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## My Olzhas in “Numbers...”

Uldanai M. Bakhtikireeva 

RUDN University, Moscow, Russian Federation

✉ [uldanai@mail.ru](mailto:uldanai@mail.ru)

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## Мой Олжас в «Цифрах...»

У.М. Бахтикиреева 

Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Российская Федерация

✉ [bakhtikireeva-um@rudn.ru](mailto:bakhtikireeva-um@rudn.ru)

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Marina Tsvetaeva has “My Pushkin.” Olzhas Suleimenov has “My Chokan.” For me, “My Olzhas” remains an unfinished project. Every attempt to write a satisfactory essay about the scientific and creative universe of Olzhas Omarovich Suleimenov, or at least about a separate fragment of this cosmos, is, according to M.M. Auevov’s apt comparison, “equivalent to an attempt to fit a mountain stream into an aquarium.”<sup>1</sup> The first essay, “My Olzhas,” was written in 2002 in the magazine *As-Alan*. It is safe to say that the essay “My Olzhas” will be written throughout my life, and I do not foresee the happiness of satisfaction with it. This attempt at writing seems to me to be another static “text-photograph” rather than

<sup>1</sup> Auevov, M.M. 1996. “Inspired by the Breath of Eternity — With Words”. In: *Together with Olzhas*. RDW-Baumbach: Kazdesign, pp. 159–166. Print (In Russ.)



a “text-reality,” according to Y.M. Lotman.<sup>2</sup> Allusions to Olzhas’ universe of poetic science invariably transform into yet another of Uldanay’s omages, a genre that can confidently be described as dreary, sluggish, and pitiful.

Another reading of the concept “Numbers. Archaeology of Numbers: Sumer and the Origin of Arithmetic”<sup>3</sup> with the aim of absorbing, breathing in, and understanding the wealth of knowledge produced, scattered even between the lines of the text, created “in the full conviction that language creators were artists.”<sup>4</sup> I can read, but I cannot speak. How can I even compare myself to a craftsman? A shell clinging to the bottom of a huge, multi-deck white liner floats. And I still “float” in my texts. At the age of 16, having read *The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader* — “AZ i IA”, stolen from the library during the Suslov auto-da-fé and the one on Volkhonka, what could I understand? — Practically nothing. Half a century ago, “AZ i IA” was like “the call of a bugle” (*M.M. Auezov*)<sup>5</sup> in its very first edition, as well as a quarter of a century of “The Language of Writing” (1999), “Turks in Prehistory” (2002) and subsequent books cry out, and in response, the speechlessness of a spineless, single-celled bacterium...

Reflections on Olzhas proposal to humanity, “Numbers. The Archaeology of Numbers: Sumer and the Origin of Arithmetic” (hereinafter “Numbers...”) plunged me into a continuum of associations, the first of which leads to the metaphors of Olzhas Omarovich, who ‘... bloodied his bare soul on the razor’s edge,’<sup>6</sup> goes ‘in search of ancient signs,’ encountering “them on different roads.”<sup>7</sup> “A man of sensual mind — Chalyabi.”<sup>8</sup> Olzhas once again looks for a hat in a store where salespeople can only offer galoshes...

The transition of highly developed countries to the Sixth Technological Order is characterized by the advancement and resolution of technocratic and humanitarian problems, with the former clearly prevailing over the latter. The impact of the synergistic combination and strengthening of nano-bio-info-cognitive technologies on humans, their ontology, and their existence as a species is undeniable. In this context, complicated by ongoing global historical events, the new work by Olzhas Omarovich Suleimenov calls on those who hear to overcome

<sup>2</sup> Lotman Y.M. 1992. “The Phenomenon of Culture”. In: *Selected Articles in Three Volumes*. Vol. I Articles on Semiotics and Topology of Culture. Tallin: Alexandra, pp. 34–45. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>3</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 2024. “Numbers.” In: *BILGAMESH. International Almanac of Cultural and Social Studies*. No. 11. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NUMBERS. Almaty: Service Press, p. 32. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>4</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 1975. “AZ i IA. *The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*”. Alma-Ata: Zhazushi. Print (In Russ.) P. 304.

<sup>5</sup> See this quote: Auezov, M.M. 1996. “Inspired by the Breath of Eternity — With Words”. In: *Together with Olzhas*. RDW-Baumbach: Kazdesign, pp. 159–166. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>6</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Alma-Ata: Zhazushi, p. 195. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300–302

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195

the ‘joyless servility’ within themselves<sup>9</sup>. To shake off the ‘shiri mankurt’<sup>10</sup> of routine everyday life in order to overcome that very *homo erectus*, whose main occupation is the search for mammoths for food.

It is no coincidence that Chalyabi Olzhas writes about this *homo* in the collective unconscious in “Numbers ...”:

‘Homo erectus has not disappeared. It continues to exist today. Every ethnic group contains combinations of these two types of Homo. And Homo sapiens sometimes reverts to the state of Homo erectus. Their struggle continues. In peoples where erectus begins to predominate, culture dies out. Therefore, Homo sapiens and Homo erectus continue to fight for survival in every national culture.’<sup>11</sup>

However, decades earlier, Olzhas Omarovich had already written about this:

‘... where the bream ends,  
the pike begins,  
where the male dog is scarce,  
the bitch begins...’ (Suleimenov, poem “Grey Miss”)<sup>12</sup>.

In me, a representative of modern humanity, ‘bream and pike’ coexist dialectically; the depletion of subjectivity is accompanied by ‘bitching’, which I try to justify with everyday routine and intellectual incompetence. So much effort and time is spent on the momentary and insignificant for the sake of the ‘mammoth’ that reflections on one's calling and that very ‘direct connection with God’<sup>13</sup> often seem like an inappropriate whim. But for Olzhas, a man of sensual intellect who produces and transmits knowledge, it is important to have a conversation partner who responds to the spirit of his intellectual struggle, or at least a Homo Audiens who consumes this knowledge and, if possible, transmits it further.

The painful process of changes in global logic and the foundations of relations in the world order, which has considerably shaken my previous picture of the world and often serves as an excuse for my own passivity, is perceived by the sage Olzhas Suleimenov, judging by his creative and scientific reflection, as natural. Cities and states, aqueducts and blooming gardens were built and destroyed, some peoples were forever classified as barbarians, some as savage and bloodthirsty, incapable of generating any knowledge... Your personal existence, your activity, your agency should not depend on any assessments if you are trying to find ‘the path to the

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<sup>9</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Alma-Ata: Zhazushi, p. 195. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>10</sup> “Shiri” on the head of the mankurt, planet Earth — an allusion to the Kazakh legend from Ch.T. Aitmatov’s “The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years.”

<sup>11</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 2024. “Numbers.” *BILGAMESH. International Almanac of Cultural and Social Studies*, no. 11. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NUMBERS. Almaty: Service Press, p. 26. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>12</sup> Translated from Russian by D.S. Emchenko.

<sup>13</sup> Suleimenov. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Alma-Ata: Zhazushi, p. 195. Print (In Russ.)

essence’, which ‘lies through the court, the continuously sitting tribunal of thought’<sup>14</sup> — this conceals one of the most important pieces of subtextual information that Olzhasov’s “digital” proposal to humanity conveys to me.

The signs denoting numbers are conditioned by thousands of years of human practice, the urgent need to name the patterns of the surrounding world for more effective use. Logical figures grew out of repeated practical experience and became axioms. V.I. Lenin also wrote about numbers in his posthumously published *Philosophical Notebooks*.<sup>15</sup> Earlier, Moritz Cantor, in his book *Mathematische Beiträge zum Kulturleben der Völker*,<sup>16</sup> devoted to numbers, wrote about the mathematical contribution to the cultural life of peoples.

Half a century later, based on this work, Professor Evgeny Leffler, in his small book “Numbers and Numerical Systems of Cultured Peoples,”<sup>17</sup> taking into account the latest research and findings of his time, set himself the task of ‘showing that numbers and number systems are closely linked to the cultural state of a people, and that they often constitute one of the many links between different peoples and eras.’<sup>18</sup> Professor E. Leffler sought to present numbers in the light of cultural history, not limiting himself to their external form and appearance, but above all, in connection with the principles of application of these numerical signs by different peoples, combining them into a numerical system.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the scientist, combining previous experience and new achievements, made a significant contribution to the history of numbers.

More than a century later (113 years), Olzhas Suleimenov focuses on numbers as a cultural and intellectual product of peoples. Reflecting on symbols (numbers) he once again gives humanity the opportunity to believe in itself as a living collective mind capable of understanding interdependence and intellectual viability. Not to destroy, but to create a collective mind for more prudent joint survival and the construction of human society.

In “Numbers ...,” Olzhas Suleimenov not only offers his interpretations of symbols — signs covered with a multi-layered patina dating back thousands of years — he also produces new meanings, directing the attention of intelligent people to humanitarian problems, cultural, value, and ethical dimensions, and the need for a qualitative transformation of the humanitarian dimension in science, education, and society. And many of us, the so-called ‘scientists’, can only offer

<sup>14</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 1975. *AZ i IA. The Book of the Well-Intentioned Reader*. Alma-Ata: Zhazushi, p. 9. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>15</sup> Lenin, V.I. 1947. *Philosophical Notebooks*. Moscow: State Publishing House of Political Literature, p 164. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>16</sup> Cantor, M. 1863. *Mathematische Beiträge zum Kulturleben der Völker*. Halle: Druck und Verlag von H.W. Schmidt. Print (In German).

<sup>17</sup> Leffler, E. 1913. *Numbers and Numerical Systems of Cultured Peoples*. Ekaterinskaya, No. 58. Odessa: Tekhnik Printing House, 102 p. Print. (In Russ.)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

galoshes when asked for a hat. Alas, the possession of academic degrees and titles does not automatically create personalities of all their holders. And how piercingly, desperately lonely Olzhas Omarovich is from the lack of a worthy interlocutor, in whom, as M.M. Auezov noted, ‘an interlocutor of times past and future was formed, resurrecting in memory the image of the universal brain of historical situations of the Renaissance.’<sup>20</sup>

Olzhas’ approach to the object and subject of understanding is above the inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary approaches that post-Soviet intellectuals have been actively discussing for the last three decades; his approach is above all approaches. For almost five decades, “AZ i IA.” has demonstrated a SUPER approach, calling for the abandonment of monodisciplinarity and the old model of generating, translating, and transferring knowledge in science and education. The essence of Olzhas’s logic is a call to overcome the narrow coordinates of individual branches of knowledge that do not fit into the new architecture of the transcultural world, its subject, and its epistemological foundations. Current social debates among humanities scholars should be directed towards the task of transforming the humanities and bringing them closer to the needs of modern man and the world, as Olzhas Suleimenov urges:

‘By their very nature, the social sciences must at least be understandable to society, otherwise they do not fulfill their purpose. The most profound and thorough research in disciplines that are also commonly referred to as worldview disciplines must be scientifically popular. Popularity, that is, the accessibility of the presentation, should become one of the main criteria for assessing the significance of a work in the humanities.’<sup>21</sup>

Hence his reflections on the urgent need to overcome the limitations of national, cultural, linguistic, and academic forms of knowledge, to rethink the traditional tools of philology and other humanities. We are faced with a brilliant personality whose scientific and creative activity is a high humanistic technology — High Hume.

The problematic field of cultural heritage and its preservation in another historical, turbulent era of global change cannot be narrowed, but only widened. This is precisely the understanding that Olzhas Suleimenov brings us to. The rapidly changing face of the Earth, as developed by Homo sapiens, is leading not only to the emergence of new objects, but also to the erasure of past intellectual experience — the heritage that lies buried in the depths of epochs and historical strata. Hence his gloomy reflections, although I, the Kazakhs, and humanity should be grateful to him for his hope for reason, for his reminder of the interdependence and interrelatedness of human society in all its manifestations:

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<sup>20</sup> Auezov, M.M. 1996. Enlightened by the breath of eternity — with words. In: *Together with Olzhas*. RDW-Baumbach, Germany: Kazdesign, pp. 159–166. Print (In Russ.)

<sup>21</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 2004. *Collected Works in 7 volumes*. Vol. 4/1. Almaty: Atamyra, p. 14. Print (In Russ.)

“In the field of cultural heritage of humanity, the UNESCO World Heritage List is recognized as the measure of all that is significant. Including a monument in the list is not an easy task. The decision means recognition by the world community of the uniqueness of the included objects. According to data from 2014 (known to me), there were 1,007 sites on the World Heritage List. The leaders in terms of the number of World Heritage sites are Italy with 50, China with 47, Spain with 44, Germany with 39, France with 39, India (32), the United Kingdom (28), Russia (26), and the United States (22). In 2013, there were three sites on the World Heritage List representing the Republic of Kazakhstan: the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (added in 2003), the Tamgaly petroglyphs (included in 2004), and Saryarka — the steppe and lakes of northern Kazakhstan (included in 2008), which accounts for 0.4% of the total number of sites.”<sup>22</sup>

In November 2013, at the UNESCO General Assembly in Paris, the Republic of Kazakhstan was elected to the 21 member countries of the World Heritage Committee as a result of a vote by 195 countries. This was a great success for the republic on the international stage. The first Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to UNESCO, which operated from 2001 to 2013, played a special role in achieving this recognition.

In 2024, the International Center for the Rapprochement of Cultures under the auspices of UNESCO in Almaty organized a conference on the topic of “Archaeology of Numbers,” which proposed the inclusion *of* numbers — not as material objects, but as the intellectual heritage of humanity — in the World Cultural Heritage List.

“Our time is called the digital age. More and more often, headlines feature terms such as ‘digital consciousness’ and ‘digital knowledge economy.’ The time has come for researchers to turn to the number itself — this universal system of signs invented by Homo sapiens in the earliest era – and to approach knowledge that could become a global discovery.”<sup>23</sup>

It is time to remind ourselves once again about Sumer and the fact that *those who migrated from Sumer* were able to ‘invent their own writing system.’<sup>24</sup> Turkic nomads, overcome your centuries-old intellectual dependence and lack of independence, your ‘colonial’ way of thinking! Self-reflection and self-criticism are quite effective tools for harmonizing epistemological asymmetry in the question of who produces knowledge and who only transmits it, passively conveys it, consumes it. This is also discussed in Olzhas’ “Numbers... .”

O. Suleimenov’s project also answers an indirect question posed by Ivan Yakovlevich Depman, a scientist of Estonian origin and author of the book “The

<sup>22</sup> Suleimenov. 2024. “Numbers...”

<sup>23</sup> Suleimenov, O.O. 2024. “Numbers.” In: *BILGAMESH. International Almanac of Cultural and Social Studies*, no. 11. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NUMBERS. Almaty: Service Press, p. 32. Print. (In Russ.)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

History of Arithmetic”: “Once upon a time, a large prize was announced for writing the book ‘How a Man Lived Without Numbers.’ However, the prize was never awarded: apparently, no researcher-writer was able to depict the life of a person who had no concept of numbers.”<sup>25</sup>

O. Suleimenov’s approach continues the task set by E. Leffler and expands the research route. A new technological leap, capable of destroying humans as a species, is accompanied by a phenomenal nano-bio-info-cognitive revolution. In these circumstances, we should focus our attention on the intellectual potential of humanity — Homo Sapiens, express our faith in its rationality and wisdom, and elevate NUMBERS to the rank of the greatest cognitive achievements, giving it the right to live and multiply on planet Earth.

**Bio note:**

*Uldanai M. Bakhtikireeva* is a Doctor of Philology, Professor, Department of Russian and Intercultural Communication, Institute of Russian Language, RUDN University, 10a Miklukho-Maklay St, 117198, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0001-5088-7568; Scopus Author ID: 57188757248; Researcher Id: ABA-9665-2021; SPIN-code: 4562-5001. E-mail: bakhtikireeva\_um@pfur.ru

**Сведения об авторе:**

*Бахтикиреева Улданай Максумовна* — доктор филологических наук, профессор, профессор кафедры русского языка и межкультурной коммуникации института русского языка, Российский университет дружбы народов. Российская Федерация, 117198, г. Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, д. 10А, каб. 283. ORCID: 0000-0001-5088-7568; Scopus Author ID: 57188757248; Researcher Id: ABA-9665-2021; SPIN-код: 4562-5001. E-mail: bakhtikireeva\_um@pfur.ru

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<sup>25</sup> Depman, I. Y. 1965. History of Arithmetic. Moscow: Prosveshchenie. P. 15