



## **THE SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF B.KH. KARMYSHEVA AND THE PROBLEMS OF ETHNOGENESIS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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<b>Article history:</b>	<b>Abstract:</b>
<b>Received:</b> 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2025 <b>Accepted:</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2025	Historical research indicates that Central Asia has long been a region inhabited and utilized by both nomadic and sedentary population groups. These ethnic communities developed through mutual interaction, cultural exchange, and integration. The unique cultural heritage they created has significantly contributed not only to the development of the region but also to the broader progress of world civilization. The origins and formation of ethnic groups that emerged in the Eurasian space during the medieval period and later became part of modern national structures remain complex scholarly issues. This is primarily due to the limited availability of source materials and the insufficient development of theoretical frameworks. A prominent scholar who introduced innovative approaches in this field and made a substantial contribution to the in-depth study of Central Asian ethnic history was B.Kh. Karmysheva. Her scholarly work has served as an important methodological foundation for subsequent researchers.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, B.Kh. Karmysheva, problems of ethnogenesis, karakalpaks, autochthony, scientific methodology, nomadic communities, Shaybani khan, lokay, kongrats,

**INTRODUCTION.** The issues concerning the origin and historical development of ethnic communities formed within the Eurasian civilizational space are intrinsically linked to a complex and multifaceted set of scholarly problems situated within the framework of medieval ethnic history. These challenges are primarily explained by the insufficiency of source materials, the diverse and intricate nature of the available evidence, and the incomplete development of theoretical and methodological foundations. Throughout the course of conducted research, historical sources and existing literature related to the study of ethnic communities in Central Asia have been collected and subjected to comprehensive analysis. Through the application of appropriate research and interpretative methods, it becomes possible to address numerous questions in ethnic history that pertain not only to the past but also to contemporary ethnic processes. From this perspective, a thorough examination of existing scholarly works on the subject—particularly the implementation of a critical analysis that elucidates the historiographic landscape in all its complexity—has emerged as a scientific necessity [6, p. 131].

At the beginning of the 20th century, a methodological approach aimed at studying various scientific aspects of specific regions began to emerge, leading to the development of numerous research projects. Some of these studies have retained their academic significance to this day, among them research related to the policy of national-territorial delimitation. During the period of the “cultural revolution” in the Soviet Union, which was

marked by rapid transformations, ethnography—as a discipline previously associated with “bourgeois science”—came under severe criticism. In place of traditional methodologies, a new approach grounded in Marxist perspectives was formulated. This approach sought to investigate the socio-economic structure of nations and the history of ethnic communities in conjunction with contemporary social issues. In addition, thematic studies emerged during this period, focusing on the economic activities and types of production systems among various ethnic groups. However, due to the lack of a long-term theoretical foundation, these research directions did not develop into coherent or systematic frameworks in subsequent stages.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS.** This study is based on the scholarly works of B.Kh. Karmysheva devoted to the ethnic history of Central Asia, in particular her field research conducted in the regions of Northern Bactria, Northern Tokharistan, and Eastern Bukhara. The primary sources for the research include the scholar’s monograph *Essays on the Ethnic History of the Southern Regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Based on Ethnographic Data)* as well as her various academic articles. In these works, the results of field investigations are integrated with written, archaeological, linguistic, and anthropological sources, providing a systematic analysis of ethnogenetic processes in the region.



The research was conducted on the basis of B. Kh. Karmysheva's works on the ethnic history of Central Asia. The main methods employed included historical-ethnographic analysis, processing of field research data, comparative ethno-linguistic analysis of ethnonyms, and the study of archival sources. In addition, archaeological and anthropological data, as well as sociological observations, were used to clarify the processes of interaction between nomadic and sedentary populations.

**RESULTS.** By the late 1930s, a significant paradigmatic shift occurred in Soviet ethnography regarding approaches to the origins of ethnic communities. According to the newly developed concept of that period, the formation of peoples was explained not by external factors—particularly migratory movements—but as the result of internal historical and social processes that had taken place within their current territories. In this framework, the idea of autochthony—that is, formation under local conditions—was advanced as the central scientific principle. This concept was formulated within the primordialist model in Soviet historiography and ethnography. According to this model, modern ethnic groups emerged as a result of intermixing between ancient indigenous populations and later-arriving groups. The latter were typically identified as nomadic tribes originating from the steppe zones.

However, by the early 1950s, this approach underwent critical reassessment, and the role of migration in ethnogenesis was reacknowledged. This marked a departure from viewing autochthony as the sole and absolute explanatory model. In fully understanding the intellectual context of this period, the life and scholarly contributions of B.Kh. Karmysheva (1916–2000) hold particular significance. Her research was distinguished not only by its empirical foundation but also by a methodologically rigorous and analytically deep approach.

The conceptual frameworks developed by Karmysheva made it possible to interpret the formation processes of ethnic communities in Central Asia in connection not only with historical and cultural but also with socio-economic factors. For this reason, her perspectives on the ethnic landscape of the region remain highly relevant as an independent subject of scholarly analysis. A step-by-step study of B.Kh. Karmysheva's scholarly legacy provides valuable insights into the formation of the Soviet ethnographic school, its methodological foundations, theoretical limitations, and ideological influences.

Balkis Karmisheva was born on July 13, 1916, in the city of Ghulja, located in the Xinjiang province of China, in a Tatar-populated settlement, into the family of an employee of a private trading company. Her father,

Khalil Fatikhovich Karmishev, was the son of a mullah from the ancient Tatar village of Oltata, located in the steppe region along the Volga, within Samara province (present-day Saratov region). After graduating from a madrasa, Khalil went in search of work to the famous Makaryev Fair in Nizhny Novgorod, where he was employed by a Uyghur merchant from Ghulja. The family of Galiya Shakhmukhamedovna (1888–1971), the mother of Balkis Karmisheva, had also migrated to this city from Kazan province. The couple married in 1905 and had six children — five daughters and one son. From 1905 to 1923, the family lived together in Ghulja. The lifestyle of this Jadid (reformist Muslim) family cultivated a distinct worldview. The intellectual and cultural values instilled in Balkis during her childhood by her parents led her towards science and scholarship. The broad outlook and intellectual development she acquired during her youth laid the foundation for her future path as a prominent ethnographer of the Central Asian peoples. Among the relatives of her mother, Galiya Khanum, were hereditary imams, mullahs, teachers, Islamic scholars, merchants, scribes, and other educated individuals who had studied in madrasas, were fluent in Eastern languages, and had traveled extensively[1, p. 155].

In 1923, Khalil Fatikhovich Karmishev was sent to the USSR as a trusted representative of the firm and subsequently accepted Soviet citizenship. However, his family remained in Ghulja. Three years later, the entire family relocated to Moscow. In 1930, the head of the family was arrested and Galiya Khanum was ordered to leave Moscow with her children within three days. K. F. Karmishev was sentenced to three years in a labor camp, and after some time, he was exiled to Kolyma. During this difficult period, with the family left without its head, full responsibility fell on the mother. The Karmisheva family first moved to Andijan, and later to Tashkent. Under these dire circumstances, Balkis Karmisheva was compelled to take up various jobs in different places. In 1936, Khalil Fatikhovich Karmishev was again imprisoned in Tashkent, this time accused of pan-Turkism, and was sentenced to five years of incarceration. He died while in prison.

Despite the complex political and social conditions of the time, Balkis Khalilovna Karmysheva did not cease her scientific pursuits and remained firmly committed to continuing her research activities. She began her professional career in the Kazakh SSR, working as a laboratory assistant at the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve in the Chimkent region and later as a teacher in a general education school. In 1946, she successfully graduated from the Faculty of History at Tashkent State University, a milestone that formally marked the beginning of her academic career in ethnography.

Following her marriage, Karmysheva relocated to Dushanbe, the capital of the Tajik SSR, where she



joined the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography under the Tajik branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Even before completing her university degree, she had been employed at the Institute of History of the Tajik Academy of Sciences, where in 1945 she began her research as a junior scholar. Her first major ethnographic focus was the Lakay, one of the most numerous and compactly settled Uzbek communities in southern Tajikistan, whose origins were unclear and could only be clarified through detailed ethnographic inquiry [4, p. 9].

She conducted fieldwork among the Lakay population in 1947 and again from 1948 to 1950. In 1950, she was admitted to the postgraduate program at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. As a result of her persistent scholarly efforts, in 1951 she successfully defended her candidate's dissertation entitled "An Ethnographic Study of Animal Husbandry among the Lakay", under the academic supervision of the renowned historian Dr. L. P. Potapov. This research later formed the basis for her first monograph, "The Uzbek-Lakay of Southern Tajikistan", published in 1954, which was widely recognized as a continuation of the best traditions of national ethnographic scholarship. Thanks to her broad intellectual perspective, Balkis Khalilovna was able to examine diverse aspects of traditional culture and demonstrate their direct relevance to the ethnic history of the peoples of the region [5, p. 38].

Until 1956, B. Kh. Karmysheva worked as an academic secretary and senior research fellow. The scholar had intended to study the Turkic-speaking populations of southern Tajikistan, in particular the Karluks, who lived in close proximity to Tajiks. However, the Presidium—specifically, B. G. Gafurov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan and an academician—did not approve of this research direction, deeming it appropriate to focus solely on the culture and way of life of the Tajik people in Tajikistan. As a result, Karmysheva was denied permission to pursue this topic. This situation clearly reflects the application of ideological restrictions to academic research during that period. Consequently, in 1956, Karmysheva was compelled to seek employment elsewhere and subsequently joined the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Following a positive response, she relocated to Moscow, where she continued her research in the southern regions of Tajikistan and in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan [2, p. 111].

Nevertheless, B.Kh. Karmysheva did not deviate from her chosen academic path and continued her research with consistency and academic rigor. In 1978, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation titled "The Ethnic History of the Southern Regions of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," earning the degree of

Doctor of Historical Sciences. From 1959 onwards, she headed the Central Asian Ethnographic Expedition of the Institute of Ethnography under the USSR Academy of Sciences. The fieldwork conducted within this expedition provided both practical and theoretical foundations for studying the historical development, economic structures, social organization, and cultural heritage of ethnic communities in the region. Karmysheva was recognized as a leading scholar who effectively combined large-scale empirical observation and fieldwork with rigorous academic analysis. She authored over 60 scientific articles and monographs. In her research, she was among the first to clearly articulate a key scholarly thesis regarding the development of medieval Central Asia: namely, that the interaction and integration between oasis populations and nomadic communities from the steppe zone played a decisive role in the economic, political, cultural, and ethnic formation of the Mawarannahr region. Drawing on scientific evidence, Karmysheva demonstrated that the concept of the "nomadic steppe" should not be confined solely to areas outside Mawarannahr, but also encompassed extensive steppe and semi-desert zones within the region itself. This approach enabled her to conduct a detailed analysis of the internal ethnic dynamics of Central Asia.

**DISCUSSION.** B.Kh. Karmysheva was one of the first female scholars to systematically study the formation processes of ethnic groups residing in the territories of modern-day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In her research, she placed special emphasis on analyzing the problems of ethnogenesis in close connection with historical, cultural, and economic factors. In her initial research, Karmysheva approached the issue of the origins of the Lokay people with considerable depth. She reconstructed their tribal and clan structure and conducted a comparative analysis of these formations with the ethnonyms of other Turkic ethnic groups. According to her findings, the closest parallels to the Lokay composition were found among ethnic groups from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Southern Siberia, particularly among the Tatars. This indicates that even in her early works, Karmysheva was oriented toward resolving fundamental questions.

In addition, the scholar conducted detailed studies of some of the most historically and ethnographically complex regions of Central Asia—geographic areas known as Northern Bactria, Northern Tokharistan, and Eastern Bukhara. She carried out extensive fieldwork in these regions, directly observing the ethnic composition, social structures, and cultural practices of the local populations. These investigations laid the groundwork for Karmysheva's major monograph titled "Essays on the Ethnic History of the Southern Regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Based on Ethnographic



Data)". In this monograph, not only is the area she referred to as her "beloved region" covered, but it presents an almost comprehensive picture of the population formation history of Central Asia as a whole. The monograph analyzes the formation of the ethnic composition of the southern regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in both historical dynamics and contemporary context. The unique field data forming the basis of the study were collected by the author over many years of direct observation and were enriched with written, archaeological, linguistic, and anthropological sources. In examining the processes of ethnic history in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the author focuses particular attention on various Uzbek ethnic groups, especially descendants of semi-nomadic Uzbek tribes. Additionally, sedentary Tajiks and Chagatai Uzbeks are studied as distinct ethnographic subjects.

Like several other ethnographers, B.Kh. Karmysheva emphasized that the formation of the Uzbek people occurred through the convergence of three major historical layers. Although these layers gradually intermingled over the centuries, by the early 20th century, they still existed as identifiable and distinct ethnographic units.

The first stratum consists of the earliest population layer formed by ancient Turkic tribes;

The second stratum includes the settled, primarily agrarian population of ancient oases, who spoke either Turkic or Persian languages;

The third stratum emerged as a result of the migration of nomadic tribes from the Dasht-i Qipchaq to Mawarannahr under the leadership of Shaybani Khan. It was this group that later provided the basis for the ethnonym "Uzbek." Within this layer, the Qongrats (Kungirats) held a distinctive position.

In her research on the issue of migrant population numbers, B. Kh. Karmysheva acknowledges that these groups constituted a quantitatively significant proportion. At the same time, she underscores the necessity of refraining from artificially inflating statistical data. According to her scholarly analysis, the ancestors of the Karakalpaks initially inhabited the regions along the Syr Darya River. As a result of subsequent migration processes, in the 18th century, a portion of the Karakalpak population moved southward from the areas surrounding the Aral Sea, Yangidarya, and Syr Darya, ultimately settling in the territories of Surkhandarya region.

In this context, Karmysheva arrived at an important conclusion: the formation of an ethnic unit is not determined solely by numerical dominance. If a given ethnic group or clan fails to establish a strong socio-economic foothold in a particular region, it cannot attain the status of an independent or major ethnic structure—even if it is large in numbers. A commonly observed pattern in historical retrospect is that smaller or weaker

tribes often became assimilated into more stable and powerful ethnic formations. For instance, the incorporation of certain sedentary groups living in Central Asia's oasis zones into the ranks of semi-nomadic Uzbeks further complicated the already intricate ethnic mosaic of the region.

This complexity becomes especially apparent in research conducted on the Qongrats. In her analysis of their origins, Karmysheva referred to genealogical and ethnographic data presented in R.G. Kuzeev's studies on the ethnic composition of the Bashkirs. She identified several Qongrat clans—Aylli, To'g'iz, Tulkichi, and Tirnakli—as being analogous to Bashkir tribal units. According to the researcher, such similarities may be remnants of fragmentation, dispersal, and reconfiguration of nomadic tribes in the medieval period. Nevertheless, Karmysheva did not discount the possibility of coincidence, and expressed her conclusions with scholarly caution, avoiding the presentation of uncertain ideas as absolute truths. This methodology reflects her academic integrity and may be interpreted as a critical re-evaluation of traditional ethnographic concepts.

Despite this careful approach, Karmysheva consistently returned to the hypothesis of the Mongol origins of the Qongrats. Ultimately, she advanced the following important scholarly argument:

"Whether the Qongrats (written as 'Kongrat' by the author) had Mongol or Turkic ethnic roots is not fundamentally significant for us. Even if a tribe was originally Mongol in the early stages of its history, by the time it migrated to Mawarannahr in the early 16th century, it had already undergone Turkicization in terms of language, culture, and ethnic composition. This means that, around the original Mongol nucleus, various fragments of Turkic tribes had gathered, and as a result, Mongol elements in this unity were preserved merely at the level of nomenclature."

B.X. Karmysheva's scholarly legacy includes a particularly notable body of research devoted to the social strata of khojas and sayyids, which continues to draw academic interest. The researcher classified these groups not as ethnic units, but rather within the framework of social and class-based categories. This approach, rooted in a complex and relatively underexplored theme within Soviet ethnography, was further challenged by limitations in available sources, which made in-depth analysis difficult. Nonetheless, based on newly acquired data, Karmysheva introduced significant corrections and clarifications to some prevailing theories. According to Karmysheva, khojas and sayyids were widespread among both Tajiks and Uzbeks. In certain cases, they were considered integral to the Tajik ethnic composition, while in others, they functioned as an inseparable part of Uzbek society's social structure [3, p. 148]. This observation suggests



that these groups were not rigidly defined by ethnicity, but instead evolved primarily through historical, religious, and social dynamics.

Karmysheva's body of work also reveals the complex relationship between scholarship and politics during her era. The concept of "social demand"—that is, the themes prescribed or encouraged by the state and ideological apparatus—had a direct influence on the formation of many research trajectories. Her scientific output reflects the ideological constraints of the Soviet period, including adherence to Marxist methodology, the interweaving of ethnography with themes of "national policy" and "interethnic relations," and the prominence of the concept of "survivals" (or remnants) within the academic discourse [7, p. 44].

At the same time, Karmysheva's ethnographic work was largely free from excessive ideological bias. Her field observations and collected data retained a high degree of scientific objectivity. For this reason, the empirical materials she gathered remain relevant today and continue to serve as a valuable foundation for contemporary studies of Central Asian ethnic groups.

**CONCLUSION.** The scholarly legacy of B.Kh. Karmysheva holds significant theoretical and practical value in the study of the ethnic history of Central Asia. Her extensive fieldwork, combined with historical, archaeological, linguistic, and anthropological sources, enabled a multilayered analysis of the region's ethnic processes within a complex historical context. In her works, the formation of the Uzbek people and other local groups, their historical strata, and the interactions between nomadic and sedentary communities are substantiated with well-founded empirical evidence. Her analyses of such distinct ethnographic and social units as the Qongrats, Karakalpaks, and the strata of khojas and sayyids reveal the intricate nature of ethnogenetic processes. They demonstrate that these processes should be explained not solely through numerical dominance or ethnic origin, but also through factors of socio-economic stability and cultural adaptation. Karmysheva's cautious and critical approach—particularly her restraint in drawing definitive

conclusions in cases of uncertainty—reflects both her scholarly integrity and methodological rigor.

Thus, B.Kh. Karmysheva occupies a distinguished place in history not only as a prominent representative of the Soviet ethnographic school, but also as a leading scholar who profoundly investigated the ethnogenetic history of the peoples of Central Asia, enriched its theoretical foundations, and whose work remains relevant for understanding contemporary ethnic processes.

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