

Yayın Değerlendirme/Book Review

Türk Dünyasının Bilgesi Abay Kunanbayoğlu (Abay Kunanbayoğlu the Wise Kazak of the Turkic World) (2020). Edited by Nergis Biray, Güljanat Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun, Soner Sağlam. Ankara: Bengü Yayınları. 664 p.*

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Great Kazakh poet and intellectual Abay Kunanbay is one of the most prominent figures in the Kazakh land in the last two centuries. His life as a notable intellectual, an educator, a poet and a prominent personality within Kazakh society is still an important area of study. However, his mission extends far from the era he lived in and the age he passed away.

He was born to a family and environment described as resourceful in the Kazakh society in the nineteenth century. He was raised as a child aware of his nomadic and Islamic roots. Wisdom, virtue and all the traditional values of the Kazakh society surrounded the young Abay. He was also aware of all the negative and positive events according to his well-established logic, fairness instilled in him through his genes and upbringing. His family was wealthy and influential in the society. He was familiar with most of the

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important events and matters related to the society in the Kazakh past and the, then current times. His learning journey was not limited with his native kins. He began to learn more, first from the surrounding society of Muslims in Central Asia, and through them the further geographies belonging to the Muslim world, in greater Eurasia and further to the cradles of the oriental Islamic world.

He has educated himself by reading the works of intellectuals revered by the societies of the East for many centuries, such as Fuzuli, Biruni, Navoi, Firdavsi, and Hafız. Abay Kunanbay never lived outside the borders of the Central Asian geography, yet his thoughts traveled much further, to the heart of the famous Russian intellectuals and their works that took their roots from Europe, the land of enlightenment and progress. The era of communication accelerated with the wider usage of printing press that enabled the intellectuals, living in isolated parts of the world such as Abay of *Shingis Tav*, to follow global developments. His work reflected his comprehensive vision of men and society that led him to gain a forward-looking attitude for the purpose of awakening his society. He was a humanist and an intellectual supporting parallel ideas of the Renaissance in praising the human as the most able and perfect creature of God. Pushkin, Lermontov, Krillov and Mickiewicz were those poets whose works were translated into Kazak by Abay Kunanbay.

As a pioneer intellectual determined to enlighten his people and awaken the isolated nomadic society of Kazakhs, he began to look beyond the boundaries of the steppe society. At the same time, last quarter of the nineteenth century was the age of awakening for the whole Muslim World in general and the Turkish/Turkic World in particular within the Tsarist Russian empire. Publications among the Turko-Muslims within the tsarist empire used to spread the ideas of modernization in all spheres of life. Abay was an intellectual aware of such social, cultural and spiritual discussions in the pages of those publications within the Muslim and Turkic peoples. He was also an enlightened mind to preach his people to the highest virtues of mankind. His poems began to be circulated all over the geographies inhabited by the Kazaks in Central Asia.

His life-long struggle to serve this way earned him the label “classic” of the Kazak literature. Abay’s philosophical knowledge, talent and ability

displayed in his “Words of Edifice” Qara Sozder. World, humanity, nation, history and spirit, as well as integrity, harmony and peaceful universe found their rightful place in his humanistic ideas under the title of Qara Sozder. Poet Abay stands apart from all the other figures in the national literature. He has a unique style in his poetry. Reading his poems motivates one to think about societal problems, behavior of the people, the individuals and their reactions in many issues and in many different circumstances. Altogether 170 poems and 56 translations of this exceptionally gifted talent still engage many scholars and intellectuals today. Consequently, true value of Abay is not in his attempt to be able to learn foreign languages, making translations from foreign poets or transferring wisdom of world-known intellectuals to the attention of nomadic Kazakhs, but utilize valuable knowledge of the outside world for the benefit of the Kazak society. International virtues such as humanism, ethical virtues as well as justice, and fairness will enlighten the path of each and every generation of Kazaks who will read the work (170 poems and 56 translations) of this remarkable Kazak.

Abay studies go hand-in-hand with historic, political, ideological and overall systemic changes and developments in the history of Kazakhstan. Many politically oriented issues, such as identity, native language, Kazakh philosophy or religion, together with literary and poetic studies reflect the influence of this great figure.

The book (*Türk Dünyasının Bilgesi Abay Kunanbayoğlu. (Abay Kunanbayoğlu the Wise Kazak of the Turkic World)* Edited by Nergis Biray, Güljanat Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun, Soner Sağlam. Ankara: Bengü Yayınları, 2020.664 p.) to review is dedicated to the 175. Birth Anniversary of the great Kazak men-of-letters-Abay Kunanbayoglu, consist of a Turkish translation of 42 articles written/published in Kazakstan and 18 research articles written by Pamukkale University’s North-West Turkic Languages group’s graduate students and academic staff. It should be noted that Professor Nergis Biray, Head of the Departmental Study organized the realization of this project. The cover of the book however include the logo of the Eurasian Writers Union(whose related facility, the Bengu publishing house assumed the responsibility of materializing the printing job) and the International Turkic Academy, whose head wrote two rather short piece of research articles. It has been written on the information page of the book

that the Head of International Turkic Academy Darhan Kızıralı, as the General Coordinator of Publication and the Head of Writers Union of Eurasia, Yakup Ömeroğlu, as the Coordinator of Publication. The book also includes a statement by Kazak president Kasım-Jomart Tokayev in the form of an article entitled “Abay ve XXI.yüzyıldaki Kazakistan”, Abay and the XXI century Kazakistan translated by a specialist from International Turkic Academy, Elmira Kaljanova, whose name also been printed as the publication coordinator. However, one cannot refrain from wondering about the organizational issues of content in the book. Categorization of articles according to separate subject headings would have provided the reader with a much clearer understanding of the bigger picture of Abay studies. For example, articles related to Kayum Muhamethanov, who was subjected to a lifelong criticism, prejudice and even some years of imprisonment can be found in the book pages way apart from each other. For example; Tursın Jurtbay’s article about the sufferings of Kayum Muhamethanov can be found in the page 77; Danagul Mahat’s archival study related to ideological accusations of “students and followers of Abay” is in page 323 and Hüseyin Kahraman Mutlu’s article about K.Muhamethanov’s biography can be found in page 409. Broadness of the issues related to Abay studies stem from the caliber of this great men. Therefore it must have been difficult to separate one subject matter from another in designing the content of this book.

Articles published previously by well-known Kazak specialists and academics starting from the Soviet period up until the current times about Abay Kunanbayoğlu’s literary, poetic, philosophical, social and cultural legacy were included in the form of Turkish translations. Another unfortunate shortcoming was the absence of citation of original sources of such earlier works published in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, appreciation of the effort of translation of articles from Kazak into Turkish and bringing together such a big number of articles in the form of a single book, however cumbersome to hold, should be given to the original owner of the project Prof. Nergis Biray, and to other members of the editorial group, Prof. Güljanat Ercilasun and Dr. Soner Sağlam.

Abay Kunanbayev’s legacy and four generations of Kazak intellectuals struggle to keep the Kazakh spirit alive by writing about Abay during the Soviet period as well as their unnerving sufferings as the followers of

Kazakh spiritual, traditional, religious and philosophical champion Abay, can be seen in the translated accounts of Kazakh intellectual into Turkish. As it is a well-known fact by many that Abay Kunanbay's legacy praised by leading Alash intellectuals prior to the Bolshevik revolution. Soviet state utilized such accusation materials against "students of Abay". Starting from the most celebrated Kazakh literary figure Muhtar Avezov to Kayum Muhamethanov, who struggled to keep studying and following to depict the genuine Kazakh literature of the past through using Abay's works continued most of the Soviet era. During the Soviet period, depicting Abay with his translations of Russian poets' works and by his admiration of the Russian literature as the examples of ideas of progress was the most highlighted point. The great Kazakh novelist Muhtar Avezov who wrote a monumental four volume of a novel, *Abay Jolu* (Abay's Path) was not immune to accusations, punishment and repression under the Soviet regime. Under such an ideological pressure, Avezov depicted Abay's father, Kunanbay as a bourgeois feudalist and reactionary personality. Second and third generation of Kazakh intellectuals born well in the midst of the Soviet period and lived up until the independence period studied Abay's works as well. Abay's legacy performed the role of "**volksgeist**" for those Kazakhs to preserve the genuine national identity, spirit, language and all that belong to the Kazak past. During the current millenium now one can witness a new group of young Kazakh intellectuals and academics who began to publish their own research about Abay Kunanbay's legacy and Kazakh heritage through Abay's work with modern methodical scientific approaches and perspectives. Importance of this book lies in the presentation of those works to Turkish public eye and to the attention of academics who want to understand the independent Kazakh national identity and the spirit of millenial Kazak society.

There are a number of encyclopedia's, volumes of book, hundreds if not thousand of articles, many academic thesis written about Abay Kunanbayoglu in Kazakhstan. His poetic ability was remarkable and spread among the lay Kazakh people long before publication of his works and researches about him came to the public eye. This reviewed book opens a window to such publications that appeared in Kazakhstan.

Demise of the Soviet Empire and declaration of independence of Kazakhstan

opened a free way for Kazakhs to roam over the whole world, without any ideological constraints and restrictions inflicted upon them during the Soviet era. Young Kazakhs also came to brotherly Turkey and gained freedom to study in all areas of life. An exchange of interaction also took place between Kazakh and Turkish scholars. Fruits of such an exchange were displayed in the articles written by Turkish scholars who were eager to study and analyze the Kazakh society in depth in this book. As it was stated by the very editor in her introduction of the project, the book aimed to make an important contribution for these two brotherly nations decades long journey to discover each other's literary, cultural, political, social, philosophical and religious worlds further Turkey and Kazakhstan established official diplomatic, cultural, economic, etc ties some three decades ago, yet the gap of their separation goes to an even longer back in the history. Turks in Anatolia and the Turks of Central Asia lived apart from each other for many centuries. This book also is a material result of rejuvenation in discovering the common grounds and origins of their brotherhood.

The future of Kazakh identity and the genuine rights of the Kazakhs in their own indigenous land was one of the questions asked often regarding the newly independent state of Kazakhstan immediately after the demise of Soviet Empire. Native language was the most fundamental root to save their national identity. Heavy russification inflicted upon the native Kazakhs brought them to the brink of extinction after seventy-years long Soviet rule. During those decades, it was the works of Abay and the followers of legacy of this remarkable Kazakh personality that has preserved what was there in the name of historic origins and values. Abay Kunanbay is being depicted as the spiritual forefather of the native Kazakh society and one of the most celebrated figures in the present-day Kazakhstan. This reviewed book is valuable in this aspect as well.

Last, but not the least important point is the official decision to announce commemoration of Abay Kunanbay's 175 Birth anniversary in 2020. An article by the Kazakh president Kasım-Jomart Tokayev published in this book is the evidence of such measure. Official policy of the Kazakh state for this occasion publicized by the very top official authority in the country. Spiritual development goals, further improvement of education of future generations, preservation of national mentality and adjustment of such

mentality to the new age were named as targets of the state of Kazakhstan in launching this campaign. According to president Tokayev Kazakh society will benefit from Abay's legacy as their righteous source and will recognize Abay as the mentor of Kazak national identity. It will deepen the historical consciousness of the Kazakhs and will shape up the spiritual culture of the society in the era of globalization.