

**MIGRATION OF TURKISH PEOPLES TO TURKESTAN, MALGUZAR MOUNTAIN
RANGES AND MIRZACHUL
(18th – first half of the 19th century)**

Umurzak Alibekov Yuldashevich

Lecturer department of history Gulistan State University, Uzbekistan

umurzokalibekov@gmail.com

Abstract: This article analyzes the migration processes of Turkic peoples to the regions of Turkestan, the Molguzar mountain ranges, and the Mirzachul steppe during the first half of the 18th and 19th centuries, based on historical sources. It examines the influence of climatic changes, political instability, and military invasions on population movements and their impact on the ethnodemographic situation. The study also highlights the integration of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, and other Turkic groups into the local population and the resulting ethnic transformations.

Keywords: Turkestan, Mirzachul, Molguzar Mountains, migration, Turkic peoples, ethnodemography, historical process, Dzungars, nomads, ethnic composition.

Introduction. The study of the ethnic history of Central Asia is closely connected with the region's natural environment, political transformations, and socio-economic conditions. During the first half of the 18th and 19th centuries, large-scale migration processes occurred throughout the area, significantly influencing the demographic and ethnocultural structure of the region. In this period, the territories surrounding the Molguzar mountain ranges, Turkestan, and the Mirzacho'l steppe became important zones of settlement and interaction among nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkic peoples.

These migrations were largely the result of complex interrelated factors. On the one hand, natural and climatic changes—particularly those associated with the end of the so-called “Little Ice Age”—led to ecological stress, famine, and the collapse of pastoral economies. On the other hand, political instability caused by the Dzungar invasions, conflicts among neighboring khanates, and the expansionist policies of the Qing Empire further intensified the displacement of Turkic tribes. As a consequence, large groups of Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Karakalpaks, Kipchaks, Uighurs, and other Turkic peoples were compelled to seek refuge in safer and more fertile areas such as Mirzachul and its surrounding foothills.

Some of these migrating communities remained temporarily, while others permanently integrated into the sedentary population, gradually assimilating culturally and linguistically. This process not only altered the ethnic composition of the region but also reshaped its socio-economic and cultural life, leaving a lasting impact on the formation of the modern Uzbek people and the broader demographic history of Central Asia.

The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the historical dynamics of ethnic interactions in the Turkestan–Mirzachul region. Based on historical records, ethnographic observations, and archival materials, the study analyzes the causes, directions, and consequences of the migration of Turkic peoples, highlighting its decisive role in the ethnodemographic development of the region.

METHOD. The research is based on historical, ethnographic, and analytical methods. Historical materials such as chronicles, archival documents, and scientific works of Central Asian scholars were used to study the migration processes of Turkic peoples during the 18th–19th centuries. Ethnographic information collected from modern field observations and oral reports helped to identify the traces of ancient Turkic groups in the present-day population of the region.



The comparative and geographical method was applied to determine the main directions of migration and the influence of natural and climatic conditions on the settlement of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples. In addition, demographic and statistical data were analyzed to show how these migrations affected the ethnic structure of Turkestan, the Molguzar mountain ranges, and the Mirzachul area.

By combining different methods, this research provides a general understanding of the historical circumstances, causes, and consequences of the migration of Turkic peoples. The multidisciplinary approach ensures that the results are objective and based on reliable historical evidence.

RESULTS. Historical circumstances, as well as natural and anthropogenic factors, had a significant impact on the ethnic composition of the sedentary population — sometimes leading to the addition of new ethnic components, and at other times causing the displacement or forced migration of the indigenous inhabitants. An analysis of historical data shows that whenever a state or region experienced peace, stability, and prosperity, sedentary culture flourished and the population became enriched through the integration of new ethnic layers. As in other parts of Central Asia, during the mid-18th to 19th centuries, the region under study also witnessed intense migratory processes.

In our opinion, toward the end of the “Little Ice Age,” climatic fluctuations created numerous difficulties for economic life. Due to the failure of food crops to ripen, large numbers of livestock perished, which in turn drove pastoral communities to seek wealth through military raids and plunder. As a result, various Turkic peoples — including Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, and Uighurs — migrated and settled in the villages located within the Turkestan mountain ranges, as well as in the foothill zones and along the edges of the Mirzacho‘l steppe.

DISCUSSION. In the early 15th century, the Jungars (also known as Oirats or Kalmyks) appeared along the eastern borders of the state ruled by Abulkhayr Khan (1428–1468). After defeating his army in 1457, they repeatedly launched plundering raids into the Dasht-i Qipchaq and even into the Mawarannahr region. From the mid-18th century onward, Jungar attacks against the Kazakhs became a recurring and systematic phenomenon. In 1683–1684, the Jungars devastated the city of Sayram and even posed a serious threat to the Fergana Valley.

The conclusion of the Jungaria–China peace treaty in 1723 led to the outbreak of large-scale military actions against the Kazakhs. That year is remembered in Kazakh oral tradition as “Aqtaban Shubyrundy,” meaning “the years of great calamity.” The sudden and ruthless invasion of the Jungars, combined with their military superiority, forced the Kazakhs to abandon their livestock, tents, and belongings and flee. Many inhabitants of northern Kazakhstan sought refuge by moving into the southern regions of Russia and the territories of Western Siberia.

In the south, several clans of the Great and Middle Zhuz crossed the Syr Darya River and retreated toward the city of Khujand. Many of the Middle Zhuz tribes moved toward Samarkand, while the Small Zhuz, bypassing Sayram, headed in the direction of Khiva and Bukhara. The Jungar invasion resulted in the mass destruction of the population: thousands of Kazakhs drowned while attempting to cross the Talas, Borolday, Arys, Chirchik, and Syr Darya rivers.

When speaking about the “Aqtaban Shubyrundy” period, the Great and Middle Zhuz Kazakhs often recall the phrase “Alqa kól sulama,” meaning “they fell exhausted from hunger and fatigue on the shores of Lake Alqa.” In their desperate search for survival, Kazakhs entered the cities and villages of Central Asia, where their presence sometimes disrupted the lives of sedentary populations, while they themselves endured severe suffering and displacement.

As noted by A.N. Levshin in his research, “During these years, the Kazakhs perished from famine; men, in their despair, would even abandon their wives and children.”



According to modern researchers who analyzed information obtained from local informants, during the years of the Jungar invasion many Kazakhs settled along the middle course of the Syr Darya River, particularly in the regions of Chimkent and Chordara. By the 1850s, as the ecological and political situation improved, the majority of these Kazakhs returned to Kazakhstan, leaving only a few families in the area under study. Later, during the process of developing the Mirzacho'l steppe, new waves of migration from southern Kazakhstan (present-day Turkistan region) moved into the central parts of Uzbekistan, particularly the Syrdarya and Jizzakh regions.

According to the research of academician N. Tursunov, the Kazakhs who had settled in the villages of northern Tajikistan eventually assimilated with the local population — becoming either “Tajikized” or “Uzbekized,” depending on the ethnic environment of the area.

Modern informants report that the Kerei Uvoq group, who initially spent winters along the Syr Darya and summers in the Kazakh steppes, later settled near the Yangimazor area close to Khavast. Over time, they began to live permanently around the Sarmich region. After establishing marital relations with Rustam Bek, the ruler of Uratapa, who gave them his daughter in marriage, they were granted Uvoq — the westernmost village of Uratapa — as a gift.

According to these accounts, after Rustam Bek's downfall, part of the Uvoq group moved to the present-day Uvol village in Bulungur district, where they continue to reside. Russian sources state that the Uvoqs were part of the Middle Zhuz during the time of Abulkhayr Khan and belonged to the Kerei tribe. The term “Uvoq” is derived from the word “usak,” meaning “small” or “minor people.”

The Kerei Uvoqs were divided into two main branches — Dörva and Karkaraly. The Dörva were further subdivided into the Muratali and Eshali clans, while the Karkaralys included the descendants of Eshmurot and his five sons. Modern ethnographic reports indicate that the Uvoqs are divided into the Dörva and Otbosar groups. The Dörvas trace their lineage to their elder ancestor Batir and consist of the following subgroups: Nadir, Sarson, Uyvli, Oymok, Durim, Korpa, Olaybaytal, Qonokkhur, and Mulla. The younger brother Otbosar, who was born on the road, is said to have given rise to two subgroups: Urukhkhur and Bokimachoyi.

During the 1950s, in connection with the development of the Mirzacho'l steppe, the Uvoq families settled in the Boyovut, Khavast, and Mirzaobod districts of Syrdarya region, as well as in several settlements along the Tashkent–Chinoz route. They venerate the shrine of Uvoq Ota located in the Uvoq village of the Ohangaron valley. Uvoq Ota's real name was Ubaydulla Ota, a disciple (murid) of Shaykh Sulaymon Boqirgoni — known among the people as Hakim Ota.

According to the 1903 report of agronomist Poniatovsky, seven villages of the Qarapchi community located along the Syr Darya River were studied, and within them a settlement of the Jetti Uru (Seven Clans) was identified. The Jetti Uru represented one of the three main ethnic groups of the Small Kazakh Zhuz and was divided into the following clans: Tabiyin, Tama, Kerderi, Kerayit, Jagalbaily, Tilaw, and Ramazan.

Today, the village of Jettiuru on the banks of the Syr Darya is inhabited mainly by Uzbek O'yuvli families. The ethnonym “Jettiuru” should be understood as deriving from the name of the Kazakh clan that once lived in this area and migrated from here around the 1850s.

According to academician K. Shoniyozov, the Choproshli were originally a clan belonging to the Great Kazakh Zhuz. They migrated into Central Asia during the 17th–18th centuries and eventually became part of various Uzbek tribal communities.

Our observations indicate that representatives of the Choproshli can be found among different ethnic groups such as the Sirg'ali, Qorasirak, Kazakh tribal groups, Uzbek Boyovut, Uzbek Qirq, Paymardlik, and others. The process of enriching the sedentary population's ethnic composition



through the inclusion of new ethnic layers has been noted in ethnographic studies of the Nurota oasis — a region characterized by intense interethnic interaction.

These findings align with the ethno-political developments observed in the Uratpa principality and the Mirzacho'l area, demonstrating that Kazakh, Karakalpak, and other Turkic ethnic elements gradually assimilated into the composition of the local population.

During the 16th–19th centuries, the weakening of central state authority in Mawarannahr led to continuous raids and incursions from the Dasht-i Qipchaq and southern regions. In 1580–1581, the Kazakhs launched military campaigns and captured the cities of Tashkent and Samarkand. However, Abdullah Khan defeated the Kazakh forces and compelled them to retreat.

According to Hafiz Tanish's Sharafnoma-yi Shahi, the Bukhara Khan Abdullah II (1557–1598) maintained friendly relations with the Kazakh sultans. Under the terms of their agreement, the Kazakh rulers transformed from dangerous rivals into strong allies, which reduced the threat of attacks on Mawarannahr from the north. The ruler of Tashkent made use of the Kazakh sultans in his struggle against the rebellious Barak Khans.

In return for their military assistance, Abdullah II granted the Kazakh Sultan Shigai Khan an ulus (territory) near Khujand in June 1581. Upon hearing of Abdullah Khan's death in 1598, Tauakkal Khan launched a campaign, capturing Akhsi, Andijan, Tashkent, part of the Fergana Valley, and advancing as far as Miyonkol near Samarkand. However, when Tauakkal Khan marched on Bukhara with an army of 70–80 thousand men, Pir Muhammad Khan confronted him with a force of 15 thousand, defeated the Kazakh army, and expelled them from Mawarannahr.

Such migratory processes taking place in Central Asia can also be observed in the example of the territories inhabited by the Kyrgyz people. The main body of the Kyrgyz originally lived around the Yenisei River during the Middle Ages. They gradually moved southwestward and, by the early 16th century, had reached the territory corresponding to their present ethnic homeland, settling in the areas of the Alai mountain ranges.

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Kalmyks launched fierce raids and invasions into Kyrgyz lands, forcing a large portion of the Kyrgyz population to migrate into the Fergana Valley.

According to Professor U. Abdullaev's analysis, the Kyrgyz tribal and clan groups were historically divided into three major branches: the right wing ("on"), the left wing ("sol"), and the "ichkilik" (inner) Kyrgyz. These groups were distributed throughout the Fergana Valley based on traditional clan structures. In the eastern part of the Fergana Valley, the ichkilik Kyrgyz included subgroups such as Bostan, Qipchaq, Tayit, Nayman, Mangush, Avat, and Kesak, as well as the on (right) and sol (left) branches, which comprised tribes like Bagish, Mogol, Munduz, and Basiz.

Following the defeat of the Jungar nomads by the Chinese in 1756–1758, the majority of the Kyrgyz returned to their traditional summer pastures located in the northern Tianshan region (the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan). However, a portion of the Kyrgyz population who had settled in the mountainous regions of the Fergana Valley, including the Turkestan and Molguzar mountain ranges, remained there permanently.

Some ethnic groups of the Kyrgyz in the Fergana Valley also spread widely into neighboring regions. Comparative analyses of the works of ethnographers N. Tursunov and V. Bushkov, who studied the ethnic composition of northern Tajikistan, and T. Salimov, who researched the population formation of the Zomin district, reveal that the tribal composition of the Kyrgyz currently living in the mountainous areas of Shahrison, Zomin, and Bakhmal (particularly in the villages of Jadid and Teraklisoy) corresponds closely to that of the Kyrgyz tribes residing in the



eastern part of the Fergana Valley. This indicates that intensive migration processes also took place in these regions.

The Kyrgyz gradually settled in the villages and surrounding areas of the Turkestan mountain ranges over the course of several centuries (18th–19th centuries). The fact that they have preserved their ethnic unity, language, and many aspects of their traditional culture up to the present day attests to their strong historical and cultural continuity.

By this stage of the historical period, another ethnic component — the Karakalpaks — had entered the region under study. According to early sources, in the 16th century the Karakalpaks were settled along the middle course of the Syr Darya River. During the first quarter of the 18th century, as a result of the Jungar invasions, the Karakalpaks living in this area were forced to migrate in search of peace, moving toward the southern part of the Tashkent oasis, the northwestern and eastern regions of the Khiva Khanate, and other territories.

In these circumstances, the Karakalpak leaders were compelled to negotiate with the Russian government under Peter I about becoming vassals. Dissatisfied with this situation, the Kazakh Khan Abulkhayr launched a military campaign in 1743 along the lower course of the Syr Darya and dealt a devastating blow to the Karakalpaks. Deprived of their possessions, a large portion of the Karakalpaks moved and settled along the southern shores of the Aral Sea, while others migrated along the Syr Darya to the Zarafshan oasis, the southern slopes of the Nurota Mountains, and still others to the Tashkent oasis and the Mirzacho'l region.

At the same time as the Kazakhs and Karakalpaks, the Kipchaks who had lived along the banks of the Syr Darya River and adjacent routes also fled from the Kalmyks and settled in the Mirzacho'l region. In the densely populated Zarafshan oasis of the Bukhara Khanate, particularly in the Miyankul area (between Samarkand and Bukhara), a significant portion of the population consisted of the Khitoy-Kipchaks.

In 1745, the Khitoy-Kipchaks of Miyankul, under the leadership of Iboydulloh Bi, rose in rebellion against Abulfayz Khan. Unable to suppress the uprising, Abulfayz Khan sought assistance from Nadir Shah. The punitive detachment sent by Nadir Shah, commanded by Muhammad Rahim Khan and supported by artillery, defeated the rebels and pursued them as far as the borders of the Fergana Valley.

According to ethnographer L.S. Tolstova's analysis, although the majority of the "Upper Karakalpaks" migrated to the Fergana Valley during the 18th century, this migration process continued into the early 19th century.

As a result of the Jungar invasions, Nadir Shah's punitive campaigns, and regional conflicts, parts of the Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kipchak, and Pashsha populations moved from the Mirzacho'l area toward the foothills of the Turkestan Mountains. In the village of Yakkatut (Jakkatut) of the Zomin district, Karakalpaks had previously lived; however, during the process of developing the Mirzacho'l steppe, the entire population of this village was relocated to the desert area.

Similarly, in the village of Chiyali in the Khavast district, representatives of five Karakalpak zhuz (tribal unions) settled after fleeing the Jungar invasions. They trace their lineage to the Rajab branch of the Uzbek Yuz tribe. The Besh Zhuz (Five Unions) were divided into three branches: Karakalpaks, Miyankals, and Chaganiyans. Initially, the Besh Zhuz settled in the village of Samgar near the city of Khujand; later, 28 households moved to the area around the village of Balandchaqir in the Yangiobod district, and subsequently resettled in the village of Chiyali.

Due to the intense ethnopolitical processes that took place in Central Asia, from the second half of the 18th century onward, a large part of the Muslim population of Eastern Turkestan—defeated in their struggle against the Chinese rulers—migrated to the Fergana Valley and other regions of present-day Uzbekistan.



Through the territory of the Kokand Khanate, groups of Uyghurs settled in the village of Kal along the Syr Darya River, while communities from Kashgar established themselves in the village of Paymard. In addition, some groups known as akhuns found among the populations of various towns and villages also represent ethnic elements that originated from Eastern Turkestan. Thus, during the Jungar invasion of Central Asia, the territory of the Kazakh Khanate served as a strategic base of operations. The Jungar incursions brought about severe political consequences in the region and triggered complex ethnopolitical transformations.

In our view, toward the end of the “Little Ice Age,” climatic fluctuations created numerous difficulties for economic life. The failure of food crops to ripen led to the mass death of livestock, compelling pastoral tribes to seek wealth through military campaigns and plunder. As a result, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, and other Turkic peoples migrated and settled in the villages situated along the foothills of the Turkestan and Molguzar mountain ranges and the edges of the Mirzacho‘l steppe, thereby influencing the region’s ethnodemographic composition.

Ultimately, these historical developments demonstrate that the area under study remained a relatively peaceful and stable region, which in turn attracted various Turkic groups and contributed to its rich and diverse ethnic history.

CONCLUSION. The study of the migration processes that took place in Turkestan, the Molguzar mountain ranges, and the Mirzacho‘l region during the first half of the 18th–19th centuries reveals that natural, political, and socio-economic factors jointly shaped the demographic and ethnic landscape of Central Asia. Climatic fluctuations following the end of the “Little Ice Age,” the Jungar invasions, and regional political instability forced many Turkic pastoral groups — including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Karakalpaks, Kipchaks, and Uyghurs — to migrate southward in search of safer and more fertile lands.

These migrations were not merely spontaneous population movements but complex historical processes that contributed to the ethnodemographic transformation of the region. The interaction between nomadic and sedentary communities led to mutual cultural adaptation, linguistic exchange, and the emergence of new ethnic components within the sedentary Uzbek population. In particular, the Mirzacho‘l steppe, the Turkestan foothills, and the Molguzar mountain zones became key centers of settlement where ethnic integration occurred over several generations. The results of the research confirm that migration was one of the decisive factors in shaping the ethnic diversity of Central Asia. The historical experience of these processes demonstrates how climatic, political, and economic pressures can lead to new forms of coexistence and cultural synthesis. Therefore, the study of such migrations not only provides valuable insight into the formation of the Uzbek nation but also contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of ethnic and demographic development in the region.

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