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**ETHNONYMS AND CULTURAL MEMORY: A LINGUOCULTURAL AND
HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS**

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Relevance of the topic: Language is not merely a means of information exchange; it is a living treasury that preserves the experience, worldview, beliefs, and history accumulated by a people over centuries. In the context of modern globalization and cultural homogenization, preserving a people's national-cultural identity, understanding its roots, and ensuring the transmission of spiritual heritage across generations are pressing issues. Ethnonyms (the names of peoples, ethnic groups, clans, and tribes) are not simply ordinary, transient labels within a language; rather, they are entities that carry profound cultural and historical codes. Through them, it is possible to reconstruct the stages of a specific ethnic group's formation, its geographical distribution, its socio-political structure, and its belief systems.

The aim of the study: to reveal the layers of cultural memory (totemic, mythological, social, and geographical) preserved within ethnonyms—by analyzing their formation and functions from linguocultural and historical-ethnographic perspectives—and to demonstrate the role these names play in shaping national identity.

Cultural memory is a complex of knowledge, legends, values, and historical events preserved in the collective consciousness and transmitted from generation to generation through symbols, rituals, texts, and linguistic units. The ethnonym stands as one of the most enduring linguistic forms of this collective memory. Unlike other lexical units, ethnonyms preserve concepts spanning centuries, remaining intact despite the social and political changes occurring within a society. The ethnonymic system is the product of an ethnic group's strategy for perceiving both itself and others. A comprehensive study of the ethnonymy of Uzbek and other Turkic peoples allows for the categorization of their cultural memory into several key layers:

1) Totemistic and mythological layer: In the worldview of our ancient ancestors, natural phenomena, animals, and plants were sanctified and regarded as the legendary patron or source of origin for a clan. “Bo’ri” / “Qashqir”: Among ancient Turkic tribes, the wolf was a symbol of freedom, courage, and leadership. The etymology of tribal names such as “Barlas” and “Qiyot” is also linked to totemic and military-mythological concepts.

“Qipchoq”: In oral folklore—specifically the “Oghuz-nama” epic — the origin of the “Qipchoq” ethnonym is associated with the motif of a “hollow tree” or a “child born in a tree hollow”. This is not merely a simple legend, but a linguistic manifestation of an ancient mythic memory regarding the tribe's genesis.



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2) Socio-political and characterological layer: The ethnonym reflects a specific group's societal role, lifestyle, and character traits. “O‘zbek”: According to numerous sources, this ethnonym signifies “o‘zi bek” — meaning an “independent, self-ruling, and free person”. This name reflects the people's spiritual and cultural aspirations for freedom and independence. “O‘g‘uz”: Derived from the Old Turkic word “o‘q” (meaning clan, tribe, or branch), it signifies ancient forms of tribal and military-organizational structures.

3) Geographical and ethnotoponymic layer: Ethnonyms form in association with specific territories and subsequently evolve into place names (ethnotoponyms). “Qang‘li”: Refers to ancient nomadic pastoralist tribes; their name preserves a historical memory linked to carting and transport culture. Today, names of villages and neighborhoods in Uzbekistan — such as Nayman, Mang‘it, Qipchoq, Barlas, Mingt, and Yuz — serve to map the historical settlement areas and migration routes of these tribes.

Many ethnonyms preserve ancient Turkic words and dialectal elements that have fallen out of use in the modern literary language. Etymological analysis of these names helps reconstruct the grammatical and lexical state of our language in the past. Ethnonyms illustrate the mutual integration, symbiosis, and assimilation of various ethnic groups and cultures. For instance, the ethnonym “Nayman” (derived from the Mongolian word for “eight” - signifying a confederation of eight tribes) reflects the historical interactions between Turkic and Mongolic groups. Through ethnonymic memory, individuals gain a sense of their lineage, ancestral heritage, and cultural roots. This, in turn, strengthens national unity and self-identity.

Conclusion

Ethnonyms are not merely terms or labels; they are expressions of our people's cultural memory, history, and spirit, shaped over centuries. Conducting comprehensive research on them from a linguocultural perspective serves to deepen our understanding of the intrinsic link between language and culture and helps transmit our national and spiritual heritage to future generations in its authentic form.

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