

History of The Development of Libraries in Karakalpakstan

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Abstract: This article analyzes the formation and development stages of librarianship in the territory of Karakalpakstan. It highlights the earliest madrasa and mosque libraries, the expansion of the public library network during the Soviet period, and the modernization of information and library centers in the years of independence. In addition, the role of libraries in the development of science, education, and spiritual and educational life is discussed.

Keywords: Karakalpakstan, library, librarianship, culture, enlightenment, information and library center, book fund.

Introduction: Libraries occupy a special place in the spiritual, cultural, and scientific development of any society. Libraries are among the most important social institutions responsible for preserving the scientific, historical, and literary heritage created by humankind, passing it on to future generations, and enriching the knowledge and worldview of the population. They function not only as places where books are stored but also as information centers that contribute to the development of science, education, culture, and enlightenment. Through libraries, members of society gain knowledge in various fields and have the opportunity to improve their intellectual potential. The region of Central Asia has long been one of the centers of science and culture. The rich scientific heritage of scholars, thinkers, and enlighteners who lived and worked in this region has been preserved through libraries and made accessible to the wider public. The territory of Karakalpakstan has also not remained outside these cultural and educational processes. Librarianship in Karakalpakstan has undergone a long historical development path, and its formation is closely connected with the cultural processes of Central Asia [1].

In the region, from ancient times onward, books were collected in mosques and madrasas, manuscripts were preserved, and necessary sources for learning were

created. This indicates that the earliest forms of library culture emerged in the region. Libraries are considered one of the most important social institutions in the development of society [2]. The history of librarianship in Karakalpakstan is closely connected with the cultural life of the people, the education system, and social development. Libraries that initially operated within religious and educational institutions later transformed into cultural and educational centers serving the wider public. In particular, in the 20th century, as a result of literacy improvement policies, the library network expanded, and new libraries were established in both urban and rural areas. This played an important role in developing reading culture among the population and meeting the demand for scientific and literary works. During the years of independence, reforms in the field of librarianship elevated library activities to a new stage of development.

The introduction of modern information and communication technologies, as well as the creation of electronic catalogs and digital library systems, has improved the quality and efficiency of library services. Today, information and library centers in the Republic of Karakalpakstan not only preserve book collections but also perform important functions such as providing access to electronic information resources, supporting scientific research, and promoting a reading culture

among young people. The aim of this article is to study the formation and development history of libraries in Karakalpakstan, analyze the specific features of library activities in different historical periods, and highlight their role in the development of society. In addition, one of the key objectives of the research is to scientifically assess the current state of librarianship and its future development directions. Library traditions in the territory of Karakalpakstan have a long history, and their earliest forms emerged closely connected with the activities of mosques, madrasas, and other religious and educational institutions. In the Middle Ages, madrasas—considered centers of science and enlightenment—collected various manuscripts, religious books, and scientific sources to organize the educational process. These collections of books served as the earliest forms of libraries of that period. Through them, students and teachers acquired knowledge in Islamic studies, history, literature, linguistics, philosophy, and other fields.

Libraries operating at mosques and madrasas in the territory of Karakalpakstan mainly preserved religious, historical, legal, and literary works written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages. In particular, copies of the Qur'an, collections of hadiths, sources on Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), scientific works of Eastern thinkers, and examples of classical literature were of great importance. These books played a significant role not only in acquiring religious knowledge but also in shaping the scientific and cultural environment of the region. By the 18th–19th centuries, reading culture in Karakalpakstan began to develop further. In major settlements such as Qo'ng'iro't, Xo'jayli, and Chimboy, book trade expanded, and demand for manuscripts and lithographed books increased. Through trade caravans, various books were brought from Bukhara, Khiva, Samarkand, and other scientific and cultural centers. This indicates that the population of the region had a strong interest in knowledge and enlightenment. The widespread circulation of books contributed to the enrichment of library collections. Local intellectuals, scholars, enlighteners, and wealthy patrons made a significant contribution to the development of the earliest libraries.

They used their own funds to collect valuable manuscripts and establish private libraries. Such libraries were open to scholars and students and functioned as centers of knowledge exchange. Some private libraries contained hundreds of books and manuscripts and were considered important scientific and educational institutions of their time. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the strengthening of the enlightenment movement in the region had a positive impact on the development of librarianship. As a result

of the opening of new-method schools and the growing interest in secular sciences, library collections were enriched with literature of new content. Consequently, libraries ceased to be solely centers of religious knowledge and became broader centers of science and culture. Thus, the formation of early libraries in Karakalpakstan was closely linked to the activities of religious and educational institutions, and they played an important role in the scientific and cultural development of the region. These libraries later laid a solid foundation for the formation of a modern library system. In the 1920s–1930s, the first state libraries were established in the territory of Karakalpakstan. During this period, literacy campaigns were carried out, and libraries began to function as centers of education and enlightenment. New libraries were opened in both urban and rural areas, reading rooms were organized, and mobile library services were introduced. Through mobile libraries, people living in remote and rural areas were also provided with books and newspapers. As a result, the number of readers increased, and the role of libraries in public life became stronger.

During this period, library collections were enriched with political, scientific-popular, literary, and agricultural literature. In particular, the introduction of new alphabets and the increasing number of publications in national languages further contributed to the development of library services. Libraries began to function not only as places for borrowing books but also as cultural centers where various educational events, discussions, book exhibitions, and public readings were held. During the years of the Second World War (1941–1945), library activities continued under difficult conditions. Throughout the war years, libraries functioned as educational and ideological centers [4]. Although many libraries faced material hardships, their work did not come to a halt. During the war, libraries fulfilled the tasks of providing the population with essential information, strengthening patriotic spirit, and offering moral support to workers in the rear. Literature related to the war, as well as newspapers and journals, was widely promoted, and thematic meetings and educational events were organized in libraries. Most importantly, despite the severe conditions of the war, the main part of existing library collections was preserved.

In the post-war years, the library system developed further. In the 1950s–1960s, public libraries began operating in almost all districts and cities of Karakalpakstan. Library collections were regularly replenished with new literature, and special attention was paid to improving the qualifications of librarians. During this period, libraries played an important role in raising the cultural level of the population, promoting

scientific knowledge, and educating young people. In the 1950s–1980s, the library network expanded, and scientific libraries were established [3]. By the 1970s–1980s, the library network became further improved, and centralized library systems were established. As a result, the management of library activities, the consolidation of collections, and the quality of services provided to readers were significantly enhanced. Scientific libraries were established in the city of Nukus, and specialized libraries began operating under higher education institutions, research institutes, and cultural organizations. In particular, the Scientific Library of the Karakalpak Branch played an important role in the development of scientific research in the region. This library made a significant contribution to the advancement of science by providing scholars, researchers, and students with scientific literature.

Overall, the Soviet period was an important stage in the formation and development of the library system in Karakalpakstan. It was during this time that a wide network of libraries was created, the reading culture of the population developed, and libraries became important educational and cultural centers of society. The material and organizational foundation established during this period served as a strong basis for the further development of librarianship in subsequent years. After the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1991, significant changes and large-scale reforms were implemented in all sectors of the country, including the library system. In the new period, special attention was given to organizing library activities based on modern requirements, strengthening their material and technical base, and improving the quality of information services. Libraries were transformed not only into institutions for storing books but also into information resource centers, becoming an important means of meeting the population's need for knowledge and information.

In the early years of independence, efforts were made to enrich library collections with examples of national and world literature, restore historical and cultural heritage, and promote national values. New publications in Uzbek and Karakalpak languages were regularly supplied to libraries. At the same time, work on collecting, preserving, and providing readers with sources related to the country's history, national statehood, and culture was intensified. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid development of information and communication technologies has ushered in a new stage in library activities. Traditional libraries have been transformed into modern information and library centers, with the introduction of electronic catalogs, digital databases, and internet-based services. As a result, readers have gained access

not only to printed materials but also to a wide range of electronic resources and online information. This has significantly improved the speed, quality, and efficiency of library services.

Regulatory and legal frameworks adopted in 2011 related to library and information activities have further contributed to the development of the sector. Libraries across the country began operating as a unified system, and efforts to digitize and convert library collections were intensified. In addition, modern computer technologies, electronic reading halls, and internet networks were introduced in library institutions. These reforms have also been consistently implemented in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Information and library centers operating in Nukus and all districts are equipped with modern technical facilities and provide a wide range of services to the population. Libraries provide readers with opportunities to use printed and electronic literature, search for scientific information via the internet, work with electronic catalogs, and participate in various educational events. Today, libraries in Karakalpakstan play an important role in developing the reading culture of young people, encouraging their interest in science, and organizing their leisure time in a meaningful way. Regular activities such as book presentations, creative meetings, educational events, competitions, and conferences are held in libraries. In particular, state programs and projects aimed at promoting reading culture among young people have further activated library work. In recent years, innovative library projects have been implemented in Karakalpakstan, and modern library spaces have been established. Such centers have become multifunctional institutions that serve not only as places for reading books but also as venues for education, scientific research, access to information technologies, and participation in cultural events. In addition, efforts are being made to digitize rare manuscripts and historical documents, with great attention paid to preserving national cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations.

During the years of independence, the field of librarianship reached a new stage of development. As a result of the introduction of information and communication technologies, as well as the creation of electronic catalogs and digital library resources, traditional libraries were transformed into modern information and library centers. This process has improved the quality of services provided to readers and significantly expanded access to information resources. Today, libraries in the Republic of Karakalpakstan play an important role in meeting the population's demand for knowledge, developing a

reading culture among young people, supporting scientific research, and preserving national cultural heritage. They function as modern information centers serving the development of education, science, and culture, contributing to the enhancement of society's intellectual potential.

Thus, the history of library development in Karakalpakstan has passed through a long and complex path of evolution, and today these institutions occupy a special place in public life not only as sources of knowledge but also as important factors in spiritual and educational development. In the future, their role in societal progress is expected to grow even further through the wider introduction of digital technologies, enrichment of electronic resources, and continuous improvement of library services.

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