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How becoming an Orientalist?

A Journey through my Life and Field Research



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Orientalist

(Turkology, Mongolistics, Central Asian Studies)

Thank you to the SWISS SOCIETY Bangkok and Josef Schnyder, for inviting me to present my curriculum as an Orientalist. Our main task is to produce knowledge and to make it accessible through rather dry scientific publications. I will mention some on my slides. Composing a study on one theme needs hours, days and years alone between original documents, books in various scripts and languages and even oral texts. That is sometimes really frustrating and too boring to talk about. But the colorful aspect of my curriculum are the lively encounters with the people of my focus when collecting material from WITHIN. And this is what I want to show in the context of my life.



I grew up in the tranquil suburbs of Freiburg on the border to France and Switzerland. During my younger age, I complained about the narrow selfsufficiency of the region. So I used to counter prevailing expectations and followed my proper ideas. Today, I appreciate Freiburg for its old university and the solar **technology**. Recently I heard during a lecture by Prof. Eicke Weber (Prof. em. Fraunhofer Institut, Freiburg): the photovoltaic technology of *the entire panels worldwide* was originally developed at Fraunhofer Institut in Freiburg – and then sold! And also today, I share the locals' appreciation for wines, but I prefer the most distinguished Winery - you see FRANZ KELLER Winery on the upper left.

General overview

- Born in **Freiburg** i. Brsg. Southwest of Germany.
- Highschool, than Berlitz School of Languages: Diploma (interpreter) French and Italian.
- Au Pair in **Istanbul**, Turkey.
- Studies at Freie Universität (FU), later also at Humboldt Universität (HU), **Berlin**. Several travels to **Turkey**.
- Fall of the **Berlin Wall**, re-unification of Germany and disintegration of Soviet Union.
- Extensive travels: around **Turkey** and to **Soviet Union before 1988. Post-soviet Caucasus, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, Kirghizstan**.
- Prepares Magister Examen (M.A.), publishes articles while in Sichuan Province, **Peoples Republic of China**, due to Paul's assignment.
- PhD Studies and research work at Sorbonne and INALCO, **Paris**. Publishes articles.
- Lecturer at Gumanitarnyj Universitet in **Bishkek, Kirghizstan**. Works in archives and continues collection of research material.



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More exiting for me was, that the East-West Cold War History had played a role my life. My parents had moved from Berlin to Freiburg *before* the Wall. And from early times, my mother took me yearly to her parents and brother in Eastern Berlin. I was proud to travel to the capital of another country and even behind the «Iron Curtain». But I still remember the hostile atmosphere during the border controls in early times. My father did not return until the Fall of the Wall in 1989!

Furthermore, I experienced the slow approach between post-war Germany and France and Switzerland and the resentments. Due to these experiences with «frozen conflict zones» I developed a curiosity to learn about the other. And I developed interest for languages. This mainly while travelling down to Italy's contradictory South.

- Travels and collection of written documents and oral material among the Kirghiz in **Xinjiang** and **Heilongjiang** Province of China and **Kirghizstan**.
- Articles during Paul's assignment to Panzhihua (**PR China**) and Taichung, **Taiwan**.



Goethe-Institut Staufen 1961-1993

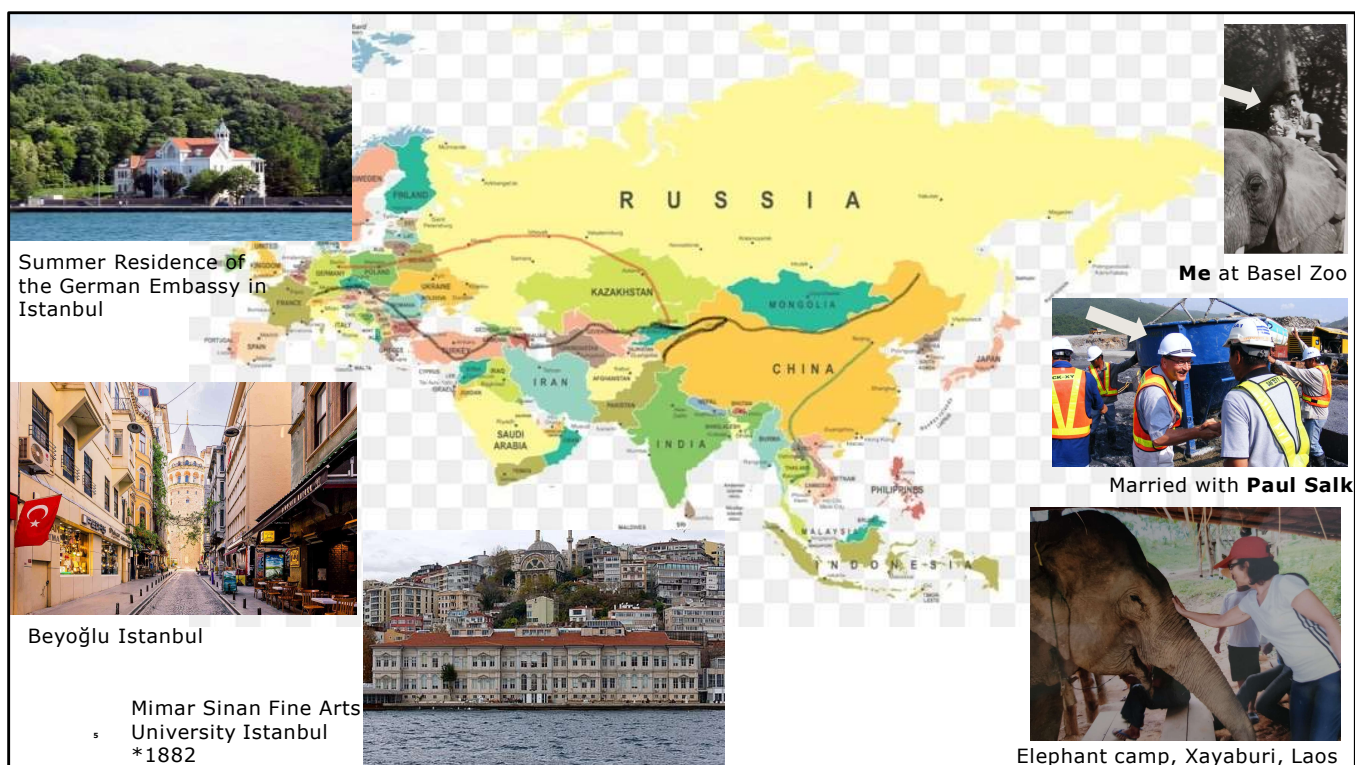
- Lecturer (Institute for Turkology and Institute for Translations) University of **Mersin, Turkey**.



- Returns to **Freiburg**, PhD at Albert-Ludwigs Universität, Institute for Islamic Studies, Turkology. Publication of thesis and other article
- Research assistant and lecturer at FU **Berlin**, Institute of Turkology.
- Research project for German Research Foundation DFG. Moves to **Laos** and **Bangkok** (due to Paul's assignment).
- **Bangkok**



But the most important were my early contacts with students from the *Goethe-Institute* – you see on the upper right. In the tiny but *very* open-minded city of Staufen I went to school, and it was easy to meet students from Turkey, Cyprus, Iran, Syria, Libanon – such places, Germans usually did not expect to visit during the 1970ies. Unlike my classmates, I was excited to learn about different cultures, and I first saw Iranian miniatures, which I will also show later on. And I learned my first words in Turkish.



The map in the middle shows, how I had already travelled through West- and Inner Asia during my geography lessons. But I didn't expect my fantasy to become true. And I had never thought to end up in our present-home in the *Southeast of Asia*, which was far beyond my concerns.

After high-school, my classmates went for an Au Pair stay to *London* or *Paris*. Instead - I had applied for *Istanbul*. So I spent almost one year in the family of a former Turkish Delegate to the United Nations.* My host family even took me to the Garden-Party in the historic Residence of the German Embassy facing the Bosphorus, you see it on the upper left picture. This wonderful property was a gift to Kaiser Wilhelm II. In 1880 by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid (1842-1918).

Luckily my task was not to take care for children - but to revise the German-written memoirs of the honorable family. But I must admit, I did not understand the importance of the historic document in my young age.

*Turkey has been a *member state* since 1945.

Oriental Studies

1. Islamic Studies: Turkology, Iranistics, Arabistics.
2. Inner/Central Asia: Mongolistics, Tungusic studies.
3. Others, like: Siberian language studies... and other minor groups. Sinology, Southeast Asian Studies (Thai-Lao group ↔ Malay group), Japanology, Indology, but also Indo-European Studies (incl. Old Armenian) or Ancient Near East (e.g. Assyrian, Hetit, Sumerian...).
4. Linguistics: for ex. **agglutinating** languages (Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic); **flecting** languages (Indo-European), but also Arabic (Semitic language group), Language types, comparative linguistics.
5. History on: Discovery, Colonisation and Research → Compiling the History of the local peoples.
6. Reading documentations in secondary languages (English, French, Russian) and sources and documents of the concerned.
7. Ethnic geography



Mixed cultural styles: urban+ agriculture + nomadic
Flecting language type: prefix+ main stem+suffix. For ex. arabic: *kataba* 'write' → *maktub* 'letter'.



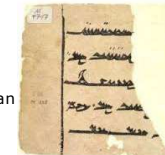
Nomadic culture + Agglutinating languages:
Batı -lı-la-ş-tır-ıl-a-ma-y-acak-lar-dan-mış-ız =
 'we seem to belong to those who cannot be westernized'
 → main stem + „sticked“ suffixes. Fixed regular order + vowel harmony

From point 1 to 3 on the slide, you can see examples of various Oriental Subjects. Not many students would decide for, as Western people generally do not feel a need to understand the historic and socio-cultural context beyond their own standards. I feel, that overcoming this lack would lead to less conflicts and more peace. On the map, I marked in yellow the dominance of the culture and language type along the *Inner-Asian belt*. I was fascinated about the linguistic structure, which is extremely different from Indo-European. Therefore I chose Mongolistics as a combination to Turkology. My personal interest was to find out if Inner Asian languages do have a common linguistic ancestor.

That time I had studied Turkology in Western Berlin, and, immediately after the fall of the Wall in 1989 I took the chance for Mongolistics at Humboldt University in Eastern Berlin. In the Bundesrepublik, Mongolistics was only offered in Bonn. During these early days of re-unification, all East-German structures went upside-down, as many institutions and positions were abolished. We were only five enthusiastic students from the West at an institute with seven professors and lecturers! Together we decided on the classes and lectures and made plans, how to keep our

institute alive and justify its existence.

1. Turkish and the former arabic-based Ottoman;
2. Azeri, belonging to West-Turkic (close to Anatolian dialects and Turkish)
3. Uzbek and the former arabic-based Tshagataian (Southeast Turkic)
4. **Kirghiz (Kirghizstan)** and arabic-based **Kirghiz (Xinjiang, China)**; Northwest to East-Turkic
5. Old Uighur (mixed: East and Northwest Turkic)
6. Orhon Turkic (ancient period: East Turkic)
7. Dolgan and Yakut Turkic (Northeast Turkic); upper Yenissei area, Yakutia (Siberia, Russia).
8. Basic secondary languages for reading sources and documents: Persian, Arabic, Russian.
9. Mongolian (Outer Mongolia) and Ancient Mongolian
10. Introduction into Manchu (Tungus group)



Languages are the key into a society. And I can say, without that skill, I would never had gained such confidence. Several languages have also produced written representations. These are also a key into reading History and into the analyzis of related language structures. This slide shows examples of those *Inner Asian languages* and *scripts*, which had played some role for me:

- 1.) Top-left is the Kirghiz Epic Poem *Manas*, in *arabic-based* Kirghiz from, China. The Xinjiang versions were mainly told by the famous singer *Jusup Mamai* in *Urumqi*, whom I had the chance to visit in 1995. His longest oral performance last 14 hs! So – listening needs patience.

- 2.) And top right is a cyrillic-based Kirghiz example.
3.) In the middle you see an *Old Uighur manuscript and alphabet*. The present-day Uighurs use a modified arabic alphabet. But the Old Uighurs adopted the script from *Iranian Sogdians**, then introduced it to the *Mongols*, and the Mongols had passed it later to the *Manchu* – the *last Dynasty of China!*

For ex. my lower left foto is a genealogy of the 19th century. I found the document by chance - but in secret in 1996; the owners were a poor family in northern Heilongjiang - but originally the

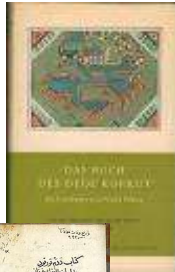
decendants of a *leading garrison family* of the Manchu Dynastical Order.

4.) Then, lower right side is *Orhon Turkic* with a *runic* alphabet in northern Mongolia and South Siberia.

*Sodians: approx. 6th century BC to 11th century AD.

Oriental Art – my hoppy and favorite

1. Literature



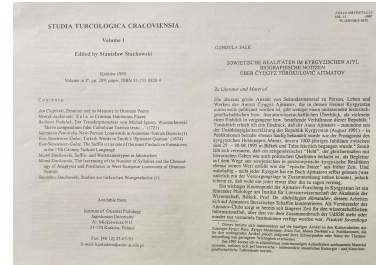
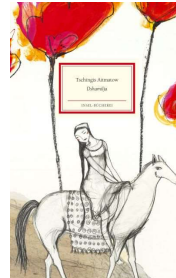
Das Buch des Dede Korkut
(Oghuzname) Dresden
Manuscript, 14./15. AD



Sabahattin Ali (Istanbul 1940)



Nizami Genjewij
1141-1208 AD



Tchingis Aitmatov (1928-2008) in Bonn 1995



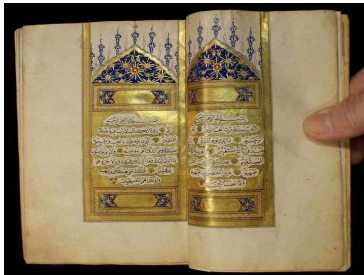
The next three slides will show my hobby:

Oriental Art is also appreciated by non-specialists. Here examples of literature. However - I myself, I do not like literature - exept as a historic or socio-political document.

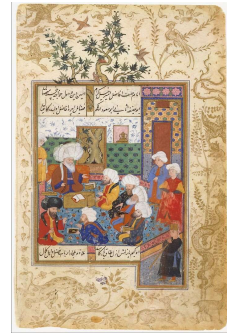
1. You see on the left: A narrative of the *early Ottoman* period. *It's an early example of tribal descent accounts*, something what became important for my later approach among the *Kirghiz*.
2. Then you see in Turkish *Sabahattin Ali* (1907-1948): altering self-concepts due to the social and national awakening during the early Republic period in Istanbul.
3. And of course, you see *Nizami Genjewij* (1141-1208), in a German translation from Persian. «Leila and Madjnun» is considered the most touching love story in - at least Iran and the Near East. *Gänjä* is a place in Northwest Iran and home to the *Turkic Azeri*, so they consider this a heritage as much as do the Persians and other Iranian speakers.
4. The right side is dedicated to the famous Soviet-Kirghiz author *Tshingis Aitmatov*. You see his debut piece «Dshamilija» from 1958.

I met Tshingis Aitmatov several times. Also his family in Kirghizstan. He even came to our home. Worth to mention: he became a reformist politician under president Gorbatchev in Moscow, later then ambassador for the *Soviet Union* to Luxemburg. And after 1992, he was *Kirghizstan's* Ambassador to Brussels, the center of EU. Aitmatov wrote in *Russian*, so he reached many people *within* and *beyond* the Soviet Union: Some books were translated into as much as 160 languages and sold in 128 countries! He was very important at that time, as many Western people learned about the intimate life behind the «Iron Curtain» from Tshingis Aitmatov.

2. Miniatures and book manufacturing



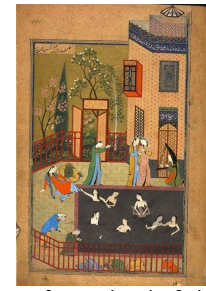
Ottoman Qur'ān manuscript before 1500



The Ottoman school before 16th AD



Topkapı painter, 16th AD



Venetian school of the Ottomans after 1600

Initially, I had thought to combine Turkology with *History of Arts* but then I kept Arts as one of my hobbies. *Miniatures* are parts of books, and since I am Turkologist, we see here Ottoman examples.

- The two maps in the lower middle of the slide show the *two Empires* producing most sophisticated examples: foremost of course, *Iran* including *Western Afghanistan* but not much less the *Ottomans*. And, of course, there are also precious examples from Arabic and Central Asian Uighur book culture.

On the upper left you see how small these books can be. The calligraphic and painting styles were modified during the centuries according to fashion, influence and taste.

3. Carpets, kelims, felt carpets and embroidery



„Holbein-carpet“ by an unknown painter: *House Conference* August 1604



Shahseven, East Anatolia, sumak, approx. 1980



Türkmen, silk on silk, approx. 1985



Kirghiz tush-kiyiz 1963, size approx. 280 x 450 cm

Kazak shyrdak



Gashgay, Turkic nomad, Iran, appr. 1980

Now, of course – *carpets*: During our travels around *all Turkey* and *Central Asia*, my husband Paul and me fell in love with *carpets*. And we had started a small private collection. But the most beautiful samples can be seen in museums and on old European paintings, like the so-called «Holbein-carpets».*

Since I am Turkologist, on this slide, we see pieces from *Turkic producers*. Meaning: from peoples belonging to the *Turkic* language group. Carpets seem to derive originally from the nomadic culture. They are made of wool from their life-stock, the sheep. Turkic peoples are all traced back to nomadic life-styles. The oldest carpet is from *Pazyryk*, an area in the northern Altai and *mythical home* to all Turks.

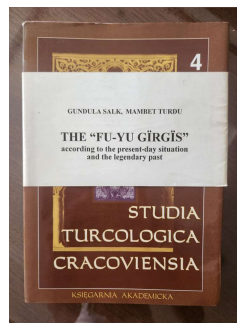
1. The left side painting shows a Western Anatolian carpet from a manufacture of the *Early Ottomans*.
2. Then middle: the *Shahseven* are a sub-group of the *Turkic Azeri* in Iran towards the Anatolian border. Shahseven carpets and Kilims are produced in Northwest Iran and rarely in Southeast Anatolia.
3. And right side: A *Türkmen* silk carpet for praying. The Türkmen live in North East Iran, Türkmenistan and Afghanistan.

4. Lower right side: one of my favorite are the *Gashgay* carpets. The Gashgay are a Turkic nomadic tribe within Southwest of Iran. They produce high quality pure wool carpets with a high density of knots (up to 500.000 knots per sqm!).
5. Lower middle: a felt carpet «shyrdak» here from the *Kazaks*, but also made by *Kirghiz*.
6. And lower left side: a beautiful example for a *Kirghiz* «tush-kiyiz», traditionally a large silk embroidery on velvet for the wall decoration in the yurt of the honorables.

*Holbein-Carpets: Hans Holbein the Younger 1498 (Augsburg) – 1543 (London), known as a Swiss painter, as he painted and lived in Basel after 1520. His paintings can be seen in the Museum of Arts, Basel. Only two of his paintings seem to show Anatolian carpets. But old Ottoman carpets are generally and mistakenly called Holbein-carpets, as we know them mainly from Renaissance paintings (15th – 16th AD), and Holbein was a famous representative of that era.

My Focus – why the Kirghiz?

1. The Kirghiz are the most ancient Turkic people in Chinese documents (approx. Han 2 AD – 2 BC).
2. Former home: Upper Yenissey Basin
3. How/when did they migrate to their present homes?
4. How/when did the Fu-Yu Kirghiz migrate to Northeast China?
5. Develop a method to trace history of non-literate nomads.
6. The Afghan Pamirs: Political role of the Pamir Kirghiz in the East-West Buffer Corridor?



Mongolküre (China), border to Kazakhstan



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You might ask «*why the Kirghiz*»?

You know probably the post-soviet Republic of Kirghizstan, the large red circle in the center of the map. Within Turkology, the Kirghiz had become a tricky «*enigma*». And you see on the map in red the scattered «Kirghiz islands».

By the end of the 17th century, the Russians had advanced into Siberia. They met on an area called *the Kirghiz lands* – you see the circle on the top. This is about 2000 km away from the center. North of the Altai, we do not only find the home of the most ancient carpet (Pazyryk), but we find *Runic Inscriptions* in Turkic idioms in the basin of the Upper Yenissei. And the Chinese historiography (approx. 2nd Century AD) also mentions the old «Kirghiz» there. However, we do not know anything about their language and ethnicity for that period. The Chinese sources mention them as «nomads and hunters with *red hair*»; that is why it has been questioned whether the «Old Kirghiz» are of ethnic *Turkic* origin or whether they had made up a part of the tribes belonging ethnically and linguistically to the Yenisseic group.

Nowadays, the main *Turkic* inhabitants of the Altai «*Hakas*». They owe their present name to the former Chinese pronunciation (*Ha-*

ka-se) of the term «Kirghiz», because they live in that area. The «Hakas» used to call themselves «Altai people» and received their official designation «Hakas» during the census in the context of the establishment of the administrative system (*oblast', rayon...*) within the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

The Russians then advanced into the South, what is today Kazakhstan. The culture and language type is so similar to those in the old «Kirghiz Lands» around northern Altai, that the Russians called the Kazaks «Kirghiz». We do not know the meaning of the term «Kazak» and whether it is a direct relative of the so-called Russian «Kozak»; to my knowledge, there is lots of speculation but no reliable proof. Then, the clans *southeast of the Kazak* differentiated themselves as the «Black Kirghiz» (*Kara Kirghiz*), meaning the «proper or true Kirghiz». All of these three groups are linguistically close, most close the Kazak and Kirghiz.

The upper right point - in China's Northeast – are the Girgis of Fu-Yu County (Heilongjiang Province). They are, as we* could show, the result of the defeat of the Western Mongol Empire and the forced migration of leading clans from the Altai – the «Old Kirghiz Lands». So they brought directly the name «Kirghiz» to Northeast China.

But, the question remains: who are the «*Proper Kirghiz*»? I wanted to find out, how the puzzle fits together. This starts with the creation of the Central Asian political units, designed by Orientalists within the Russian Empire and later Soviet Union.

But let me explain on the next slide the red point in the middle: the *Afghan Pamir Corridor*: Four Kirghiz tribes had moved to the so-called «Roof of the World».

*Mambet Turdu (short for Mambetturdu Mambetakun). He is my Xinjiang Kirghiz colleague from the Academy of Science in Urumqi, China. We had worked together, and I owe to him many open doors in Xinjiang and sights into the Kirghiz of China. Mambet's life task was – within the official regulations for China's minorities – to preserve knowledge on the still rather authentic cultural setting of his people, and to give a place to the Kirghiz «oral literature» within the world's literatures.

My Research and Publications

"Rahmankul xand'in eli". In: *Kirgiz Madaniyatı* (22.12.1993).

"Goftegu'i ba do hunermand, Qutlu Akabar wa Malik". In: *Nowbahar* 6/94.

"Die Pamir-Kirghisen in der Türkei". In: *Folia Orientalia* 31(1995), 117-144.

"Die türksprachigen Afghanistanflüchtlinge in der Türkei". In: *Materialia Turcica* (17)1996, 67-76.

"Sowjetische Realitäten im kirgyschen Ajyl: Biographische Notizen über Čyngyz Törökulovič Ajtmatov", In: *Folia Orier. alia* 33 (1997), 120-137.

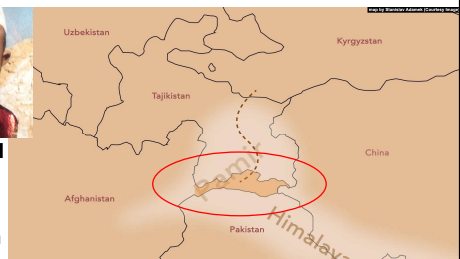
"The Fu-Yu Gırgıs - according to the present-day situation and the legendary past". *Studia Turkologica Cracoviensia* 4 (1998). Krakow.

Turdu, Mambet / Gundula Salk: "The Fu-Yu Gırgız and their past. Three stories collected in Manchuria during the Period of the Establishment of the People's Republic of China". In: *Turcica* 30 (1998), pp. 287-296.

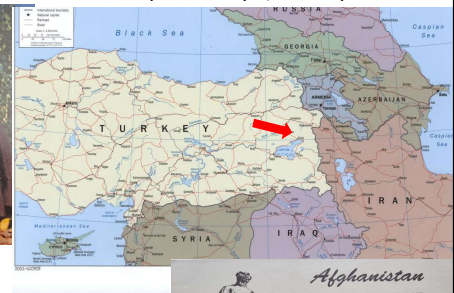


Rahmankul

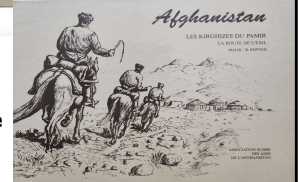
and his son



Arif, village leader of Ulupamir köyü, Turkey 1992



The Afghani Kirghiz **before** 1978 and **after** 1982.



12

The Kirghiz from the Afghan Pamirs turned to be my first Kirghiz experience. I spent some weeks with them in 1991 and 1992 in their Turkish exile, you see on the second map in the very East of Turkey. One reason was an impressive book from my later French *mentor* at *Sorbonne*, and the other reason was a more easy access to their village in *East-Turkey*. By chance, my first visit happened during the „one-year's funeral ceremony“ of their famous *khan* - *Rahmankul*. However, we were warmly hosted by his sons (you see for ex. Arif) and daughters-in-law. There are also a few historical documentaries on this fascinating Kirghiz group, still within the High Pamir valleys; displaying an astonishing *liberal* atmosphere, *far* from Kabul – *only, but* depending on the harsh conditions of nature. And the Khan himself would teach children read and write. *Rahmankul* had controlled the immediate *border region to Soviet Union*. He was well-respected by the Western Political Elite and security services (Information by Rémy Dor), because they had to rely on *his* support for *geopolitical interests*. Upon some rumour in August 1978, he led his clans to Peshāwar, Pakistan, just *before* the invasion of the Soviet Army. In Peshāwar, Rahmankul sent a petition to Turkey, finally they got asylum in 1982. Around 10.000

people – including Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazak and „Tajik“ (all refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan) - were brought in planes to different places in Turkey. I had visited all of them during the early 1990ies. Worth to mention is the Author of the lower book: Bernard Repond, is a French-Swiss, he founded the „Society for Friends of Afghanistan“ and visited this group before 1978 in the Pamirs and after their arrival in Turkey. He had especially supported Malik and Akbar Kutlu, two sons of Rahmankul, who – as autodidacts in the High Pamir valley – had transformed stones into sculptures. Upon their request, their father's caravans had brought them paper and coal pencils, what led the ground for their later curriculum as artists.* The society is now called „Pamirs bridges“ and includes Kirghizstan and Tadjikistan.

*In Turkey they got a position at the Institute of Arts in Van (Van Üniversitesi).

My Research and Publications

"Die kyrgyzische Gesellschaft und orale Traditionen". In: *Studia Turcologica Cracoviensia* 5 (1998), 217-229.

KENČIEV, JAPAR / RÉMY DOR / GUNDULA SALK: "Dire l'histoire en l'écrivant : un fragment de sanjira kirghize". In : *Turcica* 31 (1999), pp. 489-508.

Recension on: Prior, D.: The Semetey of Kenje Kara – A Kirghiz Epic Performance on Phonograph. In: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 98 (2008), 517-520.

Recension on: Light, N.: Intimate Heritage. Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang. In: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 99 (2009), 515-519.

Die Sanjira des Togolok Moldo (1860-1942). VDSUA (79), Wiesbaden 2009.

„Sind kirgisische Identitätsmuster mit dem westlichen Demokratie-Begriff kompatibel? Die kirgisischen Nationalbewegungen zwischen 1985 und 1995.“ In: *UAJ* 23 (2009), 106-125.

„Zur *aytīs/aytīš*-Kreation der Kasachen und Kirgisen in der Vielvölkerprovinz Xinjiang“. In: *UAJ* 24 (2010).

„Die Morphologie der Sarbagiš. Zur Pragmatik der Konstruktion eines kirgisischen Stammes. Berlin 2014.

13



Makhachkala (Daghestan) on the Caspian Sea, visit in 1992



Tashkent, our hotel in 1987



Bishkek, capital of Kirghizstan

From 1992, I met soviet scientists in Berlin, in the „House of World Cultures“, And with their official invitations to universities in Daghestan on the Caspian Sea (Russia) and Tashkent (Uzbekistan) I was able to receive visas for these two places. *However,* in June, I continued – together with my husband Paul – to *Kirghizstan*, my *dreamed* destination.

Bishkek, as you see it on the slide, is wonderful *from May*! Hot and dry with a blue sun - shining over a *green* modern town; on the foot of the *snowy Tianshan Mountains*, the closest almost 5000 m and the fareset around 7400 m. But need to say : after several long journeys via Sochi to Baku, then Daghestan and Tashkent, we made the trip by *local bus*. From Tashkent we went on through the south of *Kazakstan* at night - as we had *no visa* for Kirghizstan!

Organization or Participation in:

Symposium (Organizers Board): "Die Hunde bellen, die Karawane zieht weiter... Kultureller und politischer Wandel an der Seidenstraße", **Berlin-Brandenburgischen Auslandsgesellschaft e.V.** . Potsdam 17.10.1992.

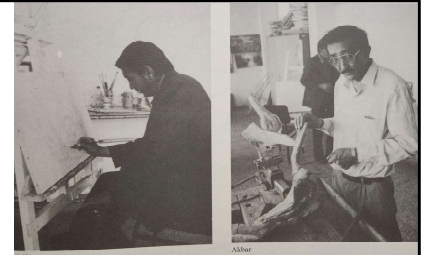
Organised the **exhibition**: "Impressions of a past Past in another Exil" (Melik and Ekber Kutlu). Geo-Galerie der **Gesellschaft für Erdkunde**, Berlin: 7.-28.02.1994.

Responsible contractor/organizer of the Symposium: "Der Steppenbrunnen. Aspekte zentralasiatischer Identitäten in einer Übergangszeit", **Haus der Kulturen der Welt**, Berlin 05.03.1994 - 13.03.1994.

Lecture and talk together with **Tshingis Aitmatov**: "Streifzüge durch die Geschichte der Kyrgyzen", Center for Anthroposophy, Kassel 09.02.1995.

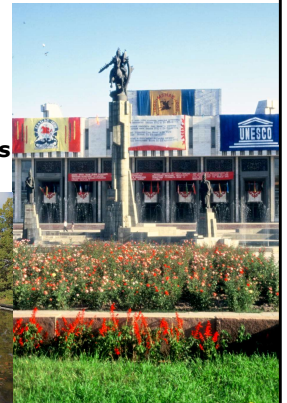
UNESCO World Heritage International Symposium: "Epos Manas and Epic Heritage of the World", 26. - 28.08.1995 Biškek. Lecture: "Kırgızdardın socialdık koncepciyası jana oozeki tradiciyaları".

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Exhibition Berlin 1994: Akbar and Melik Kutlu, autodidacts in the **Afghan Pamirs.**

Manas Monument Bishkek



House of World Cultures Berlin 1994



Our first weeks in Kirghizstan were full of coincidences and phantastic expeditions to mountain settlements. Need to say: the immediate aftermath of the Soviet period was extremely hard for the locals. All Soviet market connections and regulations had collapsed - a chance for us, as we could enter Kirghizstan by bus through a local checkpoint and not the international one, and we were not recognized on the bus. Benzin, fuel, for ex., was, in those days, sold per liter in bottles along some streets!

But since I was a first Western in Kirghizstan, I received warm invitations everywhere home and to scientific institutions and libraries. I was even offered my first Kirghiz lessons from the third day.

The early 1990ies are very prominent in my life: they were *the good years* of approach and *reciproque interest* and projects. In 1993 for example, I was entitled to organize a Five-Days-Symposium for the „House of World Cultures“. For choosing speakers, I returned another two months to Kirghizstan, this time *with visa*! In 1994 we had a huge audience at the symposium. By the way, *Bernard Repond* had also joined that event as well as my later mentor *Rémy Dor* from Paris.

And in 1995, I had the honour to belong to the speakers within the 2-weeks UNESCO Symposium on „Epic World Heritage“ in Bishkek. *The Kirghiz had maintained, until recently, the authentic tradition of reciting epic verses. It comprises around 500.000 verses! The longest oral version, as mentioned, was recited during 14 hours! This epic poem „Manas“ was mainly studied by the British Medievalist and Germanist Arthur Hatto, also with reference to geographic indications (toponyms).

International Symposium: "Folk Culture and Contemporary Life", 15. - 20.08.1997 **Urumqi; PR China**. Lecture: "Traditions and Modern Life among the Kirghiz: Following the Silk-Roads through the Pamirs and Tianshan Ranges in China and Former Soviet Union".

Organized 2 exhibitions **Mavi Art Galery, Mersin, Turkey:**

- Şuhrat Babacanov (Usbekistan), 01.-17.10.2002.

- Melik – Ekber Kutlu (Van, Türkei). Pamir Kirgizları. Kültür haftası. 02.-15.05.2003.

Conference: **Deutscher Orientalistentag DOT, Freiburg** 2007. 24.-28.09.2007. Lecture on: Erlebnisse in Nordwest-Xinjiang. Feldforschung bei altaischen Minderheiten.

Conference and lecture: Kasachische und kirgisische Balladenkunst aus Xinjiang, VR China. Zentralasien-Seminar der **Humboldt Universität, Berlin**. 7. Mai 2010.

Symposium Deutsch-Kirgischer Kulturverein e.V., Berlin. „**Auf den Gipfeln der Welt**. Lebensstile und Wandel bei den Kirgisen in Pamir und Tianshan". Location: **Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin**, Alexander-von-Humboldt-Haus. 27.05.2011.



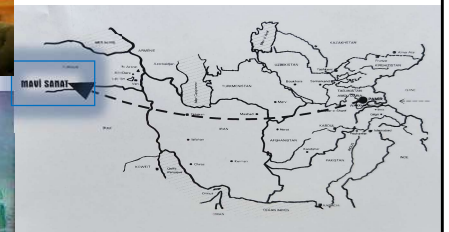
Burning Dissident, by Shukhrat Babadjanov



Painting by the Afghan-Kirghiz painter **Melik Kutlu**.



Paintings by **Shukhrat Babadjanov**



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While in China (1995-1998), I travelled around all Kirghiz minorities in Xinjiang and Heilongjiang. Today, their situation has changed dramatically, as you might have heard it for the Uighurs. It has even affected my Xinjiang-Kirghiz friend and colleague.

But I want to turn to *art* on this slide. Meeting with artists is always full of ideas and unexpected situations: I organized a first exhibition in Berlin in 1994: on the upper right an example Malik and Akbar, Rahmankul's sons, you saw them on the slide before. The custom procedure in Berlin airport was very challenging *despite* their official visa: the staff was not used to see Afghani men with big furs on their heads and - *art pieces* in luggage!

Later while in Turkey, I met artists at our university and galleries in town. Together with *Mavi Sanat Gallery*, I organized two exhibitions:

The first, again, with the two Afghani Kirghiz.

The other exhibition in Mersin, was with the *Uzbek dissident Shukhrat*. I had first met him in 1993 in Berlin. He got political asylum to Germany during that time and later started to work for the *American Service: Radio Liberty*. But when passing the passport control at *Istanbul airport*, he was arrested, as he was *wanted* by

Uzbekistan. Unluckily, just those days, the Uzbek-Turkish diplomatic relations had improved. And therefore - Turkey's officials decided in favour of Uzbekistan *instead* of the German document. And worse - this happened during the *holiday after Ramazan!* So, *nobody* – including the German Embassy – was at work these days. We spent 24 stressful hours on phone to reach influential friends in order to get Shukhrat free two days later - but right in time for the opening.

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The painting „Burning of a dissident“ was created as a reaction after 2016, when the National Security Service of Uzbekistan ordered the burning of 16 paintings by **Shukhrat Babadjanov** from the National Art Gallery in Urgench, his hometown on the **Aral Lake**. *Shukhrat* was a post-soviet Karakalpak dissident, who had collaborated with the **Uzbek opposition leader** and **poet Timur Polatov** of the **Erk Party**. They fought against the autocratic leadership in post-soviet Uzbekistan as well as against forced labour in the Uzbek cotton industry. Before 2003, when he took a position for the American service „Radio Liberty“ in Munich and later Prague, he had *numerous exhibitions also in Berlin* where I had first met on him in **1993**.



Liu Yitao: secluded water (exhibition 1997, P.R. China)

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Finally my presentation ends with the contrasting impressions of our friend and Chinese painter from Kunming. I had met him during my husband's assignment to Sichuan, China. *Liu Yitao* is an *ethno-botanist*, as you might see. He had worked as a botanist in the county of *Xishuanbanna*, what is „Sip-Soong-Pannaa“ in Tai-Lao; an area inhabited by a Tai-Lao minority of China who formerly had an own state there. Liu Yitao is part of the plants culture *beyond* the Inner Asian Steppes, within the Tai-Lao homelands in Yunnan, Laos and Thailand. And here, now in Bangkok, my curriculum has reached the present.

Thank you for your interest and attention!