

## **ELLAC AND ILEK: WHAT DOES THE STUDY OF AN ANCIENT TURKIC TITLE IN EURASIA CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION OF KHAZAR ANCESTRY?**

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Several theories about the ancestry of the Khazars and the origins of the Khazar state have been suggested to date. None of them provides a comprehensive solution for the controversial data of the written sources on the early history of the Khazars. This article investigates a possible link between the title of Kagan-Bek of the Deputy Kagan of the Khazars and a similar title Ellac/Ilek of the Akatsir-Huns. This study of the title argues for statehood and political culture connections between the earliest Turkic tribes of Western Eurasia and the Khazars and Turks of Central Asia.

**Keywords:** Khazar, Akatsir-Huns, Turkic tribes, Central Asia

### **INTRODUCTION: THE ENIGMA OF THE KHAZAR ANCESTRY**

Confederations and states of nomadic people in Eurasia may arise and disappear, but people united in clans and tribes can regroup in new alliances. New tribes and clans may join and lead them, while fragments of tribes that dominated in a preced-

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ing political entity can be ordinary members in a new alliance that would also have a new ethno-political designation. Professor Peter Golden, to whom this generalizing statement belongs, has supported his judgment through evidence from the Tölös, Kipchak, Kyrgyz, and Türgesh clans among diverse kin groups of the contemporary Altai Turks. States may collapse but people remain to create new states, often with new names, and possibly with new ruling dynasties.<sup>1</sup>

The Khazar puzzle has been that after the collapse of the Khazar kaganate in 965-969 CE, the presence of the Khazar ethnic name in other later political entities was not found.<sup>2</sup> Almost all their occasional mentions after the disaster were related to the fact of their adoption of Judaism, and apparently referred to the urban population in the lands formally controlled by the Khazars on the Black Sea shores of the Caucasus and in the Crimea.<sup>3</sup> In the Caucasus, the central terrain of the former Khazaria, we have only two vague indications of Khazars after the downfall of the Khazar kaganate that have no reference to their Judaic legacy. A local source reported that in 1064 “the remnants of the Khazars” amounted to 3000 families rebuilt the city of Kahtan on “the former Khazar territory” and settled there.<sup>4</sup> M.I. Artamonov has pointed out that the remains of the Khazars mixed with Kipchaks were referred to in a narration by the Azerbaijani poet Khagani and in the Georgian chronicle “Kartlis Tskhovreba,” in which the Khazars were described as fighting in the army of the Emir of Derbent during his unsuccessful campaign against Shirvan in the 12th century. According to

<sup>1</sup> Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1980), 28; See also S.G. Klyashstorny and T.I. Sultanov, *Gosudarstva Evrazijskikh narodov: ot drevnosti k novomu vremeni* (Sankt-Peterburg: Sankt-Peterburgskiy Tsentr vostokovednikh issledovaniy, 2009), 101; Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1992), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence from Chinese sources about the presence of a tribe called Ho-sa in the Uyghur coalition of Tokuz-Oghuz, which is identified by some researchers with the Khazars, is synchronous with the existence of the Khazar khanate. See details in Shun Shirota, “The Chinese Chroniclers of the Khazars: Notes on Khazaria in Tang Period Texts,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 14 (2005), 242-245. It was also suggested that some Khazar clans are connected with kin groups of western Kazakh tribes within the Junior Juz confederation of later times. See B.B. Irmukhanov, *Khazary i Kazakhi: Svyaz vremeni i narodov*. (Almaty: Nash Mir, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry*, 16; M.I. Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar* (Leningrad: Ermitaj, 1962; repr. 2002), 442-443.

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Minorsky and Ahmad ibn Lutf Allah Munajjim Bashi, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1958), 51; V.F. Minorsky in his commentary on the translated text mistakenly mentioned three hundred families. See *ibid.*, 107.

this Russian scholar, the Khazars, either remaining in the area of Derbent or being in the service of the Emir of Derbent, were absorbed among the Kipchaks by that time, had lost their identity and became known as Kipchaks.<sup>5</sup>

Today, none of the existing peoples is known as Khazars. The name of the Hazara people in central Afghanistan has nothing to do with the ethnonym Khazar. The traditional view on the origin of the Hazara people as offspring of Mongol soldiers who ended up in Afghanistan seems doubtless to almost everybody.<sup>6</sup> Even critics of this view do not see any connection between the Hazara people and the Khazars.<sup>7</sup>

People get famous through the perception and the names that are given to them by neighbors, but along with that, they might also be known by their own naming. Given that virtually all external sources—Arabic, Caucasian, Byzantine and Chinese—did not differ in the name of the Khazars, each of them seems to have borrowed the term from the outside. However, was this the Khazars own name, or a name that one of their neighbors gave them? Is there any eponym, political event or social shift behind the term that could lead to the formation of a new identity, and, accordingly, a new name of the people? There is also another side of the issue. The transformation of an ethnonym to a political term that embraces a multi-ethnic or multi-tribal confederation is a usual process of people building big states in Eurasia.<sup>8</sup> This can be seen in the examples of the terms Türk, Kipchak, and Mongol. The fate of these terms can evolve in different ways depending on the fate of the community they designated: they could designate the emerging broader ethno-linguistic identity (Türk, Kipchak), or the fragmentation of the community they represented could lead to a narrowing of the meaning down to a designation of a single constituent ethnic group (Mongol). However, ethno-political consolidation and consequently transition of the ethnic name of a single group to denote broader ethno-political commonality may also occur. The contemporary meaning of the term “French” can be an example of the latter. The fact that after the collapse of the Khazar Khanate, the Khazar identity ceased to exist and was not continued in the name of any unit within later confederations

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<sup>5</sup> Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar*, 445.

<sup>6</sup> In the word “hazara”—the name of the people in Afghanistan—the uppercase consonant is “h” instead of “x” (kh), as in the word “Khazars.” It is argued that “hazar” is a Persian translation of the Mongolian “ming” (thousand), from which the name of the people derived. S.A Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study* (Richmond: 1998), 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Humayun Sarabi, “Politics and Modern History of Khazara: Sectarian Politics of Afghanistan,” (Medford, MA: Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, 2006), 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Peter B. Golden, *Central Asia in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

of Eurasian nomads may justify that by the time of the disintegration of the Khazar state, the word Khazar was more a political or religious term than an ethnonym. This problem is an important aspect of the debate about the emergence and meaningful frames of the Khazar identity, but we cannot consider it in this paper.

The subject of this study is related to possible early evidence of the word “Khazar” that predates the sources contemporary to the Khazar state. In the context of the formative trends of political life among Eurasian nomads as detailed by Peter Golden, the efforts of researchers to find a Khazar ethnic or ancestral component in the political entities of Central Eurasian nomads which preceded the Khazars look quite explainable. In this article, the Khazar-Hun connection through the ancient Turkic institution of co-ruler, or deputy of supreme royal figure, will be contemplated.

## ETHNIC ROOTS AND THE ETHNONYM OF THE KHAZARS

A majority of researchers have considered the Khazars a distinct ethnic group and have sought their roots in prior populations of the region. Russian researcher S.A. Romashov in “Historical Geography of the Khazar Kaganate” details five major versions of the origins of the Khazars.<sup>9</sup> In his review of the current state of Khazar studies, Professor Peter Golden also indicated five viewpoints on the matter that were developed at different times and have retained their value.<sup>10</sup> Three versions are identical in the designations of these two experts, but the two other versions are apparently different. None of the existing versions is deemed absolutely convincing. Reputable historians have voiced arguments in favor of one or other of the versions simultaneously. For example, a leading expert on the history of the Khazars, Professor Peter Golden, having contributed to the development of several existing concepts, carefully spoke in favor of the Khazars’ descent from the Sabirs, a division of western Turkic (Oghur) tribes, and the Turks of the Western Turkic kaganate being the leading political element in the Khazar confederation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S.A. Romashov, “Istoricheskaya Geografiya Khazarskogo Kaganata. Chapters 1-2,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 11 (2001), 272-279.

<sup>10</sup> Peter B. Golden, “Khazar Studies: Achievements and Perspectives,” in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 52-53.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

The theory of the emergence of the Khazars from an early Uyghur confederation has been the longest under scholarly consideration and still continues to be a central subject of attention by Turkologists. The connection with Uyghurs has found new supporters due to data on the early history of the Uyghurs preceding the establishment of the Uyghur kaganate on the northern borders of China in the middle of the eighth century, which are increasingly available over time. In recent years, a special merit in strengthening this theory of the origin of the Khazars belongs to the prominent Russian scholar Sergey Klyashtorny, who unfortunately passed away in 2014.<sup>12</sup>

The assumption of the Khazars' connection with the *Akatsir*, a Hunnic tribe whom we know thanks to reports by the Byzantine authors Priscus of Panium (5c.) and Jordanes (6c), takes a remarkable place in the debate about the origins of the Khazars. This concept, if accepted, would restore confidence in reports by Syrian and local Armenian and Georgian sources about the appearance of the Khazars in the Caucasus earlier than the evidence of the Khazar kaganate in contemporaneous Byzantine and Arab sources.<sup>13</sup>

## AKATSIR-HUNS

In the middle of the fifth century, Priscus of Panium, who visited the headquarters of the Hun king Attila somewhere in the territory of present-day Hungary, reported on the tribe of the Akatsirs in the Union of Huns. The Akatsirs had been independent of the Huns of Attila. The Huns had to wage a military campaign and foment rivalries and intrigues inside the Akatsir nobility to subjugate them. Having used the discontent of the nobility with their tribal leader Kuridakh, Attila appointed his eldest son Ellac as lord over the Akatsirs.<sup>14</sup> Priscus also provides important information about the incursion the Akatsirs and the related Turkic-Bulgar tribe the Saragurs launched

<sup>12</sup> S.G. Klyashtorny, "KhazarSKIYE Zametki," *Turkologicheskiy Sbornik*, 2003-2004 (2005), 95-117; "Aziatskiy Aspekt Ranney Istorii Khazar", in *Evrei I Slavyane*, ed. V. Moskovich (Moskva: Mosty kultury/Gesharim, 2005), 259-265; S.G. Klyashtorny, *Runicheskkiye Pamyatniki Uyurskogo Kaganata i Istoriya Evraziyskikh Stepey*, (Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye vostokovedeniye, 2010), 175.

<sup>13</sup> P.B. Golden, "Khazars," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), vol. IV, 1172.

<sup>14</sup> Paniyskiy Prisk, "Skazaniya Priska Paniyskogo. Perevod S. Destunisa," *Ucheniye Zapiski Vtorogo Otdeleniya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk*, 8, no. 1 (1860), <http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus/Prisc/frametext21.htm>, 44, 59.

into the South Caucasus through the Derbent and Daryal (Alanian) passages that facilitates the argument for Khazar-Akatsir connections, since it was carried out via the same routes which the Khazars later followed to make their raids.<sup>15</sup> In the middle of the sixth century, Jordanes added to the description of the Akatsirs that they were a tribe who did not know cereals but lived on cattle breeding and hunting.<sup>16</sup>

This information about the Akatsir found a lot of similarities between them and the Khazars. They allegedly occupied territory north of the Black Sea steppes, and a hundred years after their location by Priscus, they were squeezed out by Bulgars to the north, where Jordanes fixed them. They also launched raids through the Caucasus gorges against Albania and Iberia, and they were a nomadic people connected to the Bulgars like the Khazars. Obviously, the author of the anonymous “Ravenna Cosmography,” written at the end of the seventh century, i.e., a half century after Jordanes, had many reasons for concluding that Jordanes called his contemporaries the Khazars by a different name, Akatsirs.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, in the second half of the nineteenth century, attempts were made in scholarly literature to identify the Khazars with the Akatsirs.<sup>18</sup> Scholars exerted considerable efforts to justify the linguistic connection of the term *Akatir/Akatzir* with the ethnonym Khazar. Almost simultaneously, two possible explanations of this connection were suggested. According to the first one, articulated by Vilem (Wilhelm) Tomaschek in 1872, the name Akatsir was derived from the Turkic “aqach eri,” i.e., “forest people.”<sup>19</sup> This etymology was later supported by the credible opinion of Joseph Marquart.<sup>20</sup>

The second opinion explained the ethnonym Akatsir as *ak-khazar* (white Kha-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93-94

<sup>16</sup> Jordan, “O Proisxozhdenii i Deyaniyakh Gotov,” *Perevod E.Ch. Skrzhinskaya* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteya, 1997), <http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus/Jordan/text1.phtml?id=576>, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Ravenskiy Anonim, “Severo-Vostochnaya Evropa v “Kosmografii” Ravenskogo Anonima, trans. V.A. Podosinov, *Vostochnaya Evropa v Istoricheskoy Perspektive. K 80-letiyu V.T. Pashuto*, (Moskva: Yazyk russkoy kultury, 1999), [http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus14/Ravenn\\_geogr/text.phtml?id=1167](http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus14/Ravenn_geogr/text.phtml?id=1167), 232.

<sup>18</sup> Paniyskiy Prisk, “Skazaniya Priska Paniyskogo. *Perevod S. Destunisa*”, note 74, 59-60. The author of the translation notes that the opinion about the identity of the Khazars and Akatsir prevails in science. However, he also expresses the view that the interpretation of the name Akatsir as Ak-Khazars (White Khazars) was built only on the consonance of words, which did not suffice.

<sup>19</sup> Y.R. Jafavov, *Gunny i Azerbaycan* (Baku: Elm, 1985), 33.

<sup>20</sup> J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische Und Ostasiatische Streifzüge; Ethnologische Und Historisch-Topographische Studien Zur Geschichte Des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts (Ca. 840-940)* (Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, T. Weicher, 1903), 41.

zars). As mentioned above, this point of view emerged not later than the first one, and it was referred to as a well-established concept in the scholarship of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Evidence from the Arab author al-Istakhri that the Khazars were of two types – black (*kara Khazars*) and white – acquired a special significance in support of this interpretation.<sup>22</sup> According to Douglas Dunlop, this evidence by the Arab author is an additional argument in favor of the theory of the relationship of the Akatsirs (Ak-Khazars) with the Khazars.<sup>23</sup> Being reserved in his own judgments, Dunlop never expressed his definitive opinion concerning the idea of the Akatsir origin of the Khazars. However, in his consideration of arguments in favor of the Akatsir theory, he was both consistent and unusually persistent. Thus, he leaned towards Zacharias Rhetor's evidence on the Khazars' presence amid nomadic people in the Caucasus not later than the latest date of the compilation of his work in 569 CE. Similarly, he also accepted the identification of the Akatsirs in Jordanes's evidence on the Khazars as asserted by the abovementioned author of the "Ravenna Cosmography." Furthermore, Dunlop seriously considered the earliest evidence of Khazars in Armenian history by Moses Khorenatsi, which reported on a Khazar incursion into the south Caucasus in cooperation with related *Barsil* people. He believed that there were many specific details in the story of the invasion of the Khazars and Barsils under the leadership of King Vnasep Surhaph that validated the source. Although the author of the first detailed monograph about the Khazars conceded the need for more evidence to justify the information of the Armenian, Georgian and Syrian sources, it was obvious that the relationship with the Akatsir seemed to him the only explanation and grounds to trust these stories.<sup>24</sup>

The explanation of Akatsirs as *agach-eri* (forest people) creates a difficulty for the concept of Akatsir ancestry of the Khazars, since the latter are characterized by various credible sources as nomadic people living in the steppes. An interesting way

<sup>21</sup> W.B. Henning, "A Farewell to the Khaqan of Aq-Aqataran," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XIV (1952): 515;

<sup>22</sup> Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Farisi (al-ma'ruf bi al-Karkhi) Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik* (al-Kahira: Wizarat as-saqafa wa al-irshad al-qami, 1961), 131. What has to be noticed is that the Arab text quotes the original Turkic term black Khazars (*kara Khazar*), but the reference to the white Khazars is done in Arabic translation (*sinjun biyadun*), without quotation of the Turkic equivalent of the term. This detail, as we will see later, may considerably weaken the argument for Akatsir as *Ak-khazar* (white Khazars).

<sup>23</sup> Dunlop D.M., *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-10.

out of this difficulty was proposed by another supporter of the Akatsir concept, the well-known Russian historian A.V. Gadlo. According to him, Bulgars evicted the Akatsirs from a Black Sea strip to the north-east Caspian steppes, where they changed their lifestyle and turned back to nomadism. That was when Jordanes met and located them after the earlier reported evidence by Priscus of Panium. Consequently, their name was changed to the consonant title Khazars, which was etymologically connected to the Turkic verb *keç* (wandering).<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Khazars, Gadlo asserted, were linked to the Akatsirs (agach-eri), and later they become known by a different name, which sounded similar, but derived from a different origin and had a different meaning. However, one cannot avoid noting that having denied the etymological connection between two terms, Gadlo just suggested a conjectural concept of the derivation of the term Khazar from the Turkic word *keç*. In addition, we know nothing about the life style of the Akatsirs except Jordanes's assertion that they were people who did not know cereals but lived off cattle breeding and hunting. In other words, they were hardly *forest people*.<sup>26</sup>

There is a difficulty also in the etymological connection of the terms *Khazar* and *Akatsir* via *ak-khazar*. Two available phonetic and graphical variations of the term—*Akatir* and *Akatsir*—justify the transition of the second consonant to “ch,” but not to “kh.” In other words, *agach-eri* is a linguistically plausible transformation, but *ak-khazar* is unlikely. Consequently, the appearance of a *kh-açar* variation in Arabic, Armenian, Georgian and Greek languages is difficult to explain.<sup>27</sup> Besides the linguistic problem, there is also a controversy over the details of Akatsir reports of their name “white Khazars” (*ak-kazar*). J. Marquart, who was against this etymology based on the aforementioned linguistic arguments, indicated that, subjugated to the Huns, the Akatsirs would fit the social status of “black Khazars,” i.e., they were not privileged members of the tribal union.<sup>28</sup> In this connection, it should be noted that in the abovementioned evidence, our source, the Arab geographer al-Istakhri distinguished black and

<sup>25</sup> A.V. Gadlo, *Etničeskaja Istorija Severnogo Kavkaza IV-X vv.* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1979), 60.

<sup>26</sup> Jordan, “O Proisxozhdenii I Deyaniyakh Gotov,” *Perevod E.Ch. Skrzhinskaya*, 67.; Jordanes, *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/jordgeti.html#huns>, V, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Marquart, *Osteuropäische Und Ostasiatische Streifzüge; Ethnologische Und Historisch-Topographische Studien Zur Geschichte Des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts (Ca. 840-940)*, s. 41, note 2; Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> See Dunlop D.M., *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 7.

white Khazars based on their physical appearance rather than social status. It is possible that having learned about the existence of white and black Khazars, the Arabic source gave its own explanation which would not necessarily coincide with the principle of division in Khazar society.

A majority of researchers considered the language of Khazars and Bulgars to belong to archaic Oghur-Turkic languages, in which “white” presumably would have sounded like *sharyg /sary*. The use of the word “ak” (white) is consistent with the norms of the Common Turkic—the language of ancient Turkic inscriptions in Mongolia. Such considerations imply a connection between the Akatsirs (based on the etymology *ak-khazars*—white Khazars) and the tribes of the Turkic kaganate. This opinion, in particular, was taken by the well-known Azerbaijani historian Y.R. Jafarov, who believed that the Akatsirs belonged to a group of “inherently old Turkic” tribes and whose name included the typical Turkish title “chur.”<sup>29</sup> The inconsistency of Jafarov’s theory was that to identify a different etymology and to justify an “ancient Turkish” origin of the Akatsirs, he was forced to abandon the above two popular interpretations of the name Akatsir. However, he did not offer a complete explanation of the ethnic name Akatsir other than the extraction of the title “chur” from it. The other difficulty for Jafarov consisted in the expression “old Turkic origin,” which was not sufficiently explained. He asserted that prior to the coming of the Huns to Western Eurasia, the nomadic confederation was consolidated in the land of eastern Kazakhstan as a product of interaction between ancient Ugrian and ancient Turkic components.<sup>30</sup> The coming of the Hun to this region at the end of the first century CE after their defeat by Chinese and Xianbei forces in Mongolia facilitated the consolidation and Turkification of the ethno-political mass that constituted a milieu for the formation of the ancient Bulgars. Other components of the “Hun-Bulgarian array,” out of which the Khazars later came, were, according to Jafarov, Turkified Indo-European “Saka-Wusun” people and the western branch of “ancient Turkic tribes” whom Huns met there.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the origin of the ethnic nucleus of the ancient Bulgar tribes and the Huns themselves as well as their role in the so-called Turkification process of the Hunno-Bulgar milieu was too broadly defined. In fact, this enabled

<sup>29</sup> Jafarov, *Gunny i Azerbajjan*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> In the study of the ethnicity of Huns and Bulgars, he followed the views of preceding Russian scholars Mikhail Artamonov, Lev Gumilev, Anatolij Novoseltsev: Артамонов, *Istoriya Khazar*; L.N. Gumilev, *Istoriya Naroda Khunnu*, <http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/HPH/index.html>; A.P. Novoseltsev, *Khazaraskoye Gosudarstvo i Yego Rol v I Evropy i Kavkaza*. (Moskva: Nauka, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Jafarov, *Gunny i Azerbajjan*, 20-22.

Kazakhstani scholar B.B. Irmukhanov, himself the author of a peculiar concept of the Khazar origin, to criticize Jafarov, unjustly, in our view, for following the academic traditions of Soviet scholarship in Khazar Studies and its patriarch M.I. Artamonov, who asserted the Ugrian ancestry of Bulgar tribes that adopted the Turkic language in the process of long interaction with their Turkic neighbors.<sup>32</sup>

However, let us return to the question of the etymological connection between the ethnonyms Khazar and Akatsir, i.e., to the plausibility of explaining the latter ethnonym as Ak-Khazars, or the white Khazars. It has been noted that the identification of the ethnonyms Khazar and Akatsir lays the foundation for the early mention of the Khazars in the Armenian written sources, which would otherwise be regarded as anachronisms.<sup>33</sup>

Color markers in Turkish onomastics are a common and ancient practice.<sup>34</sup> Chinese sources after the collapse of the Turkic kaganate in 630 distinguished Ashina Turks (blue Turks) and *Turks-Sheli* or *Shary-Turks* (yellow Turks). Over twenty years, there was a struggle in the Turgesh kaganate between the “yellow” and “black” Turgeshes that led to the degradation and decay of the Turgesh union. Even more common was the division of related tribal groups into “white” and “black.”<sup>35</sup> As mentioned above, this division did not mean social and ethnic differences. For example, amid the Turkic people *karayi* (Karaites, or Karayim – Turks professing the *karayi* doctrine of Judaism) the color marker *kara* (black) does not have negative connotations, but has a number of positive homonyms—land (fertile), big, strong. It is often found in ethnonyms in the sense of a large, powerful, inherent people.<sup>36</sup> Kara-kagan,

<sup>32</sup> B.B. Irmukhanov, *Khazary i Kazakhi: Svyaz Vremen I Narodov* (Almaty: Nash Mir, 2003), 219.

<sup>33</sup> Golden, “Khazars,” vol. IV, 1172.

<sup>34</sup> S.G. Klyashtorny, “Kipchaki, Komany i Polovtsi,” in *Vostochnaya Evropa v Drevnosti i Srednevekovye: Politicheskiye Instituti i Verkhovnaya Vlast. Materiali Konferentsii “XIX Chteniya Pamyati Chlenu Korrespondenta Akademii Nauk SSSR Vladimira Pashuto, Moskva, 16-18 aprelya 2007, (Moskva: Rossiyskaya Akademiya Nauk, Institut Vseobshchey Istorii, 2007), 113.*

<sup>35</sup> S.G. Klyashtorny and T.I. Sultanov, *Gosudarstva i Narody Evraziyskikh Stepey: Drevnost i Srednevekovye, Vtoroye Izdaniye, Ispravlennoye i Dopolnennoye*. (Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye, 2004), 109, 137. S.G. Klyashtorny suggested a new etymology of the name of Ashina. Orkhon inscriptions do not mention the term Asina, which is only reported in Chinese sources. However, the name *kok-turk* in those inscriptions was probably a translation of Sogdian and Tokharian *akbshane* meaning “dark-blue.” See also S.G. Klyashtorny, “The Royal Clan of the Turks and the Problem of Early Turkic—Iranian Contacts,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47, no. 3 (1994): 447.

<sup>36</sup> Y.A. Polkanov and A. Y. Polkanova, “Karai. Simvolika Tsveta,” *Gazeta Krymkaraylar*, <http://karai.crimea.ua/314-karai.-simvolika-cveta..html>.

for example, was the title of the supreme ruler of the Karakhanid dynasty.<sup>37</sup>

Color markers initially occurred in onomastic pairs. Splitting the terminological pair and upgrading a single part of the pair to a separate ethnonym would mean the disintegration of a former tribal community and the emergence of a new independent group.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the existence of the ethnonym “White Khazars” in the middle of the fifth century, when Priscus of Panium noted Akatsirs in the composition of the Hun tribal union, would imply the existence of the Khazar confederation even earlier in time and its decay to the point marked in the report of the Byzantine envoy to the court of Attila. However, we have no such records in the written sources or other evidence of these events.

## ELLAC AND ILEK

Along with these skeptical assessments of Akatsir identification with the Khazars, there is another consideration that connects information about these two peoples. Priscus in his narrative about the Akatsirs says that they were divided into two parts. Some remained subordinate to their own leader Kuridakh, and the other part was subjected to Attila, and he sent his eldest son Ellac to them.<sup>39</sup> The famous Austrian-American historian, author of the fundamental book *The World of the Huns*, Otto Maenchen-Helfen definitively believed that it was not a personal name, but the title of the son of Attila. He reconstructed the title as *Elik*, or *Ilig*, and translated its meaning as “ruler, the king.” A similar explanation was found in the vocabulary of the Hunnic language by the Ukrainian-American scholar Omeljan Pritsak.<sup>40</sup> *Ilig*, or *Ilek* as the term is most frequently transliterated in scholarly literature, is the highest title in the hierarchy of the Turkic nobility after Kagan, or Khan. Written monuments from Muslim times and numismatic evidence most often point to its use in the dynasty of Turkic rulers known as Karakhanids or the “The House of Afrasiab.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Klyashtorny and Sultanov. *Gosudarstva i Narody Evrazijskikh Stepey: Drevnost i Srednevekovye*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>39</sup> Prisk, “Skazaniya Priska Paniyskogo. Pervod S. Destunisa,” 44.

<sup>40</sup> Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 407; Omeljan Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* VI, no. 4 (1982): 445.

<sup>41</sup> Michal Biran, “Ilak-Khanids,” Vol. XII, Fasc. 6, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ilak-khanids>, 621.

The Karakhanids' capital at the end of the tenth century was Balasagun city in the Chuy Valley in the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan. From here, Harun Bogra Kara-Khan (970-993) began the conquest of Maverannahr, the lands between the two biggest rivers of Central Asia.<sup>42</sup> However, only his nephew Nasr b. Ali, who was known as the First Ilek (d. 1012) succeeded in completing the submission of this critical area by taking Bukhara, the Samanid capital, in 999. Apparently, the title *Ilek* was of lower significance than Kagan (or Kara-khan). The eastern branch of the dynasty had its capital in Kashgar and Balasagun. Supreme kagans from the *Chigil* tribe ruled there with the title Arslan Kara-khan.<sup>43</sup> Whereas the rulers of Maverannahr were dignified with the title *Ilek*,<sup>44</sup> the First Ilek recognized the seniority of Arslan Kara-Khans in Balasagun, though he did not always obey him. Similarly, Al-Bayhaqi characterizes the relationship between Ilek and Kara-khan in a story about the conflict between Ilek Nasr and Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi. He calls Arslan Khan in Kashgar "the most senior Turkestan khan" and notes that Ilek did not listen to his advice to be careful with the powerful and fortunate Sultan Mahmud. Nasr went to war against the Ghazni ruler and was completely defeated in battle in 998.<sup>45</sup> Later, the Balasagun and Maverennahr branches of Karakhanids—descendants of two grandsons of the founder of the dynasty, Abd al-Karim Satuq Bogra-Khan (942-955)—were openly at odds with each other.<sup>46</sup> After the capital of the Ilek-khans was moved to Samarkand in 1040, the son of Ilek Nasr Ibrahim took the title of Khan or Kagan, which seems to mean nominal independence from the elder branch. At the same time, the title *Ilek*

<sup>42</sup> In the complex hierarchy of Karakhanid titles, the highest kagan title was Kara Arslan Khan, and the title of the junior western ruler was Bogra Kara Khan. (Klyashtorny and Sultanov. *Gosudarstva i Narody Evrazijskikh Stepey: Drevnost i Srednevekovye*, 118). According to O. Pritsak, this dualism of power and Kagan titlature were due to the duality of Karluk tribal organization, consisting of *Chigil* (the ongon or totem patron was Arslan—"lion") and Yagma (ongon: Bogra—"camel"). (V.V. Bartold, "Bogra-khan," in *V.V. Bartold, Sochineniya*, ed. B.G. Gafurov (Moskva: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1964), 506).

<sup>43</sup> Klyashtorny and Sultanov. *Gosudarstva i Narody Evrazijskikh Stepey: Drevnost i Srednevekovye*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> V.V. Bartold, "Ilek-khany," in *V.V. Bartold. Sochineniya*, ed. B.G. Gafurov (Moskva: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1964), 519.

<sup>45</sup> Abu-l-Fadl Bayhaki, *Istoriya Masuda (1030-1041). Perevod s Persidskogo, Vvedeniye, Kommentariy i Prilozheniya* A.K. Arends, Izdaniye 2-oye, dopolnennoye. Pamyatniki Pismennosti Vostoka (Moskva: Nauka, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoy Literatury, 1969), 894.

<sup>46</sup> V.V. Bartold, "Ocherk Istorii Semirechya," in *V.V. Bartold. Sochineniya*, ed. B.G. Gafurov (Moskva: Vostochnaya Literatura 1963), 42, 44.

disappears from Karakhanid coins in Maverannahr.<sup>47</sup>

*Kagan* and *Ilig* were tied together in the title of the founder of the Turkic kaganate Khan Bumin. In Turkic, his title sounded like “Il(l)ig/El(l)ig Kagan,” i.e., “Kagan, holding sway over *il/el* (the state).”<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, as can be seen in the Karakhanids’ case, the title *Ilek* acquired independent significance and became subordinated to Kagan. However, despite the continuing hierarchy of positions and titles, claims of Karakhanid dynasty representatives to an independent government in Maverannahr found their manifestation in a combined title Ilek-khan. When subordination was finally thrown off, the Ilek-khans were called Kagan, or khans. In different circumstances, when the title *ilig/ilek* existed within the power hierarchy headed by Kagan, its combination with an ordinary nobility name *bek/beg* was normal and legitimate. It is this use that can be found in the didactic poem “Kutadgu Bilig” (“Wisdom Which Brings Good Fortune”) by Yusuf of Balasagun. The author started his poem in Balasagun and completed it in Kashgar in 1070. Yusuf Balasagunlu presented the poem to the Karakhanid Kagan Abu Ali Hasan b. Suleiman, who ruled in Kashgar from 1056-1103, in whose titlature all indicators of higher Karakhanid Kagan power were introduced—Tafgach-Bogra-Kara-kagan, son of Suleyman Arslan Kara-kagan.<sup>49</sup> Elik Gūntoğdı is the protagonist of the book. He is the embodiment of justice—the first of four “essences” of the poem. Yusuf of Balasagun introduces him in the following way: “... there lived Bey, wise and clever, and for many years he ruled the country.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Elik-bek is the title of the ruler who embodied justice.

These considerations seemingly are another argument for connections between members of the Hun confederation, particularly the Akatsirs, and the Turkic tribes of the Chinese frontier that later advanced to the West, to the Central Asian and Eastern Caspian region. However, where is a connection with the Khazars in this context? Arab authors repeatedly pointed to a special institution of a Khazar co-ruler, which was most often called *bek* (or *beg*).<sup>51</sup> The same title is found in Byzantine sources. However, its spelling in Arab sources varies. Al-Istakhri apparently faced such dis-

<sup>47</sup> “Ilek-khany,” *ibid.* (Vostochnaya Literatura, 1964), 519.

<sup>48</sup> Peter B. Golden, “Oq and Oğur~Oğuz,” *Turkic Languages* 16 (2012), 156, note 3.

<sup>49</sup> V.V. Bartold, “Bogra-khan, Upomyanutiyy v Kutadgu Bilik,” in V.V. Bartold. *Sobineniya*, ed. A.N. Kononov (Moskva: Nauka, Glavnaya Redaksiya Vostochnoy Literatury, 1968), 420.

<sup>50</sup> Yusuf Balasagunskiy, *Blagodatnoye Znaniye. Pervod S.N. Ivanova*, Literaturniye Pamyatniki (Moskva: Nauka, 1983), 59.

<sup>51</sup> Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry*, 162-163; Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 61, 63, 105, 145.

crepancies in the spelling of the title of his own sources, and summed up the options in the following testimony: "... the king in their own language is called the *bak*; it is also called *bāk*."<sup>52</sup> The second option contains a long vowel "a." Peter Golden, who devoted a special article to this subject, drew in comparison an option that has been preserved in the work of a later author Yaqut al-Hamavi: "... the king in their own language is called *yelik*, and also called *bāk*."

First, we have to explain why the same term *bek/beg* is quoted with a long "a" and a short one in a single piece of evidence. For the Arabic writing in which the long-articulated vowel, as opposed to the vowel itself, possesses a graphical notation, it can hardly be the result of phonetic variations of the same word that would be cited by the source as two alternative variations. Golden also pointed out that none of the ancient Turkic texts contains this Turkic term with a long "a," and therefore a different word stands behind this invariance distorted by copyists. According to the author, this was the word "yelik." Permanent copy errors in making inferior dots under the letters "ي" (y) and "ب" (b) are widespread. Writing much later, Yakut al-Hamawi might have taken this information not only from his famous predecessors of the tenth century, to whom he referred (al-Istakhri and Ibn Haukal), but have also had the opportunity to use the earlier original sources. The fact that these primary sources might have been available for later authors of Muslim geographical works can be seen in the text preserved by Zakariya al-Qazvini (1203-1283), who similarly to Yakut wrote three centuries after al-Istakhri: "they (the Khazars) have a powerful king, whose name is 'yelik.'" <sup>53</sup> Peter Golden juxtaposed the title *yelik* with the name Yeleg of the second son of the Hungarian king Arpad to justify the existence of the title related to the co-ruler of the Khazar kagan among early Hungarian tribal confederations. It is well known that the shaping of the royal power and titles of the Hungarians was considerably influenced and promoted by the Khazars at the time when the Hungarians inhabited the Eurasian steppes and were a part of the Khazar union.<sup>54</sup>

The combination of *Elig-beg* occurs in Uyghur texts of the tenth century, written in Uyghur script.<sup>55</sup> Evidence from Uyghur texts allowed Peter Golden to suggest it

<sup>52</sup> Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik*, 129.

<sup>53</sup> P. B. Golden, "The Q'azaro-Hungarian Title/Personal Name كليل," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 1 (1975): 38-39.

<sup>54</sup> Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry*, 18-19.

<sup>55</sup> *Drevne-Tyurkskiy Slovar*, (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoye Otdeleniye, 1969), XXXV, XXXVIII, 170.

was not two parallel versions of the co-ruler title of the Khazars but a single title of *Ilik-bek*, or *Yilig-beg*. He suggested that Muslim authors who were well aware of the word *bek* did not realize that the title of the Khazar ruler was a composition of two words and they split it into its component parts. Thus, in some Arab sources, variance occurred in reports about the title of co-ruler or regent of the Khazars, in which the title *yilik* was presented as an alternate to the title *bek*,<sup>56</sup> or *khaqan-beh*.<sup>57</sup>

It seems to me that one more argument in support to Professor Golden's concept can be found in the testimony of the early historian al-Ya'qubi (died 897): "... Their king is called khaqan and he has a deputy (khalifa), whose name is y-z-ʔ-d ʔ-la-sh." Dunlop considered the reading of the first part of the title as "Yazid," as proposed by the editor of the Arab text, unreasonable.<sup>58</sup> Later publishers have suggested an option for the second part as well – "Balash."<sup>59</sup> It is obvious that the text of al-Ya'qubi transfers the title of the Khazar dignitary in a strongly spoiled way. However, it is noteworthy that the title consists of two parts, and each word starts with the graphical outline of the same two letters "ي" (y) or "ب" (b), diacritical points of which constitute the constant error of the copyists and a permanent challenge for the reading of ancient Arab texts, particularly when it comes to foreign words and names. It is likely that the first word in the Khazar title from the text of al-Ya'qubi begins with "y," and the second with a "b." Graphic outlines of the rest of the letters do not rule out the words that we could restore as "yelik" and "beg."

The author of "Tarikh al-Ya'qubi," Ibn Wadih al-Ya'qubi, spent his younger years in the south Caucasus, which was a major stage of the Khazar-Arab wars. The ninth century was, however, the time of a temporary military balance and trade cooperation between the Arabs and the Khazars. A significant Muslim community lived in the trade centers within the borders of the Khazar kaganate. The Khazars who adopted Islam often preferred to move to the Muslim lands. We can find reliable reports of

<sup>56</sup> Golden, "The Q'azaro-Hungarian Title/Personal Name كليل," 40, n. 12.

<sup>57</sup> This is how Ibn Fadlan named the deputy Khazar-kagan (see the Arabic text Zaki Validi Togan, "Appendix 'Rihlat Ibn Fadlan': Arabic Text of Meshhed Manuscript Copied, Compared with the Text by Yakut Al-Hamavi and Published by Zaki Validi Togan," in *Ibn Fadlan's Reisebericht, Abhandlungen Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1939). Ibn Fadlan in his report reflected the situation in the government at a later time of the Khazar kaganate, when daily management issues and the army leadership was delegated to Bek (Yilig-beg). Respectively, the title of the deputy was raised to Kagan-bek.

<sup>58</sup> Dunlop D.M., *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmad b. Abi Ya'kub b. Ja'far b. Wahb al-Katib al-ma'ruf bi-bni Wadih al-Akhbari, *Tarikh Al-Ya'kubi*, 3 vols. (an-Najaf: Matba'at al-Ghazi, 1939), 145.

Arab geographers and historians about Khazar people settled on the Muslim lands in the south Caucasus, on the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan precisely in the ninth century.<sup>60</sup> Evidence from al-Ya'qubi quite convincingly points to the original form of the title of the deputy of Khazar-kagan as “Yelik-bek,” which later in the communications of Arab geographers of the tenth century could have been split and only the second part of the original form might have been kept by subsequent Arab authors.

## CONCLUSION

What does this evidence add to the study of the connection between the Akatsirs and the Khazars? The functions and the title of co-ruler, which might have been common for both the Akatsirs and the Khazars as well as with the government institutions and titles of Central Asian nomadic states of the Karluks and the Uyghurs, may serve as an additional argument for the existence of a common political culture and traditions of the nomadic peoples of Eurasia from the Hun era to the Uyghur domination in Central Asia. The Khazars, of course, drew from these traditions. Whether they were directly the heirs of the Akatsirs remains an unresolved issue. The identification of the Khazars with the Akatsir could solve the problem of anachronisms in the earliest evidence of the Khazars in the Caucasus. However, the analysis of the evidence of primary sources in this article still does not allow us to assert an uncontested direct connection between the Hunnic tribe of the Akatsirs and the Khazars.

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<sup>60</sup> Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 193-194.

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