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Hebrew Etymology for the Ethnonym Kipchak and the Etymologies for Varachan and Turk

Kıpçak Etnonimi için İbranice Etimoloji ile Varaçan ve Türk için Etimolojiler

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The 'hollow tree' etymology for the ethnonym Kipchak is considered to be a folk etymology, and most of the scholars who treat of this subject have given into this mistake. In their search for alternative etymologies they proposed numerous terms, but they remain unconvincing suggestions. Here I show, convincingly I think, that Kipchak indeed means 'hollow tree'. In Hebrew קֶפֶח *kaph* means anything 'hollow', and עֵצָה *etsah* or *etzah* means a 'tree'. Thus evidently the original form of the ethnonym Kipchak is the Hebrew term *kaph tsah* or *kaph tzah*, 'hollow tree'. Oghuz Khagan named the child Kipchak, Hollow Tree, because his mother gave him birth in the hollow of a tree. This etymology indicates that Oghuz Khagan and his people not only spoke Hebrew, but were of Hebrew descent as well. As for the Hun capital, Varachan, I propose the Város + Hun, i.e. 'Hun City' etymology. Finally in the *Djagfar Tarihi* the Turkic road is also the Silk Road, Turgu-yuly, indicating the Dargo or Turgu, *drága* 'dear, expensive, precious' etymology for the ethnonym Turk.

Key Words: Kipchak, hollow tree, Hebrew etymology, Varachan, Turk.

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The Kipchak – *Kaphtsah* ‘Hollow Tree’, Etymology

For the Kipchak etymology I depend primarily on Cihan Yalvar’s well-researched thesis, *The origin of the Kipchak Turks and Early Historical Periods* (Yalvar, May 2018). In addition to the ‘hollow tree’ etymology he lists about 30 more alternative terms, namely: angry, short tempered, active, restless, stiff, ruthless, ominous, unfortunate, sturdy, rotten, empty, rotten logs, decayed, narrow hollow, white, fair, fair skinned, blonde, white saks, white hairs, unlucky, unfortunate, star-crossed, empty or useless, pale folk, light yellow, and you name it.

The name Kipchak itself has more than 50 different pronunciations. I find Muhammad Al-Idrisi’s *Hifşah* and William of Rubruck’s *Capchat* and *Kapşat* renderings of the name most revealing. According to the Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Young’s, no date, pp. 487 and 999) in Hebrew קֶפֶח *kaph* means anything hollow, and עֵץ *etsah* or *etzah* means a ‘tree’. This interpretation indicates that Rubruck’s *Kap-* in *Kapşat* stands for the Hebrew *kaph*, ‘hollow’, and Al-Idrisi’s *-şah* in *Hifşah* stands for the Hebrew *etsah* or *tsah*, ‘tree’. Thus evidently the original form of the ethnonym Kipchak is the Hebrew term *kaphtsah* or *kaphtzah*, ‘hollow tree’. Understandably Oghuz Khagan named the child Kipchak, Hollow Tree, because his mother gave him birth in the hollow of a tree. This etymology indicates that Oghuz Khagan and his people not only spoke Hebrew, but ultimately were of Hebrew descent as well, i.e. a part of the “Lost Tribes.”

In the Uygur language the Oghuz Khagan Saga, cited by Cihan Yalvar, reinforces the correctness of the ‘hollow tree’ etymology. There a creative soldier, called Uluğ Orda Beğ, demonstrated to Oghuz Khan—by constructing a raft of trees and branches—the way to pass over the Volga River. Impressed, Oghuz Khan told Uluğ Orda Beğ, from now on your name will be Kipchak.

In this account not the hollow of a tree, but the hollow shape of the raft constructed of trees, prompted Oghuz Khan to name the crafty soldier Kipchak.

The Varachan – *Város* + Hun, ‘Hun City’, Etymology

In Armenian Geography the “kingdom of the Huns” is north of Derbent, with its “magnificent city” of Varachan, the Hunnic territory’s main center or capital. In his edition of ibn Fadlan’s journey A. Zeki Validi Togan posits that

Varach- and *Barsh-* are the names of the same tribe (Dunlop, 1967:44). I propose that both *Varach-* and *Barsh-* mean *város*, ‘city’ or ‘town’, from the root *vár*, ‘fortress, stronghold, citadel’. Thus evidently the name of the Hun capital was *Város*, ‘city’, an appropriate name for a capital.

Annals and chronicles often contain accounts which have more in common with fiction than history. Nevertheless they contain information which makes sense. In the *Djagfar Tarihi*’s “Description of Saksin” (Nurutdinov, no date, p. 57) we find, sic: “our ancient name for the silk, *turgu*, ... comes from the name of the Hon’s city *Turgu* made famous by its manufacture of the silk fabrics. In the antiquity the pieces of silk were the most expensive goods circulating instead of the money, and therefore the *Ulchians* [Slavs], *Artanians*, *Ulagians* and *Sadimians*, who were buying the silk from the *Bulgars*, took our word ‘*turgu*’ as a word for trade, market and everything dear...”

So according to this account the city of the Huns, *Dargo* or *Turgu*, is the name for silk, which means “everything dear.” I looked up the word “dear” in Europe’s [wordsense.eu](https://www.wordsense.eu/expensive/) (<https://www.wordsense.eu/expensive/>) with the following results:

Synonyms: dear costly pricey

Hungarian: drága

Latvian: dārgs

Polish: drogi (masc.)

Russian: дорогой (masc.) [dorogóy]

Slovak: drahý

Slovene: drag

Sorbian:

Lower Sorbian: drogi

Upper Sorbian: drohi

Ukrainian: дорогій [dorogíy]

We add to this list the Bulgarian *drag* ‘dear’, the Tibetan ethnic term *Drugu* or *Trugu* for Turks, and the Finnish *Turku* and Swedish *Torg*, meaning

‘marketplace’. Presumably these terms come from *Dargo* or *Turgu*, the city of the Huns.

On my part I am convinced that the Hun capital, Varachan, is identical with the city of Dargo or Turgu, i.e. with the modern town of Tarku or Tarki, located near to Makhachkala, Dagestan’s capital by the Caspian Sea.

Ghevond, the Armenian historian of the 8th century, mentions the Hun city Targuin connection with the 737 campaign of the Arab commander Marwan. Ghevond wrote: “After defeating the city troops, he captured the city. After the city was taken, when people saw that the enemy has prevailed against them, many of them threw their property into the sea, while others threw also themselves into the sea, and perished in its depths.”



Tarki, view from the Caspian Sea, 1839, Milyutin

The Etymology of Turk

This brings us to the etymology of Turk, which national name is of unknown origin. Since nothing definite is known what Turk means, I propose that it means a community of people engaged in the manufacture and commerce of expensive, i.e. *drága*, silk and other luxury products. The “Book of Huns” in the *Djagfar Tarihi* seems to confirm the correctness of the *Dargo* or *Turgu*, *drága*, ‘dear, expensive, precious’ etymology. There we find: “The Saksin or Azak road ... splits the Turkic road, which is also called Turgu-yuly [Silk Road] ...” (Nurutdinov, no date, pp, 23-24).

So here we have the evidence: the Turkic road is also the Silk Road, *Turgu-yoly*. This indicates that the terms Turkic and Turgu are interchangeable, both terms meaning dear, expensive, and precious silk or other merchandise.

Compare this to <https://www.etymonline.com/word/turk>, where according to linguists *Turk* means ‘strength, a beautiful youth, a barbarian, a robber’ and you name it.

Róna-Tas (1991) offered perhaps the most absurd etymology, deriving Turk from the Khotanese-Saka word *tturakä*, ‘lid’, arguing that ‘lid’ is semantically stretchable to ‘helmet’.

What also deserves our attention in the *Djagfar Tarihi* is the information that the ancient name for silk, *turgu*, comes from Madjara Suba, the capital of the Burdjan beylik. But above we were told, “our ancient name for the silk, ‘turgu’, ... comes from the name of the Hon’s city Turgu made famous by its manufacture of the silk fabrics.” So where did the name for silk, *turgu*, come from? I prefer it came from Turgu, the city of the Huns, unless Madjara Suba is identical with Turgu, what is untenable. Madjar was a fortified city on a high promontory of the Kuma River, presumably of Khazar origin.

Finally I was surprised to find in the *Djagfar Tarihi* references to the Suvarians in Caucasia. According to Chapter 38 of the *De Administrando Imperio* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus the Turks, i.e. the Magyars, bore the name *Savartoi asphaloi*.

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