

Living in the 1920s – A Tatar Diary from Äji, Kasimov and Samarqand

Michael Friederich

Introduction

Khäsan Sadiq ughly Urmanov was born in 1904 in the Tatar village Äji¹ (in Russian “Azeevo”) in Ryazan province, about 300 kilometres southeast of Moscow. He received his higher education in Kasimov, and after having finished school there, he left for Uzbekistan in 1927. He worked there as an employee in public administration. He died in Samarqand in 1986.

In the summer of 1922 he started to write a diary, which he continued until the end of May 1928. A brief supplement is concerned with the years 1936 and 1937. In the end we find a genealogy, which dates back to the 1720s on both, the father’s, and the mother’s side. The notes are handwritten in Arabic script; the language is Tatar. They contain about 40 pages of approximately A4 size. The notes are not a diary in the strict sense, but rather a “monthly”, sometimes several months are summarized under one entry.

Judging by the uniform shape of the handwriting, the original notes were copied at some later time. Khäsan’s daughter Mudrikä confirmed that her father used the Arabic script for private notes in Tatar until his death.

I received a copy of the diary from Mudrikä Khäsanovna when I met her the first time in Samarqand in November 2002 during my research on the history and present state of the Volga Tatar diaspora.² Mudrikä was born in Samarqand in August 1930; she retired in 2000, having served as long-time director of the archaeological museum in this city. During the Soviet period she visited the native place of her parents, Äji, several times. In 2002 she was the only member of her family still residing in Uzbekistan; her parents and her elder brother had

¹ Information on the history of Äji and the socio-economic situation of this very particular Tatar village until the mid-1920s can be found in Ibrahim Räxmättullah uyli Urmanov: *Äji tarixinä materjallar*, [Äji], January 1923 (unpublished manuscript in Arabic script, Library of Kazan State University, Manuscript-Collection, Call no.: 2487 T); Allajar Beläšof: *Äji avly xaqynda*, Kazan 1924; “Mustafa”: “Tambof gubirnasindä musulman avyllary”, *Vaqit* no. 1384 = 8.1.1914. Cf. also Michael Friederich: “Büfettiers und Bucharisten – Von Tataren, die auszogen, das Glück in der Fremde zu suchen” (forthcoming).

² This research project was funded for three years (March 2002 to February 2005) by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and headed by Professor Klaus Kreiser, Turkic Studies, Bamberg University, Germany. It attempts to depict the origin and the development of Volga Tatar diaspora communities in general, and focuses on Turkestan/ Uzbekistan.

died and her children all moved to Russia (before or after the collapse of the Soviet Union) in order to ensure a better living. Mudrikä herself is sad about the emigration of Tatars from Samarkand and Tashkent, where she used to have many friends, claiming that nowadays in Uzbekistan there no longer exists Tatar intellectual life but only reanimated Tatar folklore.

What are Khäsän Sadiq ughly's notes about? Can they be regarded as a source of collective or personal memory, and if so, what kind of past do they represent? Khäsän's notes deal with a past of more than 70 years ago. During these seven decades his notes could not have been a resource. This became possible only after the intervention of the researcher, a fact, which also sheds light on the interdependency between researcher and the subject of research. Khäsän's notes could not be a resource simply because they were written in the Arabic script, which, due to the repeated script changes initiated by the Soviet authorities during the early decades of the Soviet Union, none of his children and grandchildren are able to read.³ His notes became a resource for private memory as soon as I converted them into Cyrillic script, thereby rendering them intelligible for his offspring. For this – in the literal sense – deciphering of the past I was rewarded not only with words of thanks but also with a prayer and supplications at the grave of the deceased – which were meant to be a resource for my future.

A diary – for the sake of simplicity I will call it that – apparently is a text written merely for private use. Khäsän wrote and kept his diary only for his children and his family. He never intended to have it published. The literary style of the notes could hardly be simpler: apart from some dialect expressions there is no “difficult vocabulary”; sentences with complex structure are lacking, and metaphors and flowery style are very rarely used.

The content of the diary corresponds to its linguistic and stylistic approach. For me, this correspondence came as a surprise. It was a surprise because I had expected that a diary written for private use only, would give insight into the personal perception of the time. There is no doubt that the era covered in the diary – the 1920s – was a turbulent time in the history of the Soviet Union: civil war, famine, repeated restructuring of the economic and societal life, “nationalism”, national delimitation and indigenization, mass migrations – to name only the most important and crucial issues,⁴ which, of course, also had repercussions for

³ For script changes among the Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in general and the Volga Tatars in particular see Ingeborg Baldauf: *Schriftreform und Schriftwechsel bei den muslimischen Russland- und Sowjettürken (1850-1937)*. Budapest 1993.

⁴ Scientific literature on these issues is abundant. Among the most important are Orlando Figes: *Die Tragödie eines Volkes. Die Epoche der Russischen Revolution 1891 bis 1924*. Berlin 1998; Geoffrey Hosking: *A History of the Soviet Union* (revised edition). London 1990; *Russia in the Era of NEP*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinovitch and Richard Stites. Bloomington 1991; Robert Conquest: *The Harvest of Sorrow. Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. New York 1986; Richard Lorenz: *Sozialgeschichte der Sowjetunion 1*,

the Tatar region and within the Tatar community. But radical changes took place not only in the “big, objective history” of this time, but also in the “small, subjective history” of the diary’s author: he left his native land in order to build a new life in a foreign environment, in Uzbekistan. What if not such kind of event is worth being reflected in a diary?

In this paper I shall consider Khäsän’s diary in terms of its relationship to the past. My considerations might challenge some of the accepted wisdom of scholarship on Soviet history – namely the argument that in the early Soviet period all aspects of life were thoroughly “ideologized”, from “above” as well as from “below”.

The Diary

My expectations regarding the diary were based on the widespread opinion that in the Soviet Union all aspects of life were thoroughly influenced by politics and ideology. This opinion was not only continuously claimed by official Soviet propaganda and expressed in Soviet newspapers, journals and belles-lettres, it was also enthusiastically embraced by the western scholarly literature on the Soviet Union, in the writings of critics of the Soviet system (in internal as well as in external emigration), and in a large number of memoirs, diaries and autobiographies published after the collapse of the USSR.⁵

The diary of Khäsän Sadiq ullah Urmanov does not verify this attitude. It depicts the picture of a modest and somehow self-constrained life. This life, at least as far as it is described in the diary, showed hardly any interest in big societal issues; it rather tried to keep politics at a distance, seeking instead personal happiness.

It is difficult to trace the impact of “big history”. What the author of the diary wrote about his juvenile attempts to write poetry applies to his diary, too:

March 1925, Kasimov. [...] I began to compose poems about the past. For the most part I write about Rabighä [his future wife], about nature and about my own life. If sometime somebody will read what I wrote he might laugh – but well, I like this pastime very much.⁶

Major political, economic and social events and their implications for private life are hardly mentioned in the diary. And when they are, then only briefly and incidentally. To give just one example: the summer of 1922, when crop failure in

1917-1945. Frankfurt/ Main 1981; Terry Martin: *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalities in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca 2001.

⁵ For literature on this cf. the publications mentioned in footnote 30 and 31.

⁶ 1925enči jyl, mart, Qasim. [...] ütkänlärni ğyr iteb jaza başladym. Kübräk Rabıjä turysynda, tabıyät turysynda, üzemney tormyşym xaqynnda jazalyjymyn. Ber vaqitni keşilär şul jazularni uqyb možit bit köldälär – nu miya şul eš bik jaxşı kiärenä.

the Volga region led to a hitherto unknown famine and caused the death of an estimated five million people,⁷ is rendered by the following words only:

It was the years of famine. We harvested the grain ourselves, together with Khösäyin. We had become real peasants. We began to understand how one has to work.⁸

Elsewhere it is only implied that “big politics” also touched upon the “small family” and had some impact on it:

We left Kasimov on December 29 [1923] and arrived in Äji in the evening of the same day. Our arrival was sad. And it was even sadder because we did not know what had happened to [my] older brother Ghabdirrakhman. Instead of being received with joy we were received with tears. Above all [my] mother and Aunt Mahiyä were crying all the time. [...] Because of these events we had a lot of difficulties. I don’t note them but keep them in my memory. [...] It would not have been a surprise, if the things which had happened to [my] older brother Ghabdirrakhman, had forced us to quit school.⁹

In the summer of 1925 it is again his older brother Ghabdirrakhman who causes trouble for the Urmanov family. In September 1925 Khäsän goes to Moscow to see Ghabdirrakhman, who lived there most of the time. Ghabdirrakhman is not there. Khäsän searches for him, also visiting different prisons in Moscow – apparently it seemed reasonable to assume that he was arrested – but is not able to find him. So Khäsän immediately leaves Moscow for the village where Ghabdirrakhman’s wife, Aunt Mahiyä, is visiting her parents:

Aunt Mahiyä did not know that something had happened. I told her about the situation. Without considering it for long we decided to send Aunt Mahiyä off to Tashkent.¹⁰

In November of the same year the Urmanov family in Äji receives good news from Tashkent:

We celebrated the anniversary of the October Revolution joyfully. In these days I also received a letter from [my] older brother Ghabdirrakhman. He is absolutely safe now.

⁷ Cf., e.g., Orlando Figes: *Die Tragödie eines Volkes. Die Epoche der Russischen Revolution 1891 bis 1924*. Berlin 1998. 818–820. The first newspaper article in the Central Asian Turkic press to deal with the famine in the Volga region appeared in July 1921 (Abu Turjut [= Käbir Bäker]: “Idel bujynda ačlıq vä aña jardäm”, *Qızıl Bajraq* no. 78 = 15 July 1921). According to the figures given in *Qızıl Bajraq* in April 1922, between October 1921 and March 1922 790,561 Russians and 160,324 Tatars fled the famine-struck regions along the Volga for Turkestan (no. 163 = 13 April 1922).

⁸ *Ačlyq jillari idi. Xösäjin belän igänni üzəbez ešli idek. Čyn kristijanlar buldyq. Eşnej tärtilenä dä töşünä başladıq.*

⁹ 29ynda *Qasimdan* čyypb šul kön kič belän Ägigä killek. Kiliürebəz kүjelsez buldi. Täbdirraxman abzyjnyj berdän čyypb qaljan vaqiyäsi bezgä mäylüm bulmayanyä bigräk dä avyr buldi. Bezni şad-lanyb qarşı alı urnına gylanlar belän qarşı aldylar. Xosusän änä belän Mahijä däügiyi ǵylab qynä toralar idi. [...] Bu eślär belän küb kenaq qyjynčylyqlar kürergä tuyri kildi. Alarnı jazyb utyrmyjmyň, isendä genä totarmyn. [...] Täbdirraxman abzyjnyj vaqiyäsi bezney uquni tuqtatsa da yäğäb tigel idi.

¹⁰ *Mahijä däügiynej eşdän bič xäbäri juq idi. Min ajarı xälni süjläb birdem. Küb uylamyjčä Mahijä däügiyi Taşkändgä ozatryyä buldyq.*

His case is not frightening any more. Fayzullah Khojayev [himself] has dealt with his case and issued the following order: 'This case is not dangerous, get it done fast, and set Urmanov free'.¹¹

The diary does not provide any information on what Ghabdirakhman was doing in Moscow, what had happened to him there, why he went to Uzbekistan, and how he managed his life there. If it is true that Fayzullah Khojayev himself took care of Ghabdirakhman's case, it is unlikely that it was only a minor problem: at that time Khojayev was chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars in Uzbekistan.

Only incidentally and as if it were the most natural thing, the diary tells us that Aunt Mahiyä left for Tashkent, apparently to escape possible difficulties in her home town. But she is neither the first nor the only friend of the author to leave Äji for Central Asia:

On August 1, [1924], we set Äminä on her way to Bukhara. [...] As she left, she was crying heavily. It was very hard for us. As if she would never come back. The hard life [here] has forced her to leave.¹²

When talking about his own departure to Uzbekistan in January 1927, Khäsän Sadiq ugly does not show even the little sympathy with which he depicted Äminä's farewell. As if he had no personal feelings about it, he states in plain words:

Since I did not have to go to the army, I considered going to Bukhara where Ghabdirakhman was living. We received a letter from him in which he invited [us] to come. So mother and I decided to go to Bukhara. We celebrated the New Year [1927] in Äji, stayed there on New Year's Day and left for Bukhara on January 3. [...] Mother and I arrived in Bukhara in January. Ghabdirakhman greeted us with great effusion.¹³

Incidentally one learns that Tatar families from Äji, the Urmanovs being one of them, maintained "networks" – to use a modern phrase – in what was to become Uzbekistan following the national delimitation of Central Asia:¹⁴

¹¹ *Oktabr bäräm lären şadlab ütkärdek, şul könlärdä Fäbdirraxman abzyjdan xat aldyn. Ul indi tä-mam tynyçlarjan. Esi qurqynelyi tügel ikän. Fäjzulla Xuğajef anyy eşi belän tanyşyb – bu eş apasni tügel, tizräk qarayyz da Urmanefsiň buşatayz digän.*

¹² *Berençä auyustda Äminäni Buxarayä ozatdyq. [...] Kitkändä bïk ęylädi. Bezgä bïk aýyr buldi. Gójä ul indi qajyb kilmäs. Aýyr tornyş ani kitergä mägbür itdi.*

¹³ *Armijaya barmyj toryan bulyaç Buxarayä Fäbdirraxman abzyj janina kitärgä uyladym. Aýardan xat aldyq ul čapryb jazyan. Şulaj iteb bez äni belän Buxarayä kitä toryan buldyyq. Jaya jylni Äğıda qarşı aýb, bärämni ütkärdeb janvarnyy 3ençä könendä uq äni belän Buxarayä kitdek. [...] Janvarda äni belän Buxarayä kildek. Fäbdirraxman abzyj bezni bïk dä qarşı aldi.*

¹⁴ In the pre-1917 Tatar press there are many pieces of news on Tatars from Äji residing in Central Asia and the Kazakh steppe. One interesting aspect of this news is that the articles stress the attachment and commitment of these people to their native village, expressed, for example, by donations they made for schools and mosques back home (e.g. an article in *Vaqit* no. 1485 = 14 May 1914 with the significant heading "Tuyan ilen onytmauçylar" (Those who do not forget their native place)). This sense of belonging is hardly found in

August 1924: [Äminä] left to stay with her elder brother Fatikh [in Bukhara].¹⁵

April 1925, Kasimov. [...] The last days of April already belonged to spring; everywhere is beautiful and green. Lovely fragrances are emanating from the gardens full of flowers. [...] During those happy days I received a sad message from home. Uncle Ghabdulla, our relative who was living in Bukhara, has passed away.¹⁶

The last quotation shows one characteristic subject of Khäsän Sadiq ughly's diary. He talks, or rather writes, a lot about nature. Descriptions of nature, notes on the weather, the vegetation and seasonal occupations can be found in nearly every entry of his diary. It is mainly in this context that he intersperses information on cultural and societal issues:

April 1924, Kasimov. Already in the beginning of April the days got warmer and the snow started to melt quickly. Water is rushing along the streets. The days are bright and warm. [...] Today, April 6, the ice on the Oka broke and began to drift away. When the ice is breaking, it makes a sound like a cannon being fired. After one or two days the ice drift became stronger. It is very beautiful to watch. The ice was drifting for one week. Then all the ice on the Oka was gone. The water rose rapidly. Around [April] 15 the water had risen so high that it caused a flood. The Oka breached its banks and flooded its surroundings. Ships started traveling the Oka again. On [April] 17 the first ship left Kasimov for Ryazan. I went there and watched. On [April] 18 and 19 it became really warm. The temperature reached 25 degrees. People took advantage of the beauties of nature and went out into the streets to go for a walk. Alas, the people of Kasimov are city people; going out in the streets, strolling around is their old-time habit they won't give up. Young and old people are walking around in pairs.¹⁷

July 1924, [in] Äji again. This year the grain harvest is not very good. People are moaning. Besides, there are frequent quarrels between neighbouring Russian villages and the [Tatar] people from Äji about meadows and pastures. On July 15 a big quarrel took place between the villages of Bulanqä and Äji. The people from Äji drove the Russians away from the meadows and pastures and killed one of them. A commission to investigate this event came from Ryazan. A lot of people were taken to court, sentenced and imprisoned. I hold the dignitaries from Äji responsible for this event. If people had

news concerning Tatars of other places of origin, e.g. Kasimov Tatars, living in Central Asia.

¹⁵ 1924enči jyl, avgust. [Äminä Buxarayä]brati Fatix abzyj janina kitdi.

¹⁶ 1925enči jyl, april, Qasim: [...] Aprilneý aqtyq könläri bötnäläj jazyjä oxşyj bär jirdä maturlyq, jäsellek, čäcäklärl belän tulyan baççalardan xuş islär kilä, [...] Sundiy şadlyqli könlärdä üjdän qajyly xäbär aldym. Buxarada beznay ölkän abzyjbyz – Gäbdulla abzyj väfat bulyan.

¹⁷ 1924enči jyl, april, Qasim. Aprilneý başlarında uq könlär gylý bulyb kitdi qar bik tiz eri başladı. Uramlarda şalyrab su aya. Kön jaqtı, gylý. [...] Bugün 6nči aprelde Oqada buz vatylyb aya başladı. Buz vatylyanda puşqadan atqan şikelli tarýş bula ikän. Ber iki kön ütkäč buz aynı köçäjdi. Bu kürenenç bik matur bula ikän. Ber atna buz aýyb tordi. Soy Oqanyj östi buzdan arçyldi. Su bik tiz küttarelä başladı. 15lärendä su bik küttareleb taşqyn buldi. Oqa biriklarından čyzzb tirä jaqni su basdi. Oqada paraxodlar göri başladilar. 17ençisendä Qasimdan Räzängä berenç paraxod kitdi. Min baryb qarab tordym. 19-18laryndä könlär bik gylý bulyb kitdi. Gylý 25 yradusqä ğitdi keşilär tabiýatneý maturlyyndan sajdalaryb uramlaryä jörergä čyza başladilar. Qasim xalqi bit - şäbär xalqi. Alar iski yadat bujynçä uramya čyzzb yulät itmäslär bulmi. Jäslär qartlar - par-par bulyb yulät iteb görilär.

stuck to what the government said, this event would not have happened. But the people were not informed about this. In Äji there are persons who incite the people. Out of those who have been thrown into prison I know Uncle Asuq Salikh and Mäliqä Äkhmäd. The Mälis had urged me too to beat up the Russians. Luckily, I did not go there. Otherwise I would have got into trouble too. [...] Towards the end of July the weather became very nice. People started to work hard; they began harvesting rye and wheat and making hay. Those were happy times.¹⁸

October, November, December 1927, Samarqand. In October it suddenly became cold. It is raining a lot. Towards the end of the month it started to snow. In this region normally there is no snow at all, and if it does snow, there is only a little snow. But now it was snowing heavily. For the Uzbeks, especially the people in the villages, who are not accustomed to this, the situation became more and more difficult. They were complaining about us, saying 'You brought the cold here from Russia'. Since there is no wood to make a fire, the houses stay cold. The temperature dropped to 20 degrees below zero.¹⁹

Personal assessments, ideas and feelings can be found throughout the diary. Mostly they are kept short and are difficult to evaluate in the written context only. Sometimes they are expressed in a solemn and mature tone, which does not seem to be in line with the author's youth.

January 1925, Äji. Now we have entered the year [19]25. I have passed the twentieth year of my life; life is becoming shorter.²⁰

October 1925, Kasimov. [...] The days are warm. I make use of them strolling along the banks of the Oka. The forests near the Oka make me think of Äji. I watch the forest [here] and remember my childhood in Äji – playing, laughing, and running around. And I see [myself] sitting on my parents' shoulders, spending the days without worries. Ah, that was a precious time!²¹

¹⁸ 1924enči jyl, ijl. Jänä Äji. Bu jyl ašlyqlar bik jaxši tügel. Xalıq şuňa zarlana anyň östinä kürši uryş avylları belän Ägi xalqi arasynda čalu östendän geş qynä talaşular bula. 15enči ijlidä Bulanqä avyli belän Ägi tarafynda zur talaş buldi. Ägi xalqi urysslarnı čaludan qudilar berär keşilären üter-dilär dä, bu eślärni küreş üčün Räzändän sod kildi. Küp keşilärni sodni iteb türmägä alyb kitidlär. Bu eślardä min Ägi törälären yäjiblimen. Ägär xalıq xökümätnej äjtkänini qilsa idi bu eślär bulmas idi. Xalıqyä şuni töşendermilär. Ägidä şundiy keşilär bar alar xalıqni qotrytyb görilär. Sod min bel-gäulärdän Asuq Salix abzyjni, Mäliqä Äxmädni türmägä utyrtıdilar. Malilar mini dä čaqyrıyan idilär, urysslarnı qyňuaryä, jaxši barmadym, min şul bälägä eläger idem. [...] Ijulney axrynda bava bik jaxši buldi. Xalıq ašyryb ešli, aryş, buydaj uru, pečän čabu eślari başlandı. Kütjelli idi şul vaqylar.

¹⁹ 1927nči jyl, oktabr, nojabr, dikäbr, Sämärqänd. Ujlanmayan girdän oktabrdä bava suvyq bula başladı. Jayyylar da jaýyb ala. Aj axyrına qar javdı. Bu jaqda qar jaýy bič bulmyj, bulsa da bik az şynä jaýa, ä xazyr qar küb javdı. Buja ijränämägän üzbik xalqi, xosusän qyšlaq xalqi qyňala başıldılar. Suvyqni Rasijädän alyb kildegez díb bezni uruşalar. Jayaryä utyn bulmayaryä üjlär suvyq, salqyn 20 yradusqä gitdi.

²⁰ 1925enči jyl, janvar, Ägi. Munä 25enči jyl da kildi. Min indi 20 jašdän ütdem, yomür qysqara bara.

²¹ 1925enči jyl, oktabr, Qasim. [...] Könüllär ǵyli, jaxši vaqytadan fajdalanyb Oqa bujyna jörergä baramyn. Oqanyň tiräsendägi urmanlar Ägini iskä töşerä. Şularyä qarab balalyyymda Ägidä toryanyymni, uýnab köleb jörgänemni iskä alamyn qajı belmi ata-ana ǵilkäsendä raxätläneb kön kiçerülär küz aldymda tora. Ux qäderli idi şul vaqylar!

December 1925, Kasimov. [...] So now the year [19]25 has also passed. That is, a quarter of the twentieth century has passed. Be blessed, year [19]25!²²

The diary seems to be authentic. This can also be seen by the fact that apparently contradictory statements on the same topic have not been altered afterwards but remain in the text. Here is only one example, “learning and working”:

One has to finish school, roll up one’s sleeves and start to work. It is not good to study forever.²³ (September 1925)

But, about one month later: “The most important thing is to study!”²⁴

Such contradictions are simply the result of the changing attitudes of one and the same individual over time, and are part and parcel of the human condition.

From July 1924 one single subject dominates the diary: the relationship between the author and his future wife Rabighä. The depiction of their friendship and love takes up much more space in the diary than any other subject. Their story begins in 1924. Khäsän is 20 years old at that time; Rabighä is five years older than he. They have known each other from early childhood on. During the summer holidays of that year they meet in Äji.

July 1924, written in Äji. [...] My life was filled with sorrow in those days. Loneliness was hard to bear, and so I tried to find a girlfriend. There were many who told me ‘Let me be your girlfriend; let’s go out together’, but I grasped very well that they were only joking. Until now I had not found a real girlfriend. At that time I met Rabighä. Without thinking about it too much, I solved my problem. I was freed from painful thoughts. Rabighä knew me well; she understood what was going on with me. It was a pleasure for me to be together with her. Although it was still early to [think of] marriage, I was ready to tie my future to Rabighä’s. In the beginning I was shy and felt ashamed in front of her. I am not sure, maybe because she was a little older [than me] I used to call her ‘Aunt’ [...]. But as soon as I noticed that it was true friendship on her side, I regarded us as equal, and our relationship became like one between adults. I made it my holy duty to visit Rabighä every day in the evening after work was over, talk with her and make plans for the future together. What especially pleased me was that Rabighä did not reject my proposals. It became harder and harder for me to separate from her. Those were precious days.²⁵

²² 1925enči jyl, dikäb, *Qasim*. [...] Muna indi 25enči jyl da üteb kitdi. Dimäk 20enči yäserney čirigi ütdi. 25enči jilyä sälävät!

²³ [...] mäktäbni betergäč gýj syzyanyb eškä kerešergä kiräk mängilek uquči bulyb toryryä jarami. *Uquryä* yynä kiräk.

²⁴ 1924enči jyl, iżul. Äğidä jazyldi. [...] Bu könlärdä mini qajyly tormyš ezi idi. Jalyzlyq bik azyr, şunyj üčün üzimä dost keşí qarab jörä idim. Dost bulanyň dib jör digänlär kiib, lakin min alarnyň köli kenä ajtäknären tiüsünä idim. Cyn dost taba alyanyň juq. Şul arada aldyma Rabiyä kileb basdy. Min kiib ujlamasdan bu avyr mäsäläni gisib [?] jubardym. Avyr xijallärdän qotuldym. Rabiyä mini jaxşı belä idi, minem fikremni alyjy idi, anyy belän bergä bulu mijä şaqlyq kiterä idi. Äli tormyš tözergä irtäräk bulsa da, min kiläčägenmi Rabiyä belän bájlärgä razi idem. Baştaraq min ajardan ojalyb jöri idem. Belmädem jaşı mindän az zurraq bulyaryä, [...] min ajari ‘täťäj’ dib äjtä idem. Ajarda çyn dostlyq barlyy sizgäč, üzimä tiň küreb zurlarčä munasábätdä buldy.

From now on the two of them meet every day, and soon they reveal their love for each other. They spend a happy time together. Repeatedly they meet secretly in the evening to separate only at dawn.

It started to become dark. We were sitting side-by-side talking. Our friendship knew no limits. We did not commit any impropriety; we only did what is written about the doings of lovers in books. The taste of love was within our reach. [...] There were a lot of nights like this one. I won't write about all of them. I conceal them from my reader and keep them in my heart.²⁶

Their shared happiness is soon interrupted. Already in September of the same year Rabighä leaves her native village of Äji and goes to Bukhara. Surprisingly – since they had promised each other marriage – Khäsän neither writes anything about the reasons why Rabighä left nor about her departure. He does not even mention the day of her departure. For more than two years, until January 1927 when Khäsän himself leaves for Uzbekistan, they do not see each other, but they stay in contact through letters to each other. At the end of February 1927 they get married in Samarqand. Rabighä is working there at the Central Executive Committee and Khäsän, too, has found himself a job as well as an apartment for both of them. Looking back, Khäsän writes:

March 1927, Samarqand. [...] These events look like a dream to me. Four, five years ago I had fallen in love with Rabighä. Although we lived several years separated from each other, we did not change our plan. And finally it happened the way we had hoped it would. After we started living together, we began to care for the necessities of life. We learned the rules of living together.²⁷

At the end of January 1928, Rabighä returns to her mother in Äji to give birth to her first child. On March 3 her first son, Muyässär, is born. At the end of May 1928 mother and son are back in Samarqand again. Khäsän is happy.

I can't take my eyes off our son Muyässär. I am looking at him all the time. He is the greatest delight of my life. [...] In those days I couldn't think about anything else. Rabighä and Muyässär filled out all my existence. They were the only ones I was thinking about. After Rabighä's return we reorganized our life. Now we are a real family; we are one person more. Now there is no time left for grief and suffering. [...] After

Här kön, eš betkäč, kič belän Rabiyä janina baru minem izgi borgym idı, anyň belän sijläšeň, kilä-čäkdägi planlarnı tözä idek. Min zur quvanyčym şul idiki – Rabiyä min äjtkängä qarşı kilmi idı. Ajardan ajrylyb kitü miňa bik azyr bula idı. Qäderli idı şul könlär.

²⁶ *Qararyp bula başladı. Bez janaşta ulyryp sijläşäbez. Dostlyqnyň igi-čigi juq idı. Ädäb da'ıräsendän čyqmicha ýynä bez dä kitablardı jazylyan yaşıq-märyşuqälarnyň fryellären qylmyj qalmyj idek. Mu-häbbätnej tämiň beznej qulda idı. [...] Şündyj kiçälär bik küb buldi. Barysynda jazyb tormyjymyn, oquçimdan jääserel jörägemdä saqlaryny.*

²⁷ *1927nči jyl, mart, Sämärqänd. [...] Bu eślär töş kebek kürenä bundan 5-4 jyl elek min Rabiyäni sijjä başladym. Kitib jyllar ajrylyb torsaq da ujlayan nijätebezni taşlamadyq. Axyri nijätebez bez ujlayan-ča čyqdi. Bergä bulyač tormyş üçün kiräk närsälärni ǵyja başladıq. Tormyş qayidälärini üjrenä idek.*

Rabighä started working again, we hired a nice girl called Claudia to take care of Muyässär. That was a time when I was satisfied with my life a thousand-fold.²⁸

With these words the diary ends.

Conclusion

In a diary, *everything* has meaning: the weather, the prosaic details of life, the political event, memory, the sequence of time itself. We believe that the essence of a diary is the space of tension between different – often heterogeneous – times, between the personal, the intimate, sometimes the bodily, and the social.²⁹

This view is put forward by the editors of an anthology titled *Intimacy and Terror*, published in 1995, containing Russian autobiographical writings from the 1930s. If this view is correct, what then is the meaning of Khäsän Sadiq ughly Urmanov's notes? Or, to put it more simply, what do these notes tell us? What is or might be their value?

Concerning the last question, one can offer a very simple, but on no account trivial answer: his notes do have value and meaning for those members of his family who are still alive, namely his daughter and his grandchildren. The diary gives them the opportunity to remember their father or grandfather and enables them to learn about his youth. Since at least the older ones among his offspring can remember stories told by him or about him, they might understand those parts of the diary, which remain vague or unintelligible to outsiders but fill in many gaps for them. For the members of his family the diary therefore is not only of emotional value but also a source of information. That is, for them it is without doubt a resource for understanding their own past.

The question whether this diary is of value for outsiders is more problematic. It is even more so because comparable texts are lacking. At least I myself am not aware of any Tatar diaries written for the personal use of private individuals during the 1920s.³⁰

²⁸ 1928nči jyl, maj, Sämärgänd. [...] Minem xäjatemdä zur quvanyč bulyan uylabyz Mujässärdän küzenni almyj qarab toramyn. [...] Šul vaqytda min bašqa närsä xaqynda uylamyj idem. Fäqät Rabiyä, Mujässär minem vogudymni totryan id. Alarni yynä uyljy idem. Rabiyä qajtqač tornyş-ybyzni rätlädek. Bez indi čyn simja buldyq, ber ǵanyä artdyq. Indi xazyr moylanyb, qajyryb görergä vaqyt juq. [...] Rabiyä eškä kergäč Mujässärnä qarar üçün jaxşı yynä Qlaudija digän ber ǵyzni xemätkä aldyq. Tornyşlarymä meylärčä razi bulyb toryan čaglarym idı šul vaqytlar.

²⁹ *Intimacy and Terror*, edited by Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Luhusen. New York 1995. xiv (Editors' Introduction).

³⁰ An exception to this is the diary of a certain Gabdulla Gali uly Räxmättullin (1896-1938) kept in 1928 when he was living in a village called Nalasa, Arča region, Tatarstan. A short excerpt from this dairy was published in the journal *Газылар авазы/ Эх о веков* (1/2.2003. 259-262) under the title "Arča rajonynyň Nalasa avly 1928 jylда". This diary resembles Urmanovs' in some aspects: short sentences, succinct formulation, lack of metaphors, a lot of talk about weather and nature.

But I would argue that the diary does have considerable value. At first glance there are some small but important pieces of information that are difficult to find in other sources: on Tatar cultural life in Kasimov, on the school system there, on relations between nationalities, on daily life in the Tatar village Äji and its contacts with the outside world (especially with Moscow and Bukhara), on the life and work of Tatars in Uzbekistan – to name only the most important points. A researcher interested in Tatar cultural and social history might regret that information on these subjects is only sparse. However, I don't think it is appropriate to expect this kind of information from a diary written for private use within the family.

Since the late 1980s a huge number of memoirs, diaries and similar personal writings have been published in Russia.³¹ Soon after, scholarly research on these publications also began. This research focuses mainly on the 1930s, in part also on the 1920s; the main subjects of its contents are matters of subjectivity; this approach has its roots mainly in literary and textual studies. The most prominent representatives of this research are Jochen Hellbeck and Igor Halfin. Both have published various articles and monographs on this topic, e.g. “Wo finde ich mein Spiegelbild? – Soziale Identität im sowjetischen Stalinismus der dreißiger Jahre” (Hellbeck), “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)” (Hellbeck), “Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia” (Hellbeck), “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts” (Hellbeck), “The Diary between Literature and History: A Historian's Critical Response” (Hellbeck), “From Darkness to Light: Student Communist Autobiography During NÉP” (Halfin), *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Halfin), *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Halfin).³²

The “self”, the “soul” of the authors, their attitudes towards the Soviet political and ideological system – often presented as a simple dichotomy ‘affirmation versus dissent’ –, and the personal development of the authors are the main points Hellbeck, Halfin and other researchers were looking for and dealing with in their research. Apparently the texts they were studying can be analyzed and

³¹ For a general overview consult Irina Paperno: “Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience.” *Kritika* Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 2002). 577-610; *id.*: “What Can Be Done with Diaries?” *The Russian Review* Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2004). 561-573; Catriona Kelly: “Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Chronicles of the Quotidian in Russia and the Soviet Union.” *Kritika* Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 2002). 631-651.

³² Published in this order in: *bios* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1994). 149-164; *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* Vol. 44, No. 3 (1996). 344-373; *Kritika* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 2000). 71-97; *The Russian Review* Vol. 60, No. 3 (July 2001). 340-359; *The Russian Review* Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2004). 621-629; *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* Vol. 45, No. 2 (1997). 210-236; Pittsburgh 2000; Cambridge 2003.

interpreted in this respect. But doing so means treating these texts as “letters claiming personal responsibility”.³³

This kind of approach and interpretation does not seem appropriate for the diary of Khäsän Sadiq ughly Urmanov. In contrast to the texts Hellbeck and Halfin have been working with, in Khäsän Sadiq ughly’s notes it is difficult to figure out a “subjective self” that is positioning itself towards an environment imbued and determined by politics and ideology. Apart from one or two exceptions, Khäsän Sadiq ughly does not make a connection between the main framework of the state or the major political events and himself, but only mentions them. “Are we not reading totalitarianism the way totalitarianism, itself, would ‘want’ to be read?” – this suggestion, put forward by Eric Naiman with regard to the research of Halfin and Hellbeck,³⁴ is not valid for the notes of Khäsän Sadiq ughly.

And it is precisely this apparent “absence of politics” which gives value to his notes. Could it not be that this diary gives evidence of a life, which, although in many ways influenced by historical events, was not fundamentally imbued by politics and ideology – the life of the renowned “masses”, that is the ordinary people, who happened to be Soviet citizens too?

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³³ A critical appreciation and assessment of this approach can be found in Eric Naiman: “On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them.” *The Russian Review* Vol. 60, No. 2 (July 2001). 307-315.

³⁴ Naiman 2001: 311.

³⁵ Pen names are put in quotation marks.

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