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Soviet opinions on the history of literary Qazaq

Robert J. Ermers

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Seyilbek İsayev and Rābiya Sızdıqova belong to the best known specialists of the history of literary Qazaq. In the present article, the author discusses their opinions on this subject, based on two of their most recent publications in Qazaq. While giving a sketch of what is known of the history of literary Qazaq, it discusses and questions İsayev and Sızdıqova's "Soviet approach". In this respect, it brings to light a number of problems which either remain unanswered by both scholars, or for which they fail to give an argumentation that is acceptable for their Western colleagues.

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Introduction

The present article aims at giving two of the prevalent opinions in Soviet linguistics on the history of literary Qazaq. For this we use two recent Qazaq publications, i.e. Seyilbek İsayev's *Qazaq ädebiy tiliniñ tarixi* ("A history of literary Qazaq"), 1996, on the one hand, and Rābiya Sızdıqova's *Qazaq ädebiy tiliniñ tarixi (XV-XIX ғasırlar)* ("A history of literary Qazaq (XVth-XIXth centuries)"), 1993, on the other.¹

Soviet Turcologists usually divide the recent history of Qazaq into four main periods: (a) The period from the sixteenth until the eighteenth

¹ In Kazakstan both İsayev and Sızdıqova are considered distinguished scholars of the history of Qazaq. Their various publications on the subject include Sızdıqova (1964, 1968a, 1968b, 1970, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1989, 1991), İsayev (1970, 1973, 1976, 1983).

century; (b) the eighteenth century until the first half of the nineteenth; (c) the second half of the nineteenth century until 1917 and, finally, (d) the Soviet period after 1917. In this article we shall discuss the first three periods, and touch briefly upon the fourth, considering both authors' views on these issues.

The use of the term "Soviet Turcologists" here should perhaps be explained. After all, the Soviet Union does not exist anymore, and therefore, strictly speaking, the label "Soviet" has become an anachronism. Until recently, Soviet historians had peculiar views on the history and development of the Central Asian Turkic peoples, which drastically changed with a turn in Communist Party policy (see, for example, Tillet 1969). The same can be said of Soviet Turcologists. In their scholarly writings they had to follow certain paths indicated by Soviet authorities, which dictated certain linguistic and ethnic divisions between peoples. The scholars' approach to and concepts of the human sciences have not basically changed since the Central Asian republics gained independence. Indeed, many of the publications that appeared after 1991 are only slightly, sometimes even posthumously altered versions of earlier works. The label "Soviet", thus, is to be understood as a general indication for those whose scholarly concepts were formed during the Soviet era.

1.1. Accessibility of Soviet linguistics

Several reasons can be mentioned for the lack of familiarity with books and articles published in the former Soviet Union. In the first place, few of their publications ever reached Western libraries; second, there was the language problem. Soviet publications were typically written in Russian, which many Western Turcologists have a poor command of. Thus, only the most prominent Turcological studies, dictionaries, and works by the few scholars who had them translated made it to the West. Hence hardly any Western scholar was able to gain an overview of the quality of Soviet research in Turcology. Of course, there were also many publications in local Turkic languages, but hardly any was seriously studied in the West.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, both Russian and Central Asian libraries, institutes and, last but not least, the colleagues themselves have become more accessible to foreign researchers. The language problem, however, has not been solved, mainly because many Central Asian scholars are updating their publications in their native

languages first. This holds especially for Qazaq, in which since 1991 a considerable number of publications on ancient and recent history, Islam, ethnography and linguistics have seen the light.

The history of literary Qazaq is not very well documented for obvious reasons: Although the Qazaq people possessed a rich oral literature which was being preserved and transmitted by poets (*aqıns*) and singers (*jıraws*), like most other nomadic peoples, they did not use their language as a written medium. The Qazaqs were barely literate until the middle of the nineteenth century, and Qazaq was rarely written until about fifty years later. A common Turkic language in Arabic script, mostly Chaghatay or Tatar, served as the medium of written communication for the Qazaqs until the 1920s. As of the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars in the Russian Empire (among whom a Qazaq officer in the Russian military, Šoqan Wälixanov (1835-1865), deserves special mention) who had followed the Russian settlers to Central Asia became interested in the cultures and languages of its indigenous peoples. At their initiative, the first linguistic samples of Qazaq (and Qıryız) were collected and some of the century-old epics and tales were finally put down in writing.

1.2. Definition of “literary language”

The points of view as to where and when the history of literary Qazaq begins very heavily depend on the respective definitions of what a “literary language” is. If one accepts only written corpora whose linguistic features can be analysed and studied, the history of literary Qazaq would begin at the end of the nineteenth century. Amanjолоv, Sawranbaiev, Qurišjanov and Balaqayev, for example, relegate the development of literary Qazaq to the time when it became a written medium at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. İsayev 1996: 53; Sızdıqova 1993: 19). On the other hand, if one assumes that oral literature is equal to written literature, it is legitimate to include the period in which only an oral literature existed. In the latter case, obviously, the problem remains that the language of the undocumented periods cannot be studied, even though ancient literary themes and styles may be still be reconstructed from relatively recent material.

It is with this point that İsayev’s (1996: 6-36, 37-108) and Sızdıqova’s (1993: 5-17) argumentation starts. Both go to some pains to define the term “literary language” (*ädebiy til*) in the second sense. In their opinion, “literary language” is not identical with “written language”

(*jazba til*), for it may be based on an oral literature as well (İsayev 1996: 8-9). They contend that the spoken variety (*awizša ädebiy til*, SİZDİQOVA 1993: 14) should be considered a literary medium, too. Whether written or not, a literary language underlies certain norms and rules; it must be understood by all speakers of a given community, although dialects may exist and other languages may serve as media of written communication (İsayev 1996: 14, 25, 39). Moreover, in their opinion, the correlation between “literary language” and “written language” in Soviet linguistics was largely based on the concept of literary language within the urban Russian culture and the socio-linguistic situation of the Russian language. Since Russian had undergone a long development as a written literary medium, this correlation could easily be upheld, to the extent that literary language became almost synonymous with written language.

Thus, according to İsayev (1996: 9) we should not assume that, just because there was only a small written Qazaq literature before 1917, the language of the Qazaq epics had no literary value at all. It was not likely, İsayev writes, that a ruler like Abılay Xan, who in the eighteenth century had united the three confederations of Qazaq tribes, did not have any kind of literary language. Based on these assumptions rather than, in our opinion, real arguments, both SİZDİQOVA and İsayev posit the beginnings of modern literary Qazaq in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (SİZDİQOVA 1993: 51). In this period the tribes that were to form the Qazaq people joined under the leadership of the *xans* and, SİZDİQOVA argues, thus a common language for poetry developed. Names of epics, poets and singers begin to be transmitted from this era on. Even though it appears quite legitimate to posit the origin of literary Qazaq in the fifteenth century, sketching its linguistic development is not easy: There is virtually no original Qazaq material.

2. Opinions on the earliest stages of literary Qázaq

A typical feature in many Turkish and Soviet Turcological publications, especially those of scholars who themselves are of Turkic descent, is that the history of the respective modern Turkic languages is claimed to begin with the eighth-century runic inscriptions of the Orxon. Via the language of the Uygur manuscripts, that of Maḥmūd al-Kāšyarī in the eleventh century, and other sources, most scholars argue, the languages in those sources have finally developed into modern Turkish, Qazaq, Uygur or Uzbek—depending on the origin of the scholar in question.

İsayev and Sızdıqova form no exception. Sızdıqova (1993: 27-64), for instance, lists four types of historical sources of literary Qazaq, which in her opinion were important for both the oral and the written Qazaq literary languages: 1. *xalıqtıñ awızeki söyleu tili* (the spoken language), the Codex Comanicus (13th century) and the *Mamlūk* grammars (14th century) (but with the exclusion of *at-Tuhfa az-zakiyya*); 2. *Qazaq awız ädebiyetiniñ tili* (the oral literary language), the Qazaq—and Nogay—epics and folktales; 3. *ortayasirliq türki yeskertkişteri* (the ancient—lit. “medieval”—Turkic manuscripts), among which *Oyuznāma* (9th century), *Qutaδyu bilig*, *Dīwān luyāt at-turk* (11th century), *Hibat al-ħaqā’iq* (12th-13th century), *at-Tuhfa az-zakiyya* (14th century), the *Muħabbatnāma* (1353); and 4. the language of the eighth-century Orxon inscriptions. In spite of her detailed listing, Sızdıqova does not convincingly describe how these sources relate to modern (literary) Qazaq.

The oldest ones are posited as documents of the various written literary languages of the respective time periods. Here İsayev and Sızdıqova apply the definition of “literary language” discussed above. In their opinion, the written languages Turkic peoples used in the past were hardly ever identical with the ones they actually spoke. In this way, both Sızdıqova and İsayev argue, the ancestors of the Qazaqs used various languages as written media: In an early period this was the language of the runic inscriptions, later that of the *Dīwān* and the other sources, while another variety—or even another language—served as a means of oral communication. The language(s) in the *Mamlūk* grammars, varieties of Qipčaq, are regarded as reflections of a previous stage of colloquial Qazaq. An exception is *Tuhfa*, whose Turkic language material is supposedly very close to Qazaq (edited by Halasi Kun 1942; discussions in Fazylov 1976 and Ermers 1995). Based on this material not only Sızdıqova and İsayev but also a large number of other authorities on Qazaq linguistics to whom they refer—i.e. Maryulan, Zubanov, Amanjolov and Musabayev (İsayev 1996: 43-46; a summary of all views on pp. 52-53; Sızdıqova 1993: 17-19)—attempt to detect traces of Qazaq in these ancient sources.

3.1. The 16th to 17th century, and the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century

As noted above, the main problem in the study of the ancient epics and other linguistic documents, for example tales (cf. the bibliography in Alpısbaiev 1986-1988), is that they were first recorded as recently as the

eighteenth century and that their texts were printed and published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The ancient epics that most likely originate from the seventeenth century or earlier are those of Buqar, Aqtamberdi and Ümbetey; of a slightly later date are Köteš, Šal and Ğanaq (İsayev 1996: 109-110; Sızdıqova 1993: 123-124; also Kümisbayev 1994). Most of the early epics cannot be precisely dated, for they were put down in several variants a long time after their conception. Even in their extant written form, these linguistic documents have not yet been sufficiently analysed. As a result, they can hardly serve as a basis for a diachronic analysis of seventeenth-century Qazaq. Sızdıqova's (1993: 123-131) and İsayev's (1996: 165-169) discussions of pre-seventeenth century Qazaq are therefore typically limited to presentations of isolated words, morphemes and suffixes, and illustrations of their respective use. They offer lengthy examples from the epics as they were recorded in the eighteenth century, without giving any bibliographical references. Both İsayev and Sızdıqova touch upon issues such as theme, form, type of rhyme and reading variants of the early epics, which indeed can be reconstructed from the material, but which would benefit literary criticism rather than linguistic analysis.

In addition to the literary works, there is the official correspondence the Qazaq *xans* maintained with one another and with foreign (Russian) rulers, in addition to a number of simple bilingual word lists. The linguistic material in many of these word lists and official documents (from 1785 until 1828), does not in practice reflect eighteenth century Qazaq (cf. İsayev 1996: 163-164; Sızdıqova 1993: 167-173). Apart from a few clear instances of registered spoken Qazaq (*qoy yeti* 'mutton', *betene qaradım* 'I looked him in the face', *duqan bayası* 'shop / market price'), here, too, we encounter much influence from the written literary languages of that time: Chaghatay and Tatar (the latter seems to İsayev unlikely in view of the distance). Examples include *bilen* 'with' for Qazaq *men*, *yerdi* 'he was' for *yedi*, and *qonaqlay bardım* 'I went on a visit' for *qonaqtap bardım*.

There are a number of historical works written by Qazaqs, such as Qadiryali Qosimuli's seventeenth-century *Ğamī' at-tārīx / Ğama'a at-tawārīx* (on which Sızdıqova has published, cf. note 1 above) and the genealogical work *Şajira-i turk* (about 1640 AD), which were written down in the literary language of the time, i.e. Chaghatay (characterised as *orta asiyalıq türki edebiy til*, İsayev 1996: 108). İsayev (1996: 125-148) and Sızdıqova (1993: 114-122), like most of their colleagues,

search for traces of typical features of Qazaq in these works, but they have to admit that, apart from some forms that are typically Qipčaq, there are few convincing leads that specifically point to Qazaq.

The later period, which in İsayev's study comprises the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, is far better documented. The reason for this lies in intensifying contacts with the Russians who at that time were colonising Central Asia. They set up markets, founded cities, built churches and established schools which also admitted non-Russian pupils (from 1822).² The first practical needs for translating word lists arose. Later on the Russians settlers and merchants were joined by scholars who had become interested in the languages and cultures of the Central Asian peoples. At the initiative of scholars such as Adelung, Divaev, Igelstrøm, Klaproth, Pantusov, Shegrin and others, tales, epics, poems, songs and other specimens of the rich oral literature were finally written down. The manuscripts were collected and transferred to archives in the Russian Empire (at first especially in St. Petersburg, later also Almatı), where many of them remain. They are reliable records of the ancient Qazaq epics as they were recited in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and provide much valuable linguistic and literary material on the Qazaq language of that era.

To mention a few grammatical features that became standardised for Qazaq during this period: The infinitive ending *-mAQ* was replaced by *-U*, the typically Qipčaq infinitive ending still current in modern Qazaq, viz., ... *bil-mek kerek-dür* 'it is necessary to know...' and *tumaqtıñ öl-megi bar* 'after birth follows death' (Şortanbay) vs. *ölgeniñşe toyu joq* 'one cannot become satisfied until one dies' (cf. Sızdıqova 1993: 202-211). Also, the ending *-Ar-GA* (AOR-DAT), e.g. *bar-ar-ya* 'in order to go', *kör-er-ge* 'in order to see', was replaced by forms with *-U*, i.e. *-U-GA*, viz., *bar-u-ya*, *kör-ü-ge* and, occasionally, *-mAK-Ka* / *-mA-GA* (INF-DAT), e.g. *al-maq-qa*, *ber-me-ge*.

3.2. The second half of the nineteenth century to 1917

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the poets İbrahim (Abay) Qunanbay (1845-1904), Şäkärım Qudayberdi

² It is an interesting fact that from 1783 the Russian tsarist government supported the endeavours of Qazan Tatars to spread Islam among the Qazaqs; to this end, it even sponsored the foundation of mosques and Islamic schools.

(1858-1931), the teacher / writer Ibiray Altinsarin (1841-1889), and the poet / singer Ĵambıl Ĵabay (1846-1945),³ whose works were to be of definitive importance for the development of the Qazaq literary language. In view of the importance attributed to these two in Soviet studies of Qazaq, it is useful to briefly describe their position in the development of literary Qazaq.⁴

Through the Russian school system, Abay and his contemporaries (except Ĵambıl) had received a solid education; indeed they had become well acquainted with Russian and Western classical literature. It was not long before they started writing and publishing in Qazaq, their native language. Their generation witnessed and contributed to the transitional period in which Qazaq—and other Turkic languages—developed from, in İsayev’s and Sızdıqova’s terms, a non-written literary language into a written medium, i.e. a “written literary language”. It is this transition which marks the development of modern literary Qazaq.

Altinsarin is credited with being the first to write prose in Qazaq and to teach Qazaq based on the language spoken by the people. In some of his publications and letters Altinsarin expressed his concerns about common Qazaqs not being able to understand the written language of the press, which contained too many Arabic and Persian loanwords, and Tatar and Chaghatay forms. Especially the available religious literature was difficult to comprehend, Altinsarin argued. With this in mind, he wrote an interpretation of the *Šarī‘a* (*Šarī‘at ul-islām*, Qazan, 1884) employing as few Arabic loanwords as possible and a variety of written Qazaq that was much closer to spoken Qazaq than Chaghatay. In this

³ Ĵambıl was much praised by the Soviet government, since he incorporated elements of Soviet life and its ideals in his traditional songs and poems. It is likely that this traditional folk singer was impressed by the benefits of the system and was unable to criticise it.

⁴ Altinsarin was also convinced, no doubt inspired by his mentor, the missionary and linguist Nikolaj Imin’ski (1822-1891), that the Cyrillic script was much more suitable for Qazaq than the Arabic one. Nevertheless, for his *Šarī‘a* Altinsarin used the Arabic alphabet, for he reckoned that a book with a religious content would be unacceptable to the Qazaq readership if written in the Cyrillic script (cf. Baldauf 1993). In order to get his book published, he applied to his mentor Imin’ski for help, but the latter was not very eager to see to the publication of a religious manuscript; for this reason publication of the *Šarī‘a* was much delayed.

work Altınsarin created a number of neologisms for abstract notions (such as, reportedly, *talaptılıq* ‘initiative’, *uqıptılıq* ‘accuracy’) that replaced the Arabic and Persian words.

According to Sızdıqova, Altınsarin—like Abay—based his style on the supra-dialectal spoken language (*jalpıxalıqtıq söyleu tili*, Sızdıqova 1993: 253) which was being used by the poets and reciters. Thus Altınsarin contributed to the foundation of the national written literary Qazaq language (*ultııq jazba ädebiy tili*). Furthermore, no doubt inspired by his mentor Ilmin’skiy, he compiled a didactic grammar of Russian for Qazaq pupils in primary schools (*Naçal’noe rukovodstvo k obučeniju kirgizov russkomu jazyku*, 1879), and he also experimented with a new alphabet for Qazaq based on the Cyrillic script instead of the Arabic, which does not very well suit Turkic languages. Especially for these latter activities his works were much praised by later Soviet politicians, who liked to portray Altınsarin as a proponent of close relationships between the Qazaq and Russian peoples.

Abay’s contributions to modern Qazaq were complementary to those of Altınsarin in the sense that he developed a Qazaq vocabulary and prose style, although it seems that he, too, could not always escape Chaghatay and Tatar forms. For example, he used the verbal ending *-MIš* rather than Qazaq *-γAn*, and expressions such as *kibik* ‘like’, *ol-* ‘to be’ and *ošbu* ‘this’, for *siyaqtı*, *bol-* and *bul*, respectively (cf. Sızdıqova 1993: 230-235, Nuryalıev, Xasenov et al. 1995: 298; Abay 1993). In addition to his articles, essays and translations of Russian classics, Abay wrote a large number of highly valued poems, many of which were, and still are, used as song texts. Through his poems Abay was able to preserve the essence of Qazaq traditional poetry and carry it into the twentieth century, despite the continuing and increasing influence of Russian culture, which had had its impact on Abay himself as well. His interest in his native cultural heritage did not prevent him from seeing the benefits of studying Russian and maintaining contacts with Russians in general, as this would open the Qazaqs’ eyes to progress and innovation: *Orışsa oqu kerek, xiykmet te, mal da, öner de, yilim da — bäre orısta tur...* (“It is necessary to learn Russian; wisdom, money, art, science—the Russians have it all...” Abay 1993: 51). Notwithstanding this, he was also aware of the cultural problems a general orientation towards Russian culture could bring about, and he warned Qazaq parents not to expose their children to too much Russian influence. Due to his importance, not only as a poet, but also as an intermedi-

ate between the old and the modern cultural worlds of the Qazaqs, Abay is still regarded as a philosophical and poetical genius comparable to writers of international acclaim.⁵

The importance of Abay and Altınsarin for the development of Qazaq is very much stressed in all Soviet studies on the history of Qazaq. Indeed, their interest in writing in Qazaq seems to have developed against all odds. Both had received a Russian education, and both acknowledged that everything one could possibly associate with progress and development was in Russian hands. In that respect nearly all matters relating to the Qazaq culture seemed of little practical value. Nevertheless, Abay and Altınsarin clearly understood that the Qazaq people was about to lose its identity in the new circumstances, without having been able to properly define it. It is probably not exaggerated to assume that they realised that they belonged to the last generation still having direct roots in the ancient (literary) traditions, while at the same time well enough acquainted with the new media in order to be able to preserve their heritage. Some other Soviet sources (e.g. Ĵarmuxamedov 1995) assert that

⁵ Abay's writings and his significance for Qazaq culture were brought to the attention of the general public in the 1920s and 1930s by the Qazaq writer and playwright Muxtar Äwezov (1897-1961). Äwezov, who originated from the same tribe (Tobıqtı) and geographical region (Semey-Semipalatinsk) as Abay, centred his *magnum opus*, the trilogy *Abay jolı* ('Abay's way'), around the person of the latter. The underlying aim in Äwezov's work was to picture the life of Qazaq nomadic society in the recent past as he himself had known it during his youth. With his regard for the works of Abay, Äwezov paved the way for the intensive study of Abay's works and philosophy, known as *Abaytanu* "Abay studies". Moreover, in his numerous scholarly publications Äwezov greatly contributed to the study of literary Qazaq and the historiography of the Qazaq people (see, for example, Äwezov 1995). Furthermore, he was one of the first scholars to point out the importance of the Qırız Manas epic and initiated its recording in writing. In the 1930s Äwezov was persecuted on charges of "nationalism", like many of his contemporaries but, unlike them, only briefly imprisoned. By carefully choosing the style of his works, he was able to avoid serious sanctions. In the late fifties, however, he narrowly escaped local adversaries by fleeing to Moscow on the eve of his impending arrest. After two years in Moscow, where he enjoyed high esteem as a writer and philosopher, he was rehabilitated—and even awarded the prestigious Lenin Award—after which he was able to return to Almatı.

Abay knew Altınsarin, or at least was familiar with his works, and took them as a source of inspiration.

Still, the language in the printed media, such as newspapers (e.g. *Türkistan welayatiniñ gazetisi* 1870-1883, *Dala welayatiniñ gazetisi* 1888-1902) and books which were being published in this period, remained preponderantly a “general Turkic language”. Their readership was limited to the Turkic intelligentsia in Turkistan, and most publications were printed in Tashkent, Qazan and Orenburg. Therefore—apart from occasional articles and poems in Qazaq (and even Qaraqalpaq) and other Turkic “dialects” appearing towards the end of the century—the language shows predominantly features of either Chaghatay or Tatar. In the columns of the newspapers and journals socio-political and scientific vocabularies could develop along with the appropriate styles (Sizdiqova 1993: 227-237). Only in the first two decades of the twentieth century did a number of purely Qazaq journals emerge (e.g. *Serke* 1907, *Qazaq* 1907, 1913-1914, *Qazaqstan* 1911-1913, *Ayqap* 1911-1915). Abay’s language, the history of the editions of his writings, and the journals and newspapers show features that indicate that the formalisation process had not been completed. This process received new impulses by the transitions from the Arabic script to other alphabets (see the brief discussion below).

During Abay’s and Altınsarin’s lifetimes a new generation of very gifted and productive writers, poets and playwrights was born, of whom we shall mention a few: Axmet Baytursinov (1873-1938), Mayjan Jumabayev (1893-1938), Iliyas Jansügirov (1894-1938), Säken Seifullin (1894-1938) and Muxtar Äwezov (1897-1961). This generation, in their enthusiastic contributions to the journals listed above as well as others, built upon the linguistic foundations laid by Abay and Altınsarin. Almost inevitably, many were also engaged in political activities, and a large number of them fell victim to Stalin’s rigorous and merciless repression of nationalism and its representatives during the 1930s (compare, for example, Nurpeisov 1995).

In the period following the 1917 October Revolution, the Turkic languages of Central Asia underwent important reforms. Until 1924, for all Turkic languages in Turkistan—if written at all—the unsuitable Arabic script had been in use. As pointed out above, the Arabic script usually does not indicate the vowels. When applied to Turkic languages, many spelling conventions fix the shape of words, thus creating a strong ambiguity as to their pronunciation. However, precisely because of this

ambiguity and the spelling conventions which everybody could interpret in their own way, the texts remained perfectly intelligible for the general readership among the various Turkic peoples. Arabic consonants were interpreted in various ways, as obvious in Arabic loanwords, e.g. *hāĵa* ‘need’ from which developed the Qazaq words *qajet* ‘need’— in official language use, a counterpart of the more common *kerek*—and *äjjet* ‘practical need, custom’ (with a derivative *äjjetxana* ‘toilet’). In some instances even the important distinction between front and back words was not evident from the orthography, and a number of Arabic loanwords actually developed two variants, e.g. *ġumir* ‘lifetime’ < Arabic ‘*umr*, *maylum* ‘known’ < Arabic *ma‘lūm*, *qazir* ‘presently’ < Arabic *hāġir*, vs. *ömir*, *mälim*, *äzir*, respectively. (In modern Qazaq, *ömir* [öbür], *mälim* and *qazir* have become the canonised forms.)

There is some evidence that a similar case holds for genuine Qazaq words, e.g. *sin* ‘you’, *bisken* ‘ripened’ vs. *sen* and *pisken*, respectively. The readings of these words and others depended, of course, on the extended laws of vowel and consonant harmony. Some further examples are the postpositions *sekildi* ‘like’ and *ġana* ‘just, mere’, whose forms change according to the parameters of [voiced / voiceless] and [back / front], e.g. *tüye sekildi* (front) ‘like a camel’ vs. *bul siġildi* (back) ‘like this’, and *ataq qana* (voiceless-back) ‘just a reputation’ vs. *adam ġana* (voiced-back) ‘only mankind’, and *bir ġäne* (voiced-front) ‘only one’; modern Qazaq has reduced this range to *sekildi* and *ġana*, respectively. In his poems Abay creatively applied different variants of the same word for sake of rhythm or rhyme (cf. Biyzaqov 1995).

In the first decade of Soviet rule, a much debated alphabet reform was accepted and different Latin scripts were developed and accepted for Qazaq, Uzbek and Qiryiz (cf. Baldauf 1993; for Uzbek cf. Fierman 1991). Still later, in 1940, the Soviet government imposed virtually without any formal discussion adapted versions of the Cyrillic alphabet on all Turkic languages in the union.

3.3. The base of modern literary Qazaq: Dialect or koine

The recent history of literary Qazaq has been puzzling scholars for a long time. One of the most intriguing questions is which language or variety Abay (and his contemporaries) used for his writings in Qazaq. In the discussion among Soviet scholars two opinions are prevalent. The first is that Abay used the more or less artificial supra-tribal literary variety which poets of all Qazaq tribes had used until his time—a *koiné* in a

sense similar in its application to Classical Arabic as a literary supra-tribal language.⁶ The second opinion is that Abay wrote in his own dialect, more specifically, the north-eastern variety of Qazaq. Thus that particular dialect became the basis of modern Qazaq. For this second hypothesis (which is supported by yet another eminent Qazaq scholar, Amanžolov) İsayev (1996: 44) presents the following two arguments: (i) The north-eastern area was closest to the more developed Russian civilisation; (ii) it was the language of the influential Qazaq writers and intellectuals Abay and İbiray Altınсарin. Accordingly, the emergence of modern literary Qazaq is posited after the second half of the nineteenth century, when Abay started writing.⁷

İsayev's (1996: 57) and Sizdiqova's point of departure, though, is the hypothesis of the supra-tribal variety. In their view Abay and Altınсарin (see discussion in 3.1.) used a supra-dialectal variety of Qazaq that Qazaqs of all tribes understood, in particular the one that had been used for the epics. At the same time, however, İsayev (1996: 57) recognises that there were only minor differences between the Qazaq dialects.⁸

⁶ After the emergence of Islam, during the Arab conquests, Classical Arabic was used as a *koine* for military communication. In regard to modern Arabic dialects, the term *koine* is also applied when speakers from different linguistic regions use features that are commonly understood.

⁷ In a famous article on literary Qazaq, Brill Olcott (1985) argues that politically active Qazaq poets (e.g. Babatay-uli (1802-1871) and Ötemis-uli (1804-1846)) who had been educated in Tatar religious schools, wrote in Qazaq as early as the first half of the nineteenth century. Brill Olcott further argues that the Soviet authorities much exaggerated Abay's role, because he had received a Russian education, and thus matched the image of the Russified Qazaq intellectual they intended to promote. In the framework of the present article we cannot elaborate on this issue. Interestingly, although İsayev and Sizdiqova do mention the names of these poets, they do not state their importance for the history of Qazaq as a written language.

⁸ The phonological differences between the modern Qazaq dialects are of the type [ɜɔ] ~ [ɟɔ] 'road', [ʃöp ~ čöp] 'grass', [bas ~ baš] 'head' and [ɜɛl ~ yeɛl] 'wind' (cf. Omarbekov 1992), which are either difficult to convey in Arabic script or obscured by the writing conventions. In neither of these cases can the ancient material serve as a reliable basis for far-reaching conclusions. Nor are the dialectal differences in vocabulary much help, since apart from being scarce, they can often be

Neither İsayev nor Sızdıqova sustain their premise of a supra-tribal language with further argumentation, although it conjures up the question to what extent this literary variety may have differed from the Qazaq dialects (and, for that matter, from closely related languages such as Qaraqalpaq and Nogay).

4. Evaluation

Sızdıqova's and İsayev's works do not meet the expectations of their Western colleagues. For example, in works dealing with the history of literary Qazaq, a Western scholar would expect to read about the historical linguistic connections between Qazaq, on the one hand, and the closely related Qipčaq languages, on the other. Sızdıqova and İsayev, however, concentrate on Qazaq only. They even do so for stages where one could raise the question whether a Qazaq language as such already existed separately from Noghay, Qaraqalpaq and, perhaps, Qıryız and Tatar. In regard to the material in the ancient Qipčaq sources, for example, they fail to give their own opinions on the development of Qazaq from a common Qipčaq ancestor, merely repeating some isolated linguistic features, reportedly Qazaq, from studies carried out by scholars specialised in those particular branches of Turcology.

Until the second decade of the twentieth century, these and other Turkic peoples were hardly identified as separate—except, perhaps, to some minor extent by themselves—since until less than a century ago they had been governed and colonised as one single administrative area: Turkistan. It is a historical fact that the division of Central Asia into separate republics and autonomous areas as it was initiated by the Russian and Soviet authorities was largely artificial, and must to some extent have been perceived as such by the peoples themselves at the time. This artificial division was in the interest of the same authorities who had nothing to gain from an awakening unifying nationalism among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia.

A sign of the influence Soviet policy with regard to Central Asian peoples had on the development of Turkic studies in the former Soviet Union is that—at least in the major libraries in Qazaqstan—there is a disappointingly small number of publications on the related languages

accounted for as loans from neighbouring Turkic languages, such as Uzbek or Tatar.

and few comparative studies of Qazaq and neighbouring Turkic languages. At the same time, the libraries in the adjacent republics are equally poorly equipped with material on Qazaq. It appears that the scholars and research institutes in the republics were allowed and encouraged to conduct research in their own standard languages, while others more or less independently specialised in general Turcology. Except for the relatively small number of great Soviet Turcologists who are known and esteemed in the West, most Soviet scholars apparently did not pay much attention to fundamental issues, such as how the modern Turkic languages are related to one another, and which position the ancient sources occupy in their common history.

The consequences of this approach have been the development of very narrow specialisations in Soviet Turcology, and the seemingly anachronic claims of today's scholars of Turkic origin that the ancient sources reflect earlier stages of their respective languages. For İsayev and Sızdıqova this results in a picture of Qazaq as if it had evolved independently and inevitably down from the language of the runic inscriptions. They hardly, if ever, refer to structural similarities of Qazaq with Qaraqalpaq, Noghay, Bashkir, Qırız, or more remotely related Qıpchaq languages, such as Qarachay-Balkar. If properly taken into consideration, studies of that type could, no doubt, shed an interesting light on earlier stages of Qazaq and its alleged relation to the language in the ancient sources. The manifold points of resemblance of İsyev's and Sızdıqova's studies in structure, style and contents, is probably also inherent to this tradition.

Another issue is İsayev's and Sızdıqova's assumption that Abay's and Altınsarin's language was based on a supra-tribal variety of Qazaq, a poetical *koine*. Although in itself quite interesting, this assumption is not sustained by any argumentation as to how and when this *koine* came into existence, and in what sense it would differ from Qazaq dialects (i.e. despite careful reading nothing to this effect was found in either scholar's works). This is the more surprising considering their position on this issue differs from that of some other leading scholars in the field such as Amanjolov.

A minor point of criticism is that the samples of the ancient poems are, as a rule, not properly dated; thus the reader in many instances does not know from which periods the samples that are being compared to one another date, nor is there any clue as to which editions were used.

These and other differences in approach make it difficult to find one's way through Sizdiqova's and İsayev's studies.

It is certainly no coincidence that both Sizdiqova's and İsayev's works appeared after 1991, while preliminary studies were published during the late eighties, the years of *perestroika*. Until the recent past, scholarly manuscripts were subjected to strong censorship regarding apparent signs of "exaggerated nationalism" before they were released for publication. As a result, it must have been very difficult indeed to produce original research. When attempting to understand and interpret these difficulties, one cannot but feel enormous respect for the achievements of Sizdiqova, İsayev and other Soviet scholars. They have laid the foundations for the study of the history of Qazaq without having had any possibilities for inspirational exchanges of opinion with colleagues from outside. At the same time their scholarly work was severely hampered by political restrictions and prescriptions. Even if it is not possible always to agree with their methodological principles, we are grateful to İsayev and Sizdiqova for bringing to light their opinions on the history of literary Qazaq. Their studies form real stepping stones for a new generation of scholars, both in Kazakstan and abroad, who will be able to benefit from their work and freely apply new methods to the material.⁹

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