

MAHMUD AL-KASHGARI'S DĪWĀN LUGHĀT AL-TURK AS A HISTORICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL SOURCE

Ibragimova Maftuna Abdulazizovna

*Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Angren University E-mail:
abdulazizovna1789@gmail.com*

Abstract: *Mahmud al-Kashgari's Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, compiled in the eleventh century, is the earliest and most comprehensive lexicographical monument of the Turkic languages and constitutes a significant source for historical and ethnological studies. In addition to its linguistic value, the work provides extensive information on the social life, customs, traditions, worldview, and cultural practices of Turkic peoples of the period. This article examines the aims of the compilation, its structural features, and its importance as a historical and ethnological source, highlighting its role in the formation and development of Turkology.*

Keywords: *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, Mahmud al-Kashgari, Turkic languages, historical lexicology, ethnology, Turkology.*

INTRODUCTION

Written sources play a crucial role in the study of the historical and cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples. Among these sources, Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, compiled by Mahmud al-Kashgari in the eleventh century, occupies a unique position not only in linguistics but also in the fields of history, ethnology, and cultural studies. Alongside providing the earliest systematic and scientific description of Turkic languages, the work reflects the social life, customs, traditions, and worldview of Turkic society of the period.

The primary aim of this article is to analyze Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk as a historical and ethnological source, to examine the ethnographic information contained in the work, and to assess its significance in the development of Turkology.

In the introduction to his work, al-Kashgari emphasizes that the Turkic languages are a divine gift and substantiates the necessity of studying them from both scholarly and political perspectives.

This indicates that Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk is not merely a lexicographical work but also a text of ideological and cultural significance. Compiled in 1071–1072, the Dīwān is an encyclopedic dictionary of the Turkic languages containing invaluable information on Turkic tribes and clans inhabiting Central Asia and Western China in the second half of the eleventh century, including data on their social organization, language, history, geography, metrology, and astronomical knowledge.

The compilation of the work was largely motivated by the growing interest in and need for Turkic languages within the Arabic scholarly milieu.

Through this work, al-Kashgari sought to demonstrate the richness and sophistication of Turkic languages and to present them as equal to Arabic as languages of science and scholarship.

Manuscript and Linguistic Characteristics. The manuscript of *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* was discovered in 1914 in Diyarbakir, Turkey. The extant copy consists of 319 pages and is currently preserved in Istanbul. This manuscript was transcribed in 1266 by Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Fātih al-Sawī al-Dimashqi, approximately two centuries after the original compilation.

The work was written in Arabic, and Arabic diacritical marks were extensively employed to ensure the accurate pronunciation of Turkic lexical items. Due to the limitations of the Arabic script in representing certain Turkic sounds, al-Kashgari introduced special symbols and, in some cases, used double vowels or diacritical marks to indicate vowel length. Turkic sounds that could not be adequately rendered through Arabic letters were explained descriptively within the text.

The dictionary is arranged according to the Arabic alphabet and includes more than 7,500 words and expressions. Each lexical item is illustrated with examples drawn from poetic fragments, proverbs, and folklore materials, demonstrating that the author approached linguistic data not only from a linguistic perspective but also from an ethnographic one. In general, nouns are explained before verbs, and lexical units are arranged according to their length, ranging from two to seven letters.

Al-Kashgari also included a world map of his own creation. The map depicts countries, cities, villages, mountains, deserts, plains, seas, lakes, rivers, and other toponyms, while additional geographical names not included on the map are explained in the text. The map largely corresponds to what is now understood as the Eastern Hemisphere.

Historical and Ethnological Significance. The content of *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* provides extensive information on eleventh-century cities, settlements, seas, and lakes, as well as on Turkic tribes and clans, including their social status, origins, internal divisions, geographical distribution, customs, and linguistic features. In addition, the work contains valuable data on flora and fauna, astronomical concepts, zodiac signs, and the sacred calendar.

Al-Kashgari conducts a comparative analysis of the languages of Turkic tribes, presenting their phonetic, lexical, and semantic characteristics through concrete examples. This feature allows the work to be regarded as one of the earliest examples of comparative-historical linguistics. From a lexicological perspective, the *Dīwān* analyzes semantic phenomena such as polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, antonymy, and archaisms, and discusses the etymology of selected lexical items. Phonemes, vowel and consonant systems, vowel length, pronunciation, orthography, and grammatical rules are described in detail. In terms of morphology, words are traditionally classified into three groups—verbs, nouns, and particles—and their formation and inflection are explained.

The *Dīwān* is not merely a dictionary but a significant historical and ethnological source that sheds light on the social life of Turkic peoples in the eleventh century. It contains valuable information on the settlement patterns of Turkic tribes, their customs, traditions, and everyday lifestyles. Through lexical material, the author describes hunting, pastoralism, military traditions, clothing, and food culture.

In particular, proverbs and wise sayings reveal the moral values, social relations, and worldview of the people.

The poetic fragments and folklore materials included in the work are of great importance for the study of the aesthetic views of Turkic peoples.

These texts make it possible to draw conclusions about the literary thought, poetic style, and artistic imagery of the period.

Furthermore, themes such as nature, homeland, bravery, and human virtues are frequently emphasized, enhancing the cultural and educational significance of the work.

Scholarly Reception and Translations.

Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk has been highly valued by Orientalists and linguists and has been widely used in scholarly research. V. V. Bartold made extensive use of the work in his studies, while V. I. Belyaev described it as an important source based on living linguistic material.

The German scholar Carl Brockelmann translated the work into German in 1928. A facsimile edition of the manuscript was published in Istanbul, and later Besim Atalay produced a three-volume Turkish translation.

Subsequent Turkic-language editions appeared in 1957.

The work was also translated into Uzbek between 1960 and 1963 and published in three volumes by the “Fan” publishing house in Tashkent. This translation, prepared by the prominent linguist Professor Solih Mutallibov, includes not only the translation itself but also extensive commentaries, explanations of terms, and annotations on personal and place names.

The introductory sections discuss eleventh-century philology, Qutadghu Bilig, al-Kashgari’s linguistic views, the formation of Turkic tribes, and the principles of translation and transcription.

Each volume concludes with comprehensive indices of lexical items, their Uzbek and Russian equivalents, and references to their occurrences in the text.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* is not only the first comprehensive dictionary of the Turkic languages but also a unique encyclopedic source reflecting the historical, ethnological, and cultural landscape of its era.

The work holds exceptional scholarly value for linguists, historians, and ethnologists and occupies a foundational place in the development of Turkology.

Mahmud al-Kashgari’s scholarly legacy continues to play a vital role in preserving the cultural memory of Turkic peoples and in fostering their historical and cultural self-awareness.

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