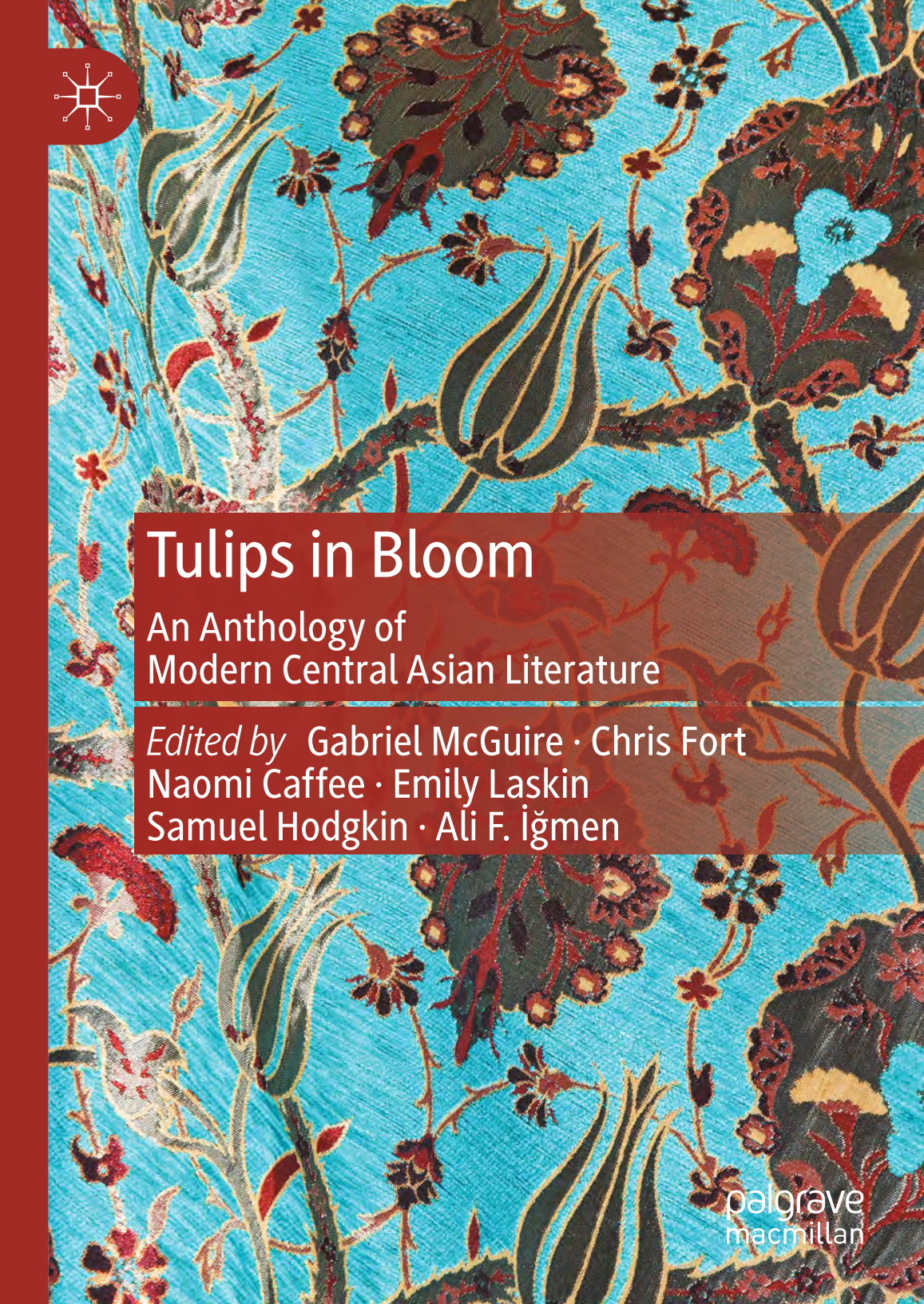
Tulips in Bloom
An Anthology of
Modern Central Asian Literature
Edited by Gabriel McGuire · Chris Fort
Naomi Caffee · Emily Laskin
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Native Intellectuals in the Russian Empire

In 1836 a short story entitled "Dolina Azhitugai" (The Valley of Azhitugai) written by the Adyghe Russophone writer Sultan Kazy-Girei appeared in the journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*). The story describes the landscape of the northwest Caucasus through the eyes of a man returning to his native land as an imperial soldier. *The Contemporary* was edited by the famous nineteenth-century Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (Kazy-Girei 1836). Pushkin was himself of part Russian and part African heritage and penned many poems about the Caucasus mountains, which reflect his intermittent embrace of his otherness in the Russian Empire. However, his editorial notes—in a classic Orientalist gesture—emphasize the otherness of the story's Muslim Russophone author, noting this: "unexpected occurrence in our literature" in which its author, "the son of a half-wild Caucasian stands beside our writers" (Kazy-Girei 1836, 169). "The Valley of Azhitugai" marks one of the first examples of a Russophone work published by a non-Russian Muslim writer in a Russian journal, foreshadowing a body of Russian-language colonial literature that would emerge in the early twentieth century after over a half century of Russian military and cultural imperialism in the region.

Kazy-Girei, like his narrator, became a soldier in the Russian imperial forces in 1825.[3] Little is known about his life before or after his military service. Soon after joining the army, he was awarded a medal for his service in the Persian Campaign of 1826–27, which led to the signing of the treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828 and the solidification of Russian imperial control in the Caucasus.[4] Between 1830 and 1840 he was stationed in Saint-Petersburg as a cadet in the Caucasian-Mountaineer squadron, where he learned Russian, attended literary salons, and frequented the theater.[5] Kazy-Girei's friendly correspondence with Aleksandr Nikolaevich Murav'ev, whom he met through military service, acquainted him

[3] Turchaninov clarifies that Pushkin, in his editorial note, confuses Sultan Kazy-Girei with his sergeant Sultan Khan Girei (Turchaninov 1970).

[4] The bloody imperial expansion into the northern Caucasus killed hundreds of thousands of native peoples and resulted in the deportation and displacement of more than a million North Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman empire from 1828 through the 1860s.

[5] The Caucasian-Highlander squadron in Saint-Petersburg was an initiative that sought to create a favorable impression of Russian culture among princes, sultans, and the local aristocracy (Turchaninov 1970, 34).

with Russian literary culture, in particular with the work of Pushkin.[6] After publishing two short stories in *The Contemporary*, he was transferred to a military division in Georgia. His correspondence with Murav'ev during this time suggests that the latter attempted, unsuccessfully, to convert him to Christianity.[7] Nevertheless, in 1855 Kazy-Girei did convert to Russian Orthodoxy when he married a Cossack woman, taking Murav'ev's first name and patronymic in his baptism as Andrei Andreevich Sultan Kazy-Girei.

Kazy-Girei's "The Valley of Azhitugai" is an autobiographical short story that narrates the author's complex psychological experience of colonial exile alongside and through a celebration of the valley of his youth. This double-voiced Russophone text reverses the Pushkinian paradigm of the Russian exile who "goes native" during his wandering on the periphery of the empire, for he recounts his narrator's return to the familiar landscape of his homeland, resonant with memories of his youth. Kazy-Girei engages the tropes of Romantic prose—its portrait of a powerful and intoxicating landscape—to instead depict his own alienation and experience of colonial double consciousness, a consciousness fractured by the recognition of his role in colonial development as an imperial officer. He cites the famous Russian Romantic poet Konstantin Batiushkov's loose translation of Lord George Gordon Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* an iconic referent for Russian Orientalist imaginary. However, Kazy-Girei's setting of his story in a valley at the banks of the Kuban river and his intimate account of the landscape and his personal memories there invert a Russian imperial imagined geography of the Caucasus in which the mountains often served as a border demarcating "civilized" Christian Russia from the "wild" peoples of the north Caucasus. Kazy-Girei's dual emphasis on the topography of the valley as an inversion of the mountain and the crossing of the Kuban river as a threshold indexes his own liminal position as he returns clothed in an imperial officer's dress and reflecting on his home in a foreign tongue. In Kazy-Girei's hands, the brilliant light caressing the Azhitugai plains

[6] Andrei Nicholaevich Murav'ev (1806–1874) served in the Russian imperial forces and participated in the Decembrist millieu. He was a poet, historian of religion, and travel writer.

[7] In 1848 Murav'ev wrote "Letters on Muhammadism" ["Pis'ma o magometanstve"]. which details the "superiority of the Christian faith over the Muhammadean (Islam)" (Turchaninov 1970, 39).

battles "the radiance of the Russian bayonet," and though the author has been vanquished by the latter, his powerful account of the valley leaves its poetic imprint on Russian literature.

Leah Feldman[8]

The Valley of Azhitugai

Sultan Kazy-Girei

Translated by Leah Feldman

Across the Kuban river, the 3rd of June 1834:
Before sunrise I left the shelter of my hospitable host and hurried to the peak, which proudly rose above the valley that I was preparing to abandon. Hoping to shorten my route, I avoided the main road and turned instead onto a path on the left that snaked along the multicolored walls of the cliff. Strewn with speckled pebbles, this path was attractive and at the same time led to a terrifying cliff, as if enticing the curious into its nets. My heart called me higher and higher. I wanted to take up the whole of the landscape of my motherland in one glance without interruption, without sequence, and to, in one instant, raise all of the years of the past from the dead. I went up to the mountain and suddenly all of my memories crowded familiarly in front of me. My thoughts fled to the long-past years of my carefree youth, and for a long while I couldn't turn to anything new, certain that my eyes would not meet anything similar and that nothing could entice me with such happiness. For a long, long while I gave myself up to reflections like these. It seemed that the natural landscape I had abandoned a long time ago because of the dictates of fate now happily smiled at my return. A tear of gratitude fell from eyes charmed by the sight of the place where I was born.

Everything called me back to the former joys of my youth. There was a young birch tree, beside which the traces of my long-abandoned and now destroyed shelter could be seen. There, after tiring of vivacious amusements, I threw myself into the embrace of ravishing sleep, thinking of nothing but rising and setting out again to seize the rich joy of my past life.

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The green hills gleamed with many-colored flowers, and rising up from their midst, a gray-headed *kurgan*, a burial hill, stood like a grandfather among his grandchildren. I was reminded of how I used to play here, rolling down and running up the hill like a light chamois.[9] The cold *akuzh*[10] stirred the vast valley with its green grasses peppered with flowers, which seemed to lean toward one another for a sleepy morning kiss. Throughout this place recollections crowded my memory; one only need cast a glance to be moved to a few tears of tenderness.

As my gaze moved along Azhitugai valley, flocks of small, scattered towns began to appear. Travelers intersected alongside and across the valley. Boisterous crowds of young people—on horseback and on foot—amused themselves by firing their guns. Children on horseback tried to outrace one another. Every place and everything here breathed happiness; and everywhere one could hear the exaltation of a carefree spirit. Only I couldn't find the joy of my past days, for it seemed to have been swept away from my memory irretrievably.

The Nizhig river rolled quickly under my feet with high waves that rose and fell like the tender breast of a beauty excited by passionate love or anxious with a pride injured by unfaithfulness. In the past, its banks were speckled with forests of sprawling trees, in whose shadows on hot summer days I swam and played as if among transparent waves.

I awoke from reverie. The sun had risen long ago but now seemed to rise again over the horizon. It was concealed from my sight by the mountain Aru-Kiz.[11] Its rays rose gradually over the mountain's enormous bulk and soon shone over the proud beauty of the banks of the Kuban.

To the north, across the Kuban, a sumptuous valley spread out, strewn with harvest fields and with the Cossack settlement *bakchas* of Nevino-Myska and Barsuttskaia scattered over it.[12] This plain begins from the Aru-Kiz mountain, which the Russians call *Nevinnaia*, and ends near the Pogorelovskaia settlement (a distance of 50 *versts*).[13] The plain is as bare

[9] Goat-antelope found both in the Alps and the Caucasus.

[10] The original includes a footnote explaining that the word *akuzh* means a morning breeze that blows in a ravine with the river's flow.

[11] The original text notes: "A charming maiden. It is unknown how this ugly mountain got this name."

[12] The original text notes: "Bakchas in Tatar means vegetable garden, but in southern Russian refers to the remote gardens where watermelons and melons are planted."

[13] *Nevinnaia* in Russian means "innocent." One *verst* is approximately 3500 feet.

as the palm of one's hand, as one would say, but in some places has a few inconspicuous elevations, among which the high Durt-Kul, that is in Tatar, the four-cornered knoll, rises in the form of a house. From south to north the plain is surrounded by a mid-sized range of mountains, amidst which towers the Zhegerlik mountain, covered by a dense forest on the northern side and a voluptuous meadow on the southern and western sides. The prison of the Temno-Lesnaia[14] fortress—a terror for the predatory Circassians—appears pale from this height. From the west, resting against the high cliff banks of the Kuban, this valley is extremely deceptive—you look at it and cannot believe your eyes, for with the slightest wind, it turns into a rippling green sea. This is exactly the place where the bloody battle between the highlanders and the Russians took place in 1813. The top of the cliff from which I observed my surroundings is also a plain, only it is much higher and wider than those I described previously. This plain, which the natives call Kazma, begins in the east from the Nizhig delta (or from Azhitugai), continues in a straight line west to the river Urup, and stretches a great distance to the north, uninterrupted for 100 *versts*. The plain is inhabited by rich flocks of sheep, herds of horses, and hunters; as a common pasture for the sheep of all of the inhabitants of Transkubania, it breathes life into its surroundings. On the plain there are many animals, especially wolves and foxes, and as many wild goats as domestic ones. At this moment I found nothing remarkable there: only the sad consequences of deadly war were visible.

The sun shone high above my head! I needed to set out, so I said farewell to majestic nature! Hope consoled me in this separation; and having wished the best to these arresting plains of Azhitugai and Kazma I rode on further.

After riding thirty *versts* I confess that I had lapsed into such a reverie that I did not notice the distance. Everything spoke to me of the wild and warlike life of the local inhabitants—and how strange it is to suddenly find oneself in such a place as this having just left the capital, to see ungraspable desert in place of the ordered streets and some bold highlander with his faithful horse in place of dandy carriages. Yes! And my non-European mind imagined this strange, rebellious life, and theories of the formation of nations, about which many had talked and still talk, came to

[14] Russian for "dark forest."

my thoughts. Strange! Was it so long ago that I rushed about on horseback like a whirlwind in this wild land? Yet now I was ready to present a thousand plans for its development. But this work is not ours; and for us there remains only a wish for the better—let be what will be—and anyway, my traveling companions didn't care for theories. Their hearts beat with joy when they saw a place to stay the night. I, on the other hand, felt as if I had come back to earth; upon waking, I threw a tired glance at the distance and suddenly noticed a new spectacle that struck me absolutely. Ten years ago could I have imagined seeing a Russian fortification in this spot and staying there overnight with people whom I had furiously threatened as a child? The imagined enemy for all of the fighting moves I practiced while racing across this field was always Russians, and yet now, I found myself standing here as a Russian officer.

A wonderful June evening charmed my gaze, and my sentiments returned to nature. The last rays of the daytime luminescence competed with the radiance of the Russian bayonet, as if willing to darken its victorious glory with their departure. The three-edged blade seemed to recall the words of its great leader, "the bullet is stupid, whereas the bayonet is mighty,"[15] and, as if certain of the justice of his word and the immortality of its glory, proudly flashed in front of the dying rays. Finally, this time too as always, it vanquished its rival. The setting sun hid itself behind the mountain, while the bayonet still shone in front of my eyes. However, the sun concealed itself only from my glance, but did not lower its flaming rays from the peaks of a snowy giant of the charming Caucasus's majestic nature, upon which virgin snow seemed to blush, as if ashamed at the immodest rays of the splendid sunset. Charmed by the lovely pictures of my wild motherland, which I had not encountered in a long time, I involuntarily and with complete forgetfulness looked at her: how alluringly and how various she stood before me. I could hardly believe my eyes that I was in the Caucasus. I felt as if I were sitting in the plush seats of a Peterburg theater, being carried away by the lovely scenery of an enchanting opera. But one who sees the splendors of nature does not wish to watch the slavish imitation of art.

Finally, we reached the Iarsukanskaia fortress where I was ready to stay and rest in the company of an old comrade I had met there, but no! One

[15] Russian general Aleksandr Suvorov (1730–1800) wrote these oft-quoted words about early nineteenth-century Russian military tactics in his book *The Science of Conquering*, posthumously published in 1806.

who has stayed in these places knows that it is better to sleep under the open sky than in those stuffy mud brick huts, which abound in all kinds of insects. And so, we decided to sleep on route in the open field. We covered ourselves in long sheepskin coats and fell asleep on the threshold of the mud brick hut. A quiet, cool wind blew over us with its light wings. For 2 days I had admired the majesty of local nature, feeding myself with memories of the past. But a Caucasian day cannot compare to night; it is so intoxicating here in the weightless twilight, the cool, and the mysterious silence. The night was quiet and warm. I asked my comrade to go with me to swim in the river. The noise of the river seemed to call me, as if to a warm and familiar conversation, and I ran to it as if remembering past days when I lived in its waves. We armed ourselves as if before a fight because here pleasure must always be paid for with danger; but in return every little thing gives you such joy that there could be nothing greater. We had two more men and two armed soldiers in the convoy with us, for danger and night make insignificant people unashamed to surround themselves with a luxurious entourage. And why not—who would not take advantage of such a chance? Besides, I'm the lead man in this fortress. Call it whatever you wish, you could say beggars can't be choosers, but this was still my corner of the world. A safe shelter, the fortress wall, was left behind us—and ahead danger could await us—but anyway we pressed on to the river.

A crescent moon lit the entire plain. The forest blackened in the distance and amidst the night's darkness seemed to appear as a black cloud in the clear midday sky. Here in between the trees the waves of the Nizhig sparkled, silvered over by the moon. The gloomy Iarsukan proudly rose above this, spread with granite rocks and dressed in a green velvet robe of scented grasses. This gloomy mountain, eternal shelter from the wind and thunder, presides like a jealous harem eunuch frowning over the valleys sprinkled with flowers and protecting them from the torrid heat in his gloomy shadow. We were descending to the river along the cliff, which was not so high but still difficult to walk down, for its paths were strewn with quite large stones and overgrown with dense blackthorn bushes that one had to pass through with care. Otherwise, with the first wrong step off the path one could be caught by hooked boughs from which one could no more easily disentangle oneself than from the claws of a bear.

We descended to the bottom. Nature itself divides the forest in this place in two, and this division even increases the beauty of the picture;

from here the river that lay half a *verst* away seems to appear as a rainbow amidst a dark cloud.

We reached the river, and here amidst the forest, a small round area appeared sprinkled with sand and small stones. Only from this spot could you see the river! The vision of the rushing stream of the current with its high waves tricks the eye, for the river seems to have neither beginning nor end, disappearing from one's curious glance into the twilight of night and the darkness of the forest. The river flows from the thicket and then, its banks filled with translucent waves, vanishes from sight as if devoured by the jaws of a monster.

The shadows of the trees on the opposite bank lay down like giants tired from battle on the supple waves of the river and seemingly breathed with life, rising and falling with the waves. A silent breeze drove light clouds onto the crescent moon, which shone through them like a shy beauty who, wrapped in a smoky veil, walked for the first time to a felonious rendezvous with her lover. We were already on the bank. I alone undressed and my eyes leaned tenderly toward the sky, thanking it for returning me to the banks where I was born. The crescent moon swam at once both in the clouds and in the streams of the river; but I left the one moon in the sky and tried to catch the other in the waves as if I were a child. I was happy. I swam joyfully, recalling the carefree years of my childhood and forgetting the anxiety of life, my fatigue, and the whole world. Let others have conversations with the stormy waves of the seas. Let their sight roam on the immeasurable surface of the ocean. I will talk to the slender flowing waves of familiar banks where everything breathes remembrance, where I, the only child of my loving mother, tasted the bliss of love and partook of heartfelt caresses on her native breast. Here I grew up as the only hope of this inconsolable widow, and here I bid farewell to the bliss of my carefree youth. Yes! This river is native to me and there in the valley, each *kurgan* sprinkled with fragrant flowers calls to converse with me after a long separation. My soul understands everything here: the noise of the river, the howling of the wind, the murmur of the leaves, the rustling of the bushes, and the gloomy face of the fruitless rocks. My conversation with the surrounding nature was rapturous. But I was already sitting on the banks beneath my sheepskin coat, drawing smoke from a pipe filled with scented American tobacco, which saturated the air with its intoxicating aroma. There are moments during which a person's imagination flies to all places available to them. The soul at such a moment wants something inexplicable, something lofty, such that the

weak nature of man is not in any condition to constrain the yearnings of the soul. And so, God only knows, where did my thoughts not reach, where and with whom did my imagination not converse? I sat there on the bank, tired and listening to the mournful noise of the river, which seemed to understand my disordered state of being. I wiped the rolling streams from my face, but they were warm and bitter, they did not spring from the cool water of the river. My comrade sat at my side, lowering his gaze to the earth. He had not come into the river with me, but his eyes were also wet. Perhaps he envied my fate. Of course! His dreams were on the banks of the Dnieper! Perhaps in his deepest wish, he imagined himself already united with the favorite of his thoughts. It seemed that the river whispered to me: "oh, what a strange man you are!" A conversation with nature familiar and beloved—this part wrung out tears from your eyes—but you cheated on her. There, not far away, a native embrace awaits you, but your dreams wander across foreign banks, and your soul lives in a foreign land. Finally, morning arrived. A sharp wind seemed to press us with its wings to our bare bed, so that each of us wanted to double the weight of our covers. From beneath my coat, I gazed stealthily upon the ascending sun, which long ago had risen above the horizon, but, having lost itself in the thick mist of Iarsukan, now hid from my glance. The bright day dispersed its cheerful strands in a nature damp with dew. The sun grew stronger, burning the mist into white clouds and sparkling as it rolled in the azure of the heavens. Soon it lifted itself high above the mountain, but the gloomy peak still did not want to throw off its misty morning whiteness.

Finally, I ventured further. The valley lay some distance from me to the south, and the road I followed wound along it like a dusty strip. In the distance on the right, a forest could be seen around the headwaters of the Urp, Gegel, and Labe. On the left, the mid-sized ridges of mountains extended, rising higher and higher above the cliffs to the south of the snow-capped mountains. I glanced back and saw the familiar granite pillar that stood two and a half *sazhens*[16] high. My heart beat faster at the sight of this callous witness of the past, and my noble horse seemed to recognize my thoughts. My horse was racing quickly, as if he understood my desires to converse with the indifferent granite without witnesses, and

[16] A *sazhen* was 2.34 meters.

who like me was also cut off from his circle of family and placed in a strange valley, from which he gazed into the distance at the gloomy cliffs.

My horse galloped up the hillock where the great granite was rooted, and I dismounted there in order to look more closely at this old friend. The featureless old man stood there gloomily, stooping forward to the west for God knows for what reason. Overhanging his grim brow was a roughly cut cross. At first, it seemed to me as though this icon of Europe and the Enlightenment were the coat of arms for some ancient Caucasian family hidden on the hill under this granite. Perhaps it was a celebratory symbol of belief or of victory. Was it not here that the despoilers of the ancient world had passed, their menacing leaders carrying terror for Rome with them. Yes, the Caucasus was the threshold of Europe and perhaps this granite had witnessed crowds of Huns, Magyars, Avars, Pechenegs, Turks, and other uninvited guests of the ancient world. But they did not prevail over Europe!

The granite was unresponsive, and no man's hands had left any inscription upon it, but placed it here in the desert with only this mysterious and silent sign upon it. Yes, Kishik-Sil,[17] you stand in this desert wrapped in obscurity, and time and storms gnaw at you and your old greatness in vain, but wait! Your time is coming, your turn will fall, and the fierce wind of Besh-Tau will deliver your sand across the desert![18] Let others pass you here without a single word or any hint of homage, but I love you as my own. Was it not here under the shade of this granite that as a child I loved to dream in the open air? Yes, I remember the day when the wind gathered the black storm clouds and flew with them to Iarsukan, when it tore through the ravines and raised waves on the Nizhig that flooded the banks, and lightning fell like arrows that pierced the storm clouds. Thunder clattered terribly in the desert. I sat then on your pedestal and watched the horrors of nature, and it seemed to me that there was some delight in these storms. Yes, from that moment I began to love the storm, to love the wrath of nature, its gloom untouched by human artifice, and I believed the poet that

[17] *Kishik* in Tartar means curved, and *sil* means statue.

[18] *Besh-Tau*, or five mountains, is where the city Pyatigorsk, meaning "five mountains" in Russian, stands. The eastern wind, which blows from the side of these mountains, is called Zakubants Besh-Tau, that is, the wind of five mountains.

There is delight in the wildness of forests;
There is happiness in the sandy banks;
And there is harmony in the seven murmurs of the waves
Crashing on the desert path.[19]

Yes, Caucasus! Your days and nights, your storms, your lush green plains, your snow-capped mountains reaching above the clouds, they breathe wonders. Here where everything strikes the heart, the poet need not travel far. Sooner or later, there will be a bard among the future inhabitants of the Caucasus who will find this granite. The spirit of the people will carry on the legacy of the tribes of the Caucasus in their poetry, their ancient songs, and their wandering bards. And there is dignity and strength in this thought. But what will be will be, and the mystery of this granite had carried me very far away. Finally, the time had come to say goodbye to this old man. Jumping onto the saddle, I turned my horse and soon the dust covered my tracks.

St. Petersburg, 1836

Pre-revolutionary Memoir: Dilshod Barno's "History of the Refugees"

The teacher and poet Dilshod Barno did not choose to be a traveler: she was compelled to be a traveler. Following the siege and sack of her hometown of Uratepe (Istaravshan in modern-day Tajikistan) by the victorious forces of the Khanate of Khoqand in 1817, she was taken into captivity and marched across the wastelands to their capital along with over one thousand other survivors. There, she was initially separated from the bulk of the captives and was taken into the khan's palace along with two other girls. Primped and primed for royal audience, she sassed the khan with a critical verse and was expelled from the palace. After a night-time flit through the city's neighborhoods and environs, she fetched up at the home of an imam and his mother, who ran a girls school attached to her son's mosque. Dilshod married the imam and assisted his mother in the running of her school, which she took over after the old woman's death. Over the course of the next half century, she educated hundreds of young girls and often encouraged them to write poetry. She eventually

[19] The opening lines from the 1819 poem, "There is delight in the wildness of forests," by Konstantin Nikolaevich Batyushkov (1787–1855).