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## Čilger's Self-Criticism and the Problem of Ethnic Cleansing

During a raid the Merkid had seized Činggis Khan's (then still Temüjin's) wife Börte and left her to be cared for by Čilger Bökö, one of their chiefs. On Temüjin's arrival for renegeance Čilger recited a poem, a typical example of self-criticism, but in contrast to Stalin's show trials he then escaped to save his life.

In the poem he abases himself for having laid hand upon the "happy and fortunate lady" Börte, comparing himself with a black crow and a buzzard that was hoping to eat swan. He calls himself *mawui*, i.e., bad, Čilger. But before this word occurs, three other words are employed which have been remained unglossed in the Chinese translation of the Secret History of the Mongols and raised difficulties for modern interpreters.

Čilger called himself *qatar mawui*, *qaraču mawu*, *qunar mawui* and *qokir mawui*. Evidently, these terms designate base qualities. From the syntactical view-point, two possibilities seem to exist: a) *qatar*, *qunar* and *qokir* may be what I call a pseudo-subject, occurring in such expressions as *qačar qo'a ökid*, literally "cheek beautiful girls", i.e., 'girls whose cheeks are beautiful'. And b) both expressions may be real attributes, e.g., adjectives as in *doromjin mawui ulus minu* 'my lowly, bad people'.

Most translators prefer solution b), perhaps for the simple reason that *qaraču mawu Čilger* 'Čilger whose commoner is bad' makes no sense, it must be, as in Cleaves' translation, 'the commoner and bad Čilger'. Thus, also in the parallel expressions *qatar mawui*, etc., we have to suppose, not pseudo-subjects, but qualifying attributes, which in European grammar are called adjectives.

Therefore Poppe's solution in *HJAS* 13<sup>1</sup> comes to nothing. He tried to explain *qatar mawui* as a misunderstanding of the Chinese writers, supposing a reading with -d- instead of -t-, namely *ɣadar mawui* 'whose outside is bad', or, in better English, 'of poor appearance'. This sounds seductive, and indeed

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nicholas Poppe, [review of:] "Oeuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot: I. Histoire secrète des Mongols ..., Paris, 1949" *HJAS* 13 (1950):262-8, particularly 266-7.

confusion of *-d-* and *-t-* sometimes occurs in the SH, e.g., *döre* 'right' instead of *töre*. But such examples are extremely rare, and when we consult de Rachewiltz' Index we find 12 examples of the transcription *ɣadana* 'outside', never \**ɣatana*, and also *ɣada* 'outside' and *qada* 'rock' are always written with *-d-* (19 examples). And *qaraču mawu Čilger* has also been translated by Poppe as 'plebeian bad Chilger'. But we must consider the parallelism of the four terms.

All other interpreters have done so, but their solutions deviate from each other. The translation of *qaraču mawu* is not disputed. But what about the attempts at interpreting *qatar*, *qunar* and *qokir*? Here I enumerate them, translating the Russian, French, German, Mongolian and Turkish texts into English.

(1) Haenisch (1939)<sup>2</sup> translated in his dictionary: ordinary, dress, appearance, i.e., for *qatar* he chose solution b), for *qunar* and *qokir* solution a). In his translation of 1948<sup>3</sup>, on the other hand, he translated: of a low rank, ragged and ordinary, i.e., here he chose solution b), the terms in question are attributes. The discrepancy between these two solutions is evident. That he translated *qunar* by 'dress' resembles Poppe's explanation (cf. Lessing *qunar*, *qunir* 'garments'), whereas *qokir* 'appearance' is without foundation anywhere. This is a very difficult and polysemantic word. According to the dictionaries (Kowalewski, Lessing, Cèvel, but also to Zwick, Ramstedt, Čeremisov for Oirat, Kalmuck and Buriat respectively) it means: filth and dry dung, unfriendly, joke, clown. All these are terms of disparagement, but which of them is appropriate?

(2) Kozin (1941)<sup>4</sup> translated: 'rude yokel', 'stinking' and 'depraved'. None of these terms have been rationally explained and substantiated. The author simply (and correctly) divined that the Mongolian words must have some negative meaning and so invented suitable translations.

(3) Temir (1948)<sup>5</sup> wrote: ordinary, inferior, dirty. None of these terms has been explained.

2 Erich Haenisch, *Wörterbuch des Manghol un niuca tobca'an (Yüan-ch'ao pi-shi) Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*. Leipzig, 1939:63, 72, 65.

3 Erich Haenisch, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen ....* Leipzig, 1948:28.

4 S. A. Kozin, *Sokrovennoe skazanie ....* I. Moskva/Leningrad, 1941:104.

5 Ahmet Temir, *Moğolların gizli tarihi ....* Ankara, 1948:49-50.

(4) Pelliot's (1949)<sup>6</sup> translations were: greedy (with interrogation mark), rapacious (with interrogation mark) and rotten. His scepticism, except for the last word, is apparent.

(5) Mostaert (1950)<sup>7</sup> quoted the translations of Kozin, Haenisch and Pelliot. In the end he opted for the solution of the Chinese writers, i.e., he left the disputed terms unglossed and untranslated, substituting lacunas for them in his edition.

(6) Poppe (1950)<sup>8</sup> translated just as we have seen.

(7) In the *Mongolyn Nuuc Tovčoo* (1957)<sup>9</sup> we find these translations: hopeless, good-for-nothing, whereas *xoxir* can be translated in various ways, it may mean 'filth', 'dry dung' and 'unfriendly'.

(8) Cleaves (1982)<sup>10</sup> chose the Chinese writers' and Mostaert's cautious way of *docta ignorantia*, ἀφασία or reserving judgement: he does not comment on the words.

(9) Taube (1989)<sup>11</sup> wrote: ugly, badly dressed, dirty. He did not give an explanation. But it seems that he has followed Poppe. In the background we find the notions: *γadar mawui* "appearance bad" = ugly, *qunar mawui* "dress bad" = badly dressed; only the last translation deviates from Poppe's.

(10) De Rachewiltz (1995)<sup>12</sup> gave the terms as "ugly", "shabby", and "miserable, wicked". But in his commentary he wrote: "In this paragraph there are also several words the exact meaning of which is not clear. See Mostaert 52-53 and N. Poppe ...".

All these explanations are unsatisfactory for the following reasons:

<sup>6</sup> Cf. note 1, p. 150. For Kozin, Haenisch, Pelliot cf. also Antoine Mostaert, "Sur quelques passages de l'Histoire Secrète des Mongols" *HJAS* 13 (1950):334-337.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. note 6, particularly p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. note 1. Ozawa, Shigeo followed Poppe in most cases. (I owe this note to my pupil Hyong-Won Choi.)

<sup>9</sup> Cëndiyn Dandinsürën (ed.), *Mongolyn Nuuc Tovčoo*. Ulaanbaatar, 1957:65-66.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols* .... I. Cambridge/Mass.-London, 1982:§111.

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Taube, *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*. Leipzig und Weimar, 1989:47-48. Rather similar is Dorondib (ed.): *Hsin-i chien-chu: Meng-ku pi-shih*. Köke Hot, 1979:72-73. (I owe this note to my pupil Hyong-Won Choi.)

<sup>12</sup> Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols*. (*Papers on Far Eastern History, The Australian National University, Department of Far Eastern Studies*) Canberra, 1971-1985. §111 = 5 (1972):156, 170.

- (1) They contradict one another.
- (2) Some of them are mere phantasmas.
- (3) The assumption of a confusion -d- ~ -t- is not tenable in this case.
- (4) They suppose a mixture of two syntactical constructions, which is not very likely.

This means that we must find another solution, above all one satisfying condition (4): no mixture of syntactic constructions. Let us consider this.

The Mongols were not the only inhabitants of Central Asia. East of them lived the Tungus<sup>13</sup> whose territory extended to the sea. As I have proved during a symposium at Sapporo<sup>14</sup>, many Mongolian terms denoting fish are of Tungus origin, e.g., *laqa* 'perch, acerina cernua'. SH § 75 contains seven terms for fish and fishing, four of which are of Tungus origin, e.g., *čilüme* 'drag net', a term not explainable by Mongolian, but cf. Orok *čilu-* 'to drag seals'.

The Mongols' western neighbours were the Turks. There is an old problem: were the Naiman Mongols or Turks? Some venerable scholars plead for their Mongol character (Vladimircov<sup>15</sup>, Barthold<sup>16</sup>, Poppe<sup>17</sup>, Šastina<sup>18</sup>), others think that they were Turks (Howorth<sup>19</sup>, Poucha<sup>20</sup>, Murayama<sup>21</sup>, İnan<sup>22</sup>). At any rate, Šastina is right when pointing out that names are no satisfactory proof of a specific ethnic character. Here is a fun question: in 1813 there was a battle between a Scandinavian and a Baltic tribe on one side and a South German tribe on the other. What was that? That was the nations'

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Doerfer, *Mongolo-Tungusica*. Wiesbaden, 1985: particularly § 8.3.

<sup>14</sup> G. Doerfer, "Terms for aquatic animals in the Wu T'i Ch'ing Wên Chien" in Proceedings of the International Symposium on B. Pilsudski's Phonographic Records and the Ainu Culture. Sapporo, 1985:190-202. Cf. also note 13, pp. 246-254.

<sup>15</sup> B. Ja. Vladimircov, *Sravnitel'naja grammatika mongol'skogo pis'mennogo jazyka i xalxaskogo narečija*. I. Leningrad, 1929:19 sqq.

<sup>16</sup> *12 Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Türken Mittelasiens*. Berlin, 1935:121 ("ein mongolisches Volk").

<sup>17</sup> N. Poppe, *Khalkha-Mongolische Grammatik*. Wiesbaden, 1951:7.

<sup>18</sup> N. P. Šastina, *Putešestvija v vostočnye strany Plano Karpini i Rubruka*. Moskva, 1957: 353.

<sup>19</sup> Henry H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th century*. I. London, 1876: e.g., 694: "several facts make it almost certain that the Naimans were Turks".

<sup>20</sup> Pavel Poucha, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*. Praha, 1936:59 sqq. (rather cautiously).

<sup>21</sup> S. Murayama, "Sind die Naiman Türken oder Mongolen?" *CAJ* 4 (1958/59):188-198.

<sup>22</sup> Abdülkadir İnan, *Makalemeler ve incelemeler*.<sup>2</sup> Ankara, 1987:59-65.

battle at Leipzig, where the Russians (Rus' is a Scandinavian name) and the Prussians (this is an old Baltic name) defeated the French under Napoleon (French, France are names of South German origin). This happens when one takes tribal or personal names too literally.

But there would be other means to plead for a certain influence of Turkish, such as the fact that the Mongol tribe of the Qori Tumad later on adopted the name Qori-lar, with the Turkish plural suffix. There is a difficult passage in the SH, a quotation of a speech of Gürbesü, queen of the Naiman, in §189. It runs as follows: *Aiyi torluq töreksen kö'ün minu torulmiş olon doromjın mawui ulus minu asaraju barin čidaqu-yu*. The words *torluq* and *torulmiş* have been translated and explained in different ways. I cannot deal with the various opinions in any detail. This will be done in a later article. We must consider two facts: both words have not been glossed by the Chinese writer and both have not been marked as personal names. I translate this passage as follows: "Can my unruly and born weakling of a son take care of and hold my many emaciated lowly, bad people?" At any rate, *torulmiş* is a Turkish word, as the suffix proves.

Does this mean that the Naiman were Turks? I think that we should not follow the axiom that a nation is bound to speak only one language. This would mean accepting the ideas of wicked nationalists. The natural state of things, as long as politics do not disturb it, is not uniformity, but bilingualism. I remember that when I was in Central Iran, to research the Khalaj language<sup>23</sup>, I asked a passer-by whether he was a Persian or a Turk. His answer was: *Agar fārsī harf mī-zanīd fārsī-am, agar turkī harf mī-zanīd turkī-am*, i.e., "When you speak Persian I am a Persian, when you speak Turkish I am a Turk". Here I enumerate four well-known facts:

- (1) Chingis Khan spoke not only Mongolian, but also Turkish.<sup>24</sup>
- (2) Küyük's letter of 1246, to the pope, began with a Turkish formula.<sup>25</sup>
- (3) Rashid al-Din<sup>26</sup> had difficulty in distinguishing Turks and Mongols, for him the characteristic of nomadism, common to both linguistic units, prevailed.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Grammatik des Chaladsch*. Wiesbaden, 1988, etc.

<sup>24</sup> B. Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran*. Berlin, 1968:456-457; also Barthold (note 16) 151-154.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Pelliot, "Les mongols et la papauté" *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 23 (1922-23):3-30 (particularly p. 17); 24 (1924):225-235.

<sup>26</sup> This is apparent in all his works, cf. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*. I. Wiesbaden, 1963:xxxv-xxxvi.

(4) The same author reports that when Činggis' son Tolui died, the word *tolui* 'mirror' was tabooed and replaced by *küzgü*. But this is a Turkish word, with the same meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Now let us return to our original problem, the interpretation of Čilger's self-criticism. Let us write down the three disputed words:

*qatar*

*qunar*

*qokir*

We see that they have a similar structure, above all, they end in *-r*. May this be random? Krueger's Epigraphical Dictionary<sup>28</sup> will be helpful for an answer. This book contains 205 columns, 14 of them represent words ending in *-r*, i.e., 6.8%. The chance that to a given word ending in *-r* two words with the same ending are added, is thus 0.4624% or 0.004624, not very high. We may presume that behind their employment there is an intention and a rule. But how can we interpret these words? Let us assume, as a working hypothesis, that they were Turkish and see if a sensible result is attained. Let these terms be aorist forms, employed as attributes, as in Orkhon Turkish *körür közüm* 'my seeing eyes'<sup>29</sup> or Buddhist Turkish *täginür özümüz* 'our revolving self'<sup>30</sup>.

For *qat-* we find in Clauson's dictionary<sup>31</sup> 'to be hard, firm, tough'; thus *qatar* means 'hard, brutal'.

For *qun-* we find 'to steal, to carry off'; thus *qunar* means 'thievish'.

For *qoq-* we find 'to smell unpleasant, to stink'. In the various Turkish languages the aorist is not only *qoqar*, but also *qoqur*; and as Ibn Muḥannā and Brockelmann<sup>32</sup> have shown, the addition of the vowels *-A*, *-U* or *-I* means a strengthening of the semantic content, e.g., *bar-ī-dī* 'he went fast'. Thus *qoqir* means smelling extremely unpleasant.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Doerfer, same work as in note 26, iii. volume:638.

<sup>28</sup> John R. Krueger, *Mongolian Epigraphical Dictionary in Reverse Listing*. (Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series. 88) Bloomington, The Hague, 1967.

<sup>29</sup> Sir Gerald Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. Oxford, 1972:736.

<sup>30</sup> Annemarie von Gabain, *Alttürkische Grammatik*.<sup>2</sup> Leipzig, 1950:§ 399 *täginür özümüz* 'unser kreisendes Selbst'.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. note 29, p. 595.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. note 29, p. 608; C. Brockelmann, *Osttürkische Grammatik der islamischen Literatursprachen Mittelasiens*. Leiden, 1954:199.

I am not *adonai elohēnū*, therefore I do not know if my interpretation holds water. But at any rate, it makes sense and is a definite possibility. Let us check that by inserting our interpretations into Cleaves' translation, thus replacing his three dots by them.

While the black crow  
 hath it as destiny to eat scraps of skin,  
 he hath hoped, saying, 'I shall eat goose and crane.'  
 I *brutal* and bad Čilger,  
 laying hand  
 upon the lady Üjin  
 am become a plague unto all the Merkid.  
 I, commoner and bad Čilger,  
 am at the point to be attained unto my black head.  
 Saving mine only life,  
 I shall slip into the dark defiles,  
 By whom shall the office of shield be done for me?  
 While the bad bird, the buzzard,  
 hath it as destiny to eat rats and mice,  
 he hath hoped, saying, 'I shall eat swan and crane.'  
 I, *thievish* and bad Čilger,  
 in gathering the happy and fortunate Üjin,  
 am become a plague unto all the Merkid.  
 I, *stinking* and bad Čilger,  
 am at the point to be attained unto my withered head ...

Let us summarize. Both the Naiman queen Gürbeſü and the Merkid nobleman Čilger employed Turkish words, and in both cases for cursing. This is a well-known procedure: a true gentleman or lady does not curse or when he/she does, then in a foreign language.<sup>33</sup> As it seems, Turkish was well-known to many Mongols: they lived in the quite natural state of bilingualism. The question itself "were the Naiman ... Mongols *or* Turks?" is false, when it is conceived in the meaning "did they speak Mongolian *or* Turkish (exclusively)". Whether they felt themselves to be Mongols or Turks is another matter. I think that Renan was right when he said "la nation c'est un plébiscite perpétuel". We cannot say anything about their patriotic feelings. But it would be absurd to presuppose that the nationalism of the

<sup>33</sup> G. Doerfer, *Grundwort und Sprachmischung*. Stuttgart, 1988:59-62.

20th century which has caused so many idiotic wars, most recently, in the Balkans, existed at this early time. Bilingual people normally have a preference for one language which they master more fluently. We may suppose that the main language of the Naiman and Merkid was Mongolian, but that they also spoke Turkish. The idea of "ethnic cleansing" had not yet been born. In *this* point we ought to follow the example of the Mongols.