

UOT 94(479.24)

<https://doi.org/10.59849/2710-0820.2025.2.26>

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INSCRIPTIONS, EPICS, AND GENEALOGIES: TURKIC TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR AZERBAIJANI ETHNOGENESIS

Keywords: *Azerbaijani ethnogenesis, Turkic written sources, Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, Book of Dede Korkut, Oghuzname manuscripts, Turkic genealogical traditions*

Introduction. Turkic written sources present a complex challenge for Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies. With the notable exception of “Kitab-i Dedem Korkut” [4; 7], most of these texts cover geographical regions beyond Azerbaijan and do not provide direct evidence about the territory. However, the common origins, language, and culture of Turkic peoples serve as compelling grounds for considering these sources as valuable informants about Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. This approach becomes particularly justified when we consider that Turkic tribes remained a dynamic mass throughout most of their history, continuously changing their locations and spheres of influence.

The dynamic nature of Turkic tribal movements is crucial for understanding how these written sources relate to Azerbaijani history. Only by recognizing this geographical and temporal fluidity can Turkic texts serve as legitimate sources for studying Azerbaijan’s ethnic formation. The tribes that appear in Central Asian sources often migrated westward, carrying their genealogical traditions, linguistic features, and cultural practices into the South Caucasus region where they contributed to Azerbaijani ethnogenesis.

Analysis of historical chronicles and linguistic records, particularly the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions [11], reveals the enduring presence and profound influence of various Turkic tribes within Azerbaijan’s geographical and cultural landscape. These include the Bulgars, Khazars, Oghuzes, Kipchaks, and numerous other groups whose movements and settlements directly shaped the region’s ethnic composition. Persian sources [2; 8], the Uyghur Oghuzname [10],

and Mahmud al-Kashgari’s monumental work [6] further illuminate the complex interactions between these Turkic groups, providing essential data for understanding Azerbaijan’s ethnogenetic processes and socio-political evolution across different historical epochs.

These primary sources reveal intricate patterns of cultural integration and preservation among Turkic groups in the region. Their testimonies clarify issues of ethnic identity, political organization, and genealogical consciousness that are fundamental to understanding how various Turkic communities in Azerbaijan developed their collective identity and self-designation while maintaining their distinct cultural characteristics.

The Orkhon-Yenisei Inscriptions and Early Turkic Genealogical Consciousness. The Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions [11], dating from the 8th century, represent the earliest written records of Turkic genealogical and tribal consciousness. These runic monuments, carved in Old Turkic script across the steppes of Mongolia and southern Siberia, provide crucial foundational evidence for understanding how Turkic peoples conceptualized lineage, tribal identity, and ancestral legitimacy centuries before the emergence of later Oghuzname traditions documented by medieval chroniclers.

For Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies, these inscriptions are particularly valuable because they establish the earliest documented patterns of Turkic genealogical thinking. The concepts of tribal hierarchy, dynastic legitimacy, and genealogical validation preserved in these 8th-century monuments would later appear in the tribal structures of Oghuz groups that migrated

to and settled in the South Caucasus region. The inscriptions thus provide a baseline for understanding the deep historical roots of the genealogical consciousness that would shape proto-Azerbaijani communities.

The most significant inscriptions, particularly the Bilge Qagan and Kül Tigin monuments in the Orkhon Valley, establish clear precedents for the genealogical frameworks that would later characterize Oghuzname literature. These texts demonstrate sophisticated awareness of dynastic succession and tribal hierarchy. They emphasize the importance of maintaining genealogical records for political legitimacy. The inscriptions consistently emphasize the divine mandate of the Ashina clan and trace their lineage through multiple generations, establishing patterns of genealogical validation that would become central to later Oghuz tribal narratives [11, 24].

The organizational structures documented in these inscriptions directly parallel the systems that would later govern Turkic communities in Azerbaijan. The inscriptions reveal how various Turkic tribes were organized under paramount leadership, with clear hierarchical arrangements based on genealogical proximity to ruling lineages. This organizational model mirrors the later Oghuz tribal systems described in medieval sources, suggesting remarkable continuity in Turkic political and social structures across several centuries and vast geographical distances.

The inscriptions also provide crucial evidence of early Turkic concepts of tribal unity and shared ancestry that would later be systematized in the Oghuz Khan legends. References to common origins, shared territories, and collective identity in the face of external threats demonstrate that the genealogical consciousness underlying Oghuzname literature had deep historical roots extending back to the pre-Islamic period. This genealogical awareness would prove essential for maintaining tribal cohesion among the diverse Turkic groups that eventually coalesced into the Azerbaijani people.

The geographic and migration patterns documented in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions provide additional context for understanding

Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. The monuments describe movements across the Central Asian steppes, conflicts with settled populations, and the establishment of new tribal territories. These patterns mirror the migration narratives found in later Oghuzname sources and help explain how Oghuz genealogical traditions developed across vast territories before reaching the South Caucasus region.

The linguistic evidence preserved in these inscriptions offers equally significant insights for Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies. The Old Turkic vocabulary related to kinship, tribal organization, and genealogical concepts provides etymological foundations for understanding the terminology that would later appear in Azerbaijani linguistic development. Terms for tribal leadership, kinship relationships, and genealogical descent found in the inscriptions illuminate the linguistic evolution connecting early Turkic political vocabulary with the genealogical terminology that became embedded in Azerbaijani cultural consciousness.

The Uyghur Version of the Oghuzname and Its Significance for Azerbaijani Ethnogenesis. The transition from the early Orkhon period to later medieval sources reveals increasing sophistication in Turkic genealogical literature. The Uyghur version of the Oghuzname [10] represents a crucial but underexplored dimension of this literary tradition. Written in Old Uyghur script between the 9th and 15th centuries, this manuscript tradition preserves ancestral narratives and tribal genealogies in their most authentic Turkic linguistic form, predating the Persian adaptations that have dominated scholarly attention.

For Azerbaijani ethnogenetic research, the Uyghur Oghuzname's linguistic authenticity proves invaluable. Unlike later Persian versions that filtered Turkic narratives through Islamic historiographical frameworks, the Uyghur manuscript maintains direct connection to original Turkic cultural contexts. This preservation is crucial for understanding Azerbaijani formation because it maintains tribal terminologies, kinship structures, and cultural concepts in their original forms before translation and cultural adaptation modified their meanings.

The historical context of the Uyghur Oghuzname's composition directly parallels the migratory and cultural transformation processes that affected proto-Azerbaijani populations. The Old Uyghur script emerged after the collapse of the Uyghur Khaganate in the ninth century, when remnants migrated to Turfan, Qomul, and Gansu [10, 14]. This period of tribal dispersion and cultural adaptation mirrors the experiences of Oghuz groups that migrated westward toward the South Caucasus, making the Uyghur manuscript particularly relevant for understanding how genealogical traditions were preserved during periods of geographical displacement.

The Uyghur Oghuzname forms part of the broader Chingiznāma-Oghuznāma Complex, representing an oral and written tradition that evolved over seven centuries in post-Mongol Central Asia. This extended development period encompasses the era when various Turkic groups were establishing themselves in the South Caucasus region and contributing to Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. The manuscript's documentation of this transitional period provides essential evidence for understanding how tribal identities were maintained and transformed during the ethnogenetic processes that shaped Azerbaijani identity.

The genealogical framework presented in the Uyghur version offers several critical contributions to Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies. First, it provides linguistic evidence of early Turkic dialectal variations that directly influenced Azerbaijani language formation. The manuscript preserves archaic Turkic vocabulary and grammatical structures that illuminate the evolutionary path from Old Turkic through various medieval dialects to modern Azerbaijani. Second, the genealogical relationships among Oghuz confederations documented in the text include many groups that contributed directly to Azerbaijani ethnic formation.

The manuscript's treatment of Oghuz Khan's legendary genealogy and the subsequent tribal divisions provides essential data for mapping ancestral connections between various Turkic groups that settled in the South Caucasus. These tribal narratives, preserved in their original Turkic linguistic context, reveal migra-

tion patterns, inter-tribal alliances, and cultural synthesis processes that directly shaped proto-Azerbaijani communities during the medieval period. The preservation of these narratives in their original form allows researchers to understand how genealogical consciousness was transmitted and adapted as tribes moved from Central Asia toward their eventual settlements in Azerbaijan.

The Uyghur Oghuzname's chronological position makes it particularly valuable for understanding the pre-Islamic cultural layers that remained embedded in Azerbaijani identity. While later Persian versions reflect Islamic influence on Turkic genealogical narratives, the Uyghur manuscript preserves earlier cosmological and cultural elements that continued to influence Azerbaijani folk traditions and collective memory long after Islamization.

Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Divani lugat ut-Turk" and Oghuz Genealogical Traditions. Building upon the foundation established by earlier sources, Mahmud al-Kashgari's monumental work "Divani lugat ut-Turk," completed in 1074, stands as one of the earliest and most comprehensive linguistic and ethnographic studies of the Turkic peoples. While primarily conceived as a dictionary and grammatical treatise, this remarkable 11th-century work contains invaluable genealogical information about Oghuz tribes that makes it an essential source for understanding Azerbaijani ethnogenesis alongside traditional Oghuzname literature [6, 9].

Al-Kashgari's approach to documenting Oghuz tribal genealogies emerges from his systematic effort to catalog the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Turkic world. His work provides what might be considered the earliest scholarly attempt to organize and preserve Oghuz tribal nomenclature and lineage structures. For Azerbaijani studies, this systematic approach proves particularly valuable because it captures tribal relationships and cultural patterns during a period when many Oghuz groups were beginning their westward migrations that would eventually bring them to the South Caucasus region.

Unlike the narrative approaches found in later historical chronicles, al-Kashgari's docu-

mentation appears as ethno-linguistic analysis, making it uniquely valuable for understanding how tribal identities and genealogical consciousness were preserved during the transition from the pre-Islamic to early Islamic periods. This transitional perspective is crucial for Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies because it documents tribal structures during the period when ancestors of the Azerbaijani people were developing their distinctive cultural and linguistic characteristics.

Al-Kashgari's treatment of Oghuz genealogies demonstrates remarkable geographical and cultural breadth that directly benefits Azerbaijani research. Writing from Kashgar in Central Asia, he had access to diverse tribal traditions and oral histories that may have been less accessible to later chroniclers. His documentation includes the names of 22 distinct Oghuz tribes (Kayı, Bayat, Alkaevli, Karaevli, Yazır, Döğər, Dodurğa and etc.), making his work one of the most comprehensive early catalogs of Oghuz tribal organization. Significantly for Azerbaijani studies, many of these documented tribes would later contribute to the ethnic formation of the Azerbaijani people through migration and settlement in the South Caucasus.

Al-Kashgari's inclusion of tribal tamghas alongside tribal names represents a unique contribution to understanding Azerbaijani ethnogenesis [6, 26-28]. These symbolic representations were crucial for tribal identification, property marking, and maintaining genealogical consciousness in largely oral cultures. The preservation of these material culture elements provides insights into how proto-Azerbaijani groups maintained their tribal identities during periods of migration and cultural contact with other populations in the South Caucasus region.

The genealogical framework presented in "Divani lugat ut-Turk" shows clear awareness of legendary ancestor Oghuz Khan and traditional tribal divisions, but al-Kashgari's presentation differs significantly from later mythologized accounts. His systematic, less embellished approach focuses on practical tribal organization rather than heroic narratives. For Azerbaijani ethnogenetic research, this pragmatic approach provides valuable evidence for understanding the historical core of Oghuz ge-

nealogical traditions before they became heavily mythologized in later literary works.

Al-Kashgari's linguistic focus allows him to trace tribal connections through shared vocabulary, dialectical variations, and naming patterns that illuminate the linguistic foundations of Azerbaijani development. His documentation of how different Oghuz groups referred to themselves and their neighbors provides crucial insights into inter-tribal relationships and the fluid nature of tribal boundaries during the medieval period when proto-Azerbaijani communities were forming.

Turkic Tribes in the Kitab-i Dede Korkut. The progression from earlier sources reaches its most direct relevance to Azerbaijani ethnogenesis in the Kitab-i Dede Korkut, which provides unparalleled insights into the socio-political structures and tribal affiliations that directly shaped Azerbaijani identity. This epic represents a foundational text in Oghuz Turkic literature and offers the most geographically and culturally proximate evidence for understanding proto-Azerbaijani tribal organization and cultural practices.

The epic has been extensively studied [3; 4; 7; 9], and its importance for ethnogenetic research lies in its preservation of authentic tribal nomenclature and social structures that directly correspond to the historical populations that formed the Azerbaijani people. Unlike the geographically distant sources examined previously, the Book of Dede Korkut emerges from the very region and populations that contributed to Azerbaijani formation, making it an indispensable primary source for ethnogenetic studies.

The Oghuz Turks significantly influenced Azerbaijan's Turkic identity through their migrations and settlements beginning around the 10th and 11th centuries. The Book of Dede Korkut serves as a crucial ethno-historical document for understanding the tribal nomenclature and socio-political organization of these groups. The epic specifically references tribal entities including the Bayat, Ulaş, Salur, Uran, Bayandur, and Kipchak, among others [4, 43]. These tribal names correspond directly to groups that historical sources document as contributors to Azerbaijani ethnogenesis.

The epic's explicit mention of the Oghuz as a significant tribal group [5, 22] provides direct textual evidence for the presence and influence of this nomadic Turkic confederation from Central Asia that invaded Azerbaijan in the mid-11th century. This documentation proves particularly valuable because it represents contemporary or near-contemporary testimony about the very populations and events that shaped Azerbaijani ethnic formation.

Beyond explicitly named groups, the epic alludes to broader tribal confederations and subclans, reflecting the intricate and fluid nature of Turkic tribal structures that characterized the period of Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. The text reveals how various tribal groups maintained their distinct identities while participating in larger confederative structures, providing insights into the complex processes through which diverse Turkic populations eventually coalesced into the Azerbaijani people.

The epic also contains invaluable information on the historical geography of Azerbaijan, with even newly discovered manuscripts explicitly mentioning Azerbaijan [3]. This geographical specificity reinforces the text's direct relevance to Azerbaijani ethnogenetic studies and provides contemporary evidence for the territorial and cultural boundaries within which Azerbaijani identity developed.

Oghuznames as Primary Sources on Oghuz Turk History and Genealogy. The transition from oral traditions preserved in sources like the Book of Dede Korkut to systematic written genealogical works represents a crucial development in the documentation of Azerbaijani ethnogenetic processes. While Turkish researchers claim that approximately thirty "Oghuzname" works exist, this study focuses on the most genealogically significant sources: those by Rashid ad-Din and Abul Gazi Bahadur Khan, along with Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Divani lugat ut-Turk." These sources specifically list genealogical lines and tribal names essential for understanding Azerbaijani formation [9].

Fadhil-allāh Rashīd al-Dīn's "Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh," particularly the section known as "Oghuzname" [8], stands as a pivotal historical document offering detailed accounts of Oghuz

genealogical origins and tribal structures that directly relate to Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. This extensive work, compiled in the early 14th century, serves not only as a historical account but also as a foundational text for understanding the political legitimacy claims of various Turkic dynasties that ruled over territories including Azerbaijan and claimed descent from Oghuz Khan.

Rashid ad-Din's work proves particularly significant for Azerbaijani studies because it was compiled during the Ilkhanate period, when Mongol-Turkic rulers governed Azerbaijan and sought to legitimize their authority through connection to Turkic genealogical traditions. The author's position as a prominent vizier and physician in the Ilkhanate provided him access to diverse historical traditions that included those of Mongols, Turks, and Persians, creating a synthesis that reflected the multi-ethnic reality of Azerbaijan during this formative period.

The "Oghuzname" section meticulously details 24 Oghuz tribes, tracing their eponymous ancestors to the six sons of Oghuz Khan and establishing a complex genealogical framework that underpinned tribal organization and political hierarchy [8, 54-60]. For Azerbaijani ethnogenetic research, this comprehensive tribal enumeration provides an unparalleled resource that includes specific tribal names such as Kynyk, Kaiyg, and Bayındır, among others. Many of these tribes are corroborated by contemporary sources like Mahmud al-Kashgari [5, 77-82], and several contributed directly to Azerbaijani ethnic formation through migration and settlement in the South Caucasus.

Abu'l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan's *Shajara-i Tarākima* [2], completed in 1659, represents another crucial source for understanding Azerbaijani ethnogenesis through its comprehensive compilation of Oghuz genealogical traditions. The author composed this work by comparing Rashid ad-Din's "Oghuzname" with approximately twenty local Turkmen Oghuzname narratives, creating a synthesis that preserved both written and oral genealogical traditions spanning several centuries.

For Azerbaijani studies, the *Shajara-i Tarākima*'s significance extends beyond histor-

ical documentation to illuminate the construction of Turkic identity and legitimization of dynastic power within Central Asian and South Caucasus contexts. The work's emphasis on monotheistic origins and deep historical roots of the Oghuz provides insight into how Turkic populations in Azerbaijan and surrounding regions understood their place within broader Islamic civilization while maintaining their distinctive genealogical consciousness.

The work's rapid international recognition, with a French translation appearing in Leiden as early as 1726, demonstrates its importance for European understanding of Central Asian and, by extension, South Caucasus ethnogenetic processes [12, 133]. This early translation made Azerbaijani ancestral narratives accessible to European scholars and influenced Enlightenment-era perceptions of the region's complex ethnic history [12, 140-145].

The integration of the *Shajara-i Tarākima* into European oriental studies provided primary source material for understanding the region's historical migrations and cultural heritage, influencing later scholarly expeditions and research that would further illuminate Azerbaijani ethnogenetic processes. Despite some European scholars' critical assessments of its narrative style [12, 170-175], the work's preservation of genealogical traditions proves invaluable for understanding how diverse Turkic populations maintained their ancestral consciousness while adapting to new geographical and cultural environments.

Conclusion. This comprehensive examination of Turkic written sources reveals the complex, multi-layered processes underlying Azerbaijani ethnogenesis. The textual evidence, spanning from the 8th-century Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions to the 17th-century genealogical compilations, demonstrates remarkable continuity in Turkic genealogical consciousness and tribal organizational patterns that directly informed Azerbaijani ethnic formation.

The Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions establish foundational precedents for genealogical validation and tribal hierarchy that would characterize later Oghuz traditions. The Uyghur *Oghuzname* preserves these narratives in their most authentic Turkic linguistic form, provid-

ing crucial evidence for understanding the pre-Islamic cultural layers of Azerbaijani identity. Mahmud al-Kashgari's systematic documentation bridges oral traditions with written chronicles, while the *Book of Dede Korkut* offers direct ethnographic insights into proto-Azerbaijani tribal structures.

The Persian adaptations by Rashid ad-Din and Abul Gazi Bahadur Khan, though filtered through Islamic historiographical frameworks, preserve essential genealogical information that maps the relationships between various Turkic confederations contributing to Azerbaijani formation. These sources collectively demonstrate how diverse Turkic groups maintained genealogical consciousness while adapting to different geographical and cultural environments.

The linguistic evidence traces the evolution from Old Turkic dialects to modern Azerbaijani, while genealogical frameworks illuminate the complex tribal relationships and migration patterns that shaped the South Caucasus region. This textual corpus reveals that Azerbaijani ethnogenesis resulted not from simple migration, but from sophisticated processes of cultural synthesis, tribal confederation, and genealogical integration that occurred over several centuries.

These Turkic written sources thus provide indispensable primary evidence for understanding Azerbaijani ethnogenesis, offering both linguistic authentication and genealogical documentation that illuminate the historical processes underlying the formation of Azerbaijani ethnic identity.

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Xülasə

Lalə Ağamirzə Əliyeva

Kitabələr, dastanlar və şəcərələr: Azərbaycan etnogenezi üçün türk mətn dəlilləri

Bu tədqiqat Azərbaycan xalqının etnogenezinin anlaşılmasında türkdilli yazılı mənbələrin həlledici rolunu araşdırır; Azərbaycan etnik formalaşmasının mürəkkəb tarixi proseslərini işıqlandıran ilkin mətn sübutlarını təhlil edir. Tədqiqat qədim və orta əsr türkcə əlyazmalarının geniş korpusuna əsaslanır; bunlara türklərin dil və mədəni kimliyinin ən erkən yazılı şahidləri olan Orxon-Yenisey yazıları da daxildir. Araşdırmanın mərkəzində duran əfsanəvi epik silsilə – “Dədə Qorqud Kitabı” – proto-Azərbaycan tayfa strukturlarını və mədəni praktikaları əks etdirən dəyərli etnoqrafik və dilçilik məlumatlarını qoruyub saxlamışdır.

Təhlil uyğur əlifbası ilə yazılmış Oğuznamə əlyazmalarının incələnməsini də əhatə edir; bu mətnlər Azərbaycan xalqının ata-baba soy köklərini izləmək üçün mühüm olan genealoji ənənələri və tayfa mənsubiyyətlərini sənədləşdirir. Xüsusilə əhəmiyyətli olan türkcə genealoji əsərlərin farsdilli adaptasiyalarıdır – Rəşideddinin “Oğuznamə”si və Əbülqazi Bahadır xanın “Şəcərəyi-Tərakimə” bu mənbələr mədəni ötürülmə yolu ilə əsas etnogenez məlumatlarını qoruyub saxlamışdır.

Bu mənbələr birlikdə türkcə dialektlərin Azərbaycan dilinə təkamülünü göstərən dilçilik sübutlarını təqdim edir; eyni zamanda müxtəlif türk tayfa konfederasiyaları arasındakı əlaqələri xəritələndirən ətraflı genealoji çərçivələr təklif edir.

Açar sözlər: *Azərbaycan etnogenezi, türk yazılı mənbələri, Orxon-Yenisey yazıları, Kitabı Dədəm Qorqud, Oğuznamə əlyazmaları, türkcə genealoji ənənələr, tarixi dilçilik, tayfa konfederasiyaları*

Резюме

Лала Агамирзе Алиева

Аадписи, эпосы и генеалогии: тюркские текстовые свидетельства этногенеза Азербайджанцев

Данное исследование рассматривает ключевую роль тюркских письменных источников в понимании этногенеза азербайджанского народа, анализируя первичные текстовые свидетельства, проливающие свет на сложные исторические процессы, лежащие в основе формирования азербайджанской этничности. Исследование опирается на обширный корпус древних и средневековых тюркских рукописей, включая фундаментальные Орхонско-Енисейские надписи – первые письменные свидетельства тюркской языковой и культурной идентичности. Центральным элементом анализа является легендарный эпический цикл «Книга Деде Коркута», сохраняющий ценнейшие этнографические и лингвистические данные, отражающие прототипические племенные структуры и культурные практики азербайджанцев.

Анализ также охватывает рукописи Огузнаме, записанные уйгурским письмом, документирующие генеалогические традиции и племенные связи, важные для прослеживания родословных азербайджанского народа. Особое значение имеют персидскоязычные адаптации тюркских генеалогических сочинений – в частности, «Огузнаме» Рашид ад-Дина и «Шаджара-йи Таракиме» (Генеалогия туркмен) Абулгази Бахадур-хана, которые сохранили важнейшую информацию об этногенезе благодаря межкультурной передаче.

В совокупности эти источники предоставляют лингвистические свидетельства эволюции тюркских диалектов в азербайджанский язык, а также содержат подробные генеалогические схемы, отображающие взаимосвязи между различными тюркскими племенными конфедерациями.

Ключевые слова: *Этногенез азербайджанцев, тюркские письменные источники, Орхонско-Енисейские надписи, Книга Деде Коркута, Рукописи Огузнаме, тюркские генеалогические традиции, историческая лингвистика, племенные конфедерации*