

## From animal to name, remarks on the semantics of Middle Mongolian personal names

In 2006 I published my dissertation, “Die Personennamen und Titel der mitelmongolischen Dokumente: Eine lexikalische Untersuchung”, in the series of the Institute for Asian and African Studies at Helsinki (Publications of the Institute for Asian and African Studies 8).<sup>1</sup> At that time, I planned to publish in the near future a revised version of the work (together with additional chapters on semantics, word formation, etc.). As it happened, however, a great quantity of new material of Middle Mongolian (including numerous personal names and titles) was published at that time: the materials discovered in Dunhuang at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium (Peng & Wang 2000, 2004a–b), as well as the materials found in Qaraqoto and preserved in Huhhot (Yoshida & Cimeddorji 2008), this last publication includes also some unique Middle Mongolian fragments e.g. hPags-pa written in cursive script. At this point, a revised publication would have meant rewriting the whole dissertation; for that reason, the whole plan was abandoned. Other research interests also led to this decision. Already partly written, however, were some sections of the revised version: a treatment of semantics and word formation, an overview of Middle Mongolian literature (in its broadest sense), and an additional chapter dealing with the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist entities. As I believe that these chapters might still be of some interest to the scientific world, I hereby present the chapter on the semantics of Middle Mongolian personal names as a token of gratitude to my teacher Juha Janhunen.

The corpus of names, titles and so forth found in Middle Mongolian documents—that is, documents belonging to the period from the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries—consists of about 1600 entries, out of which approximately 900 can be classified as personal names. Linguistically speaking, this corpus can be divided into five groups: Turco-Mongolian, Arabo-Persian (including European languages), Irano-Persian (including Buddhist Sanskrit), Tibetan, and Chinese. The largest of these is the Turco-Mongolian group, consisting of around 850 entries (out of which approximately 650 are personal names). Into this group falls also the largest group of etymologically unclear names (130 entries). The next largest group is formed by Chinese names and titles and comprises around 320 entries. Due to the rather low social status of the Chinese during Mongol and Yuan times,

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1. See <<http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/aasia/vk/rybatzki>> for a free downloadable PDF-version.

this group consists mainly of names of offices and titles adopted during the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368); personal names (about 70 entries) belong largely to Chinese Buddhist or Taoist clergy. While this group includes only a very small number of names of non-religious persons, is it unclear if they consist of Chinese in the service of the Mongols, Mongols that had adopted Chinese names, or (most probably) both. The next group is the Arabo-Persian, consisting of around 140 entries (out of which 100 are personal names). The second to last group is the Irano-Persian, numbering some 130 entries. This group consists mainly of names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Buddhist deities, and so forth; the number of actual personal names is very low (only around 15 names). The majority of these are names belonging either to the Turkic area of the Mongolian empire or names adopted by Mongols through Turkic intermediaries. The smallest group is the Tibetan, consisting of only around 80 entries; however, the number of real personal names is comparatively high here (about 50 names). For analyses of the use and semantics of (Sanskrit/Tibetan) Buddhist names in Mongol onomastics, see Krueger (1962), as well as Kwanten (1971) and Sagaster (2003).

As I have stated in an earlier publication (Rybatzki 2003), little research has been done on the etymologies of the Turco-Mongolian corpus or the semantic and morphological aspects of its names. Real research in Middle Mongolian onomastics has primarily focused on biographical matters; it is in this field that some great achievements have been gained, mostly due to the efforts of, among others, Chan (2009), de Rachewiltz, Chan & Hsiao (1993) and Franke (1991); for further publications involving this field of research, see the bibliographical section of my dissertation (Rybatzki 2006: 741–841).

Most of the linguistic research on Middle Mongolian names is scattered throughout various small articles and footnotes; to date, a thorough treatment of the subject has been lacking. The works of Beffa (1996), Bese (1978), Poucha (1956) and others deal for the most part only with the names of the *Secret History*. Furthermore, these works are either outdated or use scientific approaches which must be regarded as highly problematic. Aside from small articles by Bese (1974), Kempf (2006), Poppe (1975) and Vásáry (2009), as well as some Russian publications, there is no extant research on the word formation of Middle Mongolian personal names.

As concerns the semantic grouping of Middle Mongolian names, the situation is even more lamentable. Aside from a short chapter in *Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Jagchid & Hyer 1979) and some other minor publications, no research has been done. Furthermore, while Jagchid and Hyer's book is the most important (or at least most well known) resource on this topic, it lumps together personal names of different periods, thus giving an incorrect picture of the semantics of Middle Mongolian names.

Providing some assistance for the semantics of Middle Mongolian names are two articles by the Hungarian Turcologist, László Rásonyi: "Sur quelques catégories des noms de personnes en Turc" (1953) and "The Psychology and Categories of Name Giving among the Turkish Peoples" (1976). Another important contribution, presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> PIAC, is Tydykova's paper on the se-

mantic grouping of “Altaian Heroic Names”. Here one finds all of the semantic groups that are also attested in Middle Mongolian name-giving. But it must be remarked, as Bese has already done (1983), that names of folklore or mythological origin are highly problematic. It is by no means certain that the names of legendary ancestors (as recorded, for example, in the *Secret History of the Mongols*) were ever used as actual personal names. In fact, a large number of etymologically unclear names in the Turco-Mongolian corpus may be explained by the fact that they are folkloristic or mythological names, not current in everyday life.

However, some striking differences between Middle Mongolian names and Old/Middle Turkic and Uighur names should be pointed out. Turkic name-giving derives a large body of personal names from verbal forms; one need only remember the names based on *turmiš*, *bermiš*, *almiš*, *aldī*, *bolmiš*, *bolzun*, etc. (Rásonyi 1962, 1976). This form of name formation is completely unknown in Middle Mongolian: the attested examples in the corpus (e.g. *Ötemiš*, *Alimasar* or *Bökmiš*) are of Turkic origin and indicate persons that are ethnically Turkic.

Semantically speaking, a great number of Turkic names are of theophoric origin. Accordingly, one finds *Ingri-berdi*, *Allah-berdi*, *Qudai-berdi*, etc. (Rásonyi 1976, 217); perhaps the large group of Turkic names including the element *el* (Rybatzki 2006, 79–93) also belongs to this group. In genuine Middle Mongolian word formation, theophoric names are not found (as is also the case with Ostyak (Khanty) names (Hauel 1994)). This specific feature could be a trace of the Sibero-Tungusic background of the earliest known stage of Mongolian culture (Rybatzki 2010). It must be remembered, however, that some of the names or epithets of the early Mongolian rulers (including, for example, *Cinggis*, *Cayadai*, *Ögedei*, *Qubilai*, and *Möngke*) may have a theophoric aspect; unfortunately, the exact meaning of most of these is not clear.

After this short introduction and overview of the problems connected with Middle Mongolian onomastics, I would now like to proceed to the main subject of my paper, namely the semantic grouping of Middle Mongolian personal names, with special reference to personal names formed on the basis of animal names.

The largest semantic group of Middle Mongolian personal names consists of names related to physiological or psychological features of a given person. This group might be further divided into real personal names, such as *Batu* ‘confident, immovable’, *Bayan* ‘rich’ and *Berke* ‘strong’. For the most part, they indicate characteristics like good fortune, good behaviour, and so forth. Rásonyi styled this group as “desiderata names, names decisive of Fate”. Other names that fall into this group (such as *Büjir* ‘filthy’, *Budayu* ‘stupid, dull’ and *Ködön* ~ *Köten* ‘backside, buttocks’) carry a negative connotation. Behind such names is the superstition that “bad names” (which indicate that the child is nauseating and worthless, for example) may discourage and repel evil spirits; in Rásonyi’s system, these names are styled “protective names”. Closely related to this second subgroup is a third, consisting of names that might be styled sobriquets or nicknames: compare, for example, *Bedügün* ‘large, huge, big’, *Bujar* ‘dirty’, *Da-aritai* ‘having an abrasion’, *Taraqai* ‘bald-headed’ and *Qaljajai* ‘bald’. The

second largest group of personal names consists of animal names (which are dealt with below). Together these two groups comprise about 25% of the names. Semantic groups of medium size (that is, ranging between 6–7% of the names) are made up of names related to or derived from colours, ethnic names, and names given in relation to the first object or person seen (and the first word spoken) after the child's birth. This last group, which Rásonyi calls "fortuitous names (omen-names)", proves to be extremely problematic when analyzing the semantics of (Middle) Mongolian personal names. Anything can be included in this group! If a given name does not fit into any other semantic group or pattern, it can somehow still be located here. Semantic groups of small size (that is, less than 4% of the names) include names that are formed on the basis of professions, relationship terms, titles, circumstances of birth, metals, tools and weapons, objects of nature, scenes of delivery from adverse circumstances, and so forth. According to Rásonyi, these small groups must be considered subgroups of the three previous main groups. Thus, names based on professions, relationship terms, titles, metals, tools and weapons belong to a sub-group entitled "names decisive of Fate", while those based on circumstances of birth, objects of nature or scenes of delivery from adverse circumstances belong to the group of "fortuitous names (omen-names)".

As stated above, Middle Mongolian personal names formed on the basis of animal names comprise the second biggest groups. However, not just any animal name is used as a personal name. A large group is formed by bird names; this includes birds of prey, but also small birds (such as *Bilji-ur* 'Lerche, kleiner Vogel, Sperling', *Ögöljin* 'hoopoe' and *Ular* 'heath cock, black goose'). Another group is formed by names of domestic animals (for example, *Uquna* 'male goat', *Üker* 'cow' and *Buqa* 'bull'; the latter is also attested in several derivations, such as *Buqa.n*, *Buqa.cuq*, *Buqa.car* and *Buqa.tai*, *Buqa.tu*). The generic name for horse (*mori/n*) is not attested as a personal name. Names connected with horses are always based on specific features of the horse (for example, *Oqotur* 'Stumelschwanz', *Atkiray* 'stallion', *Unuyucar* 'foal', *Tobicaq* 'a horse of western origin' and *Qulun* 'a foal'; one also finds names after the colour of a horse, such as *Qongqor* 'chestnut' and *Jēren* 'chestnut'). There also exist names that belong to combinations of colours; *Qara* 'black, black horse' and *Caqa-an* 'white, white horse' fall into this group. Another large group is formed by different designations of dogs; compare, for example, *Baraq* 'a long-haired dog', *Qasar* 'a hound' and *Küciük* 'puppy'. The generic name *Noqai* 'dog' is also well attested in Middle Mongolian onomastics. Further names are connected with hunted animals, such as *Keremün* 'squirrel', *Buqu* 'deer', *Solangqa* 'marten, weasel' and *Qaliyun* 'otter, beaver'. The last group is formed by animals which are not native to Mongolia, such as *Arslan* 'lion', *Becin* 'ape' and *Jiqan* 'elephant'.

In terms of name-giving, the group of animal names is by no means homogenous, but must be subdivided into at least three subgroups. The first subgroup comprises examples that might be called *totemic names*. A large part of the birds of prey fall into this group, but names based on *Bōri* or *Cino* 'wolf', *Ayid* or *Ötege* ~ *Ötöge* 'bear', as well as *Maral* also belong here. The second sub-

group might be called *names decisive of fate*. According to Rásonyi (1976), this subgroup (represented by such names as *Buqa*, *Arslan* or *Bars*) is based on the idea that the “animal name has changed into a symbolic one, according to what characteristic features they possessed which the parents considered desirable with regard to the infant, such as braveness, aggressive temper, power, speed, while in the case of one or the other domestic animal its size is the symbol of the appreciated or useful feature.” The third subgroup belongs to the group of *protective names*, indicating that the child is similar to despised animals (e.g. *Küciügür* ‘fieldmouse’ or *Kökecü* ‘titmouse’). The fourth and last subgroup belongs to the group of *fortuitous or omen-names*. In this group falls a set of names classified as “first animal or person seen after birth”. Most names connected with domestic animals, as well as some of the bird-names, might belong to this group; *Nomon* ‘mole’, as well as the aforementioned *Küciügür* ‘fieldmouse’ and *Kökecü* ‘titmouse’, should also be included in this group.

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