

ISTANBUL FRAGMENT IN 'PHAGS-PA AND OLD UYGHUR SCRIPT REVISITED¹

MEHMET ÖLMEZ – ALEXANDER VOVIN
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ – EHESS/CRLAO

Abstract

This article represents a joint effort of a Turcologist and a Mongolist to present a new interpretation of a bilingual fragment kept in the museum section of the library of the Istanbul University and probably dating from the fifteenth century. This is likely the latest text written in 'Phags-pa Mongolian script and one of the earliest samples of pre-Chaghatay Turkic in Old Uyghur script.

Résumé

Cette article est le fruit de la recherche conjointe d'un turcologue et d'un mongolisant. Elle présente une interprétation nouvelle d'un fragment bilingue conservé au musée de l'Université d'Istanbul et datant probablement du XV^e siècle. Ce texte, peut-être le dernier qui fut écrit en alphabet mongol 'Phags-pa, un alphabet mongol, est aussi l'un des premiers exemples de turc pré-Chaghatay en écriture vieux ouïghour.

An interesting bilingual fragment is kept in the museum section of the library of the Istanbul University (F 1423). It is found in the fifteenth century compendium *Mecma' u'l-acāyib* 'Collection of curiosities' that deals with various books, samples of calligraphy, and other curiosities (see Plate III for its cover page). This fragment is in Middle Mongolian written in the 'Phags-pa script and in pre-Chaghatay in Old Uyghur script. Both texts are located on the same page accompanied with a translation to Arabic (Plate II). This fragment was initially published by Süheyl Ünver (Ünver 1958: 57-58), who has provided only photographs from the manuscript without any transcription, translation, or discussion, with the 'Phags-pa text reproduced on p. 57 and Turkic text on p. 58 of his publication. It was consequently published by Tuna and Bosson (1962), who offered an exhaustive commentary on the provenance and the description of the fragment, which we will not repeat here. It was published again several times, with or without reproduction of the original (Ligeti 1972: 123), (Damdinsüren 1986: 90), (Junast 1991: 216-219 + plate), (Tömörtogoo: 2002: 66-67), (Jančiv 2002: 144), (Hugjiltu & Sarula 2004: 514-515 + plate 52), (Sertkaya 2006)², (Tumurtoogoo 2010: 115-116 + plate 49), however, none of these studies is as detailed as Tuna and Bosson (1962). Nevertheless, we believe that in

spite of the comprehensive nature of the research by Tuna and Bosson (1962), the further improvement of the description of the 'Phags-pa script used in the fragment and its reading, as well as of the linguistic analysis, and the translation of the Middle Mongolian text are possible. In particular, we believe that obscure places in the Middle Mongolian text can be clarified on the basis of the pre-Chaghatay Turkic text, which apparently represents almost word-to-word translation of the former.

The photograph published by Tuna and Bosson (1962: 10) is barely legible. Fortunately, recently Mehmet Ölmez was able to purchase a perfectly legible copy of this fragment, which we present at the end of this short article as Plate I. It is exactly this copy that allowed us to come to a number of readings and solutions different from Tuna and Bosson (1962).

The text in 'Phags-pa is preceded by the following phrase in Arabic (Plates I and II) that we reproduce here together with its romanization and translation:



وهذا خطٌ يكتبونه في الخطاى والقان و يُسمونه بالدوربلجين

wa hāzā ḥaṭṭ^{um} yaktubūna fi'l-ḥiṭāy wa'l-qā'an wa yusammūnahu bil-dūrbalğin

They were using this script in Cathay between Kha'ans and they call it as *dörbeljin*.

¹ We thank Bayarma Khabtagaeva and Juha Janhunen for their valuable comments. All mistakes and shortcomings remain our responsibility.

² This is the first publication of the fragment photograph in color.

hereafter, later' (Haenisch 1939: 110), (Mostaert 1952: 286), (de Rachewiltz 2004.1: 390). While we are not challenging this analysis, MM *mona* ~ *mono* appears to occur exclusively as a bound word only in front of *qoyina* 'after'. This calls for an explanation. Tumurtogoo, in our opinion, defines *mona* correctly as 'this, the same one' (2010: 187). In our opinion, the first definition of *mona* as 'this' is almost correct, although Tumurtogoo does not provide details how he arrived to this conclusion. We believe that etymologically we deal here with a Turco-Mongolian hybrid, where *mon-* represents the oblique stem of OT *bo* 'this'⁶, and *-a* the MM dative-locative case suffix *-A*.

Line three. This line starts with a mysterious word *gesü* (ᠭᠡᠰᠦ). Tuna and Bosson offer two suggestions: first, that it is a conditional converb *ge'e-'esü* of the verb *ge'e-* 'to say, to speak', noting at the same time that it would be a "grammatical abomination" here (1960: 10), which is correct; and second, following Nicholas Poppe's suggestion that it might be a *casus indefinitus* of *gesün* 'stomach', cf. WM *gesüsün*, Kalmyk *gesn* 'stomach', etc. (1960: 16). Tumurtogoo believes that there is a *lacuna* in front of *gesü*: [...]*gesü* (2010: 115), but his proposal is difficult to agree with, because the word in question is found in the absolute beginning of the line, and there are no indications for a *lacuna* in the manuscript. In our interpretation we follow here as well as elsewhere our methodology of relying on Chaghatay translation. Therefore, mysterious MM *gesü* corresponds to Chaghatay *il* 'nation'. Consequently, we believe that MM *gesü* (ᠭᠡᠰᠦ) represents Mongolian *ger* + nominal suffix *-sUn*. Several commentaries are in order here. While the usual translational tags for Mongolian *ger* are 'home, house, yurt', it appears that actually the word has a much wider meaning, including 'homeland, native place, one's nomadic territory, state'⁷. On the other hand, Turkic *el* ~ *il* means not only 'nation', but also 'tribal union, nation, state, people'. Mongolic *-r-* is frequently lost before *-sUn*, cf. MM *yesün* 'nine' < **yer-sün* and WM *čayasun* 'paper' < **caxar-sun*⁸ (Janhunen 2017, p.c.). The rest of the line is pretty straightforward.

Line four. Most of this line is pretty straightforward as well, with the exception of *quriya-ča* that Tuna and Bosson leave without an explanation (1960: 12). While MM *quriya-* is, of course, 'to gather', we believe that *-ča* is a deverbal nominalizer *-čA*, attested in both Middle Mongolian (Godziński 1985: 40) and Written Mongolian

⁶ This, incidentally, provides external evidence for the point of view that OT had *bo* 'this' (Erdal and Schönig 1990), (Erdal 2004: 199), and not *bu* like most modern Turkic languages.

⁷ Cf. Buriat *geree hana-* 'to miss homeland, to think about homeland', *gertee yaba-* 'to travel to Buryatia' (Khabtagaeva 2017, p.c.). Also cf. Khalkha *tör ger* ~ *ger tör* 'country, state'.

⁸ But cf. MM *ča'alsun* 'paper' (MNT §203), (HYYY 1:10b.8) with *-l-*, not *-r-*.

(Poppe 1964: 44). Thus, we can interpret *quriya-ča* as 'gathering, process of gathering'.

Line five. The beginning of the line before the sign ☉ is relatively unproblematic, although it is not clear why there is an extra space between 'e (ᠡ) and 'üt-kü-n (ᠡᠭᠦᠲᠦᠭᠦᠨ) in the verbal form 'e'üt-kü-n of the verb 'e'üt- 'to erect', 'to undertake', 'to begin'. Unfortunately, the end of this line is damaged, and one can read only *b[...]*bayi**. Tuna and Bosson read this as *bi bayi*, lit. 'I am', translating it though as 'I wrote (it)' (1960: 11). But it seems that there is not enough space to write *iči* between two {b}; and, in addition, we would expect the past form to be *biči-bei*, written as *biči-beyi*. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that we have *-bayi*, and not *-beyi* as the marker of the past tense here. The partially readable *b[...]*bayi** corresponds to Chaghatay *bol-miš* 'be-PAST', therefore, given this plus the fact that *-bayi* requires a verbal stem with [+back] vowel, we believe that *b[...]*bayi** should be reconstructed as *b[ol-]*bai** 'be-PAST'.

The preceding part *bir mhd* (ᠪᠢᠷᠮᠠᠳ) is mysterious, but it must at least partially correspond to *jarlig* 'edict' in the Chaghatay text. Tuna and Bosson offer a different analysis: *bi Ramhamd* 'I, Ramhamd' (1960: 11). Let us note that while there is a Pakistani name Ram Hamd, we are not aware of any other similar Islamic names. We believe that the first of these words, which we read as *birma* is exactly the word for 'edict'. Namely, it represents a loan of Arabic فرمان *farmān* 'royal edict'. Some additional commentaries are in order. First, there is no /f/ in Middle Mongolian, and no letter corresponding to it in the 'Phags-pa script. There are only letters {p}, {b}, and {v}, and the former is used in the initial position just in one word: *puryan* 'Buddha', which also has an alternative spelling *burqan*, while the latter as initial is used only in two loanwords from Sanskrit. Thus, the substitution of /f/ by /b/ is expected. Second, Arabic short /a/ is phonetically realized as a front vowel [e] or [æ], so phonetically فرمان is [fermān]. Modern Turkish has also *ferman*, whether its Ottoman predecessor was borrowed directly from Arabic or via Persian, where the same phonetic realization of short /a/ takes place. Note also that the loans of the same word in European languages point to vowel [i], cf. French *firman* [firmā], English *firman*,⁹ and Russian фирман [firman].

We believe that the next word *hmd* (ᠬᠠᠮᠳ) should be read as *hamd*, and like the previous loanword is also a borrowing from Arabic حمد *ḥamd* 'praise'. Since in Arabic a modifier follows a head noun, *birma hamd* < *farmān ḥamd* is a 'praiseworthy edict'. Note that in the vicinity of all post-velar consonants Arabic short /a/ is phonetically realized as [a], not as [e].

⁹ Modern phonetic realizations in British English as [fə:mæn] and in American English as [fə'mæn] are secondary developments.

The text in Old Uyghur script is preceded by the following phrase in Arabic (Plates I and II) that we reproduce here together with its romanization and translation:

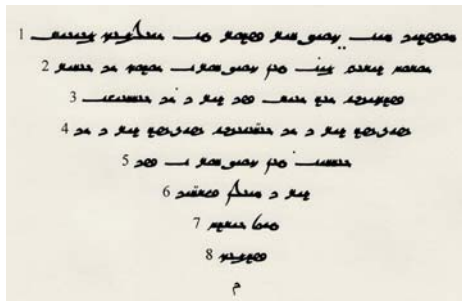


خط الأيغورية

ḥaṭṭu'l-uyğuruyya

In Uyghur script

Turkic (Pre-Chaghatay) Text in the Old Uyghur script



Transliteration of the Old Uyghur script

1. qwpwl'y q'n šwnkq'r pwlwr t' 'ydmyš'y mynynk
 2. 'wrwq l'rym m'n tyn swnkqwr 'wlws ny yyq'r
 3. pwls'nkyz 'yl nynk pwy l'r y ny yyqqynč'
 4. kwnkkwl l'r y ny yyqjynkyz kwnkkwl l'r y ny
 5. yyqq'n tyn swnkqwr ' pwy
 6. l'r y q'yd' p'rq'y
 7. t'p y'rlq
 8. pwlmyš
- m¹⁰

Transcription of the Old Uyghur script with morphemic analysis

1. qubulai han šuŋqar bol-urta ayṭ-miš ay men-iŋ
 2. uruğ-lar-ım män-tin soŋgura ulus-nı yığ-ar
 3. bol-sa-ŋız el-niŋ boy-ları-nı yığ-ğınč'a
 4. köŋgül-läri-ni yığ-ıŋız köŋgül-läri-ni
 5. yığ-ğan-tın soŋ-(ğu)ra boy-
 6. ları qay-da bar-ğay
 7. te-p yar(l)ğ
 8. bol-miš
- m

¹⁰ Letter *mem* (Arabic *mīm*) is frequently found at the end of Islamic manuscripts.

Glossing of the Turkic text in the Old Uyghur script

1. Qubulai khan falcon become-CTMP edict-PERF. PART EXCL I-GEN
2. descendant-PLUR-1SP I-ABL after people-ACC gather-AOR
3. be-COND-2PP land-GEN body-3PP-ACC gather-CT
4. mind-3PP-ACC gather-IMP.2P mind-3PP-ACC
5. gather-PAST.PART-ABL after body-
6. 3PP where-LOC go-FUT
7. say-CSUB edict
8. be-PERF.PART

Translation of the Turkic text in the Old Uyghur script

(1-2) When Qubilai Khan was dying, [he] said: “Oh, my (2-3) descendants, if you gather the people after me, (3-4) gather their minds, until gathering their bodies. (4-6) After you have gathered their mind, where can their bodies go to?” (7-8), [so this] was [his] edict.

Commentary to the Turkic text in the Old Uyghur script

Old Uyghur script was still used by Muslim Turks even after fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the wide geographical area from Central Asia to Qypchaq steppe in present day Russia. A detailed account of these texts was published more than twenty years ago by Sertkaya (1977). The newest study of such texts was produced recently by Sugahara (2007-2008).

In contrast to the Mongolian text in 'Phags-pa, pre-Chaghatay Turkic text in Old Uyghur script is quite straightforward and does not offer any difficulties. Only a few comments are in order.

Line one. The expression *šunqar bol-*, lit. ‘to become a falcon’ is an honorific metaphor for ‘to die’ (Barthold 1927: 14-15), (Barthold 1945: 15), (Tuna and Bosson 1962: 14). Temporal converb *-urta* etymologically goes back to a combination of aorist suffix *-ur* and locative *-ta*. *šunqar* ‘falcon’ is originally a Turkic word, but its phonetic shape suggests that in pre-Chaghatay Turkic it was reborrowed from Mongolian (Doerfer 1963: 360-362, § 237). The original Turkic form is *suŋqur* ‘falcon’, attested in Late Old Uyghur and Middle Turkic (Clauson 1972: 838), but as a matter of fact there is even earlier Old Uyghur attestation *suŋkur* ‘id.’ (Ölmez, forthcoming).

The oldest form of Old Turkic verb *ayt-* was disyllabic and it meant ‘to ask’ until the end of the thirteenth or the fourteenth century, however, after the fourteenth century it contracted to the monosyllabic form *ayt-* and the meaning changed to ‘to speak, to say’ (Clauson 1972: 268-269, Röhrborn 2010: 117ff).

Although *meniḡ* 'my' is spelled as *mynynk*, the first syllable must have had a mid vowel, therefore we can read *mynynk* as *meniḡ*.

Line two. On Turkic *urug* 'descendants, seeds' see Li (1999: 55-58) and Clauson (1972: 214-215).

For the postposition meaning 'after, later', modern Turkic languages normally use either *soḡ*, or *keyin*, *kiyin* or similar words derived from Old Turkic *kedin*. Nowadays *sonra* < *soḡra* is preserved only in the Oghuz languages, especially in the West Oghuz group. But there is also limited usage of *soḡra* in 'East Turkic' texts like *Nahju'l-Faradis* (1360 AD) or in some Chaghatay texts (Li 2004: 431-436, § 277). The form *soḡgura* is a typical homorganic obstruent consonant insertion in Chaghatay and also in some Kipchak Turkic languages after the consonant *ŋ*, like *köŋül* → *köŋgül* 'mind, heart' on line four of hour text. There are also other similar examples from – the Central Asian Islamic Turkic Languages, especially after 14th century, like *yeḡil* → *yeḡgil* 'light (not heavy)', *yüŋül* → *yüŋgül* 'light (not heavy)', *toḡguz* → *toḡguz* 'pig', etc., cf. (Räsänen 1969: 198), and also a similar phenomenon in some Mongolian loanwords from Turkic: Old Turkic *öŋ* 'color' → MM, Classical WM *öŋge*, Old Turkic *miḡ* 'thousand' → MM *miḡyan* ~ *miḡqa*, Classical WM *miḡya(n)*.

The verb *yıg-* is just one of many words in Turkic vocabulary for 'to gather', other words, such as *kuvrat-*, *ter-*, *evdi-*, and *yüg-* are also attested. However, the verb *kuvra-* has disappeared over time, and mainly after Mongolian period. Today we can find some derivations from *kuvra-* only in the Turkic languages which have had close contact with Mongolian like Tuvan. In other Turkic languages, and especially in Oghuz we have today another verb *topla*-¹¹

Line three. Pre-Chaghatay *boy* means 'body', also confirmed by MM *beye* in the 'Phags-pa text. Old Turkic *bod* had mainly the meaning 'clan', but the semantic shift to 'body' occurred after after the thirteenth or the fourteenth centuries. Oghuz Turkic preserved both meanings 'clan' as well as 'body; shape'. For details see Clauson (1972: 296-297).

CONCLUSION

We respectfully disagree with Tuna and Bosson's judgment that the 'Phags-pa text in Middle Mongolian was just carefully copied by a scribe who had no competence in the language (1960: 9). As a matter of fact, we see no ungrammaticality in this text. We also hope that we have solved in our modest contribution most if not all the puzzles outlined by Tuna and Bosson. Although it is

¹¹ Clauson has misread *topul-* in the Toḡuq inscription as *topla-* (1972: 440) as demonstrated by Tezcan (1976: 175-178).

impossible to date exactly this fragment, we surmise that it originates from one of the Central Asian or Middle Eastern Muslim states, where Middle Mongolian might have still played a role of a written, although not a spoken language. Most likely, this fragment does not postdate the fifteenth century.

ABBREVIATIONS

1PP	first person plural possessive
2P	second person plural
2PP	second person plural possessive
3PP	third person plural possessive
1SP	first person singular
2SP	second person singular possessive
3SP	third person singular possessive
ABL	Ablative
AOR	Aorist
ACC	Accusative
COND	Conditional converb
CP	Preparatory converb
CS	Subordinative converb
CT	Terminative converb
CTMP	Temporal converb
EXCL	Exclamation
GEN	Genitive
IMP	Imperative
LOC	Locative
MM	Middle Mongolian
NML	Nominalizer
NP	Noun phrase
PAST	Past
PERF	Perfective
PFPART	Present-Future participle
PLUR	Plural
POSS	Possessive
WM	Written Mongolian

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 MNT Mongyol Niuča Tobča'an, ca. 1249 AD

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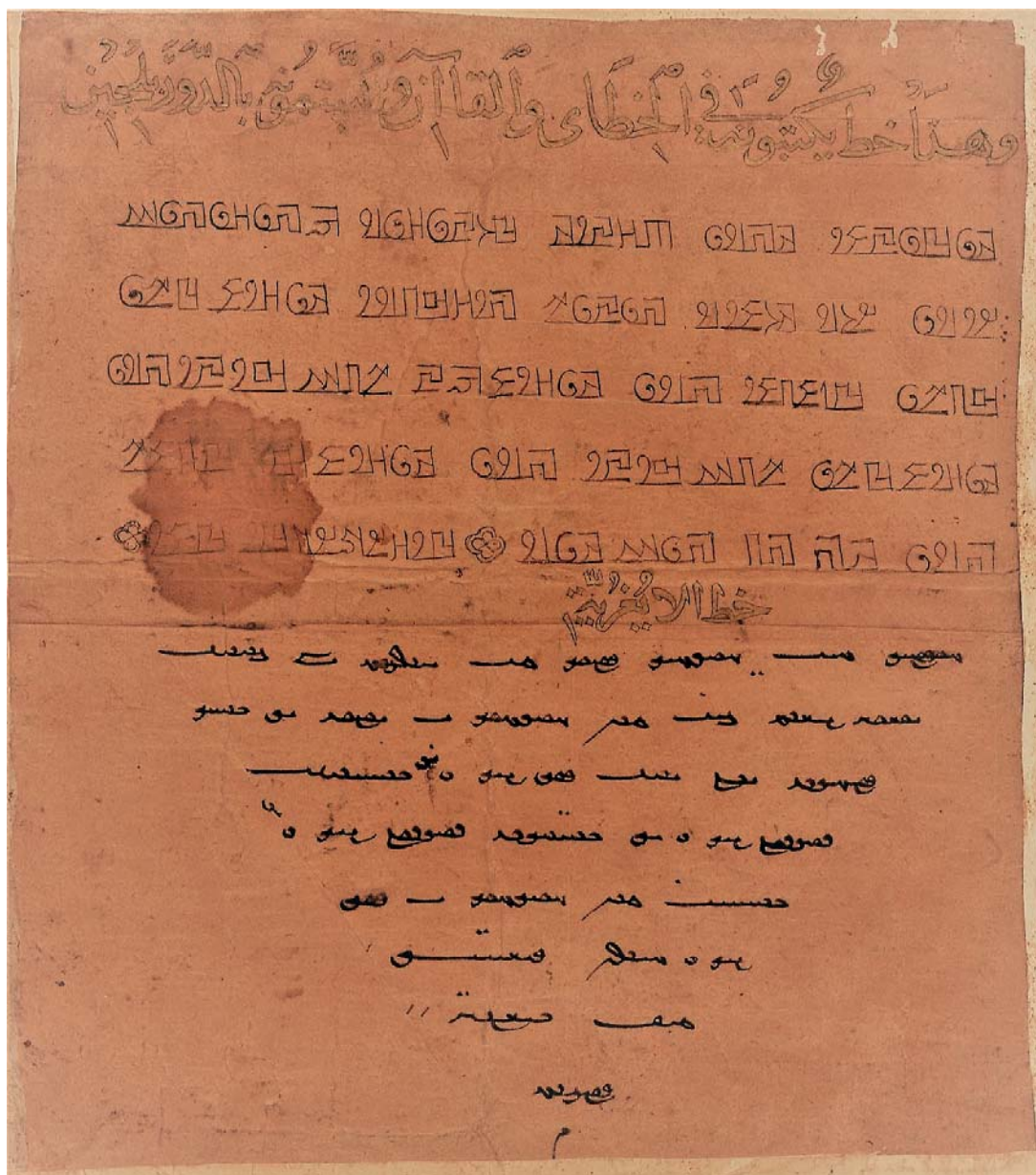


Plate I: Bilingual Middle Mongolian-Turkic Istanbul fragment.



Plate II: The page from *Mecma' u'l-acāyib*, where the fragment is found in the upper right.

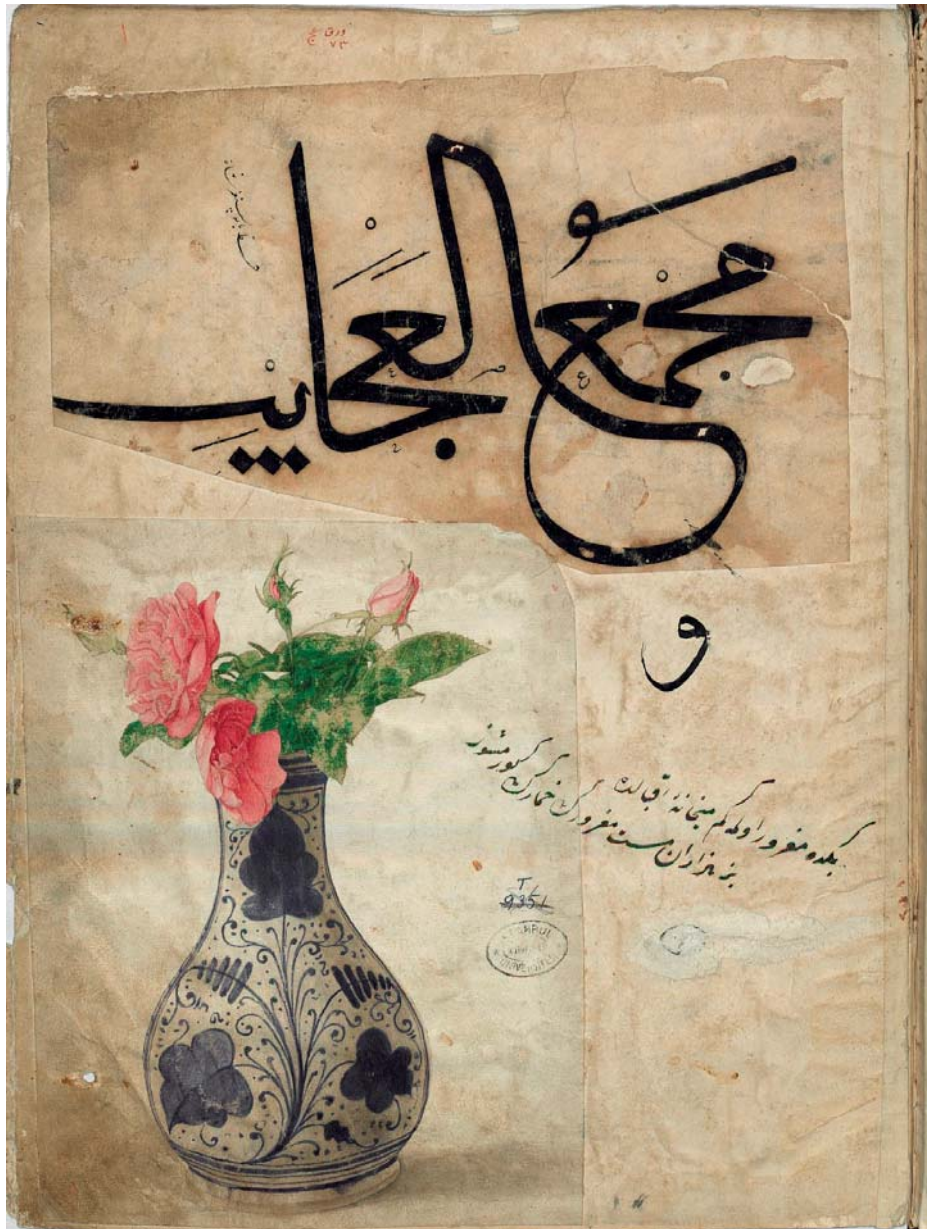


Plate III: The cover page of *Mecma' u'l- acāyib*.