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ARABIC ROOTS AND STEMS: HOMONYMY, SEMANTIC EXTENSION, AND THEIR INTERPRETATION IN OLD UZBEK

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the issue of Arabic roots and stems in Old Uzbek from a comparative-historical and etymological perspective. The study focuses on the specific features of the Arabic triliteral root system, its historical development, and its connection with older biliteral Proto-Semitic roots. Based on the theoretical frameworks proposed by B. M. Grande and A. Jeffery, the article analyzes root homonymy, semantic expansion, and the differentiation of meanings in Arabic loanwords adopted into Old Uzbek. It is argued that Arabic borrowings entered Old Uzbek not at the level of abstract roots, but through historically formed and semantically stabilized nominal and verbal stems. Using examples such as kinship terms, as well as lexemes like sultan, salita, *and* madaniyat, *the research reveals the multilayered etymological nature of Arabic loanwords. The findings demonstrate that Arabic exerted not only lexical but also profound historical and morphological influence on the formation of the Old Uzbek lexicon.*

KEYWORDS: *Old Uzbek Language, Arabic Borrowings, Root and Stem, Root Homonymy, Semantic Expansion, Etymology, Comparative-Historical Linguistics, Semitic Languages.*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic loanwords occupy an important place in the formation of the lexicon of the Old Uzbek language. These borrowings not only expanded the vocabulary of the language but also significantly enriched its semantic, morphological, and stylistic possibilities. In particular, the issue of how words formed on the basis of the specific root–stem system of the Arabic language entered Old Uzbek—through which channels, in what forms, and within which semantic layers—has special scholarly significance in linguistics. Therefore, when analyzing Arabic borrowings, it is necessary not to limit the study to their external formal similarity but to examine deeply their internal morphological structure and historical-etymological roots.

The study of the morphological and etymological features of words borrowed from Arabic into Old Uzbek has been carried out within various scholarly schools across different periods. In this respect, it is essential to rely primarily on the achievements of classical Arabic grammar, which developed the theory of roots and stems, as well as on modern comparative-historical Semitic studies.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED TO THE TOPIC

European scholars who studied Arabic from a comparative-historical perspective approached this issue critically. In particular, B. M. Grande, in his work *Comparative-Historical Analysis of Arabic Grammar*, interprets the Arabic root system as a dynamic and historical process. The scholar substantiates with scientific evidence that the triliteral root system in Arabic was formed relatively late and that beneath it lies a layer of ancient biliteral Semitic roots. Grande also points out the existence of roots composed of identical consonantal clusters but belonging to completely different semantic fields, explaining this phenomenon through the concept of "root homonymy." His views serve as an important theoretical basis for understanding the process by which Arabic words were borrowed into Old Uzbek.

The studies of Arthur Jeffery are of particular importance in the issue of Arabic loanwords and their original sources. In his etymological research devoted to the vocabulary of the Qur'an, Jeffery strictly distinguishes between borrowed and Common Semitic layers of the Arabic language.

From this perspective, the present study aims to apply the achievements of comparative-historical Arabic morphology to the material of the Old Uzbek language. The views of B. M. Grande and A. Jeffery are taken as the methodological foundation, and the research determines through which stems, within which semantic layers, and at which historical stages Arabic words entered Old Uzbek. This approach not only systematizes existing knowledge within the topic but also allows for a more precise and deeper interpretation of the process of the formation of the Old Uzbek lexicon.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In studying words borrowed from Arabic, distinguishing between roots and stems has important theoretical and scholarly significance. A root is the base common to all forms of a word, consisting only of consonants and preserving the core meaning of

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the word. A stem, on the other hand, is a form derived from the root through the addition of vowels and affixes according to specific patterns and belongs to either the noun or verb category. In the process of borrowing Arabic words into Old Uzbek, it was precisely the stem forms that served as the basis. Several interesting lexical-semantic phenomena occurred during this process.

As noted by B. M. Grande, the verbal stem is not always primary. In some word-formation groups, the nominal stem is primary, and the verb is derived from it. This phenomenon is also observed in certain groups of words borrowed into Old Uzbek.

Cases where the verb is primary. From the Arabic verb *kataba* (to write), nouns such as *kātib* (scribe), *kitāb* (book), and *maktūb* (letter) were derived. Old Uzbek adopted these words separately as nouns.

Cases where the noun is primary. For example, the noun *kalb* (dog) is primary, and the verb *kaliba* (to become rabid, to behave like a dog) was later derived from it.

In some cases, noun and verb stems derived from the same root are not derived from one another. For example, the verb *jaraḥa* (to wound) and the noun *jurḥ* (wound) are not derived from each other but are both considered primary stems. For Old Uzbek, this distinction was not of practical importance. The language adopted all these words as ready-made nouns or verbal masdars and assimilated their lexical meanings rather than their derivational history.

Words derived from a single root usually cluster around a common semantic field. However, as noted by the Semitologist B. M. Grande, sometimes a root composed of the same set of consonants may underlie completely different and unrelated semantic groups. This phenomenon is referred to in scholarly literature as **root homonymy**.

According to Grande, the reasons for such cases may vary: in some instances, words with different meanings entered the literary language from different dialects of ancient Arab tribes; in other cases, words borrowed from other languages coincidentally matched an existing Arabic root in form; in still other cases, the meanings of a word diverged so greatly over the course of historical development that the original connection was completely lost.

In his *Comparative-Historical Analysis of Arabic Grammar*, B. M. Grande provides several vivid examples of this phenomenon. He emphasizes that in such cases the root should be viewed as a “skeleton” for morphological construction, but it cannot always serve as a basis for semantic analysis [1, pp. 12–13].

Some of the examples cited by the scholar include:
The root ḥ-l-m (ح-ل-م):

1. *ḥulm* (حُلْمٌ) – dream; *ḥalama* (حَلَمَ) – to dream.
2. *ḥilm* (حِلْمٌ) – gentleness, forbearance; *ḥaluma* (حَلُمَ) – to be gentle.
3. *ḥalam* (حَلَمٌ) – a skin disease in animals, a tick.

From these groups, Old Uzbek mainly borrowed words from the first and second groups, such as *hiyla* and *hilm*.

The root l-ḥ-m (ل-ح-م):

4. *laḥm* (لَحْمٌ) – meat.
5. *malḥama* (مَلْحَمَةٌ) – bloody battle, war; *iltihām* (اِلْتِحَامٌ) – collision, fierce battle.
6. *luḥma* (لُحْمَةٌ) – weft thread in weaving.

The root d-b-r (د-ب-ر):

7. *dubur* (دُبُرٌ) – back, end.
8. *dabbara* (دَبَّرَ) – to manage, to plan.
9. *dabūr* (دَبُورٌ) – a swarm of bees.

These examples show that in the process of borrowing from Arabic, Old Uzbek also adopted homonymous words that share the same root form but differ completely in meaning. This, in turn, contributed to the enrichment and increased complexity of the Old Uzbek lexicon.

Old Uzbek, in the process of borrowing from Arabic, adopted not only words based on triliteral roots but also new roots consisting of four or more consonants. B. M. Grande explains the emergence of such new roots through several mechanisms.

1. Fusion of affixes with the root. In some cases, Arabic derivational affixes (prefixes and suffixes) entered Old Uzbek together with the root, forming a new, longer root. For example, there are views that connect the Arabic word *tarjama* (translation) with the root r-j-m (*rajama* – to stone). However, Grande argues that this word entered Arabic through Akkadian *ragamu* (to speak loudly) via *targumanu* (interpreter), resulting in the emergence of a new four-consonant root t-r-j-m in Arabic. Old Uzbek adopted this word precisely in this new root form.

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2. Borrowings from other languages. Arabic itself borrowed words from other languages (Aramaic, Persian, Greek, Ethiopic). In the process of forming new words from triliteral roots, derivational affixes sometimes became integrated into the stem, forming an expanded root. Grande cites the word *sulṭān* (سلطان) as an example. Originally derived from the root s-l-ṭ (س-ل-ط) meaning "power, authority" with the suffix -ān, the word *sulṭān* eventually became an independent stem. From it, verbs such as *tasallaṭa* (to rule, to dominate) were formed, resulting in the emergence of a new four-consonant root s-l-ṭ-n. Old Uzbek adopted both *sulṭān* and *saltanat* (سلطنة – sovereignty, kingdom) based on this expanded stem.

Notably, from the same ancient root s-l-ṭ, which conveys meanings of "dominion," "power," and "pressure," the word *salīṭa* (سليطة) also emerged, meaning "quarrelsome, sharp-tongued, shameless woman." In Alisher Navoi's *Mahbub ul-Qulub*, this word appears with a negative moral connotation, illustrating how a single root developed semantically in divergent directions.

This example clearly demonstrates how a single Arabic root enriched the Old Uzbek lexicon not only with socio-political terms (*sulṭān, saltanat*) but also with moral-ethical vocabulary (*salīṭa*), thereby expanding the expressive potential of the language.

In studying the history of Arabic loanwords in Old Uzbek, it is sometimes evident that their roots trace back not only to Arabic but to even more ancient Semitic languages. A vivid example is the word *madaniyat* (culture), derived from the noun *madīna* (city).

While traditional Arabic lexicographers attempted to derive *madīna* from the Arabic root d-y-n ("to judge, to govern"), Arthur Jeffery and other Western scholars (Nöldeke, Fraenkel) regard this as "folk etymology" and firmly assert that the word is a borrowing. According to Jeffery, *madīna* entered Arabic from Aramaic *mdīntā*, which originally meant "place of judgment," later "province," and finally "city." After becoming firmly established in Arabic, the word gave rise to new derivatives, including the verb *maddana* (to civilize) and the nouns *madaniyya* (culture) and *tamaddun* (civilization), which entered Old Uzbek through these expanded stems [3, p. 259].

Thus, the etymological path of the word *madaniyat* passed through several complex stages, illustrating the layered nature of lexical borrowing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research of Arthur Jeffery, it can be concluded that fundamental kinship terms such as *ab* (father), *akh* (brother), and *umm* (mother), which were borrowed into Old Uzbek, are not borrowings even for Arabic itself but belong to its most ancient Common Semitic lexical heritage. This indicates that in adopting these words, Old Uzbek came into contact with the deepest lexical layers of Arabic.

At the same time, distinguishing between words such as *umm* (mother) and *ummat* (community, nation) demonstrates the necessity of avoiding superficial formal similarities in loanword analysis and instead conducting thorough etymological research.

The findings of the study show that in borrowing words from Arabic, Old Uzbek relied primarily on ready-made stems formed during the historical development of Arabic itself. Borrowings did not occur at the level of abstract triliteral roots but through lexically and semantically established nominal and verbal stems. Consequently, in Old Uzbek, the ready-made meaning and functional potential of Arabic words were more important than their derivational history.

The analysis also revealed that verbal stems are not always primary; in some cases, nominal stems are primary, and verbs are derived from them. Additionally, the phenomenon of root homonymy—where identical consonantal clusters correspond to unrelated meanings—played a significant role in enriching and complicating the Old Uzbek lexicon.

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