**Book Reviews**

*Tarihин AKTAY BARAKTARI [THE BLANK PAGES OF HISTORY]*


A new book on Törökul Aitmatov, his life journey and his era

The history of the Kyrgyz and their leaders during the first half of the twentieth century has only been objectively studied since the fall of the Soviet Union. A great deal of work today, however, remains to be done as some archived materials still have yet to be taken out of boxes and properly assessed.

Younger Kyrgyz generations, born during the last years of the Soviet Union and since independence, do not sufficiently understand the level of censorship that was present during Soviet Communist rule. Part of this is our lack of understanding of the power-chains that limited scholars to only positively express aspects of the Soviet era and the ideology of the one party-regime. Despite the statement “we have built a proletarian dictatorship,” the reality is that what was built was a self-serving apparatus of Communist leaders and their Soviet bureaucratic supporters, while the rights of common citizens and workers were disregarded.

This era has yet to be thoroughly weighed and investigated. By studying the lives of the non-Russian ethnic leaders and people of this period, one can determine the significance of this epoch. While there are multiple studies on the Kyrgyz writer, thinker and social activist Chingiz Törökul-uulu Aitmatov (1928–2008), little attention has been given to his father. The previously mentioned censorship of the
Stalinist regime and the closed access to archived materials of topics deemed prohibited made it impossible for such matters to be openly discussed.¹

The year 2013, more than two decades after Kyrgyzstan proclaimed independence, marks the 110th anniversary of the birth of one of the great Kyrgyz national leaders—the social activist and prominent statesman, Törökül Aitmatov (1903-1938). Coinciding with the centennial, a reprint of an earlier released work of the same name, entitled *The Blank Pages of History*, written by his youngest daughter, professor and publicist Roza Törökül-kizi Aitmatova, was published, augmenting the 2007 first print with noteworthy material. Along with this new edition, a translated version of the book was also published and distributed in the same year.²

Professor Roza Aytmatova’s book consists of an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion and appendices of photos, including a photocopy of a hand written autobiography penned by Törökül Aitmatov, pictures of him and his close associates, as well as a family tree of Aitmat and Hamza, the grandfathers of Roza from her father’s and mother’s sides.

The prologue of the book serves as an exposition on Stalinist repressions during the 1930’s and details how mass graves south-east of Bishkek, in Chong-Tash village, were discovered for the first time in 1991, with the verification that the author’s father, Törökül Aitmatov, was one of those shot dead and buried in that secret grave. The author warrants, “I wanted to write about everything. The young generation must know about the horrible stories of the past.”

The chapter on “Ata Beyit, Atalar mazarı” (Ata Beyit, the memorial complex of the fathers, pages 5–34), covers the events leading up to November 1938. It was at that time that 137 Kyrgyz citizens of different ethnic backgrounds (the identity of the 138th body, apparently belonged to a woman who was supposed to have been an accidental witness of the secret burial, is still unknown) were secretly killed between
the fifth and eighth of November 1938, and buried on the latter date, after the celebration of the twenty-first anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. The chapter recounts how in the summer months of 1991 the mass grave site was revealed.

The second part is named “Aitmattiin butaktari” (Aitmat’s branch, pages thirty-five through ninety-three) and describes the family tree of Törökül Aitmatov, a Kyrgyz from the tribe of Kytay/Kitay. The chapter also discusses Aitmat’s father, Kimbildi Konchujok-uulu, who was a wealthy public figure of his time (during the Soviet era, social activists did not talk about the wealthy roots of their ancestors and had to show that they were from poor farmer families). When Kimbildi passed away, Aitmat, like others of the time, suffered the painful realities of poverty; however, he was able to provide his son a good education.

The third part of the book, entitled “Hamzaniiin butaktari” (Hamza’s branches, pages 94–137), contains important information on her mother Nagima’s family tree, beginning with of Hamza Abduvaliev (1850–1932), also spelled Abdulvaliev, Gabduvaliev, Gabdelvaliev, a rich ethnic Tatar. He lived in the town of Karakol, in the Ysyk-Kul region and was Roza Aitmatova’s maternal grandfather. This chapter is crucial for understanding the lives of the Tatar diaspora of that era and the interesting aspects of Törökül and Nagima’s married life, building a home together during the harsh Stalinist period.

The fourth part of the book entitled, “Atasizdiik” (Being without a father, pages 138–163), discusses the false accusation against Törökül Aitmatov for being “an active participant of the ‘Social-Turan Party,’ which was alleged to have been attempting through armed means to destroy Soviet rule and establish a nationalist bourgeoisie state under the protectorate of England.” The incrimination and following sentencing occurred without any just trial and resulted in his execution-style murder within the last hour on November 5, 1938, as an “enemy of the state.”
Moreover, this chapter describes the hardships children and relatives of a so-called “enemy of the state” had to face in the USSR.

The fifth part of the book, called “Özgörüülör mezgili” (The era of change, pages 164–175), is based on the hope, as expressed in Kyrgyz folk sayings, that “justice will prevail” and “the truth can be [temporarily] bent but it will never be broken”. This chapter deals with Törökül Aitmatov’s formal acquittal nearly two decades later in 1957 and the remaining days of his surviving wife, Nagima, who passed away before ever finding out the truth behind the killing of her husband by the Soviet repression machine.

The sixth part, “Atamdï eskerüü” (Memories of my father, pages 175–196), touches upon the work and historical importance of Törökül Aitmatov as a social activist and statesman.

The seventh part illuminates the achievements of the author’s brother, Chïngïz Aitmatov. The chapter is entitled “Baktïluu üy” (The happy family, pages 197–205).

The conclusion (pages 206–209) of the book is inspired by a famous Kyrgyz proverb: “If your father dies, may the person who has seen your father stay alive.” Törökül Aitmatov’s close friends exemplified these words by remembering him and his family, especially during the turbulent times his family suffered through.

Overall, Roza Aitmatova’s book about her father Törökül Aytmatoğ is animated, lively, straightforward and based on facts. Moreover, this book contains an important element that others would not be able to rely on—a personal portrayal of family life that can only be shared by those so closely connected, Roza Aitmatova and her close relatives.
This book does not only tell the biography of Törökul Aitmatov, but also investigates the era he lived in. We can clearly state that this book is an important addition to any study on Aitmatov, a special scholarly branch of research on the life and accomplishments of the famous Kyrgyz writer Chîngïz Aitmatov, the eldest son of Törökül Aitmatov.

As we mentioned before, the Czech writer and playwright Karel Capek coined the word "robot" to describe a machine that resembles a human being; Aitmatov resurrected the old Kyrgyz word "mankurt," meaning a robot-like human stripped of his intellect by a process of physical brainwashing imposed by a brutal, oriental tyranny. The Kyrgyz writer begs any new generations to remember their father’s name, their ancestors, and their personal intellectual identities. The same did his youngest sister, Roza, with her new books on their father, Törökul.

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