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Representing ethnic others in the medieval Middle East

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Summary: Mongols in Mamluk Eyes. Representing Ethnic Others in the Medieval Middle East

In the seventh century AH, or the thirteenth century CE, the Islamic world was shaken by the sudden invasion of the Mongols and their subsequent conquest of large parts of Islamic territory. Not only did the local population suffer the shock of many deaths, vast destruction, and extensive plunder, the Muslim world was faced with a spiritual disaster as well: the fall of Baghdad to Hülegü (*c.* 613-63/1217-65) and his armies and their murder of the Abbasid caliph al-Mustaʿṣim (r. 640-56/1242-58) sent shockwaves through the Islamic world. Mongol dynasties would rule parts of the Islamic world for centuries to come. But although Hülegü and his successors of the Ilkhanate made various attempts to expand their realm to the Mediterranean coast, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria managed to prevent that, regularly waging war against them for decades.

The ruling elite of the Mamluk sultanate (648/1250-922/1517) was formed by men who had come to Egypt as military slaves, so-called mamluks (*mamlūk*, pl. *mamālīk*), and had been taken predominantly from Turkic areas in Central Asia. The establishment of Mamluk rule in Egypt – Syria at that time still being ruled by the Ayyubids, the Mamluks' predecessors – coincided with the Mongol advance into the Middle East. They first defeated the Mongols at the battle of ʿAyn Jālūt (Goliath's Spring), in the Jezreel Valley in the Galilee on 25 Ramaḍān 658/3 September 1260. Yet, while the Ilkhanate remained the primary enemy of the Mamluk sultanate until the peace agreement of 723/1323, the Mamluks developed and maintained friendly diplomatic relations with another Mongol khanate, the Golden Horde, from the early 660s/1260s onwards. They shared an enemy in the Ilkhanate – against whom they were the Mamluks' most important ally – traded, and exchanged diplomatic missions.

This dissertation investigates, analyses and contextualises the representation of the Mongols in Mamluk Syria and Egypt, *c.* 656-761/1260-1360. There was a basic image of the Mongols as 'violent infidels', but a closer study shows that representations of the Mongols were more elaborate and intricate than that. The formation of images and stereotypes of the Mongols in the Mamluk sultanate took place in complicated and diverse cultural and political contexts, and was therefore far from straightforward and unanimous. There are various reasons for this complexity and diversity. For one, the Mongols were a 'new' people in the Islamic world, arriving suddenly and unexpectedly. Mamluk-era authors could therefore not simply rely on earlier texts to make sense of them, but had to work creatively in combining existing stereotypes of other peoples and ideas on ethnicity with new information. Second, the Mamluk sultanate made for an ethnically complicated

context for such image formation. The Mamluk elite itself was predominantly of Turkish descent – most mamluks being imported from Turkic Central Asia, and Mamluk rule often being referred to as *dawlat al-atrāk* ('the dynasty/state of the Turks') – and the Turks and the Mongols were widely regarded as closely related ethnically: wholesale condemnation of anything Mongol based on ethnic stereotypes would cause problems. Moreover, there were ethnic Mongols present in the upper Mamluk echelons, either because they had been imported as mamluks themselves, or because they had arrived as immigrants. The population over which they ruled, however, including most of the authors who wrote about the Mamluks and the Mongols, were local Syrians and Egyptians. Third, the Mamluk sultanate had different relationships with the Mongols of the Ilkhanate and those of the Golden Horde, respectively. This was further complicated by the Ilkhanid conversion to Islam around the turn of the century – an important part of Mamluk rhetoric against the Ilkhanids had been based on an image of the Mamluks as defenders of Islam and Muslims against the infidel Ilkhanids. Mamluk-era authors thus wrote about Mongols, who formed a key Other, in a complicated social and historical context.

Given these circumstances, the development of ideas on and stereotypes of Mongols in the first century of the Mamluk sultanate is a highly relevant case study into processes of image formation, selfing and othering. This study analyses how these images were developed from existing discourses combined with new information, but also investigates when, where and why they were used. In this way, it brings to light the variations in representations of the Mongols across genres, periods, authors and groups of Mongols, thus showing the agency and creativity of authors, as well as offering an analysis of images' differing functions and effects, in a variety of contexts – political and otherwise.

Chapter 1 explores how Mamluk-era authors made sense of the previously unknown Mongols by incorporating them into existing traditions, both climate- and humoral theory and the biblical division of peoples between the sons of Noah, connecting them to other northern peoples, including the Turks. It also shows how environmental theory was used to explain perceived physical and mental characteristics of the Mongols. This incorporation of the Mongols into existing ideas on northern peoples served as the basis for Mamluk-era images of the Mongols: courageous and savage, with wide chests, broad faces and narrow eyes.

The next two chapters analyse how authors made use of Mongol cultural stuff. Origin stories, an important part in the creation of ethnic identity, were used to malign the Mongols, as I argue in chapter 2. The Mongols' own narrative of Chinggis Khan's ancestress Alan Qo'a and her reported immaculate conception was used to paint Chinggis Khan's male ancestor (or even himself)

as a bastard child – and the Mongols as fools for believing the story of a sun-ray induced pregnancy. Another, non-indigenous, story about Mongol origins was recounted by Ibn al-Dawādārī, who used it to paint an image of the Mongols that emphasizes the same characteristics (courage, strength, savagery) that were derived from the environmental theories as discussed in chapter 1. Moreover, he used the myth to explain contemporary circumstances and concerns, particularly the shared heritage and enmity between the Turks and Mongols.

Arguably the most famous part of Mongol cultural stuff was the Yasa – a supposed legal code, promulgated by Chinggis Khan, about which many questions remain in today's scholarship. Mamluk-era authors made enthusiastic use of the Yasa and its founder in their othering strategies, depicting Chinggis Khan and his Yasa as photonegatives of the prophet Muhammad and the Sharia. In Chapter 3, I argue that authors did so from a very early stage in Mamluk-Ilkhanid relations: rather than from the ninth/fifteenth century onwards, as previous scholarship has asserted, the Sharia and the Yasa were contrasted in the late seventh/thirteenth-century already. The discourse of opposing the Yasa and Islamic rules and mores was then developed in more detail in the eighth/fourteenth century. Chapters 2 and 3 also stress the importance of individual authors' agency, and show how they purposefully used their source material to bring a message across, which at times resulted in different images of the Mongols or their culture.

Differences in the depiction of Mongols not only depended on individual authors, but also on to which group of Mongols they belonged, which is especially visible in the different representations of the hostile Ilkhanids and the friendly Golden Horde, respectively. Chapter 4 investigates how Mamluk-era authors portrayed the first Mongol armies, the later Ilkhanate and Golden Horde. Using a series of chronological case studies, I explore how writers in Egypt and Syria used the works of their predecessors and from thereon further developed images and stereotypes. From their descriptions of these early Mongols through the Mamluk-Ilkhanid war, aspects as courage, violence, infidelity and savagery were taken and expanded upon and joined by images of subterfuge and trickery. The Mongols of the Golden Horde, however, received drastically different press. Their Muslim khans, especially Berke (r. 655-64/1257-66) were praised for their piety, but even in the case of khans who were not Muslim, authors made an effort to connect them to Islam nonetheless, for instance by emphasizing their advancement of Islam and/or Muslims over other religions and their adherents. Depictions of Mongols were thus strongly influenced by political concerns.

The importance of context in the use of images of ethnic Others is similarly evident in the case of Mongols within the Mamluk sultanate. In chapter 5, I use three case studies to investigate

the way in which Mamluk Mongols were represented. The reports around the various groups of Mongol immigrants, *wāfidiyya*, to the sultanate as well as the reign of the Mongol Mamluk sultan Kitbugha (r. 694-6/1294-6) show that their ethnic backgrounds were not necessarily problematic. Problems instead arose due to *jinsiyya* – favouritism based on ethnicity shown by Kitbugha to the Oirat *wafidiyya* of 695/1296 – and the Oirat refusal to convert to Islam, in addition to the factionalism in which some members of the elite considered Kitbugha a usurper to the throne. That tensions regarding Mongol Mamluks should be sought in these issues, rather than in their *jins* (ethnicity) itself, is exemplified by the metalwork produced by Muḥammad ibn al-Zayn, particularly in the basin now known as the Baptistère de Saint Louis. This work – which I consider to have been made for a Mamluk audience rather than a European one, as has been argued in the past – depicts the military and courtly elite of the Mamluk sultanate: the *khāṣṣakiyya*. Among them are ethnic Mongols, recognizable by their faces that follow the physical descriptions of Mongols as found in the ethnographic tradition discussed in chapter 1.

This study thus reveals the development of representations of Mongols by authors in the Mamluk sultanate, thereby contributing to the developing field of research into ethnicity in the medieval Middle East, showing how contemporary scholars were actively involved in processes of ethnic identification, categorisation and othering. Through their intellectual efforts, which included the gathering of new information, (de)selection and use of existing sources, these scholars developed a discourse on the Mongols that generally tied in with the concerns and programme of the Mamluk military elite. That meant that different images were created for different groups of Mongols, in which Islam played the role of an important cultural marker. Yet, although there was a certain discursive consistency to the way the Mongols were represented in the Mamluk sultanate, there was also ample variation: across genres, between authors, and with regard to the latters' aim. The images of the Mongols were thus actively constructed and used for a variety of purposes in response to, and in interaction with, the sultanate's complex ethnic and political contexts.

Samenvatting: Mongolen in Mamlukse ogen. Het verbeelden van etnische *Others* in het middeleeuwse Midden-Oosten

In de zevende eeuw AH, ofwel de dertiende eeuw CE, werd de islamitische wereld opgeschrikt door de plotselinge invasie van de Mongolen en hun daaropvolgende verovering van grote delen van het islamitische gebied. De lokale bevolking leed onder grote aantallen doden, ongekende vernietiging en grootschalige plundering. Daarnaast zag ze zich ook nog geconfronteerd met de mentale klap van de val van Bagdad, dat in handen viel van Hülegü (*c.* 613-63/1217-65) en zijn legers. De daaropvolgende moord op de Abbasidische kalief al-Musta'ṣim (reg. 640-56/1242-58) veroorzaakte een schokgolf in de islamitische wereld. Vanaf dat moment zouden Mongoolse dynastieën nog eeuwenlang over delen van de moslimwereld heersen. Maar hoewel Hülegü en zijn opvolgers in het Ilkhanaat pogingen bleven doen om hun grondgebied uit te breiden tot de mediterrane kust, wisten de Mamlukse heersers over Egypte en Syrië dat te voorkomen. Decennialang voerden de Mamlukken en de Ilkhanidische Mongolen regelmatig oorlog tegen elkaar.

De heersende elite van het Mamlukse sultanaat (648/1250-922/1517) werd gevormd door mannen die als militaire slaven naar Egypte waren gekomen, zogenaamde mamlukken (*mamlūk*, mv. *mamālīk*). Zij waren voornamelijk afkomstig uit Turkstalige gebieden in Centraal-Azië. De vestiging van de Mamlukse heerschappij in Egypte – Syrië was op dat moment nog altijd in handen van de Ayyubiden, de voorgangers van de Mamlukken – viel samen met de Mongoolse opmars in het Midden-Oosten. De eerste keer dat de Mamlukken de Mongolen versloegen was in de slag bij ʿAyn Jālūt (Bron van Goliath), in de Vlakte van Jizreël in Galilea op 25 ramadan 658/3 september 1260. Het Ilkhanaat zou de voornaamste vijand van het Mamlukse sultanaat blijven tot er in 723/1323 een vredesverdrag werd gesloten. Tegelijkertijd ontwikkelden en onderhielden de Mamlukken vanaf de vroege jaren 660/1260 vriendschappelijke diplomatieke relaties met een ander Mongools khanaat, de Gouden Horde. In het Ilkhanaat deelden zij een vijand, en de Gouden Horde was voor de Mamlukken daarin dan ook hun belangrijkste bondgenoot. Daarnaast werd er gehandeld, en waren er diplomatieke missies over en weer.

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt, analyseert en contextualiseert de beeldvorming over de Mongolen in Mamluks Syrië en Egypte, ca. 656-761/1260-1360. Er bestond een basisbeeld van de Mongolen als 'gewelddadige ongelovigen', maar nadere studie laat zien dat beelden van de Mongolen breder en complexer waren. De vorming van dergelijke beelden en stereotypen in het Mamlukse sultanaat vond plaats in gecompliceerde en diverse culturele en politieke contexten, en

ze waren daardoor verre van eenvoudig en eensluidend. Deze complexiteit en diversiteit hadden verschillende oorzaken.

Om te beginnen waren de Mongolen een 'nieuw' volk in de islamitische wereld, dat plotseling en onverwacht arriveerde. Auteurs in het Mamluks Syrië en Egypte konden dus niet leunen op oudere teksten om te begrijpen waar ze mee te maken hadden, maar moesten in plaats daarvan op creatieve wijze aan de slag om bestaande ideeën over etniciteit en stereotypen van andere volkeren te combineren met nieuwe informatie. Ten tweede vormde het sultanaat zelf een etnisch gecompliceerde context voor het vormen van dergelijke beelden. De Mamlukse elite was zelf voornamelijk van Turkse afkomst. De meeste mamlukken werden uit Turks Centraal-Azië gehaald, en naar de Mamlukse heerschappij werd dan ook vaak verwezen als *dawlat al-atrāk* ('de dynastie/staat van de Turken'). Mongolen en Turken werden algemeen beschouwd als nabije etnische verwanten. Een algehele afkeuring van alles van Mongools was op basis van etnische stereotypen zou dus problemen veroorzaken. Bovendien waren er ook etnische Mongolen te vinden binnen de Mamlukse elite. Zij waren ook als mamlukken geïmporteerd of waren als immigranten naar het sultanaat gekomen. De bevolking waarover de Mamlukken heersten, inclusief de meeste auteurs die over de Mamlukken en de Mongolen schreven, bestond echter uit lokale Syriërs en Egyptenaren. Ten derde had het Mamlukse sultanaat dus verschillende relaties met de Mongolen van het Ilkhanaat en met die van de Gouden Horde. Er traden nog meer complicaties op toen de Ilkhaniden zich rond de eeuwwisseling tot de islam bekeerden. Een groot deel van de Mamlukse retoriek tegen de Ilkhaniden was namelijk gebaseerd op een beeld van de Mamlukken als verdedigers van de islam en moslims tegen de ongelovige Ilkhaniden. Auteurs in het Mamlukse sultanaat schreven dus over de Mongolen, die een zeer belangrijke *Other* of Ander vormden, in een complexe sociale en historische context.

Gezien deze omstandigheden is de ontwikkeling van ideeën en stereotypen van de Mongolen in de eerste eeuw van het Mamlukse sultanaat een zeer relevante casestudy naar processen van beeldvorming, *selfing*, en *othering*. Deze studie analyseert hoe deze beelden werden ontwikkeld vanuit bestaande discoursen die gecombineerd werden met nieuwe informatie, maar onderzoekt ook wanneer, waar en waarom ze werden gebruikt. Op die manier breng ik de variaties in beelden van Mongolen aan het licht, tussen genres, periodes, auteurs en verschillende groepen Mongolen. Op die manier is niet alleen de *agency* en creativiteit van auteurs zichtbaar, maar bied ik ook een analyse van de verschillende functies en effecten van deze beelden, in verschillende contexten, zowel politiek als daarbuiten.

Hoofdstuk 1 onderzoekt hoe auteurs in de Mamlukse periode proberen de tot dan toe onbekende Mongolen te begrijpen door hen te incorporeren in bestaande tradities, zowel de klimaattheorie en humorenleer als de op de Bijbel gebaseerde verdeling van volkeren in afstammelingen van de zoons van Noach. Hierbij verbonden ze de Mongolen aan andere noordelijke volkeren, waaronder de Turken. Dit hoofdstuk laat ook zien hoe deze, op de fysieke omgeving gebaseerde, theorieën gebruikt werden om vermeende lichamelijke en mentale kenmerken van de Mongolen te verklaren. Deze opname van de Mongolen in bestaande ideeën over noordelijke volkeren dienden vervolgens als basis voor de beelden van de Mongolen in het Mamlukse sultanaat: moedig en barbaars, met een grote borstkas, brede gezichten en smalle ogen.

De twee hoofdstukken die daarop volgen analyseren hoe auteurs gebruikmaakten van Mongoolse culturele elementen. Oorsprongsverhalen, een belangrijk element in de vorming van etnische identiteit, werden gebruikt om de Mongolen te beschimpen, zoals ik in hoofdstuk 2 beargumenteer. Het Mongoolse verhaal van Chinggis Khans voorouder Alan Qo'a en de daarin vermelde onbevlekte ontvangenis van haar kinderen werd gebruikt om haar zoon, en dus Chinggis Khans mannelijke voorouder, als bastaardkind af te schilderen. Daarbij werden de Mongolen zelf neergezet als dwazen vanwege hun geloof in dit verhaal van een door een zonnestraal veroorzaakte zwangerschap. Een ander verhaal, dat niet van de Mongolen zelf was, werd verteld door Ibn al-Dawādārī, die het gebruikte om een beeld van de Mongolen te schetsen dat dezelfde kenmerken benadrukte (moed, kracht, barbaarsheid) als die die naar voren kwamen uit de in hoofdstuk 1 besproken theorieën. Bovendien gebruikte hij het verhaal om contemporaine omstandigheden en zaken te verklaren, in het bijzonder de gedeelde achtergrond van, en de vijandschap tussen, de Turken en de Mongolen.

Wellicht het beroemdste onderdeel van de Mongoolse cultuur was de Yasa, een vermeend wetboek dat uitgevaardigd zou zijn door Chinggis Khan. Tot de dag van vandaag bestaan er onder historici over deze Yasa veel onbeantwoorde vragen. Auteurs in het Mamlukse sultanaat maakten echter enthousiast gebruik van de mysterieuze Yasa en zijn grondlegger in hun *othering* strategieën. Zij presenteerden Chinggis Khan en zijn Yasa als fotonegatieven van de profeet Mohammed en de sharia. In hoofdstuk 3 stel ik dat deze auteurs dat vanaf een zeer vroeg moment in Mamluks-Ilkhanidische betrekkingen deden. Het is niet pas vanaf de negende/vijftiende eeuw dat de sharia en de Yasa worden gecontrasteerd, zoals eerder onderzoek heeft bepleit, maar dit gebeurde al in de late zevende/dertiende eeuw. Dit discours, waarin de islamitische regels en mores tegenover die van de Yasa werden gezet, werd vervolgens in de achtste/veertiende eeuw verder ontwikkeld. De hoofdstukken 2 en 3 benadrukken daarnaast het belang van de individuele

agency van auteurs, en laten zien hoe zij hun bronmateriaal doelbewust inzetten om hun boodschap over te brengen. Dat resulteerde soms in verschillende weergaves van de Mongolen en hun cultuur.

Verschillen in de weergave van Mongolen kwamen niet alleen voort uit de keuzes van individuele auteurs, maar waren ook afhankelijk van de groep Mongolen waartoe ze behoorden. Dit is met name zichtbaar in de verschillende voorstellingen van respectievelijk de vijandige Ilkhaniden en de vriendschappelijke Gouden Horde. Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt hoe auteurs in het Mamlukse sultanaat de eerste Mongoolse legers, het latere Ilkhanaat, en de Gouden Horde neerzetten. Door middel van een serie van chronologische casestudy's kijk ik hoe auteurs in Egypte en Syrië het werk van hun voorgangers gebruikten en van daaruit beelden en stereotypen verder ontwikkelden. Uit hun beschrijvingen van deze vroege Mongolen en de Mamluks-Ilkhanidische oorlog werden aspecten als moed, geweld, ongelovigheid en barbaarsheid gehaald en daar werd op voortgebouwd. Hier werden beelden van bedriegerij en listigheid aan toegevoegd. De Mongolen van de Gouden Horde kregen echter een geheel andere behandeling. Hun islamitische khans, in het bijzonder Berke (reg. 655-64/1257-66) werden geprezen om hun vroomheid, maar zelfs in gevallen van khans die geen moslim waren, deden auteurs moeite om hen toch aan de islam te verbinden. Dat deden zij bijvoorbeeld door hun bevordering van de islam en/of moslims boven andere religies en hun aanhangers te benadrukken. De beschrijvingen van Mongolen werden dus sterk beïnvloed door politieke overwegingen.

Het belang van context in het gebruik van beelden van etnische *Others* is op vergelijkbare wijze zichtbaar in het geval van de Mongolen in het Mamlukse sultanaat. In hoofdstuk 5 gebruik ik drie casestudy's om te onderzoeken op welke wijze Mongoolse Mamlukken werden afgeschilderd. De verslagen over de verschillende groepen Mongoolse immigranten, *wāfidiyya*, in het sultanaat, evenals de regering van de Mongools Mamlukse sultan Kitbugha (reg. 694-96/1294-96), laten zien dat hun etnische achtergrond niet per definitie problematisch was. In plaats daarvan ontstonden problemen als gevolg van *jinsiyya* – voortrekkerij gebaseerd op etniciteit, zoals Kitbugha tegenover de Oirat-Mongoolse *wāfidiyya* van 695/1296 aan de dag legde – en de weigering van de Oirats om zich tot de islam te bekeren. Daarbij kwam nog het factionalisme: sommige leden van de Mamlukse elite beschouwden Kitbugha als een usurpator. Dat deze spanningen rond Mongoolse Mamlukken dan ook verklaard moeten worden vanuit deze kwesties, en niet vanuit hun *jins* (etniciteit) zelf, wordt geïllustreerd door het metaalwerk gemaakt door Muḥammad ibn al-Zayn, in het bijzonder in het bekken dat we nu kennen als de Baptistère de Saint Louis. Dit object – waarvan ik meen dat het gemaakt is voor een Mamluks publiek in plaats van Europees, zoals in het verleden wel gesteld is – toont de militaire en hoofse elite van het Mamlukse sultanaat: de *khāṣṣakiyya*. Onder hen zijn

etnische Mongolen, te herkennen aan hun gezichten die afgebeeld zijn op een manier die overeenkomt met de fysieke beschrijvingen van de Mongolen zoals die te vinden zijn in de etnografische traditie besproken in hoofdstuk 1.

Dit onderzoek toont hiermee de ontwikkeling van beeldvorming over de Mongolen door de auteurs van het Mamlukse sultanaat. Hiermee levert deze studie een bijdrage aan het zich ontwikkelende veld van onderzoek naar etniciteit in het middeleeuwse Midden-Oosten. Het laat zien hoe auteurs in deze tijd actief waren in processen van etnische identificatie, categorisering en *othering*. Door middel van hun intellectuele inspanningen, waaronder het verzamelen van nieuwe informatie en het (de)selecteren en gebruiken van bestaande bronnen, ontwikkelden deze auteurs een discours over de Mongolen dat over het algemeen aansloot bij de belangen en het programma van de Mamlukse militaire elite. Dat betekende dat er verschillende beelden werden gecreëerd voor verschillende groepen Mongolen, waarin islam als een belangrijk cultureel kenmerk fungeerde. Tegelijkertijd, ook al was er een zekere discursieve consistentie in de manier waarop de Mongolen in het Mamlukse sultanaat werden neergezet, was er ook aanzienlijke variatie: tussen genres, tussen auteurs, en tussen de doelen van die laatsten. De beelden van de Mongolen werden dus actief geconstrueerd en gebruikt voor diverse doeleinden in antwoord op, en in interactie met, de complexe etnische en politieke contexten van het sultanaat.

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