

# ETHNOGENESIS AND HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF THE QURAMA ETHNIC GROUP IN THE TASHKENT OASIS

Maftuna Abdulazizovna Ibragimova  
A Teacher of Angren University, Uzbekistan  
E-mail: [abdulazizovna1789@gmail.com](mailto:abdulazizovna1789@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The article provides general and statistical information about the origin and formation history of the Qurama ethnic group living in the Tashkent oasis, Ohangaron valley, and the town of Angren from a scientific-historical perspective. Historical data were derived from the works of Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Russian historians and ethnographers. Through an alternative hermeneutic method, the authors' statements were analyzed, and their conclusions are reflected in the article.

**Keywords:** Qurama ethnic group, Angren town, Ohangaron valley, Jungar invasion, ethnos, subethnic group, main ethnic group, meta-ethnic group, Qurama dialect, composite people, Qurama uyezd, Uzbek Quramas.

## Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving era, various nations and ethnic groups coexist around the world. Some of these groups form the indigenous population of large states, while others are being absorbed and assimilated into macro-ethnic entities. Historically, the foundation of these groups is formed by ethnos, or people, which holds a vital place in the ethnic composition of humanity. The complexity of this structure is tied to the emergence of other ethnic formations. For instance, a subethnic group refers to a population that has settled in a specific area and possesses not only cultural and linguistic characteristics but also elements of shared ethnic self-awareness. Subethnic groups exhibit fewer ethnic traits compared to the main ethnic community. Their distinctiveness is often linked to their origin. In some cases, they may include former ethnic groups that have gradually lost their primary ethnic identity but still acknowledge their shared community with others. Alternatively, they might represent social communities with unique cultural traits. However, the criteria for distinguishing them are often behavioral, highlighting their retained connection to a particular ethnic group while differing somewhat from their surrounding environment.

Thus, the conclusion derived from the structural organization of ethnos is that an individual can simultaneously belong to multiple ethnic communities at various levels. For example, someone may identify as Russian (main ethnic group), Don Cossack (subethnic group), and Slavic (meta-ethnic group) while collectively referring to themselves as Russian.

One such subethnic group is the Qurama people. The Qurama population is primarily concentrated along the Angren River in the southeastern part of Tashkent region's Ohangaron



valley. According to informant A. Razzoqov, they also reside in certain villages of Andijan region and in Bakhmal district of Jizzakh region. Researchers hold diverse opinions regarding their origins<sup>1</sup>.

According to Radlov, the Qurama people (in Uzbek—Qurama, which literally means "formed" or "assembled") are considered to have originated from Uzbek and Kazakh tribes and clans, classified as steppe settlers living in intermediate zones inhabited by nomads and Sarts. In terms of anthropological type and certain aspects of their lifestyle, some of their characteristics resemble those of Kazakhs.

Even their language, in terms of structure and morphology, has been considered very close to the Kazakh language since the 20th century. This was clearly observed during research conducted in the Ohangaron and Angren regions in the 1990s<sup>2</sup>.

Due to their complex origins, the 18th-century Russian researcher I. Andreev also wrote in his work:

“We cannot say much about this new composite people. What we do know is that neither the Tashkentians, nor the Khachkarliks, nor the Bukharians recognize them as an established community. It appears they migrated from other places, with some considering them fugitives or escaped bandits. As their numbers grew, they began occupying cities of Bukhara that had neither armies nor rulers.

The Angren region, situated beyond the Chirchiq River flowing into the Syr Darya, borders Tashkent and Kokand. Their population does not exceed ten thousand; they possess sufficient livestock and crops. Under the control of the Kokand bey, nine cities are located about 50 kilometers from Tashkent. These are:

1. Pskent, home to eight hundred households;
2. Keriyschi, considered a fortress city;
3. Sharukiya, subordinate to Khodja governance;
4. Buka, with one thousand households;
5. Muratali;
6. Kireyt Baksu;
7. Koraqtay;
8. Kalai Shtamp;
9. Pangalar.

In these cities, the communities have winter shelters. In the summer, they relocate to the outskirts of the cities for farming and livestock rearing, while maintaining sufficiently strong guards in their towns”<sup>3</sup>.

M. Terentyev, in his work, states:

“About 600 years ago, the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) people descended into the Iloq Valley (modern Ohangaron and Angren regions, Tashkent oasis), abandoning their nomadic lifestyle and transitioning to a sedentary way of life. They engaged in settled living, not in isolated hamlets

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<sup>1</sup> Abdumalik Razzoqov. “Ohangaron gavharlari”. Toshkent-2018.

<sup>2</sup> Радлов, Василий Васильевич. Этнографический обзор тюркских племен Южной Сибири и Джунгарии / перевод с немецкого ; [сочинение] академика В. Радлова. — Томск : Типо-литография Михайлова и Макушина, 1887. — v

<sup>3</sup> Н.Андреев., “Описания среней орды киргис-кайсаков”, 1785 й



but as entire villages. Gradually, they forgot their tribal affiliations and began to adopt the collective name 'Kurama.'"

As we can see, M. Terentyev associates the emergence of the Qurama people with the transition of the Kazakhs to a sedentary lifestyle. He emphasizes that the Kazakhs, over time, lost their long-standing tribal structure and nomadic lifestyle, embracing settled living. This transition led to the dissolution of tribal lineage, assimilation into the culture of the sedentary local population, and the birth of a new ethnic identity. This process involved blending with another ethnic community—the local population—ultimately giving rise to a distinct ethnic group<sup>4</sup>.

Certainly, the formation of any specific ethnic community requires time. A. Maksheyev is one of the researchers who wrote about the origins of a mixed population derived from Kazakhs, which later assimilated with Sarts and Uzbeks, earning the name of a composite people. In his work "Geographical, Ethnographic, and Statistical Materials of the Turkestan Region", he states:

"In the settlements along the Angren River, the Qurama people reside. It is said that these communities were established about a hundred years ago by three hundred nomadic Kazakh clans. These Kyrgyz (Kazakh) people, living in extreme poverty and unable to migrate, settled in 'otakhonas' (stables) near the Sarts or outside cities and engaged in farming as much as they could. Through intermingling with the Sarts and possibly Uzbeks, various new groups emerged. As a result, they became known as 'Qurama,' meaning united or mixed. According to the local population, the final merging took place around 80 years ago.

Based on the information I gathered from Tashkent, the composite population of Kazakhs is composed of the following clans: Tama-Alshin, Kerderi, Jagalbayli, Kereit, Teleu, Argyn (Kanjigali), Dulat (Uysyn), and Bestamgali (a division of Jalair)," he explains.

As we can see, Maksheyev also highlights in his work that the origins of these composite communities trace back to Kazakhs, further developed through interactions with Uzbeks<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Терентьев М.А. Статические очерки Среднеазиатской России. //«Записки Российского географического общества». Т. IV.—1878

<sup>5</sup> Машкеев А.И. Географические, этнографические и статические материалы о Туркестанском крае. // «Записки Российского географического общества» по отделению статистики. Т. 2. СПб.:—1871



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In a work on the statistical data and economy of the Angren River delta, it is stated: "The Qurama people, as the name suggests, represent a group of individuals born from a blend of various nations. For instance, the settlements along the upper reaches of the Angren River are more intertwined with Tajiks, while the settlements in the middle and lower reaches of the river (such as the Ibelek-Moghul and Khurdon areas) retain memories of their origins in Akmachit. The settlements near Maydantal associate their names with the Kalmyks".

These observations indicate that the emergence of the Qurama people as a new ethnic community can be described as "composite," not only due to the migration of different Kazakh tribes but also because of their intermingling.

An informant from Angren city, Abdumalik Razzokov, emphasized that the local population comprises primarily Uzbeks and Tajiks. Thus, in the first quarter of the 20th century, 93.1% of the population living along the Angren River in Tashkent province belonged to ethnic groups. While the majority of the present-day population in the mentioned area consists of these communities, which previously identified themselves as "Qurama," they now refer to themselves as "Uzbek-Qurama."

The prominent Turkologist V. Radlov also noted in his writings:

"Between Tashkent and Khujand (in 1868), there are small Tatar nomadic tribes who call themselves Kombai. They are divided into five clans: Jaloyir, Telov, Tama, Jagalbayli, and Tarak. It seems that the ethnic community arose from the fusion of Uzbeks and Kazakhs. According to reports, the Kazakhs named the community 'Qurama' because it was composed of various tribes (kura means composed of various parts, etc.)."

In another part of his writing, V. Radlov mentioned that sedentary Tatar tribes, who identified themselves as Qurama, were located between Tashkent and Khujand. These tribes, though not very large, consisted of five clans: Jaloyir, Telov, Tama, Jagalbayli, and Tarakhti.

After the Russian colonizers occupied Tashkent in 1864, the Russian organizational committee conducted the first census of the colonized population in 1868 to gather demographic data. According to this census, the population of three plateaus—Toytepa, Angren, Chirchiq, and Kumbash—was categorized, with the Qurama being one of the recognized groups. Other major groups in the region included Kazakhs (144,970), ethnic minorities (77,301), Uzbeks (34,636), and Tajiks (11,634)<sup>7</sup>.

Information about the origins, names, locations, and populations of the communities can be found in I. Zarubin's work "List of Peoples of the Turkestan Region." It is emphasized that the

<sup>6</sup> Аристов Н.А. Заметки об этническом составе тюркских племен и народностей, сведения об их численности // Живая старина. СПб., 1896. Выпуск. III-IV

<sup>7</sup> Радлов, Василий Васильевич. Этнографический обзор тюркских племен Южной Сибири и Джунгарии / перевод с немецкого ; [сочинение] академика В. Радлова. — Томск : Типо-литография Михайлова и Макушина, 1887. — v



formations in the Angren River delta belong to Turkic peoples and are of great interest for further study.

In I. Zarubin's work, it is stated: "Quramas are the result of the fusion of Kazakh and Uzbek clans, not only through blood relations but also, in many cases, through social interaction, as well as the incorporation of elements from other tribes. The emergence of the Qurama as an ethnic group dates back to the first half of the 18th century.

From an ethnographic perspective, the formations are an intermediate group resulting from the blending of Kazakhs and other sedentary Turkic peoples. In some cases, these formations are closer to Kazakhs (e.g., the use of yurts and unveiled faces of women), while in other cases, they are closer to the Sarts (settled Turkic peoples)"<sup>8</sup>.

Radlov and other researchers from the past century identified specific combined clans. However, in modern times, clan divisions have largely disappeared in many areas. In some places, individuals still identify themselves as belonging to a particular clan (e.g., the Yuzd), but this does not prevent them from intermarrying within the clan—something that is uncommon among Kazakhs. National identity among these communities is not strongly pronounced. Some avoid using the name "Qurama" or use it as a secondary designation.

For example, in three settlements in the Bobodarkhon neighborhood of Namangan province, 500 residents, descendants of the Telov village, identify themselves as Uzbek, Turk, and even Tajik. This explains the usage of names such as Kyrgyz (Kazakh)-Qurama, Sart-Qurama, Yuz, and Uzbek-Yuz. This complexity makes it difficult to determine the exact number and location of these formations.

Populations are concentrated in settlements such as Obliq, Buka, Telov, Qanjig'ali, and finally Piskent, where they comprise up to 64.5% of the inhabitants.

In N. Aristov's work, based on the first census of 1868, the Angren settlement had 11,043 households and a population of 77,301. These figures clarify Terentyev's earlier data. According to L. Kostenko, in 1868 the communities comprised 27,631 farms, which increased to 31,330 farms by 1877, representing a 13% growth. Assuming each household contained an average of five members, this population totaled 156,650.

I. Zarubin indicates that 9,330 individuals were registered in the Ural province of Khujand, with a total population of 52,335 in 1917 and 49,697 in 1920 (excluding Tashkent). As seen from various early 20th-century census data and the All-Russian Census of 1920, their population had nearly tripled by 1920 compared to 1868 census data.

When comparing census data, it is evident that the 77,301 individuals recorded in 1868 had declined to 49,697 by 1920, a reduction of approximately 27,000. During this period, Kazakhs constituted 45.8% of Tashkent province's population, Uzbeks made up 26.6% (91,632 individuals), and ethnic minorities accounted for 15.3% (52,808 individuals), among others.

This data is further corroborated by information from other sources:

"The formations were a mix of all Kyrgyz (Kazakh), Uzbek, and perhaps Tajik clans, located southeast of Tashkent around Angren. Of the recorded population of 49.7 thousand (both men and women, accounting for 1.1% of the Republic's total population), almost all lived in rural

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<sup>8</sup> Зарубин И.И.Список народностей Туркестанского края... // Труды по изучению племенного состава население России и сопредельных стран. Т. I. Л.: -1925. -С.12



areas. The decline in their numbers can be partly attributed to their partial assimilation into the Uzbek population”<sup>9</sup>. Here is the English translation:

The data analyzed in the works of Aristov, Terentyev, and others show that the composite population was formed from 300 Kazakh representatives who could not migrate during the Dzungar invasion, as well as Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other Turkic peoples. It is undeniable that there were communities consisting of a mix of these peoples. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the communities of Ohangaron district exhibited a stronger resemblance to Kazakhs.

According to research and field observations conducted during that time, including the method of gathering ethnographic material, their lifestyle, language, and anthropological characteristics were much closer to those of the Kazakhs than to the Uzbek and Tajik peoples. According to village elders, until the 1960s-1970s, the language of these composite communities was well-preserved. Nowadays, some studies suggest that these formations arose as a result of intermarriages between Kazakh and Uzbek peoples, making it difficult to pinpoint the exact period of their emergence.

Thus, the composite peoples discussed in this article were once a collection of tribes and clans within the Kazakhs (in some sources, involving representatives of various nationalities). Historically, due to their mixed nature, they formed a sub-ethnic group known as "Qurama." For this reason, today, almost all of them consider themselves as Uzbeks of the Qurama group. For instance, some identify as Jalayir or Qurama-Telov. Uzbeks living in these regions also refer to themselves as Qurama-Tajiks.

Furthermore, based on some research and ethnographic field materials collected throughout the Republic, informants state that the unified population was not solely derived from the Kazakhs' ethnic and tribal composition but also included Tajik, Uzbek, and other groups. According to Fayziyev, who wrote a special study on these formations, the Ohangaron formations historically represent a type of ethnically formed group with distinct customs and traditions. However, due to rapid urbanization, national-local (spiritual and regional) ethnic traditions have been forgotten.

## Conclusion

Although the population recorded in the 1926 census of the Republic of Uzbekistan comprised a significant portion of the Republic's total population, they were barely visible in subsequent records starting from the 1930s. Moreover, research has revealed that the people who claimed until the 1980s that they were not of mixed origin actually possess an ancient history. Various scientific perspectives exist regarding the origins and formation of this ethnic group.

It has also been discovered through research that the Qurama group was mentioned in the 15th-century work Waqf-nama by Khoja Ahror Vali. More details on this will be presented in subsequent articles.

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<sup>9</sup> Статистико-экономический очерк Долины Р. Ангрен, 1923:



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