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THE HISTORICAL PLACE OF THE KARAKALPAK PEOPLE IN TURKIC CIVILIZATION: ETHNOGENESIS, SHARED CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract
This article examines the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization, focusing on their ethnogenesis, historical connections with Kipchak, Oghuz, and Pecheneg groups, and the role of shared Turkic cultural heritage in the formation of national identity. The ethnogenesis of the Karakalpak people is interpreted not as a linear process originating from a single ethnic group, but as the outcome of long-term ethnocultural interactions in the Aral Sea, Syr Darya, and Amu Darya regions. The study applies historical-comparative, ethnological, linguistic, and civilizational approaches. Particular attention is paid to the position of the Karakalpak language within the Turkic language family, as well as to oral traditions, epic heritage, customs, and historical memory. The author proposes a conceptual approach termed "multi-layered ethnocultural continuity" to explain the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization. This approach makes it possible to examine the interaction of ethnic formation, language, cultural memory, and regional historical experience as an integrated process.

Keywords: Karakalpak people, Turkic civilization, ethnogenesis, Kipchaks, Oghuz, Pechenegs, Aral Sea region, ethnocultural continuity, national identity, historical memory, Turkic languages.

Introduction

The historical formation of peoples, the establishment of their ethnic identities, and their civilizational development are among the most complex subjects in the study of human history. The present-day national character of every people is closely connected with centuries of migration, ethnic interaction, interlinguistic

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relations, cultural exchange, and socio-political processes. From this perspective, the history of the Karakalpak people is of considerable scholarly importance not only for the study of Central Asia, but also for understanding the history of Turkic civilization as a whole.

The Karakalpak people are among the peoples with a rich historical and cultural heritage that took shape in the Aral Sea region. Their history is connected with the Syr Darya and Amu Darya basins, ancient population layers around the Aral Sea, and interactions between communities practising nomadic and sedentary ways of life. Since ancient times, these territories have constituted an important historical space in which different ethnic groups migrated, trade took place, cultures interacted, and political processes unfolded.

The ethnogenesis of the Karakalpak people has been studied in different periods of historiography. In particular, the scholarly works of S. P. Tolstov, T. A. Zhdanko, P. P. Ivanov, and other researchers have devoted considerable attention to the ethnic history, tribal composition, and cultural characteristics of the population of the Aral Sea region. More recent studies have also examined the role of Kipchak tribes in the ethnic and cultural formation of the Karakalpak people.

The relevance of this issue lies in the fact that studying Karakalpak history solely within the framework of a particular tribe, dynasty, or historical period does not fully reveal the complexity of its ethnocultural development. Instead, the historical formation of the people needs to be examined in conjunction with long-term relations among Turkic peoples, shared linguistic features, cultural traditions, and the historical experience of the region.

Accordingly, the main aim of this article is to analyse the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization through the interplay of ethnogenetic, linguistic, and cultural factors, and to provide a scholarly rationale for the significance of the common Turkic heritage in the formation of their national identity.

Since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ethnic origins and historical development of the Karakalpak people have attracted the attention of historians, ethnographers, and linguists. In particular, research conducted as part of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition helped to collect

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important information about the ancient history, material culture, and ethnic composition of the population of the Aral Sea region.

T. A. Zhdanko's studies devoted to the historical ethnography of the Karakalpaks are an important scholarly source for examining the people's clan and tribal composition, settlement patterns, economic activities, and cultural characteristics. S. P. Tolstov's research on the history of Khorezm and the Aral Sea region, in turn, provides an important foundation for understanding the ancient population layers and ethnocultural processes in the region.

The participation of the Kipchaks holds a distinct place in the ethnic formation of the Karakalpak people. This issue continues to be explored in contemporary research. For example, an article published by M. Davletiyarov in 2025 analyses the influence of Kipchak tribes on the ethnic and cultural history of the Karakalpak people, their settlement in the South Aral Sea region, and their place in the ethnic composition of the population.

The position of the Karakalpak language within the system of Turkic languages is also important for studying the people's historical and civilizational affiliations. In linguistic classification, Karakalpak is assigned to the Kipchak group, particularly the Kipchak–Nogai branch. However, the presence of linguistic features characteristic of the Oghuz group in some of its dialects points to the complexity of historical relations among Turkic languages.

Thus, the existing scholarly literature provides an important foundation for studying the ethnogenesis, language, and culture of the Karakalpak people. Nevertheless, there remains a need for a comprehensive analysis of these issues within a unified civilizational framework, examining the interaction among ethnic formation, language, historical memory, and national identity.

The Ethnic Formation and Historical Development of the Karakalpak People

The ethnic formation of the Karakalpak people is a complex process that spans an extended period of history. Since ancient times, the Aral Sea region and its neighbouring territories have been home to diverse population groups and have witnessed interaction between nomadic and sedentary communities. Explaining the ethnocultural processes in this area solely in terms of the migration of a single

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tribe or the complete transformation of a particular people would be a limited scholarly approach.

Three important historical dimensions can be distinguished in the study of Karakalpak ethnogenesis. The areas around the Aral Sea and the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers have long been regions where agriculture, livestock breeding, fishing, and trade developed. The ancient cultural traditions that emerged in this space subsequently interacted with later population groups. Therefore, the study of the historical roots of the Karakalpak people requires a comparative examination of archaeological cultures, anthropological materials, ancient written sources, and ethnographic data.

In the Middle Ages, the Oghuz and Pecheneg tribes were important ethnic and political formations on the Eurasian steppes. They participated in migration and political processes that took place in the territories around the Aral Sea, Syr Darya, and Amu Darya. Some studies particularly emphasise the role of these tribes in the ethnic formation of the Karakalpak people. Their influence, however, should be assessed on the basis of specific historical sources, archaeological evidence, and comparative ethnographic materials.

In the Middle Ages, the Kipchaks were known as a confederation of Turkic tribes spread across a large part of the Eurasian steppes. Their activities in the Syr Darya and Aral Sea regions had a considerable impact on the ethnic and linguistic environment of the area. Historical processes associated with the Kipchaks constituted one of the important factors in the formation of the ethnic composition, language, and cultural traditions of the Karakalpak people.

An important scholarly point should be emphasised here: it would be incorrect to associate the ethnogenesis of the Karakalpak people exclusively with the Kipchaks or, alternatively, solely with the Oghuz and Pechenegs. Ethnogenesis is a multi-stage process involving interaction among different tribes, their integration with local populations, political unions, and migration.

It is therefore appropriate to interpret the formation of the Karakalpak people as a process resulting from the historical movements of Turkic tribes in the Aral Sea region and their long-term ethnocultural interactions with the local population.

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The Karakalpak Language and Its Place in the Turkic Language Family

Language is one of the principal social institutions through which any people preserves its historical memory, cultural experience, and ethnic identity. It reflects a people's worldview, social relations, values, and historical development.

The Karakalpak language belongs to the Turkic language family and is studied among the languages closely related to the Nogai branch of the Kipchak group. Its shared features with Kazakh and Nogai, as well as its historical connections with Uzbek and Turkmen, are linguistic expressions of the region's centuries-long ethnocultural relations.

The phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of the Karakalpak language make it possible to identify its historical place within the Turkic language family. In particular, Oghuz elements found in some dialects demonstrate that historical relations among Turkic tribes have also been preserved in the linguistic system.

The Karakalpak language should be regarded not merely as a means of communication, but also as an important cultural mechanism for preserving civilizational memory. The people's social experience, accumulated over centuries, is embodied in their oral literature, epics, proverbs, toponyms, and historical terminology.

In this respect, the preservation and development of the Karakalpak language also contribute to enriching the common Turkic cultural heritage. Similarities between languages, however, do not automatically mean that peoples are identical or that one people originated from another. Rather, such similarities should be interpreted as scholarly evidence of historical contacts, shared linguistic development, and cultural influences.

The Karakalpak People's Cultural Heritage within Turkic Civilization

One of the defining characteristics of Turkic civilization is that it developed through shared languages, literature, oral traditions, customs, and values among peoples spread across a vast geographical area. This commonality fostered a shared historical and cultural space without erasing the distinct national identities of individual peoples.

The cultural heritage of the Karakalpak people is an integral part of this civilizational space. The people's epic traditions, the art of the bakhshi (epic

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storyteller and performer), oral literature, national music, crafts, and customs have transmitted their historical experience from generation to generation.

The epic "Kyrk Kyz" ("Forty Girls") occupies a particularly important place in the spiritual and artistic heritage of the Karakalpak people. It gives artistic expression to the ideals of courage, patriotism, collective unity, bravery, and freedom. The epic can be studied not only as a literary work, but also as an important source for understanding the people's historical memory, values, and social ideals.

At the same time, certain shared images, heroic motifs, epic plots, and ritual elements found in the folklore of Turkic peoples offer considerable opportunities for comparative research. Such similarities may be the result of a common historical environment and cultural contacts. They should not, however, be treated as direct proof that one people originated from another.

Although the national culture of the Karakalpak people has developed in harmony with the common Turkic heritage, it possesses its own independent artistic traditions, linguistic features, customs, and historical experience. Thus, shared Turkic identity and national distinctiveness are not contradictory concepts; rather, they are cultural processes that enrich one another.

The Concept of "Multi-Layered Ethnocultural Continuity"

As the article's theoretical contribution, it proposes a conceptual approach termed "multi-layered ethnocultural continuity" to explain the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization.

According to this approach, a people's place within a civilization is determined not solely by ethnic origin or linguistic affiliation. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of ethnic formation, language development, cultural memory, regional experience, and historical identity.

The concept consists of five interrelated components:

1. The ethnogenetic layer. This involves studying the historical influence of ancient local populations and Turkic tribes that participated in the formation of the Karakalpak people. Processes associated with tribes such as the Kipchaks, Oghuz, and Pechenegs are particularly significant in this regard.

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2. The linguistic layer. This encompasses the position of the Karakalpak language within the system of Turkic languages, its shared and distinctive features in relation to other Turkic languages, and historical linguistic contacts.
3. The cultural layer. This represents the people's oral literature, epic traditions, music, customs, crafts, and spiritual values.
4. The territorial-historical layer. This is based on the study of the role played in the people's history by the Aral Sea region and the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins, as well as population migrations, economic activities, and regional cultural relations.
5. The identity layer. This encompasses historical memory, national self-awareness, cultural continuity between generations, and the formation of a sense of belonging to Turkic civilization as a whole.

An important feature of this approach is that it does not link the place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization exclusively to the past. On the contrary, it also makes it possible to analyse the influence of historical heritage on contemporary national identity, cultural policy, education, and continuity between generations.

At the same time, the proposed concept should not be regarded as an established and universally recognised theory. It should instead be understood as an authorial conceptual approach that requires empirical testing in future historical, ethnological, and linguistic research.

The Significance of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Context of Globalisation

In the context of globalisation, preserving the national identity of peoples, safeguarding historical memory, and transmitting cultural heritage to future generations have become pressing tasks. The expansion of the information space, intensification of intercultural relations, and social changes are placing new demands on the formation of national identity.

In this process, studying the historical heritage of the Karakalpak people in the context of common Turkic civilization is important in several respects.

First, scholarly research into the Karakalpak language and literature, together with the development of digital dictionaries and electronic corpora, constitutes an effective means of preserving the national cultural heritage.

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Second, comparative study of the history and ethnocultural heritage of the Karakalpak people alongside the histories of other Turkic peoples can help develop scholarly cooperation. In this regard, joint study of historical sources, the introduction of archival documents into scholarly circulation, and the conduct of collaborative research are important.

Third, integrating oral literature and epic heritage into the modern education system can strengthen the younger generation's historical memory and respect for national values.

Fourth, academic publications, international conferences, and interdisciplinary research play a major role in promoting the place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization in the international scholarly arena.

Fifth, the study of the common Turkic heritage should not seek to standardise national cultures or diminish their distinctiveness. Rather, it should serve to develop an objective understanding of each people's historical experience within the framework of a shared civilizational process.

Thus, belonging to Turkic civilization does not negate the independent national identity of the Karakalpak people. On the contrary, it makes it possible to study their history and culture within a broader historical space.

Main Findings

The analysis makes it possible to formulate several important scholarly conclusions regarding the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization.

First, the ethnogenesis of the Karakalpak people was a multi-stage historical process in which the interaction of local population layers in the Aral Sea region with various Turkic tribes played an important role.

Second, the affiliation of the Karakalpak language with the Kipchak group is important evidence of the people's historical and linguistic connections with the Turkic language family. Oghuz features found in some dialects, in turn, demonstrate the complexity of interlinguistic relations in the region.

Third, the epic traditions, oral literature, and national rituals of the Karakalpak people share certain features with the common Turkic cultural space while also retaining distinctive local characteristics.

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Fourth, alongside ethnic origin, language, and culture, the people's historical memory and national identity have been shaped by regional experience and socio-historical relations.

Fifth, the proposed approach of "multi-layered ethnocultural continuity" may serve to study Karakalpak history on the basis of the interrelationship among ethnogenesis, language, culture, and identity.

To deepen these conclusions, future research should combine comparative linguistics, archaeogenetics, ethnographic fieldwork, historical archival materials, and folklore sources in an integrated analysis.

Conclusion

Studying the historical place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization is of considerable scholarly importance for understanding the ethnic formation, cultural development, and historical relations of the peoples of Central Asia. Historical information and existing studies indicate that processes associated with Turkic tribes such as the Kipchaks, Oghuz, and Pechenegs played an important role in the ethnic formation of the Karakalpak people. However, it would not be scientifically sound to attribute these processes to a single ethnic source. The formation of the people was the result of long-term ethnocultural contacts and historical transformations.

The Karakalpak language, national folklore, epic traditions, and material and spiritual culture demonstrate the people's close connection with Turkic civilization. At the same time, this heritage also reflects the people's independent national identity and distinctive historical experience.

The conceptual approach of "multi-layered ethnocultural continuity" advanced in this article proposes an analysis of the historical development of the Karakalpak people through five interrelated dimensions: ethnogenesis, language, culture, territorial history, and national identity. This approach may serve as a theoretical foundation for future interdisciplinary research into the place of the Karakalpak people within Turkic civilization.

From this perspective, the study of Karakalpak history is not limited to investigating the past of a single people. It also makes an important contribution to understanding the formation of Turkic civilization, regional cultural relations,

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historical continuity among peoples, and the patterns governing the development of national identity.

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