Understanding the Career of Mongolian Speakers in the Mamluk Sultanate
A Comparative Perspective

Yihao Qɪᴜ

Abstract: As an aspect of the linguistic landscape in the Mamluk Sultanate, the role and career of Mongolian speakers remain open to discussion. Through analysis of the primary sources of various genres from different parts of Mongol and post-Mongol Eurasia, this article overviews the Mongolian language and its speakers in the circle of Mamluk Sultan's Court. Furthermore, compared with the Persian and Chinese sources, I try to point out the similarities of Mongolian education in the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Empire. In addition, the complexity of the relationship between language acquisition and knowledge of Mongol history will be discussed.

Keywords: Mamluk Sultanate, Mongolian, Ilkhanate, History of the Mongols, Cross-cultural Exchange

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1. Introduction

The military victories under the direction of Chinggis Khan and, in the name of a new ethnonym, Mongols, finally forged a new empire – *Yeke Mongγol Ulus* (the Great Mongol State). Meanwhile, the Mongol language, initially an insignificant dialect spoken by several petty nomadic principalities of eastern inner Asia, spread rapidly along with the Mongol conquests across a vast continent stretching from northern China to the Qipchaq steppe and Anatolia. Hence, as the mother tongue of the dominator, Mongolian, both in oral and written language, was established as the premier official language. Learning the ruler's language, therefore, had a strong appeal to the governed subjects – especially, to the literati and the low-rank bureaucrats who came from different cultural backgrounds but were attracted by the obvious advantages of the language knowledge.[1]

As one of the regimes shadowed by the threat of Mongol incursion, the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517) was not an isolated island. In fact, population exchange between the Mamluk and the Mongols occurred continuously. It included two main routes: via the slave trades from Qipchaq Steppe, i.e. the Golden Horde, and via the *réfugiés* and captives, most of whom came from the war against the Ilkhanate. Despite the overt hostility of the Mamluks as well as the Arabic Muslims toward the Ilkhanate (1256–1336) and its ally, the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the Mamluk sultan established an effective translation team to take charge of Mongol affairs. It was based on practical needs, e.g. acting as intelligence and espionage, serving on diplomatic occasions, etc. Similar to the cases that occurred in the government of Yuan-China and the Ilkhante, knowledge of Mongolian language was a political asset in the Mamluk Sultanate.[2] Translators and interpreters – usually recruited from the Mamluk military corps, were assigned to positions at the court, or, included in the sultan's intimate circle.

In summarising the role that the pastoral nomads played in the cross-cultural exchanges during the Mongol era, Allsen identifies them as the chief initiators, promoters and agents of the exchanges (ALLSEN 2001: 211). The situation in the Mamluk Sultanate is likewise. Due to linguistic and cultural affinities, acquisition of the Mongolian language for the Mamluk elites, who were mainly of Turkish origin, was not a difficult task and these Mongolian speakers usually acted as intermediaries and agents in the diplomatic and commercial contacts with the different Mongol regimes. Through daily communication, the

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[1] Given that there are numerous contributions, I highlight the exemplary studies. As an overview on the language policy in the Mongol Empire and the successive Chinggisid states, see XIAO 1999, SINOR 1982, HONG 1990. As for the language contacts and the mutual influences between the Mongolian and Persian-Arabic, see POPPE 1927, DOERFER 1963–1975, GOLDEN 2000.

[2] On the position of language specialists at the Mongol court, see ALLSEN 2000: 30–40.

influence of the Mongolian language permeated the Mamluk court, the military schools and barracks (*al-ṭibaq*). A typical case was name-giving practices, that is, Mongolian names bestowed to the *mamluk*s of non-Mongol origins (YOSEF 2021: 59–118).[3] Furthermore, serving as a means of access to information for its principal opponent, the perception – sometimes displayed via stereotypes – of the Mamluk society concerning the Mongol Empire was to some extent shaped by the introduction of Mongolian speakers and therefore inevitably influenced by their cultural preferences.

The complexity of the linguistic landscape in the Mamluk Sultanate has attracted the attention of researchers. However, most discussions so far have focused on the linguistic contacts between Qipchaq Turkic and Arabic as one of the most important issues of Turkicisation in the medieval Middle East.[4] This phenomenon is reasonable. Compared to the allogeneic Turkic-speaking elites, in Mamluk society, Mongols and Mongolian-speaking people were a minority community and, on the other hand, the Mamluk chronicles and biographical dictionaries only supply fragmentary depictions of the language competence of the civil and military elites. As for the Mongol people living in the territories of the Mamluk Sultanate, existing studies revolve around questions of the origin of the Mongol Mamluks and their role in the political arena (AYALON 1951, NAKAMACHI 2006, AMITAI 2008).

In view of this, the current contribution will deal with several cases of the *mamluk*s who served as Mongolian interpreters and spoke the language in an intimate circle, followed by reflections on how language competence and language learning bound a minor ethnic group together with a medieval immigrant society. Based on the information recorded by contemporary Arabic writers, it is possible for us to trace the life and career of many particular personages.[5] The author tries, more or less, to provide a glimpse into the active scene of the Mongolian translators and interpreters serving in the Sultan's court. Besides, the relationship between the spread of the knowledge of Mongol history and language education is also worth investigating. In the meantime, my discussion will feature a comparative perspective with the western and eastern parts of the Mongol Empire. Therefore, to begin with, the systematic records of the routine duties of the Mongolian interpreters in the *dīvān al-inshā*ʿ (Chancery Bureau) will be introduced, as well as the Chinese sources written during the Yuan Dynasty.

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[3]　In this article, I will distinguish between the "Mamluk", the sultanate reigning in Egypt, Syria and Hedjaz, and the "*mamluk*" (with italics), the military slaves.

[4]　EYCHENNE 2013: 153–188. An anthroponomastic dictionary which focuses on the Turkic personal names appearing in the Mamluk sources is contributed by RÁSONYI and BASKI 2007.

[5]　A brief introduction of historiography and historical sources of the *Baḥrī* Mamluk period is given by LITTLE 1979.

2. Mongolian in the Ilkhanate: a parallel case

In Central Asia and Iran, the initial interpreters who were proficient in Mongolian appeared even before Chinggis Khan ascended to the throne in 1206. His earlier Muslim followers, for instance, Ḥasan (阿散, Asan) and Jaʿfar Khvāja (札八兒火者, *Zha-ba-er-huo-zhe*), very likely, talked to Chinggis Khan in the latter's mother tongue. In Ögedei's time, a centralised bureaucracy was formed, including an office of the secretary, which was under the leadership of the *Ulugh-bitigchi* (the chief scribe). Hülegü, who established the Ilkhanate after the fall of Baghdad in 1258, brought the Mongol chancery practice into his state, which spanned much of the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia. As al-ʿUmarī said, although Hülegü intended to maintain the *status quo*, the people around him "emphasised everything in the way of Mongolisation"[6]. The impact of the Mongols on the bureaucratic institution is apparent. Hülegü installed an office of the *bitigchi* (scribe) in his chancellery, to deal with the secretarial services in Mongolian and Turkic languages, and even replaced the position of *dīwān al-inshāʿ waʾl-ṭughrā* (office in charge of incoming and outgoing correspondence), traditional in Islamic governance (Sᴘᴜʟᴇʀ 1955: 240–241; Lᴀᴍʙᴛᴏɴ 1988: 58).

There is no denying that in Ilkhanid Iran, Mongolian was the first official chancellery language in the initial period and was thus used officially and colloquially. Besides, there are several official letters in Mongolian issued by Ilkhan, and it is reasonable to assume that there should be more epistles written in Mongolian, or, with a Mongolian translated version (Mᴏsᴛᴀᴇʀᴛ and Cʟᴇᴀᴠᴇs 1952). A similar situation also occurred in the correspondence with other Chinggisid states, e.g. the Golden Horde (Vásáʀʏ 2005: 120; Fᴀᴠᴇʀᴇᴀᴜ 2007). After the 1300s, as Vásáry pointed out, Mongolian began to wane both in the public sphere and in private use. Yet, bilingual documents and Uyghur-script Mongolian were continued down to the Jalayirid era (1336–1431) (Vásáʀʏ 2016a: 142–146). Therefore, mastering the Mongolian language for civil officials (i.e. "the men of the Pen") in the court circle became an essential skill. Also, given that the linguistic landscape of the Ilkhanate is quite complex, multilingualism was not only a means of communication but a daily reality.

When an Ayyubid vassal, Mulk ʿAzīz b. al-Mulk al-Mughith, the lord of Karak visited the Mongols' camp in 658 ᴀʜ / 1259–1260 ᴄᴇ, his cousin – son of the Lord of Ḥiṣn Kayfā, served as a Mongolian interpreter in his conversation with Toquz Khatun, Hülegü's chief wife (*Taʾrīkh Majmūʾ* p. 105). Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1244–1323, full name Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Shaybānī al-Ḥanbalī), a librarian of the royal library in Baghdad, collected abundant information to record such a polyglot situation in intellectual circles of the lkhan's court (Aɪɢʟᴇ 2008–2009: 17). Maḥmud Yalawachī al-Khwārzmī, a Muslim

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6   Translated from the German text as given in Lᴇᴄʜ 1968: 102.

from Central Asia who was assigned as a city governor in Chinggis Khan's time, and then held the high position in the "Mobile Secretariat for Yanjing and Other Places" (*yanjing dengchu xingshangshusheng*, 燕京等處行尚書省) after the enthronement of Möngke, was described by Ibn al-Fuwaṭī as able to "write in Mongolian, Uyghur, Turkic and Persian, and speak in Chinese, Indian and Arabic".[7] The aforementioned depiction is impressive and raises further questions in the meantime, because there is no other documentation proving that Yalawachī knew Chinese and Indian – in this context probably referring to Sanskrit. Therefore, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī might exaggerate Yalawachī's polyglot competence, due to the latter's reputation in the Islamic world. Nevertheless, his depiction illustrates a linguistic landscape under Mongol domination. There are four written languages – the most important of which is undoubtedly Mongolian – that correspond to the principal languages used to communicate with the Mongol rulers and their "various foreign assistants" (*semu*, 色目) in daily affairs. As for the three oral languages, they relate to the three intellectual communities that served the Mongol Khan, i.e. Confucian, Buddhist monks and Muslims. Saʿd al-Dawla (1240–1291), a Jewish minister who won favour with Arghun Khan (r. 1284–1291), likewise is mentioned as a man fluent in "the languages of these territories which adjoin and interlock with the Mongols and Turks" (*mukhālahat va mujāvart-i mughūl va turk mālik-i īn zabān-hā shuda*).[8]

In the provincial administration, the performance of Mongolian-speaking officials was active too. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Qutluq Bek, an *amir* from a Kashghari merchant family, served Urūq *noyan* as his companion in Baghdad and knew Persian, Turkic, Mongolian and Chinese.[9] In addition, the "Scribe" (*kātib*) Mujāhid al-Dīn's experience is typical in the initial decades of Ilkhan's era. During the fall of Baghdad, he and his father were captured by a commander Sunghūchāq (*asīran maʿa al-amīr Sunghūjāq*). The latter was a Mongol commander from a Suldus lineage. He, together with Baiju and Buqa Temür, attacked and took control of the western side of Baghdad in 1258 (*Jamiʾuʾt-tawarikh* vol. 2, 495). As Sunghūjāq's personal captives, Mujāhid al-Dīn and his father were taken to Marāgha. During the days when they settled there, he accompanied a Uyghur scholar and *bakhshi* (*al-bakhshiyya*, "scribe"), and learnt about writing with the Uyghur script (*al-khaṭṭ*) and their language.[10] In the above context, the "Uyghur script" doubtlessly refers to Mongolian, which uses the same script as the Uyghurs. Under the Mongol ruler, it was an ideal

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[7]   *Al-Alqāb* vol. 3, 192, no. 2472: *yaktubu bi-l-mughūliyya wa al-uyghūriyya wa al-turkiyya wa al-fārsiyya wa yukallimu bi-l-khiṭāyya wa al-hindiyya wa al-ʿarabiyya*. Trans. mine.

[8]   *Tārīkh-i Vaṣṣāf* p. 236. Regarding his biography also see *Nasāʾim al-Asḥāra* p. 108.

[9]   *Al-Alqāb* vol. 2, 448, no. 1785; As for Arūq, the Mongol emir in Baghdad, see *Al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmiʿa* p. 313.

[10] His full name is: Mujāhid al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍāʾil Ṣad-mard b. Naṣirat al-Dīn Baghdī b. Bahāʿ al-Dīn Urghshī al-Baghdādī. *Al-Alqāb* vol. 4, 366–367, no. 3995.

method to promote social status through his language skill. The lower-class upstarts, who relied on their Mongolian knowledge, displaced the former local elites, and this situation – as Juvaynī's (1226–1283) bitter comment describes – "the Mongol language in the Uyghur script, and that, in this present age is the essence of learning and proficiency" (BOYLE 1997: 523).

In Ilkhanate, two terms referring to Mongolian-Turkic secretaries frequently appear in historical sources, as *bitigchī* and *bakhshī*. Although the definition of the term *bakhshī* originally meant the Buddhist monk in Old Turkic, during the 13th–14th century, the meaning had already evolved to refer to not only the Buddhist monk or Shaman but also the "Mongolian scribe", especially when this title appeared in administrative documents. In such contexts, the term *bakhshī* is utilised as the synonym of *kātib*, *munshī* and *muḥarrir*, all these Arabic-Persian terms referring to the Persian secretary (VÁSÁRY 1987: 120–121). Nakhchiwānī Muḥammad b. Hindūshāh (also known as Shams-i Munshī Nakhchivānī, 1293–1376), the compiler of the *Dastūr al-kātib fī taʿyyin al-marātib* ("Manual of the Scribe for the Affixing of Ranks", compiled circa 1365, hereafter cited as DK) – an anthology of Persian *inshāʿ* style, collects three commissions of the Mongolian *bakhshī*s (Ürük, Toghay, Qutlugh Būqā). There are detailed depictions of *bakhshī*'s rights and duties. The first commission, entitled "Appointment of the *Bakhshi*s (scribes) for writing the decrees in Mongolian", noted:

> As one of these kindnesses [of the Majesty], we know that to every community, the decrees must be issued and produced in their own languages, so that they will easily understand the content of those [decrees]. Thence, in the Islamic City, Baghdād, and in the rest of the country of Arab Iraq (*bilād-i ʿIrāq-i ʿarab*), the decrees are produced in Arabic; in Persian communities (*aʿājim*), in the mountainous areas and the low-lands of Fars (*bilād-i jibāl va biqāʿ-i furs*), it is necessary [to produce the decrees] in Persian; as for the Mongolian and Turkic communities, likewise, the decrees dispatched in their customs and with their letters (*bi al-sana va khuṭūṭ-i īshān*) are easily to be understood.

> […] He (*bakhshi*) will write the content of the royal decrees (*aḥkām-i yarlīgh-hā*) issued] to the regional governor, the commanders of myriarchs, the chiliarchs and the centurions, and [write] all the other kinds of judicial documents. To make it apparent, he should confirm the meaning with an abridged summary, so that from the entire content, anything minute will not be lost. Thus, while the arrival of decree for being read publicly, it aims to be understood rapidly. If some Mongols and powerful men (*mughūlān va mutaghallibān*) oblige him and make him write something which is far off the way of justice and the law of

yāsā and *yāsāq* (i.e. "the law and ordinance"),[11] by compulsion, he does not heed such [requests].[12]

Needlessly to say, the bureau of *bitigchī* and *bakhshī* and their function were inherited from a prototype of the central administration in the time of the Great Mongol Empire. We can easily point out that a similar function already existed in the secretariat under the leadership of Chingqai (Zhenhai 鎮海), a Christian of Uyghur background active in Ögedei and Güyük's reigns. A Chinese envoy noted that, "they (i.e. Mongols) use the Western writing under Chinqai's direction".[13]

In Chinese context of the Yuan dynasty, a parallel term "Mongolian translation official" (*mengguyishi*, 蒙古譯史) frequently appears in historical sources, and – according to the *Official History of the Yuan Dynasty* (*Yuanshi* 元史, hereafter cited as YS) – the translation official was installed in each rank of the bureaucratic institution with a fixed staffing level.[14] As Nakhchivānī recorded, after *bakhshī* composes the official document, "he should confirm the meaning with an abridged summary". Coincidently, such an obligation also appeared in the practice of the Yuan chancellery. In the *Yuan dianzhang* (元典章, "Institution of the Yuan Dynasty"), a relevant term *shimu* (事目, "outline")

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[11]   The term "law" in classical Mongolian is *ǰasaq* and in the medieval Persian-Arbic sources was transliterated as *yāsā* and *yāsāq* randomly. (DOERFER: 1963–1975: vol. 4, 71–81) In the article I use transcription of *yasa* because it is commonly used in English-language literature, but in the translations of primary sources I keep the original transcription of *yasaq*. As for the definition and the distinction of the Turkic-Mongolian terms, *yasa* and *yasaq*, see VÁSÁRY 2018: 68, n. 28, 29. But in another article (VÁSÁRY 2016b: 164), he said, "*yāsā* and *yāsāq* are actually the same notion, the first used in Muslim (Turco-Persian) sources, the second being the original Turco-Mongol form. Consequently, no distinction can be made between them." However, I tend to regard it as a formulaic expression, which usually appears in a scenario where people need to invoke the *Yasa* of Chinggis Khan. Several variants of this phrase are also familiar to scholars, including the "*yāsā va yusūn*", "*yāsā va tūra*" and "*yāsā va bīlīk*". Or, to be aligned with the writing style in Persian, one of the Turko-Mongolian words in the above phrase is replaced by an Arabic-Persian synonym, for instance, *qavāʾid*, *qānūn* and *siyāsa* (all these terms mean "law, rule"), etc. Although no distinction can be made between them, it is – at least in a Turkic-Mongolian context – a solemn testimony to emphasise the legitimacy of the law to which people resorted.

[12]   DK vol. 2, 39–41; trans. mine.

[13]   "Among the Westerners, they use the Western writing under Chinqai's direction." 行於回回者，則用回回字，鎮海主之. *Heida shilue* p. 61). In here, I use Atwood's translation and according to his comment, the term "Huihui" later came to mean "Muslim", but in the Yuan era it was used for all people from the West with a more or less "Caucasian" appearance. "Western writing" (*huihuizi*, 回回字) refers to the basis of the Uyghur-Mongolian script. ATWOOD 2021: 106.

[14]   Wherever the official Mongolian translator is appointed, each order issued from the hundred offices within and outside the palace, must be written in Mongolian script [as well as in Chinese]. 諸內外百司應出給箚付，有額設譯史者，並以蒙古字書寫 (YS p. 2615).

is defined as "to summarise the official documents in Mongolian letters",[15] and later, this obligation was extended through the entire government apparatus, from the Central Secretariat to the local government. Gakusho Nakajima supplies evidence according to documents found at Qara-Qota (Gakusho 2009). It reveals that in both the Ilkhanate and Yuan dynasties, the chancery practice, to a certain extent, shares a common experience. In Ilkhanate, this can be illustrated from a *Vaqf* document of 1272, which was addressed to Nūr al-Dīn b. Jājā, for protecting his endowment in Anatolia from the potential seizures of Mongol soldiers, and was concluded with a Mongolian summary (Temir 1959: 59–165).

To compose the diplomatic letter is *bitigchī* and *bakhshī*'s duty too. The diplomatic letter addressed to Mamluk Sultan and the latter's response are written in Mongolian, usually attached with an Arabic version (*al-Taʿrīf* p. 47; *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* vol. 7, 294). Given the enduring influence of the Mongol Empire, which lasted even after its dissolution, the Mongolian language continued to be used as a *lingua franca* on diplomatic occasions. In the earlier contacts between the Ming and the Timurid empires, both Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and Samarqandī report the official correspondences sent by the Ming Emperor included three copies, in Persian, Chinese and in "Mongolian script" (*khaṭṭ-i mughūlī*), though the content of the three letters is the same. In addition, the list of the animals and gifts – usually constituted by nines or multiples of nine – were also made in "all three languages and with three scripts" (*bi har sa zabān va har sa khaṭṭ*).[16] Even down to the year 1453, an edict issued by Emperor Jingtai (景泰, r. 1449–1457) to the "leader" (*toumu*, 頭目) of Lār (i.e. capital of the district of Lāristān, in Iran), Yanglirgi, was composed in Mongolian, although Mongolian was not a native language of either side in this diplomatic exchange (Cleaves 1950). The situation in western Asia is similar. One of the *mamluk*s of Sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq (r. 1382–1399), Manklī-Bughā al-Ṣalāḥī al-Ẓāhirī who "was good at reading in Mongolian", was dispatched as an envoy to Timur in 799 ah / 1396 ce.[17]

Given the visible benefits, the Mongolian language attracted non-Mongols seeking a position in the government to acquire it. Mastering Mongolian supplied (non-Mongol) subjects with access to the ruling class, that is, the Mongol rulers and their companions. Among them, Uyghur people had a natural advantage, due to the relative similarity of their language with Mongolian. A Yuan author concludes, "the *Gaochang* [i.e. Uyghur] people of the present day are honoured

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[15] "Each document [between Central Government institutions] must include the outline of files in Mongolian script." 凡有行移文字並用蒙古字標寫本宗事目 (*Yuan dianzhang* vol. 2, 524).

[16] *Zubdat al-tavārīkh* vol. 2, 699; *Maṭlāq* vol. 3, 266.

[17] *Al-Manhal* vol. 11, 286; *Taʾrīkh Ibn al-Furāt* vol. 9, 453; Yosef 2021: 106 n. 263.

far more than other nations, due to their language and writing abilities".[18]

Likewise, when Hülegü departed on his western campaign, he took a certain number of Uyghur intellectuals along with the expeditionary forces. Most of them were recruited from his own fief in Zhangde (彰德, today's Anyang, in Henan Province) and the fiefs of the Toluid family, i.e. Zhending (真定, today's Zhengding, in Hebei Province). Later, several of them stayed in Iran and were appointed local governors in southern provinces. For example, Vankiānū, with a Chinese name *Wanjianu* (萬家奴), who came from the group of Hülegü's "initiate *amir*s" (*umarā'-i mulāzim*), was assigned as fully fledged governor (*ḥukūmāt-i kullī*) of Fars (Mɪʏᴀ 2010: 178). Ūnkiyānū was dismissed in 1271, and his successor Sunghūchāq Aqa (or Sūnchāq, Mongolian *Su'unčaq*) was a Ughur *bitigchī*, too (Cʜᴇɴ 2019: 11–25). In the time of Arghun Khan, Shishī *bakhshī*, a senior Uyghur courtier was dispatched to Shabankāra as *shiḥna*, i.e. the overseer of a city (*Majma' al-ansāb* pp. 180–181).

Besides, local Muslims in the Ilkhanate also held the post of *bakhshī*, i.e. taking charge of the Mongolian interpreter. A typical case is: Muḥammad Bakhshī (full name Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Ḥasan b. Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd al-Ghafūr al-Samarqandī), a polyglot scribe, who completed a copy of Juvaynī's *Tārīkh-i jahāngūshā* on 26 May 1324 (1st Jamādī II, 724), wrote the verses in four languages (Arabic, Persian, Mongolian and Turkic) (ᴅᴇ Rᴀᴄʜᴇᴡɪʟᴛᴢ 1969; Gᴀɴᴅᴊᴇɪ 1970). As Tourkhan Gandjei pointed out, Muḥammad Bakhshī might be no more than a copyist of these verses, but it is enough to prove that he was a proficient scribe (*bakhshī*) in all the four languages above and with personal curiosity in Turco-Mongolian literature as well. On the other hand, the people who associated with the Mongols, via verbal communication, were easily influenced by the aliens' living style and manners.

Mongolian words permeated daily life, especially in Persian slang. Even for contemporary Persian literati, inserting Mongolian words in their literary works is a prevailing style. A poet, and satirist living in the early era of Ilkhanate, Pūr Bahā' Jāmī in his famous "Mongol Ode", which was dedicated to ʿIzz al-Dīn Ṭāhir Faryūmadī, *vizir* of Khurasan, cited a wide range of Turko-Mongolian technical terms, for illustrating a vivid scene of Persian life under Mongol domination (Mɪɴᴏʀsᴋʏ 1956). Even erudite authors, e.g. Vaṣṣaf al-Ḥażrat and Majd-i Hamgar, who were not known for their polyglot competences, could not forbear ornamenting their prose and verses with some Mongolian words (*Majmūʿa-yi Ashʿār-i Vaṣṣāf al-Ḥażrat* p. 74; *Dīvān-i Majd Hamgar* pp. 622–623). A similar phenomenon is also seen in the jestbook by a post-Mongol poet, ʿUbayd Zākānī's (full name as: Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn ʿUbayd Zākānī, d. ca. 770

18　於今高昌之人....語言文字之用尤榮於他族。See, "Epitaph of the Great Zongzhengfu Yeke Jaruʏči, King of Gaochang" (*dazongzhengfu yeke zhaluhuochi gaochangwang shendaobeiming*, 大宗正府也可札魯火赤高昌王神道碑銘). *Yüji Quanji* vol. 2, 1068.

AH / 1370 CE) jestbook, *Rasāla-yi dilgūshā* ("The Joyous Treatise") (*Rasāla-yi dil-gūshā* p. 86). It seems to have been a welcome prevalence in the circle of Persian literati to which the aforementioned authors belonged, since these foreign words "which from military camps and market-places" endowed their works with an exotic shadow (Minorsky 1956: 261).

For the common population, a basic knowledge of Mongolian had some benefits, too. Several bilingual glossaries come down to us, e.g. a Turkic and Mongolian vocabulary included in the zoological section of the *Nuzhat al-qulūb* ("Adornment of Hearts"), and a manuscript found in Kaitak (in Dagestan, southern Caucasus) scribed in 1647, reveals how knowledge of the Mongolian language penetrated into the local society (Pelliot 1927; Pelliot 1931). Likewise, the *Zarnī* Manuscript, a Mongolian-Persian lexicon found in Afghanistan and edited by Iwamura, to a certain extent, reveals a heritage language that can be traced back to the Mongol era (Iwamura 1961).

For contemporary Persian writers, the terms *Mongol* and *Turk* are interchangeable. In most cases, the author tends to use *Turk* rather than *Mongol* to designate these nomadic conquerors who came from the East. This is not only due to the longer history of the Turkic people migrating to Iran than the Mongols, but also the stronger influence of the Turkic culture in Iran after it took root in these new territories. As an example, Vaṣṣaf mentioned Ghazan Khan's envoy Noqai, who, when he took an audience at the Palace of the Yuan Emperor, "knelt and considered a *salām* sufficient with Turkic ritual" and replied to the Emperor in eloquent Turkish (Qiu 2020: 162). The author sometimes chose the term *Mongol* just to emphasise people's ethnic background. Or, when the terms *Turk* and *Uyghur* appear together in the same context, the latter one, Uyghur, more likely means the Mongolian (script or language). Ibn al-Fuwaṭī once met a man in Sultan Öljeitü's (r. 1304–1316) army, named Quṭb al-Dīn Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥmmad b. Ḥamd Ṭāyankū al-Khwārazmī, and said this person who "served in the ministers' office wrote with Uyghur, Turkic and Chinese (*al-khiṭā'iyya*) perfectly".[19] In this context, Uyghur doubtless refers to Mongolian written in the Uyghur script.

3. Mongolian speakers among the Mamluks

The military system of the Mamluk Sultanate was claimed to have continued and reformed the institution of the later Ayyubid period, based on the manpower that was constantly imported from the steppe areas outside the Islamic World. Later, a reformation of the military and administrative structure took place during Sultan al-Ẓāhir Baybars' (r. 1260–1277) reign. The general structure of the Mamluk forces, as seen in Ayalon's exemplary studies, was constituted

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19   *Al- Alqāb* vol. 3, 422, no. 2885. In this critical edition, Ṭāyankū is misspelled as Ṭānīkū.

of three main parts: a) Royal Mamluks; b) Amir's *mamluk*s; and c) the troops of the free corps. The young *mamluk*s, mainly imported from the Qipchaq Steppe and Caucasian lands, were purchased and set free by the ruling sultan (AYALON 1953: 204). Thereafter, they converted to the Islamic faith and received military training, and therefore developed a profound loyalty toward their master and liberator (*ustādh*). In the meantime, the bond of *khushdāshiyya*, i.e. "brothers-in-arms", linked all the *mamluk*s that belonged to a single master. The relationship between the senior and junior *mamluk*s of the same household was regarded as that of *aghā* and *īnī* (pl. *aghawāt*, *iniyyāt*, Turkic, elder and younger brother), very similar to those of a family (AYALON 1987; LEVANONI 1995: 14; YOSEF 2017: 18–19). Given that most of the *mamluk*s spoke allogeneic Turkic dialects, it follows that in Mamluk Egypt, the populations were divided into the Turkish-speaking military elites and the rest of the Arabic-speaking people.

Unexpected evidence indicates, however, that some traces of the Mongols appeared in Mamluk Cairo even before the first encounter between two states on the battlefield. Kolbas introduces a Mamluk mint of 651 AH / 1251–1252 CE, with a personal name "Ilqāy ʿAlī", and gives a hypothetical biography of the career of this person. She suggests that Ilqāy ʿAlī is a Mongol treasury officer who was sent to organise vassal coinage in Georgian and Rum Seljuq territory in 645–646 AH / 1247–1248 CE, and then offered his services to the Mamluks (KOLBAS 2022: 1–11).

On 25 Ramaḍān 658 AH / 3 Sept. 1260 CE, the Mamluks, led by Sultan Quṭuz, defeated a Mongol army under the command of Ket-Buqa at ʿAyn-Jālūt, in northern Palestine. This victory finally stopped the momentum of the Mongols' western march, and unexpectedly facilitated the initial diplomatic connection between the Mamluk and the Golden Horde, two sworn enemies of Hülegü and his newly founded regime (FAVEREAU 2018: 13–40). Afterwards, a number of the Mongols entered Egypt, as refugees (*wāfidiyya*, pl. *wāfidūn*), defectors, and, mostly, slaves. The *wāfidiyya* Mongols mainly belong to troops of the Jochid, consisting of the soldiers of Oyirat ancestry (LANDA 2016). The Mongol soldiers were integrated into the regiment of *Baḥriyya* and their female relatives were married to the Mamluk Sultan and nobles (AYALON 1951; NAKAMACHI 2006; AMITAI 2008: 126–130). In view of the number and influence of the Mongols during Baybars' reign, some Arabic writers stated, perhaps with a certain exaggeration, "al-Malik al-Ẓāhir (i.e. Baybars) [...] acted according to the principles of the Mongol kings and most of the laws of Chinggis Khan as *yāsā*".[20]

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[20] *Al-Nujūm* vol. 7, 182–185; *al-Khiṭaṭ* vol. 2, 221. Here I cite Levanoni's English translation (LEVANONI 1995: 6).

In Sultan Qalāwūn's (r. 1279–1290) era, the Mongols became the second most important ethnic group among the Mamluks besides the Turkic people. Not only the constant Black Sea slave trade, but also the civil war among different Chinggizid states, e.g. the Ilkhanate-Golden Horde conflicts and the war between khan Toqta and Noghay, etc., brought a considerable number of the Mongol slaves into the Mamluk Egypt. After Qalāwūn, Sultan ʿĀdil Kit-Bughā (1294–1296), an Oyirat Mongol, was even installed on the throne of the sultanate. Kit-Bughā's partiality for the Mongol is apparent. As Little pointed out, at that time, occasionally, "the consciousness of being Mongol outweighed the traditional Mamluk loyalties" (LITTLE 1970: 126). Kit-Bughā's reign was short. He was deposed by the disgruntled Mamluk elites. Yet, the influence of the Mongols continued to increase.

Qalāwūn's son, Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1310–1341), made no secret of his partiality to Mongol customs. During his third reign, several of the highest rank *mamluk*s in his court were Mongols, or behaved like Mongols. One of his favourite amīrs, Sayf al-Dīn Bashtāk al-Nāṣirī, originally came from the Golden Horde. He arrived in Egypt because Sultan al-Nāṣir once asked a slave trader, Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī, to bring a *mamluk* who resembled Abū Saʿīd (r. 1315–1335), the last Ilkhan. Therefore, Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī introduced Bashtāk and brought him to the Sultan's court.[21] Bashtāk's political opponent, Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī (or named Qawṣūn al-Sāqī), also came from the Golden Horde. Qawṣūn was known as one of the few of Sultan al-Nāṣir's amirs who had colloquial and writing competence in Mongolian, and his manner and actions, in various aspects, expressed a deep Mongol influence. Some contemporary authors depict his arrival in Cairo thus: "he would ride like the Mongol kings, escorted by 300 horsemen in two lines, each line preceded by a man beating a *qubuz* or Mongol drum".[22] At the wedding ceremony of the Sultan's son Anūk, Qawṣūn supplied fifty horses for eating meat and making *qumiz*, an alcoholic brew made by fermenting mare's milk (IRWIN 2010: 1–2). The honourable status of Sultan al-Nāṣir's Mongol-*mamluk* reveals the extent to which the Sultan was attracted by Mongol culture. This is, probably, the reason why the Arabic author in the post-Qalāwūnid era, e.g. al-Maqrīzī, described the Sultan al-Nāṣir's period in such a distorting way. He said: "Egypt and Syria became crammed with the Mongol peoples and their customs and manners spread there" (AYALON 1973: 111).

The positive integration of the Turkic people and Mongols resulted from their millennial symbiosis in Inner Asia. According to Nakamachi's inventory, there were altogether twenty-four defections from 1262 to 1337, the eve of the collapse of the Ilkhante. Twenty-four *Wāfidiyya* commanders' names and their military

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21   *Al-Aʿyān* vol. 1, 691. *Al-Durar* vol. 1, 478. *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūta* vol. 1, 361.

22   *Al-Sulūk* vol. 2, 615; trans. VAN STEENBERGEN 2001: 454.

ranks were recorded in Mamluk sources (NAKAMACHI 2006: 66–67). Compared to the majority of Mongol-*mamluk*s who remained in their modest ranks and left merely ambiguous traces in the historical accounts, several prominent personages reached a higher status – even including one sultan, in various ways. Just as in Sultan al-Nāṣir's own words, "the Mongol and Turks are now one people (*jins wāḥid*)" (AYALON 1973: 121–122).

3.1. The Mongol language in the Mamluk

In Mamluk society, different languages mark different origins and classes of the speaker. On the one hand, the Turkic language in allogeneic dialects, especially Qipchaq Turkish, in the period we discuss, represented a common language among the military elites and in contrast to it, Arabic was the language of civilians and the administrative and religious elites. On the other hand, considering that the Sultan's private *mamluk*s (*khāṣṣakiyya*, bodyguard) were selected according to their ethnic origins, some minority languages, therefore, continued to display a social bond, to maintain ethnic solidarity (AYALON 1953: 214 n. 6).

In the Mamluk administrative institution, the secretariat – especially, the department of interpreting – was a place gathering the polyglot officers in charge of the official documents and diplomatic correspondence of the sultan. This might have been due to the scattering of the population caused by the Mongol conquest of the Eurasian continent. To compose official letters and decrees in several languages, or to translate them from one language to another, the establishment of this agency was therefore necessary for an Empire with people from a diverse variety of ethnic backgrounds. In comparison with the dominant status of Chinese in East Asia and Arabic in the ʿAbbasid government, a multi-lingual chancellery practice first took precedence in the central minister office of the Mongol Empire, and then, was imitated by contemporary rulers. Juvaynī describes the scribes of diverse origins, e.g. Persian, Uyghur, Khitai, Tibetan and Tangut, in Möngke Khan's office who wrote the governmental documents in different languages (BOYLE 1997: 607). Gradually, this tendency of multilingualism in chancellery practice spread from the core of the Mongol Empire to the realms located on the fringe area, from the Black Sea to Yemen.

The diplomatic correspondence of the Mamluk addressed to the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate was usually composed in two versions, an Arabic version in which content was accepted by the Sultan, and a Mongolian translation. Sultan Baybars' first mission to Berke Khan, dispatched in 1262, carried an Arabic letter and its Mongolian translation drafted by Sirghān Aghā, a *wāfidiyya* Mongol commander (*al-Rawḍ* p. 138; FAVEREAU 2018: 43). Later, al-ʿUmarī introduces the process of drafting diplomatic correspondence during the reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir, as:

The form of correspondence to [the Khan of the Golden Horde] – if it is written in Arabic – is [the same] form as written to the ruler of Iran [i.e. the Ilkhan], as has been mentioned. But most of the time it is written in Mongolian (*bi-l-mughulī*), for which is responsible Ötemiš al-Muḥammadī, Ṭayir Bughā al-Nāṣirī (also spelt as: Ẓahir Būqā al-Mughulī), the translator *Arghudāy (ARĠDAQ) and Qawṣūn al-Sāqī.[23]

Ötemiš (his full name in Arabic sources as: Sayf al-Dīn Aytamish Muḥammadī) was the chief member in charge of drafting the diplomatic letter to Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd. However, the transliteration as "Aytamish" must be ruled out. In classical written Mongolian, if the mid vowel *ö* is the first letter or in the first syllable of a word, it requires the stroke of the *-i* added under the *u* (GRØNBECH and KRUEGER 1993: 57). During the 13th–14th century, Persian/Arabic scribes followed this rule when they transliterated the Mongolian word with Arabic letters. Therefore, the mid vowels *ö* and *ü* were usually transliterated as *wāw* (if it is the first letter, *alef* should be added) plus *yāʿ* (او + ى).[24] Therefore, although his name appears in the Mamluk sources as "Aytamish", it doubtlessly should be identified as "Ötemiš". Ötemiš is a Uyghur Turkic word, deriving from the verb *ötä-/ödä-* ("to carry out an obligation") and therefore he is presumed of Uyghur origin.[25] One can also find a parallel Chinese form in the YS as *yuedemishi* (月的迷失, i.e. Ödemiš) (YS pp. 274, 278). Given that he had adapted the spelling of his name in Qipchaq Turkic, it seems very likely that he came to the Mamluk sultanate – where the western Turkic occupied a dominant position– at a very young age.

As for the third person, his name "ARĠDAQ" (ارغداق) is perplexing. I tend to identify it as "Arghudāy", i.e. Ötemiš' brother Sayf al-Dīn Arquṭāy. Since in Arabic transliteration, the *alef* in initial position can designate any vowel and *gh-* and *q-* are interchangeable. The pronunciation *t-* in Uyghur or Qipchaq corresponds to *d-* in Oghuz Turkic (AMITAI 2007: 271–272 n. 36.), and the last letter *qaf*, most likely, is a typo of *yāʿ*. Arquṭāy derives from the Mongolian person's name "Uru'udai" (or Urɣudai), and its transliteration in Chinese is

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23   *Al-Tāʿrīf* pp. 62–63. Here I quote Amitai's translation, AMITAI 2008: 137.

24   Abundant cases can be found in the *Shuʿab-i panjgāna* ("the Five Genealogies"), which is identified as Rashīd al-Dīn's works. In this work, each name of the Chinggisid members (e.g. Khan, prince and princess) is recorded in the Mongolian scripts and Arabic letters (*Shuʿab-i panjgāna*).

25   Ötemiš' biography is included in several Mamluk biographical dictionaries, as: *al-Aʿyān* vol. 1, 634; *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 9, 249; *Al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr* vol. 3, 335–342; *Al-Manhal* vol. 2, 291. For the etymologic discussion of the name Aytamïs, see RÁSONYI and BASKI 2007: 25. The authors identifed that the etymon of Aytamïs derives from Turkish "to say (sagen, söylemek)". But I have to reject Rásonyi and Baski's presumption, because based on Ötemiš' personal Mongolian signature, Cleaves has already pointed out it is Ugyhur Turkic (CLEAVES 1953: 485; RYBATZKI 2006: 36). For studies on his biography, see LITTLE 1979: 347–401; AMITAI 2007: 264–275.

Uluwutai (兀鲁兀台).[26] As al-Ṣafadī's recorder, both Arquṭāy and Ötemiš, spoke "Turkish" (*lisān al-turk*) and were fluent in the Qipchaq language (*lisān al-qibjāqī*), and the Sultan consulted them about the "Yasa" that was prevalent among the "Turks" (*Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 8, 233). Here, al-Ṣafadī distinguishes the "Turkish" language and Qipchaq and indeed, in the above context "Turks" and "Turkish" refer to the Mongols and Mongolian, respectively.

Only when Ötemiš was absent, Ṭayir Bughā – Sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn's maternal uncle – would be asked to take over the former's duty. Ṭayir Bughā had been the Ilkhanid governor of the Anatolian city of Akhlāṭ, but had submitted to Mamluk during Qalawūn's reign. His son, Yaḥyā, also served the Sultan on diplomatic occasions.[27] Qawṣūn al-Sāqī, i.e. Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn al-Nāṣirī is Ötemiš' assistant too. Al-Nuwayrī reported that when Ötemiš was absent at the arrival of Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd's mission in 726 AH / 1326 CE, Qawṣūn presented the greeting ceremony as a Mongolian interpreter (*Nihāyat al-Arab* vol. 33, 226). This tradition seems to have remained in the period after the centralised authority of Ilkhan dissolved in Iran. Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn b. al-Nashā'ī stated, the letter to Ṭaghāy Timur, a descendant of Jochi Qasar who was elevated as a Mongol khan in Khurasan after Abū Saʿīd's death, was composed in Mongolian (*Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* vol. 7, 253.3).

Without a doubt, the above four persons in al-ʿUmarī's chancery manual represent the highest level of Mongolian competence in the Sultan's court. Moreover, al-Yūsufī, a biographer of Sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn, asserted that "his (i.e. Ötemiš) speaking in Mongolian was at the utmost level (*kāna fī kalāmhi bi-l-mughulī fī ghāya*) and his Mongolian was perfect (*yakūnu min al-faṣāḥa bayna al-mughul*)". His handwriting is praised as "more beautiful than fine Kufic [script]" (*khaṭṭ al-kūfī al-majīd*) (*Nuzhat al-Nāẓir* p. 330). It is worth noticing that the authors of the biographic dictionary prefer to use a term, *faṣīḥ* (pl. *fuṣaḥā*), which means "clear, eloquent, who speaks a good language, purist", to emphasise proficiency in a certain language (EYCHENNE 2013: 154 n. 3). The definition of *faṣīḥ* is close to the Chinese term *Xiangsheng* (像生, "lifelike, fluent as a native speaker").[28] Living in a similar multilingual environment under Mongol rule, such a term

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[26] Rásonyi and Baski suggest identifying his name as Arïq-tay, "kinny, meagre foal". RÁSONYI and BASKI 2007: 71. Yet, considering that the names of him and his brother Ötemiš might not derive directly from Qipchaq Turkic, I tend to presume it comes from the Mongolian "Uɣudai". For an etymological discussion, see also RYBATZKI 2006: 151. In the YS, an ancestor of Jočitai (Zhuchitai, 朮赤台) is mentioned by this name (YS p. 2962).

[27] Ṭayir Bughā's biography, see *Al-Durar* vol. 2, 234, in the entry of "Ẓahir Buqā al-Mughulī"; *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 13, 422. For the discussion about his relation with the Mamluk Sultan, see BROADBRIDGE 2019: 278–279.

[28] One case came from a poetic drama (*zaju*, 雜劇), which titles "A Mongolian *kuogu* (i.e. *gugu*) cap wearing actresses, speaking fluent barbarian language" (*xiangsheng fanyu kuogudan* 像生番語括骨旦, *kuogu* 括骨 is a variant form of *gugu* 罟罟). *Luguibu* p. 212.

reveals the special attention of the contemporary literati to the people who have a high linguistic competence.

Eychenne suggests that the term *faṣīḥ* means perfect knowledge of a language, but suspects it does not for sure imply that someone has already acquired all its subtleties. Yet, an exception could be found in Sayf al-Dīn Qibjaq's (an Arabic transliteration of "Qipčaq") experience. He was a senior Mongol-Mamluk amir trusted by Sultan Lajīn (r. 1296–1299), and his father served a Mongol *noyan*, Ḥasan Tuqū as a scribe, mastering both Mongolian and Arabic. Therefore, Qipchaq "was good (*yajyadu*) in speaking and writing with Mongolian". Once, in a conversation with his father, Qibjaq observed that "we [Mongols] like you [that is, the Arabs] have a 'good' (*jayyid*) and 'bad' (*radiʾ*) speech".[29] Corresponding to it, in a poetic drama (*zaju*), titled *Scenery of Peach Blossom Land* (*taoyuanjing*, 桃源景), we find a parallel expression that reflects ordinary people's stereotype of the Mongolian language. The dramatist arranges a line in the transliteration of Mongolian and its Chinese explanation, as "[a Chinese man] abuses someone with immoral words" (歹言語罵人–卯兀客勒莎可只).[30] The transliteration of a Mongolian phrase, according to Fang Linggui's identification, can be reconstructed as: "*ma'u kele sügü-zhi*", meaning "abuses [someone] with bad words".[31] Therefore, in al-Ṣafadī's recording, it is obvious that the adjectives "good" and "bad" are literal translations from the Mongolian words, *sayin* and *ma'u*, respectively. This case truly reflects his knowledge of the subtleties of his mother tongue, Mongolian and the acquired language, Arabic.

However, for people who did not have an affinity with the Mongols, acquiring knowledge of this language was not an easy matter. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī mentioned that Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Muḥāsan Manṣūr b. Aḥmad, an Arabic poet, "is used to speaking in Mongolian with an emphatic pronunciation but without understanding its meaning; he just uses it to speak in a funny way [with it] in his speech".[32] In view of the natural advantage, translators and interpreters who served in the administrations usually inherited their positions within the family, not only indicating a tradition of linguistic expertise, but also as an ideal method

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[29] *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 24, 133, and Little translates this sentence as "high and low speech" (Little 1979: 395).

[30] *Zhu Youdun ji* p. 194. Zhu Youdun (朱有燉, 1379–1439) is son of the first Emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). As a productive dramatist and poet, he shows a great interest in collecting the anecdotes of the Yuan dynasty.

[31] "Shake" (莎可, Hitoshi transliterates it as "*sökö*") also appears in the *Huayi yiyu* (華夷譯語, "Chinese-Barbarian Glossary", 1389) and its Chinese explanation is "abuse" (*ma*, 罵). Hitoshi 2003: 43. As for the "*zhi*" (只), according to Fang's opinion, this character is used as a suffix of perfect aspect in the colloquialism of the Yuan period (Fang 2001: 266–270).

[32] *yukallimu bi-tafakhkhim al-alfāẓ min ghayr maʿrifat bihā wa yutamaskharu fī kalāmhi*. Al-Alqāb vol. 4, 263, no. 3812; trans. mine.

of maintaining social networks and social status. The Ilkhanate's chancery manual supplies a parallel case. It said:

> If he (i.e. Ürük *bakhshī*) intends to retire from the position of secretary after years of serving at the chancellery for reasons of age, people should consider one of his children, or someone else who acts as deputy or [who] replaces his position as the superintendent [of *bakhshī*] and his successor. It is necessary to commit him in charge of writing the decree.[33]

In fact, Arabic sources prove a similar situation in the Mamluk sultan's court. For example, the aforementioned Ṭayir Bughā al-Nāṣirī's (or Ẓahir Būqā al-Mughulī) son Yaḥyā on 14 Rajab 726 ah / 16 June 1326 ce, assisted his father in treating Chopan's envoy and read the latter's letter to Sultan Nāṣir.[34] Besides his son, Ṭayir Bughā al-Nāṣirī's nephew Muḥmmad once was mentioned as an attendant who worked on the reception of Abū Saʿīd's mission on 4 Rajab 727 ah / 26 May 1327 ce (*Nihāyat al-Arab* vol. 33, 231). Probably in Ötemiš' absence, his personal *mamluk*, Sayf al-Dīn Kirmās took Chopan's letter back from the Ilkhanate in 1326 (*Nihāyat al-Arab* vol. 33, 226).

Refraining from speaking Arabic, or actually lack of competence to acquire Arabic, in the Mamluk Sultanate, was a common stereotype about the Mongol-*mamluk*s. For example, the Sultan expressed a reluctance to speak Arabic on official occasions, so as to keep his distance from the audiences (*al-Rawḍ* p. 85; Favereau 2018: 56). The case of Bashtāk al-Nāṣirī is similar. It was said that he "refused to speak Arabic" though some sources say that he knew it, and "if there is no interpreter, he does not speak to his *ustādhdar* (i.e. major-domo) and scribe".[35] This tendency can probably be attributed to privilege, or the need to keep a certain social distance (Eychenne 2013: 160). However, we cannot rule out that some Mongol people had the talent to learn a new language. Quṭlū-Bak seems to be an exception. It is said that he "knew Arabic, jurisprudence and Prophetic tradition very well".[36]

3.2. Language acquisition and the dissemination of Mongol history

If we could take a bird's-eye view of the Asian continent in the 13th–14th century, we would see, coincidently, a multilingual environment, alongside a multicultural administration and multi-ethnic immigrants, common across various empires, west to east. Therefore, when comparing the Mamluk sultanate and Yuan-Ming China, many similarities can be observed in the process of foreign language acquisition in spite of the wide difference in cultural background. The

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[33] DK vol. 2, 42; trans. mine.

[34] *Al-Durar* vol. 2, 234; vol. 4, 417; *Nihāyat al-Arab* vol. 33, 226.

[35] *Al-Aʿyān* vol. 1, 690; trans. mine.

[36] *Al-Aʿyān* vol. 4, 124; trans. mine.

compilation of bilingual (multilingual) vocabularies thus became indispensable for interacting with speakers on the other side of the language barrier. The double-column lexicon is a popular style. Several vocabularies passed down until today were compiled in the Mamluk era, for instance, the Leiden Manuscripts and Arabic-Mongolian vocabularies in the Biblioteca Corsini in Rome, and a trilingual manuscript tilted *Tarjumān turkī wa ʿajamī wa mughulī* – a Turkish Arabic and Mongolian-Arabic dictionary composed for a Qāḍī of Cairo in the 1340s, written by an Anatolian from Konya (POPPE 1927; WEIERS 1972; FLEMMING 1968).

The Rasulid *Hexaglot*, a dictionary of Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Persian, Turkic and Mongolian languages, reveals the working process of the compilation. Al-Malik al-Afḍal (d. 778 AH / 1377 CE), King of the Rasulid dynasty and the compiler of this work, asked an informant of Mongolian origin to supply a basic vocabulary and appended the equivalent terms in other languages. It is notable that the work of compilation revolves around the Mongolian language.[37] Meanwhile, these bilingual vocabularies are usually listed in the classification of meaning rather than in alphabetical order. In post-Mongol China, a parallel case also can be found, e.g. the lexicon *Huayi yiyu*. According to the *Ming shilu* (明實錄, "Veritable records of the Ming dynasty").

> (On 6th day, first lunar month, 1382) Now, consequently, he (Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang) commanded Huoyüanje, together with Mashayihei (Ma Shaykh), a Compiler [of the College of Literature], and others to translate its words into Chinese. Everything in astronomy, geography, human affairs, categories of living things, food and raiment, utensils – none is left out of the compilation.[38]

In such a tradition, the compiler's primary target focuses on practicality, namely to enable the learner to quickly acquire the necessary words relating to daily life. In contrast, grammar was not the teacher's priority. From a modern perspective, it is probably not a good language learning theory, because it means that the formal instruction is inadequate. This is also the reason why Ötemiš, as a person of non-Mongol origin (see above), is highly praised by Mamluk historians due to his distinguished Mongolian competence. Several authors describe how he became "a master of their language (i.e. Mongolian), his level amongst the Turks was [like] the status of a grammarian (*al-naḥwiyya*) among the [uneducated] common people (*al-ʿamma*)".[39]

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[37] VALLET 2015: 647. For a modern edition of the *Hexaglot*, see GOLDEN 2000.

[38] "乃命火原潔與編修馬沙亦黑等以華言譯其語﹐凡天文﹐地理﹐人事﹐物類﹐服食﹐器用﹐靡不具載." *Ming shilu*: "Taizu", pp. 2223–2224. Mashayihei (馬沙亦黑) is a Uighur scholar. He, as a descendant of Central Asian migrants, was instrumental in the activities of the Directorate of Arabo-Persian Astronomy. For English translation, see HUNG 1951: 452.

[39] *Al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr* vol. 3, 240; *Al-Durar* vol. 1, 424; trans. mine.

Besides bilingual vocabularies, historical works were widely used as learning material for foreign languages in this era. Al-Ṣafadī provides an impressive depiction of Ötemiš' knowledge of Mongol history. He said,

> He was trained in Mongol manners. He used to judge the members of the bodyguard (*khāṣṣakiyya*) within the Sultan's house according to the Law and "Yasa" (*siyāsa wa al-yāsaq*) which had been established by Chinggis Khan. He knew the biography (*sīrat*) of Chinggis Khan, and he used to read and consult it repeatedly. He knew the Mongol families (*buyūt al-mughul*) and their lineage (*ansābahum*) and origins (*uṣūlahum*). He used to learn by heart their [the Mongols'] histories and events (*tawārīkhihim wa waqā'i'ihim*).[40]

The aforementioned paragraph includes an abundance of information that enables us to catch a glimpse of the complex relationship between language acquisition and historical knowledge. Al-Ṣafadī mentions several different types of historical documents. The term *sīrat*, according to Aigle's explanation, means the idea of life and exemplary conduct. Its extended meaning, therefore, refers to the historical work about a certain personage who is worthy of remembrance, including both his superior quality and his faults (AIGLE 2008–2009: 21). It is also used as a synonym of the term *Ta'rīkh* (history). For example, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī sometimes names Juvaynī's *Tārīkh-i jahāngushā* as *sīrat al-mughūl* ("History of the Mongols") (*al-Alqāb* vol. 4, 25). Given this, when Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī reports, [Sultan] al-Nāṣir liked him (Ötemiš) very much, and if someone mentioned the *sīrat al-turk*, he (Sultan Nāṣir) would say: "let them tell Ötemiš". In this context, I tend to construe the *sīrat al-turk* as the "History of the Mongols" (*Al-Durar* vol. 1, 424).

Coincidently, a Mongolian-Arabic bilingual document in Ötemiš' own handwriting is inserted into an Arabic manuscript of al-Nasawī's *Sīrat Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dīn Mankubirtī* ("Biograph of [Khwarazm Shāh] Jalāl al-Dīn") and passed down to today.[41] Several scholars already provided the translation and explanation of this document, and the content as following:

Mongolian:

1. ene bičig Ötemis karag-un
2. nayibayin büi möna qoyin-a
3. ene bičig-i ken ungšibasu iraqmad

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[40] *Al-Aʿyān* vol. 1, 634; *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 9, 249; *Al-Durar* vol. 11, 424. Here I quote Ayalon's translation of this paragraph (AYALON: 1973: 135). To enhance clarity in the ensuing discussion, I have included transliterations of certain specific Arabic terms.

[41] HOUDAS 1895: IX–X. For the translation of Arabic paragraph, see DE SLANE: 1883–1895, 341; for a modern translation of the Mongolian text, see CLEAVES 1953: 478–486 and for a detailed reference, see AMITAI 2007: 263–275.

4. kitügei Ötemiš kereg-ün irgen

5. medelün büküi-dür bičibei.

Arabic:

– hadhā kitāb al-amīr Sayf al-Dīn, nā'ib al-Karak

Cleaves' translation is "This *bičig* is [that] of the [*n*]*ayiba* of Karag (Karak) Ötemiš. If anyone reads this *bičig* in the future, let him show mercy. The *nayib* Ötemiš wrote [this]". (CLEAVES 1953: 483). The Arabic text is: "This is the book (or letter) of the officer Sayf al-Dīn, governor of al-Karak" (i.e. al-Karek Castle, in Jordan).[42]

Amitai identifies that Ötemiš in this context is Sayf al-Dīn Ötemiš al-Muḥammadī, the famous Mongolian interpreter of Sultan al-Nāṣir. All later researchers seem to be guided by de Slane's following statement: "The page including these lines is the end part of a scroll that seems to be the content of an official letter, and there is no relationship with the text of al-Nasawī's work".[43] Given that they translate the Mongolian term *bičig* as well as the Arabic *kitāb* into "letter" rather than "book". Yet, I prefer to identify these two terms (*bičig* and *kitāb*) as "book", namely, al-Nasawī's biography. Thus, I regard these words more as a colophon that Ötemiš wrote after reading this work of al-Nasawī. Moreover, we cannot completely exclude the possibility that this manuscript once belonged to Ötemiš' private collection.

Moreover, the phrase "let him show mercy" (Mongolian *iraqmad* < Arabic *raḥmat*, also means "kindness") seems like a formula people usually scribed at the end of the book. In Chinese sources, we can easily find parallel examples. In the later period of the Yuan dynasty, Gong Shitai (貢師泰) wrote a colophon at the end of a poem scroll collected by Nai Xian (廼賢), a sinicised Turk, as "Yizhi (易之, Nai Xian's adult name), please keep [this work] with kindness (易之尚善葆之)".[44] Based on this assumption, we can understand which kind of reference is used by Ötemiš to acquire knowledge of Mongol history.

As for three other terms that appear in the aforementioned Ötemiš biography, the Mongol families (*buyūt al-mughul*), the lineage (*ansāb*, sing. *nasab*) and the origins (*uṣūl*, sing, *aṣl*), to a great extent, are equivalent terms of Mongolian words *ger*, *uruɣ* and *huǰa'ur,* respectively.[45] These terms also appear in Rashīd

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[42] AMITAI 2007: 267. He translated the term *kitāb* as "the letter".

[43] "Le feuillet qui porte ces lignes est un bout de rouleau qui paraît avoir contenu une dépêche officielle et n'a aucun rapport avec le texte d'Al-Nasawî" (DE SLANE 1883–1895: 341). This sentence was also quoted by CLEAVES 1953: 478.

[44] In "A colophon of Huang taishi's scroll of the 'Poems on Itinerary of visiting Capital'" (*tiwangtaishi shangjing shigaohou*, 題黃太史上京詩槀後), *Wanzhai ji* p. 354.

[45] Arabic: *bayt*; Turkic: *ev*; Mongolian: *ger*-?. GOLDEN 2000: 249.

al-Dīn's *Compendium of the History*. Rashīd al-Dīn mentions "Chinggis Khan and his offspring" (*Chīnggīz khān va ūrūgh*), and "the history of the origin and the genealogy of the Mongols" (*tavārīkh-i aṣl va nasab-i mughūl*), to classify the different definitions referring to Mongol history (*Jami'u't-tawarikh* vol. 1, 34–35). This reflects that Ötemiš's knowledge of Mongol history was systematic and might be the reason that al-Ṣafadī praises him as the person "who was the most knowledgeable person of his time in the Mongols' affairs" (*kāna aʿraf ahl zamānahu bi-aḥwāl al-mughul*) (*Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafāyāt* vol. 25, 122).

Although according to Ötemiš' case, we can conclude that learning Mongol history was motivated by the requirement of acquiring the language, which led to the dissemination of the knowledge of the Chinggisid family in the Mamluk Sultanate. Meanwhile, the Mongolian speakers played the role of an introducer who supplied historical information to contemporary Arabic historians. Ṭayir Bughā al-Nāṣirī, one of the four Mongolian translators, contributes another example. He introduced the "Dynasty" (*al-bayt*) of Chinggis Khan to al-ʿUmarī while the latter compiled the section of the Mongol history in his encyclopaedia.[46] Furthermore, the practice of using historical materials as foreign language textbooks seems to have been very popular throughout the Eurasian continent in the 14th century. In Ming China, the compilers "moreover, used the *Yuanmishi* (元秘史, "The Secret History of the Mongols") for reference, joining or cutting the words [on the one hand] to approximate the sounds [on the other]".[47] Similarly, in Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), the official textbooks of Mongolian language used by the "Bureau of Interpreters" (*sayeogwon*, 司譯院) included the "biography of the General Bayan" (*boyan bodou*, 伯顔波豆, "Bayan Baγatur") and "Wang Qaγan" (*wangkehan*, 王可汗, "Ong Qan").[48]

4. Conclusion

The Mongolian speakers in the Mamluk Sultanate, just as Allsen points out in his exemplary work on Eurasian cross-cultural contact during the Mongol era, mainly appear as agents who make such contact possible. Thanks to their efforts, the Mongolian language became a bridge for the transmission of culture and knowledge between the eastern and western Eurasian continent, even far beyond the borders of the Mongol Empire. As the above discussion indicates, the Mongolian language and its speakers, in a circumstance completely in contrast

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[46] *Masālik al-abṣār* p. 104, Arabic text, p. 20.

[47] "復取《元秘史》參考，紐切其字，以諧其聲音." *Ming shilu*: "Taizu", p. 2223; HUNG 1951: 452.

[48] "Bayan Baγatur" is the name of [a Mongol] general. As it is [the collection] of his speech, we therefore use [his name] as the title of the book. (伯顔波豆：將帥名。以其言，故仍為書名。) "Ong Qaγan" is the ancestor of Emperor Taizu of the Yuan (王可汗：元太祖之先。) Obviously, the compiler confused chief of Kereyit tribe with Chinggis Khan's ancestor. *Gyeongguk Daejeon* pp. 222–225.

to their native cultural background, still have a certain place. In addition, since most of these Mongolian speakers were active in the secretariat, according to Grévin's words, they also participated in the creation of "the culture of interpreting office", which covered the space from the Black Sea to Yemen and shared a multilingual practice (Gʀᴇ́ᴠɪɴ 2012: 347, 355).

The acquisition of the Mongolian language, in both eastern and western Eurasia, demonstrates multifaceted similarities. One of the typical cases is the relationship between the knowledge of history and language acquisition. In the Mamluk Sultanate and in the Ming China, people would – from written history and oral tradition – master the Mongolian. Meanwhile, adapting historical works into foreign language textbooks was a common practice. Furthermore, the connections in a matrix between history and language acquisition inevitably influence the form and style of historical knowledge during its dissemination.

Traditionally, the Mamluk political system is considered to have been based on a concept of "comradeship" (*khushdāshiyya*, i.e. "brothers-in-arms"). The "comradeship" between *mamluk*s and their masters and liberators served as bonds of loyalty within groups of ethnic outsiders (Cʜᴀᴍʙᴇʀʟᴀɪɴ 2002: 43). Yet, on the other hand, linguistic competence is indispensable for people who want to develop social relations in a complex ethnic community. It sometimes manifests as a linguistic affinity to tie the people of various ethnic origins. As a minor group in Mamluk society, a few *mamluk* elites constructed a quasi-ethnic network. In this network, linguistic competence rather than ethnic origin formed a basis of identity (*Nuzhat al-Nāẓir* p. 330, 334; Lɪᴛᴛʟᴇ 1979: 391).[49]

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ᴀʜ. Anno Hegirae, in the year of the Hijrah.

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[49] For example, Ötemiš was elevated by Sayf al-Dīn Qibjaq of Mongol origin, because of his language skill and although he was generally identified as a "Turk" (see above), but in al-Yūsufī's chronicle, he was depicted as "of pure Mongol stock (*min khāliṣ jins al-mughul*)". This case reveals that the ethnic boundary in Mamluk society sometime is flexible.

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