

Chora Batır: A Tatar Admonition to Future Generations

Introductory Note

Chora Batır is the Tatar account of events and associated social conditions within two Tatar (Kazan and Crimean) khanates prior to the Russian conquest of Kazan. This military venture represents the earliest Russian eastward expansion and one of the first outside Slav domains. Russian, Soviet, and Western historians, in recording and analyzing this event and the relationship between Kazan and Muscovy that preceded it, have relied almost exclusively on Russian sources, especially the highly politically motivated chronicles. These were mostly exercises in wishful thinking rather than recording history.¹ Rarely have scholars attempted to go beyond these sources or the views they contain. One noteworthy exception is a group of articles published in *Slavic Review* in 1967,² by Edward L. Keenan, Jaroslaw Pelenski, and Omeljan Pritsak (Introduction by Ihor Ševčenko) which brought new information to light using heretofore neglected sources and a broader viewpoint. These authors noted the scarcity of the Tatar view of Kazan–Muscovite relations and the conquest itself. Chora Batır partly answers that need, so that the *Slavic Review* articles and Chora Batır at one level complement each other.

However, Chora Batır is not primarily a report of the conquest or of relations with Muscovy, neither is it a chronicle. Chora Batır is a dastan, an ornate oral history which embodies the essential issues of Central Asian identity. It is part of the historical and literary traditions of the Tatars, the beginnings of which predate even the first mention of the 'Rus' in written records. It is in these terms that Chora Batır, and all dastans, must be viewed. Furthermore, Chora Batır presents a threat to the Russians and for that reason they have attempted to destroy it. It is a threat not merely because this dastan names the Russians as the enemy: Chora Batır constitutes a profound challenge to Russian and Soviet attempts to portray history as they see fit. As history, it belies Soviet historiography's accounts of 'national origins', 'historic friendships', and 'voluntary unions' with the Russian state. Like all dastans, it thereby represents a roadblock to the mythology underlying efforts to create the New Soviet Man. As literature, it

1. Much has been written on this propensity of the Rus chroniclers, inter alia, 'predicting' events that have already happened. For an evaluation of the chronicle genre, see Basil Dmytryshyn, *A History of Russia* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977), p. 7. For the political deployment of these chronicles, see Jaroslaw Pelenski *Russian and Kazan: Conquest and Imperial Ideology (1438–1560)* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974) and Edward L. Keenan, 'Muscovy and Kazan: Some Introductory Remarks on the Patterns of Steppe Diplomacy', *Slavic Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, 1967.

2. Vol. XXVI, No. 4, December 1967.

undermines the regime's attempt to establish the alleged primacy of literary Russian.³ Therefore, this paper discusses Chora Batır as a repository. Second, it describes the attempts by the Russians to destroy or distort the dastan and, lastly, it describes the efforts of contemporary Central Asians who are hard at work, effectively parrying Russian thrusts.

The Dastan Genre

Chora Batır is a dastan, an ornate oral history. This literary genre is the repository of the Central Asian identity, its customs, and the traditions of the Central Asian Turkic tribal confederations. They are recited by ozans (composer–reciters), who accompany themselves with a native musical instrument (kopuz), at every feasible occasion. Chora Batır belongs to the Tatars. In 1923, Gazi Alim wrote:

. . . if we do not know the dastans . . . we will not become familiar with the struggles of the Turkish tribes, the reasons underlying their politico-economical endeavors, their methods and rules of warfare, the characters and the social places of their heroes in their societies; in short, the details of their past . . . All Turkish tribes have their dastans: the Kipchaks have their Koblandi Batır; the Nogays, İdige Batır; the Kungrats, Alpamysh Batır; the Naymans, Chora Batır; the Kirghız, Manas Batır.⁴

After centuries of purely oral existence, Chora Batır was committed to paper, like most other dastans, at various locations and times by different individuals in the 19th century.⁵ Chora Batır is the only classical Central Asian dastan which names the Russians as the enemy. Thus it is no surprise that the Soviet regime, which is very active in propagating the alleged Russian epic, the Lay of the Host of Igor, has taken a very different attitude toward Chora Batır. The Russians attempted to eradicate this dastan (along with all others) and failing that, tried to subvert it. The duality of the Russians' behavior regarding the 'epics' is nowhere more clear than in a comparison of the attacks on Chora Batır and the glorification of the Igor Tale. This unequal policy is reflected in a resolution submitted to UNESCO calling for the commemoration of the '800th anniversary' of the Igor Tale. The resolution refers to this tale—a work of controversial origin and character—as one of the 'events which have left an imprint on the

3. The very definition of dastan in *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* is written to downgrade its true nature. See my *Alpamysh* (manuscript in progress) for details.

4. 'Alpamyş Dastanına Mukaddime' (Introduction to the Dastan Alpamyş) by Gazi Alim, in *Bilim Ocağı*, nos. 2–3, 18 May 1923. For the full translation, see my *Alpamysh*. The tribal–ethnic compositions constituting the population characteristics of 'nations' living in the current southern 'republics' of the USSR are given in Z. V. Togan. According to Togan, the Naymans, in part, joined various 'Tatar' confederations and principalities. See his *Türkili Türkistan* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1981), (2nd Ed.) 29–35. W. Barthold also traces Nayman activities and dates a major Nayman migration to the west, in 1215, settling in the geographic locations which later became the Kazan and Crimean Khanates. See his *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1977) (4th Ed.), pp. 384–387 and 393–402.

Since the majority of the events related in Chora Batır generally took place in the first half of the 16th century, we must conclude that Gazi Alim was referring to the Tatars, whose tribal confederation included the Naymans from earlier times. At this point, however, we do not know the sources on which Gazi Alim based his argument with respect to the Nayman reference. Chora Batır may well have travelled with Naymans east to Turkestan, after the fall of Kazan. These Naymans then joined and merged into Kungrats, a subdivision of Özbeks. See Togan, *Türkistan*, op. cit. Substantiating Gazi Alim's observation, an earlier variant of Chora Batır was taken down from the Kirghız, in the Chimkent region (currently in Kazakh SSR), by Divaoğlu. See notes 13 and 26 below.

5. For further details of the early work on this matter, see my 'Saviors of Dastans', presented at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) national conference, Boston, November 1986.

development of humanity', and as 'one of the jewels of world literature'. It 'invites, the scientific and cultural community of the Member States of UNESCO to undertake the extensive commemoration of this anniversary which represents a landmark in the history of world culture'.⁶ Neither the Igor Tale nor the two centuries' long debate over its authenticity concerns us here. However, it is ironic that this tale which Russians regard as so fundamental to their literature actually deals with early Turk-Slav relations.⁷

Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleimenov's *Az I Ya*,⁸ a recent contribution to the discussion of the Igor Tale's origins and intent, reveals pervasive Turkic elements in the text. It further suggests earlier historic relations between Turk and Slav peoples and the great cultural impact of the Turks on the relatively more primitive Slavs.⁹ This may be yet another factor which contributed to the official unpopularity of Chora Batır. In any event, it is noteworthy that this much-touted heroic epic of the Russian people commemorates the defeat of the Slavs by the Kumans (also known as Kipchak, Polovtsy), a Turkic tribe.¹⁰

As for Chora Batır itself, several written variations exist. Most of these were recorded between the 1890s and the 1930s in the Russian empire and abroad. Those collected and published within the Russian empire were subject to the infamous censorship laws. Although Peter I made the first attempt at controlling the printed word in 1722, the first censorship statute was not promulgated until 1804 during the reign of Alexander I. Between 1826 and 1828, under Nicholas I, the most strict codes were developed. However, these proved to be so unwieldy as to be unenforceable and were superseded by a new code in 1828. The 1828 code laid the basic foundation for many areas of censorship for the rest of the Imperial period. A major supplement to the 1828 code was enacted in 1865 which shifted the emphasis from a preemptive character (where the efforts of the censor are concentrated on preventing the 'offensive' material from reaching the press) to a punitive character (providing sanctions against those defying the censor).¹¹

By the 1890s, the character of censorship had become particularly troublesome with respect to non-Russians. From the reign of Alexander III (1881-1894), Russification

6. The full text of this resolution is also found in *International Affairs* (Moscow: All Union Znaniye Society, August 1984), p. 149.

7. For these early Turkic-Slav relations, see P. B. Golden, *Khazar Studies* (Budapest: Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica, XXV, 1980), pp. 1-2. N. Golb, O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); U. Schamiloglu, 'Tribal Politics and Social Organization'. (Columbia University 1986). (Doctoral Dissertation.) Pertaining to Kazan-Moscow relations, Edward L. Keenan, 'The Jarlyk of Axmed-Xan to Ivan III: A New Reading', *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, V. XII, 1967. On Crimean Tatars, see Alan W. Fisher, *Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978). On Volga Tatars, see Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); see also Pelenski, *Moscow and Kazan* (note 1), op. cit.; and A. Sheehy, *Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meskhietians*, (London: Nationalities Papers, 1973).

8. Olzhas Suleimenov, *Az I Ja: kniga blagonamerennogo chitatelia*, (Alma-Ata: 1975).

9. For a discussion of *Az I Ja* and Suleimenov, see Frederique Diat, 'Olzhas Suleimenov: *Az I Ja*', *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 3, No. 1. 1984.

10. For a discussion of Kumans, see Peter Golden, 'Cumanica', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, IV, 1984. Also Thomas Noonan, 'Polovtsy', *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1981.

11. On Russian censorship, see M. T. Choldin, *A Fence around the Empire: Censorship of Western Ideas under the Tsars* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985); also B. Daniel, *Censorship in Russia* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979). The present author has benefitted from discussions on this issue at the Seminar on Censorship in the Soviet Union, sponsored by the Russian and East European Center, at the University of Illinois, at Champaign-Urbana, June 1986.

became an official policy of the state. Censors were sensitive to any elements of anti-monarchical and, increasingly, of anti-Russian or anti-Orthodox thought. Policies in publication, like those in education, were heavily influenced by the drive to Russify and Christianize. Russians such as the missionary and Orientalist Il'minskii came directly into conflict with Turkic Muslims and especially with the Tatars.¹² It was in this atmosphere that Chora Batır was first put on paper.

To our knowledge, the first to collect and publish Chora Batır was Abubekir Divaoğlu, a Baskurt (Bashkir), during 1895 in Tashkent.¹³ Divaoğlu, as the editor, concludes his narration of Chora Batır with a mysterious remark to which we shall return.

Radloff appears to be the second person who recorded the dastan.¹⁴ Characteristically for him, it is a fragment, severely truncated and taken down without noting the source or the time or place of recording. Perhaps this was simply Radloff's usual over-eagerness in rushing into print, or the effects of censorship. He may have been compelled to leave out those parts which were objectionable to the Russians. However, Radloff presents a small variant pertaining to the courage and valor of Chora Batır himself which is not found in more complete versions.

Tatars themselves, perhaps again due to the prevailing censorship in the Russian domains, could not openly print this dastan. On the other hand, two Tatars demonstrated their remembrance of this heritage (perhaps in defiance of the censor) by including passages from a verse-variant in their History of Tatar Literature.¹⁵ Another version, recorded among the Dobruca Tatars in 1935 by Saadet İshaki (Çağatay) and issued in Krakow, unlike the remaining versions contains a complete sequence.¹⁶ Another variant appeared in Istanbul during 1939.¹⁷ This one was taken down from émigré Tatars living in the Turkish Republic, with extensive dialogues in verse. A Tashkent version¹⁸ and two Bucharest¹⁹ variants, if merged, may constitute a somewhat complete dastan, for the Tashkent version lacks the ending, and the Bucharest fragments have rather scanty introductions. The latest Chora Batır variant reaching the West is found in '*Tatar People's Creations, a Collection of Dastans*', printed in Kazan during 1984.^{19a} We can expect that further variants, new and old, will emerge or be unearthed in the future.

Below is a composite summary which I have compiled from the aforementioned variants. The task of a full translation, utilizing all available sources, with critical apparatus, awaits a more suitable time.

12. Regarding censorship concerning nationalities at that stage, see Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 170-71, 250-51, 358, 485-487, 501-505.

13. Regarding Divaoğlu, see my 'Saviors' (note 5), op. cit.; and Note 26 below.

14. W. W. Radloff, *Proben*, Vol. 6. St. Petersburg, 1896.

15. G. Rahim and G. Gaviv, *Tatar Edebiyatı Tarihi* (Kazan: Izd.i Pechati TSSR, 1925), p. 141.

16. Chora Batır. Polska Akademyja Umiejtnosci, Prace Komisji Orjentalistycznej NR 20.

17. Collected by Hasan Ortekin, Eminönü Halkevi, Dil Tarih ve Edebiyat Şubesi Neşriyatı X.

18. *Dastans*, Gafur Gulam adında Edebiyat ve Sanat Neşriyatı, Taskent, 1980. This volume is issued by the foregoing institute as a part of their series and contains a variant of Chora Batır, recorded by Cafer Bekirov. This version was republished in *Emel*, Sayı 141-145, 1984.

19. In the book *Tepegöz: Dobruca Masalları* (Bükreş: Kriterion Kitabevi, 1985).

19A. In *Tatar Halk İcadı*, F. V. Ahmatova (Ed.) SSSR Fanlar Akademiyasının Kazan Filiali, Galimcan İbrahimov İsminde Til, Adabiyat ham Tarih İnstitutı, Kazan: Tatarstan Kitap Neşriyatı, 1984. Dr. Nadir Devlet kindly supplied the copies of *Tepegöz*, *Emel* and the *Tatar Halk İcadı*.

Synopsis of Chora Batır

A young man named Narik is a page in the service of a Khan in Crimea. He is known to be a diligent worker, trustworthy, honorable, and a brave soul. He is present at the Khan's Court where he is highly visible. Merchants plying the lands of the continent are very much impressed with the exemplary character of Narik. So the merchants present him with rare and expensive gifts. The Khan, not wishing to be outdone in his own Court, orders his page Narik to journey in the domains of his khanate for the purpose of finding a suitable girl to marry. This gesture of the Khan further evokes the jealousies of others who are in the Court.

Narik traverses the land of the Khan, between the Idil (Volga) and Yayik (Ural) rivers, in the Turgay–Yayik basin and while resting in a village, notices a woman who kindles the fire and, in keeping with custom, refrains from stepping on the ashes. Narik, noticing this attention to tradition, asks if this woman has a daughter. Finding that she indeed has, declares that he would like to marry her.

The marriage takes place with due pomp and ceremony with all the dignitaries and the masses in attendance. However, the Khan's son is also taken with the beauty of Menli Aruk Sulu, Narik's bride. Scheming to take her, the young Prince orders Narik to carry a message to Moscow. Menli Aruk Sulu, suspecting the Prince's motive, begs Narik not to go. Narik seems indignant, and seems to refuse to heed his wife's word. However, he decides to feign departure and to return unobserved. The Prince visits Narik's home that night, confident of finding Menli Aruk Sulu alone. Narik's wife admits the Prince into the house and begins telling him a tale:

'My father was a wealthy man who lived along the Idil River. He had herds of horses. In one of these herds there was a beautiful colt. One day this colt fell asleep and became separated from the herd. A hungry wolf found, attacked, and bit the colt's hind leg. Just in time, a hunter tracking the wolf appeared on the scene. The wolf took refuge in the forest but the colt was left lame. Time passed, a lion hunted down the lame colt. But the lion noticed the teeth marks of the wolf on the colt's leg and said: "I am a lion. I will not eat any animal that survived a wolf".'

The Prince, very upset, rising, states: 'May your tongue be swollen Menli Aruk. You are a young woman, where did you learn to speak in this manner?'

As the Prince prepares to leave, Narik, who has been secretly observing the proceedings, confronts and kills him. When the prolonged absence of the Prince becomes apparent, the Khan begins questioning the members of his Court. Narik owns up to his deed. Given the evidence, the Khan tells him: 'I cannot punish you, for you were within your rights. However, from now on we cannot be in amity.' After amply paying Narik for his past services, the Khan orders Narik to leave the land.

Narik leaves with his wife. One day, Menli Aruk has a dream: 'A flame shot out from between my feet. The other end of it reached the sky. No one could put it out despite diligent efforts. A black cloud appeared in the sky. Very heavy rains emanating from this cloud extinguished the fire.' Menli Aruk continues: 'I will interpret my dream. I will give birth to a boy who will become a mighty Batır.'

Time passes. Narik and Menli Aruk's son Chora is herding the village cows together with other youngsters. An old man appears, a mendicant Dervish passing through the village. While the other boys are afraid of the visitor, Chora treats him with respect and offers food. Before leaving the old man selects a young colt, ties a collar around its neck, naming it Tasmalı Ker. The Dervish then tells Chora: 'By the time you grow up to be a mighty Batır, this colt will become a steed worthy of you.'

Later on, the Khan's tax collector, Ali Bey, visits the village for the annual payment. Narik treats the tax collector to a feast. While he is eating, the tax collector notices that a young man is watching him intently. Although every other individual in the village seems to be deeply intimidated by his presence, Chora only appears to be curious and not at all afraid. Ali Bey leaves the village without collecting any taxes, citing for his reason the fact that he was treated in the most courteous manner.

However, the tax collector's master, the Khan of that region, hears of the incident and summons Ali Bey: 'Why did you not collect any taxes from K k k l  K k Dam?' Ali Bey answers: 'I granted it to a young man in that village.' 'Were you so afraid of him?' 'No, not at all, however, he is a valiant young man.' The Khan thus desires to meet Chora. The word is sent, Chora appears before the Khan and the Court. After due and proper salutation, the Khan expresses amazement. 'You are but a youth. You are not a Batır. Look at Ali Bey, he can tie his moustache behind his neck. When he walks, his steps sound as if seventy-thousand troops are afoot. He is the equal of one-thousand Batırs. How many men are you equal?' Chora Batır answers: 'I am equal to one who is worthy of me.' Immediately withdrawing from the Court, Chora mounts his horse, and heads towards his village.

The Khan, observing this, orders forty men to intercept Chora. The forty men crowd Chora's path. Chora dismounts. Girding his loins, he then remounts and spurring his horse, battles and overcomes the forty men. He ties their hands, disrobes them all, and takes them back to the Khan: 'Make sure these dogs are well tethered so that they may not attack other travellers.'

This event deeply embarrasses and angers the Khan. He orders Ali Bey to gather plenty of troops and pillage Chora's village and bring back his horse. Chora is not home. Ali Bey insults Narik. Collecting Chora's horse, Ali Bey returns to the Khan's Court. Nariks seeks his son Chora and relates the events in a long and touching manner, in verse. Chora, girding up once more, again does battle with the Khan's men. After defeating them all, he recovers his horse. He cannot any longer stay in the same location. Therefore, he heads for Kazan.

On the way he sights and shoots an akku, a very high flying bird. The bird falls to the ground in Kazan. The Batırs resident there discover the bird with an arrow through its body. It is reported that ordinarily it is not possible to shoot this bird in flight. The arrow cannot be identified by any of the Batırs as belonging to anyone living in their realm. In fact the arrow is too long to fit the bows of the people who have found it. The Batırs of Kazan, the best in the land, marvel at this incident and are clearly intimidated.

Upon further investigation, it is determined that the arrow was discharged from Chora Batır's bow, who has just arrived in Kazan. He is immediately invited to take part in a shooting contest. Chora Batır borrows a bow and an arrow, but the bow cannot withstand the power of Chora Batır. When drawn, it breaks. He is at once given another, but the same fate befalls the new bow. His shooting skills are then questioned. He asks that his own bow be brought, which he had left with his horse. One Batır cannot carry Chora Batır's bow. A second Batır is sent to help the first. Two Batırs manage to carry it with difficulty. With his own bow in hand, Chora Batır wins the contest.

The other Batırs, who have been unseated from their former glory by Chora Batır, conspire against him. However, Chora Batır prevails over them. The Khan of Kazan's daughter, Sarı Hanım, distributes valuable gifts to thirty-two resident Batırs. Some receive a horse, others embroidered robes or a sword. To Chora Batır, she sends an empty money pouch. Annoyed, Chora discards the bag on a dunghill.

At this point word of Russian forces attacking Kazan reaches the Batırs. Thirty-two Batırs face the Muscovites, and fight for seven days and nights to no avail. The Khan asks: 'How is it that the Batırs cannot turn back the Muscovites? Is Chora Batır among them?' The answer he receives is 'No, Chora has not left his abode.' The elders of Kazan visit Chora Batır, imploring him to take up arms against the Russians. Chora does not answer. Next, the Khan of Kazan comes calling with the same request. Chora does not leave his room. Now it is Sarı Hanım's turn, who arrives with her select handmaidens, and makes an impassioned and tearful plea. Finally Chora responds with: 'You gave valuable presents to each of the thirty-two Batırs. To me you sent an empty money pouch. These thirty-two Batırs cannot turn back the Muscovites. How can I leave this room?' Then Sarı Hanım asks: 'Where is that pouch now.' 'On the dunghill.'

Sarı Hanım and her beautiful hand-maidens rush out to the dunghill and start sifting through it. They recover and return the pouch to Sarı Hanım who opens it and displays a sword folded eight times. Chora Batır is overjoyed. Wielding this 'G k  buk', Chora joins the battle against the Russians who came to conquer Kazan. Chora Batır turns back the Russians. The Russian

general, defeated by Chora Batır, takes an oath never to return again or to gird a sword. Upon this victory, Chora Batır becomes the 'Baş Batır' of Cifali Han, Ruler of Tatar Kazan.

After their defeat, the Russians consult astrologers to seek a way to subdue Kazan and especially Chora Batır. The astrologers determine that a Russian girl would conceive a son by Chora Batır, and this boy would eventually kill his father. The Russians send a pretty girl to Kazan with specific instructions to find Chora Batır and return to Russian territory upon becoming pregnant. Chora Batır lives with the girl. After conceiving, the Russian girl returns to her people.

Time passes; Chora Batır's son by the Russian girl grows up and leads the Russian troops advancing on Kazan. During the final battle for Kazan, Chora Batır is killed by this boy.

Commentary

Chora Batır contains references and allusions to various known aspects of Tatar political life and Tatar–Muscovite relations. It shows that the khanates of Crimean and Kazan are now separate realms, each in the possession of different ruling Khans.²⁰ The dastan reflects the frequent diplomatic relations which Crimea maintained with Muscovy—Chora is asked without much fanfare to undertake a mission to Moscow. Muscovite attacks on Kazan appear at regular intervals and seem to be routine, even expected by the Kazan populace.

The dastan also shows some causes of internal friction in both khanates: in Crimea, the tax collection by the functionaries of the Khan is not on a smooth or methodical basis; and in Kazan, there is obviously a division of opinion as to who should take command against a Russian attack.

There are 32 Batırs in Kazan, prior to Chora Batır's arrival. They are the ones heading the Kazan forces in battle against the Muscovites. To what extent this group is directly related to the 'karachi families' is not immediately obvious.²¹ These 32 Batırs may or may not have constituted an additional council to the Khan.²²

The dastan further indicates Tatar awareness of Muscovite use of 'astrologers'. Indeed, although astrology is not acceptable within Christianity, visions and dreams certainly figure, sometimes prominently, in Rus chronicles, such as the *Kazanskaia istoriia*.²³

Chora Batır does not, however, allude to the overt competition which existed among Crimea and Muscovy for control over the Turgay–Yayık basin. This is especially important in the period immediately preceding the Russian conquest because in the late

20. There were also relations between the Tatar domains and Central Asia. The Russian encroachment towards east 'Türkistan' (also called 'Independent Tartary' by a number of Western authors and cartographers) was being watched closely by Central Asian rulers. It was generally known that the Russians, for their own purposes, were very interested in establishing contacts with the Moghuls (founded by Babur, a descendant of Timur) of India and the Safavids. Most Central Asian rulers were against these activities and took steps to stem or limit the Russian initiatives. Accordingly, Özbek Shaybani Khan sent the following quatrain to Muhammed Amin, Khan of Kazan in 1506, after the latter defeated another Rus attack on Kazan:

Islam başına tac ü tarak bolsun/Yaring tün ü kün Tengri tabarak bolsun/Eşittim, Orus kafirini kırımsın sen./Oğlum, sanga gaziliq mubarak bolsun.

See Togan, *Türkistan* (note 4), op. cit. pp. 133–4.

21. For a discussion of karachi, see Edward L. Keenan, 'The Jarlyk of Axmed–Xan to Ivan III: A New Reading' (note 7), op. cit.; idem, 'Muscovy and Kazan: Some Introductory Remarks on the Patterns of Steppe Diplomacy' (note 1), op. cit. Also A. W. Fisher, *Crimean Tatars* (note 7), op. cit.

22. The figure 32 is not necessarily among the more widely known and recognized 'auspicious' numbers which are at times employed by the reciters and composers of dastans for ornamentation. For example, 40 would have been a more familiar number.

23. See Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan* (note 1), op. cit. p. 569.

1520s and early 1540s, various members of the Crimean ruling family assumed the throne in Kazan.²⁴ The competitive Crimean–Kazan relationship is hinted at in Chora's moving to the Kazan khanate, when in disfavor in the Crimean Khan's realm.

Turning to the structure of the dastan, a number of features stand out. There seems to be almost inordinate emphasis on Chora's parents, then on Chora's childhood and early feats. Once he leaves Crimea, less attention is paid to such details. (However, focus on this type of detail is in keeping with the tradition of the Central Asian dastans.) The ending, on the conquest itself, is so rapidly disposed of as to be almost anticlimactic. This is most unusual for a classical dastan, which describes the outcome in vivid detail.

Composers of the dastan emphasize Chora's lineage—the honor and bravery of his father and the virtuousness of his mother—and his early feats that set him apart from others. They display the noble qualities of his parents and his innocent youth. These suggest Chora's innate virtues and strength, thereby stressing even further the height from which he fell because of his own indiscretion or error of judgment. By his ill-considered liaison with the Russian girl, he ensured his own defeat as no other Batır, not even whole armies, had been able to do.

This treatment of Chora is also significant in that responsibility for his own actions is placed on the Batır himself rather than being attributed to 'fate', 'divine will' or some other uncontrollable or unknown force. It reinforces the concrete aspect of the dastan, which is discussed further below.

The perils of 'intermarriage' are stunningly disposed of in the terse and stern ending—the death of the Batır and the fall of Kazan. This ending is most unusual for the dastan genre. All classical dastans end with the liberation of the people to which they belong, under the leadership of the alp²⁵ who is the favorite son. The victory is invariably celebrated by a *toy* (lavish feast). However, in Chora Batır the ending marks a defeat. This exception is made so as to shake a finger at future generations. Because dastans are also the 'last will and testament' of the creators and their generation, this ending provides an almost eerie foreshadowing of the debate on *sliianie* ('merging') in later times. The perils of ignoring the admonition of Chora Batır are vividly demonstrated in *Uncensored Russia* (Peter Reddaway, Trans., Ed.) which documents the plight of Crimean Tatars in their current fight for their homeland (American Heritage Press, 1972. 249–269).

Chora Batır is remarkably free of magical imagery, which at times constitutes the ornamentation in such a work. Also absent are supernatural motifs. Hence it drives home the solid message that any well bred young man of Tatar origin can duplicate the efforts and deeds of Chora Batır. In fact, this is one of the main messages incorporated into the dastan by its composers. It contains the admonition and, as already noted, the 'last will and testament' of the Tatars of the 16th century: Russians are the eternal enemies—no *sliianie*, no *sblizhenie*, not even *druzhiba*.

In light of the clear message of the uncensored versions of Chora Batır, Divaoglu's ending is especially curious. He abruptly truncates his narrative, leaving Chora alive after the battle. In three brief, cryptically apologetic paragraphs he concludes the narration:

24. A. W. Fisher, *Crimean Tatars* (note 7), op. cit. p. 43.

25. Used interchangeably with 'Batır', meaning valiant, gallant, brave; as attributes of a skilled and fearless champion tested in battle or contest. See Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 127.

'About the further activities of Chora Batır, nothing is known. By some accounts, he returned to Kazan.

'And now, we will offer a prayer for the repose of the souls of these wonderous heroes, never having thundered throughout the universe! (Having been cut down at their prime.) Lighten, Oh God, the heavy embankment over their graves.

'And now we will close our mouth and forgive us, reader, if into the narration have crept a small mistake. Indeed we are people, and people sometimes err.²⁶

This also attests to the nature of Russian censorship. Furthermore, true to the dastan tradition, the Divaoğlu 1895 variant contains a layer of local references suggesting the travels of the dastan eastward. Dastans, as they migrate with their owners, tend to acquire these additional layers and details on one common base. Analysis of all layers, and their contents, allows the historian a method for tracing their movements.²⁷

The 1984 Kazan version, despite persisting censorship, goes remarkably further. Tatars seem to have employed suitable allusions to make the final point clear. The Kazan 1984 variant also specifically names the Russians as the enemy. In the end, Chora Batır, while fighting against the attacking Russian forces, encounters a young man among their ranks. He cannot defeat this boy, and from the intensity of the struggle between them, Chora Batır's horse's hoofs become very hot. To cool them, Chora Batır rides into a nearby body of water, where he is drowned.

The Russian Attack on Chora Batır and Central Asian Native Literature

During the cultural and 'national' purges of the 1930s, Chora Batır had been especially singled out by the Soviet regime for total extinction due to its powerful message. The Soviets almost succeeded in eliminating all written copies of this dastan. However, despite the state's monumental efforts Chora Batır is still alive, befitting the best dastan tradition of oral recitation. It surely is not a coincidence that of a number of principal characters in current Tatar and other Central Asian literary works several resemble Chora Batır.

The Russians have always been aware of the power of native works in Central Asian literature, especially the dastans. The tsarists, in preparation for colonization, studied them in order to understand the mind of the Central Asians. The St. Petersburg establishment also trained the Orientalists who were assigned as advisers to the tsarist expeditionary commanders in the field during the phase of conquest. Later, a number of these individuals were designated as 'Inspectors of Schools', virtually performing the functions of civilian Governors-General (semi-independent under the military governors) in the aftermath of the military operations.²⁸

The Bolsheviks, following Lenin's dicta with regard to the preservation of national customs, and attempting to defuse reaction against their rule,²⁹ tolerated the printing of the dastans in the 1920s. Later, the Soviets highly praised the same body of literature as

26. Abubekir Divaoğlu, *Chora Batır*, Tashkent, 1895. Collected from the Kirghız, living in Chimkent region of current Kazakh SSR.

27. For illumination of this feature, see my *Alpamysh*. A discussion on the issue of dastans travelling with tribal confederations also appears in Nora K. Chadwick and Victor Zhirmunsky, *Oral Epics of Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

28. Among others, Radloff was such an Orientalist who served as Inspector of Schools.

29. For a complete text of the Lenin-Stalin declaration of 'freedom to nationalities', see J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

'liberty songs of the Central Asians'.³⁰ During the 1930s a number of these works were reprinted in the original and translated into Russian.

Then came the 'crisis of the dastans' between 1950 and 1952, when the whole of these dastans were attacked fiercely by the apparatchiks.³¹ Apparently the dastans were finally read—in Russian translation—by party planners and in military circles. It was at once correctly assessed that their stubborn contents would stiffen the Central Asian resolve against Soviet designs. A series of denunciations immediately declared them 'reactionary', 'poisonous', and 'feudal'.³² The Soviets wanted to eradicate them totally. They were banished from all libraries, removed from sight, and became contraband. But the dastans did not die; thanks to their oral tradition they remained safe in the minds and souls of their reciters.

The Russians responded, in part, by liquidating the reciters and the traditional native schools in which they trained. The memory of the dastans still did not fade away, because entire generations had heard them many times. Finally realizing that overt methods were not succeeding in removing them from the minds of the Central Asians, the Soviets changed their approach. This new method involved a renewed effort to take down the traditional oral literature of the Central Asian Turkic populations and fix it on paper. These manuscripts were then deposited with the nearest branch or affiliate of the USSR Academy of Sciences, for 'safekeeping' and eventual 'preparation for publication'. Not all versions thus collected were heard again. The censorship duties with respect to the Central Asian literature seem to rest, as they had before the revolution, in the Oriental Institutes. This appears to have remained the case despite the creation by the Soviet regime of Glavlit, which oversees the Russian language literature. The Soviet Oriental Institutes, under the orders of the communist party, went beyond merely removing offensive passages and were charged with the task of actively and zealously propagating Marxism.³³ To obey and execute the order, the Oriental Institutes devised 'sanitization'.

The phase of preparation for publication, under very close Russian supervision, has crucial importance. During this process, any passages reminiscent of the old ways or statements bearing on the historical identity of the Central Asians are deleted from the text. I term this practice 'sanitization' as it strives to remove all aspects of the historical heritage that may be instrumental in germinating the true Central Asian identity in the minds of the new generations. All relevant historical facts are stripped away and in some cases replaced by artificial versions sympathetic to the Soviet cause. Along the way, the linguistic style is also altered.³⁴

When the Russians 'proudly' claim that they are doing all they can to preserve the

30. See A. Bennigsen, 'The crisis of the Turkic National Epics, 1951–1952: Local Nationalism or Internationalism?' *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 & 3 (1975), pp. 463–474; also my *Alpamysh*.

31. Bennigsen, *ibid.*

32. Bennigsen, *ibid.*

33. Concerning the literary controls on non-Russian language output, especially Central Asian dialects, and the conditions under which such controls were designed, see Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., 'The Structure of Soviet Orientology', *Russia in Asia*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972). For predecessor institutions to those of the Soviets, and their activities, see Richard N. Frye, 'Oriental Studies in Russia', *Russia in Asia*, *op. cit.* Pertaining to the Soviet assertion of Russian history in general, see, C. E. Black Ed., *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past*, (New York: Praeger, 1956). Soviets also have a novel way of interpreting the histories of the non-Russian nationalities, aside from their other attitudes toward these 'minorities'. See Lowell Tillet, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1969).

34. For further details, see my *Alpamysh*.

'native folklore' of the Central Asian heritage, they are referring to the sanitized versions they have been printing of Central Asian literature. The Russian use of the term 'folklore' is not incidental. The aim is to relegate all aspects of native Central Asian culture to the status of folklore, a harmless and antiseptic body of tales which will only add skin-deep color to Soviet life.

As a platform for the sanitization, some of the old popular reciters and their works were 'rehabilitated' post mortem, albeit after having been subjected to this heavy 'sterilization'. These works are now held by the Russians as the ultimate and 'final' versions of the dastans. These are the ones found in the libraries and one and all are encouraged to study them, while the complete old variants, collected by the Orientalists, languish in the manuscript departments of, inter alia, Tashkent, Alma-Ata, Leningrad, and Moscow. This new method is infinitely more destructive and has more far-reaching effects. When the young Central Asians now read the sanitized, 'folkloric tale' versions of the most important Central Asian historical documents, they have no way of knowing that these have been completely gutted. The older generations, who knew these works well, are no longer there to advise their offspring otherwise.

Rescuers

Becoming aware of the games the Soviets are playing, Central Asians have been adapting to the new conditions. Their weapon is historical fiction. That is to say, the new generations of authors have been producing volumes of 'fiction' on historical topics. Since the genre is officially classified and labelled as 'roman' (novel) these young Central Asian authors have been able to move in directions that are not possible for their historian brethren.³⁵

The Central Asian historian is fettered by the works of Lenin, Marx, and the latest Politburo Chairman. On the other hand, the novelist can write about an allegedly fictitious area and timeframe. That does not mean, however, that the novelists are completely free and without official manuals to guide their pens.³⁶ For that matter, occasionally the censors are awakened to the fact that a work is a direct indictment of the Soviet system in the guise of glorification of it. Consequently the guilty author is suitably paraded before his knowing colleagues, officially repenting, and promising to rework his latest opus.³⁷ Nevertheless, the novelists are able to return to the original sources of their own history, the dastan. Mamadali Mahmudov's *Ölmez Kayalar* (*Immortal Cliffs*), published in 1981, is a prime example, one which also incorporates Chora Batır into its main theme.³⁸ Thus the 'official history' now becomes the fiction. As one Marxist philosopher recently put it: 'We all know that the future is glorious, comrades. It is the past that keeps changing.'

35. See H. B. Paksoy, Ed., *Central Asian Monuments*, (forthcoming).

36. Manuals on publication guidelines are known to exist, and are circulated under strict control. For one example, pertaining to Soviet newspaper editors, see L. Branson, 'How Kremlin Keeps Editors in Line', *The Times*, 5 January 1986, p. 1. In addition, organs of each Authors' Union of every 'republic' regularly publish directives, specifically aimed at the authors themselves, on every conceivable topic. *Muhbir*, published in Tashkent, is one such organ, devoted to 'guiding' the authors in Uzbek SSR.

37. For a series of examples pertaining to Uzbek writers between 1980–1982, refer to John Soper, 'Shake-up in the Uzbek Literary Elite', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1983), pp. 59–82.

38. See the examples in my 'Central Asia's New Dastans', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1986), pp. 21–37.

Conclusion

The dastans are so resilient that they also adapt themselves both to adversity and to new technology. Some 'unsanctioned', unapproved dastans are now being spread on cassettes. These cassettes are prepared and recorded within the Soviet sound studios by the Central Asians, much to the chagrin of the Soviet establishment.³⁹ More significant even than the production of these unsanitized cassettes is their immense popularity. Demand for them is great and they appear to be selling widely. This is indicative of their continuing appeal to the populace at large, and not merely to the educated 'elite'.

That popularity raises an even larger, fundamental issue—the nature of Central Asian identity. Current views of Soviet Central Asia stress that religion is the primary identity among Central Asian 'Muslims'. The popularity of these cassette dastans, which are not religious,⁴⁰ and the conditions under which they are produced and sold is yet another signal demanding a rethinking of the conventional wisdom. In the face of mounting evidence recently reaching the West, the primacy of Islam as the driving force of current Central Asian identity can no longer be accepted as 'given'.

The clear distinction between the ethnic and religious identities, though generally ignored in Western scholarship during recent decades, is not a new phenomenon. It is often expounded, in various forms, by many native Central Asian authors, old and new. Among the last four generations of writers elucidating this issue, in addition to Olzhas Suleimanov already referred to above, can be cited Yusuf Akçuraoğlu,⁴¹ Gazi Alim,⁴² Hamid Alimcan,⁴³ Alisher İbadinov,⁴⁴ Mamadali Mahmudov,⁴⁵ and Qulmat Omuraliyev.⁴⁶ This is by no means a comprehensive list.

All of these authors have risked not only their careers, futures, and lives but also those of their families. Many others lost their lives in the purges. But all these dangers did not restrain the Central Asians. Each author, for an expression of his true identity and those of his fellow Central Asians, drew on the historic documents of their common heritage. Their sources included the dastans, the repositories. In their approach to the task of recovering their native identity, Central Asian authors utilize dastans and alps as sources and models for their arguments. Some, such as Mahmudov and İbadinov,

39. For the saga of a dastan spin-off, see 'V tsene li'chernye glaza', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* (December 5, 1984).

40. Although some classical dastans contain religious layers, acquired in the same manner as they collect geographic variations discussed above (note 27), these layers were juxtaposed on one base long after the dastans were composed, and were not initially created for religious reasons. See my *Alpamysh* for further discussion. However, currently there are other religious activities in Central Asia, quite separate from the legacy of dastans. See, for example, my 'The Deceivers', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1984), pp. 123–131.

41. In his 'Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset'. This important essay was written in the village of Zoya, Russia, and first published in Cairo (then under British control) in a Turkish language newspaper (which was in opposition to the Ottoman ruler), *Türk Gazetesi* (1904) No. 24. A more recent re-print of this work was issued by Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara: VII Dizi, 1976. Sayı 73.

42. See note 4 above.

43. His introduction to *Alpomış*, Tashkent, 1939.

44. 'Küyes Ham Olov', *Gülistan*, No. 9 (1980).

45. See note 38 above.

46. *Kazak Adebıyeti*, No. 30 (1982). For an analysis of this work, see Charles F. Carlson and Hasan Oralbay, 'Kül Tegin: Advice on the Future?' *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1983), pp. 121–138. Current Western debate on ethnic vs. religious identity in Central Asia is in its nascent state. For an example, see Nazif Shahrani, 'From Tribe to Umma: Comments on the Dynamics of Identity in Muslim Soviet Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1984), pp. 27–38.

freely borrow motifs. Others, like Gaspıralı, include the name of a specific alp in their addresses to the public.

Gaspıralı İsmail Bey,⁴⁷ was the founder of Jadidism⁴⁸ and the proprietor of one of the longest lived Turkic language newspapers in the Russian empire, *Tercüman*.⁴⁹ During 1905, a group of revolutionary young Tatars impetuously criticized Gaspıralı İsmail Bey in the newspaper *Tan* (Dawn)⁵⁰ for his cautionary views. Gaspıralı answered his critics in his widely read *Tercüman*.⁵¹ His reference to Chora Batır, without further elaboration, reflects the wide familiarity of his readers and critics with the dastan and its messages. Moreover, Gaspıralı does not leave to chance or interpretation whose duty it is to follow these lessons—each individual and the community as a whole must heed the admonition of the dastan. In this way Gaspıralı acts as a link between traditional recitation and necessarily elliptical allusion. He is utilizing the dastan in the spirit it is intended and foreshadowing the work of later rescuers of Central Asia's alps and their legacies. Gaspıralı's retort is embedded in his following poem:

If my arrow would hit the target
 If my horse should win the race
 Chorabatır is valiant
 If my arrow could not reach its target
 And my horse cannot win the race
 Tell me, what could Chorabatır do?⁵²

47. For Gaspıralı, see Edward J. Lazzerini, 'İsmail Bey Gasprinskii and Muslim Modernism in Russia, 1878–1914', Seattle, University of Washington, 1973. (Doctoral Dissertation.)

48. See Edward J. Lazzerini, 'Gadidism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: A View from Within', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, No. 16 (1975).

49. See A. Benningsen and C. Lemerrier-Quellejey, *La presse et le mouvement national chez les Muselmans de Ruse avant 1920* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964); also E. J. Lazzerini's chapter on *Tercüman* in *Central Asian Monuments* (note 35), op. cit.

50. A Tatar Socialist group, closely connected with the Russian Social Democrats (SRs), were clustered around this newspaper. See A. Benningsen and C. Lemerrier-Quellejey, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (G. Wheeler Tr.) (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), p. 55.

51. Gaspıralı's *Tercüman* had readership ranging from Tatar Domains to 'Eastern Turkistan' (Xinjiang province, currently in the People's Republic of China), from India to Azerbaijan, Ottoman domains to Cairo.

52. Okum nisan ursa idi/Atım koşu ozsa idi/Çapar edi Çorabatır/Okum nişan ırmaganda/Atım koşu ozmaganda/Ayt nisesin Çorabatır? Cf. Kırımlı Cafer Seydahmet, *Gaspıralı İsmail Bey* (İstanbul: 'Matbaacılık ve Necriyat', n. p., 1934), p. 41.