

Törü, Kut and El in the Old Turkic political worldview: a contextual reconstruction and an symmetric comparison with the organization of Turkic states

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ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the meanings and relations of törü, kut and el in selected Old Turkic political texts and asks how far those meanings can be placed in a disciplined comparison with the public institutional language of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Monumental inscriptions and a didactic mirror for princes do not record behaviour. The object of analysis is therefore the elite political worldview represented in the Kül Tegin and Bilge Khagan inscriptions and in Yusuf Khass Hajib's Kutadgu Bilig, not the conduct of historical actors. The study combines philological close reading, contextualist intellectual history, conceptual history and comparative political theory. Its comparison is deliberately asymmetric: each historical term is first reconstructed by genre, collocation and narrative function; contemporary concepts are then used only to identify shared political questions, not as translations or evidence of equivalence. The analysis produces four findings. First, the Orkhon passages strongly attest the pairing of el and törü: political community and inherited normative order are narrated as jointly maintained, lost and restored. "Relational normative order" is proposed as an analytical description of this pattern, not as an Old Turkic expression. Second, kut is explicitly possessed and divinely favoured in the Kül Tegin formula "because I had kut, I became qaghan"; the inscriptions do not, however, describe a mechanism by which it is withdrawn. The Kutadgu Bilig develops the instability of Fortune and relates enduring rule to justice, counsel and wisdom, supporting a cautious interpretation of kut as conditionally conferred authorisation without establishing a formal theory of withdrawal. Third, el spans polity, people and ordered condition without corresponding exactly to the modern state, nation or society. Fourth, current OTS materials invoke Turkic history and tradition in describing the Council

of Elders and employ the diplomatic language of shared past, mutual trust and respect. They do not use *törü*, *kut* and *el* as a conceptual cluster and do not establish transmission from the medieval texts. The comparison therefore demonstrates limited conceptual resonance and contemporary heritage self-presentation, while leaving generic institutional design, invented tradition and domestic instrumentalisation as viable explanations. The article's contribution is a source-bounded method for bringing Old Turkic political thought into comparative theory without turning textual representations into behavioural evidence or modern institutions into proof of historical continuity.

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Көне түркі саяси дүниетанымындағы *törü*, *kut* және *el*: контекстік реконструкция және Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымымен асимметриялық салыстыру

Аннотация. Мақалада көне түркі саяси мәтіндеріндегі *törü*, *kut* және *el* ұғымдарының мағынасы мен өзара байланысы қайта қарастырылып, оларды Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымының (ТМҰ) қазіргі ашық институционалдық тілімен қандай шекте салыстыруға болатыны анықталады. Ескерткіш жазбалар мен билеушіге арналған дидактикалық дастан тарихи тұлғалардың нақты мінез-құлқын тікелей тіркемейді. Сондықтан зерттеу нысаны – мінез-құлықтың өзі емес, Күлтегін мен Білге қаған жазбаларында және Жүсіп Баласағұнның «Құтты білік» еңбегінде берілген билеуші әулеттің саяси дүниетанымы. Зерттеу әдістемесі филологиялық мәтін талдауын, контекстік зияткерлік тарихты, ұғымдар тарихын және салыстырмалы саяси теорияны ұштастырады. Салыстыру асимметриялық қағидамен жүргізілді: алдымен әрбір тарихи ұғымның мағынасы мәтіннің жанры, тұрақты тіркестері және баяндаудағы қызметі арқылы анықталды; содан кейін ғана қазіргі теориялық категориялар ортақ саяси сұрақтарды көрсету үшін пайдаланылды. Олар көне түркі сөздерінің баламасы немесе ұғымдардың теңдігін дәлелдейтін құрал ретінде қолданылған жоқ. Талдау нәтижесінде төрт қорытынды жасалды. Біріншіден, Орхон мәтіндері *el* мен *törü* арасындағы байланысты анық көрсетеді: саяси қауым мен атадан қалған нормативтік тәртіп бірге сақталатын, жоғалатын және қалпына келтірілетін құбылыстар ретінде баяндалады. «Қатынастық нормативтік тәртіп» атауы көне түркі тіркесінің аудармасы емес, осы мәтіндік үлгіні сипаттайтын зерттеушілік ұғым ретінде ұсынылады. Екіншіден, Күлтегін жазбасындағы

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«өзімде kut болғаны үшін қаған болдым» деген формула kut-тың грамматикалық тұрғыдан иеленілетінін және Тәңірдің жарылқауымен байланыстырылатынын дәлелдейді. Алайда жазбаларда оның кері алыну тетігі сипатталмайды. «Құтты білікте» Дәулеттің тұрақсыздығы әділет, кеңес және ақылмен өзара байланыста қарастырылады; сондықтан kut-ты белгілі шарттармен берілетін билік құзыреті деуге болады, бірақ оны кері алудың формалды теориясы дәлелденбейді. Үшіншіден, ел саяси қауым, халық және реттелген саяси күй мағыналарын қамтиды, бірақ қазіргі мемлекет, ұлт немесе қоғам ұғымдарының ешқайсысымен дәл сәйкес келмейді. Төртіншіден, ТМҰ-ның қазіргі материалдары Ақсақалдар кеңесін түсіндіргенде түркі тарихы мен дәстүріне сілтеме жасап, ортақ өткен тарих, өзара сенім және құрмет туралы дипломатиялық тіл қолданады. Дегенмен бұл құжаттар *törü*, kut және ел ұғымдарын біртұтас жүйе ретінде пайдаланбайды әрі ортағасырлық мәтіндерден тікелей сабақтастықты дәлелдемейді. Осылайша салыстыру шектеулі тұжырымдамалық үндестікті және қазіргі институттың өзін қалай танытатынын көрсетеді; ал үлгілік ұйымдық құрылым, ойлап шығарылған дәстүр және мұраны ішкі саяси мақсатта пайдалану ықтимал түсіндірмелер ретінде сақталады. Мақаланың ғылыми үлесі – көне түркі саяси ойын салыстырмалы теорияға дерек шегінен шықпай енгізетін, мәтіндік пайымдарды мінез-құлық дерегіне және қазіргі институттарды тарихи сабақтастықтың дәлеліне айналдырмайтын әдіс ұсыну.

Кілт сөздер: көне түркі саяси ойы, саяси дүниетаным, *törü*, kut, ел, Орхон жазбалары, «Құтты білік», легитимділік, нормативтік тәртіп, ұғымдар тарихы, салыстырмалы саяси теория, Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымы

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Törü, kut и ел в древнетюркском политическом мировоззрении: контекстуальная реконструкция и асимметричное сравнение с Организацией тюркских государств

Аннотация. В статье реконструируются значения и взаимосвязи понятий *törü*, kut и ел в избранных древнетюркских политических текстах и определяется, в какой мере эти значения допускают методологически контролируемое сравнение с публичным институциональным языком Организации тюркских государств (ОТГ). Монументальные надписи и дидактическое «зерцало для государей» не фиксируют поведение исторических акторов. Поэтому объектом исследования выступает элитарное политическое мировоззрение, представленное в надписях Кюль-тегина и Бильге-кагана, а также в «Кутадгу билиг» Юсуфа Баласагуни, но не само поведение, из которого исследователь мог бы непосредственно выводить устойчивые закономерности. Методология объединяет филологическое чтение, контекстуалистскую интеллектуальную историю, историю понятий и сравнительную политическую теорию. Сравнение строится асимметрично: сначала каждое историческое понятие реконструируется с учётом жанра, устойчивых

сочетаний и функции в повествовании; современные категории затем используются только для выявления общих политических вопросов, а не как переводы древнетюркских терминов или доказательство их эквивалентности. Получены четыре результата. Во-первых, Орхонские тексты убедительно подтверждают устойчивую связь *el* и *törü*: политическое сообщество и унаследованный нормативный порядок описываются как совместно поддерживаемые, утрачиваемые и восстанавливаемые. Формула «реляционный нормативный порядок» предлагается как аналитическое описание, а не как перевод древнетюркского выражения. Во-вторых, в формуле Кюль-тегина *kut* грамматически выражен как принадлежащий правителю и связанный с небесным благоволением: «поскольку у меня был *kut*, я стал каганом». Однако надписи не описывают механизма его утраты или отзыва. В «Кутадгу билиг» Непостоянство Фортуны соотнесено со справедливостью, советом и мудростью; это позволяет осторожно понимать *kut* как условно дарованное полномочие, не выводя формальной теории отзыва. В-третьих, *el* охватывает значения политики, народа и упорядоченного состояния, не совпадая ни с современным государством, ни с нацией или обществом. В-четвёртых, современные материалы ОТГ обращаются к тюркской истории и традиции при описании Совета старейшин и используют дипломатический язык общего прошлого, взаимного доверия и уважения. При этом они не употребляют *törü*, *kut* и *el* как единую понятийную конструкцию и не доказывают семантическую преемственность от средневековых текстов. Следовательно, сравнение выявляет ограниченный концептуальный резонанс и современную институциональную самопрезентацию, сохраняя в качестве возможных объяснений типовой организационный дизайн, изобретённую традицию и внутреннюю политическую инструментализацию. Научный вклад статьи состоит в методе включения древнетюркской политической мысли в сравнительную теорию, строго ограниченном возможностями источников: текстовые представления не подменяются поведенческими данными, а современные институты не превращаются в доказательство исторической преемственности.

Ключевые слова: древнетюркская политическая мысль, политическое мировоззрение, *törü*, *kut*, *el*, Орхонские надписи, «Кутадгу билиг», легитимность, нормативный порядок, история понятий, сравнительная политическая теория, Организация тюркских государств.

Introduction

The Kül Tegin and Bilge Khagan inscriptions present political collapse and restoration through a vocabulary whose central terms include *törü*, *kut* and *el*. Yusuf Khas Hajib's eleventh-century *Kutadgu Bilig* subsequently places justice, royal fortune, wisdom and the final end within an extended dialogue on rule. These sources are regularly approached as evidence for early Turkic political ideas, but their relationship to contemporary categories of trust, legitimacy and political continuity remains methodologically difficult. The difficulty becomes greater when a modern intergovernmental body, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), publicly invokes a shared Turkic past.

The central problem is evidentiary. The Orkhon monuments are dynastic, commemorative and admonitory; the *Kutadgu Bilig* is a didactic mirror for princes. Neither source type records

conduct in a form that would sustain a behavioural analysis. They disclose representations of cosmic order, legitimate authority, political obligation and communal continuity. Accordingly, this article reconstructs an elite political worldview encoded in the texts. “Worldview” is used here as an etic analytical category: it names a structured set of represented assumptions and prescriptions, not a claim that all members of the *bodun* shared an identical outlook or acted in accordance with it.

Three questions guide the inquiry. What meanings and relations do selected passages support for *törü*, *kut* and *el*? How can those meanings enter a comparison with contemporary political theory without becoming translations of modern constructs? What, finally, can public OTS documents establish about the present availability of Turkic heritage language, and what remains beyond their evidentiary reach?

The argument is deliberately narrower than a continuity thesis. The three historical terms are treated as an analytical cluster, not as an established triad that always co-occurs or survives unchanged. The strongest collocational evidence concerns *el* and *törü*. *Kut* belongs to the same field of legitimate rule, but its connection is reconstructed from distinct passages and from the later didactic elaboration of the *Kutadgu Bilig*. On the contemporary side, the article examines institutional self-description and structural analogy; it does not infer the intentions of the 2009 treaty drafters or an institutional descent from the Türk qaghanates.

This article contributes in two ways. Substantively, it distinguishes what the sources directly attest from interpretive extensions: *törü* as inherited normative order, *kut* as divinely favored authorization whose conditionality is unevenly evidenced, and *el* as a category spanning polity, people and ordered condition. Methodologically, it offers an asymmetric comparison in which Old Turkic concepts are reconstructed in context before contemporary theory is introduced. The result permits conceptual dialogue without converting historical texts into behavioural data or contemporary heritage claims into proof of transmission.

Materials and research methods

Source corpus and genre

The first source group comprises the Kül Tegin (732 CE) and Bilge Khagan (735 CE) inscriptions of the Second Türk Qaghanate. The Tonyukuk inscription is used only as contextual material; the core claims below rest on passages whose monument, face and line can be specified. Readings follow the editorial tradition initiated by Thomsen and Radloff and systematised in Tekin’s grammar, Clauson’s dictionary and Erdal’s grammar (Thomsen, 1896; Radloff, 1894-1899; Tekin, 1968; Clauson, 1972; Erdal, 2004). The inscriptions are products of dynastic patronage. They justify a restoration, commemorate rulers and admonish an audience. Their statements are therefore evidence of an official elite representation, not transparent reports of social consensus.

The second source is Yusuf Khass Hajib’s *Kutadgu Bilig*, completed at Kashgar in 1069–1070. It is read in Arat’s critical text and with Dankoff’s English translation and commentary (Arat, 1947; Dankoff, 1983). Its allegorical dialogue belongs to a different genre and intellectual setting from the stelae: a Qarakhanid, Muslim court and a didactic argument on ethical government. The poem is not treated as an unchanged continuation of eighth-century political theology. It is examined as a later Turkic rearticulation in which *kut* and *törü* remain meaningful while Islamic ethical and literary resources reshape their relations.

The third group consists of official, publicly accessible materials connected with the OTS: the Nakhchivan Agreement, the OTS description of the Council of Elders and *Turkic World Vision 2040*. The 2024 Declaration on the Common Turkic Alphabet is considered separately because it was issued by the Turkic Academy, not by the OTS itself. These are contemporary diplomatic and institutional texts. They can show public wording and institutional self-presentation, but without drafting records or interviews they cannot establish the private intentions of negotiators.

Unit of analysis: represented political worldview

A behavioural reading would require observations of choices, compliance or recurrent practice. The available sources provide none of these systematically. The unit of analysis is therefore the represented political worldview: the relations that the texts construct among cosmic authorisation, normative order, rulership and political community. Conduct matters only as narrated conduct within a rhetorical design. A statement that discord destroyed the polity demonstrates that the inscription represented discord as causally and morally significant; it does not independently prove how historical actors behaved.

This distinction also restricts the modern comparison. Institutional trust, legitimacy and ontological security are theories developed for other evidentiary environments (Levi, 1998; Hardin, 2002; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). The article asks whether the Old Turkic texts formulate related political questions: what sustains a normative order, what authorises rule, and how is a political community represented as persisting through disruption? It does not attribute those modern constructs to eighth- or eleventh-century actors.

Contextual reconstruction and asymmetric comparison

The interpretive sequence combines four methodological commitments. Contextualist intellectual history requires reconstruction of what a term does in its historical utterance before it is classified by a later vocabulary (Skinner, 1969). Conceptual history warns that lexical persistence does not by itself establish semantic continuity (Koselleck, 1985). Conceptual morphology directs attention to a term's relations with adjacent concepts rather than to isolated dictionary glosses (Freeden, 1996). Comparative political theory permits traditions to be read as sources of political reflection while resisting both assimilation and claims of absolute incommensurability (Dallmayr, 2004; March, 2009; Godrej, 2011).

These commitments are operationalised in four steps. First, each claim is assigned to a source and genre. Second, meanings are reconstructed from collocation, grammar and narrative function, with monument lines or poem couplets supplied where the claim carries analytical weight. Third, a modern category is introduced only as a question-forming heuristic. Fourth, the comparison records both resonance and non-equivalence. The method is asymmetric because the historical materials determine the initial categories and evidentiary limits; modern theory does not supply missing historical evidence.

The labels “relational normative order” and “conditionally conferred authorisation” are therefore analytical descriptions, not translations. The first would be weakened by evidence that *törü* is principally a unilaterally promulgated code or that its loss is routinely independent of *el*. The second would be weakened if *kut* were consistently inalienable, but would be strengthened by explicit links between conduct and its loss. The present corpus strongly supports the *el-törü* pairing; it supports divine favour and possession for *kut*, while leaving withdrawal underdescribed.

Protocol for the contemporary comparison

Four evidentiary levels are distinguished for the OTS comparison. Direct lexical use of *törü*, *kut* or *el* in a constitutive text would be the strongest relevant evidence. Explicit institutional invocation of Turkic history or tradition establishes current heritage self-description. Structural similarity, such as an elders' council, supports analogy but not genealogy. An analyst's conceptual mapping is the weakest level and remains heuristic. The official materials examined here do not deploy the three terms as a cluster. They do contain general heritage language and an official retrospective explanation of the Council of Elders.

Three rival explanations are retained throughout. The Council of Elders may reflect a generic advisory form found in many organisations. Heritage language may constitute an invented tradition in the sense of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). It may also serve domestic identity agendas in particular member states. Public documents alone cannot adjudicate among these explanations and historical reactivation. The test is therefore not whether the medieval concepts "survive" in the OTS, but what the contemporary documents actually say and how much inference those statements license.

Procedure and scope

The inscriptions are cited by monument, face and line: KT for Kül Tegin, BK for Bilge Khagan, and E, S, N or W for the face. Old Turkic forms follow the normalised spellings used in the cited philological works, while variants are noted where relevant. *Kutadgu Bilig* passages are cited by couplet range because pagination varies between editions and translations. The selected passages were chosen for their density and argumentative relevance; the study is not an exhaustive concordance of the Orkhon, Yenisei and Old Uyghur corpora.

Research background

Philological scholarship has established the lexical and grammatical basis for any reconstruction of Old Turkic political language. Bombaci's study of *qutluğ bolzun* placed *kut* at the centre of debate over royal fortune (Bombaci, 1965). Historical syntheses by Golden provide the political setting of early Turkic state formation but do not by themselves prove a fixed three-term doctrine (Golden, 1992; 2011). The present argument therefore relies on the cited primary passages rather than using historical context as a substitute for textual demonstration.

Recent research underscores both the productivity and the contested character of the material. Nauruzbayev, Altayev and Abdimomynov emphasise virtuous leadership in the *Kutadgu Bilig* (2024: 450–466), while Yavari situates Yusuf's royal wisdom within a wider history of political thought (2024: 64–74). Bakır's analysis of khatuns in the runic inscriptions shows the continuing importance of sacral authorisation in the political language of office (2025: 867–894). Manav explicitly evaluates *kut* through Weberian charisma (2024: 555–574). That comparison is valuable as evidence of an active interpretive debate, but it does not settle equivalence: Weber's ideal type and the Old Turkic grammar must still be distinguished.

The relevant contemporary theories provide comparative questions, not historical answers. Trust scholarship examines expectations that make cooperation possible (Levi, 1998: 77–101; Hardin, 2002). Beetham distinguishes rule conformity, justification through shared beliefs and expressed consent in legitimation (1991). Weber's charismatic authority rests on devotion

to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character attributed to a person (Weber, 1978: 241–242). Ontological-security scholarship concerns the continuity of an actor's self-narrative and routines (Mitzen, 2006: 341–370; Steele, 2008). These frameworks sharpen questions about the sources, but none is projected back as an emic Old Turkic category.

Analysis

Törü: inherited order and the el-törü pairing

Törü, also represented as *törö* or later *töre*, denotes an inherited normative order in the selected Orkhon passages. “Law” is too narrow if it suggests a self-contained written code promulgated by a sovereign. The inscriptions describe *törü* through verbs of holding, ordering and following ancestral precedent. This semantic range is established not by etymology alone but by recurrent pairings and narrative functions (Tekin, 1968; Clauson, 1972; Erdal, 2004).

The strongest evidence is its collocation with *el*. At KT E1, Bumın and Ištemi Qaghan are said to have held and ordered the Türk people's *el* and *törü* (*türük bodunı ilin törüsin tuta birmiř, iti birmiř*); the parallel passage occurs at BK E3. BK E18 uses the possessive pairing *ilimiz törümüz*, “our *el* and our *törü*”. The narrative of disintegration at BK E6–11 joins the loss of *el*, qaghan and *Türk törü*, while restoration invokes ancestral *törü* at BK E12. These passages support a close conceptual association; they do not establish that every occurrence of one term presupposes the other.

The relevant verbs matter. BK E4 describes holding the *el* and setting *törü* in order; BK E12 presents the restored order as following the *törü* of the ancestors. In the cited passages *törü* is maintained and reordered within relations among qaghan, beks and *bodun*. Because the monuments speak in a dynastic voice, this is an official representation of those relations, not evidence of a negotiated social contract. “Relational normative order” captures the textual pattern more accurately than “relational compact”: the evidence supports interdependence and inherited obligation, but not a compact in the reciprocal or contractual sense.

The inscriptions also make memory part of political instruction. Their account of dispersal, subjection and restoration turns past failure into an admonition directed at later rulers and the *bodun*. *Törü* is therefore both received order and a norm for judging political continuity. Set beside trust theory, it raises a comparable question about the expectations that sustain coordinated rule. It is not “institutional trust” in historical disguise: the texts supply neither attitude measured among subjects nor observed compliance, and their explicit ancestral and cosmological framing exceeds the modern construct.

Kut: divine favour, possession and conditional authorisation

The grammatical evidence requires a correction to readings that make *kut* purely relational or deny possession. At KT S9 the ruler states: *teŋri yarlıkadukın üçün özüüm kutum bar üçün qaŋan olurtum* – in a cautious rendering, “because Heaven favoured [me], and because I myself had *kut*, I became qaghan” (Ross and Thomsen, 1930: 861–876; Tekin, 1968). The first-person possessive *kutum*, “my *kut*”, and the existential *bar* show that *kut* can be represented as possessed. The same formula also places that possession within divine favour; grammar alone does not decide whether the concept is substance, fortune, capacity or authorisation.

The restoration narrative supplies a related but distinct image. At BK E10–12 Tengri raises Elteriř Qaghan and El-Bilge Khatun so that the Türk people will not perish, after which the

dispersed community is reorganised according to ancestral *törü*. The passage links divine action, political restoration and the welfare of the people. It supports the proposition that legitimate rulership is represented as divinely favoured and purposive. It does not state that *kut* was withdrawn from the previous rulers or describe a juridical mechanism of revocation.

The *Kutadgu Bilig* gives conditionality a more developed literary form. The poem introduces four central figures within couplets 350–397. Ay Toldı identifies and explains Fortune in couplets 620–764; later passages dwell on Fortune’s movement and instability, especially couplets 1045–1157. Kün Togdı’s representation of justice and *törü* is elaborated across couplets 765–954, where images of balanced and impartial rule appear (Arat, 1947: couplets 350–397, 620–954, 1045–1157; Dankoff, 1983). The juxtaposition of unstable Fortune with justice, counsel and intelligence makes enduring rule ethically demanding (Devereux, 1961: 299–310; Nauruzbayev et al., 2024: 450–466; Yavari, 2024: 64–74).

This evidence supports “conditionally conferred authorisation” as a cautious analytical formulation. “Conferred” reflects the role of divine favour; “conditional” reflects the poem’s insistence that fortunate rule cannot be stabilised without justice and wisdom. The formulation is stronger for the *Kutadgu Bilig* than for the inscriptions. “Withdrawable mandate” is too definite because the Orkhon passages do not narrate withdrawal and the poem’s personified Fortune can depart without constituting a formal theory of revocation.

The Weberian comparison must therefore remain controlled. Manav’s reading through charisma draws attention to extraordinary authorisation and instability (2024: 555–574). Yet Weber’s ideal type concerns authority sustained by followers’ devotion to qualities attributed to a person and the problem of routinisation (Weber, 1978: 241–242). The KT S9 formula instead combines Heaven’s favour with possessed *kut*, and the *Kutadgu Bilig* embeds Fortune in a moral-didactic architecture. The comparison identifies a shared problem of legitimation; it does not make *kut* equivalent to charisma, divine right or performance legitimacy.

El: polity, people and ordered condition

El, also written *il*, has a semantic range that includes polity and political community. In the passages at issue its loss is more than military defeat: BK E6–11 presents a people deprived of *el* and qaghan and having abandoned Türk *törü*. The privative form *ilsiremiš* at BK E11 represents the *bodun* as made “el-less”. Because the noun can denote both a political formation and the ordered condition attributed to a people, no single modern term-state, nation, society or territory-exhausts it (Clauson, 1972; Tekin, 1968).

The throne name *Elteriş* is compatible with this centrality: *ter-* carries the sense of gathering, so the name is conventionally understood in relation to gathering or restoring the *el*. A throne name is nonetheless a programmatic designation, not independent evidence that the whole population shared the dynasty’s self-understanding. The safest conclusion is that the official commemorative vocabulary represented restoration of *el* as the constitutive achievement of the ruling house.

Modern social science often distinguishes analytically among state institutions, society and collective identity. The Old Turkic category cuts across those distinctions in the cited contexts, but this does not show an inability to differentiate ruler, beks and *bodun*, all of which have separate names. In comparative terms, *el* raises a question similar to that addressed by theories of political continuity: how does a community represent itself as remaining the same kind of political entity through loss and restoration? Calling *el* “ontological security” would

exceed the evidence, because the inscriptions do not formulate that modern theory and do not provide behavioural data about identity-seeking routines.

Relations among the three categories

The evidence is uneven and should not be flattened into a symmetrical triad. The *el-törü* pairing is directly attested in parallel monumental passages. *Kut* is directly attested in a formula of accession and belongs to the broader representation of divinely favoured rule, but the passages cited do not show all three terms co-occurring, being lost together and being restored together. The *Kutadgu Bilig* brings Fortune and justice into sustained dialogue, yet it does so within an Islamic ethical and allegorical framework rather than by reproducing the Orkhon narrative.

It is therefore more accurate to speak of an analytical cluster within a field of political order. *El* names the polity or ordered community; *törü* names the inherited normative order represented as constitutive of it; *kut* names a form of fortunate and divinely favoured authorisation to rule, whose stability the later poem relates to justice and wisdom. This reconstruction is sufficient for comparison at the level of political questions. It is insufficient for a claim that one stable doctrine moved intact across thirteen centuries.

The Organization of Turkic States: evidence and limits

The contemporary comparison draws on four official sources¹. The Nakhchivan Agreement includes a Council of Elders among the organisation's bodies. This is evidence of a founding design choice in a modern intergovernmental treaty. The OTS's current website further explains that the Council was constituted "in line with the Turkic history and tradition". The latter statement is an official retrospective self-description. It demonstrates that the organisation now publicly frames the body through heritage; it does not demonstrate what motivated every treaty drafter in 2009.

Turkic World Vision 2040 invokes common language, culture and a shared past, and places mutual trust and respect within the organisation's projected cooperation. Such language establishes a contemporary diplomatic narrative of affinity. It does not reproduce the specific meanings reconstructed above: the document does not set out *törü*, *kut* and *el* as a conceptual cluster, identify a conditional theory of authorisation, or cite the Orkhon inscriptions and *Kutadgu Bilig* as sources of institutional design.

The Declaration on the Common Turkic Alphabet illustrates the importance of institutional attribution. It was issued by the Turkic Academy after the work of the Turkic World Common Alphabet Commission, and therefore belongs to a wider ecosystem of Turkic cooperation rather than constituting an OTS foundational document. It may be discussed as a contemporary project of linguistic coordination and mutual legibility. It cannot independently evidence a continuation of *el* or an OTS application of the medieval worldview.

The comparison thus yields one firm contemporary finding and several weaker resonances. The firm finding is public heritage self-presentation: the OTS explicitly relates the Council of Elders to Turkic history and tradition. The weaker resonances concern counsel, mutual trust, common memory and cooperation justified through practical results. These motifs are compatible with the historical questions raised by *törü*, *kut* and *el*, but they are also ordinary

¹ Official institutional materials cited in this section (all accessed 13 August 2026): Nakhchivan Agreement (3 October 2009); OTS, "Council of Elders"; OTS, *Turkic World Vision 2040*; Turkic Academy, "Declaration on Common Turkic Alphabet" (16 September 2024).

features of intergovernmental organisations and identity-building projects. Generic design, invented tradition and domestic instrumentalisation remain live explanations.

Results

The analysis yields four source-bounded results. First, the strongest internal relation is the pairing of *el* and *törü* in the Orkhon inscriptions. The texts represent political community and ancestral normative order as jointly maintained and jointly endangered. “Relational normative order” is a defensible analytical description so long as it is not converted into a historically attested compact.

Second, KT S9 requires *kut* to be read in light of both possession and divine favour. The evidence rules out the categorical claim that *kut* is never a property, but it does not reduce the term to a material possession. The *Kutadgu Bilig* supplies the clearest case for conditionality by juxtaposing unstable Fortune with justice and wisdom. Neither source establishes a formal withdrawal mechanism.

Third, *el* spans political formation, people and ordered condition. Its heuristic comparison with political continuity is productive because both address collective persistence. Equating it with the state, nation, society or ontological security would erase the historical category’s range and claim evidence the texts do not provide.

Fourth, the OTS comparison supports a finding about present institutional self-description, not historical transmission. The official heritage statement concerning the Council of Elders is probative of how the organisation currently presents itself. The broader language of shared past, trust and practical cooperation is compatible with multiple genealogies. Table 1 summarises the evidence, comparative question and inference limit for each historical category.

Table 1. Historical evidence, comparative questions and limits of inference

1-кесте. Тарихи деректер, салыстырмалы сұрақтар және тұжырым шектері

Таблица 1. Исторические данные, сравнительные вопросы и пределы вывода

Category	Historical evidence	Comparative question	Limit of inference
Törü	KT E1 / BK E3 pairing with <i>el</i> ; holding, ordering and ancestral precedent	What normative expectations sustain political order?	Not a translation of trust and not evidence of an OTS continuity
Kut	KT S9 possessive formula and divine favour; KB 620–954 and 1045–1157	What authorises rule, and under what represented conditions can it endure?	No withdrawal mechanism in the inscriptions; not equivalent to charisma

El	Loss/restoration at BK E6–12; privative <i>ilsiremiš</i> at BK E11	How is a political community represented as persisting through disruption?	Not identical with state, nation, society or ontological security
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The table is a map of the argument, not a set of equations. Its historical-evidence column records what is directly supported; its comparative-question column identifies only a shared problem-space; and its final column prevents the heuristic from being mistaken for translation or continuity.

Limitations

Five limitations define the result. The selected monumental passages are not an exhaustive concordance, and the Yenisei and Old Uyghur corpora may complicate the proposed relations. The monuments represent a ruling house's voice, not a socially representative archive. The chronological and intellectual distance between the Orkhon inscriptions and the *Kutadgu Bilig* prevents the latter from simply filling silences in the former. The nine centuries between the Qarakhanid work and the OTS documents are not traced through Chaghatay, Ottoman, Qipchaq or modern national corpora. Finally, public OTS materials reveal neither confidential drafting histories nor the intentions of individual officials.

These limitations determine what could disconfirm or revise the argument. A full concordance may show that *törü* often operates independently of *el*. Further philological work may favour a non-authorisational reading of *kut*. Intermediate corpora may demonstrate semantic discontinuity. Archival records or interviews may show that the Council of Elders arose wholly from generic organisational negotiation, or conversely document an explicit historical model. Until such evidence is available, stronger claims should remain suspended.

Conclusion

Selected Old Turkic texts support a differentiated reconstruction of *törü*, *kut* and *el* within an elite political worldview. The clearest relation is between *el* and *törü*: ordered political community and inherited normative order are represented as mutually implicated. *Kut* is grammatically possessed and associated with divine favour in KT S9; its ethical conditionality becomes more explicit in the *Kutadgu Bilig*, where unstable Fortune is set beside justice, counsel and wisdom. *El* spans polity, people and ordered condition without matching a single modern political category.

This reconstruction makes comparison possible only under an asymmetric rule. Contemporary theories of trust, legitimacy and political continuity can identify questions shared across contexts, but they cannot supply translations or missing historical evidence. The analytical labels that result – relational normative order and conditionally conferred authorization – remain accountable to the cited lines, couplets, and silences of the corpus. The comparison with the OTS is correspondingly limited. Current public discourse invokes Turkic history and tradition in explaining the Council of Elders and uses broad language of shared past, mutual trust and respect. The examined documents do not deploy the three Old

Turkic terms as a system and do not establish a chain of transmission from medieval texts to contemporary institutional design. The defensible conclusion is therefore one of present heritage self-description and limited conceptual resonance, not survival, reactivation or institutional descent.

The article's broader contribution lies in the discipline of that limit. Old Turkic sources can enter comparative political theory as sources of political reflection when their genres, grammar and historical distance remain visible. Treating worldview rather than behaviour as the object does not reduce their importance; it specifies the kind of knowledge they can provide and makes the comparison more historically credible.

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