

The Kazakh hordes (zhuzs)

The consolidation of the Kazakh people was accompanied by the formation of their ethnic territory. Under conditions of a largely nomadic way of life with extensive cattle-herding, the boundaries of the areas occupied by clans and tribes were not clearly defined, but they nevertheless became increasingly definite and comparatively stable in the course of ethnic integration. Three main groupings were ultimately formed: Ulu Zhuz (the Great Group or Elder Horde), Orta Zhuz (the Middle Group or Horde) and Kichi (Kichik) Zhuz (the Little Group or Younger Horde) [1].

The term zhuz, or zhus (pl. shuzder, zhuzler) is usually applied to large groupings or alliances of tribes occupying a territory that is more or less traditionally defined. When and how the Great, Middle and Little Hordes were formed remains uncertain; the legends on their origins are highly contradictory, while information from written sources is indirect and relates to a later era. Some assume that zhuz comes from the Arabic juz and so means a 'part' or a 'branch', while others consider that it derives from Turkic and stands for 100 (yuzin Turkic) [2].

One document dated 1616 states that the Kalmuks (Qalmaqs) were the overlords of the Cossack (Kazakh) Great Horde [3]. It seems obvious that a Great Horde could exist only in relation to a Little Horde or, in other words, the Younger Zhuz. Manuscript maps produced in the seventeenth century also make quite explicit references to Kazakh zhuzs (groups or hordes). Facts from Kazakh history recorded in the eastern chronicles of the sixteenth century suggest the existence of zhuzs at a still earlier time [4].

The main area of the nomadic wanderings of the people of the Great Zhuz in the fifteenth century was connected politically and economically with the territory of Moghulistan. The tribes and clans of the Great Zhuz evidently formed the core of the Kazakh khanate that emerged around 1470. The tribes of central and north-eastern Kazakhstan (the Middle Zhuz) often tended to gravitate towards the Central Asian states, those of western Kazakhstan (the Little Zhuz) towards the khanates of the Volga region and later the Russian state.

The Great Zhuz largely occupied the territory stretching from the Syr Darya through Semirechye; the Middle Zhuz, mainly the areas of central Kazakhstan and, in part, north-eastern Kazakhstan; and the Little Zhuz, the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, the shores of the Aral Sea and the northern area of the Caspian lowlands. The Little Zhuz was divided into two branches – the Alimuls and the Bayuls – with a third element, the Yetiru (Yediru) branch, apparently emerging later. The Alimuls included tribes such as the Keraites (Kereyids) and the Noghays alongside many others [5].

There were also many ancient tribes in the Middle Zhuz – the Kipchaks, Arghins, Naimans, Kongrats (Qonqrats) and Keraites – while on the Irtysh the clan names found among the Basentin (Basetein) tribe include the Qoghanchureks, Boras, Shujes (Chuges) and Aqteles, i.e. descendants of the tribes that had inhabited the West Turkic khanate, one of which, the Ongits, was incorporated in the Uaq clan. The names of the Karluk (Qarluq) tribes (Aq-Marqas, Qara-Marqas) have been preserved in the Altai region, while around Lake Zaysan there are the tribal names of the Oghuz (probably Yemeneyes or Jebeneyes).

The main elements making up the population of the Great Zhuz included tribes such as the Usuns (Uisuns), Dulats (Dughlats) and Jalairs (Jalayers), some of which are already mentioned among the confederation of ten tribes of the West Turkic khanate. The composite character of the three hordes reflected the complexity of the formation of the Kazakh people out of the many

Turkic (and Mongol) nomad tribes that had continuously migrated into the steppes and settled there.

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References:

1. See also on this division, Howorth, 1882–1927, Vol. 2, p. 641
2. See Istoriya Kazakskoy SSR, 1957, pp. 148–9; Amanzholov, 1959, p. 111
3. Materialy po istorii russko-mongolskikh otnosheniy, 1607–36, 1959, p. 53
4. MIKKh , 1968, pp. 242–3
5. The Bayuls included the Aday, Alash, Baybakt, Berish, Alshin, Jappas, Maskar, Tazlar, Esentemir, Cherkesh, Tana and Kzil-Kurt tribes; the Alimuls consisted of the Kara-Sakal, Kara-Kesek, Kete, Shomekey, Shokt and Torkara, Kerder, Jagalbayl, Tibin, Tama, Ramazan (Ramadan), Kerait and Teleut tribes.