

AYNAZAR OTEMISOV AND THE FORMATION OF THE KARAKALPAK SCHOOL OF ETHNOGRAPHY

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Abstract: This paper explores the life, academic career, and scientific contributions of Aynazar Otemisov (1934–1977), one of the most prominent representatives of the Karakalpak school of ethnography. His extensive research on the traditional culture, crafts, and everyday life of the Karakalpak people significantly enriched the ethnographic and historical studies of the region.

Introduction

Aynazar Otemisov, a distinguished scholar of Karakalpak ethnography, was born on December 23, 1934, in the Karauzak state farm of the Karauzak District. After completing secondary education, he entered the Faculty of History at Alisher Navoi State University in Samarkand in 1953, graduating in 1958. Following his graduation, Otemisov began his professional career as a secondary school teacher.

In April 1959, he joined the Karakalpak branch of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge as an inspector-methodologist. From February 1960, he worked as a junior researcher in the Archaeology and Ethnography Department of the Institute of History, Language, and Literature named after N. Davkharayev under the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. Between 1965 and 1968, he completed postgraduate studies and later served as a senior researcher until 1977.

Academic Contributions

In 1971, Otemisov defended his candidate dissertation titled “The Life and Culture of Fishermen on the Southern Shores of the Aral Sea.” His scholarly interests were focused on the history and ethnography of the Karakalpak people. His major works include “Byt i kultura rybakov poberezhya Yuzhnogo Arala” (1970), “The Fishermen of Karakalpakstan” (1979), and “The Crafts and Trades of the Karakalpaks” (1991). In addition to his monographs, Otemisov authored more than thirty academic articles published in various scholarly journals and edited volumes.

Beginning in 1977, he worked as a senior lecturer and later as an associate professor at Karakalpak State University, where he played an important role in educating and mentoring young scholars.

Scientific School and Successors

Under Otemisov’s supervision, many researchers developed into professional ethnographers and defended their candidate dissertations. Among them were R.S. Kamalova, N.A. Tlewbergenova, E.Y. Kalbanova, A.Y. Bijanova, Z.I. Kurbanova, T.Kh. Esbergenova, and S.Kh. Esbergenova. Their research topics encompassed a wide range of subjects, including traditional beliefs, household rituals, labor education, and dwelling types of the Karakalpak people and neighboring communities. The results of these studies were published in academic journals, collected volumes, and conference proceedings, contributing to the advancement of ethnographic science in Karakalpakstan.



Collaboration and the Development of Ethnography in Karakalpakstan

At the end of 1958, Kh. Esbergenov was sent to the Miklukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow for postgraduate studies. During his time in Moscow, he attended lectures by leading ethnographers such as S.A. Tokarev, G.F. Debets, M.O. Kosven, and M.G. Levin, and mastered ethnographic fieldwork techniques under the guidance of G.P. Snesev. Over the years, Esbergenov, together with Academician S. Kamalov and other colleagues, made invaluable contributions to the development of ethnography in Karakalpakstan.

The Karakalpak School of Ethnography was established through the dedicated efforts of these scholars. Their collective research demonstrated that the Karakalpaks are descendants of ancient local tribes who emerged as a distinct ethnic group along the southern shores of the Aral Sea in the 10th century through the unification of various tribal communities. These findings were presented and discussed at numerous academic conferences held in cities such as Nukus, Tashkent, Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Almaty, Bishkek, Moscow, Omsk, Ufa, Nalchik, Makhachkala, Chernivtsi, and Yoshkar-Ola, and were published in the corresponding conference proceedings.

Field Expeditions and Ethnographic Data

Between 1960 and 1977, while working at the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Otemisov actively participated in numerous historical and ethnographic expeditions under the supervision of renowned scholars including T.A. Zhdanko, U.Kh. Shalekenov, L.S. Tolstova, and Kh.E. Esbergenov. These expeditions covered the districts of Karakalpakstan, as well as regions such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, the Kyzylorda province of Kazakhstan, and the Kunya-Urgench district of Turkmenistan. The materials collected during these expeditions formed the empirical basis for many significant ethnographic and historical studies, including Otemisov's own publications, which have provided an enduring contribution to the understanding of the cultural heritage of the Karakalpak people.

Conclusion

Aynazar Otemisov's scholarly activity laid the foundation for the Karakalpak ethnographic school and established a lasting intellectual legacy. His research not only preserved the traditional culture of the Karakalpaks but also integrated it into the broader framework of Central Asian ethnography. His students and followers continue his mission, enriching the scientific understanding of the historical and cultural identity of the Karakalpak people.

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