

## THE OTRAR STATE ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM THE ARYSTANBAB MAUSOLEUM

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(Translated into English by T.T. AYAZOVA and G.H. SIZDIKOVA)\*\*

The mausoleum and its orchards are located in the Otrar district of the Chimkent region. Though it is deeply dried by the winds of Arystan Karabas, it remains a very picturesque places. If a traveler happens to find himself in the northwestern part of Kogam, he will at once catch sight of a very tall building. Two big domes and a small one with its beautifully carved towers at the corners of the mausoleum give a peculiar beauty to it, thus attracting everyone's attention. This splendid building built on the Arystanbab burial ground is a memorial. Whenever you visit this memorial, you will see people of different nationalities and ages: the elderly, middle-aged, young men and young women. These pilgrims are from different parts of Central Asia and come to this Holy Place to pay their respect.

What is the reason for the pilgrims' worship o this holy place? And what do we know about Arystanbab? To Answer these questions it is necessary to dwell upon the way Islam was spread among the Turkic peoples. A new religion, Islam, was introduced to the Turkic tribes in the 8th century. Islam was gradually spread among the Turkic peoples who inhabited the densely populated Syr-Darya region. According to the 10th century historian Ibn-Khaukal, Islam was spread by the Turkic nobility who century historian Ibn-Khaukal, Islam was spread by the Turkic nobility who possessed the best pastures of Farab, the Kendjedy and Shash. But at that time most of the Turkic tribes could not abort the religion.

Even praying to Allah, the followers of the prophet Mohammed couldn't completely reject their old beliefs. The archeological finds in Otrar show that even in the 11th to 13th centuries there was a holy fireplace in each house to pray to Allah. Even Khairkhan, the khan of Otrar in the 13th century, had not adopted Islam when a child.

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The introduction of Islam by force among Turkic tribes was not a success. It was more fruitful by peaceful propagation. A great role was played in the propagation of Islam by the local folk. Arystanbab and his disciple, Akhmed Yasavi, directed the first believers of Islam. The name Arystanbab (sometimes Arslanbab) consists of two words. The word Arystan is the assimilated form of the Arabic word "Arslan". In the Arabic language, the first meaning of the word is "a lion"; the second word means "big, powerful". Academician Bartold states that the word "bab" means "a gate". In Turkey this very word is added to the names of the persons who propagated the beliefs of Islam. So Arystanbab had contributed in the introduction of Islam in Turkestan.

A short poem written down by Abubakir Divaev, heard by him from the Kazakh sorcerers, proves that people appealed to Arystanbab for help and support.

Thousands of saints in Turkestan  
 Thousands of saints in Turkestan  
 I plead for help.  
 Countless saints in Sairam  
 Thirty saints in Otrar  
 The most honorable Arystanbab  
 I plead for help.

In O. Dostenov's book, "The Truth about the Holy Places", there is a religious song with the same content which is widely spread in Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

So Arystanbab introduced Islam, one of the world's religions, to Turkic people. Through the new religion the Turkic people learned the Arabic language, its alphabet and its culture. This helped the Turkic peoples of Central Asia to develop, to a certain extent, while at the same time they contributed to the further development of Islamic culture in their part of the world. There appeared many scientists and philosophers among the Turkic people of the Syr-Darya district.

Among the famous scientists and philosophers who came from the Syr-Darya district the most outstanding were the scientist Abu Nasir al Farabi and the poet and thinker, Akhmed Yasavi. These men became a source of pride for the Moslem world.

It is a well-known fact that Akhmed Yasavi was Arystanbab's disciple. Arystanbab's name is often mentioned in Hodja Akhmed's collection of verse legends, "The Divan'i Hikmat".

In the work of a French researcher, Irene Melikoff, 'Akhmed Yasavi & Islam of the Turkic People', we find some facts about the future poet's becoming Arystanbab's disciple; "Ibrahim, the father of Hodja Akhmed, was a famous sheikh of Sairam. Akhmed became an orphan at the age of seven. His aunt took him to the town of Yassy. There he met with Arystanbab, his first teacher".

According to Abubakir Dyvaev, Arystanbab taught Hodja Akhmed chemistry.

Having studied Yasavi's religious views, the English scientist J. Tremingham came to the following conclusion. "Akhmed al-Yasavi is the father of all the Turkic religious people. The Yasavi school was Turkic to the utmost degree". Until the death of the Turkic Sheikh Arystanbab, Akhmed had been raised by him. He later moved to Bukhara. After his teacher's death, Hodja Akhmed kept in touch with his relatives. Arystanbab's son, Mansyr, became Hodja Akhmed's first disciple and follower after the latter obtained his religious title.

A tomb bearing Arystanbab's name can also be found in Khyrgyzstan. Then the question arises: where was Arystanbab, the famous, 12th century historical figure buried? The people of the Osh region think that Arystanbab was a hero (batyr) who fought against the Kalmyks. But Arystanbab from Osh lived in the 17th to 18th centuries.

People named after Arystanbab are encountered in many places over different time periods. Further proof that Yasavi's teacher, Arystanbab, lived in Kazakhstan is found when considering the widespread occurrence of place names referring to him in the southern region of Kazakhstan. In the above mentioned verse you encounter such place names as Turkestan, Sairam and Otrar. Gordlevsky's work summarizes the different opinions about Aristanbab's burial place: "In Otrar there is a holy place for Hodja Yasavi. That holy place is Arystanbab's burial ground".

There is a legend about Arystanbab. "Mokhammed passed away at the age of 63. Before his death he told his people. 'I am dying. Who will continue my religious mission?' At that moment a 300 year old Arystanbab (Salmeni Fars) spoke. He had known 33 religions, but adopted only Islam. Having accepted Aristanbab's agreement to continue his work, Mokhammed then turned to Allah for advice. Getting Allah's permission, Mokhammed gave his message to Arystanbab.

Another 500 years passed. One day Arystanbab met an eleven-year old boy in the fields who asked: 'Aksakal, give me the message of Allah.

That boy was Akhmed". The idea of the legend is the following: Hodja Akhmed was Mokhammed's follower. Aristanbab was the person who connected them.

This religious trend of Moslems shows the close connections of every sheikh with Mokhammed which looks like a chain, "silsil", an Arabic word meaning "a chain". In fact, it is a list which shows how and through whom the sheikh adopted Mokhammed's doctrine.

Consider Hodja Akhmed's "silsil".

1. Hodja Abu Zhusyp Khamadani.
2. Sheikh Abu Ali Farmidi.
3. Sheikh Abil Kasim Karkani.
4. Sheikh Abil-Khasan Kharakani.
5. Bayazit Bistami.
6. Imam Zhapar Sadyk.
7. Khasim Ibn Mukhammed Abu Bakir.
8. Salman Farsi.
9. Abu Bakir Syddyk.

The "silsil" shows that 9 people connected the prophet Mokhammed ad Hodja Akhmed. The "silsil" begins with the name of Abu Bakir, the first Arabic Khalif, who lived 565-634 and ends with Hamadani who was a well-known sheikh and Hodja Akhmed's teacher in Bukhara. In the "silsil" after Abu Bakir comes the name of Hodja Akhmed's contemporary Salman Farsi, sometimes referred to as Parsi, al Farsi. His grave is in Medina in Irag. The mausoleum and the mosque were built over the tomb of Salman Farsi, the holy place for the Sunni tribes. Thus, Arystanbab and Salman Parsi were quite different people living in different centuries. Salman Parsi, one the founders of the Islamic movement, was considered to be the teacher of all the religious sheikhs. Based on this, Arystanbab, HodjaAhmed's teacher, who lived in the 12th century, was mistaken for the 7th century Salman Parsi.

The building over Arystanbab's tomb was briefly described in 1898 in A.T. Poslavsky's article. Since that time this place has been studied by scientists who came to ancient Otrar. At the beginning of the 20th century, V.V. Konstantinova published an article devoted to its architecture. In scientific words the building is usually referred to either as a mausoleum or a mosque or a mausoleum-mosque. It is a complex building which explains why it has been described with various architectural terms, In fact it is a fine specimen of religious architecture consisting of a tall mausoleum

crowned by a dome, an arcade with a carved ceiling, a mosque, a tower from which the mullahs call people to pray and some other rooms.

As it was reconstructed over many centuries, it is very difficult to specify the original architectural form of this complex building. The most ancient part of it is the tomb. Even now it stands high above the rest. The walls at certain points are joined to the dome with the help of ornamental brick carvings. The dome is huge and high. The door faces the West, to be more exact-Mecca. Moslem tradition requires that a believer should face the mausoleum and have his back to the west while praying. The tombstone is the earliest sign that was erected in the 12th century, the flourishing "Renaissance" period in the life of Otrar. According to 13th century documents one of the Otrar gates was called a holy place and it was not without reason. The architecture of the tomb and the anteroom with a dome resembles the mausoleum of the 14th century. That why we should consider the following legend.

On the night after the walls of Hodja Akhmed's mausoleum had been erected, nine huge, green bulls destroyed the walls with their horns. The walls were again erected and the reconstruction of the dome began. But the same thing happened again the mausoleum became and ruins. Emir Timur thought much about these events. In his dream an elderly man ordered him to build a mausoleum on Arystanbab's burial ground. Following the demand of his dream, Emir Timur constructed the building in Turkestan".

The proof that the construction took place during the reign of Timur are the two wooden columns in the mosque. The foundation of the wooden columns is an octagon which becomes wider in the middle. At the top of the column were beautiful carvings and ornamentation. In the opinion of researcher V. Voronina such columns cannot be found in any other monument either in Kazakhstan or in Central Asia. The columns mentioned above were made by an unknown skillful Otrar wood carver either at the end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th century. According to K. Akyshev, the carvings on the columns resemble Kasakh traditional ornaments. M. Sembin found the same ornaments in the mausoleum of Ayak Kamyр in Central Kazakhstan. These columns are now exhibited in the Alma-Ata Archeological Museum. Copies of the originals have been placed in the mosque.

At the beginning of the 20th century Arystanbab's mausoleum underwent great changes. The people of Otrar donated money for the reconstruc-

tion of the run down mausoleum. The door of the mausoleum faced Mecca earlier and now the facade of the reconstructed building faces Azret Sultan in Turkestan. The two towers on the sides and the triangle above the arcade were built as a reminder of a huge mausoleum in Turkestan. On the arcade gates there is a marble inscription which indicates the year 1327 according to the Arabic calendar. This date for the completion of the construction corresponds to 1909 of the modern calendar. There is also another inscription below the first. The second inscription is on the entrance of the mosque. On the brick board five lines are written in Arabic in the following order.

1327  
 skilled craftsmen  
 Kalmyrza  
 and Musapir Turkestani

It is necessary to mention that this inscription has not yet been studied in connection with researches on Arystanbab. This inscription was described by S. Ergubekov, a researcher of the Otrar State Archeological Open-Air Museum. In O. Dostenov's book "The Truth about Holy Places" it is written that the last construction of Arystanbab Mausoleum was headed by Iskendir from Tashkent, a skillful stone mason. Now it is necessary to seriously consider this opinion.

Secondly, the inscriptions with the name and birthplace of the skilled stone mason in the ancient Arystanbab mausoleum, though rare in Kazakhstan, are very valuable to study. These inscriptions refute the opinion that the mosques and religious schools (medrese) were built by foreign architects in southern Kazakhstan in the 15th-20th centuries. The inscription also proves that Arystanbab mausoleum is the masterpiece of local craftsmen and paves the way for the further study of other monuments. For example, similar inscriptions found in places between Arystanbab Mausoleum and Baba Medrese provide indications that the Kalmyrsa craftsmen might have taken part in the construction of other monuments on the other side of the Karatau mountains. The front of Arystanbab Mausoleum resembles the facade of Azret Sultan mausoleum. It became a building tradition and the same resemblance can be seen in the monuments of northern Karatau. For example, the Sozak mosque is the tallest in Baba ata. Its architecture is a copy of Akhmed Yasavi's mausoleum. It is typical of southern Kazakhstan monuments. This gives us the right to say that there was a certain architectural style between the Arystanbab mausoleum and the facades of mausoleums scattered along the railway in Kazak-

hstan. The local craftsmen also participated in the building of railway stations and an oriental style dominates the architecture of the Turkestan railway station. Alongside the oriental style the skillful carpenters and craftsmen also appropriately used the European style.

Until the Great October Revolution, the Arystanbab Mausoleum was one of the Islamic centers; around the memorial there was a tavern, tea houses, dwellings and an orchard. Pilgrims followed their forefathers' traditions which said, "Spend a night at Arystanbab and pray to Hodja Akhmed for help". They couldn't ride to Turkestan without praying at the holy place in Otrar. On religious holidays people gathered on the square in front of Arystanbab Mausoleum and sang religious songs. Some ancient artifacts were entrusted to the men who took care of the mausoleum. One artifact was a large wooden seal, 11.5 centimeters in diameter. This seal was given to the pilgrim as a talisman. In the middle of the seal one could read the name of Sultan Hodja Yasavi, and around to the right the following names:

Sheikh Akhmet Ravande  
Sheikh Akhmet Zhami  
Sheikh Akhmet Marghan  
Sheikh Akhmet Kabir  
Sheikh Akhmet Arkam  
Sheikh Akhmet Sakhkhak  
Sheikh Akhmet Kharb  
Sheikh Akhmet ... (the end is not read)  
Sheikh Akhmet Marsal

This seal was translated by the scientist, A.A. Ivanov, from St. Petersburg. This is the only seal with the name of Azret Sultan that survived to modern times. This seal and the plan of the Arystanbab Mausoleum of 1911 were preserved by the Narynbet dynasty. These are most valuable historical documents.

Arystanbab Mausoleum, which left a considerable mark on the history of all Turkic peoples, is a masterpiece of Islamic architecture. It is the creation of both ancient Otrar and skillful Turkestan. Its unique form, which is unlike thousands of other Kazakhstan and Central Asian monuments, affected the peoples over the course of many centuries.

The mausoleum can help unlock the mysteries of unknown history in the Otrar area. Today every pilgrim can visit this place and learn much about our ancient culture and history. People may learn more about this mausoleum by using the recommended list of literature which was used in preparation of this article.

