



**HAL**  
open science

## Making political rebellion "primitive": the 1916 Rebellion in the Kazakh steppes in a long-term perspective (1840s-1930s)

Xavier Hallez, Isabelle Ohayon

### ► To cite this version:

Xavier Hallez, Isabelle Ohayon. Making political rebellion "primitive": the 1916 Rebellion in the Kazakh steppes in a long-term perspective (1840s-1930s). Manchester University Press. The Central Asian Revolt of 1916. A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution, Manchester University Press, pp.256-288, 2019, 978-1-5261-2942-0. halshs-02568166

**HAL Id: halshs-02568166**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02568166>**

Submitted on 16 Jan 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Making political rebellion "primitive": the 1916 Rebellion in the Kazakh steppes in long-term perspective (1840s-1930s)

Xavier Hallez  
Isabelle Ohayon

### Introduction

Since the 1920s an extensive historiographical corpus (syntheses, testimonies from participants, anthologies) has been published on the 1916 revolt in the Kazakh steppes.<sup>1</sup> Even though many studies dealt with local events, the revolt was primarily examined within a larger historical context through three frames of reference: the 1916 rebellion across Russian Central Asia, the Kazakh struggle for national or People's liberation, underway since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, for more recent studies, World War I.

In this study, the revolt is examined within the framework of a long history of opposition that pitted the Kazakh society against the Russian State, and then the Soviet State. This study chronicles three significant historical sequences of violence against the ruling authorities in the Turgaï region (in nowadays Kazakhstan's Aktobe and Kustanaï *oblast'*): the 1838-1847 war led by Kenesary Kasymov, a descendant of the last khan from the three Kazakh hordes, the 1916 rebellion *per se* and the 1929-1931 insurgencies that confronted a population of herders and farmers, who would not comply with the requisition rules of collectivisation, to a predatory Soviet State. We ruled out analysing the issue through the angle of national liberation, which views the events as a long-term process leading to the Revolution, the building of a Kazakh nation or the creation of Kazakhstan. Instead, we chose to follow Korine Amacher's lead and her studies of the Russian revolts: "It is of the utmost importance to avoid viewing the history of revolts and revolutionary movements in Russia as portents of an inevitable revolution."<sup>2</sup>

A connection between these three revolts that lasted for nearly a hundred years from the Russian colonisation to the second wave of Sovietisation was maintained by the thread of collective memory and its sets of references to previous experiences and narratives. An analysis of the past insurgencies and how the Kazakhs used their experience during each of these three sequences in

---

1 Aïnagul' Nurseitova, Aliia Saïdembæeva, *Istoriia Kazakhstana (s drevnejshikh vremen do nachala XX veka: Bilbiograficheskiï ukazatel'* (Almaty: Mektep, 2008), 135-142; Cloé Drieu, "L'impact de la Première Guerre mondiale en Asie centrale: des révoltes de 1916 aux enjeux politiques et scientifiques de leur historiographie", *Histoire@Politique* 22 (2014): 175-193.

2 Korine Amacher, *La Russie 1598-1917: Révoltes et mouvements révolutionnaires* (Gollio: Infolio éditions, 2011), 9

order to create modes of action and political references reveals both continuity and rupture. The main focus of this research is placed on the evolution of the Kazakh society through its population, and not through speeches and initiatives spearheaded by an educated elite from Russian institutions and madrasas. The foundations of the struggle against colonial pressure rested on precolonial forms of politics, whose transformation and disintegration will be described through these three historical moments.

As Yves-Marie Bercé showed in his studies of the peasant revolts in France: “it is no longer a history of moments of insurgency [...] but an observation of the status of collective violence in a certain type of society.”<sup>3</sup> The use of collective violence by communities who were conquered or recognised the sovereignty of a state over them finds legitimacy when the colonial power violates their mutual agreement or the political and social equilibrium. The legitimacy given to protest in the face of injustice competes with that of the State. “The spirit driving the revolt knows full well what it is fighting against. Generally, it has a very precise idea of the forces of oppression it is facing.”<sup>4</sup>

There is a lot at stake from a political and historiographical perspective in choosing the terms used to name these revolts. The Kazakhs used two words: *soghys* (war) and *köterilis* (uprising). In this study, we chose to use a declination of war, rebellion and insurgency. Each of these three words evokes a specific scale and framework and illustrates the evolution of the revolt within the Kazakh society. The term “People’s” was not used by either the Kazakhs or the Russians at the time of these violent events. The revolutionary rhetoric had not penetrated the Kazakh population and the idea of anti-colonialist struggle was not clearly expressed. However, the Kazakh events bear elements comparable to many other cases of revolt in unrelated colonial empires, such as the Guarani wars of 1754-1756, that broke out in reaction to “an immediate threat to their way of life or a violation of the reciprocal exchanges and obligations they had established with the Spanish colonial state”<sup>5</sup>, the 1908 and 1916 revolts in Annam, where the modernist elites<sup>6</sup> played a similar role, or the 1917 Kanak war, triggered by conscription for a faraway war and whose memory was preserved in a significant oral corpus.<sup>7</sup>

---

3 Yves-Marie Bercé, *Croquants et nu-pieds. Les soulèvements paysans en France du XVIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 14

4 Pierre Miquel, *La révolte* (Paris: Bordas, 1971), 9

5 Barbara Ganson, *The Guarani Under Spanish Rule in the Rio de la Plata* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 94

6 Thé Anh Nguyễn, “1908 et la remise en question du rôle de l’élite dirigeante des lettrés”, in *Vietnam. Le moment moderniste*, ed. Gilles De Gantès, Phuong Ngoc Nguyen (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2009), 197-204

7 Alban Bensa, Kacué Yvon Goromoedo, Adrian Muckle, *Les sanglots de l’aigle pêcheur. Nouvelle-Calédonie: la guerre kanak de 1917* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2015)

The quintessential political entity in the Kazakh geographical space before the Russian conquest was the khanate.<sup>8</sup> This term, invented by 17<sup>th</sup> century European Orientalists, was used to label a political entity ruled by a Khan, and was generally referred to in source material from Central Asia as *Ulus-i Qazaq* or *Han-i Qazaq* or less frequently *Qazaqstan*.<sup>9</sup> Structurally, the Kazakh Khanate was made of a hierarchy of khans, supposedly descending from the Chinggisids. Each ruled over a section of the Kazakh population, since each *zhüz* (hordes),<sup>10</sup> among which all the tribes were distributed, had its elected khan. In order to federate into a Kazakh entity, one of these three khans was chosen to rule over the three *zhüz*. Our study will show the fundamental evolutions underwent by the initially dominant ideology of the khanate. In the culture of lineage-based<sup>11</sup> societies recognising the Chinggisids' legitimacy in Eurasian lands, the construction of a political structure headed by a Khan was the culmination of any given form of tribal or supra-tribal alliance. Examining the events of 1837-1847 in congruence with those of 1916 and 1929-1931 enables us to understand the new conditions that structured the political discourse in a context where colonisation, and then sovietisation, radically reassigned the repositories of political legitimacy. Through a comparison of three defining moments of historical rupture for a tribal society like the Kazakh society, this article investigates over a long period of time how political authority evolved and changed hands. It will thus analyse the effects induced by the colonial presence in the Kazakh steppes and their consequences on the means of resistance used by the nomadic population until its eventual full settlement, during the collectivisation period.

## 1. Kenesary Kasymov and the last war of the Kazakh Khanate (1837-1847)

---

8 Irina Erofeeva, "Kazakhskoe hanstvo i vlast' v tradicionnom obshchestve kazakhov", in *Istoriia Kazakhstana: Narody i kul'tury*; ed Nurbulat Masanov et al. (Almaty: Daik-press, 2000), 113-190

9 Joo-Yup Lee, *Qazaqliq, or ambitious brigandage, and the formation of the Qazaqs: State and identity in Post-Mongol Central Eurasia* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016)

10 Each three *zhüz* (elder, middle and junior) occupied their own geographical zone, respectively the south, the centre and east, and the west of nowadays Kazakhstan. The Turgai region was inhabited by lineages from the middle and junior *zhüz*. For a detailed description of the tribe breakdown per *uezd* at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Marat Mukanov, *Qazaq zheriniñ tarikhy* (Almaty: Atamura, 1994)

11 The word "lineage" refers to a political unit within the Kazakh tribal structure. It can be applied liberally to the tribe or to much smaller groupings and corresponds to the Kazakh word "ru". The word "line", however, refers to a family's genealogy or to a dynasty. In Kazakh, it corresponds to the word "äulet".

Kenesary Kasymov's (1802-1847) war<sup>12</sup> against the Tsar was waged several decades after the recognition of Russian sovereignty by the Kazakhs in the northern steppes. The khans of the middle and junior *zhüz* had bent the knee in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Kazakhs and the Russians had a different understanding of what implied submission to the Tsar.<sup>13</sup> To the Kazakhs, it was merely a formal affair, not supposed to entail administrative integration to the Russian empire. It was a move in the political game played by the *töre* lines,<sup>14</sup> serving internal designs and used to achieve a balance of power between several Central Asian political entities: the Kazakh space, the khanate of Khiva, the khanate of Kokand and the emirate of Bukhara.

The slow Russian penetration, which accelerated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, brought to the Kazakhs profound challenging changes. The various *töre* lines were constantly negotiating with the tsarist authorities with a view to strengthen their power on the steppes. While still collaborating, they would also use armed conflict as a strategic tool to pressure the authorities into shelving unwelcome measures or promoting their interests. Kenesary Kasymov's actions against the Tsar between 1837 and 1847 are the perfect illustration of this ambivalence. Military operations were interspersed with lengthy peace talks during which Kenesary claimed he submitted to the will of the Tsar.

Kenesary's endeavours can be considered as a continuum of struggles, which started in the 1820s with the last khan of the middle *zhüz*, Gubaïdulla-khan (1770-1852) and then with his own father, Kasym (1756-1840) – both were sons of Ablai-khan (1711-1781), the last Khan to have ruled over the three Kazakh *zhüz*. The 1822 Statute on *inorodtsy*<sup>15</sup> (Aliens) and the building of Cossack forts and administrative centres (*prikaz*) in the Kazakh steppes marked a clear dispossession of the Khan's sovereignty over the nomadic population. The Kazakhs were never consulted on these changes. Several *töre* balked at this loss

---

12 *Soghys* (war) is the word frequently featured in Kazakh sources from before 1917 to describe Kenesary's feats.

13 Isabelle Surun, "Une souveraineté à l'encre sympathique? Souveraineté autochtone et appropriations territoriales dans les traités franco-africains au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, 2 (2014), 313-348

14 *Töre* descend from the Kazakh khans, whose genealogy could trace descent from Genghis Khan. They were the only ones with a legitimate claim to the title of khan and their line was not part of the Kazakh tribal structure. They formed a separated aristocracy – the White Bone – whereas Kazakhs belonging to one of the three *zhüz*'s tribes were known as the Black Bone. See Irina Erofeeva, *Rodoslovnnye kazakhskikh hanov i kozha XVIII-XIX vv.* (Almaty: "Print-S", 2003).

15 The Statute of 1822, enacted by lawmaker Mikhail Speransky created social estates (*soslovie*), and defined the "alien" population, as a special category of subjects of the Russian Empire, with specific rights and with rules of administration differing from the other categories. This category was made up of the non-Europeans and natives from Siberia and Central Asia including the Kazakhs. They had a similar status to peasants in terms of tax collection and benefitted from some rights: exemption from military service and their own local administration.

of authority. They tried to force Russia to recognise the legitimacy of their power over the Kazakhs and, at the same time, to preserve their territorial integrity.

Kenesary's war was more significant and bore a higher impact than his predecessors' rebellions. This came as much from his personality as from a pervading atmosphere of latent insurgency in the junior *zhüz*.<sup>16</sup>

As illustrated in a legend reported in the Kazakh press in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>17</sup> Kenesary was notorious for his heroism and the leadership skills he had honed over the many years spent under the command of his father and elder brother, Sarzhan (?-1836). Like them, Kenesary constantly referred to his birth rights as a descendant of Ablai-khan. He considered himself a legitimate heir to power and refused to be robbed of it by the Russians. He particularly took issue against the abolition of the title of Khan, enacted in 1822. Ideologically, his discourse hinged on the Kazakh Khanate's political structure and, more specifically, on the Chinggisid legitimacy. There was no religious element in his demands; except for a Tatar mullah at his side, none of the main protagonists in this revolt had any religious status. He did not call for *ghazavat* (holy war) either, a strategy often used in the Caucasus and Central Asia to mobilise the people against the Russian authorities.

In his first letter sent to the Governor-General of Western Siberia, Kenesary promised to “free the *Kyrgyz*<sup>18</sup> from the Russian yoke, since all *Kyrgyz* were his people by the law conferred by his grand-father Ablai-khan.”<sup>19</sup> Kenesary wanted to preserve a specifically Kazakh dominion, where he would have unified all of the populace. He was not, however, disputing the Russian sovereignty *de jure*, but he wanted Russia to refrain from intervening in the administration of the

---

16 Kazakhs from the junior *zhüz* were the first to be affected by the constructions of the defensive lines in the steppes, which deprived them from grazing land and access to water. Their emergence throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century triggered revolts: the Novo-Iletsk line (1822), the Emba line (1826), the New line (1835). In the 1820s, Zholaman Tlenshiuly, a batyr from the Tabyn tribe of the Zhetyru tribe, opposed the erection of forts on the Novo-Iletsk defence line in the north of the Turgaï region, as they were encroaching the Tabyns' pastureland. In the 1830s, Zhankozha Nurmuhamedov (1774-1860), a batyr from the Shekti lineage of the Alimuly tribe, located near the Aral Sea and the mouth of Syr-Daria, was at war against the khanates of Khiva and Kokand.

17 “While they were still teenagers, Kenesary and Nuruzbaï [his younger brother] showed boldness on many occasions and surprised not only their parents, but also the older and respected *aqsaqals* by their courage.(...) Their courage helped them achieve pride of place among their father Kasym-han's commanders( ...) and Kenesary roamed the steppe at the head of a brave and faithful army.’ I.A., “Kenisara i Nauruzbaïaï (Kirgizskoe predanie)”, *Turgaïaïskaia gazeta*, n°21(1901), in Irina Erofeeva (red.), *Istoriia Kazakhstana v russkikh istochnikakh XVI-XX vekov. Tom IX: Narodnye predaniia ob istoricheskikh sobitiiax i vydaiushchikhsia liudiakh kazakhskoj stepi (XIX-XX vv.)* (Almaty: Daïk-Press, 2007), 257

18 Until 1925, the Kazakhs were called *Kyrgyz* or *Kyrgyz-Kaïaïsak* in all the published material and sources in Russian. In the article's text, the word “*Kyrgyz*” is in italics to show this word was used to designate “Kazakhs”.

19 Kenesary Kasymov's letter to Petr Gorchakov dated from 1837, CGA RK 64/1/13/542

Kazakh population and to recognise his full authority over the steppes. The khanate model was also used by Kyrgyz and Turkmen trying to federate their peoples and to increase their political weight in a Central Asia marked by an era of conflicts and conquests.<sup>20</sup>

The war started in 1838 with Kenesary's attack on a Russian caravan but was preceded by two events in 1837. The Tsar's authorities imposed a tax on Kazakh households and inaugurated the defensive line connecting Akmolinsk to Kokchetav, on Kenesary's territory. On top of his project to reinstate the Kazakh Khanate, Kenesary's claims against land expropriation and tax collection found an echo in numerous lineages. In one of his letters to the Governor-General of Siberia he wrote: "I have the honour to inform you of my desire for both of our peoples (*vladenii narod*) to live in peace. You claim I am commandeering your subjects, but I would say that, on the contrary, you are building a regional *divan*<sup>21</sup> on the lands we inherited from our grand-father, Khan Albaï, and you are collecting taxes from the *Kyrgyz*. Therefore, you are oppressing them."<sup>22</sup> The attacks were thus justified as protest against Russian interference in two sovereign domains: the control over territory and tax collection.

Kenesary sent emissaries to enlist tribal elites in his fight against the Russian authorities. He managed to federate Kazakhs beyond the Arghyn, Kereï and Uaq lineages of the middle *zhüz*, under his authority in the Kokchetav and Akmolinsk regions.<sup>23</sup> The territories involved in the insurgency spread to the Turgaï region and the western part of what would later be the Semipalatinsk *oblast'* and then reached the north of the khanate of Kokand. Kenesary struck alliances with Alimuly (Shomekeï, Shekti and Tortqara) and Zhetyru (Tabyn, Tama and Zhaghalbaïly) lineages, from the junior *zhüz*. They joined the fight after spectacular battles – one ended with the destruction of the Akmolinsk *prikaz* at the beginning of summer 1838. Qypshaq lineages of the middle *zhüz* also joined in large numbers after blind repression by the Cossacks in autumn 1838. Most of the Baïuly tribe from the junior *zhüz*, located in the western part of nowadays Kazakhstan, and of the Naïman tribe of the middle *zhüz* in the east, did not participate. Prominent Arghyn lineages also refused to join or only very briefly engaged in combat. The two reasons for this lied in the Russians' military might

---

20 In 1842, for the first time, some Kyrgyz lineages chose to elect a khan, Ormon (1792-1854), who came from the Sarybagysh tribe and, therefore, was not a Chinggisiid. Some Turkmen tribes followed suit in 1853 with Govshut-khan (1823-1878) who came from a Teke lineage.

21 An equivalent to the Russian *prikaz*, but in terminology borrowed from khanates of Central Asia.

22 Letter from Kenesary Kasymov to the Governor-General of West Siberia, Gorchakov, dating from 1838, CGA RK 82/1/164/15-16.

23 Mentions in sources of the lineages who joined Kenesary enabled us to draw these conclusions: Ermukhan Bekmakhanov, *Kazakhstan v 20-40-e gody XIX veka* (Almaty: Qazaq universiteti, 1992), 170-173



and the advantages these lineages enjoyed from their collaboration with the tsarist authorities. Akhmet Kenesarin, one of Kenesary's sons, relayed the declaration from the Kazakh tribal elites, explaining their reluctance to stand to Kenesary's side: "Russia is a powerful State. We cannot rise up now and nomadise with You (Kenesary), furthermore, our people would not be able to join you as the territory between Russia and Kokand is too small to settle into. This is why, as long as you have not gained strength, we shall remain Russian subjects, we shall however pay the *zakat* (tax on livestock) to support you."<sup>24</sup>

Kenesary ruled with the help of a *kurultaï* (Council or Assembly), made of prominent *batyrs* (heroes) and *biï* (political leaders and judges) who represented the lineages rallied to his cause. The *batyrs*, many of whom had already successfully participated in confrontations against the Russian authorities, were a driving force in bringing in lineages. They then took military command and, as such, became the second major actors of the war after the Khan. One of them, *batyr* Iman (1780-1847) from the Qypshaq tribe joined Kenesary in 1839 and his whole Begimbet lineage followed suit. Born from a line of *batyrs* who had fought the Djungars, he became one of Kenesary's closest lieutenants. He participated in his retreat to the south and was killed with him, not far away from nowadays city of Tokmak, in Kyrgyzstan.

Surrounded by his *kurultaï* and intent on increasing his legitimacy and power in the steppes, Kenesary was elected Khan in autumn 1841. He tried to get his status and title recognised by the empires of China and Russia and regional leaders, except for the khanate of Kokand. After his father was assassinated in 1840, Kenesary had broken off contact with Kokand and was launching expeditions against their positions. At the same time, he was building closer relations with the khanate of Khiva, where his support was sought in a fight against the emirate of Bukhara and, with Bukhara itself, as the emirate was also at war against Kokand. The Emir was in fact the only one to officially recognise Kenesary's title of khan of the Kazakhs.<sup>25</sup> The Russians refused to do so, but the years 1841-1843 were marked by peace talks. These diplomatic relations were all the more essential that Kenesary was in need of weapons. Aside from the spoils of war, all weapons (rifles and sabres) and ammunitions were provided chiefly by the emirate of Bukhara and, to a lesser extent by the khanate of Khiva.

Kenesary targeted the symbols of Russian presence and the expansion of the khanate of Kokand in the Kazakh steppes. Attacks were led against Russian forts and institutions and against cities under Kokand control. However, the greater part of the military operations consisted in holding caravans to ransom, taking prisoners and livestock. Punitive raids were planned against Kazakh lineages

---

24 Akhmet Kenesarin, *Sultany Kenesary i Syzdyk* (Almaty: Zhalyñ, 1992 [1889]), 19

25 Report from Lieutenant Karl Gern, dated 1845, CGA RK 4/1/2621/929



who had refused to recognise Kenesary's authority or to pay the *zaket*. Refusal to form an alliance with Kenesary was considered an act of treason to the Khan. Kenesary also led several attacks against the *töres* who had refused to join the war or collaborated with the Russians.<sup>26</sup> According to the military authorities' estimations, Kenesary's forces were of about 20,000 combatants, called the *dzhigit*, and the potential for mobilisation from the tribes of the middle and junior *zhüz* was of about 50,000 men.<sup>27</sup> However, the number of Kazakhs participating in the conflict fluctuated greatly over the decade the war lasted. In the first years, many lineages pledged their support, but in the face of increasing Russian military pressure, some disengaged over time. Kenesary was rapidly forced to leave his lands and seek refuge on the Turgaï plateau, which then became the core of a territory he would control over many years. His main support came from Qypshaq<sup>28</sup> lineages, and, to a lesser extent, from Shomekeï, Tortqara and Tabyn lineages. After 1845, he was forced to retreat to Semirech'e, where he was murdered by Kyrgyz attackers in 1847. Kenesary thought the Kyrgyz were bound to recognise the authority conferred by his status of Khan.<sup>29</sup> They refused, considering he was pillaging: "The Kenen khan (Kenesary) came to plunder the Kyrgyz, to slaughter them and steal their livestock, their goods and their orphans."<sup>30</sup>

The Russians viewed Kenesary and his troops as bandits and many descriptions insist on the looting of caravans and capture of livestock, labelled as *barytma* or cattle-stealing. This image of criminality coexisted with a very contrasting portrait in songs and tales. In a Kazakh song dating back from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and collected in 1918, Kenesary is depicted as a defender of the people: "the steppe breathed red fires: the steppe was burning with revenge and war, not a single *dzhatak*<sup>31</sup> committed treason, only the

---

26 It was the case of Vali-khan's line (1741-1819). He was the son of Ablai-khan and his descendant, Chokan Valikhanov (1835-1865), was the first prominent member of the Kazakh intelligentsia. Same with Barak's line (?-1750) from which also came Alikhan Bukejhanov (1866-1937), leader of the Kazakh national movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

27 Various Russian sources assess the amount of potential forces to 100,000 men for the junior and middle *zhüz*. If the contribution of the Baïuly and Naïman tribes is deducted, as they did not participate in Kenesary's war, the number drops to 50,000 since, combined, they made up for half of the total population of these two *zhüz*, Ian Campbell, *Knowledge and the ends of empire: Kazak intermediaries and Russian rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917* (Ithaca & London: Cornell U.P., 2017), 25

28 El'toka Dil'mukhamedov, *Vosstanie Kazakhov pod rukovodstvom Kenesary Kasymova v 1837-1847 gg* (Almaty, 2012[1946]), 396-412

29 The Chinggisids' legitimacy was recognised throughout the whole Central Asia. Khan Ormon, however, who had been elected khan of the Kyrgyz in 1842, could not claim such ancestry, which gave grounds to Kenesary's claims.

30 Daniel Prior (ed.), *Shabdan baatyr codex. Epic and the writing of Northern Kirghiz history* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 148

31 *Dzhatak* were impoverished nomadic herders; with no cattle, they were forced to work in the fields or the mines.

wealthy, used to selling out, had to bear the brunt of Kenesary's actions.”<sup>32</sup> Another example, from a tale, has more laudatory undertones: “Kenesary, who was khan, always collected laurels, from all three *zhüz*, his name rose high in the sky, Kene's miracles were many, my life is dedicated to you.”<sup>33</sup>

Kenesary Kasymov's war was the last widespread Kazakh mobilisation against Russian domination until the 1916 revolt. The memory of these events was kept alive in oral tradition, through tales and songs,<sup>34</sup> legends and stories told with genealogies, like the many battles against the Djungars of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was strongly featured in the genealogies of lineages who had taken an active part in the war.

## 2. Khan and batyr: two political figures undergoing a change of perception

Following Kenesary's failure at rebuilding the Kazakh Khanate, the Tsar pursued his strategy to further integrate the steppes and the imperial legal system gradually transformed the whole political landscape through the implementation of new statutes. Between 1822 and 1845, with the abolition of the title of Khan, the Kazakhs were progressively deprived of a unifying figure and, compelled to rethink and redefine the idea of community. This also affected the *töre's* specific status. Political power in the Kazakh khanate previously resulted from the relations and balance of power between the khans and the tribal elites and from a khan's capability to assert his authority. The *töre* were stripped from their privileges<sup>35</sup> by the Tsar's policy on Kazakh administration, especially the regulations of 1867 and 1868, which weakened their position within Kazakh society.<sup>36</sup>

The policy of the colonial regime towards the *inorodtsy* led to the advent of two categories of public figures who transformed the Kazakh political landscape: one emerged through elective office (*volost'* - district – administrators,

32 Bekmakhanov, *Kazakhstan*, 183

33 Epic tale entitled “Kenesary”, in S. Qosan (red.), *Babalar sözi: zhüz tomдық. T.29: Tarikhi zhyrlar* (Astana: Foliant, 2006), 290

34 A.D. Nesterov, “Hvalenaia pesnia Doshodzhi v chest' Sultana Kenisary Kasymova”, *Izvestiia obshchestva arheologii, istorii i ètnografii Kazanskogo universiteta*, tome XVI, series 1(1900), 38-57; Petr Rasponov, “Pesnia o Kenesare”, *Obraztsy kirgizskoj poèzii v pesniakh èpicheskogo i liricheskogo soderzhanii, perelozhennykh v russkie stikhi* (Orenburg, 1885), 368-408

35 There were various kinds of privilege: some were inherited from the khanate such as *zaket* collection, *töleñgit* – authority over the lineages at their service, ownership over grazing land. Others were given by the tsarist authorities, in particular exclusive access to public office through elections or appointment to local governorship for the *töre*. This regulation, not always enforced in practice, was abolished in 1868.

36 Yet, in this challenging context the *töre* managed to maintain their unifying role and their political pre-eminence until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the eve of 1917, the two main Kazakh leaders were Bakhytzhan Karataev and Alikhan Bukejhanov – both were *töre*.

*starejšin*<sup>37</sup> and *biï*<sup>38</sup>) and the other were Kazakhs educated in Russian institutions and called the *intelligentsia*. After the 1867-1868 reforms, the highest level of representation available to the Kazakh population was the *volost'*.<sup>39</sup> The lineages' political life was marked by an increasing focus on the balance of power within these *volost'*, which acted as a centrifugal force on the *zhüz* and tribes as political entities. The Kazakhs did not question the *volost'* as an institution and some lineage-based groups sought to obtain the creation of new *volost'*, where they could hold a majority and play a political role with respect to the colonial power. After 1917, the constitution of Kazakh governing bodies also followed the imperial administrative division of the land. The tsarist era was characterised by the interaction between a precolonial Kazakh model and the colonial administrative legislation, which resulted, among others, in a political fragmentation of the Kazakhs. In the absence of research on this topic, it is difficult to determine what the balance of power between the two has been since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the Kazakh society.

This situation finds an illustration in the strong ambivalence that characterised the activities of elected *inorodtsy* civil servants. The *volost'* administrators were frequently denounced and even removed from office by the tsarist authorities for their refusal to collect taxes and for many forms of passive resistance. This reluctance to accept Russian governance, of which they were an offshoot, came with a desire to perpetuate former practices, among those, *barymta*, of which they were the principal instigators. On the other hand, the duties of their office and rampant corruption in the colonial administration put them on the frontline of popular discontent.<sup>40</sup> The second category, the intelligentsia, civil servants working in the *uezd* and *oblast'* administrations (interpreters, secretaries...), but also new figures in the Kazakh political sphere who were the product of Russian acculturation (teachers, lawyers, doctors and publicists) played an increasing role. Their political view was not shaped by practices in place prior to the Russian colonisation. They considered tribal boundaries as an obstacle to a Kazakh political future. They absolutely did not want to recreate a Kazakh khanate. The figure of the khan did not correspond to the progressive forms of politics of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, even if it remained a

---

37 The *starejšin* is in charge of an administrative aul, this is the lower level of the tsarist administrative division in the Kazakh regions.

38 The 1868 statute limited the Biï's authority to judicial issues and their name was changed to "People's court" (*narodnyj sud'*) by the 1886 statute

39 A short period between 1906 and 1907 was the only exception: representatives from the Kazakhs were elected in each *oblast'* to the First and Second Dumas of the Russian State, which breathed new life to the tribes' political role.

40 Xavier Hallez, "Instauration et évolution des pratiques électorales dans la population kazakhe de l'*oblast'* du Semirech'e (1868-1917)", *Working Paper n°19* (2017, IFEAC) <http://ifeac.hypotheses.org/3428>

reference.<sup>41</sup> After the 1905 revolution, the Kazakh intelligentsia enjoyed an increasing influence and gained prominence through legalist political actions, aimed at defending the Kazakhs against arbitrary decisions and the consequences of colonisation and at making the tsarist regime take heed of their claims. The *Intelligenty* did not base their model for action on violence, which, they felt, was bound to fail. Therefore, they did not take part in the revolts, even if some may have approved of them.

Yet, it did not mark the end of the violence resulting from power struggles between lineages and of movements of protest against the colonial administration's decisions. However, they were now deemed illegal. They became partially marginalised, while maintaining their pre-Russian colonisation prestige. The status of *batyr* evolved and his range of action was reassessed. Initially, this status was bestowed after acts of heroism, such as successful attacks or feats in defending relatives (mostly from one's lineage or, in some occasions, one's tribe or the whole Kazakh people) against an enemy.<sup>42</sup> The integration of the Kazakh people into the Imperial administrative and legal systems, as well as the *inorodtsy's* military exemption minimised the chance of a *batyr* to reveal himself. The *batyr* was turned into a *barymtashy*, a person who would steal livestock as revenge, which paved the way to the emergence of the "social bandit". As Eric Hobsbawm theorised in *Bandits*: "Social bandits are peasant outlaws whom the Lord and State regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders for liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported."<sup>43</sup>

Kazakhs who successfully managed and mastered cattle-stealing (*barymta*) became *barymtashy*. The *barymta* would intervene in the regulation of conflicts opposing lineages or tribes and was even a major tool for resolution. The Imperial authorities did not recognise this social function and viewed it as thievery, a prosecutable and punishable offence.<sup>44</sup> The confusion around what the *barymta* entailed lasted until the Soviet period and was instrumental to the power in place and the Kazakhs.<sup>45</sup> The *barymtashy* played an important part in the power struggles between lineages and in the various forms of resistance against the colonial administration. They could interact with Kazakh *volost'*

---

41 This aura was particularly notable in the case of Ablai-khan, whom the Kazakh people continued to celebrate, especially in the middle *zhüz*.

42 Radik Temirgaliev, *Épokha poslednikh batyrov (1680-1780)* (Almaty, 2009)

43 Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New-York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 17

44 Virginia Martin, "Barimta: Nomadic custom, imperial crime", Daniel R. Brower, Edward J. Lazzerini (eds.), *Russia's Orient. Imperial borderlands an peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 249-270.

45 Karlygash Usejnova, *Institut barymty i ego mesto v obychno-pravovoï sisteme Kazakhov*, dissertatsiia k.iu.n. (Almaty, 2007).

administrators but could also be in open conflict with them. In the same way, their actions could be viewed as banditry or become a source of prestige, if it was aimed at counteracting an action or decision considered unfair.<sup>46</sup>

For instance, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *barymtashy* Ryskul, the father of Turar Ryskulov, one of the leading Kazakh Bolshevik leaders, was invited to settle in his district by a *volost'* administrator who wanted to benefit from his talents. A conflict later ensued and Ryskul murdered the *volost'* administrator. It led him to his death upon a transfer to Siberia. His celebrity was widely advertised in many legends and stories, where this episode was depicted as an act of resistance against the oppression of an *inorodtsy* civil servant.<sup>47</sup>

The shift from *batyr* to *barymtashy* was already perceptible in local uprisings resulting from the 1868 statutes and the creation of the Governorate-General of Turkestan and the steppes. Bahytzhan Karataev (1863-1934), a Kazakh lawyer and political leader thus described the birth of the movement: "The turmoil caused by the Kazakhs' rejection of the new reform translated into the formation of *barymtashy* gangs, who then gathered forces into substantial, well-armed groups, each with their own leader."<sup>48</sup> As opposed to the previous revolts, where the *batyr* was the driving force, this time, it was the *barymtashy*. Violence resulted from the implementation of new laws, injustice or the corruption of the *Inorodtsy* and Russian administrations. Armed opposition forces were finding it hard to express a clear political project and building a national state was no longer the protest's political horizon.

As the revolt was taking shape, the figures of the khan and the *batyr* were re-emerging. Karataev's description continues with a quote from a witness of the 1869 revolt in the Ural'sk region: "First, the participants threw their hats at the feet of *batyr* Sengirad and asked him to become their khan, but he refused and explained that he would follow the path of his *batyr* ancestors and that he was ready to lead his *dzhigit* to battle. For him, this was enough. (...) The participants then threw their hats at the feet of *bař* Shemish. He too declined, stating that (...), just like his rich ancestors, he preferred to give horses, clothes and food to the combatants. (...) Finally, the participants threw their hats at the feet of Berkin

---

46 These two sides can be seen in a Kazakh's description of two *barymtashy*: "who benefitted for a long time of the blaze of glory attached to exceptional thieves" (CGA RK 44/1/5549/8).

47 Xavier Hallez, "Turar Ryskulov: the career of a Kazakh revolutionary leader during the construction of the new Soviet state, 1917-1926", *Colloquia Humanistica*, Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, volume 3 (2014), 120. Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auevov's short-story "Qarash-Qarash", published in 1927, used this story as its model. This short-story was highly successful. Cf. Mukhtar Auevov, *Qarash-Qarash / Vystrel na perevale / the shot on the mountain pass*, (Almaty: Zhazushy baspasy, 2008).

48 Bakhytzhhan Karataev, *Obzor materialov iz istorii kolonizacii Kazakhskogo kraia v sviazi s vosstaniem Kazakhov Orenburgskogo kraia v 1869 godu i v nachale 1870-h godov*, (Aktobe, 2006), 61.

Syrymov shouting that he was the illustrious Syrym's<sup>49</sup> great-grand son and it would be a shame for him to refuse to be their khan while the Tsar was threatening of robbing the Kazakhs of their lands and of Russifying them and when the Baïbaqty and Tana [two lineages of the Baïuly from the junior *zhüz*] needed a leader in order to fight. Berkin Syrymov sweated profusely, not knowing what to do. The participants shouted for him to raise his hands for prayer as a sign of consent. Berkin raised his hands, a prayer on his lips and was made khan of these two Kazakh lineages.<sup>50</sup>

Every Kazakh revolt was organised according to the same notional model of an overarching khan, and a *batyr* assuming command of battle, but these figures and the role they played in the course of the war were increasingly muddled by the Russian colonisation. The Kazakh society was progressively freeing itself from the *töre* lines on the political, social and economic levels<sup>51</sup> and was also gaining empowerment during these movements of resistance. Even though the reluctance to accept the title of khan demonstrates the symbolic legitimacy of the Chinggisid lineage, no revolt after 1867 was ever led by a *töre*, aside from one known exception.<sup>52</sup> In their absence, the position and title were given to an influential member of the rebel lineage, by conjuring up a glorious ancestor who had shone in battle against the Russians.

What could be called the *habitus* of the *batyr* and *biï* – personal characteristics attached to their social position and role – had a tendency to be reproduced in each line, as defined by the *zheti ata*.<sup>53</sup> The prestige inherited by the descendants commanded the apparition of a new *batyr* and *biï* amongst them. It was their duty to carry on the legacy and show their worthiness to their line and lineage. Historical events (Djungar war, Kenesary war...), memorialised in the genealogies, served as an essential tool in securing the legitimacy of the resistance. It determined the position of an individual within his lineage and established the political order of lineages. These memories however were not completely fixed; they were pliable according to the context. The evolution of their role in the 19<sup>th</sup> century's Kazakh society raises several questions. Was one's eligibility for *volost'* administration dependent on one's position within the lineage and on the balance of power between lineages? Could one's election

---

49 Syrym batyr (1753-1802) [Baïbaqty (Baïuly) tribe, junior *zhüz*] led an uprising against the Russian authorities in 1783 and 1797.

50 Karataev, *Obzor*, 66.

51 Virginia Martin, "Kazakh Chinggisids, land and political power in the nineteenth century: a case study of Syrymbet", *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 29(2010), 79-102.

52 Kudiarkhin Tezekov – a descendant of the Tezek *töre* from one of Abłaï-khan's lines, but a different one from Kenesary's – was elected khan of several *volost'* of the Semirech'e, home to the Alban tribe from the elder *zhüz* during the 1916 rebellion.

53 The *zheti ata*, which literally means the seven fathers, corresponds to a direct family line running from the 7<sup>th</sup> generation ancestor to the last son.



lead to the creation of new historical memories within the lineage? Were these new memories superseded by the authority vested in a political career in the tsarist, and then Soviet, administration?

Between 1848 and 1916, there were two coexisting modes of ideology and political action. One was based on precolonial practices, specific to the tribal structure of the Kazakh social world, but these were already undergoing change. The other borrowed ideas of progress and modernity from the Russian, Ottoman and British Empires. In the first case, the political subject remained the lineage or the tribe, but in the other, it was the nation. The Kazakhs had two alternatives when dealing with the Russian authorities: collaboration and the adoption of Russian regulations – used to defend their rights – or rejection of measures perceived as forced and, as a result, armed conflict.

### 3. The 1916 Rebellion on the Turgaï plateau: friction between the local and the “national”

Again, the 1916 revolt drew on the two politically legitimate figures of precolonial armed conflict: the khan and the *batyr*. In this context, historical narratives played an important part, as they embedded the legitimacy of the rebels in a Kazakh political model. This is perfectly illustrated by the example of the Turgaï *uezd*.

While the uprising against the Tsar's edict of June 25<sup>th</sup> 1916 – ordering the mass mobilisation of *inorodtsy* – started in the summer in Turkestan and was brutally quelled in September, the chronology of events was very different in the northern part of the territory, especially in the Turgaï *oblast'*, the rebellion's northern stronghold.<sup>54</sup> The summer marked a turbulent time for the steppe, reflecting the concern of its inhabitants and their refusal to comply. Protest was however limited to shredding the registration lists and preventing them from being drawn up, which resulted in the mobilisation being postponed to October 15<sup>th</sup> in the Aktjubinsk and Kustanaï *uezd* and to October 15<sup>th</sup> in the Turgaï and Irgiz *uezd*. Only a few *volost'* from the Aktjubinsk and Kustana *uezd* rebelled in September. Several *inorodtsy* civil servants, among which *volost'* administrators, were murdered, revealing the level of tension within the Kazakh population. In the other *volost'*, tribal elites and the *Intelligenty* succeeded in mollifying the nascent rebellious sentiment. An *aqsaqal* (an elder, an *aul's* figure of authority) from an *arghyn* *volost'* intervened to ease the tensions: “this is the worst time to rise against the tsarist authorities. If soldiers in the 1840s were merely armed

---

<sup>54</sup> Marat Myrzaghaliuly, *1916-1917 zhyldardaghy Torghaï Qazaqtarynyng köterilisi* (Almaty, 2005).



with flintlock rifles, (...) the Tsar's army is now equipped with rifles, machine guns and canons, the Kazakhs have none of those and even their warmongering spirits have receded.”<sup>55</sup> The authorities came down hard on them and a punitive strike at the end of September put an end to rebel attempts. The mobilisation started as early as October-November, but many Kazakhs chose to go and work in the *oblast's* mines in order to be exempted.

However, in the *oblast's* two other *uezd* (Irgiz and Turgaï), in October, neither the young Kazakhs, nor the majority of the *volost's* administrators, attended the planned days of mobilisation. Three *volost'* administrators in the Irgiz *uezd* – who were Kazakhs – were beaten by rebel groups on the eve of October 15<sup>th</sup>, while they were trying to draw up the list.<sup>56</sup> In the Turgaï *uezd*, the *volost'* administrators abstained from executing the official orders. The rebellion, which had been festering since the summer, broke out in both *uezd*. The situation was more favourable to an uprising than in Aktyubinsk and Kustanaï, as the Russian presence was not as marked and the garrisons further apart. The Turgaï *uezd* was particularly isolated from the lines of communication. *Barymtashy* launched attacks against Russian outposts, cutting telegraph lines, plundering villages and official buildings and many skirmishes opposed the rebels, who had control over the roads, to the Cossacks.

In the Turgaï *uezd*, the rebellion was dominated by the Qypshaq lineages who had already supported Kenesary's revolt in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In November, these lineages elected Abdigapar Dzhanbosynov (1870-1919) as their khan. He was a descendant of famous *batyr* Tleuly (1695-1760) and of *biï* Niiiaz (1735-1783), who had been raised by Ablai-khan to the rank of sultan (a title reserved to the *töre*).<sup>57</sup> Dzhanbosynov could draw on his illustrious ancestors' legacy to lead the rebellion, even if he didn't belong to the *töre* order. He was the face of enduring resistance to the Russian authorities. Some legends place *biï* Niiiaz to Kenesary's side,<sup>58</sup> situating him in a more recent event by virtue of historical memory, and associating him to a political figure more in tune with the 1916 rebellion. Dzhanbosynov's line was greatly influential in local politics. His father, Dzhanbosyn (1847-1895) had been the *volost'* administrator for many years – so were he and his brother Sadman (1888-1930). Each served one term,

55 Konstantin Harlamovich, *Vosstanie Turgaïskikh Kazak-Kirgizov 1916-1917gg. (po rasskazam ochevidtsev)* (Kzyl-Orda: Izd. Obshch. Izucheniia Kazakstan, 1926), 4.

56 Protocol of the Bel'kopinskaia, Taldyskaia and Temir-Astauvskaia *volost'* administrators from the Irgiz *uezd*, dated 10/13/1916, in Anatolii Piaskovskiï, *Vosstanie 1916 v Srednej Azii i Kazakhstane. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1960), 590-591.

57 Myrzaghaliuly, 1916-1917, 42.

58 Kazakh historian Manash Kozybaev explains that Dzhanbosynov was “the grandson of the prominent *biï* from the Niiiaz middle zhüz who enjoyed the status of khan by the will of Kenesary”. Manash Kozybaev, “Nacional'no-osvoboditel'naia voïna 1916g. v Kazakhstane: Kontseptual'nye problemy”, in Manash Kozybaev, *Kazakhstan na rubezhe vekov : razmyshleniia i poiski. Vol. 1* (Almaty: Ghylym, 2000), 191.

but both failed to return to office in the last elections before 1916. He was also known as a *barymtashy*.

Even if Abdigapar was named khan by the population and kept being identified as such in collective memory and in a large part of the historiography, he preferred calling himself an emir. This choice can be explained by his search for another kind of legitimacy that came from the religious charge attached to this title and the influence of the emirate of Bukhara. Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic influence in the public and political spheres of the Kazakh society had increased, especially that of Kazakh ishans and their disciples. Abdigapar, well-known for his devotion, was close to Murza and Faizolla Satybaldin, sons of ishan Satybaldy (1826-1898), a holy figure of the Turgaï region, who was from Batpakar, like Dzhambosynov's line.<sup>59</sup> His mausoleum had become a place of pilgrimage and his sons had taken over as local religious leaders. If, *a posteriori*, a call to *ghazavat*, or more specifically to its Kazakh equivalent, the *qazattyq*, was mentioned in some testimonies, neither Abdigapar nor the other leaders of the rebellion in the Turgaï region made reference to it. Religion was only mentioned in passing and there was no allusion to an Islamic state. There are as many tales of imams calling for rebellion, as of imams using Islam to encourage obedience to the Tsar.<sup>60</sup>

Dzhambosynov's choice to use the title of emir was in fact an exception. It was more the rule to designate oneself khan in the Turgaï region in 1916 and there were at least ten of them. Their authority remained local and temporary. As Tomohiko Uyama<sup>61</sup> noted, the khan only had real power over his own lineage. Except for Dzhambosynov, two other khans shone during the rebellion. A part of the *Arghyn* lineage in the Turgaï *uezd* elected their own khan: Ospan Sholakov (1854-1930), a descendant of *batyr* Zhanybek (1693-1753), who was the first khazakh *tarkhan*<sup>62</sup>: “not only his ancestors, but also his courage spoke for him.”<sup>63</sup>

---

59 In his article about 1916, Tomohiko Uyama mentions Murza Satybaldin, or more specifically “ishān Myrza” who, according to a Kazakh source from the Soviet era, had made a call for obedience to the Tsar's decree, based on the *shariat*. The information on the position adopted by these Kazakh spiritual figures is fragmented, it could have been presented as the exact opposite to serve another dominant ideology. Tomohiko Uyama, “Two attempts at building a Kazakh state: The revolt of 1916 and Alash movement”, in Stéphane Dudoignon, Hisao Komatsu, *Islam in politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early eighteen to late twentieth centuries)* (London: Paul Kegan, 2001), 84.

60 “Even those who supported a jihad did not explicitly call for creating an Islamic State in Qazaqstan. (...) Islam provided Qazaqs with an ideology of resistance, but not an ideology of State building”, in Uyama, “Two attempts”, 84.

61 Uyama, “Two attempts”, 83-84.

62 The title of *tarkhan*, from Turkic-Mongolian origin, brought certain privileges in the Golden Horde and the Tamerlan Empire, including exemption from taxes. The Russian empire arrogated to itself the title and bestowed it essentially to Tatars and Bashkirs who had rendered exemplary military or diplomatic services to the Empire.

63 Harlamovich, *Vosstanie*, 12

In conflict with his *volost'* administrator, during the summer, he seized the mobilisation list that the latter was refusing to destroy. The Shomekeï lineages in the Irgiz *uezd* did the same when they chose Aïzharkyn Kanaev (1855-1930), the Kendzhegarinskaia *volost'* deputy administrator.

Even though historiography sometimes mentions a Qypshaq or Arghyn khanate when referring to them, these elections were not driven by a will to re-establish the Khanate. Beyond the rejection of the Tsar's edict, the struggle's political endgame was ill-defined and seemed beyond the rebels' control. In opposition to Kenesary's project, there was no ideological speech from the rebels outlining the idea of building a State. The rebels used Kazakh political institutions and the figure of the khan as defender of the Kazakh people to secure their legitimacy. The nature of the khan's election as a unifying institution for Kazakh tribes was altered by the choice of candidates on the one hand, and its political value on the other. Coming from the tribe who had elected them, none of the three khans we mentioned belonged to the *töre* order. The Kazakh unitary political entity could no longer be incarnated by a khan who had become a mere lineage rebel leader, and these local khans did not pretend they were representing the whole Kazakh population.

In the same way as before, the figures of khan and *batyr* working in pairs were used by the rebels: Amangel'dy Imanov (1873-1919) stood behind emir Abdigapar as his military leader and *batyr*. He was a descendant of Iman Batyr (1780-1847), a close lieutenant of Kenesary Kasymov. Like his ancestor and his father Uderbaï (1829-1879), Amangel'dy Imanov had become a prominent figure in the Turgaï *uezd* and was known in the whole *oblast'*. A distinguished *barymtashy* and hunter, he had garnered fame for his actions against the Russians before 1916 and his political activities during the election of *volost'* administrator. Harlamovich who compiled testimonies for his retelling of the rebellion published in 1926 wrote: "Amangel'dy was raised to this position as he was a fine shooter and, more importantly, had a well-established and well-deserved reputation for *barimtashy*, recklessness, and because no fight nor raid could have taken place without him in the *volost'*."<sup>64</sup> He was arrested many times but always managed to escape deportation thanks to the support of his people and Kazakh civil servants. He was always accompanied by Qypshaq *dzhigit* and empowered enough to oppose the *volost'* administrators and refuse to obey the arbitrary decisions of the Russian local authorities. He carefully cultivated an image of defender of the weaker lineages and of the Kazakh people against the colonial administration, as shown by the many legends about him passed on orally over the years.<sup>65</sup> In 1916, in order to assert his status as *batyr*, he gave up

---

64 Harlamovich, *Vosstanie*, 12.

65 *Amengeldinskaïa èkspediciia Kaz. Filiala AN SSSR*, 1943.

his last name, Uderbaev, to take Imanov in honour of his illustrious ancestor.<sup>66</sup> He was only able to claim the title of *batyr* during the 1916 rebellion, and not for his previous feats.

In the Turgaï and Irgiz *uezd*, the rebels amounted to up to 15,000 men,<sup>67</sup> called *dzhigit* but also *sarbaz*,<sup>68</sup> but such an impressive assembly was very rare. The troops, more or less stabilised and organised according to the usual model in groups of tens or hundreds – a quasi-military organisation activated during relatively significant mobilisations<sup>69</sup> – were not as big: Kanaev had around 2,500 men, Ospanov – 3,000 and Dzhanbosynov – 3,500. Outside the *volost'* under the three khans' control, smaller groups of insurgents coming in various shapes and sizes had also formed. The number of Kazakhs who could potentially join the ranks of the rebellion amounted to about 50,000 men for the Turgaï oblast', which corresponds to a tenth of its population.<sup>70</sup>

In November-December 1916, the rebel groups representing the Qypshaq, Arghyn and Shomekeï lineages joined forces during the attack and the siege of the city of Turgaï. During these events, Dzhanbusynov's authority was recognised by the other khans. The assault led by Amangel'dy Imanov resulted in the destructions of institutions reflecting the Russian presence (buildings, infrastructures and villages) and the capture of livestock. They had much less firepower than Kenesary's *dzhigit*, with only 200 rifles for the whole forces, while the Cossacks and their troops were much better equipped. Losses on the battlefield reveal the extent of the discrepancy: there was one Cossack fatality for several dozens of Kazakhs, sometimes hundreds. The rebellion did not receive weapon deliveries from either the khanate of Khiva or the emirate of Bukhara and their seizures from the enemy were too small. Alibi Dzhangil'din (1884-1954), a Qypshaq from the Turgaï *uezd* who was a close ally of Imanov, and the first Bolshevik Kazakh, went to Bukhara at the beginning of February 1917 to try and buy weapons.<sup>71</sup>

---

66 Harlamovich, *Vosstanie*, 12.

67 The figure of 50,000 men often comes up in historiographical research, but it comes from reports by a Russian officer who based his estimation on one soldier (*asker*) per home or yurt, which seems overestimated. The amount of attackers recorded for the raid in the city of Turgaï in November-December would be closer to reality. This operation gathered troops from the *oblast'*'s three main zones of rebellion. Report from Chief of Staff to Nicholas II dated 12/2/1916, in Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie* 1916, 612.

68 This word, coming from Persian, was used to designate a soldier. It was also used with the word *dzhigit* during the Turgaï revolt and its definition became fixed to designate the insurgents in 1916.

69 Aïbolat Kushkumbaev, *Voennoe delo kazakhov v XVII-XVIII vekov*, (Almaty: Daik Press, 2001).

70 The Russian Home Ministry estimated an amount of 50,000 men that could be mobilised in the Turgaï *oblast'* according to the 06/25/1916 decreed.

71 Alibi Dzhangil'din, *Dokumenty i materialy (k 125-letiiu Alibi Dzhangil'dina)* (Almaty: Anaitili, 2009), 162-163.

The uprising of two *uezd* of the Turgaï oblast' was criticised in *Qazaq*, the only Kazakh newspaper circulating throughout the steppes. An article written by a collective of the *oblast's* *Intelligenty* called for the rebellion to stop and the acceptance of the mobilisation.<sup>72</sup> Describing the bloodshed in Turkestan following the repression against the rebels at the end of summer 1916, they warned the Turgaï insurgents of the fate awaiting them. The might of the Russian military forces was, again, one of the main deterrents. They also argued the conscripts had satisfactory living conditions and that the fears of the insurgents were not justified. Although some criticism was levelled against the edict and its clauses of application, the authors were choosing to collaborate.

For the same reason, in January 1917, Bukeïhanov opened an office for *inorodtsy* (Inorodcheskiï otdel) in the Minsk *zemstvo*, in order to help the Kazakhs and others who had been brought to the western front. He was joined by many young students, school teachers and Kazakh civil servants. The rebellion in the Turgaï *uezd* inevitably complicated their lives and their relations to the authorities. It did a lot of damage to the image Bukeïhanov and many *Intelligenty* wanted to convey of well-integrated Kazakh subjects, worthy and deserving of becoming full-fledged citizens. Nobody could imagine then that the demise of the Tsar was so close and it was therefore of essence to differentiate oneself from the rebels and disown their actions. It was a consensus across all *Intelligenty*, whether they had chosen to become public servants or had developed an anti-colonialist political stance that had put them under pressure from the Russian authorities. Both sides felt that defending the Kazakhs could not be achieved through violence or armed conflict, as it would only lead to failure.

On the eve of the February 1917 revolution, the situation turned critical: only Dzhanbosynov's and Imanov's lineages had not laid down their arms. Punitive expeditions had taken their toll on the rebels. Many auls had been destroyed, goods confiscated and all gatherings brutally disbanded. There were about 1,000 Kazakhs fatalities over December and January. The rebellion was quashed in the Irgiz *uezd* in January and Aïzharkyn Kanaev was arrested. The Arghyn rebel lineages of the Turgaï *uezd* had to show submission to the imperial authority at the end of the same month. Ospan Sholakov surrendered to the authorities and returned an important amount of money he had stolen from a post office. An imminent attack threatened the last rebels who were surrounded by Cossacks. The tsarist authorities had confidently set the mobilisation date in the Turgaï and Irgiz *uezd* to February 15<sup>th</sup> and March 15<sup>th</sup>, depending on the *volost's*

---

72 Baïtursunov, Dulatov, Kadirbaev, Tungachin, "Torghaï ñäm Yrghyz halqyna" *Qazaq*, n°207(1916), Äbdimälik Nysanbaev (red.), *Qazaq gazetä*, (Almaty: Qazaq Änciklopediiasy, 1998), 348-349.

remoteness. As for Dzhanbosynov and Imanov, in desperate positions, they were devising plans for an escape to China or Afghanistan.

The regime change gave an unexpected respite to the last Qypshaq rebels. Pacifying operations in the *uezd* were suspended<sup>73</sup> and the rebels benefitted from an amnesty granted by the temporary Russian Government on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1917. Those who had been arrested were released and there was no execution. The *Inorodcy* insurgency ended by an edict of the temporary Russian Government on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1917. Kazakhs from the Turgaï and Irgiz *uezd* were not sent to the front.

Dzhanbosynov and Imanov took drastically different routes from the future leaders of the national Kazakh movement, Alikhan Bukeïhanov (1866-1937), Ahmet Baïtursunov (1873-1937) or Mirzhakyp Dulatov (1885-1935). Dzhanbosynov and Imanov were primarily motivated by tribal and local perspectives, while the others espoused national and unitary concerns. The firsts did not object to the use of force and to acts deemed illegal by the tsarist authorities, while the others were committed to follow a legalist and democratic line. After the 1917 revolution, this distinction became all the more political.<sup>74</sup>

What was remarkable in the Turgaï *uezd*, as opposed to the usual models of popular revolt, is that neither Imanov nor Abdigapar stood against modernisation. Both had opened schools in their aul and promoted agriculture and settlement. They had also joined forces with Alibi Dzhangil'din, an essential figure in the creation of the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan. Imanov and Abdigapar joined the Soviets but did not become members of the Communist Party and were killed in 1919 by Kazakhs hostile to the new regime.

#### **4. The 1929-1931 insurgencies: a modus operandi based on the 1916 experience**

1927-1928 marked a turning point with the adoption of stringent economic policies and increased repression, which paved the way to a wave of insurgencies in the Kazakh rural society of the Turgaï plateau. In the same way as in 1916, measures implemented by what was perceived as external authorities were deemed unfair and illegitimate. Baïkadam Karaldin (1877-1930), who came from the same Qypshaq lineage as Amangeldy Imanov and had been arrested in 1916 for rebellion, described this situation in a letter to Dzhangil'din, where he anticipated the commotion caused by the "de-baïisation" campaign: "as

---

73 Report from the Chief of Staff to the War Minister from 03/06/1917, in Piaskovskii, *Vosstanie 1916*, 629-630.

74 Xavier Hallez, "Le ralliement des Kazakhs au pouvoir soviétique (1917-1920): convictions politiques, système tribal et contexte russe", *Cahiers du monde russe*, n°56/4(2015), 705-752.



we speak, they are preparing an action to confiscate livestock which will take place in a few days. Before I came to Turgaï, I was absolutely not aware of it. There were multiple rumours. (...) the plenipotentiary, who just arrived from the district centre and does not know anybody, will be ill-advised. Local civil-servants and persons of interest, for various reasons, will give him wrong information. As a consequence, people who should not have been affected by the edict will be included to the list of displaced people, just like in 1928-1929, when the article on the agricultural tax came into force.”<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, the first riots started after a series of requisitions of agricultural products – livestock, cereals – and a tax increase. In some auls of the Batpakkar district, these measures, alongside zealous local tax officials, raised the level of tension to its maximum between summer 1928 and autumn 1929. Over these eighteen months, 188 people were arrested and convicted in extra-judicial adjudications for resisting tax collection or the delivery of wheat and livestock.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the Soviet authorities launched three campaigns of repression against alleged enemies of the regime: they confiscated goods and displaced several “feudal baï”, they tried former members of Alash-Orda and led a crackdown on religion. There was mounting discontent against a form of repression that was political, socio-economical and religious. This would bear strong future implications on the forms of resistance of the Kazakh society.

The Soviet administration and Party organs lacked control over the Kazakh rural areas, and concerned Soviet authorities claimed the resistance to Sovietisation was the result of a tribal or lineage-based solidarity. They viewed it as a consequence of the persistent influence of the Kazakh elites (baï, imams, former tsarist civil servants or Alash-Orda members), whose social rank and political ideas conflicted with the principles promoted by the new regime. They saw proof in the election results for the local Soviets and decided to weaken these elites by taking away their livestock or displacing them. The 1928 elections were postponed to 1929 in order to enable the completion of the displacement of the most powerful lines in 1928.<sup>77</sup>

In February 1929, in the Batpakkar district a wave of arrests was prompted by the “discovery” of an alleged plot aiming at getting elected candidates sponsored by prominent “baï, mullahs or *aqsaqals*.”<sup>78</sup> The brothers of former khan Qypchak Dzhanbosynov, Valiï Zhalmagambetov (1887-1930) and

---

75 Karaldin’s letter to Dzhangil’din dated 09/16/1928, CGA RK 135/1/439/4.

76 Kaïdar Aldazhumanov, “Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie soprotivleniia”, in *Deportirovannye v Kazakhstan narody: vremia i sud’by*, (Almaty: Arys, 1998), 67.

77 Andrej Kuchkin, *Sovetizaciia kazakhskogo aula 1926-1929 gg.* (Moscow: Izdat. AN SSSR, 1962).

78 Protocol n°5 from the OGPU troika meeting of 05/25/1930, in Ardak Berkimbaï, “Batpakkara köterilisi”, *DAT-obshchestvennaia poziciia*, 10 (16/03/2011).



Sadman Dzhanbosynov (1888-1930) were arrested. They had actively participated in the 1916 rebellion and their arrest was very poorly welcomed. So were those of other charismatic local figures: Baïkadam Karaldin, was put on the list of feudal baï and accused of having helped the Cossacks fight the insurgents in 1916, even though he had been arrested and sentenced to death by the Tsar for his participation in the rebellion; Askar Dulatov,(1865-1932) (Arghyn), a former *biï* and the elder brother of one of the main members of Alash-Orda, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, saw his belongings confiscated and was arrested as an “enemy of the people”, so were the brothers Murza (1861-1930) and Faïzolla Satybaldin (1888-1959).<sup>79</sup> All were accused of preventing tax collection and the redistribution of agricultural land and of plotting against the Soviet authorities. The Satybaldins were charged for leading the conspiracy and their religious influence was heavily alluded to.<sup>80</sup>

Movements of resistance crystallised in early November 1929, when the administrative centre of the Batpakkar district was taken. Like Kenesary's destruction of the Akmolinsk *prikaz* in 1838 and the siege of the city of Turgaï in November 1916, this exploit sparked an insurgency that spread across the whole Turgaï plateau in winter 1929-1930. Between 400 and 500 men from the *auls* of Batpakkar and originating from the Arghyn and Qypshak tribes gathered together – only 50 were armed – and took over the district's administrative centre, where they maintained their position for almost a week. They fulfilled their primary objective and freed the prisoners, they then set the administrative buildings on fire and destroyed documents and archives of the Party, the *Prokuratura* (Procuracy) and the militia. They held all the representatives of the Soviet authorities hostage and then put up posters listing their demands and shouted slogans condemning the Soviet authorities and the Communists, demanding the reinstatement of mosques, the return of all the displaced *baï* and of the confiscated goods.<sup>81</sup> They also requested the end of tax collection.

The insurgents came from various backgrounds: there were former and current civil-servants of the Soviets (President from the local Soviet's executive Committee, head of the district's militia, former members of local revolutionary committees or from aul's Soviets...), literary figures from Alash-Orda sympathetic to the cause, and rebels from the short-lived “khanate” of Qypshak (formed in 1916). The main political leaders were represented and Omar Barmakov (-1930) was elected khan by the insurgents. A well-respected merchant from the

---

79 Aldazhumanov, “Krest'ianskoe”, 67.

80 Zhangel'dy Otarmaev, “Batpakkarinskoe vosstanie. Delo n°648”, *DAT*.

*Obshchestvennaia pozitsiia* (2011): <https://planetanyne.ru/batpakkarinskoe-vosstanie-delo-648/>

81 KNB RK archives, 101/9/12-13, report from the Kustanaï *okrug* committee addressed to all of the *raïon*'s committees, in *Nasil'stvennaia kollektivizaciia i golod v Kazakhstane v 1931-1933 gg., sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, (Almaty: XXI vek, 1998), 48.

Qypshaq tribe, he had taken part in the 1916 rebellion under Dzhanbosynov's lead and had been convicted twice for embezzlement in the 1920s.<sup>82</sup> It seems there was no *batyr* to lead this short insurgency, whose only feat was the capture of the district's capital.

According to the political police, the insurgents had aimed at raising an army of 1,000 men recruited in groups of 50 in each administrative aul.<sup>83</sup> This type of military organisation relied on experience garnered from 1916 and, as the Kustanaï Region Committee's report shows, the population was calling the new insurgents “*sarbaz*”, a word inaugurated in 1916 that had become widespread in 1929-1930 in lieu of *dzhigit*. The Turgaï revolt is remarkable because some participants in the 1916 events were still active in 1929-1930. This can be explained by a lack of generational renewal during the brief 13-year long interval between the two episodes and by the fact the memory of the 1916 events was actively maintained. The involvement of the same figures and the references to 1916 were *de facto* a pivotal instrument of mobilisation. Undoubtedly, the *modus operandi* – based on the recruitment of groups from each aul, their military organisation – but also the nature of the attacks belonged to the same repertoires of contention as in 1916. The insurgents targeted representatives of the State, even if they were Kazakhs, in the same way as 13 years prior when they killed and attacked Kazakh *volost'* administrators and *aqsaqals* who had delivered lists of mobilised men.<sup>84</sup> As in Kenesary's war and the 1916 rebellion, the insurgents targeted Kazakh civil-servants whose loyalty was to the State more than to their community and who thus accepted to implement policies from the central authorities.

Therefore, it is quite telling that the Soviet authorities had a differentiated treatment of the insurgents depending on whether they had been active in 1916. An analysis of the date of birth of participants to the insurrection who were eventually convicted<sup>85</sup> shows two generational categories: one, by far the biggest, made of men born between 1850 and 1900 who had participated or been direct witnesses to the 1916 revolt, and another, made of younger individuals born between 1900 and 1910. In these partial lists featuring several dozens of names, men from the former generation were systematically sentenced to death (as active rebellion leaders and representatives of the former order), while the younger men were almost all condemned to deportation. Notes in OGPU reports in 1929 and 1939 show the political police paid extra attention

---

82 *Nasil'stvennaia...*, 49.

83 KNB RK archives, 101/9/12-13, reference to document, in *Nasil'stvennaia...*, 49.

84 *Qakharly 1916 zhyl (Quzhattar men materialdar zhinaǵy)*, vol. 2 (Almaty: Qazaqstan, 1998) and CGA RK 76/72/33/293, in *Vosstanie 1916 v Srednej Azii i Kazakhstane*, (Moscow, 1960).

85 “Memorial”, <http://Lists.memo.ru/> and <https://ru.openlist.wiki/>

to the rebels' past. The Soviet authorities resorted to a tried practice and used a predefined conviction to sentence opponents from diverse political backgrounds, who did not necessarily meet the profile of the charge. The main accusation relied on ties or membership to Alash-Orda, now labelled a bourgeois nationalist movement, but many had never even been members or had strongly opposed it.

Bolstered by popular support, the autumn 1929 insurgency which started with the Batpakkar events had extra sporadic outbursts in various areas of the Turgaï and Kustanaï regions and ended with a brutal crackdown in November 1929, after less than a month. The insurgents had even less firepower than in 1916 and their troops could not be called an army, as they were too fragmented, fewer numbered and ill-organised. 530 people were convicted, among whom 115 were shot by order of the OGPU troikas.<sup>86</sup>

## 5. A political language transformed by the revolt's religious stake

This first Turgaï uprising set a precedent for the following broader movements of insurgency in the neighbouring region of Irgiz in February 1930 in reaction to the beginning of collectivisation. The resistance started in the districts of Irgiz and Dzhetigar – where confiscation from baï had been particularly severe in 1928.<sup>87</sup> Insurgents fleeing the Turgaï and Kustanaï regions following the repression and other armed groups from the cities of Kustanaï, Aktiubinsk, Turgaï, Troistk and Akmolinsk joined the rebellion's ranks.<sup>88</sup> They were mainly driven by lack of food and resentment against the ban on the killing of livestock for consumption or sale.<sup>89</sup> OGPU plenipotentiaries had issued threats of evicting from the district those who refused to participate in the collectivist system “in the same way as baï and mullahs”, as only 36% of the Irgiz district had formed kolkhozes. In addition, they had to grapple with the fateful obligation of shearing their sheep and goats in the middle of winter, in order to meet the Plan's requirement for wool deliveries, and sanctions due to poor harvests and insufficient tax collection.<sup>90</sup>

A parallel can be drawn between these insurrections and the Turgaï episodes. The sequence of events started on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1930, by an act

---

86 Aldazhumanov, “Krest'ianskoe”, 67.

87 CGA RK 135/1, Central Commission on confiscation.

88 Aldazhumanov, “Krest'ianskoe”, 67.

89 CGA RK 5/21/13/103, in *Nasil'stvennaia...*, 67-68.

90 Isabelle Ohayon, *La sédentarisation des Kazakhs dans l'URSS de Staline. Collectivisation et changement social (1928-1945)*, (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2006), 182-185.

against symbols and representatives of institutional power. Coming from everywhere, the troops surrounded the district centre and peasant villages.<sup>91</sup> Their leaders were either former participants in the 1916 revolt or religious figures (ishans, hazirets and mullahs). They had elected Aïzharkyn Kanaev as their leader, who, after his 1916 election, was thus reinstated as Khan.<sup>92</sup>

This episode was marked by the increasing use in the mobilisation and political discourse of an element previously rarely mentioned in the Turgaï revolt: Islam. Archived documents about these armed rebel movements make many references to Islam when detailing the reasons for insurgency or describing their leaders. The closure and destruction of the region's mosques in 1929 was conducive to the emergence of a religious figure, Mukantaï Samatov (1875-1930), who became second in command to Khan Kanaev. A former imam of the Karasu mosque, he had been educated in one of Bukhara's madrassas and was appointed to take military command of the rebel army, an honour usually bestowed on the bravest *batyr*. Aïzharkin Kanaev and Mukantaï Samatov's duo was reminiscent of the traditional khan/batyr pair who, in this case, represented the Bozgul lineage, the most prominent in the Shomekeï tribe. Together, they succeeded in raising troops of over 700 men, going from aul to aul to recruit in public meetings, calling for insurgency, using the term of *ghazavat*.<sup>93</sup> After several incursions, the insurgents were unsuccessful in their effort to take over the hamlet of Irgiz on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1930; they were defeated on the following day by the 8<sup>th</sup> division of the Red Army's cavalry – where Slavs made up 85% of the troops. Their ethnic composition made them as alien in the eyes of the Kazakhs, as were the Tsar's military forces in their time. Kanaev and Samatov were killed in action.

The resistance was revived by a new group of rebels from the Toqa lineage [Shomekeï tribe], led by Tomenbaï Nurlybaev (-1930), who was elected khan, and his advisor ishan Isataï Satybaldin (-1930) – not a relative of Murza and Faïzolla Satybaldin. The troops who were in the south of Irgiz led an attack on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and were crushed a week later, due to insufficient fire power.<sup>94</sup> A similar fate befell ishan Zhumagazy Baimbetov (1874-1931) who led another rebel group at the end of March. If some mullahs and ishans had been in the background of the 1916 rebellion, documents from the OGPU show they were higher-numbered in the 1929-1930 insurgency and more in the frontlines. Yet, this information should be treated with caution. As pointed by Niccolo Pianciola in his article on the Suzak rebellion in 1930 (a region in the south of nowadays

---

91 CA FSB RF, 2/8/23/122-134, *in ibidem*, 251.

92 Alexis Berelowitch, Viktor Danilov, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK, OGPU, NKVD, dokumenty i materialy, t. 3 (1930-1934), kn. 1, 1930-1931* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2003), 322-326.

93 CA FSB RF, 2/8/53/2-28, *in* Berelowitch, Danilov, *Sovetskaia*, 322 and 326.

94 Aldazhumanov, "Krest'ianskoe", 73.

Kazakhstan), OGPU reports were ideologically more prone to accentuate the role of religious figures in order to justify the repression. References to the involvement of mullahs and ishans and to religious demands in 1929-1939 might in fact stem from a bias of the Soviet authorities.<sup>95</sup>

The final report from the Kazakh section of the OGPU shows that about 2,500 people<sup>96</sup> were involved in the Irgiz insurgency, which ended with 300 rebel fatalities and the escape of most of the others.<sup>97</sup> After the rebellion was quashed, the combatants dispersed and joined the gangs hiding in the Aralian part of the Karakum desert.<sup>98</sup> This first led to increasing skirmishes in the area and then to the emergence of a new insurgency. The combatants had joined other groups originating from southern areas like Suzak and Kzyl Orda, where the rebellion had also been crushed. In an area filled with places of worship and holy sites of Islam, religion was assuredly a core element of mobilisation. Therefore, the dissemination of the religious message most likely benefitted from the movement of combatants between both sites of resistance – the Turgaï plateau and the Suzak region. Afghanistan occupied in the Kazakh geopolitical perspective the role formerly played by the emirate of Bukhara.

## **6. The rise of the modern State as a condition for the revolt's "primitivisation"**

The primitive revolt as defined by Hobsbawm in his essay on Primitive Rebels<sup>99</sup> is a series of social protests with the same central feature: "social banditry". It can lead to peasant revolutions, like in Mexico, where rural banditry played a major part in the revolutionary dynamics. Hobsbawm makes a distinction between the "social bandits" and the "ordinary bandits", who are plain criminals. The social bandit was recognised and supported by the rural community as an authentic repository of the primitive revolt; these peasant outlaws were viewed by their peers as avengers fighting for justice and the rights of the oppressed, attacking detested external authorities guilty of imposing their will and control over the population. The ordinary bandit was a misfit, uprooted from his/her community, whose actions were rejected by society.

---

95 Niccolò Pianciola, "Interpreting an Insurgency in Soviet Kazakhstan: The OGPU, Islam and Qazaq 'Clans' in Suzak, 1930", in N. Pianciola, P. Sartori (eds.), *Islam, Society and States across the Qazaq Steppe (18th - Early 20th Centuries)* (Vienna, 2013), 297-340.

96 CA FSB RF/2/8/329/198-212, in Berelowitch, Danilov, *Sovetskaia*, 521.

97 Aldazhumanov, "Krest'ianskoe", 72.

98 Desert located at the north-east of the Aral Sea, namesake of the great Turkmen desert.

99 Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (New-York: Norton & Company, 1965).

The Marxist historian's interpretative model, if strictly applied to our case study, runs into limits. Indeed, Hobsbawm looks at social banditry or primitive rebellion within the framework of a history of capitalism from the modern times to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the west European world and its (ex-) colonies, except for the Russian area. Yet, the chronology of events he chose for his thesis corresponds to the rise of the modern state, defined by Michel Foucault as a sophisticated mechanism of governance and social engineering. The history of primitive revolt and social banditry in the Kazakh steppes is only of meaningful significance if it is compared to a history of power, marked by a will of the Imperial, and then Soviet, State for increased control over societies and territories, a State bent on limiting or even eradicating autonomous marginal figures and ever so mindful of the borderlands and edges of its territory. Therefore, elements of governance such as institutional justice, taxation, civil and military administration of the territories (...) and the creation of a constitutional body for non-Russian representatives of the State seem to form the conditions presiding over the emergence of a primitive revolt. The modern State in its tsarist and then Soviet form was confronted to revolts as soon as it was perceived as "predatory" or as negating the rights of the Kazakh community: abolition of the title of khan, attempted control over pastureland, creation of taxes and partition of the steppe by administrative divisions, change of status for political figures, mobilisation of men and agricultural goods in 1916, deportation of members of the local elites, large-scale confiscation and collectivisation in the 1930s...

In rural areas, the waning influence of political structures and practices and the disintegration of the social fabric and former economic operating modes accelerated in 1928-1932. Therefore, as the grip of the modern State on the Kazakhs grew stronger, the resistance turned more primitive: the "traditional" society in which historically potent political tools had been rendered useless no longer had the ability to formulate a political project going beyond a reactionary revolt against changes and measures that were branded illegitimate and unfair.

The Kazakh society was indeed increasingly drained of its institutions and denied an ideological future. A new colonialist system of governance was imposed as a superseding political structure, whose integrating requirements were at the core of Kenesary's rebellion in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. More than 50 years later, the 1916 revolt used it as a symbol, but rather than requesting political autonomy on the basis of norms associated with the Khan's power, the rebels fought the State as a constraining figure forcing upon them conscription and in kind contributions. The rebellion was only defined by protest and violence as radical tools of negotiation. The rebels targeted civil-servants who were loyal to the official authorities and refused to join the Kazakh intelligentsia in the search for a compromise with the Russian authorities.

This analysis differs from research from Tomohiko Uyama and Niccolo Pianciola, as they see in the 1916 rebellion the attributes of a State for Uyama and a quasi-State for Pianciola, which he also calls “micro-state characteristics”. Niccolo Pianciola also interprets the 1929-1930 insurgency in the same way. Tomohiko Uyama's argument lies chiefly with the election of khans that he describes as an action “directed at forming a State”, while recognising that this intention was not expressed in the political discourse. However, we have shown in this analysis that the figure of the khan underwent a transformation during the revolts, and became dissociated from the form of State that was the khanate. Niccolo Pianciola argues there was “the presence of an alternative idea of State and of legal order”, that is to say of specific practices (the organisation of a revolt through the election of a khan, the implementation of a commanding structure and the application of local conscription and taxation) and the use of administrative frameworks inherited from the tsarist era (what he calls “the authority networks” – *volost'* administrators). The use of Kazakh symbolic political figures and the reproduction of some traditional practices to organise the revolts were not accompanied, however, by a state-oriented discourse. They were more meant to ease the transmission of modes of resistance and to confer legitimacy to the revolts. The opponents to the 1916 rebellion, future members of Alash-Orda, were the ones who developed the idea of political autonomy for the Kazakhs and envisioned the building of a State, to which would adhere many former rebels.

## **Conclusion**

The study of the 1916 revolt in a long-term perspective highlights how decisive the armed movements opposing the Russian colonisation and then Sovietisation were in reconfiguring the Kazakh society's political landscape. The successive revolts that spanned over a century relied on a political language and an organisation predating the colonisation. In 1916, they became inadequate in many regards. They were insufficient to structure the movement in a sustainable manner and paled in comparison to the new dominant forces of governance and political practices driven by the modernity of the Imperial and then Soviet State and a Kazakh intellectual elite who had distanced itself from a lineage-based structure and the khanate model. This process is one of primitivisation; the revolt, rising from the bottom, was no longer driven by a concrete political project and did not succeed in regaining political traction in the face of new dominant references. It became primitive in Eric Hobsbawm's sense of the term. Under this configuration, the revolt still found resonance with other political dynamics, as it was at the core of society's concerns, but the imaginary it projected seemed out



of touch compared to the powerful modern State. Therefore, the primitive revolt marks the end of a process of decline and should not be reduced to a product of social and political marginalisation, resulting from a lack of access for a segment of society to means of political expression. In Eric Hobsbawm's notion of banditry, the peasants have long been under the yoke of feudal lords and cannot project themselves into a political future. In our context, we are dealing with a society recently deprived of its institutions and trying to adapt and rehabilitate them. It failed in enforcing an ideology rendered obsolete by the colonial change, and lost out to the embodiment of modernity that were national and progressive statist ideologies. Yet, a pressing need for ideological renewal came with raising awareness of the degradation affecting the institutions inherited from the Kazakh khanate. This renewal was marked in particular by the penetration of Islam in the discourse and amongst the active participants in the 1916 revolt, and more importantly in the 1930s, without triggering any change to the *modus operandi*. Unlike Hobsbawm's model, these revolts were not part of the revolutionary process, even though they seemed to accompany it during the initial phase between 1917 and 1920. Dzhanbosynov, Amangel'dy Imanov, Karaldin backed the Soviets and occupied prominent positions in the Soviet administration, but they did not become members of the Bolshevik Party. Those who survived the civil war kept to their region and local activities after 1920. Keeping to the local community is true to the characteristics of "social bandits", whose force laid in their solidarity with the population. This primitivisation of the Kazakh revolts is also reflected in the way they unfolded: Kenesary led a 10-year long war over a large territory, involving forces gathering many tribes from the three *zhüz*. The 1916 rebellion only lasted six months and was divided according to lineages, the 1929-1930 insurgencies were even more short-lived, lasting from one week to a month and more sparse. The number of participants also decreased sensibly between these three episodes, even if the revolts of 1916 and 1929-1930 were part of larger movements of resistance: that of Central Asia in 1916 and of the USSR in 1929-1930. However, the revolt's *modus operandi* remained the same with violent reactions to measures deemed illegitimate, "*batyrs*" leading feats of glory, the constitution of armed groups, the election of a khan and an attempt to set up a structure to organise the revolt.

The recourse to violence is one of the main modes of reaction from rural Kazakh communities against measures they deemed unfair and imposed by the authorities. Violence was viewed as a marker of opposition and a tool of resolution in conflicts against the official authorities. The tsarist authorities led negotiations with Kenesary in order to appease tensions in the steppes but their propositions were limited to offering positions within the indigenous colonial administration. Afterwards, the Russian and Soviet authorities reacted by

crushing the revolts. Punitive expeditions were led in the regions where the revolts took place and their leaders, khans and batyrs, were either killed in battle or arrested and sentenced to death. The February 1917 revolution saved the leaders of the 1916 rebellion from this fate. The only outcome from a stand off with military superior opponents was to retreat and take refuge in territories such as China, the emirate of Bukhara, the Khanate of Khiva and Afghanistan, depending on the times.

The pair formed by the khan and the batyr underwent profound transformations. The batyr, as a figure, succeeded in maintaining his status over the colonial period even though he was marginalised by the tsarist authorities. Only in the last phase did the figure veer from its precolonial model. The batyr helped in mobilising men and inspired bravery on the battlefield. In 1929-1930, the call for Islam served this mobilisation and gave a new breath to the pair khan/batyr by having religious figures take on the batyr costume, especially ishans. The title of *batyr* was very little used during the revolts of 1929-1930, as the events were too brief and the role was played by various religious personalities. After 1930, the Soviet propaganda redefined the function of batyr and tried to draft a revolutionary history integrating the non-Russian populations. Mikhail Pokrovskii, who shaped the writing of history in the USSR in the 1920s-1930s, posited the central part played by the struggle of the classes in the evolution of societies. Marked by this teleological interpretation, he reconstructed a genealogy of the peasant revolts until 1917 and identified popular leaders for the Russians. The Kazakhs, meant to be included in this historical construct, chose the figure of the *batyr* and conferred to him a national dimension that was no longer limited to his tribal fortress.<sup>100</sup> Amangel'dy became the iconic *batyr* and popular leader – which clearly distanced him from the *barymtashy* whose activity remained illegal and challenged by the Soviet regime.<sup>101</sup> During WWII, the epitome of heroism, the Red Army soldier, glorified in the Soviet patriotic discourse, was also called a *batyr*.<sup>102</sup>

The khan embodied the revolt's legitimacy and a legitimate use of violence. His election repeatedly occurred in each group who opposed the power in place as soon as the revolt gained ground after an epic victory. After Kenesary

---

100 Harun Yilmaz, "The rise of Red batyrs in the Kazakh steppe", in Harun Yilmaz, *National identities in soviet historiography: the rise of nations under Stalin* (London: Routledge, 2015), 87-108.

101 This practice was labelled as a daily crime "bytovye predstupleniya", in the 1924 RSFSR criminal code, cf. Zaiĭlagi Kenzhaliev, Sofia Dauletova, *Kazakhskoe obychnoe pravo v usloviakh sovetskoi vlasti: 1917-1937 gg.* (Almaty: Nauka, 1993), 103. After 1991, changes in historiographical paradigms revived the identification of Amangel'dy to a barymtashy in order to denigrate the Soviet Pantheon.

102 Roberto Carmack, "History and Hero Making: Patriotic Narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh Frontline Propaganda, 1941-1945", *Central Asian Survey* 33/1(2014), 95-112.

Kasymov's war, the khan no longer was a unifying element prompting a common response and evoking a potential Kazakh political entity. As a result, the khan was no longer required to come from the *töre* and his choice was, in fact, a reflection of a tribal or lineage-based anchoring, and therefore garnered a local dimension. The figure of the khan, a feudal symbol, raised more issues with the Soviet regime and its ideology. An important and well-known controversy took place around Kenesary Kasymov: Kazakh historians wanted to integrate him to the genealogy of national revolts.<sup>103</sup> This was briefly the case when he was included in the list of famous batyrs written by the Soviet regime, but it was his role as popular leader that was highlighted and not the fact that he was a khan. The commemoration for the 550<sup>th</sup> year of the “Kazakh Khanate” in 2015 gave him back his status of last Kazakh khan. Dzhanbosynov benefitted from a similar symptomatic treatment: even though he was elected khan in 1916, the Soviet and post-Soviet historiography links the 1916 insurgency in the Turgaï region to Amangel'dy Imanov. Dzhanbosynov is always referred to in his shadow and his role remains fairly unknown. No studies has been devoted to Aïzharkyn Kanaev, made khan in 1916 and 1930 in the Irgiz *uezd*. The connecting thread between episodes of violent protest (war, rebellion, insurgency) was maintained through different forms of orature<sup>104</sup> (epics, songs, legends or genealogical tales) dedicated to historical transmission. The increasing prominence of the Soviet discourse and the human loss of figures of transmission in the 1930s due to famines and repressions broke off the modes of resistance and revolt of the Kazakh society. In the protests of the 1950s and 1980s, the Kazakhs did not return to the *modus operandi* described in this study and neither the figure of the khan nor the *batyr* were resuscitated.

---

103 See the controversy surrounding the works of historian Bekmakhanov, whose doctoral thesis on Kenesary Kasymov was defended in 1947. He was arrested in 1952 and condemned for his “bourgeois and nationalist views”. Sattar Mazhitov, *Istoriik Ermukhan Bekmakhanov* (Astana: Foliant, 2005)

104 Orature is a term created by Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the beginning of the 1970s encompassing all spoken and musical oral traditions.