



GUIDE TO KAZAKHSTAN

SITES OF FAITH SITES OF HISTORY

GIAN LUCA BONORA

IN COLLABORATION WITH

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Front cover: The Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi is dedicated to the first saint of Turkic origin in the holy religion of Islam. Every season the city of Turkestan, also known as the “second Mecca”, is inundated by thousands of pilgrims.

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Foreword

This *Guide* to Kazakhstan is, in some ways, special. In fact, it presupposes and indeed perfects other, even excellent, Guides that illustrate this country. It is special because it has been constructed by experts of the territory, to be sure, but above all by scholars of social and religious history. These are not content with illustrating the peculiarities of a landscape and its distinctive artifacts, but have a further objective in mind: to reach back to that landscape's innermost soul sedimented through the centuries, that is to say, to the pristine character of a civilization, a necessary introduction to the knowledge of modern Kazakhstan that explains both its internal evolution and its situation in the world.

That an Italian scholarly institution has arrived at the decision to present this type of *Guide*—obviously designed not so much for mass tourism as for a qualified one—can be explained thus: at a certain point this Institute, founded in order to study the relationship between religion and society in an Italian and European context, felt, as it were, displaced. In the old Western world religion was no longer so interesting, vanquished and uprooted as it has been by secularization, the outcome of modernity. But at that point someone recalled the case of Kazakhstan: an immense country that, after the collapse of the programmatically atheist Soviet Empire, began its new history as an independent republic based, among other things, on the input of religions. This fact prompted the Institute to project its mission outside Europe in order to focus on *religious Asia* rather than on *lay Europe* (reference is made here to a recently published essay).¹

Thus “Project Kazakhstan” was born. It has seen the world's foremost specialists in the field working side by side with Kazakh scholars in the intent to proceed to the rediscovery—which, often enough, turned out to be a discovery—of the religious and social history of this coun-

¹ Peter Berger, Grace Davie, Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Ashgate Publishing, Farnham 2008). But the idea that secularism is by no means the only outcome of “modernity” is now gaining ground in lay Europe as well: the other such outcome is, not too paradoxically, the return of God: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts–London 2007).

try. And the fruits of this ongoing three-year work are beginning to appear: a first volume on Kazak religions and society was published last year and additional volumes are in progress (the discriminating tourist can consult them with profit).²

In any event, these fruits—this is our persuasion, as firm as ever—could not remain in the private domain of scholars. Hence the idea to share them with a broader audience, filtering them whenever possible also in a unique tourist *Guide*. On the other hand, as the Project was taking shape, we felt—since we are from Venetia, heirs to Marco Polo—more and more attracted, almost smitten, by a country like Kazakhstan, which we perceive to be the great gateway to Asia, the giant crossroads of so many religions and civilizations, as well as a political entity certainly destined to a great role in the world's future.

Thus we are certain that many people, coming from every country in the world, will also be attracted and consequently will want to know and visit Kazakhstan, be it in order to discover its over-brimming treasures of faith and culture, be it to open up to the perspectives of peace, tolerance, and universal solidarity (as opposed to the risks of a wild globalism) that happily come to us today from this country, also because of those treasures.

Moreover, for those who feel the fascination of the history of “another” humanity—not the sedentary one, descended from Cain who killed his brother Abel “shepherd of flocks” and “invented” the city (as narrated in the Hebrew Bible),³ but a nomad and pilgrim humanity, living in freedom and peace in the wide open spaces of boundless nature—Kazakhstan is to an even greater extent a required destination. Here, in this mostly flat territory stretched between the lower course of the Volga River and the Caspian Sea, back to back with Russia and China, that “other” humanity we spoke of—with its nomad groups living off hunting and shepherding herds in the immensity of the steppe—was able to preserve itself perhaps longer than elsewhere in the world: not as an exotic relic, but as an alternative lifestyle that celebrates objectively the universal values of solidarity and communion between individuals and families, of harmony between the environment and freedom.

By now, it is true, in today's largely urbanized and industrialized Kaza-

² See the first volume: Gian Luca Bonora, Niccolò Pianciola, Paolo Sartori (eds.), *Kazakhstan, Religions and Society in the History of Central Eurasia* (Umberto Allemandi & C., Turin–London–Venice–New York 2009). Two additional, more exhaustive volumes are now ready for the press.

³ Genesis 4:1–9 and 17.

khstan, nomad society has dissolved and survives only as a memory and a myth (the myth of a world where one could still breathe “the fragrance of grass”).⁴ But it is by no means certain that its deepest values (those previously mentioned) have been likewise dissolved; in fact, they are still the pristine foundation of the modern state, inasmuch as it wants to be and to be recognized as a privileged *locus* for the peaceful encounter of religions and civilizations.

One more reason to visit it: see you again, then, in Kazakhstan.

GIORGIO CRACCO

Secretary General of the Institute of History in Vicenza, Italy

⁴ I refer to the novel *Il profumo dell'erba* by Nereo Laroni, a profound expert on Kazakhstan (Marsilio, Venice 2009): a novel that is also a history of the nomad Kazakh society and that, because of its undoubted power of attraction, should be translated also into the Kazakh language.

Introduction

GIAN LUCA BONORA

In the heart of the Eurasian continent, in the center of Central Asia, a natural crossroads between the Far East and China on one side, Europe and the Near East on the other, cold Siberia to the north and the Indo-Iranian territories to the south, Kazakhstan has been in history, for thousands of years, the cradle of some of the most important and significant Asian civilizations: the homeland of pastoral nomadism, of the four-wheeled cart and the yurt (mobile home of nomadic herd breeders), and native land of warlike conquerors, physicians, scientists, chemists, philosophers, and scholars.

The caravan routes that at the dawn of history joined East and West, like sinuous bridges, to carry the flow of cultures, fashions, technologies, sociopolitical and religious ideas, animals, and peoples, had in Kazakhstan a series of terminals where the cities of Otrar, Kaylyk, Sygnak, Sauran, Zhambyl, and Turkestan were truly ports situated between the steppe and the desert, before reaching the high, nearly impassable mountains far above (the Tien Shan and the Pamir Range). All the roads in antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in the Modern Age led to Kazakhstan, and its central and strategic position made it a prey coveted by many armies seeking conquests and glory.

Immensity is the most immediate visual sensation for the inhabitants of this land and for travelers to this territory, for thousands of miles totally void of defined boundaries: a land apt to free the mind from any barriers and, if needs must be, to break them down. In Kazakhstan the landscape is tinged with infinity. Wavy plains stretch well into the horizon, sometimes plunging into depressions of varying depth and width. Suddenly, softly rounded hills are sucked upward by uncommonly high mountains, their slopes covered by sparse trees or narrowly limited forests of larches, cedars, pines, firs, and birch trees. But this is little compared to the endless steppe, only slightly furrowed by a few hill-like mounds, which between the end of spring and the beginning of summer turns into a single carpet of grass, a sea of grass that reaches on one side all the way to Manchuria and on the other as far as the Hungarian *puszta*.

Here, in this deep and remote Asia, survival has always been hard. It

still is today. It is always the same wind, ceaselessly scourging everything and everyone, particularly from late fall to winter. It is always the same sun, scorching at more than 40°C during summers occasionally broken by noisy rainstorms. Winter frost crystallizes the colors of nature, seemingly dying until its spring rebirth in the month of April. Here, under a deep blue sky, there is little room for intermediate climates. Even the seas are unknown and far away. The Aral Lake that until twenty years ago was still a source of life and social and commercial prosperity for many communities settled along its coasts has become today another dried up sea, a recently formed desert situated to the left of the Kazakhstan steppe, just as the Gobi Desert is symmetrically to the right of it.

Giving and receiving culture, upbringing, and civility cannot stop at the caravan routes that connected the extreme boundaries of the Eurasian universe. Even a military clash, after the initial shock has been overcome, can be turned into an encounter of cultures and become an intersection of diverse humanity. In 54–53 B.C. the Roman legions led by Crassus met with a humbling defeat by the Parthians at Carrhae, not far removed from the Persian Gulf. The commander was killed and several legionnaires were captured. A captivating legend, tumbling down through the centuries till our days but never verified as to its authenticity, proposes that those Roman prisoners were the mercenaries employed by the Huns eighteen years later in the battle fought against the Chinese troops of General Cheng Tang, near the Chu River, close to Balkhash Lake in Kazakhstan: Parthians, Huns, Chinese, and Romans, that is to say, the Near and the Far East, were coming close.

The pattern of rejection and osmosis, expulsions and receptions, must necessarily involve the geography of religions. Banished from Christianity, Manichaeism, which in the sermons of the third-century Persian Mani had mixed Christian, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist principles, had better luck with the Asian populations and even became the official religion of the Uighur Turks from A.D. 762 to 840. At the western limits of Asia, on the Russian border, Judaism was fully accepted by the Khazars, whose highest class was not to remain indifferent to the message of the prophet Muhammad; for, from the eighth century on, Islam had gained a steady foothold in Kazakhstan and in other regions of Central Asia, particularly after the battle near the Talas River in 751 that saw an Arab–Turkic–Tibetan coalition definitively arrest the Chinese progression toward the west.

Thus, until the crusades provoked the hardening of Islamic people and

their anti-Christian reaction, not only the teachings of the Koran, but also Nestorian Christianity (that of the followers of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, whose christological doctrine had been condemned as heretical by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431) could freely prosper in the Muslim districts, alien from persecutions and proselytizing. Yet Nestorianism found at Baghdad, side by side with the Abbassid dynasty, a powerful launching pad toward Central Asia and the East. From the seventh to the ninth century, its expansion and subsequent taking hold among the people made Nestorianism the main Christian Church in size and prestige.

Yet apostolate was easier and more effective when it turned to settled communities. As soon as it became necessary to propagate it among the peoples of the steppe, materially and spiritually transient and elusive, its hold proved to be weak. Thus, in the Central Asian steppes of Kazakhstan Shamanism remained most successful, centered as it was on the persons of wizard-like celebrants, who governed not only the religious, but also the sociopolitical life of the community, holding (as the case might be) elective or hereditary powers.

Thus, this introduction—brief, lest it be tedious—has outlined in broad strokes the path followed by this *Guide*. This volume, *Guide to Kazakhstan. Sites of Faith, Sites of History*, deals with history and geography, religion and archaeology, sedentary populations and nomadic ones, ancient times and *stricto sensu* modernity, whose common denominator is the young Republic of Kazakhstan in its total geographic extension. This work, however, does not presume to be a mere guide to Kazakhstan because this task has already been fully and meritoriously accomplished by publications quite recently released such as, for instance, *Kazakhstan: Nomadic Routes from Caspian to Altai*, by Dagmar Schreiber in the series ‘Odyssey Illustrated Guides,’ or: *Kazakhstan*, by Paul Brummel, published by Bradt; further, *Apples Are from Kazakhstan: The Land that Disappeared*, by Christopher Robbins, published by Atlas & Co., and finally the guide *Central Asia*, of the Lonely Planet Publishing House, where a substantial portion of the text is devoted to the land of the Kazakhs. These publications, briefly cited here, are certainly fundamental to make possible a visit to the most famous historical, architectural, religious, cultural, and environmental sites in Kazakhstan; furthermore, they provide an extensive and detailed series of information of a practical character that may prove most useful to tourists, visitors, travelers, and (generally) travel lovers.

Our book, *Guide to Kazakhstan. Sites of Faith, Sites of History*, is still



Fig. 1. Map of Kazakhstan.

a guide, but it must be defined *sui generis*, because, unlike the previously mentioned ones, it turns its almost undivided attention to important and significant sites in the political, social, and religious history of Kazakhstan: some of these sites are described and circumstantiated here for the first time in a Western language. It must be stressed that the best-known sites in Kazakhstan's social and religious history—the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan, the Mausoleum of Aristan Bab not far from Turkestan, the funeral barrows from the Saka age at Issyk at an hour's distance from Almaty, and the new buildings of Astana with their national-symbolic value—are presented here side by side with mostly unknown monuments from times remote, culturally and geographically distant from Western standards. These “new” sites of history and faith receive in this book an accurate



scholarly description and historical presentation. Suffice to mention here, among countless examples, the underground mosques of the Mangystau region, the mausoleums of the eleventh–thirteenth century in the Kara-Kingir valley in central Kazakhstan, the ancient and medieval citadels and the contemporary burial monuments localized in the inner delta of the Syr Darya River in the region of Kyzylorda, and the wonderful figures sculptured in stone at Tamgaly, at four hours' travel by car from Almaty, a site of great archaeological value, since 2004 on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites.

Admittedly, in this book there is neither room for practical information (required documents, transportation and mobility, security, clothing, restaurants, hotels and currency, and so on) nor for sites or monuments of geographic–environmental value (for example Nation-

al Parks and Nature Reserves), so that our work cannot do without other, more specifically tourist-oriented publications, which include accurate and precise topographical references, telephone numbers, fax and e-mail addresses to make possible the optimal organization of a journey or a simple excursion to a given place.

Last but not least, another distinctive element of this publication is the scientific accuracy underlying the collection and narrative of facts, stories, legends, and all descriptions of historically and religiously relevant sites included here. This is so because the volume *Guide to Kazakhstan. Sites of Faith, Sites of History* is the fruit of long labors carried out by a team of Italian and Kazakh researchers, and because every one of them, though young, is responsible for important scientific tasks at an international level in fields such as ancient and modern history, archaeology and ethnography, and the education and preservation of the cultural heritage.



Fig. 2. The green slopes of the Tien Shan range, south of Almaty.

1. A Brief Historical Overview

GIAN LUCA BONORA and NICCOLÒ PIANCIOLA

THE SAKA

From the start of the first millennium B.C., Kazakhstan, like other regions of Central Asia, was occupied by groups of Indo-European origin speaking an ancient Iranian language called Saka in Persian sources and *skythai* (Scythians) by the Greeks.

What we know of the economic and social models of the Saka and their material culture derives from the digs in their tombs which were earth barrows (*kurgan*) or mud-brick buildings (mausoleums); in both cases they were imposing and majestic structures. One of the most spectacular archaeological discoveries in Central Asia occurred amongst the burial barrows in 1969, when the so-called “Golden Man” of Issyk was unearthed (see pp. 92–95).

THE SILK ROUTE

The history of Kazakhstan in the early centuries A.D. is somewhat obscure, being marked by frequent movements of populations of whom we have little and fragmentary information. What is certain is that the trade between Europe and Eastern Asia which passed through Central Asia increased considerably during this period. The southern steppes were crossed by Chinese, Sassanid–Persian, Bactrian, Sogdian, Kushan, and Wusun legations, merchants, and commercial adventurers who set the foundations for and established the contacts that subsequently modeled trade in the Asian interior.

The Silk Route was a vast and branching network of trade routes, some of which also cut through Kazakh territory. The goods transported along it were not only luxury items, but also religious cults, fashions, ideas, arts and costumes, spices, precious metals, horses and slaves. The nomads of the central and northern Kazakhstan steppes played an important role in the trade networks, leading and escorting the caravans passing from one town to another and acting as intermediaries in the exchanges.

THE PERIOD OF THE GREAT MIGRATIONS

In the last centuries of the first millennium B.C. and in the early centuries of the Common Era there were various migratory movements of peoples speaking a proto-Turkic language and coming from the east (Wusun, Yueh Chih, Hsiung-nu, Rouran, to mention only the best known) who occupied the regions of Kazakhstan, forcing other peoples to move west or southward.

Around the fifth–sixth century the Wusun were first replaced by the Western Götürk Khanate (A.D. 603–704) and subsequently, in the seventh and eighth centuries, by the Eastern Götürk Khanate. These were organized, complex, and stratified societies, with a prestigious aristocracy, diversified classes of traders, farmers in the oases, groups of nomadic herders, and a caste of professional warriors.

The khanate, whose center lay between the Karatau Mountains and the Zhungaria Mountains with Sujab as the capital, reached the peak of its power with the reign of Zheguj Khan (610–618) and his younger brother Tong Yagbu Khan (618–630). After his death a series of civil wars weakened the potentate. The Chinese emperor Tang took advantage of the situation, conquering Semirechë.

At the start of the eighth century the Western Götürk Khanate fell and made way for the rise of the new Götürk Khanate which maintained the capital in Sujab, although a second important political and administrative center was the city of Kungut, on the River Ili. Despite the fact that around the mid eighth century the Götürk Khanate was at the height of its power, spreading from the Hindu Kush to the mountains of Zhungaria and the upper area of the Yenisei to the Volga and beyond, it was unable to resist the attacks by Arabs, united in the name of Islam. Following a first military victory in 723, when the Turgesh were allied with the Karluk of the Ferghana valley and with the inhabitants of the Chach or Shash plain (now the territory corresponding to the city of Tashkent), the khanate was subsequently attacked in 739 on the banks of the River Syr Darya and the weakness caused by the invasion led within thirty years to the inevitable end of the Götürk power. All this to the advantage of the Karluk, who would constantly increase their political influence throughout Central Asia and in 746 settled in Semirechë and in Altai. But there was a new development shortly afterward. The Chinese of the Tang dynasty also tried to take advantage of this crisis, gaining rapid access to various potentates. In 748 the Tang governors of eastern Turkestan led their army to Semirechë where they conquered and razed to the ground the city of Sujab.

From here they moved to attack the Arabs, ranged in defense of the valley of the River Talas. The Chinese emerged defeated from the battle that took place in 751 near the city of Atlakh, not far from modern Taraz or Zhambyl. The battle of Atlakh has a profound historical value for the destiny of the peoples of Semirech'e and Central Asia. In fact, the Tang army abandoned the "land of seven rivers", while the Arabs decided not to remain in the Talas valley and withdrew to the Shash. In 756 a new polity emerged, the Karluk Khanate. This state was ruled by members of the Turkic royal house, the Ashina, and had the great merit of developing and enriching the economy of some of the most important cities in the steppes, such as Otrar and Taraz, and the adjacent rural areas formed of small villages, making them mainly agricultural. At the same time, the extreme south of the country was under Samanid dominion, with its center in Bukhara.

Around the mid eighth century, following a series of conflicts with the reigning Karluk, a consistent part of the Oghuz, a Turkic group originally settled in Semirech'e, moved to the foothill region of Karatau and the valley of the River Chu. From here, at the start of the ninth century they moved to conquer the southern area of the Syr Darya and the Aral Sea, thanks to an alliance with Karluk and Kimak groups against the Kangju-Pecheneg confederation. They attained a major victory over the Pechenegs at the end of the ninth century, which allowed the Oghuz to command all the territories between the Rivers Volga and Ural and marked the start of a period of economic fervor and political stability. However, a subsequent crisis, both political and socio-economic, created the conditions for another Turkic-language population, the Kimak (led by the Kipchak group), to take over from the Oghuz.

It is known from medieval Chinese and Arabic sources that between the second half of the eighth and the early ninth centuries the Kimak moved in three different directions, starting from the region lying between the Altai and the basin of the Irtysh: northeast in the direction of the southern Urals where they originated the Cuman or Polovtsian peoples, to the southwest in the direction of Syr Darya and southern Kazakhstan and southward into Semirech'e. The Kimak Khanate was formed at the start of the ninth century thanks to the union of seven independent political units. But already at the start of the eleventh century this federation had collapsed due to the centrifugal tendencies of Kipchak Khan, who desired independence, the exacerbation of the internecine conflicts, and the migration of other nomadic peoples from the east.

Thus, in 940, the power of the Kimak Khanate passed to another Tur-

tic group of Islamic religion, the Karakhanids (942–1210). They managed to encourage the economic development and growth of both the cities and the rural areas: the artificial irrigation system of the steppes was extended under their rule to the point where it was possible to plant fruit trees and cultivate vegetables and cereals. The progenitor of the dynasty was Satuk Boghra Khan (915–955) who proclaimed himself sultan in 942.

In the twelfth century the Karakhanid territory was subject to a series of invasions from the east by various populations, including the Kara-Khitans (or Khitan or Khidan or Liao) and the Mongol Naiman and Terei, who spoke Turkic. Following this complex historical moment the southern territory of Kazakhstan lacked the guidance that could guarantee the conditions of safety and stability that on the contrary had characterized previous centuries. Much of the central and northern territory of Kazakhstan was governed politically and militarily by Kipchak Khan who had taken over from the Oghuz. In the mid eleventh century the Kipchak began a slow but constant movement westward that brought them into contact with the peoples of the Rus' of Kiev and Novgorod, with Byzantium, the Bulgars of the Volga, and the Bashkirs, and they widely populated the regions of Mangyshlak and Ustyurt, between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Lake.

Between the end of the eleventh and the early twelfth century, the cities on the Silk Route along the Syr Darya valley, such as Zhend, Zhankent, and others of smaller dimensions and historical importance, were controlled by Kipchak Khan. Nonetheless, the kingdom of Khorezm also wanted to extend its power over this territory and in fact the king of Khorezm, Muhammad (1200–1220), occupied the region of Sygnak at the start of the twelfth century and from here made numerous and brutal incursions toward Dasht-i Kipchak. In 1216 during one of these attacks, thanks to which they reached the banks of the River Irgiz, they fought with the army of Genghis Khan (Chinghiz Khan) engaged in the pursuit of the Merkits who had taken refuge in the territory of the Kipchak. Immediately after the battle, under cover of darkness, the Mongols withdrew. This episode marked the first appearance of the Mongols in the territory of Kazakhstan.

THE MONGOL EMPIRE

In 1207 Temujin, crowned Genghis Khan, began the series of conquests that led him in just a few decades to form a vast empire that extended from the Danube to Beijing. In 1218, Genghis Khan also at-

tacked the territory of Kazakhstan and first conquered the region of Semirech'è or Zhetysu and in 1220 he moved toward Otrar and the other prosperous cities of southern Kazakhstan (Sygnak and Ashnak), which were annexed to the imperial territories. The pretext for this campaign against cities that until that time had recognized the political authority of the king of Khorezm was the incident known as the "Otrar catastrophe" when in the summer of 1218, by order of Muhammad of Khorezm, the components of a trade caravan sent by Genghis Khan were massacred. The governor of the city of Otrar, Gajir Khan, managed to defend the city for about five months, after which the city was taken and razed to the ground, its inhabitants deported and Gajir Khan executed. By spring 1221 the Mongol conquest of Central Asia was complete. The fighting had already moved to the Iranian highlands, in Afghanistan and northern India.

Following the death of Genghis Khan in 1227, the empire was divided into four appanages (*ulus*), each of which was assigned to his sons or grandsons. Batu Khan, to whom the lands west of the Volga, still to be conquered, were granted, soon began to expand his domain: he founded the great khanate of the Golden Horde, and established the capital in Saray, situated in present southern Russia, near Saratov, on the Volga. During his advance, which lasted seven years (1236–1242), he threw himself against the Bulgars of the Volga and the Russian princedoms, arriving in central Europe and the Danube. All the subjects of this area of the empire called themselves Kipchak, although the Golden Horde was a multiethnic state where the majority of the population was certainly Kipchak, Kangly, Karluk, and numerous other nationalities were also present (Bulgars, Mordovians, Greeks, Circassians, Khorezmians). The Mongols represented a minority and between the end of the thirteenth and the start of the fourteenth century they had strongly felt the Turkic influence. From then onward the people of the Golden Horde were known as the "Tatars".

Despite the fact that the agricultural cultivations and the infrastructures of the sedentary society of the territory now known as Kazakhstan were destroyed and erased by the Mongol invasion, the installation of the *pax mongolica* allowed the great transcontinental trade routes to be reestablished and caravans could travel in greater safety than in previous decades.

Already during the reign of Berke Khan (1256–1266), the brother of Batu, the Golden Horde had become an independent state. The kingdom reached the peak of its power during the first half of the fourteenth century, principally thanks to Uzbek Khan (1312–1342) and

his successor Zhanibek (1342–1357). In 1312 Uzbek Khan made Islam the state religion of the Horde.

The first Mongol dominion ended in 1360, as quickly and unexpectedly as it had begun, due to the sudden appearance of a warlord and military genius, Tamerlane (Amir Timur Lang), who founded an empire with Samarqand as its capital. With swift military campaigns he conquered Central Asia, Persia, India to the mouth of the Ganges, the southern Caucasus, and Russia, arriving close to Moscow. His sudden death in 1405 interrupted preparations for the conquest of China.

In the meantime, in the most eastern part of Dasht-i Kipchak, in the late thirteenth century and at the start of the fourteenth, the potentate of the White Horde had been established with its capital in the south of the country at Sygnak. Thanks to very precise campaigns against the *ulus* of other descendents of Genghis Khan, during the fourteenth century the White Horde possessed all the territory of present-day Kazakhstan. Under Urus Khan, who reigned in the 1460s and 1470s, the White Horde considerably consolidated its power, but the following decade saw various campaigns by Tamerlane launched in the territory of the Horde. Formally speaking, the region of the steppes was never annexed to the Mongol Empire, but in fact southern Kazakhstan, which, with its cities of Sygnak, Otrar, Sauran, Yasi, and Sayram, was so important for the economy of the nomadic peoples, was lost forever. This was a decisive blow for the independence of this kingdom.

Between the mid fourteenth and the early fifteenth century, the southeastern part of Kazakhstan was part of the Moghulistan kingdom (from the term *moghul* or *moghol* as the Mongols were called in Turkish and Persian sources), which arose following the fall of the kingdom of Chagatai, Genghis Khan's second son. The borders of this kingdom went from Tashkent to the west, to Lake Barkul and the city of Hami in the east, from Balkhash and Tarbagatai in the north and to the Ferghana valley and the agricultural oases around Kashgar in the south. This potentate was also forced to deal with the campaigns of Tamerlane. The result of the long and tiring battle was the division of the kingdom in various sections.

In the early 1520s in the steppes of Kazakhstan, following the dissolution of the polity of the Golden Horde, the potentate of Abu'l-Khair (1428–1468) was formed. The dominions of this khanate extended from the Ural River (Yaik) to Lake Balkhash and from the River Syr Darya and Lake Aral to the Rivers Tobol and Irtysh. The composition of the population was very similar to that of the White Horde, various groups of Turkic origin, who called themselves “Uzbeks”, and the khanate of Abu'l-

Khair was also known as the Uzbek Khanate. The state was centralized, but was administratively divided between a number of different possessions (*uluses*), headed by members of the Genghisid aristocracy. Abu'l-Khair Khan led various campaigns beyond the borders of his territory, both in Central Asia and in southern and southeastern Kazakhstan. In 1430 he occupied Khorezm for a short time, sacking Urgench, while in 1446 he managed to take the cities of Sygnak, Susak, Ak Kurgan, Uzgend, and Arkuk from the Timurids. Sygnak became the capital.

THE KAZAKH KHANATE

However, in 1457 Abu'l-Khair was defeated by the Oirats at Sygnak. After this defeat, the majority of the nobility abandoned him. Two descendants of Genghis Khan, Zhanibek Abusayd and Kerei (Girei or Girej), with their followers, deserted him and were welcomed by Yesen Buga Khan in Moghulistan, from whom they received land to farm in the valley of the River Chu. Between 1465 and 1467, following the death of Yesen Buga Khan, and the killing of Abu'l-Khair in 1468, they proclaimed the birth of the Kazakh Khanate which the majority of the population in the Uzbek area (*ulus*) immediately joined, along with other groups, after the khanate successfully extended its territory to the north. The splitting of Abu'l-Khair's Uzbek Khanate led to the birth of the "uzbek-kazakh" politonym. While "uzbek" means "autocrat" in Turkish, and indicates a central political authority (historically in the person of Abu'l-Khair Khan), "kazakh" means "free man", or "outlaw", "person not submitted to constituted authority". In the expression "Kazakh Khanate", or "the state of the non-subservient" (to Abu'l-Khair) the adjective "kazakh" was therefore both a politonym and an ethnonym. It was only in later centuries that the adjective which indicated the population of the khanate became an ethnonym, indicating the common origin of the "Kazakhs". The khanate was administratively divided into three *jüz* (translated in Russian and western sources as "horde"), beginning with the original territory of the khanate, the present southeastern Kazakhstan and, following the geographical expansion northwest, the Senior Jüz (Horde), Middle Jüz (Horde) and Junior Jüz (Horde). These expansions had already started during the reign of Burunduk Khan (1488–1509), when the southern cities of Suzak, Sygnak, and Sauran were conquered by the Shaybanids (descendants of Batu Khan) and incorporated into the khanate. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the khanate's policy of territo-

rial occupation continued under the reign of Kasym Khan (1509–1518) reaching the Urals in the northwest, Syr Darya in the south, the Mangyshlak peninsula in the west, and Semirechë in the east. The second half of this century was marked by internecine battles for power or for separatist reasons, which culminated during the reign of Tahir Khan. Even so, toward the end of the sixteenth century the power of the khanate was once again stable and structured.

THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

Kazakh society was differentiated from the beginning between a Genghisid aristocracy (called “white bones”, *ak suiuk*) and commoners (called “black bones”, *kara suiuk*). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Tauke Khan, the juridical treaty of the “seven rules” (*Zheti Zharghi*) was written by Aykete Bi, Tole Bi, and Kazybek Bi, which regulated relations between the different estates inside the khanate (in particular, it established relations of dependence of the more humble classes *Kara Shalik*), and decreed the general principles for the resolution of conflicts.

Nonetheless, the legal system introduced could not put a halt to the continual struggles for the sharing of power: the internal equilibrium failed and the khanate precipitated into vulnerability. Pressure on the khanate also came from the Oirats further east. By the seventeenth century there were three Oirat polities: the Zhungar principality in western Mongolia and northern Xinjiang, the Deed Mongols in northern Tibet, and the Kalmyk Khanate on the Volga. The Zhungars regularly attacked the Kazakhs between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, attempting an expansion westward. The first contact between Tauke Khan, who sought allies against the Oirats and the tsarist state, dates from 1717. However, the Russians did not promptly intervene, being heavily involved in the construction of a line of fortifications along their northern frontier (between Omsk, Pavlodar, Semey, and Oskemen).

KAZAKHSTAN AND THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Abu'l-Khair Khan of the Junior Jüz (Horde) and Abylai Khan of the Middle Jüz (Horde) tried repeatedly to unite Kazakh military forces capable of opposing the eastern invaders. Finally, in 1731 Abu'l-Khair Khan reached an agreement with the Tsarist Empire, which, however, led to increasing intrusion by the Russian powers in the Kazakh terri-

tory. In 1748 Abylai Khan of the Middle Jüz accepted nominal Russian suzerainty, but he also swore allegiance to China in 1756. Until the end of his life in 1781 he actually remained independent. The Tsarist Empire consolidated its presence to the north of the steppes, forbidding the Kazakh to lead a nomadic life on the right bank of the Yaik River (present-day Ural) in 1756, and on the right bank of the Irtysh, further east, in 1764. However, the administrative consolidation and the effective conquest of the territory of present-day Kazakhstan by the Tsarist Empire was a slow process, being achieved only in the 1860s, when the Russians conquered the center of the sedentary regions of Central Asia (Tashkent, the most populated town of the region, was taken in 1865). In 1822, the “Statute of Siberian Kyrgyz [Kazakhs]”, promulgated by the Siberian governor-general Speranskii, established the relations between the Kazakhs and the tsarist state for the following century.

The conquest provoked strong reactions among the population. The most important revolt of the entire tsarist period was led from 1837 onward by Kenesary Kasymov Khan, grandson of Abylai Khan. There were more than three hundred rebellions during the Russian colonization, showing that opposers of integration were numerous. Nevertheless, the Russian Empire successfully rooted an administrative system in the steppes, positions in its lower echelons being held by Kazakhs, often an expression of the aristocracy, elected to the position of “head of district”. The inclusion of part of the Kazakh elite in the administration ensured the social stability of the steppes in the long term, even in the presence of the Slavic peasants’ mass colonization between the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

In June 1916, at the start of World War I, the decision to recruit the Central Asians, including the Kazakhs, for work under the orders of the army led to a major revolt throughout Central Asia. The uprising was bloodily repressed, tens of thousands of Kazakhs were killed and almost two hundred thousand fled to China just a few months before the tsarist regime fell in February 1917.

SOVIET POWER AND THE BATTLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

During the period of the civil war in the territory of the fallen Russian Empire the most important political organization was the Alash Horde, which was the name of the central organ of independent regional government in the steppes (at times called the “Alash Autonomy”). Its formation was decided during the pan-Kyrgyzian congress held in December 1917. The intention was to form an independent

government, similar to other political bodies of a liberal–democratic nature (present in Turkestan and in other regions of the ex-empire) which opposed the coming to power of the Bolsheviks. Allying with the anti-Bolshevik power during the civil war, the Alash Horde also allied with the “reds” in 1919. Its exponents still held important positions in the cultural institutions of the newborn Kazakh Soviet Republic, formed in 1920. But with Stalin’s “revolution from above” and the purges of the late 1930s they were all imprisoned and shot. In 1924 the Soviet government took the step that went down in history as the “national delimitation” of Central Asia, which tried to respect the “national borders” between the various populations. Thus, the northern regions of Turkestan, inhabited above all by Kazakhs, were united in the Kazakh Republic, which, despite some subsequent territorial changes, had by then assumed the borders that it preserves even today.

FORCED COLLECTIVIZATION

The most important event in the history of twentieth-century Kazakhstan is the total collectivization of agriculture (begun in 1930), which in Kazakhstan was accompanied by projects for the forced sedentarization of shepherds (at that time about three quarters of Kazakhs were shepherds and a quarter were farmers). Between 1931 and 1933, almost one and a half million Kazakhs died of the great famine caused by the requisition of grain and farm animals. Apart from the victims of the famine, more than one million Kazakhs abandoned the republic in an attempt to escape from death by hunger, fleeing to China, Siberia, the Urals, and other republics of Central Asia. The refugees returned slowly during the following years, until the end of the 1930s. In the meantime the great deportations toward the territory of Kazakhstan had begun: at the start of the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of Russian peasants arrived in the steppe, reducing the percentage of Kazakhs in the total population (Russians and Ukrainians were already one third of the population before the deportations). These deportations, which were officially carried out for “social reasons” (those deported were labeled as “rich peasants”), were followed by further expulsions for ethnic reasons. Germans and Poles arrived in their tens of thousands between 1935 and 1936, followed by almost 200,000 Soviet Koreans in 1937.

The early 1930s also saw the construction of a huge work camp as part of the Gulag system. The lager of Karaganda, built in 1931 and extend-

ed over the years, was one of the most important islands of the Gulag Archipelago. Amongst its uses, coal from the Karaganda coalfields was sent north to fuel the steelworks at Magnitogorsk, while inside the camp were the huge state farms that employed forced labor.

EXILE IN THE STEPPES

World War II saw new migratory flows from the west: the evacuated families (almost half a million) were joined by more than a million contingents of people deported under ethnic discrimination, beginning with the Soviet Germans who were exiled en masse following the Nazi attack of 1941. In 1943–1944 there followed the Chechens, Tatars from Crimea, Kalmyks, Greeks, and the Ingush people, of whom many died in the months and years following the deportation. However, the war also led the European part of the empire to transfer entire industries to Kazakhstan, together with a number of the workers employed in them.

THE VIRGIN LANDS CAMPAIGN

In 1954, a year after the death of Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev launched the state program for the cultivation of the Virgin Lands, the vast tract of land between southern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan. Thanks to this policy around 800,000 workers arrived in the country, but only a certain number settled permanently in the republic. 225,000 square kilometers of steppe were dug up and farmed, the crops were mainly cereals. After the successes of the 1950s in terms of an increased production of cereals, the erosion of the soil led to disastrous harvests at the start of the next decade. By the time of the destitution of Khrushchev (1964) it was clear that the program, one of the last heroic “epics of work” in the history of the USSR, was a failure from an economic and environmental point of view.

ATOMIC TESTS IN THE STEPPE

The heads of the Soviet atomic program of the 1940s chose the vast area of the steppes to the west of the city of Semipalatinsk (now Semey) for use as a nuclear test site. Here, in 1949, they exploded the first Soviet atomic bomb. The experiments in the atmosphere continued until 1963; later they were carried out underground. Only at the end of the 1980s, thanks to the campaign launched by the Ne-

vada–Semipalatinsk Movement for Human Rights, were protests organized with the aim of stopping the tests. The last explosion took place in 1989, while the test site was definitively closed in 1991.

FROM BREZHNEV TO NAZARBAEV

The 1960s and 1970s saw the start of the terminal economic crisis of the Soviet system, which was one of the causes of the slow but inexorable emigration of Russian families from Kazakhstan, which would reach a catastrophic level in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, after 1991.

The years in which Brezhnev was Party Secretary (1964–1982) also saw a considerable development of the country’s industrial base, with the setting up of vast industrial complexes in various regions of the country. Moreover, as in the rest of the USSR, a process of urbanization was underway. This was particularly significant in a territory like Kazakhstan, which had had almost no towns until the previous century. In 1989 Kazakhstan had more than thirty cities with 50,000 inhabitants, nineteen cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, and five with more than 300 inhabitants. Brezhnev’s period was also that of the definitive “kazakhization” of the administration of the republic, guided for more than twenty years by Dinmukhamed Kunaev (1912–1993), the first Party Secretary in Kazakhstan from 1960 to 1962 and then from 1964 to 1986. A mining engineer and a leader in the Muslim community, he entered the USSR Politburo in 1971.

In the 1980s Gorbachev’s perestroika marked the crisis of the power system that had consolidated under Brezhnev. The XVI Congress of the Kazakhstan communist party, in February 1986, sanctioned the removal of more than 500 administrators. The reorganization of the Kazakhstan administration followed similar procedures in other Soviet republics, begun under the secretariat of Andropov. The accusations were above all linked to misappropriation and privatistic management of the transfer of funds from Moscow to the various banks of the republic. The “purge” even struck Kunaev. His removal did not go unnoticed: in December 1986 hundreds of students from Almaty gathered in the main square of the city to protest against the substitution of the first secretary of the Kazakh communist party, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, by the Russian Gennady Kolbin. The protest was repressed (nowadays, December 16 is a national holiday) and Kolbin remained in office until 1989, when Nursultan Nazarbaev reached undisputed power in the republic.

On October 1990 the (Soviet) Supreme Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan issued the “Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Kazakh SSR” and almost one year later (December 1991), following the definitive collapse of the USSR, independence was proclaimed. Kazakhstan, led by Nursultan Nazarbaev, was the last of the member countries to leave the Soviet Union: the decision was not taken lightheartedly, considering the degree of complementarity and interconnection between the economic structure of Soviet Kazakhstan and that of its neighbors, *in primis*, Russia. After the profound economic crisis of the 1990s, common to all the ex-Soviet territories but particularly severe in Kazakhstan, the economy of the country stabilized in the mid 1990s, the period in which the capital was moved to northern Astana—former Tselinograd, the “capital” of Khrushchev’s Virgin Lands (1997). The urban development of the new capital, beginning from the previous Soviet urban center, has become a symbol of the new independent Kazakhstan.

The territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan covers 2,727,300 square kilometers; thus it is larger than Western Europe. With 16.2 million people (2010 census), Kazakhstan has the sixty-second largest population in the world, though its population density is less than six people per square kilometer.

Islam is the largest religion in Kazakhstan, followed by Russian Orthodox Christianity. By tradition the Kazaks are Sunni Muslims, and the Russians are Russian Orthodox. According to a 2009 national census, approximately seventy percent of Kazakhstan’s population is Muslim. The southern region of the country has the highest concentration of self-identified practising Muslims. Less than twenty-five percent of the population of Kazakhstan is Russian Orthodox, including ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians. Other Christian groups include Roman Catholics and Protestants. Other religious groups include Judaism, Hindus and Hare Krishnas, Buddhists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.



Fig. 3. Grazing horses near Balkhash Lake.

2. The Geography of Kazakhstan

GIAN LUCA BONORA

The Republic of Kazakhstan, with an area of about 2.7 million square kilometers, is the ninth largest country in the world, about the same size as all of Western Europe. It borders on Russia to the north, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan to the south, China to the east, and the Caspian Sea and southern Russia to the west.

There is a wide variation of landscapes within Kazakhstan: vast, low plains, some of which are below sea level; plains alternating with high mountain chains in the area around the Caspian Sea; stone and sand deserts flanked by lakes that are as large as seas; and the interminable grass-covered uplands, hills, and prairies of the steppe. These are only a few of Kazakhstan's most representative geographical features, its natural ones. Human activity has also shaped the region over the course of the millennia. In fact the southern portion of the Aral Sea has nearly disappeared; a large zone of central Kazakhstan, the area around Semipalatinsk, is still feeling the effects of radiation from underground and aboveground testing done in the past; and large tracts of semi-desert steppe became uninhabited after rivers and reservoirs dried up.

About half of Kazakhstan's territory consists in low, hilly uplands which lie between 300 and 600 meters above sea level. About one third is plains and lowlands, while one fifth of the territory is covered by mountain chains that rise about 1000 meters above sea level and one tenth by high, perennially snow-covered mountain peaks.

Kazakhstan is bordered by the Caspian Sea, the Caspian basin, and the Volga River to the west, the plains of southern Siberia to the north, and the tall peaks of the Altai, reaching a maximum of 4506 meters in height (Mount Belukha), and the Tien Shan Mountains to the east and southeast. It is here that three large lakes—Balkhash, Zaysan, and Alakol—are situated, each of which has distinct geographical characteristics. The south of the country is ringed by the Turan depression, and contains the valley of the Ili River, which flows into Kazakhstan from China, and the valleys of the Chu and Talas Rivers, which flow in from Kyrgyzstan. The southeastern area of the republic, bordered on the north by these three lakes and on the south by the Tien Shan

ridge, is called Semirech'e (Zhetysu in Kazakh), the "land of seven rivers", because it is crossed by seven rivers of which the Ili is the most important.

The peaks in the Tien Shan rise from 4000 to 5000 meters above sea level. The highest is Khan Tengri, with an elevation of close to 7000 meters. Northwest of the Tien Shan lie the Chu-Ili Mountains, whose tallest peak is 1294 meters, and the Karatau Mountains, where some points are over 2000 meters above sea level.

CLIMATE

Stretching across the center of the Eurasian continent, thousands of kilometers from oceans and large seas, Kazakhstan has a continental climate. Average winter temperatures in the north of the country range from 0 to 1°C, while in the south they are generally around 10°C. Temperatures can vary greatly: up to 40°C in the north, and about 33°C in the south. The coldest month is February, when the average temperature in the north is about -10°C, while in the south it stays at about -1°C. In July, the hottest month, the average temperature is 20°C in the north and 30°C in the south.

Average rainfall is extremely low: slightly over 300 millimeters a year in the north, while some desert areas in the south get barely 100 millimeters. There is slightly more rainfall at higher altitudes (400 millimeters), while in the mountains, which remain snow-covered all year round, there can be up to 1000 millimeters of snow per year. Nearly all Kazakhstan is swept by strong winds, and hurricanes, especially in the spring and autumn, are not uncommon.

RIVERS

There are seven rivers of over 1000 kilometers in length (the Irtysh, Syr Darya, Ural, Ishim, Tobol, Ili, and Chu), while nine are between 500 and 1000 kilometers (the Sarysu, Nura, Turgai, Emba, Sagiz, Ilek, Bolshoy Uzen', Irgiz, and Uil). Nearly all of them are torrential, in other words they transport about ninety percent of their annual flow in a period of a few weeks in the spring.

LAKES

There are 48,000 lakes in Kazakhstan. Lakes cover about forty percent of the region to the east of the Tobol River. Many medium-sized lakes

are also located along the banks of the Irtysh River and in the mountains around the city of Kokshetau.

Most of Kazakhstan's lakes are either medium sized or large. They are subject to sudden changes in water level, which varies with the seasons and from year to year. There are both freshwater and saltwater lakes: the former mainly in the steppe, in the mountains and in the large river valleys; the latter in deserts and in ecological niches in the semi-desert steppe.

THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

Moving across Kazakhstan from north to south, one encounters a succession of natural zones: first sylvo-steppe (or forest steppe), then true steppe, semi-desert steppe, and finally desert. Each of these ecological niches extends for thousands of kilometers from east to west and for hundreds from north to south. In each niche the climate, relief features, sediments, and vegetation differ and give rise to natural landscapes of breathtaking variety.

Much of the sylvo-steppe is found in the far north of the country. It occupies a mere four percent of Kazakhstan's surface and is its coldest region. Average temperatures in February hover around -10°C , while in June the average is 19°C . The flat land of the sylvo-steppe is crossed by the Irtysh, Ishim, and Tobol Rivers and there are numerous lakes and ponds. Where the forest gives way to treeless plains with fertile soil, fields of wheat and other cereal crops stretch as far as the eye can see.

As one gradually moves south, the forest-steppe turns into the true steppe that covers part of northern Kazakhstan, the plains of the Turgai region, and most of the zone of central Kazakhstan known as *melkosopchnik*, for its low hills. These, together with plain, are the most prominent land forms, although there are also mountain ranges such as the Kokshetau, Karkaralinsk, Kent, and Bayanaul which rise slightly more than 1000 meters above sea level. Winters in the steppe are harsh, while summers are moderately warm. Average temperatures in February hover around -16°C , in July 21°C . From November to early April a 25- to 30-centimeter-thick blanket of snow covers the ground. Over the centuries inhabitants of these zones engaged in forms of agriculture which did not require the use of irrigation, but because of its dependence on weather conditions did not assure dependable yields. Countless species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs grow on central Kazakhstan's rocky terrain. These include *tavolga*, a plant

in the *Rosaceae* family, *kuranga*, or steppe grass, fringed wormwood (*polin'*), and *tipchak*, a variety of thyme.

To the south of the steppe ecological niche, the semi-desert steppe, also called the pre-desert steppe, begins. It stretches from the 50th parallel north to the 47th to 48th parallel south and includes the entire plains region that borders on the Caspian Sea, the southern zone of central Kazakhstan, the banks of the Emba River, the southern part of the Turgai plains, and a few other areas. The land forms include plains, hills, and low mountains. The climate of the semi-desert steppe is dry, with a typically continental climate. Winters are cold, with an average temperature of -14°C in February, while summers are hot: the average in July is 23°C but there are days when the temperature can reach peaks of 40°C . Most rainfall occurs between late spring and early summer.

A few kilometers north of the 47th parallel, the desert zone begins. It extends eastward, to Kazakhstan's southern border, reaching the southeastern zones of the high Altai and Tien Shan mountain ranges. It is a plains region with some hills that barely rise above the level of the surrounding land, a dry zone with annual rainfall of less than 200 millimeters, in some areas less than 100 millimeters. Most of this rain falls within the space of a few months, from late spring to early summer. Evaporation is ten to twelve times higher than total annual rainfall. As is typical of deserts, there is very little snow in winter and summers are dry and very hot. In this vast extension of land, both latitudinally and longitudinally, there are sizeable differences in climate from east to west and from north to south. Average temperatures in February go from $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the west to -15°C in the east and from -4°C in the north to $+16^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the south. July is warm throughout the area, with temperatures fluctuating between 24° and 26°C , reaching 29°C in the far south. Few animals live in the desert and most of those that do must protect themselves from the suffocating summer heat by remaining inside their burrows during the day and coming out only at night. There are reptiles, including a poisonous snake, the *shitomordnik* (*Microvipera lebetina*), tortoises, and lizards. In the desert of Kyzyl Kum it is possible to encounter the desert monitor lizard (*Varanus*), some of which reach 1.5 meters in length. There are also large herds of *djeiran* antelope, insufficiently protected from illegal hunting. There are also birds of prey and rodents, two of the key elements in the desert's food chain. Both white-headed and brown-headed eagles, with wingspreads of two meters or more, circle above the deserts of Kyzyl Kum, Ustyurt, and Moyynkum, as do other birds of prey which build their nests atop saxaul (or saksaul) bushes (*Haloxylon ammodendron*).

THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS

At the feet of the Altai, Tien Shan, and Tarbagatai mountain ranges, there is a vast extension of semi-desert steppe that is somewhat different from the zones just described. It lies between 400 and 600 meters above sea level, has heavy rainfall (concentrated in spring and autumn), and very fertile soil. Agriculture making extensive use of irrigation has thrived. Cotton fields, vineyards, and apple orchards are found in the warmer regions, where non-irrigated land is used for pasturage. Above the semi-desert mountainous terrain begins. On the ridges of the lower mountains, the ecological niche consists in rocky terrain and alpine meadows, while the tops of the higher mountains remain covered by snow and ice all year round.

Southeastern Kazakhstan extends along the southern edge of the Tien Shan, two Chinese words that mean “celestial mountains”, whose Kazakh-language name is Tengri Tau. Mount Khan Tengri (7010 meters) marks the border between China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Forests of spruce, ash, larch, and juniper form an ideal habitat for lynx, wolves, boar, squirrels, chinchillas, marmots, and brown bear. In the spring and summer the higher meadows (above 2000 meters) are covered with wild flowers and small trees: iris, edelweiss, wild roses, and cornelian cherry trees.

Kazakhstan’s eastern border, which it shares with China, consists in a series of mountain chains that culminate in the Altai, where some peaks are over 4000 meters. On their western and northwestern slopes, there are conifer forests of Siberian fir trees, Moscow spruce, and cedars, while on the southern and southeastern sides of the mountains there are forests of light-colored conifers such as larch and pine and thickets of cedar and juniper bushes. The grassy meadows are dotted with wild flowers: anemones, geraniums, asters, heart’s ease, snapdragons, and gentian. The only vegetation in the mountain tundra above this zone are mosses and lichens.

Kazakhstan’s mountains are a true paradise for birdwatchers. There are hundreds of species, not only birds of prey, like the steppe eagle represented on the country’s flag, or the bearded vulture, but many other endemic birds as well: the spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*), the Eurasian capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus uralensis*), and the Himalayan snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*).

3. Akmola Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA and ZHANAR JAMPEISSOVA



Fig. 4. Map of Akmola Region.

3.1 ASTANA, THE CAPITAL

Astana (the Kazakh word for “capital”) lies at the heart of the Eurasian continent and is Kazakhstan’s second largest city (after Almaty), with an estimated population of 752,000 (official figures for November 2008). It is located in the north–central part of the republic, in the Akmola Region, though administratively separate from the rest of the Region. It stands on the Ishim River in the flat, semi-desert steppe region which covers most of the country’s territory.

Since 1997, when it became the new national capital, it has not only been the administrative center of sovereign Kazakhstan, but also a symbol of the country’s achievements after independence. The government embarked upon an ambitious architectural project, involving new construction on a vast scale. World-famous architects such as Kisho Kurokawa and Norman Foster were called in and given the task of blending the refined precepts of Oriental art and architecture with European and American architectural style. Construction of the new city was actively promoted by Nursultan Nazarbaev, president of



Fig. 5. A riverside walkway on the banks of the Ishim River, Astana.

Kazakhstan, and in December 2009 Astana celebrated its twelfth anniversary as the nation's capital, having taken its place alongside other modern capital cities. The city offers both residents and visitors a range of modern theaters and concert halls, monuments and museums, a riverside walkway on the banks of the Ishim, large parks, entertainment facilities, good hotels, bars and restaurants. Soviet-era buildings are being removed and replaced with new structures, and construction sites dot the city landscape.

While the old city, on the right bank of the river, is indistinguishable from other cities in northern Kazakhstan and southern Siberia, the new city on the river's left bank has been organized entirely to highlight an alignment of large, visually striking buildings and the symmetry of ministerial office buildings. The official objective of the building program, to be completed in 2030, is to rival ultra-modern Asian cities, such as Dubai.

In the succession of buildings, moving from east to west, the first on our path is the Presidential Palace, behind which the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (see pp. 51–52), where President Nazarbaev organizes a Congress of World and Traditional Religions every three years, can be seen across the Ishim. We then arrive at a semicircle of ministerial buildings, the Bayterek Tower (see pp. 49–51), the National Science Library, the Nur-Astana Mosque (see p. 49), a circular piazza, the headquarters of KazMunayGaz (the state oil and gas company), and finally Khan Shatyr, under construction at the time this volume is being written. This colossal tent-shaped building will be approximately 150 meters tall and will house not only restaurants, cafés, and other leisure facilities, but also an artificial lake where thousands of people can swim year round, even when outside on the surrounding steppe the temper-

ature plummets to -30°C . A specially designed transparent plastic dome will make it possible for heat to be absorbed from the sun's rays even in the depths of winter because Astana is the second coldest capital in the world (after Ulan Bator in Mongolia) with temperatures remaining below freezing for about six months a year and lows of -35° to -40°C common in winter. Overall it has a continental climate with moderately hot summers, but can become extremely hot and muggy.

History

In 1820, the Russian journal *Sibirskiy Vestnik* ("The Siberian Herald") published the diary of the engineer Ivan Shangin, who, while exploring the beds of the Ishim and Nura Rivers, discovered the ruins of an ancient settlement. In 1999, almost 180 years later, archaeological excavations headed by K. A. Akishev and M. G. Khabdulina began to explore the site, called Ak-Zhol (the White Track), located fifteen kilometers from Astana. Bozok, the early settlement Akishev and his team excavated, was situated on the shores of the lake of the same name, on what was a secondary branch of the Silk Road at the time of the Kipchak kingdom (tenth–eleventh century). Archaeologists think the town served as a military outpost and was the court of the Kipchak khans. According to some historical sources it had a caravanserai and was a transit center, known as Karaotkel, for goods traveling along the left bank of the Ishim River (Yessil in Kazakh). Medieval Bozok and Karaotkel can be considered to be the direct ancestors of modern Akmolinsk/Astana.

The tsarist government built a large fortress in 1829–1830, which was given the name Akmolinsk, on the site where present-day Astana is located. The stronghold was conquered and razed by Kenesary Kasyrov, leader of the largest Kazakh revolt against Russian colonialism in the nineteenth century. After the rebellion was quelled, the city was rebuilt in the shape of a polyhedron with five towers. As time passed retired soldiers, merchants, and craftsmen settled there, mainly in the western part of the city.

It is known that by 1856 there was a Cossack school, a madrasa, a mosque, and a wooden Russian Orthodox church inside the fort. In 1862 the Russian government issued a decree making Akmolinsk a town. Merchants continued to arrive and by 1869 the population had grown to about 5000, while in 1910 there were 13,000 inhabitants. In 1898 there were twelve Orthodox churches, twelve parish-run primary schools, and several secondary schools.

In the Soviet era, the city became the major railway junction in the

north-central part of present-day Kazakhstan, as well as an important mining center. During World War II, about 70,000 Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Russians were evacuated from battle zones in the west of the Soviet Union and relocated in the Akmolinsk region. The people of Akmolinsk did much to assist the war effort: money was collected for a defense fund; food parcels and winter clothing were sent to the front; the wounded and disabled were given assistance, as were the families of soldiers killed in battle.

Gulags were built in the Akmolinsk region. Outside Astana there stood ALZHIR, a Russian acronym for the Akmolinsk Camp for Wives of Traitors of the Motherland, one of the most notorious in the Gulag system, where the wives of men considered “enemies of the people” were interned by the government under Stalin. Many Volga Germans were deported to the region and used as forced laborers to turn large unproductive areas into fertile farmland.

In the 1950s, the city became the capital of the Soviet Virgin Lands Territory (*Tselinny Krai*), under Nikita Khrushchev’s Virgin Lands program, whose objective was to make Kazakhstan into one of the Soviet Union’s largest grain producers, second only to Ukraine. People arriving from Almaty, Russia, and Ukraine were set to work to build settlements and grow crops on formerly unproductive land. The city was renamed Tselinograd in 1961.

After Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991, the city and the region were renamed Akmola. Often translated as “white tombstone”, the name actually means “holy place” or “holy shrine”.

In 1994, when it was decided that the city would be the future capital of the newly independent country, it was once more renamed, called Astana, after the capital was officially moved there from Almaty in 1997. The reasons given for the move included the risk of seismic activity in Almaty, insufficient room for expansion, and proximity to international borders. Additionally, parts of northern Kazakhstan are populated primarily by ethnic Russians, which raised fears of possible irredentist activity. Moving the capital may have been an attempt to increase its ties to the rest of the country. The decision was also justified in terms of the geopolitical location of the city at the center of the country, at the hub of its major rail and road networks, and so the availability of transport and telecommunications infrastructure, and land for capital investment and development.

At the same time, it is true that Astana is virtually isolated in the middle of the Kazakh steppe and its harsh winter climate could hamper the social and economic development planned for the city and sur-

rounding region. Astana has several universities but most of the country's historical, geographic, and demographic archives have remained in Almaty. Most of the country's scientists, researchers, and arts professionals continue to live and work in Almaty, which remains the cultural capital of Kazakhstan.

However, the population of Astana more than doubled between 1997, when it became the country's capital, and 2007, when there were over 750,000 inhabitants, and is estimated to top one million by 2030. Migrant workers, legal and illegal, have arrived from elsewhere in Kazakhstan and from neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Astana is a magnet for young, career-oriented professionals. This has changed the city's demographics, bringing more ethnic Kazakhs to a city that formerly had a Slav majority.

3.2 PRESIDENTIAL CENTER OF CULTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

A cultural and scientific center opened in 2000, its purpose is to circulate information about the scientific and cultural inheritance of the Kazakh people and their achievements in the arts. Inside the imposing white building topped by a blue cupola, which is its signature feature and creates the impression of a yurt, there are a museum, a library, and conference facilities. The Presidential Cultural Center is situated on the corner of two major avenues, Republic and Baraev, at 2 Republic Avenue.

The museum occupies much of the space in the five-story building. On the ground floor (here and elsewhere in the east called the first floor), there is an enormous atrium which displays a collection of President Nazarbaev's memorabilia—gifts he has received and photographs of important cultural events and state visits in which he participated. Also on this floor is an ethnography room with jewelry and traditional Kazakh clothing, where it is possible to see an exceptionally beautiful yurt decorated with brightly colored rugs. The second floor is devoted to archaeology and the ancient history of Kazakhstan. Two areas are of particular interest. In the one devoted to the culture of nomad peoples, exhibits are arranged in chronological order, starting from the Saka tribes of the first millennium B.C., and proceeding to the Zhety Asar of the Syr Darya delta, the nomadic Huns in the second to the third century A.D., and the Turkic culture that spread across the steppe between the sixth and the eleventh century A.D. The other area is entirely devoted to exhibits of gold, silver, and bronze ornaments and utensils made

by the Saka, with numerous items from the tomb of the so-called “Golden Man” in Issyk (see pp. 92–95), as well as funerary goods found in other burial mounds. Another exhibition space on the second floor is devoted to the medieval period of Kazakhstan’s history. There are three-dimensional reconstructions with explanatory panels of some of the region’s important monuments, such as the citadel at Kulan (seventh–tenth century A.D.; see pp. 115–116), the Aisha Bibi Mausoleum (eleventh–thirteenth century A.D.; see pp. 110–112), the baths at Taraz (tenth–twelfth century A.D.), the Mausoleums of Zhochi Khan (thirteenth century A.D.; see pp. 60–62) and of Aristan Bab (ninth–tenth century A.D.; see pp. 142–144), as well as an enormous model of the famous Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi Mausoleum (see pp. 134–138) and one of the Beket Ata Mausoleum (see pp. 197–199).

The third-floor exhibits cover the history of Kazakhstan from the fifteenth century onward. On exhibit are documents, letters, reconstructions, maps, everyday objects, arms and clothing concerning the peoples who inhabited Kazakhstan, with some display cases devoted entirely to the presentation of the life and work of some of the country’s most important thinkers, for example, K. Satpaev, A. Ermekov, Sh. Ch. Chokin, K. Mynbaev, K. A. Akishev, and A. T. Kaydarov. On exhibit on this floor there is the Tasmagambetov Collection, a unique set of masterpieces of fine and applied art from Kazakhstan, with a total of over 1500 items, mainly from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The fourth floor is devoted to the city of Astana—its history, life there at present, and plans for the future—while the fifth, top floor, houses a gallery of modern art. Another important sector of the Presidential Cultural Center is a collection of 315 traditional Kazakh musical instruments, donated to the museum by the music professor Bolat Sarybaev. The library has approximately 700,000 books, written in over forty of the world’s languages. The most valuable part of the library is its rare book room, established in 1992, with a collection of over 3125 seventeenth- to early twentieth-century volumes. The concert hall hosts performances and events intended to extend musical and artistic culture to all Kazakhs.

3.3 MUSEUM OF THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

The Museum of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is housed in President Nursultan Nazarbaev’s birthplace and childhood home, at 11 Beibetshilik Street (tel: +7 7172 751214). Room settings



Fig. 6. The imposing building of the Presidential Center of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana.

exhibit the family's furniture and household objects that were in the house when President Nazarbaev lived there. The museum's collection currently consists of over 60,000 items, including manuscripts, printed materials, video and photo documents, works of fine and applied art, and personal belongings and papers of President Nazarbaev, as well as a collection of awards he has received.

3.4 SEYFULLIN MUSEUM

The museum at 20 Auezov Street is dedicated to the statesman, poet, teacher, writer, and philosopher Saken Seyfullin (1894–1938). Opened in 1988 in the wooden house built in the 1800s in which Seyfullin was born, the museum exhibits chronicle Seyfullin's life from birth until his death at the age of forty-four. The collection contains over 5000 items.

3.5 CATHEDRAL OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

The most important district of the Roman Catholic Church in Kazakhstan is the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Archdiocese of Maria Santissima (Mary Most Holy) in Astana. It was first created as the Apostolic Administration of Astana on July 7, 1999, by Pope John Paul II and subsequently it was elevated to the Archdiocese of Maria Santissima in Astana on May 17, 2003, with the suffragan sees of Atyrau, Karaganda, and Santissima Trinità in Almaty.

The mother church of the archdiocese and thus the seat of its arch-



Fig. 7. The Cathedral of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Astana.

bishop is the Cathedral of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. It is located on Tashenova Street 3. The first service here was celebrated in 1980, even if throughout the 1980s religious services were occasional and closely tied to the private enterprise of some pastors and vicars coming from the Baltic republics. In 1995, the Apostolic Administrator for Kazakhstan, Bishop Jan Pavel Lenga, established the construction of the first church on the bank of the Akbulak River, while the cathedral was built on the same place in 1999.

3.6 LUTHERAN CHURCH

The birth of the German Lutheran religious community of Astana is closely tied to Stalin's deportations. After the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin ordered approximately one million Germans in the European part of the Soviet Union to be deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. In 1956 the first Evangelical Lutheran congregation was registered in Akmolinsk/Tselinograd (today, Astana). For ten years it functioned as the only legal German Lutheran church until two Siberian congregations were organized in 1965. The Lutheran church is one of the few historical buildings still present in Astana. It belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan (ELCRK) congregation, which was the first in the entire Soviet Union to be registered following the years of Stalinist oppression. It

thus does not only carry great historical and emotional significance for the congregation, but for the ELCRK as a whole.

3.7 NUR-ASTANA MOSQUE

The Nur-Astana Central Mosque, opened in 2005, combines the elegance of traditional Muslim architecture with glass, concrete, steel, and granite. In a space of almost 4000 square meters, 5000 believers can pray in the inner rooms, while the square in front of the mosque can accommodate another 2000. The forty-meter-tall cupola represents Muhammad's age when God was first revealed to him, while the sixty-three-meter-tall minaret is a reference to the age at which the Prophet died.



Fig. 8. The Nur-Astana Mosque, Astana.

3.8 BAYTEREK

Bayterek is the name of the monument that is the symbol of Astana. It is an observation tower which stands at the center of the city's political, presidential, and ministerial district, on Vodno-Zelen Boulevard, on the left bank of the Ishim River. The idea for the tower came from the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, while the project was brought to completion by Akmyrz I. Rustambekov, representing the Union of Architects of Kazakhstan. The Bayterek Tower consists of a ninety-seven-meter-tall metal shaft, widening at the base and top, where a sphere measuring twenty-two meters in diameter houses a bar, a restaurant, and an imprint in gold of President Nazarbaev's right hand at the center of the main panoramic hall. The sphere is reached by two high-speed elevators inside the cylin-



Fig. 9. Bayterek, an observation tower and a symbolic “Tree of Life” in the centre of Astana.

der. From an architectural point of view, the sphere recalls Fuller’s geodesic dome. The tall, sphere-topped tower, one of the city’s most popular tourist sites, is meant to represent a nest resting in a tree’s branches, hidden in its foliage and protected by it. According to the Kazakh cultural tradition, it represents the universal roof, covering humanity and all its goods, a sort of nest where people can find shelter, comfort, and protection. The sphere is the hinge to which human life is attached and the locus on which it turns and develops. The tradition can be traced back to the cosmological representations of the ancient Turks who believed that the Bayterek was the staff of life, symbol of the three worlds (the subterranean, the terrestrial, and the celestial), as well as the symbol of the three phases of life (past, present, and future). In their folk-



Fig. 10. Bayterek at night with its floodlit fountains; by day it is surrounded by office blocks, exciting new architecture, flower beds, and trees.

tales, it is the mythical bird Samruk, which laid its golden egg in the branches of this tree, that created all life and is itself a symbol of life. The tower was constructed in keeping with the principles of modern architecture, as evidenced by its height and the combined use of metal and glass both as construction materials and decorative elements. The Bayterek Tower rapidly became the symbol of the city of Astana and of independent Kazakhstan.

3.9 PALACE OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

The pyramid-shaped Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (also translated as Palace of Accord) is situated on the edge of the city of Astana's new directional and administrative district, directly behind the official residence of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at a short distance from the ministerial office district. It was officially inaugurated on September 1, 2006, the opening day of a forum called the First Congress of World Leaders of Traditional Religions. Designed by British architect Sir Norman Foster, the pyramid is sixty-two meters tall (the height of a twenty-five-story building) and rests on a square base, each of whose sides measures sixty-two meters. The overall volume of the complex is 25,500 cubic meters. Entry to the pyramid is through a long corridor, which is partly below ground level and enables visitors to go inside the low, artificial earth hill on which the monument was built. It is made of stone and stained glass with an optic-mirror system that allows sunlight to filter in through the glass tip



Fig. 11. The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation was built by Sir Norman Foster's firm in 2006.



Fig. 12. The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation was officially inaugurated on September 1, 2006, the opening day of a three-yearly forum called the Congress of World Leaders of Traditional Religions.

and shine down to the structure's nine floors. Inside the Palace, there is a 1500-seat opera theater, as well as the National Museum of Culture, where it is possible to see ornaments that decorated the clothing and conical cap found in the tomb of the so-called "Golden Man" at Issyk. There are also exhibition rooms and concert halls, a library, a center for the scientific study of world religions, and prayer rooms for use by members of thirty-two of the world's religious denominations. The top floor, designed to be used as a conference hall, can seat 200 people and in 2006 was the venue for the forum where the world's religious leaders met. The walls of this congress hall consist entirely of large windows decorated with images of doves, framed in blue and yellow, the colors of Kazakhstan's flag.

4. Karaganda Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 13. Map of Karaganda Region.

4.1 KARAGANDA

The city of Karaganda is the capital of the central Kazakhstan region. The city's name is likely to have derived from the caragana (Siberian pea) tree (*Caragana arborescens*), which grows throughout the area. It is situated approximately 220 kilometers south of Astana and 1000 kilometers north of Almaty. With a population of 423,700 inhabitants (2003 figures), it is the fourth largest city in the country, after Almaty, Astana, and Shymkent. In recent years the population has decreased by about 100,000 as the majority of its Volga German inhabitants left for Germany.

In the 1940s nearly seventy percent of the population was German, descendants of the Volga Germans who on Stalin's orders were deported to Siberia and central Kazakhstan when Hitler invaded Poland, and were interned in hard-labor camps entirely on the basis of their origins. Karaganda was the site of one of the principal gulags of the Stalinist era. KarLag (all the hard-labor camps in the area around Karaganda) was set up in order to furnish the Karaganda area's many coal mines with a workforce composed of prisoners. All Volga German scholars and scientists were interned. What ensued was a rebellion

against the intellectual death of penal labor in the mines. With the few resources at their command, the prisoners managed to hold concerts and put on plays to celebrate holidays. There was even a KarLag ballet company. Many of the scholars who were deported here stayed on in Karaganda even after the gulag was closed in 1959, making a significant contribution to the city's cultural growth in the 1960s and 1970s. The city was founded in 1926 and it was prisoners who built the houses, public buildings, shops, and other infrastructure that was needed for them to be able to live there. Today little is left of this early twentieth-century city. A new city has been built a few kilometers south of where the old one stood.

Although there are numerous monuments in the city, none of them has historic or artistic value. Worth a visit are the city's three museums, which are briefly described here. The Museum of the Karaganda Region (Yerubaev Street 38) is important for understanding the history of the city and the hard-labor camps built in the area. The museum has three sections: one on history, archaeology, and ethnography; one on contemporary history; and one on the resources of the territory that surround the city. The city's Museum of Art (Bukhar Zhirou Street 33), although opened only twenty-one years ago, already has a collection of over 8000 works of art, some by well-known Kazakh artists of the past. It also has a remarkable collection of bookplates. The Ecological Museum of Karaganda (Bukhar Zhirou Street 47) is dedicated to protecting the environment and its displays include objects gathered from the weapons testing sites in Semipalatinsk and Sary Shagan (near Karaganda), as well as missile pieces that fell in the Kazakh steppe. The museum wishes to focus on current ecological issues and has an entire section devoted to the history of the Baykonur Cosmodrome and the ecological damage it caused.

Karaganda is the principal center of the Catholic religion in Kazakhstan. The reason for this lies in the 1930s when the KarLag system imprisoned numerous priests who, following their liberation, asked the Soviet authorities for permission to continue to live and work in this city. Amongst them we must recall W. Bukowinski and A. Chira, who helped to organize a clandestine system of assistance and Catholic religious inspiration. For more than thirty years Chira worked as a volunteer ambulance driver, while he secretly operated as a teacher for many young people, including future priests. Since the 1960s and 1970s many official documents have been found in which reference is made to a Christian community, mainly located in the Maykuduk district, where many citizens of German, Russian, and northern Cau-

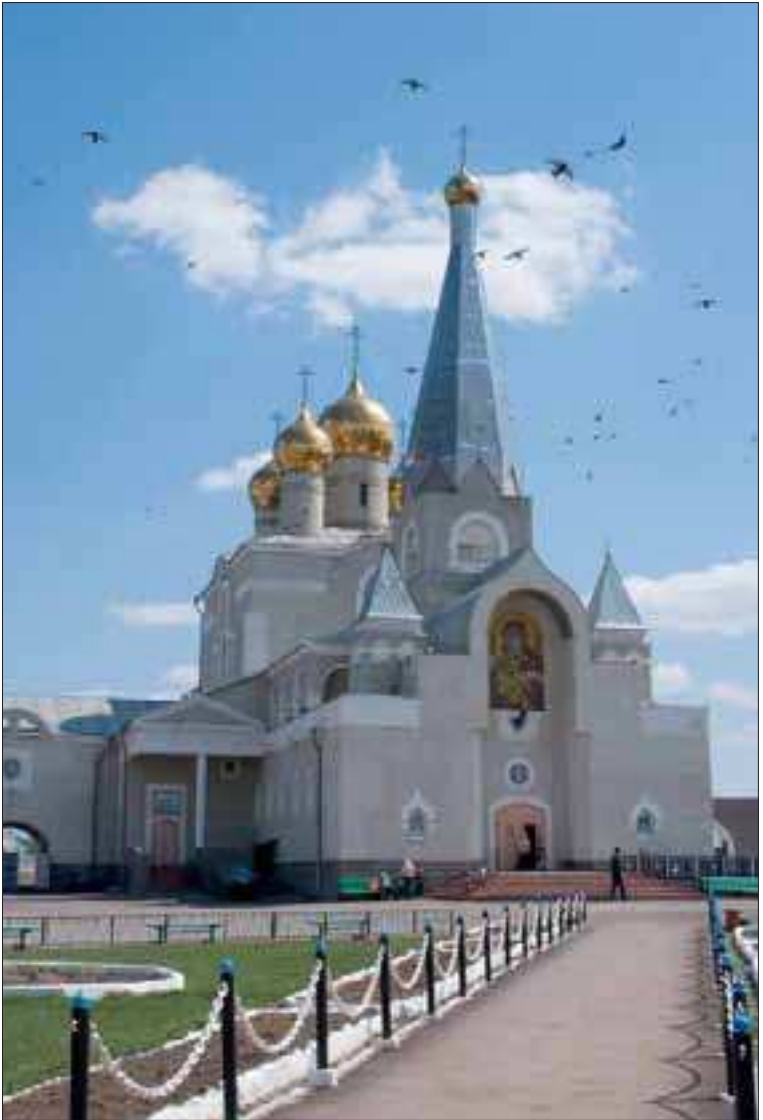


Fig. 14. The Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Karaganda.

casian origin lived. Only in 1978, after infinite disputes between the Soviet authorities and the entire citizenship of Karaganda, was the construction of the first church of Karaganda completed. It was dedicated to Saint Joseph and stands at 23 Oktyabrskaya Street. It looked like a normal house, without any religious symbols on the exterior. In 1991, immediately following the perestroika, Pope John Paul II named P. Lenga Apostolic Administrator of Karaganda, for the Catholic community of the Latin rite in Kazakhstan. Although the headquarters was in this city, P. Lenga also carried out his duties and obligations for

the other four ex-Soviet republics in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). In 1999 when the Apostolic Administration of the city of Astana was constituted, Karaganda became secondary with respect to Astana.

There is one cathedral in the city, dedicated to Saint Joseph as mentioned above and restructured to look more like a church at the end of the 1990s, and two churches: one dedicated to Mary Mother of the Church (15 Orlova Street) and the second to Our Lady of Fatima (32 Prospekt Shakterov). Since 1997 there has also been a seminary for spiritual training, the only one in Central Asia, dedicated to Mary Mother of the Church (3 Vostok Street). There are two Greek Orthodox Catholic churches attended mainly by citizens of Ukrainian origin: the church of the Intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God (3 Pischevaya Street) and the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary (3 Samarkandskaya Street).



Fig. 15. Map of central Kazakhstan, highlighting the main sites between Karaganda and Zhezkazgan.

4.2 MAUSOLEUM OF ZHUBAN ANA

The Mausoleum of Zhuban Ana is a twelfth- to thirteenth-century architectural monument situated in the Zhana Arka district of Karaganda Region, twelve kilometers northwest of the Mynadyr (or Monadyr) railway station, located 189 kilometers up the road that crosses the Sarysu valley between Karaganda and Zhezkazgan. The mausoleum, built on the right bank of the river, is a protected site under the Republic of Kazakhstan's laws for the safeguarding and conservation of architectural monuments.

The first written description of the monument is to be found in P. I.

Rychkov's work *Orenburg's Topography*, published in 1762. Additional information and a drawing is provided by Ch. Valikhanov, who wrote in 1863 that the Zhuban Ana tomb was venerated by Kazakhs because it was the burial place of someone they honored as a holy person. Other writers mention this funerary structure, including S. B. Bronevskii and A. I. Levshin in 1830, A. K. Krasovskii in 1868, and I. A. Castagné in 1910. Research done by A. Kh. Margulan after World War II led to the hypothesis that the structure was built by the Kipchaks.

Zhuban Ana was a judicious, farsighted woman. Legend narrates that one day an entire herd of horses was lost in the steppe, although the herdsman returned to his village safe and sound. Zhuban Ana tried to reassure everyone, saying that the horses would return on their own, but no one listened to what she said. Many villagers sought in vain to find the lost horses. After several days had passed the horses returned to the village of their own accord and everyone was obliged to recognize the wisdom of Zhuban Ana, who from that time forth became the personification of maternity for the entire village.

The one-room mausoleum has a central vaulted cupola which is hemispherical. Its fifty-centimeter-thick foundation stones have stuccoed alabaster ornamentation on the interior side. The structure is made of bricks measuring 27 by 27 by 6 centimeters and has a nearly square floor plan (six meters per side). Its walls are approximately two meters in depth. Its overall height is four meters.



Fig. 16. Map of the eastern part of Karaganda Region, highlighting the main sites.

4.3 RUINS OF THE PALACE OF KYZYL-KENT

This architectural monument, dated as having been built during the period of Zhungar rule over the steppe (fourteenth century), is situ-

ated in the Kent Mountains, in a narrow valley that surrounds it on all sides. It is known among local people as the “Palace of Kent”.

A number of scholars have visited and described the ruins. The first was G. F. Miller in 1760, while the next was V. Nikitin, who excavated at several points on the site in 1895. There are also descriptions of the palace by A. Levshin and I. A. Castagné. In 1986 and 1987, new archaeological excavations were carried out, after which the complex was included on the list of monuments safeguarded by the state.

The complex is not very large. The palace has a square floor plan measuring approximately eleven meters per side, with a series of small rooms enclosed within four walls. These narrow spaces have no entryways from the exterior. Their extremely poor state of conservation (even by the end of the nineteenth century the building was virtually a ruin) do not allow us to reconstruct the original building’s general floor plan.

An entrance to the palace was created in the southern wall, under an overhang formed by a balcony which rested on six 2.80-meter-tall wooden pillars, which in turn held up seventeen thick joists. Battens were placed in the interstices between the joists, and over that slabs of stone were laid. There are still some wall fragments left around the balcony–overhang. There was a window above it, while on the inside of the wall, at a height of about 2.2 meters, four thin wooden beams, which may be the remains of the second-story flooring, are still visible.

There were a number of other buildings of different sizes nearby, constructed to serve a variety of purposes. The complex also contains several tombs, which on first glance do not seem to belong to the tradition of Kazakh funerary structures. It is in fact possible to date them to the same period the palace was built, during the period of Zhungar dominion of the Kazakh steppe.

It has been argued by several scholars, most cogently by I. Chekanskii, that the complex may have been a Buddhist sanctuary. Others maintain that it was in fact a Lamaist monastery in which a Buddhist sanctuary was located. Although the latter interpretation has been accepted by most of the academic world, the study and analysis of the architectural structures, surviving decorations which ornamented the palace, and the archaeological finds brought to light during excavations in the palace and the area around it, do not allow us to fully confirm this fascinating hypothesis.



Fig. 17. Map of Karaganda Region, highlighting the main sites around the city of Zhezkazgan.

4.4 ZHEZKAZGAN

Zhezkazgan (literally, “copper extraction”) is a city in the region of Karaganda in central Kazakhstan. It stands on the shores of two artificial lakes formed by the damming of the Kara-Kingir and Zhezdi Rivers so that water could be provided for farming, industry, and the area’s inhabitants. The two lakes and their river basins stand in sharp contrast to the desolate steppe surrounding them. In the 1920s and 1930s there were still over 3000 nomads living in the steppe, making it the most densely populated area of Kazakhstan. In 2004 the city of Zhezkazgan had a population of about 90,000, while today it has about 100,000, but considering it together with the nearby mining city of Satpaev, the number rises to 150,000, with Kazakh- and Russian-origin majorities and Ukrainian, Volga German, Chechen, Belorussian, and Korean minorities. The city’s growth began in 1939 on the site of a village named Kengir. The factor that most contributed to its expansion and which is still its principal source of income is the exploitation of immense copper deposits. In fact, in 1973, to the southeast of the city a large mining and metallurgical complex was built to work the copper which had previously been shipped elsewhere. Other raw materials that are mined in the area around Zhezkazgan include manganese, iron, and gold. The city’s history is closely tied to K. I. Satpaev, the first president of Kazakhstan’s Academy of Sciences and an outstanding geologist who made many studies of his country. The city is also known for the many Bronze Age settlements in the surrounding area, whose principal ac-

tivity was mining, working, and trading copper minerals, principally malachite and azurite.

The Soviet-era Kengir Gulag, mentioned both in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and Alexander Dolgun's *An American in the Gulag*, was located in Zhezkazgan. This penal labor camp was built to hold 70,000 prisoners but its numbers were always much lower because of the enormous difficulty involved in reaching this remote city in the heart of the Kipchak steppe.

The historical reasons that have made Karaganda the city with the largest Catholic presence in all Kazakhstan are those which have allowed the formation of a tight-knit Christian–Catholic community in Zhezkazgan, which nowadays meets in the church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord (59 Mayakovskogo Street).

Zhezkazgan is not a tourist city, unlike the surrounding area where, as will be described in the pages that follow, there is a wealth of historical, archaeological, and sociocultural evidence of life there in the past. Some of these sites can only be reached in all-terrain vehicles and it is indispensable to have good maps and a compass and to hire a knowledgeable local guide. Gas stations are few and far between outside Zhezkazgan, so it is a good idea to carry a tank of gas in the car.

4.5 MONUMENTS OF ZHOCHI KHAN

One of the largest medieval cities in central Kazakhstan is a monument that is now known by the name of “the Zhochi Khan (or Zhoshi Khan) complex”. It is thought by many scholars to be the ancient city of Orda Bazar, the court of the Zhochi dynasty. It is located in the valley of the Kara-Kingir River, about fifty-five kilometers north-northeast of Zhezkazgan and a short distance to the west of the village of Zhigerli.

According to one legend (for which there is virtually no supporting evidence), the principal mausoleum was erected over the tomb of Zhochi, the eldest son of Genghis Khan (Chinghiz Khan) and father of Batu Khan. The events connected to Zhochi Khan's death and burial are also wrapped in legend. One tradition narrates that he died accidentally, falling from his horse while hunting wild horses. Another attributes his death to a command of his father's, issued because of Zhochi's proud, indomitable character. It is said that Ghengis Khan's fury was so violent that all that remained of Zhochi's body were two fingers, which, when found, were given an honorable burial. In 1946 the archaeological mission of central Kazakhstan brought to light here

a tomb containing a wooden coffin which held a skeleton that was missing a jaw and some fingers.

The architectural complex consists in the Mausoleum of Zhochi Khan, the remains of other medieval mausoleums, and early residential structures which now appear as archaeological deposits of different elevations. Some Kazakh *mazars* lean against the south and southeast walls of the mausoleum.

The mausoleum itself is a massive, powerful structure (9.5 x 7 meters) made of parallelepiped-shaped bricks, with a projecting front, entry door. The eight-meter-high, southwest facing door was covered by a vaulted, conical cupola set on a sixteen-pointed, star-shaped tambour, similar to the one in the Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun (see pp. 112–113). Nothing remains of the upper portion of the cupola. Through a stylistic analysis of the architecture and based on the information in historical sources (Zhochi Khan died in A.D. 1277), the monument has been dated to the years 1228–1230. It was first mentioned in the writings of Khafiz Tanysh, author of the work *Abdulla-name*, who in the 1580s accompanied Shaybanid Abdullah Khan on his military campaign in the Ulytau region.

The outer walls are undecorated and only the portal has an embedded cornice that in the past was ornamented with colored tiles, now



Fig. 18. The Mausoleum of Zhochi Khan, near Zhezkazgan. According to one legend, the building was erected over the tomb of Genghis Khan's eldest son.

lost. The interior of the mausoleum consists of a nearly square single room (5.1 x 5.2 meters), which was entered through a door projecting about 2.2 meters from the outer wall. The niche formed was originally covered with square, glazed, lapis lazuli-colored tiles (4.5 centimeters per side). The outside walls are ornamented with simple decorative motifs, while the inner ones are nearly bare, except for corner arches at the level of the web of the vault. The cupola has two layers of covering. The inner one is hemispherical–conical in shape, while the cone-shaped outer one is covered with lapis lazuli-colored ceramic tiles. Their fragments now lie heaped in mounds around the mausoleum.

The archaeological research done here in the early 1990s identified a settlement from the period of the Golden Horde (thirteenth–fifteenth century A.D.) adjacent to the necropolis. This is considered to have been a military headquarters, where the surrounding mausoleums served as religious buildings.

The excavations carried out in the medieval settlement brought to light the remains of a large residential construction, measuring approximately 300 square meters, inside of which archaeologists were able to identify five different dwellings and several spaces in which the inhabitants stored their own food and fodder for their animals.

4.6 DOMBAUL

An important monument from the pre-Muslim period (probably built between the eighth and ninth centuries A.D.) is located a short distance from the Mausoleum of Zhochi Khan, in the same valley of the Karakingir River. The monument stands on the left bank of the river, about fifty-eight kilometers north-northeast of the city of Zhezkazgan.

Little is known about Dombaul, the person this monument is dedicated to. It was built several centuries before he lived. He is traditionally thought to have been either a musician at the court of Genghis Khan (Chinghiz Khan) or one of the khan's bodyguards. According to another legend, Dombaul was a *gighit* (skilled horseman) and it was he who destroyed the herd of horses responsible for the death of Zhochi Khan, eldest son of the great Mongol warrior and conqueror. The building has a nearly square floor plan (8.9 meters on its north–south sides, 7.9 meters on its east–west sides) and is made of pinkish-gray lamellar sandstone. It is 5.5 meters tall, with walls that are over two meters thick, and resembles a yurt, the dwelling of the nomads of the Eurasian steppe. The entry faces southeast. Both in



Fig. 19. The Mausoleum of Dombaul, in the Kara-Kingir valley, was probably built between the 8th and 9th centuries A.D.

terms of form and the materials used in its construction, the building closely resembles the Mausoleum of Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu and the Daumshar Mausoleum on the Emba River in the Aktobe Region. In the Kazakh language this type of stone burial chamber is called *uytas* (melon). Some can be found in central Kazakhstan, particularly in the Turgai River valley.

The low mounds that surround the Dombaul monument indicate the presence of ancient tombs, now in an advanced state of decay.

Proceeding an additional twenty kilometers up the Kara-Kingir valley, it is possible to visit the vestiges of an early cemetery with three mausoleums. These were built of brick and had projecting vault-covered portals. All that remains of the first are its walls. Traces of a diamond-shaped decorative pattern created by lines of projecting brickwork can still be seen. The inside walls were, instead, made of unbaked brick. The cupola of the second mausoleum is a partial ruin, while the third mausoleum is nearly intact.

There is an interesting five-cupola mausoleum further upriver, about fifty kilometers north of the village of Sary-Kingir, located on the right bank of the Sary-Kingir River, a tributary of the Kara-Kingir.

4.7 MAUSOLEUM OF LABAK

The Mausoleum of Labak is located twenty kilometers southeast of the village of Malshibay in the valley of the Sary-Kingir River, a tributary of the Kara-Kingir. We have no information about who commissioned the mausoleum nor about the person who built it.

It has a rectangular floor plan (8.25 x 7.25 meters), is 6.45 meters tall, and has a cupola-covered portal. It is a single-room structure, built in about 1845. Both its interior and exterior walls are made of unbaked brick covered with baked bricks. The cupola is about 1.5 meters tall and is also made of square bricks. A simple tile frieze and denticulate cornice decorate the upper portion of the principal facade. The same decorative motifs are used on the other three facades, while the masonry has been ornamented with a herringbone pattern. The entrance to the mausoleum is composed of a vault-covered niche and faces southwest. The walls are slightly less than one meter thick.

Ketebay *kumbez* (mausoleum) is located a short distance away from the Mausoleum of Labak and was built in a similar architectural style. Constructed in 1898, it belongs to the category of front-portal, cupola-covered mausoleums.

4.8 MAUSOLEUM OF AYRANBAY

The Mausoleum of Ayransbay, also called “the five-cupola mausoleum”, is located 110 kilometers from Zhezkazgan, and like the two previously described mausoleums is in the Sary-Kingir River valley. It has been listed and safeguarded as a monument of historic and cultural interest since 1949. It is part of a much larger funerary complex that also contains a front-portal *mazar* which was formerly covered by a cupola (now lost) and several funerary enclosures made of stone and unbaked brick, now in an advanced state of decay.

The five-cupola mausoleum was built on a Greek cross using baked brick to cover the unbaked brick core structure. Four of the five cupolas were placed along the arms of the cross, while the fifth, largest one was set over the center of the building. The exterior walls are decorated with a diamond pattern, created by alternating light- and dark-colored bricks. There is a tile frieze with geometric decorative motifs on the upper portion of the walls. There is also a denticulate cornice made of bricks. There is Arabic writing on some of the tiles of the principal facade. The mausoleum measures 9.75 by 8.25 meters and is 6.25 meters in height.

4.9 MAUSOLEUM OF ALASH KHAN

The Mausoleum of Alash Khan, considered one of central Kazakhstan's most important architectural monuments, was probably built in the Oghuz–Kipchak era (tenth–eleventh century A.D.). It stands on a rise overlooking the Kara-Kingir River valley, on the right bank of the riv-

er, about ninety kilometers north of Zhezkazgan. It is a short distance away from the village of Malshibay in the province of Ulytau.

The mausoleum was built entirely of baked red bricks and has a rectangular floor plan (9.73 x 11.9 meters). It culminates in a 2.31-meter-tall hemispherical cupola set on a sixteen-sided tambour. The decorations on the building's side and back walls are worthy of note. The entire mausoleum is approximately ten meters tall. It is entered through a large barrel-shaped vault, typical of twelfth- to fourteenth-century Kazakh religious architecture, then a large two-paneled door (two meters high by 1.2 meters wide). It is not known who the building is dedicated to. It has been suggested that it was constructed over the tomb of Akhmed Khan, who lived in these lands in the fifteenth century. The monument's name includes the word "*alash*", an ancient word of Turkic origin, which means "brothers, relatives, people joined together by family ties". The term is often used to identify unions of Kazakhs who have formed alliances to achieve a common purpose.

The most noteworthy feature of the Mausoleum of Alash Khan is the decoration on its exterior side and back walls, where diagonal lines, created using bricks which project from the wall surface, intersect at right angles forming a diamond pattern. Smaller diamonds are set inside the larger ones, using the same technique of setting bricks so that they project from the wall surface. The inside walls give the impression that they are large carpets ornamented with large and small decorative motifs. The high vault of the portal is visually emphasized by the use of a herringbone pattern. All the V shapes point upward, creating momentum and a sense of lightness. It is clear that architects of old were aware of the effect that straight lines and ornamental patterns have on the eye and used the herringbone bond to lighten the heavy brick structure by creating an impression of upward movement. A cornice runs along the upper portion of the mausoleum, while under it there is a frieze which in the past was covered with ceramic tiles, few of which have survived to the present. Ornamentation was geometric. The frieze was framed by glazed dark-blue tiles, none of which remain.

An indispensable component of Muslim architecture in constructions of this type is the ogival arch that serves as the entrance to the mausoleum. This arch was an imposing one, meant to direct the aspirations of the faithful upward. On both sides of the principal facade there are six-sided columns, each of which rests on three hemispheres, a stylistic feature that is extremely rare in the architecture of Central Asia. The interior of the Mausoleum of Alash Khan is much brighter than other mausoleums of the same historic and cultural period. Light en-



Fig. 20. The Mausoleum of Alash Khan, one of the oldest architectural monuments in Kazakhstan.

ters not only through the entry door, but also through a circular hole in the cupola, resembling the *tanduk* of a yurt. According to tradition, this hole had a second purpose: it did not serve only to light the interior but also allowed the soul of the dead person to leave the mausoleum and take a walk. There are four additional openings in the tambour of the cupola which make it possible for light to enter. These windows were made using wooden elements together with bricks.

In a corner niche to the left of the entrance there are stone steps that lead to the base of the cupola. About halfway up the height of the building a passageway was cut into the wall, making it possible to walk along the entire perimeter of the mausoleum. It is narrow, cramped, and poorly lit and leads to the part of the staircase that proceeds up the opposite side of the building, the one to the right of the entrance. The steps then lead only as far as the cupola and it is not possible to reach the ground. This may have been a secret passageway, used by the mullah to perform miracles, thereby increasing the “sacred” value of the tomb. The cupola opens onto a wide view of the surrounding landscape; the mausoleum may also have been used as a military watchtower and observation point.

The building was completely destroyed but now, thanks to partial restoration, can once more be visited. According to local tradition, the clay used to make the bricks used to build the tomb was mixed with *kumyz* and the bricks were baked on the tail fat of 5000 ewes and 3000 rams.

After the Mausoleum of Alash Khan was built, over the course of the

centuries that followed, a large necropolis was constructed. Its elegant structures form a unique architectural complex, one of the most important medieval monuments in central Kazakhstan.

Proceeding along Kara-Kingir valley, we come to two other interesting monuments: the Duzen *mazar*, now nearly a ruin, and the Erden Sandibayly Mausoleum.

4.10 MAUSOLEUM OF AJAK KHAMYR

The Mausoleum of Ajak Khamyr is also situated in a river valley, the valley of the Zhezdi River, a tributary on the left side of the Kara-Kingir. It is near the village of Leninshil, a few kilometers north of Zhezdi, on the road between Zhezkazgan and Ulytau. The monument is not visible from the road. Even after entering the valley and looking in the direction of the cemetery, it is hidden from view by other architectural structures. Local people call it the “Temyr Kuluk Mausoleum”.

It has not weathered well. The cupola and the entire upper portion of the building have collapsed and the walls are about to fall. Few of the terracotta decorations which once ornamented the facade remain. The most original feature of the construction are the two small columns that frame the portal and call to mind the minarets of a mosque. In no other monument is this architectural detail found. Inside the mausoleum, brick flooring gives way to a cavity, probably a tomb, now entirely covered by stones and bricks. A local legend narrates that at different times three different bodies were buried inside it. Most scholars tend to date the complex to the eleventh–twelfth century.



Fig. 21. Coniferous forest and verdant pastures blanket the slopes of the Tien Shan.

5. Almaty Region

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Fig. 22. Map of Almaty Region.

5.1 ALMATY, THE OLD CAPITAL

Almaty is the largest and most densely populated city in Kazakhstan (1.4 million inhabitants according to the 2008 census) and probably, from many points of view, the most interesting in the republic. It was the capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan SSR) during the Soviet era and also the first capital of the newborn independent republic of Kazakhstan, from 1991 to 1997. At present it remains the most important financial and economic–commercial center of the entire country and is the most important destination for tourists and foreign visitors, as well as the scientific, intellectual, and cultural heart of the state, thanks to its lively cultural life. It is not therefore by chance that Almaty is considered not so much a large and important city, as the “second capital” of Kazakhstan and specifically the “cultural capital” of the country. This occurred as a result of a series of historical events during World War II, when numerous institutes of Science and Culture were moved to Almaty from Eastern Europe, threatened by the Nazi–Fascist military advance. Many artists, scien-

tists, and researchers chose to continue living in the welcoming milieu of Almaty even after the war. Nowadays there are numerous national and international universities, academies, and colleges and a considerable number of theaters, contemporary art galleries, concert halls, bookshops, cinemas, and cafes where a variegated public meets. At the same time there are many elegant shops, national and international restaurants, as well as places of entertainment, supermarkets open twenty-four hours a day, and fashionable coffee shops. Almaty is a very pleasant city that deserves a stay of at least three days in order to admire its most important monuments, but above all to wander through its streets, enjoying its flavors, sounds, and the lights of what is one of the most charming examples of Russian culture in Central Asia.

When the weather is sunny and the air crisp and clean, the palette of colors formed by the crystalline blue sky, the eternal white glaciers, and the slopes of the mountains covered in luxuriant foliage of an intense green that surround the city is truly splendid. In fact, on Sundays the residents of the city invade the pinewoods and the groves of birch, lime, and poplar trees on the slopes of the mountains to enjoy the cool, clean air and the enchanting sound of the numerous brooks that tumble down the mountainside to form two rivers that cross the center of Almaty from south to north.

Thanks to its location at the foot of high mountains, Almaty has a temperate climate, very pleasant in spring and autumn and not suffocatingly hot in summer, although it is certainly cold in winter. In the summer season Almaty does not suffer the high temperatures that are



Fig. 23. Almaty lies at the foot of the Tien Shan Mountains, whose 4000-meter peaks form a superb backdrop to the cityscape.

characteristic of the steppe area to the north of the city and in winter it is only occasionally whipped by the Siberian wind, the *buran*, which hits kilometers and kilometers of steppe, mainly in central and eastern Kazakhstan and in the area of Lake Balkhash. The urban layout, with roads running north–south, intersecting with other roads running east–west, was deliberately and farsightedly chosen by the urban architects to allow the fresh breezes from the mountains to flow between the residential and administrative buildings, bringing cool air and cleanliness during the hottest summer months. A particularly farseeing regulation was introduced by General Kolpakovskii, governor of the city at the end of the nineteenth century, which established corporal punishment for any citizen found lopping branches or felling the trees along the avenues of the city and in the urban parks. Many of these trees, which provide welcome shade during the hot summer months, can be seen along the avenues such as Bogenbay Batyr Street, Kabanbay Batyr Street, and Kasteev Street, and in the eastern part of the city, a few hundred meters south of the Cultural Park.

The numerous farms that prosper in the area around Almaty enjoy this pleasant and temperate climate. In fact, the cultivation of apples has a long history, as the name of the city suggests: Almaty literally means “the father of apples”. According to another interpretation, the correct translation should be “full of apples”. What is certain is that a species of apple, of particularly large size, called *Aport*, famous at the court of the tsars of Moscow and throughout the Soviet era, is still cultivated on the slopes of the mountains that surround and tower over



Fig. 24. Very tasty dried fruit at the Green Bazar, Almaty.

the southern area of the city. This species is accompanied, on the same hills, by many other species of apple, offering considerable genetic diversity within a fairly small region that has led some scholars to consider the region of Almaty as one of the principal ecological niches for the growth of wild apples, including the wild species *Malus sieversii*, one of the possible candidates of the domestic apple *Aport* which is to be found everywhere in the city.

Not only is the flora on the Zailinsky Alatau chain particularly diversified and luxuriant, there is also a vast range of fauna. A national park, called Ile-Alatausky, reaches the eastern suburbs of the city of Almaty, and includes protected areas, habitat for numerous species of birds, felines, and deer. Some of them are included in the “Red Book of Kazakhstan”, which lists all the species of flora and fauna at risk of extinction. The most famous example is certainly the snow leopard (also known as the *irbis*; *Pantera uncial*), whose silhouette can be seen on the city crest. About 8000 hectares of urban land are dedicated to cultivated areas—managed at family level—gardens, parks, and public squares dominated by the delicate fragrance and colors of beautiful rose gardens cared for daily by teams of skilled gardeners.

Approximately fifty percent of the current inhabitants of the city of Almaty are of Kazakh origin, while thirty percent are Russian. There are also important minorities, such as the dense community of Uighur origin (5.8%), Tatars (2%), and Koreans (approximately 2%). There are also Ukrainians, Germans, and Chinese, and Europeans are also numerous, since many of the diplomatic seats of the Old Continent have maintained their headquarters in Almaty, as well as opening offices in Astana, after 1997.

History

During the Bronze Age, approximately from the tenth–ninth centuries B.C., the first farmers and breeders of cattle, sheep and goats settled at the foot of the Zailinsky Alatau chain, in the area where Almaty now stands. Traces of this remote past are evident in the archaeological sites of Terenkary and Butakty I located within the modern urban settlement. During the Saka period (from the seventh century B.C. to the second century A.D.) the area was chosen by numerous nomadic groups of Saka and Wusun culture; their heritage is the graves under wide and tall funeral barrows (*kurgan*) and some settlements. The most important example is the archaeological site of Issyk (see p. 92), not far from Almaty.

Little is known of the history of the city in the late Middle Ages. Some information of greater historical importance is available from the

twelfth–thirteenth century A.D., when it became a trading center on the Silk Road, also operating as an agricultural and manufacturing center. Dating from the thirteenth century we find the first mention of the region (Almalyk) in a work by the Arab historian Rashid ad-Dina (1274–1318) and the discovery of four silver coins (*dirham*) found in the State Academy for the training of border guards, which suggest the presence of a city mint. On one of the coins the numismatists have been able to read the word “Almaty” and the chronological indication 1272–1273.

Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the settlement did not enjoy particular economic prosperity. Nonetheless, this period of time was marked by political events that had important repercussions not only for the future of the city, but also for the Kazakh territory in general. In fact, the historical events that occurred around the city laid the foundations for the formation of the Kazakh state, where various ethnic components met, mingled, and integrated.

Only in the nineteenth century in the area of Almaty was a fort built to defend the already numerous population. The operation took place as part of the Russian policy of expansion toward Siberia and Central Asia. On February 4, 1854, construction of the fort of Vernyi was begun (literally “Fortress of Faith”), located in the area between the modern Rivers Bolshaya (Great) and Malaya (Small) Almatinka. The defensive construction was completed in the autumn of the same year and this is the year in which the official history of Almaty commences. It was a pentagonal structure, fenced with wooden pales, and on one side it was protected by the River Malaya Almatinka. Later the wood was replaced by stone and brick. The Vernyi fort was intended to be only the first of a long series of defensive works that the Russian government planned to erect throughout Semirech'e (literally, the “land of seven rivers”, in Kazakh “Zhetysu”) in an attempt to prevent the advance of nomad groups from the east (from Chinese territory) and from the southwest (from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) who attacked the Kazakh khans.

From 1855 onward the fort began to welcome refugees, soldiers, and traders. The following year Russian peasants from the interior, from Voronezh and from the most extreme parts of Siberia began to join them. A Cossack settlement was founded on the banks of the River Bolshaya Almatinka, beside the fortress. The number of persons who moved here increased year by year and it was necessary to found a second settlement on the banks of the Malaya Almatinka, and a third known as *Tatarskaja sloboda* (literally, free Tatar settlement). Subse-

quently the name Tatarskaya was altered to Tashkenstaya, or Tashkent. This free settlement was occupied by merchants of Tatar origin who came from the regions of Semipalatinsk, Tyumen, and Omsk in southern Siberia, and from other regions in the Russian interior. By May 1859 the population had already reached five thousand.

On April 11, 1867, the Vernyi fortress was transformed into a town and called Almatinsk. Nevertheless, the new name did not please the people who lived there and so the Commission of the steppe returned to the old name in 1868 and established that the town should be the capital of the province of Vernenskii and of the region of Semirech'e. At four in the morning of May 28, 1887, a disastrous earthquake, lasting about eleven almost consecutive minutes, razed the town to the ground. Almost 1800 brick buildings were totally destroyed and many of the others were damaged. Only one building in the entire urban area suffered no damage at all and can still be seen today. It stands at number 51 Gogol Street.

The image of the city deteriorated definitively, and from that time onward and for decades the citizens of Almaty had only one-story wooden houses, with foundations in stone or brick. A significant contribution to the recovery of the image of the town, the reconstruction in general, and the lessening of the fear of the population came from the military engineer and civil architect Andrei P. Zenkov, who was one of the first in the world to have elaborated and subsequently employed anti-seismic construction techniques, for example in the cathedral, in the Museum of Popular Musical Instruments, in the House of Fabric, and in the textile market. Another earthquake in 1910 confirmed that the anti-seismic construction techniques used by Zenkov were correct and appropriate.

This is the description of the town of Vernyi published in 1909 in *Russia. Complete Geographical Description of Our Motherland* by Semenov-Tian-Shanskii:

Vernyi is a concentration of all the government institutions including those managed by the military governor. This is the post of duty of the Turkestanskii and Tashkentenskii bishop. The population of the city is 37,000 people (26,000 are Russian, the rest are Taranchi, Dungane, Sarty, Tatar, Kyrgyz). In Vernyi there are 2100 buildings, nine churches, four mosques, eighteen educational institutions, a small regional museum, and sixty-six plants and factories with 313 working places.

The city definitively received the name of Alma-ata in February 1921 and five years later the Russian Council for Work and Defense approved the construction of the Turkestan–Sibir railway line (known



Fig. 25. A view over Almaty from the Kok Tobe hill.

as TurkSib) which became a crucial structure for the development and socioeconomic growth of the eastern and southeastern regions of the country. At the same time the TurkSib railway line laid the foundations for Alma-ata becoming the new capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan, succeeding to Kyzylorda in 1929.

1930 was another very important year for the city. The work on the railway station (now known as Almaty 2) was completed, allowing the transfer of all the government offices and agencies and the airport from Kyzylorda, which transformed the city into the gateway to Kazakhstan and much of the Central Asian Soviet world. At the same time, the city saw the construction on a large scale of new and numerous government buildings and residential structures for the thousands of people who poured into the city looking for work and good living standards. In fact, by the end of 1929 Alma-ata had a population of more than 100,000 people.

During World War II, as previously mentioned, the city hosted the citizens, institutions, and industries transferred from the frontline of the war. Approximately 26,000 refugees reached Alma-ata, while there were around thirty industrial structures, eight hospitals, and thirty-five culture and science, technical–scientific university and school institutes. But the city continued to grow also after the end of the war. Groups of Germans from the Volga region, Koreans evacuated from the border between Russia and Korea, due to the Korean war, and Uighurs from the most western regions of China all emigrated toward Alma-ata and its vast suburbs.

Between 1966 and 1971 the building boom reached a peak. Without forgetting the positive experience of the anti-seismic constructions



built by Zenkov, the new residential structures were multistory blocks of flats, some eight stories high. Beside them and in between them were nursery schools, junior, middle and secondary schools, hospitals and clinics, cultural buildings, and areas for free time activities. These were the years in which Lenin Square (today Republic Square), Hotel Kazakhstan, and the Medeu winter-sports center were built. Almaty had a new, very important political role to play in the years prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, it was the first city to rise up against the policy known as glasnost (transparency) promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev. In December 1986, in the old square of Tole Bi Street, thousands of people gathered to protest against the decision to substitute Dinmukhamed Kunaev with General G. Kolbin as First Secretary of the Communist Party in Kazakhstan. The meeting-riot with factory workers in the heart of the city turned the protest into an uprising that the police repressed by opening fire and killing about 250 people. Subsequently, in 1991 a meeting was held in Almaty that decreed the end of the Soviet Union and pronounced the five republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) members of the CIS (Community of Independent States) founded a few months earlier by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In 1993 the national government decided to alter the name of the city once again; it became Almaty, abandoning the old Alma-ata. Just four years later (1997) Almaty lost its historical role as a political center. The capital of Kazakhstan was moved to Astana, where it still remains. Since 1998 Almaty has enjoyed particular status, which was approved on a legislative basis. The city was in fact declared the scientific, cultural, historical, financial, and industrial center of the new Republic

of Kazakhstan. In order to promote this status, a program of work was planned, which should be completed in 2020, with the aim of modeling Almaty as a garden-city. On this occasion all the industrial structures will be located outside the city and underground railways will offer swift links between the suburbs and the city center.

Amongst the most important and popular universities of Almaty is the State University al-Farabi (KazGU), the leading higher educational institution of the republic, opened in 1934; the Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University (KazPI), inaugurated in 1926; and the K. I. Satpaev Kazakh National Technical University, the leading institute for technical training in the country. The campus of the State University located between Al-Farabi Avenue and Timuryazova was built entirely in the 1980s, when the First Secretary of the Communist Party was Dinmukhamed Kunaev, who promoted the new urban and architectural development of the city thanks to the construction of the circus on Abay Street (a sort of gigantic yurt), the television tower on Kok Tobe hill (in the mountain district of the city), the great edifices of the Academy of Science (a masterpiece of Soviet monumental architecture) between Kurmangazy Street and Shevchenko Street, and the imposing structure of the Arasan thermal baths, on the right-hand side of Panfilov Park when climbing toward the mountains.

5.2 WAR MONUMENT AND PANFILOV PARK

The imposing monument inaugurated in 1975 in Panfilov Park commemorates the twenty-eight heroes who fought for the freedom and independence of the Soviet Union, defending a small village near Moscow against the Nazis. The architects of the work, which is entitled *Oath*, were T. K. Basenov, R. A. Seydalin, and V. N. Kim, while the sculptors were V. V. Andrjuschenko and A. E. Artimovich.

The entire composition is formed of three sculptural elements and a long horizontal stone on which a flame burns in eternal memory and under which the twenty-eight soldiers of the 28th Panfilov Battalion are buried. The central element of the triptych is certainly the most expressive: it represents the soldiers of all the Russian republics emerging from a map of the Soviet Union. The blocks of stone at the entrance to the memorial contain capsules with earth from the battlefields.

On the “Day of Victory”, which marked the end of World War II (May 9, 1945), the War Memorial and much of Panfilov Park is invaded by



Fig. 26. The central figure of the commemorative monument *Oath*, in Panfilov Park, Almaty.

thousands of citizens from the early morning onward who bring bunches of flowers and render homage to the veterans of the Great War. By the end of the day the long black stone is completely buried under thousands of roses, daisies, carnations, tulips, and simple sprays of yellow, white, and pink flowers. It is also customary for young couples to come to the War Memorial on the day of their wedding and place flowers and bread on the funerary stone.

5.3 CATHEDRAL OF ALMATY

One of the symbols of the city of Almaty, this church, *Svyato-Voznesenskii*, is located inside Panfilov Park. It is more than forty-one meters tall (this is the height of the cross on the bell tower), with deep foundations, a large wooden door, and six domes that taper toward the top; above all the polychrome decoration and the carved and inscribed wooden elements give the building an elegance that makes it one of the most important Christian churches in Kazakhstan.

Mention was made of the construction of an Orthodox cathedral for the town of Vernyi at the end of the nineteenth century. The first cathedral church was in fact located in the *stanitsa* (Cossack village) of Bolshchaya Almatinskaya. However, the church was destroyed during the great earthquake of 1887. Immediately after the earthquake a temporary church in wood was built, and the altar was dedicated to the martyrs Vera, Nadezhda, and Liubov, and to their mother Sophia. The wood used came from the city residence of the governor, which had been destroyed during the earthquake. The final phase of the project was begun by the architect Konstantin Arkadevich Borisoglebskii, who drew up the plans for the cathedral in 1899. The building was designed to hold nearly two thousand worshippers and all its bearing structures were to be in wood. The stability of the planned building was subject to careful inspection and, in 1903, the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg approved the final project, substantially altered by the engineer Andrei P. Zenkov. Popular belief that says that the bearing structure is all in wood, without a single nail, is not correct, since Zenkov made considerable use of metal in the structural parts of the building. The icons were painted by the famous workshop of A. Murashko in Kiev. The building was inaugurated in 1907, and resisted the great earthquake of 1911 without damage.

Immediately after the October Revolution, the church was transformed into the headquarters of the Kazakhstan Society for Study and subsequently into that of the Society for Protalitariat Tourism. In 1929 the bells were removed from the bell tower and the splendid iconostasis destroyed. In 1934 Andrei Zenkov himself was commissioned to supervise the restructuring of the interior, in order to turn the cathedral into a museum, and between 1929 and 1985 it became the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan (for a certain period it also hosted a radio station). Following the darkest era with regard to the antireligious repressions (between the end of the 1920s and World War II, and then again during Khrushchev's antireligious campaigns between the late 1950s and the early 1960s), the situation improved in the



Fig. 27. The Holy Ascension Cathedral in Panfilov Park, Almaty, is one of the symbols of the southern Kazakhstan capital.

1970s. In this decade the cathedral became a monument of “republican meaning” and was preserved by the state. For the first time funds were set aside for its restoration. The Association for the Restoration and the Scientific Restructuring of the Ministry of Culture, under the direction of A. O. Itenov, managed to partially restore the original floor plan, although the building was destined to become the Museum of the History of the Restoration of the City of Almaty. For the first time since the 1930s, the multicolored domes were visible once again. Only in 1995 was the building restored to the eparchy of Almaty and Semipalatinsk of the Russian Orthodox Church, which carried out a profound restoration, during which forgotten icons emerged from be-

hind the false walls inserted in the Soviet era. Shortly afterward the church reopened for worship.

Two other monuments built by the architect Zenkov are still visible in the heart of Almaty, both of a religious nature. They are the Church of the Mother of God of Kazan and the Church of Saint Nicholas. The first of the two was built in 1872, seventeen years after the founding of the first urban settlement of Almaty (dated 1855).

5.4 MOSQUES OF ALMATY

Prior to 1917 in the city of Almaty there were no less than twelve mosques. By the mid nineteenth century the Tatar mosque had been built, but it was partially destroyed by the earthquake that struck the southern region of Kazakhstan in 1887. It was operative until 1940, when the building was transformed into a warehouse. In 1986 the Tatar mosque was completely destroyed by fire, but in 1998 a new building was constructed.

Almost all the nineteenth-century mosques in Almaty were built by the architect Yskakbay. One of them is to be found at the corner of Kunaev Street and Makataev Street, while the Uzbekh mosque stands at the junction between Abylai Khan Street and Zhibek Zholi Street. A third mosque, which is also a madrasa, was preserved until the start of the twentieth century.

It is not known who built the old building of the Central Mosque, while



Fig. 28. The Central Mosque of Almaty, opened in 1998, was built with funds from different Arab countries.

the new mosque, which carries the same name—inaugurated in 1998 and built thanks to funds from various Arab states—comprises the most common stylistic traits of eastern architecture, the front portal and the dome. It stands on the corner of Raimbeka Street and Pushkina Street. The main facade of the religious building is marked by a portal with a vaulted vestibule, while at the four corners of the mosque there are towers, and the blue dome is supported by a circular angled drum.

To the left of the facade, on the southern side of the building, stands a minaret, from which it is possible to hear the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer. The facade, the dome, and the internal walls of the mosque are decorated with motifs in national style and inscriptions in Arabic. The mosque can host up to three thousand worshippers and on Fridays, the day of prayer, it is so packed that many people withdraw to the courtyard to find the necessary space and concentration for their prayers.

Nowadays there are eighteen mosques operating in the city of Almaty, including an Islamic cultural center, dedicated to Khosim Mubarak, on Al-Farabi Avenue.

5.5 REPUBLIC SQUARE

Inaugurated in 1980, Republic Square in Almaty is rectangular (580 x 210 meters) and served for parades, exhibitions, and the celebration of festivities and important events in the city.



Fig. 29. Republic Square with the high Independence Monument centre-stage, which is surrounded by statues and reliefs symbolizing ancient Kazakh history.

The square is surrounded by important urban buildings, such as the Mansion House (Akimat), one of the residences of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Institute for Strategic Research, the Monument to Independence (see below), and the Monument to the Decabrist Martyrs of 1986 (although the work was erected in 2006). A granite tribune for around three thousand people stands before the Independence Monument.

5.6 INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT

Inaugurated in December 1996, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and erected in the center of the *Ploshchad Respubliki* or Square of the Republic, this monument is composed of a stone obelisk decorated on all four sides with motifs typical of the art, history, and folklore of Kazakh society. At the top a fantastic, winged, zoomorphic figure carries on its back the image of the “Golden Man”, who holds a bow in his left hand and a bird of prey in his right.

In this square, the obelisk is surrounded by sculptures that recall typical aspects of the culture and history of Kazakhstan, such as the two figures of young riders on fawns and two human figures that allegorically symbolize “wisdom–sky” and “fertility–earth”.

5.7 CENTRAL STATE MUSEUM OF KAZAKHSTAN

This is certainly the most interesting museum in Almaty. Located at 44 Furmanova Street, in the microdistrict Samal 1, this severe building with its light-blue cladding concentrates in just a few floors numerous objects and documents that illustrate the history and the material and spiritual culture of Kazakhstan, from the most remote antiquity to the present day and the transfer of the capital to Astana. The principal purpose of the museum is the diffusion amongst the citizens of Kazakh science and culture.

Set up in 1925 as the KASSR Central Museum in the city of Orenburg, in 1929 the entire collection was transferred to Almaty, to the cathedral built by Zenkov in Panfilov Park. In 1985, when the cathedral was returned to the faithful of the Orthodox Christian cult, the museum collection was displayed in a new building near Republic Square. The architects of the museum building were Y. Ratushniy, Z. Mustaphin, and B. Rzagaliev. The total area of the museum is 17,557 square meters.

On entering the visitor is welcomed by four mannequins, reconstruc-

tions of great archaeological discoveries in the Kazakhstan territory, amongst which the copy of the “Golden Man” in his traditional red garments obviously takes pride of place. The rooms on the ground floor display archaeological items and artifacts from the most ancient times to the period of Genghis Khan, and scale reproductions of the most important monuments of the country. Particularly well-made is the reconstruction of the ice grave discovered a few years ago in Berel, in the Altai Mountains, in Kazakh territory. Then visitors will be amazed to see the gold harness and trappings and the caparison decorated with color, the gilded horn on the equine skulls and the coffin made from the trunk of a Tien Shan pine tree in which two individuals were buried, probably a prince and his consort. Anyone wishing to examine the gold artifacts and the grave goods of the “Golden Man” of Issyk and other masterpieces, such as the diadem of Kargaly, in gold and turquoise, or other items from this treasure which was found in 1939, can purchase a ticket for the Treasure House on the basement floor of the museum. Around thirty objects in gold are on display here, described by a local guide in Russian and, at times, in English.

The second floor is dedicated to life in the towns along the Silk Road and to ethnography. There is a fine yurt with wonderful wooden furniture, wool and felt furnishings, weapons, fabrics, and carpets, wooden and leather tools, and utensils used daily, harnesses for horses, and other objects relating to nomadic life on horseback, such as whips, saddles, caparisons, and flasks. In some cabinets there are beautiful musical instruments and numerous collections of ancient coins. Other cabinets display objects that belonged to I. Q. Abay, Ch. Valikhanov, A. Zhan-gel'din, and other important names in the history and culture of Kazakhstan. A large collection of drawings by the artist M. S. Znamenskii and the photographic collection of N. N. Pantusov are also on display. The third floor is dedicated to Kazakhstan between the twentieth and the twenty-first century, with photographs of famous characters and their works and information about their tribal groups. In particular, in this sector it is possible to admire numerous documents, photographs, and objects in daily use, such as luxury products from the Soviet pre- and post-revolutionary period and from the years of independence.

5.8 CHURCH OF SAINT NICHOLAS

This Christian religious monument, built in 1908 (the architects were N. I. Lavanov and S. K. Troparevskii), was closed in 1936 and transformed into a museum, while during World War II it was used as a

military deposit and stabling for the Bolshevik cavalry. Only at the end of the war, in 1945, on the occasion of the organization of the eparchy of Almaty and Kazakhstan, was it returned to its function as a place of worship for the Christian Orthodox cult. Between 1945 and 1995 it was the most important church of the Kazakhstan eparchy. It is worth a visit since it may appropriately seem to be a fragment of Russia in Central Asia, given the icons, candles, and newly restored frescoes it hosts. Since 1995 it has been considered a monument of national architectural interest.

5.9 KASTEEV STATE MUSEUM OF ART

Pearls of national and world art culture are gathered in the collections of the A. Kasteev State Museum of Art (Satpaev Street 30a). Local crafts are presented through the work of master craftsmen, felt workers, jewelers, and harness makers. Exhibits of classic Russian and Western European art offer a glimpse of the various schools and masters from Russia, Italy, France, and Germany. Nowadays the museum hosts a collection of about 22,000 first-class works, which compose the national property of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The collection of around 1500 paintings and sculptures by Kazakh artists is superb and includes a room dedicated to the works of A. K. Kasteev, judged the greatest professional Kazakh painter.

5.10 TAMGALY

Tamgaly is a picturesque archaeological site in Semirech'è, located about 170 kilometers northeast of Almaty, on the southeastern slope of the Chu-Ili mountain chain. The impressive number of monuments present here, more than one hundred, their diverse nature (settlements, necropolises, rock carvings, ritual structures, and funerary monuments), and the wide chronological range within which they occur, from the mid Bronze Age to the early twentieth century, allow us to consider Tamgaly one of the most important and complex archaeological sites not only in Kazakhstan, but in the entire world. In fact, in 2004 it was included in the list of monuments safeguarded by UNESCO.

The settlements in this area are located at the foot of the mountains and extend between 300 and 1200 square meters, occupying various topographical and geomorphological areas, such as small valleys, the foothills, and some upland plains.

There are also necropolises of which the most extensive and most stud-



Fig. 30. Bird's-eye view of the Tamgaly petroglyphic complex. Listed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, it contains more than one hundred rock art representations.

ied are those dating from the Bronze Age, of Andronovo culture—seven altogether—concentrated along both banks of the River Tamgaly. On the metamorphic rocks surrounding the two necropolises of Tamgaly 2 and Karakuduk 2 there are numerous petroglyphs (rock engravings) mainly representing anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. Here one can see the images of sun-headed idols, warriors, married couples, women in childbirth. There are also compositions with many figures, portraying images of people and animals in scenes of hunting and bull sacrifice. Plots with the image of chariots are very rare. There are many solar symbols. The survey of the rock engravings begun some years ago by A. Rogozhinskii, with the cooperation of R. Sala and J. M. Deom, has so far identified around five thousand engravings, some of which are in almost perfect condition. These petroglyphs date from various times, but they mostly belong to the Bronze Age. Paintings done in the “animal” style of the Sakas are located separately from the ancient petroglyphs. In some instances, however, they complete them and even overlay them. Medieval petroglyphic images have been hammered out on the hills that surround the canyon and on the small waterless canyons on the mountainsides. Distributed among forty-eight complexes with associated settlements and burial grounds, they are testimonies to the husbandry, social organization, and rituals of pastoral peoples. The central canyon contains the densest concentration of engravings and what are believed to be altars, suggesting that these places were used for sacrificial offerings. Amongst the funerary structures there are also a number of barrows

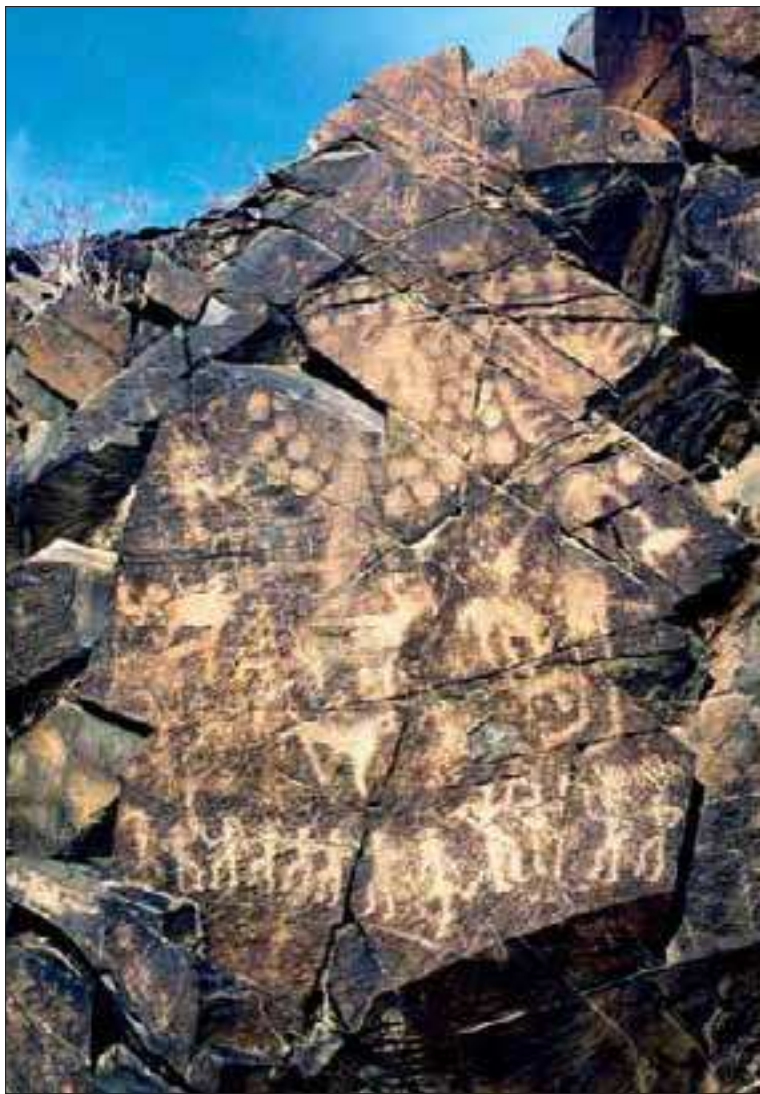


Fig. 31. One of the most interesting and complex scenes from Tamgaly, dating back to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

(*kurgan*) dating from the Iron Age, that is, between the third and the second century B.C. In 1986 other funerary barrows were excavated and grave goods dating from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. were found, including a bronze mirror.

5.11 AK BESHIM (SUJAB), KYRGYZSTAN

In the upper valley of the River Chu, in Kyrgyz territory, archaeological research has brought to light seven Buddhist architectural struc-

tures, probably sanctuaries, located in the citadel of Ak Beshim; they were excavated in the 1950s.

Ak Beshim lies, as we said, in Kyrgyzstan, seven kilometers south of the modern city of Tokmok and about sixty kilometers east of the capital Bishkek. It was founded in the sixth century by Sogdian traders and is known from ancient Arabic, Chinese, and Persian sources by the name of Sujab. It was an important trading town on the Silk Road, but it was mainly a center of cultural symbiosis between the Indian, Chinese (Tang), Sogdian, and Turkic cultures. Each of them has left traces of its culture and religion. In fact, archaeological research has identified a cemetery of the Zoroastrian cult, two Nestorian churches and, in particular, two Buddhist sanctuaries that were built by the Sogdian culture, continuing the tradition of the Kushan era.

The first of the two Buddhist sanctuaries has been dated by scholars to the seventh century A.D. It was still in use in the mid eighth century, but was then destroyed, probably by Karluk and Turkic tribal groups. Subsequently, for around two centuries, temporary residential structures were built on the ruins of the sanctuary until the ninth century, when the citadel of Ak Beshim was definitively abandoned. The sanctuary (76 x 22 meters) was divided into two parts, the actual sanctuary and a vestibule with six cells. Built on three terraces, the structure plunged underground to the temple, which was about three meters below the surrounding countryside. The sacred area consisted of the temple hall, about 6.5 meters square, a corridor surrounding the *sancta sanctorum* on three sides, and an octagonal room. The facades of the monument were oriented to the points of the compass and access was from the east.

In the part reserved for the sanctuary there were four statues of seated Buddhas, made of clay over a wooden structure; they were painted in various colors (blue, yellow, orange, and red). Also the walls and the internal shelves had painted decorations, while the walls of the cell had moldings, in particular there was a bas-relief showing the sacred Bodhi tree.

The archaeological digs have also brought to light various plaques in gilded bronze, portraying Buddha, various Bodhi trees, and other characters from the Buddhist pantheon.

The second Buddhist sanctuary has been judged by archaeologists to be amongst the oldest religious buildings in the valley of the River Chu. Its earliest phases date from between the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., while it was abandoned at the start of the eighth century. It is believed that the temple fell into disuse following the invasion by

Turkic groups and their conquest of the political power in the region. This religious building was constructed about 100 meters from the residential district of the town of Sujab; it was oriented to the points of the compass, with a slight inclination, and was built of unfired brick. It was almost square, about thirty-eight meters per side, and it had an entrance on each facade, although the main entrance faced north, toward the town. The *sacellum*, which was also almost square (10.5 x 10 meters circa) and was surrounded by a double perimetrical corridor, was built above the other rooms of the structure. The interior walls of the *sacellum* had three deep niches, inside which statues of Buddha and Bodhi trees were placed. During the excavations, fragments of clay statues (the face of Buddha and of the tree) were found in both the *sacellum* and in the corners of the perimetrical corridor.

These monuments, like others found in the valley of the River Chu, confirm the spread of Buddhism in southern Kazakhstan and the surrounding regions, whose expansion at the end of the sixth and the start of the seventh century was sponsored by governors and aristocrats from the western Turkic groups. Some of them even converted to Buddhism. The Turkic khan Tanshekhu, whose military camp stood amongst the groups of herders around Issyk Kul, captured the Buddhist monk Xuanzang, but rather than killing him, he listened attentively to his preaching. Nevertheless, this religious belief was never fully accepted in Turkic-speaking communities, although it continued to gather proselytes until the end of the ninth century. The Arabic geographical treatise *Hudud al-Alam* recalls that Christians, Zoroastrians, and *sabii* (Buddhists) lived peacefully together in the towns along the Silk Road of Semirechë.

Following the conquest of the valley of the River Chu by the Kidarites in 1131, there was a renewed spread of Buddhism in the region of southern Kazakhstan, but the sanctuaries of Ak Beshim did not regain their former splendor.

In Sujab it is also possible to admire the remains of what are considered to be one of the most ancient churches of the Nestorian Christian culture, if not the most ancient of all those in Kyrgyzstan, just a few kilometers from the southern border of Kazakhstan. It dates from the seventh–eighth century A.D.

The first of the two Nestorian churches stands outside the *pomoerium* identified by the walls of the city, and it was formed of a square room with a dome and an altar, of a room facing south with a supplementary altar, probably a baptistery, and of rectangular, walled areas. The entire structure measured thirty-six by fifteen meters. Some

scholars think that there was a large courtyard with overhanging roofs, while others believe there was a *naos* with three naves resting on columns. Around the church, mainly under the walls and inside the courtyard, numerous Christian graves were discovered, which on the basis of the pottery and coins found with them were dated around the seventh century A.D.

The second church was excavated about ten years ago by Russian specialists from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, in collaboration with Kyrgyz historians. It was erected inside the *pomoerium*, in the southeastern corner, and consisted of three or four parts, each of which was represented by a room running east–west, about twenty-five meters long (in one case it was clearly a courtyard), connected on the eastern side to square rooms (five meters square) with niches and altars, while others were auxiliary rooms. It is probable that around the church on three sides, there were corridors that divided the internal space into three or four sectors, as previously mentioned. It is interesting to recall that numerous rooms in this second church contained clay and wooden receptacles in which grape seeds were found. Vinification and the preservation of wine in the small rooms arranged around the main structure were managed entirely by Christian farmers and traders, since the Muslims were prohibited from such commercial practices.

On the basis of the relics found (crosses, manuscripts with dedications) and the numismatic, epigraphic, and stylistic analysis carried out on the artifacts, the second Nestorian church of Ak Beshim dates from the last period of the city's life, that is, between the tenth and the early eleventh century A.D.

The discovery of these two Nestorian churches undoubtedly confirms the strong position of Christianity in the area of Semirech'è, now divided between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Other occasional finds from the same historical period and the presence of tombstones with Nestorian inscriptions dating from the thirteenth–fourteenth century suggest an uninterrupted, strong and widespread presence of Christianity in Semirech'è between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries A.D.

5.12 KRASNORECHENSK (NAVEKAT OR NAVAKET), KYRGYZSTAN

The town of Krasnaya Rechka, in the valley of the River Chu, also in Kyrgyzstan, has been identified by scholars as the Sogdian settlement of Navekat, or “new city”, which was founded by rich representatives of the Sogdian aristocracy, probably from the city of Samarqand, not

before the sixth century A.D. The founder is known from documents brought to light on Mount Mug by the name of Chir syn Vakhzanak, and the Sogdian title of prince.

In 737 Navekat was already known as a military camp of the Turkic khan Sulak Chabysh-chor, who married the Tang (Chinese) princess Tzsjakhe, the daughter of Ashin Khuydao, claimant to the throne of the Western Turkic Khanate. Sulak formed family alliances with the Eastern Turkic Khanate and with powerful Tibetan warlords.

Between 1961 and 1963 two Buddhist sanctuaries were found in the town, they were located behind the southern wall of the residential district. One of the two was built on the ruins of an earlier fortress. On the basis of the coins found, it is possible to date the first phase of life in the sanctuary to the seventh century, while it declined in the mid eighth century. Initially the sanctuary consisted of a single, six-meter-square room and a perimetrical corridor where there was a statue of Buddha. It is possible that this first temple was surrounded by numerous other structures. The walls of the *sacellum* had decorative moldings, while the statue of Buddha, twelve meters tall, was made of clay, decorated in red, and had an internal structure in wood.

Subsequently the entire building was rebuilt. The height of the floor was raised and new walls (2.5 meters high) were built with highly original painted decorations on a plaster backing. Amongst the decorative motifs the scholars have recognized the lotus flower, human legs, decorations on garments, tongues of fire, and receptacles of a ritual nature. Amongst the most interesting archaeological finds are two gilded statues of Avalokiteshwara, brought from India, and a Chinese stele in granite, portraying Buddha seated on a lotus flower, Bodhi, and wolves defending a *stupa*. This stele dates from the mid Tang period and it is now possible to admire it in the Kyrgyzstan–Russian University Museum. Starting from the second half of the seventh century until the mid ninth century, initially in India and subsequently in China, there were uprisings against the spread of Buddhism and its advocates. The sanctuaries were raided and systematically destroyed. It is possible that in this period of time the sanctuaries of Navekat were also raided. The stone steles were destroyed, the sacred images of Buddha and Bodhi chiseled, and the inscriptions with their names rendered illegible. It is still possible to casually find fragments of these steles here in Krasnorechensk, since many of them were later used for constructing banks of rivers and canals, or as steps in residential buildings. A small statue in bronze, gold, and encrustations certainly met a better fate since it was hidden and preserved for many years in private homes.

Nowadays it can be admired in the museum previously mentioned. The second Buddhist sanctuary dates from the final phase of the spread of Buddhism in Semirech'e, that is, between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. Excavated and studied in 1938, the building stands on the southern edge of the residential area of the town and it was also built on the ruins of a previous construction, probably a fortress. Inside it measured 60.5 by 57 meters and it comprised a *sacellum*, and a courtyard, where there is evidence of a craftsman's workshop. Built on the cardinal points, its floor plan almost completely copied that of the previous military structure.

The *sacellum* was rectangular (32.7 x 30 meters) and inside there was a small square room (3.2 meters), a perimetrical corridor, a large hall in front of the *sacellum* and two other rooms adjacent to the hall. In all the rooms there were platforms on which to place ornaments and objects of cult. This floor plan is not typical of Buddhist constructions. It is possible that the canons of Buddhist architecture, when they came into contact with local building traditions, felt important influences that even brought about changes in the floor plan that are difficult to identify and explain.

The walls of the inner rooms, clearly destined for religious rites, were plastered in chalk and clay and decorated with paintings. Here a portrait of Buddha, accompanied by stars, was found; it is colored in red, blue, yellow, and brown, with black outlines.

Archaeological research, concentrated exclusively on the sanctuary, has not revealed either the monastic complex or the residential structures connected to the sanctuary, which should be nearby, as can be seen from other Buddhist sanctuaries in the valley of the River Chu. In fact, when Buddhist sanctuaries dating from the seventh and eighth centuries were built, fortified monasteries including residential areas were also built beside them.

On the other hand, it is necessary to consider the theory presented by authoritative scholars that this is not really a building for the Buddhist cult, but rather a Manichaean sanctuary, in which the temple is still hidden in the monastic complex, not yet subject to archaeological excavation. This theory is based on the fact that the statues found here are not typical of a Buddhist temple. It is also known from written Arab sources that a large Manichaean community lived in Navekat. Nonetheless, the presence of images of Buddha does not contradict the Manichaean tradition, since Buddhist believers often considered Mani the prophet of Buddha. And they compared Mani to Maitreya (Metteyya), that is, the future Buddha. Finally, it is necessary to state

that Manichaean monasteries were built on the basis of Buddhist architectural models.



Fig. 32. Map of the eastern part of Almaty Region.

5.13 FUNERARY BARROWS (*KURGAN*) OF ISSYK

These impressive monuments date from the Saka period, fifth–fourth century B.C. The funerary barrows of Issyk are concentrated at the gates of the town of the same name, at the foot of the Zailinsky Alatau chain, around forty kilometers east of the city of Almaty. At the end of the 1960s they were repeatedly subject to archaeological excavation under the direction of K. A. Akishev. These hill-shaped funerary structures extend over almost three square kilometers and vary in diameter between thirty and ninety meters, and in height between four and fifteen meters. About forty-five have been counted, although some small examples were certainly destroyed during excavation and building works.

The barrows (*kurgan*) were a typical expression of the nomadic, pastoral society and economic system of the Saka tribal groups and they dot the Eurasian steppe like geographical and social markers, within a space without borders or obstacles. In 1969, at Issyk, one of these barrows was excavated. It was situated near the mountain chain and led to the discovery of what is now known as the “Golden Man”. This is the most interesting and sensational archaeological find to have oc-

curred so far in the territory of Kazakhstan and it immediately became the symbol of modern Kazakhstan.

Two tombs were found inside this barrow, which was about sixty meters in diameter and six meters high. Unfortunately the central and principal tomb had been totally plundered in the past. A second grave, offset with regard to the center of the tomb, was represented by a coffin in trunks of Tien Shan pine (3.3 x 1.9 meters and buried at 1.5 meters). Inside the coffin, supine, with the skull turned to the west, was a skeleton, almost certainly female, aged between eighteen and twenty-two, dressed in splendid uniform and with arms: the so-called "Golden Man". The body had been placed on a woven mat, decorated with golden plaques. The overall number of decorations, jewels, and plaques sewn to the clothing was more than four thousand; many of them were finely decorated with animal and floral motifs. The skeleton wore golden rings on its hands. The decorations on the conical headdress, almost seventy centimeters high, are a masterpiece of ancient art. Arrows pointing upward, snow leopards ready to pounce, a fantastic creature with wings and two heads, representations of the mountains, flying birds, mountain goats, and horses are just some of the most important decorations, found in excellent condition, on the headdress. On the left-hand side of the skeleton was a short sword (*akinakes*) tied to the belt, while on the right-hand side there was a long sword, completely gilded.

It must also be said that a silver bowl was found (dated between the fifth and the fourth century B.C.) with an inscription on the base consisting of twenty-six letters, in an alphabet that has not yet been deciphered and which is the object of academic dispute, since some of the letters have analogies with runic, the ancient Turkic script, while others are similar to Ancient Greek and yet others to Armenian.

The analysis of the funerary relics found so far has made it possible to theorize the meaning and the function of certain decorative subjects. The images that decorate the headdress have been interpreted as the stylized representation of the three levels of the universe and contain the implicit meaning that the deceased, whatever its sex, was a "lord of the universe" or a "priest of three worlds", the only person capable of stabilizing, governing, and making the celestial world thrive (in which birds of prey fly); of making the terrestrial world prosper (home to felines, horses, and goats, and above all to "common" man); and of making the underwater and the subterranean worlds flourish (the most suitable environment for rodents and fish). The main meaning of the garments and the headdress lies in the exaltation of the person-



Fig. 33. Aerial photograph of some barrows (*kurgan*) of the Issyk funerary complex where the “Golden Man” was discovered in 1969, the outstandingly rich grave of a Saka prince.



Fig. 34. The *kurgan*, like this one from Issyk, are the main geographical landmarks in the flat steppe of the Zhetysu Region.

ality of the prince or the princess and their elevation to the rank of divinity.

Some of the finds from the precious grave goods of the “Golden Man” are now on display in the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan (Furmanova Street 44, Samal 1 district; see pp. 82–83) while others are on show in the display cabinets of the Presidential Cultural Center in Astana (Republic Avenue 2; see pp. 45–46).

There are numerous archaeological complexes with funerary barrows throughout Kazakhstan and each of them has its own characteristics and peculiarities that are not possible to describe in detail here. For those who intend to make an excursion along the River Ili, on the right bank, fourteen kilometers east of the village of Zhantogay, the necropolis of Besshatyr, formed of ninety-four *kurgan*, dated between the

fifth and the third century B.C., is worth a visit. The largest funerary mound in the necropolis is fifteen meters tall and has a diameter of just over 100 meters.

5.14 BUDDHIST ROCK ART OF TAMGALY-TAS

The Kazakh toponym Tamgaly-Tas can be literally translated as “stones with signs” although it is better known by the meaning of “historiated rocks”. More than one thousand petroglyphs have been identified in this area, about 120 kilometers from the city of Almaty, on the course of the River Ili, between the towns of Kapchagay and Bakanas. They mainly date from the medieval era and the most famous and most frequently visited are the five portrayals on the rock of Buddha, beside which there is an inscription in Sanskrit, which scholars have dated to the twelfth century. The inscription reads “*Om mani padme hum*”, that is, “Greetings, oh jewel in the lotus flower”. It is one of the best-known and famous mantras recited in the Buddhist doctrine in situations of suffering and danger.

The five portrayals show Buddha illuminated, serene, with four arms, as the king of space, and as the god of medicine. Of these, the one that shows the god of space, the custodian of the sacred space according to the canons of Buddhist mythology, is now almost illegible and in very poor condition. I would like to mention that some years ago three of the four inscriptions were subject to stupid vandalism. Thanks to



Fig. 35. Buddhist rock art from Tamgaly-Tas, recently restored, along the Ili River.

the intervention of the Institute for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of the Kazakhstan Nomadic Peoples, with headquarters in Almaty, the inscriptions are now visible once again, attracting numerous local and foreign visitors, mainly in spring and autumn.

In relation to the presence in this area of the stone portraits of Buddha there are numerous traditions and popular legends which say that in the tenth century Buddhism began to spread to the Semirech'e region and that when the missionaries reached the river valley they were startled by a violent earthquake that broke a boulder from the mountain, throwing it onto the bank of the river. The event was interpreted as an inauspicious omen. The monks decided to return to their own country, but before they could start the journey toward India, they wanted to mark the point they had reached in Central Asia and they carved these divine portraits on the rocks of Tamgaly-Tas. Another popular legend says that the rock pictures refer to the presence in the area of a Buddhist sanctuary; however, archaeologists have not been able to locate it.

5.15 KAYLYK (ANTONOVKA)

The description of the ancient city of Kaylyk, or Kaylak, now identified as the archaeological settlement on the eastern edge of the village of Antonovka, not far from the Lepsa River, in the Semirech'e region, and about 190 kilometers northeast of the city of Taldykurgan, has reached us thanks to the work of the missionary monk and ambassador to the king of France, Louis IX, Willem van Ruysbroeck.

Willem van Ruysbroeck, on the orders of the king, was sent in 1253 to the court of the khan of Mongolia, Mangu Khan, in the Karakorum camp. The precise commission entrusted to him by the king was to convert as many Tatars and Mongols as possible to Christianity. When he returned to France, the missionary wrote a book entitled *Itinerarium fratris Willielmi de Rubruquis de ordine fratrum Minorum, Galli, Anno gratia 1253 ad partes Orientales*, in which he describes his journey, the people he met, the towns and cities, the places he visited, and the paths he trod. One of the finest chapters of this work is precisely that dedicated to the description of the city of Kaylyk where, to the amazement of the monk, he boarded and ate with representatives of the most diverse religions, including some whose name and philosophical doctrine Willem had never heard of.

Prior to the journey and the work of Willem van Ruysbroeck, Kaylyk had been known thanks to Arabic and Persian sources. Archaeological research has shown that the settlement began in the eighth centu-

ry. As from the tenth century Kaylyk played the role of capital of the ancient Turkic state of the Karluks; it was one of the most important cities on the Silk Road and a large urban conglomerate that included numerous towns and villages surrounding the main center. The majority of the satellite settlements were destroyed by the Mongols of Genghis Khan (1219), who, for unknown reasons, did not approach the city of Kaylyk, at that time known as Kayalyk.

In the description of the Franciscan missionary, who stayed in this city for twelve consecutive days, Kaylyk appears as a large city with markets, spacious squares, and various sanctuaries. He also writes that for the first time in his life he was struck by a sanctuary in which the faithful had shaven heads and wore yellow garments, were chaste and pure, held a cord with one hundred or two hundred small knots in their hands, and recited a prayer “*on mani battam*” (a mantra known in Lamaic Buddhism) similar to the prayer “Our Father”. He also recalls that he arrived in this city on a religious feast day, organized in honor of the full moon by the priests of this unusual sanctuary. The missionary does not write that it was a Buddhist sanctuary, only that the highest attributes of the city of Kaylyk were made to the representatives of this religion.

When archaeological research was carried out at Kaylyk, immediately following the start of the excavations, a building enclosed by a corridor was found. The dig brought to light the entire structure of a Buddhist sanctuary (16 x 18.5 meters) in the center of which was a square room, the *sacellum*, which was surrounded on all four sides by a long corridor. There were jutting, hemispherical towers on the four corners of the building. The entire construction was built in fired and unfired brick. The ceramic materials found here have dated the sanctuary between the twelfth and the thirteenth century.

Only a few years ago a second Buddhist sanctuary was discovered and excavated. The material found dates the structure between the end of the eleventh and the start of the twelfth century and has established that it is the oldest Buddhist construction in Kazakhstan.

The mosque built inside the citadel dates from the start of the thirteenth century, or perhaps at the end of the twelfth century. Prior to excavation it appeared to be a thirty-meter-square hill. Following excavation, the structure was shown to be rectangular (34 x 28 meters internally and 40 x 32 meters externally), it extends northeast to southwest. Its size, in the opinion of the archaeologists who carried out the dig, suggests that it was one of the principal Muslim buildings in the city, at that time capital of the Karluk kingdom in Central Asia.



Fig. 36. Kaylyk was an important medieval town on the Silk Road, visited and written about by monk and French ambassador Willem van Ruysbroeck in 1253.

The entrance to the mosque was in the southeastern wall, while the rectangular *mihrab* niche was in the center of the northwestern wall and made of rectangular fired brick (42 centimeters deep and 1.36 meters wide). In front of the *mihrab* was a rectangular area separated from the rest of the mosque by a wooden railing, which stood on a wall still well preserved, built in square brick and topped in stone.

The Kaylyk Mosque is a classic example of a hypostyle mosque, with internal pillars. This means that the interior was completely lacking stone walls to support the roof, which was borne on fifty-four columns. Only the stone bases are visible today.

The external perimetrical walls of the mosque were in mud brick, just over 1.5 meters thick, and they have been preserved to a height of about two meters. Internally they were plastered in clay and white-washed. It is interesting to note that the walls had a narrow air space through which hot air for heating the mosque during the winter could circulate.

Amongst the relics discovered, a burnt wooden tablet carrying inscriptions in the Arabic alphabet and a pile of burnt wood near the *mihrab* are of interest. According to scholars this could be the remains of the *minbar*, that is, the dais of the preacher.

A second mosque, slightly more recent (fourteenth or fifteenth century) than the Kaylyk Mosque, has recently been brought to light in the town of Antonovka, a few kilometers east of Kaylyk. It documents



the spread of Islam in northeastern Semirech'e in the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

Returning to the work of Willem van Ruysbroeck, it is necessary to take into account an interesting passage in which the missionary expresses his curiosity and surprise with regard to another religious cult, also documented in this city on the Silk Road. He writes:

In the city of Kaylak the idolaters [Nestorians, Muslims, and others] have three sacred places; I have entered two of them and have been able to witness the folly of their rituals. In the first of the two I found a man who had a small cross painted with ink on his hand, from which I understood that he was a Christian. Also because he answered my questions as a Christian. I then asked why there were no paintings of the cross and Jesus Christ in the sanctuary and he told me that it was not part of their religious and cultural tradition. From this conversation I understood that they were certainly Christians and that this lack derived from ignorance of the doctrine.

The Manichaean sanctuary of Kaylyk was very similar to the religious structures of the Manichaean cult scattered through Chinese Xinjiang and Khakassia, where the faith was common. This in Kaylyk was certainly the first Manichaean sanctuary in Central Asia. According to tradition, Manicheans decorated the walls of their sanctuaries with frescos whose themes included floral motifs, two-dimensional pictures, bas reliefs, and crosses. Architecturally the Manichaean sanctuary, which now has windows, comprises four rooms: the preaching room, the school room, the prayer room, and the most holy room. Scholars believe that the builders of this sanctuary, which is very unusual for Kazakhstan at that time, were Sogdian workers, who came

to Kaylyk specially for this purpose. Unfortunately the construction was destroyed by a violent fire that spared only some of the artifacts in the building. In one of the rooms the archaeologists brought to light a lamp with thirteen spouts. Both the number of spouts and the presence of crosses decorating the outside indicate its use during the rites. The entire lamp and many other fragments of lights for illuminating the halls of the sanctuary and the motifs on the walls certainly show that this structure was a Manichaean sanctuary in which the use of light and fire must have been very limited and circumscribed.

In concluding this paragraph dedicated to the ancient city of Kaylyk, we recall that Willem van Ruysbroeck, after a twelve-day stay in the city, left on the day of Saint Andrew, that is, November 30 according to the Christian calendar. This is what the monk writes: "On the feast day of Saint Andrew we left the city of Kaylyk and, about three leagues away, we found a village inhabited only by Nestorians. Entering their church we sang as joyfully as we could the *Salve Regina*, since we had not seen a Christian church for some time." In fact, a Nestorian settlement has been brought to light near Kaylyk; the ruins are now known as the citadel of Lepsa.

Life in the city of Kaylyk ceased in the fourteenth century. Amongst the possible causes is certainly the war between the successors of Genghis Khan, who lorded it over much of Semirech'e. Constant raids destroyed the irrigation system, the economy of the towns, and the trade with the surrounding populations. Also, much of the rural habitat, unlike the main settlements, had been sacked and raided by the Mongolian chief himself. Other scholars feel that the decline of Kaylyk is associated with the terrible fire that destroyed most of the buildings, forcing the population to find a new place to live. Finally, another theory refers to the danger of earthquakes constantly present in the Semirech'e region, which lies close to the Tien Shan mountain chain. The analysis of the architectural structures found during the digs and in particular the bricks has made it possible to theorize a dramatic earthquake that practically razed the city to the ground, forcing the inhabitants who survived to leave in search of greater safety.

5.16 MOSQUE OF ZHARKENT

The city of Zharkent (from 1942 to 1992, called Panfilov) lies in the region of Almaty, 330 kilometers northeast of the southern capital of Kazakhstan, on the borders with the People's Republic of China, on the course of the River Ili. It extends on both sides of the A353 road

which leads from Almaty to China, the cities of Korgas and Urumchi. This border town is interesting because it is home to the mosque that reflects the cultural formation of the Chinese architect who designed and built it between 1892 and 1895, Khon Pik. It has a rectangular floor plan (54 x 28 meters) and is 14.5 meters tall; it has a wooden minaret of nineteen meters and is surrounded by fifty-two wooden columns in Tien Shan pine. The entire wooden structure was built without nails. The interior is decorated with suras from the Koran. In the courtyard of the mosque, on the northeastern side, there is a small garden, while the madrasa stands on the southern side. Access to the mosque is through two doors, one on the northern side and the other on the southern.



Fig. 37. A place of worshipping along the Ili River. Cloth strips are tied to tree boughs or bushes in order to make vows.



Fig. 38. An isolated grave with three burials on a hill, Almaty Region.

6. Zhambyl Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA and IGOR SAVIN



Fig. 39. Map of Zhambyl Region.

6.1 TARAZ

The city of Taraz is the regional capital of Zhambyl Region in southern Kazakhstan, close to the Kyrgyzstan border. Known in the past as Talas, Aulie-Ata, and Zhambul, Taraz lies on the River Talas (or Taraz) and currently has a population of almost 350,000.

Taraz is one of the most ancient cities in Kazakhstan and the entire Transoxiana region (the lands north of the Amu Darya River). It celebrated its first two thousand years of history and culture in 2001 although the first mention, the most ancient historically documented, dates from A.D. 568, when the Byzantine historian Menandros Protector wrote of a settlement called “Talas”. At that time (sixth century A.D.) the city, represented by a fortified settlement of which nothing remains, played an important commercial and economic role on the Silk Road of southern Kazakhstan, between China and India on the one hand and the Syr Darya valley, the Iranian plateau, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean world on the other.

The year 568 is recalled by the Byzantine historian because the ambassadors sent by Byzantium, led by Zemarchos and Maniach, and the leaders of the Turkic tribes under the reign of Khan Muhan, met within the walls of this city. Also present at the meeting were a legation of

Sogdian merchants, interested in guaranteeing the safety of the caravans, and Persian ambassadors (Hephtalites), who wished to reach an agreement with the Sogdian merchants in order to curb the growing Byzantine power.

Subsequently, in A.D. 629 (or 630) the city was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, who left a brief description of the settlement, which he calls Ta-lo-se: “The city is eight or nine *li* [an ancient Chinese unit of measurement equal to 576 meters] in diameter, and was settled by Hu [‘barbarian’] merchants from various nations. The products and the climate are about the same as Sujab [Ak Beshim; see pp. 86–89].” When, at the start of the thirteenth century, the groups of Turkic origin in the valley of the River Ili separated into two branches (Yellow Turkic and Black Turkic), the Black Turkic group (in Kazakh “Kara”) settled in the valley of the River Talas and the community became their capital. In the middle of the same century, in 751, a few kilometers north of the position of the modern city, a battle was waged between the Chinese army of the Tang dynasty and the Arab dynasty of the Abbasid Caliph helped by Turkic soldiers. Although they won the battle, the Muslims withdrew from the region. One of the consequences of this battle was that numerous manufacturers of Chinese paper who were following the army were taken prisoner by the Arabs and deported toward the Mediterranean. But the internecine struggles between the Yellow and Black Turkic groups were not mitigated by the advance of the Chinese on one side and the Arabs on the other. In 766 when the Karluks made their appearance in the southern part of Kazakhstan, they had little difficulty in conquering the entire territory, but they were not able to hold it for long.

In the ninth century Taraz was a thriving, rich city under the dominion of the Samanids and subsequently under the Karakhanids, both of whom were Muslims. The period of greatest economic and cultural splendor for the city was between the eleventh and the twelfth century when Karakhanid power left the city considerable political independence. Taraz, above all under the reign of Tugan Khan, thus reached sufficient power to organize a powerful army and make war on the cities of Samarqand and Kashgar, which were conquered for some years. This was also the period in which the cultural life of the city emanated throughout Central Asia. The urban center made up of the citadel, or *arg*, and the residential quarters, or *shahristan*, enhanced by monuments which are still visible, although restored, such as the Mausoleums of Aisha Bibi and Karakhan (see pp. 110–112, 107–109), became the economic and cultural heart of southern Kazakhstan.

The tenth-century Arab geographer al-Maqdisi described the city like this:

Taraz is a large fortified settlement, with many gardens and a dense network of residential structures. It has a moat, four gates, and a military encampment outside the fortifications, which is also densely inhabited. Near the gate, facing the *medina*, runs a wide river and beyond it spreads another part of the city, which is traversed by a narrow street. The mosque is located between the markets.

Due to the internecine wars for power within the reigning Karakhanid dynasty, the region of southern Kazakhstan and the city of Talas were conquered first by the Kara-Khitans and later (around 1210) by Muhammad of Khorezm, who razed most of the city and many of its monuments to the ground.

Shortly afterward, in 1220, the entire region was conquered by the Mongols. Unfortunately we know little of the history of Taraz under the Mongol domination. Archaeological digs have shown that the city was razed once again and burnt. It is possible that it was called Yani (“new” town) but what is certain is that it completely lost its political and commercial independence. Consequently, the city entered a long period of decline. Amongst other factors that had direct repercussions on the political and economic crisis of Taraz/Yani, we must certainly recall the transportation by sea of goods from the Far East to Europe and the Mediterranean. The Silk Road had become too dangerous, risky, and inadequate compared to the sea routes.

Between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century, Taraz was rarely mentioned. The historical sources refer to a small settlement where agriculture and the manufacturing of crafts were combined with animal husbandry. Immediately following the conquest of southern Kazakhstan by the Zhungars (1723–1755), Kazakh groups began once again to populate the Taraz valley, constructing new irrigation systems for agricultural activities.

In the early nineteenth century the upper area of the Taraz valley was conquered by Kipchak mercenary soldiers of Kokand Khanate. They built small fortresses on the ruins of the ancient city in order to control the territory and the caravan routes. It was the start of a new phase of growth and development of the Taraz settlement, which grew rapidly under the name of Namangan-i Kochek (“little Namangan”), since the first new inhabitants of the town came from Namangan, an Uzbek community in the Ferghana valley. In 1856 the name was changed to Aulie-Ata (“holy father”) in honor of Karakhan, the founder of the Karakhanid dynasty. From that year on demographic growth, increase

in construction, and the wealth of the inhabitants went hand in hand. A great spring fair attracted thousands of farmers and breeders even from the most remote regions of Central Asia, intent on exchanging goods and products.

In 1864 Aulie-Ata surrendered to the tsarist troops of General M. G. Chernyaev. The construction of a line of fortification was immediately undertaken, with the aim of uniting Aulie-Ata with Shymkent and the course of the Syr Darya. However the city continued to prosper economically, thanks to trading in animals, dairy products, skins, furs, and woolen goods. In these years, for the first time, a company for the cultivation of vines and the production of wines appeared (nowadays it is one of the most important sectors of occupation). In 1876 the first school of a European stamp was opened, run by a priest of Russian origin. At that time Aulie-Ata had around 12,000 inhabitants, the majority of which were of Russian and Ukrainian origin. The Kazakhs were almost totally absent from the urban context.

During the period of the Revolution and the subsequent civil war, Aulie-Ata remained a small town. Its name was changed once again in 1936, this time to Mirzoyan, the name of the Secretary of the Kazakhstan Communist Party, but only two years later L. I. Mirzoyan was killed during the Great Terror, Stalin's purges of the 1930s, and in 1938 the city's name changed once again. The new name, Zhambul, paid homage to the popular Kazakh poet, singer-songwriter Zhambul Zhabaev. The 1930s and 1940s were marked by the arrival in Zhambul (as in many other cities of Kazakhstan) of thousands of deported citizens from Chechnya, Ukraine, and Korea, and Germans from the Volga area. The result of this process of deportation is evident in the multiethnic nature of the population of Zhambul, where the majority are still Russian, but Kazakhs and Ukrainians represent a significant number.

In the years following independence, from 1991 onward, Zhambul has suffered a serious economic crisis that has forced many companies to close. Consequently, there has been a significant fall in the population, since many residents have abandoned the city to seek their fortune elsewhere. Nowadays Zhambul has almost completely lost the multiethnic nature that marked it until twenty years ago.

The name of the city was changed from Zhambul to Zhambyl at the end of 1992, while in 1997, on the orders of the president of the Kazakhstan Republic, the city once again assumed the name of Taraz.

Amongst the most recently built monuments is the church of the Assumption, of the Eastern Orthodox church, on Tole Bi Street. Built in

1993, this domed monumental sanctuary has a tall brick bell tower. The walls of the church are clad in light-colored ceramic tiles.

6.2 MOSQUE OF TARAZ

In 893 Ismail Ibn-Ahmad, governor of the Samanid Empire in Central Asia, took the city of Taraz and transformed the city church into a mosque. In this manner, beginning with the existing Nestorian church, the oldest mosque in the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan was founded.

The archaeological research conducted on the occasion of the celebrations for the jubilee of the city (2001), brought to light traces of this ancient mosque. It was identified in the center of the fortified city, within military encampment number three, not far from the mausoleum of Karakhan. The relics found dated the mosque to the thirteenth century, that is, in the earliest period of the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan. Scholars believe that it was built on an existing construction, probably a Nestorian or a Manichaean church, in raw brick and blocks of *pakhsa* (pressed clay). Of this Christian church there are still traces of the pillars that decorated the interior.

The dimensions of the ancient architectural structure, rectangular in shape, were approximately nineteen by twenty-one meters and the northern and southern walls were 2.5 meters thick, while the western and eastern walls were less than two meters thick. All the walls were built in raw brick and *pakhsa*, with some use of wood. Nowadays only the stone blocks that served as a base for the columns decorating the entire monument survive. The mosque underwent various destructions and fires, the last of which was fatal: in the early thirteenth century, during the conquest of the city of Taraz by Khan Kuchlug, the tribal leader of the Naiman group. Following this tragic event the mosque was not rebuilt until a few years ago.

On the eastern wall of the mosque there was a platform on which the congregation sat, while the niche of the *mihrab* was situated on the western wall.

Within a short time the mosque of Taraz became an important place of pilgrimage for Muslims, as the numerous fragments of suras from the Koran found during archaeological digs bear witness. Nowadays these relics are held in the brand-new city mosque. This building, which has been completely restored, is the first open-air museum in Taraz.

In the historical area of the city there is a second mosque, known as Aulie-Ata, situated in Elektricheskaya Street, on the corner of Kylysh-

bay Akyn Street. Built in 1913 by order of the trader Yunuskhan, it is a one-story building, with a rectangular floor plan, with a vast internal space that can be divided into two sectors, a northern one and a southern one. The prayer hall (21 x 12 meters) is located in the southern part of the building, where there is also the *mihrab*. Large windows in the northern and southern walls light the interior, which features numerous columns. The northern sector, with the entrance, has no columns.

6.3 NEMETBAY (OR NAMETBAY) MOSQUE

The Nemetbay Mosque stands in the center of the city of Taraz, along Tashkentskaya Street, at the junction with Bayzak Batyr Street. Built in 1887 on the orders of the citizen Aulieat Nemetbay, with a rectangular floor plan (27 x 8 meters) and with just one story, this building comprises three large rooms (entrance hall, general room, and prayer room). It was built using a wooden framework clad in a mixture of clay and straw. The building is approximately five meters high and the roof is flat. The ceiling of the prayer hall was constructed according to the regional architectural traditions, which foresaw the exclusive use of wood. Columns divide the internal space and shaped vertical corbels fit onto them. The walls, the columns, and the corbels are all painted (blue, red, and yellow).

Apart from the mosque, this architectural complex comprises a madrasa and service rooms.

6.4 MAUSOLEUM OF AULIE-ATA (OR OF KARAKHAN)

The Mausoleum of Aulie-Ata or of Karakhan stands in the center of the city of Taraz, within the historical citadel of the ancient city on the Silk Road, at the junction between Tole Bi Street and Bayzak Batyr Street, not far from the stadium. Built in the nineteenth century, over an earlier structure containing the tomb of the “holy father” (the meaning of Aulie-Ata) Karakhan, one of the principal Karakhanid political leaders of Central Asia, the monument was completely rebuilt between 1905 and 1906 by a Tashkent architect, Said Bekkhanov. Unfortunately many of the original decorations in polychrome tiles were lost during this excessively invasive restoration. Nonetheless, thanks to the photographs still existing and the material brought to life during the architectural digs in the area (mainly terracotta cladding tiles) it has been possible to reconstruct the original aspect of the mausoleum. Further restoration was undertaken between 1975 and 1985, and in 2001.

The inscription in Arabic characters above the portal of the facade is the *Shahada*, the declaration or oath taken by Muslims “*lâ ilâha illallâh, Muhammadur rasûlullâh*” (“There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”). Composed of a monumental structure with a portal on the facade and a domed roof, in the typical religious architectural style of Central Asia in the late medieval period, it was built in fired brick on the ruins of a previous building between the tenth and the eleventh century. The monument comprises a cross-shaped room, where there is a large brick tomb, three corner rooms and a narrow staircase. The central room is covered by a dome. The internal walls still preserve the first bricks, from the Karakhanid period, from which the very first building was constructed. In the mid nineteenth century the building was in poor condition, but this did not prevent artists and photographers from capturing its architectural features and leaving a testimony for future centuries.

Originally the monument was a cubic structure of ten meters per side, capped by a dome. The entire work was in fired brick. The external walls were decorated with geometrical motifs, squares, diamonds, and herringbone, created using jutting bricks. The entrance was formed by a large portal with an arched door and the facade was decorated with diamond motifs, stepped stars, and herringbone, together with a beauti-



Fig. 40. The Mausoleum of Aulie-Ata, known also as the Mausoleum of Karakhan, was restored in 1906 but many of the building's original decorations were lost.

ful decoration in polychrome-glazed tiles. The archaeological digs have brought to light nearly thirty different types of brick, some of which are similar to those used in the construction of the Aisha Bibi Mausoleum between Taraz and Shymkent. On the walls beside the entrance we can see tall, narrow niches; the plaster was originally painted.

Nowadays the mausoleum is an important place of pilgrimage and an exhibition space that hosts the permanent exhibition “The Monuments of Ancient Taraz”, dedicated to the description of the millenary history and culture of this important medieval center along the Silk Road.

6.5 MAUSOLEUM OF DAUTBEK

A monument dating from the thirteenth century A.D. situated in the center of the city of Taraz, the Mausoleum of Dautbek (or Davudbek or of Shamansura or Shamsur) stands at the junction between Tole Bi Street and Baysakov Street, not far from the Mausoleum of Karakhan. Like the latter it is part of the state park, the “Monuments of the Ancient City of Taraz”.

Inside the mausoleum a tombstone carries an inscription in Arabic characters that recalls that Balig Bul’ga Ulugbeg Ikbal khan-Davudbek Isfakhsalar, son of Il’jas Ogul Bek Shakanshak, is buried here. He died at the end of March 1262 as the historian V. V. Bart’old tells us. The historian of Taraz, Zh. Bodanov, says that the inscription carried the following words, no longer visible: “He that is buried here was a lord of the art of writing and of the sword, protector of Islam.”

On the basis of the historical data gathered by scholars, Dautbek was a military leader and governor of the city of Taraz, and according to certain sources he died a violent death. The Mausoleum of Dautbek is a monument with a portal on the facade, a domed roof, and a square floor plan; it was built in fired brick. The portal, which is very high, almost as tall as the dome, is not decorated, unlike the walls of the niche that surrounds the entrance to the monument. At the sides of the portal there are two small towers. The dome, which is quite squat, rests on arches and on the walls of the mausoleum. The interior of the building is in the shape of a Greek cross, with deep niches in the walls. In the center of the mausoleum is the tomb of Dautbek, a stepped pyramid in stone.

At the start of the twentieth century this mausoleum, like all the other monuments of medieval Taraz, was restored and practically rebuilt thanks to the munificence of a rich citizen, Kali Yunus Mayjusupov. Nowadays the monument is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims, not only from Kazakhstan, but from all over the world.

6.6 MAUSOLEUM OF TEKURMAS

The hill known as Tekurmas (literally “unquiet place”) is of particular interest. It is situated approximately one kilometer from the center of the city, on the right bank of the River Talas. At its foot and on the sides graves under a funerary ritual linked to the Zoroastrian cult have been found, dating between the seventh and the tenth century, as well as other Muslim tombs from the tenth and eleventh centuries. At the top of the hill stands the mausoleum of the same name, an architectural monument dating from the fourteenth century which is unfortunately in very poor condition, since in 1936 bricks from the walls and the dome were used to build a sugar-processing factory. Today a stone marks the place where until only a few decades ago this mausoleum was still visible.

The mausoleum had a domed roof, a square floor plan and was entirely built in brick with walls standing on a stone foundation. The entrance was a portal with an ogival arch, facing west, that is, toward the center of the city of Taraz. The corners of the structure were decorated with pillars, while the walls were plastered and decorated with stucco. The inhabitants of the area, in the past as today, believe that this was the tomb of the saint Sultan Makhmud Khan.

6.7 MAUSOLEUM OF AISHA BIBI

An architectural monument built between the eleventh and twelfth century, situated in the village of the same name, eighteen kilometers east of Taraz. Together with the Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun, it bears witness to a high standard of architecture. The original nature of the construction methods, the architectural forms and the decorative solutions found here, in the Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun, and in other poorly preserved monuments dating from the tenth–twelfth century have led scholars to theorize the existence of a school of architecture in northern Turkestan, characterized by close bonds with the traditions of the steppes.

Studied at various times by eminent researchers of various nationalities, the mausoleum was built on the orders of Karakhan, the governor of the city of Taraz, in memory of Aisha Bibi, who was to have been his bride.

The building has a square floor plan of 7.5 meters; in the center stands the tombstone (3 x 1.4 meters). The interior walls are in raw brick, while on the outside they are clad in tiles with engraved geometric and



Fig. 41. The Mausoleum of Aisha Bibi stands to witness the tragic story of the fateful love between Aisha Bibi and Karakhan, Lord of Taraz between the 11th and the 12th century.

floral motifs. It is possible to see more than fifty different types of decoration on the tiles used to embellish the exterior walls. These facades are identical; there are four entrances through niches, one on each side, equal in size and shape. The conical roof that now soars above the mausoleum is a modern addition, since the mausoleum never had either a dome or a conical roof. The Mausoleum of Aisha Bibi was completely restored in 2004.

According to the most common and best-known legend, Aisha Bibi was the daughter of an important scholar and famous poet of the eleventh century, Hakim Suleyman Bykyrgan. After the death of her father, she was educated at the court of the sheik Aikhozh. One day the governor of the city of Taraz, Karakhan Mukhammed (in honor of whom the mausoleum of Taraz was erected) asked for her hand, which was refused by the sheik in person, so the girl, with a subterfuge, tried to go to Taraz alone. However, her future husband never met her because Aisha Bibi died on the banks of the river, bitten by a snake that had hidden in her headdress. Desolated by this sudden misfortune, Karakhan had a mausoleum built at the scene of the tragic event. Babazha Khatun, friend and handmaiden (she may have been the wet nurse, perhaps the servant) of Aisha Bibi, remained as the custodian of the mausoleum and on her death was buried in a tomb nearby.

According to another version, Aisha Bibi lived near the city of Tashkent

around the eleventh or twelfth century. One day Karakhan, the first governor of the state of Karakhanid, came to visit Aikhozh, the father of the beautiful girl. The two young people immediately fell in love, but Karakhan had to return to Taraz to face attacks by his enemies and the two could not meet for some time. Aisha Bibi asked her father for permission to leave and go to Karakhan, but when her father refused she disobeyed him and left for Karakhan in the company of forty handmaidens and servants. However, during the journey Aisha Bibi died of a snakebite. As the first version of the story tells us, Karakhan, as a sign of his love for the girl, had a commemorative monument built.

6.8 MAUSOLEUM OF BABAZHA KHATUN

The Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun is an eleventh-century construction situated in the village of Aisha Bibi, eighteen kilometers from the city of Taraz. The architect is unknown. Since 1982 the monument has been protected by the state jurisdiction for the safeguarding of cultural heritage.

The legend regarding the construction of the *kumbez* of Babazha Khatun is directly linked to that of the construction of the Mausoleum of Aisha Bibi, although it is difficult to untangle the various legends, at present no less than twenty-eight are known.

The Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun is not very large; it is almost cubic (6.9 meters per side) and about five meters high. The walls are little more than a meter thick. It was completely built in light-red fired



Fig. 42. The Mausoleum of Babazha Khatun, the nurse of Aisha Bibi, was erected in her honor very close to the tomb of her mistress.

brick (25 x 25 x 4.5 centimeters) and is extremely simple from an architectural point of view. All the facades except the western one are decorated with arched false windows, niches, and circular motifs in brick. The main facade differs from the others because there is a parapet on which there is an inscription in Arabic characters, now only partially visible: “This is the tomb called Babazha Khatun. Its builder...” All the decorative elements on the facade are enclosed in a three-sided rectangular cornice. Above the cornice, a horizontal band of two angled, overlaid bricks runs along the perimeter of the mausoleum. Similar bands run along the parapet and the drum supporting the dome. The passage between the octahedron walls and the dome is masked by a cladding in small tiles. One of the main characteristics of the monument is represented by the *murqanas* or conical dome decorated with sixteen ribs, an architectural feature not found in any other monument in Central Asia or Kazakhstan. The dome collapsed in ancient times and was only restored to its former glory in 1981 thanks to careful restoration.

The mausoleum is an important place of pilgrimage, above all for women who come here to ask for marital happiness and children. It is also much venerated by mothers with many children.

6.9 KARAKOZHI MOSQUE

A religious building dating from the early twentieth century (1909) characterized by medieval artistic features; in fact it is similar to the mosques built in Samarqand and Bukhara, in Uzbekistan, although the latter had an arched architectural shape. It is situated in the village of Oyyk, now better known as Seylbek, in the province of Talas, on the right bank of the River Talas. It was constructed using both European and Central Asian materials and techniques: for example the walls of the building were built in European-style bricks, while the dome is made of Asiatic-type bricks.

Little remains of the original mosque, which had a square floor plan and was capped by nine domes. The old structure collapsed in the 1980s and since then the building has undergone numerous interventions of restoration that have almost completely altered its original appearance, which is witnessed by photographs taken in the past.

The mosque now has a square floor plan of 16.5 meters per side, and is divided into nine rooms, three on each side of the building, with domes and separated by columns. In the center of the southwestern wall is the niche of the *mihrab*.

6.10 AKYRTASH

This monument is situated about forty kilometers northeast of the city of Taraz, close to the city of Kyzyltash, at the foot of the Kyrgyz Alatau mountain chain.

The architectural structure of this monument has a square floor plan (180 x 205 meters) and was built in massive blocks of red sandstone to a height of between one and 1.5 meters. The blocks were placed in one, two, and more rarely three–four rows. The longer sides of the construction face north–south. A road links the northern and southern sides and a second road, perpendicular to the former, stretches east–west. The complex is thus divided into four parts. In the center of the structure there is a courtyard with five-meter-square stone bases for columns. The first of the four lots is empty ground and a series of rooms face onto a courtyard that measures thirteen by eighteen meters. Three of these rooms are corridors eighteen meters long and 2.5 meters wide. The second lot is divided into two sectors: a residential structure composed of twelve rooms and three internal courtyards, which are grouped around a courtyard eighteen meters square, and a simple structure composed of five long narrow rooms, between two and three meters wide. These rooms all face onto the internal courtyard. The third lot has thirteen rooms built around a courtyard, which has an independent entrance and exit. The fourth lot is formed of residential rooms arranged around a courtyard measuring twenty-five by thirty-four meters. In all there are eighteen rooms, two internal courtyards, and three narrow rooms. This courtyard also has an independent entrance.

Only part of the stone walls are trimmed. The blocks used for the walls are of various dimensions (115 x 60 x 60 centimeters, or 100 x 50 x 50 centimeters, or even 60 x 60 x 50 centimeters). Some of them weigh hundreds of kilograms. These blocks form a sort of container, which is filled with gravel and pebbles. The width of the external walls is five meters, while the internal walls are 3.5 meters wide.

During the archaeological digs water pipes were found, which suggest that water was brought here from springs four kilometers away.

The historical and archaeological study of Akyrtaash began immediately following the Russian conquest of Central Asia, but even now scholars do not agree on the purpose of this construction. Some consider it one of the most mysterious architectural monuments of Kazakhstan. It is also difficult to date the monument. We certainly know that it was already a ruin in 1221.

Some scholars think it was a Buddhist monastery, others a Nestorian monastery. Yet others, a palace with the function of fortress, built between the eighth and the ninth century, while the theory that it was a caravanserai, an enormous roadside inn where travelers could rest and recover from the day's journey and trade, dating from the tenth century, has found few supporters. K. M. Baypakov considers Akyrtaş the headquarters of the Karluk Khanate, which governed the region between the tenth and the eleventh century.

Since 1996 a French–Kazakh team has opened new digs that have made it possible to reanalyze the material gathered in the past and to give new interpretations and dating to the monument. The conclusion is that it was a hypostyle-type mosque (a forest of columns), beside which stood the residence of the Arab or Karluk governor of the region. In fact, in 751 an important battle was fought near Atlakh, where the Arab and Karluk allies trounced the Chinese army. It is possible, therefore, that these ruins are effectively those of the residence of the Arab–Karluk governor, with a mosque alongside. Should this be so, the identification of the monument by the toponym of Kasribas, mentioned in Arab sources of the thirteenth century, would be considered more important. In any case, it is still not clear why such a large building was constructed in an unfertile place without a water supply. Around the main building, at a distance of approximately one kilometer, there are the ruins of fortresses and watchtowers, which almost certainly were military structures to defend the governor's palace. These buildings were linked by pipes for the distribution of the little water available in the area.

6.11 KULAN (OR LUGOVOE)

A medieval city whose remains stand on the eastern edge of the village of the same name (Kulan or Qulan), in the region of Zhambyl, along the road that links Taraz with Shymkent, some kilometers to the north of the modern Vannovka, which is now called Turar Ryskulov. Inhabited from the seventh to the thirteenth century, Kulan is an area with a 300-meter-square plan, raised three to four meters above the surrounding plain. Archaeological and topographical research carried out here in the 1960s under the direction of K. A. Akishev, has made it possible to identify a fortified citadel, a *shahristan* (a residential district), a long fortified wall, and a nearby moat surrounding the entire old city. There was also certainly an earlier phase of occupation of the territory of Kulan, which is represented by a settlement and fu-

nerary barrows from the Wusun era, dated approximately between the first and the second century A.D.

The digs are concentrated above all on the discovery of a fortress dating from the twelfth–thirteenth century and a farm from the seventh–tenth century, which was specialized in vinification and the preparation of flat bread made with dried fruit and grape juice.

The first information available regarding the social and economic life of the town of Kulan comes from Arab sources of the seventh century (Ibn Hordadбек) and from the ninth and tenth centuries (Kudam ibn Jafar), who describe Kulan as an important trading center on the Silk Road to the west of Taraz. The information reported by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, who calls the settlement Zsjuy Lan, date from the mid eighth century. In the tenth century al-Maqdisi wrote that Kulan was a fine fortified city with a mosque, situated on an important caravan route, but already struck by the decline that would soon lead to it being abandoned.

6.12 MERKE

Amongst the mountains of the Kyrgyz Alatau, approximately thirty-eight kilometers south-southeast of the town of Merke, on an upland traversed by the river of the same name and its tributaries, stands a vast area sacred to the ancient Turks, which over thousands of years has been enriched with numerous commemorative complexes that differ in type and period. Situated on the western edge of the village of the same name, to the north of the road that leads from Almaty to Taraz, the area of Merke was studied by V. V. Bart'old at the end of the nineteenth century and subsequently in 1936 by A. N. Bernshtam and in 1964 by the Zhetysu Archaeological Mission. This archaeological research has made it possible to establish the total extension of the territory over which the relics to be catalogued are distributed (more than 240 square kilometers) and to determine the position of all the archaeological and historical evidence. It has also been possible to analyze the numerous types of monument, amongst which the *kurgan* steles, also known as *balbal* stones, are particularly interesting. Thanks to the richness of its heritage, Merke is now included in the UNESCO list of natural and cultural sites to be safeguarded.

Thirty-six of the *balbal* stones are still in position amongst the funerary monuments and they are perfectly visible. More than sixty steles have been found in the sacred area so far. The stones were placed on top of funerary mounds, in the center, or on the eastern side of the

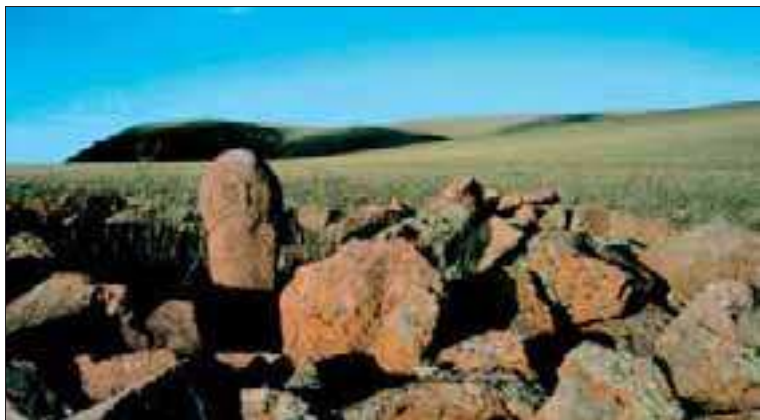


Fig. 43. A *balbal* stone from Merke. Possibly, it stood on top of a funerary barrow (*kurgan*).



Fig. 44. Merke was a vast area sacred to the ancient Turks that has been enriched with numerous commemorative complexes over thousands of years.

kurgan, within a stone enclosure. Often there were two statues, one representing a male and the other a female. However, there are also funerary structures that contained three (in many cases) and four (only in one case).

The iconographic analysis carried out on the majority of the steles has shown that the Turkic peoples of the Semirech'e region used a similar style to represent their deified ancestors. Both the masculine and the feminine figures are portrayed in static poses, with their hands in their laps; both sexes held a flat bowl in their hands. The female figures can be recognized by an exaggerated characterization of the sexual attributes, the shape of the headdress, and the trinkets and jewelry worn (necklaces and earrings). There are more female figures (twenty-eight) than male.

Throughout Eurasia, in the Middle Ages, the Turkic nomadic groups built sanctuaries dedicated to their deified ancestors, the valorous and courageous warriors who had the spiritual power to protect the living. The choice of the site on which to construct these sacred places was reserved for valleys or uplands rich with water and pastures, or at the point where two rivers flowed into each other. They were always sites of great strategic importance, both from a political point of view and because prosperous caravan routes passed by them, and from an economic standpoint because they were the lands where the nomads grazed their flocks and the animals could feed and thrive.

Amongst the other monuments worthy of interest in this archaeological area there is also a town that was occupied between the seventh and the thirteenth century. It stands at the western edge of the city of Merke, north of the state road from Shymkent to Almaty, and in the seventh century was already known as Merke. The Arabs Kudam ibn Jafar and Ibn Hordadbek, who lived between the seventh and tenth centuries, describe it as an important trading center, while a precise description of Merke as a fortified city is offered by al-Maqdisi.

Nowadays the ruins form a rectangular hill whose northern side measures 380 meters, the eastern 275 meters, and the western 250 meters. In the southwestern area of the city stood a citadel, rectangular in shape (110 x 75 meters), which was separated by a wall from the residential district, which had an almost rectangular floor plan. The corners of the fortification were further defended by mighty towers.

6.13 ORNEK

A medieval town that existed between the eighth and the twelfth century, today it stands close to the village of the same name, on the banks of the River Altynsu. It has been suggested that it may be the town of Kul'shub mentioned by Arab travelers of the ninth and tenth centuries. Kul'shub was a settlement belonging to a Karluk khan and frequented by numerous nomadic tribal groups who gathered here to trade their products and purchase grain, mainly wheat.

Studied at various times by the archaeological missions led by K. M. Baypakov, the central area of the town of Ornek is square, with the corners facing the points of the compass. The sides of the archaeological area of the internal citadel, including the valleys and the fortified works, cover about 160 square meters, while if we consider the entire archaeological area of medieval Ornek, the area covers approximately 500 hectares. The ruins are about five to six meters high, but there



Fig. 45. Ornek was a medieval town that existed approximately between the 8th and the 12th century A.D.

are some buildings whose ruins stand fifteen meters high. Archaeological research has identified the gates to the town; the roads joined in the center of the fortified space where there were mausoleums and a mosque, no longer visible. Today it is still possible to see circular structures once used for storing water, standing beside the citadel. Ornek Mosque was rectangular (40 x 20 meters) with clay walls one meter thick, built on a stone foundation. Access to the sanctuary was from the northwestern side and it was formed by two walls jutting about 3.5 meters from the facade. On the internal wall, facing the entrance, was the niche of the *mihrab*. Inside the mosque, where the archaeological dig has revealed layers in a good state of preservation, the bases of columns have been found, some of which still carry traces

of the polychrome color that decorated them in the past, while others had motifs carved into the clay that clad the bases. Stylistic analysis of the decorations has found floral motifs and some anthropomorphic figures that are difficult to identify. It is possible that the overall number of columns in the ancient mosque were fifty-five or fifty-six. This hypostyle hall had a flat roof. The mosque has been dated between the tenth and the twelfth century.

6.14 MAUSOLEUM OF SHOKAYA DATKA

The Mausoleum of Shokaya Datka was built between the twelfth and the thirteenth century in honor of the *datka* (one of the highest honorific titles of Kazakh and Kyrgyz society) Shokay, in the western part of the village of Baykadam (nowadays known by the name of Saudakent), in the province of Sarysu, Zhambyl Region. The mausoleum was built on an area that in the past was the ninth–tenth-century necropolis of the medieval city of Saudakent.

The building, entirely in fired brick, is composed of a rectangular structure (8 x 4 meters), preceded by a fine central portal; the entrance has a slightly pointed arch. The entire structure is capped by a dome on a low drum. At the sides of the portal there are two columns, partly touching the side walls, which support two small towers, clad in polychrome-glazed tiles. At the sides of the niche with the entrance door, there are small decorative niches. Inside the mausoleum there is a sarcophagus.



Fig. 46. A place of worshipping in southern Kazakhstan. According to popular belief, many illnesses can be cured after direct contact with the tomb of a person revered as a “saint”.

7.

South Kazakhstan Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA, PAOLO SARTORI, and IGOR SAVIN



Fig. 47. Map of South Kazakhstan Region.

7.1 SHYMKENT

Shymkent is the capital city of southern Kazakhstan, the most populous region of the country. It is the third largest city in terms of number of inhabitants after Almaty and Astana. The most recent census conducted in 2009 indicates an estimate of more than 650,000 people, of which more than fifty-five percent are of Kazakh origin. The largest ethnic minorities in the city are of Uzbek and Russian descent. Situated approximately 700 kilometers west of Almaty, Shymkent is located some 120 kilometers to the north of Tashkent and approximately two hours by car from the border with Uzbekistan. Today the inhabitants of this city are easily recognizable by the language they speak, Kazakh with Uzbek influences.

Shymkent, whose literal translation means “city of grass”, was founded in the twelfth century A.D. as a caravanserai to protect the town of Sayram, the most important town of that period, situated ten kilometers to the east. Recently, certain artifacts dating back to the Saka period (sixth–fifth century B.C.) were brought to light in the vicinity of the city’s railway station. A necropolis dating from the sixth–seventh century A.D. was also discovered nearby. These findings could date the first

settling of the city to an earlier period, anticipating by several centuries initial inhabitation. The first historical evidence of the city's name can be dated back to 1325, when it is referred to in the literary composition entitled *Zafar-nameh* (Book of Victory), an epic poem composed by the Persian poet Hamdollah Mostowfi (1281–1349), who describes the struggle for power between the Timurids following the death of their father. Over the centuries Shymkent has grown considerably both in terms of size and in number of inhabitants, primarily as a result of its function as a market center for trade, predominantly dedicated to agriculture and handicrafts, amongst nomads of the northern steppe and the settled populations along the Silk Road. Between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century, the city was protected by an almost square-shaped fortification, oriented toward the cardinal points. The north–south face of the fortress reached 180 meters in length, while the east–west wall stretched out some 210 meters. The main access point was situated to the south. A citadel was located in the northwest corner of the city, which extended (40 x 50 meters circa) higher than the level of the surrounding countryside by six to eight meters.

Shymkent was besieged and destroyed on several different occasions, for example by the army of Genghis Khan, by the northward advance of soldiers from the southern khanates, and to the east by the Zhungar army. Under the political and military influence of the khanate of Kokand, it became part of the emirate of Bukhara in 1810, while later, in 1864, it was annexed to the Russian Empire. In view of the city's strategic position of contact between the agricultural south and the pastoral-based economy of the north, the Russian government considered the conquest of Shymkent as being very important. The economic growth of the city received a further boost in 1883, when a well-structured pharmaceutical enterprise, which exported most of its medicinal products to European Russia, was established here and was subsequently converted into a chemical–pharmaceutical industry. Two herbs, which even today grow in abundance and fragrantly throughout the whole area of the steppe on the hills at the foot of the Tien Shan and Karatau Mountains, as well as in the most southern valley of the Syr Darya, *Artemisia absinthium* (wormwood) and thyme, were the basis of pharmaceutical productions.

Shymkent was renamed Chernyaev in 1914, in honor of Mikhail Chernyaev, the Russian general who, together with Konstantin Kaufman and Mikhail Skobelev, directed military operations and the advance in Central Asia of the army of Tsar Alexander II of Russia. However, shortly afterward, in 1921, the city was once again given the name



Fig. 48. The earliest archaeological evidence from Shymkent comes from a hilly plateau near the city's railway station.

Shymkent, known as Chimkent in the Turkic language of the Uzbeks. The city maintained its historical and commercial role as a market center for trade between Turkic nomads of the steppe and the settled populations distributed along the Syr Darya River and throughout the region that is today crossed by the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, even during the tsarist period.

The Regional Museum of Shymkent frequently organizes interesting exhibitions dedicated to the history of both the town and the region, as well as displaying the archaeological artifacts discovered in the various cities distributed along the Silk Road of southern Kazakhstan. The upper floor of the museum is dedicated to more recent periods of local history, in particular the Russian conquest and the Soviet period.

7.2 CATHEDRAL OF SAINT NICHOLAS

The cathedral church dedicated to Saint Nicholas dates back to the years 1913–1914. It stands in the oldest part of the city, where the most historical park, also referred to as the garden of the cathedral, once stood. Today, the name of the spot has been changed and the park, which is famous for the presence of some secular oaks, is now called “Ken Baba”. The entire architectural structure was built employing high-quality bricks. Despite withstanding several architectural restructures over the years, the church is still found in a perfect state of conservation. In 1920 the church was closed, while the dome was removed from its roof. Following this intervention, the building housed several institutions of a cultural nature or related to the education of children. Immediately after its closure, the former church became a technical institute for the development of Agricultural Sciences. At a later date the structure was transformed into the regional headquarters of the Pio-



Fig. 49. The Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Shymkent is today considered one of the most beautiful examples of Russian religious architecture built in the distinctive “red brick” style.

neers, becoming a puppet theater in the 1980s. Although the building underwent several changes and architectural restructuring, the original flooring of the church was kept intact, preserving to date the ornamental stone tiles, laid in 1913 for purely decorative purposes. The Cathedral Church of Saint Nicholas is today considered one of the most beautiful examples in southern Kazakhstan of Russian religious architecture built in the distinctive “red brick” style. The two-story building has a rectangular ground plan and is beautifully decorated externally, featuring arched windows containing twisted cast-iron gratings. On several occasions promises have been made to render the Cathedral to the Russian Orthodox Church; however, to date such pledges have not come to anything.

7.3 MOSQUE OF KOSHKARAT

The Mosque of Koshkarat, visible in the oldest part of the capital city of southern Kazakhstan, is the earliest, most well-preserved monument in Shymkent. The mosque is attended mainly by people of Uzbek descent and is believed to have been initially dedicated to Saint Koshkarat, the patron of the city. This mosque was the only Muslim house of worship to celebrate religious services during the Soviet era. Precise information relating to the exact period of construction of the mosque is not available. Certain documents refer to the second half of the tenth century, others to the first half of the same century, while



Fig. 50. The Mosque of Koshkarat is the most ancient, well-preserved monument in the city of Shymkent.

numerous scholars believe that an older and slightly smaller mosque existed previously on the same site.

The mosque was built in high-quality fired brick, which does not seem to have suffered the negative effects of time and weathering. Despite this, the building has undergone several reconstructions. The covered porticoes supported by lateral colonnades were initially removed and substituted with covered terraces, on two stories, which housed several rooms for prayer. The mosque has a winter prayer hall set apart from the terraces, which were used for prayer during the summer months. The main facade consists of a portal with three arches and two minarets at the corners, each of which ends with a lantern and a small dome. The western wall of the winter room houses the niche of the *mihrab* at its center. The walls of the recess are adorned with paintings presenting botanical motifs, as well as words from the Koran. A service courtyard lies adjacent to the mosque, accommodating structures for worship and other facilities for storing food produce.

7.4 ISHAN BAZAAR MOSQUE

The mosque in Ishan Bazaar was built in the late tenth century, approximately thirty-five kilometers north of the town of Shymkent. It has recently been restored employing funds from the “Cultural Heritage” program of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The initiatives of certain rich powerful figures among Kazakhs, invit-

ing builders to the city, provided for the religious building to be constructed. The choice of the location for the future construction was chosen with great care: on the left bank of the River Aris, which rises to about thirty meters above the riverbed. The building operations were undertaken on the outskirts of the village of Akkoyla. The building is well-known as Ishan Bazaar, although it is also known as the Mosque of Akkoyla. It also has a third name, Ak Mechet, namely the white mosque. The most interesting aspect is the fact that by the side of the mosque stands a madrasa, where the alphabet and basics of reading and writing were taught, as well as a large market, where nomads frequently went to buy or sell their cattle. In this setting, therefore, both traders and buyers, as well as those wishing to celebrate the major holidays of the Muslim calendar, were able to serve their religious obligations. The Ishan Bazaar Mosque belongs to the type of building having a portal at the front and developing an axis branching off the main front entrance. The mosque is covered by five domes, supported by an octagonal architectural structure, whose walls hold two-dimensional arched niches. The mosque has an elongated prismatic form, considering the vertical section, where the central dome stretches upward, built on a high cylindrical drum. The main room inside is of a square form. Several floral decorations and epigraphs that decorated the interior walls of the building have been successfully retained by restoration. Such initiatives were extremely complex since some of the walls had almost entirely collapsed. The brick structure of the central dome, on the other hand, has withstood the passing of the years, as well as the destructive effects of the weather. The dome was once decorated, but unfortunately the motifs are no longer visible today.

7.5 MAUSOLEUM OF APPAK ISHAM

The architectural complex of Appak Isham, dating back to the late tenth century, is located near to the village of Chayan, in the Baydibek district, approximately 110 kilometers north of the city of Shymkent. The name of the locality is identical to that of the river that flows alongside the area. Both originated from the fact that many crabs, known as “*shayan*” in Kazakh, can be found in the waters of this river. Still in good condition, the complex now houses the museum of the Baydibek district.

The complex was built during the second half of the tenth century by a spiritual leader of the region. It was erected with the intention of establishing a center of Muslim religious education that would attract

students and scholars from all over Asia. The workmen employed to build the structure were invited from Bukhara, but the names of the architects have not been preserved in historical records.

The entire complex comprises a mosque, a madrasa, and a building containing rooms for students. The buildings have been aligned together along a single axis. Unfortunately, the minaret had already fallen to the ground by the 1930s. It is interesting to note that there are no other religious complexes in the whole of southern Kazakhstan that can be compared to this building complex in terms of layout and overall structure. It is also worth mentioning that bricks based on European models were employed for the construction of the complex.

The numerous domes, decorated roofs, and the walls made with bricks of different shades contributing to form decorative patterns, as well as the presence of pillars on the facades of the monuments, lend a certain architectural expression to the buildings of the complex, which are all of one floor and are more or less similar in height.

Fragments of pictorial decorations are still preserved inside the mosque, where decorative motifs are represented by geometric and floral elements.

The madrasa contained thirty-two rooms, used as classrooms, while the remaining rooms were private rooms where students retreated to study and sleep. Each room measured three by six meters and each had a fireplace for heating, a basin for ablutions, and a toilet. The walls present niches where books and other items of personal use could be placed. Not far from the complex lies the Mausoleum of Appak Isham. Built on an almost square plan (6.7 x 6.6 meters), holding a square interior room (3.5 square meters), the mausoleum was entirely built of fired brick. It is topped by a dome, bringing the height of the monument to six meters. The interior walls are distinguished by niches, oriented toward the cardinal points.

Two burial chambers are housed inside this monument. The first is that of Appak Isham, builder of the mosque with a madrasa, and the second that of the craftsman who erected the monument.

7.6 RELIGIOUS COMPLEX AND MAUSOLEUM OF ISMAIL ATA

The medieval architectural complex of Ismail Ata in the village of Turbat, in the Kasygurt district, seventy kilometers south of the city of Shymkent, was built and restored many times between the eleventh and the twentieth century. The main *kumbez* (mausoleum), which gives its name to the whole complex, was built between the late

eleventh and early twelfth century, over the tomb of Ismail Ata, brother of Ahmad Yasavi's father, namely Ibrahim Ata. Ismail Ata was also an important personality of the eleventh century, mainly distinguishing himself as a Sufi master, as a teacher of Muslim doctrine and as a mystic.

The whole architectural complex includes a mosque and a series of mausoleums, which are arranged in a fan around the perimeter of a court. Until the last century, the area was enclosed within a large enclosure. Today, only the access doors to this, built in the tenth century, remain. The main monument is the Mausoleum of Ismail Ata, which has a large portal on its facade, more than 5.5 meters high, with an ogival arch. The roof is formed of two domes, one inside the other. The inner spherical-shaped dome rests on the eight walls of the building, while the outer dome is supported by a tambour. The tambour that carries the dome is hexagonal at the bottom and cylindrical at the top. The interior walls of the main area are decorated with white plaster on which ornaments are visible, as well as geometric and floral characters and certain inscriptions in Arabic script. The entire *kumbez* was built with square-shaped mud bricks. Numerous initiatives have been undertaken over the centuries to restore the building, including the operations of the late nineteenth century, and those in the 1980s, while more recently, further restoration and preservation activities were concluded just a few years ago.

Several other architectural structures of a funerary and religious nature with numerous steles and enclosures (*saganatami*) surround the mausoleum. Part of the large cemetery is still in operation today. Since 1982, the monument is protected by state laws on the preservation and conservation of the artistic and cultural heritage.

7.7 MAUSOLEUM OF SAGINDYK IN SHAUL'DER

The Mausoleum of Sagindyk is crowned with five domes and is a type of funerary building that is completely atypical and rarely found in Kazakhstan. Dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, situated approximately forty kilometers southwest of the village of Shaul'der, south of Turkestan and northwest of Shymkent, the mausoleum was erected over the grave of a person about whom almost nothing is known.

Rectangular in plan, this five-domed building is perfectly preserved to this day as a result of the good quality clay bricks used for its construction. Considering that fired bricks were expensive materials dur-

ing the period of its construction, it can be deduced that the person buried here was prosperous, if not wealthy.

The outer walls of the building do not hold any decorative or architectural details of importance. Only the main facade bears an arched covered access, framed by two pillars. The mausoleum was probably used as a family burial place, since there are seven tombs inside.

A mosque lies next to the mausoleum, dating from the same period as the funerary building. It was erected by a local builder named Konyrbay. Given that this mosque is also rectangular in plan and is topped by a five-domed roof very similar to that of the mausoleum next to it, it is believed that Konyrbay was also the creator of the *kumbez* of Sagindyk. Access to the mosque is marked by two cylindrical columns that cover the entire height of the religious building, positioned to the left and right of the entrance. The interior of the mosque is divided into two sections by two pillars, which serve to support the roof.



Fig. 51. Map of the western part of South Kazakhstan Region.

7.8 TURKESTAN, THE SECOND MECCA

The city of Turkestan is located 165 kilometers northwest of Shymkent and 280 kilometers southeast of Kyzylorda, in the valley of Syr Darya

and the foot of the Karatau mountain range, on its southern side. Turkestan is the most important historical city of the country. It is also the most popular place of pilgrimage for the whole of Central Asia, as the city houses the most important architectural monument of the whole of the Republic of Kazakhstan: the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, the first saint of Turkic origin in the holy religion of Islam. Every season the city is inundated by thousands of pilgrims, in fact Turkestan is also known as the “second Mecca”, a city of enormous importance for Muslims from both Kazakhstan and from farther afield. Lying at the juncture between the steppe to the north and the area of development of the most important cities of Central Asia along the Silk Road, the city of Turkestan is one of the few cities in Kazakhstan and Central Asia in general whose history can be traced from its foundation. Archaeological research has shown that the earliest levels date from the fourth century A.D. Little is known about the city during this ancient period, but thanks to Chinese sources it has been evidenced that a settlement named Beitian was located near to the modern city. Reference to the name Beitian ceased to appear later in history, while Shavgar, followed by Yasi, began to appear. The history of these two locations, which in the Middle Ages were the administrative and economic centers of the entire population of the area of Turkestan, is closely linked with that of the city of Turkestan.

Prior to the seventh century, the city belonged to the political dominion of the Western Turkic Khanate, later being annexed to the territory of the Turgesh Khanate between 702 and 756. Immediately afterward, the Arabs began their conquest of Central Asia and southern Kazakhstan. Moving south, the Arabs occupied the region of Mawarannahr first, namely the area between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers (Mawarannahr in Arabic means “the land beyond the river”, or north of the Amu Darya), and from here moved further north to the River Talas, which was occupied in the second half of the eighth century. At the beginning of the tenth century, during the reign of al-Mamun (809 to 818), the region, including both Otrar (Farab) and Turkestan (Shavgar), represented the northern border area of Arab rule. This geographic area played a similar role during the reign of the Samanid dynasty and the Karluks (820 to 999). Successively the Oghuz Turks were to consolidate their power and establish a true state at the level of the middle and lower reaches of the Syr Darya River and in the surrounding steppes, in addition to capturing the city of Shavgar.

Shavgar experienced periods of great prosperity and wealth during the ninth and tenth centuries, becoming a thriving agricultural cen-

ter and an advanced nucleus for craftsmanship. Al-Maqdisi described the city in the late tenth century, stating: “Shavgar is a large town with an extended *rustrak* (stronghold); there is a wall around the town. On the edge of the market there is a mosque. It is situated far off the highway.” During the period of power struggles to gain control of what is currently southern Kazakhstan between the Karakhanids and the Kara-Khitans and subsequently, in the twelfth century, when even the kingdom of Khorezm advanced its claims of conquest on the same geographical area, it seems that the city of Shavgar maintained its own important role. In fact, to formalize the immense strategic importance of the region of Syr Darya around the city in the eyes of the Arabs, the king of Khorezm decided to issue a series of coins bearing the inscription of the name of Shavgar. However, the period of submission to the power of the kings of Khorezm did not remain in being for long. From the middle of the twelfth century the name Shavgar no longer appears in any historical or geographical documents written in Arabic, in addition to an absence of monetary emission attesting its duration.

The name Yasi first appears in written sources in 1255, in relation to the journey of the Armenian king Hethum I toward the military camps of the Mongolian khans Batu and Mongke. Yasi, however, probably existed for several centuries prior to this period as a small satellite town. This settlement or town was smaller than Shavgar. The town rose to gain a historically and economically significant role only after the decline of the ancient town. The overall growth in importance of the town may be explained by the burial of the Turkic Sufi preacher and teacher Ahmad Yasavi at one of the cemeteries in Yasi, rather than in the center of Shavgar. Yasi was thus to be considered a holy place by the local population, since it preserved the remains of a great master of spiritual life.

The cities in the valley of Syr Darya were conquered by the Mongolian army of Genghis Khan with tremendous bloodshed and interminable sieges. The town of Yasi, nevertheless, is not mentioned in sources amongst those which, like Otrar, resisted throughout and where thousands of people perished. It can therefore be assumed that Yasi did not offer any resistance to the Mongolian advance.

Following the death of the leader Genghis Khan and the subsequent division of the conquered territory among his descendants, Yasi and the region of southern and southeastern Kazakhstan were assigned to Chagatai. However, Zhochi Khan immediately initiated a policy of strong pressure against this area. Taking advantage of the internal difficulties of the Chagatai *ulus*, the White Hordes of Zhochi Khan succeeded in occupying the entire middle and lower reaches of the Syr

Darya and mainly the cities of Yasi, Sauran, Zhankent, and Otrar, as well as other towns of smaller dimensions.

The 1370s were marked by the Timurid's successful conquest of the Syr Darya valley in Kazakh territory. Tamerlane's political project not only provided for political and military control of the region and of the population, but also included the construction of public buildings and sites of worship such as mosques, madrasas, and mausoleums. Under the aegis of Tamerlane, the town of Yasi became the most important religious and cultural training center for the people of the steppe. Around 1390, at the express will of Tamerlane, a magnificent *mazar* (the Persian term *mazār* is an honorific appellation for the tomb of a person of high rank) was erected above the tomb of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. This monument is still the most beautiful and prominent architectural landmark that can be admired in Kazakhstan today (see pp. 134–138).

Yasi was an influential town between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. The geopolitical importance and spiritual strength of Yasi, which could be fully exploited in the process of unification of all Kazakh groups to form the first state entity, contributed to the town becoming the capital of the Kazakh Khanate. To provide the city and its monuments with increased political and historical worth, many illustrious political–military leaders, scholars, and scientists of medieval history in Kazakhstan were buried here. For this reason, the remains of Abu'l-Khair, Rabiga Sultan Begim, Zholbarys Khan, Esim Khan, Ondan Sultan Abylai Khan, Kazybek Bi, and others lie in Yasi. At the



Fig. 52. Aerial photograph of the medieval citadel of Turkestan, in South Kazakhstan Region. The first evidence of urban development here is documented from the 7th century A.D.

same time Yasi/Turkestan became the residence of the khans of Kazakh Khanate, and Yasi was chosen to hold the most important meetings and councils in which the political, economic, and social future of the khanate was planned. The city was thus to acquire once again economic importance as a center of craftsmanship, as well as reemerging as a significant center of commercial activity. It is known that important meetings of tribal leaders also took place in other places of Kazakhstan, for example at Ordabasy, although Turkestan remained the location of choice for the most important meetings.

Makhmud ibn Vali, author of the works entitled *al-Bakhr Asrar*, refers to the town with a new name in the late eighteenth–early nineteenth century: “Now Turkestan is the town of Saksi, which is called by ordinary people Yasi. Ahmad Ata Yasavi was born in this place and buried there”.

When the city fell under the control of the Russian authorities in 1864, Yasi belonged to the Kokand Khanate. Subsequent to this, in 1867, Yasi became one of the cities of the Governor-Generalship of Russian Turkestan. When the tsarist regime fell in 1917, the city briefly became a part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, before being incorporated into the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. In 1928, historical research and the first archaeological studies were initiated under the leadership of M. E. Masson, considered by many as the “father” of archaeology in Central Asia.

Currently Turkestan counts just short of 100,000 inhabitants, of whom approximately half are Uzbek. Since the number of pilgrims visiting the city throughout the year is consistently high, many families have furnished rooms in their homes to accommodate not only pilgrims but also tourists at very economical prices. Almost all the houses located in the district in front of the mausoleum offer this service.

7.9 NATIONAL PARK MUSEUM “AZRET SULTAN”

The historic and cultural Museum and National Park known as “Azret Sultan” was established in 1991 in Turkestan, with the precise purpose of recording, conserving, and providing for the study of archaeological, artistic, and architectural monuments of the city of Turkestan. Extending over approximately ninety hectares, the reserve comprises: the citadel of Kul’tobe dated to the fourth–fifth century A.D.; the Sufi center dated to the tenth–eleventh century under which the underground mosque or *khil’vet* is situated; the ritual building of Shildekhan; the Mausoleum and Mosque of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi of the four-



Fig. 53. The Museum and National Park “Azret Sultan” was established in 1991 with the precise purpose of recording, conserving, and providing for the study of archaeological, artistic, and architectural monuments in the city of Turkestan.

teenth century; thermal baths dating from the sixteenth century; the nineteenth-century Mosque of Khum; the Mausoleums of Rabiga Sultan Begim from the fifteenth century, Esim Khan, Abylai Khan, Zholbarys, Kasym Khan, Zhanibek Batyr, Kazybek Bi, and of others, and even a medieval citadel adjacent to a *shahristan*; a prominent citadel fortified with sturdy walls, towers, and gates, safeguarded with louvers and guard posts; a barracks which housed the guards; the underground mosque of Aulie Kumshik Ata; the ruins of the Mausoleum of Alkhodzha Ata; and the Mausoleums of Gaukhar Ana. The entire museum complex has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list of protected sites.

7.10 SHRINE COMPLEX OF KHWAJA AHMAD YASAVI

The Mausoleum (*mazar*) of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi is the most important Islamic shrine complex in present-day Kazakhstan. The architectural complex seen today dates back to the late fourteenth century. Its original nucleus, however, contains evidence of the burial site of a saint dating back to the twelfth century. Although the importance of the site grew within the Yasavi Sufi lore, connected to the spiritual heritage of the saint, the shrine has become a place of Muslim worship in general since early modern history. In fact, Islamic chroniclers of the sixteenth century refer to this shrine complex as “the Kaaba of Turkestan”, attest-

ing to the growing importance which the Muslim rulers of the region deemed pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) to this place. In addition it should be noted that, until the Russian takeover of Central Asia, various Islamic principalities ruling over the region in different periods made efforts to enhance their political legitimacy by supporting the descendants (*awlād*) of the saint in maintaining the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. The shrine complex is a very large portal-cupola structure. The mausoleum is 46.5 meters wide and sixty-five meters long, and contains thirty-five rooms. It is a cluster of diverse elements that embodies rooms with various functions, including a central hall (*jama'at-khana*, or *qazandiq*), a burial vault (*gur-khana*, or *qabr-khana*), a few large and small ceremonial halls (*ak-saray*), a library (*kitab-khana*), a dining room (*as-khana*), a room with a well (*qudua-khana*), and numerous cells for students (*hujra*). The rooms are connected to other areas of the building by means of a sophisticated system of corridors and staircases.



Fig. 54. The front portal of the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, Turkestan. The construction of this sanctuary was established by Tamerlane Timur at the end of the 14th century.

The connecting nucleus of the entire building is the *jama'at-khana*, a place of assembly mainly used for rituals of group remembrance (*dhikr*). This large room is also called the *qazandiq*, that is, the place where a boiler (*qazan*) was located. The dome of the *qazandiq*, whose diameter is more than eighteen meters, rests on massive walls, three meters thick. In the center of the hall there is a large bronze boiler (*tayqazan*), which has a capacity of 3000 liters, weighs two tons and has an upper diameter of nearly 2.5 meters. The boiler was filled with sweetened water known for its healing properties. According to various legends, the bronze boiler was cast in an alloy of seven metals in the settlement of Karnak (or Chornak), located twenty-five kilometers north of Yasi, by the master (*ustadh*) 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn ustadh Sharaf-ad-din Tabrizi.

The transformation of the first shrine of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi into the mausoleum complex visible today is attributable to Timur Lang (Tamerlane; 1336–1405) and a charitable endowment (*waqf*) which supported the upkeep of the monument and which promoted the Islamic institutions that are bound to it. In fact, besides being a shrine (*mazar*), the complex is above all a cluster of cultural institutions, which bring together a Sufi lodge (*khanaqah*), a mosque, and a secondary school (*madrasa*).

The purpose of the shrine complex and the policies of Timur are clearly proclaimed on the piers of the northern portal. The external walls of the right and left piers are inlaid with facing bricks in the form of large squares laid out in an angled, overlapping pattern. Each pier has four squares filled with epigraphic motifs. The inscriptions are created in the Geometric Kufi script. Within the squares of the right pier, the inscriptions are inscribed in turquoise brick, while in the squares of the left pier, words are written once or twice. The dark-blue designs distributed around the inscriptions of the squares on both piers, spell out the name of the Prophet. This name is written four times from top to bottom, and a fifth time below them, as well as four more times from top to bottom.

The inscriptions present eulogies that reflect the spiritual legitimization of Timur's power over Transoxiana: "The ownership [of all things] belongs to Allah! The indication of the true path belongs to Allah! The indication of the true path belongs to Allah! The ownership [of all things] belongs to Allah! Muhammad." This idea is developed further on the northern pier of the northern portal: "All power belongs to Allah! Eternity belongs to Allah! The achievement of grandeur is possible only together with Allah! The achievement of grandeur is possible only together with Allah! Muhammad."

Another set of inscriptions on the ceramic slab located above the door to the burial vault is usually interpreted as revealing the ruling claims of Timur over the territory controlled by the Moghul state. This slab is 60 centimeters high and 170 centimeters wide. The two rows of inscriptions on the slab, written in the Suls script, contain the genealogy of Timur Kurakan. “The supreme leader, the ruler of all peoples, favored with the patronage of the Merciful Ruler, Amir Timur Kurakan ibn Amir Turgai/Taragai ibn Amir Burakil ibn Amir Ilingir ibn Amir Idjil ibn Amir Karadjar, commanded this sacred burial vault to be built, may Allah the Almighty immortalize his power and his rule!” In addition, the inscription on the Π-shaped frame of the door to the burial vault, which reproduces the words of the prophet Muhammad: “Say: Oh God, King of the kingdom! You grant power to whomsoever you wish!”, may refer to the fact that Timur also belonged to the Chinghizid clan and, accordingly, had equal right to rule in that region. Located in the niche there is an epigraphic composition consisting of two inscriptions. The main part is written in Kufi *bina’i* script. The letters are the width of three bricks, of which the middle ones are white, while the bricks on both sides are dark blue. The inscription contains a tradition (*hadith*) concerning the prophet Muhammad. The second inscription is written in Kufi script over the main writing and inlaid with turquoise-colored bricks. The Persian text contains information about the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). It states that: “The truth is that the members of Muhammad’s family are ‘Ali, Fatima, and Hasan, Husain.” The third text is written in Naskhi script, in white on dark-blue medallions. The medallions contain fifty-four repetitions of the



Fig. 55. The Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmed Yasavi was the first monument in Kazakhstan to be listed in 2003 as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site.

phrase: “The ownership [of all things] belongs to Allah, grandeur belongs to Allah!”

7.11 *KHIL’VET* OF AULIE KUMSHIK ATA IN TURKESTAN

The *khil’vet* of Aulie Kumshik Ata was built in the twelfth century, approximately one kilometer south of the first burial place of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. The *khil’vet* is an underground architectural structure where Sufi anchorites and Muslim mystics lived. Openings situated along a ten-meter-long, slightly curved corridor, led into small cells. Endowed with good acoustical characteristics, these small chambers provided a retreat of absolute peace and tranquility.

To mark the jubilee anniversary of Turkestan, this beautiful monument has been carefully restored. At the time of drafting this work, however, a road or trail leading from the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi to the *khil’vet* still had to be built.

The first *khil’vet* constructions in the southern Kazakhstan region belong to the tenth century. These buildings should probably be identified with the circulation of the heretical Islamic group of Shafiiti in the area, who, as it is well known, were accustomed to finding shelter and refuge in underground constructions, mainly in caves in the mountains. The *khil’vet* of Aulie Kumshik Ata is a subterranean two-room space with an access opening in the form of a vertical tunnel, which forms the initial part of a ten-meter-long corridor, covered with an arched ceiling. Built in fired square-shaped bricks, the first room has a square floor plan, with two-meter-long sides that extend more than 1.5 meters in depth. The room is crowned with a domical vault. A second circular-shaped area, adjacent to the square room, is covered by a dome. Niches are enclosed in the walls where lamps were once stored. A vertical shaft, with a diameter of approximately one meter, opens in the ceiling, about halfway down the corridor. The opening is designed to illuminate the underground structure and to serve as a conduit for the passage of new and fresh air. The interior walls were left unfinished and were never plastered.

Throughout southern Kazakhstan only two underground *khil’vet* have been preserved to this day.

7.12 MAUSOLEUM OF ESIM KHAN

The Mausoleum of Esim Khan is an architectural monument of the seventeenth century, located within a short distance of the Mausoleum

of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi and erected above the tomb of the khan of Kazakh Khanate, Esim.

Built in fired brick, with a nine-meter-square plan and walls that were more than one meter thick, the building was partially destroyed during the late seventeenth and early nineteenth century. The reconstructed mausoleum has a main facade with a portal, decorated with geometric motifs. The entrance to the monument is located in the south-eastern part of the building. The internal floor was also created employing fired bricks of a square shape. The building underwent a second restoration in the year 2000.

7.13 MAUSOLEUM OF RABIGA SULTAN BEGIM

The Mausoleum of Rabiga Sultan Begim is an architectural monument of the fifteenth century situated to the left of the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, in the medieval cemetery of the city of Turkestan. Initially, the monument was octagonal, with one room, covered by a dome resting on a high cylindrical tambour. The structure of the building was changed to a square plan at a later date. The whole building, however, has not withstood the test of time. By contemporary times the monument resulted in a state of disrepair, until the conclusion of a complete building restoration campaign a few years ago. Today the building encompasses five rooms within its structure. An octagonal hall extends throughout the center of the building, around which two square rooms and two rectangular rooms are located.



Fig. 56. The Mausoleum of Rabiga Sultan Begim, reconstructed in recent times, was erected on the grave of the daughter of Ulug Beg, grandson of Tamerlane, and wife of the Uzbek khan Abu'l-Khair.

References to the monument can be found in sources as early as the sixth century. The building was erected over the tomb of Rabiga Sultan Begim who lived approximately between 1430 and 1485, daughter of Ulug Beg (grandson of Timur [Tamerlane] ruler of the Timurid Empire, as well as a prominent astronomer and mathematician, born in 1393 or 1394, died in 1449), who was given in marriage in 1451 to Abu'l-Khair Khan and who became the mother of the khans Koshkinsh and Suyinish.

The main facade of the mausoleum is enriched by an impressive portal framing a deep niche providing access to the structure. This niche, which faces the main facade of the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, is covered by an arch. Niches with pointed arches framing the windows, representing old facades of the original octagonal plan, are still visible at the sides and behind the main facades of the Mausoleum of Rabiga Sultan Begim. Today the structure is covered with a large blue dome set on a high cylindrical drum, which is adorned with Arabic scripts, namely suras from the Koran. A second entranceway, positioned in the southeast facade of the mausoleum, leads directly into the octagonal room, where several tombstones have been preserved. The tomb of Rabiga, on which an inscription of considerable length has been engraved, providing a trace of this important woman who died in about 1485, is also conserved in this room.

7.14 MOSQUE OF ZHUMA

The Mosque of Zhuma is an architectural monument located 160 meters south of the grand Mosque of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi in Turkestan, extending alongside the *khil'vet* (*qil'vet*). It is a building with one single room, square in plan, with *ivan* (large vaulted halls) adjacent to the north and east facades. The structure is made entirely of mud bricks, while the interior walls and outer facades are finished and coated with stucco. The mosque is covered with a flat roof, while the interior is adorned with a structure of beams whose purpose is purely decorative, and which are mortised to the walls through shelves embellished with engravings, and an eight-sided column. Both the column and the ceiling have been painted dark brown. Polychrome decorations featuring botanical motifs have been conserved only on the planks that form the frame. The furnishings of the *mihrab*, as well as the mosque, have unfortunately been lost. Four niches, which function as the *mihrab*, in the main room are embellished with inscriptions in red and depictions of branches of pomegranate, on which

pairs of pigeons rest. The high ceiling, large windows, as well as the door, wooden flooring, and the painting on the frame and the walls have contributed to rendering this mosque an important building of a social character in the city during medieval times. Until the late tenth century, about forty mosques similar to that of Zhuma could be counted. Restoration work was carried out on the mosque in 1980.

7.15 MOSQUE OF KUMSHIK ATA

The Mosque of Kumshik Ata is a subterranean architectural monument, used in medieval times as a place for Sufi rituals, dating from the tenth–twelfth century. Today the monument is no longer underground but exposed to the open. It is located at approximately one kilometer south of the Mosque of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi.

Miraculously well preserved, this underground structure comprises two rooms, extending a total of ten meters in length. It is made entirely of brick, with walls lodging small niches designed to hold candles.

7.16 MAZAR OF IMAM MARKOZI

One of the most interesting monuments of the area around Turkestan is the *mazar* of Imam Markozi in Shobanak. The tenth-century *mazar* is held to be a building that inspired the architects of the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi in the city of Turkestan.

The story of Imam Markozi is extremely interesting. He reached Turkestan, then called Yasi, at a time in which Ahmad Yasavi practiced proselytism. He arrived in the town from Khorezm bearing several manuscripts. The legend suggests that the greatest aspiration of Imam Markozi was to correct habits and direct local Muslims toward an appropriate style of life. It should be noted that the Sufis, at that time, were not deemed worthy of esteem and respect amongst the scholars of Islamic law.

Ahmad Yasavi met Imam Markozi at the city walls. He illustrated the books to the students and invited them to choose whichever book they desired. The imam, on the other hand, secretly prayed that the students would not take the books away. Thus Ahmad invited Imam Markozi to take one of the manuscripts, encouraging him to examine the inside of the book. When Markozi randomly took one of the manuscripts into his hands, he noticed that the text on the pages had begun to disappear. Ahmad Yasavi then told Imam Markozi to close the books he had examined, inviting him to open them once again. It then

seemed to Imam Markozi that the texts in the books had reappeared. Although the information available is scarce, the legend transformed the historically attested struggle, among the different directions of Islamic teachings in the territory of the southern steppe between the twelfth and the thirteenth century. Sufism, of which Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi was the most influential figure, resulted a predominant influence in the end, as is clearly evidenced by the differences in size and grandeur of the two funerary mausoleums of the two scholars.

The *mazar* of Imam Markozi was created observing the architectural traditions of Central Asia and in particular those of the southern region of Kazakhstan. This is a building with a portal located on the front facade, crowned with a conical dome. Square in plan, the structure has an arched covered niche located inside the front portal, which provides access to the building. Two towers are located at the corners of the main facade, within which two spiral staircases lead up to the roof of the *mazar*.

Not far from the mausoleum are the remains of a minaret dating from the nineteenth century which was part of a former architectural complex comprising of a mosque and a madrasa, and which unfortunately is no longer conserved. Even the minaret, erected with mud bricks, fails to be fully preserved. In fact, the whole of the upper part of the building is no longer in existence and consequently the building reaches just eight meters in height. The diameter at the foot of the structure is 3.5 meters, while tapering upward. Internally, the minaret contains a spiral staircase that is illuminated by a few small windows cut out of the central part of the building.

7.17 MAUSOLEUM OF ARISTAN BAB

The Mausoleum of Aristan Bab is an architectural monument constructed during the twelfth and the fourteenth century, situated a short distance from the ruins of the great medieval city of Otrar on the Silk Road. The building was erected in the twelfth century over the tomb of Aristan Bab. Later destroyed several times, the structure was restored and modified in the fourteenth century and finally in the twentieth century. The work that can be visited today dates to 1910.

According to tradition, Aristan Bab, also known as Arslan Bab, was a follower of the prophet Muhammad. A legend binds his biographical path directly to that of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. According to this tale, when Muhammad, on his deathbed, enquired of his disciples as to who wanted to continue preaching, the young Aristan took the



Fig. 57. The Mausoleum of Aristan Bab is an important pilgrimage place for the Islamic World.

Amanat chain, a symbol of prayer, and began wandering around the world. After about ten years of traveling, he approached a bridge, within a short distance of the city of Sayram. Here he met a child of eleven, who asked him for the Amanat chain, affirming that he himself would continue preaching in the world. Aristan understood immediately that his wandering had ended and that he had finally found a disciple to whom he could teach the doctrine of the Koran and the philosophy of Islam. That child became well known as Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi.

The building consists of two parts: the mausoleum and the mosque. The mausoleum comprises two areas, covered by large spherical-conical domes, whose walls are adorned with niches. The mosque is composed of a room for prayer, with a *mihrab*, and auxiliary rooms. The roof of this reading room has been created with wooden beams, and an eight-cornered dome which rests on six pillars embellished with beautiful carvings.

The main facade of the religious complex has a fully symmetrical composition. At the center there is a small portal, while two towers, partially built three-quarters into the walls, flank the facade. Ornamental motifs, thirty-five by twelve centimeters in size and created with bricks, adorn the main front of the commemorative complex.

A recent project plans the construction of a complex in front of the Mausoleum of Aristan Bab open to tourists and pilgrims wishing to visit this locality for religious reasons and the nearby ruins of the medieval city of Otrar. Given the name Otrar Resort, this complex will include hotels, restaurants, and other reception and catering struc-

tures built next to gardens and fountains that draw water from the Syr Darya River. The aim of the project, due to be completed in 2010, is to recreate the splendor of the city of Otrar.

7.18 OTRAR

Otrar, also called Farab or Parab, as well as Turarband, Turar, and Tarband, was one of the most important cities on the Silk Road, in the valley of Syr Darya. Today this archaeological settlement is located approximately one hour's drive from Turkestan, within a short distance from the village of Shaul'der and seven kilometers northwest of the railway station of Temir, along the Shymkent–Kyzylorda rail line. For centuries Otrar was the political, administrative, and cultural center of a vast region of farmers and breeders situated midcourse on the Syr Darya that had trade and cultural contacts with China in the east, with the Mediterranean world and Europe in the west, with the Near and Middle East and India to the south, and with southern Siberia and the Ural region to the north.

Today, Otrar presents itself as an enormous hill, formed of stratified archaeological deposits of an irregular pentagonal shape, extending over approximately 200 hectares and eighteen meters higher than the surrounding countryside. Of the beauty and prosperity of the past, there remain only numerous ruins made of clay and fired bricks that are partially covered by tufts of grass and a selection of shrubs, while the immense series of villages and farms that occupied the space around the main center and where cows and camels once grazed is now covered by vast areas of pre-desert steppe. The impressive irrigation system that was a source of wealth to many farmers and breeders is currently hidden under layers of clay, where small rare plants of *Artemisia abisinthium* (wormwood) and certain saxaul shrubs (*Haloxylon*) grow. Since the archaeological findings around the main center are numerous, it is clear that Otrar did not consist of one single settlement. Countless hills that were once ancient cities, small villages, farms, watchtowers, forts, and military garrisons to control the surrounding territory can be seen from the summit of Otrar. As many medieval sources mention, all the cities and all villages, which were part of the district administered by Otrar, could be reached in one day's journey. Many of these, as with Otrar itself, have been the object of research and archaeological excavations that have contributed to understanding the immense historical, political, economic, and cultural importance of this urban conurbation that in antiquity resembled a vast oasis.

The city of Otrar is mentioned in numerous ancient sources in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages. One of the earliest, dating from the seventh–eighth century, provides evidence that the first name of the city was most probably Tarband or Trabán. Archaeological research has shown that the earliest traces of human occupation in the area are dated to the first century A.D. The most important city of the area during the first millennium A.D. was the city of Kadar/Keder. The leading role, however, was taken by Farab in the tenth century, which is described by the Arab geographer al-Maqdisi as a fortified city with a citadel, a mosque, and a flourishing market that was also attended by nomads from the steppes to the north of the Syr Darya. Al-Maqdisi also provides us with the number of inhabitants (70,000) in the tenth century, although this number appears to be overstated.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, when the main mode of transport was the horse, Otrar was one of the most economically important cities first submitted to the political control of the Arab Caliphate and then to the Samanid dynasty. During this period, Muslim practice and study of the doctrine underwent a process of rapid growth in the city and surrounding area. At the same time many sources observe that one of the greatest libraries of the period was situated in Otrar, in addition to referring to the vast number of mosques and madrasas that were erected in the city. As already mentioned, Otrar was also an influential cultural center where Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, a pre-eminent philosopher (who died in Damascus in 950), was born in 874 and where Aristan Bab carried out his activities as a preacher.

In the early thirteenth century Otrar passed under the control of Taj al-Din Bilge Khan, a prince of Karakhanid and a vassal of the Karakhitans, who was killed by the regent of the kingdom of Khorezm, Ala al-Din Muhammad, a few months prior to the invasion of the Mongol army of Genghis Khan (Chinghiz Khan) in Central Asia.

The economic prosperity, as well as the political and administrative authority of Otrar, was abruptly interrupted by the Mongolian offensive in Central Asia by Genghis Khan. The historical background is known as the “tragedy of Otrar”. In 1218, Genghis Khan sent to Otrar and to the court of the king of Khorezm, Muhammad, a trade caravan full of products accompanied by 450 Muslim merchants. But, in accordance with the orders of Muhammad to Inalchuq Kair Khan, governor of the city, the caravan was robbed and the merchants, considered spies, were slaughtered. In the autumn of the following year, the Mongols began to lay siege to Otrar and a few months later also Konya Urgench, the capital of the kingdom of Khorezm, was besieged by



Fig. 58. Bird's-eye view of Otrar, one of the most celebrated cities along the Silk Road.

troops of Genghis Khan. Despite a heroic defense of the city, Otrar fell and Inalchuq Kair Khan was executed. The main settlement and many other towns in the area were placed under attack for days on end. Some of these communities were never inhabited again. Otrar on the other hand rose again very quickly and by the troubled years of civil wars, which followed the death of Genghis Khan, returned to being a center of political and economic power. The importance of the town continued to grow throughout the thirteenth century.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the city was brought into the sphere of Timur Lang's (Tamerlane's) power. Here in February 1405, when Timur was in the process of preparing an army for a new campaign of territorial conquests, he fell seriously ill and died in one of the buildings of the city.

The death of Timur provoked an endless series of struggles for his succession. Many were descendants of the leader who undertook to lay claim to this region and thus for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the steppe area of the Syr Darya and around Otrar was subject to rebellions, armed clashes, and destruction that thwarted the complete economic development of the city and the surrounding area. What little stability was maintained during these years, however, was lost completely with the arrival of the Zhungars in the steppe. Following the arrival of the Zhungar tribes, the city suffered an uninterrupted political and economic decline, associated with the depopulation of the surrounding territory and the abandoning of farming and livestock activities. Other factors also contributed to the decline of Otrar.

First, most of the land transport along the Silk Road had been diverted to transportation by sea, giving rise to crisis and economic destabilization in the cities and towns situated along this commercial route. Second, the irrigation system that supplied water to the agricultural activities had in part dried up as a result of climate changes.

In the late eighteenth century there were approximately fifty families remaining in Otrar, compared to the almost seven thousand families that lived in Otrar in the fourteenth century, during the period of the city's greatest splendor.

7.19 MOSQUE OF OTRAR

Dated between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, the mosque of Otrar was located in the southeastern part of the central area of the city. Some scholars believe that this mosque and the Mausoleum of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi were built simultaneously.

The mosque was rectangular in plan, measuring sixty by twenty-two meters, with a construction axis extending from east to west. The building was accessed from the north, where a portal with pillars positioned in a rectangular plan protruded slightly from the surface of the walls. Two cylindrical minarets were situated in the corners of the portal, measuring about two meters in diameter, which contained a spiral staircase providing access to the roof of the building. At the center of the south wall there was a niche, the *mihrab*, which was preceded by a large room topped with a dome that was entirely filled with columns on a brick base. The mosque was constructed with fully built walls that were nearly 1.5 meters thick, while the flooring was laid with high-quality rectangular fired bricks. The walls, both inside and out, of the building were embellished with attractive decorations, created with glazed tiles coated with lively colors such as blue, light blue and green, as well as ornamental compositions comprising phytomorphic and zoomorphic motifs. Inscriptions taken from the suras of the Koran were also used to ornament the walls. In the area of the southern hall and the area close to the *mihrab* most of the polychrome tiles have been recovered.

In terms of its type, this hypostyle mosque can be compared to that of Keder, which, dating from an earlier period, was deemed the building model for the religious construction of Otrar.

The mosque of Otrar was destroyed a few years after the death of Tamerlane (Timur Lang). The details of what caused the destruction of this building are not known; however, it is believed that there is a close correlation between the death of Timur in a religious building

in Otrar and failure to complete the mosque, resulting in the building being considered “unfortunate” and thus destroyed, while the construction of a new religious building in the residential area of the city was undertaken.

Building work on the second mosque in Otrar was initiated in the second half of the fifteenth century. This structure remained operational until the end of the sixteenth century. Excavations have revealed part of the northwest facing portal which provided access to the structure, in addition to the room containing the *mihrab* niche, while all the rooms situated laterally have not yet been brought to light. All of the structures, which today rise to a height comprising between one and 1.5 meters, were built in fired brick.

7.20 KEDER (KUYRYKTOBE)

The ruins of the city of Keder, identified in the grounds of the hill of Kuyryktobe, are situated within the area comprising the oasis of Otrar, three kilometers west of Otrar (Farab), and consist of a citadel with a palatial building, of a *shahristani*, and a *rabid* (suburb).

Excavation of the citadel has enabled archaeologists to determine with accuracy the period of existence of the entire settlement. It is believed that the city had a first period of life from the seventh to the eighth century, a second from the eighth to the second half of the tenth century, and a third and final existence which has been dated between the tenth and the twelfth century. The palace built in the citadel, whose function is little understood, was one floor high, housing a room for entertaining situated centrally, around which numerous rooms and other areas fanned out. Defense towers were situated at the corners of the building, while a sort of corridor ran along the whole inside perimeter of the roof where the archers would take up position, protected by a crenellated structure, to defend the palace against enemy attack. The entire building was made of fired bricks and blocks of *pakhsa* (pressed clay). The walls were decorated with a frieze of carved wooden boards. Unfortunately the palace was set on fire and almost totally destroyed. Nevertheless, Russian and Kazakh archaeologists who excavated the site have successfully recovered fragments of wooden boards that adorned the external facade of the palace. Some of these bore representations of the gods of the Zoroastrian pantheon.

At the center of the town, at the junction between two main roads, a mosque was located. This mosque had two periods of existence, a first period between the late ninth and early tenth century, and a second

that began immediately after the reconstruction of the building, dated between the tenth and the twelfth century. After the thirteenth century the mosque was completely destroyed and the area underwent transformation to become a cemetery. Archaeological excavations have established that the building was rectangular in plan (36.5 x 20.5 meters), with a main axis extending from southwest to northeast. The walls were erected employing a combination of fired and mud bricks. The large number of bases for columns found within the walls indicate that the mosque was a hypostyle (built with many columns).

7.21 PETROGLYPHS OF THE KARATAU MOUNTAINS

The Karatau Mountains are a range of mountains that originate in the territory between the cities of Taraz and Shymkent in southern Kazakhstan, and which extend northwest to the outskirts of the city of Kyzylorda, along the valley of Syr Darya. Stone carvings from the Bronze Age and Iron Age can be admired in various locations on both the northern and southern mountain sides.

The tens of thousands of petroglyphs (rock engravings), which have been the object of several studies by Kazakhs and foreign specialists, are concentrated in certain localities, including Arpaozen, Koybagar, Maydamtal, Ulkentura, Kysan, Zhyngylshak, Koshkarat, Gabaevka, Rang, and Sujundiksay. Those situated in Arpaozen, consisting of more than 3500 incisions on stone, deserve special consideration for



Fig. 59. Petroglyphs with zoomorphic figures, among them two camels, from Arpaozen.



Fig. 60. Rock art incisions from Koybagar, in the Karatau Mountains.

the beauty of the drawings and perfection of techniques employed for their creation. The petroglyphs are located seven kilometers southwest of the Abay winter encampment, in the Suzak district, in the southern region of Kazakhstan. The carvings of Koybagar are also worthy of note in terms of the number of petroglyphs, approximately 3000, as well as for the charm they transmit. The petroglyphs of Koshkarat, thirty kilometers south of Suzak, and those of Gabaevka, twenty-seven kilometers northeast of the railway station in Burnoe, portray several hundred subjects.

These representations are engraved directly on various sizes of flat surfaces of metamorphic rocks. They are located a short distance from water sources, where communities of transhumant herders would stay for a certain length of time to graze and rest their animals, as well as to exchange goods, food products, and produce with other groups of nomads and sedentary farmers of the region. Some of the most widespread engravings on the rocks of Karatau are depictions of ferocious wild animals, camels (probably a symbol of wealth and power), and hunting scenes, including that of dogs hunting a mountain goat, one of a cat being hunted with a bow, and scenes of birds being hunted. Chariots were frequently carved; there are forty examples amongst the petroglyphs dating from the Bronze Age, which are similar to the figures of Semirechë (Zhetysu).

The petroglyphs of the Karatau mountain range are unique monuments of culture, as well as depicting the social and spiritual life of the community of shepherds and farmers of the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

7.22 OKSUS/ZERNUK/VESIDZH

A medieval town, dating from the first to the fifteenth century, located in the southern region of Kazakhstan, approximately eight kilometers north of the village of Majakum and a short distance from the village of Akzhar. Situated on the left bank of the Syr Darya, the town lies approximately forty-three kilometers from Turkestan, in a southwest direction. It is the city where the great scholar Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi was born.

The first name given to the city was that of Vesidzh, but in historical and archaeological literature the settlement is known as Oksus. From the thirteenth century, Oksus is mentioned in the documents drawn up by the Armenian king Hethum I, on his diplomatic trip to the capital of the Mongolian Karakorum kingdom to meet the great khan Mongke. The Arab source Abu Abdullaha al-Khorezm explains the meaning of what appears to have been the third name of this town, writing in fact that *zernuk* indicates “one of the species of cereal.”

Archaeological research has exposed the elaborate irrigation techniques employed in Zernuk, with which the inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area drew water from the Akaryk canal.

Covered by archaeological layers and partly destroyed by weathering, the medieval city is almost invisible today. A hill of archaeological deposit in the shape of an irregular pentagon on which several archaeological excavations have been opened is all that is visible. In chronological order, the latest excavations were those created by the Archaeological Mission of Southern Kazakhstan in 1975 (supervision of works assigned to K. A. Akishev and K. M. Baypakov).

7.23 SAYRAM

Sayram was one of the major cities of the Middle Ages during the ninth and tenth centuries. It is located in the province of Sayram, a region of southern Kazakhstan, southwest of the homonymous modern town and twelve kilometers east of Shymkent. A bustling center located along the Silk Road even before Shymkent was built, Sayram is the birthplace of the great Sufi master Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. The modern town, on the banks of the River Sayramsu, is inhabited by about 40,000 people, most of them of Uzbek origin.

Research has revealed that a *mazar*, often consisting of the sacred tomb of a scholar considered holy and wise, can be found in each village located in the area of Sayram, and even in the steppe. Each year

a substantial number of pilgrims reach the town from outside of Kazakhstan, to pray and to visit a burial place or a mosque.

Sayram, as well as being the center of an extremely fertile oasis of farms, was also an important and populous commercial and handicrafts hub, as well as an artistic and cultural center, situated along the Silk Road between the cities of Shash (today Tashkent) and Taraz. Chinese written sources, from the seventh century (ca. A.D. 629) and later, refer to the city of Isfijab (or Isbidjab). Numerous scholars believe that this toponym should be identified with the town of Sayram, although there are just as many scholars who do not accept this interpretation. During this period, Isfijab was the capital of an urban district that included other conglomerations such as Farab, Sauran, Navekat or Navaket, Balasagun and others. In the eighth century a large and active Nestorian community was formed in the town. In 766, however, Muslim troops, in an attempt to conquer the city, first tried to drive the Nestorians west, then to condemn them to slaughter, killing thousands of followers. It is known that in the tenth–eleventh century, or perhaps slightly later, the urban conglomeration already took its current name. Thanks to Ibn Khaldun, it is also known that in the conglomeration, surrounded by defense walls, there was a *medina*, a citadel with its own fortifications, and a *rabad*. A mosque was built inside the *medina*. Archaeological investigations have successfully established that almost 40,000 towns and villages surrounded the center of Sayram and that nearly 2000 *rabad* existed. Among the most important, Ulugtobe, Martobe, Shabad, Budukhket, Manket, and Zhuvikat should be noted, in addition to a series of necropolis located in the river valleys of Sayramsu and Badam. In 1214, the city was taken by Muslims from Khorezm and five years later by the Mongols. The city entered a period of economic crisis, from which nevertheless it was able to recover in a short period of time, as evidenced by the Chinese monk Chan-Chun who lived between 1221 and 1223 in Sayram and describes it as a “great city”. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Sayram was a trading city with the most prominent handiwork products of the whole Kazakh Khanate. In fact, numerous *rabad* and caravanserai were located in and around Sayram. At that time, Sayram was part of the confederation of cities on the course of the Syr Darya amongst which a violent power struggle broke out involving the Shaybanid dynasty and several Kazakh khans. In 1684 and 1723 the town endured raids and destruction by the Zhungars, while in the nineteenth century it became part of the Kokand Khanate and was later annexed by the Russian Empire in 1864. The ruins, represented by a rectangular area fortified by walls and by



Fig. 61. Aerial photograph of Sayram, one of the major medieval cities along the Silk Road, between the 9th and the 10th century.

two embankments, extend over an area of approximately 600 square meters and are found at the center of the modern town of the same name. Most of the archaeological material visible today belongs to the post-Mongol period. The oldest archaeological layers and relating structures are buried beneath the architecture of the late medieval period, as well as below modern architecture.

The ancient urban area of Sayram is accessed by crossing the northern gate, the one of Shymkent, and the only one of four gates preserved until today. There are many monuments to be visited, mostly concentrated in the area of the cemetery. In addition to the most important monuments described below, several other sites are worthy of mention, including the Mausoleums of Makhmud Khan Ata (the grandfather of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, who lived in the tenth century), of Kamaliddin Bayzavi (who lived in the twelfth century; his cult was founded when several followers swore to have heard voices come from his tomb), of Khwaja Ata Khadzhi (another great scholar, whose funeral building was built in white bricks, on a square plan, with each side measuring four meters in length, rising to six meters in height), of Sarkalka Baba (the *mazar* was accidentally discovered by archaeologists northeast of Sayram who exposed the remaining five or six rows of stone foundations), and that of Lutfulla Sayrami (located to the north of the mosque). Finally, notable among these monuments is also the Hisr Paygambar minaret built in the tenth century, which was part of the Kydyra (or Kyzyr) Mosque and which rises approximately fifteen meters high.

7.24 MAUSOLEUM OF IBRAHIM ATA

The Mausoleum of Ibrahim Ata is situated on the northeastern boarder of Sayram, almost three kilometers from the city center, located on a hill along the road leading to the village of Aksu. Built between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, the mausoleum was erected over the tomb of Ibrahim Ata, father of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. It is a domed building, typical of medieval architecture in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The mausoleum has been restored several times. In the mid twentieth century, following a violent earthquake, the dome crashed to the floor and was replaced with an iron roof with four pitches, at the center of which a conical-shaped dome was erected.



Fig. 62. This funerary building was erected over the tomb of Ibrahim Ata, father of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi.

The monument is square in plan, with sides measuring little more than seven meters in length, rising to 8.25 meters high. The building has just one room, with access from the south, and is distinguished by two identical portals with shallow niches that open on the western and eastern sides. The interior walls are embellished with a stucco decoration, while the floor is covered with fired bricks plastered with clay mixed with lime.

Ancient Sayram was certainly one of the most heated centers of dissemination and propaganda of the Islamic religion, where many spiritual teachers and doctors of Islamic law lived. One of these was Ibrahim Ata, who practiced the profession as a teacher to thousands of young students in this city. He lived in the eleventh century, when Islam, spreading slowly, began to enter the hearts of the peoples of Central Asia.

7.25 MAUSOLEUM OF KARASHASH ANA

The Mausoleum of Karashash Ana is an architectural monument dating from the thirteenth–fourteenth century, built over the grave of the mother of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, Karashash Ana (?–1099 or 1100). Located at the center of Sayram, the mausoleum suffered great damage over the centuries and has required several restorations. The building seen today is the result of the last restoration, which took place in the mid nineteenth century. The monument is square in plan with sides measuring almost 6.5 meters each. The building rises to an overall height of seven meters and is crowned with a domed roof. The building materials employed to construct the monument include brick, wood, clay, and other natural materials.

The southern and western walls are characterized by wooden doors and hemispherical niches. All the walls accommodate shallow arches, enclosing shallow niches containing windows, in addition to the entrance to the mausoleum. The upper part of the southern and western walls are outlined in the shape of a pointed arch.

At the center of the mausoleum is the tomb of marble slabs of Karashash Ana. A further four tombs, belonging to individuals related to Karashash Ana, are situated next to it. A popular legend narrates that in ancient times a strand of black hair (the word Karashash in fact means “black hair”) was attached to the top of the dome, which was, however, lost over the years.

Virtually no evidence relating to this female character has been found. As already specified, we know that she was the mother of Khwaja Ah-



Fig. 63. The Mausoleum of Karashash Ana is an architectural monument dating from the 13th–14th century, built over the grave of the mother of Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi.

mad Yasavi and that she was one of the most enlightened and educated women of her time. The figure of Karashash is still worshiped today in many regions of the Turkic world.

7.26 MAUSOLEUM OF ABDUL AZIZ BABA

An architectural monument dating from the ninth century A.D. in the Karakhanid period and located within the medieval town of Sayram, the Mausoleum of Balegerdan is better known today as the Mausoleum of Abdul (or Abdel) Aziz Baba.

In 766 the town of Sayram was taken by Arab forces led by Iskaq Bab. The standard-bearer of this army was in fact Abdul Aziz Baba, who was renowned for his great efforts in spreading the Muslim creed. Arab sources observe that his broad basic education contributed to his acclaimed art of public speaking, as well as being notable for the perseverance and faith of which he was imbued. The inhabitants gave him the nickname “Balegerdan”, meaning “he who drives away misfortune”, with which Abdul Aziz Baba is also referred to in history books.

A new mausoleum was erected in the sixteenth century by order of Nayryzakhmet Khan (Barak) and is still to date one of the most prominent among the monuments situated in the historic center of Sayram. The building, which was built entirely of bricks, as per the style of medieval architecture in Central Asia, bears a portal on its front facade and is capped by a dome. The monumental building is quadrangular in plan, measuring eleven by six meters and rising approximately ten meters high. It contains three different rooms covered with a dome, which are accessed via an entrance framed with an arch, supported by columns. The central hall was the place of prayer and worship, while two rooms leading off to the side served as burial grounds. Abdul Aziz Baba is buried in the north facing room, while Seit Kozhaxhan Ata is found to the other side.

Unfortunately, the building did not survive in its original form to present times, and was completely rebuilt in the nineteenth century. During the course of the last restoration, the monument was restored almost to its former architectural design.

7.27 MAUSOLEUM OF AKATA BAB

A few meters before the north gate to the medieval city of Sayram the *mazar* of Akata Bab rises. The mausoleum is rectangular in plan, measuring four by five meters and 5.5 meters in height. The dome atop

the monument was covered in recent times in aluminum and, unfortunately, the building visible today is the result of reconstruction completed in 1995 supported by the subscription of the residents from Sayram. Over the years the original architectural structure has been completely destroyed, with the last traces being deleted in the late nineteenth century.

Akata Bab was the pseudonym of Shakhbiddin Isfijabi, who lived in the years at the turn of the eleventh century and who was acclaimed as the eminent scholar and teacher of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. His works are in fact evidence of his extensive cultural background and deep wisdom, while the sources of his contemporaries remember him as a man who promoted the ideals of goodness, culture, and wisdom to his fellow citizens and students, as well as religious Muslim teachings.

7.28 MAUSOLEUM OF MIRALI BAB

In the western part of Sayram the Mausoleum of Mirali Bab rises, one of the finest monuments of this ancient city on the Silk Road. Today the monument is clearly visible thanks to its reconstruction that was carried out in the second half of the nineteenth century. It lies at the heart of the old city, where once the cemetery of the conurbation lay. The funeral building has a rectangular floor plan (9.8 x 6.4 meters), is nine meters high, and has been constructed entirely in brick. The monument dates to between the end of the eleventh century and the early twelfth century. During the fourteenth century it remained in a good state of preservation; however, soon after, the condition of the tomb slowly deteriorated, resulting in a structure whose original features are almost impossible to recognize today.

Written medieval sources provide evidence that the mud-brick tomb belonging to Malik Shah, the father of Mirali Bab, who lived in the eleventh century, was built just north of the mausoleum. Until recently, this tomb was preserved under a small mound of earth covered with grass and shrubs. Today, a restoration project has opened an excavation, unearthing the mud bricks used for construction and revealing the walls of the lower part of the Mausoleum of Malik Shah, which still conserve their base in stone and clay.

Mirali Bab was a great scholar of spirituality who many considered a prodigy in spreading the doctrine of Islam. He acquired his passion for religious studies from his father and was himself father of two children, Khwaja Nasrulla Farso and Khwaja Fatkhulla Makhmud, who were acclaimed upon their father's death for the wisdom with which

they conferred advice to people. Their tombs were also located in the vicinity of those of their father and grandfather.

Even today, evidence of the name Bab Mirali is found in the city of Sayram, insofar as an old cemetery dating from the thirteenth century and a modern residential area of the town have been given this name.

7.29 MAUSOLEUM OF BIBIGIZHAS ANA

The Mausoleum of Bibigizhas Ana, which collapsed in a period not known, is located to the southwest of the burial ground of Mirali Bab, built over the grave of the mother of Khazret Khyzr. In 1998, the inhabitants of Sayram commissioned the construction of a new mausoleum, which to date remains a clearly visible monument. The mausoleum contains two rooms, of which the west room holds the tomb, while the east room is covered by a roof and serves as the place for prayer and worship.

7.30 MAUSOLEUM OF KAZY BAYZAVI

The Mausoleum of Kazy Bayzavi is an architectural monument erected, probably, over the place of burial of a local *kazy*, who lived in the ninth–tenth century and who was considered “holy”. Built of brick and located on the left, just outside the southern gate of the medieval city of Sayram, the building originally had a one-room structure that was almost square in plan (4.8 x 5 meters), covered by a dome supported by a tall tambour. The overall height of the building surpasses ten meters. The tomb is located inside the mausoleum, oriented from east to west. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a memorial room measuring six by almost five meters was built on the south side of the monument. Today, the building consists of two rooms arranged in an “L” shape, covered with a four-sectioned sloping roof. Rooms similar to *iwan* (halls), distinguish the two main facades of the monument which are oriented respectively toward the west and south. The interior and external walls are decorated with stucco and whitewashed. Bayzavi is also remembered in the history of Kazakhstan as having been an eminent scholar of Islamic sciences.

7.31 MAUSOLEUM OF KHWAJA ATA KHADZHI

The Mausoleum of Khwaja Ata Khadzhi is a small monument, built over the grave of the distinguished scholar Khwaja Ata Khadzhi, which

has not withstood the test of time and erosion caused by atmospheric conditions. The inhabitants of Sayram thus ordered a new Akhmetzhan Khwaja Ata Mausoleum to be erected in white bricks, attending to each detail and surrounding it with trees and evergreen plants. The mausoleum has a square floor plan, with sides measuring four meters in length and six meters in height.

Khwaja Ata was a great scholar, as well as being a grandson to the holy Khazret Bekhish Ata. He was therefore related to Ahmad Yasavi. Many of his disciples were to become famous for the devotion with which they taught and preached Muslim philosophical and religious doctrine among the working classes.

7.32 MAUSOLEUM OF MAKHMUD KHAN ATA

A great-uncle of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, Makhmud Khan Ata was given a mausoleum that was built and rebuilt several times. Makhmud Khan Ata lived during the tenth century, a time of great economic and cultural development for the region of Sayram and neighboring areas. Sheik Iftikhar, father of Makhmud Khan Ata, was a courageous warrior, who participated in numerous battles to defend the city of Sayram. During one of these battles, Iftikhar was mortally wounded. Prior to his death, the sheik managed to voice his request to be buried on the summit of the Karatau mountain range, expressing his desire to become a spiritual symbol of the people and an obstacle for enemies approaching from the north.

7.33 SAURAN

The ruins of the medieval fortress of Sauran are located in the pre-desert steppe, not far from the course of the Syr Darya River, approximately forty-three kilometers from the city of Turkestan in a north-west direction and fourteen kilometers from the village of Sauran. The ruins are situated less than two kilometers south of the road leading from Kyzylorda to Turkestan and Shymkent.

Of the medieval cities along the Silk Road, these ruins are the most spectacular and well preserved throughout Kazakhstan. The archaeological area of Sauran includes a large fortified city, oval in shape, around which heterogeneous remains of what was once a prosperous and rich agricultural district are spread, namely the ruins of small villages, isolated agricultural settlements, cultivated fields, structures for irrigation systems, pastures and barns, as well as roads. Although par-

tially razed to the ground, the ruins are in a good state of conservation, and, as a whole, provide a clear image of medieval urban culture in southern Kazakhstan. In 2002, an international group of researchers worked together to survey and record for the first time all the archaeological evidence located at this site, bringing to light a system of underground canals (*kjarez* or *qanats*) of extreme complexity and seven kilometers in length. These structures were used throughout the medieval period. Large squares, streets, and roads of various sizes and scope, in addition to administrative, residential, and commercial buildings and other types of constructions are found inside the fortification, of which the battlements and arrow slits in both the defensive line and the four semicircular towers protruding outward from the walls are still visible. The gates of the urban area, which are approximately five to six meters wide, are located at the northeastern, southeastern, and eastern extremities of the walls surrounding the city. The earliest history of this urban settlement located in the area of Sauran is related to the town of Karatobe, located approximately three kilometers south of Sauran. Karatobe, extending 325 meters from northwest to southeast and 230 meters along the perpendicular axis, provides evidence of archaeological levels dated from the mid first millennium A.D. to approximately the twelfth–thirteenth century. Excluding a period in which the area was abandoned, from that moment onward, a new city, Sauran, was founded, which was to be occupied until around the eighteenth century.

Sauran was an urban settlement formed in the shape of an oval, extending 800 meters from the northeast to southwest and 550 meters northwest to southeast. It was enclosed by fortified walls, whose average height reached seven meters above the level of the surrounding countryside. A wide suburban area and the cemetery lay adjacent to the city. Based on current knowledge relating to the detailed, precise topography of the settlement, Sauran can be split into the following broad areas: 1) the city itself, surrounded by defensive walls, that accommodates alternating areas housing residential buildings and buildings designed for public use; 2) the area of the medieval urban cemetery, characterized by a mosque located in the east of the fortification and a series of fortified land areas, presumably funerary enclosures; in addition to 3) a large suburban residential area that extended around the fortified city.

The mosques and the madrasa, recently uncovered by archaeological excavations, were found in poor conditions of conservation. Dated to between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the first mosque of



Fig. 64. Sauran, a 9th-century commercial centre along the Syr Darya trade route whose seven protective walls made it a useful military stronghold.

Sauran was built arranging the rooms around a central courtyard (15.3 x 17.8 meters) and housed a well for water at its center. The construction axis of the building stretched from southwest to northeast. The entire religious building had a rectangular plan, measuring 31 by 33.5 meters. A second mosque, known as “the Party Mosque”, with a courtyard, entirely surrounded by a fortification wall, was built in the sixteenth century and was to be functional until the late seventeenth century. The entire complex covered an area measuring 100 meters square, while the mosque, which was accessed from the northwest, was fifteen meters wide and was square in shape. The *mihrab* was placed at the center of the western wall of the main hall, which was covered by a dome. To the right of the *mihrab*, there was the *minbar* (pulpit), of which only the first step of the podium has been conserved. In the late seventeenth century, both mosques were transformed into residential buildings, resulting in the loss of their religious functions. The front facade of the madrasa, which dates to the same period as the two mosques described here, was oriented to the northwest and was framed with two minarets. The building was erected along the northeast and southwest axis and was rectangular in plan (28 x 31.5 meters). The various rooms and areas of several dimensions having different functions were arranged symmetrically around the courtyard at its center, measuring fifteen by eighteen meters. Two large rooms, which were octagonal in plan, situated on either side of the entrance to the vestibule, provided access to the central courtyard. In the walls of the smaller rooms, there were small niches equipped with a heating system that enabled students to live, study, and pray in the madrasa even during the coldest days of winter. The internal and ex-

ternal walls were ornamented with multicolored tiles, embellished with phytomorphic decorations and inscriptions in Arabic characters. In relation to the oldest town, Karatobe can be described from a topographical point of view as the unison of three areas, enclosed with walls of fortification, concentrically entered into one another. The defensive perimeter outlines a sort of circle whose diameter is approximately 2000 meters and which encloses an area of approximately three square kilometers. The ruins of what was once the citadel, an almost oval-shaped stronghold with a straight fortification wall in the southern sector, rise at the center of the settlement of Karatobe. The citadel, which extended 340 by 280 meters oriented to the axes of the cardinal points, ascends six to eight meters above the level of the surrounding countryside.

Another monument worthy of interest within the archaeological area of Sauran is Mirtobe, a quadrangular fortress that extends approximately seventy meters in length along its longest side and rises to five to six meters above the surrounding plain. The remains of dwellings extend around Mirtobe. The analysis of finds of material culture discovered here during archaeological excavations have enabled archaeologists to date the occupation of the fortress to between the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The first reports regarding the city of Sauran (Karatobe) date to the tenth century. The Arab geographer, al-Maqdisi, provided reports that Sauran (Savran or Sabran) was a large city, surrounded by seven lines of fortifications and housing a large residential and handicrafts district, as well as a mosque and a large square for the market.

During the first half of the fourteenth century, Sauran was the capital of the tribal confederation of the White Horde. Sasy Buka, one of the leading political representatives of the White Horde, was buried here in 1320. His son Erzen, ordered the construction of many mosques, madrasas, and mausoleums both here in Sauran and in other localities of southern Kazakhstan. Sauran maintained the status of capital even in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The writings of the poet Vasif are considered a precious testimony to this period. Vasif, who lived here in 1514 and 1515, was to provide a beautiful description of the madrasa, whose main characteristic was represented by two very slender minarets. Unfortunately, neither the madrasa nor the minarets have been preserved up to the present day.

The city fell around the year 1725, during the conquest of the Zhungars of the southern part of modern Kazakhstan. All sources originating from the seventeenth century refer to Sauran as a small conurba-

tion, which no longer possesses any historical, economic, or political importance.

7.34 SUZAK

Suzak was a medieval town located on the southern edge of the homonymous modern city, in the region of southern Kazakhstan, a few kilometers north of the mountain range of Karatau and just south of the desert sands of Moyynkum. Its name can also be found in the form Sozak.

The first written sources in medieval times, particularly those of the thirteenth century, provide evidence that the first name of the settlement was Khuzak, while sources originating from the sixteenth century refer to the toponym of Syzak, which was maintained until the eighteenth century, when the town ceased to be inhabited. Archaeological research conducted here in the years 1946–1948 by A. Margulan and A. N. Bernshtam and in the years 1982–1983 by A. N. Podushkin has documented a settlement extending over approximately nineteen hectares, consisting of three large residential areas, of which the largest was about twenty-five meters higher than the level of the surrounding countryside. Initial occupation traces back to the sixth century, even though an important urban conurbation was formed only in the tenth and eleventh centuries, while the last phase of true urban life in Suzak is dated to the mid eighteenth century, even though the town continued to be inhabited by Kazakh shepherds in later centuries. Suzak was an important trading center along the Silk Road and also one of the most important cities of the Kazakh Khanate, as well as the capital of the khanate in the years 1465 to 1469 and from 1511 to 1521.

In February 1930, during the complete collectivization of agriculture launched by the Stalinist regime, Suzak was the object of a large anti-Soviet uprising that was to be crushed after days of bloody conflicts. The uprising was led by Sultanbek Sholakuly, a local khan, who was killed by troops of the Soviet political police along with hundreds of other insurgents.

Several interesting monuments can be admired in the town of Suzak including the Mosque of Shaki Ahmed Ishan, the Mausoleum of Baba Ata with adjacent madrasa, as well as the Mausoleum of Tukty Shashty Aziz, and Ata Azhe, all dating from the nineteenth century, in addition to that of Karabura. This mausoleum was built at the end of the twentieth century. It encloses the oldest mausoleum dedicated to the same saint, which some call Burakhan-aulie. Karabura, which

in Kazakh means “black camel”, performed the mortuary ablutions on Ahmad Yasavi, after being a companion and adviser to Karakhan, the founder of the Karakhanid dynasty, reigning from A.D. 840 to 1212, the first dynasty to make Islam the state religion in the region. The important historical and religious figure of Karabura is venerated by the tribal Tama group, of which Karabura was a member during his lifetime and by whom he was much revered. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Tama had their winter territories and pastures in the region of Suzak.

The mosque of Suzak dates to the late nineteenth–early twentieth century. Rectangular in plan, it comprises a series of rooms linked together by passages, extending along a single axis of architectural development. The prayer room opens out on the west side of the monument. The structure of the mosque is made of brick, although many artistic ornamental details inside the building are made of wood. A tall portal with a large window at the top and framed by two minarets on either side distinguishes the main facade of the monument.

One of the most interesting archaeological sites located within a short distance from Suzak, in a northwest direction, is the almost rectangular-shaped hill of Tarsantobe. The hill lies approximately twelve meters above the level of the surrounding countryside and has been the object of several archaeological missions since 1946 and 1948. It encloses a deposit containing two large built-up areas defended by wall fortifications and an entrenchment. The architectural remnants, in brick and soft stone, document that the town was a development dating between the third and the ninth century.



Fig. 65. Vast swathes of grass, a hilly piedmont rich in crops, and the snow-covered peaks of Tien Shan typify the southern Kazakhstan landscape.

8. Kyzylorda Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 66. Map of Kyzylorda Region.

8.1 KYZYLORDA

Kyzylorda is the capital city of the region of the same name in southern Kazakhstan; it has approximately 200,000 inhabitants and the River Syr Darya runs through the city.

The original name of the city was Ak Mechet (“white mosque”) and it indicated a fortified, mainly military, area built in 1817 by Omar Khan of the Kokand Khanate at the point where various caravan routes met, and where the fortress of Kamyz-Kala had previously stood. This square fort was surrounded by two concentric walls and a deep moat. Numerous arrow slits dotted the walls. It is believed that this fortress housed about fifty dwellings, two mosques, a madrasa, various wells for drinking water, services, and a first-aid center.

In June 1853 the Russian army, under the command of General V. A. Perovsky, took control of the city, led at that time by Yakub Beg (the future lord of Kashgaria in eastern Chinese Turkestan in the 1860s and 1870s). After this event the city was named Fort Perovsk and later Perovsk.

Following the October Revolution the city returned to the earlier name of Ak Mechet and in 1925 it was changed to Kyzylorda (literally “red

capital”). The city was also the capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan from 1925 to 1929. In the 1930s and 1940s the population of the city and the surrounding area increased considerably when numerous families fleeing from the advancing Nazi army in Eastern Europe moved here. Poles from western Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic republics and Koreans from the island of Sakhalin in the Pacific Ocean were also deported to the city. Nowadays ninety percent of the city’s population is composed of Kazakhs, while there are minority groups such as Russians, Germans, Chechens, Koreans, Uzbeks, and Greeks. In the area on the border with Uzbekistan there is a strong presence of the Karakalpak community.

Built on one of the principal routes of the Silk Road, the city of Kyzylorda boasts numerous monuments of historical and tourist interest, situated above all in the surrounding area. In the city, the station is a fine example of railway architecture from the tsarist period; in fact it was built around 1905 on the occasion of the construction of the Orenburg–Tashkent line which, for the first time, linked central Russia to the Central Asian colony.

8.2 AYTBAI MOSQUE

The Aytbai Mosque is probably the most important monument in the city, and is also one of the few examples in the ex-Soviet Union of an Islamic place of worship constructed using brick as the basic material. Built between 1880 and 1885 by the architect Khaytbai Baltabaev of Bukhara, it stands in the center of the city, just a short distance from the market and from the most important administrative buildings of Kyzylorda. The building was restored to the Islamic cult only in 1992. The edifice is rectangular (22 x 16 meters), built in brick and divided into two rooms by an internal wall that separates the vestibule from the prayer hall. The center of the prayer hall is capped by a small cupola, currently covered in a brilliant blue metallic cladding.

The external walls are richly decorated with pilasters, shallow niches, and jutting cornices. Chequered motifs and geometrical figures are also visible, created using bricks in various hues. The western wall, which contains the niche of the *mihrab*, has the best decorative motifs. The four external facades are further enhanced by a perimetrical portico composed of a low balustrade in wood with chunky columns and a series of tall, slim pillars, also in wood, which cover the entire height of the monument. On each façade, six pillars are arranged to form a vast central opening in correspondence with the door and two



Fig. 67. The Aytbay Mosque, probably the most important monument in Kyzylorda.

smaller openings on each side of the main entrance to the mosque. In the courtyard, on the northwestern and southeastern sides, there are service rooms and residential spaces.

8.3 CHURCH OF CHRIST THE SAVIOR

The Church of Christ the Savior is located at number 5 Toktybaeva Street, close to the stalls of the city's old bazaar. The church is composed of two areas: a central nave and a forepart which gives access to



Fig. 68. The Church of Christ the Savior, built in 1878, is surrounded by trees and numerous shops of the local bazaar.

the church. The building is eighteen meters tall and it measures seventeen by twelve meters. The entrance space, like the rest of the church, is on two stories, capped by a small cupola supported by an octagonal drum on two levels. Each side of the drum has tall, narrow windows. Other windows illuminate the transepts.

8.4 KORKYT ATA

A modern architectural monument located about eighteen kilometers from the city of Zhuzali, in the province of Karmakshi, in the region of Kyzylorda along the road that leads from Kyzylorda to Uralsk.

Until 1950, about one kilometer from the town of Zhuzali, on the right bank of the Syr Darya stood the Mausoleum of Korkyt Ata, built around the eleventh or twelfth century and left to deteriorate after World War II. The original building was erected in raw brick; it was circular and had a dome formed of six adjacent pyramids. Described by numerous travelers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, including A. I. Maksheev, P. I. Lerkh, A. A. Divaev and I. A. Castagné, this monument was linked to the presence of a large necropolis which had grown up beside it over the centuries. In 1980 a new monument was built further away from Zhuzali, designed by the architect B. Ibraev and the acoustic expert E. Isataev. It is formed of four large vertical steles in the shape of an arrow (*kulpytasy*), indicating the points of the compass, eight meters high and built in reinforced concrete. The structure is intended to represent, in an idealized manner, the musical instrument (*kobyz*) that Korkyt Ata played with passion and skill while he attempted to reach the shamanic trance. The surfaces of the four steles are decorated with carvings and mosaic. In the central part of the monument is a construction with forty metal pipes that tinkle when the wind blows through them. This melody recalls the sound of the lute played by Korkyt Ata. Legend says that the composer's lute was placed on his tomb and that it played delicate notes when it was brushed by the wind.

In 1997 the entire monument was restored. On that occasion the work for the construction of an amphitheater, an underground sanctuary (*khil'vet*), a hotel, and other structures that will form a single and coherent architectural complex was begun. In 2000 a museum was inaugurated that illustrates the history and the culture of the period in which Korkyt lived.

Korkyt Ata was a shaman, a thinker, a minstrel, a lute player, and a composer and nowadays he is considered the founder of Kazakh string and bow music. He lived in the ninth century, or at the start of the tenth, in



Fig. 69. This monument is dedicated to Korkyt Ata: a shaman, a thinker, a minstrel, a lute player, and a composer, nowadays he is considered the founder of Kazakh string and bow music.

the steppes along the River Syr Darya, in the tribal confederations of the Oghuz–Kipchak shepherds. In all the Turkic populations of the Oghuz branch (Kazakh, Turkmen, Azeris, Turkic, Karakalpak, and Bashkir) we find well-documented and widespread legends in which Korkyt is a courageous protagonist and tribal leader, and also predestined by fate. From an etymological point of view it would seem that the name Korkyt means “he who brings happiness and luck” since in one legend it is said that he was born after three days and three nights in which the sun was obscured from man’s sight.

Many merits are attributed to Korkyt. He lived in a period in which the territory of the Dasht-i Kipchak had not yet encountered the Muslim doctrine, which had begun to spread mainly amongst the richer classes, and is remembered as a thinker who defended the philosophy of the *tengri*, which was widespread at a popular level, against the diffusion of Islam, which was imposed by force and above all by using weapons. He is given credit for having strengthened alliances and unions between the pastoral tribes and for having spread the philosophical thinking and the concept of the world typical of the Turkic populations of Oghuz origin. He also tried to preserve popular wisdom.

8.5 ZHEND (ZHANA KALA)

The medieval town of Zhend, inhabited from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, stands 115 kilometers west-southwest of Kyzylorda and four kilometers from the right bank of the Kuvan Darya delta-

ic branch. It was repeatedly studied in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s by the Khorezmia Ethnographical and Archaeological Expedition, led by S. P. Tolstov, who called it Zhana Kala. The settlement extends for more than forty hectares, although it must be said that the entire archaeological complex of which Zhend was certainly the administrative, economic, and political center, composed of villages and farms, fortified structures and watchtowers, irrigation systems and farmed fields, extended for about forty to fifty kilometers to the east of Zhend along the Kuvan Darya deltaic branch.

Numerous medieval sources mention the toponym Zhend from the eleventh century onward; in fact Lake Aral, which lies not far from the town, is often mentioned in these sources by the name of Lake Zhend. In 1220 the settlement was taken by the Mongols and from then onward it came under the power of Zhochi Khan and his successors. In the mid thirteenth century the scholar Zheman' Karshi lived for some time in this city and left a portrait of it that does not seem to be confirmed by archaeological data and other historical sources. In fact, Karshi describes the economic life of the city as miserable and insignificant, probably referring to a cycle of crisis and decadence in the urban development.

The ruins present in the city are numerous and belong to various historical periods. Amongst them we can still see those from the period of the Karakalpak occupation, represented mainly by half-buried houses, pens and folds for animals, and circular areas without vegetation occupied in the past by yurts (the typical tents of the nomadic Mongols). The central citadel dates from this period. Only one watchtower, a section of the two-meter-high wall, piles of rubble from the collapsed towers, and the deep moat are still visible. The main building of the citadel was built in raw brick and divided in half by a long corridor. Each half was composed of eight to ten rooms. The watchtower, which is still seven meters high, has an octagonal floor plan and was built in *pakhsa* (pressed clay) and raw brick. The battlemented wall surrounds an area of approximately 600 by 500 by 600 meters, inside which there were monuments from the medieval period, some of which were built in square fired bricks (28 x 28 x 4.5 centimeters). Most of the medieval buildings, identified thanks to finds of polychrome-glazed ceramics and dating from between the thirteenth and the fourteenth and also between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century, were built along a canal that divides the central part of the Karakalpak citadel. To the west, on a low rectangular hill, we see the ruins of an architectural complex with a trapeziform enclosure beside

it, which has been interpreted as the residence of the governor of Zhend. Pottery finds documenting the trade contacts of the town between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century have also been found, in particular vases, jars, cooking pots and bowls produced in Iran and China.

8.6 ZHANKENT

A medieval town situated at the mouth of the River Syr Darya, about twenty-two kilometers south-southwest of the modern city of Kazaly. Its name literally means “new city” and it is known in Persian-language sources as Dex-i-Nay, in Arabic sources as al-Kar’-jat al-Khadisa, and in Turkic sources as Yangikent.

According to the theories presented by V. V. Bart’old, in the tenth and eleventh centuries Zhankent was a winter camp of the Oghuz Empire. In 1867 the Russian Archaeological Commission sent the famous orientalist Petr Lerkh, assisted by M. P. Priorov, to open a dig and gather the finds. The study of the town was continued in 1868 by V. V. Vereschagin and following the war by the Khorezmia Ethno-Archaeological Mission led by S. P. Tolstov, who carried out the first detailed topographical surveys.

Zhankent is rectangular in shape (375 x 225 meters) and comprises a separate citadel in the northwestern corner, approximately square (100 meters per side), raised seven or eight meters with respect to the surrounding town. The height of the battlemented walls is approximately eight meters and there are watchtowers with arrow slits at the corners of the walls and along the perimeter wall. The gates to the town stand in the western and eastern walls.

Numerous ancient sources recall the role of the town as an important trading center along the routes from central Kazakhstan to Khorezmia (the delta of the Amu Darya, now in Uzbek territory), and they also mention the trading along the River Syr Darya in grain from the Shymkent and Turkestan regions destined for Khorezmia. The economy of the town was mainly based on agriculture and animal husbandry, but fishing also played an important role and was practiced along the delta of the River Syr Darya and the nearby shores of Lake Aral. The town prospered between the tenth–twelfth century until the Mongol invasion. In documentary sources the town is mentioned until the fifteenth century, confirming the important economic role not only of the town, but also of the settlements around it. After the fifteenth century there is no mention of Zhankent.

8.7 TOWERS OF SARAMAN KOSY AND BEGUM ANA

Funerary monuments in the form of tall towers, situated a short distance from the ruins of the archaeological complex of Zhankent. Both towers were built in raw brick and clad in fired brick.

Built in the eleventh century, the Saraman Kosy Tower has a diameter of twelve meters in the lower section and fifteen meters in the upper section. The roof of the tower has a trapeziform section. The walls are more than 1.5 meters thick and the entire building is composed of three stories, with a total height of approximately thirty-one meters. The first floor is the highest and has a square window; the second is quite low, while the third and last has two windows, one to the north and the other to the south.

Restored in 1984, the tower has been safeguarded by the conservation laws of the Kazakhstan Republic since 1982.

The legend that I. A. Castagné tells in detail says that the tower mausoleum was built in the place where the Karakalpak Saraman and the beautiful Kosy of Urgench were killed. The two Karakalpak *batyrs*, Zhaba and Aydos, ordered this commemorative edifice to be built. The architectural historian Mendikulov does not consider this legend worthy of note and says that the tower was originally a watchtower for the defense of the important city of Zhankent, which is only a few kilometers away. Only later when Zhankent was undergoing a crisis and had fallen into ruins, was the tower transformed into a burial place. The considerable height of the tower and the presence of the second and third stories suggest that it was originally part of the defensive system of the medieval settlement of Zhankent, later being transformed into a tomb.

Tradition says that a princess who resided in Zhankent was buried here. She was accused of betrayal without reason by a courtier, repudiated and sent away by her husband. The princess therefore spent the rest of her life in solitude and prayer, awaiting death inside this tower where she was finally buried. According to some versions of this popular legend, the economic crisis that struck Zhankent and the subsequent ruin of the city were caused by the tragic decision of this prince. The work by I. A. Castagné suggests that there are a number of variants in the description of this dramatic legend.

Until a few years ago the monument to Begum Ana was formed of an octagonal structure, which unfortunately no longer has its external cladding in fired brick, and of an upper pyramidal structure, also octagonal, which still shows the cladding in fired brick. The walls of the

monument, which is divided into two stories, are particularly thick. In the past there was probably a staircase leading to the second floor, but it no longer exists. Restoration carried out a few years ago has given this ancient tower an excessively modern appearance.

Since Zhankent was part of the Oghuz dominion between the ninth and the eleventh century, and it was the capital on the River Syr Darya and it became an administrative city inhabited by Kipchak groups in the mid eleventh century after it was conquered by the Mongols, both the Saraman Kosy Tower and the Tower of Begum Ana could be constructions built by the Oghuz –Kipchak tribal groups who settled in the valleys of the River Syr Darya between the end of the tenth and the end of the eleventh century. Also, the similarity between the two constructions and the uniformity of the materials used suggest that these two commemorative towers were built around the same time.

8.8 SARLY TAM

An architectural monument dating from the eleventh–twelfth century situated in the Syr Darya delta, in the most southern area, more than 150 kilometers south east of the village of Zhana Kala, in the province of Karmakshi or Zhuzali. It is absolutely impossible to reach the monument without the help of a local guide and a four-wheel drive jeep, with a store of petrol cans in the rear. Since early 2009 the province of Karmakshi (Zhuzali) has been part of a limited number of areas in Kazakhstan which are open only to foreigners equipped with a special permit issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) or the National Security Committee (KNB). It is therefore advisable to organize this excursion between the end of August and the end of September when an international archaeological expedition works in the inner Syr Darya delta, finding a guide who will accompany you to the mausoleum and the archaeological sites along the southern delta of the River Syr Darya and the deltaic branches of the Zhana Darya, Inkar Darya, Kuvan Darya, and Pra-Kuvan Darya, dating from the end of the second millennium B.C. and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D. In fact, moving from the village of Zhana Kala it is possible to visit the Saka fortress and settlement of Babish Mulla; the enormous funerary barrows inside the necropolis fortified with three defense walls of Chirik-Rabat (about seventeen hectares); the funerary mound covered in slag on the mountain plain of Sengir Tam; the settlement in Balandy with its elegant architecture in an Achaemenid style; and many other legacies of the agricultural and farming civilizations that



Fig. 70. One the main funerary mud-brick buildings of Chirik-Rabat, a Saka-culture settlement in the Syr Darya delta.

sprang up and developed rapidly thanks to the waters of the two rivers which are now almost completely dry.

The Sarly Tam Mausoleum is a single room with a rectangular floor plan (10 x 11 meters), with a portal on the facade and a dome, entirely built of brick. In antiquity there was a second dome supported by a sixteen-sided (hexadecagon) drum, which has not been preserved. The *kumbez* has two entrances, one on the northern facade and one on the southern. The main entrance is the one on the southern facade, capped by an ogival vaulted roof. Few of the colored majolica tiles that once decorated the central part of the portal remain. The windows of the drum are arrow-shaped, pointing upward, the same type as that found in the defense walls of settlements from the second half of the first millennium in this cultural area (Chirik-Rabat, Balandy, Babish Mulla). The area of the Syr Darya delta is rich in history and consequently in monuments, some of which are in areas that are extremely difficult to locate and reach. Without a guide who knows the region it is impossible to find the numerous fortified settlements of the archaeological culture of Zhety Asar, situated in the northern part of the delta, or the domed brick mausoleums along the bed, now dry, of the Zhana Darya deltaic branches. One example is the Mausoleum of Shetbay, 115 kilometers from Kyzylorda to the southwest, on the right bank of the Zhana Darya. It has a square floor plan (6.7 meters per side), with walls three meters high; the corners have buttresses shaped as if they were towers. The dome of the mausoleum is six meters high. The entrance is a portal on the south wall inside which there is a niche with an ogival vault. Inside, the Shetbay monument is composed of a square room lit by a small window in the dome. The internal walls are plastered, with painted ornamental motifs. The painting on the south wall is par-

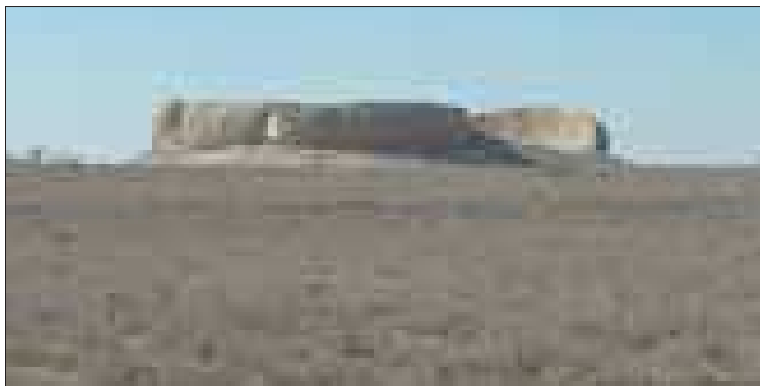


Fig. 71. Sengir Tam, a funerary complex dated to the Early Iron Age, 8th–6th century B.C., in the Syr Darya delta.

ticularly fine: it portrays eight knights in ceremonial dress, mounted on horses with rich and elegant harnesses. On the left of the entrance is a hunting scene: a knight is freeing a golden eagle which has spotted a hare, beside the hound is a fox. The Mausoleum of Shetbay was studied by the Khorezmia Archaeological Mission in the 1950s and 1960s and dates from the ninth century.

8.9 AKTAS MOSQUE AND THE MAUSOLEUM OF AYKOZHA ISHAN

Situated south of the railway station of Besaryk, about fifty kilometers south-southeast of Yanykurgan and sixty-one kilometers west-northwest of Turkestan, both the mosque and the mausoleum were built on the orders of the famous theologian Aykozha Ishan Zhumadilla Uly (1773–1857) in the Syr Darya basin at the end of the nineteenth century. The construction of the mosque was started by his son, Ibadulla and completed by his second son Atamagzum, using labor brought in specifically from Samarqand. It is the most important mosque in the Syr Darya basin, has a square floor plan (18.55 x 19 meters), is twenty meters high, and was built in fired brick beside a spring. On clear days, from the roof, it is possible to see the Mausoleums of Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi and of Aristan Bab.

The mosque, completed in 1884, is composed of a single room with a dome on a stepped drum. Both the facade and the side walls are divided into three sections by four pillars that enclose rectangular niches, topped by slightly ogival arches. The niches on the facade are deeper than those on the side walls. The central niche on the facade and those on the sides act as portals and have a small door, topped by an arched window, giving access to the mosque. On the southeast wall, in the up-

per part of the building there are two stairways leading to the roof. The interior of the mosque has three enormous niches in the walls, while the fourth wall, facing the main entrance, contains the niche of the *mihrab*.

Aykozha Ishan's Mausoleum was designed by the Bukharian architect Khalit in fired brick. The floor plan is almost square (8.42 x 8.46 meters) and it is 7.5 meters high. It is one of the most interesting architectural projects in the region of Kyzylorda. The site of graves, amongst which that of his wife and members of his family, it has a domed roof supported by an octagonal drum. The facade faces south-southwest and has a deep niche which contains the entrance to the monument. The northern wall also has an entrance, at present closed by a wooden door, since this is the side facing Mecca. On the contrary, the niche on the eastern wall is blind.

The restoration of this commemorative building a few years ago revealed that the walls were almost certainly originally plastered and whitewashed. Today all the external decoration has been lost.

The interior was also originally decorated with geometrical and floral motifs, which have now disappeared due to water damage and humidity and due to restoration. In the center of the room is a tomb with a white covering.



Fig. 72. Map of the eastern part of Kyzylorda Region.

8.10 SYGNAK

Sygnak or Syganak is a medieval town with archaeological levels dating from the tenth and twelfth to seventeenth centuries, situated near the village of Sunak Ata, 16.5 kilometers east of the town of Chiili, thir-

ty-six kilometers northwest of Yanykurgan and sixteen kilometers north of the River Syr Darya, in the region of Kyzylorda.

Repeatedly studied at various times (in 1867 by P. I. Lerkh; in 1906–1907 by I. A. Castagné and A. Ju. Jakubovskii; and in 1947 by A. N. Bernsh-tam), the settlement of Sygnak was built in the fourth century, but only in the tenth century it became an urban center inhabited by the Oghuz community, while in the mid eleventh century, when it had become an important trade center and a well-known site for crafts, it became the capital of the Kipchak tribal confederation. Destroyed by the Mongol army of Zhochi Khan in 1219, it again became an important town on the Silk Road in the second half of the thirteenth century, when it was one of the main cities with the right to mint money for the Golden Horde. In the fourteenth century it became the capital of the White Horde and the imperial residence of their legendary sovereigns Erzen, Mubarek Khozhi, Urus Khan, and Tokhtamysh. Around 1423 Sygnak was contended by Tokhtamysh and Ulug Beg, the grandson of Tamerlane, who conquered it, being aware of the important strategic, economic, and political role of this city on the River Syr Darya. Subsequently it also became the capital of the Uzbek Khanate in the fifteenth century, while in the sixteenth century it became part of the Kazakh Khanate, playing a political and social role as important as the cities of Turkestan and Sauran. Certainly, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was the most important city in the lower Syr Darya. According to some sources around five hundred camels came to its market every day, carrying goods, produce, and people. The farmed area around the city was vast; the cultivations made good use of the waters of the Syr Darya and the minor rivers that flowed from the southern Karatau chain.

From a topographical point of view, Sygnak has an irregular pentagonal shape and a main gate in the southeastern wall of the fortifications formed of a twenty-meter-long corridor. The walls of the city can still be seen in some places; they were seven meters high and inside there are the ruins of a mosque and a madrasa, a military camp and a citadel, some mausoleums and some buildings still to be excavated, which archaeologists have not yet identified. Archaeological research undertaken in 2003 has concentrated on the two deposits that hid the ruins of a mosque and a mausoleum, but no material has yet been published. The information gathered during various digs has dated the occupation of Sygnak between the sixth and the eighteenth century. Like many cities in the lower area of the Syr Darya, it was completely abandoned in the early nineteenth century.

8.11 MAUSOLEUM OF KORASAN ATA

Situated about thirty-one kilometers west-southwest of Yanykurgan and twenty kilometers south of the village of Baykenzhe, this building recalls the nickname, “Korasan Ata”, of one of the first missionaries of Islam and warrior, in the lower Syr Darya basin. His real name was Abdulzjalil’. As I. A. Castagné recalls, this nickname was given because it was said that he could cure people of smallpox (in Kazakh “*korasan*”): in fact, if Abdulzjalil’ touched the head of a person suffering from smallpox the disease was immediately transformed into a less serious form and the person soon recovered. There is, however, a second version that explains the reason for this nickname, which says that it derives from the Khorasan region in northern Iran, from which Abdulzjalil’ came. Already documented by I. A. Castagné, the mausoleum was built between 1890 and 1898 by the builder Abduali Babazhan Uly, who was buried beside his work. In 2005 a new mausoleum was built by workers from Khorezm, on a totally different site.

The late nineteenth century building, in parallelepiped bricks (7 x 14 x 28 centimeters), had a rectangular floor plan (7.88 x 16.07 meters) and was composed of two rooms, one larger than the other, with separate entrances. Both rooms were covered by spherical-conical domes of different sizes, supported by drums of different shapes. The one supporting the smaller dome was circular, while the one over the larger room was octagonal. Both drums narrowed at the top, but they were larger in diameter than the domes they supported.

As we already said, the two rooms had separate entrances. The entrance to the smaller room faced southeast and acted as a vestibule and *tileukhana*. The portal of the Korasan Ata Mausoleum is very unusual; it juts outward and does not support the roof of the building, being more similar to a covered corridor with a slightly ogival arch. This architectural feature makes it possible to include the mausoleum in the “Dakhistan” typology, where deep portals are believed by scholars to be elements of the traditions of the nomadic peoples prior to the spread of Islam.

The interior of the smaller room features four rectangular niches topped by arches standing against the walls and eight tombs in raw brick, including that of Korasan Ata’s son, Khusain Gazi, which stands in the western corner and is the largest of all. The walls of the larger room, on the contrary, were plastered and have no niches. On the floor, in two rows, there were eight tombs including that of Korasan Ata (the third from the entrance on the right-hand side).

8.12 MAUSOLEUM OF KOK-KESENE

A medieval architectural monument in the Syr Darya valley, five kilometers north of the Tyumen Aryk railway station and eight kilometers south of the village of Sygnak, in the region of Kyzylorda, built on the tomb of Barshyn Sulu (Gul'barshyn), wife of Mamysh Bek (Alyp Mamysh, Alpamys) in the architectural and artistic style of the Seljuk period of the fourteenth–fifteenth century. The mausoleum collapsed almost completely around 1914; at present only part of the southern portal and a domed tower are standing. There are numerous testimonies and descriptions in the work of V. Kallaur, who visited it in 1901, and of E. Kasymov, I. A. Castagné, and V. V. Bart'old.

The monument had a square floor plan, was formed of two drums, one above the other, was preceded by a portal and had a blue conical dome. The entire construction was in fired brick. From the base to the roof, the architectural structure was transformed from an octagon to a sixteen-sided figure (hexadecagon) which supported the conical dome. The diameter of the part of the portal still standing is five–six meters, the height a little more than four meters. Part of the mausoleum is decorated on two sides by columns with arabesques. The walls have geometrical decorations, similar to those present in the Mausoleum of Alash Khan. In general, it is thought that the Kok-Kesene Mausoleum was fairly similar to the Karakhan Mausoleum.

According to A. Ju. Jakubovskii, the monument dates from the 1370s or definitely from the late fourteenth century, although the same author later proposed a date at the end of the fifteenth century on the basis of pottery found near the building. M. Mendikulov believes that the former dating can be accepted since in the mid fourteenth century the area of Sygnak enjoyed a period of economic and cultural splendor, befitting the construction of this monument.



Fig. 73. The steppe of southern Kazakhstan is an endless hilly plain, completely covered by grass.

9. Aktau Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 74. Map of Aktau Region.

9.1 AKTAU

Aktau, called Shevchenko from 1984 to 1992, is both the most important urban area and the capital city of the homonymous region of western Kazakhstan. The literal meaning of Aktau is “white mountain” and the name was given to the city because of the white cliffs overlooking the Caspian Sea, located a short distance away.

The city came into being in 1958 both as a dormitory town for oil company workers arriving from other areas of Kazakhstan and as a port for shipping the oil that would be the basis of the region’s future prosperity. Even today the city’s streets have no names, and addresses consist simply of three numbers—a district number, a building number, and finally an apartment or office number. There are currently about 170,000 inhabitants. In 1963, five years after the construction of the first residential and commercial buildings, the center was accorded the bureaucratic-administrative status of a city, and was given the name Aktau. In 1984 its name was changed to Shevchenko, in honor of the poet and artist Taras Shevchenko who lived in the region in the 1850s, after having been exiled from St. Petersburg for his separatist ideas. In 1992 it was decided that it should once again be called Ak-

tau, the name that continued to be used after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The plan is for the city to double in size in the next ten to twelve years. On September 11, 2007, Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, took part in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Aktau City Project, whose goal is to develop the tourist industry and attract new investments to the city, principally from Western Europe, Turkey, and Russia. Construction of a completely new city is planned for the northwestern section of the old urban area. Approximately four million square meters of residential structures, commercial buildings, and offices for companies working in the service industries will be constructed, following the architectural guidelines adopted in the last ten years in the Arab Emirates and in other places in the Middle and Near East. At the same time, residential and commercial infrastructure will be built on the shores of the Caspian Sea, the idea being to create a seaside resort with accommodation for large numbers of tourists who could enjoy sunshine, sandy beaches, and water sports; Kazakhstan also wishes to discredit the topos that it is the country in the world that is farthest from the sea. Aktau's best beaches (Manila, Dostar, and Stigl) are located south of the city. There is a modest entry fee for using them. Aktau's economy is presently based almost entirely on selling the oil drilled along the eastern shores of the Caspian and there are several refineries, pipelines, and conservation towers for the country's black gold, as well as several steel factories, in areas around the city. The only building of architectural interest in Aktau is the Regional Ethnography Museum (Mikrorayon 9, Building 23-A), whose exhibits include not only recently excavated archaeological finds from nearby necropolises connected to the Iranian-speaking Iron Age cultures of the Sarmatians or the Saka-Massagetae, and from the sanctuaries located in them, but also Kazakh-culture instruments and utensils from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

9.2 KANGA BABA FUNERARY COMPLEX

One of the most important monuments in western Kazakhstan is the twelfth- to thirteenth-century Kanga Baba (also written Khanga Baba) necropolis and mosque located on the southern slope of a plateau about twenty-five kilometers east of the city of Fort Shevchenko and two to three kilometers south of the road that goes from Fort Shevchenko to Taushik. In antiquity the site was on one of the principal caravan trade routes that stretched across Eurasia from north

to south, the route that ran along the northern and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, then continued north to the region known in antiquity as Khorezm and the great cities of the Silk Road, of which Khiva was one.

The reasons for the name of the necropolis are not clear. In the nineteenth century, Russian scholars wrote tentatively that the name may have been connected to the presence of a tomb of a Kazakh khan. It is possible that the name derives from the ethnonym of an Oghuz (or Oghuz Turkic) tribe, which al-Idrisi called “Khangakishy” or “Khangaguzy” and whose lands on the southern shores of Lake Balkhash he called “Khangaket”. In fact the toponym Kanga (or Khanga) is fairly widespread in the area of the Ustyurt Plateau, for example the Fortress of Kanga-kala, located in present-day northwestern Khorezm, on the southern border with Ustyurt.

The poet–painter Taras Shevchenko visited the necropolis in 1851 and a charming drawing he made of the central complex has come down to us. The Kanga Baba Cemetery has quite a complex structure. To the west, at the base of the plateau, there is a grove of mulberry trees (about 800 according to N. L. Lomakin, writing in 1870) and a water fountain, while to the east stands the Mausoleum of Karakoz. The ruins of a necropolis and a mosque are found in a depression under the plateau, as are the remains of a much more recent village and its school. A short distance above them, on the banks of a stream in the eastern part of the complex, there is a second necropolis. Additional scattered groups of funerary structures lie to the west of the mosque, on hilly outcrops and on the slope. Onomatological studies have shown that tribal groups of Kazakh, but principally Turkmen, animal herders are buried here. The Turkmen tombs are decorated with drawings of sabers and with suras from the Koran, while the Kazakh tombs are richer in geometric, purely decorative ornamentation.

The building of the Kanga Baba complex is certainly connected to the presence of the trade route and to a freshwater spring, already in use in the Oghuz–Kipchak period (eleventh–thirteenth century). The first nucleus may have been built because of the presence of both water and mulberry trees, two natural elements that are considered sacred in Central Asia, and it is possible that some sort of sanctuary of the cult of water was present here. Some of the mulberry trees are still visible today and have trunks which measure over 1.5 meters in diameter, a clear indication of their great age. In springtime wild mint grows between the mulberry trees and on the banks of the streams which run down the plateau, filling the air with its scent.

The mosque, which unfortunately is in disrepair, belongs to what is certainly the oldest nucleus of the Kanga Baba Necropolis, the Turkmen one, built no later than the fourteenth century. It consisted of some residential quarters, other rectangular auxiliary areas, and a prayer hall, entered through a vestibule. In the center of the main chamber, the prayer hall, a wooden pole still stands that in the past reached the peak of the cupola. The walls of the mosque were all made of stone slabs. The entire covering structure consisted of a cupola that collapsed and now lies in pieces on the ground. There is a somewhat later necropolis (fourteenth to fifteenth century) extending alongside the mosque, called “the cemetery of Makhtym Baba aulye” by people in the area.

The complex is noteworthy for the presence of rare types of monuments, for example *koshtarasi*, schematic relief representations of a ram’s back and horns, which from a compositional point of view are very similar to *koytasy*. Another type of archaic monument in evidence at Kanga Baba are “Shiraki steles”.

9.3 AKSHORA (OR AKSHURA) MAUSOLEUM

The Akshora Mausoleum belongs to the class of front-portal, cupola-covered (or vault-covered) mausoleums and is architecturally similar to the Kosmola Mausoleum. Its walls were built without foundations, simply alternating stone blocks on the same stratum, some along the horizontal axis and others along the vertical one.

The ground plan is a square whose sides measure six meters each. On the massive main facade there is an ogival arch, whose purpose is purely decorative, framing the entry door. The mausoleum has fallen into disrepair. Its northeast wall and the upper part of the cupola have collapsed and the stone cladding on the western half of the facade has fallen off.

The mausoleum bears the name of the person buried in it, about whom no reliable historical information has come down to us. An analysis of the building’s stylistic features and a close comparison with the Kosmola *kumbez* (mausoleum) indicate a dating between the fourteenth and sixteenth century and attribution to the Kipchak–Nogai communities that nomadized this territory.

In the area around the mausoleum there are numerous funerary structures, but no count has yet been made of them. Of particular interest are both simple and zoomorphic *koytasy*.

9.4 KENTY BABA

The Kenty Baba Necropolis contains monuments built between the fourteenth and the twentieth century, although the majority date from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century and are attributable to animal farmers and herders of Turkmen origin. The necropolis is located ten kilometers south of the cemetery at Sultan Epe, a short distance from the road that goes from Fort Shevchenko to the village of Taushik. The most interesting feature from the architectural and historic point of view is that the building is what is called a “steppe mosque”, that is, a building which has neither walls nor a covering roof but is instead an open space with a *mihrab* consisting of flat steles driven into the ground. This stone faces east and is part of the circumference of a circle of horizontally placed stones. Inside the space, which is located in the southeastern part of the cemetery complex, the pilgrim can feel protected by God, both night and day, in all seasons of the year.

The Kenty Baba Cemetery is not large. It contains approximately 130 monuments, most of which are *koytas*-style grave markers, unroofed enclosures with *koytasy* and simple vertical steles, the majority of them facing west or northwest. Most of these funerary structures are made of sandstone.

The interesting features of the necropolis include the high level of workmanship of the *koytasy*, depictions of sabers and swords, carved zoomorphic figures (horses and camels), and floral and geometric ornamentation (triangles) on the interior walls of the enclosures and along the sides of several tomb markers, and the near total absence of epigraphic inscriptions.

The three mausoleums in the cemetery are well-proportioned and of a high level of workmanship. One of them, built in the traditional tower shape, seems to have been erected above the grave of the eponymous saint. Confirmation for this identification is provided by the presence of a long wooden staff surrounded by stones and goat horns which stands in the center of the mausoleum.

According to some legends, it was in this mausoleum that the elder brother of Sultan Epe was buried and for this reason the site continues to be an important pilgrimage destination for Muslims.

9.5 SULTAN EPE

The Sultan Epe complex, which can be dated to the general period of the twelfth–thirteenth century, is located approximately thirty kilo-



Fig. 75. In the Sultan Epe funerary complex, dated to the 12th–13th century, an underground mosque has been dug into the rock.

meters northwest of the village of Taushik, in a canyon crossed by a seasonal stream which flows into the Gulf of Mangyshlak.

What is certainly the most interesting monument in the cemetery complex is an underground mosque dug into the rock. Several access paths with stairs lead to the mosque—a single room with stone columns supporting its roof. A not very large necropolis extends around this sacred building. It contains several types of funerary structures and tomb markers: *saganatamy*, stone cists and sarcophagi, *kulpytasy* and *koytasy*. The most important monuments on the site are, however, a second mosque, more recent than the underground one, and the tomb of the legendary Sultan Epe, who, according to popular tradition in Mangyshlak, was the son of the well-known Central Asian mystic and poet Hakim Ata (Suleyman Bykyrgan), a disciple of Ahmad Yasavi and Ambar Ona.

Sultan Epe is the patron saint of fishermen and sailors. According to legend, one day many centuries ago, his father called all his children to him. They all immediately hurried to reach him, except his youngest son, Sultan Epe, who, arriving several days later, found that his father was mortally offended. The young Sultan Epe said that he had been far away, on the waters of the Caspian Sea, where he had helped sailors and fishermen in grave danger. To demonstrate the truth of his words, he bared his back, on which the marks of a rope could clearly be seen. Having heard this account, his father allowed him to leave and from that day forward Sultan Epe has helped all those in danger of dying at sea. He is said to have performed several miracles. For example, he

carried the Kaaba for his father from Mecca to the city of Bakyrghan in Khorezm and it is said that he was able to bring slaughtered oxen back to life. Since his father did not believe that he had performed these miracles, Sultan Epe bade his father goodbye and became invisible. In doing so he performed yet another miracle.

Many scholars associate the name Sultan Epe with “*ab*”, the Iranic-origin word for water.

9.6 SHAKPAK ATA

Shakpak Ata is the most beautiful and mysterious of Mangystau’s underground mosques, as well as being one of its oldest. It is part of a complex located to the east of the Sultan Epe Cemetery, on the Tupkaraghan peninsula, on the south shore of the Gulf of Sarytash, about twenty kilometers northwest of the village of Taushik. The necropolis adjacent to the mosque contains monuments dating from the eleventh to the eighteenth century A.D.

The area was first used in pre-Muslim times and afterward underwent a number of transformations. The construction of the mosque, probably in the first half of the fourteenth century, entailed digging into the mountain. The founders are believed to have been Sufi missionaries in the Naqshbandii, Yasavi, and Qubrawi orders.

The necropolis extends along a north–south axis to the west of the mosque. The southern and southwestern sections contain principally funerary monuments, including several thirteenth- to fifteenth-century mausoleums inscribed with Turkmen names. Made of soft limestone, the mausoleums have fallen into disrepair. The northern part of the cemetery contains eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Kazakh monuments.

The main entry to the mosque is located on the eastern side of the mountain, at the end of a stairway which was also dug into the rock face. A second entry, used by servants, faces the western side of the mountain. When using this entry, the mosque proper is reached after crossing an elongated rectangular room. The principal entryway is rectangular and faces east, toward the surrounding necropolis. It is enclosed within a deep arch-covered niche at whose base two rectangular stone platforms (possibly places for people to sit) are found. A series of artificial grottoes set along both access sides of the mosque form part of the special setting that includes resting places for pilgrims and the tombs constructed and utilized over the centuries.

The inner room of the mosque, oriented toward the northeast, is built



Fig. 76. Shapak Ata is the most beautiful and mysterious of Mangystau's underground mosques, as well as being one of its oldest.

in the shape of a Latin cross. Thus the mosque consists of two rectangular spaces at whose intersection a central room measuring 4.5 by five meters is located. This is separated from the two inner rooms by columns set against walls and surmounted by capitals. The side rooms have flat ceilings, while the ceiling in the central space is nearly hemispherical. In the middle of the southern wall a niche was dug for the *mihrab*, which of course faces Mecca. The niche is flanked by two small rooms. Similar niches were created in the walls in the eastern room of the mosque. At the center of the cupola there is a sort of trapdoor that is approximately five meters tall and 1.2 meters in diameter. Outside this opening, atop the mountain whose depths enclose the mosque, there is a square structure which in addition to protecting the trapdoor from rain and snow, also served as a watchtower and a minaret. The uppermost part of this minaret–tower has collapsed. The walls of the entry space are decorated with engravings written in Arabic and simple letters carved into the stone. The oldest engraving, probably from the Oghuz period, consists of handprints, while the most recent, made when the area was inhabited by Adai animal herders, depicts horses and battle scenes. The botanical decorative motifs engraved on the walls of the entry room to the underground structure are similar to the flower and foliage decorations on the main facade of the Bel'turan (also called Zhalgyztam) Mausoleum, also located in Mangyshlak. The 208 inscriptions in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic found in the Shapak Ata Necropolis are evidence of the fact that the site was visited by people of all social classes—rich and poor, cultured and illiterate. It is believed possible that many visitors came seek-



Fig. 77. One of the rooms of the Shakpak Ata underground mosque.



Fig. 78. Most of the visitors to the Shakpak Ata necropolis are people afflicted with an illness who wish to stay for a few hours in one of the grottoes alongside the mosque.

ing to purify their souls by spending a period of atonement in the desert or in one of the grottoes next to the mosque and planned to enter the mosque to pray only after having achieved sincere inner pureness. Some of the most interesting inscriptions are Sufi poems about the transience of human life and the wickedness of the world we live in. The epigraphic element plays an important role in determining the date of the monument. Although scholars disagree about the dating, we feel it bears keeping in mind that many of the words in the Sufi po-

ems inscribed here are typical of literary Oghuz and Kipchak language in the period of the Golden Horde. This makes it possible to date the construction of the mosque to the first half of the fourteenth century. According to legend, the dervish Shakpak Ata (Shak Mardan), grandson of Chopan Ata, together with his disciples, found refuge in one of the grottoes in the necropolis during a period when the entire region was being attacked by enemies. He was also famous in ancient times for his ability to produce sparks simply by rubbing his fingernails against each other. In fact “*shakpak*” means tinderbox or flint and in the area around the cemetery there are many outcroppings of flint. This geological feature may furnish a plausible explanation of the legend. According to another legend, Shakpak Ata was able to flee enemies after he had been decapitated. The footprints he left while escaping are said to have remained visible on stones in Kunansy. The topos of a “saint” who manages to perform actions after having been decapitated recurs frequently in mid-Asian and Kazakh hagiography. A further example is Kusum Ibn Abbas of Samarqand who “remained alive and hid in a well, carrying his head, which had been cut off by his foes, in his hands”. Scholarly opinion is that this type of literary and religious character is evidence of the antiquity of the cult of suffering saints.

The Shakpak Ata Necropolis has become a destination for tourists, but most visitors are people afflicted with an illness who wish to stay for a few hours in one of the grottoes alongside the mosque. According to popular belief, many illnesses can be cured following direct contact with the rock inside the hollow dug into the mountainside.

9.7 KARAMAN ATA CEMETERY

The Karaman Ata Necropolis is located approximately thirty-five kilometers southwest of the village of Shetpe and five kilometers west of the village of Kandybas, in the central part of the Mangystau peninsula. The road leading to the complex winds through hills, one of which is called “Myn kyz tau”—the mountain of the young maids. In fact, according to legend, a thousand pure, beautiful virgins stopped a brutal, fierce, bloody war that was raging on the mountain. The inhabitants of the Mangystau peninsula refer to this legend to explain the origin of the name of the area in which they live.

The cemetery, a funerary and cultural site, is very large. It contains elements from several historic periods, roughly from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth, and consists of an underground mosque, nu-

merous funerary structures from the Oghuz–Turkmen period, and others from the Kazakh period, dateable to the eighteenth–nineteenth century and attributable to the Adai tribal group. The latter structures are located principally in the northeastern part of the cemetery and are mainly *kulpytas*-style tomb markers with *koytasy*, generally larger and with richer decoration than similar ones found in other necropolises nearby. One of the most recent monuments is the Mausoleum of Shoynbay, built in 1914.

The underground mosque dug into the slope of the hill consists of three rooms: an entry room, a prayer room (23 x 6 meters), and a circular room in which Karaman Ata was buried. The burial chamber is connected to the prayer room by a long, narrow corridor. For many years, the mosque was used as a school where children from nearby villages learned to read and write.

Karaman Ata was one of 300 missionaries sent to the Mangyshlak region and the Mangystau peninsula to spread Sufism. There are many legends with a protagonist named Karaman Ata, but few of them seem to actually refer to the Karaman Ata that was—and is—considered worthy of respect and veneration in the Aral–Caspian area. A book by M. Mirzoeva, for example, relates Karakalpak legends about a one-eyed giant named Karaman who is tricked and then killed by Batyr Esim. In another Karakalpak legend, Karaman is described as an avaricious, severe *bey* who is cursed for having slandered and offended Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi and is turned from a sheik into a dog–man.

The name Karaman also appears in Turkmen legends. One of them, set a few centuries ago, is the story of two brothers, Akman and Karaman, famous for the respect they showed everyone and for the authority they enjoyed among people. One day something happened which led to a fight between the two brothers and Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. As a result Akman and Karaman were forced to leave their home and travel westward with their families to the Mangystau region. After the death of one of the brothers, the necropolis and underground mosque were built.

A legend handed down until the nineteenth century, known as the “Adai Legend of Holy Individuals who lived and died on the Mangyshlak Peninsula”, relates that Karaman Ata was the son of Ikhsan (Esen Ata) and grandson of Chopan Ata. He was very much like his grandfather and performed several miracles in the area within a radius of a day’s journey from his grandfather’s tomb. He was buried in the grounds of the mosque but no one is certain exactly where.

In popular belief there was an underground road between the Esen Ata and the Karaman Ata necropolises. It is clear that such a road did

not exist, but in Sufi doctrine, a road of this sort was the symbol of union between two holy places. Pilgrims and visitors can in any case experience going below ground and enter the underground Karaman Ata Mosque.

9.8 MASAT ATA NECROPOLIS

The medieval Masat Ata Necropolis lies twenty-five kilometers south-east of the village of Ushtagan, in Aktau Region, situated in the north-western part of the Bostankum Desert. According to one legend, the necropolis is connected to an individual revered as a saint and held to be invincible, who came here directly from Mashhad at the time of the Kalmyk invasion. He fought them for many years. When the Kalmyks captured and decapitated him, the legend relates that he “picked up his head and held it in his hands, mounted a horse, and galloped away, disappearing from view, but the marks of his horse’s hoofs are still visible today”.

All the funerary constructions in the cemetery are made of limestone, the only raw material found in the surrounding area. Part of the one-room mosque is below ground level and has a south-facing entrance. The necropolis consists of one section with Turkmen burial places and one with Kazakh graves. The earliest group of funerary monuments, dated between the fourteenth and the eighteenth century, comprises a mausoleum and several tombs built in the “*koytas*” style, typified by extreme simplicity of ornamentation and inscription. There are four striking sculpted figures of rams (*koshkary*).



Fig. 79. According to one legend, the necropolis of Masat Ata is connected to an individual revered as a saint and held to be invincible.

The Kazakh section lies compactly in the northeastern part of the cemetery. It contains many *kulpytasy* and *koytasy*, both standing on their own and together with *sandyktas*. The decoration on them is typical of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Monuments of particular interest include a *kulpytas* with a figure of a horse depicted on its base and a headless anthropomorphic stele.

9.9 NURBERGEN KALYSHULY MAUSOLEUM AND THE SENEK CEMETERY COMPLEX

The mausoleum is located a short distance from the village of Senek in the province of Mangystau and is known to have been constructed in 1900 by someone named Dutbay Zhandauletuly.

The most surprising feature of the monument is the use of fossiliferous limestone, ranging in color from yellowish white to light gray, in the ornamentation on its outside walls. A quarry with this material is located approximately eighty kilometers to the west. By using this type of limestone, as requested by the person commissioning the construction, the builder was able to obtain a building that is strong and sturdy yet gives the appearance of being light and slender. A 5.5-meter square, the mausoleum consists of a cubic base structure on which a cylindrical tambour surmounted by a vaulted cupola is set. The apex of the cupola stands 8.5 meters from the ground. Another unusual feature of the construction is the absence of an underground foundation. The mausoleum was in fact constructed directly on a ground-level socle which sits on a stratum of leveled and solidified earth and sand. As is traditional, its main facade, where the entrance to the burial chamber is located, faces south. It is ornamented with floral motifs, decorative whorls and patterns of lines, nearly identical to the ornamentation found on the other three walls. Decorative elements fill in and frame the shallow rectangular niches cut into the walls of the monument.

What makes the mausoleum unique is the richness of the ornamentation on both its outside and inside walls. Graceful, clean and precise, its refined artistry is evident in the gentle, harmonious associations of a range of light pastel shades.

The Senek cemetery complex contains several architectural monuments built between the seventeenth and the twentieth century. It is composed of two sectors, both used as burial grounds, and is situated on the eastern edge of the village of Senek, in Aktau Region. There is a third sector located in the center of the village itself.

The first sector, which extends over approximately 1.5 hectares, con-

tains three cupola-covered mausoleums, thirty-one *saganatamy*, and a *kupytas*- and *koytas*-shaped funerary monument. The second sector, which lies about 600 meters southeast of the first, extends over slightly less than a hectare. It contains two cupola-covered mausoleums, about twenty *saganatamy*, and other types of grave markers. A mosque and a large dwelling space, built to resemble a yurt, both made of limestone, can be seen in the center of the village of Senek. One important shrine of the cemetery complex is the *mazar* of Bekkul Zhantorin, built in 1785 and notable for its size. But what is surely the most interesting monument of the area is the Mausoleum of Nurbergen Kalyshuly, built in 1900.

9.10 CHOPAN ATA CEMETERY AND UNDERGROUND MOSQUE

The Chopan Ata Necropolis is located twenty-five kilometers north-northeast of the village of Senek. It lies on the route of the ancient caravan road that led from the Mangyshlak region to the Khorezm region (taking in a geographic area that reached from the broad Amu Darya delta to the southern shores of the Aral Sea), in the southeastern part of the Mangyshlak peninsula.

The entrance to the necropolis is situated on its eastern side, where there is an old well flanked by a stone tub used to collect rainwater. There are a large number of mausoleums without cupolas, built in the nineteenth century and first twenty-five years of the twentieth, which differ from the Turkmen ones in the western and northwestern sections of the cemetery, both in style and because family *tamgas* are present. This part of the cemetery contains mainly un-named Kazakh graves, principally of the Adai tribal group.

An underground mosque and the tomb of Chopan Ata are situated in the southwestern part of the cemetery, as are early funerary monuments built by the Oghuz and Kipchak tribal groups that occupied this area from the tenth to the fourteenth century A.D. These include *saganatamy* (simple mausoleums without cupolas built in the Turkmen-style) and fences, as well as simple flat steles and several types of grave markers (*kulyptasy*, *ushtasy* and *koytasy*), now reduced to shapeless ruins by wind and weather. Some of them have bas-relief ornamentation—geometric or zoomorphic motifs—while some have drawings of weapons such as swords and sabers. Simple epigraphic motifs and symbols indicating ownership (*tamgas*) have also been found. Only three mausoleums in the necropolis were covered by cupolas, one of which has caved in.

The mosque was built by digging into the rock of the mountainside and consists of about ten rooms, some of which are in such a poor state of repair that they can no longer be visited. The most important of the rooms open to visitors are the chamber with the niche of the *mihrab*, the prayer room, a room where pilgrims could repose, and one other room, probably used for the reading and study of sacred texts of the Koran. There is a centrally situated rectangular room measuring 7.1 by 5.1 meters, reached through a narrow passageway on the northeastern side the building. The most important feature in this first room is a long wooden pole set near the barycenter of the room and covered with pieces of cloth and the horns of an *arkhar*, a large wild mountain sheep. The pole protrudes about 1.5 meters above the top of the ceiling, passing through an opening that measures 1.2 meters in diameter, which is also placed at a slight distance from the room's true center. During the day, the opening allows sunlight to filter into the room and light the complex. Even today, the place where the pole is anchored to the ground is believed to be sacred and is worshipped. The southern and western walls have entrances into two large rooms whose purpose was to accommodate pilgrims and visitors, while tableware and cooking vessels (jars, samovars, tea kettles, buckets, and other receptacles) were hung on the northern wall. The part of the mosque used for religious ceremonies, which contained the niche for the *mihrab*, was reached through an opening in the eastern wall of the central chamber; a doorway and small window allow worshipers and light to enter.

In the southeastern corner of the central room there is a gently sloping staircase, which has been turned into an inclined ramp that leads to a second prayer room and to the burial chambers, one of which contains Chopan Ata's tomb in a small, vault-covered room located below ground level. In the past, a long corridor (now impassable) led to a second burial chamber, where, according to legend, Chopan Ata's daughter was buried, as was Sultan Azar, a person venerated as a saint, whose life we know nothing about.

Above the central room there was a chapel (or oratory) and two burial chambers. The west wall of the chapel collapsed several centuries ago and it is therefore impossible to determine whether it was ringed with railings and parapets or, instead, was simply an open space.

Wind erosion has severely damaged some walls in the complex, including the north wall of the mosque. The surface finish on the gray walls was hastily applied and no ornamentation was present. It is plausible that the architectural severity of the site was connected to mystic–anchorite ascetic practices.



Fig. 80. Chopan Ata is one of the oldest underground mosques in Mangystau Region dating to about 10th–12th century A.D. and it hosts the grave of Saint Chopan Ata, who lived in the 12th century A.D.

A second mosque was built at a somewhat later date, located slightly to the east of the first and with an entrance of its own. The prayer room in the newer building has a construction axis that is perpendicular to that of the first mosque and in fact its *mihrab* faces south. In front of the entrance, which looks out over the enormous necropolis, stands a sacred mulberry tree and to the east of the tree tombs were dug into the rock to serve as collective graves.

There is no reliable information regarding dating in written sources. Many legends and traditions concerning Chopan Ata (“*shopan*” in Kazakh and “*chaban*” in Russian mean shepherd) have been collected and studied, first by nineteenth-century Russian scholars, and then by twentieth-century Kazakh ethnographers and historians. One legend relates that Chopan Ata was a dervish, a disciple of the famous poet and philosopher Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi. On one occasion Ahmad Yasavi gathered all his students and told them to shoot arrows through the hole at the top of a yurt (*shanyrak*). Outside, wherever the arrows fell, the disciples were to preach and spread Sufi doctrine. Chopan Ata’s arrow flew to Mangyshlak and fell in the mountains, at a low altitude, near the village of a rich animal herder named Bayan. Several months later, Chopan Ata reached the village, found his arrow, and began working for Bayan. It was agreed that Bayan would pay Chopan Ata on the basis of the number of white sheep born the following year. One year later, only white sheep were born. Bayan, however, did not pay his shepherd and said that he would recompense him on the basis of the number of spotted sheep born the following



Fig. 81. There are many legends and traditions concerning Chopan Ata. One of them relates that he was a dervish, a disciple of the famous poet and philosopher Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi.

year. And what happened was that an entire flock of spotted lambs was born. Bayan understood that Chopan Ata was a special individual and to recompense him he gave him his daughter in marriage, which meant that he now had blood ties to Bayan and could enjoy his wealth. Chopan Ata built a mosque and from the arrow lodged in the ground there grew a tall tree, the vestiges of which can still be seen in the long pole set inside the central room of the first mosque.

A second legend, in which there is no mention of the students shooting arrows, relates that Ahmad Yasavi told his disciples to spread Sufism throughout Central Asia and said that each of them would recognize the place where he was to preach from the presence of a stick lodged in the ground. Chopan Ata was the only one who asked to go to Mangyshlak and that is what he did. There he met a highly respected elderly person, struck up a friendship with him, and eventually married his daughter, but what was most important was that he recognized the stick he had long searched for as the long staff that now marks the interior of the central room in the first mosque.

There is yet another legend in which the protagonist is a young Kazakh. The young man, named Mussa, one day helped a young woman move a heavy stone off a well so that she could get water for her sheep to drink. To express his gratitude, the girl's father hired the young shepherd to work for him. Some nine years after this happened, only white lambs were born in the flock, while the following year all the newborn lambs were spotted. The old man decided to give Mussa his

youngest daughter in marriage and chose him to be the shepherd of his entire flock, that is, to be “Chopan Ata”.

In concluding this discussion of legends about Chopan Ata, we wish to note that in the traditional stories about him that have flourished for several centuries, Chopan Ata performs actions or utters words that are very similar to the actions and utterances of another shepherd—the biblical Moses.

Traditional legends and the historical information gathered allow us to date the Chopan Ata religious complex between the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, when preachers first reached Dasht-i Kipchak and lands to the west of it. It is possible that the grotto dug into the rock was initially the dwelling of a Muslim eremite in medieval times, probably one of the first Sufi preachers. After his death, pastoral communities—first Turkmens, then Kazakhs—constructed this outstandingly beautiful cemetery complex.

9.11 BEKET ATA

Beket Ata, one of the cemetery complexes most representative of western Ustyurt, is located near Olgandy, less than sixty kilometers directly north-northeast of the village of Senek. Like other cemetery complexes in the region, it is on the trade route that ran from the lower course of the Emba River and the northern shores of the Caspian Sea into Ustyurt, then continued to the Khorezm region and the cities of the Silk Road to the south of the Aral Sea. Before setting off on their journeys over the inhospitable, barren, dry Ustyurt plateau, caravans stopped here so that people and animals could drink at a crystal clear spring of cool water.

The ritual center of the necropolis consists of an underground mosque dug into the mountainside, reached by a steep ascending staircase. This place of worship is connected to Beket Myrzagululy, a scholar and teacher, about whose life and activities very little is now known. The information we have, gathered from written sources in the nineteenth century, indicates that Beket was of the Adai tribe and after spending some years in a *madrassa* in Khiva studying Muslim doctrine, at the age of forty became a teacher who devoted most of his remaining years to children’s education and spreading Muslim philosophy among the poor of the Mangystau region. He was active between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, until his death, probably in 1813 or 1814, a date consistent with local tradition which sets his date of birth in the years around 1750 and relates that he was six-



Fig. 82. Beket Ata is one of the cemetery complexes with an underground mosque that is most representative of western Ustyurt.

ty-three years old when he died. The reliability of the information we have needs to be carefully evaluated, however, as there are several similarities between the life of Beket Ata and the lives of other important Muslim historical figures. Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, for example, died at the age of sixty-three. We know for certain that the dates of Beket's birth and death (1650–1713) which appear on the commemorative plaque placed in the mosque in 1986 are erroneous.

Secondly, there are documents that show that Beket planned and supervised the construction of four mosques, the first on the Emba River, a second one in Beyneu (see 9.12), the third on the shores of the Aral Sea (whose precise location is now unknown), and the fourth here, in western Ustyurt, where he himself was buried. These sites were carefully chosen to correspond to the seasonal pasture areas of the nomads who lived in the same village as Beket did. In some traditional accounts, Beket had other mosques built and his children were buried in them, but we also lack the corroboration of historic evidence for this information.

The mosque, which was dug into the mountainside at Olgandy, has five rooms, preceded by an entryway that is protected by a fortified wall. The second of the rooms is the vestibule of the mosque and is covered by a cupola with an opening that allows light to enter. To the west of the vestibule there is what seems to be a prayer room, with a niche for the *mihrab* in its southern wall. To the southeast of the vestibule there are two rooms in succession, both of which probably served as residential quarters. There were small niches for oil lamps set in the walls of the interior rooms. It is possible that this mountain-

side grotto was initially the dwelling place of an eremite and was only enlarged and transformed into a mosque at a later date.

There are late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century funerary monuments both on the steep hillsides to the right and left of the mosque and at the foot of the slope, principally *saganatamy*, *kulpytasy*, and *koytasy*. Building such structures in a place as remote as this must have been a complex and difficult task.

The Beket Ata complex is quite close to the Olgandy Cemetery where the monuments include huge funerary enclosures, dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, stone burial cists, burial sites consisting of stone mounds, and nineteenth-century steles of outstanding artistic quality, placed alongside other funerary constructions.

9.12 BEKET ATA MOSQUE AND ADJACENT CEMETERY OF BEYNEU

Beyneu is located approximately 360 kilometers northeast of Aktau, where the caravan routes that ran down from the northern shores of the Caspian Sea, the mouth of the Ural River, and the banks of the Emba entered the Ustyurt region. The presence of a large freshwater spring allowed merchants, travelers and transhumant pastoral nomads to stop for a few days' rest before continuing their journeys into a region where water was, and continues to be, scarce.

Southwest of the spring and the village, there is a large necropolis divided in two by two deep gorges. The older part of the necropolis lies at the back of the second, western gorge and consists of very old funerary structures in very poor condition as well as some early twentieth-century enclosures. The sixteenth- to nineteenth-century tombs in the second section, at the top of the plateau, have suffered less damage.

The site, which written sources indicate is medieval, was long a pasturage and transhumance area for numerous peoples, including the Oghuz, Kipchak, Nogai, Bashkir, and Turkmen, and for Kazakh-origin tribal groups such as the Adai, Tama, Tabyn, Kete, Serkesh, and Bersh. However, due to the poor state of conservation of the oldest tombs, it is virtually impossible to ascertain when they were built, study their salient artistic features, or determine their ethnic attribution.

The most important construction in the cemetery complex (mentioned above) is an underground mosque dug into the side of the slope of the gorge. The building, which has an entrance door facing southwest and three circular rooms, is flanked by a well, dug some time after the original construction was completed. Its main room—the prayer room—measures 4.5 meters in diameter and was covered by a cupola. A small,

narrow niche in its southwest wall served as a *mihrab*. A second, larger, hemisphere-shaped niche set into the back wall contained a series of stone platforms, probably places where tired pilgrims could rest. A wide door in the north wall was the start of a passageway that led to a second room, whose function is not entirely clear. It may have been either a second prayer room or a space for storing items that were not being used. It can also be hypothesized that the caravans that crossed the Mangystau and Ustyurt regions, in case of particular need, used these grottoes carved into the mountainside to hide voluminous objects that would have further slowed their progress, already rendered difficult by weather conditions and lack of water. A passageway in the west wall of the second room led to a third chamber, now partially caved in, which contained tombs. None of the walls of the mosque were decorated and there were only a few small niches in them for holding oil lamps.

9.13 AYTMAN MAUSOLEUM

This architectural monument, located near several water wells called Aytman-su, in the southwestern part of the Ustyurt region, is positioned on top of the tomb of a religious leader about whom very little is known. Erected in 1897–1898 by Duysen, Omir, and Ordabay Karazhusipuly, three brothers who were popular artists, the building is topped by a vaulted dome set on a cylindrical tambour that covers a base structure of harmonious proportions. Its clay-brick walls are similar to one another and are divided on the exterior into three sections, each with two hemispherical-section pilasters topped by an uninterrupted arched parapet. The complexity of the incised and painted ornamentation, both inside and outside the *kumbez*, is worth noting. A high level of workmanship is evident in the ornamentation of the interior walls, done using white, red, yellow, and blue in drawings, most of which depict objects in everyday use (cups, spoons, a samovar) and bladed and other weapons, as well as complex geometric and botanic motifs. The ornamentation in the niches set in these walls includes images of a rifle, a bow, a sword and a dagger, a lance and household items.

9.14 SEYSEN ATA CEMETERY

This cemetery complex contains funerary monuments dating from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth century. The oldest seem in fact to date from the Kipchak–Nogai period and comprise tumulus-shaped funerary structures, with either stone or earth fill. Located in the

Mangystau region, approximately forty-five kilometers north of the Sayotes railway station, the Seysen Ata cemetery area is composed of seventeen large cupola-covered mausoleums, about ten rectangular monumental enclosures, and about 100 smaller, less important funerary structures. The salient feature of the necropolis, and of the adjacent Uali cemetery area, located in the northern part of the western Ustyurt plateau, is the great variety of types of funerary structures concentrated in different, discrete groups, while at the center of the western sector of the entire funerary area there are the ruins of a mosque flanked by residential structures, which are also virtually in ruins. The burial grounds from which the entire cemetery takes its name lie to the northeast of the mosque.

There are over fifteen mausoleums, all consisting of a single room, which may be either square, rectangular or hexagonal, all covered by a vaulted cupola. Most are located in the northern, eastern, and southern sectors of the necropolis and are dry-wall constructions (that is, made without mortar) built using fossiliferous limestone. Most of the cupolas are capped by tall decorated pinnacles. None of the mausoleums are very large, measuring from five to six meters in width and between seven and eight meters in length. Their principal facades are usually decorated, some with engraved inscriptions, while others are painted. Some of the nineteenth-century mausoleums are funerary monuments of great historic and architectural value, for example those of Kozhanazar, Sundet, Ergaliy, and Tileulibay, as well as the mausoleum of Agatay Tokabay, the most beautiful and most harmoniously proportioned one in the cemetery. Constructed by an anonymous



Fig. 83. The Seysen Ata cemetery complex contains funerary monuments dating from the 14th to the late 15th century.

artisan in 1905, there are still traces of the blue pigment used to color the cupola when it was built. The inside walls of the tomb are also interesting. They are decorated with ornamental paintings framed by a series of niches and pilasters, which confer a sense of movement on the otherwise uniform walls.

The mausoleum in which Seysen Ata was interred stands at the center of the complex. It is made of roughly worked stone and is notable for the strength and solidity of its facade and for its rather heavysset cover made of large, roughly hewn stone blocks. The entry room, reached through an opening in the main facade, is traditional in style, except for its geometric center whose sides are framed by two massive columns with a balcony above them. The tops of the columns are covered with carved decorative motifs.

The mausoleum in which Ergaliy was interred contains a series of features typical of traditional nineteenth-century architecture, in particular the triangular rises that mark its corners and a highly regular vaulted cupola. The floor plan is hexagonal and is perfectly inscribed inside a circumference which measures 6.2 meters in diameter. The walls were built by horizontally and vertically alternating stone slabs, while the main facade, facing southwest, is notable for its engraved decorations. The entry room is raised above the level of the surrounding land and the year when the mausoleum was constructed—1874—is carved on the tympanum.

The enclosures found here differ from one another both in terms of architectural features and decorative elements, representing unique examples of the traditional architecture of western Kazakhstan.

The other funerary structures consist of *sandyktasy* (stone sarcophagus-shaped cists), *kulpytasy* (thin stone steles), and *koytasy* (decorated blocks of stone), and often by associations of two of the above structures. Funerary enclosures containing *kulpytasy* have also been found on the site. Some of these architectural structures are outstanding for the originality of the engraved and painted decorations, predominantly phytomorphic motifs.

9.15 IMANBAY MAUSOLEUM

The mausoleum, built between the 1880s and the early twentieth century, is situated on the top of a rise and is a landmark for people traveling across the western Ustyurt plateau, between the towns of Beyneu and Uali.

It was erected above the tomb of a wealthy animal herder who had

never pastured his flocks in this territory. Doubts exist about the exact date of its construction due to the fact that three inscriptions have been engraved on its walls, two of which set precise limits on the time period when the mausoleum was constructed. The first inscription dates Imanbay's death to 1790 and consequently dates the construction to the end of the eighteenth century, while according to the second, construction took place when there was a mullah named Ikhmukhamed Akberghen, that is, between 1663 and 1664. This chronological evidence contrasts sharply with information given by informants to local historians, which led them to believe that the Imanbay Mausoleum was constructed in the 1880s. In support of this theory, they cite the name of the builder, Daitletniyazov, the same person who built the Sundet Mausoleum on the Emba River. Most art historians are inclined to accept this more recent dating.

The mausoleum was built of fossiliferous yellow limestone and has a rectangular floor plan measuring 5.1 by 5.8 meters. Its principal facade faces south. The walls were constructed following a precise, regular pattern, using blocks of stone cut to be nearly rectangular. Dry-wall construction was used and interstices were filled with small scraps of stone. The western and eastern facades and part of the northern facade have crumbled, evidence of structural defects left uncorrected when the building was constructed. The southeastern corner of the main facade and the cladding on the eastern and western sides of the tambour and cupola are also partial ruins. Despite its poor state of conservation, the building is of interest for its monumentality and the general harmony of its composition, noted principally in the pleasing proportions between the geometrical forms used in the cemetery. The mausoleum itself is nine meters in height and at the top of the principal facade a parapet hides part of its eighty-six-centimeter-high tambour and also part of the cupola from view.

A fundamental difference between this mausoleum and the majority of medieval funerary buildings found in Kazakhstan needs to be kept in mind. Here the building is without the central portal that normally surrounds an ogival arch and lacks the vaulted covering in which the entry room is normally located. The entrance here consists simply of a small door above which there are two projecting cornices separated from one another. Above the first there is a system of small triangular-capped niches, while fine-drawn phytomorphic decorations were engraved above the second overhang. Several types of decorative patterns were used on the principal facade, making the mausoleum one of the few in Kazakhstan marked by ornamentation of

outstanding quality. On both sides of the portal there are bas-relief arch-like motifs, as well as geometric patterns, flowers, and foliage, noteworthy for the use of colors—green, cream, and black—which harmonize with the color of the fossiliferous sandstone.

The decorations on the outside of the mausoleum are not as well done as those on the inside. There are rectangular niches with pilasters between them. For example, five niches and four pilasters are set in the northern wall, while there are seven niches and six pilasters in the eastern and western walls. Both the niches and the pilasters are ornamented with a range of decorative motifs, some of which are small, some medium sized, and some quite large.

9.16 OMAR AND TUR MAUSOLEUM

The mausoleum is a nineteenth-century Kazakh construction located in the Mangystau region, approximately twenty kilometers east of the village of Beyneu and eighteen kilometers north of Novyy Beyneu. The names of the three brothers who built the mausoleum are known (Duysen, Omir, and Ordabay Karazhusipuly), as is the year in which it was constructed (1897).

The floor plan is rectangular (6.15 x 5.7 meters). The building rises to a height of 8.21 meters and is covered by a cylindrical tambour which supports a vaulted cupola. The decorative apparatus on its walls is worthy of note. It consists principally of pilasters and vertical pillars that frame shallow niches. The architectural decoration is much richer on the principal facade than on the other three walls and a low prothyrum extends over its entire height. Slender pillars facing the cardinal points were used as ornamental elements to decorate the tambour and cupola. The play of light and shadow produced by these purely ornamental architectural elements on both the interior and exterior walls of this *kumbez* is enchanting. The interior walls contain rectangular-section niches ornamented with engraved decorative motifs and inscriptions. A spherical-conical cupola set on a massive cylindrical tambour roofs the mausoleum.

The most noteworthy aspect of the mausoleum is its ornamentation, which despite the use of only a few large-scale patterns (whose stylistic rendering is not always perfect), is distinguished for the vividness of the geometric designs and the harmony of the colors used. The high artistic and architectural level that can be found in this mausoleum makes it one of the masterpieces of traditional nineteenth-century architecture, not only in Kazakhstan, but in all of Central Asia.

10. Atyrau Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA

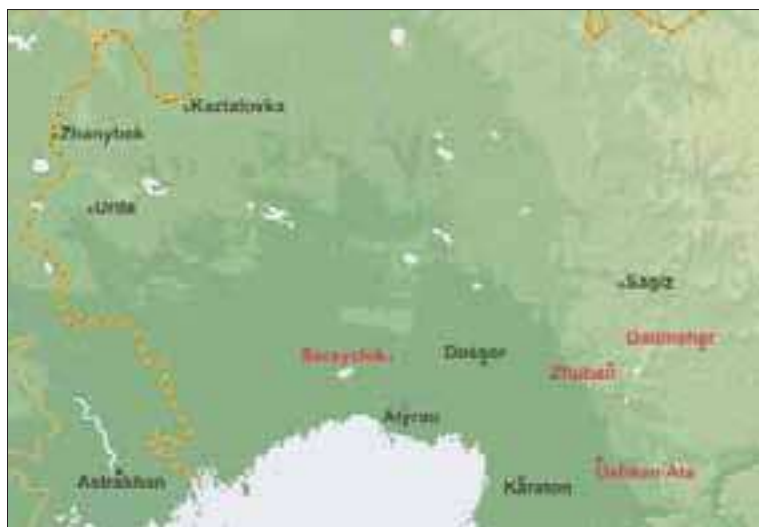


Fig. 84. Map of Atyrau Region.

10.1 ATYRAU

Atyrau is both the regional capital and most important city in western Kazakhstan. Located on the north shore of the Caspian Sea, it is about 2000 kilometers from Almaty and 1500 from Astana, while the Russia–Kazakhstan border and the Russian city of Astrakhan are relatively nearby, respectively 250 and 300 kilometers to the east. The city currently has a population of slightly over 150,000 inhabitants, ninety percent of them of Kazakh origin, while the remaining ten percent are of either Russian, Tatar, Ukrainian, or Caucasian origin.

Atyrau is situated in the delta of the Ural River, slightly less than thirty kilometers to the north of the Caspian Sea. With this position close to both the sea and the border with Russia and Eastern Europe, it is the Caspian's most important port of trade, with goods traveling to and from Asia, the southern Caucasus and Iran, and numerous countries in Europe.

The buildings in the old part of the city, which stretches along the right bank of the river, are mainly one- and two-story wooden houses, while

those in the new districts are generally residential tower blocks and office buildings, constructed around parks with gardens and playground areas for children. The new districts boast top-class hotels and elegant restaurants, and the offices of the oil companies and the apartment buildings where their workers live are also located in them. Since the Ural River is the geographical boundary between Europe and Asia, it can then be said that in Atyrau, one bank of the city is European and the other Asian.

The first settlements go back to 1645 when a wooden fort was constructed at the mouth of the Yaik (now the Ural) River and named Nizhnii Yaiskii Gorodok (literally the lower Yaik fort). The venture was the responsibility of M. Guryev, a trader of Russian origin appointed to provide the court of the tsar with caviar. Guryev also sent other precious goods to the Russian emperor and empress (textiles, spices, semiprecious stones) and these traveled through the cities on the Silk Road, particularly the ones in Khorezmia—Khiva, for example—and those in early Mawarannahr (present-day Uzbekistan), Bukhara, and Samarqand. The name of the fort was subsequently changed to Uyshik by people of Cossack origins. In 1662, after it had been stormed, taken, and almost entirely destroyed by attacking Ural Cossacks, the Guryev family decided to build new defensive structures, using stone instead of wood and strengthening the city's defenses by constructing eight watchtowers and arming them with a total of seventeen cannons. A few years afterward it was Tsar Alexei himself who sent a large company of archers both to help defend the city from incursions by steppe Cossacks and protect the precious goods that were being sent from the Caspian region through the Russian interior to the court in Moscow. Despite this the city fell twice, in 1667 and then 1668, to Stepan Razin, the leader of another Cossack uprising against the tsar. Several violent revolts broke out along the lower reaches of the Ural River between 1779 and 1837. Because of the many uprisings the Guryevs' fortress lost much of its commercial and strategic importance. The 1836–1837 revolt was the most violent uprising in Kazakhstan's history. Led by Makhambet Utemisuly (who was also a poet) and his comrade in arms Isatay Taymanov, the revolt ended when its two leaders were killed and the Guryevs' fortress was razed. In the intervening years, the Uyshik fortress had been renamed Guryev, the toponym that continued to be used until 1992, when the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan decreed that its name should be changed to Atyrau.

The city's economy today is based largely on the export of oil, extracted in fields situated in the northern waters of the Caspian Sea and in

the wetlands along the shores of the sea. The Tengiz oil field is one of the most important, but the reserves recently discovered in Kashagan are also extremely rich.

The Regional History Museum, located at B. Momyshev Uly Street 3, has numerous exhibitions of objects and documents related to the life and work of Makhambet Utemisuly (Utemisov in Russian), who made a major contribution to educating the Kazakhs through his poetry and other writings.

On exhibit at the Museum of the History of the City of Atyrau (located at Azattyq 9B) there is a “Golden Man” garment, similar to the one found in a burial mound in Issyk, to the east of Almaty. The one in Atyrau is a richly ornamented robe of a Sarmatian prince, discovered in 1999 not far from the city. The museum’s other exhibition rooms house finds, both old and new, from Saraychik, which was one of the capitals of the nomad empire of the Golden Horde and is located on the Ural River, approximately fifty-five kilometers north of Atyrau.

A mosque with a brilliant blue cupola was built on Satpaev Street, while a second one, the Kuspan Molla Mosque, is located slightly further north on the same street.

The Uspenskii Cathedral, built in 1883 and recently restored, stands on Isatay Avenue, in the old part of the city. An outstanding example of late nineteenth-century architecture, its construction was made possible by the generosity of a merchant named Fedor Tudakov and his wife Irina. The cathedral is made entirely of brick and has seven domes topped with crosses. The largest dome rises seventy meters from the ground while the others are approximately ten meters lower.

10.2 SARAYCHIK

The medieval city of Saraychik (literally “the new princely residence”) is located on the lower reaches of the Ural River (called the Yaik River up to the Pugachev revolt at the end of eighteenth century), about fifty kilometers north of Atyrau, behind the village of Saraychik. The German zoologist and botanist Peter Simon Pallas visited the city in the 1770s and mentions it in his writings. There have been several archaeological excavations here, most recently the one begun in 1996 by a team led by Z. Samashev.

Saraychik, founded some time between the tenth and the eleventh century, was on the trade route that connected the lower Volga River, and therefore Western Europe, with Khorezm, Central Asia, India, and China. According to legend, it was founded by Batu Khan (1205–1255), a



Fig. 85. In the period of the Golden Horde, Saraychik was the most important city in the khanate, thanks to its strategic position between Europe and Asia.

grandson of Genghis Khan (Chinghiz Khan), but archaeological evidence shows that the city's history must have begun many years before Batu Khan lived. Many stone tools and arrowheads, identified as Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, have been found in the deepest archaeological levels, the most ancient ones.

In the period of the Golden Horde, Saraychik was the most important city in the khanate, from the commercial, political, and cultural points of view and thanks to its strategic position between Europe and Asia. The city's aristocracy built imposing palaces and there were districts where wealthy traders and artisans lived. The city boasted a highly developed network of canals and sewers with ceramic pipes, as well as a quarter entirely devoted to ceramic production and one to metallurgy, and even a mint for striking its own coinage. Other activities included fishing and the selling of dried fish, carpentry, cultivating fruits and

vegetables, particularly *Cucurbitaceae* (cucumbers, pumpkins, and watermelons). The grave goods found in archaeological sites are evidence of the wealth of the city and its inhabitants. Many tombs contain gold, silver, or bronze coins. In the work *Journeys in the Dasht-i Kipchak*, written in 1333 or 1334 by the geographer and traveler Ibn Battuta, Saraychik is described and compared to Baghdad. Its location on a river is noted (Ibn Battuta writes of Ulu, “the great river”) as are the many bridges and ferries that connected the two banks the city was built on, their thousands of small farms, rural hamlets and caravanserais, and the wells with nomad encampments that circled the city.

In 1395 Saraychik fell to Tamerlane’s army, which sacked and razed the city, and it was only in the years between 1430 and 1440 that its economic, social, and cultural recovery began. In around 1490, it became the capital of the Tatar Nogai Horde and was the site of a large military encampment. The coins found in Tatar tombs during archaeological excavations seem to indicate that during this period the city was called Sarail’ Zhadita (literally “new Saray”) to distinguish it from Saray Batu and Saray Berke, two other important cities of the Golden Horde located on the lower Volga River.

Immediately afterward it became the capital chosen by the first of the Kazakh khans. For several centuries it was the place khans chose as their burial place. In fact seven khans are buried here, four of the Golden Horde (Sartak, Berke, Toktakiya, and Zhanibek), two of the Nogai Horde (Ismail and Uraz) and one Kazakh (Kasym).

In either 1580 or 1581, Saraychik was taken and nearly totally razed by groups of independent Cossacks.

10.3 MAUSOLEUM OF ZHUBAN

The mausoleum of the mullah Zhuban stands on the top of a small hill fourteen kilometers northeast of the village of Daulettau, in the northeastern part of the Emba River delta. It is made of light yellow fossiliferous limestone and was built at the end of the nineteenth century. Although it is small, its hilltop position makes it visible from a distance. It was discovered in 1952 by an expedition from the Department of Architecture of Kazakhstan’s Academy of Sciences. The building has remained in quite good condition, although over the years some parts of the painted decorative motifs on the cupola and the outer walls have been lost and a block of stone from one angle of the parapet of the principal facade has fallen off.

If we accept as true an inscription on the interior northern wall of the

mausoleum, the mullah Zhuban died in 1894 and the mausoleum must have been built within a few years after his death. There are, however, scholars who believe that it may have been commissioned and built a few years before he died. A second inscription is of particular interest. It indicates that the total construction cost was 20,000 roubles, ten horses, 122 sheep, one *pud* of tea and one *pud* of sugar (a *pud* is an old Russian measurement equal to 16.38 kilograms, or 36.11 pounds). The inscription closes with the name of the builder: Usta Nugman. The fact that only the builder's first name is given, without any indication of his last name or the tribal clan he belonged to, indicates that Nugman was well known in the closing years of the nineteenth century in the region.

The mausoleum has a rectangular 5.8- by 6.65-meter floor plan and is composed of a base resting on a two-stepped stylobate. It is topped by a low cylindrical tambour and a tall vaulted cupola. All four of its exterior walls, from the impost on the socle to the cornice under the parapet, are divided into three vertical sections: the central parts contain two lateral pilasters and a median element, above which there is a richly decorated tympanum, while the two side parts contain shallow niches, constructed on two levels of depth. The principal facade, which faces southwest, is clearly distinguished from the others by the presence of a massive parapet built over the cornice in the highest part of the facade. The parapet, which partially hides the tambour and the lower part of the cupola from view, is decorated with a string of small rectangular niches while the corners of the other walls are triangular figures.

The surface of the cupola, made of stone slabs placed in concentric circles which become progressively narrower as they reach the top, was painted with patterns of floral motifs and large geometric figures. Color was used, principally light blue, red, and light yellow. Although parts of the decoration have now completely disappeared, the impression one has when looking at the cupola and the mausoleum as a whole is of a lightweight edifice that seems almost to be floating in the blue of the sky that surrounds the hill the *kumbez* stands on.

The entrance space was constructed in a way that made it impossible for animals to get inside the tomb, while the flooring consists of simple packed earth that was lowered to the level of the base of the socle, in order to considerably enlarge the interior space. The four walls of the interior space are divided by rectangular-section niches and by pilasters, decorated with animal, flower, and leaf motifs, as well as with representations of tools used in daily life and weapons.

10.4 NECROPOLIS OF DAUMSHAR

One of the most important and well-known necropolises in the Emba River valley is the necropolis of Daumshar, located on the left bank of the river, thirty-seven kilometers southwest of the village of Zharkamys. Dated between the late eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the necropolis measures 150 by 125 meters and contains over 200 funerary monuments. It takes its name from the *batyr* Daumshar, a chieftain of the Adai tribal group. According to a fairly well-documented tradition, the protagonists of a tragic event which occurred in 1810 are buried in the cemetery. It is said, in fact, that this was the place where Daumshar and other Adai animal herders were pasturing their flocks that autumn. An English (or in other accounts a Russian) scientific expedition arrived, led by a man named Nobely. The mission's translator was a Tatar, who explained to the Adai that the group had come to the region to study its geography and the people who lived there. But Daumshar did not believe what the Tatar said and consequently fighting broke out between the Kazakhs and the English. Nearly all the Adais and some of the English were killed and were buried in the lower part of the cemetery.

A building that was half mausoleum and half funerary enclosure was constructed for Daumshar's body. It is not known what the top of this building looked like as it crumbled many years ago. Part of the structure of the building is made of raw brick and part of baked brick. On the west side of the mausoleum two *kulpytasy* were erected. One, made of red sandstone, is very old, while a much more recent one, made of reinforced concrete, is inscribed with the dates of Daumshar's birth (1770) and death (1810).

There are also three vaulted-cupola mausoleums in the necropolis. The most interesting of these is the Mausoleum of Myrsa-Muryn, built in 1881 and 1882. All three mausoleums have a rectangular floor plan and their principal facades face south. The interiors were richly decorated using a range of light colors

10.5 NECROPOLIS OF USHKAN ATA

The Necropolis of Ushkan Ata (also called Ushken Ata) is the most famous necropolis located along the lowest portion of the Emba River. The area is historically important as it was long the crossroads of several trade routes, including the road that joined the middle and lower reaches of the Volga and the northern shores of the Caspian with



Fig. 86. The necropolis of Ushkan Ata is the most famous necropolis located along the lowest portion of the Emba River.

the Khorezm region and the city of Khiva. It was also the terminus of the road that went from southern Siberia through the Turgai Gate and ran alongside the Emba until it reached the northeastern shores of the Caspian.

The cemetery complex is located twenty kilometers south of the modern city of Munayly, in Atyrau Region, and is flanked by the ruins of a city constructed in the era of the Golden Horde. The ancient city, with its large caravanserai, has been identified by scholars as Trestar-go, a settlement mentioned in medieval sources.

The toponym Ushkan probably derives from the name of the person buried here. He lived during the earliest period of the spread of Islam in the Aral–Caspian area and was considered a saint. But there are other possible explanations for the name, which recur principally among local populations.

One is related to the fact that three different watercourses come together here and holds that the toponym can be explained as meaning “three streams”. Another tradition recalls that this was the place where three groups of Turkic speaking animal herders—Kazakhs, Kalmyks, and Turgouts—joined forces in the eighteenth century in an attempt to halt the Tsarist Empire’s conquest of the Central Asian steppe. According to this tradition, the toponym could mean “the union of the blood of three peoples”.

Over the centuries, the presence of a source of water approximately 200 meters northwest of the necropolis, as well as a lake fed by this source, and rich spring and autumn pastures along the lower Emba

River attracted many pastoral groups to the area, where it was also possible for them to farm. The Necropolis of Ushkan Ata is evidence of the region's historical importance and ferment. In fact the cemetery was used almost uninterruptedly from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Today, instead, the spring has slowed to a trickle and the lake it fed has dried up over the course of the last fifty years.

The Ushkan Ata burial ground, a funerary tumulus topped with a tall pole, is in the southwestern portion of the cemetery. In the past there was a mosque in this area but now only its ruins remain. Most of the necropolis's oldest funerary monuments are also ruins.

The best preserved structures are late eighteenth- to early twentieth-century tombs attributed to Kazakh groups, particularly mausoleums made of raw brick, quadrangular enclosures (called *tortkulak*), and *kulpytasy* with engraved decorations set next to *koytasy* on the west side of the mausoleums and enclosures. The most easily recognized *kulpytasy* are those made between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These are extremely large, some of them over 3.5 meters tall, and are decorated with representations of bladed weapons, objects in everyday use among the inhabitants of the steppe, and the instruments that stonemasons used to make these very monuments. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century grave markers can, instead, be identified by the depth of the engraved decorations.

Studies of the Kazakh names on the grave markers have made it possible to establish when the cemetery was used as a burial ground by different tribal groups: the Adai, Kete, Shekt, Tabyñ, Serkesh, and, more rarely, a few others.



Fig. 87. Horses graze peacefully on the open steppe of western Kazakhstan.

11. West Kazakhstan Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 88. Map of West Kazakhstan Region.

11.1 URAL'SK (ORAL)

Located at the confluence of the Ural and Chogan Rivers, Ural'sk, the capital of Kazakhstan's northwest region, is thirty-five kilometers south of the border with the Russian Federation. Although it is considered geographically in Europe, the majority (about 72%) of its 210,000 inhabitants are Kazakhs.

The city's historic importance is due to its strategic position on the Ural River, on the confines between Europe and Asia. It was an important trade center in the past and continues to be a gateway between Russia and the Ural region and the shores of the Caspian Sea and southern Kazakhstan. Ural'sk is the principal entry point for goods traveling by rail to and from Europe and Siberia, as well as an important distribution center for the multinational companies involved in extracting and exporting oil from the Caspian Sea and Atyrau Region. Ural'sk was founded by Cossacks in 1613. Its original name was Yait'sk, after the River Yaik, now called the Ural River. From December 1773 to April 1774, the city was besieged by Ural Cossacks, led by Emilian I. Pugachev, and the tsarist army managed to regain control only after recapturing Orenburg from rebel forces. In January 1775, after the uprising had been quelled, Empress Catherine II decided to

rename both the river and the city, the former Ural and the latter Ural'sk.

In September 1833 Alexander S. Pushkin, accompanied by his friend Vladimir Dahl, came to Ural'sk to find bibliographic material for his book *The History of Pugachev's Riot* and his novella *The Captain's Daughter*.

Ural'sk was once again besieged by Cossack troops during the Russian Civil War. Mikhail Frunze, Vasily Chapaev, and Georgy Zhukov participated in its defense. In 1991, when Kazakhstan became independent, a decree of the president of the new republic renamed the city Oral. One of the most important monuments in Ural'sk is the Russian Orthodox Cathedral Church of Christ the Savior, built over a period of 300 years, from 1591 to 1891. During the Soviet era, the church was turned into a museum of atheism and one dome was used as a plane-



Fig. 89. One of the most important monuments in Ural'sk is the Russian Orthodox Cathedral Church of Christ the Savior.

tarium. Today, after many years of restoration, it is once more being used as a church.

11.2 GREAT MAUSOLEUM NECROPOLIS

The necropolis, dated between the mid thirteenth and early fourteenth century, is located about two kilometers east of the old city, at the top of a flat mountain called Svistun, while the old city itself is located eight kilometers south of Ural'sk. An archaeological site, the cemetery is composed of numerous low earth hills, some of which were destroyed over the course of time and only two of which are well conserved. The first of these, in which the remains of a mausoleum are hidden, has been given the name "Great Mausoleum".

On the basis of the excavations that have been done, we can furnish a possible reconstruction of the principal features of this architectural structure. The monument had a quadrangular ground plan, whose long sides measured 19.5 meters and whose short sides measured 12.85 meters, and a raised parallelepiped on which two domes, one larger than the other, were set. Both domes were covered with glazed blue tiles of different sizes. Similar tiles were used to decorate the tambours under the cupolas and some passageways. The main facade faces south and consisted of a monumental portal with an approximately four-centimeter-deep, arch-covered central access-niche. It is likely that this portal wall was taller than the construction's other three walls. The facade and niche were both covered with glazed tiles which formed an ornamental frieze decorated with phytomorphic and geometric motifs in colors ranging from white and light blue to pale gray and turquoise. The lateral facades were dominated by deep red, bordering on ochre—the color of the bricks used for the framework of the mausoleum.

Inside, there is a tall decorative panel assembled from glazed gray tiles. In the upper portion of the panel these are surrounded by a frame and by epigraphic ornamental motifs written in gold on a gray and cobalt blue background. The walls around this upper portion of the panel were carefully decorated with white stuccowork, on which traces of polychrome painting can be seen.

The first room, a square measuring approximately 4.4 meters per side, had a volume that was slightly bigger than the two niche-shaped chambers with platforms set at opposite ends of the central axis. These spaces served as a "place of prayer or place of memory", in which the faithful could pray and read suras from the Koran. While the muezzin stood on the central platform, the faithful took their places in the lat-

eral chambers. It is likely that the space was covered by a dome set on a tall cylindrical tambour.

The most important space in the mausoleum was the burial area (*gurkhana*). A square measuring 8.8 meters per side, it had a masta-ba-shaped platform resting on the construction's main axis, under which the two principal tombs were located. The mausoleum functioned as a family burial ground. It is believed to have belonged to an aristocratic family that lived during the period of the Golden Horde. In terms of its architectural features, the mausoleum can be considered to belong to the class of two-chamber mausoleums whose facade lies along the building's main axis.

11.3 SMALL MAUSOLEUM

The Small Mausoleum is located eighty-five kilometers to the west of the Great Mausoleum. Before archaeological excavation began, it was visible as a small hill measuring approximately thirty-five meters in diameter and just under one meter in height.

Excavation revealed that structural features, walls and even the mausoleum floor had been repeatedly subject to destruction and depreciation. The state of conservation of the monument is such that it is now only possible to hypothesize about its size and how it was used as a burial site.

The mausoleum was built without a foundation. It was made mainly of baked bricks measuring 26 by 25 by 5 centimeters but smaller bricks were also used. Built on a rectangular ground plan (9 x 12 meters circa), the principal axis ran from southwest to northeast, with a slight inclination toward the east. It had two domes. The southwest facade, which is 2.25 meters thick, contains a portal in which badly weather-worn brick from the entry to Room 1 are conserved. The building's remaining walls were 1.75 meters thick.

The entry set in the center of the portal niche leads to the first room, used as a "place of prayer or place of memory". It had a rectangular floor plan (5.5 x 3.5 meters) and to the right and left of the entry, set respectively into its east and west walls, there were low platforms measuring 1.25 meters in depth and four meters in height. The perimeter of these platforms was also built of brick, while their centers were filled with sterile black earth. The flooring in the room, which measures 3.5 by 2.75 meters, was made of square baked bricks set on a limestone base.

A door in the center of the north wall, now only barely visible, led to

the second room, used as a burial place (*gurkhana*). It has a square floor plan (5.5 meters per side) and was decorated with glazed tiles with epigraphic ornamental motifs made of gold.

The flooring in the southern part of the room consists of six-sided baked bricks framed by square bricks. A single row of square bricks ran along the southern, western, and eastern walls, while there were four rows of bricks along the northern one.

There was only one grave in the *gurkhana*. It was nearly in the center, opposite the platform set against the north wall. The ditch for the grave (1.6 meters in depth, 2.55 in length, and 1.15 in width) was oriented along an east–west axis. A crypt made of baked bricks measuring 25 by 25 by 5 centimeters was built along the perimeter at the base of the tomb. Its masonry work includes bricks of other sizes.

The tomb has been repeatedly sacked and all items of value carried off.



Fig. 90. Another example of cloth strips being tied to tree boughs or bushes in order to make vows, following popular belief.

12. Aktobe Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 91. Map of Aktobe Region.

12.1 AKTOBE

Aktobe (formerly Aktiubinsk) is a city in northwestern Kazakhstan, at the confluence of the Kargala and Ilel Rivers, with a population of about 320,000 inhabitants of mixed ethnic composition: Kazakhs (about 56%), Russians (about 24%), Ukrainians, Tatars, Uighurs, Chechens, Armenians, and Greeks. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was also a large Volga German community. There has been strong population growth in the city and its province in recent years, mainly due to the prosperity that followed the discovery of oil in the steppe and oil extraction in the region. The Russian city of Orenburg is located 200 kilometers to the northwest, while Orsk, another Russian city, is about 150 to the northeast.

“Aktobe” comes from the Kazakh words “ak” (white) and “robe” (hill) and the city’s name is a reference to the heights on which the original nineteenth-century settlement was located.

The territory of what is now the Aktobe Region has been the scene of the rise and fall of many Central Asian cultures and empires. The re-

gion figured prominently in the history of the Kazakh Junior Horde. Kazakh war leader Eset Batyr launched his campaigns against the Zhungars from here. Abu'l-Khair Khan (1693–1748) was also based in this region.

In March 1869, a Russian military fort with a garrison of 300 was built at the confluence of the Kargala and Ilek Rivers, along the Orenburg–Kazaly caravan route. Slavic settlers began to immigrate to the region and farm villages were built around the fort. In 1874 the fort was expanded in size and streets were laid out to and from its gate. In 1891 the settlement became the capital of the surrounding *uezd* (administrative subdivision), and was officially named Aktiubinsk.

The settlement expanded rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the 1889 population was estimated to be 2600, figures for 1909 show that the population had grown fourfold, to 10,716 official residents. The Trans-Aral railway was extended through the city in 1901, and in the years before World War I industry and economy began to develop, including the construction of an electric power plant and a brick factory and the holding of an annual trade fair.

The city was affected by the Russian Revolution of 1905, and strikes and riots took place during the years between 1905 and 1907. On January 8, 1918, local Bolsheviks moved to seize control of the local soviet and by January 21, 1918, Bolshevik power over the city was secured. With its location on the Trans-Aral railway, Aktobe was a strategic point and during the Russian Civil War there was heavy fighting between the Red and White Armies to maintain control over the city. Some Kazakh and Russian inhabitants of Aktobe and its environs sided with the Bolsheviks, while others supported the Whites.

An All-Kazakhstan Conference of Soviet Workers was held in the city on March 13, 1920. This was the first of a series of regional organizing conferences held by the Bolsheviks that ultimately led to the creation of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic—the entity that would ultimately develop into the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan.

Aktobe became the capital of Aktobe Region in 1932. The city expanded during World War II, when factories from Ukraine and Moscow were evacuated and reconstructed there. The relocated activities included a ferroalloy factory. Chromium began to be mined and processed in the province. In the 1960s, an extensive expansion of the city was undertaken by Soviet authorities, resulting in the construction of a city center and sports stadium.

Since Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, Aktobe's society and economy have changed radically. Older heavy industries have declined

and been overtaken in importance by the energy sector. The city has continued to expand with new construction as many Kazakh immigrants have moved there from the surrounding countryside.

However, the major engine of economic growth in Aktobe and Aktobe Region has been the development of energy resources. The Chinese National Petroleum Company has a sixty percent stake in AktobeMunaiGaz, and is investing heavily in oil and natural gas extraction from Aktobe province oilfields. A pipeline has been constructed to transport oil to Xinjiang. The revenues from oil and gas extraction have helped to develop banking, real estate, and support services.

There are two theaters and one children's theater in Aktobe. There are also two museums: a museum of Aktobe's natural history (flora, fauna, and the environment) and human history (archaeology, ethnography, architecture, and ancient and modern history) and the Aliya Moldagulova Museum. There is also a geological exhibition in the city. The city has two Russian Orthodox churches, three mosques (the third completed in 2006), and one Catholic and one Pentecostal church.

12.2 ABAT BAYTAK

Abat Baytak, situated about nineteen kilometers south of the village of Taldysay, is in the Khobodin district of the Khobda River valley. It is one of the most important medieval cemetery complexes in the Aktobe region. The toponym comes from a mausoleum in the eastern part of the cemetery that is a fascinating example of a baked-brick mausoleum with a conical covering, one of the rarest to have survived to the present day.

According to legend, the Mausoleum of Abat Baytak was erected in the place where Abat, son of the fifteenth-century Kazakh philosopher Asan Kayty, lost his life when he fell from a camel while searching for pastures where their flocks could graze and shelter for the night. Legend also tells us that the building was completed quickly by all the inhabitants of the local steppe. This is the origin of *baytak*, the second word in the toponym, whose literal meaning is "wide or enormous" but is used here to mean "of all peoples, common to all peoples".

The first known mention of the mausoleum is in the eighteenth century, in the writings of P. I. Rychkov, after which an interesting description can be found in a work by I. A. Castagné, a Frenchman who was a member of the Archival Commission of the city of Orenburg. For many years afterward the monument was believed to have gone to ruin, until in 1979 the Kazakh scholar Serik E. Azhigali identified it and

began a study not only of the mausoleum but also of the vast necropolis that stretches along three of its sides, to the north, west, and south. The first point his architectural analysis clarified was that typologically the mausoleum was similar to front-portal constructions whose cupolas hide a second interior hemisphere-shaped covering (for example Kok-Kesene and Kesene; see pp. 179, 230–231). The portal of the mausoleum has been destroyed but its low, quadrangular body is still visible. On this base rests an eleven-sided tambour which supports a cone-shaped cupola, part of which has also collapsed. The body of the mausoleum measures 9.52 by 9.8 meters, while its surviving portions measure 14.5 meters in height. The complete original monument is believed to have been approximately sixteen meters tall.

One entry door is set into the southern side of the mausoleum, and a second one in its western side, where the portal stood. This second door is now closed, bricked over by people who live nearby to stop animals from entering. The interior walls are stucco-covered. No traces of depositions have been found. The mausoleum was built of unfired bricks clad with square-shaped baked bricks, while trapezoidal bricks were used to make the roof. Traces of the light blue and gray polychrome decoration used in the cupola are still visible. In recent decades several hypotheses have been advanced concerning the dating of the construction. M. Mendikulov argued that it could be dated to the first quarter of the thirteenth century, while according to the historian A. Toktabaev it was built some time in the fifteenth century. One of the most recent hypotheses, advanced by S. E. Azhigali, is that it can be dated to the general period of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.

The necropolis which extends from three sides of this mausoleum contains mausoleums made of baked brick and a series of over 200 funerary monuments (*kulpytasy*) and steles erected between the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The prime significance of these grave markers is that each one is different. No stele or *kulpytas* has the same form as another or has decorative motifs that use elements found elsewhere in the necropolis. It is also significant that the monuments are evidence of a high level of workmanship, for example in the engraving techniques of the ornamental patterns and the overall crafting of the grave markers. The engraved decorations consist largely of geometric ornamental motifs but weapons and women's jewelry are also depicted. Verses from the Koran and information about the life of the dead person can be found engraved on the western side of many steles and *kulpytasy* and there are numerous *tam-*



Fig. 92. The name of the cemetery, Abat Baytak, comes from a building that is a fascinating example of a baked-brick mausoleum with a conical covering, one of the rarest to have survived to the present day.

gas (a seal or stamp of a tribe's emblem) which document that people from many tribal groups were buried here: Tabyn, Kete, Alshyn, Baybakt, Shekt, and many others.

12.3 MAUSOLEUM OF ESET BATYR

Eset Batyr (1667–1749) was a Kazakh military leader who played a vital role in the Kazakhs' war against Zhungar invaders. The mausoleum where he is buried is located near the village of Beshtamak, twenty-six kilometers south of Aktobe, in the province of Alga. Buildings where pilgrims can rest have been constructed around the mausoleum, as have some commercial structures. The mausoleum is spartan in appearance. Its nearly cubic base is crowned with a cupola resting on a cylindrical tambour. It is a year-round pilgrimage site, visited by Kazakhs who wish to feel spiritually close to the man who did much to liberate their land from invaders. In May and June large numbers of secondary school and university students, who have passed their exams and been promoted, visit the tomb to thank Eset Batyr for his help. Eset's father Koki also distinguished himself in battle. He fought in the war of liberation of 1635–1643 and was widely known under the name Taymas Batyr. Historical records show that Koki was a courageous fighter. He served under Batyr Zhalantose and one day led 20,000 foot soldiers to relieve Khan Zhangir, who was attempting to fight off



Fig. 93. The Mausoleum of Eset Batyr, a Kazakh military leader who played a vital role in the Kazakhs' war against Zhungar invaders.

50,000 Zhungars with a company of 600 Kazakh soldiers. Eset was born during wartime and from childhood experienced fighting and danger. The title “*batyr*” (military leader) was bestowed on him when he was still a young man, in recognition of his heroic deeds in the war and the disregard for danger and death he showed in battle.

In 1700 Eset was the military commander of a tribal subgroup, while ten years later he had become the commander of the Alim tribe and by 1722 he was the undisputed head of the Zhetyru tribal confederation. In all these years he made an enormous contribution to the war of liberation, both on the battlefield and as a military strategist. He continued to distinguish himself in the years between 1720 and 1745, repulsing the attacks of Kalmyks and Bashkirs. In the last years of his life, Eset Batyr was an ally of Abylai Khan, serving as the khan's military and political advisor. Together with other important figures, such as Bogenbay Batyr and Zhanibek Batyr, Eset supported Abylai Khan's political vision, principally in the difficult period when the Kazakhs' territory was being annexed by tsarist Russia. On October 10, 1731, on Abylai Khan's orders, in the company of other military commanders of the Junior Horde, Eset swore allegiance to the imperial tsarist government. And in Orenburg in 1740, while taking part in the negotiations between the tribal leaders of the Middle Horde and Junior Horde and the representatives of the Imperial Commission of Orenburg headed by Prince Vasilii Urusov, Eset pledged loyalty to tsarist Russia for the sec-

ond time. During the negotiations and discussions, he supported every point in Urusov's policy on relations between the Russians and the Kazakhs. Eset was subsequently personally involved in developing commercial and political relations between the two peoples and attempted several times to act as a mediator with the Kalmyks, who were hampering the annexation of the Kazakh territory by Russia. For his diplomatic and political activities, Eset Batyr was given the title "Tarkhan" by the tsarist government. He died at the age of eighty-two.

12.4 UL'KEN ZHYBYSKY NECROPOLIS

The complex contains not only funerary buildings, but also a mosque and several residential structures, dated between the nineteenth and early twentieth century. There is a clear-cut topographical division between the living city and the city of the dead, typical of complexes in the northern Caucasus comprised of dwelling and funerary structures. In fact the name of the necropolis is clearly of Ingush origin.

The mosque is in a very poor state of conservation. It has five rooms, separated from one another by 1.5-meter-thick walls built of unfired brick and large blocks of stone. The principal entry to the building is in the west wall and leads directly into the prayer room. The *mihrab* niche was hollowed into the south wall. The upper walls and the entire cupola collapsed many years ago. The mosque is thought to have been built in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The residential structures are located to the south-southwest and north-northeast of the mosque and were also built by alternating raw brick and blocks of stone. They are now deserted and in disrepair.

The necropolis is certainly noteworthy, principally for the presence of stone-slab enclosures of gigantic dimensions, and a tower-shaped mausoleum with a cupola built of unfired brick. The *saganatamy* were made of baked bricks and their internal and external walls were decorated by laying bricks on two levels.

12.5 KHAN MOLASY

Khan Molasy, that is, "the cemetery of the khans", is located four kilometers west of the confluence of the Ol'keyek and Kabyrga Rivers, in the territory of what is now the province of Autekebiy. It covers an area which measures approximately 600 meters from north to south, and about 300 from east to west. There are approximately 950 monuments on the site. Much of its fame is due to the likelihood, based both on

historical sources and on local oral tradition, that Khan Abu'l-Khair of the Junior Horde, who died in 1748, is buried here.

Studies done a little over ten years ago by a team led by S. E. Azhigali confirmed these historical and oral accounts. The cemetery seems to have been built as a necropolis for military and political leaders. Burial mounds alternate with the ruins of enclosures and mausoleums. In the summer of 1998 an attempt was made to identify the tomb of Abu'l-Khair Khan, and seems to have met with success. Until then the exact position of the renowned Kazakh leader was unknown, although in the past researches had attempted to locate it. The first of these was N. Rychkov in 1771, twenty-three years after the khan's death, while the results of a second, far more circumstantial study, carried out by Prince D. Eristov, appeared in the *Encyclopedic Lexicon* published in St. Petersburg in 1835. Eristov wrote somewhat confusedly that the mausoleum for Abu'l-Khair had a nearly square floor plan with an elevation that narrowed slightly at the top and that the entire building, covered by a hemispherical cupola, was made of unfired grayish bricks. When Rychkov's and Eristov's information is put together, it becomes clear that the mausoleum was entered from the west and that inside it there was a clay tomb-emblem and a stone enclosure, where animal sacrifice was practiced. Both writers agree that a beautiful birch tree grew on the eastern side of Abu'l-Khair's tomb. When at the end of the nineteenth century the mausoleum caved in, the local community continued to make pilgrimages to the cemetery and the birch tree, symbol of Abu'l-Khair's strength and audacity, became an object of veneration. One reason for the sudden collapse of the mausoleum was probably the poor quality of the raw bricks used to build it.

It was, as is mentioned above, only in 1998, after extensive historical and archaeological research had been done, that it was hypothesized on the basis of scientific evidence that the mausoleum might have been located in the northeast corner of the necropolis. However, no trace of the birch tree was found nearby. Interviews with elderly local people indicated that there had been a large birch tree on the east side of one of the mausoleums in the northeast corner of the cemetery until the 1950s, after which the tree had been burned. The next step was excavating the building and this furnished a definitive confirmation of the hypothesis which had been put forward. Archaeologists uncovered the remains of a structure that corresponded perfectly to descriptions in written sources and to the informants' memories. The building measured approximately 5.7 by seven meters. The most important result was finding a stratum of burnt material, with carbonaceous re-



Fig. 94. Khan Molasy, literally “the cemetery of the khans”, consists of about 950 monuments, most of them buried and so far unexcavated.

mains and burnt branches, which clearly corresponded to the destruction in the late 1950s of the birch tree that had stood next to Abu'l-Khair's tomb.

The Khan Molasy Cemetery is also interesting for the wealth and variety of its stone tomb markers, particularly *kulpytasy*, *koktasy*, *samar-kandtasy*, and other types of stele with a wealth of epigraphic documentation. These funerary monuments are not from the period of Abu'l-Khair Khan's death; they were made in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century from a local variety of marble. Most of them are split in two or more pieces. The low, narrow parallelepiped steles found here are noteworthy for the columns decorating their corners and ornamental friezes which cover their entire surfaces, similar to steles found in the Syr Darya valley and in the Turkestan region.

12.6 ZHUYSEMBI MOSQUE

The mosque is located in the Irgiz valley, at the source of the Irgiz River, near the village of Zhansaybay in the Irgiz district. It is one of the most important religious buildings in the region to the north of the Aral Sea.

It was built between 1909 and 1913 by construction workers and craftsmen from Orenburg and Ufa under the direction of Zhuysembi Imashuly of a local tribal group called Shomekey-toka, and the building is in good repair.

It has a rectangular (9.6- by 24.2-meter) floor plan and is oriented along

a northeast to southwest axis. The walls were built of baked brick and adjacent to the northeast facade there is an eight-sided minaret tower, measuring nineteen meters in height, which has a cone-shaped roof. The *mihrab* is set into the inside wall of the opposite, southwest facade. The uniformity of the external walls is interrupted by niches, windows, and pilasters that project slightly from the wall surface. There are two entrances to the mosque, one in the southeast and another in the northwest wall.

The interior space was originally divided into two sectors. The one on the minaret side of the building had a wooden staircase and the second, larger space, where sermons were preached, housed both the *mihrab* and the *minrab*.

There are brick kilns along the southern and northeastern sides of the mosque used to bake the bricks used in its construction.



Fig. 95. A lake in an inter-mountain valley between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

13. Kostanay Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA



Fig. 96. Map of Kostanay Region.

13.1 KOSTANAY

The city of Kostanay (literally “an encampment of the Kazakh tribal group Tanay”) is a regional center situated on the Tobol River in northern Kazakhstan. Most of its approximately 205,000 inhabitants (2003 figures) are of Russian or Kazakh origin, but there are also people of Ukrainian, Volga German, and Tatar origin.

Founded in 1879 and called Nikolaevsk from 1893 to 1895, at the beginning of the twentieth century it was the site of a large market (*jar-marka*) and an important crossroads for several land and river trade routes connecting Central Asia, East Asia, and Russia. The construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad made it possible for the city to trade directly with several Russian cities. In the 1930s, a Swede named Lorez had a large beer brewery and bottling plant built there, at a time when the sale of beer in glass bottles was still a rarity.

In the 1950s, as part of the Russian government’s “Virgin Lands” pro-

gram launched to open up areas of the steppe to farming and bolster grain production, the city of Kostanay grew significantly and the country around it witnessed the birth and growth of many small centers, still in existence today. Nearly all of the new farming communities were involved in growing cereal crops (principally wheat). The message on a nearly five-meter-tall billboard on the Tobol River at the city's eastern entrance makes this clear, proclaiming that the weekly production from farms in the country around Kostanay is "385,000 tons of wheat".

Mining is also an important sector of the city's economy. Both bauxite and asbestos are mined, refined and sold, as are iron and iron alloys, kaolin, titanium, zirconium, and even gold. The city has several important state-run universities and scientific institutes. These include Baytursynov University, a teachers' college, and the Dulatov School of Economics and Engineering.

Although the city itself has little to offer tourists, it is an excellent starting point for excursions to the Great Lakes area near Turgai and the Naurzum nature reserve.

13.2 KESENE MAUSOLEUM, RUSSIA

The Kesene Mausoleum is located in the Varna province of the Chelyabinsk region of Russia, a short distance from the border with Kazakhstan and the province of Kostanay. It was built in a necropolis that is situated between two lakes—Bolshoe (large) Kesene and Maloe (small) Kesene—and was recently restored by specialists from Chelyabinsk's Association for Preserving the Historical and Cultural Monuments of the Russian Federation working together with members of Russia's Union of Architects. The architect M. G. Semenov was in charge of the restoration. A detailed study was made of the parts of the monument that were in a good state of repair, after which plans for reconstruction and restoring were drawn up. Work lasted for two years, from 1981 to 1983. According to Semenov, the mausoleum was probably built during the first half of the fourteenth century when the White Horde experienced a period of great economic prosperity and political progress. On the basis of archaeological evidence brought to light by E. J. Petra in 1889, Semenov believes that the mausoleum was used throughout the rest of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century. Petra found the remains of the burial site of a woman, a Mongolian aristocrat, whose body was decorated with jewelry typical of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to the archaeologist M.

Mendikulov, the Kesene Mausoleum should instead be dated as mid sixteenth century, the time of the reign of Khaknazar Khan. Mendikulov believes that this mausoleum represents one of the last examples of religious buildings with a portal and a vaulted cupola, after which, principally from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, funerary monuments were smaller and made of raw brick. The name “tower of Tamerlane” is often used to refer to constructions of the kind found in Kesene, as they resemble the monuments in Urgench, the capital of ancient Khorezm.

The Kesene Mausoleum is made of red brick set into lime mortar and has a nearly square floor plan, about 6.5 meters per side. The main facade, with its imposing projecting portal, faces south and the portal niche is topped by an ogival vault. The contours of the entrance space, set inside an arched niche, are not clearly defined. The mausoleum was originally composed of a cube-shaped *chetverik*, a twelve-sided tambour and a vaulted cupola which measured 5.68 meters in height, and its overall height was sixteen meters. It is noteworthy for its height, the harmonious proportions of its elements, the simplicity and severity of its architectural forms, and a commanding position on elevated ground.



Fig. 97. A Kazakh graveyard in the desert landscape of the Syr Darya delta.

14.

North Kazakhstan Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA and ZHANAR JAMPEISSOVA

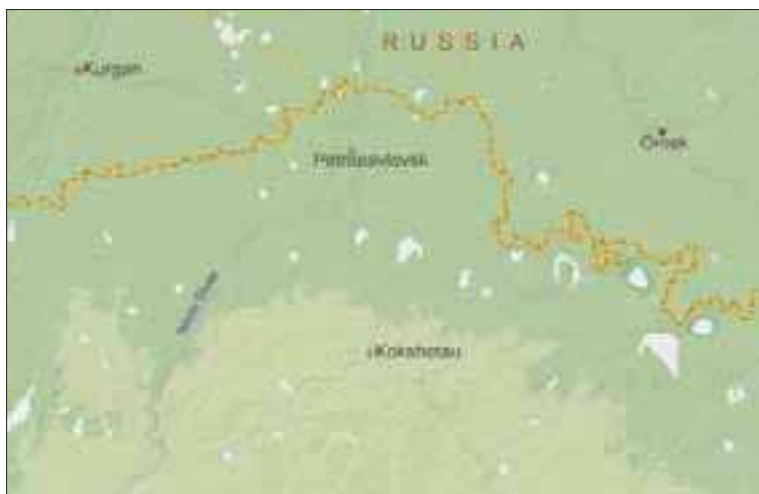


Fig. 98. Map of North Kazakhstan Region.

14.1 PETROPAVLOVSK

Petropavlovsk, the capital of northern Kazakhstan, lies on the Ishim River (also called the Esil, a tributary of the Irtysh River). It is sixty kilometers from the Russian border, on the legendary Trans-Siberian railway line. It has close business and cultural links to the nearby Russian cities of Omsk and Chelyabinsk. Most of its 200,000 inhabitants are of Kazakh or Russian origin.

The city was founded in 1752 with the name of Kyzylzhar (Red Bank) as a fortified outpost built to protect and promote the Russian settlement of southern Siberia and force the area's nomad peoples further south. Petropavlovsk was accorded the administrative status of a city in 1807 and up until the October Revolution in 1917 played an important role trading in silk, other fabrics, and carpets. This trade was promoted by the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway in 1894. Many people moved to Petropavlovsk from the west of the Soviet Union, mainly Ukraine and Russia, between the two world wars, under government policies that encouraged the opening of new commercial ventures.

Today the city is an active industrial center specializing in metallurgy and in the production of farm machinery, food processing, and grain harvesting and processing. It has two large universities: the University of Northern Kazakhstan, named after the writer Manash Kozybaev, and a Military School. There is a mosque and three churches, two of which are Orthodox.

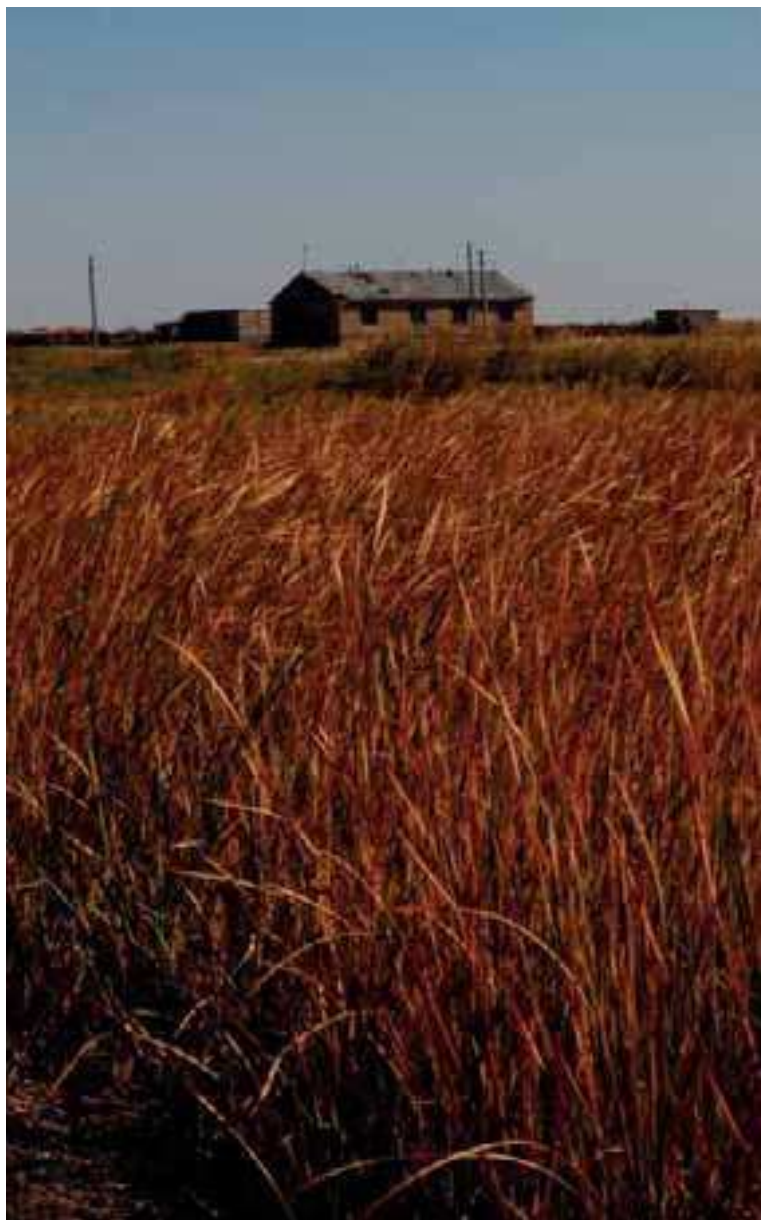


Fig. 99. A farmhouse bordered by reed-covered swamps in northern Kazakhstan.

15. Pavlodar Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA and ZHANAR JAMPEISSOVA



Fig. 100. Map of Pavlodar Region.

15.1 PAVLODAR

The city of Pavlodar, the political and administrative center of the northwestern Kazakhstan region of the same name, is on the Irtysh River, approximately 350 kilometers northeast of Astana, and 320 kilometers downstream from Semey, on the road to the Russian city of Omsk. It is an important rail hub and commercial river port, with a population of 304,000 people (2004 figures), mostly of Russian and Kazakh origin, with a sizeable number of people of Ukraine, Volga German, and Tatar origin.

Pavlodar was founded in 1720 as a Russian military and strategic outpost on the banks of the Irtysh. Koryakov, the name of the old fort, came from a lake, at the time one of the major sites of salt extraction in all of Siberia and Kazakhstan, which is located near the river. By 1838 the fort had been transformed into a village, most of which had grown up around the trading port located on the Irtysh. The city's commercial importance increased in the mid nineteenth century, when lead, silver, and copper mines opened in the area, and metal-working industries developed. In the same period, the village of Ko-

ryakov became increasingly important economically for the nomadic Kazakh tribes whose seasonal pastures lay along the course of the Irtysh and its tributaries. In 1861 the village was accorded the administrative status of a city and given the name Pavlodar—gift of Paul—in honor of Grand Duke Paul, the newborn son of Tsar Alexander II of Russia.

The government's "Virgin Lands" program, which began in 1954, sparked the growth of modern-day Pavlodar. Large numbers of young people from all over the Soviet Union arrived in Pavlodar to work in factories and on building sites. There are still farm-machinery factories, an aluminum factory and some chemical plants in the city. Construction of an oil refinery was completed in 1978. Until 1992, Pavlodar was virtually off limits to foreigners as Red Army tanks were manufactured there.

Pavlodar is now one of the most advanced centers in Kazakhstan for the development of high-quality communications technology. It has two state-run universities (Toraygirov University and a teachers' college), seventeen professional vocational institutes, and ten secondary schools. The city is known for its inhabitants' and its administration's interest in artistic and musical events and for their devotion to chess, manifested in an annual international open tournament. Several Pavlodar chess players have been awarded the title "International Master". Important monuments in the city include two museums and several places of worship: Saint Theresa of the Infant Jesus Catholic Church, situated in the Vostochnii municipal *rayon* (district); Saint Nicholas Chapel, a historic Russian Orthodox church; the Ekimsis Orthodox church; a Protestant church which Pastor Kim Song Su had built, situated behind the Oktjabr Cinema; a Baptist church; and a synagogue. The municipal Museum of Natural History (Ulitzia Lenina 147) has exhibits related to the city's history from ancient times to the present day and to the construction of the Mashkhur Zhusup Mosque (see pp. 236–237). There is an interesting paleontology section with noteworthy exhibits of osteological remains of antelopes, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and saber-toothed tigers found near Pavlodar.

The Dimitry Bogaev Museum (Ulitzia Lenina 200) occupies the one-story wooden house where local photographer and historian Bogaev (1884–1958) lived. On exhibit are photographs taken between the beginning and the middle of the twentieth century portraying daily life in Pavlodar, as well as scenes of young soldiers leaving for the front during World War II.

15.2 MASHKHUR ZHUSUP MOSQUE

The mosque named after Mashkhur Zhusup (Mäshhür-Zhüsüp Köpey-ulı, 1857–1931) was completed in 2001. It is inside a six-hectare park with gates on Kutuzov, Krivenko, and Kayrbaev streets and is the largest mosque in Kazakhstan. It was named after Mashkhur Zhusup, who is now considered to be one of the most important figures of Kazakh Islam in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. He was the author of several printed works, mainly published in the first decade of the twentieth century, but he also left a number of manuscripts. Mashkhur Zhusup's works are an indispensable body of sources for understanding Islamic culture on the Kazakh steppe during the late imperial and early Soviet periods, and particularly for appreciating the nomadic dimension of the region's Islamic history. One of his main areas of activity was the collection and recording of Kazakh oral traditions. He transcribed numerous oral epics, and he was possibly the first person to write down Kazakh historical and genealogical traditions in his region. Mashkhur Zhusup was also the author of numerous original works: epic poems devoted to the Islamic prophets and figures from early Islamic history; verse works devoted to the Islamic sciences; autobiographical works; praise poems for local figures; and travel or pilgrimage poems. After his death he was venerated as a saint and over the years thousands of pilgrims have visited his tomb. In popular belief still current today, it is thought that skin contact with his tomb is sufficient to ensure salvation or recovery from illness.

The building is an eight-pointed star measuring forty-eight by forty-eight meters, with room for up to 1500 worshippers. The minaret is sixty-three meters tall, while the half-moon cupola is fifty-four meters in height. The mosque's sky-blue cupola was built to resemble a yurt in shape. The cupola over the men's prayer room, which holds 1200 people, measures thirty-three meters in height and thirty meters in diameter. The mosque covers a total surface of 7240 square meters. The main building's two floors and minarets are made of brick, while the cupola has a metal substructure. The Sumbar rock-crystal chandelier whose 434 light bulbs illuminate the interior of the mosque was manufactured in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. From an architectural point of view, the mosque is meant to resemble a heart, open to peace, kindness, and good will.

The first floor holds the madrasa classrooms, a prayer room for women with space for up to 300 worshippers, auxiliary spaces adjacent to the

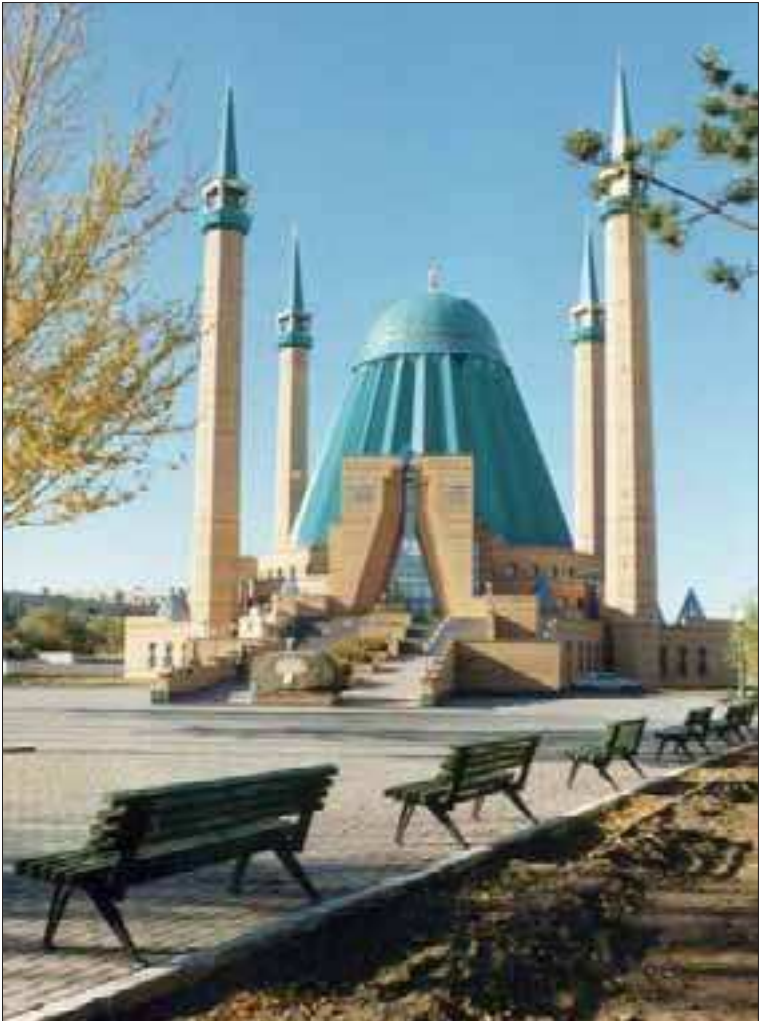


Fig. 101. The recently opened mosque of Pavlodar is named after Mashkhur Zhusup, who is considered one of the most important figures of Kazakh Islam in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

prayer room, a room with ablution facilities for ritual purification, and a checkroom. The room used to celebrate weddings is separated from the refectory by moveable partitions so the two can be joined together to form a single large space. The second floor has a balconied prayer room with space for 1200 people, a museum of Islamic culture, a library, a video room, washrooms, and some big halls. The main entryway to the mosque is located on the building's second floor.

An older mosque in Pavlodar, whose more severe style makes it less attractive than the majestic Mashkhur Zhusup Mosque, is located on the corner of Frunze and Lunacharskovo Streets.

15.3 CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

The decision to build the Church of the Annunciation in Pavlodar was taken on May 17, 1990. Work began in 1993 and was completed in 1999, on the eve of the second millennium after the birth of Christ. On October 22, 1999, the church was consecrated by the archbishop of Astana and Almaty, Aleksei Kutepov. Over fifty companies and organizations in the city of Pavlodar and the regions of Pavlodar and Ust'-Kamenogorsk in Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation regions of Moscow, Omsk, Novosibirsk, and Chelyabinsk contributed to the success of the undertaking.

The bell tower contains nine bells, whose total weight is 1024 kilograms. The windows of the church were made and subsequently set in place by master craftspeople from Tomsk. It was decided by the Akim of Pavlodar Region, D. K. Akhmetov, "in relation to the special supplementary list of architecture and monumental art subject to state protection", that the Cathedral Church of the Annunciation should obtain the status of historic and cultural monument of the Republic of Kazakhstan.



Fig. 102. The Church of the Annunciation of Pavlodar is directly inspired by the most important church in Moscow's Kremlin.

The church stands on the banks of the Irtysh River, and contributes to forming an enchanting view of the city. Its grounds and the buildings adjacent to it extend along the entire upper bank of the Irtysh, reaching the point where in the past there were only empty lots. As part of the sanctuary complex, a public park has been created next to the vast church square.

The Church of the Annunciation, directly inspired by the most important church in Moscow's Kremlin, is a five-cupola church built as a Greek cross on whose east-west axis we find the narthex (at the west end), followed by the main body of the church (nave) and then the sanctuary (altar), while on the shorter north-south axis there are side chapels which enlarge the central space. The nave has six pillars—four set in the corners—and is covered by a large cupola. The first space on the east-west axis opens onto the church porch and its adjacent bell tower. There are three hemispherical apses in the church's eastern facade. The bell tower differs from other historic ones that can be found in the region. It is a rectangular-plan building, set on a north-south axis; the church porch, in front of the entry portal, forms its first unroofed floor. Internal staircases built on both sides of the tambour, lead to the floor above, where the bell-ringing chamber is located. Topped by a semicylindrical vaulted roof, the chamber resembles a shield placed in front of the massive body of the church, although it is slightly lower in height than the cornice of the church proper. The Church of the Annunciation was the first in northern Kazakhstan to have such a complex, varied set of bells. The three small cupolas set atop the arch of the belfry chamber carry the eye upward so that the overall architectural structure and all its elements (the body of the church with its five large cupolas, the side chapels topped with cupolas and narrow ogee windows)—everything—seem to soar. A large luminous tambour, crowned by a second onion-shaped dome crowns the church cupola. Above the cornice on the nave and side chapels a series of decorative projecting, stepped architectural elements confer vivacity and movement to the uniformity of the straight lines of the walls and perimeter towers. These ornamental motifs, typical of Russian Orthodox church architecture, also decorate the base of the tambour set atop the main body of the church, on which the corner cupolas rest.

The Church of the Annunciation is an extraordinary feat of engineering and is one of the most beautiful recently constructed religious buildings in Kazakhstan. It is both an important cultural and spiritual center for the city of Pavlodar. ≤

16. East Kazakhstan Region

GIAN LUCA BONORA and ZHANAR JAMPEISSOVA



Fig. 103. Map of East Kazakhstan Region.

16.1 UST'-KAMENOGORSK – OSKEMEN

Oskemen (formerly Ust'-Kamenogorsk) is the capital of the East Kazakhstan Region. It was founded in 1720 at the confluence of the Irtysh and Ulba Rivers as a fort and trading post named Ust-Kamennaya. The city was established in 1720 according to the order of the Russian Emperor Peter the Great, who sent a military expedition headed by Major Ivan Vasilievich Likharev in search of Yarkenda gold. Likharev's expedition was directed up the Irtysh River to Zaysan Lake. There, at the confluence of the Ulba and the Irtysh Rivers the new fortress was laid—the Ust-Kamennaya Fortress. The Ust-Kamennaya Fortress appeared on the map of the Russian Empire, the very southern end of the Irtysh line. In 1868 the city became the capital of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Region. It was the site of Georgy Malenkov's thirty-year internal exile, during which he managed a local hydroelectric plant. The city developed into a major mining and metallurgical center during the Soviet period. Mining of non-ferrous metals, especially uranium, beryllium, tantalum, copper, lead, silver, and zinc remain im-



Fig. 104. The Zhambyl Theatre of Ust'-Kamenogorsk is more than a hundred years old.

portant. It is a center for the construction industry producing manufactured housing and ferroconcrete articles. The postwar industrial history of the city is very closely intertwined with the Soviet nuclear-bomb project, and the city was therefore kept closed to outsiders. One of the main industrial enterprises, the Ulba Metal Works (UMW), which produced and still produces uranium products, was kept entirely secret despite it employing thousands of workers. An explosion at the UMW's beryllium production line in 1990 led to the diffusion of a highly toxic beryllium-containing "cloud" over the city. The health effects of this incident are not entirely known, partly due to the fact that the incident was kept secret by the Soviet authorities.

There are thirty-two religious unions, presenting fifteen religious confessions including four Muslim, twenty-nine Christian, and three unions professing non-traditional religions. There are twenty-one cultural buildings in the city: among them four mosques and six Orthodox Christian churches.

16.2 CENTRAL MOSQUE OF UST'-KAMENOGORSK

Ust'-Kamenogorsk's Central Mosque (90 Satpaev Avenue) stands on a two-meter-high artificial hill and covers an area of about 1.84 hectares. The four-story building was constructed on a granite base, which is its first floor. It has a square floor plan (thirty-six meters per side) and is ringed by four forty-meter-tall reinforced-concrete



Fig. 105. The Central Mosque has recently been built in the city centre.

minarets with yellow-brick cladding. A sky-blue dome sits atop the mosque.

The facade is clad with yellow brick with inserts of ceramic tiles inscribed with Arabic-script citations from the Koran. There are seven rooms in the mosque: one for men, which can accommodate up to 700 worshippers; one for women, which can accommodate up to 300; a madrasa for about fifty students; a library and reading room for up to fifty people, and a ritual chamber for only three people. In compliance with building regulations, each of these rooms has been provided with

auxiliary spaces: a room for the imam, two dressing rooms for couples that are about to marry, archives, a library workroom for repairing and conserving books, a room for the cleaning staff, and so on.

The first floor, located in the base of the building, houses a room for funeral services capable of accommodating up to 500 people, auxiliary spaces adjacent to the funeral parlor, a canteen for fifty (open only to students in the mosque's Koranic school) and adjacent service areas, and a public prayer room for use by women, capable of accommodating up to 100 worshippers.

On the floor above this, there is a cloakroom, a prayer room for up to 1000 worshippers, and a second room for funeral services, the imam's office and reception room, a lounge, and service rooms. The imam's room has a secondary doorway connecting it to the *mihrab*, where there are separate dressing rooms, one for the groom and one for the bride-to-be.

On the next floor, the third, is the fifty-seat reading room, equipped with archives and a book-conservation room, as well as a number of rooms for the library staff.

The top floor houses the mosque's Koranic school for about fifty students divided into four classes. There are also service rooms, dormitories, and study halls. On the grounds of the mosque there are a stadium and indoor gym where students in the madrasa can practice sports.

16.3 SANCTUARY OF SAINT ZENOBIUS, UST'-KAMENOGORSK

The Sanctuary of Saint Zenobius was opened in 2005. The Metropolitan of Astana and Almaty officiated at the opening ceremony and consecrated this Russian Orthodox sanctuary, dedicated to a priest named Zenobius Sogrin, who was responsible for the construction of a sanctuary dedicated to Saint Nicholas Thaumaturgus, built in 1913 on the spot where the new sanctuary now stands. The church remained open for a short while after the Revolution and a school was housed in it but the building was then torn down and the bishop was executed.

The opening of the Orthodox sanctuary was a solemn event for the city's inhabitants, especially those in the "Sogr" neighborhood. The bell for the church belfry was cast in Moscow. It was fused from a special metal alloy so that it can be rung to call worshippers to prayer even when the temperature drops to forty degrees below zero. The church, designed by the architect B. Nevzorov, is built in the form of a Greek cross. It is a five-sided construction with a cupola, proceeding in the



Fig. 106. Picture of the old church of Saint Zenobius. The new church was built in 2005 in the northern part of the city centre.

historic-architectural tradition of cubic churches. The cube of the *chetverik* has a roof with four pitched sides, on which are set a windowed tambour supporting the central cupola and four smaller corner cupolas, built on long necks on eight-sided high towers. The side chapels are a few steps lower than the sanctuary's main space, while the eastern facade consists in a single hemispherical apse. The tall service door in front of the central entrance on the west side of the sanctuary repeats the form of the hemispherical apse, conferring refined symmetry on the plan.

16.4 RUINS OF THE SANCTUARY OF ABLAI-KHIT

Ablai-khit is a fortified Lamaist sanctuary, whose ruins, which have survived to the present day, are located about fifteen kilometers from the village of Nikitinka, in the Ablaketka River valley's Ulanskii district, in the province of Ust'-Kamenogorsk. Building of the sanctuary is thought to have begun in 1654 or in the years around then. Like other fortified Lamaist buildings in southeast Kazakhstan it is a representation in architectural terms of the political power the Oirat (Kalmyk) lords wielded over these lands in the seventeenth century and their hold on the trade routes that extended from the Russian Empire to China. Ablai-khit consists of a sanctuary, a fortress, and quarters for the lama and dignitaries and in the past was noted with interest by many of the scholars who traveled through the region. The first to describe the architectural features of the sanctuary was F. Baykov, writing during the

winter he spent at the court of Khan Ablai (or Abylai). The first ground plan and first drawings we have of the sanctuary were made in 1735 by the Russian geodesist Vasilii Shishkov. Manuscripts found in the monastery over the years are in the Asian Art Museum, branch of the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The pentagon-shaped Ablai-khit sanctuary complex was built by setting shale slates and blocks of granite on a clay foundation. Its three-meter-deep walls once reached a height of between three and five meters. The building was surrounded by a stone wall, whose remains are still visible today. The ruins now appear as an irregular rectangular rise, composed principally of gray earth in which fragments of red and gray bricks and glazed colored ceramics are hidden. There are also fragments of the glazed wall cladding of the sanctuary, often decorated with flower and plant motifs. Most of the fragments are either light blue or green, while a few are red.

In the northeast corner of the fortress, there is a deep niche, which resembles an underground cell, inside a granite rock. There are traces of the use of fire, used continuously over a long period of time, principally on the walls which appear to have been smoothed. The place may have been an observation point. Approximately thirty meters to the northwest of the principal rise, which corresponds to the main



Fig. 107. Ablai-khit is a fortified Lamaist sanctuary; it is a representation in architectural terms of the political power the Oirat Kalmyk lords in the 17th century.

building (the sanctuary), two large holes are visible: a hemispherical-section trench or moat, and ramparts on which huge blocks of granite rest. There are also several blocks of granite in the trench, with marks that are evidence of their having been exposed to fire. No other architectural structures have been found in the space between the sanctuary and the stone wall.

16.5 SEMEY – SEMIPALATINSK

Semey, better known by its former Russian name of Semipalatinsk, is one of the most important cities in eastern Kazakhstan. It is located near the border with the Russian Federation and southern Siberia. Lying on both banks of the Irtysh River, it is over 800 kilometers north-northeast from Almaty, and about 620 east of Astana. It currently has a population of approximately 330,000 inhabitants.

The first settlement in the area was constructed in 1718, during the reign of Tsar Peter I. A fortress (Fort Yamyshevsk) was built on the right bank of the river, near the ruins of a Lamaist Buddhist monastery which was inside a Zhungar village called Dorzhinkit (or Zordzhinkit). Semipalatinsk, the new name of the fortress, meant “[town with] seven palaces”. In its early years, the fortress was destroyed by spring floods several times and for this reason a new, stronger, more easily defended structure was built eighteen kilometers further up the river, which by the early nineteenth century had become one of the most solid and powerful Russian fortresses in Central Asia. Thanks to trade along the Irtysh between steppe nomads and the Russian Empire, a city slowly grew up around the fort. Growth was further spurred by the construction of the rail connecting the city to the Trans-Siberian railway in 1906, which turned Semipalatinsk into a major transit hub for people and goods traveling between Siberia, Central Asia, and western China.

Dostoevsky spent five years in exile in Semipalatinsk, from 1854 to 1859, serving as a corporal in the Seventh Battalion of the Semipalatinsk Brigade. Some of the descriptions of landscapes and cities in *The Brothers Karamazov* seem to have been written during the period he spent here. Other intellectuals were exiled to Semipalatinsk: Evgeni Mikhaelis and the four Bielosludov brothers. Forced exile was unable to stop them from pursuing their intellectual interests. Libraries, museums, and schools were set up and scientific societies and cultural circles were founded. A city library was opened in the second half of the nineteenth century, the same period in which the Society

for Geographic and Statistical Studies was founded. The men of letters who have lived in Semey include the poet, composer, and philosopher Abay Kunanbay, the poet and philosopher Shakarim Kudayberdyev, Mukhtar Aueзов, writer and founder of the Kazakh National Theater, Kanysh Satpaev, Alkey Margulan, and many others.

Between 1917 and 1920, Semipalatinsk was the seat of the independent government of Kazakhstan established by the Alash political movement, a group which formed during the years of the civil war and strove for autonomy for the Kazakhs. During this period the city's name was changed to Alash-qala. In 1920, the city fell to the Red Army. In 1949 a vast area of the steppe, about 18.5 square kilometers, approximately 150 kilometers west of the city, was chosen to be an atomic test site. For several decades afterward, Kurchatov, a secret site 120 kilometers west of the city, was the headquarters for some of the Soviet Union's most important atomic scientists. Locally, the city was nicknamed "Konechnaya", which means "the end". No city resident was allowed to enter the grounds of the test site and no one could receive visits from friends or relatives. A series of powerful aboveground tests were carried out between 1949 and 1963, after which underground tests were done. There were a total of 456 nuclear-bomb tests, 340 underground and 116 atmospheric ones. At 6.30 in the morning on August 29, 1949, a Sunday, without any prior notice to the people living near the test site, the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb (30 kilotons in capacity) was detonated, while on August 12, 1953 (another Sunday morning), its first hydrogen bomb (500 kilotons in capacity) was tested in the atmosphere.

The site was finally shut down on August 28, 1991, by an executive order of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, after, however, the effects of the nuclear explosions had caused an untold number of serious illnesses (especially cancer and leukemia) and deaths. The victims have been commemorated. On the island of Polkovnichy in the Irtysh River, about one kilometer from the bridge that connects the island to the city, there is a memorial to the victims of nuclear radiation, unveiled in 2002. At the center of the work there is a statue, called *Stronger Than Death*, which depicts a mother kneeling protectively over her child as a mushroom cloud from an atomic explosion hovers over their heads.

A decree of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan issued on June 21, 2007, officially changed the city's name to Semey (a word of Turkic origin which means "a holy or spiritual site"). It is a lively city with a large population of university students, mostly of Russian origin,

whose presence makes the city center seem more Russian than other cities in Kazakhstan. The name change, promoted by the president himself, as was the construction of a series of new constructions, represents an attempt to forget a past of death and disregard for human life and give not only Kazakhstan, but the entire world, a new picture of the city.

Until 1917 there were twelve mosques in Semipalatinsk, only four of which are still standing. Another four were built after Kazakhstan became independent. There are numerous places of interest in the city: a mosque with a single minaret which dates to the first half of the nineteenth century; a mosque with a double minaret, also built in the nineteenth century; the Jam'shev Gate, one of the three gates to the Russian fortress—the west-facing one and the only one to have survived; a commemorative museum dedicated to Dostoevsky; a local history museum, with a wealth of documents with information on the nuclear test site, and on the history of the city and region.

The two-minaret mosque mentioned above merits a more detailed description. It is the principal place of worship for Semipalatinsk Muslims. Building of the mosque, made entirely of brick from its foundation to its uppermost cornice, began in 1852 and finished in 1862. It has three wooden doorways which face southwest. The cupola atop the building is without a supporting tambour and has two minarets which rise from the roof of the entrance areas to the sides of the principal facade. The tips of the minarets are decorated with gilded crescent moons. There are fourteen windows in the mosque, topped by hemispherical openings.

Another point of interest is a convent on the city's left bank, housed in a two-story brick building constructed in 1899. It was here that the Church of Saints Peter and Paul was housed until 1917, when the building was turned into a technical-topographic secondary school. Today it is once again the Church of Saints Peter and Paul and houses a convent.

The Russian Orthodox Church of the Resurrection, built between 1857 and 1860, is topped by a large light blue and gold cupola. The church is at the center of the oldest part of the city, where it is still possible to see many old one-story wooden houses with courtyards and small vegetable gardens ringed with picket fences.

The Abay Museum has exhibits related to the life of the Kazakh scholar, poet, and intellectual Abay Kunanbaev (1845–1904). The museum complex consists of seven rooms in a nineteenth-century building and an additional ten rooms in a new construction whose Oriental archi-



Fig. 108. The Russian Orthodox Church of the Resurrection was built between 1857 and 1860 and stands at the center of the oldest part of the city.

tectural style borrows elements from the madrasa of Akhmed Rzyz and the minaret of a mosque. In addition to rooms devoted to Abay's life and work, there are others with displays related to the independent Alash Orda government and still others with objects, as well as books, texts and documents by Kazakh writers who were followers of Abay. One of these is Mukhtar Auezov (1897–1968), arguably the most important Kazakh novelist of the twentieth century.

The Dostoevsky Museum was built alongside the wooden house where the writer spent his years in forced exile in Semipalatinsk, from 1854 to 1859. There is mid nineteenth-century furniture in the rooms, as well as a wealth of documents and photographs of the writer, from his childhood years in Moscow to his stays in St. Petersburg, his imprisonment in Omsk, and years of exile as a corporal of an infantry regiment here in Semipalatinsk. At the entrance to the museum, opened in 1971 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth, there is a monument dedicated to Dostoevsky and to Chokhan Ch. Valikhanov. Valikhanov (1835–1865), the best-known representative of the more Russified part of the Kazakh social elite (having descended from the Kazakh khan Abylai), spent his childhood in the region of Kokshetau. Between 1845 and 1853 he studied in the cadet corps at Omsk, and was then appointed as orderly to the

commanding officer of the army in Siberia. He met Dostoevsky at Semipalatinsk in 1854, and they became firm friends. After having taken part in the exploration of Semirech'ë between 1855 and 1859, he moved to St. Petersburg in 1860 to study, but returned to the steppe the next year for health reasons. In 1864 he managed to take part in Chernyaev's military campaign in eastern Turkestan, before his death the following year. He left an opus of historical and ethnographical works about the region that had already become classics by the end of the nineteenth century.

16.6 CENTRAL MOSQUE IN SEMEY, DEDICATED TO ANNETBABA

One of the city's architectural gems, the two-minaret mosque of Semey is one of the most beautiful religious buildings in Kazakhstan. Descriptions and pictures of the mosques can be found in an album containing information about the world's great mosques. This album was published for the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Romanov rule and can be found in the archives in Kazan.

The mosque was designed by an architect named Bolotob and a second lieutenant in the corps of engineers named Makashev. Its construction, on a lot previously used to burn trees, was made possible by money donated by three merchants: Suleymanov, Abdashev, and Rafikov. The mosque has fourteen rectangular windows, each topped by a hemispherical window. The three-door entrance way is set on a tall platform with steps and finishes in a hemispherical cupola without a bell. The doors and the corners of the portal simulate half-columns with capitals.

The windows over the door repeat the figurative scheme of a small cupola. On the exterior, an important role is played by the two minarets erected at the front of the mosque, at the corners of the building's main hall. Two doors lead from the hall to spiral staircases which lead to the tops of the minarets, which have metal balconies. Narrow ogive-shaped windows illuminate the staircase. The tips of the minarets are decorated with gilded crescent moons. The entire outer surface of the mosque, up to the height of the cornice, is decorated with relief friezes.

The mosque is located at 48 Ulitza Abay, in the heart of the old city. Restoration work was carried out from 1971 to 1975 and the building was turned into an exhibition hall. It was only in 1994 that the mosque was returned to its original function and used as a place of worship.

16.7 MAUSOLEUM OF ABAY KUNANBAEV AND SHAKARIM KUDAYBERDYEV

The Zhidebay Museum and National Park is located 160 kilometers from the city of Semey, in the town of the same name, the birthplace of Abay Kunanbaev. The park covers an area of 6400 hectares and in addition to the museum is the site of the eight-room house in which Abay was born and the Abay-Shakarim Mausoleum in which Abay, his nephew Shakarim, his brother Ospan, Shakrim's son Akhat, and Abay's wife Erkezhan are buried. Kudayberdy, Ulkan, and Zere—respectively Abay's brother, mother and grandmother—are buried in the same complex. A mosque, in which services are held, is also located in the park.

The History of the Commemorative Complex

Zhidebay, in Semipalatinsk province, played a vital role in the life and literary work of Abay Kunanbaev. Abay's father, Kunanbay, was also born here, on a farm which the poet inherited in 1884, on which he would spend the last eleven years of his life. His mother, Ulkan, and grandmother, Zere, lived here for many years. His birthplace was an artistic and literary mecca for this poet and thinker and it was here that he wrote most of his verses, poems, and translations, and his work *The Book of Words* was composed.

When Abay inherited the farm on which he had been born he enlarged



Fig. 109. The Abay Memorial Museum in the city of Semey, which houses a didactically clever collection of exhibits that provide information about the life and work of Abay Kunanbaev.



Fig. 110. Another image of the Abay Memorial Museum in the city of Semey.

it in every way he could and carefully organized the work done on it. He modernized the house and had a school and mosque built. And it was here that Abay Kunanbaev died on July 7, 1904, and was buried next to the tomb of his brother Ospan.

Restoration work on the tomb had to be carried out on several occasions. In 1940 it was decided by the Soviet of the Ministers of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan that Abay's house in Zhidebay should become a national heritage site. In the 1960s a new granite mausoleum was built and since then thousands of people have come here and bowed their heads to honor the memory of the poet. The mausoleum was built of reinforced-concrete blocks and near it the ground was excavated to prepare a garden, failing to take the area's severe winter weather into account.

In 1970, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the poet's birth, his home was completely rebuilt, maintaining its general exterior aspects and floor plan of the interior. This is the origin of Zhidebay's Museum House, which in recent years has been visited by thousands of tourists.

16.8 MAZAR OF KOZY Korpesh AND BAYAN SULU

The *mazar* of Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu is a tenth- to eleventh-century architectural monument situated on the right bank of the Ajakok (or Aiaguz) River, near the Tansyk train station in the province of Ajaguz (or Aiaguz) in the region of East Kazakhstan.

The *mazar* ("dwelling of the dead", mausoleum), whose name is a reference to the names of two heroes in a lyrical epic poem, is one of the

oldest architectural monuments in Kazakhstan. It is first mentioned in 1771, in the work of I. P. Fal'k and was studied by N. A. Abramov in 1856, by N. N. Pantusov in 1898, and most recently—in 1952—by A. Kh. Margulan.

A pyramid on a 7.10-meter-square base, the *mazar* is 11.65 meters tall and some of its walls measure nearly two meters in depth. In the past four statues stood in front of the door, representing—according to local tradition—Kozy Korpesh, Bayan Sulu, Sulu's younger sister, and an elderly maidservant. The statues, now totally destroyed, were drawn by Ch. Valikhanov in 1856 and today are in the collection of a German museum, where they were taken in about 1860. Although the monument is an example of rather primitive architecture, it has nonetheless weathered the passing of time and is in quite a good state of repair (albeit somewhat modified in comparison to its original appearance). The changes made include the construction of a new entrance to the monument consisting of an arch with archivolt, which are little in keeping with the primitivism of the original architectural structure.

The lyrical epic poem “Kozy Korpesh, Bayan Sulu” is thought to have originated between the thirteenth and fourteenth century, although it was only written down in the mid nineteenth century. There are numerous oral variants of the story, the most famous of which is surely



Fig. 111. The *mazar* of Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu is a 10th–11th-century architectural monument and one of the oldest in Kazakhstan.

Zhanak's, while the best-known of the written variants are the ones collected by the folklorists G. S. Sablukov (1830), G. Derbisalın (1834), A. Frolov (1841), and Ch. Valikhanov (1856). A Russian-language version of the poem was published by M. Putinzev in 1856, after which it was included in the third volume of V. Radlov's 1870 collection entitled "Examples of Turkic Tribal Groups' Folk Literature". The first German translation of the poem was published in about the same year. The work is the story of two tribal chieftains, Sarybay and Karabay, who encounter a series of negative circumstances and events and therefore decide to put an end to a longstanding pact that had united them in friendship. Their children, the courageous horseman Kozy Korpesh and extraordinarily beautiful Bayan Sulu, fall in love with one another and their feelings unfortunately infringe upon the barriers between their two families. In fact Sulu has been promised to Kodar, Korpesh's rival for her love, and when Korpesh is killed by Kodar, the beautiful Sulu tricks Kodar into descending into a well. She then cuts the rope that Kodar needed to climb out of the well, throws stones into it and kills herself on the tomb of her beloved Korpesh. In all the versions which have come down to us the romance between the two young people ends tragically.

There were a number of plays made based on this Kazakh "Romeo and Juliet" folk tale and these were performed in cities throughout Kazakhstan and southern Siberia. In 1992 a movie of the same name was made by the director and actor Asanali Ashimov. The monument is now visited by couples who ask that their love for each other be protected, as well as by unmarried people hoping to find a soul mate with whom to share their lives.

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