty of courage to write the truth about the role and place of the Alash in the history of the Kazakh and other nations.

Baurzhan Zhanguitin

UNFADING IMAGES OF HISTORY

Zhanna Kydyralina. *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia*. Astana: Foliant, 2015. 440 pp. In Russian.

In the modern period of the crisis of civilisation, under the conditions of ideological pluralism, powerful intellectual resources are especially important for the understanding of the responsibility of an individual within society and in the global community. To comprehend the issues related to the future of a nation, and development of a country, we turn to the experience of history and images of a brilliant pleiad of national intelligence from the past.

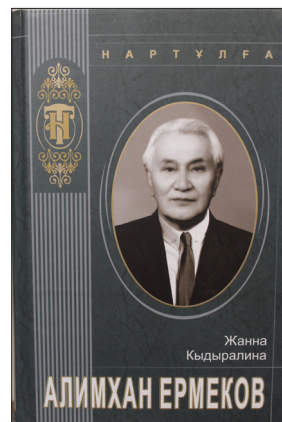
In 2015, the publishing house Foliant in Astana, in the popular series *Nartulgha* (*Vydaiushchiesia lichnosti* (Distinguished personalities)), published a book titled *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia* (Alimkhan Ermekov: Fate and Time). The author is Zhanna Kydyralina, Doctor of Historical Science. This new monograph is dedicated to the first Kazakh professor of mathematics – Alimkhan Ermekov (1891–1970), one of the founders of the first Kazakh political party Alash, and a member of the provisional government, Alash Orda.

The history of Alash and its great leaders is truly one of the brightest periods in the national history of the Kazakh people. The appearance of the movement and of the first political party Alash, and the government Alash Orda, signalled an increased civic maturity and the high potential of the Kazakh intellectual and political elite. Under the conditions of acute social conflicts of the early twentieth century, Alash announced its quest to solve the momentous questions of the future development of Kazakh native people. The leaders of Alash raised the national consciousness to the state level. They laid the foundations for the political and socio-economic transformation of modern Kazakhstan. During the Soviet period, the programme and activities of Alash were subjected to total ostracism, labelled as 'bourgeois and nationalist'. The difference of the ideology of Alash from that of the Bolsheviks consisted in denying the class paradigm and defending national positions. The leaders of Alash wanted to achieve the modernisation of Kazakhstan in an evolutionary way – by reform, without bloodshed and violence.

The fight for the preservation of the integrity of the Kazakh territory is a tribute to the tenacity of Alash Orda, which is difficult to overestimate. During Russia's troubled times after the First World War, they were able to clearly and convincingly communicate the right of Kazakhs to their land, which makes up the territory of modern Kazakhstan.

The leaders of Alash enjoyed an unquestionable authority amongst the people. They were talented people whose skills and background complemented each other. They knew several languages, were educators, wrote textbooks, and sought to raise the level of development of the nation to the level of advanced countries, including, for example, Japan.

Under the influence of the great spiritual quest of Alash Orda was a young prominent Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov. This is evidenced by an article titled *Japan*, which he wrote at the age of twenty. At the time, the leaders of Alash were looking for examples of countries that had managed to withstand the expansion into Eurasian space by the



West. And it was Japan, which had carried out the Meiji reforms in 1861, that the young Mukhtar Auezov excitedly analysed in this article, paying particular attention to their educational programmes. Japan had started to send its young people to study in Germany and other European countries. As a result, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan became a nation that knew how to defend its interests. This example was essential for the leaders of Alash Orda. Akhmed Baitursynov (p. 95) says: “We have to be rich, educated and strong. To be rich, you need to have business, to be educated you need to learn, and to be strong, unity is needed.”

This amazing generation of Alash leaders well served as an example for contemporary Kazakh youth in how to harmoniously balance the values of a nomadic civilisation, Islamic culture, and the European model of development, for the progress of the country and the people. They infinitely loved their country and its culture, and tirelessly devoted all their strength and energy to their cause. The great figures of Alash Orda had a deep insight into the world’s problems, were tolerant, read avidly, translated, and were connoisseurs of the world’s spiritual values. Among others, the great Kazakh poet Abay influenced their formation and worldview. Alash leaders were aristocrats of the spirit, but came from a variety of strata. Alimkhan Ermekov was undoubtedly among these outstanding personalities.

Alimkhan Ermekov came from an averagely wealthy family in Karkarala County, He graduated with honours from Semipalatinsk high school and then from Tomsk Polytechnic Institute with the qualification of a mining engineer.

The author of the book has been able to convey to the reader the main feeling – delight from the depth and richness of the inner ‘I’ of the main character. A. Ermekov is presented by Zh. Kydyralina as a bright politician and public figure, a talented personality, who due to tragic circumstances was devoid of opportunities to fully realise his scientific and creative talent, while retaining his loyalty to the national spirit and national values.

Courage, determination, prudence, and statesmanship earned him the recognition and trust of senior leaders from the movement. Young Ermekov negotiated with different political forces and governments on behalf of Alash Orda.

Ermekov was one of the first who stood at the cradle of the Kazakh Soviet statehood. During 1920 in Moscow, in a meeting with V.I. Lenin, chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, A. Ermekov made a report on the situation in Kazakhstan and its borders. Thanks to his initiative, and together with other representatives of the Kazakh elite, he managed to secure the return of ancestral land to the republic, including a number of strategically important territories like Akmolra and Semipalatinsk regions, and the northern coast of the Caspian Sea.

All his life he fought to overcome incredible difficulties. Following the sanctions of the totalitarian regime in the USSR, he spent almost 18 years in prison camps and exile. But nothing broke his will. Even in Stalin’s torture chambers he was bringing the light of knowledge to the people: he instigated a number of disciplines in the high school curriculum for the camp management, and the prisoners in the camp referred to him as Citizen Professor. Alimkhan Ermekov was the author of a textbook on higher mathematics in the Kazakh language, and had considerable experience teaching in a number of leading universities in Almaty.

Any outstanding personality is a product of his time. A major historical figure reveals and explains the modern era. The author of the biography has sought to fully disclose, in all its variety, the social reality of that era. A. Ermekov was supposed to be broken by fate, but was not; he did not lose his spirit, but elevated himself and raised his people in the process.

The talent of the scientist-mathematician, his hard work, the relentless blows of fate, and the inexhaustible power of the spirit – all of this is manifested throughout the book, turning it, in spite of the drama in the hero's life, into a surprisingly good and exciting work.

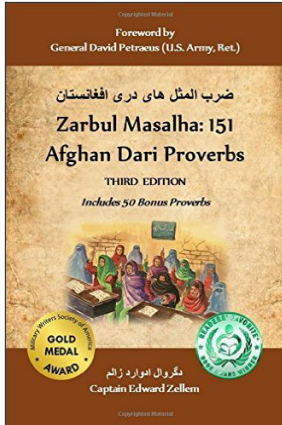
The reader can perceive the interrelationships in time: the state and society, under different political systems, faced some of the same challenges and problems as today. In the current debate and reflection on various issues of modern development – economic modernisation and the democratisation of public life, reforming of education and culture – images and views on the founders of Alash, who were far ahead of their time, appear in the mind's eye.

The book *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia* is written in a highly professional manner and can be read in one breath. The advantage of the book is its clear structure, and the skilful and harmonious combination of different methods of presentation. A series of carefully selected, interchangeable, interesting, and often paradoxical facts combine with striking and instructive examples, which recreate the historical background of the era. The paper highlights the dramatic peripeteias of the fates of the wonderful companions of the leaders of the Kazakh intelligentsia, remarkable men and women who left a bright trace in the history of a nation. The study is based on the solid ground of archival sources, memoirs, and evidence.

The unfading image of Alimkhan Ermekov will remain in the eternal memory of historical canons as an example of selfless service to a nation. The ideas of Alash, the highest moral examples of the people, who were a spiritual pendulum for the nation, live in the memory of generations, and have an impact on their deeds and actions. The spiritual world of Alash is the quintessence of the Kazakh national spirit, and it is among the eternal, immortal values.

Askar Altayev

PROVERBS WITH A BONUS



Edward ZelleM. *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs*. Third edition. United States of America: Cultures Direct Press, 2015. 223 pp.

The third edition of Captain Edward ZelleM's book, *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs*, is distinct from earlier editions in that there are an additional fifty proverbs which have been collected through the unique method of crowd-sourcing. His collection of proverbs, which began as a language learning tool, expanded into a book, drawing various members of the Afghan and American community together to create the first edition. This third edition exploits the cohesive nature of proverb collection and expands the process by using the Internet as a means of connecting people with each other in order to share culturally relevant proverbs.

At first glance it might be odd to learn that Captain Edward ZelleM's third edition of *Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs* contains 201 proverbs instead of the 151 purported in the title. Nevertheless, it is these last 50 proverbs which are of special interest; unlike the 151 proverbs published in the first edition which were collected through traditional means, the additional 50 proverbs of the third edition were gathered through a unique method of crowd-sourcing.

This book, which is now on its third edition, began with Captain Edward ZelleM of the United States Navy. As one of the first members of the Afghan Hands program, ZelleM focused on learning Dari, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan, understanding Afghan culture, and building relationships with Afghans. Collecting proverbs began for him as a "personal language learning technique... [which] evolved into a hobby, then a passion, then a series of books" (p. v). Through observation and interaction with Afghans, ZelleM noticed the frequency and skilled use of *zarbul masalha*, or proverbs, in everyday speech. As ZelleM began to collect and study proverbs, he noticed that "using them made it easier to communicate my thoughts, ideas, opinions and emotions, and that in turn led to faster, deeper human connections with my Afghan co-workers and friends" (p. vi). The more proverbs ZelleM collected, the more well-known his collection became, leading others to request copies of his list. When a friend mentioned turning the list into a book, ZelleM decided to publish only a few for family and friends.

A meeting with Aziz Royesh, co-founder and civics teacher at Marefat High School (MHS), began to change ZelleM's plan. Royesh suggested holding a contest for the students to paint pictures of 50 of the 151 proverbs to be published in the book and even offered to edit the book for him. ZelleM eagerly agreed. Together with the MHS art master Hadi Rahnarwad, ZelleM and Royesh chose and organized the proverbs and accompanying pictures into the first edition of the book which was published in 2011. A grant from the Department of State provided the funds to publish 40,000 copies and distribute them to over 200 schools across Afghanistan in an effort to support literacy and bilingualism in Dari and English.

The book sparked another book of proverbs, this time in Pashto, the other official language of Afghanistan. Unlike with the Dari proverbs, though, the Pashto proverbs were collected via social media and chosen by Zellem based on the number of “online retweets, likes, favorites, and comments [a proverb] received” (p. xv). The crowd-sourcing of the Pashto proverbs led many Dari speakers to want to participate as well. They, too, sent Zellem their favorite Dari proverbs, and Zellem used a similar method as with the Pashto proverbs to select an additional fifty Dari proverbs for the third edition of the book. This was the first time that such a method had been used to collect proverbs.

Dari language facts, a pronunciation guide, and the alphabet end the front matter. The next 204 pages consist of similarly-formatted Dari proverbs with a break between the original proverbs and bonus proverbs that provides a brief biography and picture of graphic artist and educator Sufi Ashqari. Each page of proverbs begins with the proverb in Dari with a pronunciation of the Dari letters, literal English translation, and English explanation below. Some of the pages include multiple explanations and uses, while others occasionally provide an equivalent English proverb. The equivalent proverb is a nice touch and further demonstrates for the American audience the similarities between Afghanistan and the United States.

In addition to words, as previously stated, fifty of these pages contain drawings of the proverbs. Some of these drawings are easily connected to the accompanying proverb. For example, underneath the first proverb, “seek knowledge from cradle to grave”, is a beautifully shaded drawing of a woman holding a young boy and writing the letters of the Dari alphabet (p. 1). The connection between the two is clear. For other proverbs, though, the connection is murky at best. The forty-ninth proverb, for example, is translated to mean “afraid of one’s own shadow” (p. 49). The picture below, though, has nothing to do with shadows. Instead, a man with a lion’s head helmet holds a knife while straddling a younger-looking man in armor. Thankfully, though, there is a note for the reader to look at the third appendix. In the appendices, there are five stories which explain the background behind the accompanying proverb or drawing. For this proverb, the story is of a man, Rostam, who unknowingly killed his own son because he “without reason had feared him as a rival” (p. 207). These appendices add a richness to an otherwise plain read. While the proverbs are interesting in a cursory way, the stories provide context for the proverbs and therefore a greater insight into the culture and worldview of Afghans. While it is unrealistic to expect stories for each of the 201 proverbs, it is regrettable that so few were included in the book.

Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs is a quick read, bookended by descriptions and stories which are interesting enough in content to make up for the average writing style, which neither enhances nor detracts from the message. The format of the pages of proverbs is clearly organized, making the proverbs easy to understand and read. The explanations are succinct, and the occasional alternative explanation is helpful for those who want to use this book as a tool for improving communication with Afghans. In short, taken by itself, this book is an interesting, if somewhat shallow, read which should appeal to those interested in either paremiology or Afghanistan.

Samantha Berman