

PHILOLOGY

STATUS OF THE KYPCHAK LANGUAGE IN MAMLUK EGYPT: LANGUAGE - BARRIER OR LANGUAGE - CONTACT?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to determine the status of the Kypchak language in the political, social and intellectual history of Egypt during the period of Mamluks' rule.

To clarify the situation, we have made an overview of the few primary and secondary sources that deal with the functioning of the Turks' language and the analysis of its role and place in the Egyptian medieval society from the historical, religious and cultural positions.

Metaphorically, the Kypchak language was the barrier language separating the social group of former slaves from the local population of Egypt and providing the right to a special position, up to the possibility of occupying the highest office of power. It also helped not to dissolve in a much larger society of Egyptians and to maintain the identity, the main component of which it was. However, the dominance of the military caste of the Mamluks did not engender language conflicts in medieval Egypt. Despite the cultural differences between the social groups - the Turkic military elite and the bulk of the Egyptian population, the devaluation of local dialects and languages has not occurred. Moreover, the Mamluk rulers have even strengthened the status of the Classical Arabic by their strong support of the material and spiritual Islamic culture and infrastructure. However, the Kypchak language did not lose its positions remaining the language of communication not only of the Turks but also of the Türkicized Caucasian and Mongolian ethnic groups.

We believe that the study of the language of the medieval Turkic world can be more productive if we include an interdisciplinary approach to the methodology of its study and not only Eastern but European sources as well.

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Introduction. The Kypchak (Kipchak or Qypchaq) language is an extinct Turkic language that gave rise to the majority of the Turkic languages spoken today in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Kypchak-Kuman was used as a lingua franca in the Golden Horde. The Volga Bulgars, the Kumans, the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia, and the Caucasus, the Mongolian aristocracy used the Kypchak language during the Golden Horde times.

One of the brightest pages in the history of this language was associated with the period of the Islamic state in Egypt and Syria, where the Mamluk Empire has risen as a historically unique model of a society. Mostly the Arab population of the country was subordinate to the elite of the liberated military slaves of Turkish origin. Originally, Mamluk was a Turk who was born outside Islamic territories, enslaved non-Muslim, brought to Egypt, converted to Islam, released and, finally, trained as a warrior. This process of self-reproduction of the military stratum existed for a long time. According to some sources Sultan Baybars (1223 - 1277), the former slave himself, acquired 4000 Mamluks, Kalavun (1222-1290) purchased 6000-7000, and by the end of Khalil's rule (1262-1293) in the Sultanate, there were 10 000 Mamluks. It was a professional army, which provided the existence and functioning of the Islamic state for 250 years.

The society of the Mamluk period can be explored from different points of view - historical, political, social and cultural. Historiography has preserved an impressive and diverse set of data. It can be confidently asserted that Mamluk society was ethnically and linguistically pluralistic. Given the multilingualism of Mamluk Egypt, it is natural that the status of different languages also varied. Functionally, languages can play the role of boundaries that divide or, on the contrary, unite, and in this sense, we are interested in the question, what was the status and role in this particular case of the Kypchak language, was it a "contact language" or a "barrier language".

Materials and methods. The historiographical context of the Kypchak-Mamluks' heritage is studied not only from historical and philological points of view. Much attention is paid to the question of what ideas have driven the language processes, their functional orientations and what significance they had for practical life. The interdisciplinary approach emphasizes the important role of the socio-cultural context, the dynamism of ever-changing circumstances. This approach allows us to explore the internal diversity, historical variability and global interconnection of cultures and societies of Central Asia and the Middle East. To clarify the situation, we have made an overview of the few primary and secondary sources that deal with the functioning of the Turks' language and the analysis of its role and place in the Egyptian medieval society from the historical, religious and cultural positions.

Results. It seems obvious that the Kypchak language separated the social group of former slaves who became the ruling stratum from the Egyptian autochthonous population and ensured their right to a special position up to the possibility of occupying the highest office of the state. It also helped Mamluks not to dissolve in a much larger society of Egyptian Arabs and to maintain their identity, the main component of which this language was. According to the historian Michael Winter, the "Turkness" of the ruling Mamluk elite was manifested primarily in the language and in the names. [1]. Kypchak language cannot be divorced from their native culture and identity. Social boundaries were largely static, although the situation has changed in the transition to the religious field, where knowledge of classical Arabic language, the language of the Qur'an and hadith was considered mandatory, thus leading to the coexistence of at least two languages in the Mamluk environment. In this situation, the Arabic language, which became necessary in the light of the adoption of Islam by the Mamluks who learned its basics in madrassas and kuttabs, acquired the features of a language bridge, the "language of contact". According to Taqi al-Din Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Abd al-Qadir al-Maqrizi (1364-1442), young Mamluks studied Arabic calligraphy and the basics of religious sciences before they have passed the physical training knightly arts and were released to freedom [2]. Moreover, the Mamluks objectively contributed to strengthening the positions of the classical Arabic language in Egypt due to their victory over the Mongols and Crusaders, and the subsequent establishment of centers of Muslim culture in Egypt and Syria for the local population and Arabic-speaking immigrants from other conquered Muslim lands.

Thus, there was a division of the spheres of the functioning of languages - the classical Arabic was used as the language of religion and culture, while the Kypchak language was the official palace language - the language of the Mamluk ruling elite.

This bilingualism allowed to preserve the ethnic identity and to satisfy the feelings of cultural nostalgia, on the one hand, and to legitimize the status of defenders of Islam and the ruling elite of Egyptian society, on the other. During the 1250s, Mamluks of the Bahri dynasty had the reputation of barbarians. However, gradually the contacts between the communities expanded, Arabic-Turkic dictionaries and grammars were created; they were written in the Kypchak language and served to

facilitate communication between the Mamluks and their subjects and servants. Although the Mamluk elite was ethnically diverse, those who were not of Turkic origin were nevertheless turkicized. Even Circassian warriors, who gained fame with the emergence of the Burji dynasty and became the dominant ethnic element in power, were educated in the Turkic language and were considered Turks by the Egyptian Arab-speaking population.

Some of the amirs plunged deeply into the Arab culture, writing poems, historical works, and treatises on “*furusiyya*” (chivalry). There were among them those who were interested in Hanafi or Shafi jurisprudence or hadithology. However, a deeper perception of Arab culture is more characteristic of the fifteenth century than of the early periods [3].

So, Sultan Kaytbai (1418 - 1496) a highly cultured ruler of Circassian origin wrote religious poetry in Arabic and Turkic, as well as his son Muhammad ibn Kaytbai, who ruled from 1496 to 1498, and some other sultans and amirs [4].

Nevertheless, in the official sphere, some sultans continued to ignore Arabic and preferred to use an interpreter to translate their Turkic speeches. Even towards the end of the Mamluk period, during the reign of the last sultan al-Ghawri (1501-1516), the Mamluk, called Asanbay min Sudun, copied the religious Hanbali tract of Abu al-Layth in Kypchak language for the royal library. Thus, for more than two and a half centuries the Kypchak language has not lost its relevance among the Mamluks. Among the sultans and emirs of Bahri dynasty, a sense of pride and belonging to the Turkic Kypchak roots was especially cultivated. Ethnic consciousness was reinforced by cultural differences from members of other social groups of Egyptian society, with whom they had to engage in interaction. Obviously, ethnic origin was a key component of Mamluk's individual personality, because ethnic identity was not simply manifested through names and clothes, but, more importantly, gave access to administrative positions [5].

Abu Hayyan al-Gharnati (1256–1344) a grammarian, linguist, and a poet, who produced verses in Turkic and Persian, compiled his famous work “*Al-Idrak li-Lisan al-Atrak*” as an exposition of the Turkic language as it was spoken in Cairo. Bärkä Faqih's translation of part of “*Khusraw and Shirin*” from Persian into Kypchak Turkic in 1386 was the first work of high literature to be produced in the Mamluk lands. A few years later Sayfi Sarayi, the most prominent writer of Turkic verse to reside in Egypt translated Saadi's “*Gulistan*” into Kypchak language.

Sayf al-Din Sarghitmish al-Nasiri, one of the amirs and a fanatical partisan for the Hanafi madhhab, founded a Hanafi madrasah that became a magnet for theologians-“*fuqaha*” from all over the Turkic-speaking world [3]. All the above facts indicate that the Kypchak language remained a living, fundamental and demanded element of everyday life and local culture of the Mamluk community; it ensured the stable functioning of the constantly renewed military stratum of Egyptian society.

The sons and grandsons of the Mamluks – the so-called “*awlad al-nas*” - played a decisive role in the transformation of the Mamluk culture. They were intermediaries between the local educated stratum of scholars and writers and military nobility. The sons of the Mamluks usually did not hold positions in the military elite and instead often became part of the civil administration or the Muslim religious establishment. Among the most famous “*awlad al-nas*” were writers such as Ibn al-Dawadari, Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Jankali al-Baba, al-Safadi, Ibn al-Turkumani, Ibn Mangli, Ibn Sudun, Ibn Taghribirdi, and Ibn Iyas [6].

Judging by the writings of the generation of “*awlad al-nas*”, which survived until today, they preserved the memory of their Mamluk roots and were ready to make the Turkic heritage the property of their new homeland [7].

The hybrid identity inherent in the “*awlad al-nas*”, namely being a Turk and an Egyptian Muslim at the same time, is vividly represented in Abu Bakr ibn Abdallah ibn Aybak al-Dawadari (d. after 1336) and Jamal al-Din Yusuf bin al-Amir Sayf al-Din Taghribirdi (d. 1470). Both were proud of their belonging to the Turkic-Mongolian tradition and the Egyptian religious elite, and saw their mission in revealing the virtues and values of the Kypchak tradition, the legendary past of their ancestors. Objectively, they sought to remove from the Kypchak language the status of alienation, barbarism, to raise its significance in the cultural field. Nevertheless, given that culture in the Sultanate of that era was inseparable from religion, it can be stated that their attempts in the context of Egyptian society were doomed to failure. The orientation of the Mamluks in the study of the Arabic language was rather one-sided since there were very few non-Mamluks among the population of Egypt who sought to master the Turkic language, in which they did not feel the need. On the contrary, the existence of specialized centers for teaching the Arabic language and the Islamic sciences indicated to the ever-increasing desire of former slaves, constantly replenishing the Mamluk ranks, to master this second language.

But at the same time, within the Mamluk environment, another, equally interesting phenomenon, about which we have already mentioned, happened - the Kypchak language really turned into a language bridge, in which representatives of different ethnic groups participated.

Discussion. Languages evolve, grow, change, live and die. Naturally, they come into contact and interaction in those different historical and geographical contexts in which their carriers find themselves, and sometimes situations arise when the speakers of one language contribute to the preservation and prosperity of not only their native language but also a foreign language.

For the Egyptians, the Mamluks were foreigners in the language and by geographical and ethnic origin, but at the same time, they were defenders of Islam. They protected it from external threats, and were generous benefactors of religion, literature, architecture and fine arts, although Egyptian ulama and adibs considered them semi-literate barbarians and tyrannical rulers. The military Mamluk caste did not engender language conflicts in medieval Egypt; it is obvious that the habitus or “sense of their own place” of the first generations of Mamluks allowed them to dispense with their native language in everyday and professional spheres. In the period of XII-XV centuries, among the military groups in Egypt, Kypchak, Oguz, Karluk and Turkmen dialects were used, but the Kypchak language was a “lingua franca” for the representatives of different ethnic groups constituting the Mamluk army, turning it into a single monolithic structure, which allowed achieving high discipline and efficiency. Thus, the existence of a socio-political barrier was supplemented by a language barrier, which, however, was not insurmountable, at least for Turks. The adoption of Islam required them mandatory studies of the Arabic classical language and the foundations of religion. The Mamluks were motivated in this respect by personal piety or political expediency towards Islam, which was simultaneously an assimilating and unifying factor between the Mamluks and most of their subjects. Mamluk Egypt as the last major Islamic power was able to resist the Crusaders and the Mongols. Thus, the state and administrative activities of the Mamluk elite contributed not only to the preservation but also to the consolidation of the positions of the Arab classical language and the religious circles.

The increasing use of the Arabic language in social spheres by the generation of “awlad al-nas” allowed them to enter the religious community through the system of religious education. Because of the presence of intellectuals and aristocrats who spoke fluent Arabic and Turkic-Kypchak, and because of the preservation of the status of the palace and official language by the Kypchak language, the Turkic-Arabic bilingualism became more and more widespread. Government officials and judicial circles spoke in at least two languages, while ordinary locals spoke mainly in Egyptian Arabic dialect.

Egyptian identity, Islamic laws, and social values were not violated, just like the ethnic environment of the Mamluks, which was fueled by language, the flow of new slaves, and migration of relatives and oriented by political interests. However, the invasion of the religious element into the consciousness of new Muslims significantly influenced their identity, giving it a hybrid character, combining elements of Turkic thinking, culture and behavior with an Islamic religious foundation, fixed by that time by the long development of Islamic theology, legislation, the Koranic sciences and classical philology. The Turkic cultural heritage did not have such a degree of elaboration, order as an Arab heritage and was not sanctified by a strong monotheistic religion. History knows many examples of how the barbarians and pagans conquered the mighty empire, but culturally the invaders usually obeyed conquered people.

The language boundary, based on a special Turkic history, culture and heritage, became thinner with the continuous disappearance of this alienation. The gradual adaptation of the Mamluk stratum into the environment, started in religious sphere, when paganism gave way to Islam, then in social and cultural - through marriages and the creation of families with Egyptian women, the gradual adoption of alien culture, and finally, through the recognition of the community of historical destiny, which was promoted by the strengthening of the state precisely as a Middle East bulwark of Islam, to resist the enemy in the west and east.

The elements of the original and genuine Turkic Mamluk culture were kept less and less. In addition, the ethnic composition of the Mamluks was gradually expanding due to captives of Caucasian and Mongol origin. All of them communicated among themselves in the Kypchak language but still had a different cultural foundation. Few Mamluks managed to preserve their national traditions, living in a new environment that was generally hostile to the Turkic-Caucasian-Mongolian heritage, ruled solely by the postulates of Islam and relied on its rich cultural background. Nevertheless, the social order in the military layer was still based on the system that was established in the earliest period of the Mamluks' rule, and then the group was required to maintain this order and function as the materialization of collective memory, reproduce the achievements of its predecessors. The group intention to preserve its existence, to ensure its reproduction and social functioning led in a linguistic context to giving the Kypchak language the role of the “cementing factor” and universal tool, which ensure the effective communication within this multiethnic social structure. Thus, the

Kypchak language, while retaining its role in establishing the boundary between the social groups of the Egyptian empire, acquired the status of an intermediary language among the representatives of the peoples of Eurasia, who, due to historical circumstances, entered the Mamluk army.

Conclusions.

1. Despite the cultural differences of social groups - the Turkic military elite and the bulk of the population of Egypt, the devaluation of local dialects and languages has not occurred. Moreover, the status of the Arab classical language has only been strengthened, due to the powerful support of material Islamic culture and infrastructure by the Mamluk rulers.

2. In the Egyptian society of the Mamluks period, there were multidirectional tendencies in the sphere of language interaction. The generation of the sons of the Mamluks, born in Egypt, was already a bearer of at least two languages - Kypchak and Arabic. Their historical works and treatises clearly demonstrated the desire to establish a bridge between the Turkic and Arab cultures, to remove the barrier - linguistic, social, and ideological between the peoples, which were equally close to them.

3. During the entire period of the Mamluk governance, the Kypchak language did not lose its positions, but became the language of communication not only of the Turks but also of the Turkicized Caucasian and Mongolian ethnic groups, even within the limited social formation of the military aristocracy. Thus, fulfilling the function of the language-barrier in the relations between the Mamluk military elite and the Egyptian people, it acquired the status of an intermediary language between the representatives of the peoples of Eurasia, who shared in a certain historical period a social community of "warriors of Islam".

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