

THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE TURKIC KHAGANATE

**Abdullaev Ulug'bek Saydanovich**

Professor of the Department of  
Languages and Humanities,  
doctor of historical sciences

Andijan State Technical Institute

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20308523>

**Abstract**

This article provides information about the ethnic composition of the Turkic Khaganate, which played a significant role in the lives of Central Asian peoples during the early Middle Ages. Sources and literature related to the issue under consideration are thoroughly analyzed. By analyzing these sources and literature, the author sheds light on the origin (ethnogenesis) and ethnic characteristics of numerous Turkic-speaking ethnic groups who lived within the territory of this political union.

**Keywords:** Turkic Khaganate, ethnogenesis, ethnic history, tribe, turkic-speaking, dulu, nushibi, turkesh, qarluq, chigil, tashili, tuxsi, arghun.

**Introduction**

It is known that scientific literature provides sufficient information about the formation of the Turkic Khaganate and the conquest of a large part of Central Asia by this state.

In the 60s of the 6th century, the Turkic armies defeated the Hephtalites and occupied the territories of Chach (present-day Tashkent oasis), the Syr Darya and Amu Darya interfluvium. In the 70s of the same century, the Turks occupied the lower reaches of the Volga River, the North Caucasus, the territories north-east of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, gaining vast territories and rising to the level of a major empire of its time. However, as a result of economic and political difficulties, this empire split into two independent states, the Eastern and Western Turkic Khaganates, between 581-603. The Western Turkic Khaganate, centered in the Seven Rivers, the heart of the sedentary farming oases of Eastern Turkestan and Central Asia, remained under its rule. The Eastern Turkic Khaganate was soon conquered by the Chinese government. Below, we will focus on the main aspects of the ethno-political processes that took place during the Turkic Khaganate period (6th-8th centuries).

Researchers associate the further thickening of the Turkic ethnic layer in the territory of Maverannahr and Khwarazm with the influx of numerous Turkic-speaking tribes into these lands as part of the Turkic Khaganate armies. During this period, Turkic ethnic groups penetrated all the provinces and districts of the above-mentioned territory [1: 236].

Indeed, the composition of the Turkic Khaganate army was not ethnically homogeneous. This composition consisted of a number of Turkic-speaking clans and tribes.

**Relevance and current status of the topic**

History tells us that the Ashina people, who lived under the rule of the Juzhans in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, intermingled with other Turkic ethnic groups in this area. The new ethnic group formed from this intermingling was also recorded in scientific works under the ethnonym Turk [6]. It was precisely this new ethnic group that was led by the descendants of Ashina and grew stronger, laying the foundation for the Turkic Khaganate in the middle of the 6th century. A number of tribes that were subjugated by the descendants of Ashina during this



period and were incorporated into the Turkic Khaganate army were later called by the common name - the ethnonym Turk.

As we mentioned on one of the previous pages, most scholars argue that the word "Turk" means "strong", "powerful". The first mention of this term dates back to the 40s of the 6th century. Some researchers argue that this term did not initially have an ethnic meaning, it had a social meaning. For example, researcher A. Baratova writes: "The Ashina clan, the tribes that were subordinate to it and were close relatives, and the military nobility of these tribes, who formed the core of the new state union, were called that. Later, the large tribal union and the peoples who obeyed it were called Turks, while the old name of the tribe, Ashina, remained the name of the ruling dynasty" [3: 44].

A. Khudjaev, commenting on this issue, argues that the ethnonyms «tele», «chile», «dingling», «dili», and «di» found in Chinese sources are different transcriptions of the term "Turk" in Chinese at different periods. He emphasizes that Chinese scholars unanimously agree that «tele» was a prestigious and collective name for a group of related peoples. He suggests that the term "Turk," which appeared on the historical scene in the 5th-6th centuries AD, should not be confused with it. According to him, the term "Turk" emerged in the 5th-6th centuries as the name of a specific tribe within the «tele» people. From the 7th century onwards, it became the common name for the «tele» tribes [6: 14,17].

The views expressed by both scholars on the term "Turk" indicate that the Turkic Khaganate armies that entered Maverannahr and Khwarazm were ethnically diverse, composed of various ethnic unions.

The influx of numerous Turkic ethnic groups into the territory of Central Asia during the Turkic Khaganate period (6th-8th centuries) not only increased the position of the Turkic ethnic layer but also led to a further intensification of interethnic processes in the region. Interethnic relations in this territory during this period are vividly reflected in the Turk-Sogdian relations.

As a result of the intensification of the migration of a number of new Turkic-speaking ethnic groups, by the 7th-8th centuries, a Turk-Sogdian ethno-cultural field was formed in the interfluvium of the two rivers of Central Asia and its adjacent territories [1: 228].

According to A. Otahodzhaev, who studied Turk-Sogdian relations in Central Asia during the early Middle Ages, the Turkic Khaganate, in turn, activated the political, economic, and ethno-cultural relations of ethnic groups across a vast territory [7: 40].

Turk-Sogdian ethno-cultural relations during this period occurred in almost all spheres of spiritual and cultural life. As a result of close positive relations in spiritual life, commonalities were formed in the customs and beliefs of Turkic-speaking and Sogdian ethnic groups.

Another key feature of the ethnic processes during the Turkic Khaganate period, as we have already mentioned, was the arrival and gradual settling of numerous Turkic tribes in this region.

During this period, ethnic groups such as «dulu», «nushibi», «turkesh», and «qarluq» settled in Maverannahr. We will briefly discuss the ethnic origin and other ethno-cultural characteristics of these ethnic groups.

First, we will provide historical information about the «dulu». Sources indicate that the «dulu» were one of the ancient Turkic tribes, who lived in Western Jungaria and partly in the Seven Rivers (the Ili River valley) in the 6th-7th centuries. One of the 12 Uyghur tribes mentioned in a 5th-century Chinese chronicle was called «tuli». N.A. Aristov equates this ethnonym with the ethnonym «dulu» [2: 297,298]. Based on this, K. Shoniyofov writes: "If so, the early ancestors of the «dulu» or «tuli» ethnonym go back to the Uyghurs and through them to the Xiongnu" [8: 153].

Part of the «dulu» left the Seven Rivers, where they lived, due to internal tribal conflicts and settled in the Volga region. The groups that remained in the Seven Rivers later became part



of the ethnic composition of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz, intermingling with them and forgetting their own name.

Another large tribal union in the Western Turkic Khaganate (7th-8th centuries) was the «nushibi». There is no consensus on the ethnic history of this tribal union. Some scholars consider them to be remnants of the «usun» tribes. In the 7th century, the «nushibi» played an important role in the life of the Western Turkic Khaganate, uniting a number of nomadic tribes living south of the Ili River and in the Chu River valley.

### **Conduct research**

The «nushibi» constantly competed with the «dulu» for power in the Western Turkic Khaganate. They were mainly engaged in animal husbandry.

Another tribal union that played a crucial role in the ethno-political processes of the 7th and 8th centuries were the Turkesh tribes. The origin of this tribal union's name, according to historian O. Pritsak, comes from the combination of two words: "Turk" and "young," signifying "young Turk." Another scholar, Turkologist L.N.Gumilev, supports this view, stating that the Turkic tribes dwelling along the Ili River referred to them as "young Turk" or "Turk-young." This was because the Turkic tribes were not descended from the Ashina Turks, but joined the Ashina lineage later. Researchers believe that the name of this tribal union was given later, and their ethnic name in the early Middle Ages must have been different [9: 170].

In the second half of the 7th century, the majority of the Turkesh tribes resided in the Ili River valley and the northern slopes of the Tian Shan Mountains, forming part of the Dulu tribal union. They were divided into two groups: "black" and "yellow." L.N. Gumilev writes that the "yellow" Turkesh groups had lived in the Tarbagatai Mountains and along the Ili River since ancient times, while the "black" Turkic tribes were the Abars who had arrived in these areas [5: 114]. The Abars were descendants of the Huns.

The Turkesh tribes were numerous, and at their peak, their total population reached 500-700 thousand [5: 316].

In the 60s of the 8th century, conflict intensified between the "yellow" and "black" groups of the Turkic tribes, leading to their weakening. The Qarluqs, seizing this opportunity, invaded the territory they occupied. This event occurred in 759. In 766, the Turkic tribes, weakened by the Qarluq attack, fragmented into several smaller groups [8: 159]. The descendants of the Turkic tribes later assimilated into the Uzbek and other Altai peoples.

### **Analysis of the obtained results**

The Qarluqs were a Turkic tribal union that played a significant role in the ethnogenesis and ethnic history of the Uzbek people. In the 6th-7th centuries, the Qarluqs occupied a large part of the northern and northeastern regions of Central Asia. In the 40s of the 9th century, they managed to establish their own state northeast of Maverannahr.

The ancestors of the Qarluqs lived in the "western regions of the Altai Mountains" in the distant past. After the establishment of the Turkic Khaganate, they migrated from the Western Altai Mountains and occupied the lands along the Irtysh River, Jungaria, the southern slopes of the Mongolian Altai Mountains, and the area from the southern slopes of the Mongolian Altai Mountains to the north of the Ili River. A significant portion of them occupied Eastern Turkestan, Ferghana, and some regions of Tokharistan during this time (in the 6th-7th centuries) [8: 157].

The Qarluq ethnic union consisted of three tribes. The names of these tribes are given as «meule», «chjisi», and «tashli» in Chinese sources. These tribes also united a number of ethnic groups within themselves.

One of the major tribes within the Qarluqs was the «chigil» tribe. Scholars equate the «chigil» with the «chjeisi» tribe recorded in Chinese sources and believe that the «chigil»



separated from the Qarluqs [4: 243]. Academician K. Shoniyozov also wrote: "... there is no doubt that the «chigil» were one of the tribes within the Qarluqs." [8: 159].

In the 9th-10th centuries, the «chigil» tribe mainly lived in the southeast of Issyk-Kul, the Talas River basin, the city of «chigil» near the city of Taraz and its surroundings, and in the city of Kashgar. The majority of them were nomadic and semi-nomadic.

Before their arrival in the Seven Rivers, the majority of the «chigil» lived along the Irtysh River and in Jungaria. They were numerous, lived in yurts, and engaged in animal husbandry. The settled and semi-settled groups of the «chigil» also engaged in agriculture and some crafts.

In the early 11th century, most of them migrated to the territory of Maverannahr and actively participated in the socio-political processes of the Western Kara-Khanid state. It is important to note that this ethnic union, along with the Qarluqs, played a significant role in the formation of the Uzbek people as a separate nation. They formed the Qarluq-Chigil dialect of the Uzbek language.

Although the ethnic affiliation of the «tashli» ethnic group within the Qarluq ethnic union has not yet been definitively established, it is more likely that this ethnic group was Turkic-speaking and one of the Qarluq tribes.

The Qarluq state, along with the tribes mentioned above, united many other clans within its composition. A number of nomadic, semi-nomadic tribes, and settled populations lived within its territory. Among the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, the most prominent were the «yagmo», «tuxsi», and «arghun».

Here is some historical information about the «yagmo». The «yagmo» are ethnically related to the Uyghurs, and through them, to the «tele» tribal union.

After the collapse of the Uyghur Khaganate in 840, 15 clans from the Uyghurs settled in the western part of Jungaria, the Tarbagatai Mountains, and came under the patronage of the Qarluqs. With their permission, they settled in the mountainous regions north of the Ferghana Valley (more precisely, in the upper reaches of the Naryn River) and near Kashgar. Later, the «yagmo» intermingled with the Turkic-speaking population and became part of the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people, losing their ethnic name (ethnonym).

The «tuxsi» are also a Turkic tribe. The «tuxsi» were part of the Turkic tribal union in the 7th-8th centuries. They actively participated in the political life of the Turkic Khaganate.

The Tuxsis resided in the Seven Rivers region, south of Issyk-Kul, during the 8th to 10th centuries. After the Qarluqs conquered the Seven Rivers in 766, the Tuxsis became part of the Qarluq confederation and played a significant role in the formation of the Uzbek nation. This ancient pastoral ethnic group, known for their constant migrations, saw a large portion of their population move to Maverannahr during the 10th and 11th centuries, where they settled down. Over time, the Tuxsis in Maverannahr assimilated into the local population, losing their distinct ethnic name (ethnonym).

Regarding the Arguns, it's important to note that their ethnonym appears in historical sources and literature in various forms, including "Arghin," "Orghu," "Arghun," and "Arghu."

The Arguns were a tribal union comprised of seven clans, who originally resided in eastern Jungaria and later in the Seven Rivers region. Throughout their historical and ethnic development, they were part of several ethno-political unions. For instance, they were part of the Western Turkic Khaganate in the 6th-8th centuries and the Qarluq state in the late 8th century and subsequent centuries. The term "Argun" ("Arghu") signifies "mixed" or "combined." Like other Turkic tribes, their primary occupation was animal husbandry.

V.V. Radlov once considered the Arguns to be a branch of the Qarluq tribe [10: 424.453]. K. Shoniyozov disagrees with this view, arguing that the Arguns lived in proximity to the Qarluqs but had no connection to them [8: 354].



## Conclusion

In the late 10th and early 11th centuries, a large group of Arguns, who had settled in the Seven Rivers region, migrated to the Tashkent oasis and the Fergana Valley. Another part of them settled in the Zarafshan oasis and Qashqadarya region, later assimilating into the local population.

Another tribe within the Qarluq tribal union was the Khalachs. Alongside the Chigil, Yagma, Arguns, and other ethnic groups within the Qarluq state mentioned above, the Khalachs played an active role in the formation of the Uzbek nation.

The Khalachs were one of the most numerous ethnic groups in the Qarluq state after the Qarluqs themselves. This tribe primarily resided in the Talas Valley, particularly its upper reaches. Their wintering grounds were located east of the city of Toz. They were not as numerous in the Seven Rivers region, where they were divided into two groups. The majority of them migrated to Afghanistan, India, and Iran during the 6th and 7th centuries.

A significant portion of this ethnic group settled in the Tashkent oasis and Maverannah, later becoming sedentary and assimilating into the local population. The ethnonym "Khalach" was preserved in the ethnic composition of the Uzbek people until recently.

## References

1. Askarov A. Ethnogenesis and Ethnic History of the Uzbek People. Tashkent. 2007.
2. Aristov N.A. Notes on the Ethnic Composition of the Turkic Tribes and Peoples and Information about their Number. Living Antiquity Issue III-IV St. Petersburg 1896.
3. Baratova A. The Turkic Khaganate and its Relations with the States of Central Asia // Essays on the History of Uzbek Statehood. Tashkent. 2001.
4. Bartold V.V. Essays on the History of the Seven Rivers Region. Works. Vol. II part I. M. 1960. P. 37.; History of the Cultural Life of Turkestan Vol. II part I.
5. Gumilev L.N. Ancient Turks. Tashkent. "Fan" 2007.
6. Khojayev A, Khojayev K. The Past of Our People in Ancient Sources. Tashkent. 2001.
7. Otahojayev A. Turk-Sogdian Relations in the Early Medieval Central Asian Civilization. Tashkent. 2010.
8. Shoniyozov K. The Process of Formation of the Uzbek People. Tashkent, 2001. 76 p.
9. Shoniyozov K. The Qarluq State and the Qarluqs. Tashkent, 1999. 170 p.
10. Radloff W.W. Die altukischen in schriftender Mongolei, St.pbg. Lieft.1894.

