

Origins of the Kazakhs

Two of the central problems of the history of the Kazakh people concern, first, their origins and, second, the formation of Kazakh statehood and culture. Kazakh (Qazaq, Qazzaq in Turkic and Persian; Kazak, whence Cossack, in western languages) is a Turkic word. Some scholars assume that this term originally bore the sense of a free person, a wanderer. It gradually acquired a social content, defining the status of an individual or a group that had cut itself off from its clan or tribe.

A distinction should be drawn between the history and time of formation of the Kazakh people and the appearance of the ethnonym in our sources. This is all the more important because other names (Uzbek, Uzbek-Qazaq) were used concurrently with the name Kazakh in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Fazlullah b. Ruzbihan (writing c. 1508–9) included ‘three peoples’ among the Uzbeks, these more probably being three groups of tribes. The first group was that of the Shaybans – a part of the Kipchak (Qipchaq) tribes or a lesser division of them under Muhammad Shaybani. The second were the Kazakhs, by which Fazlullah meant the subjects of the first Kazakh khans, who had wandered over the vast expanses between the Itil (Volga) and the Syr Darya (Jaxartes). And the third were the Manghits, a group that included a part of the population of the Noghay Horde.

As the Kazakh entity took shape, the collective ethnic and political term Uzbek altered in meaning. The entity that developed was initially referred to in the sources as Uzbek-Qazaqs, and thereafter as Kazakhs. Kazakh became an ethnonym denoting the people who had settled in the territory of Kazakhstan.

After the collapse of the khanate of Moghulistan and the Noghay Horde, the ethnonym ‘Kazakh’ took in the population of Semirechye (Jeti-su) and the western part of the eastern Dasht-i Qipchaq (Kipchak steppes). The ethnonym Kazakh now became firmly established as the name of the people, and Kazakhstan (Qazaqstan) as the name of the territory inhabited by them. The people expressed their consciousness of their new ethnic unity in a shared heritage of epic tales.

The formation of a nation is a lengthy process and it is sometimes difficult to ascribe any precisely dated period to it. Even so, it is evident from an overall consideration of the historical, ethnographic and linguistic materials that the formation of the Kazakh nationality had been largely completed by the close of the fifteenth century.

The rise of the Kazakh khanate was an important formative element in what we have just ventured to refer to as the Kazakh nationality. The establishment of the khanate is dated from the departure of a part of the nomadic tribes of the eastern Dasht-i Qipchaq into the valley of the rivers Chu and Talas under the leadership of Karay (Qaray/Geray) Khan and Jani Beg Khan, of the House of Jöchi, in the latter half of the fifteenth century. As the khanate of the Uzbek Abul Khayr (1428–69) was weakened by internecine strife among the Chinggisids and by his harsh reprisals against his opponents, Jani Beg, the great-grandson of Urus Khan and son of Baraq (Barakeh) Khan, ruler of the White Horde, and his kinsman Karay, having united their dependent tribal groups of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, migrated to the territory of south-western Semirechye in what was then Moghulistan.

Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat gives an account of these events in his *Tarikh-i Rashidi* (c. 1545): At that time Abu'l Khayr Khan exercised full power in the Kipchak steppes. He had been at war with the Jöchid sultans, Jani Beg Khan and Karay Khan, who fled from him into Moghulistan. Isan Buqa Khan [Isan Buqa, khan of Moghulistan, d. 1462] received them with

great honour and made over to them Kuzi Bashi near the river Chu on the western limit of Moghulistan, where they dwelt in peace and content.

The migration of the bulk of the Kazakh population throughout an entire decade – from the late 1450s to the end of the 1460s – was an unusual nomadic event, involving not only the chiefs with their closest subordinates, but thousands of ordinary herdsmen, numbering perhaps some 200,000 persons.

In essence, the ruler of Moghulistan did not have the strength to halt the incoming Kazakhs. The Kazakh khans were able to make use of the struggle between Isan Buqa and his brother Yunus (d. 1487) for their own ends. Isan Buqa, in his turn, readily entered into an alliance with the Kazakh rulers in an attempt to secure the western frontiers of Moghulistan in his struggle against Abu'l Khayr Khan and the Timurids, who supported the claims of Yunus.

The attempt by Abu'l Khayr Khan to prevent the separation of the Kazakh tribes under Jani Beg and Karay proved futile. His campaign in Semirechye in the winter of 1468 was cut short by his death. Jani Beg and Karay engaged in a successful struggle for the unification of the entire territory peopled by the Kazakhs. From an analysis of the information contained in the written sources on the events of these years, it is possible to date the formation of the Kazakh khanate to around 1470.

K. M. Baipakov