

A NEW WAVE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN THE YEARS OF
INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract: After gaining independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan has witnessed significant advancements in historical and ethnographic studies, reflecting the new academic and ideological requirements of the time. Ethnographic research continued to develop, and the number of specialists in this field grew steadily. Along with the publication of new data on the history of our people, many earlier scientific works that had been published in Russian were translated into the Karakalpak language and made accessible to the general public. This process not only expanded the worldview of the population but also deepened interest in understanding their own cultural and historical heritage. This paper explores the new wave of ethnographic research conducted in Karakalpakstan during the years of independence. It highlights the contributions of scholars such as T.A. Jdanko, O. Yusupov, L.S. Tolstova, and X. Esbergenov, who significantly advanced the study of Karakalpak ethnogenesis, culture, and traditional practices. The article also examines fieldwork-based research, archaeological expeditions, and the training of young ethnographers at the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute, which collectively contributed to the enrichment of national ethnographic scholarship.

Main Body

After Uzbekistan gained independence, a new wave of ethnographic research began to flourish throughout the country, particularly in Karakalpakstan. The government's attention to the humanities and the restoration of national identity gave momentum to the development of ethnographic studies. During these years, new specialists emerged, and numerous studies were devoted to documenting and analyzing the culture, traditions, and daily life of the Karakalpak people. Moreover, several important scientific works that had previously been published in Russian were translated into the Karakalpak language, allowing a wider audience to access and appreciate them. This process not only broadened the public's worldview but also strengthened interest in exploring and preserving national history and heritage.

One of the most notable publications of this period was T.A. Jdanko's article "Historical and Ethnographic Essays on the Karakalpaks," published in the *Amudarya* journal in 1992. The article discussed the current state of research on the ethnogenesis of the Karakalpaks, analyzing the ethnonyms of Karakalpak tribes and clans as essential sources for understanding their origins. It also provided new insights into related peoples such as the Pechenegs and others.¹ Around the same time, historian O. Yusupov published "On the First Karakalpak Ethnographic Expedition," which offered a detailed account of the specialists who took part in ethnographic expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s. Drawing from earlier articles and archival materials, Yusupov provided valuable data on the difficulties faced by researchers in gathering materials, financial issues, and

¹ Жданко Т.А. Қарақалпақлардың тарихый-этнографиялық очеркleri.// Әмиядәрья. 1992. №4-5. 5-6.

the contributions of scholars like Q. Ayimbetov and N.A. Baskakov, whose works became fundamental for later ethnographic research.²

During this period, professors and instructors of the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute guided their students in conducting fieldwork, and their findings were published in the newspaper Qoraqalpog'iston Yoshlarī under the section "My First Ethnographic Notes." These student-written pieces contained fascinating information about little-known historical figures who formed the foundation of Karakalpak national culture. Many of the first-year students from the history and geography departments collected oral accounts from elders and local storytellers about the history and ethnography of the Karakalpaks. The best of these records, which often contained elements of legend and folklore, were deemed worthy of public attention and published in the press.

The magazine Orol Qizlari published detailed articles about Lada Sergeyevna Tolstova — the daughter of the renowned scholar Sergey Pavlovich Tolstov, who introduced Karakalpak history to the wider world. According to her classmate and colleague, the ethnographer M.M. Rozhanskaya, Lada was destined for the Faculty of History at Moscow State University, specifically the Department of Ethnography. Having graduated with a gold medal from school, she entered the university and faced demanding years of study, motivated by her desire to uphold her father's scholarly legacy. During 1945–1946, she actively participated in archaeological excavations at Tuproq Qala under the leadership of T.A. Jdanko and worked as part of the Karakalpak ethnographic detachment. Her meticulous methodological approach to fieldwork laid the foundation for her lifelong research on the history and ethnography of the Karakalpaks.³

Historian L. Markova and ethnographer T.A. Jdanko also wrote about L.S. Tolstova, emphasizing her unique interdisciplinary method, which combined folklore, history, linguistics, and archaeology. According to Jdanko, Tolstova's work continued the pre-revolutionary scholarly traditions established by A.N. Veselovskiy and D.N. Anuchin, while advancing them in the mid-20th century. Her contributions served as a bridge between classical and modern ethnographic scholarship.⁴

In November 1997, the extended academic council of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan held a special session dedicated to L.S. Tolstova. She was recognized as a worthy successor of prominent ethnographers such as Anuchin, Tolstov, Potekhina, and Jdanko, and as a scholar capable of integrating diverse scientific disciplines to solve historical and ethnographic problems. Tolstova's legacy, particularly her studies on the peoples of the Aral–Caspian region, remains highly valued not only in Karakalpakstan but also internationally. To honor her contributions, it

² Юсупов О. Дәслепки қарақалпақ этнографиялық экспедициясы ҳаққында.// Эмиўдәрәя. №6-7. 1992. 111-113-бетлер.

³ Мениң дәслепки этнографиялық жазыўларым.// «Қарақалпақстан жаслары» 25-февраль 1993-жыл.

⁴ Жданко Т.А. Л.С.Толстова.// Арал қызлары. №1-2. 129-135-бетлер.

was proposed that her unpublished materials be collected, systematized, and preserved in a dedicated library.⁵

By the end of 1997, under the supervision of Candidate of Historical Sciences X. Esbergenov, a number of ethnographic and archaeological field studies were conducted. These studies demonstrated that the Karakalpaks were not migrants from the Volga or Crimea regions, but rather an indigenous population that had developed and preserved diverse forms of local culture in the Aral region. The findings also confirmed that before the spread of Islam, the Karakalpaks practiced animistic beliefs — worshipping animals and nature.⁶

In 1998, new ethnographic expeditions enriched the study of Karakalpak origins and ancient Amudarya channels with additional data. Researchers identified new ethnonyms and documented burial customs, environmental practices, folk medicine, and agrarian traditions. Materials about artisans, musicians, and folk poets were also gathered.

In 2000, the Ethnography Department, led by X. Esbergenov, carried out research on “The Material and Spiritual Culture of the Karakalpaks in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries.” One of the significant findings revealed that the Karakalpaks, in close contact with neighboring peoples, had long practiced a complex economy that included agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, and hunting. Their material culture — dwellings, clothing, and jewelry — reflected adaptation to their economic activities. The department also studied Karakalpak ornamentation and decorative art, while comparative analysis of archaeological and ethnographic materials helped trace the evolution of traditional practices and cultural exchange with other nations. As a result, sixteen scholarly articles were published, authored by X. Esbergenov, S. Esbergenova, A. Bijanova, and others.⁷

During these years, ethnographers continued publishing research articles and presenting at conferences. Among the prominent contributors were A. Doniyorov, T.A. Jdanko, X. Esbergenov, A. Otemisov, R. Kamalova, N. Tilevbergenova, T. Esbergenova, S. Esbergenova, Z. Kurbanova, A. Bijanova, and E. Kolbanova. Anniversaries of leading scholars such as T.A. Jdanko, L.S. Tolstova, X. Esbergenov, and A. Otemisov were celebrated nationwide, and the development of ethnography as a field was covered widely in the press and on television.

Despite being a complex discipline, ethnography continues to attract dedicated young researchers in Karakalpakstan. These emerging scholars see themselves as successors to the great figures of Karakalpak ethnography, striving to study and preserve the rich cultural heritage of their nation for future generations.

⁵ Есбергенов Х.Е. Жизнь, посвященная этнографии народов Арало-Каспийского региона.// ОзРИАҚҚБниң Хабаршысы. 1998. №1. 174-176-бетлер.

⁶ Есбергенов Х. Некоторые итоги полевых этнографических исследований.// Материалы сессии ученого совета, посвященный итогам научно-исследовательских работ 1998 года. Н. 1999. 6,21-бет.

⁷ Есбергенов Х. Некоторые итоги этнографических исследований 2000 г.// Материалы Научной сессии Ученого Совета, посвященной итогам научно-исследовательских работ 2000 года. Н. 2001. 19-20-бетлер.