

# Qamuq Mongqol Ulus and Chiefdom Theory

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Among many researchers studying the structure of the early polity of *Qamuq Mongqol Ulus*, two opposite points of view are advanced. Some authors believe that, in this case, we should be dealing with a state, even in embryo.<sup>1</sup> The other group of researchers thinks that the case in point should be the pre-state societies – confederations of tribes, chiefdoms etc.<sup>2</sup> The basic contradiction concerns the different interpretations of two different sources. In §§ 52, 57 of *The Secret History*

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<sup>1</sup> *Bugd Nairamdakh Mongol Ard Ulsyn Tyykh* [History of Mongolian Peoples' Republic]. Vol. 1. Ulaanbaatar 1966, 172; N. Ishzamts, *Obrazovanie edinogo mongolskogo gosudarstva i ustanovlenie feodalizma* [Formation of the united Mongolian state and the establishment of feudalism]. Unpublished Dr.Sc. Thesis. Moscow 1972, 11-12; Sh. Sandag, "Obrazovanie edinogo mongolskogo gosudarstva i Chinggiskhan," [Formation of the united Mongolian state and Chinggiskhan], in *Tataro-mongoly v Asii I Evrope*, Moscow 1977, 25-26; E. I. Kychanov, "K voprosu ob urovne sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia tataro-mongolskikh plemen," [To question on a level of socio-economical development of Uluses of Tatars and Mongols], in *Rol' kochevykh narodov v tsivilizatsii Centralnoy Asii*, Ulaanbaatar 1974, 169; *idem*, "O tataro-mongolskom uluse XII veka," [On the Uluses of Tatars and Mongols in the 12th century], in *Vostochnaia Asii i sosednie territorii v srednie veka*, Novosibirsk 1986; *idem*. *Kochevye gosudarstva ot gunnov do manchzurov* [Nomadic states from the Xoungnu to the Manchurians], Moscow 1997, 179-192; L. Krader, "The Origin of the State among the Nomads of Asia," in *The Early State*, ed. H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalnik, The Hague 1978, 99; Zh. Gerelbadarkh, "Bylo li 'khamag mongol ulus' nazvaniem gosudarstva," [Whether 'Qamuq Mongqol Ulus' was the name of the state] *Altaica X*, Moscow 2005; etc.

<sup>2</sup> N. Ts. Munkuev, "Zametki o drevnikh mongolakh" [Notes about the ancient Mongols], in *Tataro-mongoly v Asii I Evrope*, Moscow 1977, 379-382; A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*. Cambridge 1984, 234; V. S. Taskin, *Materialy po istorii drevnikh kochevykh narodov gruppy dunkhu* [Materials on a history of the ancient nomadic peoples Dunghu], Moscow 1984, 30-31; I. de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols. A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, Translated with a historical and philological commentary by I. de Rachewiltz. Vol. 1-2, Leiden-Boston 2004, 296 etc.

of the Mongols, it is reported that, a long time ago, all Mongols were ruled over by Khabul-khan and, in more recent times, by Ambaqai-qahan. In 1161, Ambaqai was been taken prisoner by the Tatars and they passed him to the Jin empire, where he was killed. The alternative versions concern translations of two fragments where the combination “*Qamuq Mongqol*” is found. The first of them declares: “*Qamuq Mongqol-i Qabul qahan meden aba. Qabul-qahan-u üge-ber dolo’an kö’üd-iyen b kö’etele Senggüm-bilge-yin kö’ün Ambaqai-qahan qamuq mongqol-i meden aba*” (“Qabul Qa’an ruled over all the Mongols. After Qabul Qa’an, although he had seven sons, Ambaqai Qa’an, the son of Senggum Bilge, became the ruler of all the Mongols by Qabul Qa’an’s will.”).<sup>3</sup> In the second fragment, relating to a legacy of the captured Ambaqai and the enthronement of Qutula, we read the following: “*Ambaqai-qahan-u Qada’an Qutula qoyar-i nereyitcü ilekse’er qamuq mongqol tayiči’ut Onan-u Qorqonaq jubur quraju-Qutula-yi qahan bolqaba*” (“According to the message of Ambaqai Qa’an, which had nominated both Qada’an and Qutula, all the Mongols and Tayiči’ut gathered in the Qorqonaq Valley by the Onan and made Qumla qa’an”).<sup>4</sup>

The most competent translators of this source translate Qamuq Mongqol as “all the Mongols”<sup>5</sup> (“die ganzen Mongolen”,<sup>6</sup> “tous les Mongols”,<sup>7</sup> “all the Mongols”).<sup>8</sup> There is no reason to doubt the authority of the opinion expressed. Munkuev who has analysed this problem in detail adheres to the same opinion: “There was no state ‘Qamuq Mongqol’ or ethnonym ‘qamuq mongqol’. In § 52 and § 57, we are only dealing with the same name ‘Mongqol’ used in the first event as a determinative ahead (‘all’) while, in the second one, as a determinative to the ethnonym ‘Tayiči’ut’ (‘Mongqol-Tayiči’ut’).”<sup>9</sup>

The second source, the treatise *Men-ta pei-lu* of Zhao hong, reports the opposite information:

In the old days, the state of Mongqus existed. For the illegal (rule period) of Jin (1123–1134), (they, i.e. the Mongqus) also harassed the Jurchen barbarian robbers... Later on, they (Jurchen robbers) gave (them) a good deal of gold and silks and have become reconciled with them. As *Zheng-meng ji* reports of Li Liang, the Mongols have replaced the rule of Tian-xing and (their ruler) has called himself the “forefather of the dynasty and first enlightened august emperor”.<sup>10</sup>

In this case, we are dealing with events of 1147 when, according to *Tongjian ganmu*, the Jurchen empire had to make peace with the Mongols, under which 27 for-

<sup>3</sup> Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 12–13.

<sup>5</sup> S. A. Kozin, *Sokrovennoe skazanie. Mongolskaia khronika 1240 g.* [Secret History. The Mongolian Chronicle of 1240]. Moscow–Leningrad 1941, 84.

<sup>6</sup> E. Haenisch, *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*. Wiesbaden 1941, 7.

<sup>7</sup> P. Pelliot, *Histoire secrete des Mongols*. Paris 1949, 128.

<sup>8</sup> U. Onon *The Secret History of the Mongols. The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*. tr. U. Onon, Curzon 2001, 52; Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 10, 12.

<sup>9</sup> N. Ts. Munkuev, “Zametki o drevnikh mongolakh,” 381–382.

<sup>10</sup> *Men-ta pei-lu*. Russian tr. N. Ts. Munkuev, Moscow 1975, 50.

tified settlements along the northern side of Xi-p'hin-he river were ceded to the Mongols and the Jurchen have committed to deliver every year to them (the Mongols) a great deal of horned cattle, rice and bulls. Moreover, the title of *Meng-fu-wang* was offered to the Mongol elder Kholobo Jinye (Jurchen *aolo bochile* – author's note); but he has not taken this title and has called his kingdom *Da-meng-gu-guo*, kingdom of the Great Mongol. Nowadays, they have made peace and delivered yearly a great deal of things and, after that, the Mongolian chief has taken the title: *Zu-yuan-huan-di*, forefather-emperor.<sup>11</sup>

Most researchers identify absolutely rightly the Mongolian chief Kholobo with Qabul qahan. His conflicts with the Jurchen had begun ten years ago after an abortive attempt was made to capture him by order of the Jurchen emperor Xi-zong. True, there are great doubts that in this case one can also tell about the state because the above source reports below: "When the first polity of today's Tatars appeared (they) had no written documents. In all cases, when the orders were distributed, the ambassadors were sent everywhere and (at that) only signs were cut out".<sup>12</sup> The acceptance of the notorious title and declaration of a splendid name are graphic evidence of the pretensions of the Mongolian chief to recognition in international affairs, but is not proof that the state has appeared as the institution. This is confirmed by the fact that, after the death of Qabul qahan and murder of Ambaqai-qahan and the successful foray to Jin, Qutula was not aware of the existence of the powerful imperial confederation in the Mongolian steppe.

Nevertheless, Eugeny Kychanov points out that Munkuyev, translating *Men-ta pei-lu* in Russian, "in spite of the abundant comments to the text, does not comment on this passage".<sup>13</sup> The problem remains to be solved: why the Mongolian-speaking sources report nothing of the state of the early Mongols and the great confederation of nomads, whereas the Chinese sources suggest for certain a presence of the political union of its nomadic northern neighbours.

Most likely, the answer to this question should consist in the following. All of those researchers who interpreted the Chinese texts as the evidence of the Mongols' state in the twelfth century proceeded, by default, from the fact that in the text, the Chinese term *guo* – polity or state – was used. However, the Chinese diplomats, functionaries and chroniclers had a quite vague idea of the real processes taking place far to the north. In this specific case, it should be borne in mind that

<sup>11</sup> N. Ya. Bichurin, *Sobranie svedenii o narodakh, obitavshikh v Srednei Asii v drevnie vremena*. [Collected information about the peoples of Inner Asia in ancient times], Vol. 1–2. Moscow and Leningrad 1950, 379; V. P. Vasil'ev, *Istoriia i drevnosti vostochnoy chasti Srednei Asii ot X do XIII veka s prilozheniem kitaiskikh izvestii o kidaniakh, dzurdzeniakh i mongolotatarakh* [History and antiquities of the east part of Central Asia from the 10th to the 13th century with an appendix of the Chinese Chronicles about Kitan, Jurchen, and Mongols and Tatars]. Saint-Petersburg 1857, 79–80.

<sup>12</sup> *Men-ta pei-lu*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> E. I. Kychanov, "Mongoly v VI – pervoy polovine XII veka," [Mongols from the sixth to the first half of the twelfth centuries], in *Dalny Vostok i sosednie territorii v srednie veka*. Novosibirsk 1980, 146.

the views on the same processes from the outside and within the society under consideration are, as a rule, different. In cultural anthropology, it has long been known that the researcher's conclusions of one or other cultural phenomena (*ethic*) differ, as a rule, from views of the bearers of this culture on the same thing (*emic*).<sup>14</sup> For this reason alone, the empires established by nomads seemed like powerful states from outside, but were no more than tribal confederations based on consensual relations if they were examined from within.

The problem of interpreting the political system of the Mongqol Uluses of the eleventh-twelfth centuries was considered with the greatest care by the Russian scholar of Asia, Eugeny Kychanov. Beginning from the mid 1970s, he developed the concept of the specific form of the early state among the people settling the territory to the north of the Chinese civilization.<sup>15</sup>

Kychanov's reasoning reduces to the following points: (1) In Uluses, social stratification, division into nobility and the poor and the slavery institution occurred; (2) Uluses could have multi-ethnic composition; (3) They were governed by a khan who had bodyguards, and held the headquarters and administration of the Ulus. His power has passed by right of succession; (4) In Uluses, the conventional rules were in force. "It was the power over people and reflecting the interests of the ruling class, the public power personified in the state mechanism of a certain construction", the researcher summarizes.<sup>16</sup> This is a typical Marxist view of the state as the tool of the rich for the oppression of the poor. Moreover, Kychanov believes that "... the Tatar-Mongolian Ulus in the twelfth century differed little in this from the Chinggis-Khan Ulus of 1206. We join the followers of that point of view according to which the Tatar-Mongolian Uluses of the twelfth century are formations of the nature of a state with unified military-administrative power".<sup>17</sup>

Kychanov characterizes absolutely rightly the typical properties of the social order of Mongolian Uluses of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. Indeed, they were characterized by social inequality, multi-ethnic composition, hereditary power etc. However, all of characteristics listed by him correspond closely to the signs of chiefdom. It is common practice to consider the chiefdom as that type of social-political organization which can be simplistically described as follows: it is a social organism consisting of the group of communal groups which are hierarchically subordinate to the central and, as a rule, most great of them where the ruler (chief) lives. The latter, resting upon rudimentary authority, organizes the economic, redistributive, judicial and religious activities of the society.

The theory of chiefdom is among the most fundamental achievements of political anthropology. The modern concepts of the basic characteristics of chiefdoms are based on the giant volume of the ethnographic data acquired by the scientists

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<sup>14</sup> K. Pik, *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior*. 2nd ed. The Hague 1967.

<sup>15</sup> See Note 2.

<sup>16</sup> Kychanov, *Kochevye gosudarstva*, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Kychanov, *Kochevye gosudarstva*, 97.

in practically all continents of the globe (except for, maybe, Europe). If the different viewpoints of the essence of chiefdom advanced at different periods are summarized, one can reveal the following major signs of this form of socio-political organization:

- (1) political hierarchy, presence of the centre and groups (communities, tribes etc.) dependent on it;
- (2) social stratification, restricted access to the key resources, there are tendencies to the separation of the endogamic elite from commoners into the closed group;
- (3) population of several thousands of people (simple chiefdom) and several tens of thousands of people (complex chiefdom);
- (4) redistribution of foodstuffs and resources;
- (5) absence of legitimate power having a monopoly for acts of force;
- (6) common ideology and/or common cults and rituals;
- (7) sacral character of power, sometimes, presence of theocracy.<sup>18</sup>

From this point of view, not only Qamuq Mongqol Ulus but also other Uluses of Mongols in the eleventh–early thirteenth centuries fall fully under the signs of chiefdom. Here, the inequality (already Bodoncar said vividly: “It is right for a body to have a head, and for a coat to have a collar.”)<sup>19</sup> and social stratification were noted. Among the Mongols, there was genealogical inequality, the transfer of power of chiefs was by right of succession, described in detail in the *Jāmi’ al tavārikh* of Rashid ad-Din. In society, the norms of traditional law were in force. I even agree with Kychanov’s opinion that the power of khans did not reflect the interests of people, but what power does reflect their interests? Machivelli in *The Prince* has shown well that any power is of extra-moral character. It exists only for its own sake. However, the ruling elite, at that, should not destroy the society but should contribute to the keeping of its unity if it wants to maintain its positions. In this case, if necessary, the interests of power can coincide with those of some or other social groups including the masses. All of this is, to a full degree, applicable to the societies of pastoral nomads.

The difference of my point of view from Eugeny Kychanov’s opinion consists only in that he considers this political system as the state. The state assumes the presence of specific management personnel. As the rulers of chiefdoms did not have subordinate specialized compulsory institutions (bureaucracy, army, police) their power was based on the benefit for the society, redistribution mechanisms and preformed ideological functions. It is the universal rule true with respect to the both settled agricultural and nomadic societies. In Rashid ad-Din’s interpretation, Chinggis-Khan looks as like typical steppe khan, lavish to his fellow tribes-

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<sup>18</sup> *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology*, ed. T. Earle. Cambridge 1991; *Chiefdoms and Early States in the Near East: The organizational dynamics of complexity*, ed. G. Stein, M. S. Rothman. Madison 1994; T. Earle, *How chiefs come to power: The political economy in pre-history*. Stanford CA 1997; *Chiefdoms and chieftaincy in the Americas*, ed. E. Redmond. Gainesville, Florida 1998; *Beyond chiefdoms: Pathways to complexity in Africa*, ed. S. K. McIntosh, Cambridge 1999, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, 7.

men and terrible to hid enemies. He describes the event when one group (Je'ureyits) were blandly taken on by Temüjin and, later on, they spread the opinion of his noble qualities among the steppe tribes.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, within the Je'ureyits, an internal split occurred and some of them and some representatives of other groups have come over to Temüjin's side. In *Jāmi' al tavārikh*, the words of the oath taken by both sides are given: "We are left as wives without husbands, as a herd without master and a flock without a cowherd! The sons descending from the great wives (*khatun*), we are extirpated and ruined! All of us will take up swords for (the sake) of your friendship and kill your enemies!", Uluq *ba'atur* has declared to Temüjin. "I was like a sleeper and you pulled my wisp and woke me. I sat (motionless), you evoked (me) from my severities (and) put (on) (my feet). I will make all that will be possible for the sake of the promises made by me with respect to you!" Temüjin answers him.<sup>21</sup> The similar promises of both sides are presented in § 123 of *The Secret History* when describing the investiture of Temüjin as khan.

Here, one important clarification which is of especial importance with respect to the nomadic societies should be made. It would be wrong to identify the strong personal power of the chief and existence of the state. Many events are known when the rulers of chiefdoms could punish his subjects and some of them are looked on even as the autocrats. However, the opposite situation is well known. If the chief did not listen to the advice of elders, attempted to change traditions, violated a taboo, oppressed his subjects harshly and perpetrated murders, then he could be substituted. As a rule, the commoners, by virtue of traditional norms, have recognized the rights of their chiefs to some part of the income they produce, however, they have insisted on the observance of justice in these relations. If the chiefs and their courtiers have abused their position then this could result in the burst of popular anger.<sup>22</sup> As the rulers of chiefdoms had no the specialized compulsion machinery, their position under such conditions was unenviable. For this reason, it is common practice to consider that the rulers of chiefdoms have only consensual power, i.e. authority. In the case of a state proper, the government can apply sanctions by using legitimate violence and can rest upon specific compulsion machinery.<sup>23</sup>

I do not agree completely with this definition, because many states have insufficient means to enforce the state's monopoly on violence.<sup>24</sup> The chiefdoms were still more unstable political systems. In simple chiefdoms, power could be inheritable and its stability depended on the successfulness of the political and military practices and charisma of the leader. In the complex, stratified chiefdoms,

<sup>20</sup> Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei* [A Collection of Chronicles]. Vol. 1, Part 1-2. Moscow-Leningrad 1952, 90.

<sup>21</sup> Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisei*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> M. D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago 1972.

<sup>23</sup> E. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization*. New York 1975.

<sup>24</sup> R. L. Carneiro, "The chiefdom: precursor of the state," in *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, Cambridge 1981; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY 1983.

the supreme power was distributed among the members of the ruling clan and the mechanisms of its transfer were developed, though all this did not exclude the possibility of internal conflicts. However, in both early and late chiefdoms, the ruler's authority was maintained by means of the gift economy, repeated distributions of material and morally significant resources. In this connection, one can recall the circumstances accompanying the death of Yesügei. As soon as he passed to his eternal rest, his former companions-in-arms left his family: "The deep lake has already dried up; sound stones have been already broken".<sup>25</sup>

Paragraph 124 of *The Secret History* allows us to understand what the Mongolian Uluses of the eleventh–twelfth centuries were. There, the different duties imposed on the bodyguards of young Temüjin are described in detail. The circle of his fellow-fighters included only 26 people, 12 of whom fulfilled the military duties. Four persons were appointed to be archers and four were sword-bearers who fulfilled, in addition, the police and punitive functions; the third four took the posts of scouts and couriers. The other group of men-at-arms (11 people) was entrusted with domestic arrangements for the khan's household. Three members of the armed band were appointed to manage the khan's fare. Three persons were appointed to watch the pasturage of horses and one the pasturage of sheep. Two men-at-arms fulfilled the duties of equerries, one man managed servants and slaves and, finally, one was responsible for the movements of the khan's headquarters. These bodies were headed by the three nearest fellow-fighters of Chingis-khan; Bo'orču, Jelme and Sübe'etei.

Based on this distribution of duties, and taking into account the study of the heroic epos of nomads,<sup>26</sup> one can assume that the fellow-fighters of the steppe polity's ruler could be appointed: (1) to guard the chief/khan and his relatives in the headquarters; (2) pasturage of the ruler's herds; (3) domestic matters in the headquarters (nourishment of the chief, his family life and amusements, preparation and holding of periodic meetings, reception and accommodation of guests, arrangement of seasonal migrations of camp and hunting). One more function is rendering of assistance to the khan in organizing the government of the polity (couriers, ambassadors etc.). On this evidence, it is wrong to interpret these relations as the legitimate institution of political power. The bodyguards (*nökörs*) do not have a clear specialization in fulfillment of some or other function and execute it from one case to another as may be necessary. The nomads have no need for bureaucratic machinery and have solved the problems as they arise quickly and without red tape. That is why it was said in the initial lines of Chapter 85 of *Yuan Shi*, devoted to the description of the officialdom of the Yuan dynasty, that even under the First Emperor (i. e., Chingis-khan), there were no confused affairs and services while the customs (i. e., administrative means) were simple and intimate.

<sup>25</sup> *Yuan Shi*, Ch.1; N.Ya. Bichurin, *Istoriia pervykh chetyrekh khanov iz doma Chingisova* [History of first four khans from the House of Chinggis]. Saint-Petersburg 1829, 9.

<sup>26</sup> V.V. Trepavlov, "Altaiiskiy geroicheskiy epos kak istochnik po istorii ranney gosudarstvennosti," [Altai heroic epos as a sources of the early statehood history], in *Follor-noe nasledie Gornogo Altaia*, Gorno-Altaiisk 1989, 158–162.