TOPONYMS OF THE FERGHANA REGION IN "DEVONI LUG'ATIT TURK": HISTORICAL–GEOGRAPHICAL AND LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: This study investigates a set of toponyms related to the Ferghana Valley recorded in Mahmud al-Kashgari's 11th-century lexicographical masterpiece "Devoni lug'atit-turk". Based on linguistic, historical, and geographic analysis, the article interprets the semantic structure of terms such as jig'ach, Ala jig'ach, and Aruq turuq, examining their connection to the natural environment, socio-economic landscape, and ethno-political processes of medieval Central Asia. The findings demonstrate that Kashgari's records provide direct evidence of environmental diversity, settlement patterns, and economic specialization in the region, offering invaluable data for the reconstruction of medieval Turkic geography. The article concludes that toponyms found in "Devoni lug'atit-turk" are not merely linguistic elements but functional markers reflecting the cultural memory, ecological features, and historical interactions that shaped the Ferghana Valley.

Keywords: toponymy, Mahmud al-Kashgari, Ferghana Valley, Turkic languages, historical geography, medieval Central Asia, linguistic landscape.

Introduction. Toponyms serve as vital indicators of linguistic history, cultural heritage, and socio-political transformation. Within the context of Turkic studies, Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Devoni lug'atit-turk" (compiled between 1072 and 1077) remains one of the most authoritative sources for understanding the settlement geography, environmental conditions, and ethnolinguistic systems of medieval Turkic populations. The work contains more than 7,500 lexical entries, many of which reference rivers, mountains, valleys, forests, border regions, and tribal lands. Among these, the Ferghana Valley holds a particularly significant place due to its fertile environment, economic productivity, and strategic location on Silk Road networks.

The objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Ferghana-related toponyms in "Devoni lug'atit-turk", to interpret their semantic and geographic relevance, and to demonstrate their value for reconstructing the socio-environmental landscape of the 11th century.

Literature Review. Research on "Devoni lug'atit-turk" has primarily focused on the linguistic classification of Turkic lexemes, ethnonyms, and dialect distinctions (Clauson, 1972; Dankoff, 1982). Scholars such as Tekin (1995), Erdal (2004), and Choi (2015) examined structural features of Old Turkic vocabulary, including semantic fields related to natural environment and social life.

Toponymic studies, however, constitute a narrower subset. Budaqov (2002), Saparov (2013), and Tursunov (2019) analyzed Turkic place names as historical documents reflecting ecological conditions, ethnic interactions, and nomadic-sedentary relations. Regarding Ferghana, existing research emphasizes its agricultural productivity, Silk Road connectivity, and administrative importance within the Karakhanid state (Bartold, 1963; Golden, 2011).

Nevertheless, there remains a scholarly gap concerning:

- systematic analysis of Ferghana toponyms specifically mentioned by Kashgari;
- interpretation of their environmental and cultural implications;
- correlation between toponymic semantics and 11th-century regional geography.

This article attempts to fill this gap through detailed linguistic and historical investigation.

Methodology. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining:

1. Linguistic Analysis: etymological examination of lexemes (jig'ach, ala, aruq, etc.),

Semantic categorization (flora-based, border-based, route-based toponyms),

2. Historical-Geographical Method

Correlation of toponyms with 11th-century settlement patterns;

Mapping ecological regions associated with the names;

3 Contextual Interpretation

Analysis of socio-economic functions of the toponyms,

Interpretation within the broader Silk Road economic system.

This methodological triangulation enables a holistic reconstruction of the Ferghana landscape as perceived by Mahmud al-Kashgari.

Results and Discussion. The Toponymic Component "jig'ach"

The term jig'ach in Turkic languages traditionally means wood, tree, or forested area. Its use in toponymy indicates dense vegetation or woodland-dominated landscapes. In "Devoni lug'atit-turk", Kashgari uses this element in the compound Ala jig'ach[1].

In medieval geography, the Ferghana Valley—especially its eastern and southeastern territories—was known for woodland belts consisting of pistachio, almond, walnut, and wild grape varieties. Archaeobotanical surveys confirm the presence of forested foothill zones near present-day Andijan and Namangan.

Therefore, Ala jig'ach likely reflects:

a variegated (multi-colored) forest region,

ecologically diverse woodland zones at the base of Ferghana mountain ranges,

a culturally significant location used by pastoral groups for shelter, grazing, and seasonal migration.

"Ala jig'ach" as a Border-Linked Toponym

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[1]"Devoni lug'atit-turk", I section, page 110

Kashgari additionally classifies Ala jig'ach as "a place near the frontier." The frontier in question may refer to:

the administrative boundary between the Karakhanid domains of Balasaghun and Kashgar;

tribal boundaries separating Karluk, Yaghma, and Argu confederations;

natural borders between Ferghana and the Tarim Basin.

The combination of natural forestry markers and political boundaries illustrates the multifunctional nature of Turkic toponyms, which simultaneously denote geography, resource zones, and strategic defense areas.

"Aruq turuq[2]": A Hydrological–Route-Based Toponym

The term aruq means "irrigation canal" or "waterway," while turuq refers to "path" or "route." Combined, Aruq turuq can be interpreted as:

"the canal road,"

"the route along the irrigation network,"

"the settlement by water channels."

Given Ferghana's centuries-old irrigation culture — including the Chodak, Shahrixon, and Kosonsoy canals — this toponym likely denotes a transport artery intersecting irrigated farmlands.

Such names allow historians to reconstruct ancient hydrological systems, agrarian structures, and communication routes of the region.

Socio-economic representation of Ferghana in the 11th century

Kashgari describes Ferghana as:

- fruit-rich (sermeva),
- densely populated (seraholi),
- possessing numerous villages (ko'p qishloqli),
- climatically pleasant (xushhavo)[3].

These descriptions align with contemporary archaeological and textual evidence. During the Karakhanid period, Ferghana was:

- a major center of sericulture, producing high-quality silk traded across the Silk Road;
- a major horticultural zone, famous for apples, grapes, and melons;
- a craftsmanship hub specializing in metalwork and ceramics;
- a strategic transit corridor linking Kashgar, Yettisuv, and Transoxiana.

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[2] "Devoni lug'atit-turk", I section, page 96

[3] "Devoni lug'atit-turk", I section, page, 496-497

Thus, the toponyms in "Devoni lug'atit - turk" are not arbitrary geographical labels but reflect Ferghana's role as an economic heartland.

Environmental diversity reflected in toponyms

The presence of terms associated with forests (jig'ach), water channels (aruq), and color-based geography (ala) indicates a region of substantial environmental heterogeneity.

Such diversity would have influenced:

- pastoral migration routes,
- agricultural specialization,
- settlement clustering,
- tribal territorial distribution.

Toponyms thus preserve "environmental memory," offering insight into how medieval Turkic societies interpreted their natural habitat.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that Ferghana-related toponyms recorded in "Devoni lug'atit-turk" represent a multilayered system combining ecological markers, socio-economic functions, and political geography. Terms such as Ala jig'ach and Aruq turuq reveal critical information about landscape types, woodland zones, irrigation networks, and borderlands of the 11th century.

Mahmud al-Kashgari's work stands as an indispensable source not only for historical linguistics but also for the reconstruction of Central Asian historical geography. The Ferghana Valley, as described in the text, emerges as a fertile, densely inhabited, and economically pivotal region integrated into broader Turkic and Silk Road networks.

The findings of this research contribute to contemporary discussions on linguistic landscape studies, environmental history, and Turkic toponymy. Further interdisciplinary research—combining GIS mapping, archaeological data, and comparative linguistics—would deepen our understanding of the spatial organization of medieval Central Asia.

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