OLD TURKIC LITERARY TRADITION IN THE "SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS"[1]

Cultural continuity and relations of the nomads of Inner Asia

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The significance of the "Secret History of the Mongols" (*Mongγol-un Niγuča Tobčiyan*) concerning the historical and cultural studies on the Mongols has been emphasised by many[2] as it also has been made evident that it not only had influence on other major written sources of the following centuries, but this rare piece of literature also preserved much of the cultural-historical traditions of the nomadic peoples and empires preceding that of the Mongols.

Probably the most evident and at the same time the most interesting, is the relation between the Mongol Empire and the ancient Turks. Though a long period of time stands between the two, the empire of Činggis was in so many ways connected to the Old Turkic traditions that it inevitably raises questions that we must not leave untouched.

Let me mention a few of the main facts concerning the above-mentioned relation. First of all, we have to consider that both empires took their origin from the very same territory, namely the valley of the Orkhon River. Considering the fact that this smaller territorial unit fell outside the interest of the nomad empires following the fall of the Turkic Uighur (and Kirgiz) Empire it is not at all surprising that the Turkic traditions survived through the centuries, not being overwhelmed by other, characteristically different cultures.

Besides the common geographical position of the two empires there are a number of features of the Mongols that show similarity to those of the Turks. One interesting point is the military tradition. Not only the division of the army into 'tümän'-s, a Turkic loan-word in Mongolian meaning a great unit of ten thousand men,[3] but the very structure of the Mongolian Army was based on the Turkic one.

As we know from Marco Polo, the Mongolian army was divided into three parts.[4] One third was infantry in help of one part of the cavalry, and the last third was cavalry on its own.[5] The same division is known of the Turks as it appears in the inscriptions of Toñuquq:

[1] The author expresses his gratitude for Professor Vásáry István's advices to the final version of this paper.

[2] Although opinions are devided as to its historical value, great scholars, like Vladimirtsov or Ligeti, appreciate the text as a most valuable one.

[3] The etymology of the word *tümän* is quite dubious, though Doerfer seems quite sure of its being an innate – "echt und ursprünglich" – Turkish word, and refuses to accept its Indo-Germanic origin, cf. Doerfer, Gerhard: *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupersischen* II. Steiner, Wiesbaden 1965, pp. 640–642, whatever may be its origin, however, it seems to be a borrowing from Turkic into Mongolian.

[4] Sinor, Denis: Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History. In: *Oriens Extremus* 19/1–2 (1972) Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden – Hamburg, pp. 172–173.

[5] "with each man on horse in the first squadrons was a man on foot behind at the crupper of the horse with lance in hand…", cf. Moule, Arthur–Christopher – Pelliot, Paul: *Marco Polo. The Description of the World.* I. London 1938, p. 197.

two parts (of them) were mounted and one part was on foot.[6] The same strategy appears in the Uighur inscription of Šine-usu (South 9): "my army … three…five hundred lightly-armoured (?) infantries, separately one or two at a time, came to me".[7]

We also know that Činggis Qan took the example of the Kereyid Ong Qan in forming his own state, as we see it at the setting of guards.[8] Accepting the assumption that the Kereyids were of Turkic origin, we are presumably right in recognising it as a model of integrating Turkic institutions into the developing empire of the Mongols.

Another clear point is religion and religious beliefs. The mere fact that the Mongol Empire refused to replace the ancient shamanistic religious system with one of the great religions is worthy of attention. What is more significant is that this religious system, which was complex enough to stand as a state-religion, was the same as that of the Turks. Both Turks and Mongols worshipped one almighty supreme power, the creator of all things: the eternal blue sky, or heaven, i.e. the Turkic *kök täñri* and the Mongol *tngri*.

Other religious beliefs and customs are known of both peoples, like fire-cult: a quite similar ceremony of purification by fire is known of the Turks told by Menandros (fragment 20)[9] and of the Mongols put down by Plano Carpini.[10] In both cases the messengers or envoys were purified by being led through between two fires before they were allowed to meet the khagan or khan:

> "The following is an example of this: when, recently, Michael, one of the Grand Dukes of Russia, had come to subject himself to Batu, they first of all made him pass between two fires. Then, they ordered him to bow toward the South in front of Chinggiz Khan. But he replied he would be pleased to bow before Batu and even his servants, but never before the image of a dead man, since this was not allowed to a Christian."[11]

However, the Turkic peoples (Turks, Uighurs and Kirgiz) and the Mongols have their own written sources that have come down to us. Those sources tell even more about their interactions and cultural relationship.

Obviously, I am not the first to note the linguistic aspects of the correlation of the inscriptions of ancient Turks and the Secret History of the Mongols. It is remarkable that not

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[6] "*...eki ülwǘ atlïγ ärDi bir ülwǘ yaδaγ ärDi*" (Toñuquq, West 4), cf. Berta Árpád: *Szavaimat jól halljátok ...* JATE Press, Szeged 2004, pp. 44–45.

[7] Berta Á.: *Szavaimat jól halljátok ...* p. 311. (translation), p. 295 "*mäniñ süm üč ...p berDi tuγ...ar beš yüz käδimliγ́ yaδaγ biriki šašïp kälDi...*".

[8] Ligeti, Lajos (ed., transl.): *A mongolok titkos története.* Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest 1962, pp. 152, 160, 166 (see notes).

[9] Lukinich, I.: (transl.): *Menander Protector.* Brassó 1905, p 105. This translation was based on Müller, Carl: *Fragm. Hist. Graec.* IV. p. 227.

[10] Iohannes de Plano Carpini: Ystoria Mongalorum. Ch.3. In: *Sinica Franciscana. Vol.1: Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV.* Ed. by P. A. Wyngaert, Quaracchi – Firenze 1929, p. 38: "Unde nuper contigit quod Michael qui fuit unus de magnis ducibus Ruscie, cum ivisset ad reddendum se Bati, fecerunt eum prius inter duos ignes transire. Post hoc dixerunt ei quod ad meridiem Chiniscan inclinaret; qui respondit quod Bati et servis suis inclinaret libenter, sed ymagini hominis mortui non inclinaret, quia non licet hoc facere christianis.".

[11] Spuler, Berthold: *History of the Mongols.* Transl. by H. Drummond – S. Drummond, University of California Press, Berkley – Los Angeles 1972, pp. 72–73.

only parts of the mythology and customs of the Turks are reflected in the Mongol text, but the linguistic means of their description as well.[12]

However, there is one point where the use of Turkic literary tradition appears in the form of a poetic device probably alluding to the Turkic origin of Tooril. His words have strong reminiscences of those of Türk khagans known from the Orkhon inscriptions. Perhaps the most apparent example of this can be seen in the part when Ong Qan (i. e. Tooril), in turn for the present given him by Činggis, promises to collect his people, who had dispersed, that is to re-organise the state.[13] Its being repeated once more shows the emphasis on this verse. (SH 104)

Buluqan daqu-yin qari' u	"In return for the coat of black sables
butaraqsan ulus-i činu	I shall *collect* for thee
bügütgeldüǰü öksü	*Thy people which have separated themselves.*
qara buluqan daqu-yin qari' u	In return for the coat of black sables
qaqačaqsan ulus-i činu	I shall *gather* for thee
qamtutqalduǰu öksü[14]	Thy people which have dispersed themselves."[15]

The same motif of losing the people shows up again when in a reverse situation Ong Qan is to ask the help of Činggis to recover his power after the attack of the Naiman (SH 163):

> "Aforetime I was delivered by his good father [in respect of] *my people which were wholly departed* like this. Now again, of my son, I have been saved [in respect of] *my people which were wholly departed*."[16]

> "*erde sayin ečige-de inu ene metü odun baraqsan ulus-iyan aburaǰu öktele'e edö'e basa kö'ün-ü'en odun barqsan ulus-i minu*"[17]

And in SH 164:

> "Mine anda, Yesügei Ba'atur, once saved for me *my people which were wholly departed*. [His] son, Temüjin again hath saved *my people which were departed*. And he hath given [them unto me]. When these, both father and son *assemble and give unto me the people which were entirely departed* on whose behalf do they suffer, assembling and giving [them]?"[18]

[12] Bira, Sh.: The "Mongyol-un Niγuča Tobčiyan" and the Legend and Folktale Contacts of Nomadic Peoples. In: *Altaic Religious Beliefs and Practices. Proceedings of the 33rd Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference*. Ed. by Géza Bethlenfalvy – Ágnes Birtalan – Alice Sárközi – Judit Vinkovics, Budapest 1990, pp. 31–35, p. 31.
[13] See parts 96, 104.
[14] Ligeti, Louis: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1971, p. 62.
[15] Cleaves, Francis W. (transl.): *The Secret History of the Mongols.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 1982, p. 33.
[16] Cleaves, F. W.: *The Secret History of the Mongols.* pp. 86–87.
[17] Ligeti, L.: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* p. 115.
[18] Cleaves, F. W.: *The Secret History of the Mongols*. pp. 87–88.

Yisügei-ba'atur anda minu odun baraqsan ulus minu nikente aburaǰu ökbe Temüǰin kö'ün basa oduqsan ulus minu aburaǰu'u ökbe ede ečige kö'ün qoyar odun baraqsan ulus nada quriyaǰu ögürün ken-ü emüne quriyaǰu ögün ǰobomui[19]

The collecting ('assembling') of the people as a motif also turns up again, more than once, like in part 167 (Sengüm speaking to Ong):

"…will suffer *thy people* which thy father Qurčaqus Buyiruγ Qan, with labour, *assembled* in so great quantity to be governed by us?"[20]

Qurčaqus-buyiruq qan ečige-yin činu ǰoban edüi quriyaǰu aqsan ulusi činu mana'ū mede'ülgü[21]

Here, like in the name or rather title of the Turk and Uighur khagans *El-teris* i.e. 'the assembler of the people',[22] we see the concept of creating a nomadic state, what's more, its poetic expression, at the same time. In the inscription of Köl Tegin, for instance, the re-creation of the empire is expressed with quite similar words (Kül Tegin S. 10):

"I *collected* all *the* destitute poor *people*, I made the poor people rich"[23]

yoq čïγañ boδwnwγ qop quβrat°δïm čïγañ boδwnwγ bay qïldïm[24]

The losing and recovering of the empire shown in the above passage is again a chief motif of the Orkhon Inscripts, especially those of Köl Tegin and Bilgä Qaγan. At the same time, this motif together with many other ones partly mentioned above shows up more than this one occasion in MNT and not only with the words of Ong Qan. Even Činggis himself, speaks such words when he becomes the great Qan of the Mongols (SH 212):

"Again, when Činggis Qahan spake unto Tolun, he made a decree, saying, How [is it that ye] father and son, are to command [each] a separate thousand? Because, [aforetime] *together assembling the people*, being one of the two wings of [thy] father, [thou] didst together draw and didst *together assemble the people*…"[25]

basa Činggis qahan Tolun-a ügülerün ečige kö'ün ö'ere minqa ker medegü büle'e či ulus quriyaldun ečige-deče öröle ǰi'ür bolun ǰiktüldüǰü ulus quriyalduqsan[26]

Like the Turkic word *el*, the Mongolian word *ulus* refers to the nomadic state and not simply to common people. The common people in the Orkhon Inscriptions (*boδwn*)[27] and in the SH

[19] Ligeti, L.: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* pp. 115–116.
[20] Cleaves, F. W.: *The Secret History of the Mongols.* p. 91.
[21] Ligeti, L.: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* p. 119.
[22] Berta Á.: *Szavaimat jól halljátok* ... p. 47.
[23] Translation by Clauson, given by Berta Á.: *Szavaimat jól halljátok* ... p. 132.
[24] Berta Á.: *Szavaimat jól halljátok* ... p. 132.
[25] Cleaves, F. W.: *The Secret History of the Mongols.* p. 153.
[26] Ligeti, L.: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* p. 183.
[27] Berta Á.: *Szavaimat jól halljátok* ... p. 76.

(*irge*(*n*))[28] are referred to when speaking of the men and women or the families,[29] or in MNT as a nomadic ethnic unit.

In the MNT though it seems a bit more difficult to make difference between the two: in paragraph 153: "*...čaqan-Tatar Alči-Tatar Dutaut-Tatar Alqui-Tatar erkit irge*"[30] is translated by Ligeti as "the nobles and the common people of the Alqui-Tatars"[31] whereas Cleaves put it as "the wheighty peoples, the Čahan-Tatar, …".[32] In paragraph 208, however, we see the expression *erkit ulus* i.e. "the major states" in Ligeti's interpretation, while Cleaves gives the same expression for that as for *erkit irgen*. The reason for that ignorance of the slight difference can be the fact that in many cases the name of the nomadic state can stand for the people itself making this difference only important for the historian.

The case is not so simple even for the historian either, as it can be seen from the fact that the opinions concerning this question, relating to both the Mongol and the Turkic expressions, are various and contradictory.

Keeping in mind that I am not to give a further definition in addition to those opinions, since that is definitely not the main issue of this paper, we must refer here to some of them. As to the concept and terminology of *boδwn* and *el* we are lucky to have more useful information in our sources, which are quite consequent in using them. So we have well elaborated theories as well on the Turkic society based just on those concepts. Vásáry pointed out that the *el* meant the power and organization over or of the people rather than a territorial concept, which is characteristic to the Inner Asian nomadic state- while *boδwn* is the collective for 'clans' or 'tribes' (made from the word *boδ*).[33]

As to the Mongolian terminology, we should note here that Vladimirtsov describes *irgen* also as an alliance of clans – as we have seen at *boδwn*.[34] These are random formations changing with time. If it is organised into a "state" it is called *ulus*[35]

Here I do not aim to go deeper into the analysis of the nomadic society of the ancient Turks and the Mongols, or to draw any parallel between the two. I also avoid now a deeper linguistic study on the two texts, since it would require further investigations. I would only like to remark that the comparison of the two sources from the point of view of poetic expression, might bring precious results in such a research. As this paper has tried to demonstrate, our sorces prove not only the fact that their historical background was analogous, namely that the Turk and the Mongol states both had to struggle contiuously with the neighbouring peoples and empires building and rebuilding ("re-collecting the people") their state. They also show a deeper relation by the way of the poetic presentation.

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[28] Haenisch, Erich: *Wörterbuch zu Manghol-un niuca tobca'an (Yüan-ch'ao pi-shi). Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen.* Leipzig 1939, p. 83.

[29] See: Szűcs Jenő: *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása*, Ed. by Zimonyi István, Szeged 1992.

[30] Ligeti, L.: *Histoire Secrète des Mongols.* p. 108.

[31] Ligeti, L. (ed., transl.): *A Mongolok titkos története.* Budapest 1962, p. 56.

[32] leaves, F. W. *The Secret History of the Mongols.* pp. 81–82.

[33] Vásáry István: Nép és ország a türköknél. In: *Nomád társadalmak és államalakulatok (tanulmányok).* Ed. by: Ferenc Tőkei, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1983. Zimonyi and Szűcs also deals with this question in details on a similar basis (Zimonyi, István: Bodun und El im Frühmittelalter. In: *AOH* 56/1 (2003), pp. 57–79 and Szűcs J.: *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása.* pp. 170–185).

[34] Vladimirtsov, B. Ya.: *Le régime social des mongols. Le féodalisme nomade.* Paris 1948, p. 100.

[35] As to Clauson's opinion, the word *ulus* also comes from Turkish, and originally referred to the geographical area which is occupied by the nomadic state (i.e. the *el*). Clauson, Gerald: *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-thirteenth-century Turkish.* Clarendon, Oxford 1972, pp. 121–122.

Although it is evident that the two societies cannot be seen as identical, similarities between them and the traces of cultural continuity are of great significance.

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