LIFE IN KOKAND ON THE EVE OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

It's 7:30 on the morning of Dec. 31, 1999, the last day of the second millenium, as well as the twentieth century.[1] Ordinarily, I get up much earlier for my morning bike ride, at a time when the only others out are street-sweepers and milk-sellers, but my late start today means that the fog which is characteristic of many winter mornings here has lifted somewhat. Heading out of the *hovli*, the communal courtyard that my wife and I share with three other households (Uzbek, Russian and Tatar), I pedal my trusty Ural one-speed onto the streets of Kokand, Uzbekistan,[2] our home since the summer of 1997.

At the traffic lights, I turn south onto Khudayar Khan[3] Street, named after the last khan to rule over the Khanate of Kokand. In its day, Kokand was a formidable power in Central Asia and a serious rival to the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva. Though less well known than these other two famous Central Asian cities, at the height of its power in the early nineteenth century, Kokand actually controlled a much larger territory than either of them did. At that time, in addition to the whole Ferghana Valley, the cities of Tashkent and Turkestan, the Kazaks of the Greater Horde and the Semirechye, the Kyrgyz of the Tian Shan and the Pamirs and much of the territory of modern Tajikistan were under the authority of the khan of Kokand. A Kokandi named Yaqub Beg even sat on the throne in Kashgar at one point in the nineteenth century.

In Soviet times, Khudayar Khan Street was called Chernishevski Street, named after a Russian writer. As is the case elsewhere in Uzbekistan, most street names have been replaced to reflect what is currently politically correct in the country. Thus, Sovietskaya Street is now Istiqlol (Independence) Street, Karl Marx Street has been renamed Istambul Street, and 40th Anniversary of Uzbekistan Street is now called Amir Temur Street. Lenin Street has vanished and in its place one finds Turkiston Street, while the street which used to be called Leninabad now has the name which that city in Tajikistan reverted to after the breakup of the USSR, Khojand. Continuing on down Khudayar Khan Street, a small shrine-like edifice with a painting of Amir Temur himself marks the beginning of the street named after this Central Asian conqueror who has become, in effect the new patron saint of Uzbekistan. There are few political speeches or other public remarks that are made without reference to "our great ancestor Amir Temur."[4]

Further down the street, a large billboard advertises two of the vehicles built by the South Korean company Daewoo in their factory in Asaka, near Andijon (at the other end of the Ferghana Valley from Kokand): the compact Tico on one side and the Damas, a mini-van, on the other. Daewoo has been one of the major foreign investors in Uzbekistan since its independence in 1991, although their recent financial troubles in Korea may not bode well for their long-term presence in the country. Eventually, Amir Temur Street converges with three

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[1] At least according to the reckoning of most countries in the world, although Uzbekistan, along with other former Soviet republics, has opted for the perspective that the 21st century doesn't start until the year 2001.

[2] Although the city's name is *Qo'qon* in the new Latin script used to write Uzbek, *Kokand* will be used throughout this article, since it is the most common rendering of the city's name into English. Recent signs have begun to promote an older form of the city's name, Hoqand-i-Latif (Kokand the Beautiful), a parallel to Bukhara-i-Sharif (Bukhara the Holy).

[3] The voiceless velar fricative that is often represented in Latinized transcriptions of Uzbek as "kh" is actually rendered as "x" in the new Latin orthography. I have chosen to use the more conventional form "kh" for transcribing names in this article, unless I am quoting a phrase in Uzbek, in which case I will use "x."

[4] Even one of the local dignitaries who opened the recent annual conference of the Uzbek Teachers of English Association could not resist pointing out that English was the language that the first play about Amir Temur (by Marlowe) was written in.

other streets at the train station, which functions as the southern hub of the city, an attractive structure built by Germans several years ago.

Turning north again onto Istambul Street, one of the other spokes emanating from the hub, my route takes me up one of the characteristically straight streets built during the Russo-Soviet period of Uzbekistan's history. This street connects the train station with the administrative centre of Kokand, still referred to by the Russian designation *gorod*, meaning "city." Along the way, one passes the Railway Worker's Cultural Palace, a symbol of the privileged position that railway workers have in this country. In addition to this edifice, they also have their own telephone exchange, bank and special schools for their children, not to mention salaries that are considerably better than those for other government jobs.[5]

Further along, after crossing Khojand Street, I can see the Kokand State Pedagogical Institute, where I taught English the first year we were in Kokand. Out front is a large bust of Mirza Muqimi (1850-1903), a famous Kokandi poet who wrote in Chagatay/Uzbek in the late eighteenth century. Since it is not a provincial capital, Kokand apparently does not warrant a university of its own (the closest one is in Ferghana, the provincial capital). As such, the "Ped Inst," as locals call it, is the highest institution of learning in town. Leaving the Institute behind, my route leads me past a Business and Technical College to the T-intersection with Istiqlol Street, the location of three turn-of-the-century brick buildings now functioning as the City Hall, the Telephone Exchange[6] and the Cotton Bank.

Directly in front, where Istambul Street dead ends at the T-junction, is one of several movie theatres in town. When I first arrived in Kokand, there was a statue out in front of a young revolutionary, clenched fist in the air and rifle flung over his shoulder. Until recently, the theatre was called the Abdulla Nabiev Theatre, named after the figure on the pedestal. Nabiev was one of the first members of the Turkiston Komsomol, killed in 1925 at the age of 20 while fighting against the *basmachi* (the Soviet term for those who fought against the Bolsheviks in Central Asia during the Civil War).[7] One day in the summer of 1998, I noticed that the statue had been taken down overnight. I heard later on that President Islam Karimov had visited Andijon and seen a Soviet monument that had not yet been removed. When the mayor of Kokand heard about the lecture that the mayor of Andijon received from Karimov, he decided to play it safe and haul Nabiev off his pedestal. The theatre is now known as the Hamza Umarov Theater, named after a famous Uzbek star of stage and screen who came from Kokand.

Rather than heading east on Istiqlol Street, the shortest route back home, my route takes me north on Imam Ismoil Bukhari Street (named after the famous compiler of the *hadith* of Muhammad), which in turn leads to the ring road that circles around the western and northern parts of Kokand. Along the way, in addition to people waiting for buses, I pass numerous plastic Coke bottles filled with oil and transmission fluid by the side of the road, the local method of advertising that those products are for sale nearby. Turning south again on Charkhi Street (named after a Soviet-era writer from Kokand), I head back towards *gorod*.

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[5] My own personal theory is that they are reaping the rewards of some kind of deal that must have been struck between the Bolsheviks and the railway workers earlier in this century. Certainly, without the cooperation of the latter, the former would have had great difficulty in consolidating their power in Central Asia.

[6] The Uzbek name for this building actually translates as "The Intercity Conversation Centre."

[7] *Basmachi* is no longer a politically correct term in independent Uzbekistan. During the Soviet era, it had the connotations of "bandit." The official term for those who battled the Bolsheviks is now *Milliy Ozodlik Xarakatining Katnashchilari* ("Participants in the National Liberation Movement").

Closer to home, I pass the city jail, an imposing structure that takes up nearly one whole city block. Currently, the streets on both sides of the jail are blocked off in order to prevent any attempts to "liberate" those inside, a threat made by the group of Islamic fighters who attempted to enter Uzbekistan last summer through Kyrgyzstan. Usually referred to in the press as "Wahabbis," "fundamentalists" or "extremists," these people who want to set up an Islamic republic in the Ferghana Valley are never far from the minds of many in Uzbekistan, especially in Kokand. In fact, there is no one group into which one can lump all those who want to see religiously-motivated political change, whether by violent or peaceful means. There are a number of different groups, both within and without Uzbekistan, who have the stated aim of establishing a form of government which is essentially religious in nature, as opposed to the current secular regime. Although most people I have talked to have little if any sympathy with those who wish to do so by violent means, the government does not take their threats lightly. Amongst other things, the "Wahabbis" have said that they want to re-establish the Khanate of Kokand, if not elsewhere at least in the Ferghana Valley, and thus restore this sleepy little city of about 200,000 to its former glory, a threat which the current regime does not intend to ignore.

One of the few reminders of Kokand's illustrious past is visible across the street from the jail: Khudayar Khan's palace, completed in 1873, only three years before the Russians shelled it in the process of finally abolishing the Khanate of Kokand and annexing it into the Governorate-General of Turkestan. Known as the *orda*, it is the centre piece of Muqimi Park. Up until this past summer, the park was a strange assortment of conflicting icons. In the words of the *Cadogan Guide to Central Asia*, it was "one of the defining images of Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia. The garish palace of the despised and maverick Khudayar Khan stands shoulder to shoulder in a public park with a Ferris wheel, sundry other fairground rides and a full-size Yak 40 airliner."[8] The airliner has since been moved out to the airport and the rides have been relocated further away from the palace, leaving the bulk of the park for rose gardens and an assortment of teahouses and fountain-like showers for children to play under in the hot summers.

In general, the rides only operate on national holidays and there are always long line-ups of children and young people waiting for their turn. At these times, there are also numerous martial arts demonstrations. Along with football and tennis (Karimov's favourite sport; he sponsors an annual "President's Cup" tennis competition which attracts players from around the world), martial arts are also popular, perhaps due to the regular diet of Jean Claude von Damme movies. Another staple of Uzbek culture and a standard feature at any celebration of a public holiday is the *dorboz*, the tightrope walker. The tightrope is usually set up near the palace to entertain those who have gathered for the festivities.

However, none of these exciting things are taking place on this cold December morning as I cycle south past the jail and then west on Istiqlol Street in order to circle Ozodlik Square. Previously called Oktyabrskaya Square, it is the former location of Lenin's statue, long since pulled down, as well as a small memorial commemorating the victims of the 1989 inter-ethnic riots in Kokand, who are referred to rather curiously as "those who were martyred for their country, for justice and for an abundant life."[9]

The square is surrounded by a number of venerable establishments: the local office of the Ministry of Public Education, a branch of the Asaka Bank (which finances auto loans),

[8] Giles Whittell, *Central Asia: The Practical Handbook* (London: Cadogan Books, 1993), 180.
[9] For more on these events, see David Abramson's article "Remembering the Present: the Meaning Today of the 1989 Violence in Kokand," in *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 3, 1997.

Kokand's only television station (Muloqot TV), the local newspaper ("The Voice of Kokand"), and several restaurants, including Dilshod's Desert (sic) Restaurant. Two major political parties have their offices on the square, the People's Democratic Party in the Asaka Bank building and the Fidokorlar[10] National Democratic Party in the Muloqot building. There are also several NGOs on the square, including the Deaf and Mute Club, the Red Crescent Society, Counterpart Consortium and the Istiqbol Development Centre, where I work as the head of the English Language Program. Located on the north side of the square, sporting some of the nicest carved wooden doors in town, the IDC is a regional office of Central Asian Free Exchange (CAFE) and houses the Ozodlik English Library, an English Teacher's Resource Room, several e-mail computers and various other English language services.

Later on that day, having donned my *telpak*, the fur hat that most men wear in the winter, I head out for another bike ride, this time around the eastern half of the city. The sky is clear, the sun is shining and it almost feels like spring is on the way, although there are nearly three more months until the arrival of *Navruz*, the Persian New Year that falls on March 21. Getting around Kokand is not difficult. The transportation system is quite efficient and relatively cheap, although fares have more than trebled since we arrived in 1997. As elsewhere in Uzbekistan, there is a plethora of buses of all shapes and sizes, from the nice new Mercedes coaches used for long-distance hauls down to the exhaust-spewing, gear-grinding rust buckets that carry people from the surrounding villages and collective farms to Kokand and back again. The most recent addition to the menu are the Otoyol buses produced by a Turkish joint venture in Samarkand.

Taxis, both official and unofficial, are everywhere and a typical fare anywhere in the city is about five cents per kilometer. However, the mode of transport with the best combination of convenience and cost is the good old *marshrut* (originally from the French word *marche route*), the 12-passenger mini-vans that run on regular routes throughout most cities in Uzbekistan. A trip on these costs about five cents and is much quicker than the buses. Normally I would catch a *marshrut*, but the weather today is nice enough for a bike ride up to Yangi Bozor (New Bazaar), in the northeast corner of Kokand, the largest bazaar in the city and, some say, the best one in the whole Ferghana Valley.

Cycling east along Sarboz Street, I pass the local medical college (one of several specialized colleges in the city) and turn south onto Turkiston Street, flanked by the canal that roughly divides the city into the newer Russian-built half in the west and the Old City in the east. Turning east onto Hamza Street, I pass the new nine-story tall National Bank of Uzbekistan building recently completed by a Turkish construction company.[11] The street is named after Hamza Hakimzoda Niyozi (1889-1929), the famous Kokandi poet, writer, musician and playwright who played a major role not only in shaping the form of modern Uzbek literature, but also in bringing Soviet reforms to the Ferghana Valley, especially in the area of women's education. Further along on the right is the large Jami Mosque, closed for the past several years as a result of the mullah preaching sermons which the government did not appreciate.

Right after the mosque is the large traffic circle at Chorsu, the heart of the old city and still a major crossroads. A large poster of President Karimov holding a young child in his arms proclaims *Mustaqillik-Istiqlol Muborak Ona Diyor!* (May your independence be blessed, Motherland!). Opposite the billboard is Hamza Park, the home of the Hamza Musical Drama

[10] *Fidokorlar* can be roughly translated as "The unselfish ones" or "Those who sacrifice themselves (i.e. for the country)."

[11] Interestingly enough, many locals refuse to enter the NBU building because it breaks the local taboo that high buildings should not be built near running water.

Theatre and the Hamza Museum. The fact that the two major parks in Kokand are both named after writers highlights the city's reputation as "The City of Writers." A significant number of famous Uzbek poets and poetesses have come from Kokand, many of them commemorated on a large monument in the form of a scroll and pen located at the northern entrance to the city: Abdutayib Hoqandi, Shohrukhbi, Amir Umar Khan, Hoqi, Alayhirukhma, Niyon Fazil Ahad, Hazrat Hakimjon, Halifa Nodira, Makzuna, Muqimi, Furqat, Zavki, and Hamza.

At the entrance to Hamza park stands a large statue of Hamza himself. As a result of his reforms, he was stoned to death in 1929 by local Muslims in Shahimardon, one of two small enclaves of Uzbekistan which lie in the mountains south of the Ferghana Valley and are completely surrounded by Kyrgyzstan. These days, the current regime is not quite sure what to do with Hamza. If the government were to lump him in with the other representatives of the Soviet era who have been deposed and blacklisted, they would be getting rid of someone who is widely recognized as one of the most important Uzbek literary figures of this century. At the same time, how can the government justify his obvious connection with the Bolsheviks? Apparently, there are a number of theories going around in the teahouses of Kokand to try and reconcile this tension, including one that states that, in fact, Hamza was killed by the Soviets in a way that made it look like religious zealots had done it. The jury is still out and, for the time being, Hamza's statue remains in the park.

On the other side of Chorsu, Hamza Street turns into Navoi Street, named after Alisher Navoi, Uzbekistan's most beloved poet. One of the major shopping areas in the city, the street is lined with stores selling all manner of goods. Commerce is certainly deeply ingrained in the Uzbek psyche; throughout the centuries, many of those who have lived in this part of Central Asia, located as it is on the ancient Silk Road, have been traders. With the current economic realities of life in independent Uzbekistan, those involved in buying and selling end up doing much better financially than many in other professions. For example, the average school teacher earns between 10,000 and 15,000 *so'm* in a month.[12] Salaries of teachers in institutes and universities are about half that; as a result, many supplement their income by taking bribes from students. In contrast, someone selling merchandise in the Yangi Bozor can easily make 50,000 to 100,000 *so'm* in a month. For those who cannot afford the price of a stall at one of the numerous bazaars in town, there is always the option of setting up a roadside table to display wares such as cigarettes, sunflower seeds, chocolate, bubble gum and *qurut* (dried yogurt balls).

Besides the main commercial bazaars and specialized bazaars such as the jewelry bazaar, the hardware bazaar, the paint bazaar and the wood bazaar, there are also numerous illegal bazaars scattered throughout the city. One of them is located in the Massif Navoi, an apartment complex which is indeed massive, stretching for blocks and blocks along Navoi Street. This particular bazaar is the *Dori Bozor*, the drug bazaar. Although all the drugs are prescription drugs (there is a separate, less well-publicized bazaar for narcotics), according to the law, they can only be sold in drugstores. As a result, the police regularly raid this bazaar and confiscate the merchandise being sold there. Another bazaar that the police like to raid from time to time is the dollar bazaar, located across from the main produce bazaar on Furqat Street.

The Old City, especially along Navoi Street, tends to be one of the more religious parts of town. One can still see a few younger men with beards (despite the government's disapproval

[12] At the time of writing, the exchange rate on the black market was about 800 so'm to the US dollar. This has since droppped to about 700. The official bank exchange rate hovers around 130.

of young people sporting facial hair), as well as a larger percentage of women wearing the Muslim headscarves completely circling their faces.[13] There are also a number of small mosques and at least one madrassah in this neighbourhood, although, since the murders in 1997 of several policemen in nearby Namangan were blamed on "Islamic fundamentalists" and the government began to crack down on any who were suspected of extremist religious tendencies, mosques have been prohibited from using loudspeakers for making the call to prayer. The only exception to this seems to be during the fasting month of Ramazon, during which calls to prayer over loudspeakers are either permitted or at least tolerated by the government.[14] Another interesting "mixed message" with a religious component used to be displayed on a sign over a shop on Navoi Street. Under a picture of a woman's eyes thick with mascara gazing out from behind a veil was written the slogan "Come into my commercial shop." The sign was taken down recently, although it is not clear whether this was a result of devout Muslims who resented the mixture of religion, sensuality and commercialism or the government, who are doing their best to discourage the practice of any kind of veiling amongst women.

My route along Navoi Street takes me past the new "Disko Bar," "Bilyard Klub" and "Kafe," apparently one of the more "hip" places to hang out in Kokand these days. Across the road is the Turon Store, one of several with the Arabic phrase *Bismullah Ar-rahmon Ar-rahim* ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate") written over the doorway. The store was closed in the fall of 1997 in the wake of the Namangan events, after the owners were accused of crimes against the state. However, it has since opened under new management and the Muslim invocation over the doorway remains.

Elsewhere on Navoi Street, one sees traditional butcher shops with sides of beef hung up for customers to inspect, a public bath (*hammom*), the ubiquitous Daewoo shops (very few of them with any cars in their display rooms) and more roadside vendors selling nisholda, the marshmallow cream-like substance that is commonly eaten during Ramazon, especially at *iftor*, when the fast is broken each day. Just before reaching Usmon Nosir Street, the next major crossroads where I will turn north to head towards Yangi Bozor, I notice a large billboard on the wall commemorating the 1200th anniversary of the birth of Al-Farghoni, an astronomer, geographer and mathematician who was one of the founders of spherical geometry. The anniversary in question was actually celebrated in 1998, but the billboard is still up. Never mind that the Encyclopedia of the Republic of Uzbekistan says that he was born "around 790." In a country that is in the process of establishing its national identity, a major anniversary is needed every year.[15] Each of these events is accompanied by academic conferences, the publication of commemorative books in Uzbek, Russian and English and lavish *son et lumière* shows, part of the Soviet heritage that the current regime has decided to retain.

At the crossroads of Usmon Nosir and Navoi Streets, essentially the eastern gate of the city, for all to see, is one of the sayings of Karimov that appears in a couple of places around town: *Qo'qon ahli o'zing nafis san'ati, hunarmandligi va adabiy muhati, ma'rifati va yuksak*

[13] Most village women and many married women in the city wear the traditional *rumol*, which does not encircle the face and has no religious connotations. The distinctly religious headscarves are a more recent phenomenon.

[14] One local friend actually told me that permission to use loudspeakers is under the jurisdiction of each *mahallah* (neighbourhood).

[15] 1996 was the 660th anniversary of Amir Temur's birth, followed by the 2500th anniversary of the founding of both Bukhara and Khiva in 1997. Both Al-Farghoni and Al-Bukhari were commemorated in 1998 and the man of the year for 1999 was Jalollidin Manguberdi, the son of the shah of Khorezm who fought against Chingiz Khan for a decade in the early thirteenth century.

ma'naviyati bilan nom qozongan ("The people of Kokand have gained a reputation for their fine art, their craftsmanship, their literature, their educational enlightenment and their high spiritual culture"). More and more, billboards like this and other publicly displayed signs, as well as shop signs, are using the new Latin script. An earlier version of the script, based on the Turkish alphabet, was initially adopted in 1993. This was later modified slightly, so that letters which do not appear in the English version of the Latin alphabet were removed, thus making it possible to use standard English language computer keyboards to render Uzbek. The current script was officially adopted in 1995 and, since then, has been introduced into the educational system, with plans for all newspapers and magazines to switch to it in the next few years.

Straight ahead, the road leads to Ferghana and Andijon. Just past the crossroads is a part of town known as Little Kuwait, the most popular place to buy black market petrol. As elsewhere, plastic Coke bottles filled with gas signal that *benzin* is available for sale. Of course, Coke bottles in Uzbekistan are used for more than just gas. Usually they contain the "real thing." In a country where certain other things are hard to get, there is usually no shortage of Coca-Cola products, perhaps because the owner of Coca-Cola Uzbekistan, Anvar Maksudi, is President Karimov's son-in-law, a fact well-known to locals and foreigners alike. Needless to say, one rarely finds Pepsi in Uzbekistan.[16] There has, however, been a serious shortage of Coke over the past few months and the price has risen dramatically as supplies drop. Various reasons are given, including the rumour that Maksudi and his wife are now separated. At the same time, others say that it is connected to the lack of convertibility of the Uzbek *so'm*.

In contrast to Coke products, which are displayed on roadside stands and in local shops, some products come to your door, many of them balanced on wooden trays attached to the back of a bicycle. Thus milk sellers, fruit sellers and even some bread sellers carry their wares throughout the city, accompanied by an appropriate cry, such as "*Sut, qaymoq, qatiq keldi*" ("Milk, cream and yogurt have come!"). Some, especially fruit-sellers, bring their products around in small donkey-carts. It is a very common sight to see horse-carts, donkey-carts, cows and sheep on the streets of Kokand. Camels, however, are rare; I have only once seen a group of them on the road to Tashkent. Apart from animals, the roads are full of a variety of automobiles. In addition to the Volgas, Moskvas and Zhigulis of the Soviet era, there are three Daewoo models currently available: the Tico, the Damas , and the luxurious Nexia. The Damas is one of the most popular modes of transport for the five-hour journey to Tashkent over the Pereval, the high mountain pass that separates the Ferghana Valley from the rest of Uzbekistan.

Usmon Nosir Street (named after an Uzbek poet and dramatist who taught in Kokand during the late twenties) leads north to Yangi Bozor. It is one of the few streets that has not been renamed since independence. There are a couple of army barracks on Usmon Nosir Street and groups of soldiers in fatigues are often seen walking along the side of the road. The military presence is not as visible here as it is in Tashkent, but it is still more than most North Americans are used to. Further up the road, close to the bazaar, is the section of town dedicated to automobiles, including car washes, car repair shops and stores selling car parts.

Finally, I reach Yangi Bozor, located in the far northeast corner of Kokand. A double row of *marshruts* is lined up outside the bazaar, all of them with slogans painted on the outside

[16] Pepsi imported from Russia is sometimes available in caselots at certain bazaars in Tashkent, but rarely elsewhere.

reminding people to obey the rules of the road. One of them is heading to Baghdad, not the Iraqi capital, but a village located 25 km east of Kokand. Apparently, some khan at some time had recruited soldiers from the real Baghdad to serve in his army and allowed them to settle in this village, which they named after their hometown. A similar phenomenon is responsible for the presence of a settlement named Kashgar just north of Kokand.

On normal days, Yangi Bozor is a mass of people, but today, apart from the sellers crowded around the entrances, the place is largely deserted, perhaps because it is New Year's Eve. There is a nice *oshxona* (traditional restaurant) with beautifully-carved wooden columns located near the main entrance. Last time I visited the bazaar, I enjoyed a bowl of *chuchvara* (meat dumplings in soup, similar to Chinese *wonton*), along with *non* and *choy*, without which no Uzbek meal is complete. The restaurant also serves *shashlik* (kebabs), *laghman* (noodles) and, of course, *osh*, the rice pilaf which is the staple of Uzbek cuisine. Many *oshxonas* and *choyxonas* are male-only establishments, where old and young men alike while away the hours chatting and playing chess or backgammon. Others, such as this one, however, cater to both men and women.

An *oqsoqol* (literally, a "white beard") in his turban-wrapped *duppi* (skull cap) and his *chopon*, a long quilted robe worn by Uzbek men, wanders into the *oshxona*. Most of the older men in Kokand and the surrounding villages still dress in traditional attire, though men under the age of retirement tend to wear modern fashions, except perhaps at special events such as weddings and funerals. Similarly, older women and village women are much more likely to wear *atlas* silk dresses and *lozim*, the pantaloons worn under dresses, whereas younger women in the city, especially those who work in local offices or attend educational institutions, tend to wear contemporary fashions. In general, Uzbek fashions are much more formal than Western fashions, especially amongst the young.

The entrance to the bazaar is a delightful mixture of the sights, sounds and smells of a Central Asian market. An *isiriqchi*, one who dispenses the much-valued fumes of the herb *isiriq* from a smoking brazier, wanders around the entrance to the bazaar, offering his services to whoever will pay for it. *Isiriq* was originally used in order to drive off evil spirits. Since the Soviets were unable to get rid of this particular folk practice, they reinvented it and promoted it as a medicinal treatment (complete with scientific studies to back up its putative healing properties). In the minds of most, it probably fulfills both functions. Although many *isiriqchis* are gypsies, who are generally looked down upon by Uzbeks for their lifestyle of begging, almost all who are approached by these peddlers of smoky blessings are happy to have the brazier waved under their nose or over their stall in the bazaar, a service for which they will pay five or ten *so'm*.

The sounds of Uzbek pop music coming from a cassette tape seller compete with the cries of vendors selling bread and fruit. The Uzbek pop music industry is quite well developed. There are a number of major studios producing newer groups such as Setora, Shahzod, Bolalar, and Khoja, as well as relative old-timers like Yulduz Usmonova and Yalla, a group which has been around for over twenty years. "People's Artists" in Soviet times, Yalla are still popular in their native land, as well as in various foreign countries they have travelled to. In a sense, they are the "John, Paul, George and Ringo" of Uzbekistan.

Parallel with the development of Uzbek popular culture, the influence of Western pop culture is evident in the vast number of videos available for rent that have been dubbed into either Russian or Uzbek (mostly the former) and the prevalence of rap and techno-dance/disco music coming from car stereos and the tables of the music vendors who sell bootleg tapes in every bazaar and on every street corner. Whether it's Michael Jackson, Celine Dion, the Spice

Girls or Backstreet Boys, the English language is in the process of conquering the music market of the young. Meanwhile, in the area of foreign movie stars, Jean Claude Von Damme and Arnold Schwartznegger have recently been eclipsed by Leonardo di Caprio. Uzbek music, whether traditional or contemporary, remains overwhelmingly popular, especially at certain events such as weddings, but Western music is slowly gaining prominence, part of the overall interest in the English language.

In a very real sense, although the Russians won the military Great Game in the nineteenth century, the English language is currently winning the linguistic version of that conflict in much of Central Asia. After a century and a quarter of Russian/Soviet rule, the cultural influence of those who formerly considered themselves the "older brothers" of the Uzbeks and other Central Asian nationalities is definitely on the wane. Although it is still widely used, the Russian language no longer has any official status in the republic. Uzbek definitely holds the primary linguistic position (as it should, since it is the mother tongue of the majority of the population) and English is posing a significant challenge to Russian, if not in use, certainly in desirability. Even other European languages that were formerly as popular as, if not more popular than English have suffered a decline in popularity. Hardly anyone wants to learn French or German at the local Pedagogical Institute. In the past few years, the English Department has split off from the Foreign Languages Faculty and now has its own floor in the main building at the institute.[17]

Heading west along Navbahor Street from Yangi Bozor leads me to Akbar Islamov Street, where I once again turn south towards Chorsu. On the right is Narbutabey Madrassah, built 200 years ago and still functioning as a Muslim religious college. On the far side of the madrassah is a large graveyard containing the mausolea of several former khans of Kokand and their wives, including the poetess Nodira, wife of Omar Khan, still widely respected for both her writing and her role in the public life of the khanate.[18]

Apart from the now-closed Jami Mosque and the Narbutabey Madrassah, there are few remaining monuments from the glory days of old Kokand. This is largely due to the events of 1918, when the Tashkent Soviet defeated the Muslim Provisional Government of Autonomous Turkestan only three months after it had been set up, destroying nearly all of the mosques and madrassahs in the city and slaughtering thousands in the process. The result is a city with a rich history, but little to show for it as far as architectural monuments. As the *Cadogan Guide to Central Asia* puts it, "apart from the palace, there is little evidence of this momentous history, nor of Kokand's pre-Revolutionary role as the second most important religious centre in Central Asia after Bukhara with, according to a local *imam*, 56 madrasas and 500 mosques."[19]

Approaching the Chorsu traffic circle once again, this time from the north, I pass the worker's bazaar, a strip of Akbar Islamov Street where unemployed men wait to be hired for various kinds of work, mostly manual labour. From Chorsu, my route takes me down Furqat Street,

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[17] Despite the overall interest in English, there are very few who have any command of the language. The lingua franca of Kokand is definitely Uzbek, although there are certain places where Russian is still largely spoken, such as the post office and the telephone-telegraph exchange office. Whenever Uzbeks learn that I can actually speak some of their native tongue, they inevitably comment on the fact that "The Russians who lived here for 70 years never learned our language, but these foreigners are learning it!' and then, in a touch of linguistic irony, they end their commentary by saying *moledets*, the Russian word for "great!"

[18] A quote from Nodira: "If a king cares not for the poor man's life, his grand rule and sublimity are all in vain," quoted in Calum MacLeod & Bradley Mayhew, *Uzbekistan: the Golden Road to Samarkand* (Hong Kong: Odyssey Publications, 1999), p. 120.

[19] Whittell, 180.

named after Zohirjon Furqat (1858-1909), another Kokandi poet who wrote in Chagatay/Uzbek. People are busy doing their last minute shopping before New Year's Eve, carrying melons and bread as they head home, shortly before *iftor*. Passing the bus station, I notice again a sign that strikes me every time I see it. In a land with a determinedly secular government, a large billboard proclaims: *Bu yorug'*[20] *dunyoda vatan bittadir! O'zbekistonni yomon kuzdan asragin!* (In this bright world, the fatherland is unique! May God protect Uzbekistan from the evil eye!). Across the street, several stores sport signs on their doors and windows in the Arabic script.

My route takes me past another bazaar and into the southern part of town, where factory after factory line Shahrukhabad Street. This area lies half in the domain of the Old City, half in the newer Russian part of town. Back on Amir Temur Street, I am getting near the so-called Jewish neighbourhood (*mahallah*) in which we live. Many of the inhabitants used to be Bukharan Jews, but most of them have left for either Israel or the other Promised Land, America.

Cycling along the southern flank of Muqimi Park, I once again reach Turkiston Street, this time heading north, past the large headquarters of the police and the National Security Service (whom most still refer to as the KGB). Out front a sign proclaims the words of Amir Temur: "Wherever the law rules, there will be freedom." Further up Turkiston Street, I turn into a *mahallah* to look at the tomb of Yalongoch Ota (Naked Father), a local doctor who helped many people, but who apparently used to wander around naked from the waist up, hence his name. He is buried between a teahouse and the local mahallah committee office.

My route back out to Turkiston Street leads me by the Gypsy Mahallah. Due to their involvement in begging and other ways of earning money which are considered questionable, most Uzbeks have little respect for gypsies. Back on Turkiston Street itself, there is a Business College with a stereotypical Soviet statue out front: a young man and woman sculpted in some kind of silver-painted metal, striding forwards with arms upraised in the typically unrealistic style of Soviet Realism, looking for all the world like Ken and Barbie dolls whose limbs have been twisted around into most unnatural positions.

More billboards greet me on the right up ahead, this time for Xon (Khan) cigarettes and Coca-Cola. Xon is one of the premier brands of British American Tobacco (BAT), another major foreign investor in Uzbekistan's economy. Against a backdrop of beautiful mountains, a group of Uzbek young people, male and female, guitar in hand and cigarettes dangling out of their mouths, proclaim, "Ours, without a doubt!" (most likely in reference to the fact that these cigarettes are produced in Uzbekistan). Smoking is common place among men of all ethnic backgrounds, young and old, although few women smoke, usually only Russians. Besides Daewoo, Coca-Cola and BAT, other important foreign companies operating in Uzbekistan include Colgate-Palmolive, Maggi Soups, Nestle, and Weston Tea.

This part of Turkiston Street seems to be a popular place for billboards, banners and various slogans painted on walls. A banner overhead proclaims, *Yangi Yilingiz Muborak Bo'lsin* (Happy New Year), while a sign in front of a building reminds people that 1999 is Women's Year.[21] Yet another overhead banner, alluding to the upcoming presidential election, implores, "Let's vote for the building of a just, humanitarian and democratic society!"

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[20] The letter *g'* in the new Latin orthography represents the voiced velar fricative, often transcribed as "gh."

[21] As with the historical anniversaries that are celebrated, each year is designated as the Year of _____. 1997 was Human Rights Year, 1998 the Year of the Family, and 1999 Women's Year. The theme for 2000 is Children's Health.

Throughout the city, election posters announce the parliamentary elections on December 5 and the presidential elections on January 9 (interestingly enough, the Sunday before and the Sunday after Ramazon).

Although the parliamentary elections have already taken place, the results are still not certain, due to a number of situations in which no candidate received the required percentage (50% of the popular vote) to claim victory. The presidential elections, a little over a week away, seem to be of little interest to most, since it is taken for granted that Karimov will easily win. He is representing the Fidokorlar National Democratic Party, while his rival, Abdulhaviz Jalolov, is representing the People's Democratic Party (Karimov's former party, which evolved out of the old Communist Party of Uzbekistan). The FNDP is a relatively new arrival on the Uzbek political scene and is actively recruiting the best and the brightest of Uzbek youth. The PDP on the other hand, as the successor to the old Communist Party, is well-organized, but viewed by some as still carrying baggage from the former regime. An interesting side note on the elections is that at least two popular singers campaigned for seats in the Uzbek *Oliy Majlis*, both of them in the Kokand region. The immensely popular Yulduz Usmonova managed to secure a seat representing a *rayon* near Kokand, but Farukh Zokirov, the lead singer of Yalla, was unsuccessful in his bid to represent one of the electoral districts in Kokand itself. Is this an indication of what people think of their musical talents, their political abilities or the fact that Usmanova was running for the Fidokorlar Party and Zokirov was running for the People's Democratic Party?

Turning back down Turkiston Street, my route takes me past the Economic High School, formerly known as the Turkish Litsey. The Turks used to have quite a well-developed network of these high schools throughout the country, part of the extensive cooperation that took place between the two countries during the early years after independence. Since that time, relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan have been "on again, off again." This may have something to do with the fact that many of the primary opposition figures associated with the Erk and Birlik parties have found exile in Turkey. In addition, it seems that the network of Turkish litseys had a definite religious agenda and the government became concerned about exactly what they were teaching the students who attended there, especially since these schools have a reputation for providing a much higher level of education than schools in the public system. In the wake of the bombings in Tashkent in February 1999, the Turks were asked to leave and the high schools were transferred to Uzbek management.

Cutting across to Charkhi Street and then past the jail brings me once again to Ozodlik Square. In the middle of one of the streets leading up to the square, a large Christmas tree has been erected. Of course, it's not referred to as a Christmas Tree, but it has become a standard part of the rather confused post-Soviet holiday that is known as "New Year" here. Part Christmas (the tree, as well as Santa Claus, known here as *Qor Bobo*, "Grandfather Snow"), part New Year (the tradition of staying up to "ring in the new year") and part Halloween (children light off firecrackers in the street and dress up in masks and costumes to dance around the tree at school events during the weeks before and after Dec. 31), it is a curious mixture of diverse cultural traditions, none of which are at all traditionally Uzbek.

Finally, I am back on O'rdatagi Street, where I live, in time to enjoy some nisholda before my wife and I go to the house of the director of our centre to ring in the New Year and find out wehtehr or not Y2K will have any affect on us in Kokand. Located on what used to be Engels Street (now called Bahauddin Naqshbandi Street, named after the famous Sufi mystic), their house is in the mayor's neighbourhood and hence rarely has any problems with gas or water

supplies, unlike other areas of the city which often suffer chronic shortages.[22] The New Year's program on TV is the usual assortment of Uzbek film and music stars. Newly-elected Yulduz Usmonova is there, as is Farukh Zokirov and everyone else who is anyone amongst the Tashkent *nouveau riche*. As midnight arrives and we cross over from the second to the third millennium, it is evident that Y2K has had no immediate effect here in Uzbekistan that we can see. The power is still on, the phones still work and tomorrow, the milk and bread sellers will be out on the streets peddling their wares. As people in Kokand say, *Hammasi tinch!* ("Everything's okay!").

[22] Typically, gas is low in the winter, when many tend to heat their homes by keeping the burners lit on their stoves, and water is low in the summer, when most of the water supply is siphoned off to irrigate the cotton fields. Other services, notably the phone and postal services, are amazingly efficient; broken phone lines are often fixed the very same day they are reported and airmail from North America arrives in about two weeks.