SHAKARIM

THE LIFE OF A KAZAKH POET

Published by the Aitmatov Academy. 2015
YERLAN SYDYKOV

SHAKARIM

THE LIFE OF A KAZAKH POET

Translation by John Amor

Published by the Aitmatov Academy, 2015
The life of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev followed ended tragically when he was shot down by an officer of the secret police. There a prolonged silence. No one could speak his name. His artistic works were forbidden. But although he was independent minded, sometimes outspoken, Shakarim was far from the nationalist rebel he had been painted as. Virtually unknown in the West, Shakarim slipped into oblivion for decades following his assassination and is only now being rediscovered by his fellow countrymen in Kazakhstan.

So why is it that Kazakhs should want to read the work of this one hundred year old poet now?
SHAKARIM
THE LIFE OF A KAZAKH POET

1858-1931
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About the Authors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Dates</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Historical Figures</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tree</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of Terms</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Chingis-Tau: Peaks and Plains</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Journeys of The Spirit</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Predictions and Premonitions</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Revolution</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Study of Conscience</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Land of The Forgotten</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yerlan Battashevich Sydykov has been President of the L N Gumilyov Eurasian National University since 2011. He is a fellow of the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences, and Professor of History. He is also a graduate of history at the S M Kirov Kazakh State University (1978).

Sydykov has worked in the Kazakh higher education system since 1978. As a teacher and researcher he has close ties with three of the major universities of Kazakhstan, The Semipalatinsk Technological Institute of the Meat & Milk Industry, where he is now Vice President, The Semipalatinsk Institute of Education, and The Shakarim State University of Semipalatinsk.

He remains active in all aspects of political and civil life in Kazakhstan.
SHAKARIM
1858-1931
IMPORTANT DATES

1858  Birth of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, poet, translator, musician, historian and philosopher.

1876  Shakarim marries his first wife Mauen.

1879  Their firstborn son Sufian (Abusufian) is born.

1881  Abai introduces Shakarim to E.P. Mikhaelis.

1882  Shakarim marries his second wife Aigansa (according to the tribal tradition, a man may take a second wife or tokat).

1903  Ziyat, the youngest son of Shakarim and Aigansa, is born, future poet, dramaturg, journalist, and active participant in the 1931 revolution in Karaul.

Shakarim is made a member of the Semipalatinsk Branch of the West Siberian Department of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society.

1905, March Shakarim meets Alikhan Bukeikhanov in the course of publishing a book of Abai’s poetry.

November  Shakarim sets out on the Hajj.

1906, March Shakarim returns from the Hajj.

1907-1909  Period when Shakarim studied the religio-philosophical works of Leo Tolstoy, adopting his conception of the morality of self-realisation.

1908  Shakarim visits Alikhan Bukeikhanov in prison in Semipalatinsk.

1909  Shakarim writes a letter to Leo Tolstoy.

1911  *The Genealogy of the Turkic Peoples. Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Khan Dynasties* and *The Canons of Islam* is published. Shakarim is made a Bolys (parish councillor)
1912  *Mirror of The Kazakhs*, a collection of philosophical and poetical musings, is published. The year is marked by the release of two books of Shakarim’s poetry, ‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’, and ‘Enlik and Kebek’ Shakarim announces to the tribe his intention to unite with the Ken-Konys zhailjau.

1913  Bukeikhanov writes a favourable article on Shakarim’s *Genealogy of the Turkic Peoples, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Khan Dynasties*, in the journal *Kazakh* (№12 28 April) under the title ‘The Right Word’

1916  Zh Aimaitov praises Shakarim’s *Genealogy of the Turkic Peoples, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Khan Dynasties*, in his article in *Kazakh* (№168 9 February) entitled ‘To Aqsaqal Shakarim’, under the pseudonym Zhelkek (‘contributor’).

1918  Publication of the essay ‘A Mirror of Lasting Happiness’

1922-1923  Shakarim’s poem ‘Layla and Majnun’ is published in Tashkent in the journal Sholpan.

1923  Shakarim receives a letter from the editor of the *Kazakh Language* newspaper, requesting him to write an article.

1924  Publication of *The Tale of Dubrovsky*. Shakarim’s translation of Pushkin’s *Dubrovsky*. Shakarim has two articles published in *Kazakh Language*, both on the subject of literary criticism, ‘An Appeal to the Newspaper Editor’ and ‘Criticism, and Criticism of Criticism’

Mukhtar Auezov and Alkei Margulan come to stay with Shakarim in Bakanas.

1925  Shakarim’s eldest son Sufian dies. This is the start of Shakarim’s second hermitage.
1925-1926 Shakarim works on his translation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

1930 Shakarim’s son Akhat is arrested. His other son Gafur is also convicted, and dies in mysterious circumstances.

1931 Shakarim is killed by a bullet from the KGB.

1932 Akhat is released from the Semipalatinsk jail.

1936 Shakarim’s translation of *Dubrovsky* appears in the journal *Literary Front*.

1937 Akhat is arrested as a son of an enemy of the people and sent to Siberia.

1958 Shakarim is exonerated.

1961 Akhat Kudaiberdiev re-buries his father’s remains.

1962 A commission is set up in the Abai district of the Semipalatinsk Oblast for the study of the life and literary heritage of Shakarim.

1963 A commission is set up in Almaty for the study of the life and works of Shakarim. The poet Khamit Ergaliev is appointed head of the commission.

1978 Shakarim’s poetry is published in Russian translation in a collection entitled *Poets of Kazakhstan* (as part of the Poets Library series) by the Leningrad publishing house Soviet Writer (Sovetsky Pisatel). The work is compiled by the writer and social commentator MM Magauin.

1988 Publication of *Six Tales* by Shakarim in the Kazakh publication *Zhazushi* (The Writer).
RELATED HISTORICAL FIGURES

Abai (1845-1904)  Poet, philosopher, composer, educator, public figure, founder of Kazakh written literature.

Aikap  First Kazakh socio-political journal of literary criticism. Published in Troitsk from January 1911 to August 1915.

Aimauytov, Zhusipbek (1889-1931)  Writer, founder of Kazakh language drama and the Kazakh novel, scholar, educator, pedagogue, psychologist. Author of textbooks and manuals addressing the education of workers.

Akbaev, Zhakyp (1876-1934)  Participant in the liberation movement, public figure, social commentator. Master of Law, researcher of civil and family law.

Alash  Organisation uniting representatives of educational, ideological and scientific intelligence in Kazakhstan, 1917-1920.

Altynsarin, Ibrai (1841-1889)  Educator and teacher, writer, folklorist, author of the first Kazakh textbooks.


Auezov, Mukhtar (1897-1961)  Writer, dramaturg, scholar, Academic at the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR (1946), representative of the Writers' Union of Kazakhstan. His novel and epic poem *The Way of Abai* is now in the Library of World Literature.
Baitursinov, Akhmet (1873-1937) Public figure, educator, literary scholar, linguist, turkologist, translator.


Bazarbaev, Muslim (1927-1995) Literary scholar, critic, one of the first to study Shakarim. Author of the groundbreaking works of research *Essays on the History of Kazakh Literature* (1960) and *A History of Multinational Soviet Literature*.

Bukeikhanov, Alikhan (1866-1937) Public figure, Deputy of the First State Duma and The Congress of Russian Muslims, Member of the Bureau of the Muslim Faction of the Fourth State Duma, St Petersburg Mason and Member of the Cadet Party. One of the leaders of the Alash Party, Commissar for the Provisional Government of Kazakhstan in 1917.

Buketov, Evnei (1925-1983) Scholar in the field of chemistry and metallurgy, writer, poet. Academic at the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR (1975), USSR State Prize Laureate (1969), Member of the Writers’ Union of the USSR, translator of Shakespeare into Kazakh.

Chokai, Mustafa (1890-1941) Public and political figure, social commentator, ideologue in the battle for freedom and independence of a United Turkestan.

Donentaev, Sabit (1894-1933) Poet and satirist, social commentator, public figure.

Dulatov, Mirzhakip (1885-1935) Kazakh poet, writer, one of the leaders of the Alash-Orda government and the national liberation movement of Kazakhstan.
Duysenbaev, Iskak (1910-1976) Scholar and literary figure, correspondent member of the National Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan.

Dzhangildin, Alibi (1884-1953) Revolutionary, important community and state leader, one of the organisers of the battle to establish Soviet power in Kazakhstan.

Dzhansha Dosmukhamedov (1887-1932) Lawyer, Politician, one of the leaders of Alash-Orda. In the spring of 1918 carried out talks in Moscow with Lenin and Stalin on the recognition of Kazakh autonomy.

Elkibaev, Rakhmatulla (1877-1919) Teacher and governor of the Muslim Children’s Shelter in Semipalatinsk (1901-1912).


Gabbasov, Sabirzhan (1889-1918) Famous journalist of the early twentieth century, participated in establishing Soviet power in the Ayagozk District, Commissar.

Imanov, Amangeldi (1873-1919) Leader of the revolution against the Tsar in 1916, active participant in establishing Soviet power in Kazakhstan.

The Kazakh Kazakhstan’s first daily newspaper, printed in Orenburg 1913-1918.

Kashaubaev, Amre (1888-1934) Singer, actor, musician, one of the founders of the Kazakh national theatrical arts, the first singer to introduce the art of Kazakh folk singing to Europe.

Kemengerov, Koshke (1896-1937) Writer, dramaturg, literary scholar, translator, public figure. Author of academic works on literary criticism, linguistics and ethnography.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirabaev, Serik (born 1927)</td>
<td>Literary scholar, academic at the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Honored Scientific Figure, Republic of Kazakhstan State Prize Laureate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kopeev, Mashkur Zhusup (1858-1931)</td>
<td>Poet, thinker, historian, ethnographer, orientalist, collector of oral folk art of the Kazakh people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulzhanova, Nazipa (1887-1934)</td>
<td>First female Kazakh journalist, translator, pedagogue. Author of preschool education books (1923).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magaun, Mukhtar (born 1940)</td>
<td>Writer, social commentator, researcher of Kazakh folklore heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailin, Beimbet (1894-1939)</td>
<td>Writer, dramaturg, talented essayist and feuilletonist. Editor of the <em>Kazakh Literature</em> newspaper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margulan, Alkei (1904-1985)</td>
<td>Archaeologist, founder of the Kazakh Archaeological School, eminent scholar in many fields: ethnography, orientalism, history, literary criticism and art history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsekov, Raiymzhan (1879-1922)</td>
<td>Human rights advocate, public figure, social commentator and orator. One of the developers of the Alash programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Musrepov, Gabit (1902-1985)  Writer, critic, dramaturg, literary scholar, public figure.


Satpaev, Kanysh (1899-1964)  Geologist, one of the founders of the Soviet Metallogeny, founder of the Kazakh School of Metallogeny. Academic at the Academy of Sciences, USSR, 1946.

Seifullin, Saken (1894-1938)  Founder of modern Kazakh literature, poet and writer, statesman, founder of the Writers' Union of Kazakhstan.

Seitkulov, Mukhamedkhan (1870-1937)  Father of Kayum Mukhamedkhanov. Guests to his home included Alikhan Bukeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov, Magzhan Zhumabaev, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, and Mukhtar Auezov. In his home, Mukhtar rehearsed his plays ‘Enlik and Kebek’ and ‘Karakoz’

Seralin, Mukhamedzhan (1872-1929)  Poet, educator, journalist, teacher, public figure, editor of the journal Aikap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suleimenov, Olzhas</td>
<td>Poet, writer, literary scholar, public and political figure, diplomat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(born 1936)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tazhibaev, Abdilda</td>
<td>Poet, dramaturg, writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1909-1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toraigyro, Sultanmakhamut</td>
<td>Poet and democrat. From 1913 worked as secretary in editing the first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1893-1920)</td>
<td>Kazakh journal <em>Aikap</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tynyshpaev, Mukhamedzhan</td>
<td>Public figure, Deputy in the Second State Duma of Russia, Prime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1879-1937)</td>
<td>Minister of Autonomous Turkestan, member of Alash-Orda, first Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>railway engineer, helped in the design and construction of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turkestan-Siberian Railway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulugbek (1394-1449)</td>
<td>Leader of the Turkic State of Timurid, grandson of Tamerlane. Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as an eminent astronomer and astrologer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valikhanov, Chokan</td>
<td>Educator, scholar, historian, ethnographer, folklorist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1835-1865)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhansugurov, Ilias</td>
<td>Poet, writer of prose, dramaturg, satirist, journalist. First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1894-1938)</td>
<td>Representative of the Writers' Union of Kazakhstan (1934-1936).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zharokov, Tair</td>
<td>Poet, translator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1908-1965)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhumbaev, Magzhan</td>
<td>Poet, writer, social commentator, pedagogue, one of the founders of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1893-1938)</td>
<td>the new Kazakh literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aksakal  A Kazakh elder
Akyn    A Steppe bard, part of a traditional of oral poetry recitation
Alchiki A children’s dice game played with small animal bones
As      A memorial celebration given in honour of a great or significant public figure on the anniversary of their death
Aul     Mountain village
Bai     Kazakh nobleman
Baibishe First (or ‘senior’) wife
Baiga   A long distance race
Batyrm Kazakh honorific title meaning ‘hero’
Biy     A traditional Kazakh authority, imbued with powers similar to that of a sheriff or county judge, who would mediate on local disputes, interpreting local laws, the only record of which was preserved in the oral tradition, and never in written form
Bolys   Leader of a volost
Chapan  Ceremonial quilted dressing gown
Elyubasi Pentecostal elders
Hadji   Honorific title given to someone who has completed the Hajj
Hajj    Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca
Hakim   An Arabic title meaning ‘appoint’, ‘choose’, ‘judge’, indicating a ‘wise man’
Haram  An Arabic word meaning ‘unclean’ used as in the context of the Koran
Khan    A ruler
Kyrgyz  May refer either to nationals of Kyrgyzstan, or (historically)
( also Kirghiz) a generic term for nomadic Steppe dwellers of Central Asia
Kistau  The winter encampment of Kazakh nomads

Nasybai  A fragrant tobacco

Oblast  An administrative division, introduced to Kazakhstan when it was incorporated into the Russian Empire

Oyaz  Chief of an uezd

Shakirti  Students in a madrasa

Shankobyz  Kazakh instrument, similar to a jews harp

Sharia  Form of Islamic law

Sufism  A mystic branch of philosophy associated with Islam

Sultan  A Muslim sovereign

Tebenevka  Snow-covered winter pastures

Tentek  Scamp, brat

Tokal  Second (or ‘junior’) wife

Uezd  An administrative subdivision; each oblast would contain several uezds

Urochische  A border region

Volost  A further administrative subdivision, below ‘uezd’, representing between one and two thousand households

Yurt  Tent or portable dwelling structure used by nomads

Zakat  Donations to the mosque

Zhailjau  Summer encampment, including the grasslands used for grazing

Zhigit  Term used for young male members of an aul community
"In his poems Shakarim celebrates honour, humanity and righteousness, and calls on people to strive towards knowledge, exposing avaricious bais, ignorant mullahs, and conceited bureaucrats... Naturally the poet's worldview attracted the kind of controversy and narrow-mindedness one would expect from the complexity of the time in which he lived and worked... Shakarim was steadfast in his position on education and humanism, and this was reflected in his artistic works. We believe that the literature department of the Kazakhstan SSR Academy of Sciences should study the work of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev in depth, arrange for his best works to be published, and also take steps to put his works on the curriculum in the history of literature in both schools and higher education institutions."

Gabit Musirepov in a letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, pending Shakarim's 'rehabilitation'

The life of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev ended tragically when he was shot down by an officer of the secret police. There followed a prolonged silence. No one could speak his name. His artistic works were forbidden. But although he was independent minded, sometimes outspoken, Shakarim was far from the nationalist rebel he had been painted as. Virtually unknown in the West, Shakarim slipped into oblivion for decades following his assassination and is only now being rediscovered by his fellow countrymen in Kazakhstan. So why is it that Kazakhs should want to read the work of this one hundred year old poet now?

Well, perhaps his intriguing and tragic fate alone is enough to draw some readers. His philosophical works may attract others. But beyond this it is the significance of the time in which he lived, and how his own life unravelled within it. The story of this man's life is the modern history of Kazakhstan, from a time when the Kazakh people were nomads living in yurts and shifting along the Steppe with the seasons, to the present day when the average Kazakh will rarely
step beyond the bounds of his native city. As the winds of change drifted across the Kazakh Steppe at the approach of the twentieth century, here was a man who symbolised the coming of a new era. Here was a very modern man. He was modern in his thought and in his feelings. He embodied philokalia and the Kazakh ethical conception of life. Above all he embodied qualities that Kazakhs could aspire to. And if only the modern reader wishes to understand where the Kazakhs come from, and who they are, one can do little better than to look at the life of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev.

His son Akhat said of him, "There was no man more honest than Shakarim. He never knew a harsh word in his life. No person ever left his company offended. I saw for myself how he would talk thieves out of stealing, after getting them out on bail." His intellect and righteous outlook are the very foundations of ethics in the law. His legacy and his philosophy of life are evidence of this.

There have been many articles and books about Shakarim in Kazakhstan since his name and his work have been restored to public consciousness. But until now there has been no comprehensive biography of the poet’s life.
CHAPTER 1
CHINGIS-TAУ: PEAKS AND PLAINS

Born on the Beautiful Steppe

"Oh, you ancient Chingis-Tau! What things you have seen since first men settled here! You have allowed Chingis Khan and Tamerlane, and so many other conquerors to cross you. You have seen the rise and fall, the ascent and disappearance of so many, many people, whose hearts burned bright, and flickered out, in whose breasts joy roared, and then gave way to sorrow. You have seen many youths, who strove for goals and attained them. You have seen the unfortunate abandoned by hope, after once shining like the sun. What peoples have lived here, rearing cattle, and trapping wild game. What rivers of blood have you seen flow!

Yet to the girls as beautiful as the sun and moon, to the young in bloom, the Batyrs without fear or blame, with lion hearts, and to impostors who lie to the world, to smooth-talking orators and biys, to all you give but an inch of land, the measure of a hearth, nuzzled in the ground, all are buried upon their own breast. And you stand there towering indifferently over everything, as though you had seen nothing, heard nothing! But this is only a small part of it. You stretch vast expanses from the East, where the hurtling sun appears like the frame of a yurt. And do I not hear you cry out, mutely, ‘Come, come to me! Know that in my embrace are both joy and hardship. Come, and squander your short life in vain battle’? And what should I do, when I hear your dumb summons?"

From 'Adil and Maria' by Shakarim Kudaibergiev.

If you look on a map, Chingis-Tau is not the most striking mountain range in the eastern part of Kazakhstan, stretching a mere twenty-five kilometers from north to south. There is no motorway here, no tourist routes pass through Chingis-Tau. Surrounded by hills, today it is completely empty. There is no trace of the former auls – they have been swept away by rain and wind, and by time. And perhaps this is for the best. The hills of Chingis-Tau are a fascinating relic of its pureness, untouched as it is by the destructive force of civilization. It is as though a shrine to time itself. It is a monument to
history, a fortress of antiquity, the epicentre of the Kazakh national consciousness. Here the Steppe is as a vast ocean. The clouds scatter in all directions. Here, the land meets the sky, engendering mystic games of light and shadow. Here in Chingis-Tau, the vast Steppe feels like a living picture of first creation.

Looking out upon this empty expanse, it is hard to believe that at that time millions of Kazakhs lived not in cities and towns as they do now, but on the Steppe, roaming with their flocks from winter camps to summer pastures, and returning to their winter huts in autumn. Many thousands of families lived in Chingis-Tau. It was their stronghold, their home, their stopping post in the universe. Today the place is dominated by an undisturbed silence. It is as though the Steppe had anticipated the silent disappearance of its former inhabitants. The wind idly makes its way along the valleys, carrying with it the smell of grass, which swoops down in waves like the breath of the ocean. The warble of the lark up high is barely audible over the singing of the wind. This is the eternal melody of Chingis-Tau, to be enjoyed from on top of any of its innumerable hills. A single blade of grass, plucked from your hand by an unaccountable gust of wind, is at one with the entire Steppe, from past to present. A little yellow flower, huddled among the grass, contains within itself the fate of Shakarim, at once thrilling and sorrowful, tragic and sublime. Shakarim considered this valley, his homeland, a sacred place, a most dearly kept secret.

To get to Chingis-Tau today, you would first have to make your way to the modern day administrative centre of Karaul, some fifteen kilometres to the north east, one hundred and ninety-five kilometers by road south west of Semey (modern day Semipalatinsk). Arriving at the centre of the Abai district, on your right you notice the small, yet conspicuous mountain Karaul-Tobe. In ancient times this was used as a look-out post. Indeed the name Karaul is from the Kazakh for ‘outpost’ Karaul remains an outpost of Chingis-Tau, standing like a guard at the entrance of this sacred place, preventing all comers from disturbing the peace of this ancient relic. Five kilometers outside
of Karaul, at the foot of Chingis-Tau, lies the small town of Bi-Ata, named after the great-grandfather of Shakarim, Kengirbai — the legendary head of the Tobykti family. There is a school in Bi-Ata named after Shakarim, with a poignant museum. Beyond Bi-Ata is where Chingis-Tau begins. Several paths lead into it, marked with the odd tracks of past journeys. Heading south, the path takes you around the huge Karashok mountain. It was at the foot of this mountain that Shakarim’s ancestors settled for decades, and where his parents later would set up their kistau or winter encampment.

Heading west, the path takes you right through Chingis-Tau and out to the extensive valleys of Shakpak. The road to Baykoshkar weaves through the hills, cutting between the valleys and mountain ridges, around the muddy banks of the almost indiscernible rivulets. Baykoshkar itself is made up of several flatlands dividing a collection of low mountain ranges. Somewhere among them lurks the river Baykoshkar. Beyond the final hill lies the Kenbulak valley. And it was here that Shakarim Kudaiberdiev was born on 11 July 1858.
Genealogy

“During one of his expansionist campaigns, before his conquest of Kiurkhan, Temchun stopped at Mt Kkhan. The Kazakhs decided to grant him citizenship. They set up an embassy and appointed the venerable Biy Maiki their ambassador. He and his cohorts went to meet Temchun in his quarters to present him with a gift [...] Then they said that as he had conquered so many peoples he should be called “Chingis-Khan”, which is to say “Great Khan”, Ruler of the World. It was here on this mountain that Temchun decided to change his name.

Members from each of the twelve tribes under Chingis Khan’s rule then drove a single post into the peak of Mt Kkhan and erected scaffolding on which they then constructed a white Shater (tabernacle). All the Biys, led by Biy Maiki, carried Temchun on a white embroidered blanket to the top of the mountain, holding it by the ends of what would become their Shater. During this solemn ceremony the people and Biys cried out “Chingis-Khan! Chingis-Khan!” And ever since Temchun was thus proclaimed, that mountain has been Chingis-Tau.”

Kahelel (Shakarim’s uncle)

It is not uncommon for places in this part of the world to hold a Chingis Khan myth. And Shakarim stood by the version quoted above. Its dubious historical veracity is testament to an oral tradition long since disappeared. A chronicler of legends, Shakarim himself was an important figure in the journey from spoken to written records in the Kazakh national literature. For Kazakhs, Chingis-Tau is not simply a picturesque collection of hillsides, gulleys and grasslands stretched along a multitude of rivulets. Its place names are relics of an ancient way of life: Schet (outskirts), Karaul (outpost), Kos (camp), Buzau (calf), Kundizdi (sable), and so on. As Shakarim records in one of his most important books, The Genealogy of The Turkic Peoples, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Khan Dynasties, it was during the time of the Dzungar expansionist campaigns of the eighteenth century that
Shakarim’s ancestor Kengirbai (1735-1825), a biy (or judge) led the Tobykti to settle in Chingis-Tau. Having expanded their influence to Altai, East Turkestan, central and northern Irtysch, and Central Tobol and Ishym, in early spring 1723, Dzungar troops invaded the Kazakh Steppe. They killed civilians, slaughtered their livestock, and destroyed Kazakh auls far across the Steppe. It was in 1723, The Year of the Great Calamity, that the Tobykti fled and finally settled in Chingis-Tau.

From this point, Shakarim traces his lineage in Genealogy as follows: “Kengirbai’s nephew Irgyzbai […] had four sons. […] The oldest son Oskenbai was elected a biy after Kengirbai. The only son of Oskenbai by his elder wife was our grandfather, the late Kunanbai-Hadji. Kunanbai and his elder wife then also had an only son, my father, the late Kudaiberdi.”

Oskenbai (1778-1850), Shakarim’s great-grandfather was regularly among the people as head of the tribe, organising and conducting all kinds of gatherings and conventions. He commanded unquestioned authority. As a biy, he was often invited by neighbouring families to resolve land and property disputes. When Oskenbai was not around to resolve these disputes then members of his family would be sent instead. Oskenbai’s young son Kunanbai would often be sent in his place, hearing out each side, offering well reasoned advice, judging each case like a proper biy. The opposing sides liked the young man, they understood him. From that time, Kunanbai was also regarded as a biy.

Kunanbai (1804-1885), father of the great Kazakh poet and thinker Abai, grandfather of Shakarim, was perhaps the most extraordinary of Shakarim’s ancestors. He took after his grandfather, Irgyzbai, having his great height and mighty strength. At fifteen years of age he took part in wrestling matches, beating as his grandfather did the best fighters.
There was a well known story among the Tobykti tribe of how at the age of eighteen Kunanbai got it into his head to compete with the distinguished athlete Sengirbai. He said to the older man, “We won’t declare the winner or loser. Whatever the result, I am prepared to give the prize to you, because I just want to fight.” And so they met and had their fight. Sengirbai took the prize horse and chapan (ceremonial quilted dressing gown). To the end of his life, Kunanbai never told anyone who had won. When anyone asked, he would answer, “And if Sengirbai dies, should I then go back on my word?”

Kunanbai had four wives. His elder wife (or baibishe) was Kunke (Shakarim’s grandmother), then there was Ulzhan (the mother of Abai, along with three other sons and a daughter), then finally Aigyz and Nurganiy.

Shakarim extolls the virtues of his grandfather, calling Kunanbai Hadji, a suffix applied to those who have undertaken the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed, Kunanbai bears a great deal of responsibility for promoting Islam among the Kazakh people. “Kunanbai-Hadji was born at a time when our people were in darkness,” writes Shakarim. “And though he could barely distinguish between the letters of the alphabet, he would take his father Oskenbai’s letters in secret. By collating these letters he read them himself one by one and this is how he taught himself to read Turkie books. He later hired mullahs from Nogai, and opened a school in which Kazakh children learned their grammar.

“It was thanks to Hadji that Kazakhs in our region learned to read and write. That school, which opened our eyes to the world, stands in the little town of Eskitam. People who came to Kunanbai-Hadji would do the namaz (Muslim prayer), even those who had not previously done it. When one mullah stated that nasybai (a fragrant tobacco) was haram (unclean), Hadji threatened to pour vitriol into the nostrils of those who used it. It was he who taught people to give zakat (donations) before this act of mercy had ever been undertaken by our people. He was even an aid to the Senior Sultan. He hoped
that by gaining the respect of the people, whether through intimidation or kindness, he could instruct them in the ways of Sharia.”

In fact, not only was Kunanbai an aid to the Senior Sultan, but in 1849 he was elected Senior Sultan of the Karkaralinsk district himself and held that post until 1859. The status of Senior Sultan had the same rank as Major in the Russian service and made you head of local government. For ten years in service, a Senior Sultan received a noble title. Accordingly, Kunanbai became a nobleman: Kunanbai-Mirza (Sir Kunanbai).

Kunanbai built a mosque in Karkaralinsk in 1851 after heated conversations with the Tsarist Administration. The bureaucrats did not agree immediately to building a mosque in what was then the capital of Kazakhstan. During the civil war, officers of the white army attempted to build a barracks at the mosque, but the story goes that when morning came the soldiers quickly left the place through a feeling of discomfort. That night, someone had grabbed their boots and made a crescent in the middle of the temple. In the Soviet era, the party District Committee issued an order to put a library within the walls of the mosque. But nothing came of this. After Kazakhstan gained its sovereignty in 1991, the Karakalinsk mosque was fully restored and regained its status as a sacred building.

As well as setting up community schools, Kunanbai kept a mullah and a teacher in his own family to take care of the education of his children. In 1853 he built a special house in the little town of Eskitam, where a mullah taught grammar to children from the surrounding auls. There were normally about twenty pupils in attendance. Teacher and children would spend days and nights in the schoolhouse until the spring, when it came time for the aul to move on to the zhailjau. The teaching of grammar fell into two basics disciplines: Arabic (reading the Koran and other muslim texts in Arabic), and Turkic Grammar (reading and writing in Kazakh, with the aid of the Arabic alphabet). However there were few books in Turkic, and most lessons were focussed on an understanding of the religious volumes.
There is no information on Kunanbai’s own theological reflections, but when in 1873 he undertook the Hajj to Mecca, other members of the Tobykti family were impressed when he purchased an inn for Kazakh pilgrims. Thereafter, they all strove to implicitly fulfill the demands of Kunanbai-Hadji by complying with the ethics of Sharia Law, by which are normally understood complex religious, moral, legal standards, and those of family and the home, enshrined in the Koran for all believers.

The household of Kunanbai was one of the most enlightened on the Kazakh Steppe, where those possessing knowledge were held in great esteem. Kunanbai’s elder wife Kunke came from a noble family. Her father, biy Aganas, had a reputation for being an intelligent and righteous man. According to the Steppe way of thinking, the marriage of Kunanbai and Kunke was a noble union, preordained by the laws of feudal nobility.

**Kudaiberdi** (1829-1866), son of Kunanbai and Kunke, was like all of Kunanbai’s descendants intellectually gifted. He studied his grammar with ease and ran his household with great skill. He was an inveterate hunter, which was of no little importance in Chingis-Tau, whose **urochische** (natural boundaries), creeks and meadows were full of wild game. He lead migrations, using the knowledge of his ancestors in the motion of a perpetual and natural circle. This started in spring when the caravans moved on to the summer grasslands (zhailjau). They lived here until the very end of autumn, before the October or November snow would cover their yurts, forcing them to leave for their winter camp (kistau) until the next spring, in houses made of dried brick or (less often) wooden beams.

It could be said that success and happiness followed Kudaiberdi. When he perceived that Kudaiberdi had reached maturity, his father decided to marry him off. The sagacious family leader had a number of options here. After sending out his matchmaker, he chose Tolebike, the daughter of an honourable though poor man named Aldabergen,
who educated his children very well for that time. Though very young, Tolebike knew her grammar, and was deemed a talented housewife.

**Tolebike** (1830-?) was betrothed to the young Kudaiberdi in 1843. She would become Shakarim’s mother. From a young age she read Arabic books written in Turkie. She was very gifted at needlework, sewing and decorating Kazakh ornaments with rugs and tapestries, tailoring clothes and even forging knives. After marrying Kudaiberdi, Tolebike left behind many of these passtimes, but kept up threading, needlework and making ornaments. She became less occupied with reading, except for two books in Arabic: the collected volumes of Islamic law the *Ibadah*, and the code of muslim law *Mukhtasar al Vikaya*, which she kept with her her whole life. Tolebike learned how to forge iron figures from a friend of her husband Kudaiberdi, who later recalled how he had instructed Tolebike. But ultimately she turned away from this, recalling the warning she had been given when she left her father’s house that forging was not becoming of a woman.

A highly talented woman, Tolebike also composed verses. No one ever wrote these down, for the simple reason that on the Steppe no one ever wrote such things down. Such works would be read or sung aloud on the Steppe by *akyns*, or improvisational singers. The nomadic people would often compose verses and songs, they has a passion for it, borne of a wild life out there in the rolling open expanses of the Steppe. The arduous labour they endured, from the sweat of their horses to the sour smells that would issue from animal pelts, none of this could destroy their romantic spirit of freedom and willfulness, that indefatigable form born on the vastness of the Steppe, limited only by the sky, like an ocean of sunsets across the full expanses of heaven.

**Abai** (1845-1904) is remembered to this day as a great Kazakh poet, philosopher and cultural reformer. The son of Kunanbai from his second wife Ulzhan, he was born on 10 August 1845 in the family aul in Chingis-Tau, in the little town of Kaskabulak. He was orig-
inally named after the prophet Ibrahim. As a sprightly and curious young child, Ibrahim would get into all kinds of dangerous situations, so that his grandmother Zere would incessantly repeat "Abai bol! Abaila!" ('be careful!') And so thanks to his grandmother he became known as Abai, meaning cautious, or thoughtful.

Abai was raised by his mother Ulzhan and grandmother Zere. It was from them that he gained his first understanding of the world of things and the world words, the world of books. From them he absorbed a love of the Kazakh language, songs, poetry and legends. He was taken by his father to be educated by the madrasa mullah Akhmet Rizi in Semipalatinsk. Thanks to his natural ability, Abai made quick progress with his studies, and mastered the Arabic language. His mind craved new things, He was tireless and irrepressible in his pursuit of knowledge. He had only a few lessons at the madrasa. He picked up Persian and other Oriental languages without any effort, opening up for himself the works of the great poets of the East, Navoi, Nizami, Saadi, and Ferdowsi.

From the age of fourteen, Abai became involved in public affairs at the prompting of his father. Kunanbai would send Abai to sub-clans of the Tobykti tribe to resolve land, property and farming disputes. The young aide was very successful. He designated the lands the auls should migrate to, settled disputes between tribespeople, and in this way became like his father something of an honorary biy. The better acquainted the young Abai became with the community, the more he was drawn to the tribe. He saw that in a nomadic society family formed the structural foundations of the individual, whose strength depends on the unity of the whole people. Members of a tribe have to help each other out, to raise and educate their young together. He grasped this truth intuitively, and took it with him throughout his life.
Childhood

Shakarim was born in the summer of 1858 when Kudaiberdi’s aul was at the zhailjau in Baykoshkar. After a few days the happy father made an offering of a horse in honour of his son’s birth. Kunanbai, head of the tribe and grandfather to the infant, came along for the festivities. He gave the newborn the name Shakarim, taken from the Koran, as are all names among god-fearing muslim families. The name reflects a respectful attitude towards the ethics of Islam. It sounds at first like Shakh-Kerim. In Arbabic, Keriim means generous, kind-hearted, magnanimous. Otherwise, Kerim is the second name of the Koran, the book of reading. But from a very early age, the young child was named in the Kazakh way, Shakarim. And this is the name that stuck with the future poet.

In lessons, the young Shakarim could not always keep up with his brothers. He was often left to himself to play and would amuse himself with figures his father cut out of paper for him: argali, wolves, foxes, hawks, geese, ducks, a hunter with a bird trap. Observing his mother, who wove patterns out of thread or carved ornaments, he began drawing and carving figures himself. What he saw his mother forge in iron, he would mimic with paints, or carve in wood. In a word, he turned his hand to the art of domestic crafts. Shakarim’s childhood years brought him unabashed happiness. As he played with friends from other families, he naturally did not consider the reasons for their class and social differences.

“I once noticed how the older children passionately tossed their alchiki (a children’s game involving small animal bones), ran races, and played ‘white bone’ on moonlit nights,” Shakarim records in his essay ‘The Mirror of True Happiness’ (1918). “Their games seemed so much more interesting than our childish things: digging ‘wells’, building ‘palaces’ out of stone. Very quickly I went over to the older children and began to join in with their games. And this was probably my first step on the path towards happiness. Among the
younger children, things would rarely go on long without a scrap or an argument of some kind. It is shameful, but I was always so afraid of the children from poorer parents that I would always threaten to ‘tell on them’ to my father. Who were my father and my brothers, after all, but wealthy, influential people, ruling over all parts of life? Who should not be afraid of them?"

At some point Shakarim’s older brother Amir took it upon himself to teach him music. Sitting on the grass outside their yurt, he started teaching his younger brother how to play the dombra, and didn’t give up till he had managed to play something. For Shakarim, whether it was the dombra, studying grammar, or cutting figures out of paper, it was all merely something to add to his childhood games. He sought diversion in everything, reaching out for new amusements and feeling put out if he didn’t find lasting pleasure in them. He was not attracted by study at first. But lessons with the mullah gradually taught him discipline, and the young child found himself unexpectedly yearning for knowledge, finding more and more that interested him in his studies.

It was at this point in his life that Shakarm began spending time with Abai, who happened to be his uncle, thirteen years his senior and also one of Kazakhstan’s greatest poets. Abai was very close to his older brother Kudaiberdi, whose children loved their uncle very much. When he was in the aul, they would not leave his side. Abai was the first to read them the verses of the Oriental poets, which he had committed to memory, relating the story of how these books came to be written. Later he began to tell stories from The Thousand and One Nights. The children held their breath as they listened to the stories of Sinbad the Sailor, Aladdin, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and were whisked away into that world of magic and danger. They fell asleep dreaming of unknown shores, and gardens full of exotic wonders.

The Thousand and One Nights became the first book Shakarim read from cover to cover. Later on he loved to tell these stories to his family members. He knew by heart the verses of Persian poets, lodging their forms in his heart, maintaining in his soul a love of
Oriental poetry that would last his whole life. From his childhood years Shakarim felt an unbreakable connection with the heroes of Kazakh epic poetry. *Er-Targyn, Al-pamys, Kobylandy, Kyz Zhibek* all these works, written in Arabic script in the Kazakh language and which he later read, naturally had an influence on the dialectics of his soul. Any time he read *Kyz Zhibek*, when he got to the part where Tolegen mournfully pleads with the six swans, the young Shakarim could not hold back his childish tears. And when he read of the bitter laments of Zhadiger in *Al-pamys* he experienced it himself.

Shakarim’s childhood years, and the warmth of his family home, left a profound impression on him for the rest of his life. He thought his childhood an irretrievable gift from heaven: “From the very outset of my life”, Shakarim writes in ‘The Mirror of True Happiness’, “making my first steps, struggling to form my first words, I felt a deep affection for the other children I played with. I loved them devoutly, as though they were my brothers, forgetting about food and the swift passage of time. It was my own untroubled bliss! The innocent pleasures, love for friends, the tremulous cares of my mother and father I felt as I returned home! Where did it all disappear? Where is it now?”
The Young Poet and Hunter

At the age of eleven Abai taught Shakarim to shoot a gun. From this moment on, the young Shakarim became inseparable from his father’s old shotgun. He cleaned the shotgun regularly, taking care not to let the powder or the shot run out, ordering these from relatives in the city. He later received a Winchester from Abai, bought from a Russian merchant in Semipalatinsk, which he kept with him to the end of his life. From the age of fourteen, Shakarim kept horses. The Kazakhs would use horses along with golden eagles in hunting. It took experienced hunters to help tame the birds of prey. He managed to raise a fine golden eagle with a wingspan of around one and a half metres. It was only a young chick when hunters took it from its nest and gave it to Shakarim. Shakarim would have had to feed the bird from his hand day after day for several months, until it had grown and got used to following the commands of a human being. The eagle would then be taught to collect the hunter’s bounty. He would take the bird hunting for geese in spring and summer and for foxes and rabbits in winter.

By the age of fifteen, Shakarim had grown to resemble his father Kudaiberdi in stature. Everything about him, his trim figure, his neat clothes, the straight line of his closed lips, spoke of his self-possession, his reserved character. The attentive gaze of his intelligent eyes, meanwhile, radiated such powerful light that others were drawn to him, as though expecting the kind of great revelation expected only from genuinely great men. He was a strong man, well-built, and physically powerful, in spite of having caught smallpox as a child. A life in nature had hardened him against the elements. Throughout his nomadic life and in hunting he had stoically withstood the searing cold and burning heat. His bravery was unquestioned. He would valiantly stride through the tugai thicket on the trail of wild boar, if there was any hope of shooting the beast. At the age of sixteen he was known as one of the most accomplished hunters in Chingis-Tau.
But he did not get into fights as a young boy. And if conflict was unavoidable, he would invariably play the part of peacemaker. He never faltered from this standpoint, believing that people should not look at their neighbours in other auls as enemies. He was not made for violence. He couldn’t stand even bad language. The other young men wondered at this, having known from childhood the importance of strength in protecting property and livestock. Shakarim took books and writing materials on the hunt with him, and in the day, when the sun beat down beyond what he could endure, he took himself into the shade to read, trying to gather together his faint and flickering thoughts to the rhythm of the lines.

When he could manage it, he wrote lines of poetry, to show to Abai later on. Occasionally he fancied to himself that he had found that rare combination of thoughts, that acuteness of feeling, the order of words, that existed in real poetry. And then, sensing a lift in his spirit, he fell to dreaming. In his youthful daydreams, it occurred to him that he had written some truly wonderful poetry and that the life of the lines he had written might outlast his own.

Whether to appease the almighty, or simply to redeem himself in later life, Shakarim expressed regret for his love of hunting in poetry and in his memoirs and philosophical writings. It might be observed that memoirs are often approached with the pangs of conscience. And his poetry bears out this tension between the pleasure and spiritual joy derived from the hunt, and its lack of utility to the thinking mind. Nonetheless, it was necessary for him to engage in hunting right into old age in order to feed his household.

When out hunting, Shakarim entered into a real union with nature and knew all parts of Chingis-Tau like the back of his hand. He wrote verses about the Steppe, raised his golden eagle, and climbed to the most distant valleys, whether in search of wonders, or merely new impressions. Abai felt his nephew’s passion. And when in the summer of 1874 Abai invited Shakarim to hunt with him at Akshoki, he set out with his uncle without argument. That season, he was trained in
the art of hunting by a talented Russian hunter from Semipalatinsk by the name of Aleksei.

The time spent with Abai introduced him to his uncle’s unique take on life’s fundamental questions: good and evil, work and leisure, richness of soul, and its poverty, man’s strengths, and his inactivity. Abai considered literature to be foremost in a young man’s aesthetic education, and quizzed his nephew on his knowledge of Oriental literature. He brought his attention to the enlightened motives and works of Navoi, reminding him that many centuries had passed since he had written *The Confusion of The Righteous*, yet so far nothing had changed in the education of his fellow Turkic countrymen. The thousand year sleep of the people over which Abai agonised made Shakarim wonder about the way his society was governed.

He questioned his uncle on the role of the Volost Leader. At this time Kazakhstan had been divided by the Tsarist administration into several oblasts. The Steppe was divided into six oblasts, each headed by a Russian military governor. Each oblast was divided into several uezds, each headed by a Russian military commander who was also assisted by a local Kazakh (usually a well-educated Kazakh nobleman). Each uezd was then divided into a number of volosts, in turn divided into administrative auls. Each volost would represent between one and two thousand households.

Abai lamented that Volost Leaders were apt to serve the interests of the rich, because it was only the rich who had the vote and in serving their interests they could line their own pockets. By contrast, to become a biy, or a Sultan or a Khan, one first had to prove ones ability in upholding the interests of the people. Competition for the post was contrary to adat law, the common law of the Kazakh people.
Irretrievable Loss

“In his last year, father rarely went hunting, spending the greater part of his time at home. He would read Turkic stories day and night. In the autumn he grew worse, coughing a lot. Before, father was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a fine bearing, a penetrating gaze, bright face, black beard and moustaches, he was agile and alert. But now, though he talked no less, his condition had greatly deteriorated [...] At home the children’s games, their fooling about had stopped [...] where previously by force of nature they talked loudly, joked, laughed, made noise, everyone now spoke only in whispers. It seemed to me that everything stopped, frozen in silence. I was gripped with despair, a heavy weight lay on my heart, as it beat faster and faster.”

Shakarim, as recorded in his son Akhat’s memoirs

The life of the nomads was somehow uncannily similar to the life of the characters in Shakarim’s favourite book The Thousand and One Nights, which is based on extremes: those who are poor one moment become rich the next, the rich become poor, the unhappy all of sudden find happiness, the law-abiding unexpectedly turn into the most lawless people. Shakarim’s father Kudaiberdi fell ill with consumption at a very young age, and spent almost the whole of autumn in 1865 in bed. For Shakarim, who loved his father very much, this time and the image of his father were indelibly stamped on his memory with cinematic precision. At this time, Abai was in the city. Learning of his brother’s illness, he bought medicine and left for the aul. Shakarim remembered well the moment when Abai entered their home and embraced the sick man. Kudaiberdi was delighted by his brother’s return and began speaking very alertly as though he wasn’t sick at all. Abai gave the invalid a drink of white powder and red-coloured droplets. He later said that he would have to take
him to the city doctor urgently. “That’s true,” answered Kudaiberdi, “but it is winter now, and you should take me there in summer.” By the middle of April, when it had got a little warmer and the grass began to turn green, the disease had so advanced that Kudaiberdi could not get out of bed. Shakarim was greatly moved by his father’s demise. To his last days, he carried with him the image of his father, remembering the happy moments spent with him.

The death of Kudaiberdi was a source of grief to the whole Tobykti tribe, because he departed life in his prime, at a time when he showed great generosity and kindness of spirit, finding new thoughts, opening up to the people. The people always valued such virtuous people, remembering them with pious words in their folk legends. And when Kudaiberdi died, his kinsfolk came to say goodbye, not out of a sense of duty, but from the dictates of the heart.

Kudaiberdi died in April 1866 at the age of thirty-seven, leaving behind him five sons. Amir was fourteen, Murtaza eleven, Shakhmardan nine, Shakarim wasn’t quite eight, and Irzykbai was barely forty days old. His elder wife Tolebike was left a widow at thirty-six, his younger wife Botantai, thirty-three. At the bedside of the dying Kudaiberdi, Abai took on his fatherly duties. He promised his beloved brother that the lives of his children would rest on his shoulders, that he would take care of them. In fact it was Kunanbai who took on responsibility for Kudaiberdi’s family when he died, seeing to it that neither the widows nor the children suffered any material difficulty.

Shakarim took the death of his father so badly, that he worried his mother, and the other adults. Their comforting words only added to his sense of irretrievable loss. He wanted to be left alone, and this seemed unusual for a child. But the adults found nothing threatening in his detachment, and decided that these childish whims were a part of the grieving process. And so he would go off to the Steppe, listening attentively to the songs of the lark, the chirping of crickets, the rustling of the wind through the grass, and at night attending the amiable silence of the moon, the mysterious shining of the stars.
Shakarim became gradually more inspired by his grandfather Kunanbai’s new, paternal relationship to him. Kunanbai considered himself responsible for looking after Kudaiberdi’s children. He loved taking his grandchildren over to his aul. Shakarim sometimes stayed for months at a time with his grandfather, who tried in his own way to console the grieving boy. Other times Kunanbai would drop in on his daughters in law. Sitting down next to Shakarim, he would ask him questions about the books he had read, the lines of poetry he remembered, testing his knowledge. If older children were to come over, Kunanbai would take it upon himself to teach them moral virtues one of his favourite themes.

It was summer, the time of the memorial service for Kudaiberdi, Shakarim sat on a hill in front of the family home, moving further out of the way of the people and riding horses who flooded into the aul. Seeing a caterpillar crawling along a rock, Shakarim decided to squash it. And all of a sudden he felt so sorry for the caterpillar that he burst into tears, remembering his own orphanhood. In this confused flood of impressions, the young boy wrote down a poem entitled *The Grasshopper*, written from the perspective of that same grasshopper. In it, the grasshopper wonders why Shakarim has squashed him and made more orphans in the world. The poem ends with a meditation on whether there is any sense at all in anything.

When Shakarim read this serious, un-childlike poem aloud that evening, the women began to weep and wail, saying that he should not write any more such melancholy poems. The next day, Tolebike showed her son’s verses to Abai, and asked him to stop the boy writing any more poetry. But Abai promised instead that he would teach his nephew the true art of writing poetry.
The Start of a Poetic Education

Abai took it upon himself to educate his nephew in the poetic craft, an education which was to last decades. Abai did not begin straight off with teaching the boy the subtleties of versification. To begin with he just introduced him to the world of words, not going into theoretical insights but just reminding him of some beautiful lines of poetry, sometimes the very ones that Shakarim so admired on reading his first books. Abai endeavoured to help him fully appreciate the beauty of great literature, to absorb within himself the power of artistic symbols and metaphors, feel the aesthetics of the poetic cannons, built up over many centuries. And only if it was ordained by the stars would poetry spring up out of him, like grass from the Steppe in spring. And so Shakarim spent his boyhood years in the shadow of Chingsis-Tau, forever in the company of Abai. He was not inclined to think of this tutelage as just another set of lessons in a craft. Rather, his meetings with Abai were life itself.

On winter evenings, Abai and Shakarim enjoyed the privacy of a distant room. Setting themselves down on a blanket, they would pick up a dombra and play. The twenty-five year-old son of Hadji Kunanbai was already a renowned poet by this time, although the only poems that remain are those he wrote after 1886, and his works were not published for the first time until 1889. For a long time Abai was happy for his verses to remain in spoken form only. For this reason, many of his poems have never reached us. But his later poems gained huge popularity. They were spread across the Steppe by the akyns, imparted from one speaker to another, as happens in nomadic societies. From out of all the creativity of the Kazakh people, only the best would remain with them, echoing like thunder through the depths of the centuries. And the fact that Abai’s mature compositions would live on in the people’s memory for decades, until finally his sons and pupils collected and published them in a single volume in 1909, speaks to the lasting power, beauty and inexhaustible profundity of his poetry.
For an aristocrat of the Steppe, writing poetry was not considered a worthy occupation, but this did not trouble Abai. He understood that poetry was a complex business when approached as an art. He began writing poetry at the age of twelve, composing simple ditties, humourous madrigals, and ironic portraits with ease. And at first he didn’t attach any great significance to his poetry writing, given that on the Steppe almost everyone composes songs, often speaking quickly amongst themselves in rhyming couplets. And even when as a youngster he would play children’s games like ‘find the ring’, the winner would have to come up with a rhyming couplet and sing a song. So writing poetry was an everyday activity for him. The fact that Shakarim grew to be an extraordinarily intelligent and well-read man was without doubt thanks to the time he spent with Abai. The young Shakarim greedily swallowed up books, his uncle providing him with an unceasing supply. In turn Abai felt a sense of unity with his young nephew generously sharing with him his programme of self-education through the national literatures of Russia and the East.
The Melodies of Winter Nights and Rhythms of the City

One winter, Shakarim travelled with his brothers Murtaza and Shakhmardan to the wedding of his mother to one of her cousins. These particular relatives lived in an aul renowned for its evening concerts, and Shakarim was invited to join in. He heard and memorised new songs. He himself wrote several popular songs of the Steppe. Then he demonstrated his own compositions which he had put on for Abai. They met with great applause. Smothered with love by his uncles and aunts, he felt like a star. His cousins would introduce him to young girls as a future famous akyn of the Kazakh Steppe. Many devotees of Shakarim would gather around him in the evening, much to the discomfort of the shy young man. His relatives would encourage the guests, reassuring Shakarim that the honour and respect shown towards him was merely a reflection of that of his grandfather Kunanbai, his uncle Abai, and his deceased father Kudaiberdi.

The sounds of the violin made a magnificent impression upon Shakarim, stronger even than that feeling aroused any time he heard someone playing the kobyz. Next day he tried to illicit a sound from a violin himself, but quickly realised that it would require special training. Still, he delighted in the sights and sounds of his relatives’ aul. There were the women painting and all different kinds of musical instruments, from traditional dombras to simple mouth organs and the old spiritual instruments. Among these were pipes and sybyzgas long flutes or pipes. With great delight, Shakarim would demonstrate his skill on the shankobyz, an ancient instrument and favourite of the shamans and baksi (jews harp). In appearance the baksi is a simple little metal circle with elongated tapered ends. A thin metal rod is attached to the circle. The shankobyz is put to the player’s lips and the chamber of the mouth acts as a resonator. And by striking the rod with the finger, a peculiarly sweet sound is emitted, evoking a profound sense of melancholy like a soul crushed by the interminable expanses of the enormous Steppe.
When Shakarim returned to his grandfather’s aul, Kunanbai informed him that he would have to go to Semipalatinsk. According to a long thought out plan by his relatives, the young man should begin entering into home affairs, including going into the town for supplies. At seventeen, Shakarim had never been to Semipalatinsk, and leapt at the opportunity.

In principle, nomadic societies should be self-sufficient. But time has a way of altering such things. Thanks to the spread of urban civilisation in the nineteenth century, there was now no great puzzle or mystery for the people living on the Steppe. Supplies, trade, administrative contacts, changed the isolated perspective of the nomads. In the everyday life of the Kazakhs, it became easier and easier to get products from the local city. It became obvious with time that it was more profitable to sell cattle in the city, and with the money from this to then buy flour, tea, sugar, honey, salt and everything one needed in the conditions of the Steppe, winter and summer clothing, furniture, metal products, paints, thread, and so on, rather than making all this back at the aul. And so the Steppe-dwellers brought carts in the summer, and sledges in the winter, to transport supplies from the city.

Everything about the trip was full of curiosity. And the leisurely three day journey along the ridges of the Steppe, accompanied by creaking carts and the journey by ferry through storms at Irtish, threatened to try to crush his spirits. But then of course he arrived in the city of the Seven Chambers (Sem Palat) with its hundreds of ancient buildings on each side of the river. When he arrived Shakarim took a moment to look upon the city’s winding streets. Transfixed, he wondered at the tall fences, struggling to figure out why such fortification was needed, what sort of life was this, with what fears, horrors, sufferings.
Russian Lessons

On the way home to Chingis-Tau, Shakarim recalled that Abai had told him several times how important it was to learn Russian, apparently aware of his responsibility to improve his own knowledge. Abai encouraged him in this line of thought. Abai believed that the Russian language was of great importance in educating the Kazakh people. In ‘Word Twenty-Five’ of his Book of Words, he wrote: “The Russian language will open our eyes to the world. By learning the language and culture of other peoples, a man becomes equal among them, and does not have bow to anyone’s orders. This education is also useful for religion. Russian science and culture are the key to the world’s treasures.” He invited a teacher named Nurpeis to give Shakarim his first Russian lessons.

Abai perhaps understood the important role of education better than anyone else at the time, sincerely believing that knowledge alone would set the people on a path to greatness. He was not yet preoccupied with the fear that as a result of mass education, the educated would become villains, even those who possessed virtuous qualities, and that social justice, which was unrealistic in the traditional, uneducated society, turned out to be equally problematic for the supposedly enlightened. Starting at the age of twenty-five, Abai himself had read books written in Russian without ceasing, at first with great difficulty and then more precisely and with greater ease. Friends would buy the books in town and he would read them day and night. He would be so shocked to the core by the novelty of the themes, the originality of the concepts, the beauty of the language. And the day came when he read a book in Russian and it was as though it had been written in his own language. This book was Pushkin’s Dubrovsky. And somewhat solemnly he handed this book down to Shakarim. Later on Shakarim would honour his uncle by translating this book in full into the Kazakh language.

With Shakarim, that childish unwillingness to be taught by the mullah had passed. His mind was clear, like that of the majority of the
nomads, a blank sheet of paper, quickly and hungrily absorbing new information, previously unaccessible, or contained in books he didn’t previously understand. Shakarim took Nurpeis’s lessons very seriously. He quickly learned the alphabet and began reading simple Russian texts. The teacher was happy with his progress. But when he opened up Dubrovsky, things slowed down. He had difficulty with the more complex texts, not knowing all the words. Nurpeis suggested that he buy a Russian-Kazakh dictionary in town, which would help him to memorise new Russian words. And so this was what he did.
First Meeting with a Russian Native

Shakarim’s family life began in the summer of 1876 when he married his first wife Mauen. Early in the spring of 1877, when snow still lay on the northern slopes of the hills and the auls gathered to migrate to the zhailjau, Abai came to see Shakarim in Karashok. He had with him his friend Erbol Komekbaiuly, his indispensable assistant Baimagambet, and one other rider, a Russian whom Abai introduced as a surveyor who was putting together a map of the local area. He brought Russian-language books and newspapers. Opening an eight-year-old Russian Bulletin, Abai pointed to the first few chapters of War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy. He promised his nephew that if he enjoyed these then he would bring more works by the important Russian author. Shakarim thanked his uncle and expressed some hesitation over his linguistic abilities. Apparently, Abai pointed out that the best thing for learning a language is to live among native speakers and it was at this suggestion that his companion Erbol reminded them both that the surveyor, Semen Ilich, was a native Russian, and why didn’t Shakarim spend some time with him?

So in April 1877 Shakarim headed for the outskirts of Chingis-Tau with the engineer Semen Ilich, where they spent almost three months. With Semen Ilich’s help Shakarim became fluent in spoken Russian. The grammatical structure of the Russian language was no longer a great mystery to him. On top of this, helping the topographer to measure distances between objects and the heights of mountain peaks, Shakarim broadened his knowledge of mathematics. In the evenings in an abandoned winter hut and by the light of an oil lamp, Semen Ilich talked fondly to Shakarim of his wife and two children who were waiting for him in Omsk, and taught his assistant the fundamental laws of geometry, and basic algebra. And then by the light of day he taught him to measure the angles of a triangle and to use a theodolite. Very quickly Shakarim learned to measure distances from the mountains, and their heights, on his
own with the help of a tacheometer and a theodolite, noting down
the figures in a journal.

They worked well together and both loved the Steppe. Semen Ilich
delighted in its noises, explaining to his assistant the authenticity, or
as he put it, the value of nature. He never tired in his enjoyment
of the trills of the larks in the sky, the honking of ducks as they
swept in flocks to a coveted lake, the patches of tulips upon the
smooth wide expanses of the Steppe, across which the soft evening
light gently spread itself. Shakarim silently listened to these delights,
hiding a smile, as though he knew all about the Steppe, its secrets, its
inaccessible regions. And when Semen Ilich was interested to know
why his assistant did not part with his gun, give up the shooting,
Shakarim, an inveterate hunter, declared that Chingis-Tau should not
impoverish itself on account of his guilt.

As they parted at the aul, Semen Ilich left an astrolabe as a gift.
He also gave Shakarim an anthology, with the wish that he should fill
it up with poetry. But the engineer saved his main present till last.
This gift was a pair of binoculars. Touched, Shakarim brought his
guest a fine colt in return. But the guest flatly refused the gift. And
no amount of protestation in the name of tradition would change his
mind. Semen Ilich declared that he could not take such a dear gift.
The stallion presented to him by Mr Abai Kunanbaev was enough, and
he would return this by courier as soon as he got to Semipalatinsk.
Shakarim was taken aback at his guest’s modesty, after hearing so
much about the appetites of government workers. After seeing off
his guest, Shakarim told his wife Mauen that Semen Ilich’s actions
were the most important lesson he had learned in getting to know
him. True to say, they had not only physically lived in the heights
among the mountains but had climbed great heights both spiritually
and emotionally too.
Preparing Shakarim for Election

It came to pass that Shakarim’s relatives put him forward for the position of Volost Leader. He had sometime dreamed of taking up this noble post, which one could only carry out with the blessing of one’s fellow tribesmen. He had a general idea about what the post involved. He knew the Volost Leader had to divide up the pastures and meadows, decide on where auls should migrate to. Before them, there was always the danger that individual elders or heads of family would arbitrarily decide to break the boundaries of the pastures. A Volost Leader would have to resolve conflicts and if the need arose, prepare papers for legal proceedings at the Uezd Court.

He didn’t doubt his own ability to divide up land, to write letters to the administration. But he was embarrassed at the thought of giving orders to the venerable people of the tribe. He tried to turn down the position, but was reprimanded by Abai. Shakarim felt that he did not have the authority to lead the people. Abai taught him that authority comes through good deeds. If he made foolish decisions then he would lose his authority. But, if he worked for justice, respect would come of its own accord. His knowledge of the Russian language would also stand him in good stead.

Abai explained to him what was at stake. Besides their family, there were two other parties wanting to elect their own candidate. They were hoping to get rich from cultivating the land. Keen that such characters should not get into power, Abai’s plan was as follows: Shakarim was technically too young to stand as a candidate. So what they would do is allow the other two parties to fight it out until the people tired of their squabbling. The elders (those with a vote) would not be able to come to a consensus, and Abai would step forward to sing Shakarim’s praises. The Russian Uezd Authorities were already of the opinion that the nomads did not know how to govern their own, and Abai wished to set things right.
Shakarim knew that Abai commanded respect in the Uezd Administration and could summon their support in the elections without great difficulty. The Russian bureaucrats had been getting involved in electing Volost Leaders for a long time. Of course, some of the bureaucrats from Semipalatinsk who had heard Abai’s speeches on justice and honourable service to the people had observed him with apprehension. But there were those bureaucrats who were impressed by Abai’s ideas on just government. In the sense that the administration wished to see order on the Steppe, obedience without any backlashes, or uprisings, Abai gave the impression of being a loyal person, whom the administration could rely on. It remained to be seen whether or not he would be a good politician capable of upholding Tsarist authority. He was an expert in the customs of the Steppe, the traditional laws, he knew a lot about the nomadic people, the tribal authorities, understanding how they thought, their intrigues, their peculiar ways. Thus the Uezd Officials (who in turn reported to the military governor) relied on the opinions of Abai on actual events, including the election of Volost Leaders. Indeed, all winter and spring Abai would meet with the important tribespeople, receiving them at his home in Akshoki, and travelling to the auls of important representatives of tribes, judging their capacity to co-operate with the Russian authorities and prospective trade with merchants in the city.

One day in June, Shakarim travelled to Kunanbai’s aul to obtain his grandfather’s blessing, or bata—a traditional farewell blessing which Kazakhs must obtain from an elder before taking on any kind of serious business. Kunanbai was happy that the judicious and well-read Shakarim intended to continue the family tradition of governing life on the Steppe. He warned his grandson that he was entering a serious time in his life, and that in order to make a good leader one first must have the respect of the people. A good leader must first and foremost be honourable and just. Drawing on his own experience, he warned Shakarim of the enemy within. No one had
envied his own authority more than his own relatives while he was head of the tribe. He told his grandson that he had always relied on the people, and that he too should help others equally, and never perceive anyone in a bad light, even if they acted against him.
The Election

The site of the 1878 Volost Congress was named as an urochische in the Eral valley, which was a journey of some twenty versts for Abai and Shakarim from their aul. The time and place of the congress was designated by the Uezd Chief, whom the Kazakhs called Oyaz. The Volost Leader was called Bolys. On the day of the elections, the twelve administrative auls that made up the Chingis-Tau Volost congregated at the urochische in several yurts, set up cooking areas and prepared a feast or dastarhan. The congregation was composed of at least three hundred of the inhabitants. They waited a long time for the Oyaz, who arrived after a day and a half in a carriage, drawn by two riders. With the Uezd Chief Kareev was Losevsky, who at the time was an officer under the military Governor General. He noticed Abai, greeted him as he would a good friend, and took him to the Uezd Chief, who exchanged a few warm words with him. These conventional greetings did not escape the attention of the gathered masses.

Arriving with the chief were an interpreter-translator and three policemen, a constable and two officers. Without any great build up they got on with the elections. They placed by a yurt a large table and a few simple benches for those who had just arrived to sit at. With the help of one of the officers, the constable hoisted up onto the table a box divided in two with a partition, half of which was painted black. The Kazakhs were seated around them in groups, and the whole scene would have been reminiscent of some marvellous painting.

The seven Pentecostal Elders (Elyubasi) of the Chingis-Tau Volost moved forward. Each of them represented fifty yurts. In practice, one ‘yurt’ was made up of all the members of an extended family, along with those that worked for the family. So sometimes one Elyubasi would represent several thousand people. These representatives were the ones who voted in what was a fully democratic, majority based system. The Uezd Chief, Collegiate Secretary Kareev, did not have much experience in how these elections were conducted and gave the duty of leading
the elections to the officer Losevsky. This began with the nomination of candidates. Shakarim followed all the activity attentively, trying to remain in full view of Abai. As Abai predicted, the contest was between two parties who each put forward their own candidate.

The Machiavellian Losevsky glanced coolly now at the Uezd Chief, now at the audience, bitterly arguing back and forth, and took down the proposals of the candidates in a list. The Kazakhs debated the candidates on all sides. Someone cried out that neither of them was fit to be Volost Leader. The others objected to this. A voice would cry out complaining of the impossible tax burden under the current Volost Leader, accusing him of squandering the money on his own expenses. The constable would stand up from the bench to demand order from the people. And Losevsky waited patiently for this anger to subside. Then he called the elders to the table, and explained the voting process. They were each given a wooden ball and asked to drop it into either the black or white half of the ballot box, depending on which candidate they were voting for. In case of an even number of votes, the final vote would lie with the Uezd Chief.

Losevsky covered the ballot box with velvet and the elders approached one by one to toss in their balls, covering their hands under the velvet to keep their vote secret. The voting finished and the wooden balls were counted. Losevsky solemnly announced the result: Both candidates had received the same number of votes. With a dramatic pause, he added that because neither candidate had been given the advantage, the election was nullified. After the interpreter repeated this to the gathered masses, there was uproar. A heated debate broke out. And Abai stood up to speak, and the voices broke off.

Abai spoke eloquently, and in Russian, of the need for the people to unite. He reminded the people of how good life had been under the wise leadership of Kudaiberdi, and pointed to his son Shakarim, telling them they would find no one better than this very man to lead them now. To his own surprise, even the fieriest orators agreed to appointing Shakarim. He listened to their impassioned words, and it
seemed unbelievable to him. He did not have to say a lot for himself. Seeing that the people took so kindly to their new candidate, the Uezd Chief was persuaded that Shakarim Kudaiberdiev should take on the appointment as Chingis-Tau Volost Leader. No one was more satisfied with this result than Abai. These elections had confirmed that his position in the tribe was stronger than ever.

The first order of business was for the Uezd Chief to arrange the salaries of the new Volost Leader and his future deputy. To Shakarim’s surprise, the pay was very low. Yet the level of taxes aggrieved him. The Uezd Chief was severe in his tone. He described the rates in terms of money. If the elders gathered their taxes in the form of cattle, then the Volost Leader would have to convert this into money. Shakarim knew that the people were already in arrears. There were also the ‘black charges’ which is what the people called the requisitions of the elders for hidden costs supposedly associated with the duties of the Volost Leader. Essentially this was a local tax. Doing a quick calculation in his head, Shakarim could already see how much of a burden these ‘black charges’ had put on the people. He decided that even if he could not totally get rid of them then he would at least drastically reduce them. He reasoned that he was already drawing enough income himself from his own land. These high-minded thoughts had distracted Shakarim from the Uezd Chief’s farewell speech. He had declared that the Volost Leader would be the eyes and the ears of the Tsar on the Steppe. And he repeated several times that the affairs of the Volost Leader should not be contrary to the Government, or else he would personally cut off the head of the Volost Leader. Shakarim was more anxious, however, for the problems of his people and their land.
The Code of Compassion

In early spring 1879 a welcome event occurred in the family. Mauen gave birth to their first son, a strong boy, immediately changing Shakarim’s thinking about life. Everyone in the aul came out to celebrate. Kunanbai arrived as the guest of honour. The honour of naming the child was once again given to him. He found the name in the Koran and solemnly named him Abusufian.

Shakarim returned to his duties as Volost Leader with a renewed energy. Without stopping to rest as he travelled from one aul to the next, he charged the people up with optimism, and the sort of inspiration more commonly found in one of his poetic compositions. But in communicating his enthusiasm to people, he did his job all the better. He was met with smiles, people praising the young Volost Leader, they listened to his speeches about the free life and marveled at the plans he created, as though standing before them was a man a hundred years younger than them.

The amazing part of Shakarim’s rule over the Chingis-Tau Volost was that prosperity ruled completely. Neighbours fought less over pastures. Weaker farms grew stronger, there was hope of increasing livestock. The theft of cattle ceased altogether. Shakarim decided that what made the tribe strong was tradition. People would open their doors to travellers more often than not. The nomadic people were governed by traditional laws passed down from one generation to the next. The legendary patience of the Kazakh people allowed them to get through tough times stoically. Literary representations of the Kazakhs as an unfriendly people still persist. But they are inaccurate. The Kazakhs were taught to live together, to protect and maintain the tribe. Their wealth was measured by the prosperity of the tribe.

But the winter of 1879-1880 brought a series of trials to the nomads. In the cold, cattle went without food, and many starved to death. The Kazakhs had not prepared the normal food for the winter. According to the count of the Russian administration at the
time, 12.7 million cattle died that year on the Steppe, about 80% of the total. Yet in Chingis-Tau the snow never settled for more than a week. This saved their livestock.

As though Shakarim had foreseen the jute crisis, in his first year as Volost Leader he changed the harvesting process. In this he followed Abai’s example, who had introduced a process of ensilage of feed in Akshoki after reading about it in a Russian journal. After the harvest, Abai would have the hay ground up. It was then loaded into a hole, and covered with branches and grass. Salt was poured on top of this, and then earth. But that year Abai forgot about it. The winter had been light. The cattle lived off the tebenevka (snow-covered winter pastures).

The next year, everyone was amazed at how the grass had maintained its succulence, as though it had been freshly mown.

Shakarim spent the whole winter travelling from one aul to the next telling the people that the state of the harvest was a warning. He had many intense conversations with elders. They were familiar also with Abai’s poetry, and they spoke highly of his poetic gift for expression and precision of thought. As the cold came, Shakarim went to stay in his winter hut in Karakosh. He had a great deal of concern over the state of farming that winter. One night, to make use of his time he decided to build a library, choosing books with love and care. The idea of writing a history of the Kazakh people had not left him. In fact he wanted to write it all the more now.
CHAPTER 2

JOURNEYS OF THE SPIRIT

“Parents, you multiply your herds, you busy yourselves, that your children’s herds are all the stouter, you pass the care of the herds on to the shepherds, and live a charmed life yourselves. You eat meat and drink kumys to your heart’s content, enjoy what is beautiful, admire your horses. At the end of the day, your zhailjaus and kistaus are your own. But using the power of your influence or of status, you buy out all the available resources, take your neighbour’s land by stealing or enticement. The robber oppresses his neighbour, abandons his homeland. Can such people want what is best for each other? The poorer they become, the cheaper becomes their labour. The more disadvantaged, the emptier are their kistaus. One waits for the other’s destruction, the other waits until he is impoverished. Gradually our concealed dislike for one another is coming out into the open, our irreconcilable hostility. We vituperate, we litigate, we segregate and separate, we bribe the influential, to gain advantage over our foes, and endlessly we fight over rank.”


Shakarim understood that a Volost Leader, with all his organisational authority, could do little to change the nomadic life. More and more he convinced himself that this was not the path for him. The Tsarist administration held back the Kazakhs, who wanted to manage their nomadic life on the Steppe according to their own traditional laws. The interference of the administration actively maintained hostility between different factions of the Kazakh population. They resented taxes, they grew frustrated by bans on seasonal migrations by traditional routes. And they would take this out on the Volost Leader, who effectively represented the Tsar. The cunning Russian officials preferred to remain as unspoken leaders. And Abai and Shakarim knew that although the people had overthrown khans, it was not
within their power to overcome the Russians, who would incessant-
ly introduce further administrative structures onto the Steppe as a
means of gradually taking absolute control. In his poem ‘Lives of
The Forgotten’ Shakarim returns several times to that period of his
life when he was Volost Leader, straining to understand how the
harmony of the nomadic world eventually disappeared. He confessed
to these feelings of nostalgic perplexity as he read his poetry aloud to
the audiences that would gather to listen.
The Weakness of a Strong Man

Shakarim proved himself a strong and proficient Volost Leader. The Uezd Officials saw that he had a quick and clear mind, speaking with great eloquence in both Kazakh and Russian, answering their questions, and not only those relating to taxes. The people had justice while this young Volost Leader was in power, and in spite of his age he was considered an active and intelligent ruler. In two years he was serving with the level of authority his grandfather insisted would come with work well done. And yet, something then took place that did not fit at all with this judicious image. Shakarim fell in love.

He travelled one night with an assistant to the Nogai aul. This was what the Tobykty called the settlement founded by the Tartar (Nogai) Iskak, who had come to Kazakhstan from Kazan. Now the girls of the Nogai Aul were famous for their beauty. In his novel The Way of Abai, Mukhtar Auezov employed many wonderful artistic devices to describe Magrifa, the granddaughter of Makhmut, who in 1892 married Abdrakhman (Abish), the beloved son of Abai and Dilda. And Shakarim could not ignore this beauty. He was struck by Aigansha, the eldest daughter of Ibyrai, son of Makhmut. She was seventeen. This beautiful, sturdy girl was helping her mother to look after their guests. The whole evening, Shakarim could not take his eyes away from hers. He felt his life could not go on without this girl, who had appeared as if out of some fantastic dream. He desperately wanted to speak with her. All this attention directed at his granddaughter could not escape the notice of the head of the family. Makhmut let it be known that he did not approve of the married men’s attentions. In the Nogai tribe, no one took more than one wife, and even joking about how the Kazakh bais would take as many as three wives was deemed inappropriate.

The next day, Shakarim managed to speak with Aigansha face to face. Their conversation was all the more impassioned for its taking place in secret. Shakarim was enraptured by the beauty of the girl,
and felt as though the proximity of their souls was preordained in heaven. It seemed to him that he had fallen in love with her even before they had met. But Aigansha told him bluntly that it would not be possible for them to meet again, as both her mother and father were against it. That day Shakarim left the Nogai aul. He reeled at the thought that he had been deprived of happiness, the fullness of which he fancied he had only just now properly felt. His wife Mauen appeared before his eyes, reproachful. What would he say to her? How could life go on? Was it possible to follow the tradition of polygamy? His ancestors had taken as many as four wives. But how it was possible to do so and at the same time maintain a harmonious home life was a mystery to him. Probably none of his relatives would have been against the idea of a second marriage, but how would he discuss the idea with Mauen, his intelligent, spiritual companion in life? How would she feel about the idea of a second wife? And how would he tell Aigansha’s relatives? He didn’t know if he would be able to see her again, but felt a genuine sense of happiness just thinking about her. The worst thing when we are young is being unable to be with those whom we love.
The Kidnap of Aigansha

By the mid summer of 1882, Shakarim could no longer stand Mauen’s not knowing about his love for Aigansha and resolved to end his dishonesty towards her and his people. He met with Aigansha and firmly stated his intention to steal her away, as her parents would not give their agreement to his taking their daughter as a second wife. Shakarim would hear no objections. The toughest part would be the conversation with Mauen. She loved Shakarim, and felt a terrible confusion at his confession. According to their tribal tradition her husband could take a tokal, or younger wife. But when she realised that she would have competition, her calm exterior dissolved into a sickness of the soul, which burrowed itself forever in her heart. She agreed to the tokal, not out of despair, but in the name of tradition. Knowing her husband well, she understood that if she stood up for herself and opposed him, it would strike him to the heart, would make her beloved husband unhappy and in turn herself. Mauen met Aigansha at the entrance of their yurt. She looked her over and then warmly welcomed her, taking her into the family home. And this is how they came to share their life together.

But Aigansha’s relatives assembled a band of men, who went after Shakarim, taking with them Aigansha’s mother who pleaded for her daughter to be returned. According to the tale, Aigansha herself then stepped up, categorically refusing to return. Shakarim did not know what to do. Mauen could not take it, leaving for what was called the ‘domestic’ yurt, where she stayed from that time on, alone. She could no longer go out anywhere. And of course, divorce among the Kazakhs was strictly forbidden. But seeing Aigansha’s resolve, her tribespeople left without her, threatening Shakarim with legal action at the Court of Biys. It might be expected that because it was a Kazakh tradition polygamy would not create any such psychological and emotional problems. But it was never straightforward.
Abai was upset at the fuss around the kidnapping and met with Aigansha’s grandfather to discuss the matter. Traditionally, the Tobyktsi held the Nogai in high esteem, and there was an unwritten rule that there would be no intermarriage between the tribes on the grounds of their differences. Abai dictated that Shakarim should take the daughter back to the Nogai leader and pay a *kun*, or penalty for his transgression. The sum was equivalent to fifty camels and twenty choice five-year-old horses. Shakarim was dismayed at this but Abai stood by his decision. On the advice of his mother Tolebike, he hastily went off to see his wealthy uncle, Abai’s brother, gathered horses, cows, sheep, and so on from the family stock. After four days he had sent cattle equivalent to the value of fifty camels and a stud of horses to the Nogai Aul. Abai also gave away a young bride from the Kunanbai tribe in marriage to a young man from the Nogai Aul. And so the Nogai agreed to give their daughter away in marriage to the Shakarim. Through this exchange they became what the Kazakhs call “matchmakers for a thousand years.”

And so we see that Shakarim’s decision to take Aigansha for his wife was founded on nothing but his own feelings. Though heavily in debt, Shakarim at last had Aigansha for himself. And the love between Shakarim and Aigansha was enough to overcome the blows of fate. They held onto this love throughout their entire lives, maintaining that tremulous feeling, which had flared up at their first meeting in the Nogai Aul. Together they had five boys: Gafur (Gabdulgafur, 1883-1930), Zherbail (who died in infancy), Kabys (Gabdulla, 1887-1932), Akhat (Gabdulakhad, 1900-1984), Ziyat (1903-1937); along with three daughters: Kulziya (Kampit, who died at a young age), Zhakim, and Gulnar (Gullar, 1912-1970).
"From the house of the governor I went, upon his recommendation, to the public library, an unpretending log-house in the middle of the town, where I found a small anthropological museum, a comfortable little reading-room supplied with all the Russian newspapers and magazines, and a well-chosen collection of about a thousand books. [...] and the collection of books, as a whole, was in the highest degree creditable to the intelligence and taste of the people who made and used it."

American journalist George Kennan in Siberia and The Exile System (1885).

Shakarim was elected a second time as Volost Leader. Abai at this time was repeatedly drawn into legal disputes with the Russian administration and over the course of the next four years was constantly travelling off to Semipalatinsk. It was then that he spent a great deal of time in the city library, which at first was effectively a reading room annexed to the offices of the Uezd Council. But later on it would become a place for political exiles to meet. These exiles included the populist Aleksandr Lvovich Black, the scholar Evgeniy Petrovich Mikhailis Chernyshevsky, the future ideologue and Anarchist theorist Apollon Andreevich Karelin, the revolutionary inclined democrat Nifont Ivanovich Dolgopolov. Money to create libraries was donated by the Semipalatinsk merchants Plescheev and Kharabov, the Pavlodarsk merchant Derov and even the Krasnodar merchant Yudin. Local historians Kolmogorov and Zemlyanitsin helped organise the library with the political exiles. On 20 September 1883 a new city library was opened at the home of Zemlyanitsin.

The previous reading room had held some 274 books. But when the library was opened, there were 750 books, including 94 volumes of philosophy and sociology, 75 history books, 120 natural history
books and 410 works of literature. 130 readers made use of these books. One of the most active was Abai. He read deeply into the works of Western and Russian literature, and his analytical research contributed greatly to his knowledge. He studied the works of Draper, Darwin, Spenser, Buckle, and read encyclopedias and reference books. But what most attracted him was Russian literature. Thanks to the public library Abai and Shakarim got to know the Russian exiles, making good friends with Mikhailis and Dolgopolov, who would come to stay in Chingis-Tau throughout the summertime. Mikhailis promised Shakarim he would get hold of some important books for him, and in the autumn of 1881 had them delivered to his aul. The books appeared to be quite simple and Shakarim wasn’t greatly interested in the academic literature at first. He subsequently told his son Akhat about these meetings, and these are recorded in Akhat’s memoirs: “When those friends of Abai came to see him, Dolgopolov, and Mikhailis, he would summon me over. And I heard a lot of useful things from them, good advice, wise instruction. Listening to Dolgopolov and Mikhailis discuss the science of sociology was a great lesson for me, and remains in my memory.
History and Legend

Shakarim’s highest concern was for defining his creative path. In 1883 his mind dwelt on two things: the legends of the elders, and the Islamic Canons. All this historical information had long been begging to be put down on paper since he began putting together his genealogy of the Kazakh families and tribes. Shakarim had heard many illustrious stories about his ancestors, and about the great Kazakh khan Abylai, from his grandfather Kunanbai. Kunanbai’s versions of these ancient stories were rather unsophisticated and it was not always possible for Shakarim to distinguish fact from fantasy, as they were based on direct oral communication of historical information. But this was genuine, living information. The genealogy put together by Shakarim grew and grew, eventually taking the form of his book, *The Genealogy of The Turkic Peoples, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Khan Dynasties*, which appeared in 1911.

He later reported that Abai had been a great help in compiling this work. Ever interested in the history of the Kazakhs, Abai set his students the task of writing historical works. And Shakarim began to write his *Genealogy*, which would trace all the tribes from the Prophet Adam to the present day in chronological order. The names of these ancestors are laid out in the Torah from Adam to Noah. All other genealogical books from this time on drew on the Torah. The genealogical ancestry of various peoples is mostly based on hearsay, handed down from generation to generation like fairy tales in the oral tradition. Some authors therefore set out to pass on knowledge, while others set out to show their writing ability.

Shakarim consistently demonstrated a critical attitude to the historical source materials listed in his preface. Among the books listed are *A History of the Turks* by Najip Gasymbeka, and Genealogy of the Turks by Abulgazi Bahadur Khan. He also took quotes from various books, including the Russian books Radloff’s *On The Uighurs*, and Aristov’s *On The Turkic Tribes*, as well as from the annals of differ-
ent peoples of the world, translated into Russian. These included the most ancient ancestry of the Turks Kutadgu Bilig, Kosho Tsaidam, the Chinese work Yuanchao Mishi (A Secret History of the Mongols), and other books by Arabic, Persian, Roman, and European historians. And Shakarim began methodically through scientific evidence to prove that the Kazakhs were descended not from the Arabs, as stated in some sources, but that their roots were in the ancient world. And he delved deep into the history of the ancient Huns. Shakarim completed Genealogy in around two years. But he continued to make changes to the book in the coming years, significantly adding to individual chapters, and sometimes completely changing their content. Even after the book was published in 1911, he did not cease from editing it. In a letter to Sabit Mukanov dated 1931, the last year of his life, he mentioned: “I recently found a lost part of the Genealogy. And as in the published edition there were typos, missing words, and other errors.” Looking back across the past five thousand years, Shakarim returned to life the great names of the ancient Turkic tribes.
Sufism in ‘Layla and Majnun’

Shakarim’s early interest in Islam was inflamed by conversations with his grandfather Kunanbai, who dedicated the last years of his life to spreading his religious views among his family. But his conversations with Abai left a stronger impression, attracted as he was by Sufist poetry, and he incorporated into his own poetry elements of the Sufist ideology. Abai established a religious and aesthetic doctrine around dedicating oneself to love of God, sincerely believing in the rebirth of the soul. In his poetry he refers to God as his beloved and this is one of the fundamental elements of Sufi culture. But for all his interest in its aesthetics, he did not actually become a Sufist. Sufism preached asceticism, refusal of all earthly pleasure, strictly following rites and rituals. Religion as merely ritual activity did not appeal to Abai. For Abai, religion should spiritualize people, but without detracting from real life. He so modified the ethics of Sufism that in his poetry it essentially lost its mystical overtones.

Shakarim also attempted to embody these Sufist elements in his poetry. Spiritual quests occupied an ever more prominent place in Shakarim’s work, as though he was preparing himself for the journey from the material into the spiritual world. But for now his ‘Sufist’ poetry continued to reflect entirely earthly feelings. In this 1890 poem, the hero manages with some effort to conquer earthly love, before ascending to the heavens and apparently arriving in paradise. There Majnun and his beloved Layla meet.

Fizuli’s poem ‘Layla and Majnun’, written in Azeri, excited Shakarim greatly. For Shakarim, Fizuli’s was the best version of the ‘Layla and Majnun’ legend. Abai had always directed him to Nizami’s poetical Farsi version, but Shakarim had always struggled in reading it. He had only barely mastered Farsi. Nizami was the first to write ‘Layla and Majnun’. But in 1535 Fizuli reworked Nizami’s great tragedy into something more accessible, enriching his own people’s oral culture and creating his own fresh human characters.
Shakarim recalled Abai’s wish that he should one day translate ‘Layla and Majnun’ into Kazakh. And now having read Fizuli’s version he decided he was ready to fulfill his teacher’s wish. Abai approved of his decision.

He decided to pay close attention to the hidden Sufist elements he perceived in Fizuli’s text, which on rereading the poem, Shakarim found were quite striking. At first it seemed to Shakarim that these were merely decorative elements, lending the poem a mystical air, as one would expect to find in any ancient fantasy. But Abai reassured him that Sufism was never overt and the lay reader would always read the poem as a straightforward fairytale. This concept of concealing a Sufist subtext in poetic works, so that only the learned would find them, is one of the main principles of the study of mysticism. Shakarim enthusiastically set about the task, drawing on the versions of Nizami, Navoi and Jami.

The theme of his poem is that of all poetry faith in the life-affirming force of love. Abai was pleased by Shakarim’s great artistic potential. He liked his young student’s version of ‘Layla and Majnun’, recognising in it a worthy contribution to that continued work to which he dedicated his life. What Shakarim essentially created was a Nazira or answer in the form of his own poetical work composed along the same themes as the celebrated literary masterpiece, keeping the same characters as in the original, but branching off from the main ideas here and there. Shakarim kept the traditional composition of the poem exactly the same. There is the opening, the climax, and the conclusion. But he added some new lines, and his own authorial remarks, the content of which were both profound and unexpected. In his foreword, the author poses the question of what Kazakhs know about love, and whether or not they are acquainted with the poetry of the East. He lists the names of all the Eastern poets taught to him by Abai, as a mark of respect towards his teacher. Reading the story of Majnun and Layla as a story of True Love, Shakarim draws his reader’s attention to Fizuli as a poet, who could “evoke an event
more beautifully than any other” He attributes this formal respect for his predecessors to a recognition, a sense of only having stumbled across their work by chance.

“There lived in Arabia a rich man, who had all the wealth he could ask for,” Shakarim’s tale begins. But this merchant has no children. In accordance with the Kazakh saying that “the sea grants many wishes”, the rich man continually implores people to wish for him to have offspring. This largess is rewarded. The merchant’s wife gives birth to a son, Kayis, whose appearance Shakarim gives the motif of ‘otherness’ Kayis grows unhappy, no one can stop his persistent crying. One day his nanny, while comforting the child, meets another nanny, her friend, with a young girl crying in her arms. This is Layla, the daughter of a wealthy feudal lord. On seeing each other, the babies stop crying. The nannies decide to come up with a way of making it so that the children are never parted.

Here Shakarim introduces a new character not present in the previous versions, an elderly wet-nurse, who agrees to look after both Kayis and Layla. As soon as she takes Kayis into her arms, the old woman, never having had children herself, immediately begins producing milk. But when she tries to take Layla to her breast, the milk disappears. The children grow up, go to school, their friendship turns to love. Layla’s mother is alarmed and forbids her from going to school anymore, keeping her at home. From melancholy, Kayis keeps losing consciousness. But he refuses medicine, running off to the desert. In the eyes of the people he is majnun possessed, insane. Kayis’s parents plead with Layla’s father to allow them to be together, but he refuses, believing that Majnun is not worthy of his daughter.

Majnun goes on the Hajj to Mecca. Embracing the Cabaa, he turns to the moon, to the wind, to the stars, to the birds with their young and this gives him the strength to get over the separation. He writes a poem to his love, lamenting that they cannot be together. Layla is as unhappy as Majnun. In her words it is the irreparable sadness of suffering through love. The lovers begin writing letters to one another,
taken back and forth by their friend Zait. But Layla is due to marry her wealthy fiancé, Ibn Salam, at her parents’ bidding. A certain spirit then tells the young fiancé that he must not touch Layla, or else he will die. Salam nobly decides to give Layla over to Majnun, but it is too late— he dies. Disguised as blind beggars, Majnun and Zait enter the city. On realising that the beggar is Majnun, Layla gives him her letter and faints. Majnun rushes to help her, but every time he gets near her he bursts into flames. The youth reads a farewell letter to Layla, and she becomes worse still. The girl says goodbye to her parents and asks that no one but Majnun should come near her after she dies. When Layla dies, Majnun hurries into the crypt. At her grave her young lover begs to be allowed near her. And his prayer is heard in the heavens. So for Shakarim, the earthly motif of tragic love and separation is contained in this motif of ‘otherness’, connected to the benevolence of the heavens.

Shakarim leaves plenty of scope for the lovers’ story to be viewed as an analogy for Sufism. He manages to create a dual-layered work according to all the rules of Sufist poetry. The outer layer, the story of the lovers, is one that any reader or listener can enjoy. The inner layer can be seen as connecting to the mysteries of Sufism. For example, Layla and Kayis are pre-ordained from infancy to fall in love, and to be miserable until they meet. This is an analogy for the Sufist conception of divine love: “The embodiment of love that draws near to beauty” The image of the elderly wet-nurse, introduced into the text by Shakarim, may also be interpreted within the Sufist discourse, developing on the well known Sufist image of the world as an old woman. The old, decrepit world comes to life and is fulfilled only when there is true love. It is also symbolic that Kayis and Layla cannot be suckled from the same source— they are not brother and sister.

An important concept in Sufist aesthetics is that of celebrating earthly love as one does the love of God, and this is fulfilled in the form of Majnun. Over the course of many centuries the Oriental poets conceived of Sufi Mysticism like Majnun, mad with love. His love of Layla
is an allegorical form of expression of the love toward God—the love that comes of experience and is realised in the confluence of Sufism and divine Truth. The image of fire has a separate meaning, corresponding to the Sufist motif of holy madness. In Shakarim, this metaphorical ‘fire of love’ becomes a real fire. When Majnun gets close to Layla, his breast erupts in flames, from which the two barely escape alive. This is a symbol of fate. In their earthly life, the lovers are not united. First Layla dies, and then, in Shakarim’s version, the ‘miracle of love’ takes place: Majnun entreats God, and the grave opens up, receiving him, and then closes, uniting the lovers in eternal life.

However, readers are not obliged to take this Sufist subtext into account. The Romantic legend as portrayed by Shakarim has become one of the best loved works of Kazakh literature. Mukhtar Auezov and subsequent researchers justifiably consider the poem a work of art in its own right. To bring the Arabian East of ‘Layla and Majnun’ closer to the Kazakh readers, Shakarim introduced into the poem familiar forms of the Steppe expanses, the sun, moon and ever-blue sky.
The Passing of Kunanbai

Shakarim decided not to stand for re-election as Volost Leader. In August 1885, Shakarim’s grandfather and the last official head of the Tobykti tribe Kunanbai died at the age of 81. For a long time he had not been involved in local affairs, had not participated in campaigns for control of the Volost, considering it beneath his station. In his remaining years he prayed fervently, crystallizing his religious outlook and understanding of the world. In his final days he fell ill, and was unable to get up from his bed.

With Kunanbai’s death an entire epoch departed. That form of leadership he governed, as head of a tribe, wielding influence over the vastness of the entire Steppe was a thing of the past. In its place came a new administrative structure, causing Kazakhs to fight amongst each other over the best grasslands and meadows in the carefully delineated field of the Volost. Fights between clans over the post of Volost Leader with its sweeping powers, the likes of which the heads of tribes had never known before, meant great financial rewards for local leaders. Those who upheld the old norms of the patriarchal society no longer fit in with the new rules of the game. In this sense, the passing of a figure such as Kunanbai, a man who had lost his regalia, but who did not let down his dignity by getting involved in squabbles over the position of Volost Leader, represented the closing of a chapter in Kazakh history.

Kunanbai-Hadji was buried in accordance with Islamic custom, with kind words uttered over a memorial dinner, and the guests departed, convinced that they would be returning in a year for his as. Kazakhs hold huge memorials (or ases) for great leaders on the anniversary of their death. A huge number of people from all distant corners of the Steppe would come to pay their respects. Hundreds of yurts were erected for the guests. They would arrange games, fighting contests, and long-distance races (or baigas). A great number of livestock were slaughtered in honour of the occasion. But this custom
was not always observed, not every family had the resources to do so. Kunanbai of course was not a commoner and his sons were by no means badly off. For a year people on the Steppe talked of how the as might even surpass that of the great Oskenbai, which Kunanbai had arranged in his father’s honour in 1851. So it was a great surprise to the Kazakhs, when a year later in August 1886 they learned that Abai had decided not to give an as for Kunanbai.

He explained to his relatives that too many indolent people would turn up at the as. It would require a huge amount of resources to arrange one, the auls would make irretrievable losses, and the common people would be left without even the means to survive. If they were to invite a great number of people, they might manage to feed the poor at the event itself, but then how would they live for the rest of the year? Abai reasoned that it was surely better to forego the as in order that the poor could be fed the whole year round. He gave orders for the gifts and cattle already prepared by relatives for the memorial as to be sent to Semipalatinsk. With Shakarim he gathered the imam’s servants at the city mosque and held a memorial dinner. The imam said a prayer in memory of Kunanbai. The food and other things were shared out among the poor and disadvantaged. Abai limited it to this. And this provoked gossip among the Kazakh society. He was accused on all sides of breaking a centuries old tradition, which brought the people together. The famous poet Mashkhor Zhusup Kopeev (1858-1931), who lived not far from Bayanaul, incidentally a contemporary of Shakarim, found that Abai demonstrated an objectionable character. He expressed this opinion in an essay published in the Dala Walayaty newspaper on 1 December 1889 in the form of a response to the publication of Abai’s poem ‘Summer’.

The people may have been right in their own way – it is a peculiarity of the nomadic mindset. The Kazakhs could not get it into their heads how a person could not hold a funeral feast, not make an offering of a horse. But Abai was a superior intellect. He understood that there would be conflict either way. The tradition of giving an as
could be traced back to the Turkic roots of the Kazakh people. This was an ancient Tengrian custom, which came from the very depths of the ages, when their Turkic ancestors worshipped the Eternal Blue Sky and the god Tengri. In the nineteenth century, at a time of crisis for nomadic farming, which famously suffered pressure from settled agriculture, to hold an as would be enough to ruin a nomadic family. And by refusing to hold a costly memorial for the old man in favour of helping disadvantaged Muslims, Abai hoped to put an end to this burdensome tradition. Islam has a much more modest approach to the memorial process, and this became Abai’s justification for the modesty he showed. The conflict between Islam and Tengrism continues in Kazakhstan to this day. Kazakhs have their own peculiar approach to funeral services that borrows from both Turkic and Islamic elements. Each religion has its role to play. Yet Abai did have the means to hold an as. But he had been thinking a long time about cleansing the attitude of the whole people in the crucible of his own moral truth. And he decided to start with himself, as though sensing the impending demise of nomadic civilisation, which broke out in the first part of the twentieth century.
Shakarim is made a Biy

Starting in 1887, Shakarim was elected a biy for twenty years running, and always acted in the capacity of both Volost Leader and elder in resolving conflicts. This did not get in the way of his literary development, which he drew from Abai. Turagul wrote in his book About My Father Abai, “A time came that you could call the Age of Enlightenment. In conversations there was no other topic than that of education. The main one among us was Shakarim. We listened to Abai, like keen students and like shakirti in an Islamic Madrasa, debating unendingly about Truth.

Mukhtar Auezov adds to Turagul’s words in his book Abai’s People, and His Life: “Starting in 1889, for the inquisitive youngsters, subjected to the knowledge and humanistic qualities of Abai, this aul came to be a great educational madrasa. Abai was the teacher, and the ambitious and energetic youngsters his shakirti. He became for his kin and those close to him, for the young generation, a formidable educator. Given all that he had seen in his life [...] Abai wanted to set the young on a new path to the heights of humanity he himself dreamed of. Talking of his own life, not concealing a single blunder made in office, nor masking his own outlook, nor evading responsibility, he entreated the young not to repeat his mistakes. And if he spoke of one truth in his poetry, then the other he would discuss aloud in his speeches. In long conversations he instructed his pupils to walk only on the pure path of humanity. He instilled in his students the qualities of justice, honesty, love, honour, good judgement, and scepticism — all the fundamental qualities that make a man.

Shakarim thought more and more often of the necessity of justifying his own existence. The artist’s thoughts sought some outlet. His work in the public arena, which brought tangible rewards, gradually lost its appeal. He became skeptical about all the previous elections he had taken part in, and wondered what it it was all for.
At the age of 40, he took the considered decision to avoid vainglorious battles for power at local level. For too long he had left behind those questions of the meaning of life, and was plagued by doubts and the pangs of conscience.
Abai’s School of Poetry

Abai never had any such thing as an official school of poetry. And he never demanded that his students should regard him as any kind of poet. But he never passed up the opportunity of giving a young poet his critical opinion, advising them on how to improve their style, form, and general writing skills. He never stopped training Shakarim in mastering poetry, even after he had established himself as a master of words in his own right. And gradually talented young Kazakhs began coming together around Abai, hoping to educate themselves in the art of poetic composition.

The school of poetry was not permanently active. Young people came in groups, in crowds. Sometimes students would come tens of kilometres to an aul where the teacher happened to be staying as a guest, having heard that other members of the informal poetry school had gone there. They were all united by a common adoration for Abai’s poetry. Sometimes, the force of the aesthetic impression would lead them to produce their own lines of verse. The point is this allure did not disappear, but the opposite, bearing an intuitive sense that the surrounding world was a poetical projection, created in collaboration with Abai.

In all the years of its existence, apart from Shakarim there were five talented students at the poetry school. Not confining himself to the discussion of the works of other poets, in Autumn 1889 Abai instructed his students to write their own poems. He reminded them that according to the canons of Oriental poetry, a true poet must leave behind no less than five poems. The students accepted the challenge and went their separate ways to each write their own poem, the theme of which they had agreed with the master.
‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’

Shakarim decided to put into his poem an historical drama about Kalkaman and Mamyр. It was easy for him to write. Images from his favourite stories of the One Thousand and One Nights were conjured up before his eyes. He endowed the heroes with characteristic features and personally lived through their passions. He finished ‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’ in spring 1890. The poem gained immediate popularity among poetry lovers. Signing off Mutylgan (The Forgotten), in the foreword to the first publication of the poem in 1912 in a book entitled ‘Historical Writings in the Kazakh Language’, Shakarim conceived the poem in the following manner: “This story really happened, in 1722, when the Kazaks of our Middle Juz migrated along the shores of the Syrdara not long before they were defeated by the Kalmaks in the ‘Year of the Great Calamity’

“Although the Kazaks were disapproving of the love between Kalkaman and Mamyр, our contemporaries are now impartial, knowing that they were not guilty, and they remember them in their prayers. The deceased cannot be resurrected, but an extinguished fire may be stoked back into life. With this concept in mind, I unravel before you the forgotten story, which is now one hundred and ninety years old. It threatens to leave the memories even of the Aksakals. So I decided: these two lovers are no longer among the living, but let a trace of them remain. In the same way, we may hope to leave traces of ourselves behind.

‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’ is one of the first poems in Kazakh written literature on the subject of national history. Stylistically polished, the poem is still interesting today through its ideas contained in the fable. In its depiction of actual events, the spiritual bases of which are ambivalent, thanks on the one hand to ancient Turkic beliefs, and on the other to Islamic customs, the poem stands out for the profundity of its themes. The story is based on the folk legend of the unbridled love between two young people from the Tobykti tribe.
Mamyr was the only daughter of wealthy parents, who had always dreamed of having a son. For this reason they allowed her to dress like a boy. The girl was in the saddle from infancy, she was out on the grasslands, and was in communion with the measured rhythm of life out on the Steppe among the peaceful herds.

Kalkaman was the nephew of Anet Baba, an influential person among Kazakh society. The young couple love each other. But the girl warns him that their love will be the death of them as people of the same blood must not marry. She tells him she will gladly lay down her own life in order for him to carry on living. The heroes find themselves in difficult circumstances. They are young, and both from the same tribe. But marriage between members of the same tribe was forbidden among the ancient Kazakhs. This custom, held by the ancient Kazakh ancestors, is called ‘exogamy’ by sociologists. The purpose of this custom is to avoid the harmful consequences of sexual union between blood relatives. There is another important rationale behind the old custom of choosing a wife from another tribe and, it was thought, the further away the better. Such unions undoubtedly helped strengthen the bonds between the people as a whole, spread out as they were across such a vast territory.

But Kalkaman proves the senselessness of the ancient moral principles, and makes a proclamation to his lover. He declares that it is all superstition that under Sharia Law you can marry your granddaughter and all that it comes down to is if she really loves him unabashedly, she should give him her hand in marriage. The young man is right Sharia Law permits marriage between close family members. But Islam did not have sway across the whole Steppe. The precepts of the ancient Kazakhs lived on in the consciousness of many generations of Kazakhs, who did not take on the canons of Islam nor yield to its influence. And when Kalkaman secretly takes his beloved away, the Court of Biys sentences them to death for breaking the moral code. Kokenai, an influential relative of the girl is especially harsh and unappeasable.
Time passes, and Mamyrl appears in her native aul. Without hesitation Kokenai shoots her through the heart with an arrow for all to see. The poem becomes not only a lyrical expression of the feelings of its heroes, but also puts across the attitude of the surrounding world, in which evil was still immortal. It would seem that the forbidden marriage was broken up, and life could go on as normal. However, the girl's relatives give Anet Baba an ultimatum: we have chastened our disobedient girl, it is now their turn to do away with that treacherous son. The motives of this demand by the Steppe procurators are clear to make sure there will be no more such young people. The death of Mamyrl is not an absolute death, as the desire for people to love did not die with the heroine. Anet Baba has to approve on both sides a rather unusual decision Kalkaman must now ride past Kokenai on his horse while Kokenai shoots him down with an arrow from his bow.

In his poem, Shakarim cleverly transposes the problems of the spiritual condition of his own times onto the historical context of the eighteenth century. Starting off from the real circumstances of the life of Abai, the poet includes his name among the luminiferous ranks of his heroic ancestors. Each of them presents the great spiritual experiences of a man standing against the rigid conditions of the time. In his address to the masses, Shakarim emphasises how catastrophic the history of the Kazakhs was, indulging as it did in evil and barbarity. Though Shakarim does not hide his attitude to the events described, it is far from unambiguous. On the one hand, he is a muslim by education and belief. On the other hand, he absorbed the ethics of the nomadic world of the Kazakhs through his mother's milk, through reading the traditions and the laws of his Turkic ancestors. Therefore Shakarim does not castigate Kalkaman and Mamyrl, but nor does he take their side unconditionally. And so he categorically does not judge Kokenai either, a guardian of the ancient laws, which in a particular religious system of coordinates could be called linguistic. Only at the moment where that severe sentence is handed to Kalkaman does the
author disapprove of the severity of the Tobykti, suggesting that this
is a groundless act of evil.

But as fast as Kalkaman’s horse turns out to be, after the death
of his lover and earthly suffering is compensated by the blessing of
heaven, Kokenai’s arrow only wounds the hero. Judging from the
motif of this strange salvation, it is possible to conclude that the
fellow tribesmen saw only the deeds of the lovers, but God saw their
hearts. Kalkaman straight away sets up home in the south, in a
distant corner of the land, never to return again. Without fluctuation
he decides not to live among the Tobykti, who sentenced his beloved
to death. Kalkaman accurately predicts that his foes will be struck
down by the Kalmaks, proclaiming that he and Mamyр will be to-
gether in eternity that he needs no one else on earth. In spring of
the following year, the Dzungars (or Kalmaks) invade the Kazakh
Steppe. The ill-fated lovers come to represent a great evil that dwells
in all of them. Shakarim’s poem on the love between Kalkaman and
Mamyр has aspects of artistic testimony to the historical biography of
the people. The poet’s preoccupation with history reveals itself in the
poem’s finale. He believes that Kalkaman’s descendants will some day
read the poem and must find their family in Chingis-Tau.

It is said that one spring a mullah was staying as a guest with Abai,
who had come from the Semipalatinsk mosque, travelling about across
the region with what one might now call sermons. The mullah did
not like Shakarim’s ‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’ as he read it aloud. The
guest believed that a good muslim should not praise the controversial
Sharia customs of their dark ancestors as though they were set in
stone. There is no mention of such customs in the Koran, and so they
have no place in ‘our’ belief system, he said. Shakarim answered that
he did not praise the customs of his ancestors, but merely brought
to light the reality of the life of people at that time. The mullah
reminded him that rather than occupying himself with stories of the
older generation, an imam must have true faith. Only an imam can
lead the people to prosperity. Therefore one must observe the laws
that make up one’s own foundations. The first rule is that a muslim must accept Allah and believe that he is the one true God. The second rule is to take the namaz and say one’s prayers every day. On top of this share what you have with the poor. Observe the holy fast. And ideally undertake the Hajj.

“We know all this very well,” Abai broke in, as the story goes. “It would be good to include in these laws the education of the people, so that you might learn to be more tolerant of our ancestor’s customs.” The mullah of course darkened and frowned. “But God has already given each of us reason,” he replied, “so that we might learn and master the sciences.” And Abai hurried to soften the sarcasm: “The point is that those who do not have genuine understanding are a long way from genuine faith. I am profoundly convinced that without education people will have neither the genuine faith, nor the prosperity which you speak of. Without knowledge there can be no namaz, no fasting, no pilgrimage, no achieving of aims. The illiterate may gain wealth only through robbery. But I have yet to meet the man who, having acquired wealth through robbery, used his wealth to do good. That which is acquired on the path of the beast, will be spent like a beast.
Shakarim resolves to take a Journey

There were two principal features to the poet’s message: first, the young people should seek out a particular path in life; second, the poet himself, acting as a defender of this path, offers a new system of moral values. Shakarim made an agreement with his teacher that he should go in search of knowledge in the cultural centre of the East, and he set off once more with great fervour. But he didn’t totally leave his duties as biy behind. He simply spent less time taking part in official work, and more on reading and writing letters at home. After making that agreement with Abai, Shakarim devoted himself to learning the Russian language. He studied a lot, brushing up on those Eastern languages he did not know so well before. This widening of his knowledge of both Russian and the Eastern languages was greatly aided by his reading of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and books in Farsi, Turkish and Arabic. The responsibility for domestic affairs of the wider family fell to his eldest son Sufian, who had got married two years earlier. Sufian understood well how to live off the land in dry winter conditions.

Shakarim did not forget his younger sons. He taught grammar to Kabysh, who had turned seven years old. He tried to teach a love of reading to the eleven-year-old Gafur. For now he had no teachers, they would come later. But he could not himself afford the same all-round course of education as had been undertaken and passed on to him by Kunanbai and Abai. Therefore he personally undertook the education of his sons. As a teacher, he was patient and infinitely kind. He remembered those beloved maxims which he had heard more than once from Abai. Devoting his time to his own person, Shakarim tailored and sewed his clothing according to his own fancy as he had his entire life. Tailored kaftans and chapans with leather pelts, encrusted with small, coloured stones and silver, were always attractive to him, but he did not put them on display except among his own family. He would only
share his designs with Aigansha. She applauded his creations and was overjoyed that her husband was not going off to take part in Volost business. He had already dedicated so much time to relations between his neighbours.
The Imperial Russian Geographical Society

Shakarim’s rise to national fame can be traced to his membership of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, which he joined in 1903. The Geographical Society was founded in St Petersburg in 1845 by Admiral Fyodor Litke. Its main objective from the outset was to collect reliable geographical information. The expeditions of the Society played a major role in developing Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, navigating the oceans and studying new lands. Any empire must necessarily develop its new lands in line with its own standards. Research and development work would be undertaken by scientists and academics, overseen by military intelligence officers. In 1850, the Geographical Society was renamed the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. In 1877 The West Siberian Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society was founded in Omsk. Finally, in 1902, the Semipalatinsk Branch of the West Siberian Department was opened. This undoubtedly assisted ethnographers working in Semipalatinsk, who in its first year commissioned a census of the population of the city of Semipalatinsk.

The founders of the Semipalatinsk Branch of the Geographical Society set out to describe the history, culture and life of Kazakhstan as a record for future generations. In this work, they sought to engage the most enlightened, most educated members of Kazakh society, experts in folk tradition and the laws of the Steppe. And of course one of the first figures to enter their field of vision was Shakarim. With his knowledge of Russian and vast breadth of interests, his undoubted poetic gift, he clearly had some authority among the people. All of this worked in his favour. He was recommended to the Geographical Society by Michaelis, who was one of the founders of the Semipalatinsk Branch. Shakarim was back in Chingis-Tau when he received this news and promptly accepted the invitation to join. In the autumn of 1903 Shakarim was formally adopted as the one hundred and third member of the Semipalatinsk Branch of the Geographical Society.
This is recorded in the archives of the Semipalatinsk Branch of the West Siberian department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, in the following entry: "Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, a Kazakh from the Chingsis-Tau Uezd of Semipalatinsk, took membership of the society in 1903, and left in 1907."

This greatly expanded Shakarim's social circle. He now spent his time among exiled revolutionaries, academic experts and other extraordinary figures. One such figure was Nikolai Yakovlevich Konshin, who became Chancellor of the Semipalatinsk Branch. He was a graduate of the law faculty of St Petersburg University. He was also a founder of the Semipalatinsk Branch of the Geographical Society, and in 1904 was awarded the society's silver medal. He was elected as a deputy of the First and Second State Duma for the urban and peasant population of the Semipalatinsk Oblast.

Other colourful characters in the society included the Beloslyudov brothers, Alex, Viktor, and Nicholas Fyodor. They played an important role in the development of local history and museums in Semipalatinsk. The Beloslyudovs were born into a poor family in Semipalatinsk, their father was an official from the Siberian Cossacks. The most talented of the four brothers were ethnographer, folklorist and painter Alexei, and local historian Viktor. Alexei Beloslyudov, for example, wrote more than two hundred tales, and ninety-seven mysteries based around Russian and Kazakh folklore. He and Shakarim spent a lot of time in discussing the subtleties of Kazakh folklore. As a result of many years' work on local history, the Beloslyudov brothers set up a museum with departments of Geology and Mineralogy, Palaeontology and anthropology, Prehistoric Archaeology, Antiques, Numismatics, and Ethnography, as well as an art gallery. In the department of Archaeology, for example, there were more than six hundred objects, in the numismatics department more than a thousand, including rare gold, silver and copper coins. Shakarim became a curator at this museum.

The leaders of the Semipalatinsk Branch warmly welcomed Shakarim into their society. To his surprise and delight, among the
new members of this branch of the Geographical Society were two women. One of them was Nazipa Kulzhanova (1887-1934), possessed of remarkable intellectual gifts unusual for that time. To gain a decent education in early twentieth century was an incredible achievement for a young Kazakh woman.

Nazipa Kulzhanova was what you might call a ‘self-made’ woman. She was born into a large family in the northern part of what was then the Turgai region of the Kazakh Steppe. She sought with all her strength to break out of the restricted circle of life, which allowed no freedom for girls to choose their own path. She studied at the Russian-Kazakh school founded by Ibrahim Altynsarin. She went on to attend the Torgai Women’s Gymnasium, graduating with honors and then taking up a teaching post at a high school, which she kept for fourteen years. But Kazakh tradition drew her back to the family home. Betrothed as a child, she had to return to her native aul. As was the custom, the match had already been agreed and even paid for. But, like Enlik, the heroine of Shakarim’s poem, Nazipa was in love with another man, another high school teacher named Nurgali. They became husband and wife. Nazipa would organize regular literary and musical evenings. This experience came in handy later on when she set up a national theater in Semipalatinsk. But in 1902, the couple were forced to leave their homes to escape legal action based on the ancient ways of the Court of Biys. They settled in Semipalatinsk, and began teaching in the newly opened teachers’ seminary. And so from the age of sixteen Nazipa began training future teachers. The smart, energetic, beautiful, and sociable young woman threw herself into public life. Any spouse of Kulzhanova would as a matter of course become a member of the Geographical Society. And their house became a kind of cultural center of the city. Shakarim often stayed with the young couple, whom he considered the living embodiment of his heroes in ‘Enlik and Kebek’ and to this extent the Kulzhanovas formed a part of his own folklore research.
This emergent Kazakh intelligentsia supported the nation’s youth talent. Nazipa and Nurgali Kulzhanova, for example, held a memorial ceremony for Abai in January 1914. A second ceremony was arranged a year later, this time to raise money for charity. Kazakh folk songs were sung in the great poet’s memory. The proceeds went towards training the Kazakh youth in the best universities of Russia. Thanks to Kulzhanova dozens of Kazakh boys and girls were able to go to school in St. Petersburg, Omsk, and Kazan. But the Kulzhanovas would never have children. In 1919, Nurgali Kulzhanov, a former collegiate secretary, Commander of the Order of St. Stanislaus in the third degree, was shot dead by the Whites, who suspected him of Bolshevik sympathies. Shocked by what had happened, Nazipa moved to Akmola. On the recommendation of Seifulin she took a job at a newspaper, and became one of the first Kazakh women journalists. In 1929 the Bolsheviks declared Nurgali Kulzhanov an enemy of the people. Ultimately left without material support, Nazipa contracted tuberculosis and died in Almaty in 1934.

Shakarim’s entry into the Geographical Society had another important effect on his life. He gained access to its scientific library. He knew that the public library was not the only one in town. The second was at the Semipalatinsk Oblast Statistics Committee. Though housing fewer books, this library contained a great collection of books and journals dedicated to contemporary academic research. Shakarim spent many hours in that library, studying Russian academic journals. Among them was the journal *Living Antiquity*, published from 1891 to 1916 in St. Petersburg’s Ethnographic Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. It regularly published articles on the history and ethnography of the various peoples that made up the Russian Empire. This included the works of famous turkologists Radloff, Aristova, Levshina, and Berezina, whom Shakarim cited most frequently in his *Genealogy*. His own research on the history of the Turkic peoples took into account lesser-known researchers like Spassky, Majewski, Balkashin, Galkina.
CHAPTER 3
PREDICTIONS AND PREMONITIONS

Year of the Black Death

“Again the mountain closes in! again the specter of death before me! That singular joy of my life, just starting to blossom, is already withering away; and is the crutch of my weary heart now really broken? And when the fruits of his father’s upbringing had just started to ripen, and before he had chance to achieve anything, was Magash to simply disappear?”


The year 1904 arrived. Abai’s son Maguiya (Magash) became very sick. His condition rapidly deteriorated. He had picked up tuberculosis in 1884, when at the age of 14 he entered the Semipalatinsk Kyrgyz School for Boys, the only official school in the city. He was graded as “outstanding” in all his subjects at school, but in his third year became tortured by a terrible cough. The doctor diagnosed him with tuberculosis and advised him to go back to the aul to rest. Abai took his son home. Magauia died at the age of 34 on 26 May 1904, as the auls prepared to move on to their zhailjau after a difficult winter. It was then on the fortieth day after the memorial service for his son that Abai Kunanbaev, philosopher, inspired poet, and the very standard of wisdom for the Kazakh nation, died on 6 July. He was 59 years old. His name and his image became a symbol of the spiritual and material wealth of Kazakh nobility. He met with appreciation and respect well beyond his own inner circle.

The officials in Semipalatinsk maintained a very positive attitude towards Abai. In a report by the Uezd Chief Navrotsky, filed by one Galkin, military governor of the Semipalatinsk region on 25 August 1903 we read the following: “The service of Kunanbaev in the Uezd Office is distinguished by well-reasoned execution and energy, utter devotion to
the government and complete lack of bigotry. One of Kunanbaev’s sons died after completing a course at the Mikhailovsky Artillery College, where he was promoted to the rank of officer and served in the Turkestan district. His now married daughter also completed a course in the University of Kyrgyz Sciences, and all of his other children can read and write in Russian. This they have been taught by their father. Kunanbaev writes books, and in newspapers and magazines, and takes great interest in Russian literature. In earlier times Kunanbaev enjoyed tremendous influence among the Kyrgyz, and was repeatedly elected as an Uezd Biy for Semipalatinsk and neighboring uezds, which is to say he was a mediator in disputes around the Uezd. This post is considered the highest honor among the Kyrgyz and places great trust in the integrity of the elected judges. In the long-term, Kunanbaev’s influence has waned. It is not what it was before, he has aged, grown tired and no longer involves himself in local disputes. He lives quietly to himself, and is passive and extremely cautious in matters that are not personal to him. He does not presume to ingratiate himself in the official matters of his own and other neighboring settlements, though party leaders will often turn to him for advice. I have never met a man so clever in my political career. And he is no fanatic either. He was a loyal ally in our dealings with the local Muslim leaders. One detected in conversation with Kunanbaev a full understanding of what lay in the public interest and held the correct view of Russia’s mission in its Asian territories, which after all was to their own benefit, and he indignantly condemned all attempts by Muslim fanatics to oppose the government in its endeavors. But generally speaking, Kunanbaev did not inspire fear among his contemporaries in the political sense.

The Russian officials could not appreciate Abai as a poet, which is understandable. They did not know his poetry, as translations of his poems in the Russian language did not exist, and the Kazakh language was unknown to the majority of them. But the above description of Abai is characteristic of the impression he left on others, and it is more or less accurate. In common with Navrotsky, Shakarim had himself
noted with no little anxiety and regret that Abai had lately slowed down. He did not exhibit the same fantastic level of activity. And this had put a certain pressure on the fragile way of life in Chingis-Tau. Abai was no revolutionary. Quite the contrary. He always sought to be a law-abiding citizen. But at that, he always strove to work for the best interests of the people and as such wielded great influence over them. He was respected among the Russian administration. But at the same time he was viewed as representative of a particular period in history, and one that would pass. He believed that the Kazakhs should seek self-governance and that in order to do this they needed to develop their own education system, to pass some critical stage in their cultural development. This for him was the most urgent problem facing the Kazakh people. For the good of the people, Abai entreated pillars of Kazakh society to work with him in building up this education system. At the same time, he was inevitably caught up in parochial squabbles over status and rank. And perhaps he would have preferred to have turned away from these archaic titles altogether, but this was simply not possible. His writing was an outlet for the enlightened sensibilities he wished to convey to the people, and he wrote bitterly of the illiteracy, laziness, indolence and avarice of the Kazakhs, which held them back from self-governance. And he wished to set them on the path to truth.

Shakarim wrote an epitaph for Abai some time after his passing. It does not appear on the poet’s gravestone, but rather in Shakarim’s Genealogy. In this epitaph he described his uncle as a connoisseur of Muslim and Russian knowledge, a man of rare intellect and talent. He praised him as an inspiration as an educator, a poet and philosopher. He also stated that Abai had “lived in sorrow among ignorant people,” emphasising that his life’s mission had not been completed within his own lifetime. After the death of his uncle he could not think seriously of other things. He put aside his working translation of Dubrovsky for a time, and the Genealogy. He could not even bring himself to read the stories of Tolstoy which lay before him in his collected Russian magazines. Instead he expressed his grief in new
poetry, expressing an acute sense of loss by the teacher-prophet, in whose immortality he had sincerely and naively believed. Shakarim began a cycle of poems, a collection of fourteen pieces all written at different times. These subsequently became part of the collection *Mirror of the Kazakhs* united under the thought-provoking title: *What I Told Myself When Abai Departed*.

Abai’s funeral was held in late June at Zhidebai. To Shakarim’s credit it was very well organised. But he did attract some criticism from the Semipalatinsk mullahs. Having authored *Canons of Islam* Shakarim knew very well the Islamic norms for this sort of occasion. However, various elements of the service offended them. Shakarim tried to reason with the clergy. There were readings of Abai’s poetry, and passages from Tolstoy. But the visiting scholars condemned the poetry reading as contrary to the norms of Islam, while Tolstoy was called *kafir* (an infidel). The sensitive Shakarim refused to get drawn into this debate. He knew from his Russian journals that in 1901 the Holy Synod had announced the excommunication of Tolstoy from the Church. But he had his own views on this. And in any case, the most inappropriate thing of all was to debate in this crass fashion in the course of a funeral service.

Shakarim found a kind of welcome solace in writing poetry. But he was also haunted by the promise he had given Abai, that he would travel in search of knowledge to Istanbul, Mecca, and Alexandria. In deep thought Shakarim appealed to the Koran, as ever his constant source of spiritual guidance. Nothing could shake Shakarim’s faith in Allah and the sacred power of knowledge, not even the obscene speeches of the local Pharisees who distorted the Islamic faith beyond recognition. In an effort to fulfill Abai’s spiritual covenant, Shakarim immediately resolved to perform the Hajj to Mecca, and go to the library of the great Levantine cities! He had to see other people, to understand the world, to expand the horizons of his knowledge – this was what was missing from his soul, languishing within the narrow realm of familiar people and places as he had for so long. And that autumn he undertook the Hajj.
Alikhan Bukeikhanov

News came in May 1905 that Alikhan Bukeikhanov would like to meet with the relatives of Abai in Semipalatinsk to discuss the publication of a book of his poetry. At this meeting, Bukeikhanov urged Shakarim to edit and systematize Abai’s collected poetic works so that they might form a comprehensive record of his literary heritage. And when he made this request of Shakarim, the young poet was only too glad to help. This would be an opportunity to keep the memory of the great man alive.

Alikhan Bukeikhanov (1866-1937), a descendant of the famous Khan Bukei, founder of the Bukeiev Horde, was born in the Karkaralinsk Uezd of the Semipalatinsk Oblast. In 1877, his father sent him to the madrassah in Karkaralinsk. He then spent seven years at the primary school and then at a vocational school in the city, where he learned the craft of a master shoemaker. In 1886 he went to study in Omsk, in a technical school. In Omsk he began working at the Akmola Gazette newspaper and its subsidiary Dala Ualayaty. During 1889 the young author published more than 18 pieces in both Kazakh and Russian which bore the spirit of Abai and Shakarim. In his prose, he subjected what he saw as the major flaws of Kazakh society to ruthless criticism—the incompetence of the city authorities, the ignorance of the mullahs, the greed of the Bais. From 1890, Alikhan studied at the Economics Faculty of the Forestry Institute in St Petersburg. After his graduation he went on to teach at the Omsk Forestry School of Forestry. He later passed his exams at the Law Faculty of St Petersburg University and received his law degree. He was elected a member of the West-Siberian department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society.

An admirer of Abai, Bukeikhanov tirelessly promoted his poetry in print. For example, in 1903 Russia: A Complete Geographical Description of Our Region was published in St Petersburg. Bukeikhanov was among the authors of the eighteen volume work,
focussing on the Kazakh steppe, having taken part in Sherbina’s scientific expeditions. He wrote the section ‘Distribution of the Population of the Kyrgyz by Territory, Ethnographic Composition, Life and Culture.’ In this section, he took particular note of Abai, praising his work. Alikhan Bukeikhanova may be considered the first biographer of Abai. His article ‘Abai (Ibrahimm) Kunanbaev’ was published in 1905 as an obituary in the newspaper the *Semipalatinsk Leaf*, established in 1902 by the merchant Procopius Pleshecheev in his own print shop. In 1907, the article was reprinted with a portrait of Abai that had already been used in the journal *Notes from the Semipalatinsk Branch of the West-Siberian Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society*. This article is in fact what started ‘Abai studies’. A talented writer, and renowned academic, Alikhan Bukeikhanov became in 1905 one of the brightest political figures of the era. And the spiritual reformism of Abai played an important role in Bukeikhanov’s determination to enter into public life. He had developed some idea of his views through an acquaintance with the man’s poetry. But it was his meeting with Shakarim and Abai’s son and other nephew Turagul and Kakitai that truly opened up to him the poetic and philosophical world of the great man.
Assembling Abai’s Poetry

The real revelation for Alikhan was Abai’s Book of Words, which Shakarim had noted down in his own separate notebook. There was never any plan to publish Abai’s prose until this point. But Shakarim believed that it was a necessary part of Abai’s creative development that gave context to his other works. And Alikhan could not tear himself away from reading it. Enthusiastically, he read aloud (from ‘Word 28’): “Any rational person should know that the duty of the believer is to do good. Good deeds cannot shrink from testing the intelligence. If you do not give freedom to the mind, then how will you live in truth? If any flaw is found in our religion, then how should we prohibit reasonable people from thinking about it? On what should we base our religion, if not on reason? What can be good, what can be done, without faith? No, you must understand and believe that good and evil are both created by God, but it is not him that performs good or evil deeds. God created wealth and poverty, but it is not him that makes people rich or poor. God created disease, but it is not him that causes people to suffer from them. Otherwise, all would be ashes.”

In the end, they decided to group the writings together into seventeen topics, “On The People”, “On Versification”, “On The Self”, “On Love”, “Thoughts” and others. And then individual sections were given to the translations of the poems ‘Masgut’ and ‘Iskander’. The idea was that in this way readers would more easily grasp the poetics of Abai. Like a true journalist, back in Omsk Bukeikhanov made the announcement in the Semipalatinsk Leaf that “The original works of Abai and his translations into Kazakh of Pushkin (an excerpt from ‘Eugene Onegin’), Lermontov, and Krylov, have been made into a collection by his son Turagula and will in a short time be published by the Semipalatinsk Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, edited by A N Bukeikhanov.” Alikhan was optimistic, as often happens when life’s circumstances change this way.
The “short time” dragged on for a good three and a half years. And that was how it happened. Upon his return to Chingis-Tau, Shakarim sat down with Abai’s poetry. He grouped the poems according to the specified sections, compiling them together into the final version of the book. Kakitai wrote up a brief biography of Abai for the book.

In mid-July Kakitai left Semipalatinsk with the finished manuscript of Abai’s works and set off for Omsk, where he delivered it to Bukeikhanov. He lived with Bukeikhanov in Omsk a few weeks and together they enjoyed reading the works of Abai, Pushkin, and Lermontov. In the course of this exercise it became clear that printing Kazakh language books in the Arabic script was not going to be easy. There were not adequate printing facilities in Omsk. And this was why Kakitai had had to make the journey from Semipalatinsk. After delivering the manuscript, he returned to Chingis-Tau. And Shakarim turned once more to the literary exercises of his youth, rereading all the works of Tolstoy he could find in his private library, wondering which of the great writer’s stories he should translate first into Kazakh.
The Karkaralinsk Petition

Around this time, Alikhan Bukeikhanov managed to get over to Karkaralinsk for the Koyandinsky fair on a very important matter. There had been a popular campaign pursued by several Kazakh public figures, inspired by the first Russian revolution of 1905. Among them, along with Bukeikhanov were the teacher Akhmet Baitursynov, aspiring journalist Mirzhakyp Dulatov, lawyer Zhakyp Akbaev, and the engineer Mukhamedzhan Tynyspaev. Petitions were taken on behalf of the people in Karkaralinsk, Semipalatinsk, Petropavlovsk, and Uralsk and sent to St Petersburg and to Omsk, center of the Steppe governor-general in the city in the name of military governors and Uezd Chiefs. There were many petitions, but the most famous, and arguably the most important for its content, was the Karkaralinsk petition, delivered on 25 June 1905 to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire Sergei Yulyevich Witte. Bukeikhanov and his comrades managed to collect the signatures of some 12,767 Kazakhs for their petition, an impressive turnout for that time.

The Karkaralinsk petition read as follows: “When all of Russia speaks of the need to completely rebuild itself, the Kyrgyz Steppe, joined to Russia by fate, cannot remain indifferent to the events it has lived through, nor keep quiet about its urgent needs.” The drafters of the petition pointed to the reasons for the plight of the Kazakh people: “[...] the introduction into the country of the “Steppe situation” created in a bureaucratic manner without any consideration to the true needs of the population, the disrespect shown for the law by the administration, which took upon itself to replace the law wholesale, with complete disregard for their spiritual and economic interests [...]” And they suggested introducing local government, changing the judicial system and public education, they demanded freedom of conscience and religion, the opening of printing presses, publication of newspapers, and the adoption of new laws. Most importantly, they demanded “recognition of lands occupied by Kazakhs and their private property.”
In October 1905 Bukeikhanov became leader of the Akmola Oblast and Omsk city committees of the People’s Freedom Party, otherwise known as the Constitutional Democratic Party (or Cadet Party). This was a new party, but in a short time it became the largest and most popular Russian opposition organization. Bukeikhanov believed that the goals and objectives of the Cadets perfectly matched the aspirations of the Kazakhs. The Cadets stood for “the inviolability of the individual, the equality of all citizens irrespective of their nationality, religion, sex or class, and personal freedoms; the introduction of a universal, equal vote by secret ballot, without distinction of sex, both in local and national government; a fully legislated resolution to land reform and a review of the national justice system.” Bukeikhanov well understood that it would neither be possible nor desirable to return to the old social order with a Khan ruling over the people. But he was convinced that the Kazakhs could participate in government.
The Printing of Abai’s Collected Works

It was on 8 January 1906, when Shakarim had long since set out on the Hajj, that Bukeikhanov was taken into custody on his way from Pavlodar to Semipalatinsk, where he had been due to take part in a meeting of the Cadets. He was officially detained in Pavlodar prison as ‘head of a Kyrgyz political movement’ The authorities seized various papers in his possession, including the manuscript containing the collected poems of Abai. Alikhan recounts that from his prison cell he would read for hours each day to the soldiers on guard from the works of Pushkin, Lermontov and Shakespeare, recalling what a great impression Shakespeare’s Coriolanus made on them. He was finally released in late May of the same year, when Shakarim had returned from the Hajj. The police returned the Abai manuscript, and the threat of its disappearance was over.

Alikhan immediately telegraphed Kakitai to tell him to get to Omsk. And so Kakitai made another trip, which attracted the attention of the authorities in many cities and villages across the vastness of Russia. Omsk abandoned the printing obligations, hearing that Bukeikhanov was being monitored by the police. On the advice of Kakitai, Alikhan went with the manuscript of Abai’s poems to Kazan. “Go to Kazan,” reads the brief telegram from Kakitai in Chingis-Tau, “Failed to print book in Omsk.” A week later another telegram came: “Kazan printers never printed books. I will go to St Petersburg. Send 200 rubles.” The two hundred rubles were sent. With the money in his pocket Kakitai travelled by train to St Petersburg via Moscow. And as soon as he reached the Empire’s northern capital he met with Alikhan Bukeikhanov where they signed a contract with the private Boragansky printers for the publication of their collection of Abai’s poems.

A native of Crimea, Ilyas Boragansky learned the printing business in Istanbul, and in 1882 he founded the first printing press for Islamic books in Arabic, Turkish and Persian in St Petersburg. Kakitai agreed to a set of terms with the printer and arranged that the proofs should be
sent to Semipalatinsk for editing. In September 1906 Kakitai returned to Chingis-Tau. Six months later a man named Modabaev travelled to deliver to him the first set of proofs, a series of large printed sheets. After making his corrections, Kakitai had the proofs sent back to St Petersburg. This process of back and forth continued over a period of two years, as the proofs crossed from Russia across the expanses of the Kazakh Steppe, between Kakitai in Chingis-Tau and the printers in St Petersburg. The day finally came in 1909 when the very first collection of Abai’s poetry was published. On its title page was the following inscription:

“The Verses of the Kazakh Akyn, Ibrahim Kunanbaev.
Published by Kakitai and Turagul Kunanbaev
SPb. I Boragansky’s Eastern Electronic Printing Press, 1909”

One thousand copies arrived in Semipalatinsk at the address of Moldabaev. This was a considerable quantity in those days. Two hundred of the books were immediately sent to Abai’s native Chingis-Tau, and the rest went on sale. After reading the title of the book, Shakarim sensed an emotion he had never experienced until then. Never before had he held in his hands a book by an author related to him by blood, by spiritual and biographical ties. And sweetly and sadly he held the book in his hands. As he turned the pages, the smell of past years’ sadness wafted to his nostrils. The book was subtle, like the great man’s soul, standing like a house of memory among the ruins of the world. Each poem seemed to hold within it the history of his family, and that of the entire nation.
State Duma Elections

Going back a couple of years, in early February 1907 elections were to be held in Semipalatinsk on the Second State Duma. As an elected member of the Chingis-Tau Uezd, Shakarim was required to participate in the meeting. And without the influence of Alikhan Bukeikhanov, representatives of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Committee of the People’s Freedom Party unexpectedly nominated Shakarim Kudaiberdiev to the State Duma. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when Shakarim joined the Cadets Party (indeed he may never have joined at all). Standing up on the podium, he quite abruptly announced that he would not be taking up this offer, though he thanked the party for granting him the honour of a nomination.

Shakarim had pledged to serve the people through his poetry, imbuing it with lofty thoughts, and dedicating his life to the welfare of the people. He had a good knowledge of Russian. He had traveled to Russia, made a pilgrimage to Mecca. He was aware of the problems in Kazakh society. And it is therefore understandable that he should be nominated to the State Duma, where he could hope to actively work for the good of that society. So why then would he immediately reject this enticing prospect? What fears pushed him from participating in the political life of the people? There could only be one reason, and that was time. Time he could otherwise dedicate to his own literary works.

In the summer of 1908, Shakarim visited Alikhan Bukeikhanov in prison in Semipalatinsk, where he was once more being held on account of political activities. In a 1915 article for the Kazakh newspaper, Bukeikhanov recalled, “When I was serving a prison sentence in Semipalatinsk in 1908, Shakarim, Kakitaï and Turagul would come to the city specially to visit me. I enjoyed the times they spent with me […] Oh, but the other Kazakhs did not make it…” Indeed, Alikhan regretted that no one but Shakarim and his brothers would come to see him in prison. Principally, of course, he was sorry for the fear
the people had of the authorities, and the resulting lack of support for his own political ideas among the masses. This factor would take on a particular importance later on, when in 1919 Bukeikhanov’s government of Alash-Orda found itself isolated, a defining moment in Kazakh history.
Dubrovsky and other works

After returning from Mecca, Shakarim finalized his translation of *Dubrovsky*. His poetic translation had turned out beautifully, as fluent as Pushkin’s original, which of course was written in verse rather than prose, just like ‘Eugene Onegin’. And all Shakarim really wanted to do was to convey the genius of Slavic literature into the Kazakh language. The idea of translating *Dubrovsky* had come to him some ten years earlier, in 1903. He would start a section and then leave it alone a while, coming back to it in fits and starts. And it is not hard to understand why he took so much time over this particular translation. One of the most valuable things he acquired along the way was a new perception of the Russian language, Russian culture, Russian life, all of which made itself known to him in vivid sensations he experienced on his voyage through Russia as he travelled to Mecca. Perhaps these impressions were in part attributable to the nature of the road, the opportunity for him to escape his own national identity. But either way what he saw and experienced gave him a lot to reflect on.

As inevitably happens, travelling clarifies our perception of the world. Shakarim’s imagination of Russia had previously been based not on the Russian officials, the merchants and military men living in Semipalatinsk, but on the colourful descriptions of Russian life in the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Nekrasov, Saltykov-Schedrin and Tolstoy. In their surroundings they had looked for answers to their own peculiar quests for truth and justice. Perhaps these impressions were simplistic, naive, idealistic, based as they were on books. But these were the impressions that fed Shakarim’s dreams and they took a powerful hold over him. The impressions he had were of a vast country, insatiable winter evenings, beautiful golden autumn days, cool summers and expansive forests. This image of Russia carried some inaccessible mystery and painful charm. When he came into contact with the country itself, his ‘literary’ perception
was overturned by the more vivid, more complete version presented him by reality. Here he met a sociable, hospitable people, he felt the peculiar spirit of Russia, the feverish atmospheres of the city, its railway stations, trains. Shakarim longed to get closer to Russia, to satisfy his endless thirst for knowledge.

Shakarim called his own work *The Tale of Dubrovsky*. It was published in Semipalatinsk in 1924 (with some minor changes which came later), though it had long since become popular among the Kazakh people. The Kazakh *Dubrovsky* had been passed from mouth to mouth like the stories of old across the nomadic society. Ideologically, the story is based on the conflict between two opposing forces—the landowner tyrant Troyekurov, and the ‘noble’ thief Vladimir, son of the elder *Dubrovsky*. It concerns that same poetics of mystery found in Shakarim’s earlier work, and the familiar theme of the impossibility of happiness between two lovers, forbidden from being married. This appealed to Kazakh readers. And Shakarim had thus set a kind of cultural precedent, a cultural dialogue between Russia and Kazakhstan.

Though they were not all published, Shakarim is said to have translated three of Tolstoy’s works. Two of them, ‘Esarhaddon, King of Assyria’, and ‘Three Questions’ were short stories both written by Tolstoy in 1903. Tolstoy himself explained that the idea of writing a tale about the king Esarhaddon was not his own, but had been taken from another tale by an unknown German author published under the title ‘Das Bist Du’ He would later complain in a letter to his friend the publisher Chertkov that both of these stories were no good, and that he would have to get rid of them. Shakarim clearly thought otherwise.

The third story was a known historical parable about King Croesus. Shakarim rewrote the story in verse, giving him the name ‘King Kriz’. The manuscript is inscribed with the words “from Tolstoy” though we know that Tolstoy never wrote any such story. Anyway Shakarim published all three along with three Chinese legends taken
from the ‘Hundred Oriental Tales’ (as they are so called in his manuscript), and gave to this collection the title ‘Six Stories’. During his own lifetime, Shakarim’s manuscripts never saw the light of day but were later published by his son, Akhat, and ‘Six Stories’ did not come out until 1988.
Correspondence with Tolstoy

In the years 1907-1909 Shakarim began really delving into Tolstoy’s moral principles, adopting them as his own. It seemed to him that in his conception of moral self-improvement Tolstoy really saw the light of truth. Shakarim’s own journey started with reading Tolstoy’s treatise ‘What is Art?’ “There is nothing older or more banal than pleasure, and there is nothing more novel than the feelings that arise in the religious consciousness of a particular time,” Tolstoy wrote. And Shakarim would warn his relatives many times to refrain from evil pleasures. In common with Tolstoy, he believed that it was only through religion and spirituality that one could attain a comprehension of the secret movements of the human soul. In Tolstoy Shakarim saw something more than a writer, but a religious teacher who taught that the foundation of all true art is religious consciousness, not the dogmatism and hypocrisy that existed in their own societies.

One night in May 1909, by the light of an oil lamp, Shakarim sat down to write a letter to Tolstoy. He knew that he had to do this. He had to share his thoughts on art and human morality. And as he began to write, he no longer felt alone in the universe. In this way, the two writers were united by the invisible bonds of spiritual kinship. Yet what Tolstoy wrote to Shakarim in his replies is not known, because among Tolstoy’s own correspondence, since meticulously reconstructed by researchers, there are unfortunately no letters to Shakarim at all.

Yet it is beyond doubt that Shakarim really did have a correspondence with Tolstoy, and the evidence for this comes from his son Akhat. In his memoirs, he refers to discussions with his father on this theme, and there is no reason to doubt their veracity. “When you speak about Tolstoy and his poetry you certainly hold him in high esteem,” Akhat tells his father. “I have always thought highly of Tolstoy,” his father replies. “I asked him three questions, and Tolstoy gave me back three very valuable replies. His replies greatly
excited me and have remained with me since. I compiled a list of all known negative human traits and asked him, ‘which of these traits that we know of can be most harmful to man?’ Tolstoy replied, ‘All of the features you have listed may do harm to the dignity of man. But to my mind there is one thing in particular that may do harm to his honour. If a person cannot speak openly, knowing about such acts that may harm other people around him, that may harm society as a whole, then he is avoiding one of three scenarios. The first is that if he is rich he is afraid of damaging his wealth by something he may say. The second is that if he is an official, he is afraid of losing his rank in the course of upholding justice. The third is if he is threatened with punishment if he speaks the truth.’”

“I also asked him for advice on writing,” says Shakarim in Akhat’s memoirs. Tolstoy’s advice is that, “Whether it is a work with a lot of different characters, or a short story, the writer must always feel as though the actions he describes, the causes and consequences of events, mysteries, societal changes, as though he were directly involved in each of them. The course of events should be as clear as an image projected in a mirror, and deeply felt. Otherwise, the work will be neither persuasive nor interesting. The writer should always bear in mind the saying ‘the coat tailored according to a man’s shadow will never fit comfortably’” An essay written from the outside, without penetrating the inside, will never come close to the truth and nor will it be interesting.”

“Our writers, myself included,” Shakarim wrote back, “are unable to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of their own works. How should we identify and correct these weaknesses?”

And Tolstoy replied, “The mark of a good writer is his ability to see the flaws in his own work and to fix them. Not everyone possesses this quality. There is a saying: ‘The errors of others are obvious. But the best thing of all is when a person spots these himself and corrects his own mistakes. And it is in the nature of such a person to have to correct his own mistakes. It means having a crystal clear heart.
If a person can assess his every act or written word with a clear heart, then he has mastered the subtle art of revealing the truth. The results of all his thought processes must pass through the sieve of the heart. The person who has developed the ability to trust the echoes of his heart will always see his own and other people’s shortcomings. Therefore, the fairest critic is the one with a pure heart.”

Endowed with such inspirational advice, Shakarim considered Tolstoy a great teacher. If there seems to be a discrepancy between the style of the words related above and that of the great Russian author, then clearly we can attribute this to the fact that the only recording we have is that related to Akhat by his father in conversation, and later written down by the son. It has been transferred from written Russian to spoken Kazakh, and then to written Kazakh and back to written Russian before being translated into English in the form you see above. Ultimately, though, the true nature of the correspondence between Shakarim and Tolstoy remains one of those great mysteries of academic research.
The Division of Land

In the summer of 1909 another innovation of the Russian administration shook the steppe. The authorities decided to allocate to the Kazakhs fifteen acres of land each for cultivation. The aim was clear to force the nomadic herders into adopting a sedentary agricultural way of life. But the project was not easy to achieve.

By that time, the resettlement of the Russian peasants across the far reaches of the Russian Empire already meant that there were plenty of them occupying areas of the Kazakh Steppe. The aim of the Tsarist administration in resettling the peasants was to solve the land problem at the heart of the Russian territory. This resettlement took place alongside a mass withdrawal and reallocation of the Kazakh population as the administration sought the most fertile lands for cultivation. From 1906-1912 alone, more than 17 million acres or land were seized in this way. The new settlers began to appear in Chingis-Tau. By the river Karaul near Zhidebai, for example, a Russian settlement of twenty houses sprang up.

On 9 June 1909, the land management authority passed a law defining two independent standards for the Kazakh Steppe. Resettlers would get 15 tithes, and nomads 12. But in order to encourage the transition of the nomads to a sedentary way of life, the Kazakhs were offered the same quotient as the resettlers with the ‘inalienable right to permanent ownership of land’. The problem with this was that the nomadic herders required disproportionately more. So the deal was no good for them. But from this point in time, they were stuck with the 15 tithes.

Shakarim and Kakitai wrote to Alikhan Bukeikhanov on this issue, knowing that he was knowledgeable on legal and political matters. Asking his advice, they wrote, “By giving up our ancestral lands along the Karaul river to the Russian peasants, we have cut our umbilical cord. They say the Russians will leave if we agree to take 15 tithes of land. Should we take it or not?” Alikhan wrote back,
“They are relying on you the descendants of Kunanbai in the Tobykti tribe like a stick in front of the camel’s nose which they intend to use to mollify the people. Whatever happens, stay with the people. Even if someone else should agree to these 15 tithes, you must not. If the Kazakhs see that the descendants of Kunanbai have agreed to these 15 tithes, they will all become slaves to their 15 tithes and it will destroy our pastoral way of life.”

Of course, Shakarim and Kakitai were worried for the future economic security of the Tobykti tribe, but followed Bukeikhanov in what became a highly significant act. Their refusal to accept the deal for 15 tithes became a symbol for the Kazakh cause. Bukeikhanov wrote in the Kazakh newspaper that “The descendants of Kunanbai have in turning down the offer of 15 tithes refused to change their allegiances, losing their native Karaul in doing so, believing that we must all think first of the people. I have never before seen such a courageous political act among our Kazakh leaders.” These administrative innovations were an open threat to the traditional lifestyle of the Kazakh people. This wilful invasion onto the Kazakh Steppe would not only mean a change to their farming methods but carried profound cultural, historical, moral and psychological implications too.

In 1911, The Genealogy of the Turkic Peoples, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Khan Dynasties and Canons of Islam were published in Orenburg as separate books, funded from the author’s own private resources. 1000 copies of Genealogy were printed, and 500 copies of Canons. Shakarim kept half of these to give away to friends and family, and the other half he put on sale in shops in Semipalatinsk. This was the first time Shakarim’s work saw the light of day. And it was met with critical acclaim.

In 1912 the first printing press in Semipalatinsk was established under the name ‘Yardam’ (the Tartar word for ‘Help’). And so from this point on there was no longer any need to travel to Orenburg to have books printed. That Spring, Shakarim’s poems ‘Kalkaman and Mamyr’ and ‘Enlik and Kebek’ and his collection Mirror of the
Kazakhs were published. 1000 copies of each. Indeed, Shakarim was perhaps the most prolific Kazakh author at that time. And all of these copies he gave away for free. Aligning himself with the ethics of his hero Leo Tolstoy, he did not wish to receive an income from the sale of his literary works. Included among the collection Mirror of the Kazakhs were fourteen poems devoted to Abai. Almost all of them were written immediately after the death of his great teacher. These were the works Shakarim grouped together under the shared title What I Told Myself When Abai Departed. Shakarim felt that it was time to depart on a long-planned move of his own, away from the madding crowd. He had in mind the kind of hermitage Tolstoy wrote of. But at this time the Steppe offered no such thing as a monastic life. He would have to invent it himself.
Hermitage

The Steppe seems the perfect retreat for the spiritual traveller, with its vast deserted expanses. And it is perhaps surprising that someone like Shakarim, or anyone else in Chingis-Tau, did not regularly practice spiritual seclusion as a means of purification, transformation and healing. The lack of such a tradition can be explained by the fact that neither Islam nor the ancient Turkic religion that preached faith in the god Tengri required the construction of monasteries. There are of course parallels between nomadism and the life of the hermit, and Shakarim enjoyed wandering across the vastness of the Steppe. And now he felt summoned by a calling from God, towards solitude, towards truth.

With a determination few are capable of, he announced to his family in the summer of 1912 that he would build a house for himself on the zhailjau at Chingis-Tau and live in solitude summer and winter, away from the people, so that he could dedicate himself to his work. The frightened family members questioned why he should want to go off to a remote wilderness when they had already worked to establish an environment of education and learning in the family home. If it was some particular obstacle he needed to get away from, he should tell them and they would get rid of it. Running away from the people and putting his own life in danger at that would not solve anything. In winter there would not be another soul around, and it would be impossible for him to get back.

Shakarim was unmoved. He knew that if he tried to explain himself fully he would only worry and confuse his family. He promised that he would visit the aul now and then. He would not in fact be running away, he assured them. He considered the retreat a necessary part of his gaining a deeper understanding of his faith. And of course, the mention of faith was enough to quell the fears of those around him. The Hadji’s authority in religious matters was undisputed. His reference to religious faith persuaded them that this was not merely
the relentless pursuit of freedom of a stubborn and indomitable man, which after all seemed too wild a notion even for Shakarim.

Reflecting, his eldest sons Sufian, Gafur and Kabysh came round to the idea that in honour of the Muslim faith they should not hold back their father, a Hadji, in his desire to comprehend the truth. They had always supported their father in such matters, convinced of his divine wisdom. They looked up to him and saw him as a model of a righteous man. But the other family members were not so easily convinced. Many brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces and so on condemned Shakarim’s actions for a long time. This sort of behaviour was without precedent. And the nomadic way of life was so well established, they were so well accustomed to it, that they could neither stand nor understand any kind of novelty. Over the next several years though, they became accustomed to the hermitage as a rite of passage of great poets, attributing to the hermit Hadji certain miraculous qualities.

Akhat gives the following brief description of Shakarim’s hermitage, which lasted over six years: “In the summer of 1912, my father put up a house at the zhailjau in Ken-Konyas, where he wintered and then remained living for some time. Right up until the snows came, he was joined by a hunter and cook. With the onset of winter, he sent the hunter home and remained alone with the cook. And he immersed himself in books and writing.” Thus began the unprecedented hermitage of a poet upon the Kazakh Steppe. The cook was Aupish, who had been a close friend from a young age. Shakarim’s delight knew no bounds. He was almost completely alone on his beloved, formidable Steppe, a feeling only Kazakhs can relate to. Shakarim retreated into the wilderness to read and to contemplate life’s questions. He read books of Western science and philosophy, pondered the questions of Man’s evolution and his purpose on the earth. And all of these philosophical musings returned him to the question of how Kazakh society should be governed.
CHAPTER 4
REVOLUTION

Hard Times

“Wake up, Kazakh!”
Slogan of the Azamat Union

The time of revolutionary change was drawing inexorably closer. Outbreaks of popular discontent induced the poet to participate himself. When the leaders of the national liberal movement Bukeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov, and Mirzhakyp Dulatov announced the establishment of their new union Azamat (‘Citizen’), Shakarim, Kakitai and Turagul Kunanbaev, Karazhan Ukibaev, Magath and Khasen Akaev all signed up as members. Azamat’s slogan was a call to action: “Wake up, Kazakh!” The slogan was borrowed from the title of Dulatov’s book of poetry published in 1909.

‘Wake up, Kazakh!’ the poetry collection was immediately confiscated, and Mirzhakyp only managed to republish it in 1911. Neither Shakarim nor any of his comrade writers could ignore what was going on at the time in the newspapers. He wrote regularly to the Kazakh newspaper, and the magazine Aikap.

Kazakh published his letter, in which he addressed the significance of the opening of the new newspaper (№ 18 from 1913): “Our people are like a child that sees a new thing, and rushes over to it, immediately discarding the old one. After the publication of Kazakh I see a certain danger, as though our Kazakhs had now discarded the journal Aikap. All Kyrgyz and Kazakhs buy either the journal or the newspaper, but it is not enough you need to buy both to get the whole picture. We don’t have to increase the volume, the main thing...
is that both are bought and read by more people. I believe there is
now no need to produce more. The position of the readers has been
made clear.”

Shakarim himself would contribute serious works to both publica-
tions. One article stands out in particular, from *Kazakh* (№65 from
8 June 1914) ‘On Courts and Judges’. Drawing on his own wealth of
experience from his time as a judge, a biy, Shakarim wrote: “Though
we may not talk about it, all Kazakhs know how unacceptable it is to
have Russian judges involved in disputes between Kazakhs. Kazakh
cannot normally raise the legal funds for these kinds of court cases,
and in addition would be forced to go against their traditional customs,
and this will result in a great many problems, causing untold damage
to our people. The Kazakh Court of Biys is something that has been
developed over a long time, formed along the course a well trodden
path. That path has darkened over time, and is now largely forgotten.
The main reason for this is the introduction of Russian laws into the
Kazakh legal system. Elections are now governed by stricter laws, for
example, but we have also seen an increase in bribes and a system
where biys will work for the highest bidder. Another reason is that
our ancient code of laws was never recorded in writing. Yet much
of that code is still applicable to contemporary life. If we look back
through the old laws and simply adapt them to suit the requirements
of modern life we may have something. Even the younger generation
may find sage words from the experts of the older generation if they
look hard enough.”

It is worthy of note that the Kazakh thinker and scholar Chokan
Valikhanov wrote something very similar fifty years earlier, in 1864,
in his own work *Notes on Judicial Reform*, where he stated that the
lives of the people living on the Steppe should be governed as they
always had by the Court of Biys and the long established traditions
of the people. The preservation of the Court of Biys was important to
both Valikhanov and Shakarim. The main advantage of this system,
according to Valikhanov, was that it was based on respect towards
an authority – the biy – instead of the official formalities and routine of the Russian system, which did not suit the mindset of the Steppe people. Most important of all, perhaps, was that the Court of Biys represented the people’s own self-development, self-management, self-protection – the people knew best how to govern themselves.

Valikhanov worked tirelessly on this cause. No one was going to abolish the new laws, but on Valikhanov’s advice, the biys remained in place. In fact, the number of biys increased over the following years. The Imperial Governor-General at that time was Alexander Dyugamel, who was a moderate and did not believe that radical change to the current system would be for the best. Moreover, other of Valikhanov’s recommendations, on public education and taxation, were largely ignored by the nomadic Kazakhs.

Shakarim concluded his own article in Kazakh as follows: “Part of the old Kazakh code of laws touches on Sharia law. But Sharia law has never been set in stone. It has been influenced and altered in accordance with the times. And the foolish mullahs have since decided that it is set in stone. There are several examples of these ossified Sharia laws we have today, which when we look back to previous times were quite different. For example, Sharia law says about freedom of action: if it is difficult, do not do it, it is better to change.

This was the sort of thing Shakarim was writing about. The issues of the day. The problem of bringing together the traditional patriarchal way of life and the new Russian administration.

He was concerned for the fate of this nascent Kazakh journalism, and contributed lively responses to topical issues discussed in the newspapers and magazines. For example when both Aikap and Kazakh launched a discussion on the threats of religious zealots among the Kazakhs to escalate the situation into a protracted war, the poet responded with a poem, ‘The Journalists of Aikap and Kazakh’. In it Shakarim called for all sides to look at the public interest. It is full of harsh language, sarcasm and irony as the poet dissects the situation.
First World War

The Kazakhs first felt the effects of Russia’s entering into the First World War through an increase in taxes. “Voluntary fees” were imposed on the Kazakh population to push its contribution to the war effort. There were different forms of taxation. In some cases, this meant clothing, livestock and food products. In some uezds, under the guise of assisting the families, conscription was introduced. Kazakhs on the labour force had to plow, sow and harvest in the resettlement villages.

Forced mobilization of transport for delivering bread to the train station became commonplace. Semipalatinsk at the time was a major trade centre for bread. Grain was brought up to the Tomsk province, and carried on steamboats to the western parts of Russia.

The confiscation of land from the people in Kazakhstan continued. The Kazakhs would oppose restrictions on their nomadic way of life that did not comply with the wishes of the aul elders and biys, refusing to pay taxes and duties, even those collected for the war effort. Shakarim heard of cases of Kazakhs stealing horses from the Russian immigrants, and burning bundles of hay. But at this point these were only isolated cases.

He returned to Chingis-Tau deep in thought. The feeling of a coming collapse did not leave the poet. And this only intensified when in the spring of 1915 his cousin Kakitai died. Shakarim loved Kakitai, who was ten years younger than him, but very close in spirit and outlook. Kakitai was an infinitely good soul. He treated every person equally, and with equal compassion, rushing to the aid of family members at the first call. It was for his great tenacity that Kakitai was chosen to transport the manuscripts of Abai’s poems from one Russian city to another, until he finally came to St Petersburg to print the first collection of their teacher and uncle. Another relative may have pulled out along the way and returned home, but Kakitai courageously overcame all imaginable and unimaginable difficulties to achieve these ends.

117 • • • • • •
Grieving over the death of his cousin, Shakarim wrote poems, one by one, as if anticipating the apocalyptic upheavals of the coming years. It was no coincidence that at that time he was still bleeding from the pain of loss. He predicted a hard life for his relatives, as can be seen from the poem ‘The Still Unhappy Kazakh’. We may say that Shakarim’s compassionate attitude towards the Kazakhs was in his blood. He absorbed the kindness and mercy his parents showed towards their own children.

Shakarim had believed that the Kazakhs could be spineless and inactive. He was concerned that living without a batyr, a leader, the people might be hopeless. Yet to a great extent he was wrong. During the war, foreign businessmen exploited the disempowered workers, reducing their wages while food prices steadily increased. As a result, in June 1915 the workers, including Kazakhs, went on strike at the Ekibastuz and Karaganda mines, and the Spassky mining plant. In the summer of 1916 the workers’ movement swept the Riddersk mines, the oil fields at Emba and Ekibastuz, the Baikonur coal mines, Spassky and Orenburg copper mines and Tashkent railways.

These events were what led to the unprecedented Kazakh uprising of 1916. The immediate reason for the uprising was a Royal decree on 25 June 1916 on the conscription into the army of all members of the male population of nomadic Kazakhs from Central Asia and parts of Siberia aged 19 to 43 years. Kazakhs were not recruited to the front as before, but the plan now was to use them to build defensive structures and means of military communications within the army.
Revolt

In early July, spontaneous demonstrations erupted in almost all regions of the Steppe, and this soon grew into an armed uprising. Kazakhs began raiding offices of the biys, and the aul elders. Some of the local nomadic authorities came out in support of the Royal decree, as biys, imams, mullahs, accountants in small credit institutions, students in higher and secondary educational institutions, and officials of government agencies were made exempt from conscription.

There were those in Alash who tried to appeal to the Kazakh people, calling on them not to resist the decree. But the people did not listen to the voices of their educated leaders. The uprising spread throughout the Kazakh Steppe. In Semipalatinsk Oblast, the armed resistance was not so violent as in other areas. By late October, the Tsar’s troops had crushed the rebels in that area, though some fighting continued, mainly amid the industrial enterprises of Semipalatinsk, where the workers were on strike.

The biggest demonstrations were in Turgai and Semirechye. The people of the Kazakh Steppe joined together in teams, armed with pikes and hunting rifles. On 17 July martial law was declared in these parts. The rebellion in Semirechye was described in Mukhtar Auezov’s famous story The Wild Years (1928). To crush the rebellion, 95 squadrons were sent into Semirechye, comprising 8750 bayonets, 24 sotnia comprising 3900 sabers, 16 guns and 47 machine guns. Pursued by the Tsarist forces 300,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, or one fourth of the indigenous inhabitants of Semirechye, were forced to flee to China.

Meanwhile, the uprising in the Turgai Steppe was growing every day. The revolt was organised by Amangeldy Imanov and Alibi Dzhangildin. The number of rebel forces at the peak of the uprising was about fifty thousand people. Amangeldy Imanov (1873-1919) managed to create an efficient military structure. The rebels besieged the city of Turgai, and attacked the Royal retaliatory forces...
on the Steppe. In November 1916 troops moved on to Betpakkara and remained there until February carrying out guerrilla raids. This is where the February revolution began. Only after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime did the uprising in Turgai Oblast come to an end. We have no accurate information on the victims of the uprising. But there were many. For example, in just one of the verdicts passed by the Governor-General Kuropatkin, commander of the Turkestan Military District, in Turkestan on 1 February 1917, 347 people were sentenced to death, 168 to hard labor, and 129 to imprisonment. And this does not take into account the number of extrajudicial killings.

In other areas, the administration was no less harsh. For example, there is documentary evidence that the military governor of Semirechye, General Folbaum, foreseeing the inevitability of the uprising in northern Kyrgyzstan, sent military troops to mountain passes, blocking the way to China. These well-armed forces did not spare anyone, killing women, children, the elderly, and slaughtering cattle. Virtually all the gorges and passes were covered with the corpses of dead people and animals. About 150,000 people died as a result of hunger and cold in the mountain passes, according to the rough data available.

Manchester Guardian 28 November 1917:

"Beyond the Siberian black earth zone come the steppes of the Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semirech, where live the nomad Kirghiz and many hundred thousands of recently arrived Russian peasants. The late Tsar’s government adopted the policy of settling this dry steppe region with colonists from the Ukraine [...] but this involved ousting the nomad Kirghiz from some of their best grazing lands. This, in fact, was done and the 2,000,000 Kirghiz of these regions were by 1916 reduced to something like half of the territories they possessed ten years ago. When on the top of this the Tsar’s government demanded military service in the rear from the Moslems of Asia the camel’s back broke. The nomad population of Central Asia rose in rebellion in the summer of 1916 and civil war resulted. About 500,000 were massacred, and something like a million fled into the confines of China at
the beginning of the year. While Western Europe has heard about
Armenian massacres, the massacre of Central Asian Moslems by the
Tsar’s agents has been studiously hidden.”

Dominic Lieven in Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals (2000):
“In the decade before 1914, 3 million Slav immigrants poured into
the Kazakh’s region. The so-called Steppe Statute of 1891 had opened
the way to the nomads’ dispossession by allowing the indigenous
population the equivalent of only 40 acres per head, far less than
what was needed to preserve a nomadic way of life. The result was
the native rising of 1916, whose other cause was the regime’s attempt
to conscript Kazakhs for labour service at the front. The rising was
crushed, with over 200,000 Kazakhs killed and many others fleeing
over the border to the more backward Chinese Turkestan, where
colonists were not yet so much of a problem.

The end of the Kazakh uprising and the practice of mobilizing
the Steppe into rear service laid the foundations for the February
Revolution. It came as the result of failures at the front and the
death of millions of soldiers, and the deteriorating living conditions
of ordinary citizens of the Russian Empire. As a result, the revolu-
tionary events of February 1917 split Russian command between the
Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. On 2 March Tsar
Nicholas II abdicated.
February Revolution

Like many Kazakhs, Shakarim genuinely delighted in the overthrow of the Tsar. At first he thought only of the possibility that people could now finally change their lives for the better. All the evil that had kept the Russian administration going for decades, all the immense humiliation the Kazakh people had experienced in the last year, an attempt at genocide, at that moment seemed to be invested with the name of the Tsar. His abdication was therefore a harbinger of freedom and independence for the Kazakh people, no more, no less. Or so the poet wanted to believe. He was at this time in the Steppe near Bakanas in his hermitage at the winter hut in Ken-Konys. Naturally, the optimistic sense of the events could not but be reflected in his poems. His poems from that time, for example ‘In the Morning Arose Freedom’, speak of a “dawn breaking on freedom”, the triumph of light over darkness.

For eight months after the change from an autocratic to a liberal-democratic government life for the Kazakh people went by without any great events, in blissful calm.

Young people in the Tobykti staged a version of the young Mukhtar Auezov’s play ‘Enlik and Kebek’ based on Shakarim’s poem of the same name. Auezov himself directed this production. And it was staged in honour of the wedding of Abai’s granddaughter Akysh. The performers were Abai’s other grandchildren and relatives of the author, and both of the women’s roles were performed by the male zhigit, as in the medieval European tradition. Shakarim knew Auezov from his time training at the Semipalatinsk teachers’ seminary. And despite their long-standing acquaintance, it may be said that this production of ‘Enlik and Kebek’ was what began the creative correspondence between these two prominent artists – young and unworldly Auezov and Shakarim. Both were involved in the historical process, both were members of the revival of national governments and both witnessed the catastrophic collapse of the nomadic way of life.
There is a certain anxiety felt in the second essay of the poet dedicated to the February Revolution. It does not contain the pathos that filled his poem ‘In the Morning Arose Freedom’, nor the appeal for anonymity of ‘The People that see the Sunrise’ In their place came uneasy thoughts. His poem ‘Flying the Flag of Liberty’ conjures up the image of time when rolling water had been outlawed. The ecstasy of optimism is lacking here as the poet speaks of the people as a “poor orphaned child” hoping to “overcome adversity” The recent developments represented enormous changes in the life of Kazakh society, and demanded the participation of the “best sons of the people” in building a new life. And so Shakarim increasingly returned to his native aul at the foot of Chingis-Tau, and remained there a long time, awaiting news from the city. He followed events in Russia closely in the media. And in spite of his undying hope, he felt a growing concern as he began to understand that the steady silence now was just the calm before the storm. The real impact of these events was yet to be felt.
The Dreams and Anguish of Alash-Orda

Political developments from the 1917 revolution were rapid. The interim government that replaced the Tsarist administration after the February Revolution, was slow to carve up national borders, something the diverse peoples of the Empire had been hoping for. It began to seem as though the new regime was not going to solve the national question.

In these circumstances, it was logical for the people to expect that political steps should be taken towards ensuring their independence, or at the very least autonomy within Russia. In March and April 1917 regional congresses of Kazakhs were simultaneously held in different regions of the Kazakh Steppe. And the political demands they put forward were different, sometimes diametrically opposed. For example, the Turgai and Ural conventions were in favor of a Federal Democratic Republic while the Cadets called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The Cadets and Kazakh Liberal Party (Bukeikhanov, Baitursynov, Dulafov), wanted to create an autonomous Kazakh state within Russia (the Alash program). They recognized only cultural autonomy.

Fundamentally speaking out against violence and bloodshed, the members of Alash nevertheless demanded that all land previously taken from the Kazakh people should be returned to them, and that the natives should have a right to the land. The thinking behind this is clear. The loss of grazing land could ultimately lead to the loss of the traditional Kazakh way of farming. Could the government really consider as primitive a method of farming that had fed all of the nomadic people for thousands of years, which is to say nomadic herding? But this debate foreshadowed future confrontation in the political landscape. From 27 April to 7 June 1917 a regional congress was held in Semipalatinsk, with the participation of more than two hundred representatives of the five uezds in the oblast: Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar, Karkarala, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Zaisan Uezds, as well as two representatives from the neighboring Biysk Uezd of Russia.
Shakarim joined the ranks of the Alash movement along with Raimzhan Marskov, Zhakyp Akbaev and Khalel Gabbassov, where he made a speech. Sadly this was not recorded for posterity. Holding regional congresses opened the way to the First All Kazakh Congress. From 21-26 July 1917 Shakarim went to Orenburg.

The most significant result was the creation of the Alash Congress Party. The name “Alash” was something Alikhan Bukeykhanov had come up with long ago. In 1910 in his historical essay ‘The Kazakhs’ he wrote that “Alash was the name of a mythical person” and was the battle cry of the Kazakhs. In his article ‘The history of the Kazakhs’ he gave a more detailed explanation of this: “Jochi Khan was given the name of Alash. The meaning of this is ‘the head of the fatherland’” (Kazakh, №7, 1913). One of the first who responded to the question “What is Alash?” posed by Bukeykhanov in his article ‘Certain Words’ (Kazakh, №12, 1913), was Shakarim. The poet was well aware of the political problems, knew that its leaders aimed to create an autonomous Kazakh state. And he did not reject the idea, though he was not overly enthusiastic about it, which was characteristic of his sensible nature.

After the Orenburg Congress the draft program of the Alash Party was published. Its priorities were declared as follows: universal suffrage, national proportional representation, the creation of a democratic Russian Federal Republic with a president and legislative Duma, autonomy as a part of Russia’s democratic freedoms, the separation of religion and state, and equality of languages. The slogan “Wake up, Kazakh!” Was replaced by the concept of Kazakh autonomy. Thus, the Kazakh intellectuals finally distanced themselves from the Cadet Party, and pledged their support for the Provisional Government.

Regional organization of the Alash Party quickly became established, first in October 1917 in Semipalatinsk, then in Omsk and then in early November in Orenburg. The chairman of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Committee was Khalel Gabbassov. Then
on the evening of 7 November 1917 a blank shot rang out in Petrograd giving the signal for the Bolsheviks to seize the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government of the socialist revolutionary Kerensky was based. This was the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks had seized power in Russia.
The October Revolution

The leaders of the Alash Party had a very negative perception of the October Revolution. Akhmet Baitursynov (1873-1937) wrote in 1919: “As far as the Kazakhs are concerned, the February Revolution was understandable, but the Socialists’ October Revolution was just completely incomprehensible. The first revolution was fully understood and very much welcomed by the Kazakhs, firstly because it freed them from the oppression and violence of the Tsarist government, and secondly because it reignited their hope to realize the cherished dream of self-governance. The reason the second revolution seemed so incomprehensible to the Kazakhs is simple: among the Kazakhs there is no capitalism nor any class differentiation, even their property is not delimited as it is in other nations. The October Revolution struck terror into the hearts of the Kazakhs. On the fringes of the Bolshevik movement were instances of violence, robbery, abuse and its own form of dictatorial authority, in other words at the fringes of this movement we had not a revolution, but total anarchy.

Shakarim expressed the same point of view in his poetry. The events of the revolution occupy a prominent place in his poem ‘Lives of the Forgotten’. Indeed like most of the Kazakhs, Shakarim soon lost interest in the ideals of the October Revolution, but he continued to follow the political events very closely. He drew attention to the fact that there were supporters of the October Revolution among the Kazakhs. It was they that came together to create the Petropavlovsk Ush Juz (‘Three Juz’) Party. The newspaper Sary-Arka (№21, 1817) posted this telegram: “The Kazakhs are not satisfied with the program of the Alash Party, created by A Bukeikhanov and have independently discovered the socialist party Ush Juz. The party was led by Colby Togysov, Mukan Aitpenov, Ishak Kabeckov and others. Ush Juz had about a thousand members, including 200 from Petropavlovsk and 450 from Omsk. The party program was to create a federation. The members of Ush Juz supported the Bolsheviks. In short, the ideological preferences of the Kazakh elite were divided.”
Alash wins seats

In the November 1917 regional elections to the Constituent Assembly Alash won the most votes and 43 parliamentary seats. Ush Juz was the loser in these elections. Overall, out of the number of votes cast in these elections (262,404), Alash ranked eighth among the fifty parties that existed in Russia at that time. The leaders of Alash attached great importance to the forthcoming elections of deputies in the zemstvos first the uezds, then the oblasts. The Zemstvos were elected bodies of local self-government in the Russian Empire and still had great political significance at this point. They were eventually abolished in 1918 by decree of the Soviet government.

Bukeikhanov and Dulanov wrote in Kazakh calling on educated Kazakhs to take an active part in the uezd election in order to take the running of the Zemstvo into their own hands. In Semipalatinsk Oblast the Zemstvo elections were held in November and December 1917. Activity among the Kazakh population was significantly higher than that among Russian citizens. This came as a clear disappointment to some, as Kazakhs indeed gained greater control of the Zemstvo, with more seats than their Russian counterparts.

There was also one woman Nazipa Kulzhanova among the six deputies elected to the Uezd Zemstvo from Semipalatinsk. Among the deputies from the Fifth Circuit, first on the list was “Kudaiberdiev Shakarim, Chingiz Volost.

Participation in the Zemstvo election may have prevented Shakarim from getting into the Second All Kazakh Congress. But he had a personal invitation. The urgency of the next congress of leaders of Alash was of course brought on by the events of October in Petrograd. Time was precious. The fate of the nation depended upon what course the development of the State would take.
The Second All Kazakh Congress

The Second All Kazakh Congress also took place in Orenburg, from 5-13 December 1917. From the Semipalatinsk Oblast were Khalel Gabbassov, Alimkhan Ermeekov, Turagul Abayuly, Zhumeken Orazalin, Akhmet Shagir, Kabysh Berdalin, and Akhmetolla Barlybaev. Invitations to the congress were sent to the twenty-eight most influential personalities, signed Alikhan Bukeikhonov. Among them was Shakarim. But he did not come to Orenburg.

At the congress they discussed national autonomy, creating a police force, and the National Council. Presentations were made by Alikhan Bukeikhonov, Khalel Gabbassov, Mustafa Chokai, and Dzhanshiev Dosmukhamedov.

The main result of the Congress, of course, was the decision on the formulation of Kazakh autonomy. The ruling congress declared: “We will call Kazakh-Kyrgyz autonomy ‘Alash’, and its surface and underground riches will belong to Alash. We will create a Transitional National Council. We will call it Alash-Orda, and the place of its temporary dislocation (location) will be Semipalatinsk.”

The formation of an Alash national-territorial autonomy and Alash-Orda government was officially announced in the Sary-Arka newspaper, published in Semipalatinsk, on 28 January 1918. In the long-term it was proposed that the All-Russian Constituent Assembly would approve a constitution for the autonomy. From 1918 to 1919 the central and Semipalatinsk Oblast committees of Alash-Orda were located on the left bank of Semipalatinsk, Zhana-Semey. In those two memorable years the left bank became known as the city of Alash.

Of course, autonomy does not mean total independence. Members of Alash were well aware that after centuries of domination by the Russian Empire, to immediately gain independence was not something they could logically expect. But the historic act of establishing the Alash Party laid the foundations for a new state, and it could well
have been a success if it were not for the opposition of other political forces that could rely on impressive public resources.

The main opposing force were the Bolsheviks. After the October Revolution in Petrograd and the establishment of Soviet power in the central regions of Russia, the Bolsheviks sought first to solve the political problems; to eliminate the influence of the Mensheviks, and second to extend the Soviet regime across the whole territory of the now former Russian Empire.
In Office in The City of Alash

In the winter of 1918, Shakarim came to Semipalatinsk from Chingis-Tau and immediately got into office at Alash-Orda on the left bank. He did not forget about his literary duties. He published a translation of Hafiz’s ‘Gazelle’ in the magazine Abai, beginning with the words “Zopa was praying something...” This translation appeared in the third edition of Abai, in 1918.

From December, he lived in the ‘city of Alash’ without a break, almost until the summer, participating in discussions as a full member of the Uezd Zemstvo. He had lot of contact with the people. He saw how difficult it was for ordinary Kazakhs to appreciate the changes that were taking place. There were still only a small number of Kazakhs on the side of the Soviet Regime, and most of these were members of the Ush Juz Party, mostly minor officials, craftsmen, teachers, and paramedics. In the press, the members of Ush Juz would pounce upon Alash, who in turn rebutted them in their own newspapers.

The rivalry between the Alash and Ush Juz parties did not last long. By June 1918, members of the Ush Juz joined forces with the Bolsheviks, and the party necessarily broke up. But the confrontation between Alash-Orda and the Soviet authorities continued and eventually turned deadly for one of the parties. One could have foreseen the danger at the beginning of 1918. The coexistence of the Red Guards with the Alash-Orda police force could not go on forever, and it would not end well.

Kazi Nurmukhambetuly, a Kazakh from the Syban tribe, became the first victim in the conflict between the Alash movement and the Soviet authorities. The first but not the last. The young man entered the Semipalatinsk teachers’ school in 1915, and was due to graduate in 1919. In the meantime, he and his friends joined the Alash-Orda police force. He climbed to the top of it even. The funeral of Kazi Nurmukhambetuly took place on 7 March. When the deceased was buried and a prayer was read, Shakarim was the first to make an
address. He called Nurmukhambetuly the first victim of Alash, and said that he had not truly died—his love for the nation was in his words and in his deeds, calling on the others not to forget their departed comrade, and what he stood for. His address was published in the Sary-Arka newspaper.

It took the Alash-Orda government a long time to comprehend how formidable an opponent they were dealing with. The Bolshevik Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies did not consider Alash-Orda a serious organization and planned by amassing their own forces to end the self-proclaimed autonomy of Alash. In the meantime the Bolsheviks went on coexisting with Alash-Orda, though putting pressure on them all the while. And it was this pressure that turned into murder, when Kazi Nurmukhambetuly was killed.

The leaders of Alash-Orda, now appreciating the might of the Bolshevik forces, had to announce their recognition of the Soviet government. And they attempted to establish communication with the central government to start talks on granting the Kazakh people autonomy within Russia. For example, on 2 April 1918, Khaled Gabbassov made direct contact with Lenin and Stalin from Semipalatinsk, negotiating with Moscow by telegraph. But the Soviet government was slow to recognize the government of Alash-Orda, delaying a resolution. A major counter-revolutionary movement was brewing, and the Soviet government had to focus on maintaining the power they had claimed in October 1917.

Meanwhile, the local Bolshevik government in Semipalatinsk decided to restrict the activities of opposition parties, including Alash. In early March 1918 the Interim Commissioner of the Czech Republic banned the first edition of the SR-Menshevik newspaper Free speech and the Cadet newspaper Delo. Then the Kazakh newspaper was banned.

The Bolsheviks really wanted to close down the Sary-Arka newspaper, the main publication of the Alash Party at that time. But its editor Khaled Gabbassov was a Sovdep member, and so the Bolsheviks left the decision on shutting down this paper until later, so as not to spoil rela-
tions with its Kazakh representatives. Only in mid-May was Sary-Arka closed, along with The Word of the People and the magazine Abai.

Subsequently, when the power was transferred to the White Guard, publication continued uninterrupted right up until December 1919.

Despite pressure from the Soviet of Deputies, the Alash-Orda government, during their ‘peaceful’ coexistence turned over many acts, trying to act as a genuine people’s power. The committees of Uezd and Oblast Zemstvos which were under the control of Alash-Orda continued to operate successfully. They solved problems in education, health, animal husbandry, food security, the justice system, and social security administration.

In April 1918, the first meeting of Semipalatinsk Oblast Zemstvo was held to consider the most important issues of governance and the creation of an administrative justice system. As a result, Mukysh Boshtaev was elected Chairman of the Oblast Kazakh Court, Imanbekov Tarabaliev the Deputy Chairman, and as Members of the Court, Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, Smahan Bokeikhanov, along with Andamasov and Temirzhanov who were elected candidates.

Shakarim was the most senior among the participants of the Alash movement, and had unquestioned authority in the nation. And so his election to the Alash-Orda Court, and indeed in the Alash-Orda government, was not accidental. In accordance with his ideas about the future of the Kazakh people, about honor and a duty to the people, Shakarim did not give up on bringing in the Alash-Orda Court. Yet on some other issues he did not agree with the Alash Party programme.

Be that as it may, the poet was now at the heart of the action in Semipalatinsk Oblast. And he immediately set to organizing the work of the Oblast Court. For example, on 21 April 1918 he published an open letter ‘To all Kazakh citizens of Semipalatinsk Oblast’ in Sary-Arka:

"The current government has approved the Kazakh court.

From now on, any encounter between Kazakhs, any dispute large or small, will be considered by the Kazakh Court. Previously all cases
were considered by the Russian Court. All those cases in which there has been no ruling will now be transferred to the Kazakh Court.”

In fact all of the figures of national revival gathered on the left bank at Alash-Orda, investing everything in the promotion of the national idea, the creation of an autonomous Kazakh state. There were many young writers who later became prominent artists working closely with Shakarim in Alash-Orda: Magzhan Zhumabaev, Zhusipbek Aimauitov, Sultanmakhmut Toraigirov, Mukhtar Auezov, Ilyas Zhansugurov, Beimbet Myleene, Amre Kashaubaev and Isa Baizakov.
Civil War

In February 1918, the White Army, with the support of financial and industrial bodies in the US, England, France and Japan launched an armed struggle against the Soviets. By the spring, military action was nationwide. This was the beginning of the Civil War.

The Bolshevik Reds proclaimed the goal of building a classless communist society, both in Russia and in Europe by actively promoting ‘worldwide revolution’ The Whites proclaimed the convocation of a new Constituent Assembly to assess the question of Russia’s political system.

Prior to joining the White government of Semipalatinsk, Alash-Orda was familiar only with the active opposition of the Bolsheviks.

On 25 May the Czechoslovak Corps began an offensive along the line of the Trans-Siberian Railway from the Volga to the Maritime Provinces. In early June, the Czechs (the so-called combined troops of the White Army) managed to capture Petropavlovsk, Pavlodar and Omsk.

On 10 June the Semipalatinsk Soviet authorities decided to evacuate. That day, the Alash-Orda government successfully established its authority on the left bank.

The next day the White Army arrived, claiming the leadership of their government. And the Alash-Orda did not question it, still hoping at some future stage to get their own autonomy within Russia. At this point in time, the Whites were content to leave the economic management of the city and the Oblast to Alash-Orda, as the battle with the Bolsheviks absorbed all their forces.

On 12 June the members of Alash-Orda, including Shakarim, who was a member of the National Council, held a meeting in which they adopted several resolutions. Zhusibek Aimauitov wrote in Abai magazine: “The current goal of Alash-Orda is to bring together the people of Kazakhstan, and to create our own autonomy. As a means of establishing this goal we have created an Alash-Orda police force.
An alliance was made between the Alash-Orda government and the Provisional Siberian Government, led by Admiral Kolchak. The relationship between the partners was not without flaws. However, Alash-Orda now finally had the opportunity to carry out administrative activities almost unhindered. The printing presses closed down by the Reds were restored. Alash-Orda came to the fore in the work of all the Uezd and Oblast Zemstvo Committees. They also became more involved in work on the Alash-Orda Court.

The Alash-Orda Court, to which Shakarim had been elected before the arrival of the Whites, came under the full control of representatives from the Provisional Siberian Government. It was the Whites who decided who among those convicted by the Alash-Orda judges would be sent to jail, and who would be released. Shakarim objected that this would simply lead to the decisions of the Alash-Orda judges being overturned. And he became disillusioned by these all too familiar abuses of power.

The leaders of the Alash Party began to follow the example of the Bolsheviks in the way they conducted business. In wartime, such measures may have been justified. But Shakarim could not accept any dictatorship apart from the dictatorship of the high moral principles of the law. And Shakarim began to see that the essence of the problem was a situation where morals were being overshadowed by the laws of class struggle. Shakarim ultimately retired from Alash for these reasons, seeking once again the purity of thought that only solitude could bring. And so he decided to return to Chingis-Tau.
The Autonomy of Poetic Thought

Shakarim did not spend long back in the aul in Chingis-Tau. The spirit of freedom in seclusion drew him further on, to Ken-Konys.

It was important to him during all of this emotional turmoil that he should take himself into quiet seclusion, to be alone with his thoughts, to regain his confidence, strength, harmony and balance. And so naturally he looked to the Steppe, in the heart of Chingis-Tau in Ken-Konys under the cover of a myriad of stars, where he had spent so much time in happy intellectual cares.

He had retired from Alash-Orda only when he felt that its violence toward the spirit had become unbearable. Alash-Orda never achieved autonomy for the Kazakhs. But Shakarim himself managed to create his own the autonomy of the spirit, the autonomy of thought.
Boycott

In the spring of 1919 Shakarim received the strange, if not to say unpleasant news from his son Kabysh, who had come to see him in his hermitage, that Alash-Orda had announced a ‘boycott’ on Shakarim.

For the Kazakhs at this time, this word hinted at something unpleasant or indecent. His relatives had long been contemplating whether or not to tell the poet about the news, which had been published in all the newspapers. Local newspapers had written of it as a sensation. People wanted to ban the printing of the poet’s works in Alash-Orda publications, and they named this act by the now fashionable term ‘boycott’, perhaps borrowing its use from among the unstoppable Russian revolutionaries.

Shakarim reacted to the boycott coldly. Knowing the difficulties he would now face in public, Shakarim’s relatives supported the poet as best they could. They even decided to make him a judge once again, in spite of the boycott. In the end the boycott was not widely enforced and Alash-Orda seemed to quickly realise the folly of this venture, ultimately ending their campaign of harassment against the poet.
The Ongoing Civil War

The situation with the Civil War changed. In the Autumn of 1919 the Red Army at the Eastern Front entered Western Siberia and Kazakhstan. The Whites retreated. Officials of the Provisional Siberian Government, the families of officers, merchants and industrialists began fleeing from the town. On the morning of 1 December 1919, Semipalatinsk was surrendered by the Whites. The governance of the city was transferred to the Military Revolutionary Committee. The members of Alash-Orda, along with all the other Kazakhs, did not take part in the fighting. This was a purely Russian war.

On 10 December part of the Red Army advanced on Semipalatinsk. In the course of a long battle in the town, they launched offensives in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Zaisan and Sergiopol. By the end of March 1920, the remnants of the White Guard units had fled to China. Semipalatinsk and Semirechye Oblast came under the control of the Soviets.

The Russian Civil War lasted until October 1922. The most terrible consequences of the war were the millions of broken lives. Experts estimate that during these battles 900,000 people were killed by the Red Army, 650,000 by the White Army and its allies, along with 900,000 by guerrilla fighters. Among the civilian population in Russia 1.2 million people died as a result of the ‘Red Terror’, 300,000 the victims of the Whites, and 500,000 of partisan troops. Hunger, disease and the cold claimed a further 6 million lives.

Kazakhs reacted cautiously to the establishment of the Soviet government, as was natural in this situation of continuous revolutionary change.

Most Kazakhs were in no hurry to become part of the Soviet regime, but Shakarim declared that the best side seemed to have been propelled into power. Indeed, the Bolshevik Party used certain tactics to attract people into the party from the indigenous populations of nations on the fringes of the former Empire. They were somewhat flexible to their demands. Once they proclaimed Soviet rule
in Semipalatinsk Oblast, the Bolsheviks set about creating a Muslim Kazakh division of the Uezd and Oblast Party Committees.

But the new Bolshevik government gradually set about dismantling the administrative infrastructure of Alash-Orda, and by 1920 it had all but ceased to exist. The Alash Party was disbanded. For two years people had subscribed to Alash’s dream, its promise of autonomy. But the organisation did not have the funds to survive, to overcome its opponents. And for now this dream was put on hold. The Soviet Regime had established itself.
Return to Poetry

All this time Shakarim did not write like other Kazakh poets, glorifying the Soviet system in his poetry. He was not inspired by the Whites, but took no joy in the Bolsheviks, yet he was frightened to death of the ‘Red Terror’. He was not in the habit of praising regimes and rulers. His poem ‘In the Morning Arose Freedom’ had been written after the February Revolution and it remains the only enthusiastic eulogy in his corpus of work. At that time, the poet sincerely believed in freedom for the Kazakh people. In one of his poems in 1919 he compared the establishment of the Soviet government with a palace built on sand.

When the poet returned to his native aul, where the authority of the honoured Hadji was still in tact, the flow of visitors, petitioners, and relatives who needed help, had not diminished. And for all his misgivings about the new regime, Shakarim remained a staunch supporter of national culture. In 1920 Shakarim even had a guest from Europe to stay—a German physician and scientist Professor Max Kuczynski, who was writing a book, *The Steppe and its Inhabitants*. With the permission of the Soviet government, he made a tour of the Kazakh steppe for the purposes of his own research. He noted the habits and customs of the local people. He saw how the great quantities of meat and kumys consumed by the Kazakhs fortified them, remarking of their diet that one meal of meat for the Kazakh people would feed a German family for a whole month. Shakarim of course proved an able and eloquent guide to the European philosopher, who praised him highly, telling him, “You think like a true scientist, you are a thinker of the Steppe!”
"Bright Moon in the sky, seeing the lovers Adil and Maria reunited, silently shared the news with Ancient Chingis-Tau: 'Oh, Aksakal! How they wanted one another! It was as though no one before them had ever met like them. As though they were not afraid even of death when in each other’s arms...' Ancient Chingis-Tau, shaking himself out of deep reflection, laughed loudly through the clear waters of the river, sparkling in the moonlight: ‘But you didn’t see a thing. It happened in the day, so you could not have seen it’ "

From ‘Adil and Maria’

In the autumn of 1925 Shakarim began his second hermitage. To live alone was not difficult for him in principle. Nomads get used to the solitude of the vast Steppe. This sort of life could be unbearable at times, but it is in the blood of the Kazakh people. As other people may be bewitched by the oceans at the edges of the lands they were born in, so too the Kazakhs have a sense of space imbued by the boundlessness of the Steppe. Shakarim retreated once more to Sayat-Bark and began to write a lot.
‘Adil and Maria’

That autumn the first thing he did was to finally finish his tragedy ‘Adil and Maria’. Shakarim called his unusual work a novel. But with all due respect to the author, it cannot be called a novel in the classic sense. The story of ‘Adil and Maria’ spans a long period of time. However, the volume of text is not itself very long. A novel is normally expected to be long in terms of its narrative arc, with complex plot development. In some places, the author introduces structural elements characteristic of a play—lengthy monologues, for example. And it might be a play if it were not for the wonderful lyrical descriptions of landscape, the stunning psychological and philosophical notes.

The plot is very entertaining, although the modern reader may find its perfectly Shakespearean conflict banal. But we must not forget when this thing was written. Kazakh prose had literally just come into being. These original and talented authors wrote stories and novels that relied very much on their own knowledge. They had no contemporary examples to draw from in their own national culture. And so their only example was the whole of world literature. The Kazakh writer at least had this to build on. And Shakarim created things so distinctive that they remain unsurpassed to this day, almost exhaustively depicting the era in which he lived.

The action of ‘Adil and Maria’ takes place in 1910 in one of the auls at the foot of Chingis-Tau. He portrays mighty Ancient Chingis-Tau as a character in the story, an indispensable witness of events, remembering the first meeting of Adil and Maria. Even then he saw love in the eyes of the fourteen-year-old girl.

In describing the life of the Kazakh aul Shakarim adds these naturalistic touches it is impossible to think of any foreign author using: “The children came out from the aul naked. They shut their ears with their palms and began to imitate the voices of the sheep and lambs. They shouted out now in loud voices, now in muffled cries.
The loud sounds were followed by the soft, and the children, slapping their bare sides, all went off ahead of the lambs.

And from his poor, poor yurt, an old man stepped out leaning on his stick, drew closer and began shouting at the sheep, ‘Ishayt, shayt!’

And at that very moment you, Ancient Chingis-Tau, lowered your shadow on the people gathered at your feet, like the pelt of a dark neckerchief. And as though he had learned of your death, the decrepit old man threw off his hat and began rounding up the sheep.”

In this picture the almost visible Steppe evening is filled with the sounds and gestures of life, and in it appear not only people both young and old, but the eternal mountain and the twilight of its descending shadow on the arches of their dwellings. This harmonic coherence of the world is so important to the author who in common with his young contemporaries is at one with the world and its harmony.

But Shakarim does not moralize. He makes no attempts to represent events according to the literary ‘fashion’ of the time, as a reflection of class struggle, or for example to show through the crimes of the story’s villain Erkimbek the depravity of the ‘new’ Kazakhs. Indeed, he does present in full the struggles of the people, their confrontations and their sometimes cruel motives, but for the poet this is not the most important aspect of ‘Adil and Maria’. He paints life as an artist, positioning its beauty within this most bitter drama amid lofty sentiments.
Collectivization

In December 1927, Moscow hosted the Fifteenth Congress of the CPSU, known as the Congress of Collectivization. As a result of this congress, by the spring of 1932 the nation’s agriculture was transformed from small-scale to large. The Russians showed the way, transforming small individual peasant farms into large kolkhozes, or collective farms. But for Kazakh farmers, whose life was led exclusively on individual farms, this decision threatened to completely destroy the foundations of their existence.

As part of the new regime, sultans and their descendants, biys, uezd leaders, nobility, and all of their relatives, all of the Kazakh Steppe nobility became class enemies. The new masters of life were not deterred by the fact that these wealthy people, referred to as bais, had for centuries managed the nomadic society, ensuring the stability of the tribal structure. They merely set out to eliminate them as a class.

Despite that the aul council of ‘Karazhartas’ decided not to confiscate property from Shakarim, the Soviet government was never far behind him. It was decided that there should be a meeting to discuss the matter at another aulsovot in Aktobe. And so the poet went to Aktobe. And again at this meeting, many voted against the confiscation.

On the third occasion, a meeting was held at the distant aulsovot of Kundyzdy. Most of the other members at this meeting were from the Mirza tribe. Shakarim had once been their Volost Leader for a term. And so once again the Mirza at the Kundyzdy meeting took the poet’s side. But the persecution had not ended. Shakarim’s case was now to be considered at a meeting of workers in Zaton in Semipalatinsk. The septuagenarian poet was summoned to the city in the late autumn.

Shakarim faced very serious charges at this meeting, held in a factory in Semipalatinsk. Although he did not have many cattle, the organizers said, on other points he certainly qualified for confiscations: he had been a Volost Leader, had undertaken the Hajj, he had cattlemen and exploited their labor, and he was a member of Alash-
Orda. In addition to this, he was Kunanbai’s grandson, and he had been the senior sultan. According to the responsible officer Altybaev’s account, the workers all stood behind Shakarim.

He was not harming anyone, after all, they argued. And so it was not right that this man, Shakarim, should be subjected to confiscations. He was a Volost Leader, yes. But the people knew that the Volost itself was not his. He may have hired workers. But where was the evidence that he had exploited them? And what about the Hajj — what did that have to do with anything? Who had not walked the Hajj at that time? And surely he could not be punished because his grandfather was a local ruler of the people. Many had personal memories of Shakarim making just decisions while in office. This sense of bewilderment and incomprehension — and what is more, all this support for Shakarim — spread around the room and the comrades expressed their approval.

It was decided that if the workers supported justice on behalf of the government, then they could not be allowed to subject Shakarim to confiscations. And so the vote was cast yet again, and there was no confiscation.

Ultimately Shakarim had his reputation to thank for avoiding confiscation. However, while it was true to say that he had no cattle that could be taken from him, he did have access to cattle — and used it. For at this time, several of Shakarim’s relatives were exiled in the south and he was periodically required to have cattle sent over to them. Shakarim himself may have avoided judgement for now, but these mass confiscations decimated the nomadic culture and brought misery to many families.

Shakarim understood the danger of the situation, seen as perhaps the cruelest in the history of the Kazakh people. After implementing drastic changes to the nomadic lifestyle of the people, they began the most destructive form of change, changing the very minds of the people and their way of thinking through psychological torment. They brought fear, hatred, and servility to the people, the desire to turn
informant, to curry favor with the administration at the expense of loyalty to the people.

There was a concerted effort to quash popular support for Shakarim, though in reality he had no direct influence on popular opinion, he simply towered over Chingis-Tau like an unfailing spiritual beacon. Yet Shakarim knew that the authorities would catch up with him eventually. They needed the total and blind obedience of all the people in their territories, and this completely went against his own cherished concept of the 'native land'.

And so it is not surprising that in order to avoid persecution, he immediately set off to Sayat-Bark. He was not running from the authorities as such, it would have been impossible to hide the location of his hermitage when everyone knew where it was. But he had a secret plan to put together his own philosophical system, which he had been building for many years, close to the heavens. From now on he spent all his time in Sayat-Bark trying to speak only with his own family, helping them to preserve the remnants of their devastated farmlands.
The Collapse of Kazakh Nomadism

The confiscation of property from the “grand bais” between 1928-1929 was only a foretaste of the mass repossesssion of property from the rest of the population. The subsequent deprivation of cattle from the nomadic Kazakhs put the entire population of the Kazakh Steppe in a desperate situation.

The original plan of the Soviet authorities in Kazakhstan was to confiscate property and livestock from the farms of about 700 “grand bai cattle owners” According to documents, cattle were indeed taken from 696 selected farms. But in reality the figure was much higher. Right from the outset it was not only the big cattle owners that were subjected to confiscations, but also the so-called “middle peasants”, who were seen as disloyal to the Soviet authorities.

After completing the first phase of their plan, in 1929 the Soviet government announced a new round of seizures. Across the country as part of a grain procurement campaign, stocks of grain, including seed reserves, were gathered up from the collective farms. On the grasslands of Kazakhstan they were also obliged to give up their grain, and in order to fulfil the plan the Kazakhs were forced to exchange what livestock they had left following the confiscations for grain.

In early 1930 a new large-scale campaign to increase the meat and wool harvest was announced. Each yurt was given a quota for wool and cattle bone production. This again led to the mass slaughter of livestock. And in winter, a large number of sheep died from the cold, having had their fleeces trimmed back. Farm owners who failed to deliver the right amount of fleeces and cattle bones (used to confirm a slaughter), were sent to jail pending trial. Frightened by this scenario, the Kazakhs would slaughter their cattle to the last, strip the fleeces from fur coats, remove it from fur blankets and clothes to gather up enough to make the quota. But it proved too little.

On 1 February 1930, Gafur, the eldest of Shakarim’s surviving children, was arrested for failing to comply with the meat, fleece and
bone quotas. His son Bayazit was taken to jail with him, and their property and livestock confiscated.

Following this, Shakarim himself was arrested. He was summoned from Sayat-Bark, and the few cattle he had, along with all his property was taken right in front of him from the family farm, which his younger sons Akhat and Ziyat helped to manage in his absence. They also confiscated the Winchester rifle given to him as a young man by Abai. The Hadji was put under lock and key along with his son and grandson. And then after a few days of house arrest Shakarim was released.

But Gafur was escorted to Semipalatinsk with Bayazit and imprisoned until the tragic day of his death on 6 July. He was awaiting sentence when, according to the official story, he slit his own throat in desperation. The story is of course highly dubious but it is impossible to prove either way due to a total lack of evidence.

Shakarim did not attend his son’s funeral. And he had no choice but to go along with the official version of events. What else could he do? He dedicated verses to his son’s memory, lamenting his loss day and night, just as thirty-five years ago Abai had inconsolably mourned the loss of his son Abdrakhman.

Gafur’s death was a tragedy for Shakarim’s family. But it went almost unnoticed amid the continuous suffering experienced across the nomadic society. Hunger, cold and disease came to every Kazakh family. Death became commonplace. The nomadic Kazakh way of life had come to an end.

Shakarim did not accept the legitimacy of Soviet rule on the Kazakh steppe, pointing to its flaws: a fanatical following, and militant intolerance of other opinions. That he did not accept the notion of socialism was not due to its unrealistic utopian conception of humanity, he simply believed that it did not work. He did not accept it because of the devastating nature of Bolshevik policy, which did not flinch from destroying people by the masses if they did not follow blindly all of the decisions both large and small that were made by their communist leaders.
In February 1930, the CEC and the CPC of the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a resolution to strengthen the socialist transformation of agriculture in the areas of complete collectivization and to fight against the kulaks and bais. And by 15 March 1930 more than 60,000 farms were declared to belong to the bais, and their property was confiscated. More than 40,000 households were “dispossessed” while other cattle-owners disappeared, leaving their property behind.

The Kazakh SSR, and especially the Kazakh Steppe, had become a land of the forgotten. A wasteland. According to data from the State Political Directorate (OGPU), in the years 1930-1931, 6765 peasants from various corners of the USSR were sent into “kulak exile” in the gulags of Kazakhstan. In addition to this, some 46,091 families, or 180,015 people were deported to Kazakhstan. These were peasants from the lower and middle reaches of the Volga, the Central Chernozemskaya Oblast, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, Moscow Oblast, other parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The tragedy of these people is unimaginable. They were loaded into trains sometimes having been given just one day to pack their things. On arriving in Kazakhstan, they found themselves adrift in the middle of the open Kazakh Steppe. And many of these “special settlers” died out there in the early years from cold, hunger, and disease.

In the spring of 1930, riots erupted across almost all regions of Central Asia and the Kazakh SSR. Spontaneous flashes of activity became mass demonstrations of discontent in Semipalatinsk and Alma-Ata. Agents of the GPU acted decisively, brutally suppressing unrest as and when it broke out. Dissatisfied auls became surrounded on all sides by OGPU officers. The inhabitants were arrested, and their property taken away, they were killed, or sent to trial at the OGPU “troika” non-judicial bodies made up of three people who had the right to impose sentence for the least criminal activity, including the death penalty. It was in these circumstances that Gafur allegedly took his own life.
Uprising in Chingis-Tau

Shakarim knew that the government could not permit the publication of any documents, letters, articles or essays, or any works of fiction that would seem to criticise, or that did not fit in with the framework of the new Soviet ideology. And indeed he gritted his teeth, hoping for better times. But the spring of 1931 exposed an unprecedented famine on the Kazakh Steppe. The starving people ate wild onions, pigeons, and cats.

Already in 1927 news had begun to reach Alma-Ata, capital of the Kazakh SSR, of the famine on the Steppe. But the authorities ignored these reports and simply tightened their administrative pressures. Kazakhs were forbidden from leaving their auls. Anyone who was shot trying to escape was branded a member of a “gang”. Never before in the history of the Kazakh people had they been deprived overnight of cattle in such droves. There was starvation, droughts.

Now cattle were simply taken by representatives of the Soviet military forces wherever they could find them. They were taken even from the very poor whose interests the Bolsheviks had sworn to protect when they won power from the bourgeoisie in 1917. People were prevented from restoring their depleted livestock on private farms. They could grow grain and keep livestock only in the collective farms, where cattle were rounded up from the scattered remnants of those confiscated from the surrounding auls. All this was happening, and the people were growing increasingly restless.

In June 1931 the young officer Abzal Karasartov (1906-1979), a native of Bayanaul, was appointed as head of the district department of the OGPU in the Chingis-Tau Uezd. The young, energetic secret police officer honed in immediately on Shakarim as the main object of his attention. He recognised him as a central figure among these people. Those among the local inhabitants who saw the new chief reported that he was a well-built, very stern-looking and dark-skinned young man who usually sat astride a horse with a revolver in his hand.
Abzal Karasartova had only worked nine months in the organisation up to this point. Before that, he had worked as head of the district department of the OGPU in the Pavlodar Uezd. He received a commendation for “exposing an anti-Soviet organization.” To all appearances he was a tenacious and reliable worker. This much we can gather from his transferral to the restless Chingis-Tau Uezd. And “Karasartov” quickly became a byword for “cruelty”

For his part, Shakarim welcomed the new guest, having little other choice. He behaved civilly with him and the two shared many encounters. But Karasartov was suspicious of the influence Shakarim had on the people, and at the same time understood that the best way to exercise control over the people was through this man. And though Shakarim himself had no violent or revolutionary inclinations, as will be seen, he soon found himself at the centre of a violent revolutionary plot.

The situation of the people continued to be hopeless. In the remote auls people went for a long time without food. In fact, many had already died from hunger, locked in their homes by police officers and agents of the OGPU.

Tax collectors would travel around the auls accompanied by police, after debtors who had not fulfilled the quotas for grain, wool, and bones (normally having slaughtered their last horse or cow). One day, a man from a poor aul by the river Sarzhal at the site of modern-day Shagan had his last cow taken by a tax collector. The unhappy man raised a cry, and along with other of his relatives ran at the uninvited guests in an attack. As a result, they killed both the tax collector and his bodyguard on the spot.

The authorities immediately began punitive action, declaring the instigators bandits, and all the inhabitants of this rebellious aul a “gang” Police officers and agents of the GPU shot and arrested inhabitants of the aul, not knowing who had participated in the murder of the public officials. Following this, the inhabitants of Chingis-Tau, enraged by the ensuing massacre, began to rise up against the Soviet
regime. Demonstrations took place simultaneously in three different areas: Chingis-Tau, Abralinsk, and Chubar-Tau.

The uprising in Chingistau began on the night of 3 September 1931. The rebels, among whom was Shakarim’s son Ziyat, captured and shot a young teacher. At this time, teachers were considered to be OGPU spies, and not without reason. This “teacher” was an aide of Karasartov’s when he worked in the Beskaragai area. Karasartov had stationed him him Bakanas as a teacher. Berdesha Azimbayuly (1885-1965), grandson of Tanirberdy, a descendant of Kunanbai, kept evidence of the main organizers of the Chingis-Tau uprising.

Berdesh (birth name Ferdowsi) was a prominent figure in the Tobykyt tribe, but did not enjoy the favor of Shakarim, who did not approve of some of his harsh actions against his relatives. Yet Berdesh was among those who lost their wealth as a result of the confiscation campaigns. And he had reason to fight against the government.

On the morning of 3 September, more than 200 rebels came from Bakanas, supplemented by hundreds of people from Chingis-Tau. Despite their willingness to fight, they had almost no weapons. The still hungry, desperate people moved on Karaul. They were met three kilometers from Karaul by the tax collector Olzhabai Shalabaev. Hated among the people, he was immediately killed. A prominent rebel, Kasymbek Soltabaev took Shalabaev’s horse from him. And they entered Karaul.

The district department of the OGPU was notified of the uprising. And the secret service agents were ready to fight. A machine gun squadron was set up on the outskirts of Karaul.

One wonders what was the best the rebels could have hoped for in this situation. Of course, one cannot expect a great deal of rational thinking from people so tired and hungry as they were. One can only guess that they were motivated by despair.

Seeing the crowds, the machine guns opened fire, and the unarmed rebels dispersed leaving the dead and wounded behind...

....................... 153 ......................
A cavalry unit led by Karasartov rushed in, followed by other GPU agents.

Around fifty rebels were killed. Many others were taken prisoner. Some of those arrested informed the police that the rebels had come together on the advice of Shakarim. And the rumour quickly spread among the GPU that on 3 September Shakarim had sanctioned the rebels attempt at capturing Karaul. Even the names of those who were with Shakarim at the time were given: Berdesh, Ziyat, Kasymbek Soltabaev, Mukhtar Dutbaev, son of Kulbadan, the daughter of Abai.

Karasartov earnestly believed in this account of events, though history has proved them wrong. And after all he was only a product of his era, and the responsibilities he was given. In his mind, Shakarim was clearly an enemy of the people, and he would have to be destroyed.
Pursued by the Secret Police

Karasartov, had to think carefully about his actions from the moment of his arrival in Chingis-Tau. But his plan only came together following the uprising. There is no doubt as to the causes of the uprising in Chingis-Tau. On the one hand there was the terrible famine and poverty among the people, and on the other hand was the brutality of the Soviet regime, which had condemned so many people to death. Nevertheless the Soviet authorities of the Chingis-Tau Uezd began searching about for ringleaders behind the hatred shown toward the Soviet regime. And, as an influential figure, they looked to Shakarim. Rumours began to spread all around that Shakarim alone had organised the uprising.

And these rumours soon reached Shakarim himself in Sayat-Bark. And what could he do? Well the Hadji did what any honest person would. He sincerely condemned the rebels, for the many senseless sacrifices they had caused in their uprising. And then he went to Karaul to meet Karasartov. The meeting went ahead without any great consequence. But Karasartov’s opportunity to inflict violence would come later on.

The Hadji returned to Sayat-Bark. The situation had depressed him. The old man knew that nothing good had come of his meeting with Karasartov. Indeed, every day the people spread more rumours about Shakarim’s involvement in the uprising. Among the GPU officers, the uprising had become known as the ‘Shakarim Uprising’.

Meanwhile, the secret police officers set out in active search for the rebels in the mountains of Chingis-Tau. They began conducting raids, searching for gang members hiding in the mountain gorges. Shakarim’s son Ziyat’s nephew Berdesh finally decided to flee to China. In Chingis-Tau they were being threatened with death. If they fell into the hands of the secret police they knew they could expect to be shot.

They went to see Shakarim again in Sayat-Bark and again offered to take him with them, but the poet again refused. His hope and
his belief was that all would work out for the best, but that it was necessary to suffer for a while. Yet just in case, he hid for ten days from the GPU in Bakanas.

This precaution proved necessary. When the secret police came to Sayat-Bark, the poet was no longer there. At this point, Karasartov made an official announcement that Shakarim was in hiding from the authorities. He wrote this up in a report to the Regional Department of the OGPU. Anyone who was hiding was assumed to be a member of the rebel “gang” he wrote. Beyond this, Shakarim was most likely the organizer of the uprising. The poet was also responsible for the collapse of the cooperative in Bakanas. And he was suspected of the murder of the teacher Abishuly Ramazan and his wife.

Submitting his report, Karasartov knew what he had to do next.
CHAPTER 6
LAND OF THE FORGOTTEN

“When they brought in the body of the old man wrapped up in a rug and laid across the back of a camel, I almost fainted. We were not allowed to mourn the dead man. The men took the body, and put it down on a bed of reeds. It turned out the horse he was riding had also been shot. They had stripped the meat from it and brought it with them. And they ate it to themselves until there was none left.”

Ukysol Kozhaeva, a resident of Bakanas.

At the end of September 1931, Shakarim returned to Sayat-Bark. The GPU was not going to make concessions to the rebels. Relentlessly, they made their way along the rivers and through the mountain ranges of Chingis-Tau, flushing out the rebels. Berdes, Ziyat, and other relatives of Shakarim finally decided to leave for China. The poet did not dissuade them, but decided not to leave with them. He stubbornly refused to leave his own land behind. He was born and would die in Chingis-Tau. But he was anxious for the safety of his children and young relatives, for at any moment the GPU might track them down. On the morning they decided to flee, Berdes recalls that Shakarim was disappointed in him, greeting him in total silence. The group talked over tea about the best route for them to take. Shakarim expressed his concerns. It was a long way to the border, more than five hundred kilometers. And it would be important for them to travel along secure tracks, where they would not be pursued. He gave Ziyat a bundle of papers wrapped up in cloth — copies of the works he wished to be saved, and which would otherwise be destroyed if found in his possession. Though Shakarim insisted that he would not join them, Berdes left for him the horse of the slain tax collector Olzhabaya Shalabaev so that he would have the means to if he changed his mind. Saddling the horse, Shakarim strapped his old rifle to it and departed with the others.
Evidently thanks to an informant, the head GPU officer Karasartov already knew that the group would be leaving Chingis-Tau for the Chinese border on 3 October. He had also hoped that Shakarim would be with them when they left. But intelligence from that same informant told him that the Hadji would not be there. All evidence points to the fact that Berdesh had betrayed Shakarim, though he later tried to prove that he was not there on the day that the poet was murdered. A selection of witness testimony, though contradictory on the details, gives us an unambiguous picture of what actually happened that day.

On the morning of 3 October, the group of fugitives accompanied Shakarim into an ambush. The secret service officers opened fire. Shakarim stepped forward to call for them to stop, confident that they would not shoot. But two shots rang out. One bullet struck the horse, the other the poet’s shoulder. One of the shots came from Khalitov, a detective from Semipalatinsk. The other most likely was from Karasartov’s gun. Shakarim fell. He lay surrounded by the GPU servicemen and police. Khalitov stepped forward and shot him one last time, this time through the heart. And Shakarim was dead.

But Khalitov could not have fired that fatal shot without the order to do so. And this order could only have come from one man—Abzal Karasartov. The only other possibility would have been that Khalitov already had the order to kill Shakarim from the Oblast authorities. On Karasartov’s order, the dead body of the poet was buried with his uncle’s Winchester, which had been stored until then in the district police department. It is beyond doubt that this murder was planned. It allowed Karasartov to write in his report that the GPU had assassinated the head of the Chingis-Tau uprising Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, an opponent of the Soviet regime. It was all the better that he had been found in possession of Shalabaev’s horse, and shot down by representatives of legitimate authority. Karasartov’s report was the basis of all charges brought against Shakarim for anti-Soviet activity. From this time a ban was placed on all mention of his name or of his work. And this ban was not properly lifted until 1958.
Crushing Defeat

Shakarim’s body was taken by the GPU servicemen to Bakanas. On the orders of their superiors, which is to say, on the orders of the inexorable Karasartov, all the local people were rounded up in the centre of the aul. One can only suppose this was designed to intimidate them. In an interview with Yevney Buketov in 1978, Karasartov spoke colourfully on the subject. In assessing the GPU officer’s words we must remember that this conversation had only one purpose, to prove that Karasartov had acted only in the name of Soviet authority, seeking to destroy only its enemies and never any honest citizens. As long as this was the case, his conscience remained clear. “The residents gathered in Bakanas and Baykoshkar,” he reports, “and they laid the body of Shakarim out on a specially built wooden pedestal. Then I made a short speech: ‘Here lies before you Shakarim, once a respected aksakal, a seeker after God, who visited Mecca and Medina; a poet who wrote ‘Enlik and Kebek’, hoping to discredit the Naimans. And see what he has come to! He has been killed in a shoot-out!’”

“And you said that he was an enemy of the Soviet regime?” Buketov prompts.

“Of course,” Karasartov confirms. “I told them, ‘Here before you is Shakarim, who has spoken out against the Soviets with a weapon in his hands, and incited others to do the same. He has the blood of many people on his hands.’ And I pointed to the body. Otherwise they would not have believed it. They would have said, “If Shakarim dies, it will be of a natural death.”

“They wouldn’t have believed that he might be struck down by a bullet?” Asks Buketov.

“Exactly,” confirms Karasartov. “This was the sort of man he was... So then I ordered for him to be buried right there. And Shalabaev, the police officer Baimashev and others can attest to exactly where that was.”
“They say you threw Shakarim’s body down a well,” Buketov then
accuses. “Then apparently they got him back out and buried him
properly as befits a... There is some talk around this subject.”

But Karasartov defends himself absolutely. “It’s all empty talk,” he
shrugs. “I don’t know exactly where they buried him. I wasn’t there
myself at the time. So I can’t say exactly where the burial place...”

“So you’re saying you spoke to the people there... and then you
left?” probes Buketov.

“No, Shakarim was buried in my presence,” Karasartov clarifies.

“In your presence?” Buketov is confused.

Karasartov gets a little testy at this point. “I repeat, I do not know
exactly where he was buried. Because I did not personally go there.
Shalabaev took care of the funeral. He led the aksakals to the burial
site and in their eyes he had betrayed his land.”

Karasartov’s words refute the testimony of eyewitnesses. Shakarim
was not a big fan of the Soviet regime, and never concealed his nega-
tive attitude towards the government. Nor was he afraid to put these
judgments into his poetry, and he was not cautious in his statements.
On the other hand, to describe him as an enemy of the people, ready
to take on the power by force of arms, would be an exaggeration. He
never raised arms against Soviet power as Karasartov claimed. And
he did not participate in any “shoot-out” He was simply shot. The
“blood of the people” was certainly not on his conscience. But there
was blood on the hands of the KGB, the blood of the broken down,
hungry, desperate inhabitants of the Steppe.

Karasartov even lied about the burial. He knew very well that the
body of Shakarim was in fact thrown into a well on the outskirts of
the aul, because his subordinates attested to this fact. And after all
they were only carrying out his orders. One of the members of his
unit Marat Tunlikbaev said: “Abzal Karasartov was our commander.
Whatever he said was the law. If he told you to lay down, you laid
down. If he said shoot, you fired your gun.” If he said throw a body
into the well, you threw it into the well. And Karasartov knew
very well that it was an inhuman act. This is why he squirmed in that interview with Buketov. He was simply following the dictates of his superiors. His aim was to intimidate the people so that they would not come out of the auls on pain of death, and would not dare to oppose the policies of the Soviet government. And of course the strongest deterrent is the death of a fellow man. The GPU officers were ordered to make such sacrifices where necessary and to destroy all “enemies of Soviet power.” The deaths were too numerous, the constant threat to life all too real. The people put up with a great deal of oppression. On leaving Bakanas, Karasartov put the word out that anyone who went near the well they had thrown Shakarim’s body into could expect to die themselves. The fear of death was so great that no one went near the well for the next thirty years. And people were afraid to speak out about what they knew.
The Condition of the Kazakh people

Another factor in the oppression of the Kazakh people was that they were suffering the worst period of privation in recent memory. There were mass deaths across the Steppe from starvation. Every day brought news of more victims. In October of that year, Gafur’s son Bayazit was released from the Semipalatinsk prison, having served a year and eight months. Hungry, exhausted and depressed, he made his way on foot to Chingis-Tau. On the way he learned of the murder of his grandfather. Other of his relatives had died of starvation. And on the cold nights, Bayazit could not find shelter. He was freezing. He had not eaten in six days. Struggle as he might he was unable to reach his beloved family and found himself spending nights in abandoned sheep pens, until he was no longer able to endure the torment. He cut his own throat. And eventually someone from the nearby kistau, a stranger, came to bury Bayazit.

Akhat’s son and daughter starved to death in Semipalatinsk in the Autumn of 1931. His son, Rukh, had loved his grandfather Shakarim dearly. Shakarim’s poem ‘Konyr-al’ makes reference to the relationship between grandfather and grandson. And yet of course Karasartov had executed the poet without trial, intent on destroying all memory of him. For a man like Karasartov, the creative heritage of the poet did not matter at all. For a man like him, it was as simple as that anyone who did not agree with the Bolsheviks was an enemy of the Soviet regime and had to be destroyed.

Almost all of the GPU operatives were stationed in the local prisoner camp set up by Karasartov near Kaual, called the Abzal camp. Along with Shakarim’s relatives there were many other prisoners in this camp. They were poorly fed, and constantly questioned. Spring started to arrive.

The first of the poet’s own sons to get out of there was Kabysh. In these times of hunger, he decided to live away from people so as not to put his family in danger. He set up his yurt by the river Shiy
in Zhidebai. In the summer of 1932 he contracted a disease and died alone in the wilderness.

Gulnar, the youngest daughter of Shakarim and Aigansha, nearly lost her life in the camp when she decided to drink poison to escape the suffering. Abai’s daughter Kulbadan saved her, giving her milk to drink. When she got out of the camp, Gulnar managed to get to Almaty. She went to live on a collective farm called Kalinin in the Iliisky district of the Almaty Oblast. Her husband died in World War II. Gulnar herself died in 1970.

Aigansha, Shakarim’s beloved wife, was held at the prison camp for almost a year. By the end of summer 1932, she was left exhausted, broken, and sick. When she did leave, she immediately made her way to the city, hoping to find her daughters. But they were no longer there. Aigansha stopped at the house of Duysenbi. And she died there of starvation shortly after.
Exodus to China

Aigansha’s eldest daughter Zhakim lived with her children and her husband Kabibolly Makhmutov in Semipalatinsk. Following Shakarim’s death they were all arrested as “bandits and enemies of the people” and imprisoned in the city jail. Taufik Dosaev, son of Kabibolly and Zhakim wrote in his memoirs, “my father and mother and their three children sat in prison awaiting a decision on their fate. At this time, Caripolla, son of Musabai-Hadji, was working at one of the offices in Almaty. He sent a missive indicating that the fate of the family would be decided in Almaty. In December 1931 the whole family was sent to by train in the ‘Red Car’ accompanied by two guards to Almaty. Caripolla then persuaded his friend Ulugbek, who was working as a police officer in Ayaguz, to remove Kabibolly and his family from the train when it pulled into the station, on the pretext that their case was to be reconsidered in Semipalatinsk.” And indeed Ulugbek answered the request, accompanied the family off the train and sent them by sled to Urdzhar. From there, the border with China was not far at all. The problem was that the border was closed at that time, and anyone attempting to cross it was shot without hesitation. The family stayed in Urdzhar that year. Kabibolly and Zhakim had four sons in all, three of whom were named by Shakarim in honour of Khoja Khafiz. Two of them, Kozhaniyaz and Khozhagapez, died of starvation in Urdzhar in 1932.

In 1933 there was a mass exodus of starving people into China. Kabibolly’s family eventually managed to cross the border on foot. Taufik Dosaev himself was born in March that year, when the family had finally arrived and settled in China. There Zhakim made contact with her brother Ziyat and his family. Ziyat was working at that time as head of the Department of Culture in the District Education Department. He had even helped them to make the crossing. But Ziyat himself did not escape repression, even on Chinese soil. In 1937, his father-in-law Nurtayuly, a respected Kazakh curator, was

.................. 164 ................
arrested by secret servicemen as an “enemy of the people.” When they took him, they took Ziyat with him. He was executed in 1938.

Not only Shakarim’s relatives, but his friends and acquaintances were also subjected to repression. There are various stories of entire families arrested on dubious charges and held for long periods of time, of others fleeing desperately in anticipation of the same fate.

The hunger and desperation of Shakarim’s relatives at this time may be judged from the following story of Gafur’s daughter Kamila Kapyrkyza:

“I was studying in my eighth year at school in Arkalyk with my aunt Lyabiba, when the orders were sent from the GPU to send all Shakarim’s relatives to Karaul. My grandmother Aigansha and aunt Gulnar were sent by other transportation. But all of us were taken to Karaul. I was locked up with my mother in a cold, dark place. At night, in the darkness rats rushed about shrieking, scaring us to death. We did not sleep. I can still see before me the pained face of my mother who clutched to her chest a bag of food crumbs for fear that they may be eaten by the rats.

Two days later, we were freed in secret by another member of the family and my mother took me to Kaskabalak. From there I remember we travelled by camel to her aunt Raikhan who lived with her daughter Shake in Semipalatinsk. Her husband was Zhamshibay. Many descendants of Kudaiberdi who fled from their native lands were aided by this family [...] Only one of us, Medeukhan Aga, could do anything. He would travel to Aleisk with stitched mittens, soap, and matches, to exchange for bread. It is hard to explain how we survived that winter. There was no food and no work [...] A person develops a bad memory through hunger, it turns out. I remember almost nothing. Those who survived until the summer and had more strength left for Siberia. The rest of the people left their auls in search of food, getting as far as the markets in Semipalatinsk. We also went to the market. There were multitudes of people there, unable to open their eyes from hunger and exhaustion. I watched a
man steal a roll of bread from one of the market traders. One began eating anything that came to hand. I still remember watching the man as he was kicked on the ground.

All Shakarim’s relatives travelled in different directions around the globe and lost contact with each other.”

So many died that year. The two hundred kilometre road from Chingis-Tau to Semipalatinsk was littered with corpses. The inhabitants of the auls sought refuge in cities. OGPU officers tracked them down on the Steppe and dragged them back. In many auls, people simply were not allowed to leave their homes by local authorities and police. Entire families died this way, lying there in the emptiness of their dilapidated yurts, behind closed doors. It was an unprecedented situation for the Kazakh Steppe. People turned to beasts in their hunger and began eating each other’s children. A dear friend of Shakarim’s, Aupisha, froze to death in the cold one winter out on the Steppe.

Kamila Kapyrkyza:

“The people sent their children to an orphanage and went to Siberia. My mother, too, moved in with my aunt Nagima in Siberia. I was left with friends. But this “friend of my aunt” soon informed me that I must leave. After school, I had nowhere to go, and I cried. A tatar girl, taking pity on me, took me to her home. Before I was sent away to school, I lived with them.

Mashim, the wife of uncle Kabysh, sent their daughter Kapiyash, who was the same age as me, to a children’s home. She went to relatives in Ayaguz and died there of starvation. Okesh, Bayazit’s wife, died in his brother Alimkozha’s house. Alimkozha himself was found guilty of his murder. The fate of his only daughter is unknown to me.

I list their fates, to show that after Shakarim’s death not only was his poetry destroyed, but also the lives of his relatives. I wonder when will I be rid of the bitterness that filled me then? We lived in those days, full of sadness [...] Let people know that there are still descendants of Shakarim.”

166 • • • • • • •
Genocide by famine

It is thought by some that around 2 million Kazakhs died on the Steppe as a result of famine between 1931 and 1933, half the total Kazakh population at that time. A further 200–250,000 Kazakh citizens from other ethnic groups also died.

These shocking figures suggest a deliberate act of genocide targeted against the Kazakh Steppe dwellers.

1 million people migrated out of Kazakhstan during the years of famine, 616,000 of whom never returned. They went to China, Mongolia, Iraq and Afghanistan. They went to the neighbouring Soviet Republics of Russia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Other research suggests that a smaller number of people died of hunger in these years – something in the order of 1.75 million people. But this is cold comfort. The numbers we are looking at here are at any rate unimaginable and represent a large-scale humanitarian crisis. The Kazakh Regional Committee (KRC), Central Executive Committee (CEC) and Council of People’s Commissars (CPC) of the republic never incurred any liability for this huge number of fatalities among the people.

Amid this terrible disaster, the disappearance of the Kazakh intelligentsia went almost unnoticed. During the 1930s, hundreds of well-educated politicians, artists and public figures were accused of a number of political and criminal misdemeanors, and were all thrown into prison. Many were shot, accused of treason, or as in Shakarim’s case, demonstrations against the Soviet government. Those that remained were sent to Stalin’s concentration camps, the gulags, where they later died. And so the Kazakh nation had not only lost one half of its population to hunger as a direct result of confiscations of land and other brutal measures imposed by the new government, but figuratively speaking it was beheaded. The intellectual cream of the nation was almost completely destroyed.
Repression of Alash

Almost all of the members of the Alash Party and the Alash-Orda government, with very few exceptions, were sent off to the gulags, where they died from disease. The rest managed to emigrate.

Alikhan Bukeikhanov, comrade and brother of Shakarim and leader of the Alash Party, was arrested by the Soviet authorities in the autumn of 1922. But he was then transferred to a private apartment in central Moscow. Under the pretext of drawing on the extensive knowledge of the man, known as he was for being an authority on that part of the world, they merely isolated him from both the people and the Alash-Orda government. Putting Bukeikhanov into retirement at the age of 57, they then kept him essentially under house arrest for the next ten years. In July 1937, Bukeikhanov was arrested in his Moscow apartment, where he had spent the last 15 years of his life, and imprisoned in the Butyrka prison. Two months later, on 27 September, the military collegiate of the USSR Supreme Court sentenced Bukeikhanov to death as a “Japanese spy” and he was shot the same day.

Akhmet Baitursynov, one of the founding members of Alash and First Commissar of Education of the Republic, was arrested in June 1929 and sent to Moscow as a state prisoner. He was charged with attempting to establish contacts with Mustafa Choka with whom he was implementing plans to separate Kazakhstan from Russia. In 1931 Baitursynov was exiled to the Arkhangelsk Oblast. In 1934, thanks to the intervention of Maxim Gorky and his wife and the International Red Cross, Baitursynov was released, and then returned to Kazakhstan. But in 1937 he was arrested again. He was held in a remand prison in Almaty by the NKVD until 8 December 1937 when he was shot.

Mirzhakyp Dulatov, journalist, writer and publicist, and fellow leader of the Alash Party, was arrested in 1928, following which he remained in prison for two years. During interrogations, in response to accusations of nationalism Dulatov responded: “I will do everything...
in my power for the sake of the future of my people. If I am mistaken, then at least I stand together with the people. Sooner or later the truth will prevail.” Dulatov was declared an “enemy of the people”, and transferred to the Solovetsky labour camp in Kem, where he died on 5 October 1935 in the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal.

Again, almost all of the people connected with Alash-Orda were killed. And the 4297 members of the Alash Party were heavily repressed.

But Alash was not the only organisation to be targeted in this way. In all, the NKVD “exposed” 183 organizations in Kazakhstan, identifying some 3720 “agents” among their members. Something in the order of 110,000 people were subjected to political repression in Kazakhstan in the period from 1920 to 1953.

The list of Stalin’s victims even grew to include Karasartov, Shakarim’s own Pontius Pilate and executioner. According to a police report, Abzal Karasartov was arrested by the NKVD on 8 January 1938 in the Karaganda Oblast. His case was dismissed the following day due to lack of evidence. The report records that he was “rehabilitated”
Shakarim’s name is banned

As a former member of the Alash-Orda government, Shakarim’s name was banned for many years. It was dangerous to speak his name out loud. Any mention of it was considered a veneration of an “enemy of the people.”

Nygmet Magauiyauly, who knew the writings of Shakarim well, recalled a certain episode. When Mukhtar Auezov would come to stay at Abai’s home, he would always bring friends with him. And one such friend was Nygmet. “One day he asked for someone to recite the poem ‘Nartailak and Aisulu’ for him. And he said: “If anyone asks, say that it was written by the poet’s son Kabysh.” He knew that if the real poet’s name were mentioned, at best one could expect to be taken out of work, and at worst sent into exile in the gulag. And so among the Tobykti, Shakarim’s works were always attributed to Kabysh from then on, still believing that Shakarim’s name would one day be cleared and thus his poetic works would be returned to the people.

Kamila Kapyrkyza:

“Then as I saw the light blue in the distance, Chingis-Tau seemed to me the worst place in the world. I remember I said to myself with tears in my eyes: ‘God forbid them to return to these places, so that I may survive.’ Sometimes, while I was away, I recalled my native land and family, but I lacked the courage to go back there. For in my memory again and again there arose this terrible image of Chingis-Tau. I visited the Abai district, hurrying through Zhidebai to visit the graves of Abai and Shakarim. From there Kistau was near at hand, but I went straight back to Taldy-Kurgan Oblast. I continued to believe that there was nothing worse in this world than Chingis-Tau.”
His name is cleared

After Stalin’s death, Shakarim’s family began writing letters to the KGB pleading for his case to be investigated. In the course of their investigation, Gabit Musirepov compiled a short biography of Shakarim (an extract of which is given in translation in the preface to the present book). Musirepov’s report details the poet’s background and creative achievements, and in accounting for his run-in with the law presents a barely veiled attack on the perceived “narrow-mindedness” of the authorities at that time, who were intent on rooting out any form of independent thinking they could not comprehend. Ultimately the investigation found no evidence of anti-Soviet activity in Shakarim. On 19 February 1958 Deputy Regional Prosecutor Grishkov announced that Shakarim’s guilt in participating in a counter-revolutionary uprising was unproven, and that the court had therefore decided to clear his name. This conclusion was confirmed by the decision of the USSR Prosecutor’s Office on 28 November 1958. Reason had triumphed. It was no longer possible to receive a prison sentence for mentioning the poet’s name. His poems could once more be read aloud. Shakarim’s son Akhat gained access to all his father’s manuscripts. Now many Kazakh writers and public figures came forward and denounced the banning of Shakarim’s name.

At that time the Commission on Rehabilitation was already working on the rehabilitation of several prominent figures of the Kazakh people, who were repressed in 1920s and ‘30s. The chairman of the commission was the academic Zhabaikhan Abdul’din.

He gave an interview on the subject of this work in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 1 February 2003: “I regarded appointing the head of the commission as the most important mission. We started, it seemed to us, with the easiest work, preparing at the end of 1987 the necessary documents for the rehabilitation of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev. Before us there had been numerous attempts to restore his good name,
but they were met with incomprehension, accusations of bourgeois nationalism, or participation in Alash-Orda activities.

I had read all the literature about Shakarim, and wondered about many things. It turns out that I knew by heart some of his works, such as ‘Kalkaman and Mamyр’. In my childhood I was taught these poems as part of folk singing. As a result of our work we found that Shakarim was an honest man, and was not involved in the Alash-Orda Party in the way he had been accused. He was an educator, a nephew of Abai, a successor of his work, who developed his ideas in the field of ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy, and lived as a hermit in the mountains, where he could not have engaged in political activity [...]

After analyzing Shakarim’s activity and his works, the commission made an objective inquiry, and gave a detailed report to the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Suddenly Miroshnikov, KGB Chairman of Kazakhstan, gets hold of our report and states that the commission has not handled the work correctly, alleging that we have idealized the figure Shakarim, an enemy of the Soviet regime, bourgeois nationalist, head of the kulak revolt in Semipalatinsk Oblast, and so on.

After he made his speech there was silence in the hall. We could expect most adverse consequences if someone from the members of the Bureau were to express solidarity with Miroshnikov. Then Nursultan Nazarbaev said: ‘Let the chairman of the commission speak on this issue.’ Thus he saved the situation. I spoke again, saying that I disagreed with the opinion of Miroshnikov and justified my position. Then no one among the members of the Bureau said a word, and the first secretary of the Communist Party Kolbin proposed to support the commission’s opinion. Thus, we survived the first battle thanks to Nursultan.’
“Rehabilitation”

In April 1988, the Commission on Rehabilitation made a press release on the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to “rehabilitate” Shakarim, declaring him innocent of all wrongdoing. Kayum Mukhamedkhanov, who was most vocal in publicising this cause, received a personal telegram from the First Secretary of the Union of Writers of Kazakhstan, Aidi Sharipov, congratulating him on this historic victory. At the end of 1988 the publishers Zhalynd and Zhazushy published two books of Shakarim’s work. His son Akhat, unfortunately, did not live to see their publication.

A memorial was finally erected in Zhidebai at the burial site of Abai and Shakarim. Publication of Shakaim’s work has continued since then, as well as research papers and books about his life and work. Most notably, in 2000 Iman, a collection of poems, was published in Almaty by the Atamura publishing house. In 2003, they then published Mirror of the Kazakhs. In 2007, the Raritet publishing house published five volumes of the research series ‘Issues in Shakarim Studies’ in Almaty, which was put together by the Shakarim Research Centre in the Semey State Pedagogical Institute. Finally, the first encyclopedia entry under ‘Shakarim’ was published in Semey in 2008.