



## The history of the origin and popularization of the song “Balkadisha”: An ethnoarchaeological study<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents an ethnoarchaeological study of the origin and popularization of the song “Balkadisha” by renowned composer Akan Seri Koramsauli (1843–1913). Despite the song’s widespread popularity, only journalists and composers have previously written about its origins, and no comprehensive academic research has been conducted on the subject.

The article first establishes the relevance of the topic and reviews the extent of prior research. A textual analysis of song collections published since the early 20th century identifies changes in the lyrics over time. The impact of Soviet ideology, particularly its emphasis on class struggle, on interpretations of Akan Seri’s work is examined. Special attention is given to the inaccurate claim that Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy was married to an eighty-five-year-old man, which was unjustifiably inserted into later versions of the lyrics.

The study introduces previously unknown historical facts about Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, using archival materials from the State Archive of the Zerendi district in the Akmola region. These documents confirm her birth year and offer new insights into her family background. Archival records also establish the birth year of Baimyrza Musayev, whose meeting with Balkadisha led to the creation of the song, thus allowing for a more precise dating of its composition.

Field expeditions were conducted in the Akmola region, including interviews with people who had known Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy and her

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descendants. These interviews enriched the history of the song's origin and dissemination. A photograph of Balkadisha preserved in the family archive of her granddaughter Aymkoz Talasova is also included.

During the ethnoarchaeological study, the burial place of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy was identified in the village of Kenotkel in the Zerendi district, and an archaeological analysis was conducted. Scientific findings confirmed that this area has been continuously inhabited since the Stone Age, with evidence of established settlements still present during the lifetime of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy.

A regional map was developed to show the locations associated with Akan Seri and Balkadisha, including GPS coordinates. The article concludes with recommendations to include these culturally significant sites in the Akmola Region's tourist routes.

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### **«Балқадиха» әнінің шығу және насихатталу тарихы: этноархеологиялық зерттеу**

**Аннотация.** Мақала белгілі композитор Ақан сері Қорамсаұлының (1843-1913) «Балқадиха» әнінің шығу және насихатталу тарихын этноархеологиялық тұрғыдан зерттеуге арналған. Халық арасында кеңінен таралған бұл әннің пайда болуына қатысты күні бүгінге дейін тек журналистер, композиторлар ғана жазып келді. Ал ғылыми тұрғыдан кешенді зерттеу жұмыстары жүргізілмеді.

Мақалада ең алдымен тақырыптың өзектілігі айқындалып, мәселенің зерттелу дәрежесіне шолу жасалады. «Балқадиха» әні мәтінінің уақыт өте келе өзгеруін анықтау мақсатында XX ғасырдың басынан бастап жарық көрген ән жинақтары текстологиялық тұрғыдан талданады. Таптық күрес идеологиясын желеу еткен кеңестік идеологияның Ақан сері Қорамсаұлының шығармасына әсері көрсетіледі. Әсіресе Балқадиха

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Ыбырайқызының сексен бес жастағы қарт адамға ұзатылғандығы туралы деректің ән мәтініне негізсіз қосылғандығын анықтауға басымдық беріледі.

Ғылыми жұмыста әннің басты кейіпкеріне қатысты бұрын-соңды беймәлім болып келген құнды деректер ұсынылады. Оның ішінде Ақмола облысы Зеренді ауданының мемлекеттік архивінен алғаш рет табылған құжаттар негізінде Балқадиша Ыбырайқызының туған жылы анықталып, отбасылық өмірі туралы мәліметтер беріледі. Сонымен қатар архив деректеріне сүйене отырып Ақан сері мен Балқадиша Ыбырайқызының кездесуіне себепкер болған Баймырза Мұсаұлының дүниеге келген жылы, сәйкесінше «Балқадиша» әнінің жарыққа шыққан уақыты көрсетіледі.

Ғылыми-зерттеу жұмыстары барысында Ақмола облысы бойынша далалық экспедициялар ұйымдастырылып, Балқадиша Ыбырайқызының көзін көрген адамдармен, ұрпақтарымен кездесулер өткізілді. Олармен сұхбаттасу барысында жазылып алынған материалдар «Балқадиша» әнінің шығу және халық арасында таралу тарихын толықтыруға мүмкіндік береді. Мақалада ән кейіпкерінің туған немересі Айымкөз Таласованың отбасылық қорынан алынған Балқадиша Ыбырайқызының фотосы ұсынылады.

Тақырыпты этноархеологиялық тұрғыдан зерттеу барысында Балқадиша Ыбырайқызы жерленген Зеренді ауданы Кеңөткел ауылындағы зираттың орны анықталып, археологиялық талдау жүргізіледі. Бұл аймақта тас дәуірінен бастап адамдардың мекендегендігі және ежелгі қоныстардың орындарында Балқадиша Ыбырайқызы өмір сүрген уақытта да тұрақты елді-мекендердің болғандығы ғылыми тұрғыдан дәлелденеді.

Ғылыми-зерттеу жұмыстары барысында «Балқадиша» әнінің кейіпкерлері мекендеген аймақты картографиялау бойынша арнайы жұмыстар жүргізіледі. Картаға белгілі композитор Ақан серінің дүниеге келген жері, Балқадиша Ыбырайқызының кіндік қаны тамған, сондай-ақ жерленген ауылдары белгіленіп, GPS координаталары анықталады. Бұл сакралды орындарды Ақмола облысы бойынша туристік нысандар қатарына енгізу бойынша ұсыныстар жасалады.

**Кілт сөздер:** Ақан сері Қорамсаұлы, Балқадиша Ыбырайқызы, тарихи-мәдени мұра, қазақ әндері, этноархеология, текстология, картография, архивтану, қасиетті орындар, экспедиция.

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### **История происхождения и популяризации песни «Балкадиша»: этноархеологическое исследование**

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена этноархеологическому изучению истории происхождения и популяризации песни «Балкадиша» известного композитора Акана сери Корамсаулы (1843-1913). До сегодняшнего дня про рождение этой песни, которая широко распространена среди населения, писали только журналисты, композиторы. А с научной точки зрения комплексных исследований не проводилось.

В статье прежде всего определяется актуальность темы и дается обзор степени изученности проблемы. С целью выявления изменений текста песни «Балкадиша» в разных периодах проводится текстологический анализ сборников песен, изданных с начала XX века. Показано влияние советской идеологии, пропагандировавшая идеологию классовой борьбы, на творчество Акана сери Корамсаулы. Особое внимание уделяется выявлению необоснованного включения в текст песни данных о том, что Балкадиша Ыбырайкызы выдана замуж за восьмидесятипятилетнего пожилого мужчину.

В статье представлены ранее неизвестные исторические факты главного героя песни. На основании документов, впервые найденных в Государственном архиве Зерендинского района Акмолинской области, установлена дата рождения Балкадиши Ыбырайкызы и даются новые сведения о ее семейной жизни. Исходя из архивных данных, указывается год рождения Баймырзы Мусаева, который стал причиной встречи Акана сери и Балкадиши Ыбырайкызы, что позволило определить время появления песни «Балкадиша».

В процессе проведенного исследования авторами были организованы полевые экспедиции по Акмолинской области, проведены встречи с потомками, людьми, которые знали Балкадишу Ыбырайкызы. Материалы, записанные в ходе интервью с ними, позволяют дополнить историю происхождения и распространения песни «Балкадиша» среди населения. В статье представлена фотографии Балкадиши Ыбырайкызы из семейного альбома родной внучки героини песни Айымкоз Таласовой.

Этноархеологическое изучение темы позволило авторам определить место захоронения Балкадиши Ыбырайкызы, а именно село Кеноткель Зерендинского района Акмолинской области. Некоторые археологические изыскания авторов данного региона показали, что регион был населен людьми со времен каменного века и что на местах древних поселений издавна проживали люди, включая то время, когда жила Балкадиша Ыбырайкызы.

Важным для исследования является проведение авторами специальной работа по картографированию местности, населенной героями песни «Балкадиша». На карте были обозначены: место рождения известного казахского композитора Акана сери, места рождения и захоронения Балкадиши Ыбырайкызы, а также определены координаты GPS этих мест. Кроме того, подготовлены рекомендации по включению этих сакральных мест в число туристических объектов Акмолинской области.

**Ключевые слова:** Акан сери Корамсаулы, Балкадиша Ыбырайкызы, историко-культурное наследие, казахские песни, этноархеология, текстология, картография, архивоведение, сакральные места, экспедиция.

## Introduction

Singing holds a special place in Kazakh culture. The national customs and traditions themselves are closely intertwined with music. Lullabies are sung from the moment a child is born, and at the end of life, mourning is expressed through ritual weeping. As a result of the centuries-old development of the singing art, professional singers have emerged, and traditional schools of performance have been formed. Songs that reflect the spirit of their time and resonate deeply with the people have become widespread classical works among the population. These works include the song "Balkadisha" by the famous composer Akan Seri Koramsauly (1843-1913). This song, distinguished by its wide range, free rhythm, was warmly received by the listener. In 1925, during the Days of Culture in France, the famous singer Amre Kashaubayev introduced Kazakh art to an international audience by singing this song.

Despite its popularity, the origin of "Balkadisha", as well as the distortions it underwent during the Soviet era to align with ideological narratives have not been thoroughly examined from an academic perspective. To date, the song has primarily been discussed by composers and journalists. The life of the central figure, Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, has often been misrepresented – commonly portrayed as a young girl forcibly married to an 85-year-old man. In reality, she married someone her own age and lived a fulfilling life. However, archival documents that might help clarify aspects of her life have not yet been incorporated into scholarly discourse. This article, therefore, seeks to explore the origin and dissemination of the song "Balkadisha" through an interdisciplinary lens.

## Materials and research methods

A diverse range of materials was utilized in the course of this research. To trace the evolution of the "Balkadisha" song text, a textual analysis was conducted on articles and song collections published since the early 20th century. In order to determine the precise time of the song's origin and to explore the life of its central figure, Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, archival research was conducted for the first time at the State Archive of the Zerendi district in the Akmola region. Notably, previously unexamined archival materials were introduced into scholarly circulation from collection No. 207, which contains documents from the Executive Committee of the Lenin Village Council of Workers' Deputies in the Zerendi district, and from collection No. 49, which includes civil registration records for the same district.

Cartographic materials were employed to identify the geographic area in which the song originated, with the aim of potentially designating the site as a cultural and tourist landmark in the future.

In the investigation of "Balkadisha", the study employed a combination of theoretical, empirical, and general logical research methods. Textual analysis was central to examining how and why the lyrics changed during various historical periods. To clarify the origins of the song, interviews were conducted with Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy's granddaughter and a person who had known her personally, utilizing interview and oral history techniques. Thus, the origin and dissemination of the song "Balkadisha" were studied through an interdisciplinary approach, integrating methodologies from art, cultural studies, history, ethnoarchaeology, philology, information technology, and other related fields.

## Research background

Following the death of the renowned Kazakh composer Akan Seri Koramsauly in 1913, the intellectuals of the Alash movement made significant contributions to the study of his creative legacy. In 1924, the prominent poet Magzhan Zhumabayev published an article titled Akan Seri in the "Sana" journal (Zhumabayev, 1924), and in 1935, Saken Seifullin compiled and published a collection of Akan Seri's selected poems (Akan Seri, 1935). However, neither of these works contains any information specifically related to the song "Balkadisha".

The celebrated writer Sabit Muqanov also mentioned Akan Seri in his novel "My schools", recounting that he had met the composer in person and heard him perform the song "Kulager" (Muqanov, 1941: 98-99). Nevertheless, Muqanov did not have the opportunity to hear "Balkadisha", the composition dedicated to Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy.

Between the 1950s-1970s, "Balkadisha" was widely included in song anthologies and sheet music collections published in Kazakhstan. However, in the absence of scholarly research, the song was inconsistently classified – sometimes as a folk song, and at other times as a composition by Akan Seri Koramsauly. In addition, the lyrics were altered, and the main character, Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, was misrepresented as an unfortunate girl who, in accordance with archaic customs, was forcibly married to a wealthy elderly man many years her senior.

1980s, marked the first attempts to study the origins of "Balkadisha" more in a systematic way. During this period, creative figures such as Zhanaydar Musin (1936-1991), editor of the "Kokshetau Pravda" newspaper, and composer Ilya Zhaqanov, turned their attention to this work. In 1985, musicologist Ilya Zhaqanov traveled to the Zerendi district of the Akmola region, where he interviewed Balkadisha's younger sister Kadisha, her eldest daughter Kulia, her daughter-in-law Rakhia, and second daughter Nagima. Based on their testimonies, he wrote a documentary narrative titled "Balkadisha" (Zhaqanov, 2013: 170-190).

Around the same time, KazTAG translator Karipkhan Tashenuly conducted a journalistic investigation into the background of the song and began publishing his findings in the mass media. In 1986, he published the article "Balkadisha", or "The Song Born at Dawn" in "Kazakh Adebieti (Kazakh Literature)", and in 1991, his essay "A Face in a Photograph", or "About the Angel of Love" appeared in the journal "Kazakhstan aielderi (Kazakhstan women)" (Tashenuly, 2002: 17-24). It is worth noting that journalist K. Tashenov was a maternal relative of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy – specifically, her maternal uncle. Following Kazakhstan's independence, mainly literary works and journalistic articles related to the song "Balkadisha" began to be published. Among them are the lyrical poem "Akan Seri – Balkadisha" by S. Turgynbekuly (Turgynbekuly, 2006) and "The Padishah Among Men" by S.O. Khasenov (Khasenov, 2024), and many others.

An analysis of the historiography reveals that "Balkadisha" has thus far been explored largely from literary and artistic perspective, and mainly through journalistic inquiry. Consequently, this topic remains in need of rigorous academic investigation.

## Analysis

The earliest information about the song "Balkadisha" appears in the work of the composer A. Zatayevich. In his 1925 publication "1000 Songs of the Kazakh People", issued in Orenburg,

Zatayevich transcribed a significant number of Akan Seri's compositions into musical notation. For instance, he documented four versions of "Makpal", and three versions each of "Kulager", "Ak Sausak", and "Ush Toty Kus". Notably, he recorded two distinct versions of "Balkadisha".

The first version of the song "Balkadisha", which is numbered 170 in the collection, was recorded by A. Zatayevich based on the performance of Amirzhan Nauryzbayev, a resident of volost No. 7 of Kokshetau Uezd, Akmola Governorate. In addition to "Balkadisha", Nauryzbayev performed several other songs included in the collection, such as "*Tongkaima*", "*Zhakiya*", "*Zhilanbaur*", "*Karakatkoz*" (Ibrai's song), "*Altybasar*", "*Zulkiya*", "*Baluan Sholak's Song*", and "*Gulder-Ai*" (Zatayevich, 1925: 28).

In the "Semei province" section of "1000 songs of the Kazakh people", the second version of the song "Balkadisha" was documented by the writer and a leader of Alash movement Zhusipbek Aimaurov. A. Zatayevich introduced him as a resident of the Bayanaul settlement of Pavlodar (Zatayevich, 1925: 191). However, Zatayevich expressed uncertainty about the connection between the two versions, stating: "Another song of the same name (I am unsure whether it is a musical variant of the original) is included in the Akmola group and differs by an unusually cropped version" (Zatayevich, 1925: 362). This suggests that the two versions of "Balkadisha", presented in the work "1000 songs of the Kazakh people" differ significantly in their musical composition.

In the work of the researcher of Kazakh musical art A. Zatayevich, the text of the song "Balkadisha" is not given, he limited himself to recording the melodies of Kazakh songs. He explained this omission by noting his lack of proficiency in the Kazakh language and his inability to accurately transcribe the words into Russian (Zatayevich, 1925: 13).

Following the establishment of Soviet power, communist ideology was aggressively promoted. Campaigns highlighting the class struggle between the rich and poor, and condemning feudal oppression, were widely implemented – including in the sphere of traditional Kazakh musical heritage. The influence of this ideological framework extended to Akan Seri Koramsauly's Balkadisha. For example, in the collection "Kazakh Songs", released in 1957 based on the collection by M. Bestibayev, the work "Balkadisha" was presented as a folk song and given only in two stanzas:

Balkadisha, Balkadisha,  
Your husband is eighty-five, old Kadisha.  
Not one but two sisters-in law have come,  
You have our permission, aha-hau, go Kadisha.

I came to Zhylandy,  
I gently brushed the forelock of my proud grey horse  
When I heard Balkadisha was gone,  
Clutching my feather pillow close, I let the tears fall (Kazakh Songs, 1957: 24).

M. Maychekin, who collected the songs of Akan Seri Koramsauly, also wrote about Balkadisha Ibraykyzy's marriage to an elderly man. In his work published in 1959, he wrote: "At a wedding ceremony, Akan Seri composed a song for the young beauty Balkadisha, who was going to marry an eighty-five-year-old man, becoming a victim of an old custom". However, the version of the lyrics he provides reads:

Balkadisha, Balkadisha,  
Your husband is eighty-five years old, Kadisha.  
Looks like your dad matched you with him,  
What is the action? – I have many dreams, go Kadisha! (Maychekin, 1959: 4).

In addition, he provides another version of the song consisting of four stanzas, three of which repeat the line "Your husband is eighty-five years old, Kadisha" (Maychekin, 1959: 14).

By the 1960s, however, the lyrics of "Balkadisha" underwent significant changes. In song collections published during this period, references to the eighty-five-year-old man became rare. Instead, the lyrics began to emphasize eighty girls who went for a walk. For example, in the collection "Kazakh Songs" compiled by N. Shakenov and published by the "Kazakh State Publishing House of Fiction" in 1961, the version attributed to Akan Seri reads:

Balkadisha, Balkadisha,  
Like a willow by the lake, swaying, Kadisha.  
Even if eighty girls went out walking,  
Among them the brightest star is you, Kadisha (Kazakh Songs, 1961: 151).

The metaphors emphasizing the natural beauty of Balkadisha, distinct from the earlier version referencing "eighty girls who went for a walk", are repeated in later collections of Kazakh songs edited by Sh. Mukhamedzhanov in 1963 (Kazakh Songs, 1963: 108) and A. Shalabayeva in 1968 (Kazakh Songs, 1968: 81). However, both collections include the line "You are the daughter of Ybyray, Balkadisha" to indicate that the father of the main character of the song Akan Seri was Ybyray.

In the 1970s-1980s, the song "Balkadisha" grew in popularity and was frequently adapted for choir performance. However, multiple versions of Akan Seri's lyrics continued to circulate. For example, in "Works for the Choir" by A. Molodov, G. Akhmetova (1973) Balkadisha is portrayed as being married to an eighty-five-year-old man (Works for the Choir, 1973: 87-91). In contrast, B. Zhakeeva's *"Working with a Choir Circle"*, published in 1988, presents a version that depicts the free-spirited life of Balkadisha, comparing her to 'a restless foal' (Zhakeeva, 1988: 21-22).

Even after Kazakhstan gained independence, various versions of "Balkadisha" continued to appear. In the two-volume work "Anthology of Kazakh Songs" by the famous singer and writer Zh. Karmenov (AKS, 1990: 111), in "Kazakh Songs" compiled by B. Zhusipova (Kazakh Songs, 2011: 33-34), the song describes the free life of Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy and the mysterious feelings of Akan Seri, while in other works, continue to portray her as a tragic figure married to an aged man.

Modern popular culture continues to reinforce the widely held belief that Balkadisha was married off to an old man according to ancient tradition. For example, this version is repeated in the song and video clip "Balkadisha", released in 2019 by the group "Zhigitter".

The historiographical analysis of the song "Balkadisha" reveals that many critical aspects of its origin have remained unexplored. To date, no comprehensive scholarly research has been conducted on Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, the central figure of the song. As a result, the present study offers several important findings related to the song's origin and its widespread dissemination.

First, establishing the birth date of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy is essential. Previous sources have commonly cited 1883 as her year of birth, locating it in Serke village of the Zeren district. This

information appears in the works of journalist K. Tashenuly (Tashenuly, 2002: 23), composer I. Zhaqanov (Zhaqanov, 2013: 190) and traditional singer S. Khasenov (Khasenov, 2024: 28), among others. The writer K. Tashenuly wrote about Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy's birth date for the first time in the article "*A Figure in the Picture or About the Angel of Love*", published in the magazine "Kazakhstan aielderi (Women of Kazakhstan)" in 1991. He wrote: "The main source is recorded in the village council book. She was born in 1883, the year of the sheep, and passed away on March 27, 1950, the year of the tiger, at the age of 67". However, the author did not specify the name of the village council, the exact registration book, or its serial number. Later researchers repeated this information provided by journalist K. Tashenuly.

Our archival research, conducted in the State Archive of the Zherendi District of the Akmola Region, led to the discovery of three key documents that help clarify the birth year of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy. The most significant finding appears in the "Household book of 1945-1947", located in fund No. 207, which contains records from the "Executive committee of the Lenin Village Council of Working People's Deputies". In particular, it is indicated that the owner of farm No. 79, Masabaieva Balgadisha, was born in 1879. In the household book Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy is identified as head of household, with family members including her son Suleimenov Zhetybai (1928) and her grandchildren Suleimenov Zharkynbai (1941) and Zholdybai (1942) (SA ZD, F. 207, F.47, P. 8)<sup>2</sup>.

[illegible]

Figure 1. Archival document containing information about Balkadisha Masabaieva, the head of household No. 79 under the "Kenotkel" kolkhoz (collective farm) (SA ZD, F. 207, F.47, P. 8).

The "Household book for 1948-1950" of the Kenotkel kolkhoz (collective farm) under the Lenin Village Council of the Zerendi District also confirms that Masabaieva Balkadisha was born in 1879. However, in this record, Suleimenov Zhetibai (1927) is listed as the head of farm No. 81, with other household members including his wife Suleimenova Bidash (1929), brothers Torebayev Zharkynbai (1941) and Zholdybai (1942), and his daughter Suleimenova (1948) (SA ZD, F. 207, F. 54, P. 32)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The State Archive of the Zerendi district, Fund 207, File 47, Page 8

<sup>3</sup>The State Archive of the Zerendi district, Fund 207, File 54, Page 32

Полный №	Фамилия, имя, отчество (полное наименование)	Отношение к семье	Пол	Год и месяц рождения	Место рождения	Гражданство	Последнее образование	В какой школе учился и в каком классе	Отметка об окончании в 1949 г.	Отметка об окончании в 1950 г.	Отметка об окончании в 1951 г.	Место работы, в качестве кого работает
1	Суленимов Жетібай	глава семьи	м	1927 г. май	с. Кеноткел	СССР						Мест. работы
2	" "	жена	ж	1929 г.	"	"						"
3	Масабаева "	дочь	ж	1949 г.	"	"						"
4	Жафарова "	дочь	ж	1941 г.	"	"						"
5	" "	дочь	ж	1942 г.	"	"						"
6	Суленимова "	дочь	ж	1948 г.	"	"						"

Figure 2. Archival document containing information about Zhetibai Suleimenov (son of B. Masabaieva), head of household No. 81 under the "Kenotkel" kolkhoz (collective farm) (SA ZD, F. 207, F. 54, P. 32).

The third piece of evidence confirming the year of Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy's birth, is found in the collection of the State Archive of the Zerendi District No. 49 within the "Death record book". In the "Death records for 1951" it is recorded that Masabaieva Balkadisha died on August 23, 1951, in the village of Kenotkel, at the age of 75. The official act of death, entry No. 17 was registered on September 9, 1951 (SA ZD, F. 49, F. 13, P. 55)<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, according to this document, Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy was born in 1876.

Balkadisha's father, Ybyray, was a man of average means and was known throughout the country for his honesty. By the will of fate, he was married three times in his life. His first wife, Zhykysh, gave birth to Balkadisha. After Zhykysh's death, he married Balzhan, a woman from the village of Aymbet. Both of Balzhan's two children died in infancy, and the family line did not continue. Ybyray's third marriage was to Altynai, daughter of Tinibai Kazhy from the village of Toksanbai, and from this marriage two daughters were born: Kadisha and Kulzhamila (Zhaqanov, 2013: 182).

Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy first met Akan Seri Koramsauly at shildekhana (a traditional ceremony held forty days after a child's birth) hosted in the village of Montai's Musa. This meeting inspired the creation of the now-iconic song "Balkadisha." This raises a second important research question: the precise year in which the song was composed. Archival investigation identified the newborn child celebrated at the shildekhana as Baimyrza Musauily. According to the 1968 death record, Baimyrza Musin was born on January 1, 1903, and died on August 22, 1968, at the age of 65 (SA ZD, F. 49, F. 14, P. 47)<sup>5</sup>. In this regard, when documenting the population during the Soviet era, it is necessary to take into account that January is set as the date of birth of the vast majority. Additionally, oral accounts indicate that the meeting of Akan Seri and Balkadisha took place in the summer. These details suggest that the song "Balkadisha" was composed in 1903.

<sup>4</sup> The State Archive of the Zerendi district, Fund 49, File 13, Page 55

<sup>5</sup> The State Archive of the Zerendi district, Fund 49, File 14, Page 47

The writer Zh. Musin cited evidence suggesting that Balkadisha was 20 years old when she met Akan Seri (Zhaqanov, 2013: 182). However, based on the archival records, it is more likely that Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy was 24 or 27 years old at that time.

Third, we attempted to verify the commonly circulated claim that Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy was married off to an 85-year-old man. According to archival findings, Balkadisha was in fact married in 1904 to Suleimen Masabaiuly (1877-1943), to whom she had been betrothed since childhood. The couple had seven children – four sons and three daughters. Two sons, Kaken and Amen died young, while their surviving children – Kulia (1906-1997), Torebai (1909-1943), Gulsin (1915-1948), Nagima (1921-1996), and Zhetibai (1927-1973) – grew up and later worked in the "*Kenotkel*" kolkhoz (collective farm) under the Lenin village council in the Zerendi district. Further documentation concerning the descendants of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy is found in the State Archive of the Zerendi District. For instance, in addition to the previously mentioned records of her son Zhetibai Suleimenov, data on her daughter Gulsin Sungatova appears in the "Household book of 1946-1948". In that document, she is listed as the head of household No. 110. The document shows that Gulsin Suleimenkyzy lived with her husband, Sungatov Kazez, their son and daughter, and two brothers-in-law and two sisters-in-law – eight people in total – living together in a single household in apparent harmony (SA ZD, F. 207, F. 50, P. 11)<sup>6</sup>.

Taken together, the archival evidence clearly refutes the popularized myth that Balkadisha was forcibly married to an elderly man. This distortion of the original narrative of Akan Seri's "*Balkadisha*" is best understood as a product of Soviet ideological pressures, particularly the drive to reinforce class struggle narratives by portraying traditional customs as oppressive.

Fourth, to further deepen the inquiry, a field expedition was conducted from April 10 to April 20, 2025. Interviews were held with people who had known Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy personally or were among her descendants. Notably, an interview was conducted with Aklima Kazhybaikyzy Kudabayeva, a long-time resident of Zerendi village in Zerendi district, Akmola region. Born in 1941, A. Kudabayeva recalled: "As a child, I studied in Kokshetau. During school holidays, I would return to the village, where I often saw Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy. She was very close to my mother, Mainur Akhmetzhankyzy. She had an average height, a graceful figure, and was very beautiful. Regarding the history of the song, my mother told me that Akan Seri came to Karaotkel, located on Mount Zhylandy and happened upon a shildekhana. At the time, the poet was grieving deeply – he had lost his beloved and his horse, Kulager. Upon entering the yurt, he was invited to the place of honor. But when the girls noticed him, they quickly gave up their seats out of fear, believing he had ties to water spirits. Balkadisha, however, remained composed and did not move. Akan Seri initiated a conversation with her, and they became acquainted. The celebration continued in a joyful and festive spirit. Later, two of Balkadisha's sisters-in-law arrived to escort her home. It was then that Akan Seri, moved by her dignity and poise, composed a song in her honor. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, there was no romantic relationship between the poet and the young woman".

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<sup>6</sup> The State Archive of the Zerendi district, Fund 207, File 50, Page 11



Figure 3. Interview with A. Kudabayeva, an elder resident of the village of Kenotkel.  
Photo by S.M. Gizzatov.

During the field expedition, an interview was also conducted with Aymkoz Talasova, the granddaughter of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy, residing in the village of Kenotkel. Aymkoz Talasova is the daughter of Zhetibai Suleimenov (1927–1973), Balkadisha's second son. She was born in 1955 in Kenotkel and dedicated many years of her life to working as a paramedic before retiring (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Interview with A. Talasova, granddaughter of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy.  
Photo by S.M. Gizzatov.

During the interview, A. Talasova, spoke about the origins of the song "Balkadisha", emphasizing that Akan Seri Koramsauly dedicated the work to a beautiful, intelligent, humble, and well-mannered Kazakh girl. She also shared a rare family photo of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy with her first grandson Zharkynbai Torebaiuly (1938-2009) taken in 1939 (Figure 5: a,b).



a



b

Figure 5. a – Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy with her grandson Zharkynbai Tolebaiuly, 1939. Photo from the private family archive of A. Talasova. b – A. Talasova, granddaughter of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy. Photo by S.M. Gizzatov.

The photographs presented above reveal a clear familial resemblance between Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy and Aymkoz Talasova. In this context, it is worth noting that contemporary Kazakh artists and sculptors have drawn upon this resemblance as a reference point when attempting to reconstruct and visualize the youthful image of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy in their artistic works.

## Results

As part of the investigation into the history of the song "Balkadisha", archaeological research was also undertaken. The Kenotkel historical area is recognized as one of the key sites that has been inhabited by humans since ancient times in this region. Since 2024, under the direction of the authors of this article, excavations have been conducted at an ancient settlement located approximately 1 km southwest of the village of Kenotkel, along the Shaghalaly River. According to the results of the findings, the Kenotkel settlement consists of four distinct cultural layers. The deepest layer contains Neolithic stone tools, followed by layers corresponding to the Bronze Age (18th–16th centuries BCE), the Early Iron Age (8th–6th centuries BCE), and the ethnographic period (19th–20th centuries CE). Samples collected from the site were submitted for C14 radiocarbon dating, and the results confirm that the Shaghalaly River valley, including the Kenotkel area, was inhabited by early humans as far back as 5500 BCE, which corresponds chronologically to the Middle Neolithic period.

A number of archeological studies have been carried out in the Kenotkel site groups. As a result, numerous stone tools from the Mesolithic-Neolithic period, as well as ceramic

fragments and tools from the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, have been discovered (Khabdulina, 1994: 29). During the authors' field research, it was also revealed that winter camps from the ethnographic period were constructed atop earlier settlements. Taking into account the fact that similar cases of Kazakh winter camps dwellings being built over ancient sites have been documented elsewhere in Kazakhstan. The discovery of pole remains during excavations at Kenotkel supports the presence of wooden architectural structures in this area (see Figure 6a).



Figure 6. a – Excavation work at the Kenotkel-10 settlement. Remnants of vertical wooden poles.  
b – Ancestral cemetery of the Boskynbai and Masabai families, descendants of Koiaydar (father of Suleimen).

According to the oral testimony of Dosymov Ramazan, a native of the village of Kenotkel, three distinct settlements associated with the Koiaydar, Kenzhebai, and Saberli lineages existed within the Kenotkel settlement area in the early 20th century. Balkadisha's husband, Suleimen Masabaiuly, belonged to the Koiaydar lineage. The ancestral cemetery of the Koiaydar lineage – particularly the Boskynbai and Masabai (Suleimen's father) families – is located approximately 3.5 km east of Kenotkel. Topographic and planigraphic studies revealed that these ancient burial grounds were constructed of stone (Figure 6: b).

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the Kazakhs of Akmola used log based construction techniques in building winter dwellings. Researcher V. Shne in 1896, "Winter Settlements and Other Permanent Structures of the Nomads of the Akmola region", notes that birch logs with a diameter of 4-5 vershoks (1 vershok – 4.445 cm, i.e., 17.8-22.2 cm) were commonly used in the construction of Kazakh winter camps in the Akmola region (Schne, 1894: 9). N.N. Kharuzin, who studied winter settlements in the forested zones of the Akmola region (Kenotkel belongs to the forest-steppe zone), reported that "semi-dugout houses built with four rows of horizontal logs above ground, topped with wooden beams and covered with earth" were widely used (Kharuzin, 1896: 31). Considering that the scientific works of both researchers were written in the last quarter of the 19th century, they coincide with the period of life of Balkadisha Ibyraykyzy.

As part of this study, specialized cartographic work was undertaken to map the locations associated with the characters of the song "Balkadisha". First, the map marked the birthplace of Akan Seri Koramsauly. According to Alash intellectual M. Zhumabayev in his article "Akan Seri", Akan was born in 1843 in a place called Koskol, located about 70 kilometers west-northwest of the city of Kokshetau (Zhumabayev, 1924: 12). Then the coordinates of the village of Serke (the foothills of the Zhylandy mountain) of the Zerendi district of the Akmola region, were determined as the birthplace of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy. Kenotkel village, where she lived

after marriage, was also mapped. Finally, the location of the Masabai family cemetery, where Balkadisha is buried, was established. These geographical and cartographic findings show that the events and characters of the song “Balkadisha” are linked to a relatively compact area with a radius of approximately 40 kilometers. This spatial concentration holds potential for the development of cultural and heritage tourism routes in the Akmola region (see Figure 7).

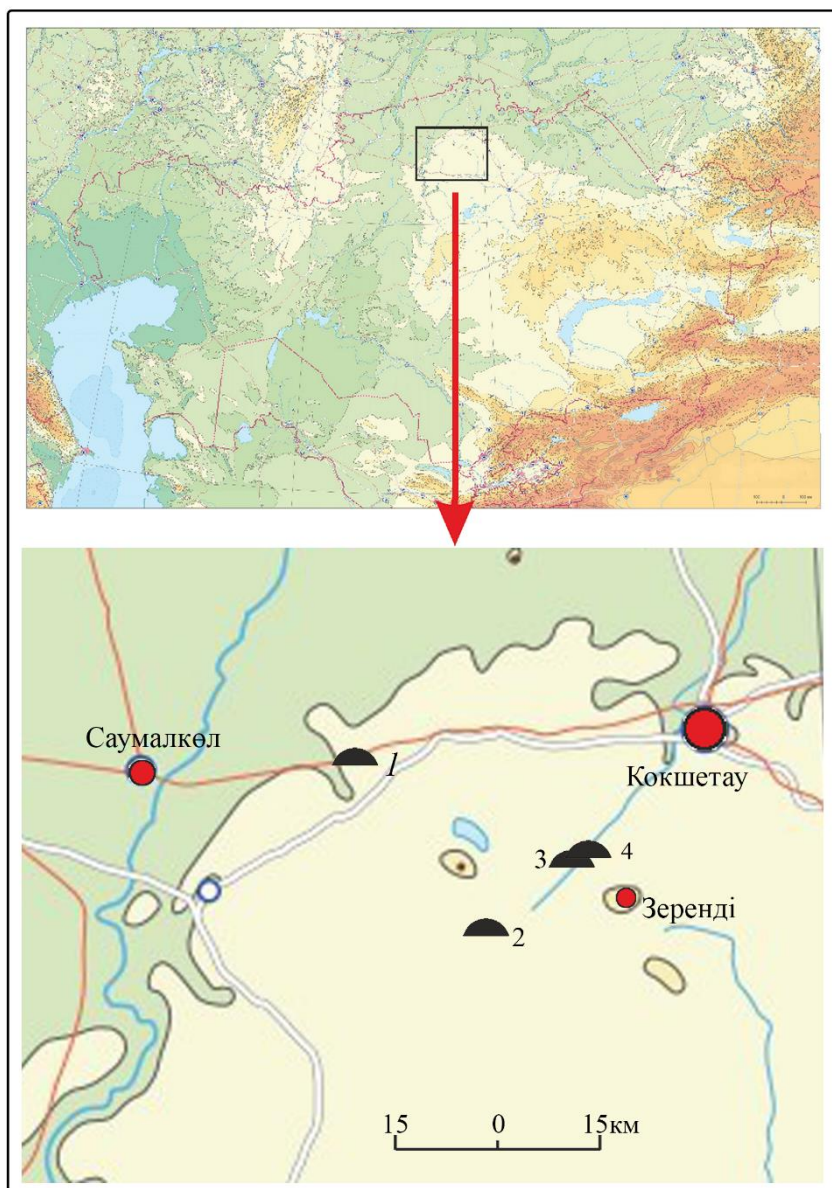


Figure 7. Map of historical landmarks. 1 – Birthplace of Akan Seri (Uly Koskol);  
2 – Birthplace of Balkadisha (Zhylandy Mountain); 3 – Settlement of Kenotkel;  
4 – Cemetery of the Masabai family.

As part of the investigation into the origin and dissemination of the song "Balkadisha", an analytical review was conducted of the musical heritage of the peoples of Central Asia. In the early 20th century, Soviet ideology had a significant influence on the folklore traditions of the various ethnic groups, including the Turkmen, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz peoples. For instance, the Turkmen folk song "Chuwal Kyz" ("The Song of Girls Placed in a Sack"), which was historically performed in the context of a bride awaiting the completion of her dowry, was reinterpreted and dismissed as a symbol of cultural backwardness. Its lyrics were modified to align with Soviet values, eliminating elements that contradicted the prevailing ideological narrative (Belyaev, 1962: 133-134). Similarly, the Tajik lyrical song "Zarra-Gul", which originally expressed a young man's love for a girl named Zarra-Gul, was altered by the addition of verses promoting collectivist ideals. A notable example is the insertion of the following lines: "In the early morning light, She came with a single thought, That her native kolkhoz. Might bloom as a splendid orchard" (Belyaev, 1962: 190-191). These revisions reflect a broader Soviet strategy to promote the process of collectivization among the Tajik population through the transformation of folk songs into ideological tools.

Just as Akan Seri's "Balkadisha" was subjected to ideological reinterpretation, the lyrics of songs by the Uzbek poet Mukimi (1851-1903) were also distorted. Although the poet passed away before the establishment of the Soviet Union, his songs – such as "Fergana Melody" and "Andijan Melody", which originally expressed romantic feelings toward women – were modified by Soviet authorities. These compositions, originally celebrating love and affection, were re-edited and performed as ideological pieces portraying "open resistance to the oppression of Uzbek women" (Belyaev, 1962: 283). This demonstrates the broader Soviet strategy of reshaping the cultural and artistic heritage of Central Asian peoples, appropriating folk and classical traditions to serve political and ideological objectives.

## Conclusion

The study of the origin and popularization of the song "Balkadisha" by the famous Kazakh composer Akan Seri Koramsaulay, has revealed a number of previously unknown historical facts. In particular, textual analysis of various song collections published since the early 20th century has shown that the lyrics of the song were significantly altered to align with Soviet ideological narratives.

Archival research conducted in the State Archive of the Zerendi district of Akmola region enabled the accurate determination of the song's date of composition and provided new insights into the personal life of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy. Contrary to earlier claims, the evidence confirms that she was not married to an eighty-five-year-old man, but to a peer, with whom she built a family and lived a long, fulfilling life.

Field expeditions, including interviews with local residents of the Zerendi district, offered further perspectives on the origins of the song. Notably, testimonies supported the view that Akan Seri composed "Balkadisha" not as a romantic tribute, but as a respectful homage to the dignity and grace of Balkadisha Ybyraykyzy.

Archaeological, geographical, and cartographic research initiated by the authors contributed to the identification of the birthplaces and burial sites of the characters associated with the song. The findings confirmed that the region had been continuously inhabited since ancient times and has remained a center of cultural continuity across generations. Based on this

interdisciplinary research, a proposal has been put forward to develop a regional tourism route in Akmola Region, centered on the cultural and historical legacy of the song "Balkadisha".

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