



Kazakhstan News Bulletin

Released weekly by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada

www.kazakhembus.com

July 22, 2005

Vol. 5, No. 29

Special edition

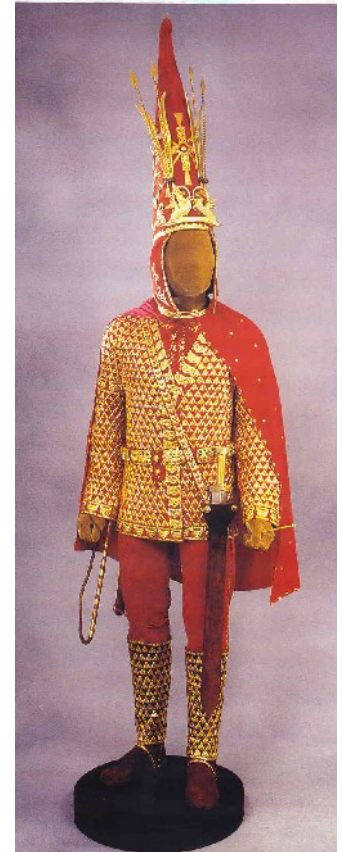
A Look at Kazakhstan's History: a Guide for the Future

Kazakhstan has a rich past. Its geographical and geopolitical position has played a vital role in promoting the country's development. Located in the center of Eurasia, Kazakhstan has long found itself at the crossroads of the world's most ancient civilizations and trade routes. It has been a land of social, economic and cultural exchange between East and West, North and South, and between the major players in Eurasia. At different stages of its history, various states emerged and developed in the land which became today's Kazakhstan. All contributed to Kazakh culture.

A thousand years before the Christian era, the nomadic Skythian-Saka civilization prospered on the Central Asian steppes. Many of their cultural monuments have survived till present days. The most impressive are tools and things of everyday life made in gold and bronze in the "wild animals style" extracted from burial mounds in different regions of Kazakhstan. The royal tomb of the "Golden Warrior Prince" of the Saka civilization, found in the ancient town of Issyk close to Almaty, is famous for its integrity, beauty, elegance and craftsmanship. The motifs of this cultural treasure have become the basis of the modern Monument of Independence erected in Almaty in 1990s.

In later centuries, the steppes were home to a powerful state formed by the Huns. Their empire greatly influenced the geopolitical map of that time. The Great Roman Empire in Europe eventually fell from the blows of the Attila the Hun's daring warriors.

Later, the Huns were replaced on the steppes by Turkic tribes. They founded several large states known as "kaganats" stretching from the Yellow Sea in the East to the Black Sea in the West. These states were distinguished by a culture progressive for that time. They were based not only on a nomadic economy but also on an oasis urban culture with rich trade and handicraft traditions. During this time, cities and caravanserais were founded in the oases of Central Asia, the territory of South Kazakhstan and Central Asia. They stood along the famous trade route known as the Great Silk Road which connecting Europe and China. Other trade routes were also important including the route along the Syr Darya River to the Aral Sea and the South Urals as well the so called "Sable Road" from South Western regions of Siberia through Central Kazakhstan and the Altai region. It was through trade on the "Sable Road" that the Middle East and Europe were supplied with expensive furs. Major cities and trade centers founded on these routes included Otrar (Farab), Taraz, Kulan, Yassy (Turkestan), Sauran, and Balasagun.



The Golden Warrior Prince costume, found in the ancient town of Issyk and recreated in full is one of the most precious and earliest archeological finds in Kazakhstan.

The Great Silk Road not only stimulated the development of trade, it also became a conduit for progressive scientific and cultural ideas. For example, the great philosopher Al-Farabi (870-950) was greatly influenced by the culture of the trade routes. Born in the Farab district, Al-Farabi was dubbed in the East “the Second Teacher” after Aristotle for his profound researches in philosophy, astronomy, musical theory and mathematics. The outstanding scholar of Turkic philology Mahmud Kashgari lived here in the 11th century. He created the three-volume “Dictionary of Turkic Dialects” which summed up Turkic folklore and literature heritages.

In the 11th Century, Yusup Balasaguni of the town of Balasagun, a famous poet and philosopher, wrote “Kutaglu Bilig” (“A Knowledge that Brings Happiness”) which is recognized as having played an important role in the development of modern social, political and ethical conceptions. The Sufi poet Hodja Ahmet Yassau, who lived in the 12th century, wrote a collection of poetic thoughts “Divan-i-Khikmet” (“Book of Wisdom”). He is famous throughout the Muslim world.

Part of the cultural legacy of that period is the elegant urban architecture. Examples such as the mausoleums of Arystan Baba, of the great Sufi Hodja Akhmet Yassau in Turkestan and Aisha Bibi in Taraz are among the best preserved. Apart from this, the most ancient nomads of the region invented the “yurt”, a dome-shaped easily dismantled and portable house made from wood and felt, ideal for their nomadic life and beliefs.

In 1221, Mongolian tribes of Genghis Khan conquered Central Asia and added their culture and values to the increasingly complex society of the region.

By the second half of the 15th Century a process of consolidation had begun among the peoples of the Central Asian steppe. This process, derived from the various ethnic and cultural identities, was drawn together by a common world view and lifestyle. The first Kazakh khanates emerged at this time. By the first half of the 16th Century, the formation of a single Kazakh nation was completed. The word “Kazakh” in the old Turkic language meant “free” or “independent” which perfectly fit the character of the people who had been long yearning for their own independent state.

In the 17th and 18th Centuries the nomadic Jungar tribes directed by the Chinese Bogdykhans started a large scale war against the Kazakh khanate.

However, thanks to the courage of the “batyrs” (knights), the decisiveness of the Kazakh leader Ablai Khan, the diplomatic skills of the Kazakh ‘biys’ (sages) Tole Bi, Kazdausty Kazybek Bi, Aiteke Bi, and self sacrifice of the people, the Kazakhs escaped total capture and physical annihilation. The Kazakh khans were forced to seek the military protection of the Russian Empire, which eventually led to Kazakhstan’s loss of sovereignty in 1871.

For a time, the fate of Kazakhstan was tied to the European model of social development and the fate of the Russian State and its peoples.

After the 1917 revolution Soviet power was established in Kazakhstan. Kazakhs suffered greatly under Soviet control.

Due to the forced collectivization in the 1930s, hunger caused the death of 1.5 million Kazakhs, which was more than 40 percent of the nation. Hundreds of thousands Kazakhs fled to China and elsewhere.

During Stalin’s purges in 1930s, the brightest and the best of the nation were repressed and often shot dead. Kazakhstan was home to many of camps of infamous GULAG camp system where millions of political prisoners were sent to.



Hodja Ahmet Yassau mausoleum in Turkestan (South Kazakhstan) is a place with a special meaning for millions of Muslims around the world.

For more than 40 years, from 1949 to 1991, Kazakhstan was home to Soviet Union's largest nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk where almost 500 nuclear explosions were carried out. They caused illnesses and deaths of 1.5 million people and contaminated an area the size of Germany.

Throughout both the Tsarist and Soviet times, the population of Kazakhstan has seen drastic changes. In addition to forced collectivization, purges and nuclear testing, which all contributed to the decrease in numbers of ethnic Kazakh populace, a few other factors contributed to a paradigm shift in Kazakhstan's ethnic composition during the last 100 or so years. These include major industrial and agricultural developmental drives, including the construction of dozens of large industrial metallurgy plants, mining enterprises in central and eastern Kazakhstan aimed at exploiting the country's rich mineral resources. These factors also include the development of the Virgin Lands in 1950s, when millions of previously untouched acres of steppes were plowed for wheat production, a reason for Kazakhstan being a major grain exporter today.

These extraordinary events led to a unique ethnic and religious, not too mention culinary, diversity in modern day Kazakhstan, a home to more than 100 ethnic groups and more than 40 religions.

The Soviet regime's last gasp was the brutal repression of the Kazakh people on December 17, 1986 as they took to the streets seeking justice. Many consider this the beginning of the end for the once mighty Soviet Union.

Kazakhstan proclaimed its independence on December 16, 1991, and Nursultan Nazarbayev was democratically elected the first President of the country.

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