ISSN: 2181-3906 2026

International scientific journal
«MODERN SCIENCE AND RESEARCH»
VOLUME 5 / ISSUE 11 / UIF:8.2 / MODERNSCIENCE.UZ

UDC: 811.512.1'373.2

QADIMGI UYG‘UR TILIDAGI “MAITRISIMIT NOM BITIG” ASARI TEONIMLARINING TARIXIY-LISONIY TAHLILI

Raximova Norjongul Mahsud qizi
Abu Rayhan Biruni Urgench State University
PhD student; lecturer at Urgench Innovation University (UrIU).
raximovanorjongul@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24221042

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada qadimgi uyg‘ur buddaviy adabiyotining ilk yodgorliklaridan biri – “Maitrisimit nom bitig” asarining Sengim nusxasida qo‘llangan teonimlar tarixiy-lisoniy jihatdan tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda tengri, burxan, tengrilar tengrisi burxan, mayitri burxan, qut tengrisi, kün tengri kabi birliklar hamda zardushtiylik va hinduiylik panteonidan o‘zlashgan azrua, hormuzta, vishnu, maheshvari teonimlari semantik, struktur va genetik jihatdan tasniflanadi. Tahlil natijasida qadimgi turkiy tengri leksemasining buddaviy muhitda semantik torayishga uchragani, ko‘p komponentli teonimlarning sanskrit birikmalaridan kalka yo‘li bilan shakllangani hamda teonimlarning bir diniy tizimdan ikkinchisiga ko‘chishi (transonomizatsiya) asoslab beriladi. Olingan natijalar o‘zbek tili teonimiyasining islomgacha bo‘lgan qatlamini o‘rganishda nazariy va amaliy ahamiyatga ega.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *teonim, teonimiya, qadimgi uyg‘ur tili, Maitrisimit nom bitig, tengri, burkan, kalka, transonomizatsiya, buddaviylik, teoforik antroponim.*

ИСТОРИКО-ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ТЕОНИМОВ ДРЕВНЕУЙГУРСКОГО ПАМЯТНИКА «MAITRISIMIT NOM BITIG»

Аннотация. *В статье с историко-лингвистической точки зрения анализируются теонимы, употреблённые в сенгимской рукописи «Maitrisimit nom bitig» – одного из ранних памятников древнеуйгурской буддийской литературы. Единицы tengri, burkan, tengri tengrisi burkan, maitri burkan, kut tengrisi, kün tengri, а также заимствованные из зороастрийского и индуистского пантеонов теонимы azrua, hormuzta, vişnu, m(a)heşv(a)ri классифицируются по семантическому, структурному и генетическому признакам.*

Обосновывается сужение значения древнетюркской лексемы tengri в буддийской среде, калькирование многокомпонентных теонимов с санскрита и перенос теонимов из одной религиозной системы в другую (трансонимизация).

Ключевые слова: *теоним, теонимия, древнеуйгурский язык, Maitrisimit nom bitig, tengri, burkan, калька, трансонимизация, буддизм, теофорный антропоним.*

A HISTORICAL-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THEONYMS IN THE OLD UYGHUR “MAITRISIMIT NOM BITIG”

Abstract. *The article provides a historical-linguistic analysis of the theonyms found in the Sengim manuscript of Maitrisimit nom bitig, one of the earliest monuments of Old Uyghur Buddhist literature. The units tengri, burkan, tengri tengrisi burkan, maitri burkan, kut tengrisi and kün tengri, together with azrua, hormuzta, vişnu and m(a)heşv(a)ri borrowed from the Zoroastrian and Hindu pantheons, are classified on semantic, structural and genetic grounds.*

The study demonstrates the semantic narrowing of Old Turkic tengri in the Buddhist milieu, the calquing of multi-component theonyms from Sanskrit, and the transfer of theonyms from one religious system to another (transonymization).

Keywords: *theonym, theonymy, Old Uyghur, Maitrisimit nom bitig, tengri, burkan, calque, transonymization, Buddhism, theophoric anthroponym.*

INTRODUCTION

As a distinct layer of the onomastic system, theonyms reflect a people's religious worldview, mythological notions and cultural contacts. Because the names of divine beings are bound up with a society's most sacred concepts, they persist for a long time in the history of a language; in periods of religious change, however, they undergo substantial changes in form, meaning and status. For this reason, the historical-linguistic study of theonyms is important for tracing the lexical-semantic development of a language, its contacts with other languages, and the stages of a people's spiritual culture.

The theonymy of the Uzbek language comprises several historical layers: the Old Turkic religious-mythological layer, the layer associated with Zoroastrianism, the Buddhist and Manichaean layer, and the Islamic layer. Written evidence for the pre-Islamic theonyms among these layers is relatively scarce and survives mainly in the Turkic runic inscriptions and in Old Uyghur written monuments. In particular, the Buddhist and Manichaean Uyghur texts found in the Turfan oasis allow us to observe directly the changes in theonymy brought about by the Turkic peoples' contact with new religious systems.

“Maitrisimit nom bitig” is one of the earliest and most extensive works of Uyghur Buddhist literature, a large part of which has survived in legible form. The work tells of the life of Maitreya – the bodhisattva expected to come into the world in the future – his descent from the Tushita heaven to earth, and his attainment of Buddhahood. As one of the two texts translated into Turkic from Tocharian, it is of particular importance as evidence of the translation activity of the Uyghurs and of the influence of the Maitreya cult among them [2; 1]. The co-occurrence of Old Turkic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Hindu theonyms within a single text makes the work a unique source for theonymic research.

The aim of this article is to identify the theonyms used in the Sengim manuscript of “Maitrisimit nom bitig”, to classify them on semantic, structural and genetic grounds, and to determine their place in the history of Uzbek theonymy. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set: to determine the composition of the work's theonyms by religious layer; to reveal the semantic change of the lexeme *tengri* in the Buddhist context; to identify the ways in which multi-component theonyms were formed; and to analyse cases of theonyms passing from one religious system to another.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tradition of studying theonyms as an independent branch of onomastics took shape in the Russian school of onomastics. In her work on the theory of proper names, A.V. Superanskaya singled out the names of deities as one of the onomastic categories [20].

N.V. Podolskaya defined a theonym as “the name of any god or deity” and introduced the term theonymy into onomastic terminology [19]. These theoretical foundations serve as a basis for the study of theonyms in later Turkology, including Uzbek linguistics.

The study of “Maitrisimit nom bitig” dates back to the early twentieth century. A. von Le Coq, who discovered the work, dated it to the 9th–10th centuries, while A. von Gabain and O. Pritsak assigned it to the 9th century; the facsimile edition was produced by A. von Gabain [4]. The transliteration of the Sengim manuscript, together with a German translation, commentary and glossary, was published by Ş. Tekin [15], and this edition remains the principal source for research on the work. Ş. Tekin dated the work to the 8th century, and J.P. Laut to the mid-9th century [2; 22]. In her study dating Old Uyghur texts by their phonetic and morphological features, F. Ağca concluded that “the work was written at the end of the 9th century” [2; 22].

Among the studies devoted specifically to the language of the work, J.P. Laut's monograph on early Turkic Buddhism and its monuments [9] and A. Baş's thesis analysing the phonetic and morphological features of the Sengim manuscript [2] hold a special place. The religious terminology of Old Uyghur Buddhist and Manichaean texts has been studied by H. Tokyürek [16].

However, existing studies have not specifically analysed the theonyms of the work as an integrated onomastic system in terms of their religious layers, structure and origin. The present article aims to fill this gap in part.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The material for the study consisted of text passages taken from the Sengim manuscript of “Maitrisimit nom bitig”.

Descriptive, comparative-historical, etymological and componential analysis methods were used. The theonyms were classified on semantic (by the divine concept they denote), structural (by the number and arrangement of their components), genetic (by their origin and mode of formation) and religious (by the religious system to which they belong) grounds. The formation of borrowed units is explained on the basis of L. Johanson's code-copying model [6].

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The theonym *Tengri*: from the Old Turkic layer to the Buddhist context

Tengri is the central unit of Old Turkic theonymy: in the Turkic runic inscriptions it denotes the Sky God and often forms a pair with the word *yėr* ‘earth’. H. Şirin interprets the phrase *üze teŋri asra yėr yarlıkadok üçün* (BK K 10-11) in the Bilge Kagan inscription as “because the blue Tengri above and the Tengri of the earth below so commanded” [14; 80], [2; 79]. This interpretation shows that in this context the lexemes *teŋri* and *yėr* denote a pair of cosmic deities. Thus, in the period of the runic monuments, *tengri* was used as the name of the Sky God, the holder of supreme and sole authority.

In the Buddhist “Maitrisimit”, however, the semantic range of the lexeme *tengri* changes considerably. Here it mostly occurs in the plural and corresponds to Sanskrit *deva*, i.e. the numerous celestial beings ranking below the Buddha. In the prologue, where the Buddha's life is recounted, it is said that by “turning the wheel of the Dharma” he saved eighty thousand tengris:

nomlug tilgen tevirip bėş pancaki-i toyın-larag sekiz tümen t(e)ngri-lerig kutgarmışın – “din tekerleğini çevirip beş rahibi ve seksen bin tanrıyı kurtardığını” [‘that he turned the wheel of the Dharma and saved the five monks and eighty thousand gods’] (1r16–v4) [2; 24].

In this example the tengris appear not as the saving subject but as the object saved by the Buddha. This is explained by the fact that in Buddhist cosmology the devas, too, are not fully liberated from saṃsāra – the cycle of birth and death.

At the same time, the lexeme *tengri* is also used in the Buddhist text as an attribute meaning “divine, exalted, sacred”. For example, the phrase *bo t(e)ngri burkan-nıng* in the prologue is rendered by A. Baş as “Yüce Burhan'ın” [‘of the Exalted Buddha’] [2; 23–24]. Here *tengri* is not an independent theonym but an epithet glorifying the theonym *burkan*. The same meaning is found in the form *t(e)ngridem*, which, applied to a ruler, alludes to his divine power and might: *buyan küçinte t(e)ngridem kutı küçi çok yalınları aşılmakı bolzun* (1v22-27) [2; 84]. In the text *tengri* also co-occurs with the semes of light and radiance: *çeçek yapargakı teg y(a)ruk yaltır(ı)g t(e)ngri kelip* “a bright, radiant tengri, like a flower petal, came” (119r2) [2; 71].

Phonetically, *tengri* is listed among the Old Uyghur words that underwent metathesis [1; 182], [2; 69]; in the Uyghur script it is written *tnkry*. On the whole, the theonym *tengri* underwent semantic narrowing in the Buddhist milieu: it shifted from the meaning ‘supreme Sky God’ to that of numerous celestial beings (*deva*), while supreme divine status passed to the theonym *burkan*.

Its attributive meaning “divine, exalted”, however, was retained, and it was actively used as a component of multi-component theonyms.

The theonym *Burkan* and the formation of multi-component compounds

In the Buddhist text, supreme divine status belongs to the theonym *burkan* (Buddha), which occurs both as a single-component form and expanded with various components. The most important of the multi-component forms is the compound *tengri tengrisi burkan*. A. Baş explains its origin on the basis of L. Johanson's code-copying model as follows:

“Eski Uygur Türkçesiyle yazılmış Budist metinlerde sıkça geçen tengri tengrisi burkan ‘Tanrılar Tanrısı Burhan, yüce Burhan’ birleşimi Sanskrit devá-tâ dev-á buddha birleşiminden yapılmış tam bir kopyadır” [2; 48]. [“The compound tengri tengrisi burkan ‘God of Gods Buddha, exalted Buddha’, which occurs frequently in Buddhist texts written in Old Uyghur Turkic, is a full copy of the Sanskrit compound devá-tâ dev-á buddha.”]

Citing the meanings “heavenly, divine; celestial, deity, god, divinity” given for Sanskrit *devá* in A. Macdonell's dictionary, the author stresses that the semantic equivalent of the compound *devá-tâ dev-á buddha* is precisely *tengri tengrisi burkan* [10], [2; 48]. According to L. Johanson's model, copying is divided into global and selective types; in selective copying, full semantic correspondence between the original unit and the copy yields a “full translation word” (tam çeviri kelime), while reduced correspondence yields a “free translation word” (serbest çeviri kelime) [6; 28–37], [2; 48]. Accordingly, *tengri tengrisi burkan* is a complete calque of the Sanskrit compound, each component of which has been replaced by a Turkic word or an earlier loanword. This evidence shows that some multi-component theonyms were formed genetically through calquing.

One important point should be noted here. According to A. Baş, "Esasen Uygurlar, orijinal olarak Sanskrit olan ödünçlemelerin çoğunu Sanskrit asıllarından değil, Soğdca veya daha yaygın olarak Toharcadaki şekilleriyle almışlardır" ['In fact, the Uyghurs took most loanwords of Sanskrit origin not from their Sanskrit originals but in their Sogdian or, more commonly, Tocharian forms'] [2; 48]. Thus, Sogdian and Tocharian served as intermediaries in the entry of Buddhist theonyms into Old Uyghur. An example is the theotoponym *br(a)hmalok* "Brahma ülkesi" ['the land of Brahma'] (< Skt. *brahmaloka*) [2; 48].

In the text the theonym *tengri tengrisi burkan* occurs in various syntactic constructions:

edgülük dıntarlar ara t(e)ngr-i t(e)ngrisi burkan-ta yigrek yok erür – "Mükemmel rahipler arasında Yüce Burhan'dan üstünü yoktur" ['Among the perfect monks there is none superior to the Exalted Buddha'] (58v6-10) [2; 27];

alku adada kutgarguçı tengri tengrisi burkan ['the God of gods Buddha, who saves from all dangers'] (16r9) [2; 75];

bo muntag türlüg öngre kisre işidmedök t(e)ngri t(e)ngrisi burkan-nıng edgü atın küsin işidip ['having heard the good name and fame of the God of gods Buddha, such as had never been heard before or since'] (13r22-24) [2; 79].

In the second example the theonym is expanded by the participial phrase *alku adada kutgarguçı* "saving from all dangers", which expresses the Buddha's role as saviour. The phrase *edgü atın küsin* "his good name and fame" in the third example shows that the divine name itself was perceived as sacred and that hearing it was regarded as a meritorious act. This clearly demonstrates the sacral function of theonyms.

The theonym *Burkan* is also actively used in appellative compounds. The compound *Burkan kut* "Buddhahood" is rendered in A. Baş's translation as "Burhan kutu" or "Burhan talihi": *ulaşılması güç Burhan kutuna ulaştığını* ['that he attained Buddhahood, which is hard to attain'] [2; 24]; *burkan kutın bulu y(a)rlıkadaçı* – "Burhan talihini haşmetle bulacak" ['who will gloriously attain Buddhahood'] [2; 85]. The compound *Burkan şazını* means "Burhan şeriatı", i.e. the Buddhist teaching [2; 21]. In these compounds the Old Turkic lexeme *kut* and the lexeme *şazın*, borrowed from Sanskrit *śāsana*, combine with the theonym to form new religious terms.

The theonym *Maitri burkan*

The protagonist of the work, Maitreya, is likewise named with the component *burkan*. This theonym derives from Sanskrit *maitrī* "kindness" and occurs in Pali as *metteyya* [3; 292], [2; 10]. Its equivalents in various languages are recorded as follows: "Pal. Metteya; Tib. Byams pa; Mo. Mayidari; Çin. Mile; Kor. Mirŭk; Jpn. Miroku ve Cishi" [2; 16]. This series shows that the theonym was widely known throughout the area to which Buddhism spread and underwent its own phonetic adaptation in each language.

In Buddhism, Maitreya is regarded as the bodhisattva who, as the successor of Śākyamuni Buddha, is expected to descend to earth in the future to save humanity; researchers point to a "messianic" emphasis in his image [2; 17]. Y. Kasai distinguishes three stages in the development of the Maitreya cult: "İlk ve en eski aşamada Maitreya, Śākyamuni Buda'nın çağdaşı olarak tasvir edilmiş ve gelecekteki Budalığının kehanetini Śākyamuni'den almıştır.

İkinci ve üçüncü aşamada ise Maitreya, hâlihazırda gelecekteki Buda olarak tasvir edilmiştir" ['In the first and oldest stage, Maitreya was depicted as a contemporary of Śākyamuni Buddha and received from Śākyamuni the prophecy of his future Buddhahood. In the second and third stages, Maitreya is already depicted as the future Buddha'] [7; 67], [2; 16].

Structurally, Maitreya's name appears in the work in several forms: *maitri burkan* (two components), *bilge maitri burkan* (three components) and *tükel bilge maitri burkan* (four components). For example: *kim tamulug etözin baru kelip tükel bilge maitri burkan körgeli boltuŋuzlar* – "Cehennemlik vücutlarınız ile gelip mükemmel bilge Maitri Burkan'ı görebildiniz" ['You came with your hell-bound bodies and were able to see the perfect, wise Maitri Burkan'] (172v21-23) [2; 91]; *anta ötrü tükel bilge maitri burkan ėdiz yüksek orun üze olurup* – "Bundan dolayı Bilge Maitri Burkan yüksek bir yere oturup" ['Thereupon the wise Maitri Burkan, sitting on a high place'] (171r4-10) [2; 94]. In these theonyms the attributes *tükel* "perfect, complete" and *bilge* "wise" express the principal qualities of the divine being – perfection and wisdom. Such attributive components are functionally close to the attributive names (epithets) of later Islamic theonymy.

The compounds *Qut tengrisi* and *kün tengri*

Traces of Old Turkic religious-mythological notions are also preserved in the Buddhist text in the compounds *kut tengrisi* and *kün tengri*. *Qut tengrisi* "deity of fortune" is a deified form of the Old Turkic concept of *qut* and is used in the text as a means of comparison. Maitreya's father Brahmayu is described as follows:

közünür kut t(e)ngri-singe üleşi brhmayu atl(ı)g bramantar iligtin – "görünür saadet ilahesine benzeyen Brahmayu adlı Brahman hükümdarından" ['from the Brahman ruler named Brahmayu, who resembles the visible goddess of fortune'] (3r29-31) [2; 85].

In the prologue, the mother of those who commissioned the work is glorified with the same theonym: *közünü turur-kut t(e)ngrisi teg ögümüz-kün silig kunçuy* – "yaşamakta olan saadet ilahi gibi olan annemiz Kün Silig Hanım'a" ['to our mother, Lady Kün Silig, who is like a living deity of fortune'] [2; 21]. In both examples the theonym *kut tengrisi* serves to glorify a person, raising his or her virtues to a divine level. This shows that the Old Turkic concept of *qut* did not lose its sacral content even in the Buddhist milieu.

The compound *Kün tengri*, by contrast, is used in the text directly in the sense of "the Sun": *alku işleyü tükedim(i)z yine yme kün tengri uyakgalır* – "Bütün işlerimizi bitirdik. Güneş tekrar batmak üzere" ['We have finished all our work. The sun is about to set again'] (12v1-3) [2; 94]. In this example the ancient cosmic theonym has undergone desacralization and become an ordinary astronomical name. At the same time, the retention of the component *tengri* is a linguistic trace of the ancient Turks' perception of the Sun as a divine being.

CONCLUSION

The historical-linguistic analysis of the theonyms of "Maitrisimit nom bitig" leads to the following conclusions.

First, the theonyms of the work belong to at least five religious layers: Old Turkic (*tengri, kut tengrisi, kün tengri*), Buddhist (*burkan, maitri burkan, tengri tengrisi burkan*), Zoroastrian

(*azrua*, *hormuzta*), Hindu (*vişnu*, *m(a)heşv(a)ri*) and Manichaean (*mani burkan*). This is a linguistic reflection of the religious and cultural diversity of 9th-century Uyghur society.

Second, the lexeme *tengri* underwent semantic narrowing in the Buddhist milieu: it shifted from the meaning ‘supreme Sky God’ to that of Sanskrit *deva*, i.e. numerous celestial beings, while supreme divine status passed to the theonym *burkan*. At the same time, *tengri* retained its attributive meaning “divine, exalted” and was actively used as a component of multi-component theonyms.

Third, some multi-component theonyms were formed genetically through calquing: *tengri tengrisi burkan* is a complete calque of the Sanskrit compound *devá-tâ dev-á buddha*. Sogdian and Tocharian served as intermediaries in the entry of Buddhist theonyms into Old Uyghur.

The results can be used in the historical-linguistic study of the pre-Islamic religious-mythological layer of Uzbek theonymy, in university courses on the historical lexicology and onomastics of the Turkic languages, and in compiling a historical-etymological dictionary of theonyms.

REFERENCES

1. Ağca F. Eski Uygur Türkçesiyle yazılmış eserlerin ses ve şekil özelliklerine göre tarihlendirilmesi: Doktora tezi. – Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2006.
2. Baş A. Eski Uygurca Maitrisimit Nom Bitig’in dili: Yüksek lisans tezi. – Eskişehir: Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi, 2020. – XIII, 116 s.
3. Eliade M. Dinsel inançlar ve düşünceler tarihi. Cilt II: Gotama Budha’dan Hıristiyanlığın doğuşuna / Çev. A. Berktay. – İstanbul: Alfa Yayınevi, 2017.
4. Gabain A. von. Maitrisimit: Faksimile der alttürkischen Version eines Werkes der buddhistischen Vaibhāṣika-Schule. II. – Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961.
5. İzgi Ö. Çin elçisi Wang Yen-Te’nin Uygur seyahatnamesi. – Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989.
6. Johanson L. Türkçe dil ilişkilerinde yapısal etkenler / Çev. N. Demir. – Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2018. – 251 s.
7. Kasai Y. Der Ursprung des alttürkischen Maitreya-Kults // Die Erforschung des Tocharischen und die alttürkische Maitrisimit / Hrsg. Y. Kasai, A. Yakup, D. Durkin-Meisterernst. – Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. – S. 67–104. – (Silk Road Studies; XVII).
8. Kudara K. Eski Uygurların Budist kültürü / Çev. M. Elmalı // Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi. – 2009. – Sayı 20. – S. 247–262.