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### THE ALASH MOVEMENT IN EASTERN KAZAKHSTAN: SEMEY AS A POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CENTRE OF KAZAKH NATIONAL AUTONOMY (1905–1920)

**Annotation.** This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the Alash Movement in Eastern Kazakhstan, focusing on the city of Semey as a major political and cultural centre of Kazakh national autonomy between 1905 and 1920. Drawing on archival documents, periodical publications and contemporary scholarship, the study reconstructs the regional dynamics of the Alash Movement, including the organisation of oblast and district-level Kazakh congresses, the establishment of the Alashorda Government, and the operational activities of its Eastern branch. Particular attention is given to Semey’s role as the provisional capital of the Alash Autonomy, the formation of the national militia, land policy initiatives, and the intellectual and educational work carried out by the regional Kazakh intelligentsia.

The article further examines the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Alash leaders to establish contact with Chinese officials in Chuguchak (Shäüeshäk) and to strengthen ties with Kazakh communities in Eastern Turkestan. The complex interaction of the Alash leadership with both the White forces and later the Bolsheviks during the Civil War is analysed to elucidate the strategic decisions taken under conditions of political instability.

The findings demonstrate that Eastern Kazakhstan served as one of the primary strongholds of the Alash Movement, where the fundamental principles of Kazakh autonomy, national consciousness and early state-building institutions were put into practice.

**Keywords:** Alash Movement, Semey, Alashorda, national autonomy, Eastern Kazakhstan, archival sources, congresses, Civil War, intelligentsia.

#### *Introduction*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Alash movement emerged as a particularly significant and progressive phenomenon in the history of the Kazakh nation’s national revival [1]. This movement raised Kazakh aspirations for national liberation to a new qualitative level and demonstrated that a nationally conscious intelligentsia educated in the Western tradition had moved to the forefront of political struggle. After the February Revolution of 1917, Kazakh intellectuals established the Alash Party in order to defend national interests and took concrete steps towards obtaining national autonomy [2]. At the Second All-Kazakh Congress, held in December of the same year, the Alash autonomy was proclaimed and the provisional National Council, the Alashorda Government, was formed. Alikhan Bokeikhanov was elected chairman of the Alashorda Government. The city of Semey was chosen as the capital of the Alash autonomy, and the city began to be officially referred to as “Alash-Qala”. During this period, the Semey region became a centre of the political and cultural life of the Kazakh people and a stronghold of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan.

The eastern part of the Kazakh steppe – the Semey oblast (territory largely corresponding to present-day East Kazakhstan) – played an exceptionally important role during the Alash movement. In this region, at the end of the nineteenth century, an awakening of enlightenment and national consciousness took place; under the influence of Abai Qunanbaiuly and other thinkers of the steppe, a group of intellectuals eager for education and receptive to new ideas emerged. The establishment in Semey of the first Kazakh library, museum, printing houses and educational institutions provided a basis for the growth of a local Kazakh intelligentsia. For example, the newspaper *Qazaq*, published from 1913, and its predecessor *Dalaualayatynyn gazeti* were eagerly read by the readers of Semey region, thus contributing to the dissemination of national ideas.

As a result of such preconditions, when the tsarist regime collapsed in 1917 and the “breeze of freedom” blew, Kazakh intellectuals of Semey oblast quickly organised themselves, convened regional Kazakh congresses and set up local national committees. Within the framework of this research article, the emergence, formation and



activities of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan – more precisely, in the Semey region – in the early twentieth century are analysed from a historical perspective. The article examines, on the basis of concrete evidence, the specific features of the political and public activities of Alash leaders in Eastern Kazakhstan and evaluates the regional dimensions of the movement within the broader context of the history of Kazakhstan.

**Research relevance.** In the context of independent Kazakhstan, revisiting the history of the Alash movement offers an important opportunity to understand the national idea of liberation and the experience of state-building. The regional history of the Alash movement, particularly its activities in Eastern Kazakhstan, remains one of the important topics that have not yet been fully and comprehensively covered in historical scholarship. Despite the fact that Semey served as the seat of the Alashorda Government, a thorough academic study of the concrete activities and influence of the Alash figures in this region remains an urgent issue for historical science.

In this article, drawing on archival documents, periodical publications and modern scholarship, a distinct characterisation of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan is presented, and its contribution to democratic transformations in Kazakh society at the beginning of the twentieth century is analysed.

#### *Materials and methods of research*

The methodological basis of the study rests on the principles of historicism, objectivity and systemacity. The main sources consist of periodical publications and archival documents of the period under consideration. In particular, materials from the newspaper *Saryarqa*, published in Semey in 1917–1918, the newspaper *Qazaq*, published in Orenburg, as well as official documents and correspondence of the Alashorda Government are analysed. Documents such as the protocols and resolutions of the Semey oblast-level Kazakh committees and congresses are treated as important sources of information. Archival data are drawn from the holdings of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Regional Historical Archive of East Kazakhstan Oblast, and archival repositories of the Russian Federation (for example, the document collection *AlashOrda* relating to the activities of Alashorda in Semey oblast) [3].

A historical-comparative method is employed to compare the activities of the western and eastern branches of the Alash movement and to identify their regional specificities. The conclusions advanced by researchers such as D. Amanzholova, K. Nurpeisov, M. Koigeldiev and others are taken into account, and a historiographical analysis is undertaken.

In the course of analysing archival materials, the chronological sequence of events is reconstructed. The socio-political situation in the Semey region on the eve of the revolutionary changes of 1917 and the activities of Kazakh intellectuals are reconstructed, while the establishment of the eastern branch of Alashorda and its actions during the Civil War are examined on a documentary basis. Newly identified information is subjected to critical analysis, and some data that had not previously entered scholarly circulation are introduced.

For example, the protocols and resolutions of the Semey oblast-level Kazakh congresses, reports and news items published in *Saryarqa*, and information on the Alash movement contained in reports of representatives of neighbouring states (Chinese administration) are analysed. In total, around 200 publications and sources have been utilised, and their data have been used comparatively. References to all works and archival documents used are provided within the text in accordance with academic requirements and are listed in the bibliography in the order of their use.

#### *Research results*

##### **The emergence of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan (1905–1917)**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, political consciousness among the Kazakh population, subjected to colonial oppression by the Russian Empire, began to awaken, and initial reformist steps were taken. In 1905, during the First Russian Revolution, Kazakh intellectuals organised the *Qarqaraly* Petition to demand their rights, and that same year, at the congress of Kazakh deputies in Orenburg, the issue of creating a national political organisation was raised [4]. This event became the first spark of what would later become the Alash Party.

During this period, in Semey oblast as well, national intellectuals joined political struggle and groups expressing dissatisfaction with tsarist colonial policy emerged. The Semey region was the homeland of a new generation of intellectuals formed in the spiritual and educational school founded by Abai Qunanbaiuly, and characterised by a strong drive for education. For instance, Kazakh youths who had graduated from the Semey real school and the teachers' seminary later became prominent members of the Alash movement, including *KhalelGabbasov*, *JüsipbekAimauytov* and others. In the early twentieth century, the first Kazakh lawyers, physicians and teachers originating from Semey oblast criticised social shortcomings and submitted petitions to the tsarist authorities on pressing issues.

Historical sources indicate that in 1907 the lawyer *RaiymzhanMarsekov* was elected as deputy to the Second State Duma from Semey oblast. Under the tsarist regime he supported ideas of self-government for the Kazakh people and defended the interests of nomadic populations from the rostrum of the Duma [5]. The emergence of highly educated professional lawyers such as *Marsekov*, who had graduated from Saint Petersburg



University, created the cadre basis for the Alash movement [6]. Although the tsarist government, after 1905, promised to introduce zemstvo-type self-government in the Kazakh oblasts, this policy was not implemented in practice. Nevertheless, among the local Kazakh elite, efforts to develop ideas of future autonomous governance continued.

Between 1913 and 1918, the newspaper *Qazaq*, published in Orenburg under the editorship of Akhmet Baitursynuly, became the voice of the national movement. Readers from the Semey region were among those who actively distributed this newspaper and contributed articles to it. Alongside leading figures such as Mirjaqyp Dulatuly and Alikhan Bokeikhanov, natives of Semey – lawyer Jaqyp Aqbaev, physician Khalel Gabbasov, publicist Köshim Shögirov and others – published articles in defence of national interests. In addition, in 1914–1915, intellectuals from Eastern Kazakhstan (Shakarim Qudayberdiuly, Turagul Abaiuly and others) expressed their views and raised social issues in the journal *Aiqap*, published in Troitsk. Thus, on the eve of the 1917 Revolution, an active and politicised public had formed in the Semey region.

The burden of the First World War and the 1916 uprising also placed the Kazakh society under severe strain. The flight of numerous Kazakh villages to Chinese territory to escape punitive expeditions was a phenomenon observed in the eastern region as well. During this period, Alash leaders were concerned not only about the fate of Kazakhs within the boundaries of the Russian Empire but also about those abroad (in Eastern Turkestan and Mongolia), and they envisaged, in the future, uniting them in a single autonomy [7]. This intention can be discerned from the draft programme of the Alash Party and subsequent actions, including the attempt to send a delegation to Eastern Turkestan in 1918 (considered below).

Following the fall of the tsarist monarchy in February 1917, a wave of revolutionary mobilisation spread throughout the Russian Empire, including Kazakhstan. The long-awaited opportunity for political freedom appeared, and under the Provisional Government certain democratic liberties were introduced. During this period, the national intelligentsia rapidly organised itself, convened oblast and uezd-level Kazakh congresses throughout the steppe and created provisional governing structures – Kazakh committees. Semey oblast was at the forefront in this regard: Kazakh committees began operating there as early as March.

After the appointment of the oblast commissioner of the Provisional Government in Semey in March 1917, the First Semey Oblast Kazakh Congress was convened in April on the initiative of local Kazakh intellectuals [8]. The congress took place in Semey from 27 April to 7 May 1917. Delegates came not only from uyezds of Semey oblast but also from other regions. Historical records show that the congress was attended by many Kazakh intellectuals, including Jaqyp Aqbaev (chairman), Raiymzhan Marsekov, Shakarim Qudayberdiuly, Akhmetzhan Qozybagarov, Älimkhan Ermekov, Nazipa Qulzhanova, Satylghan Sabataev, Biakhmet Sarsenov, Khalel Gabbasov, Jüsipbek Aimauytov and Männan Turghanbaev [9]. The composition of delegates undoubtedly influenced the decisions adopted at the congress.

The agenda of the congress included issues of nationwide significance: local governance, establishment of zemstvo institutions, the land question, women's rights, education and others. Most importantly, the congress for the first time formally raised the issue of Kazakh autonomy and adopted a resolution in favour of establishing a future Kazakh autonomy. Delegates demanded that the All-Russian Constituent Assembly be convened without delay and insisted that the right of the Kazakh people to self-government be legally recognised through that body. One of the congress resolutions stated: "...The All-Russian Constituent Assembly must acknowledge the freedom and equality of all peoples, and every people must be granted the opportunity to organise its public life according to its own way of life and local conditions" [10]. This represented the first clear and concrete articulation of a political programme by Kazakh intellectuals.

It is known that the eminent scholar and poet Shakarim Qudayberdiuly was specially invited to this congress and addressed the delegates with his blessing and guidance. As a disciple of Abai and one of the most senior Kazakh intellectuals of that time, Shakarim participated in the deliberations and supported the idea of establishing autonomy. The resolutions and proclamations of the Semey congress were disseminated among Kazakhs through the newspaper *Qazaq*. This congress gave powerful impetus to the spread of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan: Kazakh committees officially commenced work in the region, and governing bodies were established at the uezd level.

In July 1917, delegates from Semey oblast also participated in the First All-Kazakh Congress held in Orenburg, which laid the foundations for the national political party, the Alash Party [11]. The organising committee of the Alash Party included, alongside Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynuly and Mirjaqyp Dulatuly, such Semey natives as lawyer R. Marsekov, physician Kh. Gabbasov and others. The All-Kazakh Congress resolved that party committees should be formed in every oblast. In Semey oblast, the formation of an oblast committee of the Alash Party and the organisation of propaganda among the population were carried out with the direct participation of Alikhan Bokeikhanov [12].



In the autumn of 1917, Bokeikhanov came to Semey specifically to meet with the local population and held several public meetings. Upon returning from the Congress of Siberian autonomists in Tomsk in October 1917, Bokeikhanov and Älimkhan Ermekov were enthusiastically greeted by Semey residents, as vividly described in Saryarqa. On the day of Bokeikhanov's arrival, townspeople and Kazakh youths gathered in large numbers, chanting "The hero of Alash!" as they welcomed him. Sultanmakhmut Toraighyrov wrote emotionally about this event [13]. According to Toraighyrov, "Not even eight-year-old children and eighty-year-old men stayed away... All felt honoured, their spirits were lifted... All were eager to see the man who had laboured in hardship for the sake of Alash... That man was Alikhan Nurmukhameduly Bokeikhanov". This evidence demonstrates the extent of support for the Alash leader and his ideas among the Kazakhs of Semey region.

In 1917, under the influence of the Alash movement, a number of societies and associations were also created in the Semey region. One of these was the "Zhanar" (Renewal) organisation of local Kazakh youth. Established after the Revolution of 1917 in Semey under the leadership of young intellectuals such as Mukhtar Aueзов and Jüsipbek Aimaуytov, "Zhanar" pursued cultural and educational activities and aimed to educate the younger generation in the spirit of national unity [14]. In May 1918, the organisation sent delegates to the All-Kazakh Youth Congress in Omsk, where they declared their support for the Alash cause [15].

In addition, the "Talap" (Aspiration) society organised by Kazakh intellectuals in Semey was engaged in disseminating education among youth and publishing books in Kazakh. By the end of 1917, an oblast committee of the Alash Party had been officially formed in Semey, headed by Khalel Gabbasov. The oblast Kazakh committee sought to establish constructive relations with the regional authorities of the Provisional Government (the oblast commissioner and city дума).

In the summer of 1917, amid growing political instability in Russia and the weakening of the Provisional Government, the Alash leaders, following the First All-Kazakh Congress in July, began working out plans for Kazakh autonomy. However, the timing and conditions of its proclamation required careful determination. To address this issue, local Kazakh congresses were convened in different oblasts. The Second Semey Oblast Kazakh Congress was called in Semey on 12 September 1917. Because of the relatively small number of delegates, it was termed a "council". Raiymzhan Marsekov chaired the meeting, with Jaqyp Aqbaev as his deputy [16].

The council discussed the domestic situation, the establishment of zemstvo-type local self-government in the oblast, the creation of a militia and issues of education. Most importantly, the council prepared proposals on behalf of Semey oblast for the forthcoming Second All-Kazakh Congress. In particular, it considered it necessary to proclaim Kazakh autonomy without delay and examined the inclusion of representatives from Semey region in the future government of the autonomy. At this Second Congress, an oblast council of the Alash Party was formed and local activists were elected to its membership.

In general, during the period between the February and October revolutions of 1917, the Kazakhs of Semey and Eastern Kazakhstan as a whole became active participants in the national political movement. Although similar congresses were held in Verny (Almaty), Oral, Akmola and Torgay oblasts, Semey distinguished itself by the relatively large number of intellectuals and the strong support of the population.

The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd in October 1917 complicated the political situation. Kazakh leaders such as Bokeikhanov and Baitursynuly initially adopted a cautious stance towards the coup and implicitly opposed the Bolsheviks. To prevent anarchy in the steppe, they deemed it necessary to establish stable national governing structures. For this purpose, the Second All-Kazakh Congress was convened in Orenburg in December 1917, where the autonomy of the entire Kazakh (Kyrgyz) territory – the Alash autonomy – was proclaimed [17].

The delegates from Semey oblast unanimously supported this decision. At the congress, delegate Khalel Gabbasov delivered a special report explaining the rationale for establishing Kazakh autonomy, which was endorsed by the majority. As a result, the congress elected the Alashorda Government (National Council) consisting of 25 members, with 10 seats reserved for representatives of other nationalities participating in the struggle for national freedom. The list of Alashorda members included several figures from Semey oblast, such as Khalel Gabbasov and Oтыншы Alzhanov [18]. Because Orenburg had fallen under Bolshevik control, the city of Semey was chosen as the provisional seat of the Alashorda Government. Thus, from the beginning of 1918, the Alashorda Government had to carry out its activities mainly in the eastern region, in Alash-Qala near Semey.

#### **The establishment and activities of the Eastern branch of Alashorda (1918–1919)**

From January 1918, Soviet power was established by force in many parts of Kazakhstan. However, in Semey oblast, forces aligned with Alashorda were relatively strong, and initially the local Alash leaders refused to recognise Soviet rule. In January–February 1918, Red Guard units in Semey grew in number and local soviet bodies began exerting pressure on Alash organisations [19]. The Bolsheviks confiscated propaganda materials and printing presses belonging to the Alash Party. According to Saryarqa, in early March 1918 the Alash printing house



in Semey was looted, which forced the closure of the newspaper Qazaq. These coercive measures led local Alash committees to move their activities underground.

On 6 March 1918, a Red Army detachment unexpectedly attacked an Alash military unit in training in Semey and shot dead the commander of the Alash militia, Qazy Nurmukhameduly [20]. His death caused profound grief and indignation among Alash supporters. A mourning rally was held in Semey on 7 March, where Soviet arbitrariness was severely condemned [21]. Shortly thereafter, the Bolsheviks threatened the Alashorda leadership with arrest. According to sources, members of the Alashorda Government were forced to leave Semey temporarily and go into hiding in safer rural locations. For instance, in the spring of 1918, AlikhanBokeikhanov spent some time in villages of Semey oblast conducting clandestine political work.

However, in the spring of 1918, a new phase of the Civil War began, and the situation shifted in favour of Alashorda. In May–June, the Czechoslovak Corps launched an uprising in Siberia, gradually overthrowing Bolshevik power in Siberia and Central Asia. In Semey, anti-Bolshevik forces (White Guard units, Cossack detachments) began clandestine preparations for an uprising in early June 1918. The Alash militia in Semey, in coordination with them, also prepared for a joint offensive.

Under the direct leadership of Bokeikhanov, an Eastern (Semey) branch of Alashorda was formed to organise armed resistance against the Bolsheviks [22].

Archival documents indicate that in April–May 1918 the Semey oblast-level Alash committee established contacts with an underground anti-Bolshevik organisation and provided it with financial assistance amounting to 29,000 roubles. These funds were used to prepare a joint armed uprising. With the involvement of Russian officer-instructors, the Alash leaders began forming military units from rural youths and providing them with military training in villages around Semey.

On 10 June 1918, Bolshevik forces were compelled to abandon Semey. Shortly thereafter, on 18 June, an Alash cavalry detachment entered the settlement known as Zaréchnayaslobodka on the left bank of the Irtysh River near Semey. Various sources estimate that this detachment comprised between 300 and 500 fighters. On 16 June, a three-member “Muslim Section” of the Semey garrison was established, headed by the Kazakh officer Khamit Toktamyshev [23]. Under his command, the Alash cavalry detachment of about 300 fighters joined the Semey garrison and became the core of the First Semey Cavalry Regiment. Toktamyshev simultaneously assumed the position of chairman of the Military Council of the Eastern branch of Alashorda. This was an important step towards establishing a regular Alash military force. The rank-and-file of the Alash army consisted mainly of Kazakh youths, while Russian officers served as commanders, since very few Kazakh officers had been trained under the tsarist regime. Although Alashorda planned to open an officers’ school (junkers’ school) in Orenburg, the project could not be implemented due to lack of funds.

After the liberation of Semey, the Alashorda Government was able to emerge from underground and operate openly. On 11 June 1918, the Alashorda National Council adopted a landmark resolution which stated that “on the territory of the Alash autonomy, all decrees issued by Soviet power are declared invalid”. This resolution was signed by Alashorda chairman Bokeikhanov and members M. Tynyshpaev and Kh. Gabbasov. Thus, in Eastern Kazakhstan, the legal force of Soviet decrees was annulled and the authority of the Alash autonomy was formally proclaimed [24].

Alashorda quickly undertook administrative and economic measures in Semey oblast. On 24 June 1918, with the support of the Semey oblast zemstvo administration and the representative of the Provisional Siberian Government in Semey, the first normative acts of Alashorda were issued. One of the key decisions concerned the land question: it was announced that lands confiscated under Soviet decrees or left unused were to be returned to their former owners, the Kazakhs. In other words, Alashorda repealed the Soviet decree on the abolition of private ownership of land and restored the previous regime of land use. This decision had great political significance, as land was the most pressing issue for Kazakh peasants. The measures of Alashorda were supported not only by the population of Semey oblast but also by representatives of the Provisional Siberian Government.

On 19 June 1918, a ceremonial parade of the Alash army took place on the main square of Semey. Townspeople and heads of institutions gathered to welcome the cavalry under the national Alash banner. Military and civil governors delivered speeches expressing support for the Kazakhs’ struggle for autonomy. In particular, A.I. Zubarev - Davydov, representative of the Provisional Siberian Government and White Guard authorities, spoke approvingly. On the same day, Alashorda chairman Bokeikhanov appeared in the square and received great respect from the crowd.

After these events, Semey effectively became the administrative centre of Alashorda for a period of time. The former governor’s house in the city was renamed the “House of Freedom” and used as the office of the Alashorda branch. The left bank part of Semey officially received the name “Alash-Qala”, which remained in use until 1927.



The Alashorda branch based in Semey – referred to in some sources as the Eastern or Central branch – functioned at that time as the main executive organ of the Alashorda Government. While the Western branch, headed by Zhakhansha Dosmukhamedov, operated in Zhympty (Oral oblast), Bokeikhanov personally oversaw the Eastern branch. The membership of the Semey branch included representatives from each uezd of the oblast. Raiymzhan Marsekov oversaw affairs in Semeyuezd and the town, while Oтынshy Alzhanov was responsible for activities in Zaysanuezd (he unfortunately died in 1918). Various specialised commissions were established under the Alashorda branch, including a finance commission (chaired by Marsekov), an education commission and a military council (headed by Toktamyshev). Through these structures, the Alash autonomy was able to conduct concrete activities in the eastern region.

By August 1918, the First Alash Cavalry Regiment in Semey had been fully formed. According to some data, this regiment numbered around 600 fighters and was commanded by Colonel Sidorov from the Russian Semirechye Cossack forces. The Semey regiment subsequently participated in combat against the Red Army on the Akmola front [25].

The authority of the Eastern branch of Alashorda reached its peak in the summer of 1918. During this period, Alash leaders, at the national level, continued the struggle against Soviet power in alliance with White forces. In June, Alashorda established contact with Ataman A. Dutov in Orenburg. In July, Alash representatives held negotiations with the Provisional Siberian Government in Omsk and the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch) in Samara. On 15–17 May 1918, a joint conference of Alashorda and the Bashkir Government took place in Kostanay, where a common strategy for the struggle against Soviet power was discussed. The participants also considered the possibility of forming a federation of Turkic–Muslim peoples in the future. As a result of these contacts, Alashorda definitively abandoned attempts at compromise with Soviet power and allied itself with the anti-Bolshevik camp [26].

The leadership of Alashorda also sought international support. In May 1918, a special Alashorda delegation travelled to China’s Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) to organise the Kazakhs living there and to seek assistance from the Chinese authorities. The delegation included Akhmet Baitursynuly, Mirjaqyp Dulatuly, Raiymzhan Marsekov and Sadyq Amanzholov. They went to the town of Shäueshäk (Chuguchak) and met representatives of the local Chinese administration. In his report to the Russian embassy, the Chinese consul in Semey, V. Dolbezhev, wrote that “the Alashorda representatives Baitursynov, Marsekov and Dulatov are requesting military aid from the Chinese government and are asking for arms for one thousand men” [27]. The delegation reportedly told the Chinese authorities that Alashorda was planning to arm up to forty thousand Kazakh fighters. This demonstrates the intention of Alashorda to prepare a nationwide armed uprising against Soviet power. Although detailed information about the outcome of the mission is scarce, a photograph of the delegation in Shäueshäk has been preserved.

The newspaper Saryarqa reported that, already in 1917, the Chinese governor (jianjun) of the Altai region had visited Semey, met with the Kazakh committee and expressed willingness to cooperate with the Kazakhs. In issue no. 15 of 29 September 1917, an article entitled “The Meeting with the Chinese Governor” described his visit to the house of the head of the Kazakh committee, Raiymzhan Marsekov, where he emphasised that there were Kazakhs in the Chinese state, that they were treated favourably and that China was prepared to cooperate with the Kazakhs. These data show that Alashorda attached particular importance to ties with Eastern Turkestan and recognised the strategic significance of the eastern region.

Political developments in the summer of 1918 confronted Alashorda with a number of complex decisions. Both the Provisional Siberian Government and Komuch adhered to the idea of a “One and indivisible Russia” and refused formally to recognise Kazakh autonomy. Nonetheless, they were willing to utilize Alashorda’s military forces against the Red Army. At the Ufa State Conference in September 1918, which brought together all anti-Bolshevik authorities, the status of Alashorda was discussed. It was decided to place the western and eastern branches of Alashorda temporarily under the jurisdiction of the Siberian Government. From that time onwards, Alashorda was effectively divided into two separate branches operating far from one another (the western branch in Zhympty and the eastern branch in Semey).

Following the Ufa Conference, Admiral A. Kolchak proclaimed himself “Supreme Ruler of All Russia”. The Kolchak government refused to recognise either Alashorda or the Bashkir Government and regarded any autonomy as a threat to Russian unity. In official discourse, Alashorda was portrayed as a separatist organisation seeking to dismember the state. At the same time, the Kolchak regime continued to support the Alash military forces as allies in the struggle against the Reds, providing them with arms and ammunition [28]. This created a contradictory situation in which Alashorda was denied political recognition but used as a military partner.

In early 1919, the Alashorda leadership in Semey sought closer cooperation with Kolchak’s regime. In February 1919, an official meeting in Omsk discussed the administration of the Kazakh territory, attended by Alashorda representatives Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Uäli Tanashov, Älihan Turlybaev and others. At that meeting,



Bokeikhanov stressed that the Alash leaders did not seek separation from Russia but merely aimed to establish order necessary for their people, noting that the Kazakh people wished to remain within Russia and develop with its support until they were fully prepared for self-government. However, the Kolchak government again postponed the question of Kazakh autonomy and refused to grant Alashorda any official status.

By the spring of 1919, the situation on the Eastern Front changed drastically. Although Kolchak's troops achieved some initial successes in March–April, from summer onwards the Red Army launched a counter-offensive. In June 1919, the Red Army inflicted major defeats on Kolchak's forces on the eastern front and advanced towards Siberia. At this juncture, Alash leaders, recognising the waning fortunes of the Whites, began to seek contacts with the Bolsheviks. They were influenced by the example of the Bashkir Government, which in February 1919, under the leadership of Akhmet-Zaki Validov, recognised Soviet power and proclaimed Bashkir autonomy under Soviet auspices [29].

In the spring of 1919, Akhmet Baitursynuly, leader of the Alashorda in the Torgay region, initiated negotiations with Soviet representatives and corresponded with Lenin regarding amnesty for Alash figures. For their part, the Bolsheviks sought to win over the influential Alash intelligentsia by offering amnesty and promising autonomy in the future. Under Baitursynuly's influence, Alash military units in the Torgay region began to join the Red Army, while the Western branch of Alashorda under Dossmukhamedov moved to a neutral stance. In June–August 1919, official negotiations between Alashorda and Soviet power resulted in a decision to dissolve Alashorda and integrate its members into Soviet institutions.

By the end of 1919, the fate of the Civil War in Eastern Kazakhstan had been decided: Kolchak's army was defeated in Siberia and the Red Army successively occupied Semey, Öskemen and Zaysan. In November–December 1919, the Eastern branch of Alashorda concluded an agreement with Soviet representatives on voluntary transfer of power. The Revolutionary Committee for the Administration of the Kazakh Territory (Kazrevkom), created by the Red Army High Command, granted amnesty to Alashorda leaders. On 10 December 1919, the Western branch of Alashorda recognised Soviet power, and at about the same time in Semey, Alash figures such as Khalel Gabbasov and Mukhtar Auevov surrendered to the Bolsheviks and began working in the new administration [30].

In March 1920, by decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, the Alashorda Government was officially dissolved. Thus, the Alash autonomy, which had struggled for national independence for nearly three years, ended its historical mission.

The subsequent fate of members of the Eastern branch of the Alash movement was diverse. When the Kazakh (Kyrgyz) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established in 1920, some former Alash intellectuals joined the new government. Baitursynuly served as People's Commissar of Education of the Kazakh ASSR, M. Tynyshpaev held a ministerial post in the Turkestan Republic, and M. Auevov worked as deputy chairman of the Semey oblast executive committee. Even Bokeikhanov himself briefly served as an adviser at the Kazakh ASSR representation in Moscow in 1920–1921.

However, the Soviet authorities soon came to view the Alash figures with suspicion and gradually removed them from political life from the mid-1920s onward. In the 1930s, many leading Alash leaders fell victim to Stalinist repression and were executed, including Eastern Kazakhstan natives Khalel Gabbasov, Raiymzhan Marsekov, Jüsipbek Aimauytov and Oтыншы Alzhanov. Only a small number, such as Mirjaqyp Dulatov and Älimkhan Ermekov, lived long enough to be formally rehabilitated in later years.

#### *Discussion*

On the basis of the above evidence, the development of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan in the early twentieth century can be analysed from several perspectives.

First, the Eastern region served as one of the main strongholds of the Alash movement. The choice of Semey as the capital of the Alash autonomy was by no means accidental. Semey oblast was an advanced centre of Kazakh intellectual and political thought. The spiritual and educational tradition founded by Abai and continued by Shakarim, Auevov, Toraighyrov and others played a crucial role in nurturing national consciousness. Moreover, as an administrative, commercial and cultural centre under tsarist rule, Semey attracted a relatively large number of educated Kazakh youths. By 1917, this group of prepared intellectuals constituted the decisive force in explaining and promoting Alash ideas to the population and in mobilising support for autonomy.

Second, the social base of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan appears to have been relatively broad. The successful convening of oblast-level Kazakh congresses in Semey in 1917, the enthusiastic reception of Bokeikhanov by the population and the warm welcome given to Alash military units attest to this. The fact that Kazakhs constituted about 90 per cent of the population of Semey oblast according to the 1897 census also contributed to the strong support for Alashorda's policies. For example, the June 1918 decision of Alashorda to restore lands to Kazakh peasants was received with gratitude by the population [31].



Given that Russians and Kazakhs lived side by side in Semey, Alashorda also had to address interethnic relations. The programme of Alashorda contained the principle of equal rights for all nationalities, and Russian representatives were included in the oblast administrative structures. All of this suggests that the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan developed in a relatively peaceful and multi-ethnic context.

A complex dimension of the activities of Alash leaders in the East was their attempt to implement the ideal of national liberation in the devastating conditions of civil war. After coming to power in Semey in 1918, the Eastern branch of Alashorda found itself compelled, on the one hand, to cooperate with White authorities and, on the other, to safeguard the interests of its own people. While the Alash leaders sought to overthrow Soviet power with the help of the Whites, the White governments (the Siberian Government and the Kolchak regime) consistently delayed acknowledging Kazakh autonomy.

This contradiction influenced Alashorda's policies. Although the Alash leadership in Semey participated in implementing the directives of the White authorities, it simultaneously attempted to carry out autonomous policies in internal affairs. For instance, the June 1918 decision on land was a manifestation of Alashorda's independent policy. However, as Kolchak's regime strengthened, it began imposing restrictions on the Kazakh forces and, by the summer of 1919, even made attempts to disband Alash units.

Confronted with such constraints, the Alash intelligentsia undertook a tactical shift and opted for accommodation with Soviet power, primarily in order to shield their people from the ravages of civil war. The decision by some Alash leaders (Baitursynuly, Dulatuly and others) to join the Soviet side and agree to the formation of an autonomous republic within the Soviet framework can therefore be interpreted as a strategy to preserve Kazakh statehood under new conditions. When assessing the actions of Alash leaders in Eastern Kazakhstan, it is essential to bear in mind that they operated under conditions of extreme historical contingency and had to choose among very limited options [32].

Another characteristic of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan was its effort to build ties with neighbouring countries. Geographically, Semey lies close to the border with China's Xinjiang region, and the imperial frontier ran through this area. The Alash leaders sought to take advantage of this situation and considered the possibility of uniting the Kazakhs of Eastern Kazakhstan with those residing across the border in Chinese Altai and Mongolia.

The 1918 delegation to Eastern Turkestan was a first step in this direction. Although it did not achieve all its goals, the mission illustrates the far-sighted geopolitical thinking of Alashorda. The leaders understood the artificial nature of colonial borders dividing the steppe and aimed to foster national unity across them. Later, in the 1920s, the Soviet authorities also tried to exert influence over the Kazakhs of Eastern Turkestan, but their efforts did not yield lasting results. For Alashorda, however, the eastern direction was considered a key element in safeguarding national interests. In this context, the contributions of OтыншыAlzhanov, a statesman from Zaysan and a leader of the Eastern branch, deserve special mention. Despite his early death, he was actively involved in the work of the autonomy in Semey and later dealt with the integration of Kazakhs in the neighbouring Altai province into the Alash autonomy [33].

Similarly, Marsekov's direct contacts with the Chinese consul and their negotiations in his house in Semey attest to the diplomatic capacities of Alash leaders.

The legacy of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan is profound. The Semey region, which witnessed many dramatic episodes of Alashorda's history, is today often referred to in Kazakhstan as "the heart of Alash". By studying the activities of Alash figures in this region, we gain a deeper understanding of how the general national ideology of independence took shape. The concrete achievements of the Eastern branch of Alashorda – the creation of an army, the formation of an education commission, initiation of land reform and other measures – demonstrate that the basic institutions of a national state were being laid.

Of particular importance is the involvement of the Semey intelligentsia in education, publishing and cultural work. In the summer of 1918, preparations were under way in Semey, under the initiative of Mukhtar Auezov, to publish a literary and cultural journal titled *Abai*, which, according to some reports, was to carry materials related to the Alash programme. Plays by Aimauytov were staged, and the national liberation idea was disseminated through art. The "Es-aimaq" musical and dramatic troupe, founded in Semey during this period, was also strongly committed to the Alash cause. These activities indicate that the struggle of Alash supporters in Eastern Kazakhstan was not limited to armed or purely political forms but also involved efforts to uplift national culture and consciousness [34].

From a historiographical point of view, numerous studies on the Alash movement have been published in recent decades; however, most of them focus on the movement as a whole, while regional histories receive comparatively less attention. Only in recent years have some works specifically examined the activities of Alash figures in Semey. Local researchers in East Kazakhstan, such as Erlan Sydykov and Berik Abdygaliuly, have contributed to clarifying the steps taken by the Alashorda Government in Semey. The materials of the 1917 Semey



oblast congresses have been recovered and published, and documents of the Semey branch of Alashorda (decrees, letters) have been retrieved from the archives.

Russian historians such as D.Amanzholova and V.Akrachkov, who have worked extensively with Russian archival sources, have also provided information on events in Semey. Nevertheless, many aspects remain insufficiently researched, particularly the organisational structure of the Eastern branch, the specific roles of individual leaders, the extent of popular support and relations with China.

During the Soviet period, the topic of Alash was suppressed and discussed only in a condemnatory manner as a “bourgeois-nationalist movement”. Consequently, the regional history of Alashorda was almost entirely omitted from scholarly works. Only with the rehabilitation of Alash figures in the late 1980s did researchers begin to investigate the subject more freely. After Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, a trend emerged to honour the Alash movement and to recognise its leaders as national heroes.

The Semey region has been an integral part of this process: monuments to Alash figures have been erected, streets named after them, and the local university has been renamed in honour of Alikhan Bokeikhanov. Museums dedicated to Alash have been established. These initiatives represent manifestations of how the legacy of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan is being commemorated. At the same time, the academic community still faces the task of conducting more in-depth analyses of the topic.

Kazakh historians today often interpret the historical lessons of Alashorda as foundational to state-building, democracy and national unity. In this context, the present study of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan – focusing on one particular region – contributes to revealing the enduring relevance and significance of the Alash idea. Analysing the activities of Alash in the east allows us to better understand the complex transition of Kazakh society from a colonial condition to aspirations for independent statehood.

#### *Conclusion*

The findings of this study demonstrate that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Eastern Kazakhstan was one of the key arenas in the struggle of the Alash movement to establish Kazakh national autonomy. As a centre of Kazakh intellectual life, the Semey region played a leading role in promoting Alash ideas and, during the political opportunities of 1917, made a significant contribution to laying the foundations of the Kazakh autonomy. The decision of the Alashorda Government to settle in Semey and to build its own army and administrative structures in the east was a concrete step towards the restoration of Kazakh statehood.

Within a short timeframe, the Alash figures of Eastern Kazakhstan – Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Khalel Gabbasov, Raiymzhan Marsekov, Jüsipbek Aimaulytov, Mukhtar Auezov, Otynsy Alzhanov and others – managed to establish order in the region, addressed issues of local governance and land, and organised a people’s militia. These activities were carried out in accordance with the programme goals of the Alash Party.

However, the intensification of the Civil War and the political games of external forces (Whites and Reds) prevented the Alash autonomy from functioning as a fully-fledged state. By the end of 1919, due to historical necessity, Alash orda dissolved itself and ceded power to the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, the efforts of Alash leaders were not in vain: they contributed to the establishment of the Kazakh Autonomous Republic and bequeathed the ideals of freedom to future generations.

The history of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan represents a vivid and instructive chapter in the struggle for national liberation. In this region, the Alash idea did not remain on paper but was implemented in practice and, for a certain period, reached the level of institutional state structures. In Semey, the first national regiment of the Alash army was formed, the national flag was raised, and mechanisms of state governance began to function. All this demonstrated to the world that the Kazakh people were capable of independent statehood.

The example set by the Alash leaders in Eastern Kazakhstan served as an inspiration to other colonised peoples. Contemporary autonomous movements, such as the Bashkir autonomy and the Turkestan Mukhtariyat, show evident influence from the Kazakh movement.

Today, the experience of the Alash movement is regarded as an important stage that laid the foundations for the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The heroism and achievements of the national intelligentsia of that era are increasingly receiving fair scholarly recognition. Nonetheless, there remain “blank spots” in the history of Alash, particularly with regard to its regional aspects.

This article has sought to address this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan. It has reinterpreted the events of 1917–1920 in a new light, making extensive use of archival data and contemporary scholarly literature.

In conclusion, the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan in the early twentieth century was a vivid manifestation of the Kazakh people’s aspiration for national self-determination. From the moment when the flag of Alash was raised in Semey, the region became a symbol of freedom in the collective memory of the Kazakh people. The political renewal that occurred during this brief period had a profound impact on the subsequent fate



of the nation. The struggle and experience of Alash orda in the east continue to occupy an important place in the state ideology of independent Kazakhstan.

As Alikhan Bokeikhanov stated, “We must demonstrate our ability to unite as a nation and to become a state.” The historical lesson of the Alash movement in Eastern Kazakhstan lies in the fact that the proud sons and daughters of the steppe endeavoured to fulfil this task with honour. The glorious Alash era in the history of Kazakhstan will never be forgotten and will always remind future generations of the ideals of independence and unity.

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#### *Authors' Contributions*

The authors confirm that they have made substantial intellectual contributions to the preparation of this research article and share equal responsibility for its scholarly results.

M.N. Abubakir developed the conceptual framework of the study, provided the historical and methodological foundations for analysing the Alash movement, conducted the examination of archival records and rare periodical sources related to the Semey centre of Alash political activity, and produced the primary manuscript draft. He interpreted the historical data within the broader context of national liberation movements, ensured the structural coherence of the text, and performed critical revision of its academic content.

Z.O. Dukenbaeva contributed to the methodological design of the research, guided the processes of identifying and classifying documentary sources, supervised the analysis of congress protocols, governmental records, and early-20th-century press materials, and evaluated the historical accuracy and scholarly reliability of the findings. He carried out academic editing of the manuscript and approved its final version.

Both authors verified the accuracy of the presented data, approved the integrity of all sections of the article, and declare full responsibility for addressing any questions related to the research or its interpretation.

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### **ШЫҒЫС ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ АЛАШ ҚОЗҒАЛЫСЫ: СЕМЕЙ – ҚАЗАҚ ҰЛТТЫҚ АВТОНОМИЯСЫНЫҢ САЯСИ ЖӘНЕ МӘДЕНИ ОРТАЛЫҒЫ (1905–1920)**

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада ХХ ғасырдың басында Шығыс Қазақстанда, әсіресе Семей өңірінде қалыптасқан Алаш қозғалысының саяси, әлеуметтік және мәдени міндеттерді жүзеге асырудағы тарихи рөлі жан-жақты талданады. Зерттеу барысында 1905–1920 жылдар аралығындағы аймақтық саяси процестер, облыстық және уездік қазақ съездерінің шешімдері, Алашорда үкіметінің құрылуы және оның шығыс бөлімшесінің қызметі архивтік құжаттар, мерзімді баспасөз және ғылыми еңбектер негізінде қайта қарастырылып, жүйеленді. Әсіресе Семей қаласының Алаш автономиясының уақытша астанасы ретінде атқарған қызметі, ұлттық әскердің жасақталуы, жер мәселесіне қатысты шешімдер және зиялы қауымның ағартушылық бастамалары саяси жаңғырудың маңызды көрсеткіштері ретінде бағаланады.

Мақалада Алаш көсемдерінің Қытайдың Шәуешек қаласымен байланыс орнату әрекеттері, Шығыс Түркістандағы қазақтармен ықпалдастықты дамытуға бағытталған дипломатиялық қадамдары да талданады. Азамат соғысы жағдайында Алашорда басшылығының ақтарменн және кейінірек Кеңес билігімен арақатынасына жасалған тарихи-құқықтық баға қозғалыстың тактикалық шешімдерін түсіндіруге мүмкіндік береді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері Шығыс Қазақстандағы Алаш қозғалысының жалпыұлттық автономия идеясының қалыптасуына, ұлттық сананың оянуына және мемлекеттік институттардың алғашқы нұсқаларын құруға шешуші үлес қосқанын көрсетеді.

**Кілт сөздер:** Алаш қозғалысы, Семей, Алашорда, ұлттық автономия, Шығыс Қазақстан, архивтік деректер, съездер, Азамат соғысы, ұлттық зиялылар.

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### **АЛАШКОЕ ДВИЖЕНИЕ В ВОСТОЧНОМ КАЗАХСТАНЕ: СЕМЕЙ КАК ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ И КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ЦЕНТР КАЗАХСКОЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ АВТОНОМИИ (1905–1920)**

**Аннотация.** В статье проводится комплексный анализ роли Алашского движения в Восточном Казахстане, особое внимание уделяется Семейскому региону как ключевому политическому и культурному центру национальной автономии в 1905–1920 гг. На основе архивных материалов, периодической печати и современных исследований рассматриваются процессы формирования национального движения, деятельность областных и уездных казахских съездов, создание правительства Алашорды и функционирование его восточного отдела. Особая роль Семейского города как временной столицы Алашской автономии раскрывается через изучение работы административных структур, формирования национального войска, принятия решений по земельному вопросу и развития просветительских инициатив местной интеллигенции.

Отдельно анализируются дипломатические попытки алашских лидеров установить связи с администрацией Китая в Шәуешекке и объединить казахское население по обе стороны границы. В условиях Гражданской войны исследуются отношения Алашорды с Белым движением и последующий переход части лидеров к сотрудничеству с Советской властью.

Полученные результаты показывают, что Восточный Казахстан стал одним из важнейших регионов, где идеи казахской национальной автономии получили практическое воплощение, а деятельность алашских деятелей способствовала становлению основ будущей государственности Казахстана.

**Ключевые слова:** движение Алаш, Семей, Алашорда, национальная автономия, Восточный Казахстан, архивные источники, съезды, Гражданская война, интеллигенция.