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Birth of Uyghur National History in Semirech'ye

Näzäryoja Abdusemäto'v and His Historical Works

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Abstract

The article discusses the birth of a national historical discourse in Central Asia at the turn of the 20th century with special reference to the Taranchi Turks of Russian Semirech'ye (Zhetissu) and early example of Uyghur national history written by the Taranchi intellectual Näzäryoja Abdusemäto'v (d. 1951). The article shows how intellectuals among the Taranchi Turks, an ethnic group who settled in the Semirech'ye oblast of the Russian Empire in late 19th century, became involved in debates on nations and national history organized on the pages of the Tatar newspapers and journals in the Volga region of Russia. Näzäryoja Abdusemäto'v's published work *Ili Taranchi Türklirining tarihi* ('History of the Taranchi Turks of Ili') receives particular attention as part of an examination of the evolution of the author's ideas about an Uyghur nation.

Keywords

Semirech'ye – Taranchi Turks – Kazakhstan – Uyghur – National history – Näzäryoja Abdusemäto'v

Introduction

As Nationalism studies show, history plays a very important role in shaping ethnic and national identity. The spread of nationalistic discourse in Europe was accompanied by the emergence of an ethnocentric vision on the historical past focusing on the real or imagined past of particular ethnic groups imagined now as a 'nation'. This new vision on the past contrasted with previous narrations of history centred mainly on stories of dynasties, outstanding persons

(‘history of big men’) or other wealthy people. The ethno-national vision of the past led to a rise of nationalistic histories. In Central Asia this process occurred in late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Muslim historiography gave up its place to nationalistic histories. Their self-conception as a *millät* (nation/nationality) was reflected in the history-writing process in the region, which was backed up by the emergence of mass media in local languages and book printing, a process which is described by Benedict Anderson as ‘print-capitalism’. While the national(ist) discourse in Central Asia was widely discussed in academic publications with a special emphasis on the *jadidism* movement (Khalid 1991; Abashin 2007), less attention was paid to the emergence of ethnocentric historical narrations in Central Asian communities. Meanwhile the intelligentsia of all main ethnic groups of the region were involved in revising history, putting it into the frame of nations through the creation of early versions of national histories, which have been shaped by the Bolsheviks during the first decades of the Soviet power, especially after the demarcation and delimitation of new national administrative units in Russian Central Asia of the 1920s.

The constructivist approach to the nation-building process in Central Asia dominating in western scholarship very often simplifies it by emphasizing certain symbolic events and showing how identities have been ‘constructed’. This is true, for example, of studies on the Uyghur national idea, which refer mainly to the acceptance of the common name ‘Uyghur’ by immigrants from Chinese Turkistan in Tashkent in 1921. The formation of an Uyghur national identity was not a one-time event, but a process that started long before 1921, when European scholarship, especially Russian *academia*, identified a population of Chinese (Eastern) Turkistan with the historical Uyghurs who lived there in pre-Mongol times. This article focuses on the role of local intellectuals from the Taranchi community of the Semirech’ye oblast of the Russian Empire who introduced and propagated discourses of ‘nation’ and ‘national history’. Central to the article are the life and works of Nüzäryoja AbdusemätoV, who considerably contributed to the development and spread of the Uyghur national idea in the Russian Empire and later in Soviet Kazakhstan. His adoption of the pen-name ‘Uyğur balisi’ (‘Uyghur Child’) after 1914 and his compilation of an early sample of Uyghur national history are put into the context of this new trend in history writing process in Central Asia.

Theoretical Frame: From Muslim Historiography to National Histories in Central Asia at the Turn of the 20th Century

By the end of the 19th century Muslim historiography was dominant in Central Asia in both sedentary and nomadic societies, with some elements of oral

transfer of historical knowledge, which was typical for the latter. According to Tursun Sultanov, since the Islamization of the region a religious discourse prevailed in Central Asian historical works, while ethnic factors never framed historical narrations. Certainly historians discussed ethnic issues in their writings to some extent, emphasizing, for example, the importance of the political rule of the Arabs, Turks or Persians, but “there was no event in pre-Mongol period that attached significance to the ethnic factor, which affected the work of Muslim historiographers” (Sultanov 2005: 227). Sultanov believes that the only exception was the work by Rashid al-Din (d. 1318 CE) who challenged the common conceptual basis of former historical writing, describing a historical reality in a way that did not fit the ‘traditional’ holistic religious perception of reality by Muslim historians. However, this novelty was short-lived: very soon, Islam gained a foothold in the polities set up by Chingissids, where historiography returned to its religious-ideological frame (Sultanov 2005: 227).

The earliest form of a national idea of Central Asians became a pan-Turkic perception of a united and integral Turkic nation consisting of all Turkic speaking peoples, which stretched from the Crimea and Volga region and to the remote corners of the Turkic world including Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang). Simultaneously, thinking of the concept of ‘nation’ based on ethnic groups competed with the irredentist concept of a Turkic nation and was supported by the Bolsheviks after 1917.

The introduction of a national discourse in Central Asia and the subsequent rise of national histories strikingly resembled the European pattern of the national movement as described by Eric Hobsbawm, who distinguished three stages: a) the literary/folkloric period, when knowledge about the ethnic culture is accumulated without practical attachment; b) the period when a national idea is propagated by most active elements of the community, the pioneers and c) the time when the national idea acquires state support (Hobsbawm 1992:12). Even if this periodization of the national movement is based on European experience, it can be applied to Central Asian nationalisms as well, given the crucial role of the imperial practice of nationalism for colonial peoples of the Russian Empire. The Russian colonial governance embraced the Taranchi Turkic population of the Kiljia (Ili) area, which has been occupied by the Russian Empire during 1871-1881, and the Taranchi population migrated from the Ili area to the Semirech'ye oblast after the occupied territory has been returned to the Qing Empire in accordance with the St. Petersburg treaty of 1881. According to Anderson, the nationalism of colonial peoples was an imperial project: thinking in national categories was brought to the colonial peoples by the colonizers. The imperial roots of the emergence of Uyghur nationalism can be easily identified if one recalls that by the end of the 19th century Russian academia accumulated knowledge on the history and culture of the Turkic

peoples including Uyghurs of Eastern or Chinese Turkistan (Xinjiang province of China), a significant portion of which migrated to Russian Semirech'ye during the 1880s (Kabirov 1965). Knowledge on the history of Eastern Turkistan and its population has been long accumulated by Russian and other European scholars. What is more important is that it was Russian *academia* which for the first time equated the population of Xinjiang with the historical Uyghurs who had established their empire in the 8th-9th centuries and were the first sedentary Turks to set up their polities in Eastern Turkistan and the Gansu province of China. The Kazakh officer and scholar Chokan Valikhanov in his works on Eastern Turkistan (Valikhanov 1986: 167) did this, for example. The second stage in developing the Uyghur national idea relates to the propagation of the idea by militants or pioneers of the community itself, in which intellectuals of the Ili Turks of Semirech'ye (Taranchis) played a role, in the early 20th century. Most prominent among them was the poet and historian Nüzäryoja AbdusemätoV (1877-1951), who published many of his works under the penname *Uyyur balisi* ('Uyghur Child'). An examination of his life and works illuminates the process of the formation of early samples of national histories in Central Asia.

Nüzäryoja AbdusemätoV as a Militant of the Uyghur National Idea in the Russian Empire

The life and works of Nüzäryoja AbdusemätoV have long been studied in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of PRC. Soviet publications mainly focused on his contribution to literature, which was characterized as 'progressive' and 'revolutionary'. His verses were included in textbooks on Soviet Uyghur literature. His public activity and works on history attracted less attention, although he also published a lot on that topic. Popular articles on his life mentioning briefly his historical works have been announced in local Uyghur newspapers in Alma-Ata by many authors (MollaudoV 2002: 94-97, 120-123). Later during the *perestroika* period a collection of AbdusemätoV's works was compiled by the brothers Tursun and Shavkat Ayupov (AbdusemätoV 1991). The latter publication contains Nüzäryoja's works, prose and poetry, published in various magazines, newspapers and as separate brochures. Almost all these publications were popular writings, without an academic purpose and contained numerous inaccuracies in their reproduction of original texts of author's articles etc. For instance, Sh. Ayupov arbitrary replaced the words 'Türk' or 'Taranchi' in his articles with ethnic name 'Uyghur', thus smoothing out contradictory elements in the AbdusemätoV's perception of the Uyghur nationality.

Näzäryoja Abdusemätoev was born to family of farmers in 1887 in the village of Ghalzhat of the Jarkent county (*uyezd*) in the Semirech'ye *oblast*. His father participated in the Muslim rebellions against the Chinese in the Ili valley and migrated to Russian Semirech'ye during 1881-1884, but it should be noted that the village of Ghalzhat was not one set up by migrants, but it was included in the Semirech'ye territory before the return of the Ili area to the Qing Empire. Being an eyewitness of many important events, Näzäryoja's father told his son his life story evoking his interest in history. In his work on the history of the Taranchi, Näzäryoja mentions the influence of the 1905 Russian revolution on everyone striving to establish an enlightenment movement among Turkic peoples of the Empire. Indeed, the revolution invoked modernization ideas in all remote parts of the Russian Empire; Allen Frank examined this process in the case of Astrakhan (Frank 2001).

Early Publications of 'Uyghur Child' in Tatar Newspapers and Magazines

One of the consequences of the 1905 Russian revolution was the liberalization of political life in the Russian Empire and the emergence of press activities in local languages. A great part in 'print-capitalism' was played by periodicals in the Tatar language published in the Volga region (Kazan, Orenburg), including such newspapers and magazines as *Fikir* (Idea), *Vaqit* (Time), *Qoyash* (Sun), *Olug Turkistan* (Great Turkistan), *Yultuz* (Star), *Shura* (Soviet/Council), *Asliha*, etc. These periodicals were disseminated not only among the Tatar population, but among all Turkic-speaking peoples of the Empire as well, the Taranchi Turks of Semirech'ye oblastt being no exception. According to Mirkassim Usmanov, from 1908 to 1917 the magazine *Shura* alone published more than 90 articles about the Uyghur Turks of Zhetissu and Eastern Turkistan (Usmanov 1998). Näzäryoja was one of those young people who not only read them, but actively contributed to the magazine. Since 1908, he began sending his reactions, comments and articles to the magazine *Shura*; his publications in this magazine come to about twenty pieces.

One of Näzäryoja's reflections was on the article *Ghulja sultanliyi vä Taranchilar kimläär?* (What was the Ghulja Sultanate and who are the Taranchis?) published in three issues of the magazine in 1908. The author of the publication was Abdulsabit, a nephew of Abdurasul-beg, who was one of leaders of Taranchis moved by the Russian authorities from Ghulja to Verny. His interpretation of the events and the policy of the Taranchi sultans were not accepted by some eyewitnesses of the events, including someone named Zakir

Rakhmanquli. Abdusemätoʻv together with the latter started collecting information by talking to participants of those events. They also examined written sources such as Bilal Nazim's 'Ghazat dar Mulki Chin (Holy War against the Chinese)' etc. This investigation resulted to Näzäryoja's article *Ghulja sultanligi häqqidä* (*On the Ghulja Sultanate*) published in 1911, where he criticized the representation of recent history by other authors and offering his own corrections. In the same year Näzäryoja asked the editorial board of *Shura* to publish more articles on the history of Chinese Turkistan and subsequently was invited to make his own contribution on this issue.

In his brief writings in *Shura*, Näzäryoja Abdusemätoʻv addressed various issues of Taranchi society in Semirech'ye, very often reacting to urgent problems discussed in the magazine. A very urgent issue discussed in *Shura* concerned the state of science and education among Muslims and Turks. Addressing the question why science is not developed among the Muslims, Näzäryoja pointed out that the main reason was poverty and the absence of funds to support education and science (1912). In one of his discussions entitled *Taranchilarda muällim vä mäktäp mäsilisi qandaq* (How is the situation with teachers and schools?) he described education among the Taranchi Turks (Abdusemätoʻv 1991: 121-124). He argued that effective functioning of *usuljadid* (new) schools required a special curricula and qualified teachers. The development of elementary schools was considered a main indicator of development of a nation; as it was formulated in the newspaper *Ili vilayeti*: "The life, material situation, science and education of each *nation* can be measured by the size of an elementary school. If a *nation* does not have an elementary school teacher, that nation is considered to be without science and education and to be ignorant" (Abdusemätoʻv 1991: 121-122). Therefore, the author concluded that establishing more and more elementary schools, which could be done with support from wealthy people, would help a nation to develop. From his publications we learn that by 1905 there was only one old-style religious school in his village of Ghalzhat; and the first *usuljadid* school was opened there in 1910 resulting in conflict between *konichilar* (qadimists/ supporters of old style school) and *jadids*. This struggle continued for four years until the *qadimists* gave up; as a result, four schools were open in the village, one of them being a Russian school.

Abdusemätoʻv's publications on contemporary Taranchi society in Semirech'ye contained very significant observations of his community, which themselves became a source for ethnographic studies. For example, his articles *Taranchi Türklirining hayati* (The life of the Taranchi Turks), *Taranchi Türkliri qandaq turarlär* (How Taranchi Turks live), and *Bizniñ turmush* (*Our life*) represent descriptions of social and cultural life of the Taranchis of his time (Abdusemätoʻv 1991: 94, 99, 110).

History in the Focus of Abdusemätov's Discussions

History was a central issue for Abdusemätov, who produced a series of articles on the history of the Ili region and the Taranchi Turks aiming at the propagation and popularization of knowledge on this branch of the Turkic peoples. His thematic diversity can be seen in the title of his articles: *Chinniyy Türkistan türk häqliri* (Turkic peoples of Chinese Turkistan), *Chiyyiz sözi häqqidä* (On the word 'Chingiz'), *Kuteiba toyriliq javab* (The answer about Kuteiba), *Taranchi Türkliriniñ Rosiägä köchishi* (Migration of the Taranchi Turks to Russia), *Yusup Sakkaki häqqidä* (About Yusup Sakkaki), *Buyrakhan*, etc. (Abdusemätov 1991:83, 116, 124, 96).

Most his historical writings published in *Shura* were on the recent history of the Ili valley and Eastern Turkistan as a whole. Some of them discussed general historical conceptual issues such as the necessity of the knowledge of national history; some described certain historical events and periods, such as the course of Muslim rebellions of 1863 in Kucha in Eastern Turkistan that finally ended up with establishing of Yakub-bek's rule in Altishar region, rule of Hojas in Kashgaria and the khans of Moghulistan in the Ili region, history of the Ghulja Sultanate etc. All his historical writings comprised a basis for compilation of his first general history of the Ili Taranchis during the first years of the Soviet power.

Travel to Eastern Turkistan and National Discourse

In January of 1914 Abdusemätov traveled to Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang), which was known among Central Asians as Altishär (literally 'six cities', i.e. the Tarim Basin region). He took a route through the mountainous area and the high pass of Muzdavan/Muzart to reach the town of Aqsu. His travelogues published in *Shura* included a description of his route, especially the notorious Muzart pass. His description of the life of ordinary people is striking for its realistic details. During his travels he managed to collect accounts of recent political events. He noticed that the people felt nostalgia for life during Yakub-bek's rule (in the late 1860s), which persisted in local stories; for example, an old man by name Turdakhun buyay, a knowledgeable local person, told him on how prosperous Altishär was at that time.

One of significant results of Abdusemätov's travel to Eastern Turkistan was his acceptance of the nickname *Uyyur balisi* (Uyghur Child) that reflected the evolution of his idea of a united Uyghur nation. While in his earliest works Abdusemätov called inhabitants of Eastern Turkistan *Sarts*, and Muslims,

Turks and the Ili Turks Taranchi, only occasionally naming them Uyghurs, after his travel in 1914, he started propagating the idea of the Uyghurness of all Eastern Turkistanians including the Taranchis of the Ili region. In the article *'Bizniñ turmush'* (Our life) he pointed out that people of Eastern Turkistan (*Shärqi Türkistan*) had had the name 'Uyghur' in previous historical times, but they had lost that name and become a nameless population. He explains the loss of the name with reference to the predominance of the Muslim identity, which suppressed the ethnic one, but only in the contact areas where the Turks live together with nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, where they might identify themselves as *Sarts*. Thus, Abdusemätoev does not hesitate to call the whole Turkic sedentary population of Eastern Turkistan Uyghurs, frequently using expressions like *Uyyur hälqi* (the Uyghur people), *Shärqi Türkistan uy-yurliri* (the Uyghurs of Eastern Turkistan).

The importance of writing national history was recognized for the first time in his article *Chini Türkstan sartliriniñ milli tarihi häqqidä bir rija* ('A glance at the national history of Chinese Turkistan'), where under national history he understood the national history of the *Sarts* of Chinese Turkistan. He emphasized that "there is no nation without a history (*tarihsiz millät bolmaidu*)", defining a national history as the "knowledge of one's ancestors and relatives and the state of their customs and traditions, development of science and education, art and crafts, as well as trade relations and knowledge of the ways that led to the happiness of the people or, on the contrary, to tragedies, and knowledge of who their friends and enemies were" (Abdusemätoev 1991: 67-68). He distinguished cultural nations (*mädäniyätlik millätlär*) whose members, from the age of seven to seventy, know their national history and are proud of it. The absence of national history is explained by him partly by the absence of historians who would narrate and transmit historical knowledge to the people saying "our grandfathers did not write our history; even if they wrote it, nobody paid attention to the histories and they vanished by themselves" (*bizniñ bovilirimiz tarihimizni yazmiyan, yazyan bolsimu uniñya anchä ähmyät berilmigänliktin umu öz özidin yoqilip kätkän*) (Abdusemätoev 1991: 68).

Abdusemätoev saw the aim of national history in enlightening people, taking them away from darkness so that they could build up their successful life, taking into account historical experience. This approach differed from the general understandings of a role of history as a 'mirror of the past helping to manage the present' only in a way that community needed a communal history.

The national history of the *Sarts* of Chinese Turkistan was understood by Abdusemätoev as a part of the general history of a Turkic nation that encompasses all Turkic peoples, which it was impossible to gather without having general histories of its constituent parts, one of which was the Taranchi Turks of

the Ili area. Since knowledge of the communal history of a nation requires the literacy of all its members, the enlightenment of the Turkic peoples becomes the most significant social requirement: "it is very striking that such a *great nation* [as the Turks] does not have thousands of elementary schools, several national newspapers and [its own] press" (Abdusemätov 1991:70).

History of the Ili Taranchi Türks as a Sample of Earliest Uyghur National History

With the establishment of Soviet power in Semirech'ye Abdusemätov joined the Bolshevik activities and was appointed head of the section on science of the Uyghur Bureau of the Communist party (Rozibaqiev and Rozibaqieva 1987). As a recognized expert on education, science and literature of the Uyghurs Abdusemätov concentrated his efforts on the implementation of Bolshevik reforms which corresponded to his commitment to enlightenment ideas, which he continued to express now in local Semirech'ye newspapers, such as *Jidisu haliq muhbiri* (1918), *Komek* (1918-1919), *Uchtwun* (1920), and especially in the Taranchi Uyghur newspaper *Kämbäyällär avazi* (1921-1930), *Yash Uyyur* (1922), and *Birinchi chamdam* (1924). Abdusemätov now not only propagated ideas of social reforms, but also contributed to the development of Uyghur literature.

Abdusemätov participated in debates on the Uyghur nation among the Eastern Turkistan émigrés in Soviet Central Asia, which have been described by David Brophy (Brophy 2005) and Sean Roberts (Roberts 1998; 2003). The key event of the process of national delimitation legitimizing the use of an integral ethnic name 'Uyghur' for the population of Eastern Turkistan irrespective of their local designations such as 'Taranchi', 'Kashgarliq' etc. was the first meeting of the organization entitled "The Revolutionary Union of Altishahri-Jungarian Workers" in Tashkent in 1921. Although representatives of various local groups contested the name 'Uyghur', by 1930 it was commonly accepted in the Soviet Union. Debates on the commonality or differences between various local groups of Eastern Turkistanians such as the Taranchis and Kashgarians in the 1920s (cf. Roberts 1998; 2003; Brophy 2005) are important for this article only in connection with new understanding of history framed by national discourse. Writing the history of the Uyghur nation was included in the work of the Uyghur section of the Semirech'ye oblast bureau of the Communist party. The task was assigned to two Taranchi intellectuals: Abdusemätov, who was to write an early history, and Abdulla Rozibaqiev, a prominent Communist leader, who was to write about recent revolutionary years. In 1922

Abdusemätov's piece was published under the title *Ili Taranchi Türkliriniñ tarihi* (History of the Taranchi Turks), while Rozibaqiev's contribution was never published. Rozibaqiev did produce his text, which is mentioned in the book by Abdusemätov, but he published it in the form of articles describing dynamically developing political events of pre- and post-revolutionary period in Semirech'ye (Rozibaqiev 1997).

Abdusemätov's book was written in the Arabic script and comprised 48 pages. The last page of the book contains a list of the sources and literature consulted. The way in which these were presented shows how early national narratives categorized them. The author puts under a category 'sources' (*qaynuq*) two manuscripts: an unknown one under the title *Näzär aka täzkirasi* (Biography of *Näzär-aka*) and *Apaq-hoja manikabi* (Jalilov 2001), but the works by *Tarihi hamsa shärqi* and *Tarihi jarida va jadida* by Qurbanali Khalidi, a Tatar scholar, which have not been in the form of manuscripts, are referred to separately as contemporary works, even if they have not been published, probably because Khalidi was a contemporary historian. As separate entries are listed: *Shijara-turk* by Abulghazi, Zaki Validi's *Türk tatar tarihi*, *Shibacha tarihidan* by an unnamed author, *Tarihi amniya* by Musa Sayrami, *Chin musulmanlari* by Abdulaziz, 'Gazavat Chin' by Molla Bilal (Nazym), the magazine *Shura* and other newspapers, as well as *Voina musulman protiv kitaitsev* (War of the Muslims against the Chinese) published in Russian by N. Pantusov in Kazan in 1881. The author refers to an unknown 'Taranchi tarikhi' (History of the Taranchis) by Basyt Yusuf indicating that it was published by the Soviets and available in the library. In the end of the list Abdusemätov provides other materials giving names of owners or authors of materials such as *yarlyqs*, genealogies and other documents (Mukhtar Haji), *Taranchi Hitai urushlariga dair mäsililäri* ('Issues on wars between Taranchis and Chinese' by Abdusaid Baba), *Kona tarihka aid materiallar* ('Materials relating to old history' by Hussain beg), *Inqilab künlärdä taranchilar* ('Taranchis during the days of revolution' by Abdulla Rozibaqiev).

Abdusemätov reiterates his vision on the necessity to know one's national history (*milli tarih*), but his understanding of nation (*millät*) had evolved by then. If previously he spoke about the national history of the Sarts of Chinese Turkistan (*Chini Türkstan sartliriniñ milli tarihi*), now he referred to the national history of the Uyghurs. While leaving 'writing a national history for all the Uyghurs' to other intellectuals, he defined his own task as the systematic narration of one of its parts, i.e. the Taranchis' history (Abdusemätov 1922: 1-2).

The book *Ili Taranchi Türkliriniñ Tarihi* ('History of the Taranchi Turks of Ili') became a first attempt to compose a general history of the Taranchis, from ancient to contemporary times. Another feature of the work was its regional

focus: its narration was confined to the Ili valley divided between the Russian and Qing Empires. It should be said that Abusemätoŷ's earlier publications on the history of Ili and the Taranchis had helped to compile this general history. One of the challenges for the construction of an ethnocentric vision of the Taranchi's history was that there were not enough materials to elucidate the entire period of the Taranchis and their lands evenly. Therefore the author gives only a very brief outline of the early history of the Ili *vilayat*, mentioning only main events. He also gives a brief history of ethnic groups dominated in Ili from ancient times—the Huns, Usuns, etc., moving to the later domination of the Karluk tribes, who are identified in the book as being of Uyghur *toqquz oghuz* (*nine oguz tribes*) origin. Then he goes through the history the *Karakidans* (*qara hitay*), Mongol rule, the descendants of the Mongols, the Zhungars and the Qing (Manzhu) conquest. While early history is outlined superficially, the narrative becomes more detailed when it moves to the period of Qing rule and the Muslim rebellions in Altishär and the Ili area, which resulted in the ousting of the Manchu army and establishing the Ili Taranchi sultanate in 1864. The history of the Ili Taranchi sultanate is depicted in even more detail than the previous period, with special emphasis on internal events in the sultanate, the wars with the Chinese, uprisings of other ethnic groups (Mongol and Manchu tribes), the relations of the Taranchis with the Tungans and Russians, the migration of the Taranchis to Russian Semirech'ye and the account ends with a discussion of the uprising of local peoples of Semirech'ye in 1916. In a special notification Abusemätoŷ notes that the history of the Taranchis during the revolutionary days was supposed to be compiled by Abdulla Rozibaqiev, who however was not able to finish his part, which would be published separately. The last four pages of the book comprise a separate section entitled *Milli tarihqa dair türlük mäsilälär* ('Various issues relating to national history') and which discusses who the 'Turfanliqs' were (Abusemätoŷ 1922: 43-46).

As an early version of ethno-centric history, the book still maintains some elements of Muslim historical works, one of them being its dependence on local historical works and its occasional reproduction of their narrative style, although unlike previous Muslim historians Abusemätoŷ emphasized stories of oppressed ordinary people rather than 'big men' (rulers and Muslim clergymen). For these shortcomings the book was later criticized by Rozibaqiev, who wrote:

At the same time the book contains many shortcomings. In this book, which has been published by the Uyghur communists of the Semirech'ye oblast bureau, very little place is given to the Communist theory on history and learning history. Besides certain historical events, there are no

correct results and conclusions drawn; only past events are put in order and recounted. The causes of many events have not been explained; which were the results of the Ghulja uprising and which lessons and experience should Uyghur laborers learn from this? There are no answers to these questions. Which results would the uprising have had if it had been successful? The writer does not give any opinion on it. What are reasons for their failure? There is no answer to this question either. The writer sees the cause in the treason of Bushri-bek. Of course, there were many other causes (Rozibaqiev 1997: 106).

Discussing Abdusemätov's literary works in 1927 Rozibaqiev wrote that he could not go beyond his old time writings in the *Vaqit* and *Shura* journals (Rozibaqiev 1997: 108). Then he continued: "*Uyyur balisi* belongs to those intellectuals who are friendly to the Soviet government and follow its way . . . But his works mainly express Taranchi narrow nationalism (*Taranchi tar millätchilik*), later Uyghur nationalism" (Rozibaqiev 1997: 109).

One of the visible elements of the Muslim histories is the last lines of the book resembling colophons of old style Arabic script manuscripts, where Abdusemätov refers to the place and date of accomplishing the work: "Bitildi shähri Alma-Atada ١٩٢٢ sänä ٢ mart. ١٣٤٠ yil isht yili ٢ ay, päyshänbä küni" ('written in the city of Alma-Ata in 1922 year 2 March. 1340 year, year of Dog, 2nd month, on Thursday') (Abdusemätov 1922: 47). Thus, the date is given in accordance with two calendars—the Muslim and European ones.

Except for its ethnocentric vision on the past, meaning that the entire narrative was concentrated around the Taranchi Turks of the Ili and Semirech'ye area, the principal novelty of the work lies in it being a sample of early national history that it was based not only on Muslim sources, but also on European academic writings; while two works by the Russian scholars D. Fedorov and N. Pantusov were listed in the bibliography, it is obvious from the text that the author in fact incorporated the much wider achievements of Russian scholarship into his book. Another particularity of the work is its language, which contains less Persian and Arabic words and more spoken elements of the Taranchis (for example, *qaynuq*/source instead of Arabic *manba*).

The early sample of Uyghur national history compiled by Abdusemyätov in 1922 should be understood within the context of a particular history writing process at the very beginning of the 20th century, when national histories emerged to replace the Muslim vision on history as reflected in numerous historical works produced in Russian and Chinese Central Asia. We can refer here to the emergence of an ethno-centric vision on the past in other local

communities of Russian Semirech'ye, such as those of the Kazakh and the Kyrgyz. In 1910 the Kazakh writer Shakarim Qudaibergenov (1858-1931) compiled a history work entitled 'Genealogy of Turks, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and khans' (*Türük, Qyrgyz-Qazaq häm handar shejeresi*), which can be seen as an early attempt to write a Kazakh national history, and which also incorporated the history of the Kyrgyz considering them as an integral part of the national history of the Turkic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz (Shäkärim 1991). At the same time, an early Kyrgyz national history was published by Osmonaaly Sydyk uulu (1875-1940) in 1913 in Ufa under the titles *Muhtasar tarih-i qyrgyziya* ('A Brief History of the Kyrgyz'). Later, in 1914, he announced his *Tarih-i Qyrgyz Shadmaniya* (Kyrgyz History Dedicated to Shadman) (Sydykov 1913; 1914). The main approaches to ethno-centric history exposed in these works have been developed in later periods of the Soviet Union and the territorial framing of national histories was further shaped after the 1920s Bolshevik administrative-territorial delimitation in Central Asia.

Conclusions

The early 20th century, especially the 1920s, was a unique period in the history writing process in Central Asia which was marked by a transition from the predominance of Muslim historiography to national histories. An ethno-centric vision on the history of ethnic groups inhabiting the region emerged as a part of nation building process in Central Asia, when various communities started imagining themselves as 'nations'. The construction of nations with their own peculiar history, language and literature became a project of the Soviet powers from early 1920s which resulted in the delimitation and demarcation of new territorial units set up in accordance with the national policy of the Bolsheviks. However, the discourse of national history, that is an ethnocentric vision on the past putting the ethnic group (nation) in the centre of the narrative had already emerged earlier within the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century.

This article examined a novel approach to the representation of the historical past and the formation of national histories at the turn of the 20th century by studying the example of Uyghur national history. The case of the Uyghurs seems important because they represent an ethnic minority originating from neighbouring Chinese Central Asia and as such hold a marginal place in the nation building process in Russian (Soviet) Central Asia. The contemporary Uyghur national idea emerged firstly within a community of the Taranchi

Turks in the Semirech'ye oblast of the Russian Empire, then it was supported and developed by the Soviet power during the 1920s, and later accepted in the Xinjiang province of China (Eastern Turkistan). The rise of this national discourse gave birth to the concept of 'national history', the discussion of which was started in Turkic periodicals, especially Tatar newspapers and magazines published in the Volga region since the Russian Revolution of 1905. The Tatar language newspaper *Vaqit* and the magazine *Shura* provided space for publications by Turkic authors, including the Taranchi intellectual of Semirech'ye. Nāzāryoja Abdusemätov was one of the pioneers of the Uyghur national idea who laid the foundation for a national history. In 1914, after his trip to Altyshär (in Eastern/Chinese Turkistan) he accepted a penname 'Uyğur balisi' (Uyghur Child). His numerous articles on the history and culture of the Taranchis and Eastern Turkistan later formed the basis for his book *Ili Taranchi Türkliriniñ Tarihi* ('History of the Taranchi Turks of Ili') published in 1922 in Verny (Almaty), which can be seen as the earliest sample of the Uyghur national history. Like similar samples of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz national histories compiled by Shakarim Qudaibergenov and Osmonaali Sydykuulu in 1910 and 1913-1914, the book on the Taranchis Uyghurs outlined the main principles of ethnocentric vision on history, but exposed the vagueness of a notion of 'nation' at that time.

Our examination of the works written by Abdusemätov prior to Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and during the early Soviet period reveals the evolution of his understanding of an 'Uyghur nation'. While in 1911 he still spoke about the national history of the Sarts of Chinese Turkistan, by 1922 he advocated an Uyghur national history. However, when compiling the Ili Taranchi Turks history he did not pretend to compile a history of entire Uyghur nation, but only of a regional group of the Uyghurs living in the Ili and Semirech'ye areas.

The principle of an ethno-centric vision on history demonstrated by 'Uyghur Child' in his works has been developed and shaped further during the Soviet period. In the 1930-1940s other Uyghur intellectuals from Kazakhstan such as Akram Azizov (b. 1875) and Imin Bavdinov continued writing the history of the Taranchi Uyghurs, but their works did not survive. Only in the 1930s and especially in the 1940s did the Soviet historians S. Malov and A. Bernshtam contribute to developing Uyghur national history (Kamalov 2007), while political clashes in Xinjiang in the 1940s gave birth to another understanding of the national history of Eastern Turkistan in the works by Muhammad Imin Bughra and Polat Qadyri (Klemeš 2015: 166).

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