

# CHORA BATIR: A TATAR ADMONITION TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

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## Introductory Note

Chora Batir 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 Sevcenko) 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 BATIR* partly answers that need, so that the *SLAVIC REVIEW* articles and *CHORA BATIR* at one level complement each other.

However, *CHORA BATIR* is not primarily a report of the conquest or of relations with Muscovy, neither is it a chronicle. *CHORA BATIR* 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 BATIR*, and all dastans, must be viewed. Furthermore, *CHORA BATIR* 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 Russian as the enemy: *CHORA BATIR* 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 undermines the regime's attempt to establish the alleged primacy of literary Russian. [3] Therefore, this paper discusses *CHORA BATIR* as a repository.

## The Dastan Genre

*CHORA BATIR* 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 BATIR* 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-economic 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 BATIR; the Nogays, IDIGE BATIR; the Kungrats, ALPAMYSH BATIR; the NAYMANS, CHORA BATIR; the Kirghiz, MANAS BATIR [4]

After centuries of purely oral existence, CHORA BATIR was committed to paper, like most other dastans, at various locations and times by different individuals in the 19th century. [5] CHORA BATIR 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 BATIR. The Russians attempted to eradicate this dastan (along with 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 BATIR 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 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] Kazak writer Oljay Suleimanov'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 BATIR. 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 BATIR 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 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 BATIR was first put on paper.

To our knowledge, the first to collect and publish CHORA BATIR was Abubekir Divaoglu, a Bashkurt, during 1895 in Tashkent. [13] Divaoglu, as the editor, concludes his narration of CHORA BATIR 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 overeagerness 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 BATIR 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 Ishaki (Cagatay) 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 emigre Tatars living in the Turkish Republic, with extensive dialogues in verse. A Tashkent version [18] and two Bucharest [19] 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 BATIR 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.

### Synopsis of CHORA BATIR

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, keeping with the 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 those herds there was a beautiful colt. One day this colt fell asleep and became separated from the herd. A hungry wolf, 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 in 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. 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 batir.'

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 Tasmali Ker. The dervish then tells Chora: 'By the time you grow up to be a mighty Batir, 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 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 the region, hears of the incident and summons Ali Bey: 'Why did you not collect any taxes from the Kokuslu Kok Dam?' Ali Bey

answers: 'I granted it to a young man in that village.' 'Were you 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 Batir. Look at Ali Bey. He can tie his mustache behind his neck. When he walks, his steps sound as if seventy thousand troops are afoot. He is the equal of one-thousand Batirs. How many men are you equal?' Chora Batir 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. Narik 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 Batirs 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 Batirs 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 Batirs 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 Batir's bow, who has just arrived in Kazan. He is immediately invited to take part in a shooting contest. Chora Batir borrows a bow and an arrow, but the bow cannot withstand the power of Chora Batir. When drawn, it breaks. He is at once given another, but the same fate befall 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 Batir cannot carry Chora Batir's bow. A second Batir is sent to help the first. Two Batirs manage to carry it with difficulty.. With his bow in hand, Chora Batir wins the contest.

The other Batirs, who have been unseated from their former glory by Chora Batir, conspire against him. However, Chora Batir prevails over them. The Khan of Kazan's daughter, Sari HANIM, distributes valuable gifts to thirty-two resident Batirs. Some receive a horse, others embroidered robes or a sword. To Chora Batir, 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 Batirs. Thirty-two Batirs face the Muscovites, and fight for seven days and nights to no avail. The Khan asks: 'How is it that the Batirs cannot turn back the Muscovites? Is Chora Batir among them?' The answer he receives is 'No, Chora has not left his abode.' The elders of Kazan visit Chora Batir, 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 Sari Hanim'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 Batirs. To

me you sent an empty money pouch. These thirty-two Batirs cannot turn back the Muscovites. How can I leave this room?' Then Sari Hanim asks: 'Where is that pouch now?' 'On the dunghill.'

Sari Hanim and her beautiful hand-maidens rush out to the dunghill and start sifting through it. They recover and return the pouch to Sari Hanim who opens it and displays a sword folded eight times. Chora Batir is overjoyed. Wielding this 'Gokcubuk,' Chora joins the battle against the Russians who came to conquer Kazan. Chora Batir turns back the Russians. The Russian general, defeated by Chora Batir, takes an oath never to return again or to gird a sword. Upon this victory, Chora Batir becomes the 'Bas Batir' of Cifali Khan, ruler of Kazan.

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

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

#### Commentary

Chora Batir 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, and each in the possession of different ruling khans. [20] The dastan reflects the frequent diplomatic relations with Crimea maintained with Muscovy -- Chora is asked without much fanfare to undertake a mission to Moscow. Muscovite attacks upon 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 Batirs in Kazan, prior to Chora Batir'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 Batirs may or may not have constituted an additional council to the Khan.

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 ISTORIJA. [23]

CHORA BATIR does not, however, allude to the overt competition which existed among Crimea and Muscovy for control over the Turgay-Yayik basin. This is especially important in the period immediately preceding the Russian conquest because in the late 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 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 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 judgement. By his ill-considered liaison with the Russian girl, he ensured his own defeat as no other Batir, 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 Batir himself rather than 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 Batir 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 alp [25] who is the favorite son. The victory is invariably celebrated by a TOY (lavish feast). However, in CHORA BATIR 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 BATIR 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).

CHORA BATIR 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 BATIR. 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; the Russians are the eternal enemies --no 'sliianie,' no 'sblizheniie,' not even 'druzhiba.'

In light of the clear message of the uncensored versions of CHORA BATIR, 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:

About the further activities of Chora Batir, 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 wondrous 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 Divaoglu 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 Batir, 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 from between them, Chora Batir's horse's hooves become very hot. To cool them, Chora Batir rides into a nearby body of water, where he is drowned.

#### The Russian Attacks on CHORA BATIR and Central Asian Native Literature

During the cultural and 'national' purges of the 1930s, CHORA BATIR 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 BATIR is still alive, befitting the best dastan tradition of oral recitation. It surely is not a coincidence that a number of principal characters in current Tatar and other Central Asian literary works several resemble Chora Batir.

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 the 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 '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 part 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 seems 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 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 preparing 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 '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 and 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 OLMEZ KAYALAR (Immortal Cliffs), published in 1981 is a prime example, one which also incorporated CHORA BATIR 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."

## Conclusion

The dastans are so resilient that they also adapt themselves both to adversity and to new technology. Some 'unsanitized,' 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 the 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 Oljay Suleimanov already referred above, can be cited Yusuf Akcuraoglu, [41] Gazi Alim, [42] Hamid Alimcan, [43] Alisher Ibadinov, [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 Ibadinov, freely borrow motifs. Others, like Gaspirali, include the name of a specific alp in their address to the public.

Gaspirali Ismail Bey, [47] was the founder of Jadidism, [48] and the proprietor of one of the longest lived Turkic language newspapers in the Russian empire, TERCUMAN. [49] During 1905, a group of revolutionary young Tatars impetuously criticized Gaspirali Ismail Bey in the newspaper TAN (Dawn) [50] for his cautionary views. Gaspirali answered his critics in his widely read TERCUMAN. [51] His reference to CHORA BATIR, without further elaboration, reflects the wide familiarity of his readers and critics with the dastan and its messages. Moreover,, Gaspirali 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 Gaspirali 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. Gaspirali's retort is embedded in his following poem:

If            my            arrow            would            hit            the            target  
 If            my            horse            should            win            the            race  
 CHORABATIR is valiant

If            my            arrow            could            not            reach            its            target  
 And            my            horse            cannot            win            the            race  
 Tell me, what could CHORABATIR do? [52]

## NOTES

[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 (Prentice Hall, 1977). For the political deployment of these chronicles, see Jaroslaw Pelenski RUSSIA AND KAZAN: CONQUEST AND IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY, 1438-1560 (Mouton, 1974); 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.

[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. [ALPAMYSH: CENTRAL ASIAN IDENTITY UNDER RUSSIAN RULE (Hartford, 1989)]

[4] "Alpamysh Dastanina Mukaddime" (Introduction to the dastan ALPAMYSH) by Gazi Alim, in BILIM OCAGI Nos. 2-3, 18 May 1923. Since the majority of the events related in CHORA BATIR 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 arguments with respect to the Nayman reference. CHORA BATIR may well have travelled with Naymans east to Turkistan, after the fall of Kazan. These Naymans then joined and merged into Kungrats, a subdivision of the Ozbeks. See Z. V. Togan, *TURKILI TURKISTAN* (Istanbul, 1981). Substantiating Gazi Alim's observation, an earlier variant of CHORA BATIR was taken down from the Kirghiz, in the Chimkent region by Divayoglu. See below.

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

[6] Full text of this resolution is found in *INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS* (Moscow: All Union Znaniye Society) August 1984, P. 149.

[7] See P. B. Golden, *KHAZAR STUDIES* (Budapest, 1980); N. Golb, O. Pritsak, *KHAZARIAN HEBREW DOCUMENTS OF THE TENTH CENTURY* (Ithaca, 1982); U. Schamiloglu, "Tribal Politics and Social Organization" (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1986); Alan Fisher, *CRIMEAN TATARS* (Stanford, 1978).

[8] Olzhas Suleimanov, *AZ I YA: kniga blagonamerennogo chitatelia* (Alma-Ata, 1975).

[9] For a discussion of *AZ I YA*, see F. Diat, "Olzhas Suleimanov: Az I Ja" *CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY* Vol 3, No. 1 1984.

[10] P. B. Golden, "Cumanica" *ARCHIVUM EURASIAE MEDII Aevi*, IV 1984; Thomas Noonan, "Polovtsy" *MERSH*, 1981.

[11] M. T. Choldin, *A FENCE AROUND THE EMPIRE* (Durham, 1985); B. Daniel, *CENSORSHIP IN RUSSIA* (Washington, 1979).

[12] Hugh Seton-Watson, *THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1801-1917* (Oxford, 1967).

[13] See my "Saviors" and note 26 below.

[14] *PROBEN* (St. Petersburg, 1896) Vol. 6.

[15] G. Rahim and G. Gaviv, *TATAR EDEBIYATI TARIHI* (Kazan, 1925), p. 141.

[16] *CHORA BATIR*. Polska Akademja, Nr. 20.

[17] Collected by Hasan Ortekin, *Eminonu Halkevi* No. X.

[18] *DASTANLAR* (Tashkent, 1980). Reprinted in *EMEL*. 1984.

[19] *TEPEGOZ: DOBRUCA MASALLARI* (Bukres, 1985).

[19A] F. V. Ahmatova (Ed.), *TATAR HALK ICADI* (Kazan, 1984).

[20] There were also relations between the Tatar domains and Central Asia. The Russian encroachment towards East 'Turkistan' (also called Independent Tartary by romantic authors) was being watched closely by Central Asian rulers. See Togan.

[21] E. L. Keenan, "The Jarlik of Axmed-Xan to Ivan III: A New Reading" *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SLAVIC LINGUISTICS AND POETICS*, Vol. XII, 1967.

[22] The figure 32 is not necessarily among the more widely known and recognized auspicious numbers which are at times employed for ornamentation.

[23] See Pelenski, *RUSSIA and KAZAN*.

- [24] . W. Fisher CRIMEAN TATARS, op. cit. p. 43.
- [25] Used interchangeably with Batir, meaning valiant, gallant; as attributes of a skilled and fearless champion tested in battle or contest. See Clauson, ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF PRE-THIRTEENTH CENTURY TURKISH (Oxford, 1972), p. 127.
- [26] Abubekir Divaoglu, CHORA BATIR (Tashkent, 1895).
- [27] See my ALPAMYSH.
- [28] Among others, Radloff was such an Orientalist who served as Inspector of Schools.
- [29] J. C. Hurewitz, DIPLOMACY IN THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST (Princeton, 1956).
- [30] A. Bennigsen, "The Crisis of the Turkic National Epics, 1951-1952: Local Nationalism or Internationalism" CANADIAN SLAVONIC PAPERS Vol. XVII, No. 2&3 (1975).
- [31] Bennigsen, *ibid.*
- [32] Bennigsen, *ibid.*
- [33] Wayne S. Vucinich (Ed.) RUSSIA IN ASIA (Stanford, 1972); L. Tillett, THE GREAT FRIENDSHIP: THE SOVIET HISTORIANS ON THE NON-RUSSIAN NATIONALITIES (Chapel Hill, 1969); C. E. Black (Ed.), REWRITING RUSSIAN HISTORY: SOVIET INTERPRETATIONS OF RUSSIA'S PAST (NY, 1956).
- [34] See my ALPAMYSH.
- [35] H. B. Paksoy, (Ed.) CENTRAL ASIAN MONUMENTS (forthcoming) [PUBLISHED--Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1992].
- [36] L. Branson, "How Kremlin Keeps Editors in Line" THE TIMES (London) 5 January 1986). See also MUHBIR.
- [37] John Soper, "Shake-up in the Uzbek Literary Elite" CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY (Oxford) Vol. 1, No. 4 (1983).
- [38] H. B. Paksoy, "Central Asia's New Dastans" CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY Vol. 6, No. 1 (1986). [1987]
- [39] "V tsene li'chernye glaza" KOMSOMOL'SKAIA PRAVDA, December 5, 1984.
- [40] See note 27; also H. B. Paksoy, "The Deceivers" CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY Vol. 3, No. 1, 1984.
- [41] "Uc Tarz-i Siyaset" (Ankara, 1976) [For an English translation, see CENTRAL ASIAN MONUMENTS, op. cit].
- [42] See note 4.
- [43] Introduction to ALPAMYSH (Tashkent, 1939).
- [44] "Kuyas ham Alav" GULISTAN No. 9, 1980. [for an English translation, see CENTRAL ASIAN MONUMENTS, op. cit].
- [45] See note 38.
- [46] KAZAK EDEBIYATI, No. 30, 1982. See also C. F. Carlson and H. Oraltay, "Kul Tegin: Advice on the Future?" CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY, vol. 2, No. 2, 1983; N. Shahrani, "From Tribe to Umma: Comments on the Dynamics of Identity in Muslim Soviet Central Asia" CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1984.

[47] E. J. Lazzerini, "Ismail Bey Gasprinskii and Muslim Modernism in Russia, 1878-1914" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, U of Washington, 1973).

[48] E. J. Lazzerini, "Gadidism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: A View from Within" *CAHIERS DU MONDE RUSSE ET SOVIETIQUE*, No. 16, 1975.

[49] A. Bennigsen and C. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *LA PRESSE ET LE MOUVEMENT NATIONAL CHEZ LES MUSULMANS DE RUSSIE AVANT 1920* (The Hague, 1964).

[50] A. Bennigsen and C. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *ISLAM IN THE SOVIET UNION* (London, 1967).

[51] Kirimli Cafer Seydiahmet, *GASPIRALI ISMAIL BEY* (Istanbul, n.d [1934]).