

THE ETYMOLOGY OF TOPONYMY IN BULUNGUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the origin, linguistic nature, and historical-geographical foundations of the toponymy of Bulungur district, one of the ancient and strategic regions of the Samarkand region. In studying the etymology of the term "Bulungur," a comparative analysis of sources in the Turkic and Mongolian languages, as well as the views of authoritative toponymists, was conducted. In particular, interpretations of the term such as "muddy water," which has a hydrographic character, and "corner/slope of a hill," reflecting the land relief, are explained based on historical and archaeological data. The article also highlights the role in historical sources of the region's ancient names, Borkat and the Shiraz fortress built during the reign of Amir Temur. The results of the research serve as an important scientific source for studying the historical and geographical changes of the Zarafshan oasis and the regional onomastics.

Keywords

Toponymics, etymology, Bulungur, Borkat, Shiraz fortress, hydronym, oikonym, Mongolian language, Turkic languages, linguistic analysis, artificial irrigation, Zarafshan oasis.

Introduction. Bulungur district is considered one of the major historical and geographical regions of the Samarkand region. This area was established as a separate administrative district on September 29, 1926. The district borders the Gallaorol district of the Jizzakh region to the north and the Bakhmal district to the east. To the west, it borders the Jomboy district of the Samarkand region, to the southwest—the Tayloq district, to the south—the Urgut district, and to the southeast—the Republic of Tajikistan. The total area of the district is 0.76 thousand km², and according to the population registration data for 2026, 205 thousand people reside here. There is one city (Bulungur) and 7 rural citizen councils

(Beshqoton, Kulchabiy, Navoiy, Sohikbor, Fozil Yuldosh, Ortabuloq, Kildon) in the district. The administrative center is the city of Bulungur.

Literature Review. Although the toponymy of the Samarkand region has been studied to a certain extent from linguistic and historical perspectives in the research of scholars such as T. Rahmatov, B. Orinboyev, N. Begaliyev, A. Turobov, and S. Boriyev, the place names of the Bulungur district have not been systematically taken as a specific object of research. Only episodic remarks are found in the existing literature [1]. Specifically, the linguist scholar T. Enazarov, in his article titled "*On the Etymology of Kasbi and Bulungur Toponyms*," summarizes the views found in dictionaries regarding this place name and concludes as follows:

"In our opinion, this toponym went through the processes of phrase formation, word compounding, and toponymic derivation based on two topo-lexemes, eventually turning into a place name: *burun*+*g'ur* > *burun g'ur* > *burung'ur* > *Bulungur*..." [2].

According to the views of the well-known toponymist scholar Suyun Qorayev, one of the ancient irrigation facilities that draws water from the Zarafshan River is the Bulungur canal. Academician V. V. Barthold hypothesized that this canal might have been dug during the reign of Amir Temur. However, subsequent archaeological excavations revealed that the Bulungur canal was constructed at the beginning of the common era (the Antique period). S. Qorayev notes that the word "Bulungur" means "muddy water" in the Mongolian language, and brings forward comparative examples such as a stream named Bulungur in the Surxondaryo region and the Buluntszir (i.e., Bulungur) River in China [1]. Additionally, M. Abdiyev emphasized the scientific significance of researching the onomastic units of the district. However, these opinions do not fully uncover the comprehensive linguistic and historical landscape of the region's toponyms.

Main Body and Analysis

"Bulungur" is used as the name of a district, a city, a village, and a major hydronym (canal). There are two leading scientific viewpoints in linguistics and historical sources regarding the origin of this name:

1. **The Mongolian Interpretation ("Muddy Water"):** According to S. D. Nominxonov and many other researchers, the toponym is derived from the Mongolian word "*bulug'or*", which means "muddy water." The reason for

assigning this hydronymic name is that the Bulungur canal flows very rapidly, historically carrying a large volume of muddy sediment into the oasis lands. In the famous work "*Zafarnama*" by Sharafuddin Ali Yazdiy, this stream is also mentioned under the name "Bulungur suyi" (the Bulungur water). According to the orientalist V. L. Vyatkin, this canal is an ancient artificial irrigation structure, whose channel was routed along a centuries-old natural valley [3]. Due to its sandy and muddy nature, the local population also refers to it as "Qumariq" (Sandy Canal).

2. **The Turkic Interpretation ("Corner / Hill Slope"):** According to Professor B. Orinboyev, "Bulungur" is a purely Turkic word, consisting of *bulung/bulun*, which means "corner, end, border, hill slope, valley at the foot of a mountain, ridge of a hill." According to this interpretation, the toponym signifies the "corner of a long, flat plateau." In the Urgut dialect of the Uzbek language, the word "bulung" is still used today to mean a corner (for example: "*qopning bulungidan ushla*" — "hold the corner of the sack"). The fact that the district's relief is located at the intersection of plains and hills geographically supports this linguistic view.

The district area has a very ancient and rich history. In historical sources, the ancient name of Bulungur is recorded as **Borkat**. The earliest information about Borkat appears in the work "*Kitab Surat al-Ard*" ("The Configuration of the Earth") by the 10th-century Arab geographer and traveler Ibn Hawqal, demonstrating that the region was a prominent settlement as early as the early Middle Ages [4].

During the reign of Amir Temur and the Timurids, the region flourished even further strategically and economically. According to the chronicler Ibn Arabshah's book "*The History of Amir Temur*", after returning from the three-year war in 1393–1396, Sahibqiran founded villages around Samarkand named after the famous capitals of the world (Sultaniya, Shiraz, Baghdad, Damascus, Egypt) [5]. Historical-chronological comparisons show that this process took place within the timeframe between March 1397 and April 1398.

As recorded in Mirzo Ulugbek's book "*The History of the Four Ulus*":

"The Shiraz fortress was built by Amir Temur on the eastern side of Samarkand, 4 farsakhs (approximately 32 km) away from it, on the site of the ancient village of Buzmajon, which had been destroyed during the Mongol invasion" [5].

The renowned historian scholar B. Ahmedov, in his work *"Amir Temur"*, also confirms that Shiraz was a district center and a small town located four farsakhs away from Samarkand. The use of the phrases "Shiraz fortress," "Bulungur stronghold," and "Bulungur reserve" in the famous writer Pirimqul Qodirov's novel *"Baburnama"* also testifies to the defensive and military-strategic importance of the region. Upon entering the colonial period, by the decision of the Tsarist Russian administrators, the name of the region was initially changed to "Rostovtsevo," later to "Krasnogvardeysk" during the Soviet era, and it reclaimed its historical name after independence [6].

Archaeological and anthropological studies have shown that human beings have lived continuously in the middle flow of the Zarafshan oasis, particularly in the Bulungur district, since the Paleolithic (Stone Age) period [7]. Beginning from the Antique and early Middle Ages, the growth of the population led to the development of artificial irrigation networks, which created the foundation for the establishment of large oikonyms (settlements of village and town types) in the area [8].

Conclusion. A comparative and complex analysis of the sources demonstrates that the toponymy of the Bulungur district reflects the multi-century ethnic, linguistic, and economic past of the region. While the Mongolian interpretation of the term "Bulungur" as "muddy water" highlights how vital irrigation systems were to the agricultural culture of the oasis, the Turkic interpretation of "corner/hill slope" reveals the settlement principles of the ancient population based on regional-geographical relief. Deeply studying the toponyms of the region, especially the micro-toponyms, from an ethno-linguistic and ethno-geographical perspective, holds fundamental scientific significance in illuminating the history of the oasis population's formation, their ethnogenesis, and their regional culture.

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