



Article

History of the Kongyrat Karakalpaks in Surkhandarya

Prekeeva Amangul¹, Kutlimuratov Ilkham²

1. Associate Professor at the Nukus branch of the State Institute of Arts and Culture of Uzbekistan, Candidate of Philological Sciences
2. Senior teacher of Russian language and literature at School No. 5, Shimbay region, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan

Correspondence: amangul_prekeeva@mail.ru, ilhamkozabaev41@gmail.com

Abstract: The migration of tribes and their adaptation to new ecological and socio-cultural environments constitute an essential aspect of the historical development of the Karakalpak people. Among these processes, the settlement of the Karakalpak Qongyrats in the Surkhandarya region represents a significant yet insufficiently systematized historical phenomenon reflected in Berdakh's "Shezhire" and in local oral traditions. Despite existing studies, many issues related to the migration chronology, tribal branches, linguistic preservation, and ethnocultural continuity of the Surkhandarya Karakalpaks remain inadequately explored, particularly due to the limited integration of field ethnographic materials into scientific circulation. This study aims to analyze the ethno-cultural image, migration routes, and historical roots of the Qongyrats in Surkhandarya through the combined examination of written sources and oral testimonies. The findings demonstrate that the Qongyrats migrated from Turkistan to Surkhandarya, preserved distinctive phonetic features of the Karakalpak language, maintained traditional economic activities such as agriculture and animal husbandry, and retained clan identity in several villages. The study integrates documentary evidence with newly collected field ethnographic data, allowing for a more systematic reconstruction of their migration history and ethnocultural characteristics. The research confirms the distinct place of the Surkhandarya Qongyrats in Karakalpak ethnography and highlights the necessity of further systematic investigations into their language, history, and cultural heritage.

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1. Introduction

The migration routes of tribes and their adaptation to new ecological and socio-cultural environments constitute a significant component of the historical development of the Karakalpak people. Among these processes, the history of the Karakalpak Kongyrats who settled in the Surkhandarya region requires comprehensive and systematic scholarly investigation. Although certain aspects of their past have been addressed in historical and ethnographic studies, many issues related to their migration chronology, settlement patterns, and preservation of ethnic identity remain insufficiently explored [1].

Berdakh's "Genealogy" serves as an essential written source for understanding the distribution, migration routes, and historical fate of the Karakalpak tribes. This work provides detailed descriptions of the migration of the Kongyrat clan from Turkistan to Surkhandarya, outlining their economic activities, social organization, and ethnocultural

life. The information contained in this literary-ethnographic monument enables researchers to reconstruct important elements of tribal history and collective memory.

In addition to written evidence, ethnographic data collected from representatives of the local population confirm that the Karakalpak Kongyrats have preserved distinctive features in their language, traditions, and way of life. These materials demonstrate continuity in cultural practices and tribal identity despite geographical relocation and interaction with neighboring groups.

Thus, this article analyzes the ethno-cultural image of the Surkhandarya Kongyrats on the basis of historical written sources and oral testimonies, aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their historical and ethnographic development [2].

2. Materials and Methods

The method of historical-ethnographic analysis was employed in this study. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive examination of both written historical sources and contemporary field materials in order to reconstruct the migration history and ethnocultural identity of the Kongyrat clan. The research was conducted in several interrelated stages [3].

First, written sources were systematically analyzed, including Berdakh's works as well as the scholarly studies of academicians M. Nurmukhammedov and L.S. Tolstova. These texts were examined through comparative historical analysis, with particular attention given to references concerning migration routes, tribal composition, settlement patterns, and socio-economic characteristics. The interpretation of these materials allowed for the identification of key historical narratives related to the Kongyrats of Surkhandarya [4].

Second, field ethnographic interviews were conducted in the villages of Koldaulay, Khomkan, and Kallamazar in the Surkhandarya region. Informants included elderly residents, clan representatives, and local knowledge bearers whose oral testimonies provided valuable insights into genealogical memory, linguistic features, traditional customs, and economic practices. Particular care was taken to preserve the authenticity of their narratives.

Third, the collected historical and ethnographic data were systematized through comparative analysis, correlating written evidence with oral accounts. This integrated methodological framework ensured a more comprehensive and reliable exploration of the Kongyrat clan's migration history and ethnocultural continuity in Surkhandarya [5].

3. Results and Discussion

We find information about our people's history not only in written heritage but also in folk art and the legacy of prominent poets and zhyraus. Among these, the creative legacy of poet Berdakh holds special significance. His work «Shezhire» is valued as a source providing valuable information about the ancient history of the Karakalpak people. This work extensively covers legends about prophets, connections with neighboring Uzbek and Kazakh peoples, etymology of the Karakalpak ethnonym, origins of clans and tribes, as well as heroes and historical figures of the country. Additionally, the migration routes of Karakalpaks from the Turkestan region are specifically described [6].

For instance, the following lines appear in «Shezhire»:

Türkistannan qo'urat kóshti,	The Kongyrat migrated from Turkestan,
Surxangá barıp tústi,	He went to Surkhan,
Malı bası onnan da ósti,	His livestock grew even more than ten.
Mıqlım abat bolğan eken	It turned out to be quite prosperous

These lines of the poet show that the Kongyrat tribes migrated from Turkistan to Surkhandarya and their economic life improved. In the subsequent period, the following data are presented on the involvement of their lagging relatives in the migration:

Uzaq túshti aramız dep, Ashlıqtan joq sharamız dep, Biz hám kóship baramız dep, Kelip xabar salǵan eken	Saying we had a long dream, We have no choice from hunger, Saying, «We too will migrate», He had come to inform me.
On tórt urıw kóship búldi. Kimi yolda ashtan óldi. Surxanǵa bular hám keldi, Qońıratqa tapıshqan eken	Fourteen clans migrated and ruined, Who died of starvation on the way? They also came to Surkhan, It was found in Kongyrat.

These excerpts reveal that the Kongyrat clans communicated with each other, and one group was followed by another. Thus, Berdakh's work serves as an ethnographic-historical source that vividly reflects the historical migration processes of the Karakalpak people [7].

Also, through this work, we learn that during the period (1827-1900) when Berdakh lived, the lower Karakalpaks maintained contact with the Karakalpaks living in Zhanadarya, Bukhara, Miyankol, Surkhan, Kokand, and Shakhrisabz, and were aware of their situation. For his good knowledge of our people's history and creation of immortal works related to our history, academician M. Nurmukhammedov praised Berdakh as follows: «Even without mentioning his high artistic merit, «Shezhire» allows us to consider Berdakh as the first Karakalpak scholar».

Looking at this information, we wondered what scholarly data exists about the Karakalpaks of Surkhandarya [8].

Tolstova, who conducted research on the Upper Karakalpaks, states: «A number of Karakalpaks migrated and settled in the southern regions of the Bukhara Khanate – the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya valleys. The small groups of Karakalpaks in the Shahri Sabiz bekdrom quickly assimilated with the Uzbeks and became part of the Uzbek tribe. The Karakalpaks around Dehkanabad and Sherobod who migrated towards the qibla were like this».

In Sh. Paizullaeva's work «Az Emesdur Qaraqalpaq Kop» there is information about Karakalpaks living in Surkhandarya:

«It was in August of 1988. Thirty-eight elderly people came from Surkhandarya to the Local History Museum. Some had their heads wrapped with a square scarf, while others wore patterned skullcaps. They were from the Jarkurgan district of Surkhandarya region. All of them introduced themselves as Karakalpaks. They said: 'Before we pass away, we wanted to see our homeland once more, my daughter, for we have grown old. They visited the museum and mentioned that the next day they would go to Qongyrat district. I wondered why they were so eager to visit Qongyrat. It turned out that it was only because of its name, since most of their clans were Qongyrat» [9].

Additionally, Surkhandarya scholars H.Kichkilov's «Homkan Karakalpak Migration», Y.Turdimuratov's «Areal Economic Culture in the Surkhan-Sherobod Oasis in the 20th Century», and M.Fayzullayeva, Sh.Kichkilov's «Homkan» works related to the history of Surkhandarya Karakalpaks provide extensive information about Karakalpaks living in Kallamazar, Homkan and other villages of Sherobod district, their history, tribes, and occupations.

During our first visit, we met with elderly Usman Yuldashev, who lives in the «Koldaulıy» neighborhood citizens' assembly of Zharkorgan district. We tried to convey the stories we heard from him as unchanged as possible, in their original form. The reason

for this is that Usman ata's manner of speaking and the phrases he used are very close to the Karakalpak language and are considered a valuable source of ethnographic and linguistic information:

«Qońıratlardıń kelip shıqıshı aslı Enisey daryası buylarında yashaǵan. Biziń babamızdıń bashı Awǵanıstannıń qazayaqlı qışlaǵınan bir miń sakkız yuz elliinshi-almıshınshı yıllarda Surxanǵa kóship kegen, meniń urıǵım qazayaqlı, qońıratpız. Qońıratnıń toqsan altı urıǵında qazayaqlı-yam bar, ózi beshka bólinadi, meniń shajaram da bar, men hammasın jayıp aytıp beralmayman, yetmishtan ashti mi wldi ol, mınaw kállá bomaydı, tamam ekenseń, aqbarat bermayaptı, qırq jıl uqıtıwshılıq qılǵanman, tarıxtan, lekin bilgish tarıxshı emasman, kóp tarıxtı umıtqanman. Sawalarıńız bolsa berizler, qolımnan keganisha jawap beraman» («The origins of the Kongyrats go back to the banks of the Yenisei River. Our ancestor migrated to Surkhan from the Kazayaqli village of Afghanistan in the 1850s–1860s. My lineage is Kazayaqli, we are Kongyrats. Among the ninety-six clans of the Kongyrats, there are also the Kazayaqli, who are divided into five branches. I also have a genealogy, but I cannot tell everything in full detail. Did I live beyond seventy or not – I cannot say with certainty; this is not clear, and therefore the information is incomplete. I have been a teacher for forty years, mostly in history, but I am not a professional historian, and I have forgotten much of the past. If you have any questions, please ask, and I will try to answer as best as I can».) (**Informant:** Usman Yuldashev, born in 1945, with higher education, resident of «Qoldawlı» Mahalla Committee) [10].

The following section presents the accounts and information obtained from other informants:

«Our elder Khalikul-baba used to say: Three years earlier, the Kongyrats migrated here to Surkhan from Karakalpakstan, following the river. He knew history very well. Khalikul Khalmuratov worked for many years as the chief physician at the district polyclinic. He has since passed away – may his resting place be in paradise. Because of him, and because I myself am originally from Karakalpakstan, he would often emphasize that the Karakalpaks and the people here share the same roots and ties, saying: «We are Karakalpaks». Khalikul-baba's lineage belonged to the Qoldawlı clan». (Informant: Urazova Erkinay, born in 1978 in Khojeli, with secondary education, medical worker, resident of «Qorayontoq» Mahalla Citizens' Assembly) [11].

«Although Khalikul was a doctor, he was very interested in history, and he was my close friend. He was a little younger than me, but he knew history quite well. In fact, the Karakalpaks are our relatives. My mother's side is from Karakalpakstan. Among the Karakalpaks there are also Qazayaqli and other clans, and you are of our own people as well. Even our facial features resemble those of the Karakalpaks. You may also meet with Ishanqul – he knows many things. He is a wise man, a great teacher from Jarkurgan» (Informant: Usman Yuldashev, born in 1945, with higher education, Qazayaqli clan, resident of Qoldawlı MCA).

«We belong to the Karakalpaks of the Ayniy branch of the Kongyrat tribe, the Karakalpaks of Ayniy. The Ayniy have twelve sub-clans, one of which is the Ayniy Karakalpaks. Their settlement and cemetery, covering about 5 hectares, is located in Sherabad, at the site known as Termiz Ata. There is also a place called Shukurkol – if you go there, you will find Karakalpaks, our kin, living there. In Surkhan there is a professor named Tashkenbay, an ethnographer. I can give you his phone number, he is also from the Ayniy and will help you [12].

I myself have not seen a Karakalpak wedding, but I know that they have a custom called qiz ap qashish (bride abduction). From Karakalpakstan, brides have been brought here to Surkhan, and their children now study in Tashkent. The similarities between the Karakalpaks and the Kongyrats living in this region can be seen first of all in our speech, in our appearance, in our national clothing, traditions and customs, in our animal

husbandry practices, and in our crafts» (Informant: Eshonqul Khalmurzaev, born in 1952, teacher with higher education, Kongyrat–Ayniy clan, resident of Beshbulaq MCA).

The village of Khomkan in Sherabad is located in the northwestern part of the district. The Khomkan area is partly within the Baisun district and partly within the Sherabad district. It lies 130 km from Termez and 80 km from Sherabad, situated at the foothills of the Kuhitang Mountains, which are a continuation of the Hissar mountain range [13].

Khomkan borders Baisun district on one side and the Republic of Turkmenistan on the other. The village population is about five hundred people, and its school has approximately one hundred and twenty-three students.

«Right now, you won't find anyone in the village; everyone has gone up to the mountains. The villagers have taken their livestock to the summer pastures. All the people of our village are from the Kongyrat tribe, and most of them are engaged in farming and animal husbandry. We have heard that originally four ancestral lineages settled here, as the land was very suitable for raising livestock. That is how our forefathers came and remained in this place.

We were not very interested in history before. Only recently have we begun to take an interest. Until now, we simply lived saying: we are Karakalpaks, we are Kongyrats, we are of the Ak Tamgha branch. Here in this area, the Kongyrats are divided into Ak Tamghaly, Bak Tamghaly, and Kanjygaly branches. There are many Kongyrats in Surkhan, and in Kashkadarya's Dekhanabad district about 90 percent of the population are Kongyrats [14].

When we traveled by train through Karakalpakstan, we used to see a place called Kongyrat and meet Karakalpaks there. They would say, we came here from Surkhan, but I would reply, no, we went from here to Surkhan. When we go to Tashkent and people ask, who are you? we say, we are Kongyrats from Surkhan, we are Karakalpaks.

One of my daughters studied in Tashkent, and there she happened to meet Karakalpaks. We said, we are also Karakalpaks, so we must be relatives. We are Kongyrats too, but of the Karakalpak branch. They were delighted to hear this. Later, a soldier came here from Karakalpakstan, and we became close with him as well, saying, we are Kongyrats, we are Karakalpaks. Truly, we had never thought much about how exactly our ancestors came to this place».

On the 25th of May, the people of the village move to the summer pastures, setting up qara uys (traditional yurts) in the countryside, where they stay until the 1st of September to graze their livestock. The qara uy is built by a local master craftsman from special willow wood. It consists of 54, 62, or 96 uyuq (roof poles) and is mainly composed of kerege (wall lattice), erganak (door frame), uzik (felt strips), shańaraq (crown), tuzma, japsar, bağyş (supporting poles), and bosaga (threshold). Our yurts are very similar to yours. The house is covered with felt and reed mats [15].

At a distance of 7 kilometers lies a lake called Beshbulaq. Its shores are covered with reeds, which are harvested in autumn and later used to weave mats. In the summer pastures, on the mountain slopes, we live in our qara uy. When a son marries, we say «an otaw (new yurt) has been set up», as the bride moves into this yurt. Our qara uys have no electricity. If we do not milk sheep and goats, prepare sour milk, make qurut (dried yogurt balls), churn butter, or milk four cows, then, as our mothers say, «life loses its joy». If women do not weave cloth or make felt, it seems life becomes more difficult (Informant: Narbai Abdulhakimov, born in 1964, higher education, clan: Aq Tamgaly).

We milk goats and sheep, boil their milk, ferment it, and churn it in a kubi (churn) to make yellow butter. We clean the goat's stomach, wash it, and fill it with butter for storage. It is then placed in the cellar, where it keeps fresh for a long time and does not spoil. The buttermilk left in the churn is boiled in a cauldron to make qurut. In our village, people

rarely suffer from flu or colds. Even during the COVID pandemic, no one fell ill. Nowadays, healing springs have appeared here. The water of G'urumbulaq is said to dissolve kidney stones, and people from many regions of Uzbekistan come here seeking cure.

In the mountains, there is a tree called tuwdana. In the past, its branches were tied to camels and horses, given to wrestlers to wear, as our people believed it would protect them from the evil eye and misfortune. There is also another tree called Shuń. It is said there is only one in Surkhandarya and one in Arabia. This tree is believed to be a remedy for yellow fever (Informant: Nazigul Mamayusupova, born in 1969, housewife, clan: Kongyrat, Kose branch).

Before the war, there were about one thousand households in this area. During the reclamation of the Qiziriq, Angor, and Sherabad deserts, the population there was very small. Many people were forcibly resettled here from other districts. Approximately seventy percent of the Surkhandarya population belongs to the Qongyrat tribe. Our ancestors migrated to these lands as nomads, and there is a saying: «Qongyrat, load your salt on one side of the horse, and your daughter on the other».

The origin of the name Khomkan is believed to be connected with the word kan (meaning "unripe apricot"). **Informant:** Taganiyaz Abdulkhakimov, born in 1960, secondary education, member of the Aq Tamgaly lineage.

Most Karakalpaks live mainly in the Khomkon village of the Sherabad district of Surkhandarya. Up to the present day, they have held leadership positions in local collective farms. Their primary occupation has traditionally been the breeding of Hisar sheep.

Informant: Abdissamatov Hasan Ata, born on June 10, 1942, in Khomkan, clan elder of Qoshtamg'ali, residing in Sherabad's Kallamazar village.

«I, Abdissamatov Hasan Ata, was born on June 10, 1942, in Khomkan. I am now eighty-five years old. I belong to the Qoshtamg'ali clan in Khomkan and am of Karakalpak origin. In 1943, we moved from the Koksoy Jiydali settlement in the mountains to this village, Sherabad. Inside the mountain area, there is another settlement called Khomkan.

Your grandmother Tajikal's father's lineage is from the Sakkiz clan, and her mother's is from the Shanyshqyly. In this village, clans such as Sakkiz, Norbeka, Altynbash, and Alday are all Karakalpak Qongyrats. Altogether, they are Khomkan Karakalpaks. We used to break bread and say: "Come, children, take kubi (wooden churn) butter, drink the sour milk we boiled and fermented, pour the yogurt into the kubi, here is the kubi butter. The tea has just been milked fresh".

There were also fortresses here, which made up one-third of the settlement. Kallamazar means either a city-mausoleum or a fortress built by people to protect themselves during attacks. The name "Kalla mazar" has two meanings: "mausoleum on the hill" or "fortress". I worked as a livestock doctor. My grandfather was the elder of the village – when conflicts arose or feasts were held, he would preside over them. I studied at the agricultural technical school in Kashkadarya. I was not deeply educated in history, nor was I particularly interested. It is said that four young men once came here, but still, we know our lineage».

Informant: Panji Narmatov, born in 1937 in Khomkan, with secondary education, residing in Sherabad's Kallamazar village.

"They say four families came to this place long ago from the Arqa steppe, from Turkistan and Kyzylorda. There was once a feudal lord here; after increasing taxes and duties, he moved away. My father died young. I was an excellent student. But we lacked politeness and refinement. Even today, we cannot rid ourselves completely of Karakalpak traditions – it is in our blood, it cannot be erased. Bring the table closer; I cannot sit properly, I may fall, for I am ill.

In the Qirshak area of Dehkanabad district, Kashkadarya, there are also Karakalpaks. They belong to the Annaqol clan. I have now turned eighty-eight, going on eighty-nine. We are Khomkan people».

Based on the data of field ethnographic research, according to Kh. Kichkilov, “as B. Kh. Karmysheva wrote, they did not come from the Zarafshan region to the villages of Khomkan and Kirshak in Sherabad 250 years ago, but rather somewhat earlier, that is, in the middle of the 17th century”.

As a result of our conversations with the elders of Kallamazar and the Karakalpaks of Khomkan, we witnessed that their language and phonetics have preserved sounds characteristic of the Karakalpak language. Compared with Uzbek, their speech retains such phonemes as ó, ú, í, j, y, which are articulated in the same manner as in Karakalpak. “The Khomkan Karakalpaks speak a Kipchak dialect with a ‘j’-sound. Although their manners may appear somewhat rough, they are straightforward, dislike deceit, and do not appreciate flattery or hypocrisy”.

In summary, we became at least partially acquainted with the language, way of life, customs, traditions, and places of settlement of the Karakalpaks living in Surkhandarya. In their native land, through hard work, they maintain a decent standard of living. Since ancient times, agriculture and farming – passed down as a legacy from their ancestors – have been their main occupation.

In Karakalpak scholarship, information about the Karakalpaks of Surkhandarya remains very limited. Therefore, we concluded that the study of their language, literature, history, and ethnography is one of the primary tasks awaiting scholarly resolution.

4. Conclusion

As a result of the research, it was revealed that the historical roots of the Karakalpak Qongyrats settled in the Surkhandarya region are closely connected with the Turkistan area. The analysis of both written and oral sources demonstrates that their migration routes are clearly reflected in Berdakh’s works as well as in the living memory preserved through oral narratives. These materials confirm the continuity of historical traditions and provide important evidence for reconstructing the stages of their resettlement.

The study further establishes that branches of the Qongyrat tribe have preserved their ethnic distinctiveness to this day in several villages of Surkhandarya. The preservation of phonetic features characteristic of the Karakalpak language, similarities in everyday customs and rituals, and the continuity of traditional economic activities – particularly agriculture and animal husbandry – serve as clear indicators of their ethnic integrity. Despite prolonged coexistence with neighboring populations, these communities have maintained core elements of their linguistic and cultural identity.

Moreover, although the available scientific literature concerning the Surkhandarya Karakalpaks remains limited, the field ethnographic data collected in this study significantly contribute to clarifying aspects of their historical development. The integration of documentary and oral evidence enables a more comprehensive understanding of their ethnogenesis and cultural resilience.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Qongyrats of Surkhandarya occupy a distinct and significant place in Karakalpak ethnography, and further systematic research into their language, history, and cultural heritage remains an important scholarly task.

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