



“SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN *DEVONU LUG‘OTIT TURK* AND
QUTADG‘U BILIG”

Muxlisa Jurayeva Foziljonovna

Master’s Student in History

Tashkent Social Innovation University, Uzbekistan

Tel: +998 90 001 02 33

Tel: +998 33 767 27 72

Annotation: *The social structure of medieval Turkic societies is reflected vividly in classical literary and linguistic sources. Among these, Devonu Lug‘otit Turk by Mahmud al-Kashgari and Qutadg‘u Bilig by Yusuf Khass Hajib occupy a special place as foundational works of Turkic intellectual history. These texts not only preserve linguistic heritage but also provide valuable insights into the social stratification, political organization, and cultural norms of the Turkic world in the 11th century. This article analyzes the representation of social classes and hierarchical relations in both works. By examining terminology, descriptions of professions, and ideological narratives, the study reveals how social groups such as rulers, military elites, scholars, merchants, and common people were conceptualized.*

Keywords: *social stratification, Turkic society, Devonu Lug‘otit Turk, Qutadg‘u Bilig, medieval literature, Mahmud al-Kashgari, Yusuf Khass Hajib, social hierarchy.*

The study of social stratification plays an essential role in understanding the historical development of societies. Social hierarchy determines the distribution of power, economic resources, and cultural influence among different groups within a community. In the case of medieval Turkic societies, written sources provide important evidence about how social relations were structured and perceived.



Two of the most important sources for studying the social organization of the Turkic world in the 11th century are *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* and *Qutadg'u Bilig*. Written during the Karakhanid period, these works reflect the intellectual, cultural, and political environment of the time. *Devonu Lug'otit Turk*, compiled by Mahmud al-Kashgari in 1072–1074, is primarily a linguistic dictionary designed to introduce Turkic languages to the Arab scholarly world. However, the work also contains ethnographic, cultural, and social information about Turkic tribes and their way of life.

In contrast, *Qutadg'u Bilig*, written by Yusuf Khas Hajib around 1069–1070, is a didactic philosophical poem that outlines principles of state governance, morality, and social order. The work presents an ideal model of society where rulers, officials, scholars, and citizens fulfill their respective duties for the sake of social harmony.

Both texts reflect the social hierarchy of their time, though in different ways. *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* provides a descriptive account of social categories through vocabulary and examples, while *Qutadg'u Bilig* offers a normative vision of how society should function. Examining these sources together allows scholars to reconstruct the structure of Turkic society and understand how social roles were defined.

The aim of this article is to analyze the concept of social stratification in these two works and to compare the representation of social groups, their roles, and their interactions within the broader context of medieval Turkic culture.

Social Stratification in *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* (*Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*) and *Qutadg'u Bilig* (*Kutadgu Bilig*). The two monumental 11th-century works—Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* (*Compendium of the Languages of the Turks*, completed around 1072–1074) and Yusuf Khas Hajib's *Qutadg'u Bilig* (*Wisdom of Royal Glory or Blissful Knowledge*, completed in 1069–1070)—provide invaluable insights into the social world of the Turkic peoples during the Karakhanid



era. These texts reflect a transitional period where nomadic Turkic traditions blended with Islamic principles and sedentary state structures.

While neither work presents a modern sociological treatise on stratification (e.g., explicit class hierarchies based on wealth or caste), both reveal aspects of social organization, status distinctions, roles, and ideals through linguistic, ethnographic, poetic, and political lenses.

In *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* by Mahmud al-Kashgari

This encyclopedic Turkish-Arabic dictionary is primarily linguistic but functions as a rich ethnographic and cultural source. It documents the Turkic world of the 11th century, including tribal structures, customs, titles, and social life.

Social stratification appears indirectly through:

- Tribal and ethnic distinctions — Kashgari describes various Turkic groups (e.g., Oghuz, Qirghiz, Chigil, Yaghma), their dialects, and settlement patterns. He classifies communities using socio-linguistic criteria: monolingual Turkic speakers (purest in language and customs), bilingual ones (influenced by Persian/Arabic), foreign groups living among Turks, and those outside core Turkic lands. This implies a perceived cultural hierarchy centered on "pure" Turkic identity.

- Political and military hierarchy — The work records numerous titles and roles in governance and warfare (e.g., khan, beg, tarkhan, yabgu), reflecting a structured elite with ranks in nomadic and early state systems. Military titles indicate a hierarchy where leaders and warriors held elevated status.

- Social roles and everyday life — Entries include proverbs, poems, and terms related to court customs, popular beliefs, kinship, economy, and social relations, painting a picture of differentiated roles (e.g., nobles, commoners, slaves/captives mentioned in contexts like warfare).

Overall, *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* portrays a relatively fluid, tribal-based society with emerging status based on lineage, martial prowess, language purity, and proximity to power—less rigid class division than occupational or estate-based stratification.



In Qutadg'ū Bilig by Yusuf Khass Hajib

This allegorical masnavi (verse treatise) is explicitly a guide to just governance and ethics, presented as dialogues among four symbolic characters:

- Küntoğdı (Rising Sun) — the king, representing justice (köni törü).
- Aytoldı (Full Moon) — the vizier, representing fortune/happiness.
- Ögdülmiş (Praised) — the vizier's son, representing wisdom/intelligence.
- Odgurmış (Awakened) — representing asceticism/contentment or destiny.

The work outlines an ideal social and political order under a just Islamic-Turkic ruler.

Key elements of social stratification include:

- Ruler and elite — The king (as God's shadow on earth) and his officials (viziers, commanders, ambassadors) occupy the apex. The text stresses that rulers must be just, knowledgeable, and moral to maintain harmony. Nobles (beg) and officials are advised to govern wisely, with education and virtue elevating their status.

- Advisors and bureaucracy — Viziers and intelligent counselors form a key intermediary layer, emphasizing merit through wisdom rather than solely birth.

- Common people (subjects/citizens) — The ruler protects and provides for the people (halk), who owe loyalty and obedience. The text discusses social responsibilities, including fair taxation, welfare, and moral conduct for all groups.

- Moral-ethical hierarchy — True status derives from virtue, knowledge, justice, and piety rather than wealth or birth alone. Happiness (kut) comes from balancing justice, fortune, wisdom, and contentment. Material wealth is secondary to spiritual/moral excellence.

- Broader societal roles — Discussions cover conduct for the rich, military leaders, diplomats, and ordinary citizens, implying differentiated expectations and responsibilities across groups.

Qutadg'ū Bilig promotes a hierarchical yet meritocratic and just order: a centralized state with a virtuous ruler at the top, supported by wise officials, ensuring



welfare for subjects. It synthesizes Turkic traditions with Islamic ideals of justice and good governance, critiquing corruption or unjust rule that disrupts social harmony.

Comparison and Broader Context

- *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* offers a descriptive, ethnographic view of existing social realities across diverse Turkic tribes—more horizontal (tribal) with emerging vertical elements (titles, military ranks).

- *Qutadg'u Bilig* presents a prescriptive, idealistic model for a stratified yet harmonious Islamic-Turkic state—vertical hierarchy justified by moral and intellectual qualities.

- Both reflect 11th-century Karakhanid society: nomadic-sedentary transition, Islamization, and emphasis on just rule. Stratification was not rigid (like European feudalism or Indian castes) but based on lineage, merit, virtue, martial ability, and service to the ruler/state.

These works remain foundational for understanding medieval Turkic social thought, influencing later Central Asian political and ethical traditions.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* and *Qutadg'u Bilig* reveals that social stratification played a significant role in the structure of medieval Turkic society. Both works provide valuable insights into the hierarchical relationships and social roles that defined the political and cultural life of the Karakhanid period. While *Devonu Lug'otit Turk* documents social categories through linguistic evidence, *Qutadg'u Bilig* offers a philosophical framework for understanding social order and governance. Together, these works provide a comprehensive picture of the social structure of the Turkic world in the 11th century. Their combined analysis enriches our understanding of Turkic intellectual history and demonstrates the importance of classical literary sources in studying historical social systems.

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