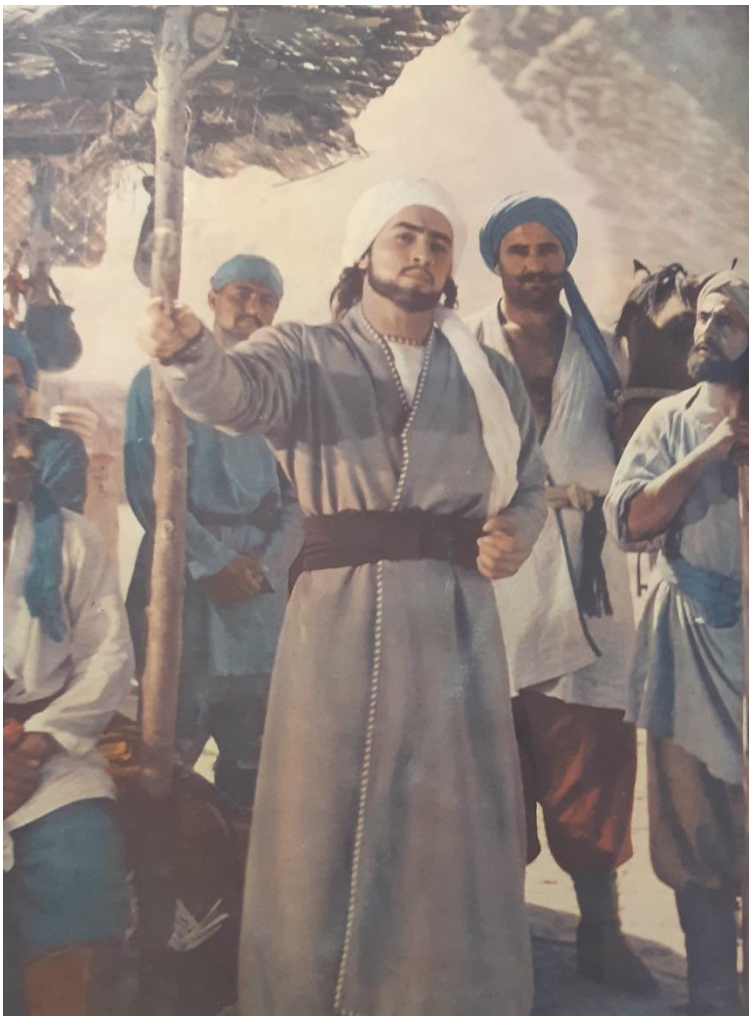
Avicenna – Prince of physicians, and prince of philosophers:

National myth-making, cinema industry and the freedom of artistic expression in the Soviet Union in the 1950s.



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Contents

Introduction

Preface

-*"He is Uzbek and the whole world knows about it!"*[1]

-*"Abuali ibni Sino, the great son of Tajik folk!!! He was born by Sitorabonu, not Yulduz!!!"*[2]

-*"Ibn Sino was Arab"*[3]

-*"Abu Ali Ibn Sina was PERSIAN you idiots. He is neither Uzbek nor Tajik. Tajiks did not even exist back then!"*[4]During the nine years that the film Avicenna has been published on YouTube more than one hundred comments were posted under it. Almost all of the comments below the film are dedicated to this one particular question: which nation can proudly consider medieval scientist Avicenna to be its own? The film was produced in Uzbekistan in 1956, but the discussion about the main character – Ibn Sina (or Avicenna in latinized version), and particularly about his national identification – remains very real.

Avicenna was born in 980 in Afshana, a village near Bukhara, in present-day Uzbekistan. In the Soviet Union the territory of Bukhara had primarily a Tajik-speaking population, and occupied a significant place in the Tajik culture and identity. However during the delineation of Soviet republics this piece of land was assigned to Uzbekistan instead of Tajikistan. Avicenna was born in a Persian family, and Dari was his native language. At the same time he was brought up and educated in an Arabic-speaking environment, as Arabic was the lingua franca of that time, and the language of science and education in the Samanid Empire. This mix created a fruitful ground for the appropriation of Avicenna by multiple modern countries.

How did it happen that such a random historical figure is so well known and can stir so much enthusiasm among non-specialists? "The prince of physicians" and "the prince of philosophers" – as it was referred to Avienna in Medieval writings – is a big historical figure, but how does the significance of his image made its way outside of historical and medical circles? When I asked

[1] Firdavs Faridunovich, posted 4 years ago. Comment on *Avicenna (feature film)*, posted on June 3, 2012. URL: https://youtu.be/CzLoSP31wlw.
[2] FORSI TOJIKI, posted 5 years ago. Comment on *Avicenna (feature film)*, posted on June 3, 2012. URL: https://youtu.be/CzLoSP31wlw.
[3] Aleksandr Li, posted 4 years ago. Comment on *Avicenna (feature film)*, posted on June 3, 2012. URL: https://youtu.be/CzLoSP31wlw.
[4] Can Art, posted 3 years ago. Comment on *Avicenna (feature film)*, posted on June 3, 2012. URL: https://youtu.be/CzLoSP31wlw.

myself about it, I had no idea that after a while an answer to this seemingly simple question will turn into my master thesis.

Locating the traces of the figure of Avicenna within the Soviet period demonstrated that 1956 became a prolific year for literary pieces about him. The interest to him grew rapidly between 1952 and 1956, and the release of the film in December 1956 became the final closing chord of a big campaign that tried to promote Avicenna among various audiences with the help of books, articles, and theater plays. Furthermore, the film about Avicenna was among the first wave of feature films that appeared after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, where Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality. This made me look deeper into academic literature on national policy as well as the role of the Soviet cinema in USSR of that period.

Historiography

Relevant academic literature for this thesis can be divided into three large groups: the first group is dedicated to the nature of nationalism and nation-building processes in general; the second one to the Soviet cinema industry during the Thaw period; and the third one to the national policy in Central Asia during the Soviet period. Below one can see short overview of these three with an outline of the questions to which this thesis can contribute, starting with literature on the nature of nationalism.

There are three bigger frameworks that scholars working on nationalism usually choose: primordial theory, modernization theory and ethno-symbolic theory. Primordialism "stresses deep historical and cultural roots of nations…and romantic appeal to nationhood based on kinship and blood ties"[5], and therefore denies the possibility of social construction of nationalism. Modernization and ethno-symbolic theories both agree on constructivist nature of nationalism, but argue about the time when nation as a phenomenon originated, and the importance of collective myths, symbols and values that play a role in the creation of a nation. Most of the scholars within the field base their research on the modernization theory of nationalism founded by Eric Hobsbawm[6], Benedict

[5] *Theorizing Central Asian Politics-The state, ideology and power* edited by Rico Isaacs and Alessandro Frigerio (Boston: Brill, 2019), 125.
[6] Eric Hobsbawm and Francis Newton, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Anderson[7] and Ernest Gellner.[8] According to this theory nations are a product of social construction, and phenomena such as industrialisation and democratic revolutions.

The Modernist approach is opposed by ethnosymbolists, who believe that nations are not necessarily the product of modernity and are based on shared symbols, traditions and myths. Anthony Smith, perhaps one of the most broadly known ethnosymbolists, sees national cinema as just one artistic mode of expression (together with literature or painting) through which "nationalist intellectuals seek to rediscover and authenticate pre-existing collective myths, symbols, values, memories and traditions".[9]

Both modernists and ethnosymbolists emphasize the role of a national intelligentsia for nation-building processes. Studies on the Soviet Union are not an exception. Despite acknowledging high governmental control over the nation-building processes, the role of a Soviet and particularly a local intelligentsia[10] in the nation and identity-building processes has never been denied. In this thesis the modernist and ethno-symbolic theories of nationalism will be tested, to find out which of them explains the nation-building processes in Soviet Central Asia in a better way. Another statement to test will be the role of a national intelligentsia in nation-building processes.

The overview of academic literature on the Thaw cinema in the Soviet Union can be best divided by the language in which it was written. Russian and Western scholars on Soviet cinema developed parallelly instead of going in debate with each other. According to the Russian scholars, cinema acquired a significant degree of independence during the Thaw, up to the point of being in open polemics with the Soviet regime. For example, according to Russian-based social historian Yulia Rusina: "a number of satirical and comedy films conducted quite legal polemics with the bureaucracy of the regime within the framework of its ideology".[11] In general it is not uncommon for

[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed. [with a new afterword]; London 2006).
[8] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (2nd ed. / introd. by John Breuilly.; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2008).
[9] Anthony Smith, "Images of the nation, Cinema, art and national identity" in *Cinema and nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 48.
[10] By this term I understand educated class of people, whose main occupation was mental labour: artists, teachers and academics, writers, etc. People involved in cinema production (particularly film directors, producers, and screenwriters) also belong to this group.
[11] Yulia Rusina, *Istoriya Sovetskogo kino, Uchebnoe posobie* [History of Soviet cinema. Study guide] (Ekaterinburg: Izdatelstvo Uralskogo universiteta ,2019), 72.

Russian language sources to view the Thaw cinema as a period of golden age of the Soviet cinema, both in academic literature and in more popular media articles.[12]

Most of the representatives of the Western academia in the field of film studies remain much less enthusiastic about the liberalization of cinema during the Thaw period. Czech film researchers Antonin and Drahomira Liehm characterize it as a period when "the new leadership wants to change its methods, but not the principles of the preceding policy",[13] and add that "the interest of the establishment and that of the artists seemed identical only on the surface. The political leadership was interested in finding a better spokesman for its policy, whereas the artists took the degree of freedom they were granted as an opportunity to speak for themselves".[14] Similarly Graham called the Thaw "a time of constant conflict, debate, and controversy, during which a handful of film makers managed to snatch — an often partial — victory from the old guard and the reactionary forces ranged against them."[15] The juxtaposition of Russian and English language academic studies on the Thaw cinema generates a debate on the level of real liberalization during this period. This thesis will contribute to this bigger debate through an Uzbekistan based case study as well.

The academic literature about nation-building and national policy in Central Asia went through a significant transformation in the course of the last 50-60 years. It can be conditionally divided into two waves: 1960s-1980s, and 1990s and onwards. The books that appeared during the first wave in the West include fundamental works of French historian and anthropologist of Georgian origin Hélène Carrère d'Encausse[16], American historians Edward Allworth[17], and Gregory Massell[18], who were widely recognized among the founders of the school of Central Asian studies in the US; former British soldier and founder of the Central Asian Research Centre in London Geoffrey

[12] E.g. "Ottepel' dvenadtsat' let vesny" [The thaw. 12 years of spring], Accessed July 26, 2021. https://www.culture.ru/s/ottepel/; "Kino ottepeli. Manifest svobody I chelovechnosti po kotoromu vse soskuchilis" [Thaw cinema. The manifest of freedom and humaneness that everyone needs], Accessed July 26, 2021. https://www.wonderzine.com/wonderzine/entertainment/movies/225754-thaw-movies and many others.
[13] Mira Liehm e.a., *The most important art: Eastern European film after 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 213.
[14] Ibid, 219.
[15] Petrie Graham, "Part One: Real Images", *Annual Film Book Survey*, №55 (Berkeley University of California Press, 2002): 66.
[16] Helene Carrère d'Encausse and Edward Allworth, *Central Asia: a century of Russian rule* (New York ; London: Columbia University Press, 1967).
[17] Edward Allworth, *The modern Uzbeks: from the fourteenth century to the present: a cultural history* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990).
[18] Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Wheeler[19], and Harvard historian Richard Pipes[20]. While each of their books on Central Asia create a foundation for the modern knowledge about the region in its own unique way, they shared the opinion that the division of Central Asian republics and their further nationalization was a forced top-down initiative of the Soviet authorities. According to these authors the character of national policy and connections with the center remained almost the same during the years. As Colonel Wheeler bluntly put it: "The death of Stalin, and the subsequent repudiation of some of his methods and policies had less fundamental effect in Central Asia than elsewhere… there was no reduction in the measure of central control exercised through the medium of the Communist Party."[21]

In the 1990s multiple factors changed the polemics in academic circles. Firstly, the former Soviet Union opened up, so archives and field trips became more accessible. Secondly, Russian speaking historians gained their momentum and introduced historical and anthropological traditions in the Russian language to the West. Finally, Central Asian republics demonstrated that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union they have their distinct national identities and self-perception. These phenomena generated a new wave in studies on Soviet national policy. Most of these revisionist studies originated in the US school of Soviet studies. Terry Martin[22] introduced the concept of "affirmative action" in Soviet nationalism, that demonstrated how Moscow contributed to the creation of national identities in national republics.

Francine Hirsch[23] examined the role of ethnographers and other former imperial experts in the formation and nation-building of the Soviet Union. Russian-American historian Yuri Slezkine went deeper into the concept of Soviet nationalism and suggested that Soviet nations should be viewed as complex and contradictory constructions, and that the cultural policy of the USSR promoted the creation of national entities and ethnic particularism among them.[24] American-Armenian historian

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[19] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The modern history of Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1964).
[20] Richard Pipes, "The Soviet Impact on Central Asia", *Problems of communism*, №6 (1957), 27; Richard Pipes, "Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects (Part I)", *The Middle East journal*, №9 (1955): 147–162; Richard Pipes, 'Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects (Part II)', *The Middle East journal* №9, (1955): 295–308.
[21] Wheeler, *The modern history of Soviet Central Asia*, 115.
[22] Martin Terry, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).
[23] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).
[24] Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism", *Slavic review*, №53 (1994): 414–452.

Grigor Suny showcased nation-building processes in the Soviet Union between 1917-1953.[25] His introductory piece together with the other chapters in *The State of Nations* demonstrated that national policy was not always well-structured and thought through, but at the end it still managed to institutionalize national bodies and the national intelligentsia. Suny's idea of progressive development of the Soviet nation-building even during the 1930s and 1940s became the cornerstone of this thesis. Another important discussion tackled the nature of nation-building in Soviet Central Asia.

Adeeb Khalid[26] became prominent in studying nation-building processes and the state of Islam in Central Asia. The studies of the 1990s and 2000s changed the perception on the nature of Central Asian nationalism and on the colonial and postcolonial nature of Soviet presence in Central Asia. According to Khalid national policy in Central Asia in the early stage of the Soviet existence was often formulated by the national intelligentsia and executed by the officials in the center without significant changes. It questioned the older view depicted by Carrère d'Encausse, Wheeler, Allworth and Pipes of Central Asians as an unorganized mass that did not have any national ambitions and ideas, and could not name their own national identity and affiliation long after the concept of Central Asian nations was introduced.[27]

These revisionist works on national policy in the Soviet Union and Central Asian region in general laid the foundation for a number of insightful country-based case studies about Central Asia that have been written starting from the late 2000s. These works investigate a variety of phenomena including for example the role of Soviet academia in the creation of the Kazakh nation[28], politics of national heritage[29], music[30], and everyday life[31] in Uzbekistan, and multiple studies about national

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[25] Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, *A state of nations empire and nation-making in the age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[26]Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014);
Adeeb Khalid, *The politics of muslim cultural reform: jadidism in Central Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Adeeb Khalid, Making Uzbekistan: nation, empire, and revolution in the early USSR* (London: Cornell University Press, 2015).
[27] As stated by Allworth, *The modern Uzbeks*, 207.
[28] Alfrid Bustanov, *Soviet orientalism and the creation of Central Asian nations* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
[29] Laura Adams, "Ethnicity and the politics of heritage in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, №2 (2013): 115-133.
[30] Kiril Tomof, "Uzbek Music's Separate Path: Interpreting "Anticosmopolitanism" in Stalinist Central Asia, 1949-52", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, №2 (2004): 212-240.
[31] Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca, *Everyday Life in Central Asia, Everyday Life in Central Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

cinemas[32]. This thesis will contribute to this flow of modern case studies by looking at the Uzbek historical movies during the Thaw, and the case of Avicenna myth-making.

Some cases studies on nation-building in the Central Asian region tend to overlook the significance of nation-building processes that took place during the Soviet period. If attention is paid to the Soviet period, most importance is given to the 1920s, during the period of indigenization, and to the years after the 1960s, when the national artistic intelligentsia gained the possibility to work again.

This thesis aims to cover this gap, and demonstrate that despite popular opinion, the period between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1960s had a certain significance for nationalization and nation-building processes. The amount of freedom that the artistic intelligentsia and representatives of academia received was very limited and unstable, but without these first steps the following blooming of national cultures in Central Asia in the 1960s and rapid nation-building after 1991 would have been impossible.

Case study and research questionsAvicenna was produced in 1956 by Tajik/Uzbek film director Kamil Yarmatov, and is the starting point of this research. It became an entrance door to the story about nation-building, film production and artistic freedom in Uzbekistan and Moscow during the Thaw period. It is important to mention that in this thesis the film was mainly approached through its context. There was no ambition to evaluate artistic value of Avicenna. From the artistic point of view Avicenna is hardly a breakthrough. It does not represent any innovative approaches and daring bypassing of the censorship machine. And this is exactly why it becomes so useful to understand the situation during the Thaw period in Uzbekistan. It represents an ordinary production process of an ordinary republican studio at the junction of two epochs: highly restrictive and repressive late Stalin period and more open period of the political thaw during Khrushchev rule.

As follows from the historiographical overview above, there are few main questions that this thesis strives to shed light upon. The first question is about the real grade of liberalization in Uzbek and Soviet cinema, and Uzbek historical film production during the Thaw. How did the film-making

[32] Rico Isaacs, *Film and identity in Kazakhstan: Soviet and post-Soviet culture in Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Rouland, e.a., *Cinema in Central Asia: rewriting cultural histories* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Hong Sang Woo, "Discovery of Central Asian Cinema, A Study on the Kyrgyzstan Cinema", *The Comparative Study of World Literature*, №66 (2019): 173–185.

process change in comparison to the Stalin period? What was the extent of artistic freedom? During the Thaw period that took place between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s censorship and repressions were relaxed which gave a boost to the Soviet cinema industry. This combination potentially created an opportunity window for cinema in national republics, but the real scope and depth of this artistic freedom remained unclear. The level of artistic freedom on the whole life cycle of the movie Avicenna is studied: from the formation of the initial idea to critical reviews in the press after the release of the movie. This thesis aims to identify and analyze the consequences of the Thaw period on cinema production in Uzbekistan.

Colonial and postcolonial points of views on national policy and nation-building in Uzbekistan is another topic of discussion. To which extent did the Soviet and Uzbek intelligentsia's contribute to nation-building processes? Was the nation-building process initiated from above or was it a grass roots initiative? There are two main reasons to look at Avicenna's case from the position of these questions. First of all to test the theoretical framework of the nature of Soviet nationalism that appeared during the second wave of academic literature during the 1990s. Secondly, to better understand the processes of nation-building and myth-creation at large.

The movie Avicenna (1956) is central to the narrative. The production and post-production of Avicenna is put in the broader context of Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan and Central Asia at large. This thesis has two time frames – the narrower one that embraces the years of production, post-production and reviews of the movie Avicenna – 1952 to 1960, and the broader one. The broader time frame of this thesis is 1920 – 1967, where 1920 is the time when the first notifications of the figure of Avicenna appeared in the Soviet printed press, and 1967 is when the last studied film review was printed in the Soviet press. The inclusion of additional years to the narrower time frame provides a broader historical prospective, and allows to look at the phenomena of Avicenna myth-making, and censorship in the printed press as a whole.

Chapter overview, sources, and methods used

The first chapter is dedicated to the process of the myth-making of the image of Avicenna through the years, from the 1920s to the middle of the 1950s. It aims to provide a background to the centerpiece of the narrative: the film Avicenna. It looks into the colonial and post-colonial nature of Soviet power in Central Asia, and the nature of nationalism in the Soviet Union at large. The first chapter is based on a variety of printed and archival sources that tackle the figure of Avicenna: from

academic articles and chapters to popular books and shorter articles in print media. The archival documents in this chapter are represented by editorial drafts of articles about Avicenna (Fund 1702 – *Noviy mir* editorial office, Inventory 4 – Journalism: articles, review and notes; Fund 618 – *Znamya* editorial office, Inventory 15 – Reviews, manuscripts sent to the editor (1949 – 1957)[33]. These and further archival evidence that was used in this thesis originates from the Moscow-based Archive of Arts and Literature (RGALI). A more detailed overview of the printed non-archival sources will be provided in the chapter itself.

The main methodological tool applied in the first chapter is the analysis of historic sequences, where attention is paid at the previous trajectory and its influence on a certain event or phenomenon. It allows to see the development of the image of Avicenna from a historical perspective, from the time when it was first mentioned by Soviet media sources, to the period of 1956 when the film about Avicenna was produced and screened.

Chapter two describes the pre-production and production stages of the movie Avicenna. It tackles all three academic debates: the level of liberalization of the Thaw cinema, (post)colonial approaches of Soviet officials, and a broader understanding of the nation-building. Sources that are used in the second chapter originate from the archive that was mentioned above (RGALI). It includes multiple drafts of Avicenna screenplays, and reviews of these drafts by the Screenplay Committee. Archival documents for this chapter come from the Fund 2372 – Screenwriting studio of the USSR Ministry of Culture (Moscow, 1941-1958) – Inventory 21,[34] Units 352 – Libretto of the literary script by Ulugzade Sashym Ulugovich and Vitkovich Viktor Stanislavovich "Ibn-Sina"; Units 353-354 – Literary screenplay by Ulugzade Sashym Ulugovich and Vitkovich Victor Stanislavovich “Ibn-Sina”. Ed. I and II; and Unit 355 – Reviews of the Screenplay Committee members for the screenplay of Ibn Sina. The final version of the screenplay of Avicenna was used to track changes in it. It came from Fund 2468 – Central Studio for Children and Youth Films named after M. Gorky (Moscow, 1936 – present), Inventory 2 – Scripts that did not go into production, and additional materials, Unit 889.

[33] Full name of the quoted above sub-category in the inventory №15 is “Reviews by P. P. Vershigora, E. Ya. Dorosh, V. M. Inber, V. V. Katinova, E. F. Knipovich, B. L. Leontyev, A. N. Makarov, Yu. M. Nagibina, P. F. Nilina, L. I. Skorino, Yu. N. Semenova, T. 3. Semushkina, A. V. Sofronova, N. S. Tikhonov, A. B. Chakovsky, N. K. Chukovsky and others. manuscripts sent to the editor (1949 - 1957).” Unfortunately it was not possible to identify which of the editors worked with the article of Ulugzade.

[34] For this fund description of the categorization of the inventories is missing in the archive.

Furthermore in order to provide an insider's look, memoirs of the film director of Avicenna – Kamil Yarmatov – were used.[35] To work with this primary source and academic literature, the method of close reading and placing documents and events within a bigger historical context of the epoch was used.

The final chapter is dedicated to the post-production advertising of Avicenna, as well as the state of Uzbek national cinema, and it comes back to the question of liberalization of Soviet cinema and the artistic intelligentsia during the Thaw. It is particularly difficult to evaluate how Soviet films in the first part of the century were met by the public, and the goal of the third chapter is to partially cover this knowledge gap. In order to put the reception of Avicenna in perspective, printed materials were analyzed about two other historic biographies produced by Uzbekfilm during the Thaw period: Furqat (1959) and The Star of Ulughbek (1964).

The periodic press was the main source type for the third chapter. It included both specialized editions dedicated to cinema, more broad intelligentsia-oriented newspapers and magazines and regular newspapers target towards the population of the USSR in its broadest sense. The archival source that was used is the transcript of the debate at the Uzbekfilm studio. It was saved in a file dedicated to the film designer and educator Boris Dubrovsky-Eshke, who took part in the debate and made a transcript of it for later personal use. The transcript can be found with the following directions: Fund 2605 – Dubrovsky-Eshke Boris Vladimirovich (1897-1963) – film designer, Inventory 1, Unit 38 – Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio "Uzbekfilm", Discussion transcript.

In chapter 3 a detailed description of editions that were used is provided. The analysis of cinema related articles contributed to an existing academic discussion: the debate about the grade of liberalization of cinema during the Thaw, that can also be framed as the debate between Russian and Western scholars. In the third chapter comparative analysis was applied, where the depiction in press of three similar historical Uzbek movies demonstrated the differences during various time periods during the Thaw.

To sum up, this thesis will combine three different perspectives on the movie Avicenna: the background and historical context when it was created, the process of its production, and the public

[35] Kamil Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie [The return]* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980).

reception of the film. It will allow to better understand myth-making processes in post-Soviet states and explain the importance of the figure of Avicenna in the national identification of modern Tajiks and Uzbeks. By doing so it aims to cover the existing gap on the Thaw cinema production in Central Asian republics, and the gap between Russian and English-language academic literature.

Chapter 1. Building the image of Avicenna between 1920s and 1950s

In his fundamental work about Uzbeks, Edward Allworth claimed that "Uzbek group identity, up to that time only tenuously developing virtually ceased between 1938 and 1956".[36] Anna Procyk took a similar stance stating that "in the late 1940s and early 1950s the cultural heritage of the nationalities was placed under such severe restrictions that one could have predicted its virtual extinction".[37]

The idea of the Soviet Union as the "prison of the peoples" has been later confronted by Terry Martin according to whom "non-Russian nationalities that survived the process of ethnic consolidation in the mid-1930s saw their sovereignty and status as Soviet nations newly strengthened. Moreover, the gradual turn toward a primordial conception of nationality during the Great Retreat led to an intensified cultivation of the separate and historically deep national identities of the recognized Soviet nationalities, both Russians and non-Russians".[38] This position was supported by Francine Hirsch, who placed the stage of national consolidation between 1927 and the late 1930s.[39] Alfrid Bustanov came to a similar conclusion. According to Bustanov the period of national consolidation or "republican approach"[40] when "Central Asian history was cut into national pieces"[41] took place between the late 1930s and early 1970s.

Some researchers refuse to consider the period before 1956 as constituent to the nation-building of the Soviet republics, for example Diana Kudaibergenova[42] who did a research on Kazakh literature in the 1960s and 1970s, or Anna Procyk, who was mentioned above. According to Kudaibergenova and Procyk, the cultural and national identity of Central Asian states only started to become nationalized in the 1960s and 1970s. As described by Kudaibergenova nationalisation happened when "Kazakh-Soviet historical narratives…were written by Kazakhs for the Kazakhs".[43] According to Kudaibergenova, Kazakh national literature was a "soft version of ethnization or

[36] Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 310.
[37] Anna Procyk, "The search for a heritage and the nationality question in Central Asia" in *The Nationality Question in Soviet Central Asia* (New York, Columbia University, 1973), 124.
[38] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 432.
[39] Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress", 251-78.
[40] Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, XX.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Diana Kudaibergenova, "Imagining community" in Soviet Kazakhstan. A historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet literature", *Nationalities papers* Vol. 41 (2013): 839–854.
[43] Ibid, 847.

nationalization" which was followed by "wide and long-awaited decolonization…in the last decades of the Soviet Union".[44]

This literature framework is essential to understand the historical context and situation in the national policy of the Soviet Union between 1920s and 1950s. While keeping these points of view in mind, let's take a closer look at a case study that highlights the main tendencies of the Soviet national policy during these forty years: the image-making of medieval scientist Abu-Ali Ibn Sina in the Soviet Union.

This chapter looks into how the image of Ibn Sina was developing in the Soviet Union over the years, from the very first notifications of Avicenna in the 1920s up to the release of the film in 1956. This investigation is tightly connected to the development of Oriental studies in the Soviet Union and national policy within the country at large. The focus is put on shifting details of Ibn Sina's image during the years, from the 1920s to the 1950s. In particular, the national identity that was attributed to Avicenna.

How many scholars have a whole interdisciplinary field that is named after them? Probably not so many. During the course of Soviet history Ibn Sina (Abu Ali Ibn Sina) – also referred to as Avicenna – became one of these scholars. Starting from the 1950s his figure and works have been studied by a whole range of sciences in Soviet Union: from medicine and chemistry to literature, philosophy, history, and Asian studies. The combination of studies from different disciplines received the name *Avicennovedenie* or *Avicennologia*. While this term did not appear before the 1980s when the anniversary of Avicenna was celebrated, the interest in Avicenna from the side of sciences became apparent already in the 1950s. In the modern period these terms are still used by Russian, Tajik and Uzbek scholars that study Ibn Sina and his oeuvre.

The attention that Ibn Sina received in the Soviet Union grew rapidly in the beginning of the 1950s when the country was celebrating 1000 years since he was born according to the Hijri (Islamic) calendar.[45] The film Avicenna that is studied in this thesis became one of the late-coming

[44] Ibid, 848.

[45] According to Hijri calendar that is commonly used by Muslims around the world Avicenna was born in the year 370 (980 AD according to the Julian/Gregorian calendar). In 1950-1951 AD was the year 1370 of the Hijri calendar. Since Hijri calendar has 355/354 days per year, the 1000th anniversary of Avicenna according to it took place almost 30 years earlier than according to Julian/Gregorian calendar (1980 AD). It allowed USSR to celebrate Avicenna's anniversary twice within short time period.

celebratory pieces timed to the anniversary. The official anniversary year was announced by UNESCO in 1952. Even though the film was released only at the end of 1956, its production began in early 1952. The screenplay spent a couple of years on the shelf of the Ministry of Culture and was accepted to production with a delay. Apart from the film, a large number of articles and books were dedicated to Avicenna and his life. From the 1950s and on translations of original works of Ibn Sina were published in Russian, Tajik, Uzbek and other languages. The second, even larger wave came in 1980 when the 1000th anniversary of his birth according to the Gregorian calendar was celebrated. It included even more scholarly and publicist works dedicated to Ibn Sina.

At the same time, before the 1950s, Ibn Sina was barely known by not only common people, but even among the artistic intelligentsia. During the sitting of the Screenplay Committee where the idea of the Avicenna film was discussed, one of the members, Alexander Chakovsky, said the following: "This is a screenplay about a great person. But when someone mentions Giordano Bruno, Copernicus or Archimedes we know something about them. And the disadvantage of this screenplay is that we do not know anything about Ibn Sina".[46] It is hard to blame Chakovsky for not knowing Avicenna, as the first translations of Avicenna's works in the USSR appeared in Russian only in the middle of the 1950s. Uzbekistan was a little earlier, the first translation of discussions between Avicenna and Biruni was published in Uzbek in 1951.[47] It means that in the course of the next several decades Avicenna became much more recognizable (as one can judge from the amount of publications about him and event from the comments under the movie that were cited in the introduction).

This change brings to mind the idea of *imagined communities*[48] and *invented traditions*[49]. While modern Tajiks and Uzbeks believe that Avicenna was well-known in these republics since the time that he was born, in fact he has only become famous among the general public during the last 70 years. This demonstrates that the ethno-symbolic approach with its belief in the necessity of pre-existing broadly known myths in order to create a national identity is wrong. The Uzbek and Tajik

[46] Reviews of Avicenna by the Screenplay Committee, 28 February 1953, 2372-21-355-27. Ministry of Cinema Screenplay Committee (1939-1958), RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[47] B.V. Lunin, "Bibliograficheskiy ukazatel sovetskoi literatury ob Abu Ali Ibn Sine I izdaniya ego proizvedeniy" [Bibliographical index of Soviet literature about Abu Ali Ibn Sina, and published editions of his works], *Obschestvenniye nauki v Uzbekistane* [Humanitarian disciplines in Uzbekistan], №4, (1979): 61.
[48] Anderson, *Imagined communities.*
[49] Hobsbawm and Newton, *Nations and nationalism since 1780.*

nations and their background were purely the product of modernity, as is suggested by the modernization theory.

The example of myth-making of Avicenna can hardly be considered unique. Starting from the late 1930s a whole number of national heroes started to be created in multiple Soviet republics. It involved more and less popular figures and the scale of their commemoration also differed. Among such figures can be named Russian poet and writer Alexander Pushkin[50], Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli[51], medieval Persian poet Rudaki (attributed as Tajik), and many others.

Other Uzbek national heroes that were promoted during this time period were medieval poet Ali-Shir Nava'I, Timurid sultan astronomer and mathematician Ulughbek, and Uzbek author and political activist Furqat (Zokirjon Xolmuhammad o‘g‘li). Besides articles they were promoted at dedicated events: such as readings, lectures, etc. The costs of organizing such events were split between the republics that hosted and initiated such evenings. The creation of national heroes developed gradually through the years. Below one can see how Avicenna was portrayed through a split of 4 decennia.

1920s

The first part of the 1920s in national policy of the Soviet Union was characterized as the time when significant efforts of Soviet scholars including ethnographers, historians, linguists, etc. were focused on investigating and describing the peoples that were living within the borders of the newly formed Soviet Union. These opinions were expressed by well-known scholars in the field of national studies in the Soviet Union such as Francine Hirsch[52], Terry Martin[53], Ronald Suny[54], Adeeb Khalid[55], and others.

Alfrid Bustanov, who specializes on the work of Soviet Orientalists and their input in nation building in Central Asia more specifically, indicated that during most of the 1920s and early 1930s

[50] Jonathan Brooks Platt, *Feast in the Time of Terror: Stalinist Temporal Paradox and the 1937 Pushkin Jubilee* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008).
[51] Diego Benning Wang, “Classical Literature and the Retroaction of Socialist Ideology—The Sovietization of a Medieval Georgian Epic Poem and Its Mysterious Author”, *Madison Historical Review*: Vol. 15 (2018): Article 5.
[52] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Francine Hirsch. “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities”, *The Russian Review (Stanford)* 59, № 2 (2000): 201-26.
[53] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.
[54] Suny and Martin, *A State of Nations.*
[55] Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan.*

scholars of Oriental studies were pursuing a regional approach[56] in relation to the region of Central Asia. It means that instead of splitting it into different national entities: Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, etc., scholars tended to look at the historical development of Central Asia as one whole, where histories and identities of people living there were tightly interconnected. During this period Soviet Orientalists were still closely connected with their Western colleagues, and one can often see scholarly references to foreign orientalists in Soviet works.

During the 1920s Avicenna was no more than one of the historical figures that happened to live in the Central Asian region, and there was no particular attention dedicated to his figure. According to the bibliography[57] that was prepared by B.V. Lunin to celebrate Ibn Sina's anniversary in the 1980s, only 4 works that were issued in the 1920s had mentions about Avicenna. In these works one can notice an interesting division in regard of Avicenna's national attribution. Famous philosopher and historian of sciences Vladimir Ivanovskiy considered Avicenna in the book *Arabskaya nauka I filosofia* [Arab science and philosophy] to belong to the Arabic world, based on the fact that most of his works were written in Arabic.[58] Similarly in the first edition of the Big Soviet encyclopedia Avicenna is called "Arab philosopher and medic".[59]

Orientalist V. Eberman called Avicenna in the book *Medicinskaya shkola v Djundishapure* [Medical school of Gondishapur] "a pure blood Persian" and further in the text noticed that the "native language of medici in Gondishapur [including Avicenna] was Persian".[60] Similarly in the Russian translation of the book *Istoriya mediciny* [History of medicine] – written by German scientists Meyer-Steinhoff and Südhof that was printed in Soviet Union in 1926 – Ibn Sina was called Persian based on the premise that he originated from "a famous Persian family".[61] As one can see, due to the peculiarities of Soviet national policy scholars did not pay particular attention to the creation of national heroes. Avicenna was a significant figure from the point of view of medical scholars, orientalists and historians, but his figure was not yet subjected to any political decisions within the Soviet Union. His national attribution remained in question, but mostly because it was

[56] Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, XX.
[57] Lunin, "Bibliograficheskiy ukazatel…". *Obschestvenniye nauki v Uzbekistane* №4, 1979.
[58] V.N. Ivanovskiy, *Arabskaya nauka I filosofia [Arabic science and philosophy]* (Moscow, 1925).
[59] Bolshaya Sovetskaya encyclopedia [The Big Soviet encyclopedia], Avicenna, 1922, 175.
[60] V. Eberman, "Medicinskaya shkola v Gundishapure [Medical school of Gondishapur]*"*, *Zapiski kollegii vostokovedov*, (Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, September 23, 1924): 61.
[61] T. Meyer-Steinhoff and K.Z. Südhof, *Istoriya mediciny [History of medicine] (*Moscow, 1925), 152.

difficult to connect a phenomenon such as national identity to a person that lived in the 10-11th centuries in a region with such a complicated political history.

1930s

Interest to Avicenna in the 1930s remained limited to Orientalists. In particular few works were published in relation to yet another anniversary – this time the anniversary of 900 years from the year of his death. It was organized by Istanbul University in 1937 and according to Bertels "the main goal of these celebrations was to prove that Avicenna was Turkish".[62]

Even though the celebrations were initiated by Istanbul University in Turkey, Soviet Orientalists used it as a chance to publish few scholarly pieces dedicated to Avicenna. As such he received attention at the second session of Soviet Arabists in 1937. In his report, I.I. Ginzburg called Avicenna an "Arab thinker"[63] who was "Persian by birth"[64], whose language and way of thinking "was different from the Arabs when it comes to the short explanation of his thoughts in scientific works".[65]

Another report on this session describing Avicenna's manuscripts were in possession of the newly founded Uzbek public library. According to the author of the report, A.E. Shmidt, the works in this library were collected from all over Central Asia. In his article Shmidt avoided providing Avicenna with a national identification (hard to say if it was intentional or non-intentional). A few times he talks about "significant Central Asian figures"[66] whose works contributed to the newly founded library. Perhaps one can see here the echo of the regional approach described by Bustanov in previous paragraphs.

In 1938 famous Soviet Orientalist Evgeniy Bertels wrote another article timed to Avicenna's anniversary titled *Avicenna I persidskaya literatura* [Avicenna and Persian literature].[67] In the article he provided evidence that Avicenna belonged to an Ismailist sect and Persian cultural tradition that was opposed to Arabic occupants and religious tradition of Islam that they brought with them. Bertels

[62] Evgeniy Bertels, *Istoriya persidsko-tadjikskoi literatury [History of Persian-Tajik literature] (*Moscow 1960), 119.
[63] Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences of USSR, *Trudy vtoroi sessii assotsiatsii arabistov [Works of the second session of the Arabists' Association]* (Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1941): 33.
[64] Ibid, 38.
[65] Ibid, 43.
[66] Ibid, 31.
[67] Evgeniy Bertels, "Avicenna I persidskaya literatura" [Avicenna and the Persian literature]. *Izvestiya AN SSSR [News of the USSSR Academy of Sciences]* №1 (1938): 75-86.

did not make any exact statements in relation to Avicenna's national attribution, and operated with indirect phrases, "his [Avicenna's] sympathies were lying at the side of the old [Persian] aristocracy".[68] At the end Bertels came to the conclusion that Avicenna had significant influence on the Persian (Iranian) literary tradition, and therefore was part of it as well. Bertels concluded his article with the following words: "Without trying to steal Avicenna from Arabists who also have the right to claim him, I want to say that without studying Avicenna we would not be able to deal with the history of Persian literature."[69]

In another work of Bertels that was included in the anthology, Bertels called Dari "native language of Avicenna to which he was trying to return"[70] even though "main works of Avicenna were written in Arabic".[71] It is difficult to say exactly when this work of Bertels was written, as the anthology was organized according to its topics, and not chronologically. It would also be important to notice that this anthology of Bertels was published after his death and without his direct participation. The publication took place after the death of Stalin and the 20th Party Congress, in 1960.

In the 1930s Avicenna was also mentioned in another publication, that was unrelated to the anniversary. In the book *Ot Geraklita do Darvina* [From Heraclites to Darwin][72] Russian and Soviet biologist and popularizer of science Valreian Lunkevich included Avicenna in the tradition of Arabic science.

To sum up what has been said before, in the 1930s Avicenna remained recognized mostly among scientists and scholars. Arabists preferred to see him as a part of the Arabic scientific tradition, as he was raised in Arabic culture and wrote most of his works in Arabic. Iranists (that were mostly represented by Evgeniy Bertels and his school) admitted his affiliation with the Arabic culture and tradition, but at the same time underlined his national origin – Persian. When Avicenna was mentioned in publications about natural sciences he was identified as a representative of the Arabic tradition. In the 1930s, debates about the national origin and attribution of Avicenna was not on the

[68] Cited by Evgeniy Bertels, *Istoriya litaratury I kultury Irana* (USSR Academy of Sciences, 1988), 243.
[69] Ibid, 260.
[70] Evgeniy Bertels, *Istoriya persidsko-tadjikskoi literatury [History of Persian-Tajik literature]* (Moscow, 1960), 119.
[71] Ibid.
[72] V.V. Lunkevich, *Ot Geraklita do Darvina [From Heraclites to Darwin],* Vol. 1, (OGIZ BIOMEDGIZ, 1936).

table yet. Even though Arabists and Iranists were discussing whether he was Persian or Arabic, Avicenna was not yet recognized as a historical figure that belonged to the Soviet people.

The late 1930s became an important milestone for the creation of national heroes[73] in the Soviet Union, but the Central Asian republics were not yet captured by this trend. The national delimitation of the Central Asian nations was in its early stages and had not come as far as to the creation of the national folklores.

1940s

In the 1940s the situation started to change. In 1941 the encyclopedia *Istoriya Filosofii* [The history of philosophy][74] prepared by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR became the precursor of the changing national policy. In the description of the early Muslim conquests (also referred to as Arab conquests) that started in the 7th century with the raise of Islam, the authors mentioned that "Arab" was not referred to as national affiliation. "Arab culture was as international as the Arab state. It was created by Arabs, Iranians, Berbers (moors), and Turks, and Egyptians. The unifying parts of these conquests were Arab language and Islam. Therefore the term "Arab" is conventional here, since it is more a language than a national category."[75] This contradicts the earlier established tradition of Soviet oriental studies. During the 1930s, Arab, Turkic and Iranian cultural achievements were divided between different branches of oriental studies. Later in the same chapter that introduced Arab conquests, Avicenna was referred to as "Arab"[76] scientist, and there was no mention of his Tajik or Uzbek roots.

The development of the changing policy regarding Avicenna was indicated in the brochure *Velikie dostizhenia sredneasiatskoi kultury I kak fashism tuzhitsya ih sebe prisvoit* [The great achievements of Central Asian culture and how fascism attempts to appropriate it][77] written by Ernst Kolman in 1942 when, at the time, he worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of

[73] According to Scholars of Russian literature G.U. and L.B. Karpenko it was late 1930s when Russian poet Alexander Pushkin became "proletarized" by the Soviet government. See G.U. Karpenko, L.B. Karpenko, "Yubileynie yazykovie klishe o Pushkine ili poet na sluzhbe u gosudarstva [Jubilee cliches about Pushkin or a Poet in the service of the state]", *Vestnik Samarskogo Universiteta* (2016): 72-79.
[74] *Istoriya filosofii [The history of philosophy]* ed. by G.F. Alexandrov, B.E. Bykhovsky, M.B. Mitin, P.F. Yudin, Vol.1, (Politizdat, 1941).
[75] Ibid, 434.
[76] Ibid, 436 and 439.
[77] Ernst Kolman, *Velikie dostizhenia sredneasiatskoi kultury I kak fashism tuzhitsya ih sebe prisvoit [The great achievements of Central Asian culture and how fascism heaves to appropriate it] (*Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1942).

Sciences. The brochure was written in a nearly vulgar tone and used a lot of Soviet jargon and derogatives, which can easily catch a reader by surprise. It would look appropriate in a denouncing article in Pravda in the 1930s, but not in a book that was issued by the printing house of the Academy of Sciences. Already in the introduction, Kolman blamed famous Soviet orientalists for "rabskoye presmykatel'stvo pered zagranitsey [slavish groveling for abroad]"[78] – a cliché that was often used during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign that started few years later. According to Kolman, Soviet orientalists (Vasily Barthold and his students in particular) were misled by the bourgeois scholarship that considered Central Asian scholars such as Avicenna, Ulughbek, and others, to have Arian roots while instead they were "ancestors of modern Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, Kazakh and Kirgiz people".[79]

At first sight it looked strange that Kolman, a mathematician that never expressed any interest in Central Asia, suddenly decided to write such piece, full of criticism towards well-established Soviet orientalists. However, the biography of Kolman dimmed the light on this mystery. Kolman was most renowned for helping with the cleansings among Soviet scholars and scientists in the 1930s and later for the communist cleansing among Czech scientists in the 1940s (he was ethnically Czech, and in the 1940s he had the position of the Head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). He personally attacked scientists such as biologist Sergei Vavilov, naturalist Vladimir Vernadsky, physicists Lev Landau and Igor Tamm and many others.[80] Therefore his attack on Soviet Orientalists was in line with his previous deeds. According to the Archives of the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences the brochure *Velikie dostizhenia sredneasiatskoi kultury* was taken seriously enough to be reviewed at a special commission.[81]

In 1943, the Uzbek branch of the Academy of Sciences demonstrated that it understood the signal and implemented the narrative introduced by Kolman in a more reserved manner. In the book *Velikiye uchyoniye Uzbekistana* [The great scientists of Uzbekistan][82] professor Rainov mentioned Arab culture and Arab science in quotation marks. "By accumulating the human experience Arabs

[78] Ibid, 13.
[79] Ibid, 14.
[80] G.E. Gorelik, "Uchit li nas istoriya nauki? [Does the history of science teach us?]", *Priroda*, №5, (1993 Accessed July 26, 2021, http://www.veinik.ru/science/history/article/291.html.
[81] M. Rozental, Review of the brochure of E. Kolman, (1943). Archives of the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy, case 165, https://iphlib.ru/library/collection/arch/document/165-165_item.
[82] T.I. Rainov, *Velikiye ucheniye Uzbekistana [The great scientists of Uzbekistan]* (Uzbfan, 1943).

were not the only owners of it. Many nations that lived in the countries of "Arab" culture were related to the lessons of this experience not less, and sometimes even more than Arabs themselves".[83] According to Rainov, Uzbekistan already existed during the period of Arab conquests.[84] Rainov admitted that Central Asia did not have national science per se, but at the same time that "there was no local science anywhere at that period".[85] He continued that "Central Asia was not some deprived province in the "Arab" world. Quite the opposite; on the territory of Central Asia, and particularly in Uzbekistan, were living and functioning highly gifted people".[86]

In one of the footnotes Rainov directly turned to the question of Avicenna's ethnic origin. He calls it "a dark and questionable story" and listed different publications that attributed Avicenna Turkic, Iranian, Tajik origin, or preferred to not mention his origin at all. "The question about the origin of Avicenna obviously needs to be further investigated. However, for the history of Central Asia it is enough to establish that Ibn Sina originated from Central Asia and his worldview was formed there".[87] By this, Rainov recognized that it would be wrong to definitively call Avicenna Uzbek, but at the same time, if there was a country that can lay claims on him it should be Uzbekistan (or at least one of the Central Asian republics within the Soviet Union).

It is important to notice that at that point, just like during the 1920s and 1930s, there were still multiple narratives about the origin of Avicenna. On one side the Academy of Sciences questioned the right to call Avicenna Arab, but on the other hand books with other opinions were still published and reprinted. For example the book *Ot Geraklita do Darvina* that was mentioned in the section about the 1930s, that did not question Arab origins of Avicenna (or at least did not see the question about his national origin as something essential and worth elaborating about).

At the end of 1948, the opinion on Avicenna's Tajik origin appeared for the first time since the 1920s: Soviet ethnographer and archeologist Sergei Tolstov expressed it in his book *Po sledam Khoresmskoi tsivilizatsii* [Following the steps of the Khoresm civilization][88]. He did not give any

[83]Ibid, 6.
[84]Ibid, 9.
[85]Ibid, 10.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Ibid, 16.
[88]S.P.Tolstov, *Po sledam Khoresmskoi tsivilizatsii* [Following the steps of Khoresm civilisation] (Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1948).

special attention to it, but listed Avicenna a few times among Tajik scientists[89] and dropped that Avicenna wrote few books "in the native Tajik language (i.e. in Dari language)".[90]

The Tajik nationality was also assigned to Avicenna by Tajik philosopher and historian of philosophy Alautdin Bogoutdinov. It is peculiar that Bogoutdinov was one of few national scholars that participated in the process of Avicenna's myth-making. Most scholars that contributed to the creation of national histories in Central Asian republic worked in Moscow, and were ethnically Russian. While in his article he never openly called Avicenna Tajik; at the end of the article he clarified that the article was written in order to "introduce the readers … to the philosophical heritage of Tajik scientists".[91] He also cited Stalin: "Tajiks have a rich history; their organizational and political abilities in the past are well-known by everyone".[92] In one of the footnotes, Bogoutdinov informed the readers that *Danishnama-i 'Alai* [The book of Knowledge] – the work of Avicenna that he analyzed in his article "was written in Dari… in the 9th and 10th centuries the ancestors of modern Tajiks wrote in this language. [Dari] differs slightly from the modern Tajik language".[93] And probably the most obvious sign that demonstrated the Tajik nationality of Avicenna was the title of the article which is called *an outstanding monument of the philosophical thought of the Tajik people*.

By the end of the 1940s there was an equal amount of Tajik and Uzbek scholars and representatives of the national intelligentsia that claimed Avicenna as their national hero. At the same time, in these claims Avicenna was never directly called "Tajik" or "Uzbek". Supporters of his Tajik origin emphasized that his native language was Dari – a language that is close to modern Tajik, while supporters of Uzbek origin underlined the fact that the places where Avicenna lived and worked were currently located within the borders of Soviet Uzbekistan.

To conclude, in the 1940s a clear shift of policy took place regarding national past, national heroes and Avicenna in particular. Even though multiple opinions about his national origin existed, in the 1940s a clear preponderance developed to call Avicenna a Central Asian, Uzbek or Tajik scientist. This shift originated not in the Orientalist circles but in the communist party and was first

[89] Ibid, 368.
[90] Ibid, 363.
[91] Alautdin Bogoutdinov, "Vydayushchiysya pamyatnik filosofskoy mysli tadzhikskogo naroda" [An outstanding monument of the philosophical thought of the Tajik people], *Voprosy filosofii*, (1948): 366.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid, 358.

expressed by the well-known failed mathematician and professional writer of complaints – Ernst Kolman, who gained a reputation of being the initiator of repressions against famous scientists in the 1930s. The variety of sciences that Kolman tackled in his accusations were so wide (from mathematics and physics to natural sciences and history and ethnography), that it was almost impossible that he was the real initiator. The question about the national origin of Avicenna and other Central Asian scholars and scientists became political.

After the end of the Second World War "historiographic autochthonization"[94] of the nationalities took place. It was tightly interconnected with Zhdanovism when the Communist party expected nothing but conformity from the artistic intelligentsia, and all the non-compliant voices were shut down. A clear signal was received about how Central Asian histories and national heroes – including Avicenna – should be portrayed. As follows from the next section, this signal was picked up by academics and writers.

1950s: general picture

The tendency to nationalize Avicenna further escalated during the 1950s. In 1952, the USSR celebrated yet another Avicenna's anniversary (marking 1000 years from the year he was born according to the Hijri calendar), and it went quite differently from the previous anniversary in 1937. While 15 years ago attention to Avicenna was very limited to the professional community of orientalists and historians of science, this anniversary caused a burst of publications, mostly in popular newspapers and magazines all around the country. According to an estimation of Bertels, only during 1952 there were more than 250 various articles about Avicenna published.[95] Moreover, there were organized readings and lectures about Avicenna's work, as well as exhibitions of manuscripts and valuable old editions of Avicenna.[96]

Apart from general praise, scientists started to study Avicenna's exact contributions in medicine.[97] The wave of publications about Avicenna did not slow down after his anniversary in

[94] Marlène Laruelle, "The Concept of Ethnogenesis in Central Asia: Political Context and Institutional Mediators (1940–50)", *Kritika (Bloomington, Ind.)*, Vol. 9, №1 (2008): 169-88.
[95] "Izuchenie stran blizhnego vostoka" [Studying the Middle Eastern countries], *Vestnik Akademii nauk,* №6 *(*1954):79.
[96] Ibid.
[97] See for example S.A. Alimov, "Tuberkulez v drevney uzbekskoy meditsinskoy literature" [Tuberculosis in the ancient Uzbek medical literature], *Problemy tuberculoza [Tuberculosis problems],* №1, (1950): 50-54; L.A. Alyavi, "Zheludochnyye zabolevaniya v trudakh Ibn Sino (Avitsenny)" [Gastric diseases in the writings of Ibn Sino (Avicenna)], *Klinicheskaya medicina [Clinic medicine],* №9, (1952):11-15; B.L. Gurtovoi, "Operativnoye akusherstvo v "Kanone" Ibn

1952 had concluded, but proceeded to bring more and more articles and even books until the late 1950s. In 1952, Avicenna was for the first time included in the *Short philosophical dictionary*[98] edited by Rozenthal and Yudin. This edition was updated and published almost every year with a circulation of 700.000 editions annually. It was also relatively short for an encyclopedia: just one volume of five hundred pages, and each concept or name took an average from a half to two pages. The fact that Avicenna was added to it, highlighted that he was considered significant enough to be mentioned among the most important personalities and concepts of the world's philosophy.

Since the amount of publications about Avicenna grew significantly in the 1950s, listing the national identification of Avicenna in each of these publications seems redundant. Just like during the 1940s, Avicenna was called either Uzbek, or Tajik, and Central Asia was always underlined as his birth place. Popular suggestions of his Persian, Turkic or Arab origin completely vanished from the press. Tajik and Uzbek identities were assigned to Avicenna almost equally often, with Tajik being slightly more popular (perhaps because it was easier to prove the connection between medieval Dari, in which Ibn Sina wrote, and modern Tajik language). The discussion between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan about his national identification became particularly fierce in the 1960s, when the republics gained more freedom in writing their own histories, and it is still going on to this day.[99]

However, the discussion about Avicenna's origin did not always come from scholars from the Tajik or Uzbek republics, or from followers of different theories. It appeared that some of the scholars (including famous orientalist and historian Alexander Yakubovskiy) consciously placed Avicenna and other famous medieval scientists and philosophers in the national histories of both republics. For example, in his publication from 1952 Yakubovskiy wrote in an article *Ibn Sina I ego vremya* [Ibn Sina and his times][100] the following: "Tajik by birth, Avicenna was fully established at the Tajik cultural soil in the very center of Central Asia – the capital of the Samanid Empire

Siny (Avitsenny)" [Operative obstetrics in the "Canon" of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)], *Akusherstvo I ginekologiya [Obstetrics and Gynecology]*, №4 (1955): 81-84; and many others.

[98] Ibn Sina, *Kratkiy filosofskii slovar* [Short dictionary of philosophy] ed. by M. Rozenthal and P. Yudin (Moscow, 1952), 153.

[99] For example at the YouTube page of the movie Avicenna one can read lengthy debates between modern Uzbeks and Tajiks, both claiming Ibn Sina as their ancestor.

[100] A.Yu. Yakubovskiy, "Ibn Sina I ego vremya" [Ibn Sina and his times], *Voprosy istorii*, № 9 (September 1952): 87-110.

Bukhara".[101] In the rest of the article Yakubovskiy also multiple times underlined that Avicenna was connected to the Tajik culture.

During the same time period, Yakubovskiy wrote in 1950 a part in the book *History of the nations of Uzbekistan.*[102] His part was dedicated to the medieval history of Uzbekistan. Avicenna was mentioned there a number of times (including a 4-page long biographical essay), but nowhere in the book could one see any connection between Avicenna and Tajik culture and/or Tajikistan. It is important to say that Avicenna was not called Uzbek either, but "Bukharan".[103] Judging by the large coverage of his persona and listing of all the achievements that he brought to the history of Uzbekistan one can presuppose that Avicenna was an Uzbek national hero. For example, according to Yakobovskiy, Avicenna "formed the cultural face of the Samanid capital"[104] and was a part of "the cultural environment that promoted the enlightenment".[105] Yakubovskiy, as one of the main creators of the national histories of the Central Asian republics, widely promoted the theory claiming that "a nation and its language are often older than its name"[106] which laid the very foundation for all claims that both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan made on Avicenna.

To sum up, it was the 1950s when the national appropriation of the figure of Avicenna started to truly bloom and was planted in the minds of the general public. The anniversary of Avicenna that was celebrated in 1952 provided a platform to overflow popular and scientific press with information about Avicenna and his Tajik or Uzbek roots. The claim whether Avicenna was either Tajik or Uzbek mostly depended on the scholar or writer.

In the situation where the Soviet leadership tried to prevent the unification of the Central Asian republics and propagandized their national differences, it was convenient to attribute the figure of Avicenna to both republics. On the one side it provided a solid source of pride for both Tajiks and Uzbeks, and on the other it helped to deepen the argument that two republics had from the time of their creation in the 1920s, and thus prevented their solidarization against the Soviet rule.

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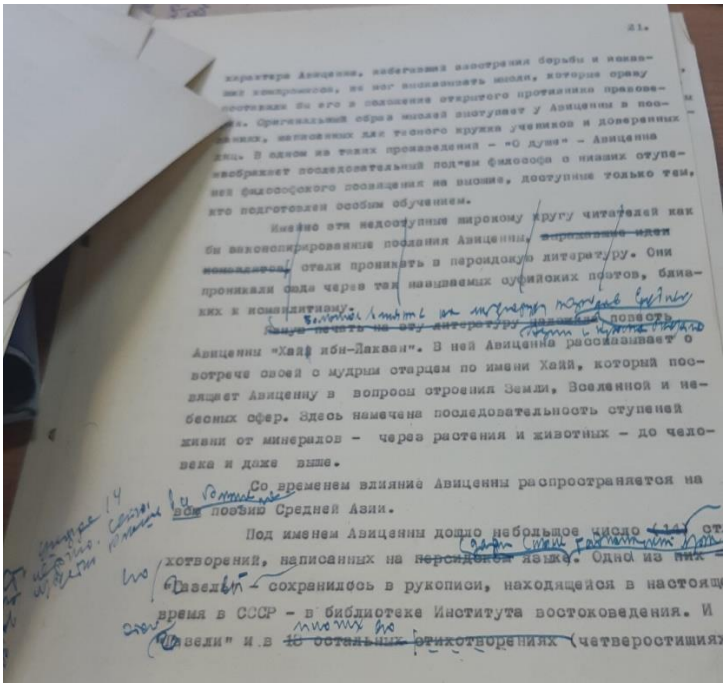
[101]Ibid, 87.
[102] *Istoriya narodov Uzbekistana [History of the nations of Uzbekistan*], ed. by K.V. Trever, A.Yu. Yakubovskiy, M.E. Voronets (Moscow 1950).
[103] Ibid, 253, 258, 259, 281 etc.
[104] Ibid, 253.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid, 9.

In some cases scholars did not hesitate to place Avicenna in both historical traditions by skillfully manipulating the description of Avicenna's origin. As such, Avicenna's national identity was never mentioned in the film from 1956. At the same time the authors seemingly tried to avoid the use of the words "Arab" and "Persian". Was it a choice of the author to do so, or some unspoken rules that he or she was following? In order to figure it out let's take a look at an example of how articles about Avicenna were produced in the 1950s.

1950s: a closer look into the production process

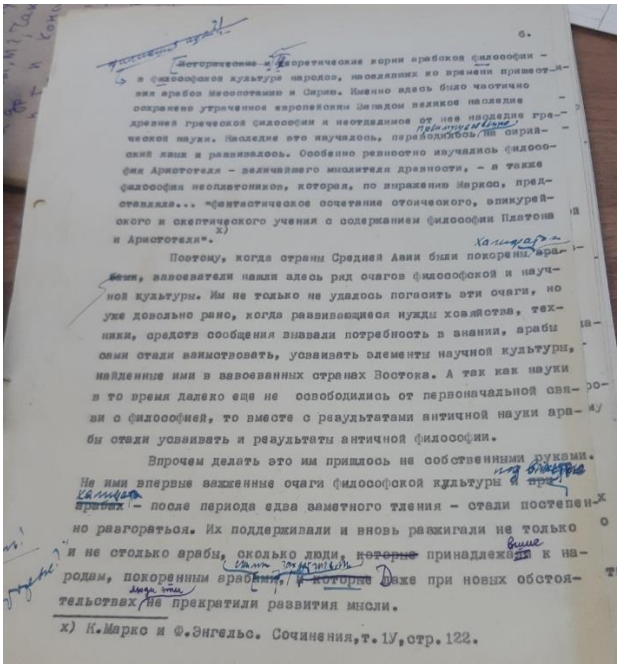
During the earlier years the connection of Avicenna to the Arabic culture was represented from different angles. In the 1920s it was quite one-sided, Avicenna was considered to belong to the Arabic culture, in the 1930s and 1940s his belonging to the Arab culture included explanations that "Arab is not an ethnic category".[107] In the 1950s any mention of Arab culture and traditions was simply removed from the texts about Avicenna and replaced by more neutral terms. Below one can see editorial remarks that were made in the article of Professor Asmus about Avicenna in the *Noviy mir* magazine:



Editorial remarks of Noviy Mir magazine in the draft article of V.Asmus "Abu Ali Ibn Sina". The article was printed in the magazine in 1952, №6. In the last paragraph "Persian language" in the original text was crossed out and replaced

[107] *Istoriya filosofii* ed. by G.F. Alexandrov et al, 434.

with "Dari, old Tajik language". Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), fund 1702 list 4 unit 1141, page 21.



Editorial remarks of Noviy Mir magazine in the draft article of V.Asmus "Abu Ali Ibn Sina". The article was printed in the magazine in 1952, №6. In the second and third paragraphs words "Arabs" in the original text were crossed out and replaced with "Caliphate". Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), fund 1702 list 4 unit 1141, page 6.

Another remarkable trait of articles about Avicenna that were published in the 1950s is that they often appeared in multiple editions at the same time. Sometimes the pieces were edited mildly, or had different titles, often copied completely. Sometimes one story was given various forms, as it happened in the case of Avicenna movie from 1956. For example the same article of Uzbek scholar Alautdin Bogoutdinov titled "The great medieval thinker" appeared in three different magazines, as well as in a book dedicated to Avicenna.[108]

The plot of Avicenna's movie written by Ulugzade and Vitkovich was not used in only the film. Even before the decision to order a screenplay for Avicenna was made officially, a story about Avicenna had appeared in the printed press in a different format.

In the beginning of 1952, Tajik writer Satim Ulugzade had written an article for *Znamya* magazine that was dedicated to Abu Ali Ibn Sina's thousand anniversary. Instead of following Ibn Sina's biography in chronological order, Ulugzade decided to describe few episodes of Ibn Sina's life

[108] Lunin, "Bibliograficheskiy ukazatel sovetskoi literatury", 42.

that could characterize him the best as a personality. Because of this peculiar choice, the article stood out from other, more academic, articles dedicated to Avicenna's anniversary, where attention was paid to the achievements and ideas of Abu-Ali Ibn Sina. Besides being published as an article, the screenplay was also printed as a book in 1958. It also became the foundation for the theater play entitled *Velikiy istselitel* [The Great healer] that was staged in Uzbekistan and Moscow in the 1980s.

To summarize, the production of articles about Avicenna in the 1950s was put on the conveyor: the authors knew what they could and could not say, and if they failed to execute all the wishes of the censoring machine, the editors backed them up and removed all potentially suspicious words and sentences from the articles. The shortage of politically correct pieces and articles was resolved by reprinting the same works multiple times in various editions, or even by reworking the same narrative into different formats. This approach allowed to produced more than 300 written pieces within the period of few years. A historical figure that until recently was known only by historians and orientalists quickly started to become recognizable among the general public.

Conclusion

The analysis of historical narratives about Avicenna between the 1920s and 1950s confirmed consistency of the standpoint expressed by Martin, Hirsch, and Bustanov that were outlined in the beginning of this chapter. National histories were not suppressed, and after the delineation of the Central Asian states that finished in the 1930s, the communist party took closer look at the national folklore. The nationalization of historical narratives and figures in Central Asia developed gradually, from the stage when Avicenna and fellow medieval scientists were considered purely Arab/Persian to the time when the same historical figures were referred to as Uzbek/Tajik. The first traces of this nationalization appeared in the late 1930s, received an additional push from party officials through Edward Kolman in the 1940s, and rapidly escalated in the 1950s. The production of Avicenna's myth-making was ideologically calibrated by skillful censors and editors. Any potential shortages were resolved by multiplying and reworking the same ideologically proper narratives. The writing of national histories remained strictly controlled by the Soviet government between the 1920s and 1950s, but the scale of this control differed and reached its highest point during Zhdanovism, in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The national history of Uzbekistan or Tajikistan about the time and figure of Avicenna in the 1930s and 1950s was not written by Uzbeks for Uzbeks or by Tajiks for Tajiks. Quite the opposite,

while there were some Central Asian authors (e.g. Alautdin Bogoutdinov) that contributed to the creation of Avicenna's image, most of the people that took part in this process were not born or raised in Central Asia. As Bustanov rightfully noted at that time period "the creation of republics' histories was too important to leave to local cadres".[109]

At the same time, contributions that these scholars made to the nation-building of both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were deemed too important to invalidate because of their national origin. Some scholars that specialize in the post-Soviet history and policy of the Central Asian states often tend to overlook the immense influence that the Soviet period, and the years of national consolidation in the 1950s, had on nation building processes in the modern Central Asian countries.[110] Taking a closer look at the Soviet roots of the modern identities in Central Asia as it is done by Timur Dadabaev[111], Ubiria Grigol[112], Alfrid Bustanov[113] and others seem to be a much more fruitful approach.

In the debate on the post-colonial position of the Soviet Union regarding Central Asia, Adeeb Khalid once said: "National determination was a key slogan as the new postcolonial states took their place on the world stage".[114] Soviet leadership had controlled and shaped national hero narratives and split Central Asian history into national pieces for completely different purposes, but essentially it lead to rising national consciousness within the republics. As a result, "after nearly fifty years of the predominance of nationality, the cultural walls between republics had grown too high and too impermeable".[115] Cutting national pieces out of Central Asian history was not always easy, and sometimes scholars purposefully chose to use certain historical figures for multiple nations, as it happened in the case of Avicenna.

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[109] Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 18.
[110] For example Helge Blakkisrud and Faruh Kuziev, "Museums, Memory and Meaning-creation: (re)constructing the Tajik Nation." *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 25, №3 (2019): 997-1017.
[111] Timur Dadabaev, *Identity and Memory in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Uzbekistan's Soviet past* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).
[112] Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).
113 Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 2015.
[114] Adeeb Khalid, "Introduction: Locating the (post-) Colonial in Soviet History." *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 26, №4 (2007): 468.
[115] Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 77.

It is impossible to unequivocally call the Soviet Union a post-colonial state, especially considering the high pressure on the nation building in Central Asia and the academic community of orientalists that was demonstrated above. But it would be a mistake to overlook certain post-colonial traits that occurred even during the toughest periods of the Soviet history.

Chapter 2. Balancing on the junction of two epochs: pre-production stage of Avicenna.

Filmmaking is a long process where only the final result is displayed to the public, and most of the work is done invisibly behind the scenes. The very first stage of it is pre-production: it entails all the processes that a film goes through; from the initial idea to the moment when a crew starts filming.

The pre-production stage, and particularly the process of finding the topic for a screenplay and approving the screenplay, was the most difficult one for the whole cinema industry in the Soviet Union. The scenario crisis was well-known by Soviet film professionals from as early as the 1930s.[116]

The screenplay crisis deteriorated in the period between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1950s. It affected both the quality and quantity of the films that were produced. 1951 was the absolute peak of this period, when only 9 films were released.[117] The academic society has not reached consensus on why the filmmaking industry performed so poorly in the late Stalin years and why the situation became better after Stalin's death.

This chapter investigates the pre-production stage of Avicenna in order to find out how the process was organized during the late Stalin period and how it changed during the Khrushchev rule. It will look at the main stages that films had to go through during the pre-production period, with specific emphasis on the work of the Screenplay Committee.

A popular opinion is that the main reason for a frozen industry was political repressions. According to Peter Kenez: "The artistic and intellectual worlds lost their last vestiges of autonomy; intellectual and artistic disputes were decided by politicians… In these years filmmaking as a form of art died."[118] Another film expert, George Faraday, shared this point of view as well.[119] Other authors, like Maria Belodubrovskaya or John Caldwell blame the very organization of cinema production,

[116] Paul Babitsky, John Rimberg, and Alex Inkeles, *The Soviet Film Industry* (New York, 1955), 115-218.
[117] *Sovietskie hudozhestvenniye filmy (1930-1957). Annotirovanniy katalog* [Soviet movies (1930-1957). Annotated catalogue], Vol. 2 (Moscow, 1961), 454-461.
[118] Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet society: 1917-1953* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press 1992).
[119] George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

rather than the strict censorship rules, or political repressions.[120] Having both of these opinions in mind, let's take a look at the pre-production of the centerpiece of this thesis – Avicenna.

Stage 1. The libretto.

In order to analyze the blockages in the pre-production processes it deems necessary to outline the steps that filmmakers were going through with each film. It started with a thematic plan of a film studio. Such plans were supposed to program the work of a studio for the next year, and the year after. Thematic plans "include topics, that were offered by the ruling organs, party and civil organizations and go in accordance with perspective thematic plans (e.g. to screen certain amount of [written] works of art)".[121] Every topic in this plan included the annotation of a screenplay, the scenarist's name, a deadline when the screenplay should be ready, as well as the name of a prospective film director. The plans needed to be approved by the Ministry of Culture (or Ministry of Cinematography before 1953).

After this step, suggested scenarists had to write a libretto, also called creative application, or an outline of their future screenplay. Such libretto "can have any form and size that are mutually acceptable for the studio and for the author".[122] The scenarist was not paid for the production of a libretto. If the Screenplay Committee of the film studio approved a libretto, it meant that the author was able to close a contract for the writing of this screenplay. When Avicenna was in its pre-production stage, studios also needed to send a libretto for approval to the Screenplay Committee under the Ministry of Cinematography of the USSR. This additional step was cancelled in September 1954,[123] when the newly founded Ministry of Culture granted film studio directors the right to independently close contracts with scenarists, and cancelled the necessity to approve each single libretto and then each screenplay by the Screenplay Committee of the Ministry.

The libretto of Avicenna must have been submitted to the Ministry of Cinematography not later than February 1952. Even though the archival file of the libretto in RGALI is dated 4 March

[120] Maria Belodubrovskaya, *Not According to Plan: Filmmaking under Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Caldwell John Thornton, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
[121] Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR, Upravleniye po proizvodstvu fil'mov. [Ministry of Culture of USSR, Department of Film Production], *Spravochnik po proizvodstvu khudozhestvennykh fil'mov* [Feature Film Production Guide] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1958), 117.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid, 204.

1952, the reviews that were written by the Screenplay Committee had been backdated manually to the end of February 1952. This mix-up could be explained by the fact that the libretto was attached to the archival file after its approval had been granted.

The archival file of the libretto included five reviews from the members of the Screenplay Committee. It seems relevant to include short biographies of these people to have a broad context of the situation. Work at the Screenplay Committee was not the primary job for any of them. Rather, they were assigned to the Committee because they had reached a certain level in their career paths.

The first review was submitted by Yevgeny Pomeschikov (1908 – 1979) – Soviet scenarist and educator. Between 1948 and 1952, Pomeschikov taught at the Screenplay faculty of VGIK. He wrote screenplays for more than thirty movies, most of which were comedies. Pomeschikov was the only member that was against accepting the libretto. He used two arguments for it, firstly that the film studio in Tashkent was not suitable for such work, and "only one of the studios in the center should be able to take it".[124] The second argument was vague, but can be boiled down to the idea that Ulugzade and Vitkovich (the authors of the screenplay) should rather have written a screenplay about modern life: "these two authors could in principle take the job… [but] I can't separate them from the question. They could possibly write a screenplay about modern life. That is why I vote against".[125]

Other members of the Committee did not directly say if the libretto should or should not be accepted, but cautiously suggested main points of attention to the authors. One of these authors was Vadim Kozhevnikov (1909-1984) a Soviet writer, journalist, and military correspondent. From 1949 until his death, Kozhevnikov had the position of Editor-in-Chief of the *Znamya* magazine (the same magazine where the article of Ulughzade about Avicenna had been printed, as described in the previous chapter). Kozhevnikov pointed out that Avicenna looked very impersonated in the libretto, and that "the authors failed to historically characterize life of the people and its intelligentsia".[126] Later in his review, Kozhevnikvov compared the libretto of Ulugzade and Vitkovich with a libretto of another author, Lezgintsev (most likely during every sitting members of the Committee reviewed several librettos at a time). This comparison was definitely in favor of the libretto of Avicenna, while

[124] Reviews of the Screenplay Committee, February 28, 1952, Fund: 2372, inventory: 21, storage unit: 355, page 23, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid, 24.

the unnamed libretto of Lezgintsev received a harsh "no" from Kozhevnikov. Possibly it was this worse review that helped Avicenna to receive a conditional pass.

The third reviewer was Milkhail Papava. Papava started his career in cinema in 1938 and was the author of 14 film scenarios that were released from 1938 to 1979 including the film of Tarkovsky *Ivan's Childhood*. Papava provided a relatively positive review of Avicenna, except for the fact the main character was "too legendary", "nearly a figure from Renaissance on the background of Islamism".[127] Papava concluded his review saying: "After our kind criticism authors will surely improve the libretto",[128] and also gave it a conditional pass.

The next reviewer was Aleksandr Chakovsky (1913-1994) – Soviet/Russian editor and novelist; head of the Screenplay department of the Mosfilm studio during the Second World War. For a long time he worked as Editor-in-Chief at *Literaturnaya gazeta*. It is hard to tell from his review if he voted positively or negatively. He took a very pragmatic stance and pointed out that the libretto lacked "militant actuality"[129] and there is no "practical activity"[130] in Avicenna's actions. "We need to show a great person from the side of actuality, thinking of our current tasks".[131]

The last reviewer was Lev Arnshtam (1905-1979) – Soviet film director, screenwriter and audio engineer. He wrote screenplays for 12 movies and directed 11 of them, including the Soviet ballet film Romeo and Juliet that was submitted to the 1955 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Best Lyrical Film and was nominated for the Palme d'Or. He was the only reviewer that thought about the film from the perspective of future spectators, and suggested different ways to make it more approachable to them, by showing Avicenna as a human being first, and only then as a scientist. He agreed with Papava that the authors should be able to create a good screenplay if they take the concerns of the Screenplay Committee into consideration. At the same time, Arnshtam doubted if the libretto should receive a green light: "In the main thematic plan [of the Ministry of Cinematography] the amount of historical movies and historical biographies is simply ominous. First we need to know

[127] Ibid, 26.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid, 27.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

what other Central Asian republics are planning to film and only then decide if the libretto should pass. We first need to consult about the necessity of this film during our time period."[132]

To sum it up, only two out of five members of the screenplay committee clearly expressed their agreement to proceed with the libretto of Avicenna. Two members remained vague about their decision, and one member rejected it. There was no final statement proclaiming that the libretto of Avicenna was officially accepted, but in September of 1952 we see that the authors submitted the first version of the screenplay to the Ministry of Cinematography.

According to the statement of the Council of Ministers of the USSR №2711 from 16 December 1946, a film studio can only close a contract with scenarists if their libretto was approved by the Ministry. That could only mean one thing: after long consideration the production of Avicenna was approved. But how could it have happened if only two members of the Screenplay Committee voiced their support for the production of this libretto? Possibly the explanation can be found in the following words of the Minister of Cinematography of the USSR, Bolshakov: "As you all know according to the ruling of the Government we have to prepare a number of historical films, and a number of historical biographic films, including Alexander Nevsky, Dmitry Donsky and others".[133]

As one can see, Avicenna was not the only historical biography that received last-minute approval to be produced. Despite the fact that more and more cinematographers and people involved in cultural planning expressed their dissatisfaction with overflowing amount of historical and biographical movies, the thematic plan for 1953 included 13 historical and biographical movies, out of the 23 movies scheduled for production.[134] According to Gershzon this decision was made directly by Stalin.[135] Moreover, Stalin's personal preference for historical biographies was repeatedly pointed out by the other researchers as well.[136] The ease with which the opinions of the Screenplay Committee were overruled by a supposed decision of Stalin creates the question if this body ever had significant weight in the decision-making process.

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[132] Ibid, 29.
[133] Fund: 2456 inventory: 1 storage unit: 3464. RGALI. As cited in Mikhail Gershzon, *Zakat Stalina i ottepel. Upravlenie kulturoi v SSSR v 1950e, nachale 1960h gg. Ocherki. [The decline of Stalin and the Thaw. The cultural management in USSR in the 1950s and early 1960s. A collection of essyas.]* (Modest Kolerov, 2018), 10.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Gershzon, *The decline of Stalin and the Thaw*, 9.
[136] See Josephine Woll, *Real Images. Soviet Cinema and the Thaw, (*I.B. Tauris, 1999); Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: 1917-1953*, (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1992 and others).

Stage 2. First round of reviewing.

After a libretto was accepted and the production of a screenplay was confirmed, the actions of the Screenplay Committee became limited. First of all, according to the circular letter of the Ministry of Cinematography from 1948, a contract with the scenarists could only be terminated if they change the concept of the libretto, or the thematic plan of film production had been changed.[137]

Furthermore, it could not ask the scenarists to change the screenplay more than twice. This included both the reviews of the Screenplay Committee in Moscow and reviews of the studio Screenplay department.[138] Essentially it meant that after the first version of the screenplay was submitted to the studio, the studio Screenplay department had its chance to express improvement points, but it was not possible for them to check or control how these changes were implemented in the second version of the screenplay. The second version of the screenplay was directly submitted for review to the Screenplay Committee in Moscow. The members of this Committee also had the chance to express their ideas about what needed to be improved only once, and were not able to somehow affect the screenplay after that.

Moreover, if the Screenplay committees failed to submit their reviews within the deadline (30 days for Screenplay department of a studio and 40 days for the Screenplay Committee at the Ministry itself) the screenplay received an automatic approval. These new rules were accepted in 1948, in the middle of the *Malokartinye* – a time period between 1943 and 1953 when very small amount of films were produced. They were clearly supposed to help with the screenplay crisis by granting scenarists a smaller amount of accountability and by speeding up the process of a screenplay's approval.

The archival evidence in RGALI supported the approval process outlined above: there were two drafts of the Avicenna screenplay found, as well as one round of reviews written by the Screenplay Committee of the Ministry of Cinematography. It was not possible to find the reviews of the Screenplay committee of Uzbekfilm, as they were most likely not submitted directly to Moscow, but instead remained in the inside the studio. It is however possible to identify their changes by comparing the two versions of the screenplay that are stored in the archive.

[137] Ministry of Culture of USSR, *Feature film production guide*, 198.
[138] Ibid.

There were several changes between the first and the second version, such as removal of any mentions about Arabic script in the second version, that existed in the initial version of the screenplay. Furthermore, the origin of people that attacked Bukhara in one of the first episodes was changed from "Turks" to more neutral "nomads".

Probably the most interesting episode that was removed completely from the first version is the one with Arkhip the Rus. This character did not exist in the article in *Znamya*, the libretto or the second version of the screenplay. Arkhip that came from "far North" and identified himself as a Rus provided Avicenna with a scheme of a "thunder machine" that can throw fired metal balls to enemies. Arkhip explained that he tried to show this machine to the sheikh, but he refused to create it because "Allah will not approve it".[139] Shortly after that, the city of Khwarazm where characters find themselves at the moment was sieged by the army of sultan Makhmud, but with the help of Arkhip's genius invention the Khwarazm was liberated.[140]

The inclusion of this episode could be explained by the national policy of that period that positioned Russia as the older brother of the other republics within the union. The traces of this national policy for example can also be seen in the film Furqat (1959). Furqat, Uzbek poet and the main character of the movie with the same name on multiple occasions cited Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and underlined that he had completely changed the state of Uzbek literature.

The historical background of this episode with Arkhip was highly questionable. First of all it was not possible to trace the invention of a cannon to this period (the earliest version of it appeared in China at least a hundred years later), there was no evidence that representatives Kiev Rus was in contact with Central Asian states during this period. At the end it is not surprising that this episode was cut out already after the first round of reviews. But it is quite remarkable that it appeared in the screenplay in the first place.

Stage 3. Second round of reviewing.

After the screenplay had passed the review by the studio itself, it was sent to the Ministry of Cinematography in Moscow, to the Screenplay Committee. While the libretto of Avicenna was first evaluated by 5 Committee members, this time there were 8 of them. It included three field experts:

[139] First version of the screenplay "Ibn Sina" by Satim Ulugzade and Viktor Vitkovich, September 1952, Fund: 2372 inventory: 21 storage unit: 352, page 69, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[140] Ibid, 69-70.

Tajik and Soviet historian Bobojon Ghafurov; historian of medicine, professor and corresponding member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR Boris Petrov; and famous Soviet orientalist Yevgeny Bertels. On top of that Aleksandr Dovzhenko was added; one of the most recognizable Soviet filmmakers, a pioneer of Soviet montage theory, who also worked as a screenwriter, film producer, and director. Yevgeny Pomeschikov, the only member of the Committee that voted against the production of Avicenna was not included in the list of reviewers.

The screenplay received reserved approbation from the reviewers, that was expressed without specifics: "only few permissible inaccuracies",[141] "generally positive impression".[142] Positive remarks were included by three reviewers out of 8 – historian Boris Petrov, former head of Mosfilm Screenplay department Aleksandr Chakovsky, and screenwriter Mikhail Papava. In the majority of cases instead of expressing their opinion about positive sides, the reviewers concentrated on improvement points instead.

The reviews of the specialists in the field of history and history of medicine (Gafurov, Bertels, and Petrov) listed a whole range of inaccuracies and points for improvement. It included comments like that it was impossible for Avicenna to carry out a surgery on the bladder and gallbladder, since back then it was not technically possible yet; mistakes about the position and views of historical figures – Firdawsi, Nasir Hithrow, Chabani, and others. At the end none of the points that were suggested by the field specialists were improved in the final version of the screenplay, or in the film itself. In fact, the amount of improvements that were based on the Screenplay Committee evaluation was very limited. Below are few examples of improvement points that were suggested by the Screenplay Committee members, as well as the information on whether they were taken into consideration by the authors or not.

In total the reviewers submitted almost forty different improvement points to the authors. Twelve of them were expressed by multiple reviewers. The point that appeared the most was the lack of drama in Avicenna, "lack of enthralling and captivating features"[143] as put by Dovzhenko. The same argument in a different form was expressed by Papava, Chakovsky, Kozhevnikov and

[141] Reviews of the Screenplay Committee. February 28, 1952. Fund: 2372 inventory: 21 storage unit: 355, page 1, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[142] Ibid, 9.
[143] Ibid, 6.

Arnshtam. On the opposite, in the libretto the authors were criticized for being "too legendary"[144] and looking "too much into the adventures instead of seriously portraying Avicenna's personality".[145] Both times there was no further explanation of what exactly the reviewers meant by this, and how exactly the screenplay should be corrected. As a result of these requests, the scene where Avicenna was put in prison and then escaped with the help of his supporters became longer and included more details than before. The other scenes were barely changed.

The second most popular critical point was one-dimensionality of Avicenna's representation. According to Dovzhenko, Arnshtam and Bertels, in the screenplay Avicenna was shown and praised only for his medical inventions. Avicenna's innovations in the field of logic, mysticism, and philosophy were not portrayed enough, which created a fairly one-sided character. Even though three Committee members had pointed this out, it did not affect the final version and in the movie we can see Avicenna only from the medical side.

Concerns were also raised against portraying Avicenna as an atheist. Historian Boris Petrov put it this way: "You should not oversimplify it in such manner. During the Middle Ages, science and philosophy wore religious coats. It is true that Ibn Sina supported some statements that contradicted the Qur'an. However, there is a long distance between denying some moments and being in direct opposition to the religion."[146] Dovzhenko and Bertels each in their own wording expressed similar concerns. In direct opposition to that, Papava requested to "show more backwardness and oppression by the Islam clergy"[147] and Kozhevnikov asked to "add more scenes against religion and its bad effects".[148] In the end, the portrayal of religion was not changed in the following screenplay version.

A similar situation occurred when it came to the portrayal of sultan Makhmud and the sheikh of Khwarazm. While orientalist Bertels called to stop portraying them in such a one-dimensional purely negative way as "small insignificant lechers, fat and lazy"[149], Papava wanted to see "more historical background, [and] demonstrable oppression from the backward sheikhs".[150] It is remarkable that the only person that requested to remove the one-dimensionality of the characters

[144] Ibid, 26.
[145] Ibid, 28.
[146] Ibid, 3.
[147] Ibid, 11.
[148] Ibid, 15.
[149] Ibid, 20.
[150] Ibid, 10.

was not from the film industry himself. Removing the traditional dichotomy between a protagonist and an antagonist and adding depth to the characters would have been a step too far for at least next five years.

Even though it might appear that during the Khrushchev Thaw filmmakers received more freedom, these kind of changes were rather an exception than a rule. For a long time people involved in the cinema production did not dare to change established tropes and images of protagonists and antagonists. According to Alexander Prokhorov, many Stalinist tropes remained in the Thaw cinema. Even though the image of a protagonist changed quite drastically – characters started to have much more personal characteristics, they became more emotional and vulnerable than before, there was still a strict division between protagonists and antagonists. As such, antagonists remained to be completely negative, and protagonists were not allowed to have negative characteristics.[151]

In the reviews of the Screenplay Committee one can already see the demand to change the image of Avicenna, by making it more humane and emotional. "The spectator always appreciates personal features of the character, not only the idea. I would love to see in this interweaving more love and friendship."[152] Kozhevnikov similarly asked to "be more daring with the personal characteristics of Avicenna, and go beyond only historical evidence".[153] This request of the Screenplay Committee was not satisfied. Perhaps because it was not clear for the scenarists on how to include more personal features. Or maybe it was simply beyond the scope of a republican studio to contest and change the image that had settled in Soviet cinema for the last 20 years.

As shown in the previous abstracts, some requests of the Screenplay Committee were difficult, or simply impossible to fulfill for a number of reasons. Sometimes requests of different reviewers were in direct contradiction to each other, sometimes the same reviewers asked the opposite of what they wanted during the first round of reviews, or it was not clear what exactly did reviewers want due to the very broadly formulated points. But this was not always the case. Even when multiple reviewers asked for one exact point that was easily fixable, the authors might chose not to do it.

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[151] Prokhorov Alexander, *Inhereted discourse: Stalinist tropes in Thaw culture* (University of Pittsburg, 2002).
[152] Reviews of the Screenplay Committee. February 28, 1952. Fund: 2372 inventory: 21 storage unit: 355, page 11, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[153] Ibid, 14

For example, the case with the hourglass scene during the epidemy. When people refuse to listen to Avicenna's recommendations in the city that had been hit by the plague, he decides to use a trick to persuade them. Avicenna told that if they would not listen to him the sun disappears, as he knew that a major solar eclipse was about to happen soon. He demonstrated an hourglass to the people and when the last bit of sand dropped down, the eclipse took place. Some reviewers, including orientalist Bertels, found it to be "cheap anti-scientific quackery"[154] that a serious scientist like Avicenna would never use. Even though this opinion was supported by two other reviewers, the scene was never changed.

A similar situation occurred with the scene in the beginning of the film, where a young Avicenna comes to the library and cites the exact lines from any book that the librarian can name. This scene was supposed to demonstrate Avicenna's intelligence and refer to him as to the creator of the first encyclopedia. This choice was not supported by some of the Screenplay Committee members. "Avicenna had genius memory, but it is wrong to assume that it was his only strength. I consider guessing the pages more of a mnemonic peculiarity of a memory, nothing more."[155] – wrote Dovzhenko in his review. Kozhevnikov also found this solution to demonstrate the encyclopedic mind of Avicenna "very primitive, as you do not demonstrate it just through the fact of having brilliant memory".[156] "He was the creator of an encyclopedia, not the owner of a mechanic memory. He was able to build a harmonious evidence system to prove his point".[157] This unanimity of the Screenplay Committee members did not help, and the episode remained untouched the way it was initially created. In the memoirs[158] of one of the authors, Viktor Vitkovich, the episode about mnemonic memory was one of few rare moments where he talked about the creation of Avicenna. One of Vitkovich's close friends had a mnemonic memory,[159] just as the one that was attributed to Avicenna. Vitkovich took a certain pride in creating this episode that was based on his personal experience, so it might be an explanation to why he did not want to remove it from the screenplay.

[154] Ibid, 22.
[155] Ibid, 8.
[156] Ibid, 14.
[157] Ibid, 20.
[158] Vitkovich Viktor, *Krugi zhizni* [The circles of life] (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1983).
[159] Ibid, 81.

Stage 4. Final version of the screenplay.

The last reviews and remarks of the Screenplay Committee were submitted by the members in mid-April 1953 (about one month after the death of Stalin). According to the Feature Film Production Guide, after a screenplay had been approved, the preparation period preceding production was set to a range of 60-90 days. However, the final version of the screenplay did not appear until 1954.[160] This could possibly be explained by the perturbations and reformation process that the Ministry of Cinematography was going through: in April 1953, the Ministry of Cinematography was merged with the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Labor Resources, Ministry of Radio Broadcasting, and the Committee for Arts under the USSR Council of Ministers, and was renamed to the Ministry of Culture of the USSR. It is not possible to date exactly when the movie went into production, but most likely it happened somewhere between late 1954 and early 1955, as the film was finished by the middle of 1956.

It seems appropriate to end the part dedicated to the Screenplay Committee with an episode that the film director of Avicenna, Kamil Yarmatov described in his memoirs. In 1956, after the production of Avicenna had been finished and the film was about to be screened, Yarmatov received an urgent invitation to come to Moscow to visit a hearing in "a very authoritative organization".[161] It turned out that one of the authors of Avicenna, Viktor Vitkovich, had submitted a letter that listed his concerns about the release of Avicenna since "it could affect our [Soviet] friendly relationships with the Muslim East".[162] The concerns that Vitkovich expressed were in line with remarks that had been submitted by the field experts to the Screenplay Committee back in 1953: the representation of sultan Makhmud was too one-dimensional, Avicenna's attitude towards Islam in the movie was not in line with reality, and the burning down of the library by sultan Makhmud did not have any historical background.

What made Vitkovich, who chose to ignore the same exact points when they had been suggested by the Screenplay Committee specialists, raise it three years later, after the production was already finished? It creates the impression that Vitkovich was trying to play safe and tailored the screenplay to the tropes and norms of the late Stalin time, but in the changed political conjuncture he

[160] Screenplay of Avicenna by Satim Ulugzade and Viktor Vitkovich. 1954, Fund: 2468 inventory: 2 storage unit: 889, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[161] Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie*, 262.
[162] Ibid, 263.

realized that what was supposed to be safe (solely negative representation of Islam, atheism of Avicenna, negative images of certain historical figures) could backfire in the new reality. If that was the case, it could be a good example of how certain authors deliberately adjusted their plots in accordance to the tropes, and how confused the artistic intelligentsia was with these constantly changing "unspoken" censorship norms. And how terrified a writer could become when he realized that his or her creation did not fit within the currently sanctioned tropes.

One might be wondering what happened to the movie after this unexpected review. In order to save it, Yarmatov asked to form a commission of orientalists and historians of medicine, in front of whom he defended the right of the movie to be released the way it was filmed. "The scholars decided that the authors of the movie should not be afraid. The movie that we created together with comrade Ulugzade and comrade Vitkovich was to be released without any changes. As far as I know it did not create any tensions in the relations with the foreign East."[163]

Conclusion

In the situation of screenplay crisis that lasted for at least several decades, it was common to reuse the same plots in various formats. As follows from the first chapter the plot of Avicenna was as magazine article, screenplay, book, and later as screenplay for a theater play. It clearly indicated that even though the request for new plots was enormous, the limitations of the system did not allow unknown authors to easily step in. Instead of opening up the strict (but at the same time highly unclear) censorship boundaries, the works of familiar verified authors were reused multiple times in an attempt to solve this shortage.

However, once the authors managed to get inside of the system they gained a fair amount of freedom with the screenplays. Due to additional restrictions that were implemented in 1948, the Ministry of Cinematography and film studios could only ask authors to change the screenplay twice: after receiving improvement points from Screenplay Committee at a studio itself and later by the Central Screenplay Committee in Moscow. Authors did not have to comply with prescriptions of the censors to the letter, and they had the possibility to ignore some of their points and requests. The way in which the Central Screenplay Committee was organized did not make it easier, as the authors received reviews from 8 different people, who did not align their points together. Sometimes what

[163] Ibid, 264.

different members of the Screenplay Committee wanted was in contradiction to each other. But even when few censors made similar statements in their reviews, authors did not have to comply with them. In the situation of the screenplay crisis and lack of plots to stage, the work of the Screenplay Committee had an advisory character, and they did not have the right to cancel an authors' contract with the studio. They also could not check if the authors decided to include their points to the new version of a screenplay.

The initial idea of the Screenplay Committee was not completely non-sensical. It included both representatives of the cinema industry and field experts, who assessed a screenplay from different points of view. However, it is doubtful if the organization and working process of the committee served its essential purpose. In the end, authors could almost completely ignore the Screenplay Committee, and these additional reviews barely added any value to the film production.

Another important tendency that we can see in the reviews of the Central Screenplay Committee is its connection to changes that are typically only attributed to the Thaw cinema. From the discussion between the committee members about the libretto, it is visible that few members doubted whether they should approve Avicenna, as there was already a list of historical biographies that had been submitted to the Ministry of Cinematography. However, regardless of their opinion, the decision to film Avicenna, among other historical biographies, was taken almost certainly solemnly by Stalin. The film industry was ready to change, and even raised their voice about it, but it was purely Stalin's will that held it back.

In the reviews, we see that the members of the Committee realized the current shortcomings, that constrained the development of Soviet cinema: such as the black-white dichotomy of the characters, and an almost complete lack of personal, emotional story for the main characters. Even though the dichotomy between antagonists and protagonists stayed in Thaw cinema for longer, emotionality and personal life of characters later became a distinctive feature of Thaw cinematography. For some reason the authors chose to ignore these recommendations, even though they were directly suggested to them. It is important to see that the cinema specialists were ready for these changes long before they became implemented in the late 1950sSome of the Russian

researchers in the field of Soviet cinema[164] consider the breakthrough during the Thaw an organic developmental step that was caused by the consolidation of Soviet cinematographers. However, the ideas of consolidation had existed in the Soviet cinema for a much longer period, and only a decision from above could have sanctioned if they could or could not be implemented.

To conclude, instead of helping to resolve the screenplay crisis regulations from 1948 that granted the scenarists more freedom, basically it added a new additional bureaucratic step, where the screenplay had to be reviewed and rewritten multiple times, regardless of its quality, and whether or not authors of a screenplay implemented requested changes. It was not surprising, that the Central Screenplay Committee was one of the first institutions that disappeared during the Thaw period. From 1954 the task to proofread and if necessary to censor screenplays was given to the studios.

This demonstration of inconsistency in film production invalidates the ideas of Faraday who had imagined a well-oiled powerful censorship machine in cinematography. According to him "All authorized cultural producers were expected to conform to a single system of aesthetic and ideological norms established by the Party leadership".[165] This chapter clearly demonstrates major variations in the opinions of the reviewers, and make it obvious that there was no written or unwritten system or set of rules, or as Faraday calls it "vertically imposed and narrowly defined norms"[166] with which the authors could possible comply with even during restrictive Stalin period.

Maria Belodubrovskaya, in her research on cinema production under Stalin, comes to a similar conclusion. While there were multiple attempts to build a committee, or a mechanism that would have filtered out films due to their discrepancy with cultural policy, all of these institutions failed to effectively censor film production, and films were often censored and prohibited already after they had been produced and were ready to be released, or even weeks after being screened.[167] This prohibition nearly took place with Avicenna as well. If Yarmatov had not been keen to defend his movie, it could highly possibly have ended up on a shelf.

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[164] See N.M. Zorkaya *The history of the Soviet cinema*. (SPb, 2006); Nikita Markov, "Team spirit in Soviet film society" in *Gumanitarnyye, sotsial'no-ekonomicheskiye i obshchestvennyye nauki* [Humanities, Social-Economic and Social Sciences], Vol.2 (February 2015): 112-16.
[165] Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers,* 53.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Belodubrovskaya, *Not According to Plan*, 211-212.

During the rule of Khrushchev, the situation became even more unclear. Essentially the cultural policy and censorship within film production was heavily dependent on current trends in foreign policy, such as the Hungarian revolution of 1956. It seems appropriate to repeat the quote of Taubman who called the Thaw "a time of constant conflict, debate and controversy, during which a handful of filmmakers managed to snatch – an often partial – victory from the old guard and reactionary forces ranged against them".[168]

This organically raises the next, bigger, question: did the struggles that cinema industry was facing come from a deliberate decision of the Party leadership (the so-called "cultural economy of shortage"[169]), or was it an unintended outcome caused by the failure of the production system to deliver? Faraday supports the former opinion: according to him the small amount of films produced during the late Stalin and Khrushchev years was a conscious decision: "the more limited the range of cultural products being offered, the greater the state's freedom to ignore actual public demand".[170] While Faraday's theory looks perfectly good on paper, it is difficult to corroborate it with source evidence.

Other works in the area of film production[171] are inclined to trace the causes for limited film production in the system crisis instead. Together with Belodubrovskaya and Caldwell, empiric evidence of this thesis demonstrates two main causes for this production crisis: the fact that it became too complicated and mutually contradicting to embrace, as well as the fact that officials responsible for cinema production refused to see their own responsibility for this, and blamed the artistic intelligentsia for that instead. This second problem is going to be further investigated in the final, third chapter.

[168] Jane Taubman, Review of Josephine Woll's "Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw." *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, №4 (2001): 786.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 56.
[171] See Belodubrovskaya, *Not According to Plan*; Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity*; Negus Keith, "The Production of Culture" in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, ed. Paul du Gay, (London: Sage, 1997): 67–118.

Chapter 3 Problems of Avicenna and Uzbek cinema in the 1950s, and press coverage of Uzbekfilm production in the press.

This final chapter describes how the Uzbekfilm studio and its films were showcased to and perceived by different audiences. In order to provide more context, the press coverage of Avicenna was compared to the press coverage of two other historical films – Furqat (1959), and The Star of Ulughbek (1964). These two movies were also based on a biography of a historical character that played a significant role in the newly framed history of Uzbekistan. The scope of production of Uzbekfilm during the 1950s and first part of the 1960s was still limited, as historical biographies were becoming less popular. As a result, only three of them were produced during the span of 10 years: Avicenna, Furqat and The Star of Ulughbek.

On multiple research questions will be elaborated below. First of all, one can see what the main limitations of Avicenna were according to the broader community of cinematographers (an interesting comparison of the criticism was provided by the Screenplay Committee). The main difference from the previous chapter is that in chapter two the screenplay was criticized only content-wise, and now the final product is evaluated. Previously, only the work of two screenwriters (and their editors) was evaluated, and now the joint work of the whole Uzbekfilm team is reviewed. Thus the evaluation focus shifts from pre-production to the production and post-production stages. Furthermore, the reception of Avicenna will be compared to the reception of other Uzbekfilm movies. It allows us to take a broader look at the whole system of film production in Uzbekistan.

Moreover, the portrayal of Avicenna and other movies in the print press, and how the press coverage of Uzbekfilm production changed during the decade will be discussed. A comparison will be drawn between cinema-specialized and other editions, as well as between the print press for the intelligentsia (or more generally for people who were more interested in the cultural life), and print press for the general public. The bigger overarching question of this chapter that connects the other research questions together is the freedom of expression. How open were people allowed to be in their criticism? And how did their openness and honesty in criticizing depended on the setting?

This chapter is divided in two parts. The first part is based on the opinions of cinematographers on the process of film production as a whole, as well as at few Uzbek movies in particular, including Avicenna. Their opinions were expressed in three articles that were published in *Iskusstvo kino* – a magazine that was intended for filmmakers. The second source is a closed-door

debate of cinematographers. This debate took place in 1960 at an exhibition of Uzbekfilm and was recorded by one of the speakers for personal use. The second part is based on articles and notifications in print press about Avicenna, Furqat and The Star of Ulughbek.

The state of Uzbek cinematography. Expert discussions and *Iskusstvo kino.*

After the secret speech of Khrushchev at the 20th congress of the communist party, society felt relieve from the strict rules of the Stalin years. Public opinion and open discussions in professional and non-professional communities started to re-emerge. A long awaited opportunity opened up to publicly discuss difficult topics in artistic circles, to pose questions, and to challenge the works of fellow writers and cinema workers in not only the safety of your own kitchen. Some of these meetings were recorded, or later described in memoirs.

The term "expert" in the context of expert debate means a wide range of specialists that were involved in cinema production: "cinematographers, writers, actors, artists, and other representatives of the republican intelligentsia."[172] The republican intelligentsia was often involved during various stages of film production in the capacity of field experts. For example, in the debates on Uzbekfilm production a director of Tashkent Art School, members of the Institute of Art History, members of the Artist Union of Uzbekistan, and representatives of the Academy of Sciences that evaluated the screenplays were present.

There were two types of these expert discussions. The first type was more official and staged; it often included Communist Party members and high-ranking officials. Summaries of these discussions were published in *Iskusstvo kino*, the magazine for cinema professionals. Opinion articles were another type of publication in *Iskusstvo kino*; these were usually written by staff members of the Uzbekfilm studio. These articles were analyzed in this thesis as part of an expert debate as well. The other type of discussion took place behind closed doors and only included the artistic intelligentsia. The recordings of the second type of meetings were not published in the press. In particular, the document that was analyzed below[173] was a typescript of one of the speakers – Boris Dubrovsky-

[172] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?" [Why does Uzbek cinematography leg behind?], *Iskusstvo kino*, №6, (June 1957): 1-15.
[173] Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio "Uzbekfilm", Discussion transcript, 1960, Fund 2605, Inventory 1, Unit 38, Fund of Dubrovsky-Eshke Boris Vladimirovich (1897-1963) - film designer. RGALI, Moscow, Russia.

Eshke – who was present at the debate. After his death in 1963, this document was sent to the archive together with other personal papers.

The room for freedom of expression within professional circles that emerged after the death of Stalin did not last very long. According to Loewenstein[174], it ended with the publication of a confidential letter written by Khrushchev, that was named "Strengthening the work of party organization in cutting off the attacks of anti-Soviet enemy elements". It was distributed through the party sections at the end of 1956. Discussions did not cease to exist completely, but the range of topics became less wide, and criticism became less open. Researchers of cinema in the Thaw period[175] usually identify several periods of thaw and freeze, that alternated in the 1950s and 1960s, and influenced the ability of the artistic intelligentsia to express its opinions freely.

The emergence of expert discussions for art professionals took longer in Central Asia compared to Russia. Loewenstein mentioned that such expert debates among art and literature professionals started to take place almost immediately after the 20th congress of the communist party (that took place in February 1956),[176] and the first notification about such occurrence in Central Asia was detected in 1957. The article "Why does Uzbek cinematography lag behind"[177] was published in *Iskusstvo kino* in June 1957. Also it is very clear that the organization of such extended debates in Uzbekistan was not a grass-roots initiative, but came from the Ministry of Culture.

In an article that was published in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1957[178], the Minister of Culture of Uzbekistan called on Uzbekfilm to take more initiative in self-organization, as the studio had gained wider possibilities to decide on the production process.[179] During the same debate, the Director of Uzbekfilm Sabir Mukhamedov lamented that Uzbek cinematographers live in isolation, "the screenplays are not discussed with larger audiences and there is no lively interest in the works of fellow artists", "the state of film criticism is still rudimentary, and no magazine of the republic has ever tried to discuss the local cinematography".[180]

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[174] Karl E. Loewenstein, "Re-emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech." *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 58, №8 (2006): 1341.
[175] See for example Liehm et al, *The Most Important Art*; Woll, *Real Images.*
[176] Karl E. Loewenstein, "Re-emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union", 1330.
[177] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 3.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid, 14.
[180] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 2-3.

Already in the next monthly issue of *Iskusstvo kino* an article appeared about a conference of cinematographers from Central Asia and Kazakhstan that had taken place shortly after the first gathering. Avicenna was among the films that were discussed during the conference where it had received some mild criticism. According to the critics: "The image of the genius scientist was not unveiled in action".[181] At the same conference, the start of a permanent seminar of artistic cinema workers from Central Asia and Kazakhstan was announced.[182]

In the publication the following year of *Iskusstvo kino* called "Fruitful meetings"[183], one can see clues that the organization of a professional community had further developed. A delegation representing the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR visited Uzbekfilm and the film studio in Alma Ata. The Union of Cinematographers was a newly created All-Union public organization. Famous film director Ivan Pyryev attempted to organize such non-governmental professional community of cinematographers already in 1945, but the activity of this community – which back then was called *Dom Kino* – was abruptly interrupted by Stalin within a few months.[184] The 20th Party Congress and the milder political climate of the Khrushchev era provided the opportunity to restart the independent professional community, and in 1957 the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR was re-created. During their visit to Uzbekistan, members of the Union consulted with local cinematographers on the creation of similar artistic communities locally.[185]

After these announcements, *Iskusstvo kino* stopped publishing any updates on this matter. Avicenna was one of the last films that was discussed within an actively supported setting by the USSR Ministry of Culture. Now let's take a look at the topics that were discussed during these debates.

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[181] "V kinostudiyakh Srednei Azii I Kazakhstana" [In the studios of Central Asia and Kazakhstan], *Iskusstvo kino*, №3, (March 1957).
[182] Ibid.
[183] "Plodotvorniye vstrechi" [Fruitful meetings], *Iskusstvo kino*, №4, (April 1958): 11-13.
[184] Valeriy Fomin, *"Kratkii ochrk po istorii Soyuza Kinematografistov v Rossii" [Short outline of the history of the Union of Cinematographers in Russia]*, Unikino 2020, Accessed July 26, 2021, https://unikino.ru/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D1%80%D1%84/
[185] "Plodotvorniye vstrechi", 11.

Often there was an established set of problems that were discussed during such expert meetings in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Two interconnected topics were addressed the most: shortage and quality of screenplays, and shortage of educated personnel. Within a more confidential, non-public setting, cinematographers also discussed recent films. Debates that took place within a more official, recorded setting did not go beyond very common film assessments and were mostly dedicated to the discussion of bigger issues and shortcomings. This difference in freedom of expression in different settings, as well as few hints about self-restriction of cinema professionals during the Stalin period in the later publications, raised the other important topic about (self)-censorship.

The highlighting of shortcomings in the production by Uzbekfilm as a whole, also has its relevance for the analysis of Avicenna, since most of the criticism that Avicenna has received falls into one of the categories mentioned above. It becomes obvious that Avicenna was a true product of its time and place.

As turned out from the second chapter of this thesis, the screenplay crisis remained relevant for Soviet cinematography for at least 30 years. However, the organizational part of the screenplay problem was not discussed, and critics addressed the screenwriters and the contents of the screenplays instead. As such Avicenna's script received a lot of criticism from Uzbek cinematographers during the closed-door discussion in 1960, and even from Kamil Yarmatov himself.[186] Yarmatov described in his memoirs: "Russian scenarist Vitkovich and Tajik writer Ulugzade chose folk life, events of the epoch as the main accent. Bluntly saying, it helped to broaden the storytelling background, but the screenplay lost its harmony and integrity, became more torn and fragmented".[187]

Almost every discussion that tackled Uzbek film production in the 1950s and 1960s started with negative comments towards the amount and quality of screenplays. The most burning screenplay-issue was connected to the shortage of screenplays that studios could use. In the debate from 1957, the director of Uzbek film studio said that "Now, for the first time the studio has few usable screenplays that we can work with".[188] According to film director Laitif Faysiev, this shortage

[186] Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie*, 258-260.
[187] Ibid. p.258
[188] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia", 2.

directly affected the quality of films that were produced: “In order for a film director to find its style he needs to find his theme, and stage a screenplay that is close to him. But we do not have this choice.”[189] In 1957 the jury of the All-Union film festival decided to abstain from awarding the prize for the best screenplay of the year.[190] In 1959 the shortage of scenarists was again brought up by film director Kamil Yarmatov.[191] In 1964[192] one can for the first time see that the portfolio of screenplays at Uzbekfilm was mentioned with positive comments.

The way in which the screenplay of Avicenna came into production fully proves the points mentioned above. According to Uzbek film director Latif Faysiev, the screenplay of Avicenna was only taken into production because the Uzbekfilm studio had such limited amount of screenplays. He proposed to change the situation and next time to refuse similarly bad screenplays that come to the studio: “if they bring a bad screenplay again we need to refuse to film it…if everyone refuses to work on it, the studio will not be able to film”.[193]

This logically brought up the second problem – the quality of already existing screenplays. Uzbek film operator A. Pann accused scenarists during the round-table meeting of 1957 of being “omnivorous, as they take any topic that has a chance for external success, instead of being loyal to their theme, the personal theme of every artist, that connects him to everyday life”, and “Glavk[194] and the reviewers approve nearly every screenplay that is produced by the studio”.[195] Uzbek film screenplays (including Avicenna) were called schematic and full of cliches,[196] and were criticized for not being national enough: “it is Soviet south in general, without particularly identifying features. If you change names you could easily give it to a studio in any other southern republic: in Tbilisi, Yerevan of Ashkhabad”.[197]

Because of the limited time of production, there was barely any room left for proofreading the screenplays by relevant experts from academia, and as a result screenplays contained a lot of

[189] Ibid, 4.
[190] “Perviy Vsesoyuzniy…” [First All-Union…], *Iskusstvo kino*, №8 (August 1958): 2.
[191] Kamil Yarmatov, “Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany” [Creative searches, thoughts and plans], *Iskusstvo kino*, №7(July 1959): 76-83.
[192] Ibrahim Rahim, “Druzhba pokoleniy” [the friendship between generations], *Iskusstvo kino*, №10 (October 1964): 9-11.
[193] Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio Uzbekfilm, 2605-1-38, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[194] Main structural unit of a ministry, in this context the Ministry of Culture.
[195] “Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?”, 4.
[196] “Plodotvorniye vstrechi”, 12.
[197] Yarmatov, “Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany”, 78.

bloopers. Most commonly, mistakes slipped into the decorations. Particularly, Makhmudov from the Institute of Art History pointed out that there was "historical contradiction"[198] in the styles of shaped arches, window decorations, and mixed-up of European and Asian ornaments. Sometimes the production started even though the screenplay was still being proofread: "once the review of the academics was ready, we were notified that the filming had almost finished".[199]

Avicenna was also called out for its pseudo-national oriental flavor. The Executive Secretary of the Board of the Union of Artists of Uzbekistan, Munz, criticized the film for its extensive decorative solutions that were full of small historical inaccuracies. In his opinion it affected the general perception of the movie: "in Avicenna, all these details, [create] some kind of oriental splendor, and this splendor, I would say, is not entirely accurate falling into the theme, since this is not Uzbekistan, this is the east in general, I personally had such an impression".[200] Makhmudov from the Institute of Art History also added that decorations in Avicenna and an other historical biographical movie, Furqat, did not represent any national affiliation with Uzbekistan: "In many drafts we do not see any nationality".[201]

At the same confidential debate of the Uzbekfilm exposition, Sokolova, representing the Artist Union of Uzbekistan, pinpointed a number of historical inaccuracies in the decorations in Avicenna and Furqat, such as majolica tiles that only started to exist five centuries after the death of Avicenna or modern consumer goods in the pottery store in Furqat.[202] This brings up the next issue that was raised during the expert debates.

The third screenplay problem featured the absence of prior discussions and evaluations of the screenplay with fellow cinematographers and other professionals before moving it into production. The practice of public readings of new pieces existed in the Union of Writers, and it was proposed to implement it for film screenplays as well. Previous attempts to start such tradition of readings were not met with enthusiasm. Playwright Sabir Abdolla remembered that: "once I was invited to the

[198] Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio Uzbekfilm, 2605-1-38, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[199] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 8.
[200] Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio Uzbekfilm, 2605-1-38, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.

reading of a new screenplay, but even the scenarists of the script did not show up there".[203] Such an initiative, according to scenarist Elenin, could have been implemented in the form of a workshop, where more experienced scenarists from Moscow will give advice to newcomers.[204] The head of the Screenplay Department of Uzbekfilm Abdolaev suggested to solve this shortage of staff by adjusting the amount of study places at VGIK and sending Uzbek youth to Moscow to be educated as scenarists.[205] The screenplay problem at Uzbekfilm was thus tightly interconnected with another issue: the lack of qualified personnel.

Uzbekfilm was understaffed not only with scenarists, but with other kinds of professionally educated specialists: sound engineers, composers, artists, actors and actresses. The situation at the studio did not quite recover from the purges of 1937: "Uzbekfilm lost all its managers for the rise of talking films, due to the activity of nationalist groups who had been in control. Production was entirely ruined. Over these years there was no longer a single qualified Uzbek director, a single actor, a single director of photography left in the studios. The new management had to start from scratch."[206]

Until the late 1950s, Uzbekfilm did not have any actors or actresses that worked exclusively for the studio. Actors and actresses were recruited from the Khamza Academic Theater in Tashkent.[207] The theater could not provide all the needs of the studio, as it had a program and plans of its own. That made film directors to look for creative solutions. For example, for his first film, Yarmatov used inmates of the local penal colony in the crowd scenes.[208] Often film directors invited students to play a role in their movies.[209]

For the main role in Avicenna, Yarmatov also invited a student of the Tashkent Academy of Arts. His main considerations were the "winning appearance" of the student and the fact that Marat Aripov came from Yarmatov's home-town – Kanibodom.[210] However, there was no click between Yarmatov and Aripov. It caused a lot of conflicts during filming and harsh criticism from Mikhail

[203] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 6.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid, 8.
[206] Klado, N., "Kliatva" [The oath], *Iskusstvo Kino*, № 7 (July 1937): 33.
[207] Ibid, 10.
[208] Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie*, 168.
[209] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 10.
[210] Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie*, 259.

Romm and Nikolai Cherkasov who expressed their concerns about the actor being "coarse" in the personal letter to Yarmatov.[211]

In 1957 Uzbekfilm was finally allowed to hire salaried actors. 15 people that would work exclusively for the studio.[212] In order to prepare for more suitable personnel, Latif Faysiev suggested to start a faculty for cinema actors in Tashkent Theater Institute.[213] In the article from 1959, Yarmatov appealed to this problem again, as according to him "every year the studio produces more films, but the amount of film directors does not change, there is not enough scenarists, and there is no influx of fresh creativity. We have difficulties with hiring actors".[214]

Even though Tashkent had few educational facilities for artistic professionals, people that needed to be educated as cinema actors and scenarists had to study in Moscow. The capacity of VGIK in Moscow was also limited, and the amount of study places had to be enlarged in order to meet the need of republic studios. The complaints of the professional community were eventually heard: in 1959 VGIK enlarged the amount of study places for aspiring scenarists and created an opportunity for them to study part-time.[215]

Interestingly, in the later publications the problem of understaffing was connected to the cult of personality. In the article from 1959, Yarmatov phrased it rather indirectly by saying that "the 20th and 21st Congresses of the Party gave the chance to open new horizons to cinematographers".[216] In the publication from 1965, Khamidulla Akbarov more openly blamed the cult of personality for the "cessation of the influx of fresh forces…which went against the development of the national cinema".[217] Furthermore, in the same article the author acknowledged that cinematographers in republican studios, including Uzbekistan, had to deal with censorship. In a way this critical remark could be attributed to Avicenna as well: "they addressed a distant past, that was interpreted in a non-historical way, where characters and their conflicts were excessively stylized and everything was portrayed with incredible pomp…all this has taught [the cinematographers] to deal with artistic

[211] Ibid, 259-260.
[212] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 11.
[213] Ibid, 10.
[214] Yarmatov, "Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany", 77.
[215] "Uluchshit podgotovku tvorcheskikh kadrov" [Improving the training of the creative staff], *Iskusstvo kino*, №6 (June 1957): 138.
[216] Yarmatov, "Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany", 76.
[217] Khamidulla Akbarov, "K poisku" [The search], *Iskusstvo kino,* №3 (March 1965): 41-45.

compromises".[218] The reason why the later publication more openly accused the cult of personality most likely had to do with yet another changing political situation. In 1961 the 22nd Congres of the Communist Party took place where Khruschev and his supporters more detailed criticized the cult of personality. There was also made a decision to extract Stalin's body from the Lenin's Mausoleum and bury it at the Kremlin walls. It gave a signal to the people that further critic of the cult of personality was accepted.

To conclude, according to the publications in *Iskusstvo kino* and closed-door debates, cinema professionals saw main sources of problems of the time period during which Avicenna was produced in two interconnected issues: shortage of educated specialists in Uzbek cinema industry, and, as a result, shortage and low quality of scenarios that the existing scenarists produced.

Non-existent support and advice of the professional community was seen as an important disadvantage of Uzbekfilm. The problem of the professional community was briefly addressed in 1957 and 1958 but in the following years, it was removed from the agenda (at least from the agenda of the print media). At a more global level the cult of personality was blamed for the unsatisfactory state of Uzbek cinema in the 1950s and early 1960s.

At a certain level, *Iskusstvo kino* demonstrated that the issues mentioned above were heard and addressed by Moscow. It can be seen in the articles that called for the enlargement of study places in VGIK, and by later articles that featured staff members of the Uzbekfilm studio.[219]

The last discovered remark that tackled expert film reviews and discussion was from 1964. The director of Uzbekfilm, Ibragim Rahim, wrote that "The studio made a rule of regular viewings of new films. These viewings are attended by the leading film directors and editors. The Screenplay Commission of the studio plays a huge role in the working process".[220] This innovation, together with the right of republican studios to create their own screenplays without additional checks from Moscow had a positive outcome for the national cinema.

Also it will be wrong to assume that film directors and other cinematographers had not received any feedback from the professional community before the abovementioned expert debates

[218] Ibid.
[219] See Yarmatov,"Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany"; Akbarov, "K poisku" and others.
[220] Rahim, "Druzhba pokoleniy", 9.

restarted in 1957. In his memoirs, Yarmatov referred to the reviews on Avicenna that he received from film director Mikhail Romm and actor Nikolai Cherkasov. In this letter they addressed poor actor choices, and particularly Yarmatov's choice of the main actor in Avicenna. The letter was received by Yarmatov during the production of the film, which means it was written in 1955 or early 1956. Cinema professionals communicated in private on an individual level.

After the local communities of cinematographers were created, publications about Uzbekfilm and its production in *Iskusstvo kino* changed and started to target different topics. This matter will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Critical reviews of Avicenna and Uzbekfilm for the general public.

There are three magazines that included publications about Avicenna and other Uzbekfilm productions: *Iskusstvo kino*, *Sovetskii ekran,* and *Ogoniok,* and four newspapers: *Sovetskaya kultura*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*.

Each of these editions had a specific style and aimed to cater a certain audience. At the same time it is possible to see overarching similarities in the type of materials that were dedicated to Uzbekfilm production. One can identify three main categories of publications in print media: short mentions; publications that were timed to certain events such as the Congress of the Communist party, a film festival, a decade of Uzbek art; and finally more in-depth publications that included criticism of a specific movie, or articles about Uzbekfilm at large. This division is rather provisory, as some publications can be attributed to two categories at the same time. Below one can see a more detailed overview of publications within the three categories.

Short mentions due to a film release

Large amount of publications included information only about one movie. Such notes consisted from background information about the movie; their appearance was connected to a movie's release. For example two publications in *Iskusstvo kino* from 1959[221] and 1960[222] listed announcements of Uzbekfilm's future movies together with announcements from the other republican studios. It mentioned a biopic about Uzbek poet Furqat (in one of the articles it is listed by the draft name "Unesenniy vetrom [Taken by the wind]"). These articles only listed the names of

[221] "Filmografiya" [Filmography], *Iskusstvo kino*, №6 (June 1959): 138-139.
[222] "Filmografiya" [Filmography], *Iskusstvo kino*, №3 (March 1960): 165-166.

staff members and actors that took part in the movie, together with a short description. Such mentions appeared not only in *Iskusstvo kino*, but in other print editions as well, for example in *Sovetskii ekran*.

After a sixteen year pause in its publication, *Sovetskii ekran* resumed its existence in 1957. *Sovetskii ekran* was published two times more often and in a much bigger circulation than *Iskusstvo kino* as it targeted a broad public that was interested in cinematography. Starting from 1960, it was one of the first print media that held a sociologic research of its audience by asking them to fill in various surveys. In 1957-1965, *Sovetskii ekran* had a total of 12 publications dedicated to Uzbekfilm.

Unlike *Iskusstvo kino* that barely had any photos in it, *Sovetskii ekran* included a lot of photos and pictures from movies with captions, usually at least 3-5 of them per article. Some of the editions included a poster from a newly released movie. №14 from 1959 had a color poster of Avicenna (this poster was placed on the front page of this thesis). This kind of design made the amount of text smaller; articles in it were rarely bigger than one magazine reversal (half or more was occupied by photos with captions).

The first mention of Uzbekfilm appeared in *Sovetskii ekran* in №2 from 1958[223] (about a month after the film was released in Russian). It included an announcement of Avicenna which consisted of a short general description of the plot, a piece from the screenplay and the names of the lead actors and staff members. In 1959, two publications were dedicated to the movie Furqat. The first one appeared in №13 in 1959, and, similar to the announcement of Avicenna in 1958, it included a few captions from the scenario and a general description of the movie.

Another edition that captured Uzbekfilm production in such short form was *Ogoniok* – an illustrated weekly magazine whose circulation reached several millions. In 1959 it published a short piece about Uzbekfilm – an announcement of a theater play and a film about Furqat. The publication consisted of general information and a notification about the upcoming anniversary of the poet. The announcement was placed together with announcements from other republican studios.

Roughly from the beginning of the 1960s, notifications from Uzbekfilm made it to the newspapers as well. *Sovetskaya kultura* and *Literaturnaya gazeta* were targeted towards the artistic intelligentsia in its wider sense. *Sovetskaya kultura* was published a few times per week by the

[223] "Avicenna", *Sovetskii ekran*, №2 (February 1958).

Ministry of Culture of the USSR and the Central Committee of the Trade Union of Cultural Workers. *Literaturnaya gazeta* was an edition of the Writers Union of the USSR and was printed weekly.

In the early 1960s, these newspapers issued a few articles about The Star of Ulughbek, during different stages of its production. The first opinion article[224] was written by Shukur Burkhanov, the actor who played Ulughbek, first in the theater play, and later in the movie with the same name. The play and the movie that were in the making were mentioned in a piece about his career and future plans. In 1963, V. Oskotskii mentioned in *Literaturnaya gazeta*[225] how he managed to witness the filming of The Star of Ulughbek during his work trip to Uzbekistan. There were more publications that were timed to certain occurrences or events, such as various types of anniversaries, party meetings, concert tours, decades of Central Asian culture, etc. They will be looked at in the next part.

Publications timed to events and occurrences

A significant number of publications that mentioned Uzbek film production was timed to such occurrences. Film festivals were the most frequent among them. Notifications about film festivals appeared both in republican newspapers and magazines, and in cinema-themed editions. A very short description of Uzbek cinema production was typically a distinctive feature of these articles. It was usually represented by just the name of the movie and its republic of origin, and a list of awards in case the film has earned any of them.

Iskusstvo kino included two mentions of Uzbek films in the context. In the publication about the first All-Union Film Festival in Moscow in July 1958[226], it listed the awards that Avicenna had received in 1958: The second degree award for decoration and setting given to the artist Vashram Eremyan and a personal award to the film director Kamil Yarmatov. Seven years later another publication dedicated to the Asian Film Festival in Frankfurt-am-Main in the summer of 1965[227] briefly mentioned The Star of Ulughbek.

In 1958 one of the issues of *Sovetskii ekran* was fully dedicated to the Film Festival of Asian and African films that was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. This issue included a piece about the films that had been produced by the Uzbekfilm studio during the last few years. Avicenna was described as

[224] Shukur Burkhanov, "Otvetstvennost khudozhnika pered obschestvom" [Artist's responsibility for the society], *Sovetskaya kultura*, №80 (2 July 1963).
[225] V. Oskotskii, "Vstrechi v doroge" [Meetings on the way], *Literaturnaya gazeta*, №136 (29 October 1963).
[226] "Perviy Vsesoyuzniy… ", 2.
[227] I. Kokoreva, "Nedelya na Maine" [A week at Main], *Iskusstvo kino* №9 (August 1965).

a "significant phenomenon of Uzbek cinema that was staged by distinguished film director K. Yarmatov. In the movie about the life of the greatest scientist and humanist Avicenna (Abu Ali Ibn Sina), problems were raised that moved modern spectators".[228] In another publication Marat Aripov, the main actor in Avicenna, was praised for his acting skills.[229]

In February 1959, Moscow hosted the so called decade of Uzbek art. That is why №3 of *Sovetskii ekran* from 1959 also included three materials about Uzbekfilm: a general overview of all the films that had been produced and were about to be presented during the Uzbek decade, and short biographies of the oldest and the youngest film directors of the studio: Kamil Yarmatov and Yuldash Agzamov. The articles listed the movies that they had produced, including Avicenna by Yarmatov and Furqat (*Unesenniye vetrom*) which Agzamov was filming at that moment. The articles did not contain any criticism or evaluations of the movies, and the general connotation was extremely positive towards the movies and the film directors.

An example of such timed publications also appeared in *Sovetskaya kultura*. The article was written by the Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan Nishanov in 1966,[230] the publication was timed to the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party. There Nishanov underlined that the most important goal of Uzbek cinematographers is to "fight for the new people and the future" and "party membership is inseparable from Soviet artists"[231]. At the same time he said that the production of the studio had to become more international, and go beyond the national identity.

Even though these type of short notifications existed in all print editions, only the latest movie The Star of Ulughbek made it to large all-union newspapers – *Pravda* and *Izevstiya*. There is no information backing up the fact that this movie in any sense stood out from the rest of the historical biographies produced by Uzbekfilm. Possibly this unexpected attention was connected to deeper shifts of national policy, as well as to the shifts in policy towards Islam that was caused by the appearance of new Islamic countries.

In 1965 and 1966 *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* published a total of six articles, that featured The Star of Ulughbek and awards that it received at All-Union and international film festivals. The Star of

[228] L. Bezmogin and A. Saidov, "Gody i sobitiya" [Years and events], *Sovetskii ekran*, №16 (August 1958).
[229] "Ikh znayut mnogiye zritely" [Many spectators know them], *Sovetskii ekran*, №16 (August 1958): 16.
[230] R. Nishanov, "Otvetstvennost khudozhnika" [Artist's responsibility], *Sovetskaya kultura*, №27 (3 March 1966).
[231] Ibid.

Ulughbek was the only Uzbek biopic that was featured in the daily print editions of this level. These publications did not provide a lot of room for analysis, as it was usually just a name of the movie that was dropped somewhere on the side note of the newspaper. More capacity for scrutiny was provided in a different type of in-depth publications, described in the following section.

Opinion pieces about Uzbekfilm production and its future plans

Comprehensive publications about Uzbekfilm and its production were published both in cinema-related editions and *Sovetskaya kultura*, a newspaper for the artistic intelligentsia in the broad sense. These publications included opinion pieces that were written by the members of staff of the Uzbekfilm studio and described the current state of business, or critical reviews from people that were not directly related to the Uzbekfilm studio. These pieces included future plans of the studio, life stories of the authors and opinions on the movies that were already produced.

The reappearance of cinema criticism in printed editions targeted towards the mass reader probably had to do with a combination of reasons: several periods in the 1960s with "a general climate of tolerance"[232] towards works of art that allowed for more open expression; a growing influence of the professional cinema community in the face of the Trade Union of Cinematographers,[233] and the directive of the Communist party "About the measures of the management to improve the development of feature films" from 1962 that indirectly allowed film criticism.

Iskusstvo kino published a few articles of this genre. The first article from 1956[234] was of a broader nature, that did not focus on specific films and provided a general overview of the studio. An article from 1959[235] included a description of the movie Furqat, as well as biographies and life stories of the leading actors that took part in the movie. In the same article, actor Abbas Bakirov described his main challenges of portraying the emir of Bukhara in Furqat and sheikh Makhmud in Avicenna. The memories about the last emir of Bukhara were still fresh in the minds of the people, which required Bakirov to study his personal peculiarities and manners in detail, while for sheikh Makhmud

[232] Woll, *Real Images*, 106.
[233] Artur Arakelyan and Marina Kosinova, "Sovetskiy kinoprokat I kinopokaz v epokhy "ottepeli" [Soviet cinema distribution and cinema screenings during the Thaw period], *Ekonomika i Servis* [Economy and Service], Vol. 9, №4, (2015): 22.
[234] S. Mukhamedov, "Tashkentskaya kinostudia" [Tashkent cinema studio], *Iskusstvo kino*, №4 (April 1956).
[235] Yarmatov, "Tvorcheskie poiski, razdumya, plany", 76-83.

he mostly needed to use his imagination, since live memories about this person did not exist anymore.

A few years later, similar articles featured The Star of Ulughbek and a new film series of Kamil Yarmatov about the revolution in Central Asia.[236] Publications written by the insiders did not include much criticism or any opinions in general on the movies that had been or were about to be produced. Critical pieces on Uzbekfilm and its production were typically written by outsiders, such as film critics. To name an example: such a critical publication appeared in *Sovetskii ekran* №22 from 1960.[237] A comprehensive page-long review written by famous soviet film critic and scenarist Nikolai Klado analyzed both the positive and negative sides of the Furqat, where negative features dominated.

Klado delineated such disadvantages of the movie as bad knowledge of a historical epoch, unclear social motivations of the main characters and an excessive interest of the scenarists in adventurous scenes. Furthermore, he criticized the primitive solutions to demonstrate Russian-Uzbek relations in the end of 19th century and lack of poetic and philosophical dimension in the movie. Acting and specifically the work of the main actor Ya. Ahmedov, and the cinematic exposition at the end of the filmeceived Klado's acclaim.

The other publication in *Sovetskii ekran*[238] also included a critical evaluation of Uzbekfilm productions, in particular reviews of the movie The Star of Ulughbek and Yarmatov's movie The Storm above Asia. Similarly to Furqat in the previous review, The Star of Ulughbek was found at fault for having too many adventurous details in the movie and undermining the philosophical innovation of Ulughbek's ideas.

Two critical publications in *Sovetskaya kultura* were quite unique, each in its own way. In 1962, *Sovetskaya kultura* dedicated a full newspaper strip[239] to news of the Uzbekfilm studio. It included short opinion pieces from its staff (Kamil Yarmatov and artist Valentin Sinichenko), a few reviews from the spectators and a large critical piece about the Uzbekfilm organization and production during the last few years.

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[236] Rahim, "Druzhba pokolenii", 9-10; Akbarov, "K poisku", 41-45.
[237] Nikolai Klado, "Furqat", *Sovetskii ekran*, №22 (November 1960).
[238] A. Loktev, "Pokazyvaet Uzbekistan" [Uzbekistan is screening], *Sovetskii ekran*, №4 (February 1965).
[239] "Uzbekfilm segodnya" [Uzbekfilm today], *Sovetskaya kultura*, №124 (13 October 1962).

The opinion pieces of Yarmatov and Sinichenko raised the problems that were extensively discussed in the *Iskusstvo kino* publications as well: lack of scenarios, and shortage of national elements in the nationally produced movies. It also included a new problem of repertoire planning, which had not been covered before in Uzbekfilm-related publications. According to Yarmatov, cinematographers from different republics often started working on the same topics and scenarios which made Uzbekfilm abruptly drop their plans.[240]

Similarly, a big article about shortcomings in the Uzbekfilm studio[241] included both problems that had been raised before (screenplay issues, shortage of educated staff and unnecessary rotation of the managing personnel), and newly discovered matters. In particular it gave attention to corruption schemes in the studio during the filming of Furqat: "80% of expense notes for the members of the mass scenes were found to be fake",[242] and it hinted that co-authors and consultants of screenplays that the studio employed earned their fees without providing any significant results. This publication stood out from the rest, as in-detail descriptions of such shortcomings had never been discussed in the press before.

Conclusion

As it becomes clear from the overview above, the reception of Avicenna, Furqat and The Star of Ulughbek varied significantly depending on three main factors: the audience that was supposed to see an opinion piece, the general setting in which the movies were discussed, and the current political agenda.

The death of Stalin and the 20th and 22nd Congresses of the Communist Party provided cinematographers and other members of the artistic intelligentsia with a long awaited opportunity to self-organize into professional communities. It took certain impulses from above to start the process in Uzbekistan, not least because the memory of recent purges of 1936-1938 was still present in Uzbekistan, when personnel of Uzbekfilm studio was cleared almost completely.[243]

There were two settings in which professional communities gathered. One involved the presence of party members and officials, and the other was intended only for cinematographers. In a

[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion under Stalin* (London [etc.]: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 87-90.

more official setting Avicenna and other films were barely discussed in detail, as these discussions were mostly built around bigger problems, such as lack of staff and shortage of screenplays. These debates that were staged in official settings were published in *Iskusstvo kino*.

Russian and Western researchers seem to disagree about the value of these debates and in general about the criticism that was published in *Iskusstvo kino*. For example, representative of the Western approach, Josephine Woll saw little importance in almost all of the publications in the print media during the period of 1957-1958. According to her it consisted of "lackluster articles, pedestrian memoirs, archival documents, and verbatim citations from or paraphrases of Party directives".[244] Russian researches[245] on the other hand often treat print media of the early Thaw period without sufficiently critical approach. Some of them went as far as to claim that *Iskusstvo kino* was a mirror that portrayed the views of the spectators: "In critical articles and reviews of *Iskusstvo kino* references to the views of spectators are encountered more often than to party decisions of speeches and leaders…the cinema had a new customer – the spectator".[246]

It is hard to agree that these publications did not bear any additional value and room for analysis. The mere fact that for the first time staff members of republican studios were given a voice and provided with an opportunity to express their ideas and concerns in the press was already of great importance. However, these publications obviously need to be taken with a grain of salt, and their informativity cannot be compared with debates that were held in more private settings.

In general, it is possible to find much more open peer criticism of Avicenna, Furqat and other Uzbek films in just one closed-door debate, than in a number of articles from *Iskusstvo kino*. From the notes of this confidential debate[247] one can learn that the artistic intelligentsia in Uzbekistan heavily criticized Avicenna and Furqat for the lack of national details and "oriental splendor", as well as for a number of historical discrepancies, and in general for the low quality film scenario. From private communication between Yarmatov and Mikhail Romm that Yarmatov disclosed in his

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[244] Woll, *Real Images*, 60.
[245] For example in M.R. Zezina, "Kinoprokat I massoviy zritel v gody ottepeli" [Film distribution and mass spectator during the Thaw period] in *Istoriya strany. Istoriya kino [History of the country. History of the cinema]*. ed. by Sekrinskiy. (Moscow: Znak, 2004), 389–412. or Marina Kosinova, "Kinorepertuar i zritel'skiye predpochteniya v epokhu «ottepeli» [Film distribution and spectators' preferences during the Thaw period], *Znanie, Ponimanie, Umenie (MosGU Magazine)*, №46 (2015): 17-26.
[246] Zezina, "Kinoprokat I massoviy zritel v gody ottepeli", 396-397.
[247] Speech at the discussion of the exhibition of sketches of artists of the studio Uzbekfilm, 2605-1-38, RGALI, Moscow, Russia.

memoirs[248] one can find out that the main actor Marat Aripov was a poor choice and failed to fully display Avicenna as a character.

At the same time, even closed-door settings did not go far enough to tackle the ideological filling of historical movies. As one can notice, most of the existing criticism was concentrated on the decorations and other relatively neutral topics. For example, no-one challenged the characters for being one-sided, where representatives of Islam and rulers were 100% portrayed black, and main characters were denied to be multi-dimensional as well, even though these kind of simplicities were mentioned in the reviews of the screenplay committee. The problem of self-censorship and fear of saying too much remained very real for the Uzbek intelligentsia, even in the milder climate of the Khrushchev Thaw.

While articles in *Iskusstvo kino* heavily covered the screenplay problem and staff shortage at Uzbekfilm, these issues were never attributed to Avicenna directly. In-detail critical analysis of films was never published in *Iskusstvo kino*. It is striking that cinematographers and artists were usually blamed for both of these issues, and called out for choosing "living in isolation"[249] or "not trusting Uzbek authors"[250] in the production of film scenarios, while in fact these "choices" were conditioned by the nationalities and cultural policy of the Communist Party.[251]

By combining the outline of the bigger studio problems and criticism directed towards Avicenna and other Uzbekfilm productions, the reader can find out that in the views of cinema professionals Avicenna had the same disadvantages as the Uzbekfilm studio at large. At the same time, Woll is right in assuming that the articles in *Iskusstvo kino* often mirrored signals and directives of the Communist Party. For example, information about the damage that the cult of personality had on the cinematography and cinema professionals was published only after Khrushchev went in detail about the Stalin purges during the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party.

To sum up, articles from the print media oriented towards the artistic intelligentsia (*Iskusstvo kino, Sovetskaya kultura, Literaturnaya gazeta*) carried out useful information for analysis, if not for the films themselves, then for the cinema industry in national republics. Magazines for the mass

[248] Yarmatov, *Vozvraschenie*, 259.
[249] "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?", 2.
[250] I. Sultanov, I., "Bolshe doveriya pisatelyu" [More trust to the authors], *Sovetskaya kultura*, №124 (13 October 1962).
[251] Belodubrovskaya, *Not According to Plan*.

reader, both in the field of cinema (*Sovetskii ekran*) and the ones without one specific topic (*Pravda, Izvestiya, Ogoniok*) did not contain any critical evaluations at all for most of the 1950s, and the first critical voices about Uzbekfilm movies appeared only in the 1960s.

Criticism of Avicenna and Furqat for not being national enough, as well as involvement of non-Uzbek experts in the cinema production (screenplays of Avicenna and Furqat were co-authored with Russian scenarists), raised the question about the colonial approach in Uzbek film production. At the same time, since a great amount of effort was dedicated to the modernization of the cinema industry in Uzbekistan and education of indigenous cinematographers[252], it is impossible to attribute strictly imperial traits to the Soviet Union. The combined approach of Laura Adams viewing the Soviet Union "as a new kind of state, one that exhibits both the cultural hierarchies of an empire and the modernization tendencies of a nation-state"[253] seems to be the most appropriate one.

The timing and character of publications in print media suggest that Soviet print editions were biased towards reviewing the production of the Central film studios in the USSR. The regularity in which Uzbekfilm appeared in *Iskusstvo kino* and *Sovetskii ekran* allows to assume that the periodic press was subjected to a certain cultural policy that required a certain amount of mentions of republican studios. At the same time, as was demonstrated above, in-detail articles about the Uzbekfilm studio were timed either to major shifts in cultural policy (like appearance of expert debates in the late 1950s) or events that took place in Moscow and involved Uzbek cultural productions, such as decades of Uzbek culture, anniversaries of national heroes, like Furqat or Avicenna, or film festivals.

[252] See "Pochemu otstaet uzbekskaya kinematografia?"; "Uluchshit podgotovku tvorcheskikh kadrov"; "Tvorcheskiy poiski, razdumya, plany".
[253] Laura Adams, "Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Theatrical Form in Uzbekistan", *Slavic Review* Vol. 64, №2 (2005): 333-54.

Conclusion

The first chapter provided an overview of the historical context and the evolution of the image of Avicenna through the years. As it turned out, the national histories of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan about the time and figure of Avicenna in the 1930s-1950s was not created by the national scholars. Before and during the 1950s "the creation of republics' histories was too important to leave to local cadres"[254]. At the end one can rightfully confirm that nation-building and nationalizing of Central Asian histories in from the 1930s to the end of the 1950s were purely state initiatives, even though they were implemented through the artistic intelligentsia. While the national intelligentsia was almost not involved in the nation-building process, the national histories of Central Asia that were produced in the 1950s became an important basis for modern national identities in Central Asian states.

The degree of independence that the national and non-national artistic intelligentsia's had in the creation of national narratives proved to vary greatly depending on the time period and current national policy. Up to the 1940s, representatives of the intelligentsia's that survived several waves of repressions had more independence when writing about national histories and national heroes. In the 1940s the course of national policy changed, and the intelligentsia's received a signal about it by means of the article of Ernest Kolman. While it did not come from an official source, the message was quickly recognized in the artistic and academic circles. The article pronounced all the historical characters that turned out to live in the territory of the Central Asian republics to belong to the national histories of the republics.

The rapid change of Avicenna's image that turned him from a Farsi-speaking scientist that belonged to the Arab scientific world to the pronounced Uzbek or Tajik anti-Islam nationalist, as well as the overflow of publications, and the creation of a movie about Avicenna demonstrated the influence of the state and national intelligentsia's. Essentially they did not only create, but also disseminate a national myth about him to the rest of the population. The ideas of *imagined communities* by Benedict Anderson,[255] and *invented traditions* of Eric Hobsbawm[256] could describe this myth-making process in one of the best ways. As literature research demonstrated, the collective myth of Avicenna as a Central Asian scholar had not existed in the collective memory before the

[254] Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 18.
[255] Anderson, *Imagined communities.*
[256] Hobsbawm and Newton, *Nations and nationalism since 1780*.

decision of his heroization had deliberately been made by the state and academics. This case study demonstrated the insolvency of ethno-symbolic approach that claimed the necessity of pre-existing myths and stories in order to create a nation. Modernization theory turned out to explain these phenomena in a better way.

The second chapter took a closer look into the film production processes during the Thaw period. The situation with artistic liberties turned out to be dubious. On the one hand it was quite difficult to get into the closed circle of cinema producers, for example to get a film script accepted if the author of the script had no previous relations to a film studio. On the other hand for somebody who was already incorporated in this tiny circle of approved cinema producers, the process of getting a script approved was relatively easy.

After signing the contract with a studio the Ministry of Cinematography and film studios could only ask authors to change the screenplay twice: the first time was after receiving improvement points from the Screenplay committee at a studio itself; and second time was after seeing the feedback from the Central Screenplay committee in Moscow. Authors did not have to comply with the prescriptions of the censors to the word, and they had the liberty to ignore some of their points and requests. In the case of Avicenna, despite the large number of improvement points that the Screenplay committee shared with the authors, only few of them were actually taken into consideration in the final version.

The production and post-production of Avicenna was done in accordance with general tropes that existed in Central Asian cinema. The situation of a constantly changing political conjuncture, and the conglomeration of censoring structures created the sense of uncertainty for Uzbek cinema-makers. The idea of the Soviet censorship machine in cinematography as of a monolith structure that eradicated all the nonconformances as presented by George Faraday[257] turned out to be invalid. It took years for cinematographers to overcome the tendencies that were established during the Stalin's rule, and Stalinist tropes in the production of the cinema did not disappear overnight. In the case of Avicenna, the film producers chose to stick to the established tropes.

This decision to play it safe almost led to the last-minute prohibition of the film. In the second part of the 1950s, Khrushchev chose more liberal approach to Islam and Islamic traditions in order

[257] Faraday, *Revolt of the filmmakers*, 2000.

establish better relations with the newly founded states where Islam was an official religion. Avicenna still included a few harsh anti-Islamic statements. As a result, a special commission of experts was called in order to evaluate if it would be safe to release the film without ruining the relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. Fortunately for the Uzbek film studio, the commission sanctioned the release of the film without any additional changes.

The case of Avicenna backed the less optimistic point of view of Western scholars about the extent of artistic freedom during the Thaw: while the methods of the Soviet power changed, the principles remained the same.[258] Especially for such sensitive areas as national narratives and historical movies, the Stalinist tropes in Uzbekistan remained dominant.

It is nearly impossible to evaluate what was the reception of Avicenna by the public. In order to somehow compensate for it, the third chapter evaluated the image of Avicenna and two other historical movies that had been created in the print press. The room for criticism of cinema production remained very limited, but sometimes critical remarks made their way in the magazines intended for the artistic intelligentsia. Big newspapers like *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, on the other hand, tended to avoid any critical assessment. It did not mean that the criticism within and outside the artistic community did not exist, but rather that it was expressed within closed circles. The development of a professional community of cinematographers in the late 1950s laid the foundation for improving this situation.

Relating these answers to the academic debate between Russian and English language literature about the Thaw cinema, and the state of its liberalization, demonstrates that both sides of this debate are right in their own way. Even though the level of liberalization during the Thaw remained limited, as claimed by Graham[259] and Liehm et al.[260], some authors and cinematographers managed to escape the censorship machine, as stated by Yulia Rusina.[261] They did it in closed circles, and sometimes this peer criticism managed to find its way to the popular print press editions. Examples of it can be seen in the reviews of the Screenplay committee, and closed-door debates of

[258] Liehm et al, *The most important art.*
[259] Graham, 'Part One: Real Images'.
[260] Liehm et al, *The most important art.*
[261] Yulia Rusina, *Istoriya Sovetskogo kino, Uchebnoe posobie* [History of Soviet cinema. Study guide] (Ekaterinburg: Izdatelstvo Uralskogo universiteta, 2019).

the cinematographers. This larger room for artistic expression essentially became one of the reasons why people in the post-Soviet states see Thaw films as a golden fund of national cinematographies.

As a closing remark, I would like to return to the question about Avicenna's national identification that brought this thesis to life. It can be answered best by citing a comment on the same movie publication on YouTube that was quoted in the preface. This comment, that received more than 450 likes, says: "There is enough knowledge, wisdom, and fame of Avicenna for all of us"[262]. Indeed, if people get to learn about the great figure of Avicenna, and learn something useful from his biography, then for most of them it would not matter how propaganda of different states tries to frame his figure.

In a period of uncertainty and unclarity, a number of Soviet authors, historians and film producers made a joint effort that introduced the figure of Avicenna to the Tajik and Uzbek nations. These nations got to learn something about the past of the territory they live at, and received an additional source of national pride. For historians it resulted in an interesting puzzle that can only be resolved through hours of reviewing academic literature and archival sources. Avicenna is neither Uzbek, nor Tajik, Persian or Arab. He can be attributed to each and every nation that claims him to be his own at the same time, just like science itself that is international in its nature and cannot be limited by national borders.

This thesis is a demonstration that cultural appropriation for nationalist purposes is always self-defeating. Political context comes and goes, nations appear and fade away, and nationalist coloring tends to quickly vanish from the picture. While during some periods of Soviet history it was impossible to escape from the political context, the Soviet artistic intelligentsia that was forced to act according to established tropes also realized that purely propagandic messages would not last. In order to corroborate that, I would like to conclude this thesis with the same words of Ferdowsi that are quoted at the very beginning and very end of the movie Avicenna: "Only the deed of a hero and words of a sage will pass through the centuries. Kind word and good deed are the only ones that will withstand everything – the storms and the sun".[263]

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[262] Gregory Gluck, posted 5 years ago. Comment on *Avicenna (feature film)*, posted on June 3, 2012. URL: https://youtu.be/CzLoSP31wlw.

[263] "Лишь дело героя, да речь мудреца проходят столетья не зная конца. И солнце и бури - все выдержат смело высокое слово и доброе дело." As quoted in *Avicenna.* Directed by Kamil Yarmatov. Tashkent: Uzbekfilm production,

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