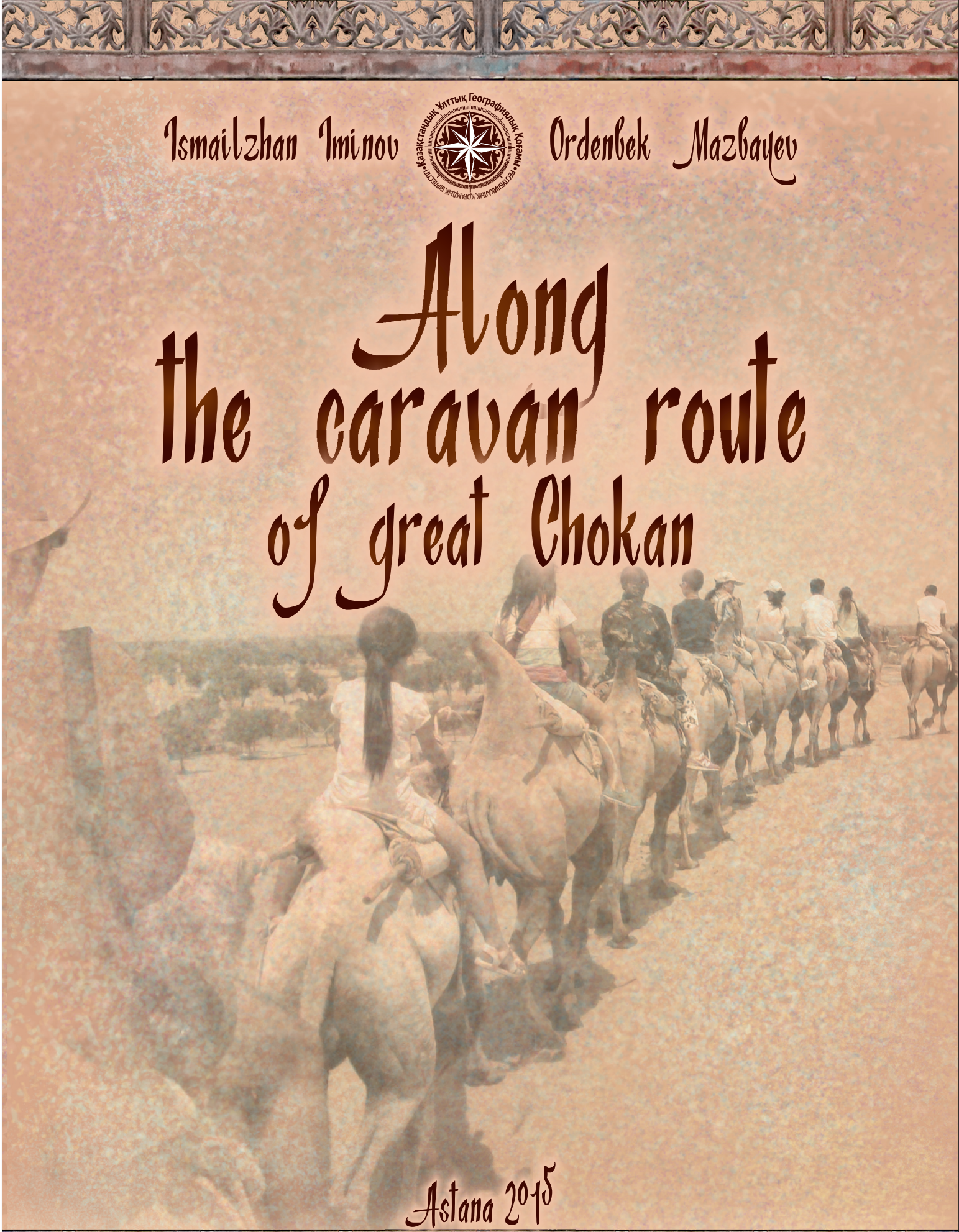
Ismailzhan Iminov Ordenbek Mazbayev

Along the caravan route of great Chokan



Astana 2015





UDC 910.4
LBC 26.8 г
I 55

Editors: Nazarova S., Tulebayev D., Zhakina N.
Translation: Tulebayev D. (Kazakh), Stamkulova G. (English)
Photo: Mazbayev O., Iminov I., Prokopenko V., Baibakisheva A.
Design and layout: Sklyarenko D.S.

Iminov I.
l55 Along the Caravan Route of Great Chokan / I. Iminov, O. Mazbayev.- Astana, 2015. – 184 p.

ISBN 978-601-275-538-1

The book is the follow up of Kashgaria research that started with expedition of the great Kazakh scientist-encyclopaedist, researcher and traveler of the XIX century, Chokan Valikhanov, whose 180-th birth anniversary is celebrated by the whole educated world in 2015.

It is written on the basis of personal, live impressions of members of the current expedition arranged by Kazakhstan National Geographic Society in 2014, it contains many informative facts and it is easily and excitedly read. The photos and entertaining episodes of this unique expedition will leave nobody indifferent.

It is written to reach the broadest audience.

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LBC 26.8 г

ISBN 978-601-275-538-1

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Ismailzhan Iminov, Ordenbek Mazbayev

Along the caravan route of great Chokan

Astana, 2015


Республикалық қоғамдық бірлестігі
Қазақстандық Ұлттық
Географиялық Қоғамы

Introduction

The Republican Public Association «Kazakhstan National Geographic Society» (KNGS) was established in October 2013 with the support of K.Massimov, Chairman of the KNGS Board of Trustees, Prime-Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

One of the first KNGS projects was an expedition to Kashgaria «Along the caravan route of Chokan Valikhanov» which took place in July and August 2014. We offer you to read a book about this journey. The publication of the book is dedicated to the 180th anniversary of the great Kazakh scientist, traveler and enlightener Chokan Valikhanov that is celebrated in November 2015.

Chokan Valikhanov is one of the greatest and most significant figures in the history of the Kazakh people. 150 years ago, he passed away before he turned 30, but his scientific feat, his works are still modern and relevant today. His ethnographic research works dedicated to the Kazakhs, Uighurs and Kyrgyz people have become classics, and their importance is increasing every year. Chokan was a scholar of encyclopedic scale; he was a historian, political scientist, geographer, anthropologist, biologist, and artist. Having many talents Chokan was an enthusiastic traveler as well. His broadest outlook combined with an incredible human courage: during his expedition to Kashgaria he was risking his life. In those times Chokan could have been killed at any moment during his expedition.

The participants of the «Along the caravan route of Chokan Valikhanov» expedition visited all the places where their great predecessor had been. They saw Kashgar and the old city, they visited famous Appak-Hodja mazar and Idkah Mosque. All these places are associated with Kashgaria odyssey of Chokan, as they are described in his writings. Members of our expedition have made the pilgrimage to the tombs of the great thinkers of the East: scholar Mahmud al-Kashgari and poet Yusuf Balasaguni, visited the ancient city of Turpan, Karashakhar, Korla, Kuchar, Aksu, Artush, the banks of the Tarim River, Bagrashkol and Lop Nor lakes and saw mysterious Takla-Makan. Members of the expedition passed through the high mountain Torugart pass, they counted rooms in a mysterious stone palace Tash-Rabat, they admired the Chatyr-Kul lake and the rapid Naryn river as Chokan Valikhanov once did. The travelers ended their journey in Almaty where Chokan ended his expedition.

Undoubtedly, there will be new expeditions, and by means of this expedition we pay tribute to the immortal memory of Chokan Valikhanov - the great explorer, enlightener, scholar and traveler, pride of the Kazakh people.

We hope that you will travel with us «Along the caravan route of Chokan Valikhanov» and immerse yourself in a world of amazing journeys and discoveries of travelers of the past and present.

Chairman of the Managing Council
of the Republican Public Association
"Kazakhstan National Geographic Society" ***K. Baigarin***





Part 1.

Research of Kashgaria by expedition of Chokan Valikhanov

In the history of the Kazakh people Chokan Valikhanov holds a special place. Even 150 years after his death, it is difficult to find a scientist, a writer who can be compared with him by value. He was a genius of a global scale, who in the late 50's and early 60's of the XIX century jolted the scientific community in Russia and throughout Europe.

His fate as fate of any genius was full of mysteries. Chokan Valikhanov is a phenomenon that scientists shall be off to study for years. Yet even so, many questions remain.



We made an attempt to understand this great man by conducting an expedition to the places and territories associated with the name of our outstanding fellow countryman.

We have always been attracted by the romantic and tragic fate of Chokan. A descendant of Genghis Khan, the great grandson of Abylai Khan, a close relative of Kenesary, the grandson of the last khan of the Middle Juz Wali, he was the leading scientist and researcher of Central Asia.

Chokan's childhood

Chokan Valikhanov was born in November 1835 in the Kushmurun fortress in Northern Kazakhstan. Here, in Kushmurun, where homestead of his grandmother was placed, he received good education: he could read and write not only in Kazakh but also in Chagatai language, he studied the Quran, the basics of Islam, Arabic and Persian languages.

Kushmurun and Syrymbet were one of the most beautiful places in Kazakhstan. Boundless open majestic steppes, scenic mountains, covered with woodland, had a huge impact on the quivering soul of child Chokan. The little one, as far back as at this age, loved folk songs and native melodies performed by his countrymen forever. His grandmother Aiganym, a widow of Wali Khan, had a massive influence on Chokan. This wise, kind woman with a great life experience loved her grandson, and Chokan felt affection towards her not only as a close person and a relative. They spent together many hours, silver-tongued Aiganym, who spoke six eastern languages, told her beloved grandson old-time legends and national fables. She often narrated stories taken from life of Abylai Khan and Wali Khan. Chokan had remembered her tales for a lifetime.



The boy's father, Genghis, was an interesting man as well. He was obviously one of the first Kazakhs who received Russian education. He graduated from Siberian military school, spoke fluent Russian, he was a colonel in the Russian army. It is known, that Genghis proved himself as a good organizator: at the age of 23 he was assigned aga – a senior Sultan in Amankaraysk District. Genghis supported Russian scientists who used to come to study steppes. He also gathered material for museums, various exhibitions and societies. In addition, he was a talented musician; he was adept at playing dombra, kobyz, sang songs and arranged aitys.

In his early childhood Chokan got into painting. The Russian painters, surveyors, engineers who came to his grandmother and father in Kushmurun and Syrymbet gave him the first lessons in art. His talent of a painter came through him at a very young age when Chokan was drawing his relatives, friends, fellow countrymen. He made sketches of nature as well.

Studies in Omsk Cadet Corps

In 1847, when he was at the age of 12, Chokan, not speaking Russian, was admitted to the Omsk Cadet Corps and three years later he became one of the best cadets of this institution and a fine expert of the Russian language.

In those years, the Omsk Cadet Corps was one of the leading educational institutions in Siberia, where experienced teachers gave lessons. A writer-orientalist F.N. Kostoletsky, a historian Gonsiewski and a philologist F.P. Lobodovsky had a great influence on development of Chokan. A young cadet studied languages, literature, history, geography and biology with all the burning ardor. Teachers and classmates of the future famous orientalist were amazed by Chokan's curiosity, thoughtfulness and great memory. Even in those years young Chokan was predicted to become a great scholar.

The young man became especially close with a teacher of Russian literature, a great expert of the East, a graduate of the Faculty of Oriental F.N. Kostoletsky. It was he who helped Chokan to master the technique of studying folklore. While studying at the Omsk Cadet Corps Ch. Valikhanov became passionate about the Russian classical literature. A.Pushkin, N.Gogol, B.Belinsky, A.Herzen were his favorite authors.



Omsk Cadet Corps

A teacher of history Gonsiewski behaved towards Chokan like a father. In spite of a great difference in age, they bonded and even became friends. Talks and lectures of Gosiewski about history of Europe and the East remained in the memory of the Kazakh thinker forever.

The young man spent his summer holidays in a family housestead in Syrymbet. There he was again spending much time with his grandmother Aiganym. He kept listening to stories, painted and wrote down texts of legends, fairy tales, and songs of Kazakh people. In those years young Chokan got into hunting with a berkut (golden eagle). He spent many hours in steppes hunting for wolves and foxes.

S.G. Yadrintsev and S.F. Durov who spent a lot of time staying in Omsk took interest in a well-educated cadet who perfectly knew the history and literature of the East. Ch.Valikhanov had a special relationship with P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky. Apparently, due to his influence, the young Kazakh man decided that the main purpose of his life was stuying Central Asia. Later, they organized a joint expedition to the Semirechye. In those years Chokan dreamed about Kashgariya, the land unknown to Europeans. As a cadet, he and his classmate, the future famous traveler Gregory Potanin, became friends. Their acquaintance developed into a strong lifetime friendship. They were not only friends, but also like-minded people.



The first journeys of Chokan. Expedition to Kuldja

In 1853 a graduate of the Cadet Corps Ch.Valikhanov was appointed an adjutant of the general Gasfort, a governor of Western Siberia and commander of the Siberian Corps. It seemed to be a dream of any young officer! However, the talented and possessed with his dreams Chokan desired to travel.

In 1854, 19-year-old Chokan met the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and their acquaintance developed into a good friendship. The Russian writer was amazed and impressed not only by Chokan's unique education, but his pure heart and big love for his people. There were few people who F.M. Dostoevsky cared for as much as he did for this outstanding Kazakh young man.

It was in 1855 when Chokan visited Semirechye for the first time. In 1856 a young man visited Semirechye for the second time, took part in a military and scientific expedition to Kyrgyzstan where he explored the basin of Issyk-Kul Lake and studied life, lifestyle and culture of the Kyrgyz people. For the first time in the history he recorded a remarkable interpretation of the epic "Manas" and made this masterpiece of the world culture available for reading. Young Valikhanov wrote a research paper "The Kyrgyz people" which still has a great value.



Governor-General of Western Siberia decided to send the talented, well-read and educated young officer Chokan Valikhanov as a member of the delegation to Kuldja - to negotiate with the Chinese authorities. The diplomatic mission was headed by highly experienced Colonel M.D. Peremyshlsky, one of the founders of fort Verniy, a classmate of M.U. Lermontov at Moscow University.



What were the purposes of the Russian diplomatic mission? The first purpose was to renew trading relations with the region and the second one was to establish Russian consulate in Kuldja and Chugachuke.

On August 1, 1856 the Russian delegation arrived to the border point Borokhodzhir where it was welcomed by a Chinese officer with gifts. It was not possible to refuse these gifts. Further, moving through uninhabitated steppe, the diplomatic mission reached the Usek river. The expedition then moved towards the Ili River. In this area, groves, gardens and well-groomed fields were seen more frequently, they saw farmers threshing wheat. (We visited these places in 2012, they still please people with a view of lush gardens and well-groomed fields. - Authors).

Under one of the trees Valikhanov noticed dehkans (farmers) resting in the shade. Chokan, of course, approached them and started talking and got to know them. They were Ili Uyghurs. The scientist wrote about them: “Hollow, deep eyes, thin and curved nose like a Turkish saber, thin lips and meagreness distinguish them from other people of Central Asia.” Kazakh traveler wrote with sympathy about these people who had turned the region into a flourishing Ili region. He said: “The people had never enjoyed full freedom, the impact of slavery and dependence left on their faces an imprint of gloomy and sad hopelessness.”

A Russian consul, famous orientalist Ivan Zakharov, welcomed them not far from Kuldja. On August 5 the expedition arrived in the administrative center of the region.

At this point Chokan acquainted with life of local people. The scientist frequently visited the famous Kuldja bazaar, where people came not only for trade but also for communication: actually this is a distinguishing feature of bazaars. Chokan was interested in other cities of the East Turkestan as well: Kashgar, Hotan and Yarkent. The scientist wrote: “Population of Ili was: native Muslims and inhabitants of Kashgar and Taranchi. Manchu officials and the Chinese lived in cities. Sibo and solons compose military population. Kalmyks of Chakhar origin wandered



around Sayramkul, and kalmyks of Olet origins wandered around Tekes." Valikhanov said: "The Uygurs were Muslims even during Genghis Khan times, at that time they had their own script and, as more educated people were used by the Mongols for writing letters."

Notes of the researcher were always very accurate. For example, during our trip to Ili region (2012) we noticed that their bread - small rolls that are sold in shops (but not tandoor bread) - differs from our Kazakh bread. This is what he wrote about this in his book: "In China bread was whiter than we had; this was because they soaked grains in water while threshing. Indeed, this way of making flour gives whiteness, but baked bread dries soon."

The negotiations were successful; the Russian delegation achieved the planned targets. Valikhanov had an opinion that the Qing Empire at that time became weak and had no clear policy. The Russian delegation had been staying in Kuldja for about three months and in late autumn they returned home.

During the journey to the Ili region, every day Chokan was writing in his diary "Western Region of the Chinese Empire and the city of Kuldja." This work is still of scientific relevance.

Just before the journey to Kashgar. On the way

Chokan visited the Ili region and Kuldja, but he couldn't stop dreaming of visiting Kashgar. Finally, in 1858 the dream came true: he made a trip to Kashgar.

What was this time like in the history of Kashgar and the Uyghur people?

In 1759 Qing China occupied Kashgar. Freedom-loving people raised dozens anti-colonial revolts. Usually hodjas, descendants of last Kashgar rulers who were under home arrest in Kokand khanate (as agreed with Qing China) led the rebels. One of the most famous revolts was a revolt of 1826-1828 under the leadership of Jakhangir Hodja. The revolt got drowned in blood. The leader was captured and taken to Beijing, where he was executed by quartering.

In 1857, a new anti-Qing revolt broke out. It was led by Valikhan-tore, a nephew of Jakhangir Khan Hodja. Almost all of Kashgar was soon liberated.

Valikhan-tore played a contradictory role in the history of its people: on one hand he, certainly, at least for a short time, recovered independence of the country, and on the other one, the tore remained in people's memory as a despotic leader who brought discipline to the state by dictatorial methods. Unfortunately, most of the rulers of the East at that time did not know other methods in controlling their possessions.

The revolt in Altyshar (name of Uyghur lands in those days) frightened not only Qing China but also the Russian Empire. Since the XVII-th century interests of China, Russia Great Britain conflicted for supremacy in the region. Russia, fearing that Kashgarya may fall under the influence of Great Britain, decided to find out what was happening there and to send a career intelligence official. Concern about the events in Kashgarya grew up after the death of the German scientist-geographer Adolf Schlagintweit who was probably an agent of British secret services, with the support of which he came from India. It is hard to believe that the official authorities in Russia were deeply upset with execution of A. Schlagintweit as some historians and writers often wish to present. But the facts say that the interest in the events in Kashgaria rose worldwide after the death of the German researcher.

Director of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Yegor Kovalevsky wrote a letter to the General G.H. Gasfort in Omsk with a request to help finding a person to send to the East Turkestan. The Minister for War also requested the General to find a right person to travel to the rebellious region.

On October 30, 1857, General G.H. Gasfort wrote to the Minister for War: "In selecting officials for this assignment I chose lieutenant Valikhanov who was attached to me for special tasks. This officer is a son of the most dignified Kyrgyz Sultan Chingiz Valikhanov, with very good abilities, and we could rely on his efficiency. Moreover, he is acquainted well with the



history and current state of the Central Asian possessions, and, being a Muslim, he could conciliate his coreligionists much better than a Russian officer.

It shall be noted that P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky played a major role in expedition Chokan to Kashgar. Impressed by the intelligence and unique education of the Kazakh researcher the Russian traveler told about this amazing young man not only to scientists-orientalists, but to officials at the highest levels, where he had some influence. Later, Semenov-Tian-Shansky wrote in his memoirs: "It went without saying that I esteemed the duty to turn a special attention of the General Gasfort to this young talented man and on my return to Tian Shan I suggested an idea about deputing Valikhanov in Kyrgyz (Kazakh. - Authors) dress with a trade caravan to Kashgar, which was subsequently implemented by Valikhanov with complete success."

Soon after the revolt in Kashgaria was suppressed with cruelty by the Qing colonizers, tens of thousands of people were sentenced to death or fled to the Fergana Valley, many of them didn't reach the Kokand Khanate: they died of hunger and cold in the mountains. Tore succeeded in fleeing to the Kokand Khanate.

Having learned in 1858 of the suppression of Valikhan-tore's revolt, the young officer was worried that the intelligence & reconnaissaissance campaign to Kashgar would be canceled. However, the interest in this region important from strategic significance point of view did not wither away. Russia firmly intended to direct his man to East Turkestan.

We have already mentioned that while being a cadet Chokan Valikhanov was interested in history, geography, ethnography of East Turkestan. During his expedition to Kuldja he started

studying the Uyghur language, later in Kashgar, he perfectly mastered the language. Of course, before the trip to Kashgar Chokan Valikhanov learned more about the political situation in the country. But the scholar could learn all the truth only after his expedition to this unstable region.

It shall be noted as well that not only general G.H. Gasfort and traveler P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky were engaged in preparation of the secret expedition, but also the governor of the Siberian Kazakhs K.K. Gukovsky and the governor of the Alatav (Semirechensk) Kazakhs Colonel M.D.Peremyshlsky.

The closest assistances in preparation of the expedition were Kasimov Tatar Faizullah Nogayev and a resident of Kokand, staying in Kuldja for many years, Mohammed Yaqub Dzhankulov (Yakup Yankoulov). Both men knew the situation in the region: Faizullah had influence on Kyrgyz manaps and Dzhankulov repeatedly visited the Uyghur cities Kashgar and Aksu. Obviously, they had collaborated with the Russian intelligence services. F.Nogaev and J. Yankoulov helped to develop the plan of the expedition and had to wait for Chokan in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Certainly, the Kazakh scientist's main purpose was to visit the mysterious Kashgar and tell about this country to the whole world. The famous Kazakh scholar and historian, academician A. Margulan wrote: "... study of Kashgaria, a rich country with an ancient culture, which was almost entirely unknown to science, was of great interest. For such a researcher as Chokan Valikhanov, it was very attractive."

The great, recognized scientist, researcher and expert of Central Asia P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky with whom Chokan had sincere friendly relations helped the young scholar with his advice.

The Russian authorities carefully developed the route of the expedition which was sent to Kashgar under the guise of a merchant caravan. It was dangerous to pass the territories of Kokand monarch Khudayar Khan, thus, the travelers headed off to the ancient city by the Issyk-Kul on the Kyrgyz lands.

Ch. Valikhanov was travelling to Kashgar under the name of the merchant Alimbay Abdillabayev, a Kokand national and son of Margelan (Fergana) trader. The scientist joined the trade caravan from Semipalatinsk on June 28, 1858 in the mountain area Karamula, thirty miles from Kapal.

Russia attributed an impotant role to the mission of Ch.Valikhanov. On the day of the trade caravan's arrival in Karatal he had a farewell conversation with the General Gasfort who specially arrived for a meeting with the traveler. What were they talking about? It was never written and spoken by Ch. Valikhanov. The General was also silent. Apparently, the officer received the last secret instructions before going to the mysterious and dangerous region. According to a cover story made for Chokan, the merchant Alimbay Abdillabayev (i.e. Ch.Valihanov) was a relative of caravan-basha, Musabay Toktabayev from Tashkent (according to other sources - Takhtubayev. -Authors). Lieutenant dressed in chapan, he shaved his head, and as a faithful Muslim, began to pray five times a day. Now he didn't look different from the other merchants of the trade caravan.

The caravan consisted of 43 (according to other sources - 42) persons, 101 camels, 65 horses, 6 travelling yurts (kosh), they had goods of 18 300 rubles worth. The expedition covered about 25 versts daily.



In August the expedition reached the land of Kyrgyz tribe Bugu. During August the merchants lived in the Kokjar, Karkar and Tekes valleys, where the Kyrgyz marked an anniversary of the death of Burambay manap. Chokan Valikhanov wrote: «Amongst the Dikokamenny Kyrgyz shortly after arrival of our caravan rumors started to spread that we were going to Kashgar and that there is a Russian officer in the caravan.” Further the Kazakh scientist noted: “We had stayed in Dikokamenny Orda for almost a month migrating with them and constatntly trading. We bartered 3026 sheep, 6 horses, 11 fox skins and 44 lambskins.

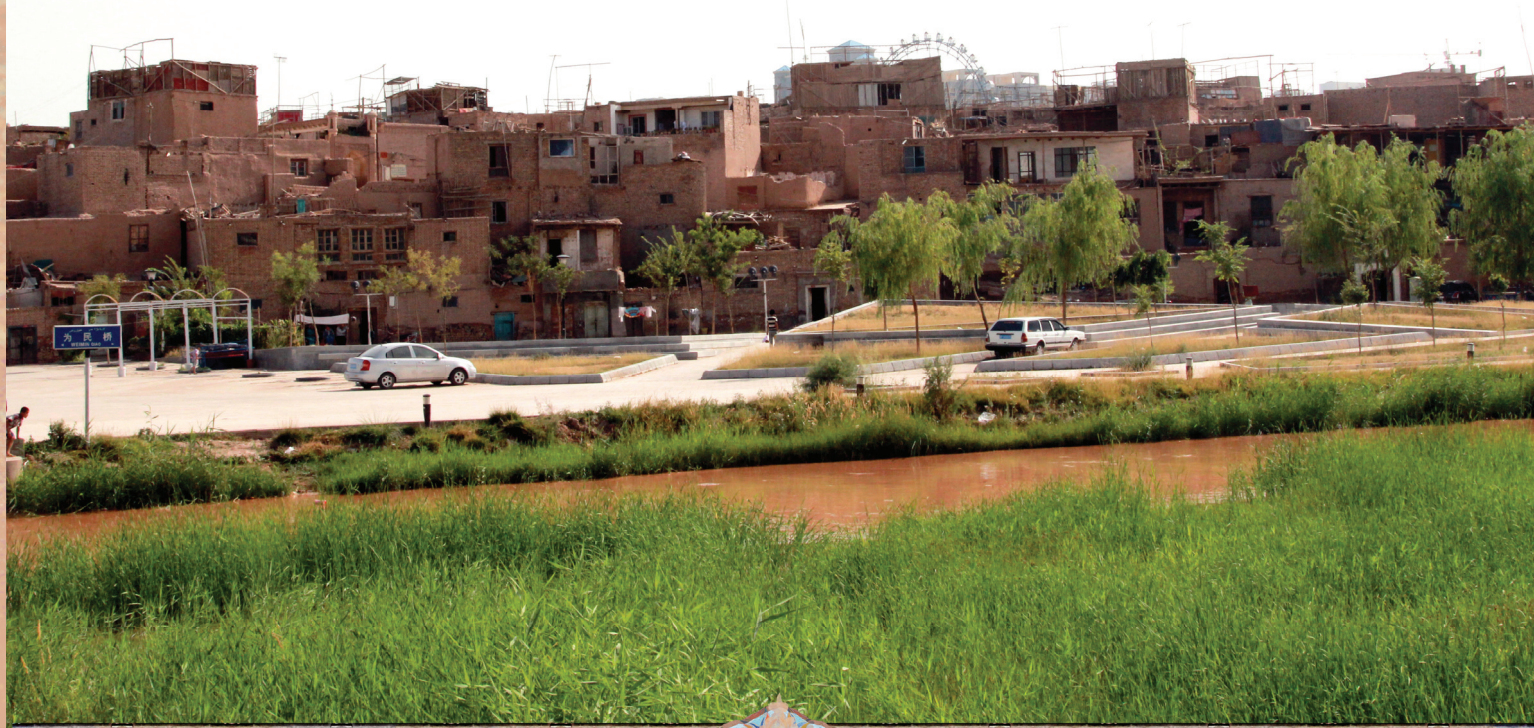
Not only Kyrgyz relatives of manap but Uyghur merchants from Kashgar came to the honorable funeral feast. Ch. Valikhanov and Musabay got to know each other well and agreed to go to the ancient city together. Valikhanov wrote: “There were many caravan routes through the Tian-Shan from the Issyk-Kul valley to Kashgar and Turfan. There were three routes most important and most attended.” The traveler selected the second route – Aksay route. He noted: “Aksay path, beginning as a flat and fruitful valley of Issyk-Kul took turns to mountains, a passage to which was steep and narrow and formed a terrace with two tarn lakes. Fragments of rock laid as large masses in a chaotic mess blocking up the road.”

Crossover through high-altitude passage was not only dangerous but also hard: there was lack of air, humans and animals had shortness of breath because of rare atmosphere. Having crossed Zauka passage, the caravan reached the head of the Naryn River, an intake to Syr

Darya. During the entire transition there was cold and biting wind. A path from north to south through the central Tian Shan lasted 12 days and ended at the Terekty-Davan pass.

In late September the caravan, already comprised of 57 people, resumed its trip. On their way, in Zauka pass the merchants were attacked by robbers. Travelers repelled the attack and moved on. The Kazakh traveler noted in his diary: “People of Kokand attacked the caravan and grabbed 300 sheep. Kashgarians started a fight, armed with poles from their tents, and very soon had the Kokand people on the run.”

On September 26, 135 versts from Kashgar, Ch. Valikhanov buried his diary in the ground, wrapped in fancy cloth and placed in a wooden coffret. The last records in the diary were: “I was on a hurry: diary was now buried in the ground, if God would return us alive and healthy, and the diary would not be spoiled with moisture, I would show it to the world. I left it to the care of Allah, goodbye.”



In Kashgar

Travelers moved towards Altyshar. The expedition was approaching villages Ustun-Artysh near Kashgar. Chokan noted in his travel diary: "Ustun-Artysh was the collective name of several villages along the river Artysh or Toin. The villages that made up Ustun-Artysh had 30 to 50 wattled houses, surrounded by gardens and orchards. Green trees overflowing these villages in the midst of the arid desert made a very good impression."

On October 1st Chokan saw the ancient Kashgar, one of the most famous cities of the East in those days. With excitement, he entered the land of the mysterious and dangerous town.

Many Europeans had a dream of seeing this town. Over a period of several centuries, scientists, travelers of the Old World tried to get there. One of the first people who visited this town in the 70's of the XIII century was the famous Genoese Marco Polo. Being admired he wrote about the ancient town: "The local people are Muslims. There are a lot of big cities and small towns here. Kaskar (Kashgar. - Authors) was the largest and most notable town. The country extended to the northeast and east, the people there involved in trading and handcrafting. They had beautiful gardens, vineyards and glorious land. There was a plenty of cotton. Many merchants leave the city to trade around the world.



Nestorians lived here; they have their own churches and their own law. The local people speak a particular language. This area extends for a five days' journey."

It is for sure; the Kazakh scientist was familiar with the books of the great Italian traveler Marco Polo "The Travels of Marco Polo" and read it several times before his trip to Altyshar. And now let's get back to Kashgar of 1858.

In Kashgar they believed in the "cover story" of the imaginary merchant Alimbay. "Relatives" who lived here, hospitably welcomed the researcher and created all the conditions for enjoyable stay. Chokan frequently attended and stayed at his "family" or their friends houses.

These were the first days when the merchants sold their goods with a good profit. They lived on the streets Usten-bui and Gian-kuche. The Kazakh scientist wrote: "Trade of our caravan in the town was generally satisfactory. From the accounts provided to me by the caravan-bashi, it was clear that in the beginning the caravan had goods worth 19 thousand rubles in silver: in the Big Kyrgyz (the Great or Senior Juz of Kazakhs - Authors) and Dikokamennaya Orda (Kyrgyzstan - Authors) we sold goods amounting to 3026 sheep (including two-year lambs). These sheep and other goods were sold to Kashgar to the amount of 4.068,5 Kokand gold coins. Quick sales of our goods and, moreover, in exchange for silver and gold had to be attributed to especially favorable opportunities."

In those years Kokand people had a special position in Kashgar. Kashgar Hodjas, the former rulers of the country, were under oversight - or rather, placed under house arrest in Kokand Khanate. Occasionally Kokand reign tried to use them to their advantage. The Qing reign had an agreement with Kokand: Central Asian Khanate kept influential and popular in Kashgar



Clothes of Uyghurs of East Turkestan. Feather. 1859.

Hodjas under their supervision in exchange for control of Altyshar external trade by Kokand. Moreover, a representative of Kokand - a consul stayed in Kashgar, and was in charge of trade affairs and collected duty. During the stay of Chokan Valikhanov in Altyshar representatives of Kokand (in Kashgar they were called "Aqsaqals" - Authors) were Nasreddin, then Nurmagamet-datkha. The traveler developed a good relationship with them; they took Chokan under their wing. This, to a large extent, helped Valikhanov to accomplish the tasks he had.



Ch. Valikhanov fitted in and even managed to marry in this ancient town. He wrote: "In Kashgar and generally in six towns there existed a rite according to which all foreigners for a period of stay in those towns had to marry. In order to follow the general rule and at the insistence of our friends, we also had to comply with the custom." Apparently, this woman played an important role in the life of the 23-year-old pilgrim, as he lived with her for more than five months. Chokan had never written about her, but was missing the ancient Kashgar. Perhaps this sadness not only referred to the wonderful town, but also to the Kashgar beautiful woman (in Urumqi we heard an interesting story from the local Kazakh-scientist. He told us that ten years ago he saw a beautiful Uyghur girl which was brought by a man to the Consulate of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Urumqi from Kashar. The man from Kashgar said that the girl was a great-granddaughter of the Kazakh scientist. It is hard to believe and even harder to prove. But perhaps, this beautiful woman is a granddaughter of Chokan in fact?)

However, this is only the external side of the scientist's life in Kashgar: the main thing is that he began to get acquainted with the ancient capital of the Uyghurs. Certainly, first of all he acquainted with the architectural and historical monuments of the wonderful town. These memorials born no resembles to what he saw in Russia. It was his first visit to the ancient eastern city, and this was a special world which requires to look at carefully. The traveler visited the famous mausoleum of Appak-Hodja, family vault of Kashgar rulers. The researcher said: "The family vault of Appak-Hodja was the best building in the Kashgar district; it is situated 6 versts to the north-east of the town, on the right bank of the Tumen River".

During our visit to Kashgar, we have repeatedly been to this mausoleum. If there was a time when the mazar was outside the walls of old Kashgar, then for a long time it had become a part of the town.



Mausoleum is a single complex consisting of mazar of Appak-Hodja, Jhama's Mosque and the famous madrasa. The entire complex is a masterpiece of the Uyghur architecture, built by masters of Kashgar in 1640.

Mazar of Appak-Hodja is a monumental building, impressing by its beauty and originality. There is a majestic dome at the center of the Mazar, there are four towers in the corners that are decorated with beautiful patterns of green and blue colors, and golden crescents shine over the dome. Inside the mazar we can see an elevated platform covered with ceramic tiles with blue patterns on white color. Seventy-two men are buried there under the solemn vault. They are Appak-Hodja, his close relatives, including Hodja's granddaughter Iparhan, a national heroine of the Uyghur people, five generations of Kashgar rulers. The tomb of Iparhan is covered by pink silk.

There is an old madrasa near the mazar where many famous poets, scientists, theologists studied.

There is a small artificial lake on the territory of the mausoleum; clear water was used by Jhama mosque parish.

It is apparent that the Kazakh scientist visited these places dozens of times during his stay in Altyshar: he did namaz in the Jhama mosque, drank clear water from the legendary lake.

The traveler-scientist noted: “The Old Town is situated on a high cutbank, whilst the new one occupied a territory well below. The town’s center was trade area Aytga (the Square of the cathedral mosque). The old town is divided into two blocks: Charsu and Ambarchi and the new one - into four: Urdaaldy, Ustenbui, Yumalak-Shaar and Anjan - Kucha.”

The Id Kah Mosque (in Chokan‘s records - Aytga - Authors) which, apparently, Valikhanov visited nearly every day, is the national shrine of the Uyghurs built in the fifteenth century by talented craftsmen of Kashgar. Beautiful minarets astonish with their greatness, the ancient gates boggled imagination. The lock on the gate of the mosque which hung there for several centuries was of interest to visitors. A sign in the Uyghur language in Arabic script was clearly visible.

Dozens of generations of Kashgarians and guests of the ancient Uyghur capital entered the gate and saw the old castle, and the Kazakh scientist was amongst them, of course.

What was the town during Chokan Valikhanov‘s time? Old Kashgar is a town of two thousand years old; unfortunately, most part of the town is now lost and destroyed in the past. Only a small part of the old town remained. However, during Chokan‘s time the town was in all its original glory. These were narrow, winding streets, where mainly craftsmen lived. These were one-floor, sometimes two or three-floors houses. Things were humming in the old Kashgar: craftsmen were working, merchants were trading. The scientist visited various workshops where fashion jewelry, art objects made of wood and bone, crook-necked pumping were manufactured and sold. Of course, the researcher came to potters as well. He watched them working for a long time whilst they were engaged in making dishes.

It is apparent that having been in Kashgar, Chokan could not but visit the Artush village which is now a part of Kashgar. The traveler said: “Astyn-Artysh (Lower Artysh), in other words Altyn Artysh (gold) 60 versts to the north-east of Kashgar was remarkable for its tomb and a mosque built on the grave of Sutuq Bughra Khan Ghazi”.



Mausoleum of Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan (in Valikhanov‘s version - Sutuq Boghra Khan Ghazi - Authors) is one of the most important buildings in Kashgar built in the year of 956. The mausoleum is a center of pilgrimage for many believers. Satuq Bughra Khan was a Kagan of the Karakhanid state. In 920 he converted to Islam. Gradually, this religion became dominant in the country and in 960 Islam became the state religion of the Karakhanid

Khanate. There is an amazing mosque near the mazar, which is certainly one of the most beautiful religious buildings in Kashgar.

It is known that Chokan visited Yangisar which served as served an administrative center in the past. In this city, the scientist visited the ancient Darwaz Aldyda mosque. This unique mosque has survived to this day. We saw it and adored the beauty of this religious architecture.

During his journey Valikhanov visited villages that were near Kashgar. Bashkeram (according to Valikhanov - Bishkerim) was one of them, a typical Uyghur village.

156 years after the Kazakh scientist's visit we also saw the village. It has pleased us with its purity and beauty. On one of the main streets, the vineyard grew on both sides of the road and its vine pleached into semi-circular tent protecting against exhausting summer heat. This vineyard stretched for several kilometers. There are many gardens over there and there are different varieties of nuts, almonds, apples, pears. Obviously, this was a village Chokan saw at that time. We could not walk by the huge apricot: we tasted its fruit, it was very tasty. We didn't throw away kernels and decided to plant them in our own country, in Kazakhstan, and would give them to the curators of Chokan Valikhanov's museum so that they could plant them near the grave of the great son of the Kazakh people.

Obviously, the merchant Alimbay, under the guise of whom Chokan lived in Kashgar, had to spend most of the time in the market. Kashgar market was a special world, where people didn't just buy or sell goods, but also communicated, learned news, exchanged rumors amongst inhabitants, had dinner and breakfast. Poets and scholars shared their thoughts, recited their poems. In the bazaar craftsmen worked with whom the Kazakh traveler liked to talk. Chokan liked going to the mosques and the madrasa, where the scientist talked with priests for hours. It was there where he acquired a rare manuscript "Tazkiryan Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan" (History of Satuq Bughra Khan), "Tazkiryan Tugluk – Timurkhan" (History of Tugluk Timur), "Tazkiryan Hodzhagyan" (History of Hodjas) and "Abu Muslim Mauruzi".

The researcher was able to create the herbarium, the collection of ancient coins, rocks, obtain ancient letters, monuments of applied and decorative art, and samples of artistic ceramics.

When you read his scientific papers, diaries, you start wondering a wide range of interests of the Kazakh scientist. In his works we learn about history, geography, economics, ethnography, and political life of Kashgar.

During his stay in Altyshar Chokan Valikhanov came to love the locals. He wrote: "Kashgarians are of good character, sociable, friendly, hardworking and extremely polite. All classes pedantically follow the forms of politeness. Everyone has to know in detail and always follow the rules of decency, while in case of Beks it comes to triviality"

The traveler liked that Kashgarians were very musical. He wrote: "In terms of music they are held in honor amongst all inhabitants of the Central Asia." During any celebration one could hear the lyrical and cheerful songs. In Kashgar women walked with open faces, they used to gladly meet guests along with their spouses." Many Uyghur women played a great role in the history of the Uyghurs.

The Kazakh scientist was one of the first who identified the ethnographic group of Uyghurs.



Ch.Valihanov said: “I tried during my stay in Kashgar to explore the Uyghur language which was spoken in Kashgar.”

Chokan Valikhanov believed that the most correct name of the country at the moment was East Turkestan. Talking about the cruel methods during conquest of the land or suppression of numerous revolts, it was safe to note that the sympathies of the Kazakh researcher were, of course, with the Uyghurs. The scientist said: “After each revolt, they (the Qing Colonizers - Authors) raged, committed to robbery, raped women, destroyed mosques and sentenced to death to horrify dervishes and other poor people.” Further the researcher wrote: “The Chinese hit everyone in the streets who don’t get down from horses, take away and get goods for free and dine in restaurants at no charge.”

There are many curious facts in his works. In particular, he wrote that at the time of suppression of the revolt in the town of Uchturfan in 1765 all its population was killed by the conquerors. The Kazakh scientist noted: “Turkestan people hate the Chinese, but it doesn’t keep them from borrowing their civilization. In conclusion, we say about the most remarkable feature of Kashgarians that distinguished them from other Muslims – it is their patriotism and political parties of Qara Taghliqs or Black mountaineers and Aq Taghliqs or White mountaineers.”

A talented artist, Chokan Valikhanov drew a lot of pictures where we could see men, women, children of Altyshar, settlements of the country. These works are priceless; they captured Uyghurs and their way of life in the nineteenth century. The artist drew with a pen and ink, sometimes used a pencil. His drawings: “Kashgar woman”, “Head of an Uyghur man and an Uighur woman”, “Hair & hats of women”, “Types of Men”, “Town gates” are of interest.

The life of the Kazakh scholar in Kashgaria became dangerous. Firstly, the talks of a possible return of Valikhan-tore to the ancient city started to spread. But the most important was that people in Kashgar started to talk openly about a “Russian spy” in the town. Inspections started... Chokan was thinking: “It was not possible to extend my stay in Kashgar: the rumors about the presence of a Russian agent in the caravan greatly troubled the town and visitors were actively watched.”

Return

On March 11, 1859, after having been in the East Turkestan for a little more than five months, the Kazakh scientist left Kashgar. The expedition did not go back the same way it came; they chose another one along the Toin riverbed.

Chokan had to leave quietly the caravan for a while to dig at the very top of Terekty his personal diary with his precious notes and observations buried on 26th of September. Travelers spent three days to going up along the Toin riverbed. It was very cold in the canyon, the cutting wind was constantly blowing. It was there, obviously, where Chokan got very sick: he chilled his lungs.

On March 18 the expedition reached the valley of the Lake Chadyrkul, crossed the frozen lake over ice and moved towards Tash-Rabat.

And we, modern members of the expedition of nowadays Kazakhstan National Geographic Society, visited Tash-Rabat in August 2014 during our return from Kashgaria. Tash-Rabat, built in the 15th century, according to other sources in 10-12th centuries, impressed us with its severe beauty. It is located at an altitude of over 3 500 meters above sea level on the banks of a small winding river which flows into the Kara-Koyun River. The length of the building is 35.7 meters, its width is 33.7 meters. Tash Rabat is covered with a spherical dome. The central facade is located in the eastern part of the Stone Palace. This is a high stone wall with strong gate with



an arch and a portal, and towers on its sides. Tash-Rabat was built under the mountain. And it seems that the stone palace is a part of the mountains, their integral extension. Inside the building, there is a quite wide corridor from the gate to the great hall, and there are small rooms on the sides, the floor in these areas is lower than in the corridor.

There are no windows in almost all the rooms, for this reason, twilight prevails in the palace. Only the dome and some rooms have windows-tunlik through which fresh air and light come, and smoke escapes when fire was lighted inside.

There is a well and zindan (dungeon) in the building.

... And now let's back again in 1859. So, from Tash-Rabat the caravan moved to the Naryn river valley by circular road, fearing militant attacks of Kyrgyz tribe Cherik. Wanderers reached the right bank of the Naryn River, where there was a Kurtka fortification. In this settlement goods of the merchants were inspected and zyaket (tax) was charged. The caravan went along the Naryn River valley and reached the ail of the head of the Kyrgys family Sarybagysh Turegeldy - a kind of "customs officer". Suddenly, there Chokan faced a danger of death. One of the Kyrgyz pointed at Valikhanov and said that he was a Russian officer and that he supposedly had seen him before in the Verniy fortification.

The senior of the family threatened Valikhanov promising that he would give him, the imperial spy, to Kokand governors and they would cut his head off. But, fortunately, a Cossack troop was moving towards Chokan, it was sent by the Russian governors who knew about return of such a valuable expedition. Frightened Turegeldy let the caravan go and gave a horse to both Chokan and Musabyaev each as a gift.

It was April 12 when the researcher returned with the trade caravan to Verniy fortified house. The expedition lasted ten months and fourteen days total. It was a feat of the researcher, traveler, lieutenant Chokan Valikhanov.



The mission of Chokan Valikhanov was very successful, but deranged his health. He arrived in Omsk where he was treated and at the same time he was working on his report on the trip to Kashgar.

The main result of Chokan Valikhanov's expedition was his unique study "On the state of Altyshar ..." It was the first scientific work dedicated to Kashgar.

In January 1860 the scientist arrived in St. Petersburg, where he was immediately welcomed with respect by the Emperor Alexander II, he was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir of 4th degree, promoted to become a staff captain, received a substantial monetary reward and enlisted to serve in the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

His report "On the state of Altyshar ..." was published in a short form in Russian and soon translated into English, German and French. Full text was kept secret and was released only in 1904. The publication of this book made Chokan one of the most famous Kazakh scientists and orientalists of his time.

For the rest of his life Chokan Valikhanov dreamed of returning to Kashgar, he wanted to be a Russian consul in that town, but – there was no chance ... Shortly before his death, in the years 1864-1865, he watched closely a new revolt in Kashgar and Ili region. It is evidenced by his letters to General G.A. Kolpakovsky.

156 years have passed since arrangement of scientific expedition of Ch.Valikhanov to Kashgar. Over the years, many things have changed, but the works of the outstanding scientist and traveler still has not lost its value and relevance. Researchers who are interested in the history and current situation in the Central Asian states will come back to these papers again and again.

We, in turn, offer the reader a creative and documentary report on the expedition to East Turkestan, compiled by us as a result of the trip in July and August 2014. The journey was arranged along the caravan route of our great countryman Ch.Valikhanov and organized by the Kazakhstan National Geographic Society.





Part II.

Along the caravan route of Chokan Valikhanov

Urumqi

We arrive in this city for the second time, and each time we observe the metropolis with interest. In June 2012, we looked at the panorama of the city from a bus window, but this time - from an airplane window.

We were surprised by a huge area occupied by the city - 1600 square kilometers. On three sides Urumqi is surrounded by mountains of eastern Tian Shan and in the east the powerful mountain Bogda shines with its snowy peaks. Its peak reaches a height of 5400 meters. The plane landed at the international airport of Urumqi.

This modern airport is considered one of the largest in Asia; hence the planes take off from here to many countries of Europe, Asia and domestic China.

We, ten people from Kazakhstan, - scientists, teachers, and journalists - arrived in this region to make a journey along the caravan route of the expedition of the great Kazakh scientist and traveler Chokan Valikhanov. We have two objectives: to follow the route taken by the Kazakh researcher; to attract the tourists from all over the world to the Central Asian region (Kazakhstan, Central Asia, XUAR China).

And now, on the way we stopped in Urumqi, the administrative center of XUAR China .

On the first day of our arrival we had an appointment at the Ministry of Tourism of XUAR China where a round table took place. We talked about our plans to open a tourist route “The Golden Ring of Central Asia”, which could unite the interesting tours to ancient cities and natural monuments in the region. Director of the Department of the Ministry Sui Xiao Chuan supported our project and said: “If the “Golden Ring of Central Asia” is established, it will attract a lot of tourists from Europe, Asia and America. This route will be unique and interesting.” We got to know huge Urumqi. A trip to the Museum of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region which is located in Saybaga area stuck in our memory. We roamed the museum for a long time, stopped by the exhibits, historical monuments found during archaeological excavations (some of them date back to the IIIrd millennium B.C.). We saw food preserved in dried form that nourished people 1.5 thousand years ago, the stand dedicated to the history of silk and the Great Silk Way caught our attention. But most of all we were amazed with mummes that were found during excavations in the Taklamakan desert.

In Urumqi, Professor Adai greeted us and helped with organization to promote the expedition. He is Kazakh, was born and grew up in Xinjiang; he was educated in his native city and Beijing, speaks fluent native Kazakh and also Uyghur and Chinese languages. Professor is a great specialist in geography, one of the developers of the tourist destinations of the native land. We were getting along with him immediately.

During the expedition to Kashgaria Nurbek who is Aday’s young colleague and a countryman, accompanied us. Nurbek works for a travel agency that offers tours to XUAR. He is about thirty years old, but looks younger than his age, almost like a boy. This modest young man speaks five



languages: Kazakh, Uyghur, Chinese, English and Russian; he knows his homeland perfectly. During our trip we became attached to him like to a son. We travelled to the beautiful land in a minibus which is a property of a travel agency that arranged our trip. The bus was equipped with air conditioning, a refrigerator, so the conditions were good for the expedition.

Great Turfan

We have heard about this great and, unfortunately, little-known town in Kazakhstan before. In 2012, we were lucky enough to visit Turfan and later wrote about it.

It is strange that in school we learn about Athens, Sparta, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople or Memphis, but we hardly know anything about Turfan which is located near us. This town, which played an important role on the Great Silk Road, was first mentioned in historical literature four thousand years ago. There are numerous historical and architectural monuments in Turfan. There is a science "Turfan studies" which studies the history, literature and culture of this region.

There are well preserved Karez (water tunnels) in the Yar settlement. It is a museum now, where it is shown how they were built and used. Thanks to Karez two thousand years ago, citizens of ancient Turfan created an oasis, a wonderful city, a country. Because of these underground channels Turfan is a blossoming region up to now. A few thousands years have passed but people could not invent anything better for irrigation of desert lands. The heat in these places is intolerable; there are no rivers, almost no rainfall there. Water at such high temperatures and strong winds evaporate at once. But the ancient residents of Turfan noticed that there were melting snow, ice-flows, and springs in the Tian Shan Mountains and they learned to use this water to the benefit of people. At the bottom of the mountains they began digging vertical shafts, and then - horizontal underground channels. Water from the wells fell into



underground channels, flowed out of the ground, sometimes forming small ponds. The height of the underground channel is about two meters. The overall length of Karez in the Turfan oasis reaches five thousand kilometers. The number of vertical wells reaches a few tens, and sometimes - three hundred, and they all were connected to the underground channels. Water reached up to each vine, tree, sowing fields, local people and animals consumed it as drinking water. In many places of this blooming land one can see the entrances to underground channels.



During exhausting heat when the air temperature rises up to 50-60 degrees and above, citizens of Turfan spend time in underground structures. These underground facilities are natural air conditioners.

We were amazed not only with the skill of ancient Turfan engineers but these hardworking people. After all, this hard work was done by hand! Probably all watched how a bucket of water is pulled out from a common well. The ancient builders used the same method to pull soil out from an underground channel while constructing a karez. Sometimes they used animals, but people had to scoop soil by hand. Once again we want to emphasize that skills and diligence of the citizens of ancient Turfan created





the miracle of the irrigation system in the desert that is oasis of Turfan.

Carried away, we silently left the underground structure and saw the monument to the builders of Karez: a tired man sat down to rest, and an old man nearby is pulling a bucket with soil from the well using a lasso. These are builders whoc created prosperity of Turfan.

The great Turfan Karez, certainly, is one of the wonders of the world, it is recognized around the world and in China they are compared with the Great Wall of China.

We went into one of Karez and drank cold water from it.

We walked through the streets - vineyards of the old Turfan, sat on benches in the shade while enjoying a green town and its friendly people.

Turfan Valley is a Klondike for archaeologists around the world. They found more than two hundred ancient towns there, forty thousand historical and cultural relics, literary monuments, various written documents, including in the Uyghur language. It was ancient Turfan that absorbed the cultural traditions of ancient Greece, Rome, Persia, Arabia, India and China. To stay in this region without seeing Turfan means not to understand and feel this country which has played an important role in the history of the Turkic peoples and Central Asia.

Of course, Chokan Valikhanov had a dream to see the town, but due to complicated political situation and remoteness of Turfan he couldn't. However, the Kazakh scientist left interesting information about the town; he recorded the words of people who visited this town. Chokan Valikhanov wrote: "Turfan. It was a residency of hereditary beks of Emin Hodja. Turfan was remarkable for the excellent taste of grape and significant growing of cotton paper."

There are famous fire-breathing mountains Yalkuntag near Turfan. Mountains are located in the basin and extend for hundreds of kilometers with a height of not more than 400-500 meters. These mountains are composed of red sandstone, and at the hot sun it seems they are burning. Yalkuntag is located on the Great Silk Road, and in the past it has been visited by many travelers, scientists who described these beautiful mountains. Now Yalkuntag is one of the most popular tourist sites of the region which is visited by guests from many countries of the world. In the middle Ages there were Buddhist monasteries over there.

Yalkuntag is one of the hottest places in the world; the temperature here reaches 70 degrees and higher. There is a huge thermometer at the center of the tourist attraction which showed that the temperature on the day of our arrival was 65 degrees. One can boil an egg under direct sun rays. We tasted the egg which is baked in this manner in a glass container; it was delicious and hard-boiled. There is a famous Grape Valley to the west of the Flaming Mountains. Of course, we could not pass it by. The length of the valley is 8 kilometers, from the western part it is surrounded by high steep cliffs and sheer drops. Different varieties of grapes are grown over here. The car stopped, we got out, sat in the cool shade of the vineyards, tasted the grapes and drank cold water and moved forward.



The festival of grapes

This festival is eagerly awaited by all residents of the Turfan oasis. It was, of course, celebrated in the past but previously it was celebrated in certain villages. Since 1990 the festival has gained a national scale, it attracts visitors from many countries. Normally the festival is held from 18 to 28 August each year.

The history of this festival goes back centuries ago. Experts say that it was carried out 2000 years ago when the grapes ripe and its gathering started. Grape growers at the festival shared their experiences, sang songs, danced, arranged camel racing, melon contest (as melon ripes at the same time with grapes), made theatrical and circus performances. At the same time they summed up the results of an agricultural year.



This was the main festival of hardworking farmers of Turfan. There is dry autumn and cold winter ahead... People before knew how to rejoice; now old traditions are being revived..

Toksun Town

The symbol of this oasis, along with Turfan, is another ancient city of Toksun. Surely, after having seen Turfan, we could not pass by Toksun.

This is one of the oldest towns, in ancient times Shan State and the kingdom of Gaochang which were regional powers and played an important role throughout the region were established over there. From the old times crafts prospered there and production was developed. The town is still famous for its textile and food enterprises. Since ancient times Toksun has been a good rival of great Turfan. It, for sure, resembles its famous neighbor, but it is different. Here, as in Turfan, the summer is very hot; there are old neighborhoods and streets – vineyards preserved, but irrigated agriculture was efficient in Toksun: citizens of Toksun carefully used every drop of life-giving water from the river of the same name. As a result, farmers grew excellent durum wheat which is considered one of the best in the world. In the fields we saw endless cotton fields.





Foggy Bagrashkol

It is evident there is no a geographer or a traveller who has not heard about the famous foggy Bagrashkol Lake. Many European and Chinese travelers had been dreaming to visit it for centuries. Our expedition also reached the shores of the famous Bagrashkol Lake. A few small rivers run into the lake and a full-flowing river Konchedarya outflows. Bagrashkol is 24 kilometers away from the town of Karashahara and 37 kilometers away from the town of Korla. This is one of the largest freshwater continental lakes in Asia. Local Uyghurs call it the Great Lakes region and the Pearl of Kashgar. It is famous for being full of fish; carp, catfish, perch, carp are found there. The shores of the lake are low and sandy. The area of the water surface is over 1 000 square km, the length is 55 km and the width is 25 km. We approach the lake and admire its beauty. Jungle of reeds and bushes grow here and there around the huge Bagrashkol. It is not hot by the lake, pleasing coolness can be felt. Damp haze rests over Bagrashkol and on the horizon the cloudy sky melts into clear water. The lake seems an extension of the sky. In the lake, just a step away from the shore, one can see a blooming lotus; small yachts are waiting at the pier. One can take a cruise on Bagrashkol by yachts.





Cane and tamarisk grow by water, willows sadly lowered its green branches in water ... The water was cold, of green and blue color. Numerous white and black-headed gulls and bank swallows flied above the lake, one could see the white wagtail, gray goose, black cormorant, swan, barn swallow, house sparrow, the great white heron, common heron, black-faced Caspian gull, white-winged tern. Lake frogs were croaking in water; we noticed ondatra as well. Beauty was extraordinary; we were sitting for a long time and did not want to leave, but had to move on.

Karashakhar

We heard a lot about this wonderful town located on the northern branch of the Silk Road, 25 kilometers away from the foggy Bagrashkol lake, near the hot Taklamakan desert.

Karashahar oasis (120 sq. km) surrounded from all directions by high mountains is notable for mild winters, relatively cool summers and fertile lands. (Nature, climate of Karashahar oasis reminded us of Ferghana Valley we visited in the autumn of 2013).

Karashahar was one of the centers of Buddhism and played a huge role in the middle ages in Central Asia. In ancient times it was a powerful country; it was mentioned in the Chinese annals of the 7th century "Life of Xuanzang." Livestock was at high level at the state, pedigree horses and camels were raised, great attention was paid to agriculture, farmers cultivated wheat, rice, millet, beans, there were plenty of vineyards and orchards there. Production flourished, woolen and cotton fabrics were manufactured. The country minted gold, silver and bronze coins. Ancient Karashahar controlled the strategically important road from Kashgar, Kuchar to Turfan and China.

... A car is entering the town of Karashahar. The town is small. The population, according to local residents, is about 200 thousand people. Like many ancient towns, Karashahar is a town of contrasts (let's use the expression without fearing to fall into stereotype). On the outskirts we saw the traditional Uyghur clay adobe houses with flat roofs which are several hundred years



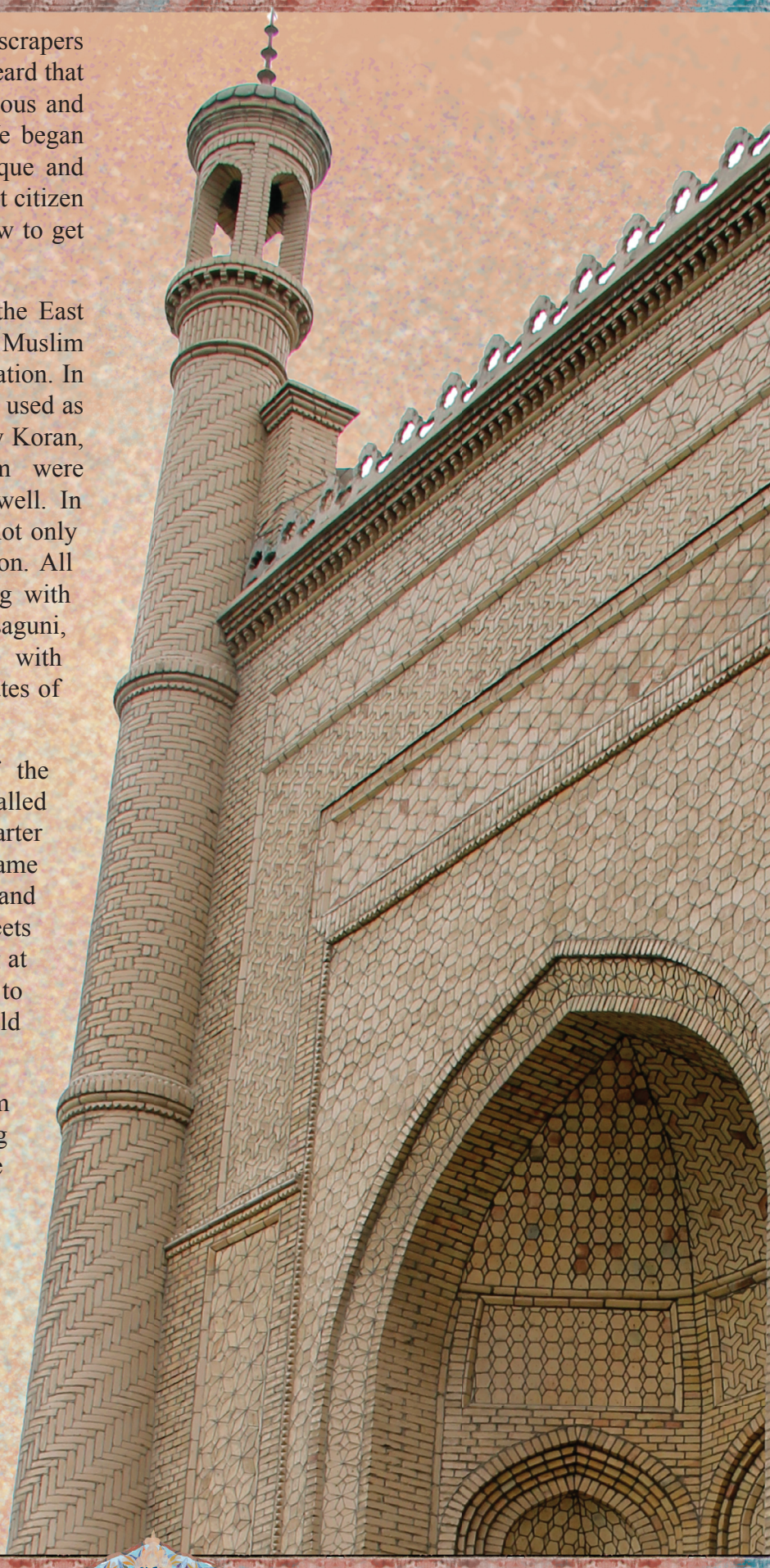
old. There are already modern skyscrapers in the center. We have read and heard that this town is one of the most famous and oldest mosques in the region. We began to ask the locals about the mosque and how to find it. Fortunately, the first citizen of Karashahar we met told us how to get there.

It is known that mosques in the East were not only places of worship, Muslim worship, but also centers of education. In the past, when every mosque was used as madrasa, where not only the Holy Koran, Shariat, fundamentals of Islam were studied but secular subjects as well. In some madrasas one can receive not only secondary, but also high education. All the great poets, scientists starting with Mahmud al-Kashgari, Yusuf Balasaguni, al-Farabi, al-Biruni and ending with Tazhali, Nazim Bilal were graduates of these madrasas.

The car drove into one of the old quarters of Karashahar called Kashgar Mahalya. In fact, this quarter resembled ancient Kashgar: the same houses with flat roofs, curved and narrow streets. In one of these streets we noticed a group of men sitting at a table and talking. We walked up to them and greeted warmly. We told them:

- We, a group of scientists from Kazakhstan, are traveling along on this wonderful land. We are interested in all things. Please tell us who are you? Where are your ancestors from?

- Our ancestors originally are from Kashgar. They left their hometown in the second half of the 18th century and settled here, that's why this area of the





town is called Kashgar Mahalya.

-We would like to see the oldest mosque in the town which we saw on the photo many times - one of us said.

- The mosque is beside and I serve as imam there, - said with a smile a man of forty-five year-old, of medium height, with a little beard, with clever, kind and friendly eyes, and dressed in a white shirt. A bright skullcap cut a feather on his head. Something childish was in this man. - My name is Azim-damulla and he is Mahmut-kari, muezzin of the mosque.



We saw a white-bearded, youthful old man, smiling, looking at us.



- I think he will be pleased to introduce you to our mosque - said Azim-damulla.

Muezzin led us to the mosque. This iconic majestic building was built in the traditional style and resembled a mosque in Kashgar.

Mahmut kari got us going to the mosque. It was really shining with cleanliness and order; it was a special sacred place. Indeed many generations of citizens of Karashahar prayed for peace and prosperity of the people.

We left the mosque and once again came up to the town people. We engaged in a warm conversation. They surrounded us and asked questions about life in Kazakhstan, the goals and objectives of our expedition. We were pleased to respond to these questions. These men seemed to be open and sincere people. We warmly said goodbye to parishioners of the mosque.

It was time for dinner. During the trip, we ate only in Muslim places: a rich variety of traditional Chinese cuisine uses a lot of food that are not eaten by Muslims and Europeans. We realized that food in Chinese restaurants, many of which we have in Kazakhstan and around the world, still requires some adaptation to the original Chinese cuisine.

The Forest of Asiatic Poplar

We took the road across the Taklamakan desert. We were offered to see the forest of Asiatic poplar. Of course, we had heard about this tree before. We saw it in Kazakhstan as well. In the Lop Nor village, in the place where previously waters of mysterious lake were rolling and on the banks of the Tarim River, we saw Asiatic poplar (Euphrates poplar). Fishermen manufactured boats of Asiatic poplar that resembled canoes of American Indians well known to us since childhood favorite books of Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid.

The car was moving, and we looked at the desert. We noticed the salt marshes, which could be seen on both sides of the road. Occasionally dead trees began to appear from under the sand dunes, then lonely green trees seemed, and then, like a mirage, the forest suddenly appeared ... It was hard to believe that this is not a mirage, but a real forest. But it was really a forest, the forest of Asiatic poplar. This mysterious tree grows in a harsh environment, the lowlands of the desert, where summer is a terrible heat and winter is bitter cold.



Asiatic poplar is a relict tree, one of the oldest on the planet; it is more than 135-year-million years. Experts call it a "living fossil plant." Asiatic poplar which grows in the Taklamakan desert is a special subspecies of this tree. Asiatic poplar of Taklamakan lives up to a thousand years, and then after falling down is not exposed to dust, and may lie in the sand for another thousand years! But what is the most surprising is that green shoots that turn into trees can appear from the fallen Asiatic poplar covered with sand. This is, for sure, one of the wonders created by nature. Without Asiatic poplar it is difficult to imagine the life of local residents. The Uyghurs call the tree "Batyr" for its endurance and love of life and consider it the most beautiful tree in the province. Having known closely the people's lives in this vast country, we realized that not only grapes, but also Asiatic poplar is a symbol of Kashgar. Since ancient times local people lived not only in oasises, but in desert or semi-desert areas, on the shores of the Lop Nor Lake or wandering Tarim River, where it is impossible to imagine life of the local population without this unique tree. Until recently, people made the majority of household items of Asiatic poplar. They were dishes, spoons, trunk boxes, carts, and even coffins before Islam. The famous columns in the old mosques and mazars of the land were also made mainly of Asiatic poplar. For sure, it would be difficult to survive for the people without this tree.

We got out of the car, went into the forest. It was a strange forest, sand was under our feet and not the soil, but the birds in the trees sang songs. We approached the trees, they were of different shapes. Here is Asiatic poplar which stretches to the sky, and another tree nearby is not tall, but

with a broad crown which stretches for several tens of meters. And this tree has some branches broken off and dried, probably, several centuries ago, and the other half is bursting with bright green leaves. We picked up a small branch and were surprised: for the first time in our life we saw a tree which leaves were of different shapes and sizes. We took a few leaves as a memory of this mysterious tree. There was a pleasant smell in this ancient forest – apparently Asiatic poplar evolved it. We wished to stay longer in such a wonderful forest. The forest and the desert are antipodes, but they live together peacefully in Taklamakan.

Suddenly we saw a hedgehog under feet and were glad to meet with the "old friend", but it was its special subspecies. And here we saw a hare running away ...

We were lucky: one of the members of our expedition was Zhaskayir Karagoyshin, Ph.D. in biology, associate professor of the Eurasian University. He knows the species and subspecies of birds and animals very well, he can easily recognize and name any bird or an animal, as well as any plant.

The car having left the forest of Asiatic poplars stopped in the desert. We took off our shoes and took a long walk in this great desert; the feet felt warm and cozy. We loved the Taklamakan desert; it seemed mysterious, but not frightful. Apart from Asiatic poplar we saw saxaul and tamarisk bushes in the desert. Tamarisk is a lush bush that holds sand, forming the hills, sometimes reaching the height of ten meters. Hills are usually placed in staggered order forming difficult points. In the area where this bush grows, dunes do not roam. But the lakes there, sometimes, wander...

Wandering Lop Nor

Probably, it is difficult to find a traveller who has not heard about the mysterious Lop Nor lake. We heard of Lop Nor in early childhood, our fathers told us about it. Later, we read short articles and notes about Lop Nor, which we came across in the pages of various newspapers and magazines. Once we found a book by the famous writer and researcher Vladimir Mezentsev "When ghosts appear." They have pages in it devoted to the mysterious lake. The Russian writer said: "Lop Nor was fed from the Tarim River and its inflow Koncha-Darya. In summer, when the snow melted in the mountains, abounding in water Tarim easily washes out sandy soils of the desert on its way, and is divided into dozens of channels. It is difficult to say, where the bulk of water would flow – its way changed frequently. The river takes off away from its old course and stops supplying Lop Nor with water. The Lake disappears. However, Tarim doesn't forget its "obligations"; it finds a new suitable location in a great desert basin and then generates a high-water lake."



Now Tarim waters disappear in the Taklamakan Desert. As a result Lop Nor grew shallow, but there are places remaining where waves of the wandering lake made noise and crashed against the shore, and fishermen of Lop Nor lived in their villages. Our expedition came to these places in the northern part of the desert. There a village of



Lop Nor people preserved and we stayed there. Lop Nor people live on the area of 72 square km. They have kept the old way of life of inhabitants of this desert region, but they are, of course, not fishermen but herders. We enter the village, we are greeted by a giant canopy of reeds, a huge tandoor (it has been assured that this one is the largest in the region); the cave where the pictography (a letter in figures) of the ancient inhabitants of the area reconstructed and, finally, the signal tower which was used by inhabitants of Lop Nor. Here we saw small ponds, a small river - the remains of the mysterious lake and the great Tarim River.

There were flying white black-headed gulls, house sparrows, rooks, common tern, woodpeckers, we saw black-winged stilt, great white heron and sand hares. We also saw the wolf skin (most likely, it inhabits this place).

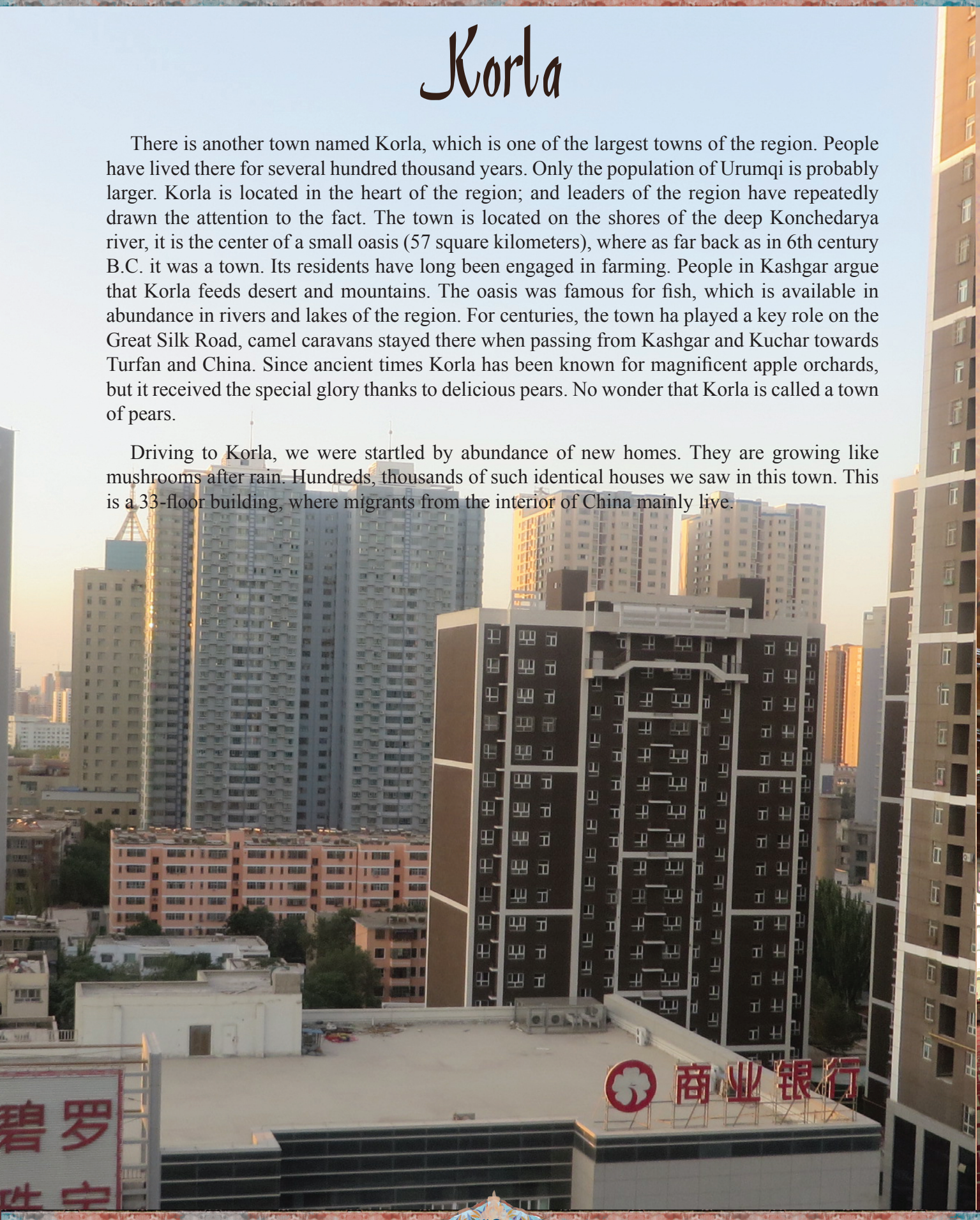


Chokan Valikhanov also heard about the village we visited. Here's what he wrote 156 years ago: "There was a Lop Nor villages near the Lop Nor lake (Star Sea), in the land of waters, springs and black waters. The residents of these villages were engaged in fishing, they spoke Turkic language."

Korla

There is another town named Korla, which is one of the largest towns of the region. People have lived there for several hundred thousand years. Only the population of Urumqi is probably larger. Korla is located in the heart of the region; and leaders of the region have repeatedly drawn the attention to the fact. The town is located on the shores of the deep Konchedarya river, it is the center of a small oasis (57 square kilometers), where as far back as in 6th century B.C. it was a town. Its residents have long been engaged in farming. People in Kashgar argue that Korla feeds desert and mountains. The oasis was famous for fish, which is available in abundance in rivers and lakes of the region. For centuries, the town ha played a key role on the Great Silk Road, camel caravans stayed there when passing from Kashgar and Kuchar towards Turfan and China. Since ancient times Korla has been known for magnificent apple orchards, but it received the special glory thanks to delicious pears. No wonder that Korla is called a town of pears.

Driving to Korla, we were startled by abundance of new homes. They are growing like mushrooms after rain. Hundreds, thousands of such identical houses we saw in this town. This is a 33-floor building, where migrants from the interior of China mainly live.



Chon Mosque

Since the first day of our stay in Korla, we tried to get in the Chon mosque. It is located in the town center, close to the hotel where we stayed. We left the hotel, turned left, walked a few blocks through the crowded streets of the town and reached the mosque. The people respectfully called it Chon Mosque (the main, large). Here it is! Whereas there are huge areas in front of the ancient mosques in Kashgar and Turfan, the Chon mosque stands on a regular avenue. We noticed long ago that ancient mosques looked alike. We think that we have already been to the Chon mosque. We see the majestic mosque, which is decorated with two tall minarets. Tremblingly we approach the door of the mosque - it is light brown in color, with national patterns. We open it and enter. Mosque is well-conditioned, it is clean and tidy throughout. We are welcomed by a young man who led us in the building. There are several rooms in the Chon mosque, we enter the small one. We admire wooden columns; everything here is painted in white, light green and brown colors.



Kuchar, the great town of the East

The ancient East heard about the city of Kuchar from merchants and travelers. The city is located in a beautiful oasis, where agriculture and gardening have been developed since ancient times. This was just what we saw when we got into this amazing and flourishing region out of the desert lands. Wheat was heading in the fields, growing in dense rows corn cobs had already showed laden ears, cotton plantations gratified eyes. Numerous gardens and giant vineyards impressed, as well as poplar and birch that grew on both sides of the road. It is clear that there is abundant life-giving water in this oasis that gives life to the city and fields and gardens. Of course, nature and the climate and the unique location of Kuchar played a decisive role in its famous history.



As early as in antiquity Kuchar was an important political and economic metropolis in Central Asia. Not only agriculture but also animal breeding flourished in Kuchar's oasis: people bred sheep, horses, cows, and camels at the foot of the Tian Shan mountains, which were magnificent pastures.

Another two thousand years ago Kuchar surprised its neighbors by pedigreed horse, pigeons, birds, peacocks, which were sold to many countries of the world.

How old is Kuchar? Scientists believe that it is several thousand years old. Back in I century B.C. being the largest city in Central Asia, till III-II centuries A.D. this bustling city with unique architectural monuments and high fortress became the capital of the mighty kingdom Kuchar. Kuchar, located on the northern branch of the Silk Road, served as a key point in international trade, caravans came here from Europe, Persia, Central Asia, India and China.

But the most important thing was that Kuchar has been one of the centers of the Buddhist religion for many centuries, this fact has been proved. There were a few hundred churches in the city. In those early centuries, the city

developed production, Kuchar citizens mined copper, iron, lead, tin, various crafts flourished. This great city remained in the history not only as Kuchar (Kucha, Kuche), but in some periods it was known as Kushiyan: still indigenous people call themselves kushan, kusyan, kusyanlik.

This ancient city was explored by many foreign scholars who visited Kuchar during their expeditions. Russian scientists D.A. Clements, M.M. Berezovsky, Nicholay and Yuriy Rerich, Japanese Otani, German A. Grunwedel, Englishman A. Stein, Frenchman Paul Pelliot visited Kuchar.

Chokan Valikhanov wrote about Kuchar: «... Among its works calico, copper, nitrate and ammonia, extracted in the surrounding mountains were remarkable. There were many caves in the mountains and lights can be seen in summer. There are carved out (carved. - Authors.) Buddhist idols in one cave».



Now Kuchar is a huge metropolis with many high-rise buildings, where only a few old quarters has been preserved.

In Khan Orda

We decided to start acquaintance with ancient Kuchar with the old capital of Kuchar rulers - Khan Orda. We drove to the site. Khan Orda was repeatedly destroyed in the past. Neither man nor the time had mercy on this place. Now it is a museum. Craftsmen used the traditional forms of oriental architecture when building the palace. A portal stands at the center of the main facade. The palace includes a large and a small reception halsl, a mosque, a residence of Khan, summerhouses. All of these areas make a museum now. The territory of Khan Orda is 85 hectares.



Our attention was drawn to a small mosque, where rulers of Kuchar had made namaz for centuries. The museum tells the history of this unique oasis. We visited the ancient pottery, musical instruments, looms, carriage, which was driven by Kuchar khans, millennial ketmen (the main tool of the peasants), we carefully considered the iron helmet of an ancient warrior, his slings and arrows. We looked at archaeological findings. These were the remains of ancient Kuchar people whose age was almost four thousand years. We saw the remains of a young Kuchar woman, her height was almost 1 meter 85 cm. She was with Asian features. The woman, of course, was reputed to be a great woman of fashion: her forehead was artificially lengthened. «Oh women, you are an eternal mystery to us men. Even a few thousand years ago you sacrificed much to please us «- we thought. On the abdomen of the woman we saw a small piece





of paper, which contained remains of a tiny infant. Obviously, his mother died while giving birth, so they rested together.

There were two more mummified bodies nearby. They belonged to young men and women of the European races not older than 30 years. Probably, they were lovers. Looking at them, visitors remember many legends about Romeo and Juliet, Farhad and Shirin, Kiz Zhibek and Tolegen.

The last Khan of Kuchar

In Khan Orda, we met with the last Khan of Kuchar Davut Makhsut. He was born in the spring of 1925 (according to other sources in 1927), he was a nephew of Kuchar khan, who had no heirs, and at the age of 12 he inherited the title of khan. Davut is the eleventh member of the ruling dynasty. Here the torment of the young Khan begins: his uncle was executed, and Davut spent several decades in lumber camps. Only in 1979, under Deng Xiao Pina's rules, he was released and returned to his family home.

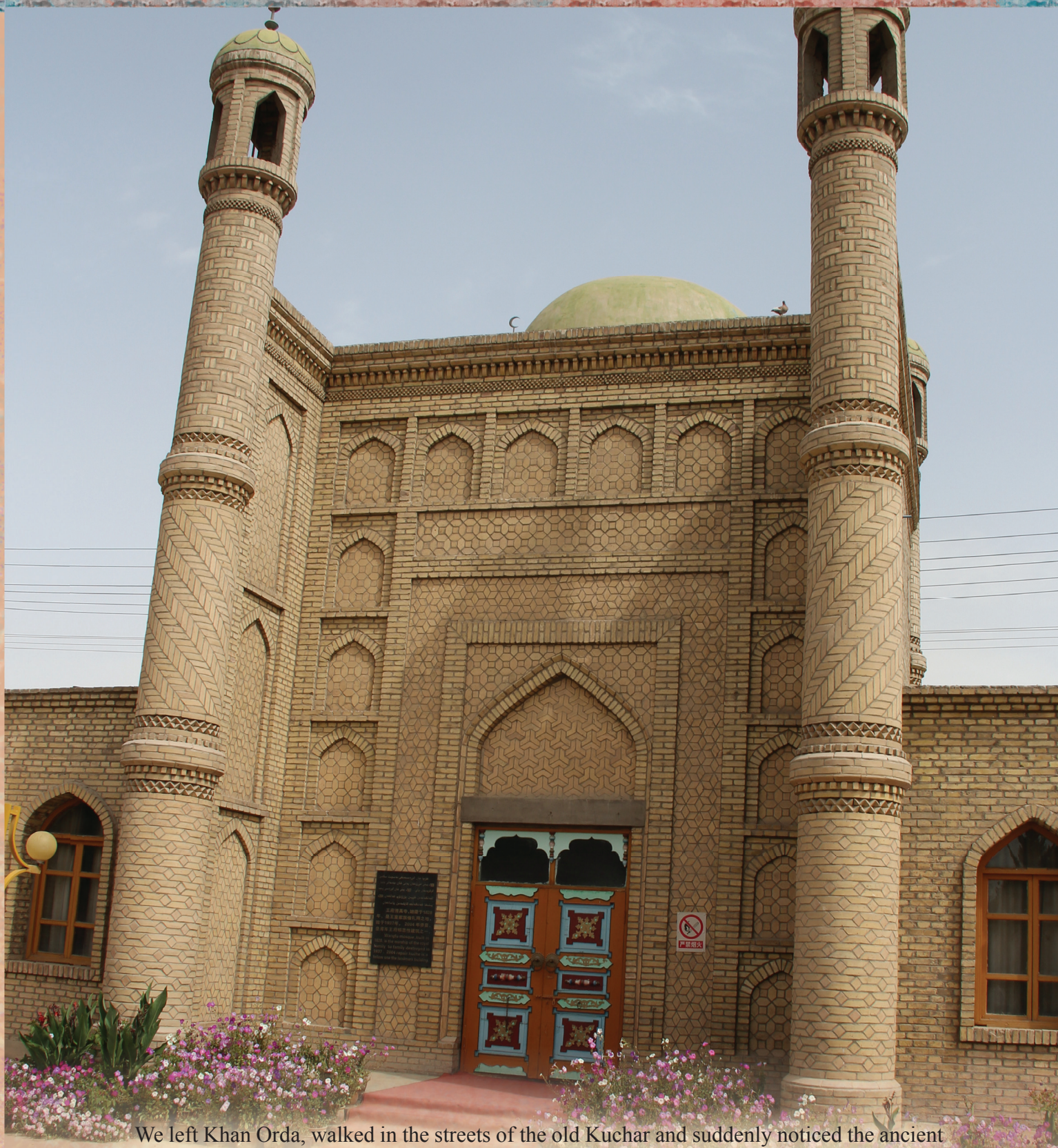
In the last years of his life he was engaged in protection of cultural and natural monuments, a historical museum was created in Khan Orda with his active participation.

When, during our expedition we met with this truly legendary man who had difficult life, he was already very old and sick. But we felt that this unexpected meeting excited Davut, and he was pleased that he was known in Kazakhstan.

We understood each other without words, we established a warm-hearted connection with him. One of us sat down by the sick old man lying in the shade of the vineyard on the couch and was telling him about the goals and objectives of our expedition, the Kazakh scientist Chokan Valikhanov, who visited Kashgar and wrote a book about it in 1858-1859. Seeing good attitude of the khan to us, and wanting to keep something as a souvenir of this meeting, we asked him: «Give us your picture, please.»



The noble old man nodded his head and looked at a pretty woman of middle age. At first we thought that she was his daughter, but the woman turned out to be his wife - apparently the youngest one. The woman went into the house. We told the former khan about independent Kazakhstan and its President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Davut aka listened carefully and eagerly. Soon the woman returned, she brought a picture of her husband. On a bedside table to the left of his bed, books lay, and a hand of Davut reached one of them. We helped him to take up this book, it was dedicated to the 200-year dynasty of khans of Kuchar. Davut gave it to us.



We left Khan Orda, walked in the streets of the old Kuchar and suddenly noticed the ancient city walls. At first glance they were usual clay walls - duvals. But builders of Kuchar as in other ancient city of Kashgar of the past owned a secret of a special construction technology of duvals: after centuries have passed the walls are in condition as if they were just built yesterday.

The caves of thousand Buddha (Myn Oy)

Of course, having visited Kuchar, we couldn't avoid visiting the village of Kizil, where the world-famous Buddhist caves Myn Oy (the caves of thousand Buddha) are located. We remember that in school days we were struck by the lines of writer Sabit Mukanov, which he wrote in the 50s of the last century after he saw the mysterious caves. The Kazakh classic, wrote: «I have seen many ancient architectural monuments, but this one was much more interesting, majestic, mysterious.» Since then we wanted to see the caves of thousand Buddha. And now our dream has come true.

The caves of thousand Buddha are located 35 kilometers away from the city. We already wrote that in ancient times Kuchar was one of the centers of Buddhism. This religion, which arose in India, penetrated Kuchar, Hotan and other city of Kashgaria, and then came to Turfan, China, Korea, Japan, and countries of South-East Asia. Kuchar was the center of religious education, many famous scholars lived in the city, but special glory was earned by a Buddhist scholar and theologian, missionary Kumaradzhiva. He preached at the beginning of the second half of the IV - V century. The legend says that Kumaradzhiva was the son of the Kuchar monarch's daughter



and a young Indian man. He was educated in his home town, and India, where famous theologians were his teachers. Kumaradzhiva was a man of wide reading, spoke many languages, was a great theologian and an expert in the ancient Indian literature, astronomy.



In Kuchar he studied Hinayana, special school in Buddhism, later he dedicated many years to research about other branch of this religion - Mahayana. In 401, monk-missionary Kumaradzhiva arrived in China, where he began to preach and translate religious literature. Being a polyglot, he created his own school of translators. But the real fame was gained by the Kuchar genius as the author of the original religious tracts. Many Buddhists still believe that he is a prophet and a saint. Kumaradzhiva remained in the history of Buddhism forever.

Our guide tells us: «Myn Oy Caves are the earliest and largest Buddhist monastery, located on the Great Silk Road. Construction of the monastery began in the III- IV centuries BC and continued during 500-600 years. The Caves suffered from the terrible earthquake in 1916.

We went up the religious temple by the concrete stairs. Surveillance cameras are installed in the caves. Three or four cave-cells are located on the same terrace. A cell consists of two rooms with a domed ceiling. The first room is larger than the second one.

There is a large niche in the first room where a statue of Buddha was placed, and there is a stone bed in the second room where Buddha was reclining, being in nirvana. Unfortunately we were shown only a few caves, they were different in size and structure. We did not see the cave, which houses a statue of 6 meters long Buddha. It is the largest Buddha image in Kuchar. We attentively and with admiration examine the brilliant frescoes. They mainly depict the life of Buddha as a hermit.Time did not spare these ancient works of art.

In the 60s of the last century during the «cultural revolution» in China Red Guards tried to destroy Myn Oy. Let's recall that recently in the beginning of the XXI century, in Afghanistan; the Taliban destroyed similar works of human culture in their country.

European travelers, scholars did not show genuine love and respect for the ancient creattions of Kuchar people when they savagely, brutally took out the remaining frescoes to Europe. During a thousand-year history of the ancient land Kuchar had survived! It is a miracle that despite all these terrible events, the caves of thousand Buddha have survived to these days.

Kyzyl Yar canyons

We look forward to meeting the world famous Kyzyl Yar canyons. They are located 64 kilometers of Kuchar. In love with mountains, we were eager to see these canyons. During our life, we saw a lot of beautiful places in mountains, and we walked a lot of trails in the native mountains of Ile Alatau. Mountains are still our passion, we try to spend all free time there, to rest and gather strength. It seemed that it is difficult to surprise us. But what we saw in Kyzyl Yar, shocked us. These canyons are one of the most beautiful and majestic places on the planet. It is accepted throughout the world. When we got to Kyzyl Yar, it seemed that we were on the other unknown and mysterious red planet. «Kyzyl Yar» in Uyghur means «red rock» or «red cliff, sheer drop» but the word «yar» also means «beloved, dear». Indeed, having been here, you will fall in love with the red rocks. Local people say that the American Hollywood shouted many episodes of its popular series «Star Wars» in these canyons.

The Russian poet Nikolay Zabolotsky once said: «Strong feelings have silence as a basis». Perhaps that is why we, the members of the Kazakhstan expedition, literally became numb, seeing such extraordinary beauty. We admired Kyzyl Yar silently for a long time. Several roads go to the canyon. The main one is 3.7 kilometers long, the shorter road is 2 kilometer, and there are a few small roads. We would like to emphasize that the rocks Kyzyl Yar shock not because of its lengths but because of its unique red color with its various shades.



Experts say that there are a lot of longer canyons in the world, but they are not prettier ones. Our team came together on the main road, supporting each other, and keeping an eye on each other. The view was fantastic, but this area is also a danger: sometimes the rocks hung over us so that the sun and the sky could not be seen, and our road turns into a narrow path in several places, where only one man could hardly walk (minimum width of a road is 40 centimeters), and sometimes our road turns into a small meadow of 53 meters wide.

On one of these meadows we saw a statue of Buddha. Beautifull as a fairytale Kyzyl Yar canyon awakened imagination; it looked like a rock of various shapes. That rock reminds a grand mosque and this one looks like a dragon; the nearest rock is like a man's head, and in the distance the same rock has an image of a dog ...

Scientists say that these unique canyons were formed in the Cretaceous period of the Mesozoic era 140 million years ago. Obviously there was a bottom of a turbulent river here. Of course, temperature fluctuations, strong winds, rain, typical for these places played a big role for millions of years. Folk proverb says: «Walk and ye shall reach». The road was hard, but we still had walked this way and reached the end of the canyon. We were happy as children.





Ghost town Subash

Now we are approaching Subash, a city of amazons, which is located 20 kilometers to the north-east of Kuchar, near of the river of the same name. This town existed in III-X centuries; its ruins were still well preserved. It is known that the great Buddhist monk-missionary of Kuchar Kumaradzhiva preached in Subash in the second half of the IV century. In the second half of the VII century, the city is transformed into a religious center of the region. It attracted thousands of pilgrims from many countries of Asia, where they listened to the preaching of monks' mentors.

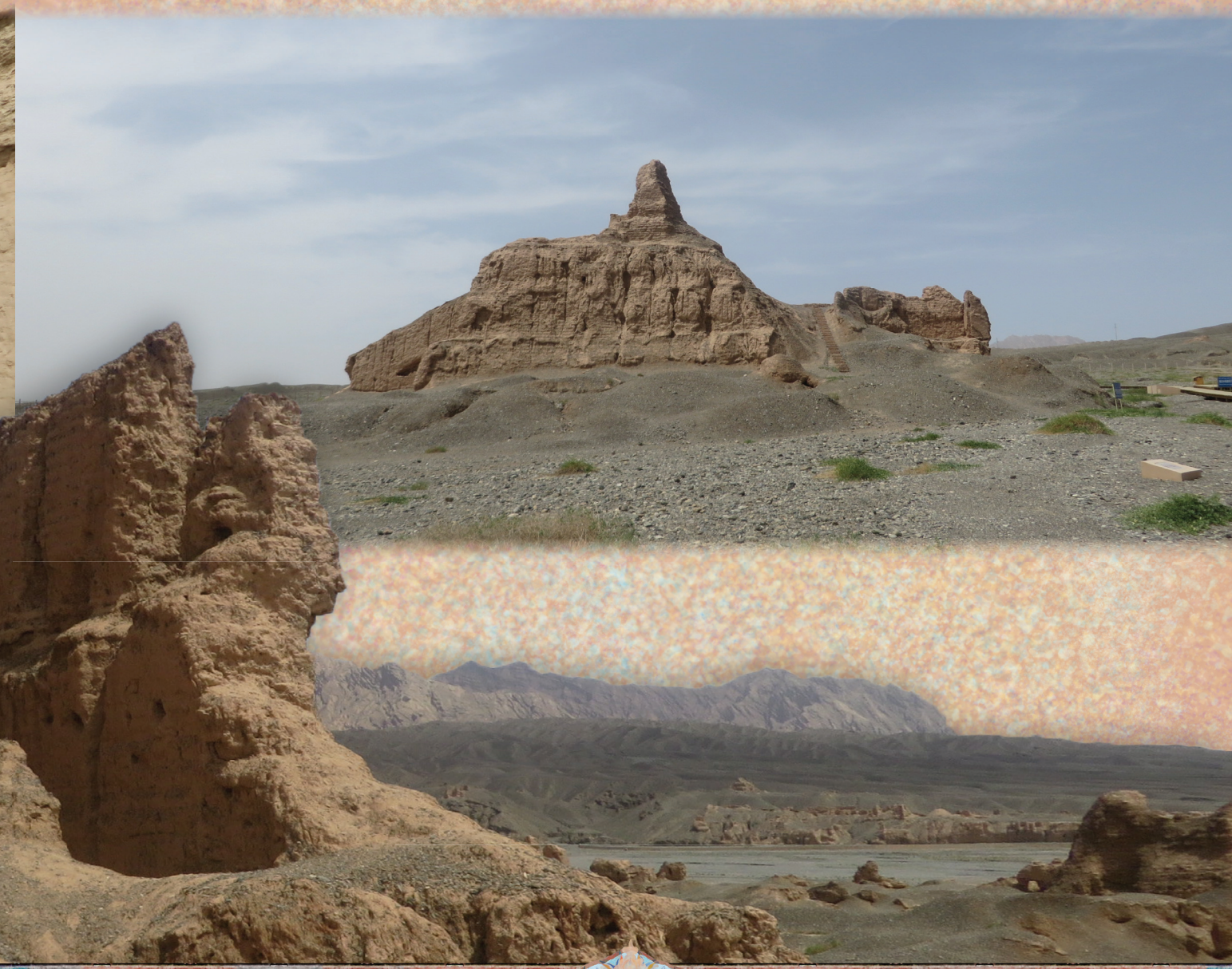
Every morning the bells ring was heard in the city, and every evening drum beats could be heard, which called faithful prayers to the temple. In the IX century Subash was gradually declining, and finally the city emptied in XIII-XIV centuries when Islam entrenched everywhere.



We wandered through Subash, examining the debris. Dead City consists of two parts: the upper part and the lower part. These parts are separated by the river channel, which starts in the mountains, hence the name of the city (Subash- «the beginning of the water»).

We can see the eastern and western parts of the city. To the east of Subash a pagoda is located where a prayer hall and a statue of Buddha are seen. In the western part of the gost city a square temple and a prayer hall are well preserved. There are seventeen Buddhist cave-monasteries to the north, which contain the remnants of ancient murals. In the gost city the outlines of ancient streets and neighborhoods are clearly seen. We had been walking among Subash ruins for a long time, before we had carefully examined Myn Oy, Khan Orda, and it seems we understand the soul of Kuchar people. They were wise and strong-willed people who were not broken by ordeals.

Despite many difficulties, the change of religions, political systems, states, they have preserved their ancient monuments and treat them tenderly. This can not but be admired, this must be learned.



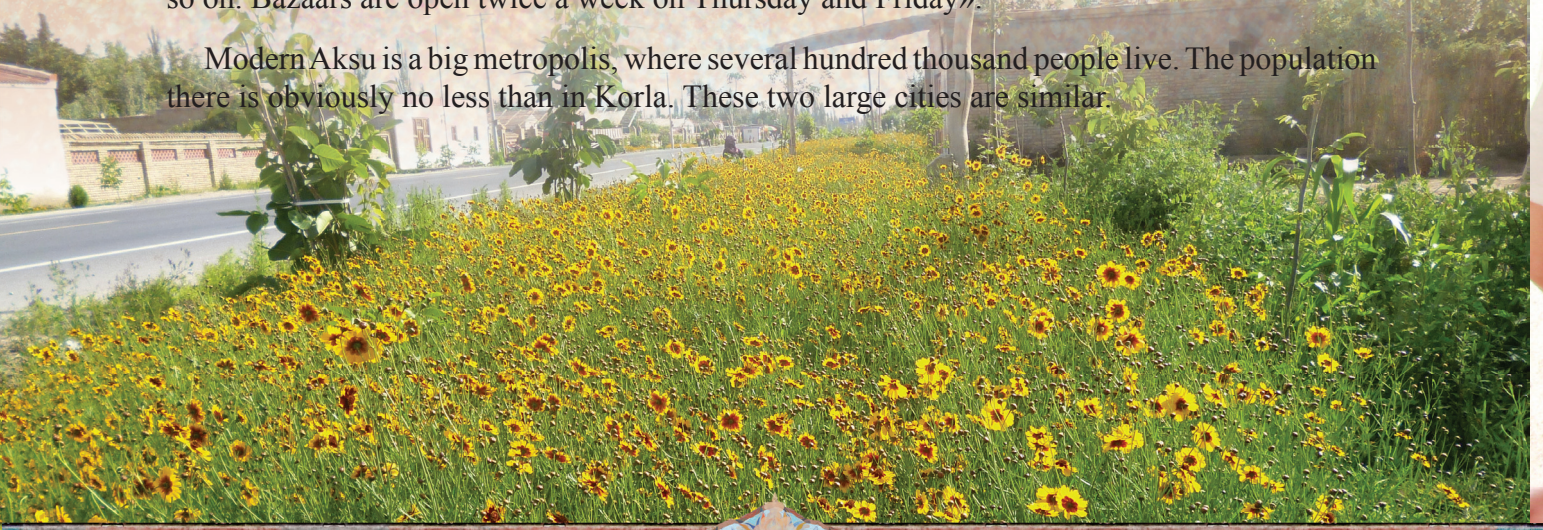
Aksu - a town of white water

Cities get their names not by chance, we understood it once again when we got into the light city of Aksu. The city, situated at the foot of the cool mountains of Tian Shan and at the part of the hot Taklamakan desert, pleases with the deep Aksu river, where light and clean water is flowing. It is no coincidence that the word «Aksu» means «white water». It is «white» water of the river Aksu that made one of the most beautiful oases in this area. Its area with the adjoining Uch-Turfan oasis is 1824 square kilometers. Nicholay Roerich, who visited these places in the mid 20-s of the last century, wrote: «Aksu Oasis is located at the confluence of two major rivers. In spring and summer the river recharges from glacier runoff of the main chain of Tian Shan, it carries a lot of water, watering the vast cultivated area.» Of course, in ancient times agriculture flourished there. We saw the manicured fields of wheat, corn, rice, melons with Bashtan, beautiful apple, pear, date, walnut gardens and, of course, wonderful vineyards, which stretch for many kilometers.

Of course, in such a wonderful oasis breeding was developed. There are sheep, cows and horses on the pastures, local thoroughbred camels are bred since olden times. Even in ancient times the city of Aksu was an important staging post on the Silk Road. It was the administrative, economic, cultural and religious center of the region. Aksu was famous for its crafts; a production of cotton textiles was arranged in the city, perfect masters worked on gem-cutting, metal and leather.

Buddhism, which came here in the beginning of the first millennium, had become the dominant religion of the region for many centuries. In the 20s of the XIII century it was conquered by the armies of Chingiz Khan. Later it became the capital of Mogolistan. At the beginning of the XIX century it was a city surrounded by a fortress wall, where there were six thousand houses, five mosques, six caravan-serais. Chokan Valikhanov, who did not get into this town, but collected interesting material about it, wrote: «Aksu City has 12 thousand houses; it is located at the conjunction of the river Aksu with Kakshal, surrounded by a clay wall, which by volume is much less than Kashgar's wall, but it has 4 gates. There are 6 caravanserais and 5 madrasas in Aksu. The Charsu square make the middle part of the city, from which the main streets stretch to the west till Timurchin gate and to the east till Akin gate, being full of shops, restaurants and so on. Bazaars are open twice a week on Thursday and Friday».

Modern Aksu is a big metropolis, where several hundred thousand people live. The population there is obviously no less than in Korla. These two large cities are similar.



In Bay town

Unlike Aksu, Bay is a small town where new buildings coexist with the old ones. Ch. Valikhanov could not visit it, but the inquisitive scientist had collected accurate information about this populated area, and he wrote the following: « The village Bay belongs to Aksu district (in Chinese - Pai) and is located 205 versts to the northeast of Aksu, near the mountains; it is remarkable for the extensive sheep breeding and the production of felt; it has 500 houses.» Of course, the population has grown there for a century and a half and now it is as much as in a Kazakh city such as Talgar.

Cozy Bay town was known in the district for tasty pigeons on tandoors cooked by local chefs. Of course, we could not avoid such a pleasure. We knew through our personal experience that the most delicious pigeons are cooked in street taverns in your presence when marinated pigeon is baked in tandoor, with the lid closed. Seeing a tandoor, we stopped. Soon we were brought pigeons, the meat was hot, soft and tasty, simply melted in the mouth. We agreed that we had never eaten anything like this. We completed our feast with green hot tea and we were glad that discovered the features of Uyghur ethnic cuisine once again.





In a village of sweet melons and water melons. Shekhyar

We drove into the village Shekhyar, which is 150 kilometers away from Kashgar. Kishlak was clean, tidy. We noticed that clean water was flowing in the irrigation ditches. The village is located on a shore of a small lake of the same name. Our car stopped in one of the main streets, where teahouses were, we decided to have lunch there. The food in such cook shops is inexpensive but very tasty. Everybody liked fried fish, which is easy to cook: they take a small carp, freshly caught in the lake, cleaned it, cut up and throw into the boiling cauldron with cottonseed oil. After a few seconds it is taken out by a special shovel, salted and served to guests. We felt that it was the most delicious fish we have ever eaten.

Next to the teahouse a boy was selling watermelons and melons, we bought them and did not regret: they were very sweet. The unusual taste of the melon was especially enjoyable. We walked up to the guy and introduced ourselves, his name was Shiraly and he was eighteen years old. He had a small mustache and a pretty face, and his cheeks were covered with a dark youthful plume that had never seen a shaver.



- Shiraly, we liked the taste of your melon. What kind is it?

- Sort of our melon is called Shekhyar (translated from Uyghur as «sugar»), sometimes it is called Shekhyarpelyak. By the way, you know that the name of our village comes from the name of the sort of this melon? It is said that this sort of melon

was brought by our ancestors centuries ago. Such sweet sort grow only in our region. Probably, we have the ideal conditions for its cultivation. Since XIX century we have been delivering it to Beijing, Shanghai, other major cities of China, and in recent years we began to sell it abroad. Farmers dry our melon, sweet dried fruit is popular in the region.

-Shiraly, and your watermelon is as good in taste as your melon, it is also very sweet. Believe me, in many places around the region hospitable owners offered us a slice of watermelon. Your watermelon is obviously one of the most delicious.

In summer days are hot, evenings are cold, and there are not enough rains. Perhaps that is why our watermelons are delicious. Our watermelons are of summer and autumn sorts. Of course, you know that summer watermelon skin is thin, and autumn skin is thick. Autumn watermelons ripen in October, they can be stored for a long time and can be eaten even in January.



Artush - a town of fig tree

It was a hot August day, the air temperature is above forty degrees. It was hot, but not stuffy, the mountain breeze was blowing. Our expedition was coming to famous Artush. The town is located about 45 kilometers of Kashgar. In times of Chokan there were several major and ancient villages there. It should be noted that not only cities have a long history, but ancient villages also do. Modern Artush is a nice cozy town, with a population of several hundred thousand people.

Chokan Valikhanov, who first saw the place in the autumn of 1858, wrote: «Ustun-Artysh (Upper Artush. - Authors.) is a collective name of several villages along the river Artysh or Toin. The villages that make up Ustun-Artysh have 30 to 50 wattle houses, surrounded by gardens and orchards. Green trees, surrounding these villages among the barren desert make very good impression».



We are pleased that in spite of the fact that there are a lot of skyscrapers, Artush remains a very green city.

As any city in the East begins with a bazaar, we immediately went to the city market. However, we have not seen the traditional bazaar; instead it was a wide street, where people traded on both sides. It was the height of the season of fruits and vegetables, so the market was full of it, but we were looking for figs. And we found figs, of course, it was not difficult - there were a number of traders with large baskets filled with these delicious fruit. We bought figs and immediately began to eat it. The fruits were different in size; mainly its size was as an average potato. The fig was really divinely sweet. Before eating fresh figs, you should soften it slightly rumpling and patting it with arms. That was what we did

First meeting with Kashgar

The car rushes us to new cities and impressions. We see a bright sign notifying that we enter the city of Kashgar: on a concrete bowl, which represents mother Earth, there is a beautiful horse rapidly hurtling away, and there is a sign in Uighur, Chinese and English below saying «Welcome to Kashgar!».

The car stopped, we come out of it, a writer and ethnographer Ismailzhan Iminov comes up to signposts and wholeheartedly thanks Allah for allowing seeing the city of forefathers once again... We are standing nearby with understanding.

Kashgar is the oldest city of the East. Its name sounds like a song for an Uyghur heart... When was it established? No one can say exactly. But it is known that the gray city is as old as the Great Silk Road. This means that even four thousand years ago, caravans of camels were going through the flourishing city from Rome, Greece, Egypt, Babylon, India and Persia to Kuchar, Turfan, China, Korea and Vietnam.

Chokan Valikhanov, who carefully studied the city, wrote about it: «Kashgar is one of the largest cities in East Turkestan, it has 16 thousand houses, located between the rivers Kizil and Tyumen, surrounded by a clay wall. The city has two gates on the east and south-west sides; the first gates are called Suv-Darwaz, the second gates are Kum-Darwaz (Sandy). The streets are not dirty, but straight, narrow, and two-wheeled carts can pass only two main streets.





Old Town has a position on a high ravine, while the new town covers much lower area. The city center is Aytga trade area (the area of the cathedral mosque). The old town is divided into two blocks: Charsu and Ambarchi and the new town is divided into four blocks: Urdaaldy, Ustenbui, Yumalak-shaar and Andzhan-kucha. «

Before the time of Islam Kashgar was one of the centers of Christianity in Asia. Marco Polo wrote: «Nestorians live here; they have their own church and law.» Obviously, even in the VII century Christianity penetrated Kashgar with the help of Greek and Syrian missionaries. It was a Nestorian Christianity, that officially was called heresy and was persecuted, both from Constantinople and from Rome. Expelled from the places where it has emerged as schismatic sect Nestorianism flourished and found refuge away from the Christian world - in Kashgar and other cities of the province. Nestor, the Patriarch of Constantinople in his sermons claimed that Jesus was born a man, and only later acquired the divine nature, for which he was cursed and anathematized as a heretic.

Also in those early years, Kashgar became the center of the Buddhist culture. Buddhism, which was born in India, came from this country to Kashgar, and from there it came to Kuchar, Turfan, China and Korea. During more than a thousand years Buddhism has been a religion which the Uyghurs worshiped, providing a huge impact on the spiritual life of many generations.

Aytga trade area

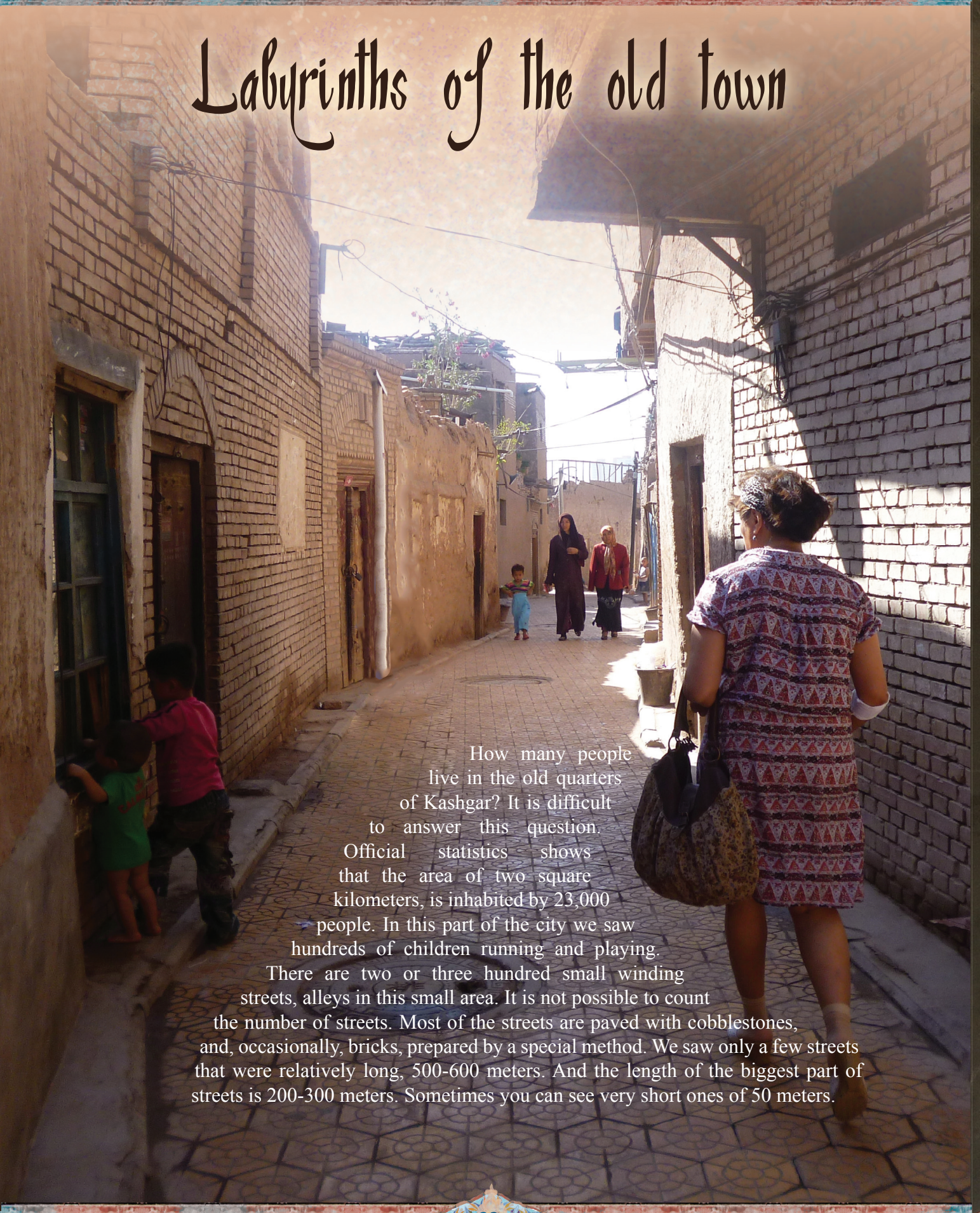
During its multi-millennial history Kashgar people confessed different religions, including the world religions: Christianity, Buddhism, and now Islam, absorbed all the best that has been and is in these beliefs. Obviously, this is the secret of their tolerance, which is admired by many travelers from Marco Polo to Chokan Valikhanov.

But the true glory Kashgar acquired during the times of Karakhanids (850-1212 years), when it became one of the centers of Islamic culture. In those years, the most educated theologians were preaching and famous madrasa functioned in the city. But wise Kashgar, fortunately, did not became orthodox, such as Bukhara. Perhaps that is why education, science and culture flourished in Kashgaria. That's why genius of Kashgar's marvellous sons Yusuf Khas Hajib, Mahmud al-Kashgari and Ahmet Yugnaki grew in this city. We will talk about it a little bit later, but now let us return to modern Kashgar.

This city, located in the flourishing valley where Tian Shan, Pamir and Kunlun converge, is one of the largest and, perhaps, the most interesting metropolises of Central Asia. Its population is not less than one of modern Bishkek that we often visit. In Kashgar old neighborhoods are combined with modern high-rise buildings. In the XXI century it is difficult to amaze anybody with skyscrapers. For example, in Dubai a building of 163 floors was built, it is obvious that another building of one hundred and seventy floors can be build in another place, surpassing thereby history to suit the modern city planning ... It is said that Kashgar will soon have one of the tallest high-rise buildings in the country. Does the ancient city need it? Everybody dreams of wandering in its old streets.



Labyrinths of the old town



How many people live in the old quarters of Kashgar? It is difficult to answer this question. Official statistics shows that the area of two square kilometers, is inhabited by 23,000 people. In this part of the city we saw hundreds of children running and playing. There are two or three hundred small winding streets, alleys in this small area. It is not possible to count the number of streets. Most of the streets are paved with cobblestones, and, occasionally, bricks, prepared by a special method. We saw only a few streets that were relatively long, 500-600 meters. And the length of the biggest part of streets is 200-300 meters. Sometimes you can see very short ones of 50 meters.

The streets resemble a maze: it is easy to get lost for a stranger, suddenly one street ends and another begins around the corner. In the beginning when we couldn't find a way out, we were wandering with confusion several times until we learned the maze of the old city better. The roads are very narrow: a carriage will hardly drive in a street, and two men will stuck if go hand in hand in another street.

Houses which densely stand on both sides of streets, usually have two floors, rarely three floors. Lower floors are built of cob bricks, and upper floors are made of wood. There are semibasement rooms almost in all houses where it is cool in summer, and warm in winter. Usually workshops of craftsmen are located there. It is often possible to see rooms over the street which sustaining walls are located on both sides of the road. Looking up you pass silently under such room, thinking that, maybe, a child or an old man is sleeping in it. And in these cases it seemed to us, that we are not in the street, but in a large comfortable house where we should consider family members...





In a house of merchant Mahmut

Suddenly we saw a beautiful big house. The door to the courtyard was wide open. We're noticing that the door of the house is also not closed. We understand that they seem to welcome guests and travelers. But whose house is this? It does not look like a regular craftsman's house. Being curious, we are entering the house, put the right hand on the heart and say out loud:

-As-salam alaikum.

-Walaikum as-salam, a quiet female voice replied to our greeting.

And only now we saw her, a young tall beautiful woman stared at us, she was not older than 35 years. We saw bright black eyes, long eyelashes, arched eyebrows, but she shyly hid the face with the translucent chiffon scarf.

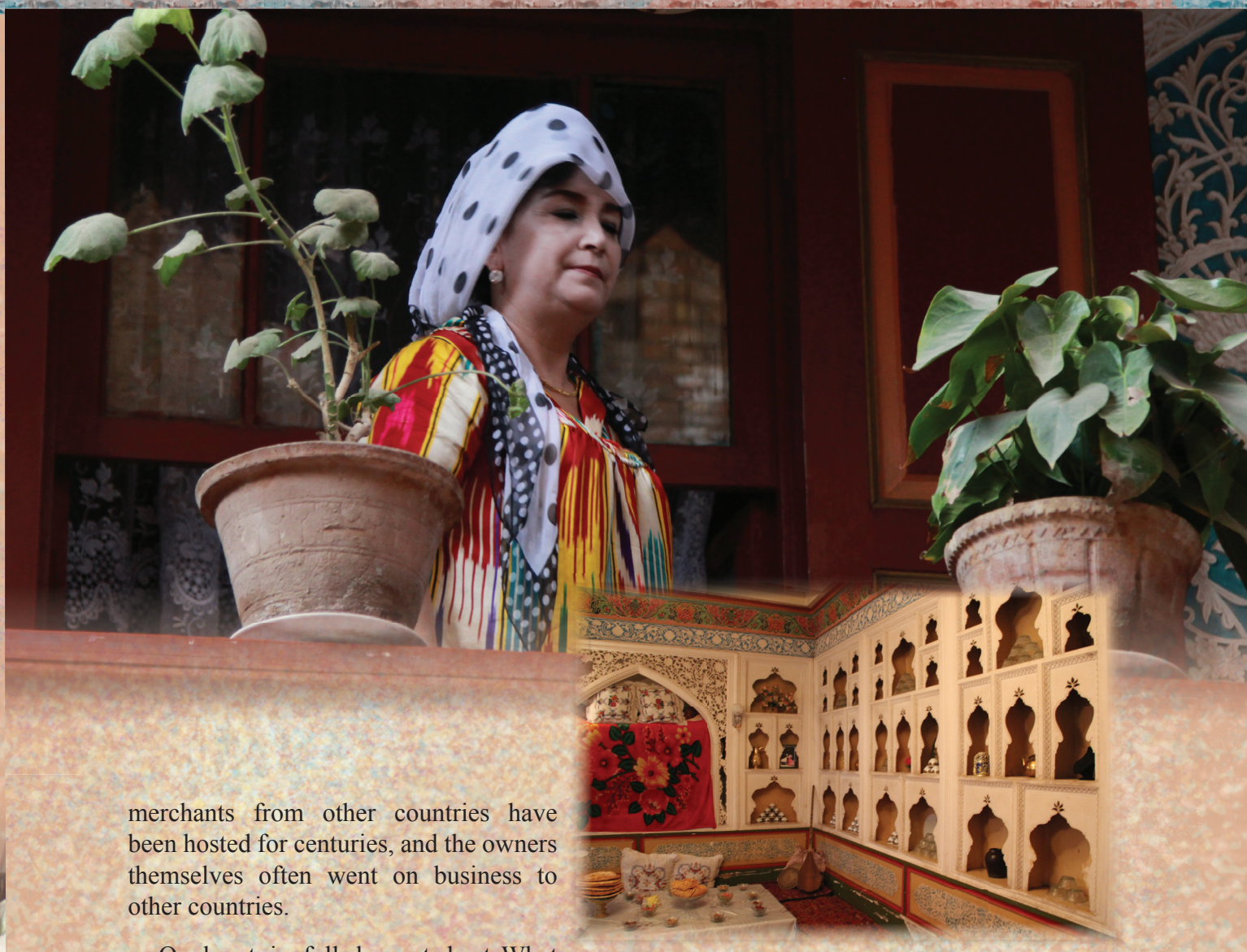
- Come in, I'm glad to see you.

- Thank you, sister. Whose house is it? - We asked her.

- It is a house of merchant Mahmut. He's out of town. There are only me and my children in the house.

The father of my children (Kashgar wives try not to call their husbands by names. - Authors.) belongs to a family of well known merchants, they have been traders for centuries. In this house





merchants from other countries have been hosted for centuries, and the owners themselves often went on business to other countries.

Our hearts joyfully began to beat. What a luck! Probably our Chokan visited this house! And if not these, then another similar one», - we thought with excitement, looking at the old house.

During the time of our arrival to Kashgar, we visited many houses of the old town, but this was different from the other houses. It was felt that wealthy people have lived here for centuries. Therefore, we will describe it.

Just outside the door to the courtyard beautiful satin curtains hung, as almost in all houses of Kashgar: the owners weekly wash and change the curtains. The yard was covered with cobblestones. We saw a small vineyard, which green branches with almost ripe white grapes were stretching to the sun. The house was built U-shaped. The second floor begins with a long balcony where an ancient columns stood with beautiful carvings which extended upwards making them dome-shaped in the form of an inverted bowl. It was felt that the house was built by talented craftsmen.

Potters of Kashgar

It is known that one of the most ancient types of crafts is pottery. In ancient times, there were districts in every major city in the East and West, where potters lived and worked. They were in Kashgar as well. Now unfortunately, only a few true dynastic houses remain in old Kashgar, where potters, descendants of the ancient potters are engaged in their craft. This art is gradually disappearing all over the world, and in many states it is completely gone, but fortunately, in old Kashgar it is still preserved. But for how long? Hopefully, forever. Therefore, during our stay in the ancient capital of Karakhanids first we decided to see the houses of potters.

Houses in old Kashgar are a special world, almost untouched by the time. How old is this house? We asked long-term residents this question many times. Usually, we were not told an exact age. «Seven hundred, eight hundred, and perhaps a thousand years», - Kashgar people said. They claimed that many generations of their ancestors had lived in these houses for for centuries.

We visited the house of potter Anwar Ali – a cheerful and talkative person with whom we quickly found a common language.

- Anwarahun, please tell us more about the art of potters, - we asked the master.

- Our profession originated tens of thousand years ago, it was one of the most ancient ones, because



even primitive man had to eat and drink from some container. Prehistoric man occasionally found burnt clay, having a form of a certain capacity, and he drank water from it. It was the first crockery, and then he realized that crockery could be made from clay. But not every clay is suitable in pottery, we need special one with good adhesion. We look for it for a long time, but if we find something we protect and share with each other, otherwise our work is impossible.



We add sand, ash, sometimes sawdust and other materials to the clay. When I sit at a potter's wheel and give a particular form to a capacity, here not only a potter's wheel works, but, first of all, my hands are working. We need a lot of experience, over the years you start to work mechanically. We do not bear prepared dishes directly into oven, first we dry it and then we cover it with glaze. We apply the glaze on clay containers so that they do not absorb liquid. And only at the end we put the dishes in the oven, but here you need skills. The main thing you need to get the dish from the oven on time. It is only at first glance our art does not seem to be a very difficult profession. It requires not only skills and patience, but also good health. Why health? Not every man will stand daily manual work with raw clay and contact with a hot stove. In times of my childhood hundreds of potters worked in old Kashgar, and now there are only a few of us left. I do not want pottery to leave with us. It is scary to think: pottery has flourished for millions of years, and suddenly we will disappear ... I also want to say that each potter family has its secrets.

- Anwarahun, can you share the secrets of your family? - We asked.

- We add a special material to the clay, which makes dishes stronger and can be stored for years. My son is growing, and I will tell him the secrets of the art of pottery, which I inherited from my father and grandfather. It's our family income. I hope my son will continue the tradition of our family, he will become a potter, and will live in our old house.

We certainly agreed with Anwar: authentic pottery keeps a lot of secrets, and no outsider, no competitor needs to know them. Every history lover knows that archaeologists sometimes find pottery items, which have lain uder the ground for centuries or even several millennia, but retained its original appearance. These works of art have been repeatedly found in archaeological excavations in many parts of the region, including the Taklamakan desert. We saw them in the local history museum of Kashgar, Turfan and Urumqi.

Idkah mosque

If the unique Kremlin, churches, towers, and the Red Square are the heart of Moscow, Ak Orda palace and Baiterek are the heart of the young beauty Astana, then the unique mosque Idkah is the heart of Kashgar.

For centuries, visitors of Kashgar have come here. It is no doubt that the great Italian Marco Polo had been here (in the first building of the mosque). Chokan Valihanov lived just behind the mosque in one of the streets. Let's remember that he came to the city and lived here in the guise of a true Muslim Alimbay. On this basis, we can say with confidence: he performed the weekly Friday prayers in the mosque.

The Idkah Mosque is the national shrine of the people of Kashgar. People are in awe of the amazing beauty of the places of worship that their ancestors built. We passed the threshold of the ancient mosque. (I, a member of the current expedition, repeatedly visited Idkah during my first visit, but again, like the first time, I am entering the mosque with excitement. - I.I.).

We see a portal arch, the corners of which adorned by the majestic 18-meter minarets. The walls are decorated with yellow glazed tiles, painted with inscriptions from the Koran and national ornaments and designs.

For the first time a mosque was built on this spot back in the X century, immediately after





Kashgar people had converted to Islam. It was the largest mosque in the city and the main one. But, unfortunately, in the XIV century, when Tamerlan troops took Kashgar after bloody battles, they destroyed it. But even after that Kashgarians came here and did namaz on its ruins. For decades, people dreamed to restore the mosque. Finally, in 1442, the mosque was re-built by the famous architect Saksiz Mirza. The foundation remained from the old mosque, it is thousand years old, it was erected during the time of Karakhanids. Idkah was built and restored thanks to contributions from people, almost all Kashgarians voluntarily made their contribution.

In 1872 Idkah experienced great restoration. The mosque had a functioned madrasa. There are still 36 classrooms for students. The total area of Idkah is 16 800 square meters, it can accommodate up to 20 thousand people, but during the Eid 100 thousand people come to worship, they do namaz right on the square in front of the mosque.

Tomb of Yusuf Khass Hajib Balasaguni

It was a warm summer morning. A fresh southern wind was blowing, summer heat has not come yet. Our expedition was driving towards the mazar and admired its majestic beauty from a distance.



Did Chokan attend the mausoleum, and had he heard about the great poet? He did not write about Yusuf Khass Hajib, fame to the poet came later after his death, but the mazar was a famous place in Kashgar in the 50s of the XIX century. Obviously, any cultural Muslim who goes to the city, has been here. After all, there was not only the tomb of the poet, but also a single religious and educational Islamic center here, which consisted of a madrasa, a mosque, a reception hall, an exhibition hall and, finally, a mazar.

Let's recall that curious Chokan visited many mosques, madrasas during his stay in the

city, he met with well-known poets, scientists, theologians (Ahuns), bought and brought rare manuscripts from Kashgar, which are now in St. Petersburg, Russia. Of course, he saw a unique complex that covers an area of 1900 meters, and could not remain indifferent.



This architectural masterpiece was built by Kashgar masters. As many buildings of the Muslim East, it impresses with simplicity and at the same time solemnity. In the waiting room of this stunning complex, we saw the bust of Yusuf Khass Hajib and there is a portrait of the poet's in the next room made by a brush of prominent Uyghur artist Ghazi Amet. Outside, on the edges of the mazar, we saw towering minarets, and a crowning dome in the middle. An architectural monument is decorated with white tiles, which is painted with bright blue patterns and dome itself was dark blue.

We are entering the mazar, with excitement approaching a place where the poet, who lived and worked nearly a thousand years ago, found peace.

There is little information about Yusuf Khass Hajib. We know that he was born in Balasagun, in the summer residence of Karakhanids in 1018 (according to other sources, in 1015 or 1016). In childhood and adolescence he received an excellent education, in addition to the native language he spoke Arabic and Persian. He was familiar with the works of many great scientists and poets of antiquity and the middle Ages. At the age of 54, according to the estimates of the Turkish scientist R. Arat, he finished a poem named «Kutadgu bilig» («Blessed knowledge»), on which he had been working for 18 months and gave it as a gift to Tabgach Bugra Khan, the ruler of Kashgar. Grateful Khan granted the poet a high rank of Khass Hajib, «Minister of the Court»,» Lord Steward of the Household». This rank had become poet's second name.



Most of the researchers of the past have characterized the poem as a didactic one, but many modern literary critics regard it as dastan, dedicated to the political structure of the state. But in any case, «Kutadgu bilig» became a treasury of the world literature. Many issues raised in it, are still relevant today.

In Opal, on the grave of Mahmud al-Kashgari

The enlightened world of the East and the West knows and remembers the name of Mahmud al-Kashgari though a thousand years have passed after his birth. But according to many researchers from different countries, a scientist of this level has not been born on the land of Kashgar and other neighboring Turkic-speaking countries before. Mahmud al-Kashgari is a symbol and pride of Kashgar.

Scholars, poets, and ordinary people come from many countries around the world to the ancient city to worship the ashes of genius of Kashgar.

Of course, we, the members of the expedition of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society, decided to visit his grave. The tomb of the scientist is located in the Opal village, which is 50 kilometers away from the ancient city. Indigenous Kashgarans know this place as the «Mazar Hazrat Mollam» - « tomb of the Saint teacher»: for centuries they have been respectfully calling the tomb of the thinker this way.

The mausoleum is located in a giant park, where millenarian of plane trees are growing. We are excited to cross the threshold of the park, where we saw a monument to the scientist. There



is white sculpture of Mahmud al-Kashgari on a high pedestal. With a book in his right hand he is confidently looking into the future...

The mausoleum is located on a high hill of more than seventy meters of height. It was built in the traditions of Uyghur architecture and the influence of Muslim architecture is felt. Of course, Mazar is the work of Kashgar builders. He strikes by a severe simplicity and solemnity, as many monuments of the region.

The mausoleum consists of a reception hall, the tomb itself, a large hall, with a portrait of the scientist made by a brush of painter Ghazi Amet, a small museum, where we can see the immortal work in different languages. Unfortunately, we have not seen the book in the Kazakh and Russian languages. If at the will of Allah, we get to Opal once again, we will deliver and donate to the museum «Divan Luga tat-Turk» in the Kazakh and Russian translation, published in Almaty.

We are leaving the mazar, coming to the old cemetery, where the representatives Karakhanid dynasty including Mahmud al-Kashgari rest. The cemetery is located on the hills that spread out around the mazar. We do not see the pompous monuments, there are even no inscriptions about the people who rest there. Indeed, we are all equal in front of God: both descendants of khans and ordinary farmers. Having gone through life, we all go into eternity.

Mahmud al-Kashgari was born in 1008 in Opal village of Azih area near Kashgar, that was the capital of the powerful Karakhanid state in those years. Biographical information about the scientist almost has not been preserved, but one fact remains: it was one of the most educated and intelligent men of his era, a patriot and humanist. We know that Mahmud was educated at Kashgar's madrasa «Sazhia» that was famous in the entire Muslim East. Many famous





scientists taught here in those years, providing great education to their students.

Even centuries after, we are still amazed by the unique knowledge of Mahmud al-Kashgari. Of course, the phenomenon of the scientist - encyclopedist could not occur out of the blue. Clearly, teachers of the famous Kashgarian were highly educated and gifted people. Students of madrasa «Sazhia» learned not only the basics of Islam and Koran, but also foreign languages, linguistics, history, geography, mathematics, biology. The XI century, when «Divan Luga tat-Turk» was created, was the century of Turkic tribes' power. At the end of the X century the Karakhanid state crushed the Iranian dynasty of Samanids, and created a powerful empire with a capital in Kashgar.

In the XI century the Turks led by the Seldzhuk dynasty controlled a vast territory in the Middle East, defeated the Byzantine Empire, invaded Constantinople. It was the era of domination of the Turkic people on the territory from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gobi desert. In these circumstances, the nations where the dominant language was Arabic, were forced to learn the language of their conquerors. For this purpose Mahmud al-Kashgari wrote his dictionary. Loving the language, literature, folklore and history of his people, the scientist traveled to many lands to learn the language of his people and write a book about it.

Clearly, fleeing from political persecution, Mahmud al-Kashgari left his home city and after a long journey settled in Baghdad, where he wrote the main book of his life. «Divan Luga tat-Turk» appeared in this city between 1072 and 1083 years, traditionally the scientist presented it to Abbasid Caliph al-Muktadi. «Divan ...» is not just a dialectological Dictionary, but it is also an Encyclopedia of that time. Written by the brilliant scientist-encyclopedist, it covers not only linguistics, but also literature, folklore, history, medicine, astronomy, logic, agriculture, military art ...

The book contains a «map of the Muslim world», drafted by M. Kashgari. Here the scientist mapped countries and cities, steppes and mountains, deserts and rivers, lakes and forests, inhabited by many peoples. This is one of the oldest maps in the world, that has survived to our days.

The old fort walls of Kashgar

During our expedition to Kashgar we were lucky to see a fragment of the preserved city wall (Duval). The height of duval reached 10 meters, its width was 5 - 6 meters, and only a small wagon could pass it. Of course, this meant that in the past the city was a well-fortified fortress. There was the central gate to the city, but there was a special entrance to the fortress from the village of Appak hodja, which was used only by hodjas. Appak hodja and his descendants played an important role in the history of Kashgar.



Torugart and Tash-Rabat

The expedition of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society left Kashgar and headed off to the border with Kyrgyzstan. We went up to the mountains and took a mountain road.

Torugart pass is at an altitude of 3530 meters above sea level. We are passing dozens of kilometers, there are no any settlements seen, only Kyrgyz yurt can be seen occasionally, as well as horses and goats on pastures.

Suddenly we saw a mountain lake. This was the famous Chatyr-Kul. We jumped out of the car and watched with admiration the endless blue expanse of the lake.

We did not see any birds. Obviously they lived there, but could not be seen and heard anywhere. Lake shores are boggy, it was not possible to come closer. I was surprised to learn later that the fish is not found here, although it could be found in a small river that flow into Chatyr-Kul. «Heavenly Lake» is the translation of the name of the lake from Kyrgyz, it lies at an altitude of 3530 meters above sea level. Chatyr-Kul is a closed lake in the Central Tian





Shan, it is located in the lowest part of the Chatyr-Kul Depression, on the place of a tectonic rift between the ridges Torugart-Too and Atbash. The area of the lake is 153,5 square kilometers.

Our great Kazakh scholar Chokan Valikhanov wrote in his diary: «The 18th of 1859 (March 18 according to the Old Style, March 21 according to the New Style. - Authors.) We came on a fairly broad valley of the mountain Chadyrkul lake (Chatyr-Kul) surrounded by mountains and covered by a deep snowpack. ... Lake Chadyrkul is about 10 versts wide and 20 versts long, it must be situated high, not less than 7,000 feet altitude.» Surprisingly, but without special measuring supplies and ample time to measure Valikhanov almost exactly estimated by eye the area of Chatyr-Kul!

Tash-Rabat is a uniquely beautiful building, a stone palace located in the inaccessible mountains of the Central Tian Shan. When, why, for what purpose was it built? There are still no clear answers to these questions. The average annual temperature is below zero. In winter, the temperature goes down to 50 degrees below zero, even in summer it is frosty here. Tash-Rabat is a little away from the Silk Road. Obviously, so many scientists who had been here, thought that in the past it was a monastery: some people think that it was a Buddhist monastery, others thought it was Christian.

But we believe that Tash-Rabat was originally built as a military fort on the strategically important mountain way during the power of Karakhanids in X-XI centuries (although some scientists believe it was in XIV-XV cc.). Obviously, the troops that were here, controlled the

road from Kashgar, Khotan and Yarkent to the Fergana Valley and Semirechye. Later it became a caravanserai, where merchants from different countries found shelter and protection. Probably, there were many fortresses and caravanserais like this one during the time of Karakhanids, but only Tash-Rabat has survived.

Chokan Chingizovich Valihanov that had been here 155 years ago before our visit to these places, saw the stone castle and wrote: « There is a stone building Tash-Rabat near the exit of the road from the valley, from which the mountains got its name. In the east rabat is a name for buildings arranged on main roads for providing shelter to travelers. ... The building is built of slabs of clay shale, it has about 12 fathoms in length and about 7 fathoms in width.

A long corridor leads to the round hall (5 yards in radius) spheroidal dome, there are little low doors on each side of a corridor, which can not be entered without bending; these doors lead to a small square and oblong little rooms».

The accuracy with which the scientist described Tash-Rabat is amazing!

We walked around the castle, we entered all the rooms of the fortress, there is a tunlik in every room (a hole from which light comes through and fire smoke goes away), we saw zindan (dungeon) and a well. The stone castle is almost a square building. Castle gates open to the east.

The Kazakh scientist tells a legend of those times according to which it is not possible to count the number of rooms in Tash-Rabat - every time you will get a different number. Following Chokan we counted the rooms and got 31. There are 20 domes and 11 arches in the fortress.



On the shores of stormy Naryn

Our expedition reached the shores of the Naryn River. This is a stormy deep river which is difficult to walk across. We, the main participants of the expedition, grew on the banks of the Kargaly mountain river, we are familiar with its temper. Of course, we were well aware that the nature of the Naryn river was tens of times more turbulent, than the one of our river. Because of this our interest to the Naryn River increased. Stormy Naryn begins high in the mountains, it is fed by its glaciers and springs. It furiously rushes down through a narrow gorge, carrying rocks and huge boulders. There is the Naryn State Reserve at the riverhead, which protects the unique nature of the region.

Our genius Kazakh scholar admired the pristine beauty of these places. Chokan wrote: «The mountains, located along the right and left banks of the river, are covered with spruce forest, and are full of animals. The shore of the river is covered by riparian forest (forest belt. - Authors.) of sea buckthorn, poplar, willow and chiliga».

The river is 807 kilometers long. High-water river is used for irrigation, the famous Big Fergana channel and Northern Fergana channels start from this river. The river has a huge energy resource; it is not a coincidence that hydroelectric power stations Toktagul, Tash-Kumyr, Uchkurgan are located here.



We were amazed by Naryn city. We are used to see that regional centers are usually quite large cities. Probably it is difficult to call Naryn a city, it is rather a small town with a population of about 35 thousand people. The city is located on the banks of the river of the same name, at the foot of the Naryn-Too Mountains, at an altitude of 2000 meters. Scientists say that the city was founded in the times of Karakhanids on the way to Kashgar. In ancient times the Romans stated, «All roads lead to Rome.» Indeed, nearly a thousand years ago, during the power of the Karakhanid Kaganate, all roads in Central Asia led to the capital of the state - Kashgar.

We drove to the famous Burana Tower. It proudly towered, it can be seen from the far distance. We immediately realized that Burana is a minaret of a mosque that once stood here. This old tower reminded us of a beautiful minaret of the mosque of Suleyman Hadji (Imin van) in Turfan. Of course, there was a big city during the Karakhanids. This minaret could be built only in a large and rich city where not only economy was developed, but also various crafts and arts flourished. It's no coincidence that a well-known Russian historian V.V. Bartold suggested that this place was Balasagun where the summer residence of the Karakhanids was located. Now, many experts identify Burana settlement with ancient Balasagun that mysteriously disappeared. Of course, it



Balbals

could not disappear without a trace, and archeologists expect to have amazing findings.

There is an archeological and architectural museum in the open air at the place of the dead city now. The tower is situated at the heart of the museum. Most scientists believe that the tower has been there since the first half of the XI century, at the same time when this city was founded in the Chu Valley and flourished in the XI-XII centuries, and decayed in XIII-XIV centuries, and in the XV century it ceased to exist. Why has the tower been called «Burana» for centuries? Obviously, the «Burana» is a distortion of the word «Munara» (minaret).

For the first time we are carefully looking at stone sculptures of balbals, which were placed on the graves by our ancestors, ancient Turks, many centuries ago. They really resemble ancient brave Turkic warriors who dominated endless territories of Asia.

... The car was approaching the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, a city that was founded in 1825 at the order of the monarch of the Kokand Khanate Madali Khan and was called Pishpek. Nowadays it has become a political, cultural and industrial center of Kyrgyzstan, our neighbor country. In the VII-XII centuries there was a Turkic settlement Dzhul here, that later ceased to exist. For a few centuries there had been a caravanserai at this place, where merchants from many countries found shelter.

We flew to Almaty from Bishkek by plane. We, like Chokan Valihanov completed our expedition in this city: Chokan started his expedition in the city of Verniy, we arrived in the city of Almaty. And it was symbolic.

We have fulfilled the goals that set for ourselves: we saw and got acquainted with many ancient cities, historical, architectural and natural monuments; we went along the caravan route of our great compatriot, scientist, traveler Chokan Valikhanov.



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