



2015

# The Administrative Origins of Mongolia's 'Tribal' Vocabulary

Christopher P. Atwood

*University of Pennsylvania*, [catwood@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:catwood@sas.upenn.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc>

 Part of the [East Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Atwood, Christopher P., "The Administrative Origins of Mongolia's 'Tribal' Vocabulary" (2015). *Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations*. 13.

<https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc/13>

At the time of publication, author Christopher P. Atwood was affiliated with Indiana University. Currently, he is a faculty member in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc/13>

For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# The Administrative Origins of Mongolia's 'Tribal' Vocabulary

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | East Asian Languages and Societies

## **Comments**

At the time of publication, author Christopher P. Atwood was affiliated with Indiana University. Currently, he is a faculty member in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

---

## ГОСТЬ HOMEPA

© Ch. P. Atwood

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORIGINS OF MONGOLIA'S "TRIBAL" VOCABULARY<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The term "tribe" is commonly found in works on Mongolian history, both in modern scholarship and in translations of primary sources. As nomadic peoples, it has been assumed that "tribes" and "clans" were the basic grassroots units of Mongolian society. Behind this viewpoint lurks the widely accepted sequence of social evolution in which state formation takes place as the culminating process of clans agglomerating into tribes which then become tribal federations and finally states. Before the formation of the state exists a type of "primitive society" organized in kin-based tribes and clans<sup>2</sup>. In the case of the "Turco-Mongolian" peoples, however, this process is seen as naturally limited by the nature of nomadism. Thus states remain feeble and subject to easy disintegration, forcing the Turkic and Mongol nomads to pass time and time again through stages which Chinese, Middle Eastern, and European peoples were able to traverse once and for all in their earliest documented histories<sup>3</sup>.

Traditionally, scholars have assumed that the Mongolian society developed from a tribal, kin-based organization to a state-based territorial organization within the fairly recent past. Boris Ja. Vladimircov gave a famous picture of this process in his classic work, *Obščestvennyj stroj Mongolov: Mongol'skoj kočevoj feodalizm* or "Social Structure of the Mongols: Mongolian Nomadic Feudalism"<sup>4</sup> [97]. In his opinion, the clan regime broke down during the rise of the Mongolian empire, to be followed by the feudal stage which last through

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was published in [6]. Since then I have been assisted greatly in understanding the topic by discussions with Temür (Temule) of Nanjing University. I am grateful to Pavel Dudin and the editors of the journal «*Eurasia: statum et legem*» for a chance to publish here a revised version of the previous paper. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> The most penetrating critique of this position is Kuper (1988).

<sup>3</sup> Thus Pamela Crossley [23, p. 24–25; 24] has emphasized how the Mongols were organized into fissiparous "federations and tribal (*aimagh*) units" lacking any sense of unity.

<sup>4</sup> This work was translated many times, but not into English. See for example the French translation by Michel Carsow, *Le Régime social des Mongols: le féodalisme nomade* [98].

the time of the Qing dynasty. Scholars in China such as Gao Wende高文德 have proposed a somewhat different scheme in which the clan society gave way to slave society under Chinggis Qan, which then developed into a feudal society under the influence of the conquest of China.<sup>1</sup> Owen Lattimore [56, p. 89, 97, 381] argued against Vladimircov that territorially-based state structures could not really develop in truly nomadic conditions and thus tribal society appeared broke down only when Mongolia was ruled by non-nomadic rulers, most especially under the Qing dynasty and under the influence of Buddhism. Others have even seen tribes and clans as existing among the Mongols all the way up to the revolutionary changes of the twentieth century.

### The Tribal Vocabulary in Modern Mongolian Historiography

Regardless of exactly when they place the transition, all of these writers imply that the clan system among the Mongols existed in the early historical period and is attested in known histories and documents. Needless to say, if that is the case, one would expect that the Mongolian language would have terms for “tribe,” “clans,” “tribal federations,” and other such social units essential to tribal society. Indeed names for all of these units can be found in modern Mongolian dictionaries. Altangerel’s *English-Mongolian Dictionary* translates the English word “tribe” as *owog*, *aimag*, *udam*, or *ugsa* (s. v. “tribe” and “tribal”) [2]. This usage is confirmed by Charles Bawden’s *Mongolian English Dictionary*, where we find the following definitions: *owog aimag*: “clan,” *owgiin baiguulal* “clan structure,” *aimag* “tribe”; *aimgiin xolboo* “tribal confederation”; and *nüüdelčün aimguudyn xolboo* “nomadic tribal confederation”(s.v. *owog*) [12].

Of the two more common words, *owog* and *aimag*, *owog* refers to a smaller, more clearly kin-based unit, while *aimag* refers to a larger unit, less clearly based on kinship and formed by a confederation of *owog*. The two terms combined together form a binome, *owog aimag*, which translates “tribe” and, in the genitive form *owog aimgiin*, the adjective “tribal” in the most abstract, social scientific sense. A 1998 historical encyclopedia defines the term *aimag* or “tribe” this way:

«In ancient times clans (*owguudyg*) were called *aimag*/tribes. In the initial stage of the break down of primitive communal structures tribal confederations (*aimgiin xolboo*) were formed. The *aimag*/tribe had its own distinct name and territory it occupied. It had a unified dialect and customs. It depended on territorial affiliation. Whichever was the leading one of the various clans and lineages (*owog ugsaatan*) within the composition of the tribe gave its name to the tribe (s.v. *aimag*)»<sup>2</sup> [43].

<sup>1</sup>See [37]. Other writers [60, p. 21–29] have interpreted earlier dynasties founded by non-Mongolic speaking peoples as also being slave societies formed as part of the break up of an earlier clan society.

<sup>2</sup>This description is an abbreviated form of the description of the *owog* and *aimag* given in [40, p. 8–9, 29].



It then goes on to mention how the name of *aimag* was used for various administrative units "after the appearance of the state" (*tör üüssenees xoiš*). The entry on *aimgiin xolboo*, "tribal federation" situates this concept in the period between the breakdown of the primitive commune and the rise of class dictatorship. So in this point of view an *aimag* was the Mongolian version of the cross-cultural concept of "tribe": a territorial federation made up of clans or *owog*, each itself with its own name and territory (s.v. *aimgiinxolboo*) [43].

The term *owog* is defined in the same dictionary as follows:

«*Owog*/clan designates an ancient Mongolian group comprised of people with a blood relationship (*cusan törliin xolboo*). . . . Among the common features of the ancient *owog*/clans were origin from a single ancestor, its own elders, a special name or title, a banner, grazing territory, a hearth, a common burial ground or ancestor's land (*ixsiin gazar*), a place of common worship, an assembly in which internal and external affairs are discussed, and a self-defense army (s.v. *owog*)» [44].

This definition is in fact merely a summary of the description of the ancient *owog* given by D. Gongor [40, p. 7–10] in his classic work in late medieval Mongolian history, *Xalxtowčoon*<sup>1</sup>. The term *owog*, in its Middle Mongolian form *oboğor obok*, even became well known outside of Mongolist circles. Vladimircov [98, p. 56 ff.] used it as a chapter sub-heading in his classic study and, based on his usage, Elizabeth Bacon [9] used it as her name for the segmentary patrilineages she considered characteristic of late tribal, proto-state societies throughout Eurasia. She even titled her book on the topic as *Obok*. According to these definitions, the *owog* designates a concrete social group, a group of people characterized by a single name, identity, and unity of action as a result of real or imagined common ancestry.

Since these terms are Mongolian, one would assume that they were derived from the Mongolian sources of the era when tribes were still existent, such as in the thirteenth century *Secret History of the Mongols*. Before the formation of the Mongol empire under Chinggis Qan, there were many socio-political units in Mongolia, which one would presume would be such tribes. Indeed, these units, such as the Kereyid, the Tatar, the Merkid, the Naiman, and so on, are in fact called *aimag* or *aimgiin xolboo* ("tribal confederation") in standard sources on Mongolian history both in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia [88, p. 96–108; 89, p. 1:170–191; 26, p. 2:51–81; 64, p. 16–47; 65, p. 1–35; 63, 5:3–35]<sup>2</sup>. One would assume therefore that *aimag* (Middle Mongolian *ayimağ*) is the tribal period name for tribes and "tribe" would thus seem to be a truly Mongolian concept.

---

<sup>1</sup>Gongor in turn cites Vladimircov.

<sup>2</sup>Dalai and Išdorj's *Mongol ulsyn tüüx* of 2003 does refer to the Kereyid, Tatar, and Naiman polities as *xanlig*, a calque translation of the Russian *xanstvo*. This change in terminology indicates some (I believe justified) dissatisfaction with the general assumption that all polities in pre-1206 Mongolia were "tribal." Yet *aimag* and *aimgiin xolboo* are still the general terms under which pre-1206 polities of the Mongolian plateau are subsumed.

Recently, however, David Sneath [91] has challenged the validity of “tribe” as a concept in Inner Asian studies in his book *Headless State*<sup>1</sup>. According to his argument, the concept of “tribe,” and of the kin-based society it is supposed to be a part of, is a product not of some early stage of socio-political development but rather of colonial expansion and rule. In his view, what other scholars have seen as tribes were actually aristocratic houses, more like the houses of Hohenzollern, Wittelsbach, or Habsburg in medieval German history.

If this is the case, however, and the concept of tribe is not indigenous to the Mongols, but is rather a form of rule imposed by outsiders, how can we explain the fact that the Mongols seem, according to the standard authorities, to have in *aimag~ayimaġa* widely used word for “tribe” and its component unit “clan” (*owog~obog*)? This Mongol example would seem to cast doubt on Sneath’s hypothesis. The distinguished Turcologist Peter Golden, in a review of Sneath’s book wrote:

«As with Mongol *aimag* (“tribe, clan” and “administrative unit”), Sneath projects the latter meaning alone into the early history of the steppe. Are we to posit “administrative units” as developing first (implying the existence of a state) and then their transformation into tribes or aristocracy-led named groups? This seems more than unlikely» [39, p. 295]<sup>2</sup>.

Clearly, here is a question that needs to be addressed from Mongolian sources from the thirteenth century onward. What, if anything, *is* the Mongolian word for “tribe”? When did they get it and what are its connotations? Here is an important contribution which those working with Mongolian sources can make to the study of the Mongol empire.

### **The Term *Ayimaġ* in Middle Mongolian**

The obvious place to begin looking for a terminology of “tribes” and “tribalism” in Mongolia is the *Secret History of the Mongols* (hereafter *SHM*). Written in 1252, this work covers the period from the legendary origin of the Mongols up almost to the conclusion of the reign of the second emperor of the Mongols, Ögedei Qa’an (r. 1229–1241)<sup>3</sup>. If there was a social revolution in Mongolian history associated with the transition from a kin-based tribal society to a class or territory based state society, then it should be revealed in the transformation of social terminology found in the *SHM*. Even more, if the state formation of the Mongols remained very weak and nomadism meant that clan-tribal structures maintained a tenacious hold on Mongolia (as is frequently

<sup>1</sup>Earlier, Morton H. Fried [35] had made a similar argument about “tribes” in general in his *The Notion of Tribe*, although without proposing any specific application to Inner Asia or any alternative explanation of Inner Asian society.

<sup>2</sup>In the interests of readability, I have eliminated Golden’s in text citation of Ferdinand Lessing’s *Mongolian English Dictionary* for the meaning of *aimag* and his citation to p. 67 of Sneath’s book for his discussion of the term *aimag*.

<sup>3</sup>On the dating of the *Secret History of the Mongols*, see [4, p. 1–48].

claimed), this terminology should be found throughout the work.

In fact the word *aimag*, or in its Middle Mongolian form *ayimağ*, the word defined in modern dictionaries as "tribe" is found in the work only twice. The first instance occurs in §156 as follows:<sup>1</sup>

*ta ede ele či'uluğsad haran* (人) *büğüde'er ayimağ* (部落) *ayimağ* (部落) *bayidqun ö'er-eče busu ayimağ-un* (部落的) *kü'ün-i ö'ere böldeyidgedkün ke'en jarliğ bolba tedüi ayimağ* (部落) *ayimağ-iyar-iyar* (部落自的每) *bayi'asu . . .*

"He spoke, 'All you of these assembled people each stand by *ayimağs* and let every one in an *ayimağ* different from your own stand apart.' When they stood *ayimağ* by *ayimağ* thus, . . ." [102, p. 165].

The second occurs in §262:

*basa Sübe'etei Ba'atur-i ümegsi, Qanglin* (種), *Kibča'ud* (種), *Bajigid* (種), *Orusud* (種), *Majarad* (etc.), *Asud, Sasud, Serkesüd, Kesimir, Bolar, Kerel, ede harban nigen ayimağ* (部落) *qarin* (邦) *irgen-tür* (百姓行) *kürtele Idil Jayağ usutan müred getülün Kiwa Menkermen balağasun-dur kürtele Sübe'etei Ba'atur-i ayala'ulba.*

"Also Sübe'etei Ba'atur was sent on campaign north up to the these eleven *ayimağ*-states-peoples, the Qangli, Qibchaq, Bashkort, Russian, Magyars, Ossetian, Sas, Cherkes, Bulghar, and Hungarians, and crossing the Volga and the Ural rivers, Sübe'etei Ba'atur reached the town of Kiev Menkermen." [102, p. 363].

These instances of *ayimağ* have been translated as "tribe" by most translators of the text<sup>2</sup>. Gongor [40, p. 27] cites the former passage in his section on *aimag* as "very clearly" (*tod tomruun*) showing the nature of the *aimag* as a social unit.

These two instances of *ayimağ* share some common features. In both, the emphasis is on the large number of similar units. In the first passage Chinggis Qan is trying to find what he suspects is a man of the defeated Tatar coalition who has infiltrated his ranks. In the second the author is listing eleven different peoples whom the Mongol general Sübe'etei Ba'atur is assigned to attack. In both cases, the word *ayimağ* is being used to designate a large number of parallel units.

Only in the first case, however, is the term *ayimağ* given alone as if by itself

---

<sup>1</sup>I have made extensive use of the concordances in Igor de Rachewiltz [74] and Kuribayashi [54]. The text of the *SHM* is given here following Wulan [102]. The *SHM* was written in Mongolian, but completely translated and transcribed into Chinese around 1400. The Chinese meanings are a valuable tool for the study of the *SHM*'s often archaic Mongolian language. I give the Chinese glosses from the interlinear translation in parentheses where relevant.

<sup>2</sup>See for example, Francis Woodman Cleaves [21, p. 84, 203], and Marie-Dominique Even and Rodica Pop [32, p. 116, 227]. Igor de Rachewiltz calls them "groups of related families" and "clans" in §156 [75, p. 1: 79] and "countries and peoples" in §262 [75, p. 1: 194].

defined a particular unit of people. In the second case, *ayimağ* is combined in a trinome with *qarin* “state, country” and *irgen* “common people”. Clearly in the second case, *ayimağ* is being used as part of a phrase designating different ethnies or pre-modern ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>. But does *ayimağ* carry that sense on its own? Are the *ayimağs* in which the Mongol soldiers are being asked to divide themselves in §156 tribal units? That is, did they designate preexisting units which had their own dialect, customs, name, territory, and so on, and which were at least to some extent independent of and prior to the new Mongol state? The Chinese translation as *buluo* 部落 might suggest so (about which more later), but nothing in the Mongolian would require it. The sense of the passage would require only that every man under Chinggis Qan’s command and gathered in that particular meeting be assigned to one and only one *ayimağ*, and that they know which *ayimağ* they belonged to. Such a definition would fit military units formed out of his subjects by imperial command as much or better than it would fit preexisting tribal entities. Indeed as Cai Meibiao [15] argued, in context the assembly described seems to be a gathering of the court or of the budding imperial family and its servants, rather than one of the entire following of Chinggis Qan.

Strong evidence that the word *ayimağ* in Middle Mongolian does not, by itself, refer to tribal-style groupings comes from the example of the other instances of the word as found in Middle Mongolian texts. Although it is not common enough to be found in the many vocabularies of Middle Mongolian, it is found fairly commonly in the surviving corpus of Middle Mongolian literature. As a rule, however, it is used *only* for groups that have no analogy with tribal units. Thus we find the term *ayimağ* being used for queens (i.e. women in a harem), of demons, of deities and dragons, of guards, of soldiers under a king, or of ants. Thus, the entourage of the Buddha is described thus:

*qağalğa sakiğsan dörben ayimağčerig-üd ba qağan qamuq sakiliğ-ud kiged noyad ba qamuğ qatud-un ayimağ ...*

“The four *ayimağ* of soldiers guarding the gates, all the bodyguards of the king, and the *ayimağ* of nobles and all the ladies” [93, p. 119]<sup>2</sup>.

Elsewhere the king Sudadani has the city Basar built and defended by *sakiliğ-ud-un ayimağ-iyar* “*ayimağ* of guards.”<sup>3</sup> In several places in the same work, we find references to *ayimağ* of demons<sup>4</sup>. The gods and dragons also

<sup>1</sup> *Ethnie* is the term used by Anthony D. Smith [90, p. 21-46] for pre-modern ethnic groups that form the building blocks of modern nations.

<sup>2</sup> “Twelve Deeds of the Buddha,” 21b. *Qatud-un ayimağ* “*ayimağ* of *qatud* (i.e. palace ladies)” is a particularly common phrase: see “Twelve Deeds of the Buddha,” 6b (twice), 11a, 16a, 17a (twice), 17b, 18a, 18b. *Ayimağ* for divisions of soldiers is also found in the *Subhāṣitaratnanidhi*; see §246 (VI.15a): *mağui dayisun-u arban qoyar ayimağ çerig*.

<sup>3</sup> “Twelve Deeds of the Buddha,” 15b.

<sup>4</sup> *čidküü-ün ayimağ-a* (“Twelve Deeds of the Buddha,” 15b); *simnus-un ayimağ-i* (“Twelve Deeds of the Buddha,” 25a, 49b, 50b, 65a).

proceed in *ayimaḡ*<sup>1</sup>. In this text and in the *Subhāṣitaratnanidhi*, we find *ayimaḡ* used of both bees and ants<sup>2</sup>.

What these units share is that none of them are self-sufficient units composed of clans, none of them has a distinct territory, but all of them share some distinct occupational or personal character. Most importantly, none of these *ayimaḡ* have a distinctive name and none of them designate a preexisting, bottom-up social group. Rather they all represent temporary groups formed top-down by assigning people from one larger social group to temporary units. In short, the usage of *ayimaḡ* elsewhere in Middle Mongolian texts overwhelmingly supports an interpretation of *ayimaḡ* in *SHM* §156 as referring to military units and/or attached subjects of family members and vassals created after the conquest by the command of Chinggis Qan, not to named tribal groups formed independently from the Mongol empire.

#### ***Ayimaḡ* in Yuan-era Administrative Documents**

The term *ayimaḡis*, however, also used fairly frequently in administrative documents from the Mongol Yuan 元 dynasty, and in this context it has been read as an instance where the connotation is clearly "tribal." A typical example of this usage comes in an inscription issued by the empress-dowager under Emperor Haishan (Mongolian temple name Külüg Qa'an) conferring immunity on a Daoist temple, dated to 1321. The order to respect this exemption is addressed to the following categories of people:

«1) *čeri'üd-ün noyad-da* 2) *čerig haran-a* 3) *balaqad-un daruqas-da* 4) *noyad-da* 5) *ayimaḡayimaḡ-ud-un ötögüs-e* 6) *yorčiqun yabuqun elchin-e* 7) *irgen-e*»

«1) to the officers of the army; 2) to the people of the army; 3) to the overseers of the cities; 4) to the officials; 5) to the elders of every *ayimaḡ*; 6) to the messengers traveling to and fro; 7) to the common people [numbering added]. [42, §31.4–5; 94, §24.4–5; 73, p. 54]».

A virtually identical list of persons addressed is found in a 1314 inscription as well. [42, 14.6–8; 94, §21.6–8]<sup>3</sup>. Nicholas Poppe understood these elders of the *ayimaḡ* to be elders of a rural social unit, a subdivision of the *otog~otog* (a territorial-administrative term):

«The word *aimak* as used in this edict has a different meaning from that in

---

<sup>1</sup> *ṅgri luus terigüten-ü ayimaḡ-iyar qotalaḡar qoyina-ača daḡaldun yabuju* "The gods and dragons all followed after him in *ayimaḡs*" ("Twelve Deeds of the Buddha," 23b). In a text from the Arjai cave (II. 14 1; p. 44), the worshipper bows down to *Delekei-yi sakigčün ayimaḡ-ud-i* "the *ayimaḡs* of the protectors of the world".

<sup>2</sup> *El ulus-un jögei-yin ayimaḡ ḡasiḡudan ḡasalbai*. ("Twelve Deeds of the Buddha," 30b) and *Subhasitaratnanidhi* § 203 (VI. 4a): *Siroḡoljin ayimaḡ-iyaran čigulju bürün*. (s.v. *ayimaḡ*) [50]. Kara defines the meaning of *ayimaḡ* as found in this source as "class, division".

<sup>3</sup> This list adds *doton-a ḡadan-a бүкүн yekes үчүкэд yamun-ud-un noyad-da* "to the officials of all the yamens internal and external, great and small" and *olon senšing-üide* "to the Daoist priests".

more recent times<sup>1</sup>. *Aimak* is a name for a group of yurts which nomadizes in the same territory, a *fratria sui generis*. Such *aimak*'s were of various sizes. Several *aimak*'s made up an *otok*. An *aimak* was by no means a clan, but the total sum of related families or sub-tribes, and even contained persons who belonged to different sibs (Mongolian *yasun*). Basically, the *aimak* was a union of families related to each other, who came from the breaking up of the old clans, the so-called *oboy*'s. An unfailing sign of an *aimak* is the possession of a common nomad camp ground... By elders of the *aimak*'s are meant persons who headed the groups of related families of nomadic Mongols, who had a common nomad area» [73, p. 97]<sup>2</sup>.

So finally here we have the *ayimaḡ* serving as the designation of a suitably “tribal” entity: groups of pastoral nomads linked by blood (“groups of related families”) and territory (“common nomad area”). The elders of these “tribes” are presumably being called upon as local authorities to heed the inscription, calm disputes, and prevent their members from harassing the clergy in the temples. Later historians, such as Gongor, cite exactly this passage as further documentation for the *ayimaḡ* as a tribal unit in Mongolia: “Based on how the Square Script monument of 1321 speaks of *ayimaḡ ayimaḡuudyn ötgös* [elders of every *ayimaḡ*], each *ayimaḡ* had its ruling elder” [40, p. 29].

Unfortunately, Poppe’s interpretation paid no attention to the Chinese translation of these and other *darḡan jarliḡs* or “decrees of immunity”<sup>3</sup>. The Chinese translation for *ayimaḡ ayima’ud-un ötgös* “elders of the various *ayimaḡs*” is given as *gezhi’r toumu mei gendi* 各枝兒頭目 ▪ 根底 “from the heads of every branch.” [42, § 31. 4–5, §14.7–8]; 94, §24.4–5, §21.7–8]. The term *zhi’r* 枝兒 “branch” is quite vague, but its homonym *zhi* 支 is used as a measure word for branches of administrative organizations, or for military units. In no case that I know of is it ever used as a term for pre-existing divisions among civilian populations. Chinese indeed has a word for “tribe,” that is, various compounds of *bu* 部 (on which more later), but it is not used in this connection. Thus, the Chinese translation is the first problem with Poppe’s “tribal” interpretation of *ayimaḡ*.

Moreover, the discovery of new *darḡan jarliḡs* have made his interpretation still less plausible. The term *ötgös* “elders” appears many times in newly discovered inscriptions, but in every other case is used for elders in a monastery or temple. Thus we find: *sensing-üd-ün ötgös balaḡad-un noyad-lu’a* [94, §5.33; §21.35] “with the elders of the *xianshengs* [i.e. Daoist priests] and officials of the cities,” or *balaḡad-un noyad doyid-un ötgös* “officials of the cities and elders of

<sup>1</sup> By this, Poppe means the use of *ayimaḡ* as an administrative term, meaning province (in Mongolia) or district (in Inner Mongolia or Buriatia).

<sup>2</sup> Poppe’s discussion derives heavily from Vladimircov [98, p. 173–178]. There is a patent anachronism in his discussion, i.e., the appearance of *otog*, an important administrative term from the sixteenth century on, but utterly unknown in genuine Mongol empire sources.

<sup>3</sup> On this term and genre in Turco-Mongolian political history, (s.v. *jarliḡ*) [101; 3].

the *doyid* [i.e. Buddhist monks] [94, §33.18–19]. While these elders do calm disputes, they do so only between the monasteries and the public [94, §21.33–34].

And in another inscription in this very stereotyped genre, we find a list almost exactly parallel to that containing the supposed "tribal elders." Yet in the parallel version, the supposed "tribal elders" actually appear as monastic elders.

1) *čeri'üd-ün noyad-da* 2) *čerig haran-a* 3) *balaqad-un daruqas-da* 4) *noyad-da* 5) *todqa'ulamasarsaqiqunharan* 6) *doyid-unötögüs-de* 7) *yorčiqun yabuqunelčün-e...*

«1) to the officer of the army; 2) to the people of the army; 3) to the officials of the cities; 4) to the officials; 5) to the *todqa'ul* [officials of the post-road system] and people who guard the passes; 6) to the elders among the *doyid* [Buddhist monks]; 7) to the messengers traveling to and fro» [94, §9.3–4].

That religious figures were so addressed in these introductory formulae is confirmed by the 1314 inscription, in which *olon senšing-üd-de* "to the Daoist priests" appears in a parallel list [42, §14.8; 94, §21.8]. The parallels here are too close to admit of any doubt: the elders of the *ayimağ* mentioned in the 1321 and 1314 inscription are elders of the divisions of Buddhist monks, not elders of "tribal" *ayimağs*. So elders of the Buddhist monastic colleges replace "elders of the tribes"—in fact, colleges within Buddhist monasteries have always been known in Mongolian as *ayimağ~aimag*.

But *ayimağ* appears elsewhere in such *darqan jarliğs* with a different Chinese translation. In a 1280 inscription, *ayimağs* are ordered not to take duties from the Daoist priests:

*Basa bidan-ača qağarqai jarliğ üge üge'ün bö'etele ayima'ud-da ala [=ele] šiltaju senšing-üd-deče ya'u ba guyuju bü abtuğai.*

«Moreover, as long as they have no specific decree from us, let not the *ayimağs* under any pretext demand anything whatsoever from the Daoist priests»<sup>1</sup> [42, §04.24–27; 94, §5.24–27].

In this passage *ayima'ud* (i.e. *ayimağin* plural) is translated as *zhutouxia* 諸投下 "various appanages." A similar passage reappears in a 1314 inscription:

*Basa bidan-ača qağas neres anu oroğsad jarliğ bö'etele ayima'ud-dača ele šiltaju senšing-üd-deče ya'ud ba guyuju bü abtuğai.*

«Moreover, even if there should be a decree in which their name appears, let not the *ayimağs* under any pretext demand anything whatsoever from the Daoist priests»<sup>2</sup> [42, §14.27–30; 94 §5.27–30].

In this version, the word *ayima'ud* is translated as *gezhi'r touxia* 各枝兒頭下 "any one of the appanages." While given the history of conflict between the two religions under the Mongol Yuan dynasty it might be possible that Buddhist monks would demand things from the Daoist priests, in this case, the translation makes it clear that here *ayimağ* is a translation of *touxia* 投下, an

<sup>1</sup> On the translation of this passage see [68, 402–03 n. 147].

<sup>2</sup> On the translation of this passage see [68, 401–02 n. 147].

administrative term for princely appanages that already had a long history in North China<sup>1</sup>.

As discussed by Cai Meibiao [15], this term originated in the Kitan Liao 遼 dynasty in a homophonous form as *touxia* 頭下 or “body” (literally, “below the head”). The *Liao shi* 遼史 defines the term twice, once as “appanage armies and prefectures” (*touxia junzhou* 頭下軍州) and once as “appanage prefectures and armies” (*touxia zhoujun* 頭下州軍). [62, 37.448 and 48.12] Both definitions are essentially the same, defining such appanages as towns or military units created for prisoners of war or other persons assigned to princes of the imperial family, imperial relatives on the distaff side, or great vassals. This definition makes it clear that these units were created purely by a top-down administrative process, in which high-ranking members of the elites organized estates or military units for the prisoners of war and other subjects they had been granted.

The term first appears in the Mongol period in an inscription of 1240, which contains a line parallel to those ordering the *ayimaḡs* not to interfere with the Daoist priests:

兼不以是何頭下官員人等，無得搔擾

“Moreover, the official personnel of the appanage (*touxia* 頭下) shall not for any reason harass them” [14, pl. 2; 20, p. 65].

In the reign of Qubilai, however, *touxia* 頭下 was mostly replaced in administrative usage by *touxia* 投下, a homonym literally meaning “thrown below.” As Cai concludes [15], this change seems to be the result of a desire to lessen the impression of autonomy of such units. In this form, the term is explicitly said to be the same as *aima* 愛馬, the standard transcription into Chinese for *ayimaḡ*<sup>2</sup>. The equivalence of *ayimaḡ* with *touxia* 投下 shows that *ayimaḡ* was not seen as being a pre-existing bottom-up unit, but rather a unit defined by top-down subjugation of prisoners and subjects to princes of the imperial family, the in-law families, and great vassals.

To conclude this discussion of Middle Mongolian and Yuan administrative usage: *ayimaḡ* is, on its own, never used as a classifier word for tribal names in any Middle Mongolian text. Not a single Middle Mongolian text pairs *ayimaḡ* alone with any named tribal or ethnic unit. Instead extant Middle Mongolian texts use *ayimaḡs* only in the abstract, to describe units or divisions within a single category: all the *ayimaḡs* of soldiers, and so on. To refer to “such and such” *ayimaḡ-aimag* – the Tatar *aimag*, the Khereid *aimag* and so on – is com-

<sup>1</sup> I thus believe that in the 1314 inscription, *ayimaḡ* is being used with two senses: in the addressees listed in lines 6–8, it is to be understood as the divisions of the monasteries, while in lines 27–30, *ayimaḡ* refers to appanages of high ranking princes and vassals. This difference is highlighted by the different Chinese translations: in the first translating it as simply *gezhi*’r 各枝兒 “every branch” and in the second adding the word for appanage *touxia* 頭下.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Shanju xinyu* 山居新語 of Yang Yu 楊瑀 in [100, p. 199].



mon usage in modern Mongolian, but has *no* foundation in Middle Mongolian. Thus David Sneath's revisionist position is indeed borne out by the philological data: the administrative meaning of *aimag~ayimaġ* is indeed prior to its "tribal" meaning, which must have come into use some time after 1368.

### The Term *Obog* in Middle Mongolian

*Aimag~ayimaġ* is not, however, the only word used by scholars to denote the complex of socio-political institutions forming supposedly clan-tribal Mongolia. Leaving aside secondary social-scientific terms such as *aimgiin xolboo* "clan federation," there is the term *owog~oboġ* "clan," referring to social groups founded on common ancestry and characterized by a distinct names, flag or banner, territory, burial ground, government and militia. As I mentioned above, Vladimircov named a chapter after the *oboġ*, and Elizabeth Bacon named a book after it.

In fact, however, the word *oboġ* is in fact not attested in Middle Mongolian text or vocabulary known to me. What are attested fairly commonly in the *SHM* and a few other sources are two derived forms, *oboġtu* and *oboġtan*. Both *-tu* and *-tan* form attributives from nouns, in the singular and the plural, respectively. Thus *oboġtu* and *oboġtan* mean "the one or ones with such-and-such *oboġ*." This may sound like a quibble, but it demonstrates one thing right away: that *oboġ*, at least in Middle Mongolian, did *not* designate a human social group or category. What it designated was rather the *name* inherited from an ancestor. Its meaning is thus closer to the English "surname" than it is to "clan". Indeed in Chinese of the Yuan period, the term is always translated with either *xing* 姓 or more rarely *shi* 氏, both terms that by themselves refer in Yuan times only to an inherited surname, and not to a social group or clan. By contrast, actual social groups or clans, then growing in influence in Chinese society, were designated by terms combining either *zu* 族 or *zong* 宗. [34, esp. 21–23; 29, "Introduction"; 19, p. 9; 46, p. 89–119, cf. 61–62]. Still, since Chinese terminology itself was not very precise, the meaning of the Middle Mongolian *oboġ*, and the attested terms derived from it, *oboġtu* and *oboġtan*, should be determined from the actual use in the sources.

There are eleven distinct passages in the *SHM* in which terms derived from *oboġ* are used. The vast majority of them come in the beginning of the work where the genealogy describes the origins of the various houses<sup>1</sup> or families into which the noble-born Mongols<sup>2</sup> [79, p. 1:79, 98, 117; 76, p. 152, 178; 77, p. 15–16] were divided.

§9: *Qorilar* (姓氏) *oboġtu* (姓) *bolju*

"he became one of the *Qorilar oboġ*" [102, p. 3].

§11 *Dörben oboġtan* (姓) *bolju Dörben irgen* (百姓) *tede bolba*.

<sup>1</sup> On the use of this term see [91, p. 111–112].

<sup>2</sup> All of the groups included in this genealogy are classified by Rashīd al-Dīn as *niru'un* or of divine ancestry.

“they became those of the Dörben *oboğ*; they became the Dörben *irgen/people*” [102, p. 4].

§40: *Jadaran* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓氏每) *tede bolba*.

“they became those of the *Jadaran oboğ*” [102, p. 12].

§41: *Menen Ba'arin* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓氏每) *tedebolba*.

“they became those of the *Menen Ba'arin oboğ*” [102, p. 12].

§42: *Belgünütei Belgünüd* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba. Bügünütei Bügünüd* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba . . . Bodonchar Borjigin* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba*. “*Belgünütei* became those of the *Belgünüd oboğ*. “*Bügünütei* became those of the *Bügünüd oboğ* . . . *Bodonchar* became those of the *Borjigin oboğ*” [102, p. 13].

The ellipsis contains exactly parallel statements about the descendants of *Buqu-Qatagi* and *Buqu-tu-Salji*.

§44: *jügeli-deče gärgaju Je'üreyid* (一種) *oboğtu* (姓有的; those with the surname) *bolğaju, Je'üred-ün* (一種) *ebüge bolba*.

“[*Bodonchar*'s sons] expelled him from the *jügeli* sacrifice and made him into one of the *Je'üreyid oboğ*; he became ancestor of the *Je'üred*” [102, p. 13].

§46: *Noyakin* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba . . . Barulas* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba . . . Buda'ad* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *tede bolba . . . Adargin* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba . . . Uru'ud* (一種) *Mangğud* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *tede bolba* [102, p. 14].

§47 *Tayıči'ud* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *bolba . . . Besüd* (一種) *oboğtan* (姓每) *tede bolba . . . Oronar* (一種), *Qongqotan* (一種), *Arulad* (一種), *Sönid* (一種), *Qabturğas* (一種), *Keniges oboğtan* (姓氏每) *tedebolba* [102, p. 15].

§49 *Yörki* (一種) *oboğtan* (一姓每) *tedebolba* [102, p. 16].

These stereotyped phrases tell us that Mongols, or more precisely the higher-status Mongols with some political significance, generally possessed *oboğ* names, that these *oboğ* names were traced to male ancestors (presumably in the male line), and that possession of this common *oboğ* could be attached, through the idea of patrilineal descent, to the right to participate in a common sacrifice. That is, if some one's descent was challenged, such a challenge would implicate both one's right to the surname and one's right to participate in a particular sacrifice. Various etiological stories associated with the origin of these *oboğ* also indicate that the surnames could also be stereotypically associated with particular characters: *Barulas* were gluttonous, *Noyakin* were arrogant, *Adarkin* were backbiting, and so on.

At the same time, however, only some of those people defined by common possession of these surnames actually formed the kind of concrete, unitary socio-political groups described in modern histories of the period as “clans” or *oboğ*. The name *Borjigin*, for example, was an *oboğor* family name but the history of the descendants of *Bodonchar* makes it clear that they were divided into many groups, frequently in conflict and which had large numbers of non-*Borjigin* subjects under their rule. Thus both the Middle Mongolian text and the

Chinese translation differentiate fairly strictly between the common *oboġ* or surname, and the social group which in some cases was associated with it, but more often was not. It is for this reason that the Dörben are described first as an *oboġtan*, the people sharing the Dörben surname, and then as an *irgen* "common people," indicating that the those with the Dörben surname and the members of the Dörben group were not actually synonymous. Likewise in Chinese, while the word *oboġ* is glossed as "surname" (*xing* 姓 or *xingshi* 姓氏), the actual groups sharing names with such *oboġ* are consistently glossed as a "kind" or "race" (*zhong* 種). When the Qatagin, Salji'ud, Dörben, and other such groups appear later in the narrative as political actors (see for example §§146 or 191), they are again glossed as *zhong* 種, not as *xing* or *xingshi*.<sup>1</sup>

Once the accounting of the origin of these various surnames is finished, the word *oboġtu* or *oboġtan* appears subsequently only twice in the whole *SHM*, and only once for the kind of minor polities that are usually considered the clans of the pre-Chinggisid Mongol world. This one instance occurs where Chinggis Qan is destroying the Yörkin:

§139: *Yörkin* (種) *oboġtu-yi* (姓有的) *ülidkebe*. *Irgen-i* (百姓) *ulus-i* (人烟) *Činggis Qa'an ö'er-ün emčü irgen bolġaba*.

"[Chinggis Qa'an] destroyed those of the Yörkin *oboġ*/surname. Chinggis Qa'an made these commoners and this people his own patrimonial people" [102, p. 129].

The Yörkin are defined once as possessors of a common surname, but then as a body of common people and subjects of a common rule. Given the usage elsewhere in the *SHM*, including in the immediate context, it is certainly the term *irge(n)* "common people," not *oboġ* "surname," which is the principal descriptor term defining what type of social group the proper name Yörkin is. The final occurrence of *oboġ* in the *SHM* only underlines the point that *oboġ* by itself signified nothing more than a surname that had no essential link to any concept of a solidary socio-political unit. Describing the famous administrators Mahmud Yalawach and his son Mas'ud Beg, the *SHM* introduces them thus:

§263 *qoyar Qurumši* (姓) *oboġtan* (姓有的) *Sarta'ul* (回回) *irejü* . . .

"two Sarta'ul [Turkestanis] of the Qurumsi surname arrived ..." [102, p. 364];

Unaware that *Qurumši* (that is, Khorazm~Khwārazm) is a region, the *SHM*'s author simply took Mahmud's *nisba* (local name) [1, p. xii-xiii] Khwārazmi, attested in the *Yuan shi* 元史, [106, 2.30] and treated it as the father-son pair's surname, distinguishing their family from others among the

<sup>1</sup> Vladimircov [98, p. 73] was at one level aware of this, distinguishing the *irgen* and the *ulus* as the general term for actual groups (which he translated as "tribe" and "fief" respectively) from the *oboġ* as "clan." Yet by translating *oboġ* as "clan" rather than "surname" or "family" name, and according it the fundamental role in his exposition of Mongolian society, he seriously distorted the actual picture given by the Middle Mongolian and Mongol empire sources.

*Sarta'ul* or Turkestani people. This *Sarta'ul* people is elsewhere called an *irgen*, or “common people,” like the Kereyid and so on. The two examples of usage of the word *obog* (or more properly, its derivatives) in Middle Mongolian sources outside the *SHM* follow the same pattern as §263. The word is rare, and not found in any of the vocabularies. But two instances are found with Chinese surnames: *Lii obuqtai* “Of the Li surname” in the Zhang Yingrui inscription and *Yin oboġtu noyan* “Lord of the Yin surname” in the *Xiaojing*<sup>1</sup>.

The conclusion from the Mongolian evidence is inescapable: *obog* is no more part of the fundamental Mongolian social terminology than is *ayimaġ*. Both have been taken to be part of the clan-tribal social structure that was overthrown in the putative Chinggisid social revolution, yet both are in fact terms more at home in the centralized and imperial socio-political structure established by Chinggis Qan. *Ayimaġ* refers primarily to administrative or military divisions and units established top-down by imperial authority, while *obog* refers simply to surnames. Even though the Mongols did not routinely use them with their given names the way the Chinese did, there is no indication from the *SHM* that in itself a common *obog* necessarily formed a single social group anymore than a common *xing* 姓 or surname necessarily formed a single social group in China.

### ***Ayimaġ* and *Oboġ* in Chinese and Persian Sources from the Mongol Empire**

Attentive readers will have already noticed a problem with this conclusion, however. While *ayimaġ* doesn't seem not mean anything like “tribe,” in the few cases where it appears in the *SHM*, it is translated by *buluo* 部落 in Chinese. This binome has long been used in Chinese to designate sub-divisions of “barbarian” (i.e. non-Han Chinese) peoples, a usage that is fairly close to that of “tribe” in English. One should also note that the term *buluo* 部落 is also found elsewhere as a Chinese descriptor for the precise Mongolian terms, such as Naiman, Kereyid, or Merkid, that I have argued are not referred to as *ayimaġ* in Mongolian<sup>2</sup>. So if *ayimaġ* does not mean “tribe” or *buluo* 部落, why did the Chinese interlinear translators of the *SHM* around 1400<sup>3</sup> [ 21, li-lxi, 75, xlv-li] translate it as such?

This first part of the answer is to understand the derivation of the binome *buluo* 部落. The binome is from *bu* 部 “section, part, department, (military) unit” plus *luo* 落 “settlement, village.” This binome is not used for “barbarian” groups in the earliest imperial histories, such as the *Shiji* 史記 or *Hanshu* 漢書, or other sources before the Latter Han dynasty, although it is attested as a designation of outlaw gangs [10, p. 72.3088-89]. *Buluo* as a binome seems to

<sup>1</sup>Zhang Yingrui inscription, l. 14 [93, p. 15]; *Xiaojing*, 13a.3 [93, p. 65].

<sup>2</sup> See for example in §14, how Uriyangqai and Qori-Tumad are glossed as *buluo ming* 部落名 “name of a tribe”.

<sup>3</sup> On the date and process of transcription of the *SHM*.

first appear in accounts of the semi-nomadic Awars 烏桓 and Serbi 鮮卑 in Manchuria compiled at the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period, where it was a contraction of 部衆“military following” and 邑落“village settlement”<sup>1</sup>. The meaning thus combined *bu* in the sense of group of people under one command, with *luo* people settled in one place; roughly a “local following”. By the sixth century AD, *buluo* had become a standard term for political sub-units among all barbarians. Only in the nine or tenth century AD, probably at the court of the Turco-Sogdian Shatuo rulers of North China, was the term *buzu* 部族 coined, combined the martial overtones of *buluo* with the idea of clanship found in *zu* 族. This new binome was widely used in Liao and Jin administration, probably because of the civilized and imperial connotations that attached to the notion of *zu* 族 [5].

Under the Yuan dynasty, however, *buluo* and *buzu* were virtually forbidden. Neither binome can be found at all in important Chinese-language sources such as the *Shengwu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄 [45; 99] and are both exceedingly rare in the *Yuanshi*. This cannot be accidental and must be a result of the Yuan court's sensitivity to the “barbarian” connotations of these words. But the character *bu* 部 by itself is anything but rare. In fact in official Yuan usage after 1260, the Chinese term *bu* “unit” was the officially approved translation of *ayimağ*, in the sense of a group of people under a single civilian or military leadership. The basic meaning of the two terms as “unit, division, section (of a larger whole)” made them natural equivalents.

This equivalence of *bu* and *ayimağ* is clear from an odd feature of the language of the *Yuan shi*'s Basic Annals (*benji* 本紀). While the term *bu* appears constantly in the earlier Basic Annals to designate the followings of Mongol princes or commanders of a thousand, the word is hardly found in the Veritable Records of the last Yuan emperor, Toghhan-Temür. Instead, where *bu* would appear in previous chapters, in his basic annals, the word *aima* 愛馬 appears, a transcription of the Mongolian *ayimağ*. Here are some examples (with the characters *aima* bolded):

庚寅，宗王脫歡脫木爾各**愛馬**人民饑，以鈔三萬四千九百錠賑之。

“In the day *geng/yin*, the people in the *ayimağs* of the prince of the blood Toghhan-Temür suffered famine and they were given bills worth 34,900 *ding* in relief” [106, p. 40.852].

壬戌，賜皇太子五**愛馬**怯薛丹二百五十人鈔各一百一十錠。

“In the day *ren/xu*, the 250 men of the five *ayimağs* [i.e. divisions] of keshigten [i.e. guardsmen] of the crown prince each received bills worth 110 *ding*.” [106, p. 43.912]

<sup>1</sup> See *Sanguo zhi* (30.832, 833); cf. *Hou Han shu* 90.2979, 2980); cf. Parker (1892-93, 73, 75). The original of this passage comes from the *Wei shu* of Wang Chen (d. AD 266), as cited in the *Sanguo zhi*. Fan Ye's version in the *Hou Han shu* is actually later than that in *Sanguozhi*.

諸王各愛馬應該總兵、統兵、領兵等官，凡軍民一切機務，錢糧、名爵、黜陟、予奪，悉聽便宜行事。

“The *ayimaqs* of all the princes, with their mobilizing, commanding, and petty officers and all the civilian and military organizations, funds, promotions, dismissals, and requisitions are placed under [Köke-Temür’s] direction” [106, p. 46.971].

Clearly Toghhan Temür’s Annals preserve the original transcribed usage, while in the previous Annals the term *aima* was replaced by the translation *bu*. As is well known, the early Ming 明 editors of the *Yuanshi* first compiled the Basic Annals of the earlier Mongol emperors on the basis of Yuan-era Veritable Records (*shilu* 實錄), but then had to hastily compiled from separate documents the Basic Annals of Toghhan-Temür. It was this difference in composition that generated the difference in usage, one having *bu* and the other *ayimaq*.

Thus we can be confident that in the Yuan dynasty, the correct Chinese translation of *ayimaq* was not *buluo*, with its “barbarian” connotations, but rather *bu*, a word used regularly in all dynasties for Chinese civilian and military organizations. *Buluo* is found very occasionally, and *buzu* even more rarely in contexts where we would expect *bu*.<sup>1</sup> But these usages are simply slips made by Ming editors or copyists used to using the word *buluo* for non-Han Chinese social groups. Secondly, this equivalence tells us that far from fading out of use in the state-based, imperial organization of the Yuan Mongols, as we would expect with a term meaning “tribe,” use of the term *ayimaq* appears to have increased sharply after the organization of the Yuan dynasty.

As I have shown, *ayimaq* was used as an official translation of the Chinese *touxia* 頭下~投下, an existing administrative term for the appanage of subjects and/or prisoners attached to a high-ranking prince or vassals. Since *ayimaq* translates both *touxia* and *bu*, this would suggest that the two Chinese terms are more or less equivalent, with *bu* being the more classical version and *touxia* the contemporary administrative term. This equivalence can be confirmed by examining the instances of *bu~aima* within the Basic Annals of the Yuan emperors. I have done a survey of these instances with relation to famine relief, and the vast majority of such *bu~aima* stated as receiving famine relief are defined by the name of their leader, usually a prince or a commander of a thousand. Only rarely are they defined by a “clan name” such as the Qonggirad, Ikires, Baya’ud, or Önggüd.<sup>2</sup> Even these groups, however, were

<sup>1</sup> The following is the list of *all* cases in the *Yuan shi* Basic Annals where these binomes are used. *Buluo*: [106, p. 1.3, 18.387, 22.477, 31.698, 34.756, 35.944]; *buzu*: [106, p. 1.3, 10.216 (Southwest tribes), 38.815].

<sup>2</sup> Partial counts show 109 instances of *bu* 部 receiving famine relief are identified by either the name of the unit’s commander or its administrative position. 52 are defined by some kind of ethnonym (with or without a place-name or commander’s name). Of these only 14 are defined by the sorts of names found in the *SHM* or Rashīd al-Dīn as Mongol sub-groups, and only 9 use only this ethnonym, without the name of

also state-defined political entities under high-status ruling families. The *bu/aima/ayimağ* in the Yuan is thus overwhelmingly defined as a top-down unit defined by designated imperial leadership, not a bottom-up autonomous "tribe" potentially opposed to the state.

In this context, the Ming translators' definition of *ayimağ* in the *SHM* as *buluo* is more comprehensible. *Bu* in the sense of section or part or unit of people in Chinese, and *ayimağ* in Mongolian as division, category, or unit of people were quite close in basic meaning and had long been treated as versions of the same term. Ming era translators, no longer subject to Yuan-era taboos, naturally reverted to the long-standing Chinese practice of using *buluo* "tribe" for *bu* "unit" when the term pertained to the "barbarian" Mongols<sup>1</sup>. But once *bu* was thus changed to *buluo* and the various connotations for *buluo* as a "tribe" of barbarians were attached to *buluo*, then a passage speaking of Chinggis Qan sorting out his men by the princes and commanders to whom they were attached thus came to be interpreted as him sorting out his people by tribes.

Another instance of "tribal" terminology found in non-Mongolian histories of the empire is found at the other end, in the Il-Khanate in the Middle East. Rashīd al-Dīn's encyclopedic history of the Mongol empire contains the following reference to *oboğ*:

«For years [the Mongol progenitors] and their progeny remained in that place [i.e. Ergüne Qun], and multiplied. Each branch of them became known by a specific name and epithet, and they became an *obagh*. (The word *obagh* means to be of a specific bone and lineage.) Those *obaghs* branched out again, and at this time the Mongol tribes have already made it clear from investigation, that all those who came into being from these branches, most are more closely related to each other, and they are all Dürükün Mongols» [79, p. 1: 80; 76, p. 153–54].

It is probably no coincidence that both this passage here, referring to the multiplication of the Mongols' legendary ancestors, and the passages in the *SHM* likewise referring to the multiplication of the Mongols, both use derivatives of the term *oboğ*. This highlighting of the term *oboğ* in the same context in both works may well be the result of literary dependence. Although Rashīd al-Dīn was never allowed to read the *SHM*, he occasionally cites information from that same tradition which Mongols with a higher "security clearance" supplied to him. A Mongol thus explaining the multiplication of the Mongols as seen in the *SHM* or a similar text, might have noted the common use of *oboğtu* or *oboğtan* and told Rashīd al-Dīn about this term.

---

a commander or a place name. The rest of the ethnonyms are much larger units, such as the Jurchen, the Water Tatars, the mDo-sMad Tibetans and so on.

<sup>1</sup> It might seem unlikely that over 100 years of Yuan usage would be so rapidly reversed at the beginning of the Ming. Yet we see the same thing happened with the word *Mongğol* in the *SHM*, which is translated throughout by the word *Dada* 達達 "Tatar," the officially approved Ming version of the same word.

This passage in Rashīd al-Dīn naturally was cited by Vladimircov and even more than the *SHM* constituted the foundational text for the Russian scholar's understanding of the meaning and significance of *obog*<sup>1</sup>. Like some other of Vladimircov's conclusions, however, such as his discussion of the supposed term *unaghanbo'ol*, he was the victim of textual problems in Rashīd al-Dīn's text. The widely used text of Berezin had the form *umāq* (to be read as *omaq*), which was then connected by Vladimircov to several other supposed Turkic forms: *omag*, *omaq*, *obaq*, and *oba* [98, p. 56]. Later writers extended the net of supposed cognates even further:

*Ūbāgh* (or *obog*, *obox*)—clan. On this term, see: B. Ja. Vladimircov, op. cit. p. 46ff. Among others, in mss. V and in Berezin<sup>2</sup> [78, p. 1: 1: 4–6] instead of *ūbāgh* is used the Turkic *umāq*, also with the meaning of clan. The word is also the same as *uymāq*, sometimes pronounced and transliterated as *aymāq*, and in that latter form, among others, it designates some nomadic tribes in northern Afghanistan, where exists firstly, the Čār-Aymāq (i. e. the Four Tribes): the Džemšid, the Teimen, the Firuzkuh, and Hezareh [76, p. 153–54n].

In face of such barrage of misleading data, it is important to emphasize first that *ayimağ* and *obog* are both words of Mongolian, not Turkic, origin, and second that they are quite certainly not related to each other. The form *uymāq* for *aymāq*, and the form *umāq* for *ūbāgh* are both later (in the case of *uymāq*, much later) than the alternative forms. *Aymāq* in Turkic usage is purely derived from the Mongol imperial usage, in which as we have seen it designates imperial appanages assigned to princes or high ranking members of the decimal hierarchy, *not* tribes.<sup>3</sup> *Obog* in Mongolian is also later found as *omog*, although its relation to the term *omog* “pride” is unclear<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> I have argued elsewhere [8] that despite being one of the most brilliant Mongolists of his—or any—time, Vladimircov's understanding of Mongolian society was built more on Rashīd al-Dīn's secondary explanations than directly on the *SHM* and Middle Mongolian sources.

<sup>2</sup> That Rashīd al-Dīn's own text had *ūbāgh* (to be read *obagh*), not *umāq* cannot be doubted. The base text for Xetagurov's translation, which reads *ūbāgh*, is A, that is, Oriental ms. 1620 of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences. This reading is also found in the Revan Köşkü 1518 in the Topkapı Palace library, as well as in the ms 2294 of the Islamic Assembly of Iran and in the British Library Or. Add. 7628. By contrast, the *umāq* of ms. Д66 in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, by itself has little authority.

<sup>3</sup> Although *aymaq* is found in Kyrgyz and Kazakh in the sense of “province,” it is not found in Mahmud al-Kashghari's lexicon of Middle Turkish, nor is it listed in *Drevnetjurkskij slovar*, unless *ajmaq* (= *aymaq*) [70, p. 30], defined as “explanation” “debate” is cognate. The form *oymaq*~ *uymāq* seems clearly to be a late rounding of initial *a*- common in eastern Iranian dialects, as seen in the change of “Tajik” to “Tojik,” and so on.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the common statements that *omaq* is the Turkic cognate of Mongolian *obog*, I have not been able to confirm any possible cognate of *obog* in Middle Turkic except for *oba* [51, p. 122; 70, p. 362]. Although *omog* is not uncommon in modern dialects for *owog* (the modern reflex of *obog*), the *b > m* alternation appears to be a late



In any case, if as seems likely, Rashīd al-Dīn's only data on the word *oboġ* comes from a text in the *SHM* tradition, then it would be foolish to give his vague, second-hand understanding of it priority over one derived from analysis of the extant Mongolian text and thorough Chinese translation. Moreover, he defines it twice, first as a "specific name and epithet" and second as "to be of a specific bone and lineage." Either meaning is consistent with our conclusion from the Mongolian data that *oboġ* refers not to a *clan* as a group of people but to a family *name*, passed in the male line.

Our conclusion then is consistent with both the Mongolian evidence and the evidence from Chinese and Persian writings from the Mongol empire. *Ayimaġ* and *oboġ* are not part of any special pre-state "tribal" terminology of Mongolian social organization. *Ayimaġ* in particular refers, when it is used as a socio-political term at all, either to state-organized and created military and civilian administrative divisions, or to divisions within organizations such as harems or garrisons or Buddhist monasteries. As such it became *more* common after the formation of the Mongol empire and the Yuan dynast, not less. Such *ayimaġ* units are usually unnamed (being temporary) but if named are designated by their commander's name. *Oboġ* refers virtually exclusively to "surnames" that are transmitted patrilineally and is not used to designate concrete social groups that might be characterized by such a common surname. In other words, if there are words for "tribe" and "clan" in Middle Mongolian, they are not *ayimaġ* and *oboġ*.

### **Socio-Political Terminology in the Mongol Empire**

This leaves the question, however, of what word the Mongols did use for the numerous groups into which they were divided. On the Mongolian plateau before the unification under Chinggis Qan there were in fact numerous polities, ranging from the large Kereyid and Naiman through the middle sized and fissiparous Merkid and Tatar, to the small Tayichi'ud, Dörben, Salji'ud, Qonggirad, and so on. Of what broader category, if any, were these groups seen as being examples? If they were not called *ayimaġs* or *oboġs*, with what term would a speaker of Middle Mongolian refer to them? And what can we learn about how Mongolian speakers of the time conceived of these groups from the terminology they used?

The primary terms used for such pre-Chinggisid "tribal" groups are in fact strikingly untribal: *irge(n)* glossed as "common people," *ulus* glossed as "dynasty," "state," or "subjects," and *qari* glossed as "state" or "realm," and only occasionally as "tribe." All of these are terms which Middle Mongolian speakers later had no problem applying to social units of the Han, the Turkestanis, or Iranians. In other words, if we were to proceed simply from the evidence of Middle Mongolian, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Mongols envisioned that what happened from c. 1200 to 1250 was some kind

---

phenomenon. *Omoġ* in the *SHM* always means "brave" or "proud," and never "surname."

of transition from a “tribal” socio-political structure to a “state” socio-political structure. Nor does the terminology indicate that they saw any fundamental difference between their polities and those of the surrounding sedentary peoples. Instead, as far as we can see from the Middle Mongolian sources, they saw the polities existing on the Mongolian plateau in 1200 as being fundamentally comparable in nature with those existing at that time in China and Turkestan, and with what the Mongols had established by 1250, only smaller.

Let us look at a few examples. In *SHM*, §§5 and 28, the representatives of the ancient imperial lineage come across small bodies of other people of unknown lineage. In both cases these groups are titles as *irgen*, glossed in Chinese as *baixing* 百姓 “people, common people.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise in his famous speech in §64, Chinggis Qan’s father in law, Dei Sechen describes his Onggirad~Qonggirad people as an *irgen*, and states that they “do not struggle for *ulus* and *irgen*,” with *ulus* here glossed as *guo* 國 (“state, dynasty”) and *irgen* again as *baixing* 百姓 (“common people”). On a much larger scale, the Kereyid, Tatars, Merkid, and Naiman are also referred to repeatedly as *irgen*.<sup>2</sup>

Quite as common as *irgen*, and often identical to it in meaning is *ulus*. *Ulus* in the *SHM* is used most often to mean the “common people” or “subjects,” being glossed in this sense by Chinese *baixing* 百姓 (e.g. §110, *Merkid-ün ulus*; §272, *olan Monggöl ulus*)<sup>3</sup>. *Ulus* and *irgen* are similar enough to be found in corresponding positions of parallel phrases such as in §§130 and 279. The other meaning of *ulus*, rather rarer, is as state or dynasty, in which meaning it is

<sup>1</sup> *Irgen* appears in the *Zhiyuan yiyu* 至元譯語 vocabulary as one of the entries in the *junguanmen* 君官們 “Lords and Officials” section, defined as *minhu* 民戶 “commoner households” [59, p. 265, pl. 3; 49, p. 300]. It also appears repeatedly in the *Hua-Yi yiyu* 華夷譯語 where it is always translated as *baixing* 百姓 [69, p. 64]. It also appears in Kirakos of Gandzak’s Armenian-Mongol vocabulary along with Turkic *el* as one of the words meaning “land” [58, p. 292–93]. As Ligeti pointed out the link with “land” here was formed via Turkish *el*, which, like Mongolian *ulus* (but unlike *irgen*), has the meaning both of the people under a single rule and the territory those people live on.

<sup>2</sup> Kereyid: §§96, 150, 186, 187, 200, 208; Tatars: §§53 (3), 58, 67, 68, 133, 153, 154, 156, 157, 205, 214 (2); Merkid: §§110, 113 (2), 152 (2), 157, 177 (2), 197, 198; Naiman: §§190 (*irgen ulus*), 192, 193, 200. The numbers in parentheses refers to the numbers of instances in the section in question.

<sup>3</sup> Of the three words I am considering here, *ulus* is the most widely attested item in the Middle Mongolian vocabularies, and the one with the widest variety of meanings. In the *Hua-Yi yiyu* 華夷譯語 it is given the primary meaning of *guo* 國 “realm, state, dynasty” but is also glossed as *guotu* 國土 “country, state territory,” *baixing* 百姓 “(common) people” and *min* 民 “commoners/civilians” [69, p. 105]. In the Rasulid Hexaglot, *ulus* is equated with Turkish *il*, Persian *vilāyathā*, and Arabic *al-buldān* “countries.” Turkish *il* is elsewhere linked to Arabic *al-wilāya* “province,” Persian *vilāyat*, Greek *horan*, and Armenian *ergir*; p. 144, and defined as “subordinate” and linked with Arabic *al-muṭī* “obedient” [38, p. 248, 144, 112].

glossed as *guo* (e.g. §64, *ulus-i ülü temčed*; §121, *ulus-un ejen boltuğai, ulus mede'ülü'esü*). Finally, *ulus irgen* together form a relatively common binome. In these cases, *irgen* is glossed as *baixing*, and *ulus* as either *guo* (e.g. §148, 281) or *renyan* 人烟 "inhabitants" (e.g. §139). Contrary to modern usage, however, *ulus* is as a rule abstract, being modified only rarely used with a proper noun. Where one might in modern Mongolian refer to the "Naimanulus," for example, in the *SHM* usage one would rather refer to the "Naiman *irgen*." Similarly while the Jin dynasty would later be referred to as the *Altan ulus* "Golden Dynasty," in the *SHM* the state is referred to by the name of the ruler *Altan Qan* "The Golden King" and the realm as *Kitad irgen* "Chinese people" (see e.g. §§132, 247, 250, 251, 271, 272).

Of the three terms *irgen*, *ulus*, and *qari(n)*, it is only the last which the Ming dynasty translators sometimes glossed as *buluo* 部落 or tribe. *Qari(n)* in modern Mongolian is a noun or adjective for a person or thing who is ethnically alien, but it is used in the *SHM* for diverse polities where some form of ethnic diversity and alliance is highlighted. Sometimes, clearly foreign people are in question: thus *qari* is used frequently to describe the peoples to the far west assigned to Chinggis Qan's oldest son Jochi (§255) and against whom the Mongols campaigned as far as Russia and Hungary:

*činadu dayisun kü'ün olon qarin* (邦) *bui*

"the enemies yonder are many *qarin*" [§270; 102, p. 381].

*orusud irgen-i* (百姓) *ta'uliju harban nigen qarin* (邦) *irgen-i* (百姓) *jüg-tür oro'ulju*

"plundering the Rus' *irgen*, and making eleven *qarinirgen* to submit sincerely." [§275; 102, p. 387]

Early on when his generals promise to bring fair maiden and fine geldings from various peoples to Chinggis Qan, the peoples to be plundered are called *qari irgen*, with the gloss being in one case *bang* 邦 "realm" or "state" and in the other *waibang* 外邦 "foreign realms" (see §§123, 197).

Yet *qari(n)* designates not only distant peoples, but also the various "tribes" of the Mongolian plateau. For example in §129, we read how Jamuqa brought together thirteen peoples to form his coalition:

*Jamuqa teri'üten Jadaran arban ġurban qarin* (bu 部) *nököčejü ġurban tümed bolju*.

"The Jadaran led by Jamuqa, thirteen *qarin* [units or divisions?] concluded a friendship and made three *tümen* [i.e. 10,000]." [102, p. 118]

In §141, where there is a long list of the people who joined together to elevate Jamuqa, including the Qatagin, the Salji'ud, the Dörben, the Tatar, the Ikires, the Qonggirad, the Ghorulas, the Naiman, the Merkid, the Oyirad, and the Tayichi'ud, they are also called *edün qarin* "so many *qarin*," with a Chinese gloss of *buluo mei* 部落每 or "tribes-PLURAL." The term can even refer to units under Chinggis Qan, when their diversity in origins needs to be stressed. In describing how the Baya'ud and Negüs "brethren" (*aqade'ü*) do not form their own unit, but are scattered among the other Mongol divisions,

they are said to be *qariqari tutum-turburatarabui* “scattered and dispersed in every *qari*” (§§213, cf. 218) with *qari* glossed as *buluo* 部落. The Ming dynasty translators of the *SHM* translated *qari(n)* as *buluo* or “tribe” when it was obviously referring to units within the Mongols, and as *bang* 邦 or “state, realm” when it was obviously a matter of large kingdoms or ethnic groups outside the Mongolian plateau. Yet this distinction is imported into the translation by the Ming translators; it has no basis in the original Mongolian. On its own, Ming translators considered *qari(n)* to mean primarily “realm” or “country.”<sup>1</sup>

Unexpectedly, the closest equivalent to “clan,” meaning a group of people related patrilineally, may be the phrase *aqa de’ü* “elder and younger brothers.” Used particularly commonly with the Tayichi’ud (a rival branch of the Borjigin lineage opposing Chinggis Qan), it is also found with two dispersed surname groups, the Baya’ud and Negüs.<sup>2</sup> Such usage may also be connected with the use of other terms such as *Tayiči’ud kö’üd* “Tayichi’ud sons” found in the *SHM* (§83), and the “Jalar and *aqas* [i.e. elders]” and “Sö’egen [=Sökeken] *jala’us* [i.e. youths]” found in the list of Chinggis Qan’s supporters in the *Shengwu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄 [45, p. 1:13a-b, 17a-18a; 99, p. 24 [9b], 28–29 [11b-12a]]. The purely patrilineal nature of *aqa de’ü* cannot be taken for granted, however. Such family based terminology is used in Mongolian for any form of solidary grouping and was not solely a question of kinship, but also of age, common residence, and comradeship. The image of a fighting fraternity may be just as good or better a context in which to put the phrase of “Tayichi’ud brethren” as that of a patrilineal kin group.

To conclude this discussion of the terms for “tribe” and “clan” in Middle Mongolian: there is no term with anything like the meaning of “tribe” in Middle Mongolian. The word usually taken to mean tribe, *ayimag*, actually meant “military-administrative division.” Another word occasionally glossed as “tribe” by Ming translators, *qari(n)*, has the basic signification of “any territorial unit with a distinctive population” and hence was no more distinctively “tribe” than it was “nation.” In any case, the polities of the pre-Chinggisid world were in the vast majority of cases referred to as *irgen*, a word that carries the full freight of connotations attaching to state society. As for clan, *oboġtan* “those with such and such surname” is occasionally used for it, but again, any “clan” operating as an autonomous political unit was as a ruled referred to as a *qari* or *irgen*, or in a few cases as *aqa de’ü* “brethren.” While lineage was absolutely crucial for status *within* groups, unity of surname, considered apart from unity of administrative and territorial position, simply does not appear to have been a formative organizing principle of Mongolian groups before or after 1206.

<sup>1</sup> *Qari* appears in a derived form in the *Hua-Yi yiyu* 華夷譯語, as *qaritan*, which is translated as *bangtu* 邦土 “country” [69, p. 88].

<sup>2</sup> See §§74, 76, 77, 78, 82, 94 (*Tayiči’ud aqa de’ü*); §120 (*Tayiči’udai aqa-nar de’ü-ner*); §213 (*Baya’udaqade’üminu*); §218 (*Negüsaqade’üminu*).

### **“Tribes” and “Clans” in the Northern Yuan Dynasty?**

So far our search for a terminology of “tribes” and “clans” has been very disappointing. But what about the time after the fall of the Mongol empire, when central rule broke down again? Historians have envisioned the possibility that the Mongols reverted to a tribal state in the chaos of the period after 1368. Could it be that *ayimağ* and *obog* change their meanings and become more common in that period? Vladimircov in fact discussed the term *ayimağ* as a socio-political unit in this period. What did he base this on?

Researching this period in Mongolian history is difficult, due to the lack of adequate sources. The Ming dynasty frontier literature, while voluminous, is very inadequate for investigating the finer points of Mongolian socio-political systems. Traditionally, the Mongolian sources used for investigating this period are the so-called “Seventeenth Century Chronicles”: Lubsang-Danzin’s *Altan tobči*, the anonymous *Altan tobči*, the *Erdeni-yin tobči*, the *Asarağči-yin neretü-yin teüke*, and the *Sira tuuji*. All of these chronicles, however, were in fact compiled well after the advent of Qing rule in Inner Mongolia. As I will demonstrate, Qing rule brought about major changes in the terminology of socio-political groups and this terminology is reflected to some degree in the text of all of these chronicles. Thus we need to use sources from the period before 1636, when the new views and institutions of Manchu Qing rule had not yet influenced the Mongols.

Before 1980, such a study would have been almost impossible to conduct. Up to that time, the only purely pre-1636 text of any length extant would have been the *Čagan teüke*, the 16<sup>th</sup> century apocryphal text describing a Yuan Buddhist utopia supposedly set in the era of Qubilai Qa’an. Since then, however, several new texts have been discovered, edited, and published. This includes a set of ritual texts relating to the Eight White Yurts, the *Činggis Qa’an-u altan tobči*, a mid-sixteenth century version of the life of Chinggis Qan, the *Erdeni-yin tunumal*, a biography of Altan Qa’an dated to 1607, and a large number of Mongol letters from the 1620s on preserved in the Manchu Qing archives and published by Li Baowen.<sup>1</sup> Together, these sources give a much better picture of Mongolian usage in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, from the reunification of the Mongols in 1510 by Dayan Qa’an to the civil war provoked by Ligden Qa’an’s ambitions and the surrender to the new Manchu empire in 1634–36.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Eight White Yurts ritual texts and the *Činggis Qa’an-u altan tobči* were published by Dorungġ-a (1998). The ritual texts have also been translated and edited by Elisabetta Chiodo [17, 1989, 91, p. 190–220; 1992, 84–144]. The *Činggis Qa’an-u altan tobči* has been transcribed and translated with a concordance by Leland Liu Rogers (2009). On the *Jewel Translucent Sutra* [47; 30]. Erdenijab-un Li Baowen [57] published the early Manchu documents in the China No. 1 Historical Archives (*Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’an guan* 中国第一历史档案馆), and these documents were translated and further studied by Nicola Di Cosmo and Dalizhabu [22].

The picture painted by these sources with regard to “tribal” terminology is not much different from that of the Mongol Empire. The terms *ayimağ* and *oboğ* simply do not appear in the *Činggis Qa’an-u altan tobči*, nor in the preserved ritual texts or the Mongolian language documents preserved in Manchu archives. Although the term *oboğ* is not found in the *Jewel Translucent Sutra*, *ayimağ* does appear frequently but only in the sense either of a division of Buddhist monks, or else as a short-term, small scale military unit. The former usage is more common in the text. [30, lines 531, 814, 839, 899, 1028, 1033, 1351, 1430, 1434] The latter occurs only twice, where we read of “five *ayimağ* of scouts”:

*Uyigurjin-ača Ong Güsi Yisütei Sarmili kiged sayid tüssimed terigüten tabun ayimağ tursigul-i čuğlağuluğad . . .*

“They assembled five *ayimağ* of scouts from the Uyghurs, led by Ong Güshi Yisütei Sarmili and the wealthy officials” [30, lines 1506 and 1450].

Obviously *ayimağ* here has the purely military-administrative sense of “unit.” The two senses, military and religious, are nicely combined in a metaphorical passages eulogizing monks as *qutuğtan-u mör-tür udirduğči ayimağ-ud-un noyan* “the lords of the vanguard units (*ayimağ-ud*) on the path of the blessed ones.” [30, line 1068]

In the *Čağan teüke* or “White History” we find both *oboğtan* and *ayimağ*, each used in ways very similar to that of the earlier Middle Mongolian texts. *Oboğtan* is found in an identical passage given twice describing in a schematic way Chinggis Qan’s conquests:

*tegün-ü qoyina, Jad Mongğol-un gajar-a Temüjin suutu boğda Činggis Qağan töröjü Čambudib-taki ğurban jağun jiran nigen keleten doluğan jağun qorin nigen oboğtan, arban jirğuğan yeke ulus-i tabun öngge dörben qari bolğan yirtinčü-yi toğtağasın . . .*

“After that, Temüjin, the brilliant and Holy Chinggis Qa’an, was born in the land of the Jad Mongols and pacified the world making the speakers of the 361 languages and the bearers of the 721 surnames and the sixteen empires (*yekeulus*) in the continent Jambudvīpa into his ‘five colors and four foreigners’...”<sup>1</sup>.

Although it would be a mistake to read too much into a utopian and schematic passage like this, surnames, like languages and political empires, are one of the coordinates of the human continent Jambudvīpa’s diversity which Chinggis Qan united under his own rule. Nothing suggests, however, that these surname groups are somehow specifically formed into separate clans. The one passage with the word *ayimağ* uses it solely in the military-administrative sense:

*Tabun önggetü dörben qari ulus-tur arbatu-yin aqa tabitu, jağutu, mingğatu, tümeten, tüg tümen-ü noyad-i inu ayimağayimağulus-ıyan tusburi medetügei.*

<sup>1</sup> See Klaus Sagaster [84, I:1:2 [81] and I:3.1 [82]]; with slightly different wording. This part is not found in the text of Liu Jinsuo [61].

---

“In the realm (*ulus*) of the ‘five colors and four foreigners’ the elders of the tens and the commanders of the fifties, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and supreme ten thousands shall each rule his own *ayimağ* and subjects (*ulus*) [84, p. II:7:41 [91–92]; 61, p. 86]”.

Just as in the Yuan texts, the *ayimağs* here designate the range of administrative and military units into which the Mongol population under Yuan rule was divided. They are most certainly *not* “tribes.” And as far as we know in the actual Dayan Qa’anid period, the Mongolian people were organized into administrative units divided up among the descendants of Dayan Qa’an, conventionally divided into six *tümen* and 54 *otogs*. *Tümen* or “tenthousand” being derived from the imperial census and *otog* being a Sogdian for country or territory, neither had any connotation of tribe. Although Vladimircov wrote extensively about how *ayimağ* and *otog* were coordinate terms, there is no attested use of *ayimağ* as an actual administrative term in Dayan Qa’anid Mongolia. (The case of the *Čagan teike* is one of a deliberately archaizing vocabulary, purporting to describe thirteenth century vocabulary.)

Thus although the sources may be thinner than in the case of the Mongol empire, the picture they paint is no less clear. The Mongols of the sixteenth century did not have any word for “tribe” as we understand it, and certainly did not use *ayimağ* for that purpose. Indeed there is no evidence that outside nostalgic references to lost Yuan institutions the word *ayimağ* was used for anything other than temporary military task forces. *Oboğ* was still the word for surnames, but it was rarely used and never appears as a term of social organization.

### ***Ayimağ* and *Oboğ* in the Manchu Qing Era: “Tribalizing” the Mongols**

This picture began to change already in the seventeenth century chronicles of the early Manchu Qing dynasty. Both *ayimağ* and *oboğ* began to take on the types of connotations that would result in them becoming the preferred word for tribal society in the twentieth century. *Ayimağ* began to take on the connotations of “tribe” and *oboğ* ceased to be just a surname and began to mean a body of people sharing the same name and affiliation.

In the sixteenth century chronicles, *ayimağ* still remained a term primarily used for divisions of soldiers, messengers, palace women and so on.<sup>1</sup> However, in some passages we see *ayimağ* being used in contexts where it had not appeared before. In the *Altan tobči*, a captive Mongol is told by his sympathetic

---

<sup>1</sup> Soldiers: *dörben ayimağ čirig tegüsüsen* ([96, p. 132b], describing Qubilai Sechen Qa’an’s administration), *qoyar ayimağ qara moritan* [82, p. 72r19]; messengers: *dörben ayimağ elčis* [82, p. 12r14]; *tabun ayimağ elčis* [82, p. 14r13]; deities: *naiman ayimağ doğsi* [82, p. 18v18]; scriptures: *ğurban ayimağ saba-yin yosuğar* [82, p. 19v22]; palace ladies: *ekener-ün ayimağ* [82, p. 21r10]; the three provinces of mNgari in Tibet: *Mgari ġurban ayimağ* [82, p. 22v17–18, 23r29, 36v26–27]; the Upper and Lower Yellow Uyghurs: *degedü dooradu qoyar ayimağ Sira Uyiğur* [82, p. 70v03].

mistress to say to the Oirats who suspect him of continuing loyalty to his Mongol family,

*ečiǵe eke nutuǵ[or otoǵ]ayimaǵ-ıyan baǵadu abtaǵsan-u tula ülü medem geǵü*

“Say, ‘Because I was taken away while still small, I do not know my father and mother or *nutuǵ* [or *otoǵ*] and *ayimaǵ*” [96, p. 150b [104]; 18, p. 56b23 [80, 313]; 11, §84 [170]].

Unfortunately, in the ambiguity of the unpointed Uyghur-Mongolian script, it is impossible to be sure if the word before *ayimaǵ* is *nutuǵ* “homeland” or *otoǵ* “county.” If it is *otoǵ*, then the word *ayimaǵ* here could be seen as simply reduplicating the meaning of *otoǵas* administrative region (although the use of *ayimaǵ* with *otoǵ* in this fashion is otherwise unattested).<sup>1</sup> But if it is *nutuǵ* then we have a new binome *nutuǵayimaǵ* in which *ayimaǵ* seems to imply not a temporary administrative unit, but a particular neighborhood as defined by territory and the people living in it.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Mongǵol-Oyirad čaǵaji* or “Mongol-Oirat Code,” dated to 1640 (although all the extant mss. have been transcribed into the Clear Script which was not devised until 1648–49) we also see a few cases where *ayimaǵ* is used in a way that seems to mean “neighborhood” in an informal, non-administrative sense. In describing the procedure to be followed in determining the truth in lawsuits, one provision says:

*Ünen qudal qoyar-i inu gereči-eče medeye . . Gereči ügei bolqula ayimaǵ-un aqa-yi anu siqaya . .*

“Truth and falsity shall be determined by witnesses. If there are no witnesses, the elders of the *ayimaǵ* shall be pressed [to give testimony]” [27, §108, p. 183].

In describing compensation to be given a husband whose wife has run away, the brothers of the wife are expected to pay back the bridewealth the husband gave her at the betrothal.

*Aqa degüü inu öǵǵüksen mal-un kiri-ber mal öǵčü abqu bolba . . Mal ügei büǵesü ayimaǵ aqa degüü inu yisü öǵčü abqu bolba . . Ayimaǵ-un aqa degüü ügei kümün-i noyad medekü bolba . .*

<sup>1</sup> In the Mongol-Oirat code, however, we find *yeke ayimaǵ ulus* “the main *ayimaǵ* realm” and in the laws of Dondug-Dashi we find *ayimaǵ döchin* “the *ayimaǵ* forty” (referring to a known administrative unit of forty households) [27, §§1, 2 [16–17], §41 [299]]. In both cases, *ayimaǵ* seems to be added as a kind of measure word for administrative units, which could be of any size. Although the order is reversed, this could be the case here with *otoǵ ayimaǵ*, if it is to be read that way.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimircov [98, p. 177–78] appeals to this passage to prove that “the *ayimaq* is obliged to possess a territory for nomadism, *nutuq*, and without this condition the group cannot be designated by the name *ayimaq*.” As Bawden [11, p. 170n1] already pointed out there is uncertainty in the reading, which could be *otoǵ* or *nutuǵ*. I would also point out that this use of *ayimaǵ* with *otoǵ* or *nutuǵ* is paralleled in no other pre-1636 text.



---

“Her brothers shall pay livestock according to the measure of livestock given before. If the livestock is no longer there, her *ayimağ* brothers shall pay a “nine” [a measure of livestock used in fines]. If the *ayimağ* brothers are no longer there, the persons involved shall be handled by the nobles (*noyad*)” [27, §115, p. 193].

Vladimircov took *ayimağ* in these two cases to be an official administrative unit, analogous to the *otog*, except that in the *ayimağ* the members were related to each other by kinship [98, p. 177–78]. Since these are the only two passages in the original 1640 code where the term *ayimağ* appears, it seems hard to believe that it was a distinctive, major institution.<sup>1</sup> In the passages, the *ayimağ* appears to have no connection with the administrative hierarchy of nobles (*noyad*), nor the “forties” headed by the *demči*, or the “twenties” headed by the *šüülengge*. As has already been noted, the term “brothers” (*aqa degüü*) in Mongolian can have a very loose sense of those related in any way (paternal, maternally, or marriage relatives) and even simply comrades and friends. The possibility that the “*ayimağ* brothers” might be absent from the scene certainly makes the *ayimağ* sound like a fairly informal group. Certainly nothing in these passages would necessitate seeing *ayimağ* as a tightly organized “sub-tribe” or “phratry” as Vladimircov does. Whether this sense of *ayimağ* as neighbors and relatives might have been there all along, but undocumented, or else might have been connected with the changes in the word’s association that would become clearer later awaits further research. A final possibility, given the Oirat provenance of these examples, is that *ayimağ* in Turkic languages, originally borrowed from Mongolian during the Mongol empire, may have in turn influenced Oirat usage.

A much greater innovation appears when *ayimağ* begins to sound much like the old *ulus* as designating the area ruled by a single lord, but now seen as a bottom-up unit. When Lord Jaisai of the Five Otog Qalqa is captured by the rising Manchus and his family negotiates for his release, the second Manchu Qing emperor criticizes their foolish policy:

*öber-ün ayimağ-yi yakin eyin mağuilamui ta?*

“How can you ruin your own *ayimağ* like that?” [82, p. 92v03–04]<sup>2</sup>

In this case, *ayimağ* appears to designate all of Jaisai’s people, but carrying the sense of a homeland. Similarly in describing how the Manchus granted titles to secure support, Saghang Sechen writes:

*yerüingkei ulus, ayimağ-taki qad noyad, tusimed-nuğud-ta, wang beile, beise güng-üid kemekü terigüten čolas-i ögčü . . .*

“To the khans, lords, and ministers throughout the people and *ayimağs* they gave titles such as *wang*, *beile*, *beise*, and *gong*.” [82, p. 95v04–05]

---

<sup>1</sup> The other instances cited by Vladimircov belong to the later amendments of Galdan Khung Taiji and Dondug-Dashi in which later Qing-style terminology, such as *qosiğu* “banner” appears. They thus cannot be used to establish pre-Qing usage.

<sup>2</sup> I have of course made extensive use of the concordance and word-index of Sayang Secen, by I. de Rachewiltz and J. R. Krueger [83].

Here, in context, *ayimağ* is a preexisting socio-cultural unit, like *ulus* “dynasty,” “country,” whose support could be won over by appointing people in it various titles. Although the difference between this and the previous meaning of *ayimağ* as an often temporary administrative unit is subtle, it is real. *Ayimağ* around this time also begins to be used as the descriptor term for named regional units in Mongolia. In the genealogy of Lubsang-Danzin’s *Altan tobči*, we read:

*Qasar-un üre Siraqan ekilen Qorčın-u ayimağ noyad boluğad edüge-yi Qorčın-u barağun ğar-un Tüshiyetü Čin Wang-tan tabun qosıǵu: jegün ğarun Jorıqtu Čin Wang-tan tabun qosıǵu: ede büğüde arban qosıǵu bui.*

“Qasar’s descendants beginning with Shirakhan became the *ayimağ* and nobles of the Khorchin. These are the present-day right flank five banners of the Tüshiyetü Chin Wang and the left flank five banners of the Jorıqtu Chin Wang of, in total ten banners” [96, p. 173b [120]].

Here *ayimağ* designates the Khorchin as a whole, particularly in distinction to the nobles. The bottom-up sense is quite clear—and new for *ayimağ*.

Most clearly indicative of changing usage are passage where material from the *SHM* is rewritten or summarized, but with the word *ayimağ* inserted. Thus in the anonymous *Altan tobči*, there is a passage on the descendants of Bodonchar’s brothers.

*Bodončur Boqda Qabči Külüg-eče busu ayimağ-un ulus-i čöm qaračus bolǵaǵsan yosun eyimü bülüge.*

“This is how all the people (*ulus*) of the *ayimağ* not descended from Bodonchur Bogda Khabchi Khülüg were all made vassals (*qaračus*)” [18, p. 8a12 [35]; 11, §8 [115]].

In a passage of the *Asarağči-yin neretü-yin teüke* corresponding to the *SHM* §141, we finally see the word *ayimağs* being applied to the “tribal” units of the pre-Chinggisid period:

*Qatagin, Saljiğud, Tatar-un beki terigülen dörben ayimağ Tatar, İkiris, Qongkirid, Ğorlusun Čindan Čağan terigülen . . .*

“The Qatagin, the Salji’ud, the four Tatar *ayimağs* led by the Beki of the Tatar, the Qonggirid, those led by Chindan Chaghan of the Gorlos ...” [87, p. 12b02 [23, 247]].

And in the passage corresponding to §153, the passage “Chinggis Qan set himself in array at Dalan Nemürges against the Tatars, the Chagha’an Tatar, Alchi Tatar, Duta’ud Tatar, and Aluqai Tatar” becomes:

*Noqai jil-dür Činggis Qağan dörben ayimağ Tatar-tur mordaju...*

“In the year of the dog, Chinggis Qa’an rode against the four *ayimağ* of the Tatars” [87, p. 13b28 [24, 248]].

Finally, the *Asarağči neretü-yin teüke*’s passage corresponding to §198 refers to *nigen ayimağ Merkid* “one *ayimağ* of the Merkid” [87, p. 15b09 [27, 249]]. In all of these cases, the *SHM* original does not have *ayimağ*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> As Oyunbilig [105, p. 31-44] has shown, the *Asarağči neretü-yin teüke* does not actually make use of the *SHM*. But it does appear to have made use of some other, now

---

By this time *ayimaġ* is clearly being used for a pre-existing subdivision of a people, that is, roughly a "tribe." In other words, the Mongolian sources demonstrate that the modern usage that I described in the beginning of this article, in which sub-groups or "tribes" of Mongols are designated *ayimaġ* dates back to the second half of the seventeenth century. Already by the end of that century, the Mongols were rewriting the remains of their own Middle Mongolian historical works to reflect this newer vocabulary.

What then was the reason for this relatively sudden spread of the term *ayimaġ* among the Mongols of the second half of the seventeenth century? I believe the answer is quite clear: it was the influence of Manchu on Mongolian usage. Specifically, the Manchus used the term *aiman*, itself a loan word from Mongolian *ayimaġ*, to translate the Chinese *bu* 部 and *buluo* 部落.<sup>1</sup> Thus as the Manchus translated extensively from the Chinese sources, they assimilated the practice of seeing the peripheral peoples around China as naturally have a special organization into "tribal" units: *aiman*.<sup>2</sup> When Manchu sources were translated into Mongolian, whether in the form of legal codes or historical literature, then *aiman* was naturally translated by its cognate *ayimaġ*. Through this pathway, the Mongols assimilated the Chinese view of themselves as naturally "tribal" and being organized into peculiar units appropriate to "barbarians."

The operation of this path from *bu* to *aiman* to *ayimaġ* can be seen in the Manchu and Mongolian translations of the *Liao shi* 遼史, the *Jin shi* 金史, and the *Yuan shi* 元史. As Ulaanbagana [104] has emphasized in his recent study of these translations, the Manchu translation and Mongolian translations of the *Yuan shi* in particular exercised a very powerful influence on the Mongolian historical tradition. The citations in his work also show many examples where *bu* was translated in Manchu as *aiman* and then in Mongolian as *ayimaġ* [103, p. 33, 37, 64–65, 66–67, etc.]. Legal and geographical literature also played a major role in popularizing the habit of referring to Mongol subunits as *ayimaġ*.

---

lost, Yuan-era Mongolian source. It is thus theoretically possible that the use of the term *ayimaġ* in these contexts derives not from the usage of the editor Šamba writing in 1677 [105, p. 15–18], but from the Yuan-era source he drew on. Although more research is needed, some of the incidents mentioned in this source, such as Ilqa Senggün taking refuge in Tibet are found elsewhere only in the *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, a Yuan era text originally composed c. 1276, and reedited c. 1318. It is possible therefore that the *Asaraġči neretü-yin teüke* used a similar source, and that *ayimaġ* could represent not the Qing-era usage, but the Yuan era popularization of *ayimaġ* as a translation of Chinese *touxia*. Either way, it does not represent any actual use of *ayimaġ* as the pre-Chinggisid word for "tribe."

<sup>1</sup> See for example [55] (s.v. *aiman*); [92] (s.v. *aiman* §10224 [573]). See also [81] (s.v. *aiman*). The term *aiman* is not found in any of the Ming-era Jurchen vocabularies, so it may have been a fairly recent borrowing from Mongolian into Manchu [52; 48].

<sup>2</sup> It is notable that all the terms connected with the office of *tusi* 土司, petty officials of the non-Han peoples in southern and western China, use the term *aiman/ayimaġ* to mark their "tribal" character [92, §1483–1491 [85]].

According to Qing administration, each Mongol banner (the real administrative unit) was also affiliated with a particular *ayimaġ* (Manchu *aiman*, Chinese *bu*), whose noble families were related and whose commoners had a common history. Thus in the famous peerage of the Mongol and Inner Asian nobility of the Qing, the so-called *Iledkel šastir*, each noble family was assigned to an *ayimaġ* [66; 71], and it became a common place to survey the Mongols by the numbers of their *ayimaġ*<sup>1</sup>. In the official view, Mongols were now seen as a swarm of peripheral tribes, as found in the clichéd phrase *Ġadaġadu ayimaġ-un olan mongġol* “the Mongols of the outer *ayimaġ*/tribes”<sup>2</sup>.

Just as with the text of the *SHM*, we can see this new understanding of *ayimaġ* as “tribe” in rewrites of sixteenth century texts and themes as well. Thus the geographical schemata describing the Mongol conquest known as originally found in the *Čaġan teüke* “White History” had no reference to the word *ayimaġ*. One had seven named countries (*ulus*) as representatives of the sixteen empires of Jambudvīpa. The other, the famous “Five Colors and Four Foreigns” (*tabun öngge, dörben qari*) scheme had the “Blue Mongolia” (*Köke Mongġol ulus*) in the center and nine different named countries (*ulus*) distributed around, two to each cardinal direction [84, II:2:2[83], II:8:3 [92]; 61, p. 73, 86]. But when this latter schema was set out in the early eighteenth century work, the *Altan kürdün mingġan kegesütü*, the terminology used was pervasively shaped by usage calqued from Chinese via Manchu:

*Tendeče Boġda Činggis Qaġan tngri-yin jayaġ-a-bar Čambutib-un dorona eteged-ün arban qoyar qaġan-u ulus-i ejelejü, yisün muji tabun öngge dörben qari ulus-i bolġaġsan inu:*

*Ġool inu dalan qoyar ayimaġ döčün tümen ileġiü Mongġol dumdadu yeke muji;*

*Dorona-yin olan ayimaġulus inu, Čaġan Solongġas, Kilüged qoyar muji;*

*Emüne-yin olan ayimaġulus inu, Ulaġan Kitad, Biteġüd qoyar muji;*

*Öröne-yin olan ayimaġ ulun inu Qar-a Tangġud, Tasiq qoyar muji;*

*Umara-yin olan ayimaġ ulun inu Sira Sartagul, Tomoġ qoyar muji büged yisün muji bolai.*

“Then Holy Chinggis Qaghan conquered the realms of twelve emperors of the eastern part of Jambudvīpa by the destiny of Heaven and made them his nine provinces, five colors, and four foreigners.

«In the center there was the great central Mongol province with more than seventy-two *ayimaġs* and forty tümens;

«In the east with many *ayimaġ* and realms, there were the two provinces of White Koreans and Kilüged;

«In the south with many *ayimaġ* and realms, there were the two provinces of Red Chinese and Biteġüd;

<sup>1</sup> E.g. “Inner Mongolia is in total six leagues, 25 *ayimaġs*, and 49 banners,” [85, p. 21–23].

<sup>2</sup> See for example [86, p. 2.17a.3–4].

---

«In the west with the many *ayimaġ* and realms, there were the two provinces of Black Tanguts and Taziks;

«In the north with the many *ayimaġ* and realms, there were the two provinces of Yellow Turkestanis and Tokmak;

«These were the nine provinces» [25, p. 340]<sup>1</sup>.

By this time, *ayimaġ* had become the accepted term for a traditional subdivision of any *ulus*, which in turn would be part of an empire or *ulus* ruled by a great *qaġan*.<sup>2</sup> This pattern of subdivision was extrapolated from the known sub-units of the Mongols to those of the Koreans, Chinese, Tanguts, Taziks, Turkestanis and so on. This passage points up the speed with which the Mongols picked up and used for their own history anachronistic administrative terms, including not just *ayimaġ*, but also *muji* "province," usually used only for the provinces of China.

By the nineteenth century *Köke teüke*, the idea that the Mongols are divided into *ayimaġ* and *oboġ* "tribes" and "clans" was a commonplace among Mongol writers. David Sneath has described how the institution of *oboġ* was spread among the Mongols by the Manchu rule as well, as a translation of the Manchu *hala* and the Chinese *xing* [91, p. 93–97]. Like *ayimaġs*, *oboġs* too were inserted where they had not been before. Under the sixteenth century Dayan Khanid dynasty, Mongolia was often seen as being divided into six *tümens* and 54 *otoġs*, a term derived from Sogdian and meaning "district." When this organization was recounted in 1835 by the monk Ishibaldan, the term *otog* "district" was replaced by *oboġ* "clans"—similar in sound, but very different in meaning [41, p. 47 [23r], cf. xvi].

Once the larger *ayimaġs* (once "province" or "division," now a "tribe") and the smaller *oboġs* "clans" came together, the picture of clan-based tribal society was almost complete. The following statement summarizes this picture of the Mongols:

*tedeger Mongġol-un ayimaġ tus tus-un dotor-a oboġ yasun adali busu olan bui . tedeger Mongġol ulus-un dotor-a yeke . baġ-a qad noyad [-un] uġ udum boluġsan-u jerge inu*

Mongolia is divided into *ayimaġs* and each *ayimaġ* has many different clans (*oboġ*) and patrilineages (*yasun*, lit. "bones"). And the ranks of the greater and lesser lords of lineage is this: ... [13, p. 42]<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the various lists of peoples here [84, p. 304–17].

<sup>2</sup> That the *ulus* of the "nine provinces" equals the *tümen* (the unit of sub-rule under Dayan Qa'an, conventionally counted as six) of the Mongols can be seen on in Dharma's *Altan kürdün mingġan kegesütü* [25, p. 342]. On the meaning of the term *ulusin* Dayan Khanid Mongolia [31, p. 17–19, 22, 29–30, 66–70].

<sup>3</sup> In using this text, I have been greatly aided by the translation, transcription, and commentary by Č. Udaanjargal [95].

This picture of the Mongols as being divided into *ayimaġ* “tribes” and *obog* “clans” has been widely accepted as the original, pre-imperial, pre-state situation of the Mongols. A description such as this nineteenth century one could thus be taken to indicate the preservation of traces of the clan-tribal regime into the nineteenth century. But in reality this passage indicates nothing of the sort. It is no survival of earlier terms and institutions, but rather a result of thorough assimilation of Manchu Qing ideas and naming practices. It is these ideas and practices which modern Mongolian writers unwittingly reflect when they emphasize *ayimaġ* and *obog* as fundamental terms for the study of pre-Chinggisid Mongolia.

### Conclusion

In summary, let us summarize how the Mongols got a word for tribe. The answer is, they took an existing Mongolian word, *ayimaġ* and, via the Manchu *aiman*, gave it the connotations of the Chinese *bu* and *buluo*. Originally, however, the word *ayimaġ* meant a division or category, and as applied to social groups meant an administrative or military unit, often temporary. This process of acquiring a “tribal” vocabulary points up several important conclusions, both methodological and substantive:

1) Mongolian sources are indeed important for Mongolian history, and the uncritical use of translations can be extremely misleading.<sup>1</sup>

2) In the case of Mongolian, at least, David Sneath was correct that *ayimaġ* began as an administrative-military term, and only later acquired “tribal” connotations.

3) *Obog* in its original signification refers not to a “clan,” i.e. a group of people, but simply to the common surname descending in the male line. It was rarely if ever used to refer to actual social groups, but only to family names born by persons.

4) The Middle Mongolian sources show no distinctive linguistic reflection of what we can call a tribal or clan order. Actual socio-political groups were usually termed called *irgen* or *qari(n)*, terms that denoted political and territorial unity, and which were used for Mongol and sedentary peoples alike.

5) The importance and frequency of the term *ayimaġ*, as an administrative-military unit, increased after the founding of the Mongol

---

<sup>1</sup> David Morgan [67, p. 6–7] notoriously declared that “the corpus as a whole does not in itself really justify the very considerable effort involved in learning Mongolian,” but later acknowledged the importance of Mongolian in the afterward to the second edition of his book.

empire. Later it declined again in use, although it seems to be attested in the sense of "neighbors and relatives" by the mid-seventeenth century.

6) The term *ayimaġ* in the sense of "tribe" was created as part of Sino-Manchu administrative vocabulary, while also retaining in other contexts the original Mongolian meaning of administrative division.

7) The modern vocabulary used by scholars to describe Mongolian "tribal" institutions of the pre-Chinggisid period was actually imported into the Mongolian language by calque translation from Manchu and ultimately Chinese. Its application to the pre-Chinggisid period is anachronistic and unwarranted.

Although the evolution of tribal terminology here may be surprising, it is in line with what Morton H. Fried has outlined in his *Notion of Tribe* [35]. In his viewpoint the "tribe" as a socio-political entity has never existed apart from the state. Far from being a pristine, pre-state social unit, the tribe is formed when a peripheral non-state people comes within the sphere of influence of an expanding imperial state. Tribal structures can serve two purposes in the resulting interaction. In some cases, the non-state people will create a tribal structure as a kind of simplified imitation of the state with the aim of resisting incorporation. In other cases, the peripheral people will be partially incorporated into the state with the "tribal chief" serving as the point of articulation between the centralized, bureaucratic state and peripheral people.<sup>1</sup>

The Mongolian case here is a kind of historiographical version of what Fried described as a socio-political process. The language of *oboġ* and *ayimaġ* was never imposed on the pre-Chinggisid Mongols by any expanding imperial power. As far as the sources can inform us, the pre-Chinggisid political concepts were aristocratic, territorial, and state-based, albeit on a small scale. This should not be surprising given the documented history of statehood on the Mongolian plateau dating back at the very least to the Xiongnu period. And of course, ultimately it was the Mongols themselves who became the great imperial power of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. But once the Mongols came under the Qing dynasty, their history was re-envisioned in "tribal" terms taken from Chinese historiography, and this "tribal" reading of Mongolian history proceeded to pervasively shape how scholars, both Mongol and foreign, understood the Mongol past. If Fried is correct, the tribes of modern ethnography exist as the result of incorporation into expanding states. In this case, the pre-Chinggisid "tribes" were formed at the time not by any expanding state, but retrospectively by the action of an expanding Qing historiography that "tribalized" the pages of Mongolian history as a byproduct of their

---

<sup>1</sup>Fried applies his viewpoint to Chinese interactions with the peoples on the border in Fried [36, p. 467–94].

administration of the Mongolian plateau. Moving beyond this Qing-era reconceptualization of Mongolian history will demand moving beyond the paradigm of “tribes” and “clans.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Bibliography*

1. Ahmed, Salahuddin. 1999. *A Dictionary of Muslim Names*. — New York: New York University Press.
2. Altangerel, Damdinsüreng(iin). 2002. *Angli-Mongol Toli/English-Mongolian Dictionary*. Ulaanbaatar: InterpressPublishing & Printing.
3. Atwood, Christopher P. 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. New York: Facts on File.
4. Atwood, Christopher P. 2007. “The Date of the ‘Secret History of the Mongols’ Reconsidered.” *Journal of Song and Yuan Studies* 37: 1–48.
5. Atwood, Christopher P. 2010a. “The Notion of Tribe in Medieval China: Ouyang Xiu and the Shatuo Dynastic Myth,” In *Miscellanea Asiatica: Mélanges en l’honneur de Françoise Aubin*, edited by Denise Aigle, Isabelle Charleux, Vincent Gossaert, and Roberte Hamayon, 593–621. Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica. —
6. Atwood, Christopher P. 2010b. “How the Mongols Got a Word for Tribe—and What It Means.” *Menggu shi yanjiu* 蒙古史研究/*Studia Historica Mongolica* (Höhhot) no. 10: 63–89.
7. Atwood, Christopher P. 2012. “Banner, *Otog*, Thousand: Appanage Communities as the Basic Unit of Traditional Mongolian Society,” *Mongolian Studies* 34: 1–76.
8. Atwood, Christopher P. 2013. “Mongols, Arabs, Kurds, and Franks: Rashīd al-Dīn’s Comparative Ethnography of Tribal Society.” In *Rashīd al-Dīn as an Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, and Charles Burnett, 223–50. London: Wartburg Institute.
9. Bacon, Elizabeth E. 1958. *Obok: A Study of Social Structure in Eurasia*. New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology.
10. Ban, Gu 班固, ed. Yan Shigu 顏師古, annot. 1990. *Hanshu* 漢書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
11. Bawden, Charles R., trans. 1955. *The Mongol Chronicle Altan tobči*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
12. Bawden, Charles R. 1997. *Mongolian-English Dictionary*. London: Kegan Paul International.
13. Bulaḡ, ed. 1996. *Köke teiike*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolian Education Press.
14. Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪. 1955. *Yuandai baihua beiji lu* 元代白話碑集錄. Beijing: Academic Press.
15. Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪. “Shuo touxiang, touxia yu touxia 說頭項、頭下與投下.” *Wen shi* 文史 87 (2009, no. 2): 217–227.
16. Chen, Shou 陳壽, ed. Pei Songzhi 裴松之, annot. 1973. *San guo zhi* 三國志. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

<sup>1</sup> I have attempted this task in [7].



17. Chiodo, Elisabetta. 1989-91 and 1992-93. "The Book of Offerings to the Holy Cinggis Qagan'. A Mongolian Ritual Text." *Zentral-Asiatische Studien*, 1st pt.: 22: 190-220; 2nd pt.: 23: 84-144.
18. Choimaa, Sharawyn, ed. 2002. *Qad-un ündüstin quriyanggui altan tobči (ex bičgiin sudalгаа)*, vol. 1. Ulaanbaatar: National University of Mongolia.
19. Ch'ü, T'ung-tsu. 1979. *Han Social Structure*, edited by Jack Dull. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
20. Cleaves, Francis Woodman. 1960-61. "The Sino-Mongolian Inscription of 1240." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23: 62-75
21. Cleaves, Francis Woodman, trans. 1982. *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
22. di Cosmo, Nicola, and Dalizhabu (Darijab) Bao. 2003. *Manchu-Mongol Relations on the Eve of the Qing Conquest: A Documentary History*. Leiden: Brill.
23. Crossley, Pamela K. 1990. "Thinking about Ethnicity in Modern China." *Late Imperial China* 11 (1): 1-34.
24. Crossley, Pamela K. 2006. "Making Mongols." In *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China*, ed. Pamela K. Crossley, Helen F Siu and Donald S Sutton, 58-82. Berkeley: University of California Press.
25. Dahrm-a (sic for Dharm-a). Čoyiji, ed. 1987. *Altan kürdün minggan kegesüti*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
26. Dalai, Čuluuny, and Cogt-Očiryn Išdorj, eds. 2003. *Mongol ulsyn tü-üx*. Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 2003.
27. Doronati, ed. 1985. *Oyirad čağaja*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
28. Dorungg-a. 1998. *Činggis Qagan-u takil-un sudur orosiba—Mongğol qağučı teiken nom-un bağlag-a*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolian People's Press.
29. Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, and James L. Watson. 1986. Introduction to *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940*, edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson, 1-15. Berkeley: University of California Press.
30. Elverskog, Johan. 2003. *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra: Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill.
31. Elverskog, Johan. 2006. *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
32. Even, Marie-Dominique, and Rodica Pop. 1994. *Histoire secrete des Mongols: Chronique mongole du XIIIe siècle*. Paris: Gallimard.
33. Fan, Ye 范曄, ed. Li Xian 李賢, et. al., annot. 1987. *Hou Han shu 後漢書*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
34. Freedman, Maurice. 1971. *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwantung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Athlone Press.
35. Fried, Morton H. 1975. *The Notion of Tribe*. Menlo Park: Cummings Publishing Company.
36. Fried, Morton H. 1983. "Tribe to State or State to Tribe in Ancient China?" In *Origins of Chinese Civilization*, edited by David N. Keightley, 467-494. Berkeley: University of California Press.

37. Gao Wende 高文德. 1980. *Menggu nuli zhi yanjiu* 蒙古奴隶制研究. Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
38. Golden, Peter B. 2000. *The King's Dictionary. The Rasūlid Hexaglot; Fourteenth Century Vocabularies in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian and Mongol*. Leiden: Brill.
39. Golden, Peter B. 2009. Review of *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*, by David Sneath. *Journal of Asian Studies* 68 (1): 293-296.
40. Gongor, D. 1978. *Xalx mongolčuudyn nügem ediin zasgiin baiguulal (XI-XVII)*. Vol. 2 of *Xalx towčoon*. Ulaanbaatar: Academy of Sciences Publishing House, 1978.
41. Heissig, Walther. 1961. *Erdeni-yin Erike: Mongolische Chronik der lamaistischen Klosterbauten der Mongolei von Isibaldan (1835)*. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
42. Hujijiletu 呼格吉勒 ▪ [Khögjiltü] and Shuanglong 双 ▪ , with Sarula ▪ 如拉 [Saruul]. *Basiba zi Menggu yu wenxian huibian* 八思巴字蒙古 ▪ 文献 ▪ ▪ . 2004. Hohhot: Inner Mongolia Educational Press.
43. Jamsran, Xereed L., Xereed J. Urangua, and Olxunud S. Demberel. 1998. *Mongol tüüxiin towč newterxii toli*, vol. 1, A-Z. Ulaanbaatar.
44. Jamsran, Xereed L., Xereed J. Urangua, and Olxunud S. Demberel. 2000. *Mongolyn tüüxiin бага newterxii toil*, vol. 2, I-R. Ulaanbaatar.
45. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏. 1979. *Shengwu qinzheng lu jiaoben* 聖武親征 ▪ 校本. Beijing: Minzu University mimeograph. (The date on the title page 乙未[1955], is an error for 己未[1979]).
46. Johnson, David G. 1977. *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*. Boulder: Westview Press.
47. Jürungg-a. 1984. *Erdeni tumumal neretü sudur orusiba*. Begejing: Ündüsüten-ü Keblel-ün Qoriy-a.
48. Kane, Daniel. 1989. *The Sino-Jurchen Vocabulary of the Bureau of Interpreters*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
49. Kara, György. 1990. "Zhiyuan yiyu: Index alphabétique des mots mongols," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 44 (3): 279-344.
50. Kara, György. 2009. *Dictionary of Sonom Gara's Erdeni-yin Sang: A Middle Mongolian Version of the Tibetan Sa skya legs bshad. Mongol - English - Tibetan*. Leiden: Brill.
51. al-Kāšyarī, Maḥmūd, Robert Dankoff, ed. and trans., with James Kelly. 1985. *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (Dīwān luyāt at-Turk)*. Cambridge: Harvard University.
52. Kiyose, Gisaburo N. 1977. *A Study of the Jurchen Language and Script: Reconstruction and Decipherment*. Kyoto: Hōritsubunka-sha.
53. Kuper, Adam. 1988. *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion*. London: Routledge.
54. Kuribayashi Hitoshi 栗林均. 2009. "Genchō hishi" mongorugo kanji onyaku, bōyaku kango taishō goi 「元朝秘史」モンゴル語漢字音訳・傍訳漢語対照語彙. Sendai: Tohoku University.

- 
55. Kuribayashi, Hitoshi 栗林均, and Hurelbator 呼日勒巴特尔. 2008. *Gyosei Manju Mōko kanji sangō setsuin Shin bunkan Manshūgo hairitsu taishō goi* 《御製滿珠蒙古漢字三合切音清文鑑》滿洲語配列対照語彙 [English title: *Manchu-Mongolian-Chinese Trilingual Dictionary of 1780 Arranged by Manchu Words*]. Sendai: Center for Northeast Asian Studies.
56. Lattimore, Owen. (1940) 1988. *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*. Reprint, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
57. Li, Baowen, Erdenijab-un. 1997. *Arban dolodugar jagun-u emün-e qagas-tu qolboğdaqu Mongğol üsüg-ün bičig debter*. Inner Mongolia Children and Youth Press.
58. Ligeti, Louis. 1965. "Le lexique mongol de Kirakos de Gandzak." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 18: 241-297.
59. Ligeti, Louis, ed. György Kara. 1990. "Un vocabulaire sino-mongol des Yuan: le Tche-yuan yi-yu." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 44 (3): 259-277.
60. Lin, Gan 林幹. 2007. *Xiongnushi* 匈奴史. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
61. Liu, Jinsuo. 1981. *Arban buyantu nom-un čagan teüke*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
62. LS: Tuotuo 脫脫 [Toqto'a], ed. *Liao shi* 遼史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 1974.
63. Mansang, Tayiciğud, ed. 2004. *Mongğolündüsüten-ü bürin teüke*. Shenyang: Liaoning Nationalities Press.
64. "Mongğol ündüsüten-ü tobči teüke"-yi nayirağulun bičikü duğuyilang, ed. 1988. *Mongğol ündüsüten-ü tobči teüke*. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
65. "Mongğol ündüsüten-ü nebterkei teüke" nayirağulqu duğuyilang, ed. 1995. *Mongğol ündüsüten-ü nebterkei teüke*. Beijing: Nationalities Press.
66. Mönggündalai, Borjigin, ed. 2006. *Jarlig-iyar toğtağasın Gadağadu Mongğol Qotong ayimağ-un wang gung-üd-ün iledkel šastir*. 3 Vols. Höhhot: Inner Mongolia People's Press.
67. Morgan, David. 1986. *The Mongols*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
68. Mostaert, Antoine. 1953. *Sur quelques passages de l'Histoire secrète des Mongols*. Cambridge: Harvard Yenching Institute.
69. Mostaert, Antoine, Igor de Rachewiltz and Anthony Schönbaum, ed. 1977. *Le matériel mongol du Houa I I Iude Houng-ou (1389)*. Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises.
70. Nadeljaev, V. M. et. al. 1969. *Drevnetjurkskij slovar'*. Leningrad: Nauka.
71. Očir, Ayuudain, ed. 2007. *Zarligaar toğtooson Mongol, Xoton aimgiin wan güngüüdiin iletgel shastir, 1-44-r devter*. Ulaanbaatar: Sogoo puur.
72. Parker, Edward H. 1892-1893. "The History of the Wu-wan or Wu-hwan Tunguses of the First Century." *The China Review* 20 (2): 71-100.
73. Poppe, Nicholas. 1957. *The Mongolian Monuments in the P'ags-pa Script*, edited by John R. Krueger. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
74. de Rachewiltz, Igor. 1972. *Index to the Secret History of the Mongols*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
75. de Rachewiltz, Igor. 2004. *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*. 2 Vols. Leiden: Brill.

76. Rašid ad-Din. 1952a. *Sbornik letopisej*, vol. 1, pt. 1, translated by L. A. Xetagurov, edited by A. A. Semenov. Moscow: Academy of Sciences Press.
77. Rašid ad-Din. 1952b. *Sbornik letopisej*, vol. 1, pt. 2, translated by O. I. Smirnova, notes by B. I. Pankratov and O. I. Smirnova, edited by A. A. Semenov. Moscow: Academy of Sciences Press.
78. Rašid ad-Dīn, Faḡlallāḡ. 1968. *Džāmi‘ at-Tavārīḡ*, vol. 1, part 1, *Kritičeskij tekst* ed. A.A. Romaskevič, A.A. Xetagurov, A.A. Ali-Zade. Moskva: "Nauka."
79. Rashiduddin. 1998. *A History of the Mongols*. Vol. 1 of *Jami‘u‘t-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles*, translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Cambridge: Harvard University.
80. Rogers, Leland Liu. 2009. *The Golden Summary of Činggis Qayan: Činggis Qayan-u Altan tobči*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
81. Rozycki, William. 1994. *Mongol Elements in Manchu*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
82. Saḡang Secen. M. Gō, I. de Rachewiltz, J. R. Krueger, and B. Ulaan, ed. 1990. *Erdeni-yin tobci ("Precious Summary"): A Mongolian Chronicle of 1662*, vol. 1. Canberra: Australia National University.
83. Saḡang Secen. I. de Rachewiltz and J.R. Krueger, word-index comp. 1991. *Erdeni-yin tobci ("Precious Summary"): A Mongolian Chronicle of 1662*, vol. 2. Canberra: Australia National University.
84. Sagaster, Klaus, ed. 1976. *Die Weisse Geschichte: eine mongolische Quelle zur Lehre von den Beiden Ordnungen Religion und Staat in Tibet und der Mongolei*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
85. Serjee, J. ed. 2004. *Qoyitu ġajar-un ayimaġ-un oyillaġ-a*. Ulaanbaatar.
86. Šaġdarsüren, Ts. and J. Gerelbadrax, eds. 2004. *Mongġol čaġajin-u bičig (ex bičġiin sudalġaa)*, vol. 1. Ulaanbaatar.
87. Šaġdarsüren, Tseweliin and Lee Seong-gyu, ed. 2002. *Byamba-yin Asarayči neretü(-yin) teüke (exbičġiin sudlagaa)*, vol. 1. Ulaanbaatar: National University of Mongolia.
88. Širendew, B. and Boris Dmitrievič Grekov, ed. 1955. *BNMAU-yn tüüx*. Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House.
89. Širendew, B., and Sh. Nacagdorj. 1966. *Nen ertnees XVII zuun*. Vol. 1 of *BNMAU-yn tüüx*. Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House.
90. Smith, Anthony D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
91. Sneath, David. 2007. *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
92. Tamura, Jitsuzō 田村實造, Imanishi Shunjū 今西春秋, and Satō Hisashi 佐藤長, ed. 1966. *Gotai Shin bunkan yakukai 五体清文鑑譯解*. Kyoto: Institute for Inland Asian Studies, Kyoto University.
93. Tumurtogoo, D., ed., with G. Cecegdari. 2006. *Mongolian Monuments in Uighur-Mongolian Script (XIII–XVI Centuries): Introduction, Transcription and Bibliography*. Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academica Sinica.

- 
94. Tumurtogoo, D., with G. Cecegdari. 2010. *Mongolian Monuments in 'Phags-pa Script: Introduction, Transliteration, Transcription and Bibliography* Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica.
95. Udaanjargal, Čuluunbaatar. 2009. "Köke Teüke: Činggis qaγan-u üye-e uliral-i temdeglegsen qad-un ündüsün-ü šastir köke teüke. The Blue History of the imperial lineage recording the successive generations of Činggis qaγan. Transcription, Translation, and Commentary." M.A. thesis, Indiana University.
96. Vietze, Hans-Peter, and Gendeng Lubsang, ed. 1992. *Altan tobči: Eine mongolische Chronik des XVII. Jahrhunderts von Blo bzañ bstan 'jin*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
97. Vladimircov, Boris Jakovlevič. 1934. *Obščestvennyj stroj Mongolov: Mongol'skoj kočevoj feodalizm*. Leningrad: Academy of Science.
98. Vladimirtsov, B. 1948. *Le Régime social des Mongols: le féodalisme nomade*, translated by Michel Carsow. Paris: Adrien-Maissonneuve.
99. Wang Guowei 王國維. (1926) 1962. "Shengwu qinzheng lu 聖武親征錄." In *Menggu shiliao sizhong* 蒙古史料四種, 1-220. Facsimile, Reprint, Taipei: Cheng-chung Press.
100. Wang Yun 王暉 and Yang Yu 楊瑀, ed. Yang Xiaochun 楊曉春 and Yu Dajun 余大鈞. 2006. *Yutang jiahua* 玉堂嘉話; *Shanju xinyu* 山居新語. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
101. Wood, William A. 1993. *A Collection of Tarkhan Yarliqs from the Khanate of Khiva*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
102. Wulan 烏蘭. *Yuanchao mishi (jiaokanben)* 元朝秘史 (校勘本). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012.
103. Wulanbagen 乌兰巴根 [Ulaanbagana]. 2009. "Yuan shi" Man Meng fanyi yanjiu «元史»滿蒙翻譯研究. PhD diss., Minzu University of China.
104. Wulanbagen 烏蘭巴根. 2010. "Qingchu Liao Jin Yuan sanshi Man Meng fanyi shi kaoshu 清初遼金元三史滿蒙翻譯史考述." In *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域历史语言研究集刊, ed. Shen Weirong 沈卫荣, 4: 289-312. Beijing: Academic Press.
105. Wuyunbilige 乌云毕力格. 2009. "Asalakeqi shi" yanjiu «阿萨喇克其史»研究. Beijing: China Minzu University Press.
106. YS: Song, Lian 宋濂, ed. 1983. *Yuanshi* 元史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

Christopher P. Atwood, PhD, Associate Professor of Central Eurasian Studies of Indiana University.

Indiana University, Goodbody Hall 321, 1011 E. 3rd St., Bloomington, IN 47405-7005. Phone: (812) 855-4059. E-mail: catwood@indiana.edu