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THE TURKIC LOAN WORDS IN MIDDLE MONGOLIAN

by

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The Mongols received their script from the Uighurs at the beginning of the XIIIth century or a little earlier. The earliest Turkic influence upon the Mongolian languages probably dates from the time of the Orkhon Turks, i.e. from the VIIIth century A.D., but we have no facts corroborating this hypothesis.

The oldest Mongolian translations of Buddhist books were made from Uighur. These translations contained numerous Turkic (Uighur) words, e. g. siimbiir tay "the Mountain Sumeru" (tay "mountain"), čaw (čau or čab) "fame", ayay-qa tegimlig "šramaňa" (ayay-qa is a native of the Uighur word ayay "honour"), qvaray "monk, clergy", etc. Many proper names and titles of historical persons were of Turkic origin as far back as the XIIth century, e. g. buyrury, küllü, etc.

So far very little has been done to investigate the Turkic loan words in Mongolian. There is an old article by Vladimirts, but at the time of its publication so little was known about the relation of Mongolian to the Turkic languages that Vladimirts had almost no criterion for deciding whether all the words he discussed were borrowings or were words of common Turco-Mongolian origin. The inevitable result was that his article contains many words which are not borrowings at all. Therefore, the whole problem must be examined anew.

This article is devoted to the Turkic loan words in Middle Mongolian as known on the basis of the Secret History (1240), the documents written in the hP'ags-pa script (1269–1368), and the Hua-i-i-yü (1389). Some Turkic words common to these texts occur also in the Moslem sources on Middle Mongolian, i.e. in the Leyden manuscript (1245), the dictionary Mtswaddlml al-Adab (XIVth century), and the glossary of Ibn Muhannâ. The latter sources contain many more Turkic as well as Arabic and Persian words, but it is questionable whether all of them really occurred in the colloquial language. The authors of these dictionaries and glossaries included many words of this kind, because their informants were polyglot and when asked to translate a word into Mongolian they often took an Arabic or Persian word which occurred to them more or less at random. Therefore, the only words from the Moslem sources that are discussed in this article are those which corroborate the data of the Secret History and the other documents mentioned above.

The Turkic borrowings in Middle Mongolian are among the most ancient Turkic loan words in Mongolian. Most of these words can be traced in Ancient Turkic (AT), Middle Turkic (MT), Kuman (K), and other old languages. Some words taken from Turkic are Persian or Arabic in origin. Nevertheless they are treated here as Turkic borrowings, because they penetrated into Mongolian through a Turkic medium. In this connection may I remark that Vladimirts devoted one article to the Indo-European and another to the Arabic loan words in Mongolian. However, most of these words were borrowed by the Mongols from Turkic and not directly from Tokharian, Sogdian, or Arabic. Therefore, the Arabic and Persian words are not separated from original Turkic

2 At that time the affinity of the Turkic and Mongolian languages was still hypothetical; cf. Julius Németh, 'Die türkisch-mongolische Hypothese,' ZDMG, LXVI, pp. 549–577.
3 Erich Haenisch, Wörterbuch zu Manghol un niuca tobo'an (Yüan-ch'ao pi-shi), Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen, Leipzig, 1939 (SH). The numbers refer to the pages. The transcription used in this article is that of Pelliot and the Reverend Antoine Mostaert.

4 N. N. Poppe, Kvardaarnaya pis'mennost', Moskva-Leningrad, 1941 (P). The numbers refer to the pages of the glossary.
7 N. N. Poppe, Mongol'skii Slovar' Mkaaddlam al-Adab, Čast' I-II, Moskva-Leningrad, 1938 (Mu.).
8 Spisok mongolskix slov iz glossariya Ibn-Muxanny po izdaniyu Muallima Rif'ata (Istanbul, 1921), Appendix IV to the work quoted in the preceding footnote (I).
9 S. E. Malov, Pamyatniki drevnyurkhske pis'mennost', Tekсты i issledovaniya, Moskva-Leningrad, 1951.
words in this article. Such Arabic or Persian words occur also in modern Mongolian languages, e.g. Mo. (Written Mongolian) gindän, Kh. (Khalkha) ginday “jail” < Turk. (e. g. Özbek) zindan < Pers. zindán “jail”; Kalm. (Kalmuck) zembl “basket” < Tatar < Pers. zambil; Kalm. azyn “evening” < Tatar ażam < Arabic aṣṣan id., etc. There is no reason to separate such words from Turkic, because their immediate source was a Turkic language.

The Turkic loan words in Middle Mongolian are as follows:


alaçu “tent” SH 4 < Turk.: MT alaçu id., K alaçuq “hut” > Russian lačuğa “hut”.

alań “the bottom of a cart” SH 4 < Turk.: Alt., Tel., Leb., Shor. alń “bottom, the lower part of an object, the place under an object”, Yak. alń “the lower part”, MT alń “the front side”, K alń “front, forehead”.

alaša “a particular breed of horses” SH 4 < Turk.: Kas., Krm. alaša “gelding”, Osm. alašça “horse”.

arał “island” SH 8, as a place name H 59, cf. Mu. M 104 “island”, Mo., Kh., Ord. (Ordos), Bur. aral, Kalm. arlı, Mong. (Mongol) arań id. < Turk.: AT aral “forest, grove” (“an island in the steppe”), Kirg. aral “island”.

arńy “pure” in arń usun “clean water” (a place name) SH 9, cf. Mong. arńa “clean”, AT, MT arń “clean”. The Mongolian forms are Mo. arńun, MMo. arńun, Bur. arńy, Kh. arńy, Ord. arńın, Kalm. arńın “pure, clean, immaculate, holy”, Mong. arńyän id.


bars “tiger” SH 13, P 146 bars id., L 1265 bars id., Mo. bars, Kh. bars – bars – bar, Ord. bar, Kalm. bars id. < Turk.: AT, MT bars “tiger”.

bezirigi “merchants” (a plural from bezirin) H 50 < Turk.: K bazaran “merchant” < Pers. bāzār “merchant”.

bor “wine” SH 19, Mu. 121 < Turk.: MT, K bor id.


erinči “world” H 51, cf. P 159 ėrinči, Mo. yirinči, Kh. yörim “id.” < Turk.: AT yirinči id. < Tibet. ēg-iten id.


jad “stranger, foreigner” SH 87 (the translation “people” given in the Wörterbuch is not correct), cf. Mu. 203 jat id. < Turk.: AT, MT, K yat “strange, foreign”.

kėbi “shop” P 152 < Turk.: MT, K kеbit “shop, store” > Russ. kibitka “yurt”.

kibča “the Kipchak Turks” SH 179, a plural from kibč “< Turk.: MT kipcak, K kipcak id.

kirkis “the Kirgiz” SH 179, a plural from kirgis < Turk.: AT, MT
qurys id. Cf. also Kh. qurys id. and qurgür < kirgis egür “an ancient tomb”, lit. “a Kirgis nest”.

xistbashi name of a lake SH 179 < Turk. qızıl “red” and baš “head”.

kitiliq a personal name SH 179 < Turk. qılıq “pertaining or referring to the winter”.

körüs “the neighbours” H 54, cf. I 440 körși “neighbour”, Mo. körși, Bur. qürsi < Turk.: MT körși “friend”, Yuk. körusi “lover” from körși “to see each other”.


naqhd or naqad “money, coins” SH 113 (the translation “gold ore” given there is not correct), cf. Mu. 245 naqad “cash” < Turk.: Osm. naqq “cash”, K naqid id. < Arab. naqda “cash”.


öliq “dead”, ölimlegii “to be engaged in life or death struggle” SH 124 < Turk.: MT öliq “dead”, K öli id., MT ölim “death”, K ölim id.

öriq “rest, peace, quiet” SH 128, cf. Mo. öriq id.14 < Turk.: MT örlük bol- “to take a rest”.

qaban “tiger” SH 54 (the translation “the name of a predatory animal” is not accurate), cf. L 62 qaban “tiger” < Turk.: Kir., KK Kir. qaban id.


qalbısh soltan “the Calif, the Sultan” SH 176 < Turk. qaliba < Arab. qaliba “Calif”.

qan melig a personal name SH 176 < Turk.: Osm. melik “king” < Arab. malik id.

qarshi “palace” SH 62, Mo. qarshi, Kh.ordo qarshi id., Kalm. qarshi id. < Turk.: MT, Chag. qarshi id. < Kučan kerciye or Sanskrit giriha “house”.

qoș “tent, a travel tent” SH 68 (the translation “house” is not quite correct), cf. Kalm. qoș “a temporary tent” < Turk.: Kir. qoș “a temporary dwelling, a hut”, Chag. qoș “camp”.

qoşly “tent” SH 68, cf. the preceding word.


sarguld “meat for sacrifices” SH 132 < Turk.: Kir. sarqut “the left overs of food given to inferior persons”, Chag. sargul “grace, favour, food”, Mo. sarqul and Kh. sarqul, Ord. sarqul “wine” is probably the same word, although its meaning is different.

sirge “vinegar” S 60,15 cf. Mu. 323 sirke (or sirge) id. < Turk.: MT, K sirke id.


tegirmen “mills” P 157 < Turk.: MT, Chag. tegirmen “mill”, K tegirmen (tegirmen) id.; cf. Mo. tegerme, Kh. tarem, Kalm. term “mill”.


toyin “a buddhist monk” H 57, cf. P 149 doyid “monks”, cf. Mo. toyin, Kh. toyin, Kalm. tân “a buddhist monk of noble origin” < Turk.: AT toyin “monk”, Yak. toyin “master, chief” < Chinese tao-jên.16

toyi “front line, battle line” SH 152 < Turk.: MT toy “military camp”, toyila- “to dance” SH 152 < Turk.: Kir. toylu- “to celebrate, to make a festival”.


turas “quadrangular shields” SH 154, a plural from tura < Turk.: MT tura “shield, parapet.” Mo. tura “building”, Bur. tura “house, town, city”, Bur. buryaq tura “church”, Kh. tura “city” is the same word and is also a loan.17

turyaq “watch, guard”, plur. turyaq’d Sh 155 < Turk.: Uig., Chag. turyaq “night watch, night guard, sentry” from tur- “to stand”.

uluy tay a place name SH 183 < Turk.: AT, MT uluy “big, great” and tay “mountain”.


uruy tariy “relatives” H 56 < Turk.: MT uruy tariy id.
yalavači a personal name SH 184 < Turk.: AT yalabač “messenger”, MT yalavač “messenger, prophet”.