

**ETHNOGENETIC PROCESSES IN CENTRAL ASIA DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES AND THEIR RESULTS**

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The study of ethnic processes is one of the important directions of historical scholarship, as it enables a scientifically grounded analysis of the origin, formation, and historical development of peoples. Central Asia has historically been a region located at the crossroads of diverse ethnic groups, cultures, and civilizations. In particular, the Early Middle Ages constituted a crucial stage in the formation of the region's ethnic landscape, during which complex and multilayered ethnogenetic processes took place.

The political transformations, tribal migrations, and cultural interactions that occurred in the Early Middle Ages played a significant role in shaping the ethnic foundations of the peoples of Central Asia, including the Uzbek people. In terms of the ethnic composition of the population of Central Asia during this period, the northeastern parts of the region were predominantly inhabited by peoples belonging to the Altaic language family—mainly Turkic ethnic groups and, in part, the ancestors of the Mongols—whereas in the southwestern regions the majority of the population consisted of Eastern Iranian-speaking peoples: the Sogdians, Khwarazmians, Bactrians, and Saka. Alongside them also lived Turkic-speaking tribes and ethnic communities. [1, – p. 352.]

In the memoirs of the Chinese monk Xuanzang, who in the 630s traveled southward along the Yettisuv–Taraz–Isfijab–Chach route of the Western Turkic Khaganate, and of the traveler Hui Chao, who set out through southern Eastern Turkestan, it is noted that the majority of the population in the settlements of this region consisted of Turkic peoples and Sogdians. [3, – p. 56.]

However, some researchers, for example the Kazakh archaeologist K.A. Akishev, interpret these territories in the Early Middle Ages as regions devoid of Turkic ethnoses. Nevertheless, this view of K.A. Akishev is far from reality. There is evidence confirming that proto-Turkic ethnoses had inhabited these areas since the second half of the second millennium BCE. [2, – p. 71.]

In particular, during the 4th–6th centuries CE, Turkic tribes such as the Utigurs (thirty clans), Huns, Barsils, Savirs, Bulgars, and Khazars lived in the territories between the Caspian and Black Seas. Most researchers agree that their language belonged to the ancient Oghur (Ogur) branch of the Turkic languages. [8, – p. 81–87]

From the 6th century onward, the large-scale influx of Turkic tribes into Central Asia marked a turning point in the ethnogenetic processes of the region. With the establishment of the Turkic Khaganate, the region came under the political influence of the Turkic world. Although the Turks initially established military-political dominance, over time they intermixed with the local population. As a result, Turkic linguistic elements spread widely, and a cultural synthesis emerged.

During this period, dozens of large and small cities arose in the territories stretching from the middle reaches of the Syr Darya to Yettisuv, and the majority of their inhabitants consisted of Turks and Sogdians. [2, – p. 51] This is also confirmed by information found in contemporary Chinese and Byzantine sources, as well as by place names preserved in Turkic and Sogdian or Turkic-Sogdian languages. [6, – p. 38–40]

In the Early Middle Ages, the Sogdians were widely dispersed across Central Asia, which is reflected in the following account recorded by the Chinese monk Xuanzang during his visit to

the region: “The land stretching from the city of Su-ye shuy (Suyab) to the country of Sze-shuana (Kesh) was called Su-li (Sogd). Its inhabitants were also known by this name. Their writing and language likewise bore this designation.” [5, – p. 113]

Based on this information, it can be inferred that at that time the territories from Yettisuv to Kesh (Shahrisabz) were perceived by the Chinese traveler as Sogd. The prominent position of the Sogdians was undoubtedly facilitated by the activities of Sogdian merchant groups and settlements that had migrated to Northwestern China and Eastern Turkestan. Consequently, the adoption of this language at the state level in both Khaganates (the Eastern Turkic Khaganate and the Western Turkic Khaganate), as well as in a number of oasis principalities, can be explained by similar factors.

The Hephthalite state, which dominated the region in the 5th–6th centuries, had a complex ethnic structure. Researchers assess the Hephthalites as a conglomerate of various ethnic components. During their rule, interactions between nomadic and sedentary populations intensified, creating conditions for the formation of new ethnic communities. This process later played a significant role in the ethnogenesis of Turkic peoples. The question of which linguistic group the Hephthalite language belonged to has not yet been definitively resolved. One group of scholars considers the Hephthalites to have been Eastern Iranian-speaking tribes, [6, – p. 40] while another group argues that they were a Turkic-speaking ethnos. [7, – p. 68]

In the second half of the 6th century, the emergence of the Western Turkic Khaganate on the ethno-political stage of Central Asia occupied an important place in the ethnogenesis and statehood of the region’s peoples, including the Uzbek people. The territories under its control for nearly two centuries included oasis principalities such as Ancient Fergana, Sogdiana, Bukhara, and Khwarazm, most of which geographically correspond to present-day Uzbekistan. By the second half of the 6th century, the Turkic Khaganate had taken control of the territories of Central Asia. As a result, during the Early Middle Ages a Turkic-Sogdian ethno-cultural, ethno-psychological, and ethno-political space was formed in the middle reaches of the Syr Darya. The consolidation of the Turkic ethnos in the Tashkent oasis reached its peak during the Khaganate period, as evidenced by the emergence of numerous place names, cities, and settlements with Turkic names in this region.

In conclusion, the ethnogenetic processes that took place in Central Asia during the Early Middle Ages were complex and multifactorial in nature, shaped by migration, political domination, and cultural interaction. These processes played a decisive role in the historical development of the peoples of Central Asia and created a solid foundation for the formation of the present-day ethnic composition. The ethnic dynamics of this period later became the basis for the emergence of the Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and other peoples. In particular, the interaction and intermixing of Turkic and local populations determined the modern ethnic map of the region.

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