

UNFADING IMAGES OF HISTORY

Zhanna Kydyralina. *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia*. Astana: Foliant, 2015. 440 pp. In Russian.

In the modern period of the crisis of civilisation, under the conditions of ideological pluralism, powerful intellectual resources are especially important for the understanding of the responsibility of an individual within society and in the global community. To comprehend the issues related to the future of a nation, and development of a country, we turn to the experience of history and images of a brilliant pleiad of national intelligence from the past.

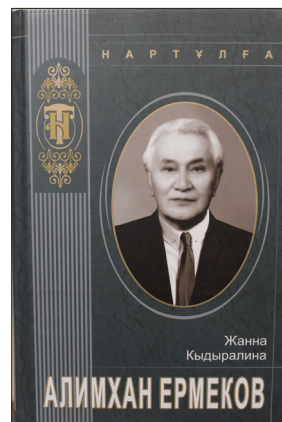
In 2015, the publishing house Foliant in Astana, in the popular series *Nartulgha* (*Vydaiushchiesia lichnosti* (Distinguished personalities)), published a book titled *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia* (*Alimkhan Ermekov: Fate and Time*). The author is Zhanna Kydyralina, Doctor of Historical Science. This new monograph is dedicated to the first Kazakh professor of mathematics – Alimkhan Ermekov (1891–1970), one of the founders of the first Kazakh political party Alash, and a member of the provisional government, Alash Orda.

The history of Alash and its great leaders is truly one of the brightest periods in the national history of the Kazakh people. The appearance of the movement and of the first political party Alash, and the government Alash Orda, signalled an increased civic maturity and the high potential of the Kazakh intellectual and political elite. Under the conditions of acute social conflicts of the early twentieth century, Alash announced its quest to solve the momentous questions of the future development of Kazakh native people. The leaders of Alash raised the national consciousness to the state level. They laid the foundations for the political and socio-economic transformation of modern Kazakhstan. During the Soviet period, the programme and activities of Alash were subjected to total ostracism, labelled as 'bourgeois and nationalist'. The difference of the ideology of Alash from that of the Bolsheviks consisted in denying the class paradigm and defending national positions. The leaders of Alash wanted to achieve the modernisation of Kazakhstan in an evolutionary way – by reform, without bloodshed and violence.

The fight for the preservation of the integrity of the Kazakh territory is a tribute to the tenacity of Alash Orda, which is difficult to overestimate. During Russia's troubled times after the First World War, they were able to clearly and convincingly communicate the right of Kazakhs to their land, which makes up the territory of modern Kazakhstan.

The leaders of Alash enjoyed an unquestionable authority amongst the people. They were talented people whose skills and background complemented each other. They knew several languages, were educators, wrote textbooks, and sought to raise the level of development of the nation to the level of advanced countries, including, for example, Japan.

Under the influence of the great spiritual quest of Alash Orda was a young prominent Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov. This is evidenced by an article titled *Japan*, which he wrote at the age of twenty. At the time, the leaders of Alash were looking for examples of countries that had managed to withstand the expansion into Eurasian space by the



West. And it was Japan, which had carried out the Meiji reforms in 1861, that the young Mukhtar Auezov excitedly analysed in this article, paying particular attention to their educational programmes. Japan had started to send its young people to study in Germany and other European countries. As a result, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan became a nation that knew how to defend its interests. This example was essential for the leaders of Alash Orda. Akhmed Baitursynov (p. 95) says: “We have to be rich, educated and strong. To be rich, you need to have business, to be educated you need to learn, and to be strong, unity is needed.”

This amazing generation of Alash leaders well served as an example for contemporary Kazakh youth in how to harmoniously balance the values of a nomadic civilisation, Islamic culture, and the European model of development, for the progress of the country and the people. They infinitely loved their country and its culture, and tirelessly devoted all their strength and energy to their cause. The great figures of Alash Orda had a deep insight into the world’s problems, were tolerant, read avidly, translated, and were connoisseurs of the world’s spiritual values. Among others, the great Kazakh poet Abay influenced their formation and worldview. Alash leaders were aristocrats of the spirit, but came from a variety of strata. Alimkhan Ermekov was undoubtedly among these outstanding personalities.

Alimkhan Ermekov came from an averagely wealthy family in Karkarala County, He graduated with honours from Semipalatinsk high school and then from Tomsk Polytechnic Institute with the qualification of a mining engineer.

The author of the book has been able to convey to the reader the main feeling – delight from the depth and richness of the inner ‘I’ of the main character. A. Ermekov is presented by Zh. Kydyralina as a bright politician and public figure, a talented personality, who due to tragic circumstances was devoid of opportunities to fully realise his scientific and creative talent, while retaining his loyalty to the national spirit and national values.

Courage, determination, prudence, and statesmanship earned him the recognition and trust of senior leaders from the movement. Young Ermekov negotiated with different political forces and governments on behalf of Alash Orda.

Ermekov was one of the first who stood at the cradle of the Kazakh Soviet statehood. During 1920 in Moscow, in a meeting with V.I. Lenin, chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, A. Ermekov made a report on the situation in Kazakhstan and its borders. Thanks to his initiative, and together with other representatives of the Kazakh elite, he managed to secure the return of ancestral land to the republic, including a number of strategically important territories like Akmolra and Semipalatinsk regions, and the northern coast of the Caspian Sea.

All his life he fought to overcome incredible difficulties. Following the sanctions of the totalitarian regime in the USSR, he spent almost 18 years in prison camps and exile. But nothing broke his will. Even in Stalin’s torture chambers he was bringing the light of knowledge to the people: he instigated a number of disciplines in the high school curriculum for the camp management, and the prisoners in the camp referred to him as Citizen Professor. Alimkhan Ermekov was the author of a textbook on higher mathematics in the Kazakh language, and had considerable experience teaching in a number of leading universities in Almaty.

Any outstanding personality is a product of his time. A major historical figure reveals and explains the modern era. The author of the biography has sought to fully disclose, in all its variety, the social reality of that era. A. Ermekov was supposed to be broken by fate, but was not; he did not lose his spirit, but elevated himself and raised his people in the process.

The talent of the scientist-mathematician, his hard work, the relentless blows of fate, and the inexhaustible power of the spirit – all of this is manifested throughout the book, turning it, in spite of the drama in the hero's life, into a surprisingly good and exciting work.

The reader can perceive the interrelationships in time: the state and society, under different political systems, faced some of the same challenges and problems as today. In the current debate and reflection on various issues of modern development – economic modernisation and the democratisation of public life, reforming of education and culture – images and views on the founders of Alash, who were far ahead of their time, appear in the mind's eye.

The book *Alimkhan Ermekov: Sud'ba i vremia* is written in a highly professional manner and can be read in one breath. The advantage of the book is its clear structure, and the skilful and harmonious combination of different methods of presentation. A series of carefully selected, interchangeable, interesting, and often paradoxical facts combine with striking and instructive examples, which recreate the historical background of the era. The paper highlights the dramatic peripeteias of the fates of the wonderful companions of the leaders of the Kazakh intelligentsia, remarkable men and women who left a bright trace in the history of a nation. The study is based on the solid ground of archival sources, memoirs, and evidence.

The unfading image of Alimkhan Ermekov will remain in the eternal memory of historical canons as an example of selfless service to a nation. The ideas of Alash, the highest moral examples of the people, who were a spiritual pendulum for the nation, live in the memory of generations, and have an impact on their deeds and actions. The spiritual world of Alash is the quintessence of the Kazakh national spirit, and it is among the eternal, immortal values.

Askar Altayev