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

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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-Chagatai Turkic in Old Uyghur script.

Résumé

Cette article est le fruit de la recherche conjointe d’un turcologue et d’un mongoliste. Elle présente une interprétation nouvelle d’un fragment bilingue conservé au musée de l’Université d’Istanbul et datant probablement du XVe 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-Chagataï 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 fifteen century compendium Mecma’u’l-acayib ‘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), (Damdinsuren 1986: 90), (Junast 1991: 216-219 + plate), (Tömörtoogo 2002: 66-67), (Jančív 2002: 144), (Hugjiltu & Sarula 2004: 514-515 + plate 52), (Sertkaya 2006), (Tumurtogoo 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.

The photograph published by Tuna and Bosson (1962: 10) is barely legible. Fortunately, recently Mehmet Ömez 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:

wa hāḏā ḥattā yaktūbūna fī l-ḥittāy wa’l-qā’ān wa yusam-mūnahu bīl-dūrālāḏīn

They were using this script in Cathay between Kha’ans and they call it as dūrbelṭīn.

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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.
Moving now onto the Mongolian text itself (Plates I and II, see also below), we should first mention that, as Tuna and Bosson correctly noted, all initial vowels in the 'Phags-pa text are preceded by 'a-chung sign བ, a phenomenon quite rare in other 'Phags-pa texts (1962: 9). We believe that this usage might have been influenced by the comparable usage of i 'ālīf in the Arabic script. Tuna and Bosson did not comment, however, on another interesting fact: namely, both MM u and ū are spelled as ղu. Letters ղo and ղő do not occur in the fragment, but there is a graphic MM contrast between ղe and ղé, although it probably does not reflect the actual phonology, cf. more typical 'Phags-pa ղI/3I beye 'body' (XII: 1, 5) vs. the variation beye- and beya- in this fragment.

**Middle Mongolian text in the 'Phags-pa script**

1. 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilan\n\n2. 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilan\n\n3. 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilan\n\n4. 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ilan\n\n5. 东方财富ilihan u 东方财富ילין \n
**Transliteration of the 'Phags-pa script**

1. Qubulayi qa’an-u ḡan-yi ḡan-wu bolurun t ‘uru’utʰ
2. min-u mon-a qoyina ‘ulus ‘irgen quriybsu
3. gesi bêyeyi ‘nu quriytl set’ghi ‘nu ◊
4. quriybsu set’ghi ‘nu quriyè⁶ beys
5. ‘nu q’e ... ‘utqun ◊ birm hmd b[ol]byi ◊

**Transcription of the Middle Mongolian text in the 'Phags-pa script with morphemic analysis**

1. Qubulai qa’an-u ḡarliq bolurun t ‘uru’utʰ
2. min-u mon-a qoyina ‘ulus ‘irgen quriybsu
3. gesi bêyeyi ‘nu quriytl set’ghi ‘nu ◊
4. quriybsu set’ghi ‘nu quriyè⁶ beys
5. ‘nu q’e ... ‘utqun ◊ birm hmd b[ol]byi ◊

**Glossing of the Middle Mongolian text in the 'Phags-pa script**

1. Qubilai qayan-GEN edict become-CP all descendant-
2. I-GEN this-DAT.LOC after country people-ACC
gather-COND
3. state body-ACC-3PP gather-CT mind-ACC-3PP
gather-COND mind-ACC-3PP gather-NML body-PLUR-
5. 3PP where erect-PFPART-PLUR ◊ firma[n] praise
be-PAST ◊

Translation of the Middle Mongolian text in the 'Phags-pa script

(5) [I] wrote down the praiseworthy imperial decree, (1) the edict of Qubilai qa’an that says: ‘All [my] descendants (2) when [you] gather people of the country after me (4) when you gather (3) their minds until gathering the bodies of the [state] people,(4/5) [in] the process of gathering their minds, where will their bodies stand?’

**Commentary to the Middle Mongolian text in the 'Phags-pa script**

**Line one.** As Tuna and Bosson noted, the proper noun Qubilai is spelled as Qubulai here (1962: 10). Tuna and Bosson do not comment on the reasons for this aberrant spelling, but we think that it is probably due to the strong labial attraction caused by both preceding labial consonant [b] and rounded back vowel [u] in the preceding first syllable.

Tuna and Bosson comment that genitive -u in qa’an-u ḡarliq ‘edict of the qa’yan’ is again unusual (1962: 9), and this is also correct. The only known exceptions of the use of genitive before ḡarliq ‘edict’ and after qa’an ‘qa’yan’ seems to be the single usage of qa’an-nu ḡarliq ‘qa’yan’s edict’ (MNT §280). The other known exceptions of the use of genitive before ḡarliq are not frequent, either: bidan-u ḡarliq ‘our edict’ (MNT §199), ečīge-yin bidan-u ḡarliq ‘our father’s edict’ (MNT §277), tenggeri-yin ḡarliq ‘edict of Heaven’ (MNT §244), ečīge-yin ḡarliq ‘father’s edict’ (MNT §254), ečīge-yin čin-u ḡarliq ‘your father’s edict’ (MNT §277), min-u ḡarliq ‘my edict’ (MNT §255), ābaqa-yin ḡarliq ‘uncle’s edict’ (MNT §274), but we find throughout the Mongol Nuعa toča’an the phrases like Činggis qa’an ḡarliq (multiple examples) or Šogūdei qa’an ḡarliq (MNT §274, §278), qa’an ḡarliq (MNT §278) without any genitive case marking.

The more typical MM forms are ḡurq ~ ḡurq ‘descendants, seeds’, although like in this text ḡurq- before the next vowel also occurs (in MNT only). Both MM ḡarliq ‘edict’ and ḡurq ~ ḡurq ‘descendants, seeds’ are loanwords from Turkic (cf. OT ḡarliq ‘edict’ and ḡurq ‘descendants, seeds’).

**Line two.** Tuna and Bosson provide a single comment on this line (also relevant for line four), namely that conditional converb -AsU usually appears as -'AsU in other ‘Phags-pa texts (1962: 9). Meanwhile, the word mona here certainly deserves our interest. Chaghatay text has men-tin sonyura LOBL-ABL ‘after me’ corresponding to MM min-u mona qoyina ‘after me’, cf. identical MM min-u mona qoyina ‘after me’ in MNT §231. Note that the MM adverbial expression mona (= mona) qoyina (e.g. MNT §93) is usually understood as ‘in the future,

⁶ Although Tuna and Bosson use this contrast in their romanization inconsistently, transcribing ղ的食物 gesi in line three as gesi (1962: 11).

⁷ The numeration of edicts and lines is given according to Poppe (1957).
hereafter, later’ (Haenisch 1939: 110), (Mostaert 1952: 286), (de Rachewiltz 2004: 1: 390). While we are not challenging this analysis, MM *mona ~ *monto* appears to occur exclusively as a bound word only in front of *qovina ‘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’ and *-a* the MM dative-locative case suffix -A.

**Line three.** This line starts with a mysterious word *gesü* (ゲッサ). 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 *gesissün*. Kalmyk *ges* ‘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* (ゲッサ) 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’. 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 *çaysun* ‘paper’ < */exa-sun* (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 the word *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 (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 (ې) and ‘it-kü-n (يئر)’ in the verbal form *e’ut-ki-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 *bi[...]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 *i’e* between two {b}’s; and, in addition, we would expect the past form to be *bi‘i-bayi*, written as *bi‘i-bayi*. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that we have -*bayi*, and not -*beyi* as the marker of the past tense here. The partially readable *bi[...]bayi* corresponds to Chaghatay *bol-miš ‘be-PAST*, therefore, given this plus the fact that -*beyi* requires a verbal stem with [+back] vowel, we believe that *bi[...]bayi* should be reconstructed as *b[ol]-b‘ayi* ‘be-PAST*.

The preceding part *birm hamd* ( البلد) 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 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 *farmân*. Modern Turkish has also *ferman*, whether its Osmanli 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 *ferman* [firmâ], English *firmance*, and Russian *шфирман* [firman].

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

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6 This, incidentally, provides external evidence for the point of view that OT had *bo ‘this* (Erdal and Schönig 1990), (Erdal 2004: 1, 199), and not *bu* like most modern Turkic languages.

7 Cf. Buriat *geere han* - ‘to miss homeland, to think about homeland’. *gertee yaba* - ‘to travel to Buryatia’ (Khabtagaeva 2017, p.c.). Also cf. Khalkha *tör ger* - *tör ‘country, state*.

8 But cf. MM *ca’alsan ‘paper* (MNT §203), (HYYY 1:108b:8) with */t-, not */r-.

9 Modern phonetic realizations in British English as [fɔ:man] and in American English as [fɔːman] 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:

\[\text{haʃtu’l-uyƣuruya} \]

In Uyƣur script

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

Transliteration of the Old Uyghur script

1. qwpwl’y q’in Šwnkq’r pwlr t’ ’ydmỳš ’y mnyknk
2. ’wrrq l’rym m’n tyn qwnkwdr ’ ’wlws ny yyyy’r
3. pwls’nkyz ’yl nynk pwy l’r y ny yyqqynč’
4. kwnkkwl l’r y ny yyqynkyz kwnkwl l’r y ny
5. yyqq’n tyn qwnkwdr ’ pwy
6. l’r y q’yd’ p’rq’y
7. t’p y’rdq
8. pwlmỳš

Transcription of the Old Uyghur script with morphemic analysis

1. qubulai han šuŋqar bol-uriy ayt-muş ay men-iŋ
2. urug-lar-im män-tin sonqura ulus-ni yig-ar
3. bol-saŋx el-niŋ boy-lar-iŋ yiq-ŋnc’a
4. köngül-lari-ni yiq-ŋnx köngül-lari-ni
5. yig-ɡan-tun son-(ɡura) boy-
6. lari qay-da bâr-ɡay
7. te-p yarli(ɡ)
8. bol-miş

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 *šuŋqar 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*. *Šuŋqar* ‘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 (Clau-son 1972: 838), but as a matter of fact there is even earlier Old Uyghur attestation *suŋqur* ‘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 meniq ‘my’ is spelled as mynyňk, the first syllable must have had a mid vowel, therefore we can read mynyňk as meniq.

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

For the postposition meaning ‘after, later’, modern Turkic languages normally use either soŋ or keyin, kiýin or similar words derived from Old Turkic kedin. Nowadays soňra < soŋra is preserved only in the Oghuz languages, especially in the West Oghuz group. But there is also limited usage of soŋra in ‘East Turkic’ texts like Nahju’l-Farâdis (1360 AD) or in some Chaghatai texts (Li 2004: 431-436, § 277). The form songura is a typical homorganic obstruent consonant insertion in Chaghatai and also in some Kipchak Turkic languages after the consonant ŋ, like köngül → köngül ‘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 yeqəl → yeqəl ‘light (not heavy)’, yeqül → yeqül ‘light (not heavy)’, tonguz → tonguz ‘pig’, etc., cf. (Räsänen 1969: 198), and also a similar phenomenon in some Kipchak loanwords from Turkic: Old Turkic ńg ‘color’ → MM, Classical WM ńgge, Old Turkic miŋ ‘thou-
sand’ → MM miŋjan – miŋqa, Classical WM miŋya(n).

The verb yig is just one of many words in Turkic vocabulary for ‘to gather’, other words, such as kavrat-, ter-, evdi-, and yığ- are also attested. However, the verb kavra- has disappeared over time, and mainly after Mongolian period. Today we can find some derivations from kavra-only in the Turkic languages which have had close contact with Mongolian like Turkmens. In other Turkic languages, and especially in Oghuz we have today another verb topola.11

**Line three.** Pre-Chaghatai 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 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 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**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>1PP</td>
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**REFERENCES**

**Primary Sources**

- HYYY Hua-yi yi-yu (華夷譯語), 1389 AD
- Mecma’u’l-‘acayib Farsça = Persian] 1423 AD, 61a [Istanbul University Library].
- MNT Mongol Nüča Tobça’an, ca. 1249 AD

**Secondary Sources**


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11 Clauson has misread topul- in the Toruauq inscription as topla- (1972: 440) as demonstrated by Tezcan (1976: 175-178).
Plate I: Bilingual Middle Mongolian-Turkic Istanbul fragment.
Plate II: The page from *Mecmāʿuʿl-ʿacāyīb*, where the fragment is found in the upper right.
Plate III: The cover page of Mecmu‘u‘l-‘acâyîb.