

## CHAPTER 8

### **Class, Subjecthood, and Ethnicity in a Continental Treaty Port: Gabdulgaziz Munasib's *Taranchi Girl* (1918)**

David BROPHY

Halim Musin is a young Tatar living in the frontier town of Ghulja in the Ili Valley, center of the Muslim Taranchi community of Xinjiang. He works as a clerk (*prikazchik*) for Galiullah, a wealthy merchant who spends much of the year away at trading fairs in Russia, leaving the seventeen-year old entrusted with the day-to-day running of the business. Halim frequents the house of a neighbor, Zaynab Adilakhunova, who is the widow of an imam who served among the Taranchis of neighboring Russian-held Semireche—that part of the Taranchi community which migrated to Russian territory at the conclusion of the Treaty of Saint Petersburg in 1881. Zaynab has a beautiful granddaughter, Jinasta, who has recently returned from Semireche to Ghulja, and immediately attracts Halim's eye. During the courtship, Halim and Jinasta visit a shrine to the martyrs of the anti-Qing rebellion in Ghulja of the 1860s, where they confess their love for each other and pledge to marry. They decide to wait, though, to ask Halim's boss for permission to wed. Months later Galiullah returns from Russia, but is stricken by illness. When he revives, he rejects Halim's request, and instead sends his employee on a trip to Huiyuan 惠遠 (Kürä) for a meeting with Qing officials. While Halim is away, a thief breaks into Zaynab's house, killing Zaynab and Jinasta in the course of the robbery. Halim arrives back in Ghulja just in time to meet the funeral procession. At his interrogation, the villain is revealed to be a Chinese-subject Kashgari, responsible for the murder of a Tatar man the previous year. Upon setting eyes on him, Halim immediately recognizes the man as a specter who had been disturbing his and Jinasta's dreams. In the end, the thief is executed in public outside the gates of Ghulja. Halim is relieved to see the emperor's justice done, but knows that he will never love again.

This is the tragic plot of a Tatar novel set in Ghulja and published in Kazan in 1918, entitled *Taranchi Girl*; or, *Halim's First Love*, by Gabdulgaziz Munasib (1888–1922).<sup>1</sup> The work provides a rare opportunity to discuss how participants in

<sup>1</sup> 'Abdel'aziz Monasib, *Taranchi qızı, yaki Hälimneng Berenche Mähäbbäte* (Kazan: Vasıta Kötebkanäse, 1918). A Cyrillic version was published in *Ädäbi miras* 2 (1992): 125–202.

the world of pre-revolutionary Russian Muslim letters viewed Muslim society in Xinjiang, and the place of Russian Muslims within it. While it is recognized that Tatar and (Western) Turkistani writings provide an important window onto social and intellectual life among the Muslims of Xinjiang in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of this pre-revolutionary corpus consists of brief journalistic accounts, with very few sustained prose works such as Munasib's. And although we have Soviet-period memoirs of the Tatar experience in Ghulja, these represent relatively bloodless and nostalgic reflections on transimperial connections whose political possibilities were well and truly curtailed by the time they were written. As Allen Frank has described, these works tend to reproduce stereotypical narratives about the "Tatar national genius, and its contribution to the enlightenment of eastern peoples."<sup>2</sup> Although *Taranchi Girl* evinces a similar view of the Tatar historical mission, the picture it paints of Muslim society in Ghulja is far from a harmonious scene of pan-Turkic solidarity. Indeed, I argue that it presents a highly skeptical view of the possibility of transmitting the Jadidist reform project to the Muslims of China.

### 1. Munasib and His Work

Gabdulgaziz Munasib was born in 1888 into the family of a muazzin in the Arsk District (now in the north of the Republic of Tatarstan). He headed to China while still in his teens, and from 1902 to 1908 spent six years working in the town of Ghulja (Yining), in western Xinjiang, as a clerk for a local import-export merchant.<sup>3</sup> He then spent three years in Tashkent before returning to Kazan. His time in Ghulja coincided with a period of growth in the local Tatar community, and the opening of the first New Method, or Jadidist, schools. While there he penned a few works of poetry for the Tatar press in Russia, and also sent letters to periodicals such as *Time* (*Waqit*). After returning from Ghulja to Kazan, he wrote reviews for the Jadidist press and published a series of plays, along with literary translations from Russian. By his own account, the idea of writing a novel set in Ghulja occurred to him soon after his return to Kazan, but he only commenced work on it in 1912, and finished it in 1915 (see the Appendix). Owing to censorship restrictions it was not published until 1918, in the midst of the revolution and incipient Civil War. Following the tsar's downfall in February 1917, Munasib served on the executive committee of the All-Russian Muslim Military Council (Harbiy Shura), and was one of the editors of

<sup>2</sup> A. Frank, "Tatar Memoirs of Republican-Era Xinjiang," in *Central Asian Studies: Past, Present, Future*, ed. H. Komatsu et al. (Istanbul: T.C. Maltepe Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011): 465.

<sup>3</sup> Some sources say that he was a teacher, though this would seem to confuse him with a second Munasib, the son of a Semipalatinsk imam who established the first Jadidist school in Tarbaghatai in 1900. See "Chughuchaqdan," *Tarjeman*, April 11, 1900, 99.

its organ *Our Voice* (*Bezneng Tavish*).<sup>4</sup> After the fall of the Volga-Ural Republic, he, like many prominent Tatar activists, fled. He died in 1922 in Tashkent in mysterious circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

That the author saw *Taranchi Girl* through to print at such a crucial point in his own life, and in the life of his emerging Turk-Tatar nation, indicates the significance he invested in it. The novel also occupies an important place from the point of view of Xinjiang's literary history: it may well be the first depiction of social life in Xinjiang in fictional prose form. It is hard to say how widely the novel was read, but it clearly made its way back to the Ili Valley. In 1925, Sabirjan Shakirjanov, a Bashkir school teacher living in Vernyi (today's Almaty) wrote an article on the "History of Uyghur Publishing" for *Voice of the Poor*, the organ of the Bureau of Uyghur Communist Sections.<sup>6</sup> As was typical of the Jadidist "low culture" approach to national construction, Shakirjanov dated the beginnings of the Uyghur literary tradition to the first collections of stories and folksongs by Russian linguists—the linguist Wilhelm Radloff and the tsarist officer Nikolai Pantusov were pioneers in this respect. Yet he also included *Taranchi Girl* in the history of "Uyghur" publishing. This eclectic list of "Uyghur" works reflected the fact that the meaning of the ethnonym "Uyghur" was still being refined: for many, it served simply as a cultural rallying point for all things Muslim and Turkic with links to China, without well defined ethnic connotations.<sup>7</sup> Although for political and linguistic reasons it would soon be cut from it, for the time being it was still possible to include a work like *Taranchi Girl* in the emerging "Uyghur" canon. The book is also mentioned in Galiia Karmysheva's memoirs of the Tatar community in Ghulja, where she gives the impression that she read it as an autobiographical work.<sup>8</sup>

Shakirjanov's article represents one of the earliest efforts to describe a Uyghur literary tradition, but also one of the last before that tradition was constricted by Soviet orthodoxy, which consigned all pre-1917 works to a dark age, and celebrated the transformative impact of the October Revolution. The last reference to *Taranchi Girl* I have found in the Soviet period is from an article by Zarif Bashiri (like Shakirjanov, a long-time collaborator in publishing activities among the Taranchis of

<sup>4</sup> On this body, see C. Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus im Russischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> For some limited biographical details, see G. Tukhvatova, "Khudozhestvennaia kartina mira v tvorchestve Gabdulgaziza Munasypova: Avtoreferat dissertatsii" (Institut iazyka, literatury i iskusstva im. G. Ibragimova, Kazan: 2011); "Gabdulgaziz Munasypov," *Tatarskii mir / Tatar Dönyasi* 8 (2012): 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Kämbäghällär awazi*, May 8, 1925, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Something I discuss in detail in D. Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> G. Karmysheva, *K istorii Tatarskoi intelligentsii 1890–1930-i gody* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004): 289. While Munasib never presents his story as in any way autobiographical, he certainly invokes his own experience at points to lend it greater authenticity.

Semireche) in 1928, drawing an unfavorable comparison between Munasib's work and Ghalimjan Ibragimov's more recent *Kazakh Girl* (1923).<sup>9</sup> After this, Munasib's legacy was implicated in the attack on bourgeois nationalism—in 1931 an article in the leading Tatar literary journal denounced him as an “epigone of the Sultangalievist Fathi Burnash”—and his work was neglected for half a century.<sup>10</sup>

Among scholars of late-imperial Russia, the study of literature has always had a place alongside the analysis of school reform initiatives and the periodical press. Studies of Muslim literature have, naturally enough, dwelt on questions of Russification and the imperial state, or on the cultural critique of Russian Muslim society that these texts embody. To my knowledge there are very few works that deal with the question of Jadidist views of inter-ethnic ties among the various Muslim peoples of Eurasia.<sup>11</sup> This is not an unimportant question, though, particularly when we take into consideration the leading role of the Tatars as intermediaries between the tsarist state and its far-flung Muslim peoples, a role that they continued to play well into the Soviet period, and during the politics of national construction in the 1920s. While there are representatives of imperial authority to be met with in *Taranchi Girl*, both the Russian and Qing Empires linger in the background to the novel's setting in Ghulja, which is almost exclusively a Muslim community. My focus in this chapter, therefore, is on the novel's depiction of the relationship between various elements of this Muslim community. As there are so few reference points for a study such as this, though, I begin here by considering the origins of the genre of *Taranchi Girl*.

## 2. The Genre of *Taranchi Girl*

In 1918 the idea of writing a novel set among the Taranchis in China was new, but using a story of juvenile love, or a young girl to represent the fate of a nation, was by no means an innovation. Indeed, by this time popular Islamic literature centering on the story of young girl, often a princess of some kind, had been circulating for

<sup>9</sup> Z. Bāshiri, “Galimjan Ibragimovni öyrenüv hem ‘Qazaq qızı’ kitabı,” *Bezneng yul* (1928): 24–6.

<sup>10</sup> F. Galimullin, “Uyghurlar häm Tatarlar,” in *Tabigiyilekkä khilaflik: XX gasirning 1920–1930-nchī yellar Tatar ädäbiyatınıñ üsüş üzenchälekläre* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nāshriyatı, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> E. Allworth, “Murder as Metaphor in the First Central Asian Drama,” *Ural-Altai Yearbook* 58 (1986): 65–97; S. Lyons, “Uzbek Historical Fiction and Russian Colonialism, 1918–1936” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1999). On Tajik writers, see Jifí Bečka, “Tajik Literature from the 16th Century to the Present,” in *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. J. Rypka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Co., 1968).

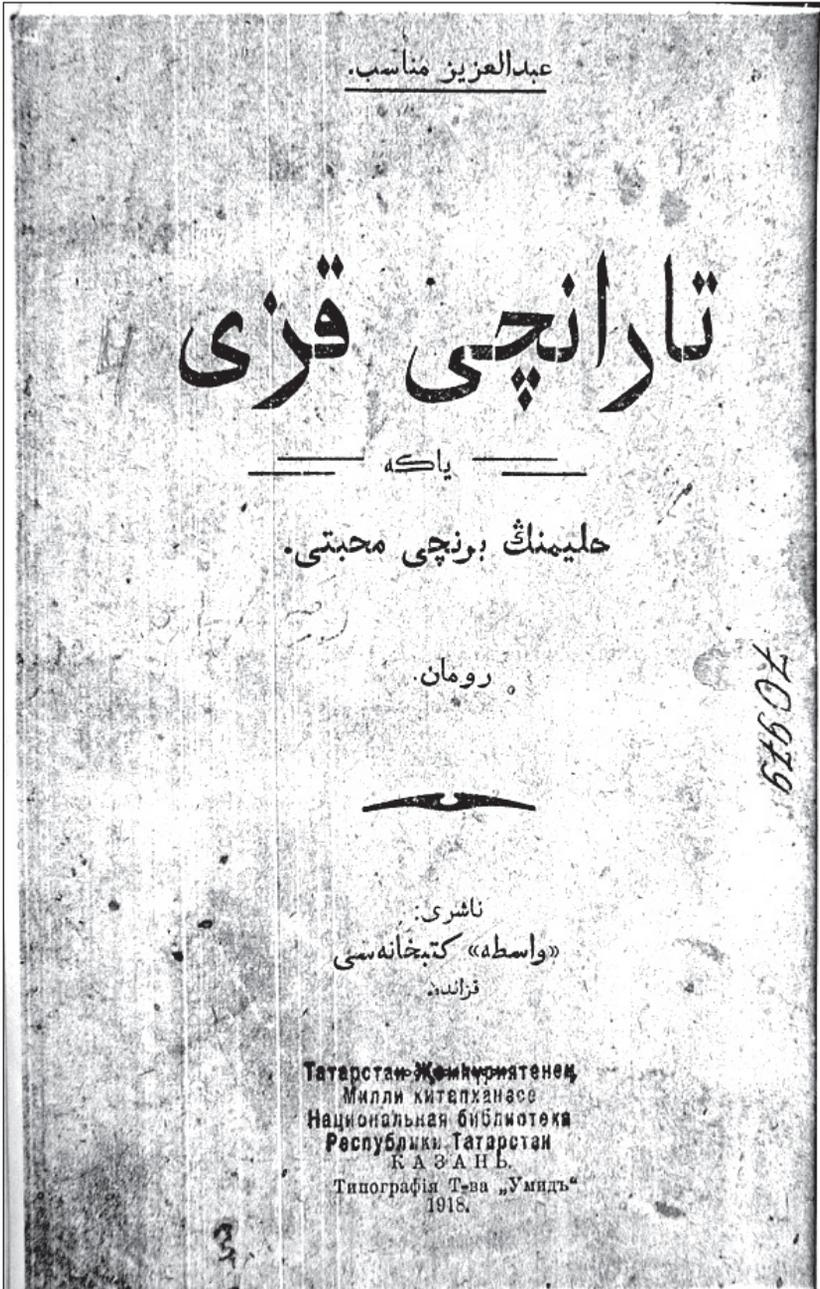


Figure 8. 1. Cover of *Taranchi Girl* (1918)

centuries in manuscript form among the Muslims of Russia.<sup>12</sup> Around the turn of the century, a new wave of plays, poetry, and short prose works with titles featuring a “girl” started appearing in Tatar bookshops, and continued to be written through the Soviet period up until today. The earliest of these works I have found among Tatar authors seems to be Yarullah Vali’s *Bolghar Girl* (1901), and among the most famous is Fatih Amirkhan’s *Tatar Girl* (1909). In many such works, the young girl is not so much the heroine as a body on which forms of social critique are inscribed. Amirkhan’s is an extreme example of this: a critique of veiling and female seclusion in which the girl in question is deliberately kept mute and hidden from view.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Munasib is at pains to emphasize Jinasta’s agency throughout *Taranchi Girl*, insisting, despite her young age, that she was as much the initiator of the romantic courtship as was Halim: “The fact that at the very first meeting she was bold enough to kiss him should suffice to demonstrate that in her feelings and emotions she had reached maturity.” As Munasib explains in an aside, Jinasta’s maturity at the tender age of thirteen was the product of Ghulja’s hot climate (the link between heat and early puberty was a feature of 19th-century thinking about gender in non-European environments).<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, by the time that Munasib was writing, this was a well-established genre. But what were its sources? The young female heroine is certainly not unknown in Russian fiction: Pushkin’s *Captain’s Daughter* comes to mind as one possible archetype. Among the Tatars, though, it seems that the inspiration came primarily via Ottoman writers, who took to the genre about a decade earlier than did Muslims in Russia. Again, it is difficult to establish a firm genealogy here, but the phenomenon clearly owes much to the influence of popular European writings that were translated and read by the Ottoman Empire’s Westernising middle class. Şerif Mardin has described this new trend as the “invasion by the penny novel” of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman letters.<sup>15</sup> Among the most popular of these penny novelists was the French author Xavier de Montépin (1826?–1902), whose works were being rendered into Ottoman Turkish as early as 1872. A number of these works feature young girls: the 1880s, for example, saw the translation of *La Gitane (The Gypsy Girl)* into both Armeno-Turkish (i.e. Turkish in Armenian script) and Ottoman Turkish. In 1888, *La Fille Du Meurtrier (The Murderer’s Daughter)* was translated into Turkish as *Katılın*

<sup>12</sup> See the lengthy discussion of this genre in S. Mardanov, ed. *Qiz hikayate*, Tatar akheografiyase 10 (Kazan: Milli kitap, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> F. Amirkhan, *Tatar qizi* (Kazan: Ürnäk, 1909).

<sup>14</sup> G. Monasıyp, “Taranchi qizi yaki Khälimneng berenche mäkhäbbäte.” *Ädäbi miras* 2 (1992): 151. For discussion of the perceived link between climate and sexual maturity, see M. Peterson, “Precocious Puberty in the Victorian Medical Gaze,” *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 4.2 (2008).

<sup>15</sup> Ş. Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006): 114.

*Kızı*. Through these Ottoman translations, de Montépin's style became popular elsewhere in the Islamic world. In Afghanistan, the reformist intellectual Mahmud Tarzi translated his works (including *La Gitane* and *Les Viveurs de Paris*) from Ottoman into Persian, and these translations in turn inspired the first original Afghan novels.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of popular French novelists such as de Montépin helps account for the strong presence of romantic and melodramatic elements in these stories, and the genre's Ottoman adaptations established precedents that Tatar authors would follow. Stereotypical national traits feature strongly, for example, as a means of characterization in Ahmet Mithat's *Georgian Girl*; or, *Revenge* (1889). Ömer Ali Bey's *Türkmen Girl* (1889) is in some ways very close model for *Taranchi Girl*: set in the mountains of eastern Anatolia, it features the story of Kumru, destined to marry a man she does not love, and who goes through great trials and tribulations before being reunited with her true beloved Ali. The novel seeks to faithfully represent the Türkmen dialect, and at the end of each chapter Ömer Ali adds his own brief ethnographic commentary, features that have led Turkish scholars to identify this work as an early example of the "village novel" (*köy romanı*).<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite obvious similarities across the genre, a shift does seem to take place in its transmission to Russian Muslim intellectual circles. There is, in the Ottoman case, a strong sense of the escapist and exotic in this style of writing, but in Tatar hands it emerges as a preferred genre for engaged literature on pressing social questions. Part of the explanation for this may be the heightened significance of the ethnographic enterprise among Russian Muslims. Among the non-Russian people of the empire, the period saw great interest in compiling folklore and investigating the "archaic" customs of the village as a step toward national cultural revival—to a greater degree, I would hypothesize, than it did among Ottoman intellectuals. Perhaps the most striking example of role that such activities might play among the non-Russian peoples of the empire is the canonization of the *Kalevala*, the ur-text of Finnish nationalism that was compiled from Karelian folklore in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the eyes of Russian administrators, "western" peoples such as the Finns, who had unambiguously established their credentials as nation, stood on a higher rung of social development as the "Eastern" peoples such as the Tatars. Tatar intellectuals were conscious of this distinction, and saw folkloric and ethnographic pursuits as a means of breaking it down. As Gabdullah Tuqay put it, "we can find the true national language, the true national spirit, only in folksongs."<sup>18</sup> By the time this approach

<sup>16</sup> M. Sadat, "The Afghan Experience Reflected in Modern Afghan Fiction (1900–1992)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28.2 (2008): 294.

<sup>17</sup> Ömer Ali Bey Paşabey-zâde, *Türkmen kızı* (Ankara: Kurgan edebiyat, [1889] 2012). See the preface for discussion of the book as a "village novel."

<sup>18</sup> Cited in M. Friderikh (Friederich), *Gabdulla Tukai kak ob'ekt ideologicheskoi bor'by*

took root among the Tatars, they already had the works of people like Wilhelm Radloff to draw on. Sabirjan Shakirjanov's references to Radloff and Pantusov as Uyghur literary pioneers, mentioned earlier, was far from the only example of these authors being invoked as founders of national literature among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Russia.<sup>19</sup>

The oeuvre of Zarif Bashiri (1888–1962) offers a case study of how the romantic and ethnographic was combined in these circles. After a trip to the Chuvash districts neighboring his native Kazan, Bashiri wrote two works: an ethnography simply titled *The Chuvash* (1909), as well as a romantic short story, *Ānisā, the Chuvash Girl* (1910).<sup>20</sup> The purpose of ethnography, Bashiri wrote in the introduction to *The Chuvash*, was to fill the blank pages of history, so that “each people living on the face of the earth would recognize one another, know who each other is, and be informed of their past and present circumstances.” In a sense, we see here the same interest in cataloguing the peoples of the world that drove the Russian academy's earliest ethnographic expeditions into Siberia, though Bashiri brought to this approach some distinctively Jadidist interests.<sup>21</sup> In analyzing the ethnogenesis of the Chuvash, for example, his priority was to determine whether or not they had been Muslims in the past (he concluded that they had). Apart from this, his book included sections on language, sayings and stories, the Chuvash economy, festivals, handicrafts, religion, hospitality, and marriage and child raising. In the companion work *Ānisā, the Chuvash Girl*, Bashiri tells of a friendship, which blooms into an impossible love, between a Tatar Muslim boy and a Chuvash Christian girl. Along the way, he engages in digressions on Chuvash housing, wedding festivals, and their spiritual bond as a people with the forest. While the Tatar boy grows up into a Jadidist man of letters, Ānisā remains a “wandering forest girl,” wasting away at the tragic failure of their cross-cultural love—and eventually killing herself.<sup>22</sup>

Such interests brought these Jadidist intellectuals into contact with Orientalists and folklorists in the Russian and European academies. Bashiri's investigations

(Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2011): 161.

<sup>19</sup> As Friederich points out, Bartol'd was the one and only non-Tatar writer that Gabdullah Tuqay included in his 1911 textbook of Tatar. See *Ibid.*, 143–4.

<sup>20</sup> Bāshiri, *Chuvashlar* (Orenburg: Karimof, Hösäynof, 1909); “Chuvash qızı Ānisā,” in *Saylanma äsärklär*, ed. R. Zäydulla (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap nāshriyatı, 2014): 303–402. Bashiri continued to publish works on the Chuvash into the Soviet period, e.g. *Chuvash ädäbiyatı* (Kazan: Tatgosizdat, 1928).

<sup>21</sup> On the origins of ethnography among the peoples of the Russian Empire, see H. Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Many more works in this genre could be cited, e.g. M. Ghafuri, “Bolghar qızı Aysılu,” in *Shuraneng tel yarışi*, ed. R. Fākhreddin. (Orenburg, 1910): 85–7. Gali Rafiqi's stories set among the Kirghiz also share these themes. See S. Mamytov, *Kyrgyzsko-tatarskie literaturnye sviazi vtoroi poloviny XIX–nachala XX vekov* (Bishkek: Muras, 1999): 142–3.

among the Chuvash coincided with the work of the Hungarian folklorist Mészáros Gyula, a leading theorist of Turanism (an ideology premised on racial kinship between the Turkic and Uralo-Altaic peoples) and an avid collector of Chuvash folksongs. Mészáros encouraged Bashiri to continue his work among his own people, the Mishars, a distinct estate group among the Turkic-speaking Muslims of the Volga region. Mészáros confirmed Bashiri's view of historiography: "Every nation's history," he told the author, "is produced by investigating their customs and morals that have survived from the past, and their language and way of life."<sup>23</sup> In Bashiri's resulting study of the Mishars, published in the Jadidist journal *The Council* (*Shura*) in 1912, the Mishars display a number of praiseworthy qualities: they are avid readers, excel in trade ("the equal of the Jews"), and are prolific mosque builders. Yet they also display some worrying negative traits: he finds among them a troubling level of Russification, and the rich fritter away their wealth on holiday feasts. The work evinces a social Darwinist view of the nation as an organism, in which the wealthy and prosperous represent its healthiest elements, and the poor and indigent a symptom of disease. Particularly significant for a reading of *Taranchi Girl* is Bashiri's emphasis on the corrosive effect of the demimonde on national vitality: "there are two things that ruin the honor, reputation, and worth of a nation: one is the proliferation of beggars, the second is prostitution."<sup>24</sup> Diagnosing such illnesses was essential for Jadidist writers if the people in question were to avoid "decline" or "extinction" (*inqirāz*).<sup>25</sup>

Gabdulgaziz Munasib's writing on the Taranchis stands squarely in this tradition, and he clearly intended his novel as a contribution to ethnography as much as a moving love story. In the preface he points out that he originally intended to include in his book a set of Taranchi songs, with musical notations, as well as illustrations of the historical sites that he describes, but was ultimately unable to do so. Nevertheless, he expressed the hope that his work would inspire further research among the Taranchis, bringing in its wake an anticipated national revival: "Although not numerically great, the Taranchis belong to one of the most quick-witted and progressive branches of the Turk-Tatar nation. Yet their lives, and even a little of their history, customs, and traditions, are still as unfamiliar to us as the depths of the ocean. Those few things that have been written about them in the journal *The Council* are, as far as I can tell, simply a drop in this ocean. It is essential that we investigate the life-ways, customs, and traditions of the Taranchis."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bāshiri, "Mishārlār," in *Saylanma äsärlär*: 276.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>25</sup> On the discourse of decline among Tatar writers, see D. Ross, "The Nation that Might Not Be: The Role of Iskhāqi's Extinction after Two Hundred Years in the Popularization of Kazan Tatar National Identity Among the 'Ulama Sons and Shakirds of the Volga-Ural Region, 1904–1917," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012): 341–69.

<sup>26</sup> Monasīyp, "Taranchī qızı": 127.

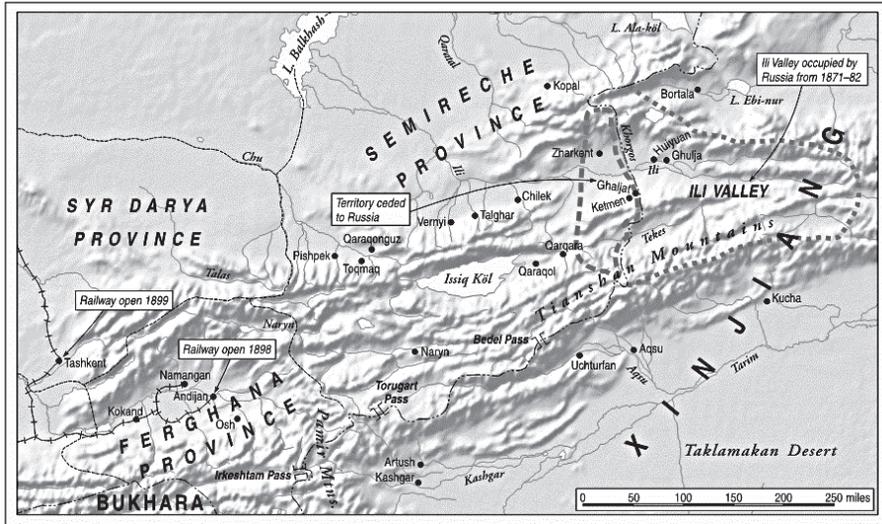
### 3. History and Identity in *Taranchi Girl*

As part of his ethnographic mission, Munasib took an interest in the origins of the Taranchi community, and derives his narration of Taranchi history from local stories circulating in Ghulja. These show interesting variations from more scholarly versions. Briefly, the term “Taranchi” refers to the community of settled Turkic-speaking Muslims of the Ili Valley, a largely rural community that first came into being through the policy of the Junghar Mongols in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to promote agriculture in the region by transplanting peasants from the Tarim Basin. The Qing continued this practice after its conquest of Xinjiang in the 1750s, both for developmental and punitive reasons. In the 1860s, the Muslim rebellion in China and Xinjiang led to the proclamation of an independent Taranchi Sultanate, but the valley soon came under Russian occupation.<sup>27</sup> When the Russians withdrew in 1881, the Taranchis were offered the option of moving to neighboring Russian-held Semireche, an option that the majority took up. As competition for land in Semireche intensified, some of these immigrants returned to Chinese territory (and eventually to Qing subjecthood), leaving the Taranchis divided on either side of the Russia-China border. Meanwhile, to make up for the loss of population in Ghulja, the 1880s and 1890s saw a new migration from the Tarim Basin to the Ili Valley—a population known generically as “Kashgaris.” Kashgaris came to the north of Xinjiang not only seeking land; they also took up work in mines and fledgling local industrial enterprises, and spread out along the roads as cart drivers and peddlers. By the time that Munasib was working in Ghulja, these recent arrivals from the south made up the majority of the town’s population.<sup>28</sup>

Munasib provides a highly idiosyncratic account of the origins of the Taranchis, departing in significant ways from the conventional narrative I have just outlined. As he tells it, the original Taranchi settlement of the Ili Valley was not a forced migration or punishment for rebellion, but one that was invited by the Chinese (*Khiṭāy*), who offered incentives for peasants from southern Xinjiang to move north. The better class of society refused, and only indigent “gamblers” (*qumarbāz*) took up the invitation, on the condition that the Chinese would provide them with wives. The Chinese obliged, procuring wives from wealthy families who were happy to

<sup>27</sup> H. Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia 1864–1877* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> S. Fedorov, “Russkaia torgovlia v Kul’dzhe (Donesenie konsula v Kul’dzhe),” *Sbornik konsul’skikh donesenii* 9.5 (1906): 377, gives a figure of 4,800 households and 8,000 individual “Kashgari Sarts” in Ghulja, compared with only 3,250 households of Taranchis. It was not only in the north of Xinjiang that the poor Kashgari migrant was a distinct feature of the social scene. Such was the case in Russian Turkistan too, where many accounts describe the impoverished position of the Kashgari hired hand, who crossed the border looking for work in increasing numbers each year.



Map 8.1. The Ili Valley and the Russo-Qing Frontier, Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

give up their daughters in return for being rid of the disruptive presence of the “gamblers.”<sup>29</sup> By blending these social groups, the gambler riff-raff were transformed into a prosperous people: “a hardworking, spirited, and capable new tribe (*qabīla*) was born!” Munasib depicts this period of Taranchi ethnogenesis as no less than a golden age, in which crime and disease were unknown, the streets were clean, the houses full of happy and healthy children, and the pasture land bursting with fat livestock.<sup>30</sup> So successful were the Taranchis in their new environment, in fact, that the Chinese feared they were laying the foundations for future independence. To curtail this threat, they sent the Manchus to enslave them.

Munasib’s depiction of the relationship between the Chinese and Manchus is confusing, though still worth trying to interpret. He sets up a contrast here between a relatively laissez-faire Chinese rule, and the punishing exactions of the Manchus. This seems to involve a historical inversion. The recent evolution of Qing Xinjiang was of course not from Chinese rule to Manchu, but the reverse—from Manchu dominance to Chinese (consolidated by the policy of provincialization in the 1880s). Or if, as may be the case, we have here a distorted memory of the transition from Junghar Mongol to Qing rule, then the story is equally back-to-front: it was the Junghars that treated the Taranchis as serfs, while during the Qing most were technically peasants enrolled in Muslim agricultural colonies (*Huitun* 回屯). In any

<sup>29</sup> This narration may contain an echo of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Qing marriage drafts, conducted for the Mongol, Sibe, and Solon soldiers who were sent to Ili to garrison the frontier.

<sup>30</sup> Monasīyp, “Taranchī qīzi”: 154.

case, the effect of Munasib's narrative is to pin the blame for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century decline of the Taranchis on the Manchus (and not the Chinese). Although Munasib is aware that the Manchus belong to the same race as the ruling dynasty of China, these local Manchus are good-for-nothing opium addicts. Their wanton impositions drove the Taranchis to a primitive state: "It reached the point that the Taranchis were forbidden to wear clothes made from anything but sheepskin."<sup>31</sup> This downward slide continued until the Dungans invited the Taranchis to join them in a rebellion against the Qing, which they did willingly.

The great Muslim rebellion of the 1860s, and its physical legacy, plays an important role in the background to *Taranchi Girl*. The novel begins with this strident dedication: "To the spirit of the Taranchi heroes, who were martyred in the course of liberating their own people from the tyranny of others, and freeing their lands from being trampled beneath the grubby feet of foreigners." At one point, the author spells out in blunt fashion the national allegory that motivates his work. Halim, looking at Jinasta, sees in her the fighting spirit of the Taranchi people: "Halim thought she was a spirit, the spirit of the Taranchi heroes (*fidā'ī*) who were martyred for the sake of the liberation and freedom of the Taranchi Turks."<sup>32</sup> The novel's fourth section contains a lengthy account of the rebellion, including a version of the legend of Sadir Palvan. Here, Sadir is described as a highwayman hiding out in the mountains of Ili, who is eventually caught and exiled to Beijing, but returns to Ghulja during the uprising to mastermind the siege of Bayandai.<sup>33</sup> The presence of such conspicuous evocations of the Taranchi rebellion of the 1860s allows a straightforward Turkic-nationalist, anti-Chinese reading of Munasib's text. In the face of this historic conflict, Munasib presents the possibility of harmonious union between the Turkic peoples by telling the story of love between the young Tatar boy and the Taranchi girl. Any cultural boundaries here are easily overcome: Halim speaks the Taranchi dialect fluently, and once their romance begins, Jinasta sets about learning Tatar.

Yet having painted the backdrop to his story in terms of this long-standing conflict between Taranchis and the Manchus/Chinese, the narrative itself allows quite divergent readings. Munasib has little positive to say about the short-lived period of Taranchi independence, describing the sultan as naïve and his advisors as incompetent. Among the locals, the events of the 1860s seem to be of declining interest, and on his trip to the garrison town of Huiyuan, Halim travels past battlefields that the Taranchis have all but forgotten. Although the Chinese are depicted as tyrants in the abstract, the Qing officials of the day are not. These are remote from everyday

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>33</sup> Sadir Palvan's pivotal role in the siege of Bayandai features in other versions of the legend, though his previous exile to Beijing does not. A comparison of the various retellings of his story would no doubt prove interesting.

life in Ghulja, and are primarily men with whom to do business. Halim's trip to Huiyuan is the first depiction of Qing authority we find in the book, and the low-ranking Qing official with whom he meets (a *galai da*, Ch. *yizhang* 翼長, conventionally translated as "brigadier") is a polite functionary who speaks the Taranchi language fluently. The second intrusion of the Qing state into the story is in the final execution scene, where Jinasta's killer is beheaded. Here Munasib dwells on the grisly details, describing Chinese corporal punishment in a fetishizing way, clearly echoing a European fascination with oriental torture techniques. Yet the punishment, in Halim's eyes, is just.

More revealing than his meeting with Qing officialdom is a second encounter that takes place on Halim's trip to Huiyuan. He reaches the town late, and lodges outside the city gates with a "Chinese" acquaintance. His host turns out to be the son of a Qing official who served in Ili before the Taranchi rebellion. While his father presumably perished in the fighting, he and his mother survived by converting to Islam. This "new Muslim," as such converts were known, took a Taranchi wife, and married his children to Taranchis. While his mother had since apostatized, he continued to raise his own children as Muslims, and he greets Halim "with true Taranchi hospitality."<sup>34</sup> In the eldest son of the family, the teenage Halim finds his intellectual equal, and the two spend the night engrossed in a literary exchange. Halim introduces his new friend to the lyrics of Tatar avant-garde authors such as Gabdullah Tuqay and Majid Ghafuri, while his companion draws on a classical Central Asian repertoire, reciting the poetry of Alisher Navai and Sufi Allahyar, and regaling Halim with stories from the epic *Shahnama*. The representative of the living Turkistani tradition in *Taranchi Girl*, therefore, is not a typical member of Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking Muslim community, but the offspring of a mixed marriage involving a recently converted Manchu.

Along with affirming the salutary effects of racial mixing, Halim's encounter with this crypto-Muslim family presents an optimistic view of the inroads that Islam was making in China—itsself a trope of modernist Muslim discussions of the Far East. This discourse can be traced back to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sinological appraisals of the relative vitality of China's religions. In the 1860s the Russian Sinologist Vasilii Vasiliev put forward the idea that the ongoing Muslim rebellions indicated the strength of Islam in China, contrasting this with the lethargy of China's dominant Buddhist and Confucian civilizations. This led him to the conclusion that China was on the way to becoming a Muslim country, a prediction that soon made its way into missionary writings on Islam in China, and eventually to Turkophone discourse in both the Ottoman Empire and Russia.<sup>35</sup>

While evidently sympathetic to the Taranchi traditions of resistance to infidel

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>35</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*: 47–8, 132.

rule, therefore, Munasib is a long way from offering a critique of Qing, or Chinese, colonialism. The elements of Munasib's work sketched out here establish a degree of common ground between Russian Muslims and the Qing elite, and set in stark relief the author's highly critical depiction of the Kashgaris, most obviously in the form of the novel's villain, the Chinese-subject Kashgari criminal. This man, Turdi Akhun by name, stalks the narrative throughout; disfigured by a brand for his past crimes, he has not only been haunting the streets of Ghulja for years, but also enters Halim and Jinasta's dreams. Other Kashgaris in the story occupy equally undesirable positions: for example, the mean folk who serve tea and food beside the road to travelers going between Ghulja and Huiyuan. When Halim stops among these Kashgaris for refreshments, they serve him bread on a dirty tray and tea in a filthy teapot, an experience that disgusts him. Unlike the Taranchis, these Kashgaris lack a distinct group identity and seemingly lack any national traditions worth exploring: for Munasib they are simply "Sarts who had migrated from Kashgar, known as 'Kashgarliks.'"<sup>36</sup> The hooded executioner in gaudy red dress at the end of the novel is also a Kashgari, though in this case the author seems to hesitate at the depiction: just before the axe falls, a second man emerges, who "in his bearing and conduct demonstrated that he was Chinese," and carries out the sentence of death.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, class prejudice is a major part of Munasib's treatment of the Kashgaris. China, in Munasib's eyes, was a society in which a Manchu-Chinese elite had risen to the top, with Kashgaris at the bottom, and his sympathies evidently lay with the former. The second dividing line that bears consideration here is subjecthood, and the way in which the position of living along the border interfered with politics as usual. A reader of the radical press, Halim considers himself a Socialist-Revolutionary (SR), the type of young Tatar who would be unlikely to socialize with Tsarist authorities in Russia. Yet within the compact community of Russian subjects he participates in the rituals of communal life, including paying courtesy visits to the Imperial Russian Consul. Most importantly, Jinasta is also a member of this in-group of tsarist subjects: she belongs to the community of Taranchis who migrated to Russia in the 1880s, and retains the status of Russian subject while living in Ghulja. The Kashgari, as a poor Chinese subject, is therefore doubly excluded from this community. As one of the few Chinese subjects present in the novel, in some ways he becomes a representative not only of the Muslims of Xinjiang, but of China itself.

I should point out that this Russo-centric perspective was not necessarily hegemonic among the Tatar community of Ghulja. It is interesting, for example, to compare Munasib's outlook with that of Gabdullah Bubi, a Tatar religious scholar who in 1914 fled to Ghulja from wartime Russia. Bubi's writings on Ghulja, unfortunately still in manuscript form, contain a wealth of observations on local

<sup>36</sup> Monasīyp, "Taranchī qīzi": 178.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.



**Figure 8. 2. “Gamblers” in Suiding, Ili Valley, 1910.**

Photograph by George E. Morrison. State Library of New South Wales [a1788091h].

society from an educated Russian Muslim point of view. These reflect his interests in educational reform and the woman question, but also provide vignettes of the various peoples inhabiting the cosmopolitan Ili Valley. For Bubi, the omnipresent Kashgari peddler was evidence of that people’s impressive industriousness. He drew, that is to say, precisely the opposite conclusion to Munasib. “They are a hardworking people,” he writes. “They never stay in one place, but go out into vacant lands and start planting things: apples, pears, grapes, melons, watermelons... and there are many of them selling these things everywhere. They’re the people who serve tea and cook food at the waystations. I hear that all along the route from Ghulja to Peking, they’re the ones doing this at every stop.” This, for Bubi, made a positive contrast to what he saw as the incorrigibly lazy Taranchi peasant—a contrast that he explained in terms of the Taranchis’ unique history of agricultural servitude during the Qing.<sup>38</sup>

Yet despite this example to the contrary, there is I think reason to believe that Munasib’s view of the Kashgaris is representative of widely held opinions in his day. This is reflected, I believe, in Munasib’s idiosyncratic narration of Taranchi history, described above, which he claims to have drawn from local accounts. Recall that here, too, it was the south of Xinjiang that was the source of undesirable social

<sup>38</sup> Gh. Bubi, “Bu niqadār yalqawliq? (1914)” in *Öch tomliq saylanma äsärälär 2* (Manuscript, Nikolai Lobachevskii Library, Kazan): 151a–152b.

elements. The original migrants from Kashgar, who evolved into the Taranchis, were referred to as “gamblers,” or *qumarbāz*. In Munasib’s day, the term *qumarbāz* referred to members of secret societies in Xinjiang (hence the British use of the term “Gamblers” to refer to anti-Qing rebels in 1911–2), but more broadly served as a catchall term for Xinjiang’s floating indigent population (see Figure 7. 2.), precisely the type exemplified by the thief and killer Turdi Akhun in Munasib’s story. In this way, we might speculate, the social fault lines of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Ghulja, and prevailing prejudices towards migrants from Kashgar, were deeply enough ingrained to be read back into the narration of the region’s past.

## Conclusion

As I have argued, *Taranchi Girl* outlines a community circumscribed by class and the privileged position of the Russian subject in China. Munasib’s work highlights the fact, obvious enough but often neglected, that the meeting between the Muslims of Russia and the Muslims of Xinjiang in the province’s treaty ports was just as much a colonial encounter as was the foreign presence in China’s coastal treaty ports. Currents of Islamic reformism such as Jadidism, along with their mercantile carriers, are sometimes depicted as classically transnational, easily evading and subverting categories of identity imposed by non-Muslim empires. But along the Russia-China border, the privileges that Russian subjects enjoyed created a society highly conscious of imperial belonging.

Naturally there are limits to the type of historical conclusions we can draw from lone literary works. One particular difficulty in reading *Taranchi Girl* is that Muslim politics was evolving rapidly in this period, and fixing the novel in time is hard. Should it be read as an artifact of 1902–8, when Munasib was living in Ghulja? Of 1912–5, when it was actually written? Or of post-revolutionary 1918, when it was published? Munasib asks his readers to forgive the work’s defects, which he says were inevitable in light of the strict censorship that was in place when he was writing. What does he mean by this? Is the novel’s strongly Russo-centric, anti-Kashgari tone in some way a product of the censorship environment, which permitted expressions of community among Muslim subjects of the tsar, but prevented anything that hinted at pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic solidarity? This is a possibility, but the novel’s preface shows that even in the “age of freedom” of 1918, Munasib continued to place his hopes for national revival on collaboration between the Tatars and the Russified elite among the Taranchi community—the same alliance represented by Halim and Jinasta in *Taranchi Girl*. Here Munasib calls on his friends and acquaintances who were conversant with intellectual life of Russian Muslims, to carry on the task of investigating the customs and traditions of the Taranchis: men such as Husayn Beg Yunusov, the Islamic scholar Ma’ruf Masudi, and the Jadidists Nazarkhoja

Abdusamadov and Muhammad Imin Zaynalov.

Coming from the pen of a leading activist in the Volga-Ural Republic, this roll-call gives us an insight into what Munasib perceived as an Ili Valley constituency for this Kazan-centered initiative. Yet by the time of his book's publication any such network was already in disarray, and divided into opposing political camps. In early 1918 Yunusov and Mas'udi were among the Taranchis who mobilized against the establishment of Soviet rule in Vernyi: in the ensuing repression Yunusov made good his escape to Ghulja, but Mas'udi was killed. Yunusov took his printing press with him to Ghulja, and in collaboration with the White émigrés played a prominent role in local and provincial politics until the 1930s. Zaynalov (d. 1926) was a Taranchi Jadidist from Semireche who likewise fled to Ghulja in 1918; there he headed a circle of progressives whose sympathies gradually evolved from pro-Turkish militancy to wary collaboration with the Bolsheviks, but he himself never set foot in the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Of Munasib's list, Abdusamadov (who took the pen-name "Uyghur child") was the only one who became active in Soviet Uyghur politics. During the turn to collectivization and cultural revolution in the mid-1920s, he bore the brunt of anti-Jadidist criticism among the Taranchis, and joined his fellow exiles in Ghulja in 1928.

Although in this sense it was already past its time in 1918, *Taranchi Girl* nevertheless helps us to appreciate certain dynamics of Soviet Uyghur politics of the 1920s. It reminds us that as much as Tatar (and indeed Taranchi) activists partook of ideas of trans-imperial racial unity at the time of the Russian Revolution, the most radical among them (young men such as Halim) mostly belonged to the wing of Russian social democracy that perceived the revolution as an exclusively Russian affair—that is to say, as members or sympathizers of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). The novel highlights the social gulf along the Russia-China frontier that divided such self-styled "progressives" from the ubiquitous Kashgari laborers and bazaar dealers. In doing so it predicts the difficulties in the 1920s of uniting the Russian-subject Taranchis and Chinese-subject Kashgaris into common Uyghur political organizations—a feature of the fractious politics of Soviet Turkistan.

<sup>39</sup> A brief biography of Zaynalov is given in T. F., "Muhämmäd Imin Zäynalof," *Kämbäghällär awazi*, July 10, 1925, 3.

**Appendix: Foreword to *Taranchi Girl***

*Dedicated to the spirit of the Taranchi heroes, who were martyred in the course of liberating their people from the tyranny of others, and freeing their lands from being trampled beneath the grubby feet of foreigners.*

**A Few Words by Way of Introduction**

Although the idea of writing *Taranchi Girl* occurred to me in 1911 when I came to Kazan, the situation up until the end of 1912 did not present me with an opportunity to make a start. In the end I set about writing this work in December of 1912. At the time I commenced, my intention was to publish a few pictures depicting the lives of the Taranchis in the Ili region, and one or two Taranchi songs with notation, but although I asked some friends in Ghulja for illustrations from photographs of the “Ruins of Bayandai” and the “Shrine of the Martyrs,” I couldn’t get hold of them. On top of this, certain other circumstances prevented me from finishing the novel until the outbreak of the Great European War.

Although this novel was completed around the middle of 1915, given the difficulties of publishing in those days I had to abandon the task of seeing it into print. Now, though, the world of letters has bid a decisive farewell to that period of disruption, and although publishing still remains difficult, it was decided to publish *Taranchi Girl* without illustrations or musical notations.

Naturally, a lot of defects will be found in the novel, and passages that are not appropriate for the present age of freedom. Nevertheless, I regard fixing up something that has already been written as akin to sewing patches on a piece of clothing, and I have not altered its original form. As for its defects, I hope that readers will forgive me, and attribute these to the fact that it was written three years ago, during the reign of Nicholas II, when his censors who were known for their inquisitions sat at the head of the publishing industry in Kazan.

As for what is written in the novel about the Taranchis, I have not copied these words from anywhere, but have simply written down what I heard and retained in my memory from the years 1902 to 1908, when I myself lived among the Taranchis. Acknowledging this, I have not checked whether what I heard was correct or not with reference to scientific works. My thought was simply this: What is written in these scientific works, and the things that have appeared in the press about the Taranchis, won’t go away. Why don’t I set down what I know of things that haven’t yet appeared in print?

Although not numerically great, the Taranchis belong to one of the most quick-witted and progressive branches of the Turk-Tatar nation. Yet their lives, and

even a little of their history, customs, and traditions, are still as unfamiliar to us as the depths of the ocean. Those few things that have been written about them in the journal *The Council* are, as far as I can tell, simply a drop in this ocean.

It is essential that we investigate the life-ways, customs, and traditions of the Taranchis I look forward to such investigations from Taranchi intellectuals such as Maʻruf al-Maʻsudi, Qasimkhan Yoldashev, Nazarkhoja Abdu[sama]dov, and my friends Husayn Beg Yunusov and Muhammad Imin Zaynalov, as well as from those young Tatars who have taken up residence among the Taranchis.

— Gabdulgaziz Munasib, Kazan, May, 1918