



## ON THE PECULIARITIES OF THE USE OF THE TERMS “DAVAN” AND “KOTAL” IN ORONYMY (BASED ON MATERIALS FROM SOUTHERN UZBEKISTAN)

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### ABSTRACT

*The article examines the origin, semantic features, and nominative functions of the orographic terms davan and kotal, which are widely used in Uzbek oronymy. The study is conducted from a historical-linguistic perspective, with reference to Turkic and Mongolian languages. Based on materials from Southern Uzbekistan, oronyms formed with these terms are analyzed, and their semantic distinctions and usage characteristics are identified. Special attention is given to the opposition between the concepts of a “high, difficult mountain pass” and a “low, easily passable mountain route” in geographical naming. The analysis of historical sources and lexicographic data makes it possible to trace the stages of formation and development of these terms within the oronymic system.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is well known that in modern Uzbek, in a geographical sense, a pass refers to a lowered section of a mountain ridge or massif that is convenient for crossing. Passes are the simplest and most convenient way to move from one mountain valley to another. The widest, deepest, and generally the most important routes are called mountain passes.

From a geomorphological perspective, passes are erosional transitions that arise as a result of the convergence of the headwaters of river valleys located on opposite slopes, as well as tectonic passes associated with local subsidence of anticlinal folds. In addition, there are glacial passes, which

are formed through the connection and subsequent erosion of opposite cirques or their walls [3].

Historically, passes were crossed on foot or on horseback, and later automobile roads were built for passage through them; in some areas, even railway lines were constructed. Since the upper parts of passes often feature relatively flat areas, resorts historically emerged there, and in some locations, even small settlements developed. From a military standpoint, passes held strategic importance.

This created the need to name passes in order to distinguish them and accurately indicate their location. Consequently, these orographic objects received names based on certain



characteristics, which over time were fixed and recorded in written sources.

Thus, the term **“dovon”** is actively used to denote the concept of a “route through a mountain” in Uzbek oronymy. The origin of this orographic term, its usage features, as well as its potential in forming oronyms, constitute a relevant subject of scientific research. This article examines the etymology and semantics of the orographic terms **“davan”** and **“kotal”** in Uzbek oronymy, as well as the features of naming orographic objects that express the concept of a mountain passage.

#### RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology is based on the historical approach applied in onomastic studies, which involves interpreting linguistic phenomena and facts within their specific historical context, without detaching them from historical reality and objective circumstances.

The scientific and theoretical foundation of the study is grounded in methods of analyzing scholarly concepts employed in the onomasiology of modern linguistics. The linguistic study of toponyms is also based on dialectical principles, which assume the unity of the general and the particular, essence and phenomenon, form and content.

The main research methods used include comparative-historical analysis, etymological analysis, semantic analysis, and structural-formational analysis, as well as the method of comparing linguistic facts.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The names of mountain passes in sources compiled by tourists, historians, as well as on geographical maps from

various periods, can vary. It is well known that written sources and tourist maps often record several names for the same pass or for different passes located within the same mountain area.

Clearly, the naming of mountain passes developed taking into account the naming traditions of the local population, the ethno-linguistic characteristics of the region in which the object is situated, and other factors. According to conducted studies, the following features can be observed in the nomination of mountain passes:

The naming of an orographic object (pass) based on its most characteristic feature (shape, size, composition, or color of the soil);

Naming according to the characteristics of the terrain where the pass is located (slope type, structure of mountain ridges, etc.);

Naming of the locality according to features reflecting the lifestyle and economic activities of the local population;

Naming a pass according to the characteristics of the valleys it connects; Naming a pass after the nearest mountain peaks.

The orographic term **dovon** conveys the meanings “a place suitable for crossing a mountain,” “mountain road,” or “a mountain that can be crossed.” In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, this term is defined as: “A high but convenient place on a mountain or hill; a pass.”

The following examples are provided: *Qashqar dovoni* (Kashgar Pass); *Arpasiz ot dovon osholmas* (“A horse without barley cannot cross the pass”) (proverb); *Donoga ergashgan*



*dovondan oshar* (“He who follows the wise will cross the pass”) (proverb); *Bu vaqt ular Qaraqarg’a degan dovondan oshib, ko’z ilg’amas, keng, tekis yaylovga chiqdilar* (“At that time, they crossed the Karakarga Pass and reached a wide, flat pasture beyond the sight”) (Askar Mukhtar); *Dovonning beliga chiqquncha Muhammad Sharif ham, eshak ham holdan toydi* (“By the time he reached the top of the pass, Muhammad Sharif and the donkey were exhausted”) (K. Mirza) [10, 633].

In southern Uzbekistan, oronyms such as **Birak dovoni**, **Taxta Qoracha dovoni** (Zarafshan Range), **Sangtor dovoni**, **Toleshut dovoni**, **Janko dovoni** (Gissar Range), **Shaxon dovoni**, **Kizil Gaza dovoni**, **Kuktug’ay dovoni** (Kamashin District), and **Chaqchor dovoni** (Baysun Range) have been recorded. In the work *Baburnama*, this term appears in the form **dobon**, with five oronyms containing it being documented.

N. M. Melkheev, who studied the toponymy of Buryatia, provides the following information regarding the use of the term **doban**:

“Daban — the name of several mountain passes. In the Mongolian language, *dabaa*, *dabaan* means ‘to cross a mountain,’ ‘to climb.’ The term *dabakhkha* derives from the verb ‘to climb a mountain,’ ‘to traverse a mountain.’ In combination with defining components, it served as the basis for the formation of names of mountains and mountain crossings: **Khamar-Daban**, **Sagan-Daban** (mountain ranges); **Daban**, **Dodo-Daban**, **Mongol-Daban** (mountain passes); **Barsin-Daban**, **Moltin-Daban** (ascents). The notion of

crossing a mountain is also preserved in Evenk toponymy” [4, 123].

In the study by N. I. Danzanova, dedicated to the orographic terminology of the Mongolian language, the following data on the use of the term “pass” are presented: Middle Mongolian: *dabaan*; Old Mongolian: *dabayan*; Mongolian: *davaa(n)*; Buryat: *dabaan*; Kalmyk: *dava*; Oirat (Xinjiang): *dabaan* — “mountain pass”;

Old Mongolian: *kitel*, *kotiil* — “mountain passage”; Mongolian: *khövmöl* — “hill, low gentle elevation; low pass; saddle, slope; incline”; Buryat: *khutel*, *yakhid khutel* — “low pass; hill, slope; saddle”; Kalmyk: *khotl*, Oirat (Xinjiang): *khötöl* — “mound, hill; mountain pass”; Old Mongolian: *oi*, Mongolian: *ol* — “low pass; elevated place on a small pass; small hillock”; Buryat (Eastern): *ulé* — “archaic: stop on a road through a mountain pass (at its highest point, where usually a sacrificial ritual was performed)” [2, 15].

Summarizing the concepts related to the term denoting a mountain pass, the following meanings can be distinguished across languages: *daba(an)* — a place for crossing a mountain, elevation; Kalmyk: “hill”; Khalkha Mongolian: *davaa(n)* — “mountain with a pass”; Tungusic-Manchu languages: *dava* — “crossing”; Evenk: *davan*, *davakit* — “mountain crossing, portage”; Oroch: *dava* — “place for crossing a mountain”; Manchu: *daba* — “mountain crossing”; *dabagan* — “place for crossing a mountain, portage”; Khakas: *daba* — “pass, gorge”; Tuvan: *daban* — “place for crossing a mountain”; Altai: *dava* — “mountain pass”; Uzbek: *dovan* — “mountain pass”; Kyrgyz: *dalan* — “mountain pass”; Tajik: *davan* —



“mountain pass”; Persian: *daban* — “mountain pass, gorge”.

According to the dictionary by E. M. Murzaev, *daba*, *daban*, *dava*, *davan* denote “a high, difficult-to-pass mountain crossing, a low ridge.” This term, of Mongolian and Buryat origin, is also known among the Yakuts and Evenks; among Tajiks and Uzbeks, it appears in the form *davan*; among the Buryats, it is also used in the sense of “mountain, ridge”; among the Kalmyks — “hill”; among the Evenks — *davakit*; for the Tajiks, it also denotes a road passing through a mountain massif [5, 69].

V. A. Nikonov, who studied Kyrgyz oronymy, notes that place names containing the component **daban** are widely represented in the toponymy of Kyrgyzstan. According to E. M. Murzaev, toponyms derived from this term are found in virtually all regions of Kyrgyzstan, but they are most widely distributed in the basins of Issyk-Kul, Kochkor, Suusamyr, and Jumgal, and to a lesser extent in the southwest of the country [7, 65].

According to the Kyrgyz toponymist B. O. Oruzboeva, Mongolian words are particularly common in the geographical names of northern Kyrgyzstan, while their usage noticeably decreases moving southwest [9, 111]. Examples of such toponyms include: **Dzhangidoban** (Sukh River basin), **Donguzdaban** (Ak-Buura River basin), the passes **Archadaban** and **Shibedaban** (Alay region), the peaks **Karadaban** (Shakhimardan River basin) and **Tegerekdaban** (Kyzyl-Suu River basin), the **Daban River** (Koson-Say basin), as well as **Jamandaban** — a pass, locality, and river (Arpa and Naryn River

basins). All these features are located in the southwestern part of Kyrgyzstan and are not recorded in other regions of the country [8, 102].

While B. O. Oruzboeva links the appearance of Mongolian elements in Kyrgyz toponymy to the period of the Mongol invasion, E. M. Murzaev expresses a more cautious view, suggesting the possibility that the term was adopted by the ancestors of the Kyrgyz even before their migration to the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan. S. U. Umurzakov, in turn, hypothesizes that the term entered the region in the 12th century during the Kara-Khitai influence [9, 200].

These scholarly positions are considered directly relevant to understanding the formation and functioning of the orographic term “**mountain pass**” in the toponymy of Uzbekistan.

If we accept the chronologies proposed in the scholarly literature regarding the term **daban**, the use of this word and the formation of oronyms based on it occurred, to some extent, in the territory of Kyrgyzstan and the neighboring regions of Uzbekistan no earlier than the 13th–14th centuries, rather than the 15th–18th centuries as previously assumed. Until that time, the term **daban** was likely unknown in these regions.

In the oronymic lexicon of the Uzbek language, synonyms denoting a “mountain road” or a “place allowing passage over a mountain” are widely attested. In particular, alongside the term **dovan**, the words **akba (ovga)**, **bel**, **kotal**, **oshuv** are used in this meaning. As with any set of synonymous units, these



terms exhibit certain semantic and functional distinctions, which are also reflected in the specifics of their usage in oronymy.

In the Bakhmal and Zamin districts, a mountain pass is denoted by the term **bel**, which refers to a relatively flat area located near the summit of a mountain and suitable for resting (“Sangzomin beli — a large bel, the border of the dovon”). The term **ovga**, in contrast, is used to describe a road that rises steeply to the pass (“ovga Karamozor beli razbita,” i.e., dangerous) [12, 68].

The term **kam**, in the sense of “kemtik,” refers to the lower part of a mountain massif, where roads often pass. Examples include oronyms such as the **Darvozakam Pass, EgarKam Mountain** (Shakhrisabz District), and the **Kamskiye Mountains** in the region. The term **bel** is also repeatedly attested with the meaning of “mountain pass,” as in **Muzbel, Karabeltov** (pass, Shakhrisabz District), and **Otabel** (pass, Mirishkor District).

The term **akba** (of Arabic origin) likewise means “mountain pass” or “mountain road.” For example, **Kalonakba** means “large pass” (Kitab District), and **Akbaykalon** (Kamashin District). In the latter case, a variant of the word combination is observed with a transposition of components: **Akbay Kalon** [11, 179].

In the oronymy of southern Uzbekistan, the term **kotal** is also actively used in the formation of mountain feature names. The orographic term **kotal** denotes a “road through the mountain” or a “lower pass.” It is widely attested in historical written sources, including works such as the *Zafarnama*

and the *Baburnama*, where it appears as a component of numerous toponyms. In the *Baburnama*, approximately 30 geographical names of various regions containing the component **kotal** have been recorded. Babur often accompanies such names with explanatory comments regarding their origin and semantic meaning.

For instance, when mentioning the hills **Javak, Tul**, and **Bozarak**, he notes: “**Tuldur** is the best of these three hills. The road to Vale is somewhat longer. Therefore it is called Tul” [1, 188]. The component **tul** is of Arabic origin and means “long.” Babur also provides an explanation for the name of **Bozarak Hill**: “Bozarak Hill is called Porandai Hill after the cavalry city of Sarob Eli Porandai” [1, 188]. Furthermore, the mountain road leading to the Parwan region, according to him, is called **Khaftbacha**: “Another road — the Parwan road — is called Khaftbacha because between the Great Mountain and Parwan there are seven hills” [1, 188].

The geographical distribution of this orographic term, which belongs to the Turkic linguistic family, is quite extensive. It is represented in the oronymy of Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan. Initially, this term was used in parallel with the term **pas**, but over time it fell out of active use, yielding to **pas**. In contemporary language, it has survived primarily as part of oronyms.

In southern Uzbekistan, oronyms such as **Kotal** (village), **Sarikotal** (elevation), **Mergankotal**, and **Kokkotal** have been recorded. This term is also found in other regions of Uzbekistan: **Uzbekkotal, Kazakhkotal** (Jizzakh region) [11, 77].



According to the dictionary of E. M. Murzaev, the term **kutal** is defined as “mountain pass, road through a ridge” (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). In Mongolia, the corresponding forms **kutul**, **khutul** denote a “convenient, flat passage, easy crossing” and are contrasted with the high and difficult **dabe**. In Persian, the word **kutel** means “to exceed a height.” For example, the **Kotelebosh-Dushak Pass**, located on the border of Iran and Turkmenistan, illustrates this usage [5, 128].

According to N. I. Danzanova, in Mongolic languages the forms *kütel*, *kötül* denote “mountain pass,” while *kyötöl* refers to “a hill; a low mountain pass; a small mountain; a slope or descent”; Buryat *khutel* means “low mountain pass; summit, small mountain”; Oirat (Xinjiang) *kyötel* denotes “barrow, hill; mountain pass”; **kutul** means “ledge, ascent”; Buryat *khutel* also refers to “a small elevation, a mountain with a gentle passage” [2, 15].

Thus, in ancient Mongolic and Turkic languages, this orographic term generally denotes a “pass through low mountain sections, an easy and convenient crossing” and is semantically contrasted with the terms *dabaa*, *daban*, which indicate a “high, difficult-to-pass mountain pass.”

In Nizamiddin Shami's *Zafarnama*, the following orographic features are mentioned: *Kulon Mountain*, *Kholis Hill*, *Sichkhan-Daban*, *Kharamis Pass*, the hills *Ak*, *Novrin*, *Kesh Pass*, the hills *Kargas*, *Jurmush*, and *Dobon Mountain*, which indicates the widespread presence of these terms in medieval toponymy.

### CONCLUSION

The conducted study of the historical-linguistic development and usage features of the terms **davan** and **kotal**, which denote the concept of a mountain crossing, allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The primary source of the term **davan** is the Mongolic language; this term is not attested in ancient Turkic monuments.
2. The geographical distribution of this term covers Siberia, Northern China, Buryatia, Yakutia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, the Eastern Tien Shan, and Northeastern China.
3. The term **davan** referred to passages through high mountains and mountain ranges, whereas the term **kotal** denoted crossings through low mountains and elevations and was actively used in the formation of corresponding orographic toponyms.

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