



Article

The History of Studying Ethnonyms: From Ancient Sources to Modern Research

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Abstract: The article provides an analytical overview of the scientific significance of ethnonyms (names of peoples, tribes, and clans), their origins, etymology, and representation in historical sources. The meanings of Central Asian ethnonyms, such as *Uzbek*, *Kyrgyz*, *Kazakh*, *Kipchak*, and *Kangly*, as well as various theories related to them, are examined. The interpretations of ethnonyms in the works of scholars such as Abu Rayhan Beruni, Mahmud Kashgari, Rashididdin, Alisher Navoi, and Babur are analyzed. Additionally, manuscript sources (“*Majmu’ at-tavorix*”, “*Nasabnomayi o‘zbek*”, etc.) and modern research (works by scholars like K. Shoniyozov, B. Ahmedov, and Kh. Doniyorov, K. Markaev) that shed light on the “92 Uzbek tribes”, a key concept in understanding the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people, are discussed. The connection between ethnonyms and toponyms, their linguistic features, and classification are also explored.

Keywords: Ethnonyms, Ethnonymy, Etymology, Uzbek Tribes, 92 Uzbek Tribes, Ethnic History, Toponyms, Ethnotoponyms, Linguistic Analysis

1. Introduction

Ethnonyms – the names of peoples, tribes, clans, and ethnic groups – constitute an essential research subject in linguistics, history, ethnography, and anthropology. They not only reflect the distinct identity of specific communities but also provide valuable insights into their ethnic history, migration patterns, and cultural and linguistic connections. The ethnonyms of Central Asian peoples, particularly those such as *Uzbek*, *Kyrgyz*, *Kazakh*, *Kipchak*, and *Kangly*, have been recorded in various historical sources since ancient times. However, their origins and etymology remain topics of scholarly debate.

This study examines the scientific significance of ethnonyms, their representation in historical sources, and the analysis of manuscripts related to the “92 Uzbek tribes”, a key concept in understanding the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people. The ethnonymic data found in the works of scholars such as Abu Rayhan Beruni, Mahmud Kashgari, Rashididdin, Alisher Navoi, and Babur are explored from the perspective of modern research (including studies by K. Shoniyozov, B. Ahmedov, Kh. Doniyorov, and others). Additionally, the study provides a comprehensive discussion on the connection between ethnonyms and toponyms, their linguistic features, and classification.

2. Materials and Methods

This study utilized the following materials and methods to investigate sources related to ethnonym research:

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Source materials

Ancient written sources: Foundational works such as Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Devonu lug'atit turk", Rashididdin's "Jome' at-tavorix", Alisher Navoi's "Muhokamat ul-lug'atayn", and Babur's Baburnama were used as primary sources. These texts provide detailed information about Turkic peoples and their ethnonyms across different historical periods.

Manuscript sources: A list of 92 Uzbek tribes recorded in 16th–17th-century manuscripts, including "Majmu' at-tavorix", "Nasabnomayi o'zbek", "Tuhfat ut-tavorixiy xoniy" was analyzed.

Modern literature: Key works in the field of ethnonymics (by scholars such as K. Shoniyozov, B. Ahmedov, and X. Doniyorov, K. Markaev), linguistic research (linguistic analysis of ethnonyms), and ethnographic/historical studies were examined.

Research methods: Comparative-historical analysis, linguistic analysis, toponymic analysis, source studies (manbashunoslik), and statistical methods were employed in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Ethnonyms remain a relatively understudied area in ethnonymics, ethnography, history, and linguistics. Researching ethnonyms provides significant insight into the ethnogenesis of peoples and nations.

Every ethnonym carries its own meaning. However, some ethnonyms are so ancient that their meanings are difficult to decipher. Typically, the names of peoples, nations, as well as tribes and major clans, are of ancient origin. For example, there are various interpretations of ethnonyms such as Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh (names of nations), or Qongiro, Qangli, Qipchaq, Uyshun, Qorluq, and Khalaj (names of tribes and clans). Yet, the etymologies of these ethnonyms have not been definitively resolved on a scientific basis.

It is an unscientific and baseless explanation to say that Uzbek means "own chief", Kyrgyz means "forty girls", Kazakh means "fugitive", kangli means "kanqli" (carriage), qarluq means "starved" (left in the snow), khalaj means "starved" (left hungry), and Kalmyk means "left out" (left out of the Islamic faith).

Ethnonyms emerge as a result of historical necessity and carry valuable information. The study of ethnonyms holds great scientific importance. Many fascinating accounts have survived to this day regarding the origins, meanings, historical roots, and creators of clan names. At the same time, the origins and etymologies of numerous ethnonyms remain unclear.

Sources providing information on ethnonyms trace back to ancient times. For instance, even in pre-Christian eras, various Turkic peoples inhabited the territories of present-day Central Asia. Works such as Herodotus' Histories, Strabo's Geographica, Pompeius Trogus' Philippic History, and Justin's Epitome of Pompeius Trogus mention Turkic tribes like the Scythians, Saka, Massagetae, and Dahae, alongside references to Tocharian and Sogdian peoples. These texts record that these tribes had long inhabited regions stretching from the Caspian Sea to the areas near the Wei River (China) and India.

Interesting ideas about ethnonyms were initially proposed by scholars of the ancient period, but this topic later also came into the focus of Central Asian scholars. Notably, great polymaths and writers such as Abu Rayhan Beruni, Mahmud Kashgari, Alisher Navoi, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur expressed their unique perspectives on ethnonyms in their works. They conducted in-depth analyses of the formation of ethnic groups, the reasons behind their names, and the aspects related to language, culture, and geographical factors. These ideas are considered important scholarly sources not only for their time but also for modern ethnolinguistics and historical geography.

One of the eminent scholars of the East, Abu Rayhan Beruni, provides significant information about ancient peoples and their names, i.e., ethnonyms. In his works, he was among the first scholars to mention the Alan and As tribes. According to Beruni, these peoples had Iranian roots and later became part of the Uzbek and Karakalpak ethnic groups. He believed that when the Amu Darya encountered obstacles in its course and began to flow leftward – toward the land of the Kipchaks – the peoples inhabiting this region migrated toward the Caspian (Khazar) Sea. Beruni specifically emphasizes that these migrating peoples were the Alan and As tribes. This information clearly demonstrates the depth of Beruni's historical-ethnographic views and his ability to connect population movements with geographical factors.

One of the most important sources for studying the history of ethnonyms in later periods is the work *"Devonu lug'atit turk"* (Compendium of the Turkic Dialects) written by Mahmud Kashgari. This invaluable work contains precious historical information about ethnonyms, with the author providing profound insights into the Turkic peoples who inhabited Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) and its neighboring regions during his time, including their tribal and clan structures, languages, and cultural connections.

Kashgari strives to reveal the close interrelations among the Turkic tribes living in these regions, highlighting both the similarities and differences in their languages and cultures. *"Devonu lug'atit turk"* is regarded as an unparalleled source not only for linguistics but also for ethnology and history. The work offers comprehensive information on the geographical distribution of Turkic tribes, their clan names, and descriptions of their history and characteristics.

Kashgari writes the following:

"The Turks originally consist of twenty tribes. Each tribe has countless branches. I have recorded the main ones, the mother clans, and selected the prominent ones... The first tribe near Rūm (Byzantium) is the Pechenegs, followed by the Kipchaks, Oghuz, Yamak, Bashkirs, Basmyl, then the Kay, Yabaku, Tatars, and Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz dwell near China. All these tribes stretch from Rūm to the lands of the rising sun. Then come the Chigil, Tukhsi, Yaghma, Igrak, Yaruk, Junul, Uyghurs, Tanguts, Khitans..."

Additionally, Kashgari provides detailed information about the 22 sub-clans of the Oghuz tribe, listing them by name and describing important ethnographic details. This data holds incomparable significance in determining the ethnic composition of Turkic peoples and studying their history and ethnonyms. These aspects of the work demonstrate Kashgari's standing as an advanced linguist and historian of his time.

In general, *"Devonu lug'atit turk"* contains valuable insights on nearly 70 tribes, clans, and peoples in total.

Mahmud Kashgari's *"Devonu lug'atit turk"* (11th century) records the names of 22 clans and tribes, including Turkic ethnonyms. He writes:

"I traveled for many years through the cities, villages, and pastures of the Turks, Turkmens, Oghuz, Chigil, Yaghma, and Kyrgyz, collecting their lexicons, studying and identifying various linguistic features. I did this not because I was ignorant of their languages, but rather to discern even the subtlest differences between them – otherwise, I was among the most proficient in their tongues, one of the greatest experts, a perceptive scholar, familiar with their ancient tribes, and a master of javelin combat".

Mahmud Kashgari analyzed the tribal communities living in Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) during his time. He sought to demonstrate the kinship, linguistic unity, and distinctive characteristics of the clans and tribes belonging to the broader Turkic family, while also providing a geographical map of their settlements.

Another important historical source containing information about Uzbek clans and tribes is Rashididdin's famous work *"Jome' at-tavorix"* (Compendium of Chronicles). This monumental work encompasses major historical, ethnographic, and political events of its

time, providing rich information about the formation process of Turkic peoples, their social structure, and ethnic composition.

In particular, the work offers detailed discussions about the Turkic clans and tribes that played significant roles in the ethnic makeup of the Uzbeks, including the Qongirat, Kipchak, Jalayir, Qataghan, Qangli, Burqut, Kyrgyz, and many others. Rashididdin describes the origins of these tribes, their political and social status, their geographical distribution, and their historical significance.

Additionally, the author provides information about the Urus (Oris) clan, which was part of the Kyrgyz tribal confederation. Through these details, Rashididdin presents important historical evidence about the internal structure of the Kyrgyz and their relations with other Turkic tribes.

"Jome' at-tavorix" (Compendium of Chronicles) is not only a crucial source for its own era but also remains an essential reference for studying the ethnogenesis and ethnonymy of the Uzbek people today. The information in this work, when compared with other historical sources, helps us better understand the processes that shaped ethnic groups.

Alisher Navoi, in his famous work "Muhokamat ul-lug'atayn" (1499), refers to the Uzbek people as "Turk" and describes their language as the "Turkic language." In the work, he consistently and extensively uses terms and expressions such as "Turk", "Turkic", "Turk ulus (Turkic people)", "Turkic language", "Turkic expression", "Turkcha (Turkic speech)", "Turkic tongue" and "Turkic diction". This reflects the perception of linguistic and ethnic unity among Turkic peoples during Navoi's time.

In his work, Navoi expresses his profound affection for the Turkic language and its aesthetic qualities in the following manner:

"...since my nature is attuned to the elegance of Turkic diction, I may appear excessive in praising it..."

He highly esteems the artistic expressive potential of the Turkic language, while endeavoring to demonstrate its unique advantages compared to Arabic and Persian. Continuing his discourse, he states:

"...In this rare meaning, there exists in Turkic such an exquisite opening verse..."

Through these reflections, Navoi reveals himself not only as a linguist but also as a profound thinker who shaped the ethnic and linguistic discourse of his era. By employing the term "Turk" both as an ethnonym and glossonym, he emphasizes the Turkic component that played a crucial role in the ethnic formation of what would become the modern Uzbek people. This allows us to clearly understand the scope and semantic content of the ethnonym "Turk" and related terminology as used in the 15th century.

When analyzing 16th century sources, one work of particular importance for illuminating the history of Uzbek clans and tribes is Majmuat Tavorikh (Compendium of Chronicles) by Sayfiddin Aksikati. Ushbu tarixiy manbada o'zbeklarning etnik tarkibi, qabila va urug'larining nomi, ularning jamiyatdagi o'rni va harakatlari haqida muhim ma'lumotlar keltirilgan.

Particularly noteworthy is the treatise's discussion of ethnonyms associated with Uzbek clans such as Qishliq, Qongirat, Kenagas, and Urus (Oris). These records provide crucial scholarly foundations for understanding the tribal structures and clan affiliations that played pivotal roles in the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people.

Another significant historical-literary monument from the 16th century is the epic poem "Shaybani-nama" composed by Muhammad Salih. This epic work chronicles the socio-political conflicts between the Timurids and Shaybanids, detailing the decline of the Timurid Empire and the establishment of Shaybanid rule. The narrative not only describes historical events but also provides detailed information about the tribal groups and clans involved in these developments.

Muhammad Salih meticulously documents over thirty Turkic tribes and clans participating in these events, specifying their political roles, military leadership positions, and social status. This makes the Shaybani-nama an indispensable source for studying Uzbek ethnonymy.

These two works – Majmu' at-Tawarikh and Shaybani-nama – hold exceptional scholarly value for researching the ethnic formation of the Uzbek people, their tribal-clan system, and the historical development of ethnonyms. They enable crucial conclusions about the ethnic landscape of the 16th century, including the geographical distribution and interrelations of Turkic tribes.

Another significant source worthy of attention in our research is the renowned memoir Baburnama, written by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur .

This work is not only an eyewitness account of historical events but also constitutes an invaluable academic resource from linguistic, geonomic, and ethnological perspectives. The Baburnama contains numerous valuable references to toponyms, ethnonyms, and anthroponyms.

Notably, researchers have identified that Babur records information about 1,034 place names in his memoir. These toponyms – ranging from cities to villages, rivers, mountains, and valleys - provide crucial source material for historical-geographical research.

Regarding ethnonyms, the Baburnama also contains noteworthy details. For instance, Babur specifically discusses the ethnonym “Toqboy”, identifying it as a clan within the Saray and Manghit Uzbek tribal confederations. He documents this ethnonym as representing a distinct socio-ethnic division.

Interestingly, the Toqboy ethnonym persists to this day, surviving not only as an ethnic designation but also in toponymic form. A prime example is “Toqboy” village in Pasdargom district of Samarkand region - one of the toponyms preserving this historical name . This situation is considered a vivid example of ethnonyms transforming into toponyms during historical processes—that is, the formation of ethno-toponyms.

The information found in the Baburnama holds significant importance in studying the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people, identifying their constituent components, and understanding how ethnonyms have persisted in the modern toponymic landscape.

Written sources from the 16th century – such as “Tarixiy Abulxayrxoni”, “Abdullanoma” and “Matbuoti Allomiy” – contain crucial information about the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people. According to these sources, the number of tribes that participated in the formation of the Uzbek people reached 92. This figure indicates that the Uzbek people have a very rich and complex ethnic structure.

Based on these same sources, our people were primarily formed through the unification of Turkic and Mongol tribes. Over historical processes, these 92 clans, tribes, and groups intermingled, forming a large ethnic unity. This process represents a crucial stage in the formation of the Uzbek people and, at the same time, serves as one of the key foundations for understanding the origin of ethnonyms, their continuity, and their traces in toponymy.

The sources mention that Abdullah Khan II (r. 1583–1598), one of the Shaybanid rulers, stated in a letter sent to Jalaluddin Akbar (r. 1556–1605), the famous representative of the Mughal dynasty ruling in India:

“We rule over the ninety-two Uzbek tribes”.

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4. Discussion

The study of Turkic ethnonyms has been significantly advanced by renowned Turkologists such as V.V. Radlov, M.V. Bartold, S.P. Tolstov, L.V. Gumilyov, and N.A. Baskakov, as well as Uzbek scholars including Yahyo G‘ulomov, B. Ahmedov, E. Begmatov, K. Shoniyozov, A. Muhammadjonov, Kh. Doniyorov, T. Nafasov, A. Otajonova, and other researchers.

Valuable insights on ethnonyms have been preserved in the scholarly works of S.M. Abramzon, N.N. Muravyov, V.N. Byatkin, G.I. Danilevsky, N.A. Baskakov, D.Y. Yermeev, Y.A. Zuev, S. Gubaeva, B.Kh. Karmisheva, K. Shoniyozov, and B. Ahmedov. These researchers have uncovered the historical roots of ethnonyms through the study of sources related to the ethnic history of Turkic peoples, archaeological findings, written records, and linguistic analyses.

In the field of Uzbek ethnonymy, numerous historians and linguists have conducted fruitful scientific investigations. Historians such as I.I. Umnyakov, K. Shoniyozov, B. Ahmedov, and A. Askarov have produced significant works on the formation of the Uzbek people, their ethnic composition, and their role in historical processes.

In linguistics, scholars such as Kh. Doniyorov, S. Qoraev, E. Begmatov, T. Nafasov, N. Okhunov, A. Turobov, K. Markaev, and N. Begaliev have conducted research dedicated to the linguistic features of Uzbek ethnonyms.

For example, K. Shoniyozov’s works – “On the Ethnic History of the Uzbek People” (1974) and “The Formation Process of the Uzbek People” (2001) – provide extensive analysis of the ethnic composition, tribal structure, and historical development of the Uzbeks. Similarly, B. Ahmedov’s book “The Uzbek Ulus” (2002) serves as an important source on this subject.

N.A. Baskakov, in his studies on “The Tale of Igor’s Campaign”, identified the presence of various Turkic ethnonyms such as Topchak, Tatan, Mogut, and Ovar, while also examining their etymological roots.

The fundamental work of Academician A. Askarov, “The Ethnogenesis and Ethnic History of the Uzbek People”, is not only recommended for researchers but also serves as a textbook for students specializing in history, holding a distinguished place among scholarly literature in this field.

Generally, the scientific works of these scholars serve as an important foundation for the in-depth and comprehensive study of Uzbek ethnonyms.

Khodzha Daniyarov’s work “Genealogy and Dialects of the Uzbek People” consists of two parts, covering significant information about the ethnic history of the Uzbek people.

The first part of the book presents interesting evidence on the reflection of Uzbek tribal and clan names in the works of authors such as Mahmud Kashgari ("Devonu lug'otit turk"), Rashididdin ("Jome'ut tavorix"), Alisher Navoi, and Abulghazi Bahadirkhan.

The second part analyzes manuscript sources and linguistic research related to Uzbek ethnonyms. S. Qoraev's "Ethnonymics" discusses the formation of ethnonyms and ethnotoponyms, as well as their semantics. Additionally, issues of Uzbek ethnonymy are thoroughly explored in works such as M. Mamedov's "Ethnic Names in Place Names" (1981), U. Sanaqulov's "The Formation and Naming of the Uzbek People and Language" (1991), G. Abdurakhmanov's "On the Formation of the Uzbek People and Language" (1999), Z. Ziyotov's "The Tribes of Turan" (2008), A. Turobov's "Samarkand Ethnonyms and Ethno-Oikonyms" (2004), and A. Shukurov's "On the Origin of the Term 'Uzbek'" (2010).

In N. Begaliev's work "From the History of Uzbek Ethnonyms", a list of 92 Uzbek clans (pp. 23–25) and the genealogy of the Qongrat tribe and its subdivisions (pp. 51–56) are provided, along with interesting etymological explanations for numerous Turkic tribal and clan names.

The classification of ethnonyms is also addressed in A. Turobov's dissertation "Analysis of Ethnonyms and Ethno-Oikonyms in Samarkand Region". The scholar divides ethnonyms into two groups based on their linguistic-semantic features:

1. Ethnonyms formed on the basis of linguistic factors.
2. Ethnonyms formed on the basis of non-linguistic factors.

K. Markaev conducted a linguistic analysis of ethnonyms in the Uzbek language based on materials from Southern Uzbekistan. The first chapter of his doctoral dissertation is titled "The Place of Ethnonyms in the Onomastic System". Subsequent chapters classify ethnonyms by meaning and subject matter, providing etymological explanations for some ethnonyms that have been forgotten or become obscure over time.

For example, the clan name "Yabu" originally meant an ordinary packhorse, as evidenced by the Uzbek folk epic verse: "Don't say 'Yabu,' this horse is a steed!" Later, this horse name evolved into an ethnonym. Another example is "Bahrin", which in ancient Turkic referred to a large bird of prey – a falcon – used in hunting. Over time, this name also came to be used as an ethnonym.

The final (third) chapter of K. Markaev's research examines the grammatical structure and formation patterns of Uzbek ethnonyms. The analysis reveals that the majority of Uzbek ethnonyms consist of simple, root-based forms. At the same time, compound two-component ethnonyms formed through syntactic methods are also widespread.

Such ethnonyms often include lexical elements such as:

to'p (ball) – boyto'p, badalto'p;
 to'da (gang) – saroyto'da, bekto'da;
 bachcha (child) – gulbachcha, jilobachcha;
 tuvq'on (born) – qarshidantuvq'on, devonadantuvq'on;
 tirnoq (nail) – ko'ktirnoq, oqtirnoq;
 bosh (head) – jortibosh, olmabosh;
 o'g'il (boy) – besho'g'il, ucho'g'il;
 tuxum (eggs) – bozortuxum, ustatuxum;
 kalla (head) – chorkalla, qorakalla;
 qora (black) – qorakaltak, qorako'z;
 oq (white) – oqmang'it, oqtelpak;
 besh (five) – beshbola, beshkal;

yetti (seven) – yettiuyli, yettiurug’;
 uch (three) – uchqora, uchuruv / uchurug’;
 ola (colorful) – olato’p, olachopon.

These structurally complex ethnonyms are directly linked to folk oral traditions and historical-cultural processes. Their content and form provide important linguistic and ethnological insights into the ethnic development of the Uzbek people.

5. Conclusion

The study of ethnonyms holds significance not only from a linguistic perspective but also in historical, ethnographic, and cultural contexts. While the ethnonyms of Central Asian peoples have been extensively examined in ancient sources, their precise etymology and meanings remain subjects of varying interpretations. For instance, explanations regarding the origins of names such as *Uzbek*, *Kyrgyz* and *Kipchak* sometimes lack scientific basis, yet modern research offers more precise approaches to these questions.

Historical sources – such as “*Divan-i Lugat-at-Turk*”, “*Jami’ al-Tawarikh*”, and “*Baburnama*” – provide unique insights into the spread of ethnonyms and their role in the formation of ethnic groups. In particular, manuscripts referencing the “92 Uzbek tribes” serve as crucial sources for understanding the complex ethnic composition of the Uzbek people.

In conclusion, ethnonyms are not merely words but vital indicators of a people’s rich historical heritage and cultural identity. Their study enables a deeper understanding not only of the past but also of contemporary ethnic processes.

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