***Turkish Studies*** *- International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*
*Volume 9/3 Winter 2014, p. 1147-1155, ANKARA-TURKEY*

# "TÜRK" SÖZÜNÜN ETİMOLOJİSİNE YENİ BİR BAKIŞ*

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## ÖZET

"Türk" sözünün tarihi, etimolojisi ve taşıdığı anlamla bağlı Türkoloji'de her kes tarafından kabul edilir bir fikir bulunmamaktadır. Bu konuda çok sayılı araştırmacıların fikirleri genelde kaynaklara dayansa da, mantıksal açıdan her kesi tatmin edecek ortak bir fikir yoktur. Takdim olunan çalışma bu konunun araştırılmasına yöneliktir. Çalışmada "Türk" sözünün farklı dönemlerde bilim adamları tarafından teklif edilen etimolojik yorumlarının analizi verilmiş, bu yorumların eksik kalan tarafları araştırılmıştır. "Türk" sözünün çok sayıda bilim adamı tarafından kabul gören "güçlü, kuvvetli" anlamının aslında eski kaynakların okunması açısından yetersiz kaldığı zaman zaman bazı bilginler tarafından vurgulansa da, bu konu günümüze kadar açık kalmıştır. İlk defa Alman bilgini F.W.K.Müller tarafından ileri sürülmüş olan ve Macar alimi G.Nemeth tarafından temellendirilmeye çalışılmış bu yorum birçok bilim adamı tarafından kabul görmüş olmasına rağmen çitti bir araştırmaya tabi tutulmamıştır. Yapılan araştırmalarda ise "Türk" sözünün ne ifade ettiğini anlamak için bilim adamları çoğu zaman Türk diline değil, başka dillere müracaat etmiş, bu kelimenin manasını başka dillerde aramaya çalışmışlar.

Takdim olunan çalışmada konuya sistemli yaklaşım uygulanarak Türk kelimesinin anlamına farklı taraftan bakılmış ve bu kelimenin çok daha genel bir anlam, "insan" anlamı taşıdığı ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Teklif edilen yorum bilimsel açıdan temellendirilmiş ve "Türk" kelimesinin tarih öncesi dönemlere giden kökleri araştırılmıştır. Eski kaynakların okunması sırasında bu yorumun mevcut yorumlardan farklı olarak bütün problemleri giderdiği de ispatlanmıştır. "Türk" kelimesinin teklif edilen yorumu bu kelimenin birçok bilim adamlarının iddia ettiği gibi 4-6. yy'lerde değil, daha eski zamanlarda ortaya çıktığını, şimdiye kadar bu kelimenin teklif edilen yorumlarının bu yorumun çeşitli varyantları olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Türk, Türkler, oğuz, oğuzlar, turuk, türük, türküt, hun, Gök Türkler.

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# A NEW OUTLOOK ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE NAME "TURK"


## ABSTRACT

There is not any view that accepted by everyone about word "Türk" history, etimology and its meaning. Although generally many researchers' opinion bases on resources, logically there is not any sufficient common view about this topic. Research paper investigates this topic. In this study the analysis of etymologic comments of word "Türk" by scientists has been given and investigated lack sides of these comments. Although scientists consider on lack of meaning of word "Türk" as a "strong and powerful" which have been accepted many other scientists from time to time, this issue is uncompleted till today. First time this comment was put forward by German scientist F.W.K.Müller and tried to substantiate by G.Nemeth. Although this comment has been accepted many scientists, it has not been investigated seriously. In researches to understand meaning of word "Türk" scientists appealed not Turkish but other languages and researched meaning of word "Türk" in other languages.

In this study topic has been investigated systematically and considered on word "Türk" in different view. Here it is observed that this word means human which is more general meaning of word "Türk". Offered comment has been substantiated scientifically and base of word "Türk" has been investigated before the history. It is confirmed that if old sources is read, in contrast of present comment offered comment solves all problems. Offered comment about word "Türk" puts forth that this word did not emerge in 4-6 centuries that claimed many scientists but emerged in much more old times. Also offered comment states that till now all comments are other variants of this comment.


**Key Words**: Türk, Türkler, oğuz, oğuzlar, turuk, türük, türküt, hun, Gök Türkler.

There is no idea in Turkology agreed upon by everyone about the history of the name of *Türk*, its etymology and its meaning. A great many scholars have put forward their ideas in this respect. Their ideas are based on historical sources. However, even in those sources there is not data on the meaning of the word *Türk*, logically satisfactory to everyone.

Investigations related with the word *Türk* have generally been performed in two directions and have not been completed yet. One of those directions is concerned with when and where the name *Türk* emerged, the historical aspect of the issue. The other direction has an etymologic aspect related with the meaning of the word *Türk*. Although there directions overlap at times is not a determinant of the others. That clearly indicates the existence in earlier times of the people known by the name of *Türk*. Prof.Dr. I.Kafesoglu analyzed the existing views on the history and etymology of the word *Türk* (Kafesoğlu 1966, 307-312).

The common belief held by a great number of scholars is that the word *Türk* came into being in the 4-6$^{th}$ century. No more recent time can by any means be specified since; at least, there are *Gök Türk* monuments on which the word *Türk* has been engraved. Only, it is not right to say that this word came into being by being carved on the monument made only in the 7$^{th}$ century. On the

monument of Alp Eletmish, the oldest of Orhan Memorials are inscribed the sentence "…Turkish people had perished …", and after that how Hakan the perceptive made the Turks recover their former reputation is extolled (Rəcəbov & Məmmədov 1993, 53). This suggests that people with self-name *Türk* existed before the 4th century.

The mention of the name of Ulug Turk the white beard in the Uyghur version of the Oguz Khan epic is a proof of this. This version is the oldest of the Oguz Khan epic and is as old as the replacement of the historic matriarchal family by patriarchal (Paşayev & Paşayeva 2002, 613-635). Were supporters of the idea that the word is found in the *Türk* writings of Herodotus (Hammer 1832, 1; Tomaschek 1887; Orkun 1940, 11-18; Togan 1946, 386).

The objective of this study is not to investigate when the word *Türk* emerged. Now we are concerned with the meaning of this word.

If we take a look at the sources, we see that the meaning conveyed by the word *Türk* is one that scholars have concerned themselves with since very early periods. A multitude of ideas have been suggested in this respect. Scholars have mostly tried to interpret the word *Türk* with words uttered by separate Turkic groups or similarly sounding words from the languages of neighboring people. However, hardly any attempt has ever been made to provide them with a logical foundation. There ideas can generally be grouped as follows.

In the work of Mahmut Kaşgarlı called "Divani Lüğet-it Türk" the word *Türk* is mentioned to mean "large", "grown-up". In "Kutadğu Bilig", Yusuf Balasagunlu has stated that the word *Türk* has been used to mean "power, strength". However, neither of these words contains detailed explanations.

In ancient Chinese source it is mentioned that Turks (Tu-ku-e) lived on the outskirts of a mountain. This mountain resembles a helmet. Therefore Turks called themselves *tukyu* (tu-ku-e)=helmet in Mongolian. Based on this version some scholars state that the word *Türk* means "helmet". A similar word exists also in Korean: *thu-ku*=helmet.

For the first time this idea has been put forward by the French Orientalist Joseph de Guignes in his published book about the history of Turks in 1758 (de Guignes 1923, 271). Subsequently, the same thought on the basis of the same Chinese source was maintained and developed by such famous scientists as J.Klaproth (Klaproth 1826, 115), J. Schmidt (1824), J.J.Hess (1918), B. Munkácsi (1921) etc (Kafesoğlu 1966, 315-316). Russian Orientalist Chuvash origin Bichurin was also a supporter of this idea (Бичурин 1851, 256).

A large number of researchers, including such famous scholars as G.Nemeth, A.N. Kononov, V.K. Müller, P.Pelliot and L.N.Gumilyev, are convinced that the word *Türk* means, *powerful*, *strong*. For the first time this idea has been put forward by German researcher F.W.K.Müller (Müller 1911, 10, 15, 97). This hypothesis was supported by the other German researcher Albert von Le Coq and Hungarian scientist G.Nemeth tried to justify (Nemeth 1927, 275-281). P.Pelliot (Pelliot 1931, 12.) and A.N.Kononov (Кононов 1947, 54-61) also supported scientists mentioned in this. Famous linguist W.Thomsen who read the Orhon-Yenisey inscriptions called the words *Türk* and *Türük* as *strength*, *castle*.

A.Vamberi has reported that the word Türk comes from the word *türemek* meaning to *multiply* or *increase* in number and that it describes man (Vamberi 1879, 51). While Fuat Köprülü agrees with this idea, G.Nemeth disagrees. His arguments in this respect will be presented later.

According to Ziya Gökalp, the word *töre* has relation with the word *Türk* and it means a *man who conforms mores* (Gökalp 2000, 24). There are also those who argue based on this interpretation, that the word *Türk* conveys the meaning of *state*.

N.A.Baskakov hypothesized that the word *Türk* has been derived from the Mongolian word *türkin\törkin* and means the *relatives of the bride* (Баскаков, 1984).

According to another version, the word *Türk* comes from the Kirghiz word *türük* meaning *wrapped, tidy, bound,* or from the word *türülgen* – meaning *accumulating, wrapping, piling,* and denotes *"society=people=clan"*.

Some writers have tried to explain the word *Türk* with the Arabic word *terk*. That is they suggested that this name has been given to Turks since they have been deserted by everyone and there are proponents of this idea, too (Kafesoğlu 1966, 316).

That is mostly all of the ideas proposed in connection with the meaning of the word *Türk*. In the works by other authors new ideas have not been suggested and only these ideas have been mentioned.

Before proceeding to analyze the explanations mentioned in connection with the word *Turk*, it is necessary that we emphasize several points. When a society names itself, it adopts an ordinary word not only because it sounds beautiful or it denotes something good. There must be good reasons for the word to be taken in the name of society. This name should be accepted by the public and neighboring communities.

These reasons might have been related with humanity in ancient periods, i.e. when society began to form. In other words it had to bear a biological character. Not surprisingly most ancient societies defined themselves with words meaning "human" since the most important attribute of a society at that time was humanity. To illustrate, ancient Sumerians defined themselves with the word "*sang-ngiga*" literally meaning *black head* (i.e. with black hair) which, is understood as human.

In the next stage when a society branched new names had to be found and such names naturally had to be different. These names had now to denote the most important features to distinguish the society in question from the other similar societies, and those features had to have as their basic system of faiths. There are a lot of examples of this in history. Different clans, tribes named themselves, according to their totems and deities they worshipped. Turkish clans have many examples of this. When the system of faiths changed, the name of the society had to change and become shaped.

In the next stage of naming societies political and economic reasons will be in the foreground. The name of the leader of the society, the name of a dominant dynasty the name of sovereign groups, the names of the richest families etc. were to be the names of the society. When dynasties changed or when the society was defeated by and included in another society or in such similar cases, societies were to change their names. That explains why a clan or tribe in Turkish history has several names.

According to the semantic value can be determined age society. However, extreme caution must be observed here. It is such that sometimes one society can be so impressive in one respect (religious, political, economic, cultural, etc.), that his name became a symbol for other societies. This word, which is the name of the society at the time, beginning to acquire additional meaning. Research should be able to differentiate between the new and the old sense meaning.

In some cases, the name of the society gives itself may be different from the one that was given to them in other societies. After some time, the company is the name given to a friend, but that

does not mean they will not give up on his behalf. Georgians, for example, call themselves *kartvelebi*. Turks call them *Gürcü* and Russian call them *Gruzin* and the Europeans call them *Georgian*. Georgians take all these names, but they will not give up his name, that is *kartvelebi*. The society cannot always choose to accept the name that is given to others. After the Russian won the South Caucasus Turks Azerbayijan they identified as *Tatars Caucasus*. Although the Russian occupation lasted for two centuries, the society does not recognize that name and never called themselves by that name.

Now let's review the above mentioned interpretations of the name *Türk*.

Interpretations "Divani Lüğet-it Türk," and those of "Kutadgu Bilig" have no basis, and accordingly, they from an etymological point of view, are insolvent.

The interpretation of the name *Türk*, as a *power*, *powerful*, *strong*, which was proposed by many researchers, despite the great achievements of these scholars, it is still far from expressing the name of the Turkic ethnic groups. The reasons for this are as follows:

This name, in this sense i.e. *powerful*, *strong* cannot be one of the oldest names Turks gave themselves. The oldest name had in some way to be connected with man. In other words the names "powerful and strong" had to represent man. The man during that time was not the most influential of the Nature. Therefore, he could not give himself such a name. Man today can call himself powerful and strong. However, he could not have done so in these periods. Then, it follows that this name must have been given to tribe in subsequently.

In later stages of develop society called *Türk* also not could have used the *powerful* or as *strong* as the name of the society. So many researchers agree that in the beginning it was the name of a tribe or dynasty. Ostensibly this dynasty created both Turk Empire. In this case, it should have been reflected in the Orkhon monuments. In stories Hakan had to write about this, when he listed the merits of his dynasty to the Turkic people. He had to write that his dynasty created Khaganate and gave it its name Kaganate and this people. In reality, in the monuments have said many times that there is a Turkic people from time immemorial. On the south side of the monument Bilge pshietsya Hagan: "When I was 31 year-old won the top to his people, his Turks ..." (Rəcəbov & Məmmədov 1993, 99). Elsewhere, in the case of Turkesh, Khan speaks about them only as "my Turks, my people ..." (*türkim budunım*). In these expressions, the word Turk can not be interpreted as a powerful or strong. There are many instances of this issue.

On the other hand the ethnonyms such as *Kangar* and *Böke* claimed to have been brought from the Turkish clans by G. Nemeth has not been investigated seriously. In our opinion these names don't conveys the meanings claimed to be clan names. Consideration of transfiguration of *kangar-kangar-kongar-kungar-hungar* will suffice to see the accuracy of this idea. This will be discussed later.

The word *Türk* could certainly be used in the sense of *power*, *strong*, *might or mighty* and it was. But when? Before or after it became the name of an ethnic group? In our opinion, it was after it became an ethnic group. And after it became powerful enough and their power was verified by other ethnic groups. Otherwise there would not be an inscription in Orhon monuments which reads "Turks have perished….." Does the powerful perish? It is not logical.

For what must the word *Türk* be interpreted as *powerful*, *strong*? This word was and still has been used in other senses, too. To illustrate, the name *tur* means *a house* in the Hakas language and the word *türük* means *twisted*. In Mongolian *tör* means *regime*, *state*. As for the word *turgud*, it means *defender*. In other words, the number of such words can be found in many dialects and accents.

In our opinion all of these meanings of the word *Türk* have been attached to it subsequently. Moreover, these words are hardly different from each other in their figurative meaning.

As is seen the hypothesis that the word *Türk* initially conveyed the meaning of "powerful, strong" is untenable. Rather it would be more precise to say: The word *Türk* began to be respected and adopted by everyone and acquired new meanings: only after Turkish tribes appeared on the stage of history as a powerful ethnic group and established a big and powerful empire such as large, *powerful, strong, castle, state,* law and law-abiding etc. To put it differently, such words have been derived from the name of Turkish tribe and not vice versa.

Baskakov also has expressed the same thought. By Baskakov, the word is derived from the *Türk* word, which indicates the name of the people, but then it took a different value, which express the singularity (Баскаков 1984).

This idea has also been implied by V.V.Bartold. In his opinion the word *Türk* mostly conveys a political meaning. He believes that the word *Türk* deviated from its initial meaning and acquired the meaning of "the mass of people united by law" (Бартольд В.В. 1998, p.23).

The same things must be said about the interpretations by Z.Gökalp, N.A.Baskakov, J. de Guignes and his supporters. In our previous study of the etymology of the word *Oğuz*, we were faced with a similar situation and we emphasized that none of the interpretations could be said to be wrong. One must speak have which of these interpretations refer to the meaning of the word initial.

The two more interpretations we mentioned above should also be explained. We can say that such words as *türük* meaning "wrapped, neat and tidy, or *türülgen* meaning gathering, wrapping, piling meaning "people", "clan" which were derived from the Kirghiz language, do exist in other Turkish dialects as well. For instance the word *dürüm* in Anatolian Turkish and *dürmek* in Azerbaijan Turkish convey the same meaning. In our opinion this is not the base word. The base word is *tüğ*/*düğ* from which the words *düğüm* and *düğün* as well as the words mentioned above. This follows that the word *Türk* could not have been derived from the words *tüğ*/*düğ* or *tüy*/*düy* and therefore the word *türük* could not be the name of Turkish tribe. Another problem is that there are attempts to explain the word *Türk* with the Arabic word *terk*. In our view this is only a similarity of form.

In our opinion the most important of the interpretations mentioned above is that of A.Vamberi. According to him, the word *Türk*/*Türük* comes from the word *türemek* and conveys the meaning of "human being". G.Nemeth countered this idea, with his own arguments below:

The name *Türk* could not be the first name of Turks, now that it was known in the 6th century A.D.

There is no word exists in the languages spoken by Turks that means "human" and reminds of the word *Türk* as far as sounding is concerred.

*Töre*/*Türe* is spelt with ü (dotted u) only in Ottoman Turkish and its spelling with ö (as its former spelling dotted o) is more precise.

The name *Türk* can be explained in other ways as well (Nemeth G. 1927. Orkun H.N. 1940, p.32).

Although G.Nemeth arguments sound serious at the beginning, they are not, in fact, consistent arguments. The name *Türk* is known not only in the 6th century A.D. Even in the first century A.D. the word *tuk-yu* appeared in Chinese sources (Rəcəbov E.– Məmmədov Y. 1993, p. 15). However, this is not the oldest date either. The name *Ulug Türk* appears in the Uighur version

of Oguz Khan Epic which is even older. It is possible that even older sources exist ((İ.Kafesoğlu, 1966).

It is argued that no word exists in Turkish languages meaning "human being" and sounding like *Türk*. A later we shall see that it is not. In fact A.Vamberi felt correctly that the word *Türk* meant "human being" only, he could not give it a proper foundation.

In our view the noun *türk*/*türük*/*turuk* has been derived from the verb *tur* and *turuk* means standing i.e. "human being". The following will suffice to prove this issue.

"The Etymolgical Dictionary Of Turkish Languages" reports that the word *tur* is a base word meaning to stand, to assume an upright position (Этимологический Словарь Тюркский Языков. 1980, pp. 297-301). The same source reports that the word *dur* a variant of the word *tur* does not convey the same meaning but means a verb related with the interruption of an activity or keeping something in a place. Both of these words have been analyzed with the conclusion that they both have the same origin. It must be mentioned it is unknown why the former of the two words *tur* and *dur* having the same origin, means to stand up, while the latter means to stop a movement or to determine a place to stop. According to the dictionary of ancient Turkish these two words have the same meaning (Древнетюркский Словарь. 1969: pp. 586-587). G.Clauson's studies on the etymology of the word *tur* is interesting. He states that the semantic core of the verb *tur* is to have an "upright position" (Clauson G. 1972, pp.529-531).

The noun *turuk* has been derived by adding the suffix *-uk* to the verb *tur*. The suffix *-uk* here like *-ık*, *-ik*, *-ük* forms nouns when attached to a verb. For example, the antonym of the word we interpreted i.e. the word *turuk* is *yat+ık* or *yat+uk*. In "The Etymological Dictionary Of The Turkish Languages" we reffered to the meaning of this word i.e. *yatık*/*yatuk*, is given as "that which has lain, that which is bent, half-leaned, that which tended, destroyed, collapsed or suppressed" (Этимологический Словарь Тюркский Языков. 1989, p. 158). In fact, since each of these words has been derived from a verb, the words with the same meaning can be obtained in the same way: *uzan+ık*, *devr+ik*, *bas+ık* etc. It is clearly seen that in all these variants the word *yatık* means "which that is horizontal". What difference could the early man have seen to distinguish himself from the animal? Of course he must have seen that animals were standing on four feet while he himself on two. In other words that animals were horizontal (*yatık/yatuk*) standing on their four feet, while he himself was *turuk* i.e. standing upright on two feet. This is how early man must have seen himself.

Thus the nouns "*turuk*/*türük*" or "*turk*/*türk*" go back to times when man began to see himself as human beings, and it is the name one Turkish clan gave itself. After this clan went through the difficulties of time and took its place on the stage of history by founding empires, this word acquired a wide variety of meanings. However, it has not lost its primary meaning now that all the interpretations presented above points somehow to man. T. Baykara detected this issue well and stated that "… Fisrt of all, *Türk* is name human being" (Baykara, 2002:375).

Now if we replace the words "power and strength", which we previously mentioned and which sound ambiguous as far as the meaning is concerned by the word *Türk* which means "human being", there remains no problem. For instance let's remember Bilge Khans statements below.

The sentence "at the age of 31 thus I made my Turk, my folk, acquire subliminess, must read as "at the age of 31 thus I made my man, my folk acquire subliminess".

It seems more reasonable that Khan remembered them as "my man, folk" when he talked about Turkeshes by saying "turkim budunım". V.V.Bartold has once drawn attention to this and has written that the word Turk had been written as if in a different sense, in the relevant place of the monuments of Gök Türk (Бартольд В.В. 1998, p.24).

Attracting attention in the Uighur version of Oguz Khan Epic, the noun *Uluğ Türk* now sounds more logical. The name of the oldest member of the tribe, the name Uluğ Turk also means "Ulu"-i.e oldest. In our time, the word "aksakal" i.e. white beard conveys the same meaning in Turkish communities.

Much has been written about the noun *Türküt*. Now this word can also be interpereted readily: *türküt*/*turgut*/*turgüt* = tü*rk*+*gü*t = *man charged with herd = defender*. *Gütmek*/ *güdmek* means to protect, or to preserve in most Turkish dialects (Этимологический Словарь Тюркский Языков. 1980, p. 107).

Finally, a few words in relation to the interpretation of the word Nemeth *kangar* as *powerful*, *strong*. In our view, the words *kangar* and *hungar* come from the same word *hun* (*kangar-kongar-kungar-hungar*). It is known that the Huns were the ancestors of the Turks. Despite this, the word *hun* was left out of the Turkic language and replaced with an equivalent word *türk*. However, the Mongolian word remains. It means "man" (БСМРРМС, 2006:866).

At this point, one more issue must be emphasized. Radlov, according to V.V.Bartold had reached the conclusion even before the decipherment of Orhon monuments, that the Turks and the Oguzzes in the VI-VIII century were the same people. After texts had been read, it was discovered that the case was indeed so. What is surprising is that the meanings of the word *Gök Türk* and *Oğuz* in VI-VIII centuries conveyed the same meaning. İn those times Türks called themselves *Gök Türkler*. Probably that is related with Turks religion which is based cult of sky. In this context the noun *Gök Türkler* means "people who worship the cult of *Gök* i.e. *Tengri*". Our previous investigations also revealed that the noun *Oğuz* had the same meaning (Paşayev & Paşayeva 2002, 613-635).

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