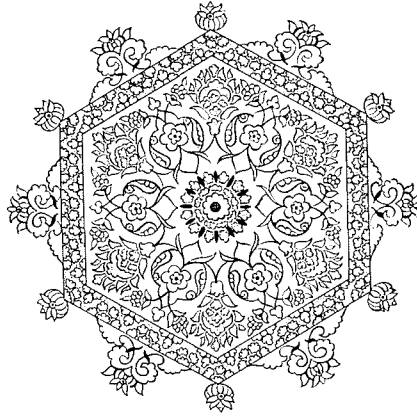




Land of the Great Silk Road

While all eyes have focused on the destinies of Russia and the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe, the five Central Asian states that emerged from the former Soviet Union have received far less scholarly attention. Our contributors here consider the past and future of this important region, land of the Silk Road, seat of empires, a center of Islamic civilization, and sometime-pawn in the world's geopolitical struggles.



CARAVANS AND CONQUESTS

by James Critchlow

Even before the official breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Central Asians began to reclaim their history. In Alma-Ata, capital of Kazakhstan, for example, civic leaders changed the name of one of their major thoroughfares from Gorky Street to Jibek Joly—Kazakh for what English speakers call the “Great Silk Road,” the fabled trade route that ran through Central Asia in ancient times. The renaming was but one of countless symbolic gestures in a process that Uzbek historian Hamid Ziyaev describes as “breaking the bars of the cage.”

The cage was of Russian making. Tsarist armies began to transform Central Asia into a colonial dominion during the 18th and 19th centuries, and efforts to Russify the region grew even more intense under Soviet rule. For roughly seven decades, the peoples of Kazakhstan and its southern neighbors Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, were forced to accept a crude and demeaning version of their past. According to official Soviet histories, Central Asians had long lived in primitive obscurity until brought enlightenment by their Russian “elder brother.”

To Central Asians, mention of the Silk Road evokes memories of a bygone grandeur, when Turkestan, a vast territory half the size of the continental United States, was an affluent center of world trade. For centuries, camel trains laden with silks and spices from China and India stopped in its caravanserais on their way to Asia Minor and Europe, and more than one traveler was struck by the splendors of its art and architecture as well as by the activity of its bazaars. During his late-12th-century journey to Cathay, Marco Polo, that cosmopolitan man of Venice, described Bukhara as a “very great and noble city.”

The attainments of Central Asian civilization were forgotten by many in the West, but not by all. H. G. Wells, in his *Outline of History*, observed that “in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. not merely Persia, but the regions that are now Turkestan and Afghanistan, were far more advanced in civilization than were the French and English of that time.” Wells’s observation came in the middle of his discussion of Manichaeism, a once-important world religion founded by the third-century Persian prophet Mani, who traveled and preached throughout Central Asia. The ancient city of Samarkand (in today’s Uzbekistan) became

the center of Mani's faith, proof, Wells noted, "that Turkestan was no longer a country of dangerous nomads, but a country in which cities were flourishing and men had the education and leisure for theological argument."

Theological argument opened the door to other religions in this era before the birth of Muhammad, giving Zoroastrianism and Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity major followings in the region. A Christian church once stood on the

site of Bukhara's Kalan minaret, since the 12th century a symbol of what has been regarded as one of Islam's holiest cities. Unfortunately, indigenous written records from that early period are almost nonexistent, and historians have had to rely on scant descriptions in Greek, Chinese, Persian, or Arab sources. But a tantalizing fragment of the early native sensibility and culture survives in a mural painted sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries on the wall of a palace excavated near the city of Samarkand. The mural depicts richly dressed nobles in an elegant bridal caravan, a royal reception of foreign ambassadors, and hunting and swimming scenes. Archaeologists at the site say they have reached a stratum showing Samarkand to be at least 2,500 years old, and they believe there are still deeper strata to be found.

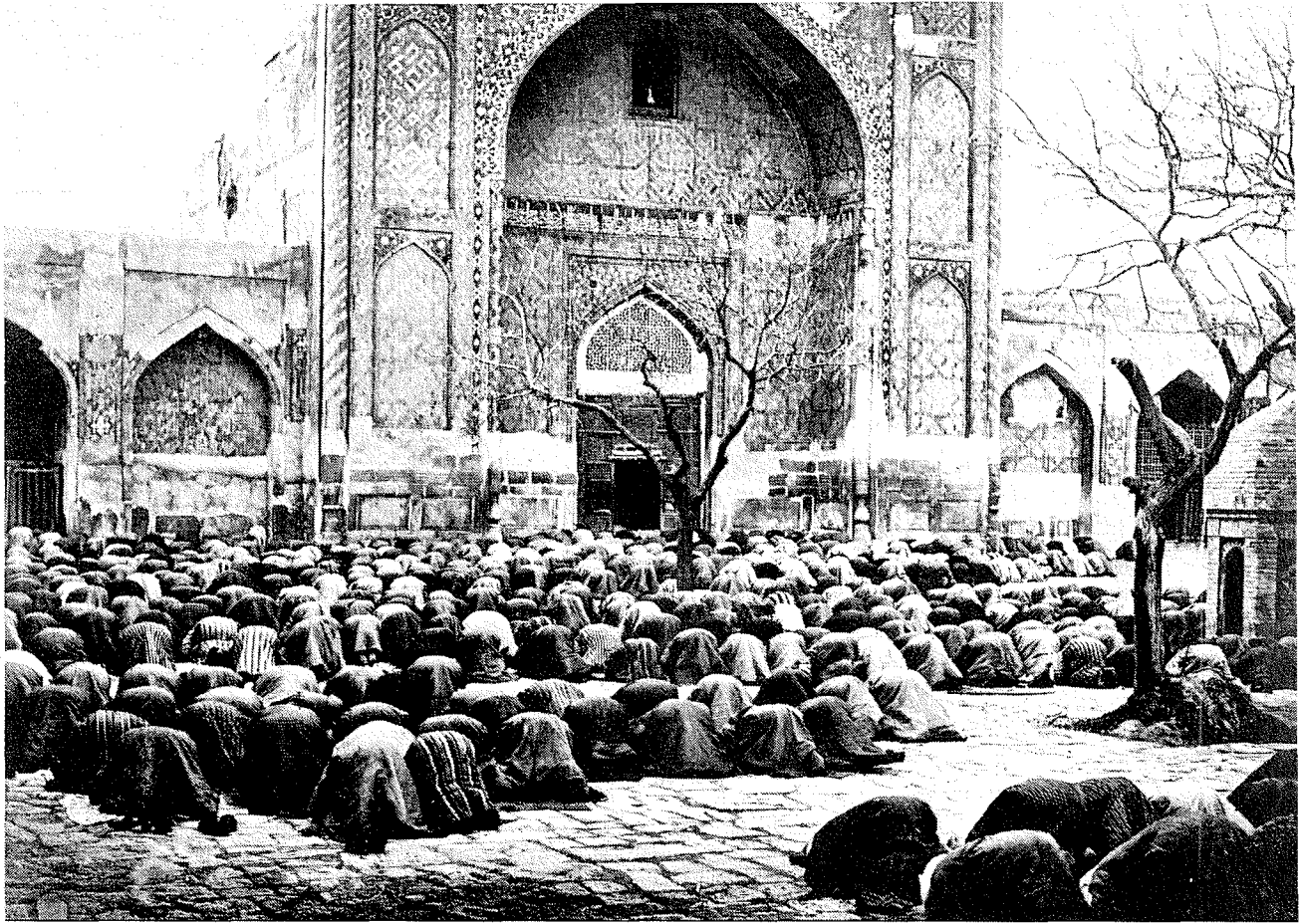
With few natural defense barriers, Central Asia has been a perennial target of invaders. For much of history, parts or all of it have been subject to the hegemony of alien empires: Persian, Greek, Parthian, Chinese, Mongol, Russian. And always (until Russian arms



Depicting two noblemen, this detail from a fifth- or sixth-century mural excavated near the city of Samarkand attests to the high level of culture attained by the early "oasis" civilization.

imposed a new order beginning in the 18th century) stability was threatened by bands of nomad raiders who, weary of their hard life as herdsman and lured by urban booty, swept down off the Eurasian plain from the north or through the mountain passes from the east. As in China, walls were erected against the intruders. The ruins of one are still visible in Bukhara today. Of all the nomadic invaders, the Turks, who came in successive waves, became the most lasting presence. Seduced by the warmth and comfort of the oases, they settled down and created an amalgam of nomadic and sedentary cultures that was to culminate in powerful empires spreading out to make Central Asians, for a time, not the conquered but the conquerors.

Their troubled history has doubtless helped to shape the character of the Central Asians, who are often viewed as wily and secretive masters of pokerfaced reserve. The American diplomat Eugene Schuyler, who made a lengthy visit to the region in 1873 from his post in St. Petersburg, liked the people he met but found them to be untrustworthy, perhaps because they identified him with the Russians who were then



The faithful pray in front of the Tilla Kari madrasah (theological school) in Samarkand's main square, the Registan. Tilla Kari functioned both as a school and as a mosque.

in the process of overrunning them.

The territory included in the five Central Asian republics of today extends southward from the grassy Siberian steppes to the deserts and oases of what ancient writers (and modern ones like Arnold Toynbee) called "Transoxania," the lands north of the Oxus, Central Asia's greatest river (now the Amu Darya). The Arabs referred to the area as "Mawara-an-Nahr" (beyond the river). And the name Turkestan came into use as a geographical concept around the third century, employed by Persians of the Sassanid

period to designate the "land of Turks" on the other side of the Oxus that then formed the border of their empire (and today the boundary between Afghanistan and the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). The name was institutionalized by tsarist administrators in the second half of the 19th century, when they set up a Turkestan Government-General to rule their newly acquired colonies in the territory.

Ethnically, however, Turkestan is something of a misnomer, because many of the modern non-Russian inhabitants are Irani-

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ans. These are the Tajiks, who speak a language close to the Farsi of Iran and are descended from the earliest recorded settlers. If today the Tajiks are an Indo-European island in a vast sea of Turks, they can at least take satisfaction in the fact that the Persian civilization of their forebears made a lasting imprint on the Turkic conquerors, especially in the great oasis cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.

Long before the first raids by the Turks and at least a millennium before the birth of Christ, Iranian nomads settled in the fertile river valleys to raise food crops and, in time, cotton. Rice became the staple and remains so today. Water was crucial to life in a region where there is often no rainfall over the entire growing season, and artificial irrigation was introduced in very early times, fed by streams that descended from the high snow-capped mountains to the east and south and then flowed gradually in a northwesterly direction toward the lowlands of the Caspian littoral, on the way forming oases in the desert. Politically, the territory came to be dominated by a land-owning class of agrarian warrior magnates, the *dihqans*, each *dihqan* exercising sway over the surrounding countryside from a fortified redoubt.

At some point during this early period, traders began to traverse the region, among them Chinese merchants, who brought silk in exchange for products of Central Asian artisanry and animal husbandry and for other goods flowing in from Asia Minor and Europe. (The "heavenly" breed of horses raised in the Fergana Valley was much in demand at the Chinese imperial court.) As well as being early traders in the region, the Chinese are credited with teaching water-thirsty Central Asians to dig wells and with providing iron as raw material for an early metalworking (and armaments) industry in the Fergana Valley. From the other direction, the Roman Empire, came knowledge

of glassmaking, and in time Fergana colored glassware was said to surpass that of Western manufacture.

By the sixth century B.C., two power centers had arisen south of the Oxus. One was the empire of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, founded by Cyrus the Great; the other was the Bactrian kingdom (centered near present-day Balkh in northern Afghanistan), where the stationing of Greek garrisons had left a strong Hellenic influence on the monarchy. Parts of Central Asia were ruled at various times by both powers. When Alexander of Macedonia stopped off with his army on his march to India in the second half of the fourth century B.C., Sogdiana, the ancient name for the area around Samarkand, was a Persian province, as was Margiana (around Merv in today's Turkmenistan). To the northwest, along the lower reaches of the Oxus near the present-day city of Khiva, the state of Khorezm (or Khwarizm) was enjoying a phase of independence.

During his stay in Central Asia, Alexander briefly pushed the outer limit of Greek civilization to the banks of the Jaxartes, Central Asia's second great river (now known as the Syr Darya), which flows north of the Oxus (Amu Darya) and more or less parallel to it. The implosion of Greek power after Alexander's death in 323 B.C. resulted, however, in western Central Asia's coming under the new Parthian Empire, which had filled the vacuum and become wealthy by controlling the east-west caravan routes and using the Oxus to move cargo by ship. The eastern part of the territory was swept by nomads called in Chinese sources the Yüeh-chih, Iranians from western China who invaded Bactria to the south.

Meanwhile, on the northern and eastern periphery, the power of the Turkic nomad tribes, said to be related to the Huns who had struck ter-

TURKS AND TURKISH

As early as the third century B.C., Chinese chroniclers mention Turks as one of several nomadic peoples living in the steppe and forest regions northwest of China. The Chinese called them *Tu-kiu* and *Tu-lu*. By the sixth century A.D. these tribes had formed a Turk empire that encompassed immense territories and persisted some 300 years. Its rulers left inscriptions in a runic alphabet on stone monuments that have been found throughout the region encompassing present-day Mongolia, Tuva, and neighboring parts of Siberia. On his funerary stele Bilge Kaghan, who died in 734, declared:

I did not reign over a people that was rich; I reigned over a people weak and frightened, a people that had no food in their bellies and no cloth on their backs To preserve the reputation achieved by [my] father and uncle, for the sake of the Turk people, I spent nights without sleep and days without rest. When I became kaghan, the people who had dispersed in different countries returned, at the point of death, on foot, naked. To reestablish the nation, I led 22 campaigns. Then, by the grace of Heaven, and because of good fortune and propitious circumstances, I brought back to life the dying people, the naked people I clothed, and I made the few many.

The next great eastern Turkish empire was established in the eighth century by the Uigurs, who were converted first to Buddhism and then to Islam. The ruins of their capital, Karakhoja, cover several square miles not far from Turfan in modern China's Xinjiang-Uigur "autonomous" region and are surrounded by walls that still stand more than 25 feet high. The Uigurs, whose empire

lasted until the 12th century, wrote their Turkish in the classical vertical alphabet that the Mongols still use. While the eastern empires rose and fell, other Turks spread across Asia to the southern Russian steppes, where many were enlisted as mercenaries in the armies of the Byzantine Empire. The Khazars, another Turkic people, created an empire that lasted from the seventh to the 10th century and extended from the North Caucasus to the Volga and beyond into western Central Asia. They converted to Judaism. Arthur Koestler advanced the controversial theory in his *Thirteenth Tribe* that when their empire collapsed, its scattered people became the Ashkenazi Jews.

The Turkish languages belong to the same Altaic family as Mongolian and Manchu. (Some linguists also include Korean and Japanese in this family.) In form but not vocabulary, Turkish is related to Hungarian and Finnish. There are now at least 20 written Turkish languages ranging from Gagauz, used by Christian Turks in Moldova, to Yakut, spoken in the republic of that name in far northeastern Siberia. Modern Turkish languages are written in the Latin, Cyrillic, and Arabic alphabets. The Turkish of modern Turkey has the largest number of speakers (over 50 million), followed by Azeri (perhaps 20 million), Uzbek (17 million), Kazakh (9.5 million), modern Uigur (7.5 million), and Tatar (6.5 million). A speaker of basic Turkish can make himself understood all the way from the Balkans to North China. Ask an Azeri or a Kazakh or an Uzbek for a glass of *su*, and each will give you water.

—Paul B. Henze

ror in Roman hearts, was growing. By the sixth century A.D. the Turks had seized control of the Eurasian plain, and Turkic cavalry were engaged in struggles against three sedentary empires, Byzantine, Persian, and Chinese. Central Asian towns began to fall to the rule of Turkic dynasties.

Although in the modern sense of the word not quite the "barbarians" that the Chinese called them, the Turks were tough

and warlike. At the same time, they shaped a society with elaborate customs and ways that have survived in the nostalgia of Turkic peoples today. Among those ways were modes of clannic and tribal political and social organization that in some forms persist to the present.

In the nomadic days of the steppe, before the Turkic forebears of today's Central Asian nationalities settled down, a tribal

chieftain had to retain popularity among his followers in order to keep them from simply wandering off. This gave rise to a certain democratic tradition according to which the chieftain consulted on important decisions with the *aksakals*, tribal elders. At the same time, ancestry played an even more decisive role than popularity in the selection of the chieftain, and elaborate oral genealogies established the all-important blood lines. (After the death of Chingis [or Genghis] Khan in the early 13th century, the ability to trace one's descent from the Mongol conqueror was especially prized, often mandatory for a ruler.)

As a result of migration and military expeditions, kindred tribal units became widely dispersed, with much intermingling and interaction. The names Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen are derived from tribal confederations, the first three being members of a larger Kipchak conglomerate, sometimes called the "northwest" Turkic group, whose name relates to the *Dasht-i-kipchak*, the steppe to the north of Transoxania. The Turkmen, by contrast, are members of the Oguz or southwestern group, which in terms of their origins puts them closer to the Turks of modern Turkey. The former Soviet republics bearing these names actually have mixed populations, with members of each republic's eponymous nationality scattered in other Central Asian republics.

During the Soviet period allegiance to tribal affiliation was officially proscribed, and could bring severe penal sanctions; only "nationality" was considered the legitimate identity. In consequence, people kept quiet about their tribal or

clannic ties, and research on the subject was taboo. Today, the question of the Central Asians' true identity is shrouded in mystery. When Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, complains about interference of clannic networks in the work of the state, is he referring to the old tribal identities or merely to family ties and local autarky? How much truth is there in reports that in Kazakhstan there are functioning networks based on the three subdivisions of the Kazakh tribes, the Greater, Lesser and Middle Hordes? Given the years of sedentary living and disruption of the old tribal patterns, are such distinctions merely a kind of romantic nostalgia without basis in social reality? These questions are ripe for study by researchers, now that they have the freedom to investigate.

Testimony about the lifeways of the early Turks survives in the chronicle of a Chinese Buddhist man of learning, Yuan-Chwang, who, in the seventh century, ventured through Central Asia on his way to India. Along the route to Samarkand, he and his party came across a band of 2,000 mounted Turkish robbers di-



In this turn-of-the century photograph, Sarts engage in a fierce game called buzkashi. The game connects the urbanized Sarts with their nomadic Turkic forebears, the great horsemen of the steppes.

viding up booty from a caravan; the Chinese travelers seem to have been saved when the Turks began to fight among themselves over the spoils. But on reaching the city where the "Khan of the Turks" was located, the Chinese party witnessed a scene of a different kind: an entourage of 200 officers dressed in brocade and with braided



The Middle East and Asia seem to blend in this photograph of painted boys performing a dance to the accompaniment of bangles and tambourines.

hair, surrounded by support troops wearing furs and "fine spun hair garments" and mounted on horses and camels. The Khan, resplendent in a robe of green satin and a silken turban, emerged from his tent, "a large pavilion adorned with golden flower ornaments which blind the eye with their glitter." Although the Turks were then still Zoroastrian fire-worshippers, the Khan with courteous ceremony conducted the learned Buddhist visitor inside, where officers "clad in shining garments of embroidered silk" were seated in rows on mats. To musical accompaniment, a feast of mutton and veal was served with wine. For the Buddhist holy man, there were special dishes of rice cakes, cream, and various

sweets. At the Khan's request, Yuan-Chwang explained the principles of his religion and was given an attentive hearing.

The seventh century, the time of Yuan-Chwang's odyssey, was also one of Chinese imperial expansion—at one point extending all the way across Central Asia to the Caspian Sea and frequently bringing the Chinese into military conflicts with the Turks. Around the middle of the same century, however, such warring began to assume far less importance to the settled urban populations of Central Asia. A new power appeared on the scene: the Arabs.

Propelled by a great burst of expansionist energy combined with religious fervor, Arab armies in the decades after Muhammad's death in 632 created an empire that extended from North Africa and Spain in the west to Asia Minor and Persia in the east. Transoxania was on the outer fringes of this vast region, and its conquest by the Arabs was neither rapid nor easy. They occupied the western oasis of Merv in 651, but farther to the east, Bukhara, under a female ruler, and Sogd (Samarkand) held out for decades. Even after initial victories, the Arabs had to reconquer the eastern portion of the territory, which at one point was given up for lost in the face of uprisings and the recalcitrance of native surrogates weakly overseen by their emirs.

Spread thin by the vastness of their empire, the Arabs lacked cadres of their own to administer it. Nor did all people of Transoxania accept the Arabs' Islamic religion. Marco Polo, passing through Samarkand more than five centuries after its subjugation by Arab power, found a sizeable Christian minority still locked in conflict with the Muslim majority. Arabic served as the official language for some three centu-

ries, but in time gave way to Persian for all but religious purposes. This development reflected the declining political power of the caliphate in Baghdad and the rise, in the late ninth century, of the Persian Samanid dynasty, whose second ruler, Ismail, made Bukhara his capital. (His mausoleum there remains in splendid condition, having been preserved beneath sand for centuries.)

The transcendent achievement of Islamization was to make Central Asia an integral and active part of a farflung international civilization. Abu Raihan Muhammad al-Biruni, born in the Khorezm district in 973, has been called by one authority "probably the most comprehensive scholar Islam ever produced." He is known for his writings on science, mathematics, and history, as well as for a description of the India of his day that is still a classic. Had he been born a few hundred years earlier, this man would almost certainly have lived and died in oblivion. Similarly, the talents of his contemporary, al-Khorezmi, who is credited with having invented algebra, or the somewhat later Bukharan Avicenna (ibn-Sina), a philosopher and scientific investigator whose medical treatise in translation was used in Western Europe for centuries, might have been relegated to obscurity.

Central Asians were also to make early contributions to the development of the Islamic religion, founding movements which continue to have significant followings throughout the Muslim world. Among such figures were the 12th-century poet and Sufi philosopher Ahmad Yasavi and the 14th-century Bukharan Bahauddin Naqshband, originator and first sheikh of what is still one of the largest Sufi orders.

If by the year 1000 Persian secular culture was in the ascendancy over that of the Arabs, political power passed definitively from Iranian to Turkic hands. Samanid rule, which at its height embraced almost

all of Transoxania and Persia, was undermined by the intrigues of Turk military commanders in its service. Its end was hastened by a singular irony: Having secured the voluntary conversion to Islam of the Turkic tribes on their borders, the Iranian Samanids, when attacked by those same tribes, could no longer call for *Jihad* , holy war. Transoxania was taken over by a succession of Turkic or Turco-Mongol rulers from outside, making "Turkestan" a political reality. In time, however, a new indigenous power arose, the empire of the Khorezm Shahs, a Muslim dynasty originally of Turkic origin centered in the city of that name. For a few decades in the 12th and 13th centuries, its dominion spread through Transoxania and Persia.

But a new invader from the east was not long in coming—the Mongol Chingis Khan. In alliance with Turkic warriors, Chingis began the year 1220 by capturing



A Jewish woman of Samarkand.

and sacking Bukhara and finished it by occupying Samarkand and the other important Transoxanian cities.

Chingis survives in the folk memory of Russians and other Europeans as the very embodiment of ruthless evil, an image that has been encouraged with varying degrees of zeal in later centuries. During the Soviet period, the portrayal of Chingis as a force of darkness became a matter of ideological orthodoxy, with official historians quoting Karl Marx on Mongol misdeeds in refutation of such "bourgeois apologists" as the Yale historian George Vernadsky, himself of Russian origin.

But while Chingis's atrocities appear to have been excessive even by the standards of his day, scholars have certainly been right to point to mitigating circumstances. His reported harshness in Central Asia, compared with relative leniency in other areas, may have been connected with an incident in which one of his trading caravans was murderously attacked on the territory of the reigning Khorezm Shah. And for all his barbarity, Chingis's conquests had the civilizing effect of facilitating the spread of Muslim culture by his Islamized descendants. It is noteworthy, finally, that accounts by foreigners who visited Turkestan not long after Chingis supposedly leveled its cities contained no reports of ruins. However ruthless he was in fact, the popular view of Chingis as bogeyman is essentially Eurocentric. In Turkic lands from Anatolia to Xinjiang, parents proudly name their sons Chingis (or even Attila).

After Chingis's death in 1227, his empire was split among his successors. It took more than a century for a new unifying force to emerge in the person of a Central Asian named Timur from the city of Kish (the old name for Shahrisabz in present-day Uzbekistan). Seizing control of Turkestan, where he made his capital at Samarkand, Timur administered crushing blows to the

nomads and led invading armies into Persia, southern Russia, India, and Asia Minor, defeating and capturing the Ottoman sultan at Ankara in 1402, three years before his death at age 69. Timur's azure-domed mausoleum in Samarkand, the Gur-i Amir, remains one of the great architectural monuments of the world.

The legend of Timur's cruelties captured the imagination of the West, where he became known as Tamerlane. Not quite 200 years after his death Christopher Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine* was being performed for London audiences by the Lord Admiral's company, and the powerful figure of its protagonist "threatening the world with high astounding terms" made it more successful in its own time than even the plays of Marlowe's contemporary, William Shakespeare. Slightly more than two centuries later, the American schoolboy Edgar Allan Poe wrote his poem *Tamerlane* in which Timur appears as a dying and repentant old man musing in Samarkand, "queen of Earth," on a youth spent "striding o'er empires haughtily, a diadem'd outlaw."

Central Asians of today see the Muslim Timur's legacy in a more positive light, especially his role in creating the lasting glory of Samarkand, a city that during his reign reached new commercial prosperity as a trading center through which flowed silks and pearls from China, sugar and spices from India, leather and cloth from Russia and Tatarstan, and rugs woven by the Turkmen tribes in the western desert (pronounced by Marco Polo a century earlier to be "the finest and handsomest carpets in the world"). A Spanish envoy who visited Samarkand shortly before Timur's death described the city's squares as "swarming night and day with people who trade without a moment's pause." From the lands he conquered Timur sent back to Samarkand

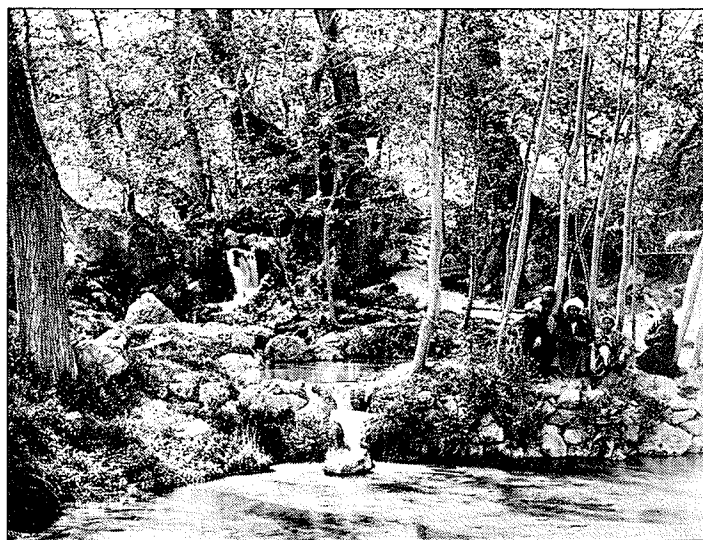
architects, astronomers, theologians, historians, craftsmen, and assorted other scientists and artists estimated by the same Spanish envoy to number "at the very least a hundred thousand." Special guards were installed to keep these unwilling courtiers from escaping the city.

Timur's domain, like Chingis's, did not long survive his death. His demise set in motion an era of fragmented power and internecine feuding lasting until the Pax Russica of the 19th century. The urbanized descendants of this warrior made lasting cultural contributions, but they were handicapped by political weakness. Although Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg, ruler of Samarkand, has gone down in history for his contributions to astronomy (the observatory which he built there survives), he was a target of political intrigue and fell victim of an assassin. Even the most famous of the Timurids, Zahiruddin Babur, who is revered today by Turks for his *Babur-nameh*, one of the first important literary works in an Eastern Turkic language, was forced—as Arnold Toynbee has pointed out—to pursue his ambitions elsewhere because of his inability to establish a reliable power base at home in Turkestan. To establish such a base, Babur marched his troops through Afghanistan to India, there founding the Mughal Empire.

The vacuum created by the political weakness of the Timurids opened the way to a new incursion of Turkic nomads from the steppes, this time Uzbek tribes led by a chief named Muhammad Shaibani Khan. These Uzbeks were able to seize

power from the remaining Timurids, completing their conquest of Turkestan in the first decade of the 16th century. But they lacked the strength to restore lasting unitary rule. (The coincidence of this tribal name and that of modern-day Uzbekistan should not lead to the assumption that the Shaibanids were the exclusive progenitors of today's Uzbeks, whose ancestry is complex and eclectic. "Uzbek" is at best an ethnic approximation, applied indiscriminately to descendants of the nomadic Uzbek tribes and to the urban Turkic population, known before the 1917 revolution as "Sarts," who had a traditional language and culture that differed greatly from those of the nomads.)

On the heels of the Shaibanid invasion, Central Asia's fragmentation into small, shifting territories ruled by feuding local khans or other aristocrats was exacerbated by two new factors, both of external origin: economic decay and religious isolation. Vasco da Gama's discovery at the end of the 15th century of a seaway from Europe to India and China further undercut the ancient land routes, where caravans were al-



The importance of oases in arid Turkestan is no mystery. Its great cities, including Samarkand and Bukhara, rose around them.

ready hampered by a proliferation of customs barriers erected by greedy petty rulers and by a breakdown of order that left them at the mercy of bandit Turkmen nomads in the Kara Kum Desert. The collapse of trade plunged the cities along the well-worn routes into decline.

Around the same time, Persia's Safavid dynasty embraced the Shi'a branch of Islam as its state religion. Growing intolerance between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims created a zone of hostility extending northward like a wedge from the Persian plateau through Azerbaijan into the Caucasus, severing the Central Asians' traditional ties with Persia and cutting off access to fellow Sunnis in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and other western Muslim countries. Turkestan, which for centuries had been an active contributor to the Islamic renaissance, now entered a long night of history.

As Central Asian power and prosperity declined, a new force was rising in the north. By the mid-16th century, Muscovite Russia had shaken off the effects of three centuries of vassalage to the Tatar-Mongol Golden Horde. In 1552, the troops of Ivan the Terrible captured the Tatar stronghold of Kazan on the Volga, opening the way for a movement of expansion eastward and southward that was to last 400 years. By the end of the 18th century, Russian traders and settlers were moving in strength into the steppelands north of the Central Asian oases, encroaching on the already dwindling pasture lands of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads. To protect these subjects of the tsar, a line of Russian forts began to stretch across the territory, manned by Cossacks.*

*The Slavic Cossacks, whose Christian society originated near the Turkic marches of southern Russia, and the Turkic Kazakhs, have names that have been attributed to the same Turkic verb, meaning "to roam." The similarity of names has not engendered amity. Even today, the government of Kazakhstan expresses concern over the alleged anti-Kazakh activities of Cossack agitators in the republic.

In time, the Turkic nomads came to accept the Russian presence, seeing it as the lesser of two evils. (The other was pressure from the east, from Buddhist nomads of Mongol origin.) This accommodation was helped by the relative recency and superficiality of the nomads' conversion to Islam, which made them more easygoing about religion than their sedentary neighbors to the south. A truce of sorts between Russians and nomads was concluded. Tribal khans accepted fealty to the tsar, although this did not always keep them from entering into simultaneous treaties of allegiance to Chinese or Central Asian rulers. Nor did it prevent the khans' subjects from attacking Russian settlers who moved onto their grazing lands. Still, tribesmen began to be educated in Russian schools and to serve in the tsarist army, some rising high in officers' ranks.

Following this relatively easy penetration of the nomadic steppes, the Russians paused for a time before moving further south into the more densely populated region of Transoxania. The chief obstacles to their advancement were three Central Asian khanates, known by their capital cities, which had become the political centers of the Transoxanian region: Kokand in the Fergana Valley to the east, Bukhara in the center, and Khiva (near the ancient site of Khorezm) in the west.

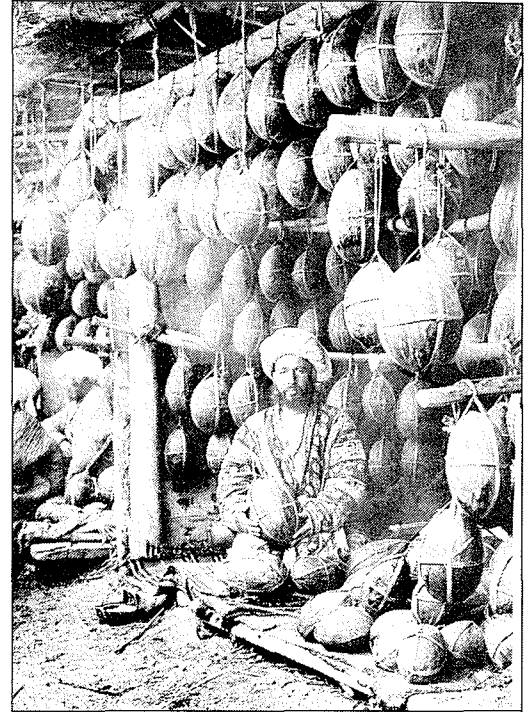
Of these, the largest and most formidable was Bukhara, whose ruling khans had come, under Persian cultural influence, to assume the additional title of "emir." ("Khan," a title of Mongol origin, was supposed to denote the bearer's descent from Chingis Khan, thus reinforcing his claim to legitimacy.) Contemporary accounts portray the Bukharan emirate as a land of poverty and persecution and slavery, of oppressive taxes, of public tortures and drawn-out executions, a place where curious non-Muslim visitors could be (and sometimes

were) clapped into the emir's *siyah chah*, his black hole, and eventually put to death. (Such was the unhappy fate, around 1842, of two British adventurers, Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly.) At the same time, the city maintained its reputation as "holy Bukhara" (*Bukhara-i-sherif*), one of the great centers of learning in the Islamic world.

By the 19th century, this reputation was enhanced by Bukhara's very remoteness and isolation. Many Muslims valued the city because it had in their eyes remained uncorrupted by the aura of infidel Western colonialism affecting such other Islamic centers as Cairo and even Ottoman Constantinople. One paradoxical result was that Bukhara's religious schools attracted Tatar students from the Volga region, young men who brought with them ideas from Russia and the European Enlightenment. Amid the stagnation of the emirate, the Tatar presence exercised a certain modernizing and liberalizing influence.

By the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the rulers of these three khanates had become sufficiently alarmed to begin making overtures to Ottoman sultans in the hope of obtaining their support against Russia. In return, they offered to become their subjects. One such appeal was received during the reign (1808–39) of Sultan Mahmud II. After deliberation with his advisers, who pointed to the remoteness of the khanates and the danger of becoming embroiled again with Russia (whose armies were threatening the Turks), Mahmud declined, defensively citing Islamic law as the authority for his refusal to come to the aid of his fellow Muslim potentates.

Now that they are free to do so, Central Asian historians have adduced evidence to show that when the Russian attack on the land south of the steppes finally came, resistance to it was far stronger than Soviet historiography ever revealed. It is true that ef-



A melon merchant in the ancient market of Bukhara. Melon- and rice-growing date from the earliest days of Central Asian agriculture.

forts by the khanates were disorganized and undercut by internecine feuding among the rulers, but the Russians were hardly welcomed as liberators. In 1853, defenders of the Ak Masjid fortress in the Kokand khanate refused demands to surrender during 22 days of siege marked by fierce fighting. In 1865, the people of Tashkent withstood siege for 42 days without food and water; when Russian troops finally breached the city wall—led by a cheering Orthodox priest—the defenders held out for another two days and nights of bitter hand-to-hand combat. It was not until 1885 that the last organized resistance was overcome with the defeat of the Turkmen tribes in the western desert.

The imperial government let the three khans keep their thrones, even while claiming their lands as tsarist protectorates. Bukhara and Khiva retained this status until

after the 1917 revolution. The khanate of Kokand, on the other hand, was liquidated soon after Russian occupation. Its land, like the rest of the conquered territory not part of the protectorates, was placed under the direct administration of the Turkestan Government-General. (By then, certain areas of what is today Kazakhstan already belonged to the adjacent Government-General of the Steppe, whose headquarters were located in the Siberian city of Orenburg.)

In the new colony the Russians practiced a policy of considerable *laissez-faire*, allowing the Muslim society to be largely self-governing. The French historians Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, whose work was seminal in reminding the West of the Muslim character of regions that many people too carelessly called "Russia," summed up Moscow's strategy in these words:

The Russians had no precise long-term policy towards the native population except in the sense that they aimed at keeping them apart, at isolating the country from all outside influence, and at maintaining it in a state of medieval stagnation, thus removing any possibility of conscious and organized national resistance.

The impact of the Russian presence was in fact enormous. Military victory opened the door to Russian settlers who gravitated toward Tashkent (in modern-day Uzbekistan), administrative headquarters of the Turkestan Government-General. New opportunities attracted Russian capital, especially to develop cotton growing. Economic change created a new class of prosperous native businessmen, while at the bottom of society fluctuations in crops and prices caused many peasants to lose their land. This was also a time of revolutionary technological change, as railroads and the telegraph brought the old cities into con-

tact not only with Russia and Europe but also with those parts of the Muslim world from which they had long been cut off.

Under Russian rule, Central Asia remained fairly stable. There were uprisings, some of them massive and bloody, but no organized radical movements. Yet the region acquired a new Islamic vigor. Turkestan intellectuals, exposed to modern currents despite Russian efforts to keep them isolated, came under the spell of Islamic reformers in other Muslim regions of the Empire, and of Young Turks and Young Iranians abroad. Muslims everywhere, humiliated by the ascendancy of European power in their lands, sought to reform their societies and make them able to compete in the modern world, to regain the lost glory that shone from the Islamic renaissance in the days when the West had been the backward neighbor.

In Russian-dominated Turkestan, which centuries earlier had been an active contributor to that renaissance, foreign and domestic newspapers in Turkic languages and in Persian now circulated freely, becoming vehicles of a new ethnic awareness. *Anjumans*, discussion groups, debated the burning issues of the day in homes and tea-houses. As elsewhere, there was a drive to introduce secular subjects into the curricula of Muslim schools, its proponents called *jadids*, from the Arab expression *usul jadid*, "new method."

This rebirth was cut short after 1917, and in the decades that followed Moscow tightened its yoke still further. Along with other repressions, the Soviet regime attempted—in the name of ideology—to eradicate or distort the record of past greatness. Yet despite persecutions and privations, the Central Asians clung privately to the memory of their former place at the pinnacle of world civilization.

THE HEAVENLY CITY OF SAMARKAND

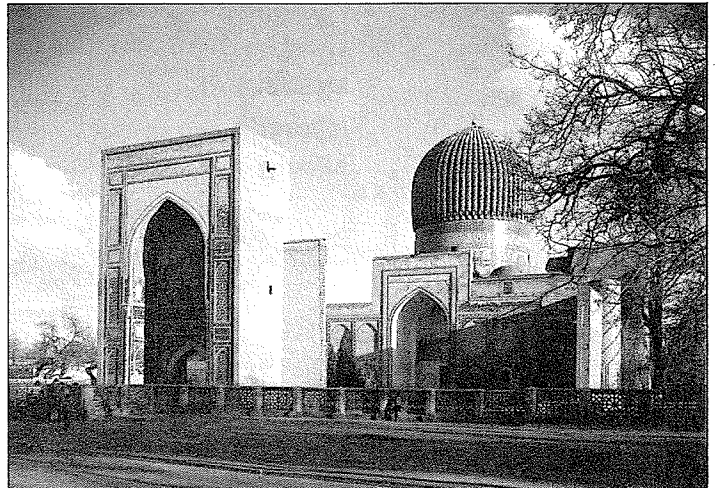
by *Roya Marefat*

The many architectural splendors of Samarkand—the mosques, religious schools, shrines, and mausoleums, sparkling even today with glazed tiles in lapis, turquoise, and gold—owe largely to the efforts of one man, the legendary conqueror known to the West as Tamerlane. A Turkicized Mongol from the Barlas tribe, Timur (1336–1405) ruled a vast empire that stretched at its height from India to Anatolia and Damascus. Endowed with artistic vision as well as military prowess, Timur laid the foundations of an artistic renaissance that was to mark the next two centuries of Islam and have a direct influence on the architecture of Iran and India.

There is no more vivid portrait of Timur himself than that penned by historian René Grousset: “Tall, with a large head and deep reddish complexion, this lame man, ever coursing about the world—this cripple with his hand ever clasped about his sword, this bowman whose marksmanship, as he ‘drew the bowstring to his ear,’ was as infallible as Chingis Khan’s—dominated his age like Chingis Khan before him.”

Unlike the blunter Chingis, Timur was a Machiavellian ruler who frequently ran his empire behind figureheads, but he was every bit as determined as his predecessor.

Conscious of the symbolic power of architecture, Timur commissioned works with posterity in mind, building not only in Samarkand but in other areas of Transoxania, including his birthplace, Kish. He was usually ruthless with the people he conquered, but he spared the lives of artists and craftsmen to bring them to work in his capital. Always concerned with legitimizing his rule—he married a descendant of Chingis Khan to compensate for the fact that he himself was not related to the ear-



This contemporary photograph of the Gur-i Amir (“King’s Grave”) complex features the gateway, the entry hall, and the fluted, melon-shaped double dome.

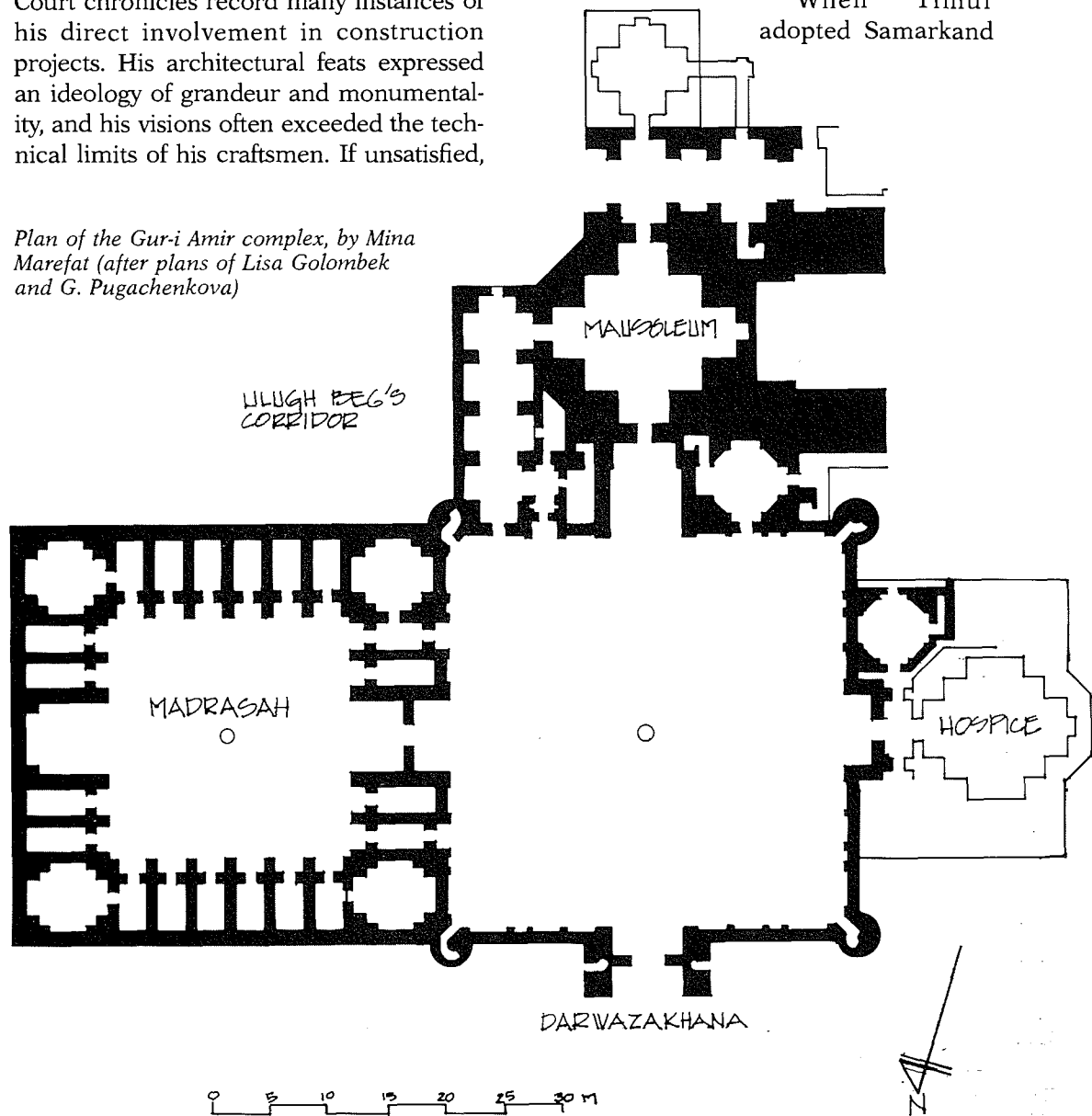
lier conqueror—he created an architecture that fused Islamic elements with refined Persian artistry and symbols of the rugged nomadic culture of the Turks and Mongols.

Timur was no passive patron of the arts. Court chronicles record many instances of his direct involvement in construction projects. His architectural feats expressed an ideology of grandeur and monumentality, and his visions often exceeded the technical limits of his craftsmen. If unsatisfied,

he would order that a building be redone. At the same time, he was obsessed with speed, and the noblemen who supervised his projects understood the literal meaning of deadlines.

When Timur adopted Samarkand

Plan of the Gur-i Amir complex, by Mina Marefat (after plans of Lisa Golombek and G. Pugachenkova)



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as his capital in 1370, the former Persian city was still recovering from the Mongol devastations of the previous century. The palaces that once lined the river were in ruins, and none of the city walls remained standing. The brick, adobe, and stone remnants of the old city were little more than ghostly reminders of a rich Persian, Turkic, and Islamic heritage. Timur quickly brought new life to his capital, commissioning numerous gardens, pavilions, and palaces for his personal pleasure. These works moved poets to think of Samarkand as "the paradisiac city," and Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, the Spanish ambassador to the court of Timur, confirmed the accounts of their magnificence:

The garden where this festival took place is very large and it is planted with many fruit-bearing trees with others that are to give shade, and throughout are led avenues and raised paths that are bordered by palings along which guests might pass their way. Throughout the garden many tents had been pitched with pavilions of colored tapestries for shade, and the silk hangings were of diverse patterns, some being quaintly embroidered and others plain in design. In the center of this garden there was built a very fine palace the ground plan of which was a cross. The interior was all most richly furnished with hangings on the walls.

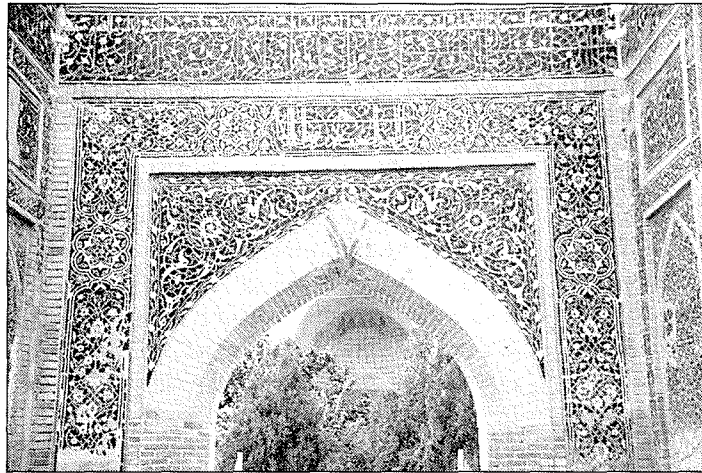
Inspired by mosques he saw during his India campaign in 1398–1399, Timur commissioned the building of a monumental congregational mosque, known today as Bibi Khanum. Some 400 to 480 marble columns, hauled from quarries by 95 elephants that Timur brought back from Hindustan, helped to support what historians Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber call "one of the most colossal monuments ever built in the Islamic world." From India, the conqueror also brought stonemasons to construct a building whose dome, chroniclers said, "would have been unique had it not been for the heavens, and unique

would have been its portal had it not been for the Milky Way."

By far, though, the best-known structure Timur commissioned in Samarkand is the mausoleum known as Gur-i Amir. Although it eventually became his own resting place, he ordered it built in 1404 for his grandson and heir, Muhammad Sultan, who had died in battle the year before at age 29. Dissatisfied with the initial result, Timur ordered his workers to make it grander. Clavijo reported that the command was carried out in 10 days, but the detailed execution of the structure casts doubt on his account.

Typifying the Timurid emphasis on a unified design for clusters of structures, the Gur-i Amir was built not as a single monument but as part of a larger complex, including three structures earlier commissioned by Muhammad Sultan. The most conspicuous of these neighbors was a religious college, or *madrasah*, but there was also a dervish hospice and a public bath.

The entrance to the Gur-i Amir (which in fact was erected by Timur's grandson) is a monumental gateway, or *darwazakhana*. Measuring 12 meters high, it is elaborately decorated in lapis tile with ornate Arabic calligraphy and lush vegetal motifs. The appearance of inscriptions on buildings, neither new nor limited to funerary structures, was integral to Islamic architecture from its inception. The dedicatory, religious, and pious sayings were interwoven in the buildings, often providing information about the date of construction, the patron, the builder, and the function of the edifice. (The architect of the gateway inscribed his name and birthplace in a cartouche on the facade: Muhammad b. Mahmoud *al-bana* Isfahani.) The geometric and vegetal ornamentation derived from an even older Middle Eastern art and architecture, but they came into wider use after the rise of Islam because of the faith's prohibition against the making of figural images. The artists of



A detail of the gateway built by Ulugh Beg in 1434 provides a fine example of the arabesque motif and Timurid tilework.

the Islamic world transformed the naturalistic forms into elaborate abstract figures, generally known as arabesques.

Beyond the *darwazakhana* is a square courtyard measuring 32.5 meters on each side, with walls that still retain remnants of rich tile mosaics. In the time-consuming and costly method of tilework known as mosaic faience, each individual color was fired separately, cut to the desired shape, and fitted into place. This technique, originally developed in Iran, was introduced to Samarkand during the building of the tomb of Timur's sister and then used in other structures. The decoration of the courtyard included both floral and vegetal ornamentation, at times intertwined with elegant Arabic calligraphy. The floral and vegetal motifs had great symbolic significance in tomb architecture because of the association of the garden with paradise in Islam. Appropriately, the Arabic terms for tomb and garden are the same word: *rawza*.

Directly across the courtyard from the gateway stands the tomb chamber. On the side of the chamber facing the gateway is an *iwan*, a roofed space enclosed on three sides and open on one. This distinctive

architectural form derived from ancient Persia, its name originally being synonymous with the word palace. (The famous *iwan* of the Sassanian Persian palace, Taq-i Kisra, in Ctesiphon, was so grand in its dimensions—35 meters in height, 25 in width, 50 in depth—that subsequent builders tried, usually without success, to equal it.) Functioning as a transitional zone between the exterior and the interior, the three-sided hall was incorporated in secular and religious ar-

chitecture throughout Central Asia, as well as in the common courtyard house.

The vaulted roof of the *iwan* in Gur-i Amir is richly decorated with a honeycomb design called *muqarnas*, the individual cells of which are in square, rhomboid, almond-shaped, and barley grain patterns. In the Gur-i Amir the cascading *muqarnas* is made of stucco and is decorative rather than structural. Applied to both the interior and exterior of buildings, the *muqarnas* symbolized the vault of heaven and the complex composition of the cosmos.

The tomb chamber itself, octagonal on the outside, is capped by a high drum on top of which sits a melon-shaped dome. The dome in Islamic funerary architecture has a long tradition. In fact, both the Persian and Arabic words for it eventually came to be synonyms for tomb. How this association came about is not entirely clear. Some scholars see the influence of Turco-Mongol society. The tent, or *yurt*, of the nomads was used not only as a dwelling but as the place for displaying the bodies of the dead before burial. Thus, it is believed, the dome mimicked the form of the tent in the sturdier urban materials of stone and brick.

(The melon shape of the Gur-i Amir dome is particularly suggestive of the circular ribbed skeleton supports of the *yurt*.) As well as carrying such traditional associations, the fluted azure and turquoise dome of the Gur-i Amir set a new standard for artistic achievement. Its double-domed structure allowed greater height, and the outer dome, with its 64 flutes, measures 34.09 meters from the ground.

The exterior wall of the tomb chamber is decorated with tiles geometrically arranged to spell the words "Muhammad" and "Allah" in a recurrent pattern. Such repetition, typical of Islamic art, recalls the repetition of prayers, or *dhikr*. Today, the tiles still shimmer in the bright Central Asian sun, making the mass of the tomb chamber appear light, almost weightless.

The dominant color of the exterior tiles is blue, ranging from light turquoise to deep cobalt and lapis. Because blue was the color of mourning in Central Asia, it was the logical choice for most funerary architecture. But the preference reflected a range of other, more favorable symbolic associations. As well as being the color that wards off the evil eye (a function that it still performs on the doors of many Central Asian houses), blue is the color of the sky and of water, the latter being a precariously rare resource in Central Asia and the Middle East. Abetting this clearly overdetermined fondness for the color is the fact that the region abounds in such minerals as lapis and turquoise.

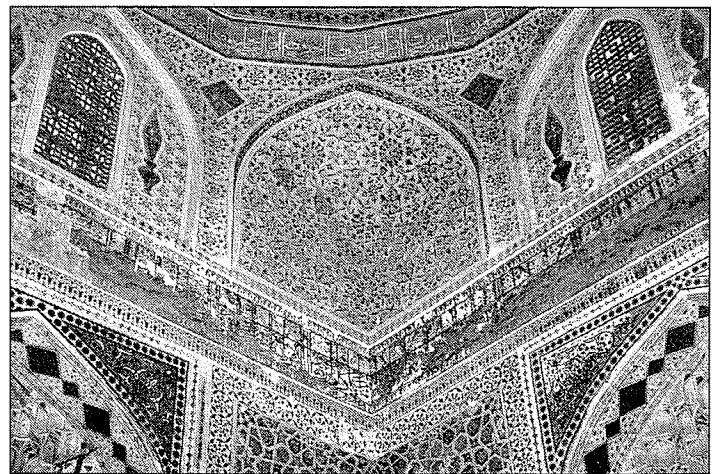
Apart from the dome, the other noticeable feature of the tomb's exterior, according to historical sources, was its four minarets. These were the towers from which

the *muezzin* called the faithful to prayer; they also stood as important elements of the Islamic urban iconography. Today, only two minarets survive, but because they are truncated and lack inner staircases, they barely resemble minarets at all.

The interior plan of the tomb chamber is square. Each side, 10.22 meters long, has a deep niche, covered with elaborate decorations in the *muqarnas* motif. The interior height of the chamber is 22.5 meters. Inside, the transition from the square chamber to the dome is achieved by means of squinches, which create an octagonal zone of transition.

Carrying the Islamic passion for geometry to new lengths, the Timurid builders established certain measurements as the basis for other elements of a structure. The entire geometric system of the Gur-i Amir is based on the two rectangles (and their diagonals) that together form the square plan of the tomb chamber.

As well as providing an outstanding example of the Timurid fascination with vaulting, the interior of the Gur-i Amir is sumptuously decorated in gold and lapis, applied in the technique of wall painting



An interior view of the Gur-i Amir shows the transitional zone—the squinch—between the square tomb chamber and the round dome.

known as *kundul*. Unique to Central Asia, *kundul* gives the appearance of embroidered gold fabric. The geometric design of the interior features the use of the twelve-sided and five-pointed star. Within the rhomboid shape of the star, the name Muhammad is interwoven three times.

In the central part of the chamber, a carved stone banister surrounds cenotaphs of Timur and his family, who are buried in a cruciform crypt. Seyyed Birka, an important religious figure, was not a member of the family, but his body was moved to the tomb by order of Timur—yet another attempt to solidify the foundation of his rule by associating himself with Islam.

The body of Timur himself was laid to rest at the foot of the Seyyed Birka. His clothing and military gear were placed on the walls, and though nothing remains of these memorabilia, vestiges of another Mongol tradition are visible in the form of a *tuq*—a tall pole with horses' tails, symbolizing the Turkish ritual of horse sacrifice honoring the dead. Even in death Timur continued the intermingling of Islamic and nomadic traditions.

In 1409 Ulugh Beg (r. 1409–1446) became the ruler of Samarkand when his father Shahrukh assumed the Timurid throne. Ulugh Beg followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and became a prolific patron of architecture. Making the most important additions to the Gur-i Amir, he was responsible for the construction of the gateway to the building and for the corridor that leads to the tomb chamber.

Under Ulugh Beg's rule Samarkand flourished as a center for culture, science, literature, and the arts. His observatory, some of which survives, is a testimony to the technological sophistication of the Timurids. Ulugh Beg's *madrasah* in the Registan, the grand square in Samarkand,

served as the inspiration for two other *madrasahs* commissioned later by the Shaibanids, the successor dynasty to the Timurids. The square, with its theological schools and bazaars, became the hub of the city and still stands as one of the world's most celebrated examples of urban design.

Just as Timurid architecture absorbed the influence of Persian and Indian building, so the great Timurid works came to influence the architecture of the Safavids in Iran and of the Mughals in India. Babur (1483–1530)—the founder of the Mughal empire—remained proud of his Timurid lineage, and he and his descendants became prolific builders, embellishing their cities with monuments and gardens. Whether Babur or envoys from the Mughal court were responsible for the transfer of Timurid ideas, or whether they came with Persian architects, the Timurid building style had a decisive imprint on some of India's more prominent structures. Similarities between the Gur-i Amir and the Taj Mahal include octagonal exterior plans, bulbous domes, *iwans* that punctuate the central part of both buildings, and their four minarets.

Today the Gur-i Amir alone marks the spot where a complex of buildings once stood. The ornately decorated monument to the dead seems to defy death and remains a reflection of paradise. Though new buildings everywhere jostle with the old, Samarkand still asserts the religious and imperial greatness of the Timurid empire. Even under the Soviets, when bars were housed in *madrasahs* and pop concerts and sound-and-light shows were held at the Registan, Muslims from all parts of the Soviet Union continued to flock to Samarkand to visit the shrines and the Gur-i Amir. In alternating hours, tourists and pilgrims paid homage to Timur's legacy.

COMRADE MUSLIMS!

by Marie Bennigsen Broxup

Those familiar with Central Asia's ancient history and civilization might assume that the Soviet era—a mere 70 years of alien domination—could have left few scars on people who since time immemorial had learned to withstand and to assimilate foreign conquerors. They would be wrong. More zealously than any former invader, the Soviet Russian overlords set out to destroy the foundation and fabric of Central Asian society. For decades, Soviet propagandists proclaimed that the Central Asian republics had become, through communism, “modern” nations, endowed with all the attributes of developed industrialized countries and enjoying a standard of living much superior to that of neighboring Muslim countries such as Turkey and Iran. Today we know that such tales of Soviet achievements were castles of sand hiding the reality of colonial exploitation, corruption, ethnic strife, and poverty.

What ended so badly be-

gan with the highest of hopes. In the early days of the Bolshevik struggle, many native leaders in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and other Muslim areas looked favorably upon Lenin's revolution. They saw it not so much as the beginning of a new socialist era but as the end of Russian imperialist domina-



A Soviet propaganda poster from the early 1920s urges Central Asians—“comrade Muslims”—to support the revolutionary cause.

tion. In 1921, one Tatar observer, Hanafi Muzaffar, expressed this early optimism: "As long as Europe can maintain its imperialistic policy [in the East] our situation will remain hopeless. However, in Europe herself new forces are growing which are becoming more threatening every day for imperialism . . . [I]t would be a great mistake for us peoples oppressed by Europe to fail to recognize that Marxism is fighting imperialism. As the Communist Party is fighting this same imperialism in Russia and abroad, we must accept Soviet power."

Lenin's "April Thesis," adopted by the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1917, promised the right of secession and political self-determination to all peoples within the old Russian empire. It did much to rally the support of Muslim nationalists and liberals to the Bolshevik cause, or at least to ensure their initial neutrality.

But when the Bolsheviks—mainly Russian soldiers and workers—took power in Tashkent in October 1917, they received, rather to their surprise (and to that of many Muslims), the support of most of the local Russian population, including former civil servants, officers, merchants, and even the resident Orthodox clergy. This unholy alliance was prompted by a common fear of the native Muslim population, which in many parts of Central Asia had long been excluded from any position of power. All 15 members of the Ruling Council of People's Commissars of the Tashkent Soviet were Russians or other Europeans. The chairman of the Council, a former railroad worker named Kolesov, declared in November 1917 that it was "not possible to admit Muslims into the supreme organ of revolutionary power because the attitude of

the local population toward us is uncertain and because it does not possess any proletarian organization."

The some 10 million Muslims of Central Asia could hardly have taken this as a very encouraging message. That same month, convinced that they could not cooperate with the Tashkent Soviet and the regime of terror it had inaugurated, Central Asian leaders called a congress in Kokand. Made up of nationalists and liberals representing all the territories of Turkestan, the Kokand "government" was intended to provide the nucleus for a future centralized government of Turkestan. Mustapha Chokay, a Kazakh aristocrat related to the princely dynasty of Khiva, was elected president. Educated at the law faculty of St. Petersburg, an active publicist instrumental in the political awakening of the Muslim population of Central Asia. Chokay was a moderate Panturkist. Regarding relations with Russia, he favored autonomy rather than secession. His main effort was directed at unifying Turkestan.

At the time, the Kokand government—called the Muslim Provisional Government of Autonomous Turkestan—was the only organization able to mount an effective political opposition to the Tashkent communists. Behaving moderately at first and willing to cooperate with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, the Kokand government viewed the Tashkent leaders as renegades. But after a disappointing exchange with Petrograd in early 1918, the Kokand leaders began to wonder whether they could count on any of the Bolsheviks. On January 23, 1918, they informed the Tashkent Soviet that they were forming a parliament in which one-third of the seats would be reserved for non-Muslims.

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The Tashkent Soviet grew alarmed. Fearful of losing Russian control of the region, Kolesov sent a large but ill-disciplined army to Kokand. Meeting little resistance, the army, which included many Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war, razed the city and massacred most of its 50,000 residents. The Kokand government collapsed, and Chokay fled, eventually ending up in Paris. Grigory Safarov, commissioned by Lenin to investigate the situation in Turkestan, described Kokand as "a sea of fire" the day after the attack. He noted, too, that the looting and banditry of the Tashkent troops was "monstrous."

The destruction of Kokand sparked an insurrection known as the Basmachi War, a struggle that quickly engulfed most of Turkestan, from the eastern Lokay region in present-day Tajikistan to the Fergana Valley to the western Turkmen steppes. The basmachi—meaning bandits—constituted an unexpected and deadly threat to the new Soviet leadership, which at the time was ill-prepared to fight a popular rebellion.

Fortunately for the Bolsheviks, the basmachi leaders were a varied lot who never developed a unified strategy or ideology. They included tribal heads such as Junaid Khan in the Turkmen area and Ibragim Beg in the Lokay region, numerous Sufi sheiks, authentic bandits, a few liberals and reformers, and a former high-ranking Ottoman officer named Enver Pasha, who had tricked Lenin into sending him to Turkestan to fight for the Bolshevik cause. The movement had roots in pre-revolutionary struggles against Russian domination, and though the basmachi had no clear ideology, they had several compelling reasons for fighting. These included the desire to defend their traditional ways against the infidel Russians and, in the case of tribal and clannic leaders, to show loy-

alty to their former rulers, the Khan of Khiva and the Emir of Bukhara. While compelling to some Central Asians, these reasons proved insufficient to gain the long-term support of the whole native population or to sustain a drawn-out war effort when faced with the enthusiasm and conquering spirit of "war communism."

Following Kokand's destruction, the Tashkent Soviet became completely isolated. Civil war raged in Russia, and Turkestan was cut off from Moscow by the White Army of Admiral Alexander V. Kolchak and Cossack units from the Urals. The Tashkent Soviet had at its disposal some 20,000 fighters, including many prisoners of war and Armenian militias. The Red troops were outnumbered and outgunned by the basmachi, who, combined with the army of the Emir of Bukhara and the Ural Cossacks, made up a fighting force of approximately 30,000 men.

Survival was the only goal of the Tashkent Soviet, which often sneered at directives from Moscow or Petrograd (including one against the recruitment of POWs into the Red Army). Its policy was simple but brutal: "Strike before you are attacked." As a devastating famine spread throughout Central Asia, the Tashkent troops plundered and massacred the rural population (which in the Fergana Valley alone fell by close to a quarter million between 1917 and 1919), even while they profaned and destroyed the mosques and confiscated religious property. By 1919, the Tashkent Soviet had to face an almost general uprising, but its strategic position, extraordinary fighting spirit, and daring cavalry raids ensured its survival until the Red Army, led by Marshal Mikhail Frunze, broke through to Turkestan in early 1920.

Frunze immediately established a "Turk Commission," consisting of himself and other Russians, to redress the political errors of the Tashkent Soviet. The commis-

sion's approach was pragmatic. To preserve Soviet power, revolution had to be achieved cautiously, in stages. Radical Russian chauvinists, accused of leftist deviation, were ousted from positions of responsibility and replaced by intellectual internationalists, including a high proportion of Jews and Georgians from Moscow.

At the same time, the commission encouraged Muslim fellow-travellers to join the Communist Party and the soviets (councils) at all levels of power. Moderate reformers and nationalists (including Young Bukharans and Young Khivians inspired by the Young Turks' movement and opposed to the rule of the Emir of Bukhara and Khan of Khiva) were accepted *en bloc* into the Communist Party. The cavalry raids were stopped, anti-religious propaganda suspended, and native society was treated with great respect. Religious trust (*waqf*) properties and religious courts abolished by the Tashkent Soviet were restored and mosques reopened.

Most important to the Bolshevik success, however, was the recruitment of Muslim fighting units. These included native militias in the Fergana Valley, the Red Army of Bukhara, a Tatar Rifle Brigade, and a Muslim Cavalry Brigade. At the same time, Muslim soldiers, officers, and advisers were incorporated into all Russian units. These Muslims fought with the same enthusiasm as the Russians, not out of belief in communist dogma, of which they knew little, but in the hope that the reconquest of Turkestan would lead to the eventual liberation of the colonial world. By having Muslims in their ranks, the Bolsheviks prevented the basmachi struggle from ever fully acquiring the character of a colonial or religious war (a strategy that failed to work many decades later during Moscow's war against Afghanistan's mujahedin).

Militarily, Frunze's strategy consisted of occupying the territory around the main

cities (particularly Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Dushanbe), isolating the enemy in the Tien Shan and Zarafshan mountain ranges and the Turkmen Desert, preventing the guerrillas from taking sanctuary in Afghanistan, and destroying them in open battles once Red units had succeeded in obtaining superiority. The Turkestan Front consisted of some 150,000 troops, outnumbering the basmachi by five to one, even in 1922, when the movement was at its peak. The basmachi resistance, almost unknown beyond Turkestan's border, received virtually no assistance from abroad, except for a few boxes of rifles from Afghanistan.

As a rule, the organization and pacification of the conquered territories was left to Muslims, in particular to the Young Bukharans. One of them, Fayzullah Khojaev, the future First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, was responsible for the successful pacification of Lokay. Indeed, credit for convincing the Turkestan population to accept Soviet rule redounded solely to the dedication and ability of the early Muslim national communists, who believed that their people would achieve equality with the Russians through communism.

In 1924 the Red Army broke the backbone of the basmachi resistance after a decisive battle in the Turkmen Desert. Red cavalry units and aircraft overwhelmed Junaid Khan, the Turkmen "Commander of the Islamic Army." Almost one million refugees escaped to Afghanistan, an enormous number if one considers that the Muslim population of Central Asia was approximately 10 million people (10,670,000 according to the 1926 census). Many took their livestock with them. In Lokay alone, the number of karakul sheep dropped from 5,000,000 in 1918 to 120,000 in 1924, and the number of horses from

51,000 to 4,750. Sporadic basmachi resistance continued well into the 1930s, but it no longer posed a serious threat.

Muslim communists and fellow-travelers now expected their support of the Bolshevik cause to bear fruit. Like pre-revolution Muslim reformers, the new Muslim communists such as the Uzbek Fayzullah Khojaev and the Kazakh Turar Ryskulov hoped to see Panturkist and even Panislamic dreams fulfilled. They believed that sooner or later all Central Asia would be unified in one state, Soviet Turkestan, and they advocated a geographically convenient administrative division of all former "Russian" Islamic territories into three states: the Tatar-Bashkir state in the Middle Volga region, Muslim Caucasus, and a unified Turkestan comprising Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian lands—Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Tajik. They also championed the formation of a Turkic Communist Party, a national Muslim army, and the expatriation of Russian colonizers from Central Asia. Chagatay Turkic was to be the official language of this immense territory.

This, of course, did not comport well with Bolshevik designs. From the earliest days of their struggle, the Russian Bolsheviks aimed to implement a strictly centralized Marxist-Leninist regime under the tight control of Moscow. In 1919, the same year the Turk Commission was established, Yakov M. Sverdlov, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, delivered the official line at the Third Congress of the Ukrainian Communist Party: "In all the independent Soviet republics which we have created we must maintain the supremacy of our Communist Party; everywhere the leadership belongs to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party."

Ideology was the justification of centralized party control, but the Bolsheviks barely disguised their real motives for re-



A poster with tips on modern child-care was but one part of an elaborate Soviet strategy to win over Muslim women—and to weaken the power of the traditional male elites.

taining a firm hold on Central Asia. Grigori Zinoviev, one of Lenin's lieutenants, made the point clearly as early as 1920: "We cannot do without the petroleum of Azerbaijan or the cotton of Turkestan. We take these products, which are necessary for us, not as the former exploiters, but as older brothers bearing the torch of civilization."

It was obvious to Moscow that if the Muslims became one nation, they would pose a serious challenge to the Russians' claim to leadership of the Soviet Union. For this reason Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Communist Party and Lenin's successor, deemed the prevention of Muslim unity essential. As soon as the basmachi threat was largely eliminated in 1924, he

set about dismembering Turkestan, dividing it along ethnic and linguistic lines, despite the fierce opposition of most national Muslim communist leaders. What had stood as three administrative territories during the early Soviet period—the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Autonomous Republic of Turkestan, and the People's Republic of Bukhara and Khwarezm (divisions corresponding to earlier tsarist ones)—was over the next 12 years transformed into six states: the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic.

The division was completed by the creation of eight new nationalities (Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Karakalpak, Uigur, and Dungan), each with its own written literary language, sometimes artificially conceived, designed to ensure that the Turkestanis would have to resort to Russian in order to communicate with one another. In 1929, by official decree, the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic script that had long been used in Central Asia. (Ten years later, the Cyrillic alphabet was substituted, further distancing Turkestanis from their cultural patrimony.)

In certain cases, the creation of the new states had some basis in historical reality. The Kazakhs, for instance, answered the Stalinist criteria of a nation—linguistic, cultural, territorial, and economic unity. In Turkmenistan, the consolidation of the great tribal federations into one nation, a trend noticeable since the end of the 18th century, was easy and rapid. Similarly, the Tajik nation, sharing the brilliant Persian cultural tradition, sedentary since ancient times, homogeneous, with no tribal divisions, had no difficulty in adapting to its new nationhood status. The Kyrgyz nation, however, was at the outset an artificial cre-

ation. The Kyrgyz could be distinguished from the Kazakhs only by slight differences in their dialect and by their way of life, being semi-nomadic mountain peoples while the Kazakh nomads roamed the steppes. In the case of the Uzbeks, consolidation was even more problematic. Linguistic and cultural differences between former nomads and sedentary people were significant, with many tribal formations keeping close kinship links with the Kazakh tribal federations. The Karakalpak nation, composed of the same tribes and clans that lived in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, was also an entirely contrived state. Its creation, unnecessary and divisive, was an important part of the Soviet's strategy to prevent the Muslim community of Central Asia from building an alliance or even an integrated economic, cultural, and administrative zone.

With the consolidation of Soviet rule in Central Asia in 1928, genuine power sharing with the Muslims came to an end. The implementation of the five-year planning system to socialize the economy called for an ever-growing class of bureaucrats and technocrats. This in turn justified a massive influx of Russians. The Central Asian elites who could have filled administrative slots were deemed ideologically unsound because of their "bourgeois" or "feudal" origins. They were accused of nationalist deviation and liquidated in the bloody Stalinist purges of the 1930s. A whole generation disappeared, including the Muslim communist leaders, and was replaced by a new generation of subservient bureaucrats, mostly of peasant origin and brought up in the Soviet mold. They and their heirs hold powerful positions in the new Central Asian states to this day.

According to Soviet doctrine, articulated by a consensus of Moscow ideologists, the new nations, guided by the Russian "el-

der brother," would gradually draw closer to each other, the final stage of this evolution being their merger into one Soviet nation, with a single Soviet culture. National differences would then disappear, national cultures would survive merely as folklore, and a new Soviet man would emerge "with the psychology and ideals of a Russian industrial worker from Petrograd"—or so dreamed Mikhail Kalinin, the first president of the Soviet Union. This crude utopia, although often criticized and reformulated within the Soviet Union, served as the basis of Soviet nationality policy until the last days of Gorbachev.

But to bring about this "new order," it was necessary to destroy not only the political and national unity of the Turkestanis but also their traditional identity. To this end, Islam, considered like all other religions as a superstition from the past, became the next target. The themes of anti-Muslim propaganda varied little after 1924, when the tenets of the anti-religious campaign were developed. In addition to the usual Marxist arguments directed against all religions—"reactionary, fanciful opium of the toiling masses"—there were specific objections to Islam. Of all the religions, it was claimed to be the most conservative and the least "social" because it sanctified the authority of elders, humiliated women, inculcated submission, fanaticism, intolerance, and xenophobia. Islamic rites and customs, such as circumcision and fasting during Ramadan, were criticized as primitive, barbaric, and unhealthy, while Islamic art and literature were ridiculed as incapable of evolution or progress. This simplistic, pseudoscientific dogma served as the basis of the atheistic education of all Soviet citizens, and was fed to children from the moment they entered an educational establishment at the age of four.

The anti-religious campaign began gradually and more cautiously than in Christian

areas in order not to provoke a resurgence of the Basmachi War. The assault was first aimed at Islamic institutions. In 1925 the Soviet government started to expropriate all *waqf* properties, which hitherto had guaranteed the Muslim institutions economic power and independence. By 1930, the process was completed. At the same time, an attack was directed against the Quranic and customary laws. In 1927, all traditional Muslim courts were abolished. Then followed an offensive against religious primary and secondary schools deemed to be "the vehicle of feudal, bourgeois, and clerical culture." There were approximately 8,000 such schools in the General Government of Turkestan alone before 1917. The last ones disappeared in 1928.

Finally, in 1928 the frontal assault against believers began. At the time, the Muslim establishment still boasted an impressive facade. On the eve of the revolution, the Russian empire, excluding Bukhara and Khiva, had 26,000 mosques. In 1927 they were still largely intact. The onslaught was led by the "Union of the Godless," grouping atheist agitators and propagandists. Muslim leaders and their congregations were hunted by the Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle Against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (CHEKA) and liquidated as parasites or counter-revolutionaries; after 1935 they were accused of being spies for Japan and Germany. Mosques were destroyed, used as warehouses, or left to rot. In 1942 only 1,312 active mosques remained.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Moscow was obliged to reduce the administrative and police pressures against Islam. In 1942, Abdurrahman Rasulaev, a Tatar cleric, approached Stalin with a proposal for normalizing relations between the Soviet government and Islam. Stalin accepted, and a concordat was signed. It granted the religion legal status



Dunes surround a fishing boat that once worked the Aral Sea. Formerly the fourth largest inland body of water, it has lost two-thirds of its volume to irrigation projects. Spewing salty dust over the region, the drying of the Aral has made the local climate hotter and less moist.

and endowed it with an official Islamic Administration. A period of relative tolerance lasted until Stalin's death, when the number of "working" mosques rose to 1,500. The administrative and psychological offensive against Islam was resumed by Nikita Khrushchev in 1953, under the policy of "back to Lenin." During this little-known purge, the number of mosques was reduced to around 350, and the number of registered clerics to at most 3,000. But far from destroying the religious feelings of the Muslim population, this policy only served to fuel underground Sufi and fundamentalist activity.

Another danger threatened the Central Asians during the Soviet years, that of being literally submerged by the Russians and other Slavs. The case of the Kazakhs was the most tragic and may yet result in dangerous conflicts with Russia, despite the cautious administration of President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

When Russian rule in the Kazakh steppes replaced that of the khans in the early 1820s, the Russians at first avoided many of the blunders they committed else-

where. For a time Russian administrators who had fallen in love with the romantic aspect of nomadic life did their best to encourage the revival of traditional Kazakh culture and literature, and to establish real cooperation. Their efforts were short-lived. The immense steppe territory with its scarce population offered a tempting solution to the eternal problem of pre-revolutionary Russia—the peasants' land hunger. In 1891, the first wave of Russian and Ukrainian settlers reached the steppes, not, as in the 18th century, in a disorderly rush of peasants fleeing from serfdom but in an organized migration planned by the administration. By 1914, over one million Slavs had occupied the richest areas along the Chinese border and on the northern fringe of present-day Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs were ruthlessly driven to the poorest regions of central, western, and southern Kazakhstan. With the loss of their pastures and consequently their livestock, their standard of living dropped catastrophically. The inevitable tragic end came in 1916 when the nomad tribes attacked the settlers, only to be slaughtered by a joint force of Russian military and armed peasants. Many survivors were forced to take refuge in China.

In 1917 the Kazakhs still constituted the majority in their land, but the Soviet administration surpassed the tsarist regime in its ruthlessness. During the late 1920s, the Soviets slaughtered the nomads' livestock to destroy their way of life and bring about "collectivization." As a result, one-and-a-half million Kazakhs died of starvation between 1926 and 1939. Finally, during the 1950s, with Khrushchev's encouragement, another huge wave of Russian rural and urban settlers moved into Kazakhstan, reducing the native Kazakhs to the status of a minority. Only in 1989 did the Kazakhs again become the majority in their republic, thanks to their high birth rate.

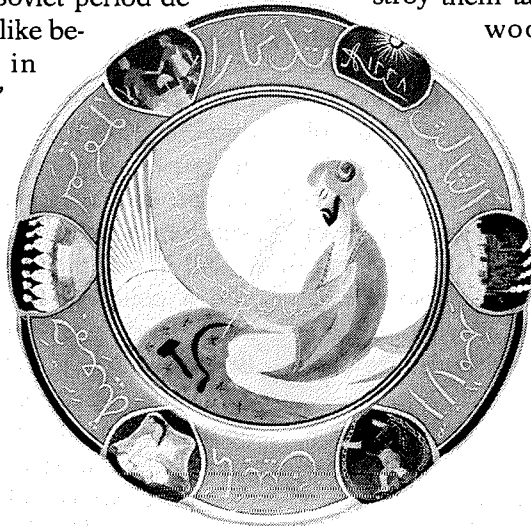
The flow of Russian immigrants was not

limited to Kazakhstan, of course, and at one time it threatened to engulf the entire region. In 1970, there were almost 12 million Russians and other Europeans in Central Asia, representing 37 percent of the total population. Needless to say, this influential minority tended to enjoy more benefits of the socialist dream than did their Muslim brethren, including everything from jobs and housing to schools and health care. At the end of the Soviet period in Uzbekistan, for example, about 80 percent of the Uzbeks lived in rural settlements, or *kishlaks*, where many of them, particularly women and children, worked in the cotton fields, earning roughly 35 to 40 rubles a month. Their land poisoned by chemical pesticides, Uzbeks suffered from one of the worst health profiles in the world (including an official infant mortality rate of 47 per 1,000, though perhaps closer to 120 per 1,000 in the area around the Aral Sea). Speaking little if any Russian, this "rural proletariat" had almost no chance for mobility through education. One Uzbek near the end of the Soviet period described his plight as "like being an immigrant in your own country," and his was a fate shared by many

other native Central Asians. Except for the approved native elites, the Muslim peoples of the five former Soviet republics found the decks stacked against them in almost every aspect of daily life.

Meanwhile, Central Asians saw their faith and traditions vilified, their history distorted, their natural wealth and resources exhausted or destroyed. Diverted for massive cotton irrigation projects, the waters of the region's two great rivers, the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya, no longer reach the Aral Sea, and the land around it is becoming a vast salt desert where nothing grows. The poignant words of a great Kazakh poet, Mir-Yakub Dulatov, in his poem of 1906, *Wake Up Kazakh*, were written during the reign of the tsars, but they speak with even sadder eloquence to the experience of those Muslims who lived under the hammer and sickle: "Every year our land and water grow smaller. They are taken by the Russian peasants. The tombs of our glorious ancestors are now in the middle of their village streets. Russian peasants destroy them taking the stones and the wood for their houses.

When I think about this my heart is consumed by sorrow like fire."



TURKESTAN RISING

by Paul B. Henze

Imagine an American think-tank in operation in 1900. A generous benefactor has given it a grant to look into the future and contemplate the farfetched possibility that European colonial empires might become independent nations by the end of the 20th century. Looking at Asia, its researchers compare prospects for two large colonial regions—British India and Russian Turkestan. Which would then have appeared to be a better candidate for successful evolution into a modern nation-state?

Consider the case for India. Although a well-known geographic entity since ancient times, it was still regarded in 1900 as a subcontinent rather than a nation. British administrators serving under a London-appointed viceroy governed two-thirds of India, but there were also dozens of semi-independent states, some (such as Hyderabad and Kashmir) as large as European countries, others only dots on the map. Seven enclaves on India's long coastline remained under French or Portuguese dominion, the largest being the historic city-state of Goa.

Inhabiting the vast subcontinent was a myriad of peoples, living in radically different ways, worshiping different gods, and speaking different tongues. (The only common language, English, was understood by perhaps less than one percent of the population.) The Brahminic caste system that held sway in many parts of India further

aggravated social divisions, and periodic outbursts of violence were taken as inevitable.

To be sure, India enjoyed many benefits of the British imperium. A network of railways had been built. Dams and irrigation works were under construction. Roads and telegraph and postal services were expanding. And several major cities had a European veneer. But native rulers had different priorities from those of the British, spending most of their revenue on palaces and temples and very little on education or social services. Even in areas directly administered by Britain, the majority of the population remained illiterate, leading traditional lives as cultivators and craftsmen. This in itself would be no cause of instability, but the fact that millions of people passed their days as beggars or on the margin of extreme poverty hardly boded well for an emerging modern nation.

All in all, chances for India's evolution into a coherent nation-state would have been—and, indeed were—rated low. Most Britons believed that India, if given independence, would degenerate into chaos, perhaps even fall prey to the Russians, eager to extend their Central Asian conquests to warmer lands and open seas.

A think-tank at the beginning of this century would almost certainly have concluded that Turkestan—Russian Central Asia—offered brighter prospects for coherent nationhood than India. The people

were almost all Turkic. The Persian-speaking minority posed no problem, for Turkic and Persian cultures coexisted and mixed with minimal strain. The area suffered no population pressure or sharp social cleavages. Ninety-five percent of the population adhered to Sunni Islam. Tiny ethnic and religious minorities—Ismailis, Arabs, Jews, among others—occupied stable niches in society. Cotton production had already brought prosperity to the region, and the threat of famine was remote. After their conquest, the Russians expanded infrastructure rapidly. Promise of exploitable minerals and vast expanses of unused land offered unlimited prospects for further economic development. By the standards of the time, the Russian colonial administration based in Tashkent set a precedent for the rational integration of the whole area.

Of course, Turkestani independence would have been thought impossible without a fundamental change in the nature of the Russian Empire. That was even more difficult to foresee at the beginning of the 20th century than the freeing of India. Then suddenly in 1917 the tsars' control collapsed. But the opportunity was lost. Buffeted by political cross-currents and military intrigues that prevented them from developing a coherent vision of their own future, Central Asians were reabsorbed in Lenin's restored Russian Empire. While India, with all its diversity, evolved toward in-

dependent nationhood under Britain's guidance, the idea of a united, autonomous Turkestan all but disappeared.

Today, that idea enjoys new life, but it will be difficult to realize, perhaps more so for contemporary Central Asians than it would have been for their predecessors. So-



Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev and Boris Yeltsin at a December 1991 meeting of leaders of the former republics of the Soviet Union. Is Nazarbaev the man of Turkestan's future, its Atatürk?

viet policies have left awkward legacies for the five Central Asian states that became members of the United Nations in March 1992. The most obvious are political.

During the Brezhnev era (1964–82), Soviet rule in Central Asia evolved into an even more effective form of semi-feudal

colonialism than it had been in earlier decades. In return for docile acceptance of Kremlin priorities for performance in certain key areas—cotton production in the four southern republics, supply of grain and meat and acquiescence in nuclear testing in Kazakhstan—local chieftains were given wide autonomy. These leaders built up networks of privileged followers and kinsmen. As long as they did not flagrantly challenge the basic tenets of the communist system and kept opposition in check, they could operate profitable schemes, indulge in ostentatious construction projects, and even foster some aspects of local culture and religion. At the very least, this system created the illusion of stability; to some superficial observers, it even appeared to be an engine of progress. But *perestroika* and *glasnost* shattered such illusions.

Ethnic tensions between native populations and peoples who had moved into Central Asia turned volatile as economic conditions deteriorated, unchecked either by Gorbachev's reforms or his program of openness. The rapid growth rate of the indigenous population created intractable problems, especially in urban areas where unemployment became serious. Acute salination affected much of the southern republics' best agricultural land as irrigation was expanded to increase cotton production. Overuse of pesticides and fertilizers poisoned domestic water sources and was linked with alarmingly high rates of cancer. The Aral Sea shrank and marine life died. In mining and industrial areas pollution spread. Large expanses of Kazakhstan were rendered radioactive by nuclear testing.

Gorbachev was incapable of comprehending the depth of the economic disaster

or ethnic nationalism and frustrated his own intentions by encouraging Russians in Central Asian communist parties to play a greater role. Massive riots broke out in Alma-Ata in December 1986 when he made a Russian the First Party Secretary of Kazakhstan, a position that Kazakh Dinmukhamed Kunaev had occupied for more than 27 years. Some reform-minded Kazakhs maintained that the riots had been encouraged by Kunaev himself, but there was more to them than that. The unrest in Kazakhstan was repeated in some form in every Central Asian republic before the end of the decade. In each instance the specific causes were different, but the common denominator was the same: critical economic problems and social and ethnic tensions exacerbated by oppression and bureaucratic neglect.

After the Alma-Ata riots, more and more Central Asians felt free to register their discontent. The native-language press became bolder. Writer Oljas Sulemeynov founded the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement. And growing numbers of Central Asians openly espoused the Islamic faith of their forefathers, many of them championing it as the basis for a reconstituted social and political order. Nevertheless, compared to many other parts of the Soviet Union, political change came slowly. Democrats and reformers displayed limited organizing skill, and protest movements were largely confined to intellectuals. Most of the mildly reformist local communists that Gorbachev favored were insecure about their own positions and were often outmaneuvered by their own conservative *nomenklatura* col-

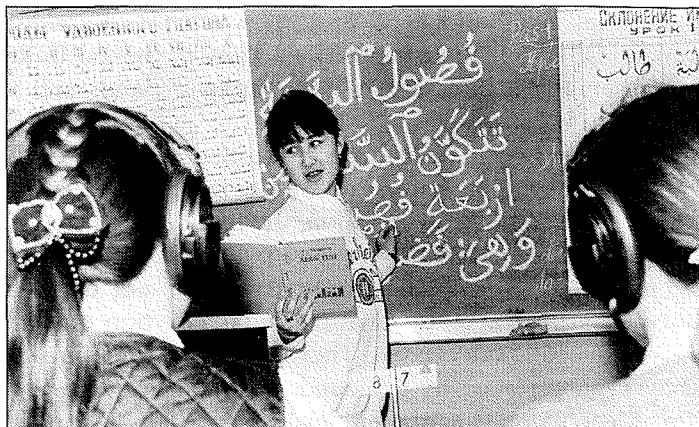
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leagues.

As the collapse of communism accelerated in other parts of the Soviet Empire, and especially in Russia itself after Boris Yeltsin took the lead, the Central Asian republics lagged behind. The most politically astute of all the new Central Asian leaders, Nursultan Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan, allied himself with Yeltsin as Gorbachev faltered and fell, but neither he nor his colleagues in the four other republics welcomed the demise of the Soviet Union.

In fact, with only one exception, the Central Asian leaders supported or at least hesitated to condemn the August 1991 reactionary coup in Moscow. The exception was the Kyrgyz leader, Askar Akaev, a scientist who had skillfully outmaneuvered the republic's conservative communist establishment in late 1990 and early 1991 to consolidate his own position. His commitment to full democracy was, and has remained, unequivocal. The other republics remained in the hands of erstwhile communists who donned democratic garb. Facing the inevitable, they all had their parliaments declare independence after the coup failed. When Yeltsin took the lead in forming the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to succeed the Soviet Union, the Central Asian leaders promptly joined.

But in truth the leaders of all the Central Asian states (including Kyrgyzstan) would rather have seen the old Soviet Union last a little longer—that, or at least evolve into a more coherent successor than the CIS is likely to be, if it manages to survive at all. The problem of making the transition to a free-market system weighs heavily upon the men who long depended



High-school students in Kazakhstan learn Arabic. Abandoning Cyrillic as the script of their Turkic dialects, Central Asians will have to decide whether to adopt the Arabic or the Latin alphabet.

upon Moscow's subsidies and familiar sources of food, fuel, and consumer goods. A Western businessman who advises Tajikistan on trade and privatization offered a blunt assessment of the current situation: "There are at least 15 things Moscow used to do for these republics. It was a totally paternalistic system. Moscow is gone now and they lack bureaucrats who know how to issue a regulation, fill out a bill of lading, or transfer money. They have to try to learn everything at once."

It is easy to understand why most of the new leaders fear competition from religious conservatives and politically inexperienced intellectuals. As communists, they were brought up to scorn such people. Their conditioned reflex is to suppress them, though they are now usually constrained to resort to roundabout methods. Islam Karimov, the Uzbek leader who has limited the autonomy of the Central Asian Muslim Board and kept the progressive *Birlik* (Unity) Party from fielding a candidate against him in the December 29, 1991 presidential election, was nevertheless sworn in on a copy of the Koran. As leaders of independent countries, they all profess a commitment to multi-party democracy,

free-market economics, and protection of human rights, but their capacity to transform themselves into genuine democrats remains to be proven.

In many of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe as well as in some parts of the ex-Soviet Union, the first generation of new leaders who were pulled and pushed to reform their economies and move toward democracy were discredited and exhausted in the process. They have already been replaced by a second generation. Most second-generation leaders are former communists too, but they have developed a less qualified commitment to change, do not carry the burden of past tactical mistakes, and have convinced a significant proportion of their populations that they sympathize with their aspirations more fully than their predecessors did. The same kind of political evolution seems likely in Central Asia. It has so far occurred only in Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan has been torn by competition between assertive communist survivors and reform-minded rivals. As of this writing, an uneasy accord has been established between President Rakhmon Nabiyev's old-guard communists and the Muslim-dominated opposition, possibly the strongest Islamic revivalist movement in Central Asia. Leaders in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan still display many of the characteristics they acquired as party *apparatchiki*.

While his embrace of democracy is far more equivocal than Akaev's, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbaev may prove to be Central Asia's most successful political survivor. He displays the dominant characteristics of his countrymen, who, despite Stalin's best efforts to decimate them during the collectivization campaign of the 1930s, have endured as a fiercely proud, assertive people whose hatred of communism runs deep.

Kazakhstan, a third the size of the continental United States, with vast agricultural lands and mineral resources but only 18 million people, outranks all the Central Asian republics in economic potential. Nazarbaev has encouraged privatization and has engaged a Korean-American, Chan Young Bang, as economic adviser. He has not based his political or economic position on preservation of any aspect of the Soviet system. He has cast himself as a convincing proponent of a dynamic, modern, economically strong country commanding respect in the world. And he has cleverly exploited Western concern about Kazakhstan's large nuclear arsenal (more than 1,000 missile warheads) in order to raise his country's visibility and influence in the international arena.

Nazarbaev harbors no doubts that Kazakhs themselves will remain first among equals in independent Kazakhstan, but he is realistic about the ethnic mix to which he has fallen heir: as many Slavs as Kazakhs, almost one million Germans (many of whom were forcibly resettled from the Volga to Kazakhstan during World War II), and at least 25 other nationalities, including Greeks, Turks, Kurds, Uigurs, Koreans, and Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims). While such a mix could be the recipe for permanent crisis, Nazarbaev has so far handled ethnic issues astutely. He countered Russian talk of territorial adjustments by reminding Moscow that Kazakhs in the southern Urals and Siberia might like to be reunited with their homeland too. At the same time he has cooperated with Yeltsin on political and economic issues and stressed the importance of broad future relations with Russia. Despite his background as a communist, Nazarbaev comes the closest of any current Central Asian leader to showing the kind of determination and political skill of the man Central Asian leaders could well aspire to emulate: Mustafa Ke-

**CENTRAL ASIAN PEOPLES
(1989 Soviet Census)**

Nationality	In the Five Central Asian Republics	Elsewhere in Former USSR	Abroad (estimate)
Uzbeks (incl. Karakalpaks)	16,937,000	173,000	1,700,000
Kazakhs	7,476,000	662,000	1,200,000
Tajiks	4,163,000	54,000	6,000,000
Kyrgyz	2,482,000	49,000	170,000
Turkmen	2,673,000	45,000	3,200,000
Other Muslims	2,133,000		
Russians	9,566,000		

**Total Population
(1989 Soviet Census)**

Uzbekistan	19,808,000	Total indigenous nationalities in five republics:	33,731,000
Kazakhstan	16,463,000	Total Central Asian nationalities in ex-USSR:	34,714,000
Kyrgyzstan	4,258,000	Total Muslims in five republics:	35,864,000
Tajikistan	5,090,000		
Turkmenistan	3,512,000	Approximate total of Central Asian nationalities outside borders of the former Soviet Union:	12,270,000
TOTAL	49,131,000		

**Ethnic Composition by Republic
(1989 Soviet Census, in thousands)**

	Uzbeks	Kazakhs	Tajiks	Kyrgyz	Turkmen	Other Muslims	Russians
Uzbekistan	14,535	808	932	175	123	923	1,652
Kazakhstan	334	6,532	26	14	4	768	6,226
Kyrgyzstan	551	37	34	2,228	1	212	917
Tajikistan	1,197	11	3,168	64	21	95	387
Turkmenistan	320	88	3	1	2,524	135	334
Total in ex-USSR	17,110	8,138	4,217	2,531	2,718	20,088	145,072

mal Atatürk, founder of the modern Turkish nation.

Questions about leadership lead to questions about the republics themselves. Do they have the capacity to evolve into successful independent states?

Central Asian boundaries, like those of most African states that gained independence during the 1960s, were imposed by colonialism. They are artificial. This is true not only of the borders Moscow drew to separate the ethnically defined republics. It is also true of the international borders of the region—those with Iran and Afghani-

stan to the south, with Chinese-controlled territory to the east, and with Russia to the north. Everywhere people with the same religion, customs, and language live on both sides. Well over half a million Kazakhs live in the southern Urals, in Russia. More than one million live in Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan).

Whatever its shortcomings, there is no better data on the ethnic composition of Central Asia than the 1989 Soviet census. Of a total population of 49,131,000, the native peoples in the five republics totaled almost 34 million at that time, of whom

half—17 million—were Uzbeks. Kazakhs, the next largest Central Asian nationality, totaled almost seven-and-a-half million. Over two million Muslims of non-Central Asian origin (primarily Caucasians and Tatars) were also counted in 1989. Muslims thus accounted for approximately three-quarters of the entire population. (In the four southern republics they accounted for more than 86 percent.) Since all Muslim nationalities have high birthrates, the total Muslim population of Central Asia may well pass 40 million in 1992.

Nine-and-a-half million Russians lived in the five Central Asian republics in 1989, three-quarters of them in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Their numbers have fallen during the past three years, as out-migration has accelerated, especially from Uzbekistan. If jobs and housing were not hard to find in Russia itself, Russians would be leaving Central Asia faster. None of the local governments, however, has pressured Russians to leave, and there has been no sustained popular agitation for the departure of Russians and other non-indigenous peoples. Ethnic clashes in Central Asia, which have occurred in all the republics since the late 1980s, have usually been between native Muslims and other Muslims, who were forcibly settled in the region or came to work (Caucasians in the oil industry, for example). Riots in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were sparked in early 1990 by rumors that Armenians fleeing from Azerbaijan would be resettled in Central Asia.

These disorders have alarmed Russians and other Europeans, but both Nazarbaev and Akaev have urged Russians to stay, meanwhile cautioning their people not to create an atmosphere in which all non-Muslims will feel compelled to leave. Somewhat over eight million Russians probably remain in all of Central Asia today. No matter what policies the governments pursue, more Russians will leave.

And even if they did not, high Central Asian birthrates make it likely that Europeans will decline proportionately and their political and economic position will erode. All of these trends lead to a clear conclusion: The future of Central Asia is and will remain in the hands of Central Asians. But how will they cooperate?

Though it encouraged some nationalist particularism, the Soviet divide-and-rule approach never succeeded in obliterating pan-Turkestan awareness. In spite of the gerrymandering that divided the Fergana Valley among three republics (with extensions shaped like U.S. congressional districts), people always crossed borders and intermingled. Every day in the *Buyuk Bozor* (main public market) in Tashkent, sellers bring fresh produce from Osh in Kyrgyzstan, from Khojent in Tajikistan, and from Chimkent in Kazakhstan.

Ethnicity has often been nothing more than a Soviet-imposed fiction. When people who had long been called Sarts had to declare themselves Uzbeks or Tajiks in the 1920s, there were instances of brothers in the same family choosing different "nationalities." Such families had spoken both Turkic and Persian for generations. They identified primarily with their town or district and regarded themselves simply as Muslims and Turkestanis. Modern concepts of ethnicity were irrelevant to their lives.

On the outer fringes of Central Asia, among peoples of nomadic culture, tribal awareness was and remains stronger. This is also true of the mountain peoples of the Pamir region (eastern Tajikistan), where old Iranian dialects change from one valley to the next. Ethnic awareness is much weaker than tribal affiliations among the Kyrgyz, the Turkmen, and the Kazakhs. The Kazakhs, perhaps more than the other Central Asian people, display many of the pre-

requisites of nationhood, but the differences among Kazakhs and Uzbeks and Kyrgyz and Uzbeks become fuzzy along their borders with Uzbekistan.

Language-engineering and alphabet-juggling—encouraged by Moscow to stress the differences rather than the similarities among the Turkic dialects of Central Asia—never went far enough to make most Turkic speakers unintelligible to each other. Variations in the kinds of Turkic spoken in Central Asia are no greater than the differences between Provençal and the French of Paris, between the Italian of Sicily and that of Lombardy, or between *Bayrisch* and the various kinds of *Plattdeutsch* of northern Germany. If the region had followed a more normal course of evolution in the 20th century, the Turkestani literary language in wide use in the early 20th century—Chagatay—would probably have evolved into a dominant standard throughout the region, with local variations surviving as dialects or sub-languages.

Is it too late for this evolution to resume? A region-wide TV broadcast in basic Turkish, launched this past April by Ankara with the enthusiastic support of the Central Asian republics, will help. So would the adoption of the Latin alphabet, especially if it is used in its modern Turkish form with sounds represented by identical letters in all the existing literary languages. But while Turkey has been sending in Latin-alphabet typewriters and computers, Iran has been offering enticements for the return to the Arabic script, and the Tajiks are shifting to it. On one thing most Central Asians are in agreement: The Cyrillic forced on them in 1939 should be abandoned.

Islam, which places small value on tribalism or ethnicity, is another major unifying force, and there has been an enormous religious resurgence throughout Central Asia. Thousands of mosques have

been reopened, legalized, or built since the late 1980s. Their number may eventually surpass the 26,000 said to have existed before the 1917 revolution. The Muslim Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, created by Stalin in 1943 as a wartime liberalization-and-control mechanism, clearly had the unintended effect of helping maintain a regional sense of religious community. (And Sufi brotherhoods, working underground, did their part as well in keeping the faith alive.)

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian Muslims showed growing reluctance to accept Moscow-managed religion. Demonstrations in Tashkent during the first week of February 1989 led to the downfall of Mufti Shamsuddin Babakhanov, head of the Muslim Religious Board. The Babakhanov family had become, since the 1940s, a kind of religious feudal dynasty. The deposed Mufti had assumed office in 1982, succeeding his father, Ziauddin, who in 1957 had succeeded *his* father, Ishan ibn Abdulmejid, Stalin's original choice for the job. Like some native party lords, Shamsuddin was accused of corruption and high-living. He was replaced in March 1989 by Muhammadsadyk Mamayusupov, head of the prestigious Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent and a popular figure, though still a member of the official Islamic religious establishment.

Muslims have continued to be assertive. An embryonic political movement, Islam and Democracy, held a conference of representatives from most of the republics in Alma-Ata following Babakhanov's fall. It defined its purpose as "the spiritual cleansing of people from immorality and preaching the democratic principles of the Koran." Whether this group has been absorbed into a larger movement, The Islamic Renaissance Party, is not clear.

Islamic Renaissance was founded at a



Worshippers in Tajikistan listen to the Friday sermon at their mosque. The religious resurgence in this former republic, while strong, does yet not augur the rise of a fundamentalist state.

conference in June 1990 in Astrakhan under Dagestani (North Caucasian) leadership and rapidly spread to Central Asia, where it seems to have wide appeal. The Muslim Board and republican leaders gave it a cool welcome. It was denied official registration in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and was thus unable to compete in elections. It has not, however, been forcefully suppressed and appears to be continuing to gain adherents. Mamayusupov has maintained that it is "unnecessary," because Islam stands above politics. Government spokesmen have branded it as reactionary, but the allegations are reminiscent of those that the Soviets used to make about Islam in general. And while influences from abroad may be at work in the Islamic Renaissance, there is as yet little reason to believe that either Iran or Saudi Arabia dominates the movement. It is doubtful too that many Central Asian Muslims would embrace the extremism of the Iranian Shi'ites or the puritanism

of the Saudi Wahhabis; by all signs, they prefer the moderate blend of religion and secularism that prevails in Turkey.

There is no question that Soviet policies discouraged economic collaboration among the Central Asian republics. But geography imposed certain limits on Moscow's strategy. All the republics share the same rivers and most major lines of communication. With few exceptions, roads and railroads could not be built to fit the Soviet-imposed borders. As a result, Central Asia never lost its basic economic unity, and today economic imperatives compel even greater cooperation

among the five republics.

As early as June 1990, the presidents of the republics met in Alma-Ata on Nazarbaev's initiative to discuss preparations for a federation. They set up a Coordinating Council in August 1991. The Ashkhabad declaration of the five republics' leaders of December 13, 1991 on joining the CIS was prompted primarily by economic worries. Leaders and ministers had already been traveling to Turkey, Iran, Korea, China, Pakistan, Europe, and the United States in search of advice and new economic ties. In February 1992 the four southern republics joined the Economic Cooperation Organization sponsored by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, while Kazakhstan opted for observer status. And the acceptance of all five-republics into the International Monetary Fund on April 27 cleared the way for the development of bilateral and multilateral economic aid and investment programs such as the one resulting from Turkish Prime

Minister Demirel's late April visit.

To be sure, the political structure Stalin imposed on the region could prove to be a serious obstacle, particularly if republican leaders are unwilling to surrender their prerogatives and face the political risks of competing in a larger arena. Though serious inter-republican rivalry has not yet developed, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan could find themselves in competition for leadership. Despite Kazakhstan's commanding size, Uzbekistan, with its large population, controls the geographic and economic heart of the entire region and is heir to most of its history.

Western journalists and strategists love to speculate about competition between Turkey and Iran for domination in the new Central Asia, whatever political form it eventually takes. Ankara's economic dynamism, democracy, and non-fanatic adaptation of Islamic practices and values to modern life so far give Turkey the edge. The head of the Uzbek writers' union, Jamal Kamal, on his return from a late 1990 visit to Turkey, summed up Ankara's appeal: "Turkey has three times Uzbekistan's population, produces only a fifth as much cotton and a quarter as much silk, and yet its population lives 10 times better than ours." Presidents, prime ministers and cabinet ministers of all five republics have made visits to Turkey and hosted Turkish officials. Even Persian-speaking Tajikistan turned to Turkey for advice on economic reconstruction in the spring of 1991.

Turkey is already preparing to make a major contribution to Central Asian educational institutions and has offered to train thousands of Central Asians at its universities. They are going eagerly. On many levels, Turkey represents an attractive avenue to the outer world for Central Asians, for Turkey itself is open to the world and commands wide respect. Dependence on Iran

would bring none of these advantages. Nevertheless, good relations with Iran are recognized by most Central Asians as desirable. In the end, a modernizing, secular Central Asia will likely have more influence on Iran than Iran has on it.

All the Central Asian republics have been formally classified as European by being accepted into the Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe, but Central Asians also know that they are Asians. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, have been eager to copy the successes of East Asia. South Korea has special appeal. Both presidents visited Seoul in late 1990 and laid the basis for cooperative relationships. All the republics admire Japanese technical prowess and hope for Japanese investment. Pakistan and India are close, and both are seen as trade partners and sources of experience that can be applied to developing Central Asia's resources. Europe is distant and the United States more so, but interest in good relations is high, as are expectations of aid and trade.

No Central Asian leader has advocated severing relations with Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union. And while there is no longer any desire to prolong dependence on backward Soviet technology and administrative practices, Central Asians view Russia as a natural trading partner. Leaders of the five republics are all hard bargainers for terms of trade that will rectify the disadvantages they suffered under 70 years of Soviet colonialism. In March, Turkmenistan raised the price of natural gas supplied to Ukraine by 50 times. New patterns of trade relations as well as other forms of mutual interchange will be slow in stabilizing.

Time will also be required for building stable relations with kindred peoples in Iran, Afghanistan, and China, and such relationships will be affected by the political evolution of these countries. Uigurs, the ba-

sic population of Chinese Turkestan, also speak a Turkic language intelligible to Central Asians. They have been watching developments across the mountains to the west with keen interest while their Chinese masters look on with apprehension. China cannot keep Uigurs and other Muslims from listening to Central Asian broadcasts, reading newspapers that make their way across the border, or even, in some favorably situated areas, from watching the new Turkish-sponsored TV network. The economic liberalization and freeing of religion that China undertook after the death of Mao have given all China's energetic Muslims wide opportunities for initiative, but politics remains frozen.

Nazarbaev, meanwhile, has encouraged Kazakhs in Mongolia and China to come back to Kazakhstan, which has room for many more people, especially Kazakhs. Serious migration is likely only when Kazakhstan begins to experience sustained economic recovery. A railway link to the Chinese system, completed in 1991, provides the basis for trade and contact across a border that was long sealed.

After being closed for most of the 20th century, borders in Central Asia have become permeable and are likely to remain so. The long Afghan border on the south was opened by Moscow's 1979 invasion. Troops and war materiel flowed into Afghanistan, but people engaging in trade and religious and political proselytizing began moving in both directions. Afghanistan is home to more Tajiks than Tajikistan, and the Tajiks and Turkic peoples of Afghanistan were happy to renew links with relatives and tribal brothers in the Central Asian republics. Some observers speculate on a massive realignment

of borders and state structures in the region before the end of the 1990s. It cannot be ruled out, but international experience in the 20th century argues against it.

Journalists and armchair strategists also like to conjecture about a resumption of the Great Game of the latter half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. It seems unlikely. Britain is no longer a player in Asia. Russia is likely to be too preoccupied with the formidable challenge of recovery from communism to have time or money to invest in new forms of expansion. Who, then, would play in a new Great Game? Turkey and Iran? Saudi Arabia? Pakistan and India? India and China? The United States with some or all of these, or with a resurgent Russia? It seems hard to envision. Empires and 19th-century imperialism are not only out of style. They cannot stand the test of cost-benefit analysis. It is far more likely that the leaders of the now-independent republics will chart their own course.

Distasteful as they found Russian imperial domination to be, Central Asians also made gains as part of the Russian Empire in both its tsarist and communist forms. They became aware of their resources and potential. Some gained mobility, and many learned the value of education. By experiencing the pains of having their culture distorted and suppressed, they gained a deeper appreciation of the value of their heritage. But most Central Asians show no desire to return to the style of life that prevailed in 7th-century Arabia, or to the stagnation and decay that afflicted them before the Russian conquest, or even to the glories of the time of Tamerlane. However much they now enjoy rediscovering the greatness of Turkestan's past, they dream no less about the possibilities of its future.

BACKGROUND BOOKS

CENTRAL ASIA

One problem in the study of Central Asia is defining the region's geographical limits. A narrow but precise definition limits the region to the five former Soviet republics that lie to the east of the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea and to the west of China. But the definition can be expanded to include some or all of the following: Chinese Turkestan, (Xinjiang Province), Afghanistan, northeastern Iran, Mongolia, Tibet, Azerbaijan, and the entire Eurasian steppe. The Soviets, by contrast, narrowed the five-republic definition by excluding Kazakhstan.

The people of the region are little known in the West, but three reference books provide helpful basic information about the main indigenous groups. (None of the books, however, is devoted solely to Central Asia.) The most concise is **The Peoples of the USSR** (Macmillan, 1984), by Ronald Wixman. A geographer at the University of Oregon, Wixman covers such subjects as ethnic definitions, languages, and status within the former Union. Both **Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union** (2nd ed., KPI, 1986), by Shirin Akiner, of the University of London, and **Muslim Peoples** (2nd ed., two volumes, Greenwood, 1984), edited by University of Houston anthropologist Richard Weekes, have longer descriptive articles on each nationality.

A reliable introduction to Central Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries is **Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule** (Columbia, 1967), as well as its revised version, **Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule** (Duke Univ., 1989), edited by Columbia University historian Edward Allworth, one of the foremost scholars of Central Asia in the United States. Both offer a clear narrative of the course of political and military events as well as chapters on specific issues, all written by specialists in the field.

Much the same subject matter, but with more background and detail on the Soviet period, is covered in **Modern History of Soviet Central Asia** (Praeger, 1967), by the late Geoffrey Wheeler of London's Central Asia Research Centre. A former officer in the British Army, Colonel Wheeler was not hesitant to pass judgment: "The death of Stalin," he wrote,

"and the subsequent repudiation of some of his methods and policies had less fundamental effect in Central Asia than elsewhere. There may have been some temporary decline in the Great Russian chauvinism fostered from the mid-30s onward, but there was no reduction in the measure of central control exercised through the medium of the Communist Party."

A classic study of the Muslims of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union through the mid-20th century is **Islam in the Soviet Union** (Praeger, 1967), by the late Alexandre Bennigsen, a leading figure since the 1960s in the Western study of Muslims in the Soviet Union, and his frequent co-author, Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejey. One of the book's many strengths is its depiction of the diversity of opinion among the Muslim peoples during a period of great upheaval. The history and politics of one particular Central Asian nationality is the subject of a meticulous study, **The Kazakhs** (Hoover Inst. Press, 1987), by Colgate political scientist Martha Brill Olcott. Discussing the political and social organization of the Khazakhs, Olcott corrects a common error: "Although used by Western and Soviet scholars alike, the term horde is probably a misnomer; the Kazakhs referred to these three groups as the *Ulu Zhuz*, *Orta Zhuz*, and *Kichi Zhuz*, literally the Great Hundred, Middle Hundred, and Small Hundred. This distinction between horde and hundred is important, since the former implies consanguinity and common ancestry, whereas the latter does not. The Kazakh hordes . . . were simply an extension of the temporary military unions formed by both Turkish and Mongol tribes . . . largely for military purposes—to make the Kazakh lands more secure in the absence of any stronger central authority."

Several 19th-century travelers recorded their observations of Central Asia before or soon after Russia enforced its dominance during the 1860s and '70s. Such books contain much useful information and are often evocative of a vanished world, even though they reflect the ethnic prejudices of their authors and the political motives that underlay most of their journeys. "According to Central Asiatic ideas,"

wrote American diplomat Eugene Schuyler in his **Turkistan**, (two vols., Schribner, Armstrong, 1876), "a city, to be really such, must have a *Jumma* [Friday] mosque, that will hold all the inhabitants at Friday prayers, and must possess all of the 32 guilds or trades (*Kasaba*) which are thought to comprise the whole world of commerce." Accounts by other military men and diplomats include Alexander Burnes's **Travels into Bukhara** (J. Murray, 1834), Arthur Conolly's **Journey to the North of India**, (two vols., Richard Bentley, 1830), Joseph Pierre Ferrier's **Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Beloochistan** (J. Murray, 1856), Arminius Vambery's **Sketches of Central Asia** (W. H. Allen, 1868) and **Travels in Central Asia** (J. Murray, 1864), and Joseph Wolff's **Narrative of a Mission to Bukhara** (J. W. Parker, 1845).

For earlier periods, the late René Grousset's 1939 classic, **Empire of the Steppes** (Rutgers Univ., 1970), deals with a broad geographic area that partially overlaps Central Asia and concentrates on the Turkic and Mongol peoples from antiquity to early modern times. Grousset wrote a lyrical prose, full of crystallizing observations, as in this description of the rhythms of nomadic conquest: "The periodic descents by the hordes of the steppes, whose khans ascended the thrones of Changan, Loyang, Kaifeng or Peking, Samarkand, Ispahan or Tabriz (Tauris), Konya or Constantinople, became one of the geographic laws of history. But there was another, opposing law, which brought about the slow absorption of the nomad invaders by ancient civilized lands. The Sinitized or Iranized barbarian was the first to stand guard over civilization against fresh onslaughts from barbarian lands." **Bukhara the Medieval Achievement** (Univ. of Okla., 1965), by Richard Frye, a professor of Iranian studies at Harvard University, uses its focus on one of Central Asia's great cities to discuss the cultural life as well as political history of the region in the early centuries of the Islamic era.

The era of the Russian Revolution and the consolidation of Soviet rule in the region is covered from different perspectives in four noteworthy books. **Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia** (Univ. of Calif., 1988), by Hélène Carrère

d'Encausse, director of Soviet Studies at the Institut d'études politiques, examines the way Central Asian advocates of modernization grappled with the pressure of Westernizing reform, pride in their heritage, and communism. Large sections of Harvard historian Richard Pipes's **The Formation of the Soviet Union** (rev. ed., Harvard Univ., 1970) look at the military and political battles through which the largely Russian or Russified Communist Party took control of Central Asia. The most unusual approach to this period is Gregory Massell's **The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929** (Princeton Univ., 1974). The Hunter College political scientist argues that in a region without a large, indigenous working class, the new communist regime used a campaign to change the status of a different disadvantaged social group—women—to undermine the authority of the traditional, male elite.

Comparatively few works focus on Central Asia in the period after the consolidation of Soviet power in the 1920s and before the mounting problems of the 1980s. The late Elizabeth Bacon's **Central Asians under Russian Rule** (Cornell Univ., 1966) offers an extremely perceptive anthropologist's insights into the social transformation the communists produced in the region. **Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia** (Johns Hopkins, 1970), by Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone of Carleton University, is a study by a specialist on Soviet politics that uses one particular republic, Tajikistan, as a case study of how people in Moscow and in the region manipulated nationality politics. **Russia in Central Asia** (Collier, 1963), by historian Michael Rywkin of the City University of New York, gives a clear, concise picture of the impact of Soviet rule on Central Asia.

The last dozen years of Soviet rule over Central Asia are covered in a large number of books and articles of widely varying quality. One of the best works to treat a broad range of issues—including language policy, nationality politics, and the status of women—is **Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation** (Westview, 1991), edited by William Fierman, a political scientist at Indiana University.

The role of Islam in Central Asia in the late Soviet period is one of the more contentious topics in the study of this region. Since the late

1970s, a spurt of publications reflected the unfortunate influence of trends in Western political thinking: the tendency to view all Muslims as alike (most often as "fundamentalist" revolutionaries) combined with the hope that the growing population of Muslims in the Soviet Union would unite under the banner of Islam to overthrow the Soviet regime. The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 without an Islamic revolution has demonstrated the degree to which that approach contained an overly generous helping of wishful thinking. Representative of a variety of different but more temperate interpretations of the Islamic question are University of Southern California professor Ayşe Rorlich's chapter in the Fierman volume and two essays by Martha Olcott, "Moscow's Troublesome Muslim Minority," in *Washington Quarterly* (9 [1986]: 73-83) and "Soviet Islam and World Revolution," in *World Politics* (34 [1982]: 487-504). My own opinions on the subject may be found in **The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan** (Foreign Policy Research Inst., 1989).

Another critical issue for contemporary Central Asia is the disastrous consequences of misguided Soviet economic and environmental policies. The most important treatments of the economic aspects are Harvard Russian Research Center scholar Boris Rumer's **Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment** (Unwyn Hyman, 1989) and Carnegie-Mellon political scientist Nancy Lubin's **Labor and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia** (Princeton Univ., 1984). The catastrophic environmental damage in the former Soviet Union receives authoritative treatment in **Ecocide in the USSR** (Basic, 1992) by Murray Feshbach, a demographer at Georgetown University, and Alfred Friendly, Jr., *Newsweek's* former Moscow bureau chief.

Central Asia has a rich literary tradition, both oral and written. Little of it is available in English. Two medieval epics strongly influenced by elements of Central Asian life but not centered there are the Turkish Dede Korkut stories (the name refers to their presumed 14th-century author) and the Persian **Shah-nameh** (Book of Kings). The Dede Korkut epic has come down to us from Turks who made their

way farther west to Anatolia and much of it is set there; however it preserves information about the culture and way of life of Turks in Central Asia. It is available in two English translations, both entitled **The Book of Dede Korkut** (one version was translated and edited by Faruk Sumer, Ahmet E. Uysal, and Warren S. Walker [Univ. of Texas, 1972]; the other was translated by Geoffrey Lewis [Penguin, 1974]). The greatest version of the **Shah-nameh** was written by Abu 'l-Qasem Ferdousi in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. This mythic history of ancient Iran from its origins to the downfall of the last pre-Islamic dynasty includes as one of its major themes the prolonged conflict between sedentary Persian-speakers and Turkic nomads from the northeast. A translation by Reuben Levy, revised by Amin Banani, is entitled **The Epic of Kings** (revised edition, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); though parts of the text are omitted and summarized briefly, it is a useful introduction to the work. Babur (1483-1530), one of the last descendants of Tamerlane to rule a part of Central Asia, was driven from there by the Uzbek conquest of much of the region and went on to found the Mughal Empire in India. He wrote his autobiography, the **Babur-nameh**, in Ohaghatai Turkish; there is an English translation, **The Babur-Nāma** (two vols., Luzac, 1922 and AMS Press, 1971) by Annette S. Beverage.

One of the most important literary works from contemporary Central Asia is a novel by the Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov, **A Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years** (Indiana Univ., 1983). It combines several themes, including the impact of modern Soviet technology and the importance of preserving a people's traditional ways and values. It also blends elements of science fiction and evocative descriptions of the natural world of the steppe, once so important to the nomadic way of life. The novel has popularized among educated Central Asians of various nationalities the word *mankurt*, which refers to a person who has been enslaved and denied knowledge of his own heritage.

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