

TOPONYMY

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES THAT PRESERVE THE TRACE OF THE QUSHCHU TRIBE

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Abstract

The Qushchu tribe is one of the ancient nomadic tribes that played an important role in the history of Azerbaijan and, more broadly, in the history of Turkic peoples. The presence of various geographical names associated with their name demonstrates the wide territorial spread of this tribe throughout history and its place in Turkic ethnography. This article analyzes the origin, history, geographical traces, and contemporary role of the Qushchu tribe in the Turkic world. The Qushchu tribe has long attracted the attention of different researchers, and various views exist regarding their origin. Most scholars assert that the tribe is of Turkic origin, while some specialists link them to the Mongols. However, the prevailing view is that the ethnonym Qushchu derives from the Turkic language and means “bird hunters” or “hunters of birds of prey.” This is further confirmed by the fact that among the Bashkirs, the Qushchus were known as “bird hunters,” which indicates that they were not of Mongol origin.

1. Introduction

Geographical names - toponyms - that exist in various regions of Azerbaijan play an important role in preserving the memory of the country's historical, cultural, and ethnic past. The traces of the Qushchu tribe have been preserved within these toponyms. In the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijani Turks, numerous Turkic peoples – including the Suvars, Bulgars, Khazars, Kipchaks, and Oghuz - played a fundamental role. The Qushchu tribe was also among these ancient Turkic tribes, and their traces in geographical names can be found not only in Azerbaijan but also across a wide geographical area (Central Asia, the North Caucasus, Bashkortostan, etc.). Historical sources indicate that the Qushchu tribe was among the nomadic peoples widely spread across the Caucasus, the northern and western regions of Azerbaijan, as well as Northern Anatolia and Central Asia. From the early periods of Turkic history, and particularly during the Middle Ages, representatives of this tribe played a significant role in various states and provinces. Let us consider the research conducted by scholars on this tribe:

- The Qushchus are associated with the Durbans (a group claimed to be of Mongol origin), yet it is emphasized that they themselves were a Turkic tribe. In the 12th century, they lived under the rule of the Durbans and adopted the Kipchak language.

- There is a direct connection with the “Qushchu” clan of the Kyrgyz. V.V. Radlov and other Russian researchers considered the Qushchus to be one of the ancient tribes of the Kyrgyz. This clan inhabited the Altai, Irtysh, and Eastern Tien Shan regions [15].

- It is known that the Qushchus, together with other nomadic Turkic peoples, migrated from Central Asia to Azerbaijan and the Caucasus [4].

- Some scholars link the Qushchus with the Kushans, particularly emphasizing the possibility of the Kushans being of Turkic origin. The Kushans had a historical presence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia, and their rulers were referred to as “Yabgu” (prince).

- There are also views connecting them with the Huns and the Black Huns. N.A. Aristov and M.H. Valiyev-Baharly classified the Qushchus as part of the Hun tribes [8].

2. Analysis and Discussion

The sources used in this research include scientific reports from the Institutes of Geography, History, Literature, Archaeology, and Ethnography; archival materials from the collections of the National Archives of the Republic of Azerbaijan; scholarly works, methodological guidelines, and literature produced by researchers in this field; as well as the results of the author's own scientific investigations.

The word "Qushchu" in ancient Turkic languages means "bird hunter" or "a person engaged with birds." This tribe was primarily distinguished by horseback hunting and a nomadic way of life. Within ancient Turkic societies, the Qushchus functioned not only as hunters but also as executors of certain military duties. Their traditions associated with birds - particularly falcons and hawks - hold a significant place in the cultural heritage of Turkic peoples [12].

Several villages, settlements, and geographical objects in Azerbaijan and neighboring regions bear the name of the Qushchu tribe. Settlements named Qushchu are recorded in Gazakh, Shaki, and other districts. The spread of these names reflects the historical distribution of the tribe and its influence in the territories where it once resided. The toponym has not remained merely a place name but has also become associated with certain tribal and family names, turning into a bearer of cultural and geographical memory:

Within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan:

- Four villages named "Qushchu" are located in the districts of Goygol, Yevlakh, Lachin, and Shamakhi.

- Geographical features such as "Qushchu Mountain" and "Qushchular Mountain" are registered in the Shamakhi and Khojavand districts [11].

- In Dashkasan district, the names "Qushchu village", "Qushchu temple", and "Qushchu mountain" are found.

- Three villages named "Qushchu-Ayrim", "Dondar Qushchu", and "Ashaghi Qushchu" exist in the Gazakh and Tovuz districts.

- Villages named "Dali Qushchu", "Dagh Qushchu", and "Chol Qushchu" are located in the Zardab, Siyazan, and Shabran districts [14].

- Villages with the names "Qushlar" or "Qushiler" are found in the Gabala and Kurdamir districts.

- "The toponym "Qushchular" is reflected in villages of the Goranboy, Jabrayil, and Khojavand districts.

- Two villages named "Ashaghi Qushchular" (Lower Qushchular) and "Yukhari Qushchular" (Upper Qushchular) are registered in the Shusha district.

- The ruins of "Qushlar" village are located in the Oghuz district.

- The family and clan names "Qushar" have been preserved to this day in the village of Ilisu, Gakh district [7].

Beyond the borders of Azerbaijan, in historical-ethnic areas:

- In Georgia's Marneuli district, there exists a village named "Qushchu" and a historical monument called "Qushchu Fortress".

- In various parts of the former Erivan Khanate and Erivan Governorate, three villages and geographical names existed under the names "Qushi", "Qushchu", and "Qushideresi" [6].

- In the Gazakh uyezd of the Ganja Governorate, "Qushchuyaya" was recorded as a mahal (district) name.

- In the districts of Abaran, Daralayaz, and Kapan of present-day Armenia, several villages named "Qushchu" existed until the late 19th century, after which they were either abolished or renamed [5].

- In the West and East Azerbaijan provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as in the Qazvin province, there exists a city and several villages bearing the toponym "Qushchu".

The toponym "Qushchu" is, in general, one of the ancient ethno-toponyms widespread throughout the Turkic-Muslim world. On the one hand, this name reflects tribal affiliation; on the other, it expresses cultural and geographical identity. Its wide distribution is primarily associated with the historical migration and settlement of Turkic-rooted population groups. The preservation of these toponyms is significant not only for maintaining historical memory but also for the development of cultural tourism potential [10].

According to 19th-century sources, more than 30 geographical objects in Azerbaijan reflected the name of the Qushchu tribe. Villages named Qushi khutoru also existed in the Kuban province of Russia. Settlements of the Qushchu and Kossi tribes are recorded in Bashkortostan and the North Caucasus as well [1]. In addition, similar names are found in other parts of the Caucasus and in northern Turkey, confirming that the Qushchu tribe moved across a wide geography and that connections existed among Turkic peoples [13].

Historical significance. The study of the historical and geographical traces of the Qushchu tribe is important not only for reconstructing the

past but also for understanding the formation of the cultural identity of the contemporary Turkic world. Their traditions of horseback hunting, elements of folklore, and linguistic features have been preserved to this day, reflecting the depth of intercultural connections among the Turkic peoples [9].

In the modern era, the roots of the Qushchu tribe and their place among Turkic ethnoses are being studied in greater depth, particularly through ethnographic and genetic research [2]. This contributes significantly to understanding the shared history of the Turkic peoples and to strengthening national identities.

In the Middle Ages, the Qushchus formed a military unit, especially among the nomadic Turkic peoples, and held an important position in Batu Khan's army. Their name is mentioned in 12th-century Armenian sources, indicating their presence in the territory of Azerbaijan since ancient times. During the Shaybanid period (16th century), the Qushchu tribe occupied a prominent position among the nomadic Uzbeks. They later became integrated into the Kazakh, Turkmen, Uzbek, Bashkir, and other Turkic peoples [3].

3. Conclusion

The Qushchu tribe occupies a distinctive place in the Turkic world both historically and culturally. The spread of geographical names associated with their name demonstrates the tribe's presence across vast territories and its significance among Turkic peoples. The traditions and traces of this tribe continue to live on within the cultural heritage of Turkic nations today, and future research will further clarify their historical and cultural role.

Studies reveal that the name and traces of the Qushchu tribe hold an important place in the richness of Turkic ethnonyms. Their origin and history are multifaceted, and the Qushchus played a significant role not only in the history of Azerbaijan but also in the wider Turkic world. The ethno-toponyms preserved in geographical names provide evidence of the settlement of ancient Turkic peoples in Azerbaijan and neighboring regions.

The widespread distribution of geographical names linked to the Qushchu tribe confirms not only their existence during specific periods and in particular regions but also their deep roots within the cultural memory of Turkic peoples. Their nomadic lifestyle, horseback hunting, and bird-related traditions highlight their unique position in the Turkic ethnogenetic system.

Among contemporary Turkic peoples, the legacy of the Qushchu tribe is still preserved – particularly through traditions of falconry on horseback, as well as elements of folklore and language. For instance, in certain regions of Azerbaijan, the art of bird hunting and its terminology continue to reflect this ancient Turkic practice.

Moreover, the analysis of geographical names shows that the influence of the Qushchu tribe extends beyond Azerbaijan to other parts of the Caucasus, as well as the North Caucasus and Central Asia. This confirms that the tribe established wide-ranging nomadic and trade connections.

In future research, organizing ethnographic expeditions to explore the linguistic, cultural, and geographical traces of the Qushchu tribe, documenting traditional practices of bird hunting, and conducting genetic studies would be highly beneficial. Such efforts would help to more accurately determine the tribe's origins and its place within the broader system of Turkic peoples.

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QUŞÇU TAYFASININ İZİNİ YAŞADAN COĞRAFİ ADLAR

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Xülasə. Quşçu tayfası, Azərbaycan və ümumilikdə türk xalqları tarixində mühüm rol oynamış

qədim köçəri tayfalardan biridir. Onların adı ilə bağlı müxtəlif coğrafi adların mövcudluğu bu tayfanın tarixən geniş ərazilərə yayılmasını və türk etnoqrafiyasındakı yerini göstərir. Bu məqalədə Quşçu tayfasının mənşəyi, tarixi, coğrafi izləri və müasir türk dünyasındakı rolu təhlil edilir. Quşçu tayfası uzun müddətdir müxtəlif tədqiqatçıların diqqətini çəkmişdir və onların mənşəyi haqqında fərqli fikirlər mövcuddur. Əksər alimlər bu tayfanın türk mənşəli olduğunu bildirir, bəzi mütəxəssislər isə onları monqollarla əlaqələndirir. Lakin əsas fikir odur ki, quşçu etnonimi türk dilindən gəlib və “quşbazlar”, “ahıcı quşların ovçuları” mənasını verir. Başqırdlar arasında da quşçuların “quş ovçuları” kimi tanınması ilə təsdiqlənir. Bu da onların monqol mənşəli olmadığını göstərir.

Açar sözlər: Quşçu tayfası, kuşanlar, Muğan xan, etnonim, oğuz eli, türk tayfaları.