

THE FUTURE LEADER OF THE NATION'S CHILDHOOD AND BOYHOOD

ALIKHAN WAS BORN DIFFERENT

Alikhan was born “circumcised and with a belly button and didn’t find his tongue till he was 6.” So say the memoirs of Smakhan tore Bukeikhan on the subject of his legendary older brother.

Is it worth suspecting the author of these memories of mystifying and idealising the image of his older brother if we remember that according to one well-known legend, which has even come down to us in written form, a distant forefather of Alikhan’s, Temujin Genghis Khan, the man who would send shock waves around the world and founded the *tore-sultans* [descendants of Genghis Khan], was born “with a blood clot grasped in his fist”. Whilst the legend served as a sign of the preordained fate of Temujin who would soon go on to conquer the whole world and create the greatest empire in human history, then the unusual occurrence observed when Alikhan was born was clearly also meant to serve as a sign of a preordained fate, someone whose lot it would be to have the historic responsibility for liberating his people from colonial dependence and oppression and restoring a national statehood which was given up without any visible signs of resistance.

It is most probable that in his memoirs, Smakhan tore was simply repeating precisely what he had been told by his own mother, Begim khanum, at a later date when her oldest son was already a living legend, his name on the lips of ordinary people as one who fought for the rights and national interests of all Kazakhs, a pillar and leader of the whole nation. We should also bear in mind that Smakhan was considerably younger than Alikhan – he was the fifth child in the family – which we will see later on, and he could only have found out about the early childhood of his older brother, who was, in any case, brought up by his grandfather Myrzatay, from stories told to him by his closest relatives – mother, father – and other relatives and people close to him.

Furthermore, in his memoirs Smakhan tore often relies not so much on his own evidence relating to such and such a fact or event of the distant life of Alikhan as much as present stories, evidence and the opinions from a multitude of eye-witnesses: Alikhan Bukeikhan’s relatives, close friends, acquaintances and brothers-in-arms. Additionally, of all the relatives and close friends, Alash movement and Alash-Orda government brothers-in-arms, the only detailed written records of him have been left by Smakhan tore and not, for example, by his former colleagues such as Ermekuly or Kemengeruly or 1930s Kazakh Soviet statesmen such as Seifullin and others.

Whereas Seifullin’s novel essay “*Tar zhol, taygak keshu*” [lit. “The Treacherous Path”] describes well-known historical events from 1917-1926 as seen from the author’s subjective point of view, Ermekuly’s memoirs mostly reflect events from the early days of Soviet Kazakhstan, especially his meeting and talks with Lenin. According to the well-known, now late Karaganda-based journalist, Mr. Zh. Bekturov, the manuscript of Ermekov’s memoirs was stored amongst the personal files of his son, M. Ermekuly, and Mr. G. Musrepov, a Soviet Kazakh writer. In an article published in 1989 in the Karaganda newspaper *Ortalik Kazakhstan* and then in the book “*Eneden erte ayrylgan tol sekildi...*”, Bekturov asserted that Musrepov was firmly opposed to publishing Ermekov’s memoirs in his day, saying that “it wasn’t yet time”. Yet in the article Bekturov gives a small quotation concerning the Kazakh delegation’s negotiations with Lenin on setting the borders between Kazakhstan and Russia.

But the memoirs of Smakhan Bukeikhan are the most valuable because they contain priceless information which, for well-known reasons, is not documented anywhere else. Such as information about Bukeikhan’s family, his nearest and dearest, about his personal life, his wife

and children; about his relationships with those close to him, his friends and brothers-in-arms; about his personality, habits and affections. Also of interest, of course, is information on his mother and father, his distant and close ancestors and on the atmosphere in which the future leader of the nation was raised and grew up.

Smakhan tore's memoirs paint a picture of Alikhan as a physically strong, pugnacious, stubborn, disobedient, capricious boy. It would appear in this he came under the influence of his grandfather sultan Myrzatay, in whose house he was raised almost from birth. Therefore he called his own father "Kesekem" [as the author of the memoirs explains, Alikhan didn't recognise his father when he would appear and would ask: "Who is that?" - "kisi kim?" - and when he grew up he continued to call him Kesekem out of habit] and his mother "Bezhekem" [Begim]. The author of the memoirs claims that Grandfather Myrzatay lived to be 93.

According to Smakhan tore, their father, Nurmukhamed, came from a noble branch of the descendants of Genghis Khan in the shape of Bukey, one of the last descendants who officially occupied the khanate throne and was the son of sultan "Kokzhal" Baraq, who was popular in the steppes. Bukey was the father of sultan Batyr, the father of Myrzatay, the father of Nurmukhamed.

Nurmukhamed, who was known as Mukan tore, was educated by the standards of the time and strove to give all his children a good education. He had authority and considerable influence over his clansmen. He was a strong master, but not rich. He wasn't afraid to spend money on his children's education. He worked the land in his native area. He had a small mill and some cattle. He practised traditional Kazakh hunting and kept hunting birds and dogs.

Alikhan's mother, Begim, more formally known as Begim khanum, was also descended from batyr Mamay, famous in the steppes, from the noble Tobykty clan. Begim khanum's sister, Boshantay, was married to Khudayberdy, the oldest son of Qunanbay, the father of the poet and thinker Abay. So Alikhan is a fairly close relative of a great poet on his mother's side. Perhaps this explains his close friendship with the poet's son and nephews, Tural Abayuly, Shakarim Khudayberdyuly and Kakitay Iskakuly, whose names we will come across here again.

According to her son Smakhan tore, Begim khanum was a truly noble woman who selflessly helped needy families in any way she could by inviting them to work on the land. She knew Islam, which was rare for Kazakh women at the time, and she gave instruction in it to orphans from surrounding auls for free.

Nurmukhamed and Begim khanum brought up five sons and a daughter. Alikhan, their eldest, was born on March 5th 1866 on the family estate in Kyzylaray on the banks of the River Tokraun in the Tokraun volost of the Karkaralinsk uezd in the Semipalatinsk oblast, now the Aktogay district of the Karaganda oblast. After him came Azikhan, their daughter Nurbek, and then their other sons, Tattikhan, Smakhan and Bazykhan.

As befits the son of a traditional Kazakh khan and tore-sultan, Alikhan grew up to be proud, brave, fiercely independent and with a particular sense of justice and honour. In early childhood he liked to play at building houses. When he was older, he couldn't bear baksy (shamans), fortune-tellers or clairvoyants, calling them liars to their faces. They would in turn try to justify themselves, saying that, "...when Alikhan appeared, the demons ran away". He stood out among his peers for his wit and ability to tell funny stories.

His sense of justice and concern for the poor and weak appeared at a young age. For example, whenever he had won all the asyk (in shagai), he immediately gave them back; when they were

on the altybakan (swings) or playing aygolek (a national game played by young people), the young Alikhan would sternly upbraid his peers or even older boys and girls who behaved with arrogance. You can't help notice that even the young Alikhan's behaviour clearly displayed all the signs of leadership.

During each nomadic migration, he would help his poor neighbours, especially women with children and widows, to load their worldly belongings onto camels or a bullock-cart and then unload them again, he would help old ladies put up their yurts, he would dig a well at the new settlement. While he was studying in Karkaralinsk during the summer and winter holidays, he would graze the village cattle and herd them to water, thus giving the shepherds and herdsmen a chance to rest, telling them, "You sleep in today".

SCHOOL BRAWL WITH A BATTLE CRY OF "BUKEY! BUKEY!"

When Alikhan was seven, his father decided he should go and study under Mullah Zarif or Zariyev in Karkaraly [then known as Karkaralinsk]. This is mentioned by Smakhanov in his memoirs. According to the pre-Revolution "New Encyclopaedic Dictionary" – Alikhan Bukeikhanov was on the editorial board himself from 1908 to 1917 – he studied "at a madrasa". When he left there, Alikhan joined the Karkaralinsk Russian-Kazakh elementary school.

At the time, Russian-Kazakh elementary schools provided four years of instruction. Having left there, Alikhan moved on to the Karkaralinsk vocational school, which also lasted four years.

Yet while he was there, such a remarkable event occurred, so typical of its time, that it no doubt played a defining role in all he did for the rest of his life. It was typical because in the 1880s, Kazakh lands were not yet recognised as belonging to the Russian state, but the colonial authorities' political and administrative reforms of 1867 and 1868 led to the Steppe aristocracy, clan leaders, people's biys and toresultans (descendants of Genghis Khan) having a much weaker influence and far less power and the Kazakh steppes were now fully subjected to settler colonisation by Cossacks and fleeing Russian peasants. Skirmishes and sometimes even bloody confrontations between Kazakhs – the true masters of these lands – and the settlers over grazing lands, meadows and the ancestral lands of the indigenous people became a regular occurrence in every part of the Kazakh steppe territory. In the end these arguments, which sometimes developed into bloody confrontations, began to be settled with increasing frequency exclusively in favour of the newcomers, thanks to which the Cossacks and Russian peasant settlers became more brazen and self-assured than the territory's indigenous inhabitants. What happened when Alikhan was at school was no exception.

At first glance, it was just a regular brawl between pupils. But the brawl had clear racial overtones as it was between the Kazakh and Russian pupils at the vocational school. Predictably, the true cause of the fight was teasing by the young descendants of the settlers. As a result, the Kazakh pupils, led by Alikhan, had little hesitation launching into the fight with the battle cry his clan used. "Bukey! Bukey!" It is curious that some years later Alikhan would declare that his surname wasn't actually Nurmukhamedov but "Bukey-Khanov," and later still he would publish the correspondence between the khan of the Middle Kazakh Bukey horde and his descendants. It is clear that the name meant a lot to Alikhan. But what exactly? We will find out later.

The brawl might not have had any ramifications if one of its victims hadn't been the son of a Russian civil servant. The case against vocational schoolboy Alikhan Nurmukhamedov, as the instigator of the brawl, went to court. A judge Akimov reviewed the case. And no less surprising was that he managed to avoid punishment by the court thanks to help from another Russian civil servant – a doctor by training – whose son he was friends with at school. What saved him was

that the court had his year of birth down not as 1866 but 1870, meaning he wasn't eligible by age for judicial penalty. But Smakhan tore asserts that he was expelled from the school. It is fully possible that all the confusion surrounding Alikhan's true date of birth started with that very legal case. For example, on all the qualifications Alikhan got from the vocational school, the Omsk Technical School [OTS] and the School of Forestry in St. Petersburg, and when he stood as a deputy to the First State Duma in 1906, and, again, when the case of 180 former deputies, signatories to the Vyborg Manifesto, was reviewed at a special tribunal of the St. Petersburg District Court in December 1907, his date of birth was listed as 1870. Smakhan tore gives the year 1865 in his memoirs. The Brockhaus and Efron "New Encyclopaedic Dictionary" listed his year of birth as 1869. It was only when he filled in a personal details form when arrested in July 1937 that Bokeikhan gave his own date of birth as March 5th 1866.

So we do not know whether Alikhan was really expelled from the Karkaralinsk vocational school for fighting, as Smakhan tore asserts, or whether he was cleared later. But it is clear that he did graduate as a document found in the Omsk oblast state archive in 1992 confirms. The document is a certificate given to Alikhan by the Karkaralinsk uezd governor for finishing vocational school alongside his qualifications, where it actually states: "The son of the sultan of the Karkaralinsk uezd in the Tokraun oblast, Alikhan Nurmukhamedov ... was educated at the Karkaralinsk Kazakh school from September 16th 1879 to June 16th 1886 ... and upon passing the final exam of the Karkaralinsk three-year school, in June 1886, he received qualifications in subjects from the city school ... While at the Kazakh school, Nurmukhamedov successfully learnt a cobbler's trade and can now pursue that profession independently" [photograph no. 2].

ALIKHAN IS TAKEN UNDER GOVERNOR GENERAL KOLPAKOVSKY'S WING

Alikhan spent about 12 years in Karkaraly. A little over a month later, he became a boarder at the Omsk Technical School [OTS]. None other than Steppe Governor General Kolpakovsky personally helped him to secure a place at the OTS. This assertion by Alikhan's nearest and dearest is very close to the truth and is indirectly corroborated by Alikhan later dedicating some of his publications to Kolpakovsky personally, though we should point out that Alikhan was not always very flattering, to put it mildly, either about the period when Kolpakovsky ruled over the steppe or about him personally in these articles. For example, in a leader in the Irtysh newspaper on October 10th 1906, he referred to one very sad practice which was introduced to the Kazakh steppe by General Kolpakovsky himself: "Prioritising the establishment of third person liability was down to ... former Steppe Governor General Kolpakovsky. It is now 20 years since he issued a circular based on which the Kazakh aul is responsible for the cattle stolen on its territory ... This regression by our rulers to the practices of our wild forebears, whereby revenge is taken on the family, clan and tribe, has created a situation which has now been the legal norm on the Kazakh steppe for more than 20 years."

In another, slightly earlier Irtysh article, "On the Governor General's Journey," the son of the steppes described in detail another side of Kolpakovsky's activities as Governor General of the steppe:

"The experts know all too well the price the Kazakh population paid for the Governor General's journey around the steppe. The journeys Kolpakovsky made – he was always accompanied by a Mr. Losevsky [civil servant for special missions. Author's note] – were particularly harsh and cruel to the Kazakhs.

Kolpakovsky travelled with 5-6 tarantasses, not including his tarantass carriage, which had two rows of six horses harnessed to it. Each staging inn had 100 or more horses. The number of staging inns was determined by how far and fast Kolpakovsky and Losevsky travelled around the

Kazakh steppe ... Furthermore, the Governor General was accompanied throughout his trip around the Kazakh steppe by a group of 100 Kazakh horsemen consisting of rulers, elders and their servants. ... The Kazakhs finally got to see Kolpakovsky on this journey in June. So hundreds of Kazakhs with thousands of horses lived on the steppe, far from their farms, under martial law, for three months, anxiously anticipating on a daily basis the incursion of their “dear” superior.

When Kolpakovsky asked in his role as Governor General how Kazakhs were doing, one young governor said openly that Kazakhs would be a lot better if their superiors hadn't made them wait for them for several months. The brave heart was sent to prison and threatened with exile ... The whole steppe has known how to answer the Governor General ever since ...”

Meanwhile, it can not be ruled out that on one of these trips, Kolpakovsky went to Karkaraly and visited the local vocational school. There is a description of the event in Smakhan tore's memoirs and in the writings of the Alash leader's nephew, R. Bukeikhanov. There follows a brief summary of what happened.

As he was introduced to the teachers and pupils at the school, this important guest suddenly turned to the pupils, who were lined up in single file, with a question: How many times had a single wheel on his tarantass carriage turned between Omsk and Karkaraly if it had travelled 760 versts?

The question was so sudden and difficult that the teachers themselves were perplexed and the pupils froze on the spot, expecting something awful to happen. And then just as unexpectedly, a boy who was small for his age but well-built came out of line. As he walked he removed his belt from around his waist and, approaching the Governor General's tarantass, measured the diameter of the wheel with his belt, crouched down and started making calculations on the ground there and then. The anxious wait for all those present, including Kolpakovsky himself, for whom those few minutes must have felt like a lifetime, turned out not to be in vain. Having quickly finished his calculations, the boy went up to the important guest, looked him straight in the face and in a relaxed, youthful voice gave the answer to what appeared to be his extremely complicated question. Impressed not so much by the local youngster's extraordinary brazenness as much as his quickwittedness and mathematical skills, Governor General Kolpakovsky immediately gave instructions to the school headmaster and the uezd governor accompanying him in Karkaraly to send the gifted youngster to Omsk Technical School once he had finished his studies here at the vocational school.

The evidence suggests this occurred in 1882-1883 as that is when Alikhan was at the vocational school. It is also backed up by an array of historical facts. For example, after the formation in 1882 of the Steppe Governorate General, Kolpakovsky was appointed the first Governor General and commander of the Omsk military district's troops. The OTS was also opened in 1882 by a so-called “imperial edict” of the Russian emperor to prepare subordinate technical personnel for the railway line being built in Siberia at the time. Naturally enough, the OTS, which had only just opened, initially had difficulty attracting students. Nor can it be ruled out that Kolpakovsky, the colonial emperor's newly appointed deputy in the Kazakh steppe, saw his primary task as helping the OTS secure the required number of students.

Alongside the traditional subjects of Russian language, literature and Russian history, the four-year curriculum at the newly established OTS also included fairly complex disciplines such as theoretical mechanics, kinematics, hoists, pumps etc.

Alikhan studied as a boarder at the OTS from 1886-1890. He devoted a lot of his spare time to reading works of contemporary Russian and Western literature as well as classic and Oriental works. He was even more interested in the history of his own people and their distinctive culture, customs and traditions. During holidays in his native aul in the Karkaralinsk uezd, he would diligently observe and study the daily lives, way of life and economic practices of his fellow Kazakhs under conditions of colonial dependency, their hopes and aspirations and the attitude of his people towards and their relationship with the alien but dominant people – the Russian colonisers. He would witness increasingly often occasions of colonial administrators taking by force from Kazakhs the plots which were most productive and best suited to agriculture and planting. Under the invented pretext of them being “for state needs”, pasture, planting lands, watering spots for cattle and winter and summer grounds were all taken away. The most plum pieces of Kazakh land were taken away, confiscated for the Tsarist treasury or for redistribution to Russian peasant settlers even though the land contained the Kazakhs’ ancestors’ graves and clans’ burial vaults. This all occurred in flagrant violation of the law and provisions adopted by the colonial empire itself and solely on the basis of a position of might.

This arbitrary rule and violence exacted against the indigenous and peace-loving population of the Kazakh steppe weren’t merely enacted by the colonial emperor’s men in the shape of the Governor General, uezd governors and migration authority civil servants. They were also enforced by regular Cossacks, who served as the main weapon in the colonial takeover and rough justice meted out to Kazakhstan, and the simple Russian peasant settlers. They also took cattle from the Kazakhs without cause or basis in law. Alikhan witnessed one of these episodes when home for the holidays in his native uezd from Omsk.

While on his way to his native village, he came across a Russian shepherd with a herd of over 100 sheep. When he expressed an interest in whose herd it was, he was told: - My boss’s.

- And who is your boss?

- Kostya.

- And where is he?

- Here he comes now, the shepherd answered, pointing to a man coming up behind him.

The shepherd’s boss turned out to be a Karkaralinsk Cossack called Kostya [Konstantin] who sported a “guardian” badge on his chest. Having asked a number of questions, Alikhan ascertained that the guard had taken the whole herd from a number of Kazakh auls belonging to the Kerey and Shubyrtpaly clans in the Karson-Karagay volost. Yet Kostya the guard couldn’t give a reason as to why he had taken the sheep from their owners. Alikhan reacted by beating the guard and insisting he return the sheep to their former Kazakh owners.

It was one of the rare and sporadic examples of a conflict between the indigenous Kazakh residents, owners of these lands, and the settlers working out in the former’s favour. And only thanks to the unprecedented intervention of a Kazakh, like Alikhan, who had been educated in Russian.

Furthermore, the chaotic and barbaric takeover and seizure of the Kazakhs’ best land directly led to a lack of pastures, meadows and watering holes for those Kazakhs who had traditional, nomadic ways of raising cattle and of sources of water for the fields for those Kazakhs engaged in agriculture and for the settler peasants. A stark example of this is given in the article, “Settlers’ movement into the Akmolinsk oblast in 1906” as penned by “The Observer” [one of Bukeikhan’s

pseudonyms. Author's note], which was published in Irtysh in 1906: "This unprecedented influx of settlers ... was created artificially and was the product of the government's unusual view of the agrarian question in Russia. Having declared resettlement ... to be almost the only way to settle the acute agrarian problem, our bureaucracy, in its wisdom, began ... to spread the idea to the guberniyas with the greatest shortage of land to solve the agrarian question.

So it is hardly surprising that the starving peasants, who had lost all faith in receiving land, took the local administrators' bait and poured into the new locations in numbers reminiscent of great human migrations. The unauthorised seizure of Kazakh lands by the settlers has already led to inevitable bloody confrontation between the settlers and Kazakhs. We have already seen this type of confrontation in the Kokchetavsk, Petropavlovsk, Akmolinsk and Omsk uezds. Fighting over land between the settlers and Kazakhs in the Petropavlovsk uezd has already led to several deaths and about 100 people being injured and maimed."

Because of this, conflicts, sometimes even bloody confrontations, and not just between Kazakhs and settlers but amongst Kazakhs themselves, become a regular occurrence. On one of his trips to his aul, Alikhan became an unwilling participant in just such a conflict with the neighbouring Kazakh aul over an irrigation canal. He received a head injury in the confrontation which left him with a scar for life.

ALIKHAN THE SOCIAL COMMENTATOR: "KAZAKHS ARE CAREFREE SONS OF THE STEPPE, LOVERS OF A FREE-WHEELING EXISTENCE..."

As noted above, while Alikhan was at the OTS he became interested in his people's history, particularly those historic events and factors which caused the Kazakh people – several million strong – to lose their statehood and end up a dependent colony. He first began to share his largely critical observations and conclusions with readers on the pages of the "Special Supplement" to the "Akmolinsk Oblast Gazette" and its Kazakh-language supplements such as "Dala ualayatynyn gazeti", one of the first periodicals to be published in Kazakh.

The new social commentator published a total of 18 articles and memorandums in Kazakh and Russian over the course of 1889. His articles covered a fairly broad range of subjects. But right from the outset, he excoriated all the vices of Kazakh society and its exponents, such as ignorant mullahs, volost rulers and elders, venal poets and educated Kazakhs who served the whims of the rich in their inhumane suppression of their own people. In young Alikhan's critical view of his people's everyday lives, mullahs' ignorance, the ruthless oppression and hoodwinking of the ordinary people by rich landowners and volost rulers, we see an organic harmony and complete overlap with the opinion and point of view of the poet and thinker Abay Kunanbayuly which he expressed in his many articles and cautionary words. This is not surprising when we consider that some of the great poet's articles were first published in the same newspaper – the "Special Supplement to the Akmolinsk Oblast Gazette" – in his lifetime, both in a Russian translation and the original, at the very initiative and suggestion of Alikhan himself.

"Almost every semi-literate Kazakh (Kyrgyz) or fugitive Tatar or Tajik calls themselves a mullah. These people are complete cads, full of superstitions and prejudices, which gets fully passed on to the Kazakh who is already superstitious enough, like a person in the early stages of his spiritual development, making him a slave to any simple phenomenon... Any Kazakh who reads the Koran at all, and doesn't understand it, because it is written in Arabic, considers himself a mullah, and is then recognised as such by all Kazakhs. In most cases, the mullah can't even write, not even badly, and when they do, with disgraceful grammar. What an example the mullah sets the Kazakh people with his life and actions full of vices and not worthy of the word mullah!

“Find me a single Kazakh whose calamities can’t be blamed on “good Kazakhs” and mullahs,” Alikhan wrote in his first article, “The mullah in the K uezd”.

In his article, “From the life of Kazakh officials in the K uezd” [Karkaralinsk uezd. Author’s note], the author gives the concrete example of the lack of or low level of morals not just of clerics in the Kazakh steppe but also of Kazakh landowners who became volost governors by bribing uezd governors with the aim of mercilessly plundering ordinary and poor people and connived with deceitful mullahs and Khojas. Alikhan called their actions an “outrage” and a “blatant mockery of the Islamic religion”.

In “Letter to the Editor,” Alikhan invents a collective image of the Kazakh volost landowners – Zulymbay Karymbayev (Cruel or Malicious Pot-Belly) - and the unfortunate poor people – Musafir Beysharin (Unfortunate Wretch). He considers the volost-level leaders, clerks and interpreters who know Russian grammar “scoundrels” and the “scum of society”. And Alikhan had real prototypes for these images both in the never-ending steppe and in his native Karkaralinsk uezd, Tokraun volost and aul: “The poor Kazakhs, a somewhat meek people, unrepresented in those serving the state, get burdened whilst roguish, rich Kazakhs in a position of authority pay nothing. If anyone should like to check the veracity of our words, he can take a list of households from a volost clerk and look on any page and find a Zulymbay Karymbayev who is registered as having 15 horses and 100 sheep, even though he actually has 300 horses and 700 sheep and Musafir Beysharin, who is registered as having 50 sheep and five horses when he hasn’t got a shirt on his back.”

In his article “Feuilleton,” he outlined the volost governor whom he came across personally during his holidays in Karkaraly: “The governor was one of those many sons of the steppe who was proud of his belly, important gait, tasty mare’s milk and other trifles. In fact, when he was chosen for the position, Kazakhs said several times that he was a typical governor: an inordinately fat, lazy, proud, rich smooth operator and so on.”

Like the poet Abay, Alikhan was merciless towards Kazakh poets who, in his view, “praised spendthrifts, thus elevating them to fair, honest historic figures which had no relationship to the actual qualities of the person being praised. Young akyns now continue where their predecessors left off. Isn’t that sad?” the young Alikhan asked.

Alikhan wrote the following regarding his Russian-educated peers who preferred not to serve the ordinary people but to look after themselves by serving the landowners and volost governors: “There is a newspaper in their own language yet they remain silent and think it is better to be trading convoy plunderers and low-level lawyers rather than work for the common good. Kazakh, thank your worthy sons for increasing your hardships! If a medical man comes, slaughter a sheep, put up a yurt, satisfy his bestial whims...”

In another publication, the author mercilessly criticises Kazakhs as a whole for their backwards way of life, carefree mentality and low level of farming: “Kazakhs are carefree sons of the steppe, lovers of a free-wheeling existence. They have never been pressed for time. They don’t think about a working life and have been happy to settle for what they got from cattle-raising ... no Kazakh has yet thought about artificially improving his cattle; for time immemorial, what a Kazakh inherited from his father has been passed on to his son.”

The 23-year-old Alikhan portrays the lack of modern culture, moral and ethics in his own society with great regret. He considered Kazakh society to be ruined by a cult of profiteering at the expense of the illiterate masses, inter-clan fighting for volost-level power, cattle theft and the

merciless oppression by the rich and powerful of the poorer and weaker: “How odd that here in the steppe we still see practices of centuries past and have the concepts of a “strong man,” a “strong clan,” as if we didn’t have laws or authorities and lived amongst savages! A large clan encroaches upon the property of a weak one!”

Alikhan considered that during those years, Kazakhs were being oppressed on three sides: by the landowners, alien, ignorant mullahs and the colonial authorities.

Yet at the same time Alikhan was not of the view that, “...all the Kazakh could do was lie down on his side and do nothing”. “He’s good out in the fields too! Just shake him up, and he can do anything,” the young Alikhan exhorted. He firmly believed that the Kazakhs were a talented people who needed to be educated: “The Kazakh steppe ... will surely make progress on the path to civilisation in the not too distant future, as will the people, gifted by nature with brains and ability.”

In a series of Alikhan’s articles published in 1889, there is a strong sense of his respect and genuine pride in his people’s indigenous culture, spiritual values and the best traditions of oral art: its sophisticated poetry and spoken literature. In his article, “Letter to the Editor,” he observed: “The Kazakh people have their own poetry. We all know the Kazakh akyns Churtanbay, Chuzhe, Orynbay, Nayman balu, Cherniyaz, Kunanbaev and others. Does a Kazakh need to have the strength of these bards’ words proven? Let us remember Cherniyaz, who words decided his fate; Chuzhe, who took gifts from Karymbay misers.”

Alikhan considered the good old custom of “zhylu” – helping those who had suffered natural disasters – and hospitality – which, to be fair, had been perverted beyond recognition – as positive aspects of his people’s culture. “Now,” Alikhan observed with regret, “only an elegantly dressed guest on a horse glistening with silver can expect a warm welcome... And there is so much insincerity, hypocrisy, deceit and falsity in it which wasn’t part of such hospitality’s original aim which showed the lofty, noble dignity of the Kazakh people in its best light. It originally served to help those close to one in times of suffering, hardship and accidents and was performed without an ulterior motive, without a small-minded, mercenary desire to do right by an important person, to receive his favour at any price with childlike naivety, and that gave it a genuine veneer of something good and lofty and, ultimately, earned the sincere gratitude of the travellers who parted with their hosts as if with their own family! Now a guest deceives his host and his host him.”

“MY REAL SURNAME IS... BUKEY-KHANOV!”

While studying at the OTS, Alikhan also observed the process of Kazakhs’ gradual transition to a settled way of life and arable farming, though he didn’t hide his disappointment that the Kazakhs cultivated the arable land “in the most primitive way possible”. He would write about this in his article, “On agriculture in the Tokraun, Kotan-Bulak and Western-Balkhash volosts of the Karkaralinsk uezd”: “The new landless peasants, who had been in contempt of any labour until then, took to agriculture once they had settled on the banks of the River Tokraun where they instantly set to making canals and formed a settled society which went by the name of “Dzhataki”.

Do not think that all the Kazakh could do was lie down on his side and do nothing. He’s good out in the fields too! Just shake him up, and he can do anything!”

As we can see, Alikhan displays his boundless love for the ordinary people and land of his forefathers in this article. And this love would determine his future profession, not the technical aspect of the Siberian railway. As he approached graduation in 1890, he expressed an interest in

going to the St. Petersburg Royal School of Forestry. The head of the OTS, a Mr. Dobrokhotov, wrote a letter on April 26th of that year appealing to the Karkaralinsk uezd governor, "...to continue to grant Alikhan Nurmukhamedov a Kazakh stipend of 200 rubles," for, as the author of the letter asserted, "...the aforementioned pupil Nurmukhamedov being accepted at this establishment of higher education is highly desirable in view of his excellent progress and abilities ... and his impeccable behaviour".

In May 1890, as Alikhan was about to be given his OTS qualifications, he told Dobrokhotov once again that, "...his real surname was not Nurmukhamedov, but Bukeikhanov".

With his honours diploma and a letter of reference from OTS head Dobrokhotov to a Mr. Borodin, the dean of the Faculty of Economics at the St. Petersburg Royal School of Forestry (the letter was waiting for him at the offices of the Governor General of the Steppe Territory in Omsk, which Dobrokhotov asked the Karkaralinsk uezd governor to inform Bukeikhanov of), the "son of the sultan of Karkaralinsk uezd" once again set off to study, this time to the capital of the colonial mother country – St. Petersburg.

Documents from the St. Petersburg Royal School of Forestry archives show that he enrolled as a student under the name of "Sultan Alikhan Nurmukhamedov Bukey-Khanov". It is interesting that Bukeikhan signed a strange document when he joined the School of Forestry whose content demands attention:

"Pledge. I, the undersigned, give this pledge to [Mr.] the head of the School of Forestry, that I will obey to the letter all rules specified (and stated) to the school's students and instructions from the superiors and not participate in any societies, such as: fraternities, clubs and the like, and will not enter any club, even those allowed by law, without the permission of the head. I understand that if I go against any of these commitments, I am liable for expulsion from the School of Forestry.

A residence permit has been issued to me.

September 29th 1890.

1st year student. School of Forestry. Alikhan Bukeikhanov [photo no. 6].

As we will see a little later, this free son of the Kazakh steppes met his obligations in precisely the opposite way.

For example, researchers at the Oxford University Department of Central Asian Studies assert that, "...in his youth, Bukeikhanov was a radical revolutionary, socialist and member of the anti-Russian literary group "Zar zaman" [literally, "tragic era"].

"ALIKHAN BOKEIKHAN IS A PERSON OF DUBIOUS TRUSTWORTHINESS"

The likelihood of Alikhan becoming increasingly radical and revolutionary in St. Petersburg is far higher as the revolutionary liberation idea and movement in Siberia and the Kazakh steppe territory, and in Russia's Asian colonies as a whole, were still in their infancy in the 1890s. Secondly, there were incomparably more Kazakh youths among the student body in the Russian capital, oddly enough, than in any other large city, except perhaps for Kazan. For example, in the School of Forestry alone, Zhagypar Aymanuly (Aymanov), the uncle of future well-known Kazakh film director Shaken Aymanov, whose name Kazakhstan's national film company Kazakhfilm bears today, was in the same group and year as Alikhan for all four years.

Furthermore, according to the same archive evidence and subsequent print media, he was at the vanguard of the student movement and was one of the initiators and organisers of the student convulsions and “riots” in the capital of the mother country. Oxford academics assert he was actively involved in the activities of various literary and political groups and recitals, especially Marxist ones.

Another Western academic, the French researcher Alexandre Bennigsen from the Sorbonne, also provided evidence of his early interest in Socialist ideas. All the Russian primary sources are more concrete in their characterisation of the socio-political views of the future founder and leader of the Kazakh national liberation movement Alash of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. For example, on the eve of Bukeikhan being elected deputy to the First State Duma by the Kazakh population of Semipalatinsk Oblast, the St. Petersburg newspaper “Our Life” wrote in December 1905 that Alikhan, “...took an active part in all student affairs while he was a student at the School of Forestry, always affiliated to the far left. In heated debates about Marxism, he always vigorously defended economic materialism theses.”

We can assume that what is meant by “all student affairs” is actually his participation in the student movement and unrest. His activity saw him being placed on a list of “untrustworthy” people and subject to police surveillance. This assumption is corroborated by archive materials.

The Russian Federation’s Central State Archive (RFCSA) contains documents on the student movement in St. Petersburg in the 1890s, and notably a case no. 3 “on unrest by young students” consisting of reports and tip-offs from a secret informer from the capital’s police department. The following lines from the statement given by the informer from the tsarist secret police in this case are particularly odd: “I have received information that a strong sense of agitation has been observed amongst young students at some St. Petersburg establishments of higher education... This agitation is the result of the effect on their fellow students of untrustworthy people who are trying to organise unrest in educational establishments. This agitation is occurring at the School of Forestry...”

The secret police agent goes on to list the names of the students noted as, “...inciting their peers to social disorder on November 21st 1893,” which, by no coincidence, included Alikhan’s. The fifth page of the statement gives a more detailed description of each of the listed “inciters”, but the shortest is Alikhan’s, one of the first to appear on the blacklist at no. 4 [surname reproduced without alteration]: “Bukey-Khanov-Nurmukhamedov Ali-Khan, 4th year – a person of dubious trustworthiness.”

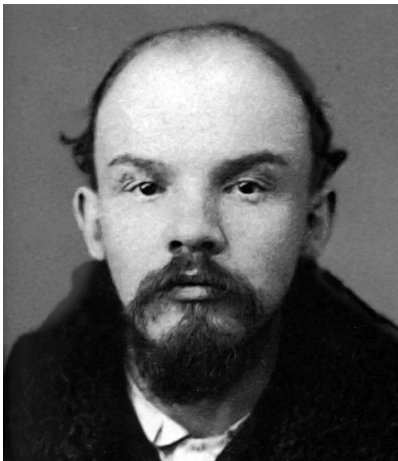
It is safe to assume that by participating “in all student affairs,” Alikhan acquired oratory skills, studied the basics of political polemics and increased his knowledge of Russian, Western European, ancient and Oriental literature and culture and of the theories of socio-political, state legal and philosophical sciences, particularly Marx’s theory of economic materialism. It is important to point out here that in addition to the lecture halls of the School of Forestry and the student Marxist and literary groups, he also garnered his knowledge and skills at the Faculty of Law at the St. Petersburg Imperial University.

TWO DEGREES IN FOUR YEARS: QUALIFIED FORESTER AND LAWYER

According to Alimkhan Ermekuly - one of the prominent statesmen of the early 20th century, colleague of Bukeikhan’s in the Alash-Orda national territorial autonomy, mathematician, professor - Alikhan took exams as an external student at the Faculty of Law at the St. Petersburg Imperial University alongside Lenin and was also fluent in several foreign languages.

As we know from the bibliographic works on the life of the future “leader of the world proletariat,” the founder and ruler of the USSR, Vladimir Lenin-Ulyanov did also take courses as an external student at the Faculty of Law at the same St. Petersburg University in November 1891 after his expulsion from the Faculty of Law at Kazan University for his participation in student unrest, thus corroborating what Ermekuly says above.

Considering Volodya Ulyanov (Lenin) was expelled from Kazan University after three months for his participation in “student unrest”, the fact that Alikhan Bukeikhan continued at and successfully graduated from the School of Forestry is a true miracle. And all at a time when there was a new university charter for the colonial empire’s institutes of higher education, police surveillance of students had been introduced and there was a broad campaign to fight “untrustworthy” students in Russia because the autocratic authorities feared students getting involved in the revolutionary movement. And as we know from archive material, Alikhan was placed under secret, external police surveillance, listed as an “inciter”, “participant in student unrest” and “untrustworthy”. The Kazakh hothead was, to put it mildly, at huge risk and it was a miracle he wasn’t expelled. All the more so when we remember that he gave a pledge in which he promised, “...not to participate in any societies, fraternities and clubs and not enter any club, even those allowed by law, without the permission of the rector [head] of the School of Forestry”. He also wrote that he, “...understood that if I go against any of these commitments, I am liable for expulsion from the School of Forestry”.



V.I. Ulyanov (1870-1924) – the founder and leader of the Soviet government.

We shouldn’t hurry to suspect Alikhan of susceptibility to unjustified risks, excessive revolutionary romanticism or youthful impetuosity. True, he did often take risks, but only when there was an acute need to do so. He would refuse to break out of prison, head off to his angry people, who had risen up against the colonial authorities, to tell them to lay down their arms, submit to the Tsar’s decree and let their children do logistical work and himself volunteer for the Western front. But he was always willing to take a risk if it was in his people’s interests. He was willing to risk his health, personal well-being and, ultimately, his life for his honour as a Kazakh and the honour of the Kazakh people. You will see this several times in his continued biography. Your author was told of one typical episode in Alikhan’s life that took place in those very student years in St. Petersburg by the late Raimzhan Bukeikhanov, the Alash leader’s nephew, who stayed with his uncle many times in a communal flat in Moscow in the 1920s and 30s. A brief résumé of his account follows.

It was another summer placement which the School of Forestry students, as qualified foresters, undertook in the forestry and hunting sectors every year before the summer holidays. These took place in various corners of Russia, including Ukraine and Belarus.

On one occasion, while they were working in the forest, one of Alikhan's co-students, a Ukrainian, who was almost two metres tall and of heroic build, saw a huge rock lying in the field, picked it up, held it for a moment and then threw it. Then he turned to his colleagues with a cocky grin and undisguised swagger as if to ask who would dare try to match him for strength.

One person gave it up as a bad job, another merely smiled back, admitting his weakness. But not everyone did. For one person, their personal dignity and honour counted above all else and they didn't intend to admit another's strength without trying to match them. That person was Alikhan, the only non-Slav amongst the students on placement. Just to look at them they were completely different. By that time Alikhan was an adult of average height and fairly strong build. But next to the Ukrainian with his heroic size and shoulders, he looked fairly puny. But he was clearly stronger, more solid and more ambitious in character and spirit.

Of course nobody expected or predicted what was about to happen so they all looked on in silence as Alikhan quietly went up to the same rock and, putting enormous strain on his body and soul, lifted it up. He also took its weight for a moment and then threw it.

It turned out that when he was holding the rock aloft, he did serious damage to the calf muscles in one leg, leaving him with a slight limp till the end of his life barely visible to the eye. According to Raimzhan Bukeikhanov, Alikhan Bukeikhan would usually write his letters and articles standing up, putting two stools one on top of the other, because of the injury. If he did have to work sitting at a desk, he would stretch out the injured leg. Only those closest to him knew this.

There is another important moment from Alikhan's time in St. Petersburg which would have a positive impact on his fate almost three decades later when he found himself in a very difficult situation. This concerns Vasily Andreevich Shelgunov, whose name we will return to at the very end of our narrative.

In all likelihood, Alikhan Bukeikhan was thrown together by fate with Shelgunov, one of the senior participants in tsarist Russia's social-democratic movement, in one of the Marxist groups while a student in St. Petersburg. This is corroborated by Shelgunov's official biography, which states he was an old Bolshevik from the so-called "Lenin guards".

Shelgunov had indeed joined the Communist Party back in 1898. He lived in St. Petersburg as of 1873 and began his career as a simple worker at the Petrov iron foundry beyond the Narva Gate in 1876-1877. In 1892, while working at the Baltiysky factory, he met Gleb Krzhizhanovsky and other student Marxists in workers' social-democratic clubs. There is no reason to deny that Alikhan Bukeikhan was one of these "student Marxists".

Moving on. Shelgunov met Volodya Ulyanov (Lenin) at the flat of Leonid Krasin - subsequently one of the leaders of the Soviet system - in late 1893.

I repeat that in November 1891, the young Volodya Ulyanov (Lenin) was taking exams as an external student at the Faculty of Law at St. Petersburg University at the same time as Alikhan Nurmukhamedov-Bukeikhanov.

According to the official biographies of both Lenin and Shelgunov, Ulyanov (Lenin) gave classes in a Marxist group for worker activists from 1894 in Shelgunov's apartment at Novo-Aleksandrovsky St. 23, now part of the building of the National Museum of the Revolutionary History of the Neva Gate. A memorial plaque on the building commemorates this.

But it is highly probable that Bukeikhan visited Shelgunov's apartment on more than one occasion. Nor can we rule out that Bukeikhan could have taken classes in the workers' Marxist group. Shelgunov saying that Bukeikhan taught them Marxism is testimony to that. He said this in the autumn of 1926 in Stalin's office in the Kremlin when trying to convince him to release Bukeikhan from arrest in Butyrka Prison.

Elizaveta Sadvakasova and Raimzhan Bukeikhanov, Alikhan Bukeikhan's daughter and nephew, remember Shelgunov as coming across as a "blind elder" in the incident but he still had definite authority as an "old Bolshevik from the Lenin guards". Note that he lost his vision after he was arrested and put in Kresty Prison in December 1905 and released on health grounds in May 1906. In September of that same year, the blind Shelgunov was called as a witness to the trial hearing the case of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, where he delivered a diatribe.

It can hardly be a coincidence that the trial was publicised in detail in the Omsk Kadet newspaper, "Irtysk," whose editor just happened to be Bukeikhan. In issue no. 57, dated September 30th 1906, Irtysk stated, referring to St. Petersburg newspapers, that this trial was taking place under increased security measures ordered by the tsarist secret police: "The police squad for the district court building during the case of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies was composed of the following by decree of the chief of the city's administration dated September 20th: 175 policemen, 45 police superintendents, 20 senior policemen, assistants, officers and civil servants from the investigations department as well as two platoons of gendarmes, 40 junior policemen and 3 gendarme division officers. In view of information we have received about an upcoming attempt by students to demonstrate at the court building, mounted police patrols will set out from the place of the suspects' detention."

According to Irtysk, the Soviet of Workers' Deputies sprang up "of its own accord" "in the honeymoon phase of our former freedoms which have been revoked by the Witte-Durnovo and Goremykin-Stolytin ministries".

The Irtysk paper would go on to focus in greater detail on the story behind the appearance of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies and what brought this government of national confidence, unrecognised by the tsarist autocracy, to end up in the dock: "In late October and November of last year [1905], the Soviet of Workers' Deputies played a leading role in the liberation movement... From every corner of Russia, which was being torn apart by the counterrevolution of the "Wachtmeisters" and the dregs of society, people were turning to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies as well as to the official government which at the time was losing the people's trust every day and fading in the light of the increased authority of this national body.

Everyone remembers the strength of the organised proletariat in November of last year [1905]. One of the Wachtmeisters, a General Prosolov, commandant of the Kushka frontier fortress, sentenced the engineer Sokolov to death. That was November 22nd.

At 6 pm, railway workers in Samara, Moscow and other cities demanded the penalty be withdrawn or threatened to go on an all-out railway strike. They also demanded an answer by 9 pm on that same day, November 22nd.

The government, represented by Count Witte himself and Minister of War Roediger, hurried to give a response by 9 pm on November 22nd. The court then acquitted Mr. Sokolov. He was saved thanks to the proletariat's lively protest. The government itself deferred to it. Two weeks later, in early December 1905, it arrested the agency of that proletariat and was now putting it on trial in circumstances incompatible with the principles of law.

By placing the Soviet of People's Deputies in the dock, they were prosecuting the Russian people, or at least the proletariat. And who were the judges...?"

A whole host of other facts lend heavy support to the premise that Bukeikhan and Shelgunov were old and close friends. For example, in autumn 1926, when Bukeikhan was arrested in Aktyubinsk simply for visiting his Alash-Orda colleagues - Baitursynuly, Dulatuly and others - in Kyzyl-Orda while on an anthropological expedition from the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the Aday uezd in Kazakhstan and placed in Butyrka Prison upon his return to Moscow, his daughter Elizaveta contacted Shelgunov via her fellow student and close friend, his daughter. We will return to this episode in greater detail in our final chapter. I would just add that even after the complete loss of his vision, Shelgunov went to prison more than once, was in political exile from 1912-1916, like Bukeikhan, returned to Petrograd after the February Revolution, took part in the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 to seize power nationally and from 1918 worked in Moscow.

At this point we can not ignore the important fact that from the moment the young Alikhan became interested in Marxism – or, more specifically, economic materialism - in his student days, he was clearly impressed by the ideas of socialism which brought him closer to the social democrats of the day. This explains his acquaintance with Ulyanov, Shelgunov and other social democrats who a little later would organise themselves into the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party or RSDLP. The RSDLP is not to be confused with the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin. The schism between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks happened much later. Alikhan remained close to the social democratic platform right up until October 1905. This will be described in more detail in the next chapter.



Vasily Andreevich Shelgunov (1867-1938) – a “Lenin guards Bolshevik”.

In autumn 1894, having successfully passed “all exams,” the “son of the sultan Alikhan Nurmukhamedov sultan Bukeikhanov”, and here I quote verbatim from his diploma certificate, “was bestowed with the title of second class qualified forester, with all the rights and advantages of current students of Russian universities [photos no. 7-9], by the Institute Council sitting on September 12th 1894.

So, with two degrees to his name from four years of study in St. Petersburg – for forestry and law – sultan Alikhan Bukeikhan was in no hurry to return to his native steppe.

And where should he return to in order to find a job worthy of his two degrees: his home aul, the uezd's main town of Karkaraly or should he stay in St. Petersburg for the prestige and greater career chances? That would only be decided a year later when he chose the city of Omsk.

Sultan-Khan AKKULY.
Prague, December 2012.