

CENTRAL ASIA'S NEW DASTANS

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Give me a chance, my rebellious dreams
My father has erected his statue in my memory
May years and winds be rendered powerless
May his legacy not be erased from my conscience
Give me a chance, my rebellious dreams
Grant my father a holy DASTAN
May years and winds be rendered powerless
May his remembrance never be allowed to fade
(*Muhbir, November 1982 [Tashkent]*)

The dastan is ornate oral history and an important part of the Turkic literature of Central Asia. Traditionally, dastans have been repositories of ethnic identity and history, and some constitute nearly complete value systems for the peoples they embrace. The primary, or "mother," dastans are those composed to commemorate specific liberation struggles. [1] Set mostly in verse by an *ozan*, [2] more than 50 mother dastans are recited by Central Asians from the Eastern Altai to the Western Ural Mountains and as far south as Bend-e Turkestan in Afghanistan.

Most dastans commemorate the struggles of different Turkic peoples against external aggressors, such as the Kalmuks and Chinese. The central figure of the dastan is the alp, [3] who leads his people against the enemy, be they from afar or from within his own tribe. The alp endures many trials and tribulations, which ultimately are shared by a supporting cast. His problems are nearly always aggravated by one or more traitors, who although a problem for the alp, can never stop his ineluctable progress toward victory. His success is celebrated by a toy, or lavish feast. Traitors and enemies are dealt with, frequently paying with their lives for their treachery, but more often left to roam the earth in search of some kind of reconciliation with their consciences and with God.

Love is a frequent theme in the dastan. Often a loved one is abducted by the enemy, only to be rescued by his or her mate after much searching, fighting and sacrifice. Foes and traitors sometimes attempt to extort favors from the lovers, but this does not deter the resolve or threaten the ultimate triumph of the alp and his supporters.

Dastan characteristically refers to historical events; it is a repository of historical memory, a record of the events and customs of its creators and their descendants. The dastan travels with Central Asians, and, like its immediate owners, it is not bothered with borders. It provides the framework to bond a coherent *oymak* [4] sharing one language, religion and history. The dastan is the collective pride of tribes, confederation of tribes and even larger units. It serves as a kind of birth certificate, national anthem and proof of citizenship all rolled into one.

The fact that more than one *oymak* may identify with a given dastan has far reaching implications. In this context, *Alpamysh* [5] enjoys a very special place among dastans, for all major Turkic tribal units have at least one version which they call their own. These variants -- if they may be called that-- display minor differences only in place names and in local detail.

Dastans are jealously guarded against textual change. Not even minor details are allowed to be altered. They are revised under only two conditions: when a major new alp appears and his heroic fight against oppression and for the preservation of his peoples' traditional life style

and customs warrants celebrating; and when the heirs of an existing dastan face oppression by an outsider. Portions of new dastans, however, will almost certainly be borrowed from older dastans. This is not plagiarism: the new alp is being compared to his predecessors, which is intended to reassure the listener of the new alp's prowess, exemplary character and resourcefulness. By borrowing from the old dastans, the new alp is inextricably linked to the existing historical- literary traditions.

Dastans are intended to be both didactic and emotive. They prepare children mentally to honor alp-like behavior and to adopt alp-like responsibilities if need be. If a dastan tells of a defeat of its own people, it serves to illustrate the mistakes made and suggest remedies.

The very nature of the dastans as a well-spring of traditional culture has led Soviet authorities to view them with considerable distrust. In the early 1950s, for example, the dastans were attacked from many quarters, although in some cases Soviet Central Asians successfully counterattacked to reduce official pressure. [6] Since then, the dastans have occasionally been at the center of controversies between the Russian center and the Central Asian lands. This tension may be reflected in the different treatment of the dastans in central and regional publications, such as encyclopedias. The *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*'s entry for dastans, for example, is limited to 240 words and is distinctly ambiguous, referring to the subject as "Persian epic genre" [7] In contrast, the *Uzbek Soviet Encyclopedia* describes the dastans in nearly 1000 words, noting their importance as documents of "liberation struggles," "heroic deeds," and the "legendary warlike abilities of selfless heroes." [8] It is likely that many Central Asians who read the dastans will substitute Russian conquerors for more ancient ones described in the dastans, which is probably why Moscow's attitude toward the dastans has remained hostile. Soviet authorities have published a number of editions of various dastans. Most of these were "sanitized." During preparation for publication, any passages describing the old ways or reflecting the roots of historical identity are deleted from the text. All relevant historical facts are stripped away and in some cases replaced by artificial versions sympathetic to the Soviet cause. This "sanitization" is designed to remove all aspects of the Central Asian heritage that may contribute to the reemergence of self-identity in the minds of the new generation. [9] The new dastans, however, cast the Russians unequivocally in the role of aggressors. The *Olmez Kayalar (Immortal Cliffs)* is one of these.

The *Immortal Cliffs*

In 1981, Mamadali Mahmudov's historical novelette, the *Olmez Kayalar* was serialized in the Uzbek literary journal *Shark Yildizi*. Its publication coincided with significant changes in the Uzbek literary establishment, including the editorship of *Shark Yildizi*. These changes may be the result of some as yet unknown processes but culminated in the publication of a series of works displaying nationalistic tendencies. [10] The *Immortal Cliffs* definitely falls into this category. It is, in fact, a dastan, complete with all the traditional structural and thematic requisites.

The conditions under which the *Immortal Cliffs* is printed warrants special attention. Instead of being issued as a monograph, it was serialized in *Shark Yildizi*. [11] Only 114 pages long, it was divided into two installments and appeared during October and November (Nos. 9 and 10) of 1981. Its author, Mamadali Mahmudov, reportedly in his 30s, took approximately four years to complete this 55,000 word "historical fiction."

The *Immortal Cliffs* was written under the well-known and severe restrictions of the Soviet guidelines on historical interpretation and was required to fulfill all the requirements of "socialist realism." One might expect, therefore, that its message --in both substance and form-- would be conventional and predictable. It is anything but these, however. First of all, one must understand traditional dastan construction to grasp *Immortal Cliffs* real meaning as

most Central Asians do. In it, for example, subtle adaptations from earlier and ancient dastans are well concealed. *The Immortal Cliffs* must be read at three progressively advanced levels of depth, content and understanding. It may compare to a three-story building, with one floor above ground and two subterranean levels. The visible level contains the immediately recognizable arguments and lessons, which are on view for everyone. The first sub-level is constructed mainly of ancient Turkic dastans, which are recognizable only to the initiated. The second sub-level, a kind of secret vault, is accessible only through a metaphorical "trap door." The vault contains the "last will and testament" of Mahmudov's ancestors, who inspired him to write as he has, and of Mahmudov himself, whose objective becomes to add his own advice to the secrets of the vault, advice which can be transmitted to the next generation in the tradition of handing down a dastan from father to son.

The first, visible layer of the novelette has been adequately discussed elsewhere by others. [12] Of primary importance when considering *The Immortal Cliffs* are the two remaining layers, particularly the sources from which Mahmudov draws his inspiration and the implications of his method.

The basic plot of *Immortal Cliffs* is as follows: Kunor and Kunis, joint heads of a tribe, bring their tribe from Turkistan into the Jizzakh mountains to save them from annihilation by the forces of Chengiz Khan. In the late 1800s (the time of the story), Buranbek, a descendent of one of the tribal heads, grows up reading the classical works of his ancestry, such as Timur's *Zafarnama* ("Victories"), and becomes imbued with their spirit. His father is responsible for teaching him the classical arts of using weapons (bow and arrow, sword and shield, lance), horsemanship, a love of nature, and respect for one's own history, heritage and the relations between man and his environment. Buranbek also participates in the philosophical discussions of his father and his peers.

At the age of 21, he gains a chance to display his valor in a fight with a bull. Shortly thereafter he marries his sweetheart, but a treacherous individual from his tribe, Kahramanbek, tries to ruin his marriage and Buranbek's future. Buranbek travels to Russia with a caravan and spends some time there. Later, Buranbek teams up with Boribek to thwart the Russian advance into their territory. Buranbek trains the young men of the Jizzakh plains to resist the Russians. In the ensuing battle, the Russians' advance is stopped. Buranbek is saluted as a *muzaffer* ("Victor"), which causes local jealousies. The jealous parties kidnap Buranbek and take him to a dry river bed where they intend to torture him. Buranbek is saved in the end by Boribek. In the final scenes, Buranbek and Boribek discuss the future as they would like it to be. Their principal wish is for future generations to take note of the events of their (Buranbek's and Boribek's) day in order to learn the lessons of their history and, consequently, to preserve their freedom.

The basic structure of *Immortal Cliffs* is not at variance with that of other Central Asian dastans, for example *Alpamysh*. Buranbek in *The Immortal Cliffs*, is born to an accomplished and respected father, and is in fact reared with a knowledge of dastans. Buranbek displays his leadership qualities in various ways. He learns from the wisdom of his forefathers, reads the works of great commanders and philosophers of his own heritage, endures all the hardships with all of the dignity befitting an alp. Along the way, Buranbek suffers the treachery of his kinsman and oppression by the common enemy, and is forced to take up arms against them.

Buranbek, however, does not exhibit the magical qualities at times attributed to an alp. This may be Mahmudov's way of stressing two points: first that this is history not fiction and the Russian threat is real and not imaginary; and, second, that magical qualities are not necessary to an alp or for alp-like action.

Unlike some fictitious alps, Buranbek does not speak when only a few days old, nor does he lead troops at the age of fourteen. Buranbek is already 21 when he is first called upon to exhibit his alp-like qualities. When, a few years later, it finally becomes necessary for him to confront Tsarist armies, Buranbek borrows from the teachings and experience of Timur, the great Central Asian commander, instead of through the use of some magical weapon or tulpar (winged horse), to force the withdrawal of the Russians.

In the *Immortal Cliffs*, Mahmudov adapts motifs from ancient dastans on at least four occasions, in addition to utilizing the general structure of Alpamysh. The borrowed motifs are the themes central to *Dede Korkut*, *Oghuz Kagan*, *Ergenekon* and *Chora Batir*. There are also direct references to yet another dastans, *Kirk Kiz* (Forty Maidens); although nothing is directly adapted or taken from it.

The Bull Theme From *Dede Korkut*

"Bogach" is a cycle of *The Book of Dede Korkut*, which in return is believed to be a partial reconstruction of the *Oghuz Kagan* dastan. [13]

According to *Dede Korkut*, a male offspring must earn his adult name, which can only be accomplished by performing a manly deed. In the case of the son of Dirse Khan, the ruler of an Oghuz tribe, such a chance occurs early in his life. He finds himself facing an angry bull owned by Bayindir Khan, at the age of fifteen:

The bull charged him, bent on destroying him. The boy gave the bull a merciless punch on the forehead and the bull went sliding on his rump. Again he came and charged the boy. Again the boy gave him a mighty punch on the forehead, but this time he kept his fist pressed against the bull's forehead and shoved him to the end of the arena. Then they struggled together. The boy's shoulders were covered with the bull's foam. Neither the boy nor the bull could gain victory. Then the boy thought, 'people put a pole against a roof to hold it up. Why am I standing here propping up this creature's forehead' and stepped aside. The bull could not stand on its feet and collapsed headlong. The boy drew his knife and cut off the bull's head.

After this event, with due ceremony, the boy is named Bogach (Bullman). [14]

In the *Immortal Cliffs*, an encounter between a bull and an alp occurs under similar circumstances, in the sense that Buranbek's first manly endeavor is to fight with a bull which terrorizes the kishlak (winter quarters of a tribe) in which he was born. [15] At that time, Buranbek is 21 years of age, realistically possessing the physical strength required for the confrontation.

The bull in *Immortal Cliffs*, belonging to a member of the tribe, goes mad and begins attacking at random. Buranbek hears of this while at the yaylak (summer pastures of a tribe) and mounting his horse, gallops to the kishlak. The bull spots Buranbek:

Buranbek managed to dismount from his horse with enviable skill. The bull groaned once again and charged him. Buranbek swiftly evaded the bull. The bull ran into the mulberry tree that was in front of him. Buranbek quickly anticipated the bull and got behind the mill-stone. The bull hit his head on the milling stone with a loud thud... The bull bellowed frighteningly, and raising the dust and as if flames were coming out of his eyes, charged Buranbek. Reyhan (a young girl from the kishlak) screamed with fear. Buranbek sidestepped and hit the bull between the eyes with his fist. He then cut off the head of the bull with the ax that Reyhan handed him. [16]

Mahmudov has taken this motif from *Dede Korkut* almost verbatim, but he does not credit his source. There can be little doubt, however, that Mahmudov intends the reader to make this connection.

The Wolf Motif From *Ergenekon* and *Oghuz Kagan*

The wolf plays a prominent role in the dastans *Ergenekon* [17] and *Oguz Kagan*. [18] The wolf motif, together with adaptations from *Chora Batir*, [19] direct the knowledgeable readers' attention to the location of the ultimate message accessible through the metaphorical "trapdoor" in the dastan *Immortal Cliffs* --regaining independence. By liberally sprinkling clues, Mahmudov seeks to signpost this passageway to the "treasure," which he has meticulously buried at the deepest level in the *Immortal Cliffs*.

Ergenekon is the name of a valley which became a secluded homeland to the Gok-Turks. [20] In this location, the remnants of the Gok-Turks, threatened with extinction elsewhere, multiplied and thrived. In one of the two known variants of the dastan *Ergenekon*, a she-wolf rescues a Gok-Turk warrior who has been mutilated by the enemy and takes him to *Ergenekon*. There, conceiving sons from him, they re-populate this oymak. According to the second version of the dastan, two sons of the Gok-Turk ruler and their Wives take refuge in *Ergenekon* after their defeat by the Tatars.

The conclusion of both versions are similar. The population of the oymak becomes so large that *Ergenekon* can no longer hold it. The population desires to leave, but no one knows the way out. Finally, a blacksmith notices that a portion of the mountains surrounding this valley is composed of iron ore. The people of the valley pile wood and coal high in front of this section setting it ablaze. The ore melts and a passageway from *Ergenekon* is secured.

The whole dastan *Oghuz Kagan* is devoted to the exploits of a ruler and his people. A number of the 16 variants contain the "pathfinder wolf" motif, without incorporating the *Ergenekon* episode. It is also known that the wolf is the *tamga* (the seal) and *gok-boru* (blue wolf), the uran (war cry, password) of the Gok-Turk tribal confederation. [21] Moreover, the Gok-Turks displayed the head of the wolf on their standards and banners. [22]

In the *Immortal Cliffs*, both the wolf and the mountainous location of Kattabag kishlak have significant connotations. The wolf motif appears in two contexts. First in connection with an opportunist member of the kishlak named Kahramanbek; and secondly with a veteran fighter for freedom, Boribek. [23] Kahramanbek is later discovered to be a traitor, while Boribek teams up with the main alp of the *Immortal Cliffs*, Buranbek, to fight off the approaching Russian troops.

Kahramanbek encounters a wolf pup while he is climbing Akkaya with a party of his tribesmen on a pleasure outing. Akkaya is the dominant mountain near their kishlak; it is also the location where the ancestors of the kishlak Kattabag are buried. Kahramanbek is at first disposed to kill the cub. Changing his mind, he tries to force the cub to cry out in pain, hoping to lure the mother wolf out into the open, his intention being to kill the mother as well as the cub. In spite of the pain Kahramanbek inflicts on the cub, the cub does not utter a sound, in other words, does not betray his mother. Giving up the thought of luring the cub's mother, Kahramanbek mutilates the cub's body in anger, breaking his legs, cutting off one ear and leaving it to die. The cub, as the reader discovers later, survives to become an avenging killer. [24]

Mahmudov is making a clear allusion to the oldest dastan through his use of the wolf motif. Kahramanbek, a traitor, tries to kill the mother wolf, which, by Mahmudov's use of the allusion to the older dastans, inter alia represents independence and sanctuary. His message is thus uncomplicated: one must beware of the traitors in our midst who will betray us, in this case to the Russians; you may have to endure great pains and suffering, but eventually you will become the avenger.

Mahmudov's plot indeed follows this path. Boribek is a veteran Kazakh, a freedom fighter who has already fought the Russians several times only to be betrayed by those of his kinsmen who would cooperate with the Russians. He had sought help of the nearby rulers; some half-heartedly furnished him with troops. When the news arrives that the Russians are en route to Kattabag, Boribek, the veteran independence fighter, joins Buranbek to prepare a defense. They train all the young and able men for the coming struggle, using techniques suggested by Buranbek, which he claims candidly to have borrowed, significantly, from Timur. They attack the Russians and force them to withdraw.

It is hard to imagine that any Central Asian today could miss what Mahmudov has clearly -- some might say flagrantly-- attempted. Most will quickly recognize the wolf for what it is: an undisguised (except perhaps from the Russians) invitation to look to the distant past, to interpret the recent past and, by implication, the present and the future. Mahmudov may or may not want his readers to take the *Immortal Cliffs* uncritically as a dastan in its own right. He clearly intends for them to read it like a dastan, the medium conveying its own message and endowing the story with a layer of meaning that only the invited can grasp or, more appropriately, feel. Is Mahmudov warning Central Asians to beware of the Kahramanbeks in their midst, those who would betray them to the Russians? If so, he leaves no doubt who will lose and who will win, who will be the torturer and who the wolf.

The Importance Of Place: Central Asian Turkic Unity

Mahmudov indicates that the inhabitants of Kattabag came from Turkistan, [25] fleeing from the armies of Chingiz Khan. They first settled here, hoping some day to return to their original home. The ancestors were originally organized around two large families, under the joint leadership of Kunor and Kunis. [26] Here is an allusion to an earlier dastan in Mahmudov's choice of two leaders in the *Immortal Cliffs*. The Kungrats of Alpamysh also have two prominent Bays known as Baybora and Baysari, who appear to be strikingly similar to Kunor and Kunis in their deeds.

Mahmudov is attempting to link the inhabitants of Kattabag to the historic Turkic lands, and he is directing his Central Asian readers to their Turkic past: the routes of continuous migrations of Turkic tribes, of the Orkhon tablets, of the Kultigin monuments. Buranbek notes that Turkic unity preceded Islam's arrival in Central Asia. The Islamic umma is both alien (arab) concept and a latecomer to the Turkic peoples. It sapped the vitality of the national identity. We see this theme again when Boribek, who has fought the Russians several times, teams up with Buranbek to carry on the military struggle against the Russians. This they agree to do by using techniques of warfare borrowed from Timur. [27] Timur was a Barlas Turk and a Muslim, but one remained relatively neutral toward religion and who, despite the efforts of the ulama, did not use Islam as a basis for unity in his empire.

The concept of Central Asian Turkic unity is one of the strongest motifs in the *Immortal Cliffs*. What Mahmudov does or does not mean by Central Asian Turkic unity must be understood clearly. His vision of unity appears to be unconnected to pan-Turkism [28] which was designed by Europeans to serve European goals in their 19th and early 20th century balance of power struggles.

The doctrine was apparently first articulated by the Hungarian Orientalist Arminius Vambery [29] in 1865 and given further impetus by an 1896 monograph written by Leon Cahun, which Ziya Gokalp noted was written "as if to encourage the ideal of pan-Turkism." [30]

Secondly, Mahmudov's vision is not a grand design for world conquest or the destruction, subjugation or assimilation of any other people (the Tajiks, for example). Rather,

Mahmudov's is a call to Central Asian unity, directed against the most recent invader, the Russians.

At different points in the story Mahmudov addresses a variety of themes related to the overarching concept of Central Asian Turkic unity. For example:

- the common ancestry of various tribes in Central Asia, i.e. Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek and their unique and specific cultural heritage; [31]
- the existence of traitors who have acted (and still act) against such a unity; [32]
- the common enemies of the Turks: Arabs and Mongols in the past, Russians during the time frame of *Immortal Cliffs*; [33]
- the necessary steps to be taken, if Turkic unity is to be realized; [34]
- the difficulties experienced by the peoples of Turkic origin who allow Islam to cloud their sense of Central Asian Turkic unity; [35]

Mahmudov's emphasis on Central Asian Turkic unity is interesting also as a possible response to the recent novel by Kirghiz writer Chingiz Aitmatov; *A Day Lasts Longer Than An Age* (*Novyi mir*, No. 11; 1980). Aitmatov's implicit message is that only Islamic unity can serve as an effective basis for Central Asian resistance to the Russians. The *Immortal Cliffs* may be a part of a larger debate --cleverly cloaked as "historical fiction"-- regarding the most sound basis for unity.

Mahmudov's characters' hostility toward Islam may appear to serve the regime. In one scene from *Immortal Cliffs*, for example, some Russian sympathizers in a conversational setting are critical of Islam as an impediment to development in much the same way as the official Soviet media today criticize Islam. Clearly, Mahmudov's intention is not to echo Soviet rhetoric. His call for Central Asian Turkic unity -- anathema to the Soviet regime-- ought to be sufficient proof. Furthermore, his argument is based on knowledge of the Turks' historical existence and written records dating from the eighth century. It is a history obscured by contradictory and unfounded Soviet "scholarship" on the "ethnogenesis" of the Turks. [36]

Furthermore, both Mahmudov's and Aitmatov's works appeared shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 1979). It is conceivable that both men are offering advice to the Afghan mujahidin about how to fight the Russians, or at least to Soviet Central Asians about how to think about the Afghan resistance to Russian aggression. If this is so, it raises the intriguing possibility that the Soviet establishment has unwittingly permitted potent pro-mujahidin allegories to reach the public domain. The immediate and intense criticism levelled at Mahmudov (see below) may in fact have been an attempt to quash this view before it became popular.

Influence of *Chora Batir* On The *Immortal Cliffs*

Chora Batir is a dastan of Tatar origin, detailing the fights of the Tatars against the Russians in the 16th century. [37] This fact alone places it in a very special

category, since the clearly named enemy is not Mongol or Chinese as in the case of Alpamysh or Kultigin.

Chora Batir, as his second name indicates, is an alp. It's quite likely that this dastan is modelled after a real Batir. [38] During his lifetime, he performs several major alp-like deeds. His prowess and skill attract the attention of several rulers and he is invited to enter their service.

In one case, an arrow shot by Chora Batir is found to have brought down a bird reputed to fly very high. It is reported that ordinarily it is impossible to shoot this bird in flight. Eventually it is determined that the arrow was shot from Chora Batir's bow. He is 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, and breaks.

He is immediately 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, however, and a second Batir is sent to help the first. Two Batirs manage to carry it. With his bow in hand, Chora Batir wins the contest, proving that he has all the qualities of an alp and that he can perform feats that others cannot.

The other alps, who have been unseated from their former glory by Chora Batir, conspire against him. Chora Batir defeats all of the conspirators, and moves on. He also fights the Russians who came to conquer Kazan. Chora Batir turns back the Russians, and the Russian general takes an oath never to return again or to gird a sword. Upon this victory, Chora Batir becomes the *Bash Batir* (Premier Champion) 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 then 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, his own son.

In the *Immortal Cliffs*, Buranbek, after turning back the tsarist Russian troops at Kattabag, is invited by the Amir of Bukhara. He is greeted with high honors and treated as Muzaffer (Victor). This, of course, draws the ire of the traitors among the retinue of the Bukhara Amir. Buranbek is invited to a private feast and lavishly praised during the festivities. Finally, he is forcibly bundled up, taken to the riverbed and tortured. Before the conspirators can kill him, he is rescued by the loyal Boribek. Buranbek goes into hiding to recover from his wounds.

Russian troops, under the command of Edward Mikhailovich Evseev, occupy Kattabag. Earlier, during a visit to his uncle in Omsk, Buranbek became involved with the wife of Colonel Evseev and fathered a son of this Russian woman. [39] Upon occupying Kattabag, Colonel Evseev immediately seeks out Buranbek, but cannot find him.

Due to its contents, the accounts of Tatars fighting against the Russians to retain an independent Kazan and then turning them back, the dastan *Chora Batir* was especially singled out by the Soviet regime for total extinction. The Soviets almost succeeded in eliminating all written copies of this dastan. How then did Mahmudov, a young man, who is perhaps not a descendant of the tatar oymak, knew enough about *Chora Batir* to quote it? Did he see a written copy which somehow survived the Soviet cultural purge? If not, we may conclude that *Chora Batir* is still alive, part of the dastan oral tradition. [40] It surely is not a coincidence that certain deeds of Buranbek, alp of *Immortal Cliffs*, follows a pattern remarkably similar to that of *Chora Batir*.

The Aftermath

At one time, Soviet scholarship insisted that the ancient dastans were, on the whole, progressive. In the case of *Alpamysh*, Soviet ideologues were lavish in their praise: "One of the most perfect epic poems in the world" [41] "The liberty song of Central Asian national fighting against the alien invaders" [42] "Authentic popular movement, voicing the ideology of the toiling masses" [43]

In the early 1950s, however, the dastans were attacked as being reactionary, their earlier progressive elements apparently conveniently forgotten. "Impregnated with the poison of feudalism and reaction, breathing Muslim fanaticism and preaching hatred towards foreigners," was how one source [44] described *Alpamysh* under the new interpretive guidelines. *Alpamysh* was condemned by the Uzbekistan Communist Party's Central Committee before the tenth plenum, [45] by a special conference of historians of literature at the Republic University in Samarkand, [46] and by the joint session of the Academy of Sciences and the Union of Soviet Writers in Tashkent. [47] At this last meeting, the defenders of *Alpamysh* were declared "pan-Turkic nationalists."

The reaction of the official Soviet establishment towards the *Immortal Cliffs* is strikingly similar to the campaign against the dastans thirty years earlier. The amount of ire the *Immortal Cliffs* drew from the authorities can be gleaned from the proceedings of the Uzbek Writers Union meetings, which were reported in editorials in the Uzbek press. For example:

...appearances of a lack of true ideological content, inattention in defining the world view, and deviation from a clear-cut class position in evaluating some historical events and individuals can harm the talent of even talented people. [48]

Mahmudov permitted some confusions to arise in the realm of a realistic description of the conditions of the historical past and in the realm of an approach to past events on the basis of Marxist-Leninist methodology. [49]

...difficult to know even which level or which social groups its heroes were representative of...It is also possible to encounter the very same shortcomings in the prose and poetic works of some of our writers. [50]

Mahmudov and his work, as was the case with the dastan *Alpamysh* during 1951-1952, is not the sole target. Mirmuhsin's "Roots and Leaves," Ibrahim Rahim's "The Consequence," and Hamid Gulam's "Mashrab" were also criticized. [51]

Under pressure, Mahmudov was forced to recant: *Immortal Cliffs* is my first major work. Rating my creative potentials higher than I should have done, I took up my pen to write about a very complicated historical period. As a result I allowed some shortcomings. What is the reason for this? Because I could not present the spirit of that age correctly. [52]

Another critic remarked:

He also wants to emphasize his commitment to good relations among the Soviet peoples. He states that having lived in Russia for five years, he has come to know and love Russian people, and he tried to convey that affection in his novel. He maintains that he stressed the positive influence of Russia on the development of Turkistan. He also wants to dispel the notion spread by [unnamed] foreign radio stations that he has been persecuted; on the contrary, he is living and working freely in his own homeland, among his writer friends. He intends to rework his novel this year and prepare it for publication. It may be worth noting that according to his personal account Mahmudov has been a member of the CPSU for some time. [53]

Mahmudov's admission to having committed "shortcomings" in interpreting the historical evidence is in sharp contrast to his detailed presentation of the evidence itself. From the extensive footnotes Mahmudov provides for his readers, it is clear that he conducted wide-ranging historical research -- far more extensive, in fact, than simply regurgitating Soviet encyclopedia entries-- in preparation for the writing of the *Immortal Cliffs*. For example, each troop movement by the Russians is supported by footnotes, lending this "historical fiction" the kind of accuracy that inclines one to think that it is more history than fiction. For example, the Jizzakh battle [54] which forced the withdrawal of General Cherniaev and his troops (in the *Immortal Cliffs*, the battle is waged by the inhabitants of Kattabag, under the leadership of Buranbek and Boribek) and subsequent events are historically accurate. Mahmudov used fiction to explain history, which is what apparently got Soviet authorities so excited. One would have thought that it was the historical record, which speaks for itself, that they would have preferred to suppress. But this may be a case of the particular genre providing a convenient carrier and disguise for the author's larger political message.

How deep was Mahmudov's recantation? In it he notes, for example, that he once lived in Russia for five years and had come to love the Russian people. This intriguing admission raises the possibility that at least part of the *Immortal Cliffs* is autobiographical, for Buranbek, too, made an extended sojourn to Russia. Does Mahmudov wish the reader to infer that Buranbek really speaks for him, the author? If so, Mahmudov appears to be stepping up his attack, not stepping back from it.

Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from the *Immortal Cliffs* and the controversy surrounding it? Some conclusions are clearly justified. First, there can be little doubt that Mahmudov intended his novelette to be understood by Central Asians as part of the dastan genre. In this way, he proposed to speak directly to them by going around Soviet censorship and the ubiquitous "socialist realism" filter which screens out culturally and politically unacceptable material. In this sense, the medium is clearly the message. History remains an important political force in Central Asia. This is more so than might have been expected perhaps because Central Asians are daily fed an historical diet that is false and alien to them. Mahmudov's critics, who attacked him largely on the basis of what they deemed to be his faulty historical analysis, appear to have grasped the significance of what he was trying to do, even if they did not understand his means.

Second, there is Mahmudov's message, or, perhaps, messages. One is clearly that Central Asians should be beware of the collaborators from among their own kin. But in this regard, he leaves no doubt about whom the ultimate victor will be.

Mahmudov's clearest and most controversial message is his stress on the importance of the Turkic ethnic origins, as reflected in his dastan, as the most logical common bond among Central Asians.

It is likely that *Immortal Cliffs* was intended to be a contribution to a debate among Central Asian intellectuals about the future of Central Asia under Russian control. As we have seen, Mahmudov's is by no means the only contribution but may be the most provocative. Not only does he brush aside the whole issue of Islamic based unity: he implies that the Soviets can manipulate Islam to keep Central Asians apart. This is a curious position inasmuch as Soviet newspapers today provide abundant evidence of the political importance of resurgent Islam among Central Asian Muslims. Mahmudov may be warning his readers that Islam is an inappropriate identity structure to promote real unity. Central Asian Turkic unity, on the other hand, is the suitable doctrine. If the appearance of a series of like-minded "historical fictions," with plots and structures closely resembling those of *Immortal Cliffs* is an indication of larger trends, it is entirely probable that the debate among Central Asian intellectuals --the "Who are we?" dilemma-- centers on this issue. *Singan Kilich* by Tolongon Kasimbekov (Frunze [Bishkek], Kirghiz SSR, 1971); *Baku 1501* by Azize Caferzade (Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan SSR, Nos. 7 & 8, 1982); *Altin Orda*

by Ilyas Esenberlin (Culduz, Kazakh SSR, Nos. 7 & 8 , 1982) have essentially common themes and by and large concentrate on similar issues.

Soviet authorities are unlikely to find either alternative pleasing; both build on the premise that the Central Asians - "Us" - are very different from the Russians - "Them." Beyond this, the Russians will be disturbed that the search for a strong political identity among Central Asians has taken them to the distant past, to their dastans, far from Soviet historiography and even further from ethnic "merging" predicted for the Soviet future.

N. B.: It is reported that Mamadali Mahmudov has been awarded the Uzbekistan CHOLPAN PRIZE in 1992 for his work Olmez Kayalar (Immortal Cliffs). see Umid/Hope (Journal of the Turkestanian-American Association) Volume 1, No. 2. Fall 1992, P. 14.

NOTES:

1. Later on, the mother dastans may spin-off their lyrical portions which become dastans on their own. The "lyrical" dastans would be concerned only with the "love story" constituting a sub-plot in the mother dastan. This usually occurs when the owners of the dastan are living independent, free and in relative calm. The "mother" dastan is not discarded, or even dismembered. The lyrical dastan tends to take on a life of its own. Subsequently, the lyrical dastans may decay into folkloric tales, recited to children as bedtime stories. See below for a discussion of the "creation" of new "mother" dastans.

2. In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, the bard is termed an ozan.

See the translation by Geoffrey Lewis (Penguin, 1974). Such a person is also called: Bahshi; Akin; Ashik; Kam in various locations. In 1923, Gazi Alim used Akin; in 1938, Hamid Alimcan used Bahshi. [See H. B. Paksoy, *Alpamysh: Central Asian identity under Russian Rule* (Hartford: AACAR, 1989)].

3. Used interchangeably with Batir/Batur, meaning "valiant," "gallant," "brave;" as attributes of a skilled and fearless champion tested in battle or contest. See Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish*. (Oxford, 1972). P. 172.

4. Ancestral unit, division of a greater tribe or confederation of tribes. In addition, boy-clan; soy-family, lineage are also used to depict the infrastructure within a confederation.

5. Alpamysh is one of the oldest mother dastans. It portrays the liberation struggle of a Turkic tribe against an alien invader.

6. For example, see A. Bennigsen "The Crisis of the Turkic National Epics, 1951-1952: Local Nationalism or Internationalism?" *Canadian Slavonic Papers* Vol. XVII (1975), No. 23, Pp. 463-474.

7. *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia. Third Edition. (Moscow, 1978), Vol. 1, P. 458.*

8. *Uzbek Sovet Entsiklopediiasi (Tashkent, 1971), Pp. 112-114.*

9. *See Paksoy, Alpamysh.*

10. *See John Soper, "Shake-up in the Uzbek Literary Elite" Central Asian Survey Vol 1, (1982), No. 4.*

11. *Shark Yildizi, a monthly literary-artistic social-political journal, Tashkent. Hereafter SY.*

12. *W. Fierman, in a paper read to Conference on Identity Problems in Central Asia and Teaching Programs. University of Wisconsin-Madison (November, 1983).*

13. *See, for example, Z. V. Togan, Editor/Translator, Oghuz Destani (Istanbul, 1972); Oughouz-name, epepee turque. R. Nur (Societe de publications Eypitiennes: Alexandrie, 1928); Die Legende von Oghuz Qaghan (Sitzb. d. Preuss. Akad. D. Wiss. 1932. Phil.-Histor. Kl. V, Berlin).*

14. *Dede Korkut., op. cit., Pp. 30-31.*

15. *SY No. 10, Pp. 75-76.*

16. *SY No. 10, Pp. 77.*

17. *N. Ural, Ergenekon Destani (Ankara: Turk Dil Kurumu, 1972).*

18. *See note 13 above.*

19. *For a synopsis of this dastan, see H. B. Paksoy, "Chora Batir: A Tatar Admonition to Future Generations." Studies in Comparative Communism (Los Angeles/London) Vol. XIX, Nos. 3 and 4, Autumn/Winter 1986. Pp. 253-265. For an early reference, see Tatar Edebiyati Tarihi (Kazan, 1925). For bibliography, see Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta II (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 29.*

20. *A more contemporary re-enactment of Ergenekon may be found among the Kirghiz tribes who fled the Soviet forces in the 1930s. Led by Rahman Kul Khan, two sizeable Kirghiz oymaks migrated to the Pamirs at the Wakhan corridor portion of Afghanistan. The location of their yurt was at an altitude of approximately 12,000 ft. In 1979, following Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, a large majority of these Kirghiz tribes became, once again, refugees. See H. B. Paksoy, "Observations Among Kirghiz Refugees from the Pamirs of Afghanistan Settled in the Turkish Republic." Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford Vol. XVI, N. 1, Hilary, 1985. Pp. 53-61.*

21. For the constitution of traditional Turkic self-identity, the triad *uran-tamga-dastan* are critical. See H. B. Paksoy, "The Traditional Oglak Tartis Among the Kirghiz of the Pamirs." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (London) 1985, Part 2. (1985). Pp. 174-176.

22. For an example of the wolf motifs in the 8th century AD funerary epitaphs, see *Eski Turk Yazitlari*, H. N. Orkun, Editor, (Istanbul, 1936, P. 35. For an English Translation of the Kul Tigin inscriptions, which contains the aforementioned motif, see T. Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*. (Bloomington: Uralic and Altaic Series Vol. 69, 1968), P. 256.

23. Bori, or Boru means wolf; bek-prince, chief, nobleman.

24. SY No. 11, P. 73,95.

25. For a definition of the homelands of the Turks see: 1) Besim Atalay, Editor, *Divan u Lugat at-Turk* (Ankara, 1934). English translation is by R Dankoff with J. Kelly, *Compendium of Turkic Dialects*. (3 Vols.) (Cambridge, MA., 1982-84). 2) Sharaf al-Zaman Tahir Marvazi, *China, the Turks and India*, V. Minorsky, Translator (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1942); 3) *Hudud al-Alam*, V. Minorsky, Translator ((London, 1937); 4) Ibn Battuta, *From Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325-1354*. H. A. R. Gibb, Translator (New York, 1929). For Turkistan, see W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. (4th. Ed.) (London, 1977) Fourth edition; Alexander Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-1927*. (New York, 1957); Z. V. Togan, *Turkili Turkistan* (Istanbul, 1981) Second edition.

26. SY No. 10, P. 32.

27. SY No. 11, P. 116.

28. or, Pan-Turanianism. For an example of the "pan- Turanian" treatment, see *A Manual on the Turanians and Pan-Turanianism*. (Oxford: H. M. Government, Naval Staff Intelligence Department, November 1918), (based on Vambéry's *Turkenvolk* (Leipzig, 1885) and that it was compiled by Sir Denison Ross, as Sir Denison later personally informed Togan. See Z. V. Togan, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul, 1969).

29. It appears that Vambéry, a professor of Oriental Languages, had extraordinary relations with the British Foreign Office, drawing regular salary, later a pension. See M. Kemal Oke, "Prof. Arminius Vambéry and Anglo-Ottoman Relations 1889-1907" *Bulletin of the Turkish Studies Association* Vol. 9, No. 2. 1985. The pan-Turanian doctrine, so conceived and elaborated, was the prime diversionary issue of European politicians and Russians, both under the tsars and by emigres after the Bolshevik revolution.

30. Quoted in Charles Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets: The Turks of the World and their Political Objectives* (London, 1957), p. 141, citing Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism* (London, 1950), P. 28. See also L. Cahun, *Introduction a l'Histoire de l'Asie, Turcs, et Mongols, des Origines a 1405*.

(Paris, 1896). For the spread of "pan" ideas among Turks, see inter alia, Hostler; and Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A study of Irredentism*. (London, 1981). Landau concentrates on the emigre aspects of the subject.

31. SY No. 10, Pp. 41, 51.

32. SY No. 10, Pp. 57; No. 11, Pp. 73, 74, 76.

33. SY No. 10, Pp. 56, 57, 60.

34. SY No. 10, Pp. 70, 75, 76, 83, 84.

35. SY No. 10, Pp. 64, 82.

36. The Soviet authors and propagandists are at variance with each other as to the dates during which the Turks existed. According to the *Ozbek Sovet Entsiklopediasi* (Tashkent, 1971), Turks existed in Central Asia from roughly the 6th to the 16th centuries and again in the 20th. (Entry on Turk). D. E. Eremeev, in *Ethnogenez Tiurok; proiskhozhdenie i osnovnye etapy etnicheskoi istorii* (Moscow, 1971) presents, albeit parenthetically, an amazingly garbled bit of misinformation: he mentions attacks on the Byzantine empire by Scythians in the 11th and 12th centuries and, in a footnote, explains that the Scythians were Turks (Tiurk) from the Balkans (p. 75). A misreading of Barthold's *Turkestan P. 137*?

A. N. Bernshtam in his 1946 work on the Orkhon Turks establishes at the outset the limits his willingness to follow his data. He states: "(Even) if the word Turk (tiurk) existed before the 6th-8th centuries, (even) if the totem "wolf" is more ancient than the Orkhon- Yenisei Turks (Tiurk), that does not mean that the Turkic nationality (narodnost') is more ancient than the indicated centuries and times." *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskii stroi Orkhono-Yeniseiskikh Tiurok VI-VIII vekov* (Leningrad, 1946), P. 4.

37. A fragment of this dastan was reported by Radloff and very sparingly, in his *Proben* (St. Petersburg, 1896).

38. See note 19. Chora Batir was certainly an historical figure. See Jaroslaw Pelenski, *Russia and Kazan: Conquest and Imperial Ideology* (The Hague-Paris, 1974).

39. SY No. 11, Pp. 86-87.

40. During World War II, the Tatars were "relocated" by Stalin for their alleged cooperation with the Germans against the Russians. Currently a sizeable tatar community is living in Tashkent and elsewhere in Uzbekistan. They publish a Tatar newspaper.

41. *Anthology of Uzbek Poetry* (Moscow, 1950). Notes 41-47 are cited from A. Bennigsen *op. cit.*

42. *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopeadiia (Moscow, 1950).*

43. *Preface to the Russian translation (Moscow, 1949).*

44. *"Concerning the poem 'Alpamysh'" in Literaturnaia Gazeta No. 14 (September 1952).*

45. *Pravda Vostoka (Tashkent, 24 February 1952).*

46. *Ibid (28 February 1952).*

47. *Ibid (3 April 1952).*

48. *Ozbekistan Adabiyati ve Sanati (Tashkent, 17 March 1981).*

Notes 48-53 are cited from John Soper, "Shake-up in the Uzbek Literary Elite" Central Asian Survey Vol 1 (1982), No. 4.

49. *Ibid, (22 January 1982).*

50. *Sovet Uzbekistani (10 February 1982).*

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Jizzakh was also the site of another uprising in 1916.*