The Cognitive Organization of Turkic Mythonyms: A Comparative-Ethnolinguistic Perspective

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Abstract This study explores the semantic organization, typological diversity, and functional behavior of mythonyms within the Turkic ethnocultural space, focusing on Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish linguofolklore. Utilizing an ethnolinguistic framework and comparative analysis on a newly compiled corpus of 512 mythonymic units, the research aims to reconstruct the traditional cosmological worldview of these Turkic peoples. The findings demonstrate that Turkic mythonyms are organized into a strict spatial hierarchy comprising celestial theonyms (e.g., Umay, Yer-Su) and terrestrial demonyms (e.g., Bichura, Oy Iyase). Comparative data reveal substantial typological parallels and high linguistic resilience across the studied dialects, alongside significant syncretic adaptation of Islamic-derived figures (e.g., Jinn, Khozyr Ilyas). This systematic categorization and cross-linguistic comparison resolve key classification gaps in Turkological scholarship, explaining the cognitive and semantic logic that governs mythological naming. Ultimately, this approach provides a robust, empirical foundation for future interdisciplinary research in comparative folklore and historical linguocultural studies.

Keywords: *Turkic mythonymy, Linguistic folklore, Ethnolinguistics, Mythological lexicon, Comparative mythology*

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1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the study of mythonyms, the proper names of mythological, legendary, and fairy-tale entities, has assumed a central relevance in general linguistics, serving as a key to decoding the cognitive and spiritual coordinates of human culture. Within the context of globalization, the problem of studying mythonyms has acquired particular urgency and significance in general linguistics (Ospanova et al., 2026). New conditions and socio-cultural prerequisites of the previous decade have accelerated the change in society's attitude toward the realities of life, triggering a pronounced interest in mythonymic dictionaries (Sarekenova & Akhmetova, 2025). As specialized onymic categories, mythonyms are not

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merely arbitrary linguistic tags but are highly charged cultural signifiers that encapsulate ancient belief systems, cosmological understandings, and the ecological-spatial orientations of historic human communities. Consequently, in the context of contemporary life, the study of this issue seems highly relevant, especially given the wide prevalence of names originating from mythological characters within the existing thematic lexicon of various dialects (Enderov, 2019).

Previous studies in folklore onomastics and ethnolinguistics have successfully demonstrated that mythological vocabulary represents not merely a static lexicon but a dynamic cultural code reflecting an ethnic group's historical development, social struggles, and geographical-ecological adaptation (Assanbayeva et al., 2024; Dana et al., 2025). Within Turkic linguistics, research has traced historical word-formation models and identified thematic layers of archaic beliefs, showing how language acts as an archive of spiritual experience (Kiryakova-Dineva, 2025). Most mythonyms represent direct semantic adaptations of fictional or legendary creatures expressing human traits, psychological qualities, and environmental morals (Burkitbayeva et al., 2025). Mythonyms can be theoretically defined as the transformation of a corresponding element of the mythological cognitive paradigm into a word (Raihani et al., 2025). These linguistic units, including prominent spirits such as *"Bichura"* (the household spirit), *"Oy Iyase"* (the house master), *"Abzar Iyase"* (the spirit of the barn and stable), and *"Muncha Iyase"* (the spirit of the bathhouse), represent a vital layer of lower-class powers associated with the daily, practical life of human beings. These mythological lexical units are recognized as being among the oldest words in the Turkic vocabulary (Enderov, 2019).

The investigation of mythonyms is particularly crucial for the Turkic-speaking peoples, whose nomadic and semi-nomadic histories necessitated a rich oral tradition and a highly responsive cognitive mapping of natural and supernatural phenomena. Across the vast territory spanning Central Asia, the Volga-Ural region, Siberia, and Anatolia, various Turkic ethnic groups developed distinct yet cognate linguistic systems of lower and higher mythology. These systems reflect not only ancestral animistic beliefs but also the historical layers of contact with neighboring Finno-Ugric, Slavic, Iranian, and Mongolic peoples, as well as the overarching transition to monotheism, primarily Islam (Urmancheev, 2008). Consequently, Turkic mythonyms serve as a fertile ground for exploring how lexical systems maintain their structural and semantic core while displaying tremendous cognitive elasticity and regional variation under dialectal and theological pressures.

However, despite this growing interest and the significant value of mythological onomastics, a critical gap remains in Turkological scholarship. On the one hand, monograph-level comprehensive studies of a general, comparative-contrastive, and synthesizing nature in Chuvash, Tatar, and Bashkir linguofolkloristics are still largely absent in modern science (Kurmanbekova, 2023). On the other hand, comparative studies of mythonymy between Turkic and other Ural-Altaic languages remain missing in modern Turkology (Sarekenova & Akhmetova, 2025). Existing studies frequently focus on isolated regional dialects or individual linguistic groups, resulting in an absence of comprehensive, comparative-contrastive analyses that evaluate mythonymic systems across multiple Turkic branches (Bakirov, 2012). For instance, while Tatar folklore onomastics is extensively documented (Bayazitova, 2018) and Bashkir ritual terminologies have been systematically compiled, there is a distinct lack of comparative frameworks that connect these Kipchak-branch systems with the Chuvash (Oghur branch) and Turkish (Oghuz branch) equivalents. This isolationist approach in scholarship leaves the broader systematic functional parameters, shared semantic relations, and cognitive mechanisms that govern how ancient mythological names are preserved, transformed, or adapted under the influence of major world religions (such as Islam or Christianity in the case of the Chuvash) largely unmapped. In this connection, there is an urgent and pressing need for a complex comparative-contrastive study of mythonyms, which would provide systematic solutions to a range of theoretical and practical problems in Turkic linguofolkloristics (Alhabbash et al., 2025). We do not yet fully understand which aspects of the ancient Turkic mythological lexicon represent pan-Turkic heritage, and which are localized ecological or historical innovations.

To address this research gap, the present study conducts a systematic ethnolinguistic and comparative-typological analysis of mythonyms across four key Turkic traditions: Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish. These four traditions have been chosen intentionally to represent different branches of the

Turkic language family, diverse historical migration pathways, and varied religious histories. While Tatar and Bashkir represent closely related Kipchak-branch languages of the Volga-Ural region with long-standing Islamic traditions, Chuvash represents the unique Oghur branch, having preserved archaisms and undergone Christianization, and Turkish represents the western Oghuz branch, which experienced deep-seated sedentarization and imperial institutionalization in Anatolia. By contrasting these systems, this study aims to reconstruct the traditional cosmological worldview of Turkic peoples by classifying and comparing their shared and divergent mythonymic spaces.

Grounded in Ernst Cassirer's (1955, 2024) Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, which posits that language and myth are co-genetic systems wherein names fuse signifier and signified as active vehicles of spiritual power, this study pursues four interconnected objectives: 1. To evaluate the conceptual and cognitive foundations of mythonymic studies, establishing a robust theoretical methodology that bridges cognitive linguistics, semiotics, and ethnolinguistics; 2. To identify and systematically categorize mythonyms into spatial and functional hierarchies, distinguishing supreme theonyms representing the celestial order from lower-class demonyms associated with terrestrial, domestic, and territorial micro-spaces; 3. To perform a comparative-typological analysis, mapping Tatar mythonyms with their Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish equivalents to determine phonetic, semantic, and structural correspondences; 4. To characterize the role of these names as active mechanisms in translating and preserving Turkic cultural heritage, focusing on the dual processes of semantic vernacularization and adaptive syncretism under the influence of Islamic monotheism.

Through this comprehensive approach, this study seeks to move beyond the mere listing of supernatural entities. Instead, it frames mythonyms as active cognitive filters and linguistic instruments through which human communities historically and conceptually organized their physical environments, regulated social behavior, and negotiated their cultural identity across centuries of geographic migration and socio-religious transformations.

2. Theoretical Framework

Research on the existence and cognitive functioning of Turkic mythonyms requires a multi-layered theoretical framework that integrates linguistic, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. This study adopts Ernst Cassirer's (1955, 2024) Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (specifically his theory of mythological consciousness and metaphorical thinking) as its core theoretical framework, integrating it with contemporary ethnolinguistic and semiotic paradigms in Turkic and Slavic studies. The theoretical basis of our research is founded upon classic works in onomastic theory that define and analyze fundamental concepts such as "mythonymics" and "mythonyms" (Podolskaya, 1988; Superanskaya, 1973). We also incorporate key publications that present a rigorous classification of mythonyms and provide a detailed description of them according to semantic and ethnolinguistic parameters (Belova, 2005; Gabisheva, 2003; Kondratyeva, 2004; Nikitina, 1993; Tolstoy & Tolstaya, 2013; Vinogradova, 2016; Zelenin, 1991). Additionally, our theoretical lens is focused on specialized research dedicated to Turkic mythonymy (Bayazitova, 2018; Gilmanov, 1996; Khisamitdinova, 2010; Koblov, 1910; Urmancheev, 2008).

2.1. Metaphorical Thinking as a Cognitive Basis

According to Ernst Cassirer (1955, 2024), language and myth represent co-genetic, non-accidental symbolic systems emerging from the same primary cognitive matrix of the human mind. Mythic consciousness does not operate through abstract, logical, or scientific categories; instead, it functions through intense metaphorical thinking. As emphasized by Cassirer (1955, p. 84), "it is metaphor that creates the spiritual connection between language and myth, though theories differ greatly in the study of this process itself and the direction in which it proceeds". The etymological origins of metaphor lie either in the very creation of language or in the depths of the mythological imagination. In some instances, a metaphor designates a word that, in its initial state, possesses an inherently metaphorical essence, thereby generating and constantly supporting a myth. Conversely, there are cases where the metaphorical nature of words is viewed as a legacy granted to language by a myth, which the myth, in turn, lends as if on loan (Endres, 2024). Under the mythic worldview, a name is not an arbitrary semantic sign or a mere label used for denotation; rather, the name is felt to be an active, substantial

vehicle carrying the spiritual essence, power, and physical reality of the named object (Endres, 2024). There is a complete fusion of the word and the thing, of the signifier and the signified.

In traditional Turkic societies, this cognitive fusion of word and reality meant that pronouncing a mythonym was a performative act that could invoke, appease, or offend the supernatural force itself. This etymological and conceptual connection explains why localized spirits, such as the domestic cellar-dwelling spirit or forest-master, possess such profound resilience in oral tradition, serving as mental schemas that order human interaction with their environment. The physical spaces of nature (such as forests, rivers, mountains) and the domestic realm (such as homes, bathhouses, cellars) are cognitively mapped, emotionally charged, and converted into symbolic personifications. In the traditional culture of the Tatar people, humanity is viewed as the master of everything that surrounds them, including objects and natural phenomena. Terminological differences are closely observed in the local manifestations of Tatar spiritual culture. It is widely believed that spirits inhabit various places where they perform their primary duties, such as houses, barns, water reservoirs, forests, and rivers. A large number of legends about the masters of water and forest exist among the Tatars. Interestingly, the majority of these mythonyms reveal gender relations based on original cosmological views of the world and creation (Urmancheev, 2008). Mythological naming, therefore, acts as a primary cognitive tool for structuring raw geographical reality, rendering the untamed, chaotic wilderness familiar, habitable, and governed by predictable reciprocal rules of human-spirit interactions.

2.2. Ethnolinguistic and Semiotic Paradigms in Turkic Studies

Within Slavic and general European folkloristics, the semiotic mapping of mythological systems has been established in the foundational works of Tolstoy and Tolstaya (2013), Agapkina (2010), and Toporov (2014). This paradigm, known as the "Slavic Ethnolinguistic School," treats folk language and folk culture as a unified semiotic system. In this view, lexical units, ritual actions, material objects, and belief narratives are parallel codes that express a shared underlying cultural text. Mythonyms, as the linguistic manifestations of this system, are analyzed not in isolation but as part of an integrated ritual and communicative matrix.

In Turkic linguistics, this interdisciplinary, semiotic-ethnolinguistic paradigm has been fruitfully developed over the past few decades to transition from structural, passive inventories of spirits to analyzing their dynamic, living socio-cultural functions. Key advances include:

- Khisamitdinova's (2010) systematic studies of Bashkir ritual magic, medicine, and mythological terminology, which uncovered the deep connections between linguistic roots and archaic healing spells;
- Bayazitova's (2009, 2018) extensive field documentation of Tatar folk traditions, spells, and domestic taboos, which showed how localized mythonymic dialects vary across the Volga, Ural, and Siberian regions, and how these variations reflect historic migrations;
- Urmancheev's (2008, 2011) comprehensive, multi-volume categorization of Tatar lower mythology, which established the structural boundaries between upper-world deities and lower-world spirits;
- Salikzhanova and Sarekenova's (2023) systematic research on the symbolic meaning of women's clothing and jewelry in Turkic folk beliefs, showing how physical adornments serve as protective amulets against malevolent demonyms;
- Auezova's (2023) research on mythopoetic codes in modern Turkic linguocultures, which utilized cognitive-semantic methods to analyze how ancient mythological symbols persist in modern literature and identity;
- Sarsenbekova and Kudaibergen's (2024) models of cultural memory, which explore how mythological names act as "memory sites" (lieux de mémoire) that sustain ethnic solidarity in a globalized world;

- Musayeva's (2025) significant successes in the study of folklore onomastics, investigating the composition and structure of anthroponymic space and analyzing the functions of Kumyk onyms.

These diverse methodologies provide the essential scientific tools needed to decode the complex, multi-layered onomastics of Turkic languages, which have been historically influenced by runic inscriptions, classical Arabic-Persian Islamic texts, and regional dialectal developments.

2.3. Linking Theoretical Paradigms to the Research Problem and Purpose

By synthesizing Cassirer's (1955) philosophy of symbolic forms with the empirical lexicographical models established in Turkic studies, we can transition from viewing mythonyms as isolated lexical curiosities or "superstitions" to analyzing them as structured, highly coordinated semiotic networks. While classical structuralist approaches successfully document mythological inventories, they fail to explain the "cognitive elasticity" and cultural vitality that allow these linguistic systems to survive centuries of migration, forced displacement, and major religious transitions.

The primary problem of this research is to resolve how the cognitive structures of Turkic mythonymy maintain their core semantic integrity while adapting to regional dialectal pressures and integrating monotheistic Islamic theological concepts. To solve this problem, this study applies a unified, comparative-contrastive ethnolinguistic framework. Language, within this framework, is treated as a cultural symptom and a cognitive archive. By analyzing the structural, phonetic, and semantic correspondences between Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish mythonyms, we can trace the historical trajectories of Turkic cosmology. This theoretical approach allows us to establish how these linguistic units function as a cohesive, resilient cultural system that dynamically balances pre-Islamic animistic worldviews with modern religious and social realities, revealing the profound adaptive capacity of Turkic folklore and linguistic identity.

3. Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, this study adopts an ethnolinguistic and comparative-typological methodology, which directly operationalizes Ernst Cassirer's symbolic theory and the lexicographical classifications of Bayazitova (2018) and Khisamitdinova (2010). Ethnolinguistics represents an ideal methodological approach for this inquiry because it does not treat language merely as a formal grammar or a random system of signs. Instead, in ethnolinguistics, language is analyzed as a cultural symptom, an expressive medium, and a cognitive repository. Consequently, mythonyms are treated as complex semiotic codes whose structural and semantic decoding reveals the historical memory, ritual practices, and spatial worldview of an ethnic group.

By comparing linguistic materials across four distinct Turkic traditions (i.e., Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish), this methodology allows us to separate general Turkic pan-mythological structures from localized, dialect-specific developments. It enables us to identify how common phonetic roots undergo systematic shifts (e.g., sound correspondences between Kipchak, Oghuz, and Oghur branches) while maintaining their underlying semantic anchors. Ultimately, this methodology is structured to systematically reconstruct the traditional mythological worldview of Turkic peoples by mapping and analyzing the semantic relations and typological correspondences within their shared mythonymic space.

3.1. Materials

The research is based on primary and secondary lexicographic, folkloric, and ethnographic sources representing a wide spectrum of Turkic mythological systems. These sources provided a comprehensive corpus of 512 mythonymic units, which were systematically extracted, cross-verified, and categorized for analysis. To ensure the reliability and historical depth of the data, the materials were gathered from a combination of classical etymological dictionaries, regional dialectal compilations, historical-literary records, and modern ethnographic field studies.

Primary materials include basic mythological and etymological dictionaries selected for their exemplary documentation of mythonyms, linguistic commentaries, and cultural contextualization. We systematically used the following dictionaries and corpora:

- S1. Tatar Telenen Etimologik Suzlege (Ahmetjanov, 2015): Provides detailed etymological information on Tatar mythonyms and tracks their long-term semantic evolution;
- S2. TTAC, Tatar Tele Anlatmaly Suzlege (Ganiev, 2005): Offers comprehensive explanations of lexical units, including figurative, symbolic, and idiomatic meanings derived from mythonyms;
- S3. TTZDS, Tatar Telenen Zhyerli Dialekt Suzlege (Bayazitova et al., 2009): Documents dialectal variants of mythonyms, recording regional pronunciation, geographic distribution, and oral contextual usage across various sub-groups;
- S4. Tatar Mythology & Tatar Myths (Urmancheev, 2008): Includes classified lists and detailed descriptions of Tatar cosmological and lower-class mythological entities and their narrative functions;
- S5. Mythological Dictionary of the Bashkir Language (Khisamitdinova, 2016): Outlines the phonetic variants and ritual contexts of Bashkir theonyms and demonyms;
- S6. Chuvash Mythology, Ethnographic Handbook (Chuvash mythology: Ethnographic handbook, 2018): Offers extensive documentation of Chuvash demonological characters, ritual protocols, and cosmological schemes;
- S7. Türk Mitolojisi & Türk Mitolojisi Sözlüğü (Beydili, 2005): Synthesizes Western Oghuz/Anatolian Turkish mythological onomastics and ritual practices;
- S8. Divan Lugat at-Turk (Al-Kashgari, 2010): Serves as the primary early historical-literary written record documenting ancient Turkic cosmology, animal taboos, and runic-era terminology.

Table 1 encapsulates the regional category of the sources and the number of units that have been extracted from each source.

Table 1
The Sources and the Corpus

Code	Source title	Source type	Regional category	No. of units
S1	*Tatar Telenen' Etymologik Suzlege (Ahmetjanov, 2015)*	Primary Lexicographic	Tatar (Etymological)	124
S2	*Tatar Tele Anlatmaly Suzlege (Ganiev, 2005)*	Primary Lexicographic	Tatar (Explanatory)	98
S3	*Tatar Telenen Zhyerli Dialekt Suzlege (Bayazitova et al., 2009)*	Primary Lexicographic	Tatar (Regional)	86
S4	*Tatar Mythology & Tatar Myths (Urmancheev, 2008)*	Secondary Folkloric	Tatar (Cosmological)	74
S5	*Mythological Dictionary of the Bashkir Language (Khisamitdinova, 2016)*	Primary Lexicographic	Bashkir (Traditional)	58
S6	*Chuvash Mythology: Ethnographic Handbook (2018)*	Secondary Ethnographic	Chuvash (Demonology)	42
S7	*Türk Mitolojisi & Türk Mitolojisi Sözlüğü (Beydili, 2005)*	Primary Lexicographic	Turkish (Oghuz/Anatolian)	30
S8	*Divan Lugat at-Turk (Al-Kashgari, 2010)*	Primary Historical	Comparative Old Turkic	*Reference*
Total extracted corpus				512 units

In addition to these, we consulted the Encyclopedia of Islam (Campo, 2009) to acquire precise contextual information regarding Islamic theological figures (such as Dajjal, Iblis, and various classes of Jinn) that have been historically assimilated into the Turkic folk demonology.

3.2. Procedure

The practical execution of this research followed a strict, standardized scientific procedure to ensure transparency, rigor, and cross-linguistic comparability.

3.2.1. Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic four-stage extraction workflow: In the first stage, primary lexicographic sources (S1, S2, S3, S5, S7, S8) were thoroughly surveyed to identify all lexical items, idioms, and phrases referring to non-human, supernatural, or personified forces (gods, spirits, demons, legendary heroes, zoomorphic entities). In Stage 2, the compiled list of potential mythonymic units was cross-verified against oral folklore archives, folk tales, epics, legends, and spells (S4, S6) to confirm their active usage in narrative contexts. Units that only appeared as artificial literary creations or unique translator inventions were flagged. During stage 3, duplicates, obvious homonyms, and purely standard metaphoric expressions (without a personified mythological character) were excluded. This left a refined, verified corpus of 512 highly active, historically grounded mythonymic units. In the final stage, each of the 512 units was documented in a centralized database with its phonetic variants, etymological roots, morphosemantic structure, dialectal geographic coordinates, associated ritual context, and secondary source citations.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

Analytical work proceeded in three main stages: First, mythonyms were grouped according to their hierarchical and semantic attributes. This process utilized a spatial-cosmological model (Upper, Middle, and Lower Worlds) and a functional-interactional model. Second, each mythonym was examined for its etymological origin, morphological composition (e.g., compound words combining a space and an ownership marker like Oy + Iyase), and metaphorical transformation processes. Special attention was paid to processes of resemanticization (where an old pagan root takes on a new monotheistic meaning) and idiomatization in folk spells. Comparative analysis across the four languages identified both shared pan-Turkic features and culture-specific, regional divergences. Third, we operationalized the three frameworks as core coding categories in our corpus database. Ernst Cassirer's symbolic theory was used to code mythonyms according to their symbolic and cognitive modes. Bayazitova's (2018) lexicographical classification was used to code dialectal-regional distribution and ritual context, while Khisamitdinova's (2010) classification was applied to code the functional and therapeutic roles of mythonyms. Using these coding categories, each mythonym was systematically annotated before qualitative interpretation and cross-linguistic comparison. Building on this systematic annotation, we then evaluated how metaphorical thinking organizes natural and domestic spaces, examining how spirits function as "moral regulators" of human environmental and social behavior. For instance, the water spirit acts as a cognitive guard prohibiting the pollution of water sources, translating environmental ethics into mythological taboos.

4. Results

The empirical analysis of our compiled corpus of 512 mythonymic units revealed two major categories of mythonyms reflecting the traditional spatial model of Turkic cosmology: theonyms (referring to the supreme upper-world deities) and demonyms (referring to terrestrial, domestic, and lower-class spirits). Quantitatively, theonyms represent 18.4% of the corpus (94 units), while demonyms constitute the dominant portion at 81.6% (418 units).

4.1. Quantitative Distribution of Theonyms and Demonyms

The distribution of theonyms and demonyms varies significantly across the four regional branches, reflecting differences in geographical environments, historical pathways of religious conversion, and dialectal preservation patterns (Table 2).

Table 2
Quantitative Distribution of Theonyms and Demonyms by Regional Branch

Language Branch	Total Units	Theonyms (n / %)	Demonyms (n / %)	Key Lexical Characteristic
Tatar (Dialectal)	218	34 / 15.6%	184 / 84.4%	High density of domestic and street 'Iyase' spirits
Bashkir	118	22 / 18.6%	96 / 81.4%	Prevalence of therapeutic and protective demonyms
Chuvash	102	26 / 25.5%	76 / 74.5%	Strong preservation of the pagan cosmological pantheon
Turkish (Anatolia)	74	12 / 16.2%	62 / 83.8%	High integration of Oghuz heroic/Islamic syncretism
Total Corpus Base	512	94 / 18.4%	418 / 81.6%	Overall average spatial distribution ratio

Table 2 shows that Tatar and Bashkir, being Volga-Ural Kipchak languages, exhibit a very high proportion of demonyms, particularly domestic spirits. This is due to the dense settlement patterns and the long history of rural farming and local craftsmanship. In contrast, Chuvash displays a remarkably high proportion of theonyms, indicating a strong preservation of their pre-Christian, pagan cosmological pantheon. Turkish, representing the Oghuz branch in Anatolia, has a lower total number of extracted active folk-mythonymic units, but displays a high rate of Islamic syncretism, where many lower spirits have been linguistically renamed or absorbed under the umbrella of Islamic categories.

4.2. Celestial Theonyms: The Upper World Hierarchy

The celestial theonyms identified in the corpus represent the highest level of the Turkic mythological hierarchy and reflect the complex, multi-layered spiritual cosmology of Turkic peoples. These figures are historically linked to the ancient Tengerian state religion of the early nomadic empires, but have undergone profound resemanticization over time.

Umay: A female sacred figure associated with fertility, motherhood, childbirth, and the protection of children. Etymological analysis of the primary data (S1, S4) shows that the name evolved in Tatar through the forms omai → ymai → may, where the root may semanticizes abundance, oil, and prosperity (Ahmetjanov, 2015). Early Orkhon runic inscriptions (7th-8th c.) establish her sacred status alongside Tengri, depicting her as the celestial protector of newborn children and warriors. Our comparative analysis reveals a clear dialectal split: while Siberian Tatars actively maintain Umay as a protective spirit of childbirth and female energy (S3), in Kazan Tatar folklore, her image has faded, being replaced by generalized maternal protective titles such as Babaylar or Analar (Urmancheev, 2008). In Bashkir folklore, she survives under the cognate *humay*, often conceptualized as a magical bird of paradise that brings good fortune and political legitimacy to those she shadows. In Chuvash mythology, a related maternal-protective figure survives as Ama (Yum-Ama). In Anatolian Turkish tradition, comparable protective maternal imagery is preserved in Umay Ana, especially in beliefs associated with childbirth, newborns, and postpartum care.

Yer-Su: The personification of the sacred Earth and Water deity governing the Middle World. Based on our semantic mapping of the Yer-Su lexical entries across the corpus (S1, S5, S6), this theonym does not represent a singular, anthropomorphic deity. Instead, Yer-Su acts as a collective term that sacralizes the immediate geographic landscape, consolidating physical elements, such as mountains, rivers, lakes, and ancestral territories, into a single, unified spiritual home. This conceptualization represents a core environmental ethic in traditional Turkic cosmology. Human interaction with Yer-Su is governed by strict laws of gratitude and conservation; physical violation of the soil, cutting down sacred groves (*keremetin* Chuvash), or polluting springs was believed to immediately invoke the wrath of the Earth-Water deity, resulting in illness or agricultural famine. In Chuvash tradition, related sacred landscape and ancestral protection are reflected in Kiremet, a holy grove and ritual space associated with spirits and communal offerings. In Anatolian Turkish tradition, comparable concepts survive in Yer Iyesi and Su Iyesi, as well as in sacred places connected with ziyaret and adak yeri, which preserve the older association between land, water, and spiritual guardianship.

4.3. Terrestrial Demonyms: The Lower World and Everyday Spirits

The findings demonstrate that demonyms constitute a separate, highly active layer of mythological nomenclature associated with everyday life, domestic spaces, and natural boundaries. These figures are intimately woven into the fabric of daily activities, representing localized masters or "guardians" (Iyase / Eyesi) of specific micro-territories.

Bichura: A domestic cellar-dwelling spirit in Tatar and Bashkir folklore (S2, S5). It is characterized by mischief, dual emotional states, and close attachment to the house's master. Etymologically, the term is believed to have deep pre-Turkic roots, potentially linked to Uralic substratum languages, reflecting ancient ecological contacts. Bichura is believed to help with household tasks if treated with respect (left with food offerings in the cellar), but can cause domestic havoc, breaking dishes and making strange noises, if the house's cleanliness or moral codes are neglected.

Oy Iyase: The spirit-master of the house (S3). Our data shows this term is highly productive in dialectal Tatar, with 12 distinct localized phonetic variants (e.g., Öy Eyähe in Bashkir, Ört-Iye in Chuvash, Ev Sahibi in Turkish). The house-master is conceptualized as an invisible old man wearing traditional clothing, living behind the oven or under the floorboards. He represents the ultimate guardian of family continuity, domestic economy, and patriarchal order.

Su Anasy: The water mother (S2, S7), acting as a powerful boundary spirit regulating human interaction with rivers and wells. In Tatar folklore, she is depicted as a beautiful woman with long green or black hair, sitting on a riverbank, combing her hair with a gold comb. If a human steals her comb, she pursues them, bringing floods or misfortune. Su Anasy represents the psychological personification of the dangers of deep water, acting as a powerful moral deterrent preventing children from swimming unsupervised and keeping the community from polluting communal water sources.

Urman Iyase: The forest spirit-master (S3, S6), equivalent to the Bashkir Yurman Eyähe, Chuvash Arşuri, and Turkish Orman Adamı. He is the master of the wild, untamed forest, capable of leading hunters astray or protecting them.

Table 3

Comparative Linguistic and Semantic Mapping of Core Demonyms

Demonym	Tatar Variant	Bashkir Equivalent	Chuvash Equivalent	Turkish Counterpart	Source Code
House Spirit	*Oy Iyase*	*Öy Eyähe*	*Ört-Iye*	*Ev Sahibi*	S3, S5, S6
Water Spirit	*Su Anasy*	*Hıu Anahı*	*Vıra-Amăsh*	*Su Kızı / Sahibi*	S2, S5, S7
Forest Spirit	*Urman Iyase*	*Yurman Eyähe*	*Arşuri*	*Orman Adamı*	S3, S5, S6
Cellar Spirit	*Bichura*	*Bıcura*	*Iye (general)*	*Gulyabani (part.)*	S2, S5

Regarding animal taboos, according to the early lexicographic records of Al-Kashgari (2010), the taboo name of the bear was aba (or apa), which also bore the meaning of 'ancestor' or 'father' in the Kipchak dialects. This lexical crossover is highly significant, reflecting ancient circumpolar bear cults and totemism where the bear was not viewed as a simple beast, but as an ancestor-relation requiring polite linguistic mitigation. Similarly, regarding the sacred hunting canine Barak, Al-Kashgari records that it was mythologically believed to be hatched from an egg of the divine bird (Zümrüd-ü Anka), representing a celestial, non-terrestrial origin. This link between animal taboos and mythological ancestry is further documented in modern ethnographic fieldwork by Bayazitova (2018), who noted that rural Turkic hunters still use euphemistic expressions when tracking forest game to avoid direct, disrespectful naming.

4.4. Syncretic Adaptations: Islamic Integration and Semantic Shifts

Our analysis of the extracted Islamic-derived mythonyms (accounting for 14.5% of the demonym corpus) reveals a unique process of semantic vernacularization. Rather than erasing pre-Islamic beliefs, the introduction of monotheistic Islam triggered a complex, creative hybridization of lexical items.

While classical Islamic theology defines the 'Jinn' as general metaphysical entities created from smokeless fire, existing in parallel dimensions unseen by humans, the folk narratives of the Tatar and Bashkir peoples (Ahmetjanov, 2015; Khisamitdinova, 2010) have localized these figures, mapping them directly onto indigenous, pre-Islamic spirits. In Tatar oral spells and folk tales, the Jinn is assigned highly specific, physical, earthly locations (e.g., bathhouses, barn lofts, or cellars) and domestic habits. The abstract theological concept has been transformed into a concrete, territorial household spirit that behaves exactly like the ancient Oy Iyase or Yen.

Similarly, Khozyr Ilyas represents a highly prominent syncretic character combining ancient Turkic land-patronage and water-master cults with the Islamic prophets Al-Khidr (the Green One) and Ilyas (Elijah). Our comparative analysis of folk legends (S4, S5) demonstrates that in both Tatar and Bashkir traditions, Khozyr Ilyas is conceptualized as a white-bearded, immortal traveler who wanders the earth, granting agricultural blessings, protecting lost travelers, and ensuring soil fertility. This hybridization illustrates how pre-Islamic ancestral protection systems successfully co-opted Islamic hagiography to maintain their semantic and functional relevance under a monotheistic theology, allowing the ancient environmental and familial ethics of Turkic societies to persist in a culturally approved, religiously legitimate vocabulary.

5. Discussion

By synthesizing our empirical results with our theoretical framework, we can evaluate the broader implications of Turkic mythonymy according to the four primary objectives established in this study. The rich comparative data gathered across Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish traditions demonstrates that onomastics is not a marginal branch of historical linguistics, but is an invaluable diagnostic tool for reconstructing cognitive histories, migration pathways, and ethnocultural transformations.

Evaluation of Cognitive Foundations (Objective 1): Applying Ernst Cassirer's (1955) Philosophy of Symbolic Forms allows us to move beyond structuralist lists and view Turkic mythonyms as active mental schemas rather than mere archaic relics. Our results demonstrate that metaphorical thinking is the primary engine of mythonymic production (Ogel, 2010). Physical micro-territories (such as cellars, forests, rivers, and bathhouses) are not simply designated; they are personified as Iyase (master-spirits) to regulate human environmental and moral behavior. This supports the concept that mythonyms act as symbolic filters through which physical survival and spiritual coordination are integrated (Cassirer, 1955)

In a traditional rural society, human-spirit relationships are structured as a series of reciprocal obligations. This structure represents what anthropologists call a "moral economy of nature." For example, the Su Anasy (Water Mother) is not merely a figure of fright; her myth serves to enforce ecological cleanliness (Bayazitova, 2018; Urmancheev, 2008). By personifying the river as a mother-spirit who combs her hair and guards her territory, the community establishes a cognitive barrier against polluting the local water supply. Similarly, the Oy Iyase (House Spirit) functions as an invisible moral watchdog; he is believed to punish families that engage in domestic conflict, marital infidelity, or economic wastefulness (Bayazitova et al., 2009). In this sense, mythonyms translate social ethics and survival requirements into performative, emotionally powerful linguistic signs, illustrating Cassirer's claim that myth is an active, ordering form of human consciousness (Cassirer, 1955; Nikitina, 1993).

Evaluation of Spatial and Functional Hierarchies (Objective 2): The quantitative mapping of our 512-unit corpus (Table 2) validates the spatial dichotomy of Turkic cosmology. The higher world is governed by supreme theonyms, which represent abstract cosmic principles like fertility (Umay) and geographic totality (Yer-Su) (Beydili, 2005; Ogel, 2010; Urmancheev, 2008). This quantitative distribution suggests that although higher cosmological theology remained symbolically important, the daily spiritual life and ritual practice of Turkic communities were primarily anchored in immediate physical and domestic realities. In this respect, demonyms functioned as active figures in everyday moral, ecological, and psychological interaction, whereas celestial theonyms remained more distant and were invoked mainly in major life transitions or collective crises. In contrast, the middle

and lower worlds are populated by a dense network of localized demonyms (Khisamitdinova, 2010; Urmancheev, 2011). This highly unequal distribution demonstrates that the active, daily linguofolklore of Turkic peoples is primarily concerned with practical, domestic, and immediate environmental relations rather than distant, abstract theological speculations. This spatial hierarchy reflects the historical socio-economic realities of Turkic communities. While the administrative elites of the ancient nomadic empires required a centralized, grand celestial deity (Tengri) to legitimize state authority and organize political hierarchies, the everyday life of the pastoralists, farmers, and hunters depended on local pastures, forests, and home shelters. Consequently, when the official state Tengrism collapsed or was replaced by world religions, the celestial theonyms either faded or were absorbed into monotheistic theology (e.g., Tengri becoming Tengre or Yaratkan in Tatar, synonymous with Allah). However, the terrestrial demonyms, being anchored in the immediate, unchanging tasks of daily survival and domestic safety, exhibited incredible resilience, remaining virtually unaffected by the theological shifts of the ruling class.

Evaluation of Comparative-Typological Parameters (Objective 3): The comparative data reveal an extraordinary degree of typological and semantic consistency across the Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish branches, despite centuries of geographic separation, varied migration pathways, and distinct socio-political developments. The structural roles of the house-spirit, water-mother, and forest-master remain virtually identical (Beydili, 2005; Chuvash mythology, 2018). This high consistency suggests a shared, ancient Oghuz-Kipchak-Oghur cosmological template that exhibits immense cognitive resilience against regional dialectal drift and external cultural pressures (Ogel, 2010). For example, when comparing the Tatar Oy Iyase with the Bashkir Öy Eyähe, the Chuvash Ört-Iye, and the Turkish Ev Sahibi, we observe not only phonetic cognates (with systematic sound shifts such as Tatar y to Bashkir h and Chuvash r/t), but also a perfect mapping of functional attributes (Bayazitova et al., 2009). All four spirits reside in the same domestic micro-spaces, perform the same protective duties, and demand the same forms of emotional and ritual respect. This high level of typological correspondence across geographically non-contiguous regions suggests that the core mythological vocabulary of the Turkic peoples was fully stabilized before the major medieval migrations and divisions. It proves that despite deep linguistic divergence, the Turkic ethnocultural space remains bound by a unified semantic and cognitive matrix (Gilazova et al., 2023).

Semantic Vernacularization and Cultural Translation (Objective 4): Our results regarding Islamic integration illuminate how mythonyms serve as active mechanisms of cultural preservation and translation rather than passive casualties of religious conversion. Rather than erasing pre-Islamic beliefs, monotheistic integration triggered a dynamic process of "semantic vernacularization" and "adaptive syncretism." When Islamic monotheism was introduced, classical theological categories such as Jinn, Satan, and Angels were not adopted in their abstract, canonical definitions. Instead, the Turkic linguofolklore forced these abstract figures to adapt to pre-existing, local, territorial templates. The classical Jinn was localized, split into various domestic species (like the bathhouse jinn, cellar jinn), and mapped onto the attributes of the ancient animistic Yen or Bichura (Campo, 2009). Similarly, ancient land-patronage and ancestor cults were preserved by mapping them onto the hagiography of Islamic prophets, most notably Khozyr Ilyas (combining Khidr and Elijah) (Ogel, 2010; Urmancheev, 2008; Beydili, 2005). This hybridization allowed pre-Islamic ancestral protection systems to maintain their semantic and functional relevance under a monotheistic framework (Beydili, 2005). This demonstrates that mythological naming systems possess a high degree of cognitive plasticity, serving as active linguistic instruments for translating historical identity into contemporary religious and social realities, ensuring cultural continuity across generations (Cassirer, 1955).

In conclusion, the comparative evidence presented in this study shows that Turkic mythonyms function not merely as lexical relics, but as enduring symbolic structures that preserve ecological ethics, kinship models, and collective memory across different Turkic traditions (Sarsenbekova & Kudaibergen, 2024). Their semantic continuity across Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, and Turkish materials confirms that mythological language remains a productive medium for understanding cultural adaptation, historical transformation, and the persistence of shared cosmological patterns (Enderov, 2019).

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Data Availability

The data supporting this study are derived from the lexicographic and ethnographic sources listed in Section 3.1. The compiled corpus of 512 mythonymic units and the associated coding framework are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Declaration

No ethical approval was required for this study, as it relied exclusively on publicly available published linguistic and folkloric sources without any human or animal subject involvement.

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