

Csaba Göncöl¹

ORCID: 0009-0008-7021-3024
University of Szeged

Continuity and Change from the Mongol Empire to the Crimean Khanate

Kontynuacja i zmiana od Imperium
Mongolskiego do Chanatu Krymskiego

Abstract

This article examines the evolution of the initial protocol used in Mongol imperial decrees, tracing its development from the thirteenth century Mongol Empire throughout the period of Golden Horde to the Crimean Khanate. It highlights the continuity of Genghisid diplomatic and bureaucratic traditions— particularly the use of the formula *sözüm/sözümüz* ‘my/our word’— that despite religious and cultural transformations throughout several centuries. Furthermore, the article demonstrates how this early Mongol tradition was adapted into a distinctive Crimean Tatar corroborating sign (*tuğra*) under the political and cultural influence of the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: initial protocol, Mongol and Golden Horde decrees, *sözüm/sözümüz*, Crimean Tatar *tuğra*.

1 The author is a member of the HUN-REN–SZTE Research Group of the Ottoman Age.

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje ewolucję początkowego protokołu stosowanego w mongolskich dekretach cesarskich, śledząc jego rozwój od trzynastowiecznego Imperium Mongolskiego przez okres Złotej Ordy aż do Chanatu Krymskiego. Autor podkreśla ciągłość tradycji dyplomatycznych i biurokratycznych wywodzących się od Czyngisydów – w szczególności użycie formuły *sözüm/sözümüz* („moje/nasze słowo”) – mimo przemian religijnych i kulturowych na przestrzeni kilku stuleci. Ponadto artykuł ukazuje, w jaki sposób ta wczesna mongolska tradycja została zaadaptowana w charakterystyczny krymskotatarski znak potwierdzający (*tuğra*) pod wpływem politycznym i kulturowym Imperium Osmańskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: protokół początkowy, dekrety mongolskie i Złotej Ordy, *sözüm/sözümüz*, krymskotatarska *tuğra*.

The Crimean Khanate was a unique state formation in Eastern Europe. As a successor state of the Golden Horde, which itself had broken away from the Mongol Empire, it preserved many nomadic political, social and state institutions, customs, and practices originating from the of Mongolian homeland of the thirteenth century. The khanate was ruled by members of the Girey dynasty, who traced their origin to Genghis Khan. A strong legitimising factor within the society was the *yasa* (Mong. *yasağ*), commandments attributed to the conqueror, and the *töre* (Mong. *yosun*), an ancient Turco-Mongolian customary law. The Crimean tribal aristocracy elevated their khans on white felts during so-called *kurultays*, assemblies originally held by Mongol royalty and chieftains. These and many similar practices reflected the khanate's enduring connection to its Mongol past.

This article demonstrates how one such early Mongolian tradition – the use of initial protocols in Mongolian and Golden Horde decrees – was preserved and transformed in the Crimean Khanate. It traces the evolution of these protocols into an introductory formula and, eventually, into an Ottoman-style corroborating sign (*tuğra*) over the course of the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries.²

2 Works addressing the present topic are often highly focused on the philological and linguistic aspects of early Mongol and Golden Horde decrees. Since this paper intends to give an overview of a custom's longevity and change, such aspects are not taken into consideration. Turkic, Arabic, and Persian terms and texts have been transcribed using the transcription system of the *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. Mongolian texts were also modified to fit this system. Sources in Old Slavic languages are rendered with the characters of Modern Russian.

Initial protocols of early Mongol decrees

When the first Mongol armies left the steppes and entered regions inhabited by sedentary populations in the early thirteenth century, the need arose for a system of literacy and administration capable of managing the nascent multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. This task fell to the Uighurs, a Turkic people inhabiting the oasis cities of the Tarim Basin, who had only recently submitted to Genghis Khan. With their long-standing written tradition and bureaucratic experience – often shaped by Chinese influence – the Uighurs adapted their script to the Mongolian language and, drawing on their own models, laid the foundations of Mongol imperial administrative apparatus that accompanied the Mongol armies in their campaigns. Although local chancelleries of conquered people often influenced Mongol chancery practices, one can nonetheless speak of a broadly unified Mongol bureaucratic tradition.

Early Mongol edicts and orders are relatively few in number. Their study is complicated by the fact that they were written in multiple languages (Mongolian, Turkic, Chinese, Persian, etc.) or scripts (Uighur-Mongolian, Chinese, 'Phags-pa, Arabic, etc.), and that many have survived only in translations (Chinese, Persian, etc.). Despite this, the documents display a high degree of structural uniformity. They typically consist of three parts: 1) an initial protocol, 2) the main body of the text, and 3) a closing section.³ The current paper focuses only on the first component, the initial protocol.

The initial protocol was generally positioned a few lines above the main text, scholarship refers to this as 'honorific lift', a layout that clearly reflects Chinese influence. Edicts issued by the Great Khans contain initial protocols of one to three lines, the latter being more common. The first invokes *möngke tengri* ('Eternal Heaven'), the supreme sky god of Eurasian nomads; the second appeals to ancestral spirits or other revered entities; the third states the issuer's title, followed by the Mongolian phrase *yarlıg manu* ('our edict').⁴ The initial protocol was explicitly designed to convey the Mongols' imperial ideology of conquest and

3 Kim Hodong, "Mongol Imperial Institutions," in *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, eds. Michal Biran, Kim Hodong (Cambridge: University Press, 2023), 399–443. 431.

4 Eric Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1940–1941): 378–413. 92–94. Аркадий Павлович Григорьев, *Монгольская дипломатика XIII–XV. вв. (чингизидские жалованные грамоты)* (Ленинград: Издательство ленинградского университета, 1978), 17–19. Kim, "Mongol Imperial Institutions," 432.

universal sovereignty. According to Mongol belief, they had received a mandate from *Tengri* to rule the world. Furthermore, *Tengri* bestowed a royal charisma (Mong. *suu*) on Genghis khan and his lineage, rendering them fit to be elevated to supreme monarchs (Mong. *ka'an*, Turkic *kağan*).⁵ An illustrative example of this idea can be found in the initial protocol of Khubilai Khan's decrees, written in Mongolian using the ,Phags-pa script, which reads as follows:

Möngke tengri-yin küçün-dür
yeke suu cali-yin ihe'en-dür
ka'an carliḡ manu⁶

'By the might of Eternal Sky / by the protection of the great Fortune Flame
/ the Great
Khan, our decree'

While the structure of the initial protocol in the edicts of Great Khans shows a high degree of uniformity, their content may exhibit varying levels of divergence. In contrast to the above-cited example, the second line of the letter of submission sent by Güyüg, the Great Khan to Pope Innocent IV – a Persian translation of a now-lost original likely written in Mongolian – features the following protocol, written in Turkic using the Arabic script:

mengü tengri küçünde
kür uluḡ ulusnūng taluynūng
ḡān yarlıḡımız⁷

'By the might of Eternal Sky / [we] the oceanic khan of all the great people
/ [issue] our command'

5 Thomas T. Allsen "Imperial Ideology," in *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, eds. Michal Biran, Kim Hodong (Cambridge: University Press, 2023), 444–459. Michal Biran, "The Mongol Imperial Space: From Universalism to Glocalization*," in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, eds. Yuri Pines, Michael Biran and Jörg Rüpke (Cambridge: University Press, 2021), 220–256. Steven Pow, Alexander Viacheslavovich Maiorov, "To «Conquer Rome and Beyond Rome»: The Mongol Ideology of World Domination in Medieval Reality and Imagination," *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana* 35/1 (2024): 3–38.

6 Domii Tumurtogoo, *Mongol Monuments in 'Phags-pa Script* (Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, 2010), 11, 13–14, 16, 18, etc.

7 Paul Peliot, "Les Mongols et la Papauté," *Revue de L'Orient Chrétien* 3/23 (1922–1923): 1–28. A note to the translation: I use the usual English "by the might..." phrase in the article. However, the reader is advised to keep in mind, that both Mongolian and Turkic texts consequently use a locative case, so "in the might."

A handful of letters and decrees – both originals and translations – have survived from Ilkhanid khans, that is, a branch of the Genghisids who ruled over Iran, Anatolia, and parts of the Middle-East. Compared with the decrees of the Great Khans, the initial protocols of Ilkhanid documents show considerable overlap, though with small but important distinctions. The Mongol rulers of Iran accepted – at least nominally – the supremacy of the Yuan dynasty, their kin in Mongolia and China. The decrees that survive from the Ilkhanid period follow the previously discussed pattern of initial protocol: it is elevated above the text (the so-called honorific lift), and – with a few exceptions – consists of one to three components. These invoke Eternal Heaven and allude to the Fortune of the Great Khan, but the issuer uses the phrase *üge manu* ('our word'), instead of *carlig manu* ('our decree').⁸ The letter sent by Arğun Ilkhan to the French king Philip le Bel in 1289 – the original of which was written in Mongolian using the Uighur script – reads:

möngke tengri-yin kücündür

hağan-i suu dur

Arğun üge manu⁹

'By the might of Eternal Sky / by the charisma of the great khan / Arğun,
our word'

The initial protocols of imperial decrees underwent a greater degree of change when a monarch converted to a new religion. For example, Ilkhanid rulers who embraced Islam – the religion followed by the majority of their subjects – incorporated Islamic elements, articles of faith, or both into the initial protocol of their decrees. A fragment of a Mongolian document from Iran contains a formula that alludes both to the sky god of the steppes and Genghisid ancestral spirits, as well as to the prophet of the ruler's subject population:

8 Григорьев, *Монгольская дипломатика*, 25–26; Louis Ligeti, "Gerhard Doerfer, Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neuperischen unter Berücksichtigung neuperischer Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen und Timuridenzeit. Band II: Türkische Elemente im Neuperischen, alif bis tä. V–VIII et 671 pages. Wiesbaden 1965 – Band III, ġim bis kâf. 670 pages. Wiesbaden 1967. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission, Band XIX, Band XX. Franz Steiner Verlag," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 21 (1968): 119–130. 125–126.

9 Erich Haenisch, "Zu den Briefen der mongolischen Il-Khane Arğun und Öljeitü an den König Philipp den Schönen von Frankreich (1289 u. 1305)," *Oriens* 2/2 (1949): 216–235. 221.

mongke tengri-yin küçündür
Muḳamad baiḡambar-un imadtur
yeke suu cali-yin ibegdüür [...]¹⁰

‘By the might of Eternal Sky / by the support of Prophet Muhammad / by
the protection of the great Fortune Flame’ [...]

As seen in this example, the initial protocol includes both traditional Mongolian (*möngke tengri*), as well as Islamic (*Prophet Muḡammad*) undertones, which is further stressed by using Persian (*baiḡambar* < Pers. *paygambār* ‘messenger, prophet, apostle’) and Arabic (*imad* < Ar. ‘*imād* ‘support, confidence, trust’) loanwords.¹¹ This particular fragment illustrates how complex and fragmentary the study of early Mongolian documents can be. It is believed to represent the upper part of a decree; the remainder of which has been lost. Since the initial protocol was written separately, above the main body of the document, it was often torn or damaged. As a result, it is frequently difficult to determine whether an initial protocol was originally included, even when the document has survived.

Evoking a superior – the Great Khan – in initial protocols was not only customary for the Ilkhans but also for their officials and subordinates. The following protocol written in Turkic, comes from – to the best of my knowledge – the earliest Ilkhanid order composed in Persian:

[İrincîn Dū]rcī yarlıḡındın
Şītūr Aḡbūḡā Toḡācār sözindin
Aḡmad şāḡīb-dīvān sözi¹²

‘According to the decree of İrincîn Dürçī / according to the word of Şitur,
Aḡbuḡa, and Toḡaçar / the word of the Minister of Finance, Ahmed’

The initial protocol of this particular order demonstrates how flexible Mongol bureaucratic practice could be, since it evokes not only the decree of the Ilkhan (first line), but also the word of his viziers (second line),

10 Francis Woodman Cleaves, “The Mongolian Documents in the Musée de Téhéran,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 16 (1953): 1–107. 26.

11 Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met with in Persian Literature* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1892), 268, 866.

12 Abdol’ala Soudavar, “İlk Farsça İlhanlı Fermanı” [The First Persian Ilkhanid Order], transl. Osman Özgüdenli *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi* [Journal of Turkish Cultural Studies] 6 (2002): 181–190. 182. The name İrincîn Dürçī is the Tibetan name given to Geḡhatu ilkhan (1291–1295).

and that of the issuer (third line). Furthermore, like the above cited letter of Güyüg, the Great Khan, it also highlights the multilingual character of the Mongol administrative apparatus.

Decrees and orders issued for diplomatic exchanges, demands of submission, or other solemn purposes usually contain an initial protocol consisting of three parts. Those, however, that were written for administrative purposes, internal communication, or for subjects of the Genghisids, are more likely to contain only a single line in the initial protocol, evoking simply the name, title and/or other honorifics of the issuer, along with the phrase *üge manu* ('our word'), *Abağa üge manu* ('Abağa, our word'),¹³ or *Ġasan üge manu* ('Ġasan, our word').¹⁴ There is good reason to suppose that this part of the initial protocol was much more often written in Turkic – at least in Central Asian, Iranian, and Anatolian Mongol successor states – and that a variant also evolved using the singular *sözüm* ('my word') instead of the Mongol plural *üge manu* or Turkic *sözümüz*. More on this below.

Invocation on Golden Horde decrees

When Mongol armies under Coçid leadership arrived in the steppes of Siberia and Eastern Europe – that is, in the territory of the Golden Horde – they did not settle in regions with a long-established tradition of literacy and administration, such as China, Central Asia or Iran. Thus, the chancelleries established under their supervision followed custom, languages, and practices of the Mongolian homeland.

Only a small number of decrees and documents have survived from the Golden Horde, the majority of which are translations of *yarlıqs* issued to Orthodox metropolitans and Italian trading colonies by khans, their officials, and female family members. These translations suggest substantial overlap with the diplomatic practises of the Mongolian homeland.¹⁵ The earliest of these translations, an immunity charter of Möngke Temür Khan, shows the continuation of the three-part initial protocol seen in Mongol decrees of the Great Khans:

13 Antoine Mostaert, Francis Woodman Cleaves, "Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 3/4 (1952): 419–506. 433.

14 Mostaert, Cleaves, "Trois documents mongols," 470.

15 Микрасим Абдуллахатович Усманов, *Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса XIII–XVI вв.* (Казань: Издательство казанского университета, 1979), 94–106.

вышняго бога силою
вышняя троица волею
Менгутемерьево слово¹⁶

‘By the might of the Highest God / by the will of the highest Trinity / the
word of Megnü Temür’

The puzzling element in the above-cited text is the seemingly Christian worldview it conveys. Since this immunity was issued to the Orthodox Church, one cannot exclude the possibility that the decree was deliberately drafted to accommodate the faith of its intended recipients. In any case, there is sufficient evidence that the chancelleries the Golden Horde continued to use initial protocols that were customary in Mongolia, China, and Iran. This argument is supported by two additional examples. It is noteworthy that, although both Özbeg Khan and Berdi Beg Khan – whose decrees are cited below – were adherents of Islam and strongly supported the spread of Islamic teachings and institutions within the territory of the Golden Horde, they retained the chancellery practice of their ‘infidel’ forefathers. The first example is a decree issued by Berdi Beg Khan in 1357, which has survived in a Slavic translation:

Бесмертнаго бога силою
и величеством из дед и прадед
Бердибеково слово¹⁷

‘By the might of immortal God / by the greatness from fathers and forefathers / the world of Berdi Beg’

As the example shows, the document invokes the ancestral spirits, a central element of shamanism. The following, a *yarlığ* of Özbeg khan from 1333 – preserved in a Latin translation and issued to Venetian merchants in Azov – reads as follows:

In virtute eterni Dei et sua magna pietate miserante Osbach verbum
nostrum¹⁸

16 Аркадий Павлович Григорьев, *Сборник ханских ярлыков русским митрополитам. Источниковедческий анализ золотоордынских документов* (Санктпетербург: Издательство Санктпетербургского университета, 2004), 15.

17 Григорьев, *Сборник ханских ярлыков*, 89.

18 Аркадий Павлович Григорьев, Борис Павлович Григорьев, *Коллекция золотоордынских документов XIV. века из Венеции* (Санктпетербург: Издательство С.-петербургского университета, 2002), 11.

‘By the virtue of Eternal God and his great merciful piety, Özbeg, our
word’

Although this initial protocol – like that of Möngke Temür Khan – contains elements that could easily be interpreted as Christian (*sua magna pietate miserante*), the first part clearly derives from the standard Mongolian phrase *möngke tengri-yin küçündür* or its Turkic equivalent *möngke tengri küçünde*.¹⁹ Evoking ‘Eternal God’ (*eternus Deus*) in the Latin text is not evidence of Christianisation, but rather a choice by the translator. In both Mongolian and Turkic languages, *tengri* meant not only ‘sky’ or ‘heaven’ but also carried the general meaning of ‘deity’ or ‘God’.²⁰ This interpretation is corroborated by Latin translations of Mongolian and Ilkhanid letters to European powers, in which the Turkic and Mongolian *tengri* is consistently rendered as ‘God’ (*Deus*).²¹

Islamic overtones did, of course, appear in initial protocols – of which there is only one surviving example. In Cānibek Khan’s decree to the Venetian merchants of Azov from 1347 – this time an Italian translation – the initial protocol features an unusual but clearly Islamic formulation:

*In nomine Domini et Maomethi, profete Tartarorum
la parola de Zanibech*²²

‘In the name of the Lord and Muḥammad, / the prophet the Tatars / the
word of Cānibeg’

Evoking a superior in the initial protocols of decrees, as seen in Ilkhanid examples, seems to have also been practiced in the Golden Horde. This is illustrated by two documents – two safe-conducts issued by Taydula, wife of Özbeg and mother of Cānı Beg Khan, who played a prominent role in Golden Horde politics and trade under the reigns

19 Apart from the morphological similarity, one has to add that every word of the Mongol phrase represents an early Turkic loanword in Mongolian, see: Gerard Clauson, *A Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford: Calderon Press, 1972), 350–351, 523–524, 693.

20 Clauson, *A Etymological Dictionary*, 523–524.

21 Voegelin, “The Mongol Orders of Submission,” 392–401. There is another *yarlıg* translated into Latin issued by Cānı Beg Khan, given to the same Venetian merchants in Azov. This has the same initial protocol as that of Özbeg Khan; the only difference is the more elaborate title of the former khan, see: Григорьев, Григорьев, *Коллекция золотоордынских документов*, 45.

22 Григорьев, Григорьев, *Коллекция золотоордынских документов*, 87.

of her son and grandson, Berdi Beg.²³ The safe-conduct begins with the following words:

*По Ченибекову ярлыку Таидулино слово*²⁴
‘According to Cānibeg’s *yarlıg*, the word of Taydula’

What stands out in this example is the use of the word *ярлык* instead of a term indicating ‘word’. As seen in Ilkhanid examples the term *yarlıg* mainly appears on charters issued by great khans residing in Mongolia and China, whom the Ilkhanids recognized as their superiors. The documents of Ilkhanid monarchs and officials, by contrast, tended to use Mong. *üge*/Turk. *söz* ‘word’. This must have been the case in the Golden Horde as well, as supported by the translations – Slavic *slovo*, Latin *verbum*, Italian *parola*. Moreover, these two documents also demonstrate that the scribes of Golden Horde chancelleries favored the use of Turkic phrases, namely *söz*. Surviving Golden Horde documents also show, as in the case of Ilkhanid material, that initial protocols consisting only of the third component – that is, the name and sometimes the title of the issuer – were common. This shortened form of initial protocol is characteristic for approximately half of the remaining material. Examples include orders and charters issued by khans, queen mothers and officials: *la parola di Berdibech*; ²⁵ *Таидулино слово*; ²⁶ *la parola de Ramadan*.²⁷ In all likelihood, behind the words *слово*, *verbum* or *parola* stood the Turkic phrase *sözüm* (‘my word’) or the majestic plural *sözümüz* (‘our word’).²⁸ The preference of Turkic over Mongolian is understandable, given that speakers of various Turkic languages and dialects constituted the majority of population under Coçid rule. Additionally, the oldest surviving original documents from the late fourteenth century – a letter of Toktamış Khan to the Lithuanian Grand Duke and Polish King

23 For the role of women in the court life of the Golden Horde see Ivanics Mária, “Die Frauen der Khane in der Golden Horde und in ihren Nachfolgerstaaten,” *Chronica: Annual of the Institute of History University of Szeged* 11 (2011): 211–220. On the political and economic activities of Taydula, see and Kovács Szilvia, “Taydula: a Golden Horde Queen and Patron of Christian Merchants,” in *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, Intellectuals*, eds. Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack and Francesca Fiaschetti (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 194–212.

24 Григорьев, *Сборник ханских ярлыков*, 58, 68.

25 Григорьев, Григорьев, *Коллекция золотоордынских документов*, 131.

26 *Ibidem*, 47.

27 *Ibidem*, 181.

28 Усманов, *Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса*, 186–191.

Jogaila (1392) and a donation letter by Temür Qutluğ Khan (1398), written in Uighur script and in Turkic – feature the initial protocols *Toktamış sözü* and *Temür Qutluğ sözü*, respectively, without mention of titles or regalia.²⁹

Here, we must address the use of the phrase *üge manu* ('our word') in broader terms. As we have seen, this phrase was a genuine hallmark of Mongol diplomatic practice across the empire. In Ilkhanid Iran, the Golden Horde, Central Asia, and their vassal states, the Turkic equivalents *sözü* (singular) and *sözümüz* (plural) appear to have been preferred. This formula became so deeply entrenched in chancellery practice of these regions that it continued to be used for many centuries by Turco-Mongolian dynasties even after the collapse of Mongol rule. Its usage persisted even in courts and bureaucratic structures where Persian was the preferred or dominant language of administration and literature.³⁰ The formula was extensively employed by monarchs in Timurid domains and succeeding Central Asian dynasties,³¹ in the courts of the Akkoyunlu and Karakoyunlu,³² by Safavid shahs,³³ to name just a few. One could even argue that this formula represents the single most influential chancellery practice to have survived long after Mongol political dominance.

29 See the documents in Akdeş Nimet Kurat, *Altın Ordu, Kırım ve Türkistan Hatlarına ait Yarlık ve Bitikler*. [Yarlıks and Documents belonging to the Golden Horde, Crimea and Türkistan] (İstanbul: Burhaneddin Matbaası, 1940), 147–148.

30 Fekete Lajos, "Arbeiten der Grusinischen Orientalistik auf dem Gebiete der Türkischen Und Persischen Paläographie und die Frage der Formel 'sözümüz,'" *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7/1 (1957): 1–20. Heribert Busse, *Untersuchungen zum Islamischen Kanzleiwesen an Hand turkmenischer und safawidischer Urkunden* (Kairo: Kommissionsverlag Sirović Bookshop, 1959), 30–31.

31 Busse, *Untersuchungen zum Islamischen Kanzleiwesen*, 30–31. Shirvan Mahendrarah-jah, "Two Original Decrees by Sultān-Husayn Bayqarā in the National Archives in Kabul," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 71/2 (2018): 161–178. John E. Woods, "Turco-Iranica II: Notes on a Timurid Decree of 1396/798," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43/4 (1984): 331–337.

32 Vladimir Minorsky, "A 'Soyūrgāl' of Qāsim b. Jahāngīr Aq-qoyunlu (903/1498)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies University of London* 9/4 (1939): 927–960. Gottfried Herrmann, "Ein Erlaß Tahmāsp I. von 934/1528," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 139/1 (1989): 104–119.

33 Ludwig Fekete, *Einführung in die persische Paläographie. 101 persische Dokumente*. Aus dem Nachlaß des Verfassers herausgegeben von G. Hazai (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1977).

The evolution of the initial protocol in the Crimean Khanate and the introductory *Sözüm / Sözümüz* formula

Shortly after the Crimean Khanate broke away from the core territories of the Golden Horde in the mid-fifteenth century, it came into contact with the nascent Ottoman Empire. The two states entered into a relationship that, for the Crimean side, evolved into an increasing dependency over the following centuries – a process that came to an end only in the second half of the eighteenth century. As a result of this long-lasting connection, the influence of Istanbul weighed heavily on the khanate's political, social, and cultural institutions and traditions, including numerous chancellery practices inherited from the Golden Horde.

An early *yarlığ* of Hâccî Girey Khan from 1453 – one of the earliest surviving Crimean Tatar documents – demonstrates a unique amalgamation of old Mongolian diplomatic customs and Islamic symbolism. The initial protocol, written above the main body of the text (the so-called 'honorific lift') according to old Mongol practice, reads as follows:

bi-smi l-lāhi rahmani r-raḥīm
bi-l-ḡuvveti ahadiyye ve-l-mu 'cizāti l-muḥamediiyye
mengü Tengri küçünde
Muḥammad resūlu l-lāh vilāyetinde
*Ḥâccî Girey sözüm*³⁴

'In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
 By the strength of oneness [of God] and the Miracles of Muhammad
 By the support of Muhammad, Messenger of God
 Ḥâccî Girey, my word'

As can be seen, the initial protocol still contains elements used in Mongol decrees in the thirteenth century: it invokes *mengü Tengri* ('eternal sky') and the *söz* ('word') of the issuer. However, the inclusion of Islamic articles of faith – much more pronounced in this period – makes it clear that the scribes and readers of the decree understood *Tengri* to refer to the God of Islam. In decrees and documents issued by Hâccî Girey's successors, a gradual transformation of the initial protocol becomes evident, both in visual presentation and content. The chancelleries of succeeding Crimean khans introduced references to Islamic faith and teachings that reflected Middle Eastern, particularly Ottoman, literary and bureaucratic traditions. These references could be brief – such as the Arabic word

34 Kurat, *Altın Ordu, Kırım*, 64–65.

huwa ('He'), meaning God and commonly used in Islamic contexts; the prayer *bi-smi l-lāhi r-rahmani r-rahīm* ('In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful!'); or the *ṣahāda*, i.e., *lā ilāha 'illā-llāh Muḥammadun rasūlu l-lāh* ('There is no god, but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God'). At times, the protocol also included the khan's proclamation of acting or commencing in the name of God.³⁵ In short, the initial protocol of Mongolian and Golden Horde charters evolved into a religious invocation in the classical sense of diplomatic studies.

What remained from the initial protocols of Genghisid documents was the line containing the name and title of the issuer and the formula *sözüm*. This part of Crimean documents is hard to place withing traditional framework of diplomatics; hence the article, following the example of Kołodziejczyk, shall refer to it as the *introductory sözüm/sözümüz* formula.³⁶

It is important to stress that the introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula was placed below the newly adopted classical Islamic invocations, but above the main body of the text, on the right side of the sheet, and cannot be identified with the *intitulatio* of the documents. The introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula displays a wide range of variations, but two general groups can be distinguished. The first group, characterised by its simplicity, was the universal introductory formula found in Coçid documents: it contains only the name of the issuer and the word *sözüm/sözümüz*. In the second group, more elaborate and lavish monarchic titles appear, among others such as *uluğ orda ulu(ğ) ḥānı* ('great khan of the Great Horde') or *Deşt-i Kıpçak barça Moğul pādīshāhı* ('the padishah of the Kipchak steppe and all the Mongols').³⁷ Usmanov observed that the appearance of such monarchic titles – referencing the Golden Horde (*Uluğ Orda*), the Kipchak Steppe, and the Mongols – began in the early

35 Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanat and Poland-Lithuania. International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th Century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2011), 314–321. One such proclamation in a Ruthenian translation reads as follows: "Почал есми в боже имя, што счастье роздае и жалует тых, которые братъство верне держать, и правду и слово свое полнят безо лсти и безъ хитрости, с чистого сердца! Царя Менликирееово слово." In translation: "I have commenced in the name of God, who gives and grants felicity to those who faithfully keep brotherhood, and who fulfill their oath and word without any deceit and fraud with a pure heart! The word of Mengli Gireey khan." See: Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 605, 608.

36 *Ibidem*, 342.

37 Усманов, *Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса*, 130; Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanat and Poland-Lithuania*, 342.

sixteenth century, specifically around 1502,³⁸ when Mengli Girey I Khan defeated his main rival, Şeyh Ahmed Khan, the leader of Great Horde ruling the steppes west of the Volga, and laid claim to the legacy of the Golden Horde.³⁹

In addition to these references, Islamic regalia also began to appear in the introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula during the sixteenth century. These included epithets such as *ebu l-feth* ('conqueror'), *es-sultān* ('the sultan'), and *el-ğāzī* ('the ghazi'). For example, Ġāzī Girey II Khan is known to have used both Golden Horde and Islamic titles in parallel: one version of his introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula includes a reference to the Great Horde (*Uluğ Orda*), while another reads: *ebu l-feth el-ğāzī Ġāzī Girey hān sözüm* ('The conqueror and *ğāzī*, Ġāzī Girey Khan, my word').⁴⁰

Male and female members of the Crimean khan's family regularly maintained correspondence with foreign powers and officials. The extant material highlights the role of *kalğas* and *nūreddīns* – second and third in command to the khan, usually his brothers, sons, or cousins – but also chief wives (*ulu biyim*, *hānī*), mothers (*ana biyim*), as well as sisters and daughters of the khan (mainly from the seventeenth century). They too made use of the introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula.⁴¹ In these letters, the formula is likewise situated below the *invocatio* and above

38 The intitulation of khans, if present, also reflect these claims. This invocation shows little variation through time and contains many archaic linguistic characteristics. A typical example of an intitulation of Cānibek Girey khan reads: *Uluğ orda ve Uluğ yurtning Deşt-i Kufçakning taht-i Kırımning ong kolning şol kolning köp tatarnıng ve köp noğayning tat bile tavğaçning ve tağ ara çerkeçning uluğ pādīşāhi bolğan Feridūn-i Kayhūsrev-kard sa'ādetli ve 'azametli Cānibek Girey hān*. In translation: "[I, the] great padishah of the Great Horde and the Great Yurt (the Turkic name of the Golden Horde – Cs.G.), the Kipchak Stepps, the throne of Crimea, of the right hand and the left hand (ie. traditional nomadic military divisions – Cs.G.), of many Tatars and many Noghays, of the tat (subject ethnic and religious minorities, such as Greeks, Armenians, Jewish communities, living on the Crimea – Cs.G.) and *tavğaç* (an archaic Turkic name indicating northern China – Cs.G.), and the Circassians living in the mountains, the Kayhusraw-like, the felicitous and magnificent Cānibek Girey Khan," Ivanics Mária, *A magyarorsági krími tatár oklevelek*. [Crimean Tatar Letters in Hungary] (Szeged: unpublished doctoral thesis, 1976), 32.

39 Усманов, *Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса*, 192–193, 202–204. For the events and their political impact see Vászary István, "The Crimean Khanate and the Great Horde (1440s–1500s). A Fight for Primacy," in *The Crimean Khanate between East and West (15th–18th Century)*, ed. Denise Klein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 13–26.

40 Усманов, *Абдуллахатович Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса*, 189, 190; Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 769, 777.

41 Усманов, *Абдуллахатович Жалованные акты Джучиева улуса*, 194, 202–203. Elżbieta Świećicka, "The Diplomatic Letters by Crimean Keräy Ladies to the Swedish Royal House," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 55/1 (2002): 1–35. 2–6.

the main text, just as in the case of the khans. Male family members included their name and honorific title *sulṭān* in the introductory formula; in Islamic Genghisid successor states, this title indicated a member of the ruling dynasty. In the correspondence of female relatives, however, the personal name of the sender is omitted, and the formula consists of the title – always with a first-person plural possessive suffix (i.e., ‘our’, the khan’s) and the word *sözümüz*. For example: *ana biyimiz ḥaḫretleri sözümüz* (‘Her Majesty’s, our queen mother’s word’); *ulu biyimiz ḥaḫretleri sözümüz* (‘Her Majesty’s, our first wife’s word’).⁴² There is some evidence of cases where the introductory formula evoked multiple ancestors or family members. A notable example appears in a peace treaty and donation *yarlık* of Muḥammad Girey Khan from 1517, which was corroborated by his son, Bahadır Girey sultan. The formula reads as follows:

Деда моего, цара Менъ Кгиреево слово, у отца моего, цара Магмет киреево слово, Богатырь солтаново слово, брата моего Алп Кирей солтаново слово⁴³

‘The word of my grandfather Mengli Girey, [also] the word of my father, Meḥmet (ie. Muḥammad) Girey, the word of [mine], Bahadır sultan, [and] the word of my brother, Alp Girey sultan.’

Such examples highlight the symbolic and legitimizing importance of the introductory *sözüm* / *sözümüz* formula.

It is important to point out that the use of the introductory *sözüm* / *sözümüz* formula was common in diplomatic correspondence with Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy, Transylvania, Denmark, Sweden, and other states, as well as in documents issued for administrative purposes. There is, however, an exception, in which it was consistently avoided – namely, in correspondence with sultans and officials of the Ottoman Empire. This fact, without doubt, reflects the superiority of the Ottomans over the Crimean Khanate. The hierarchical nature of this relationship is further evidenced by the strong influence of Ottoman chancelleries on the Crimean ones, such as the early adoption of Ottoman Turkish grammatical forms, lexicon, diplomatic formulas, and many other elements. With regard to the introductory *sözüm* / *sözümüz* formula of khans, scholarship has noted a subtle visual shift beginning in the first half of the sixteenth century. The letters of the *sözüm* / *sözümüz* formula began to appear more densely packed, and letters composed of vertical lines were elongated

⁴² Świącicka, *The Diplomatic Letters*, 11–17.

⁴³ Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 633, 636.

and extended above all other letters.⁴⁴ This visual change leads us to the appearance of an Ottoman corroborating sign known as the *tuğra*.

The way towards a Crimean *tuğra*

Since Ottoman *tuğras* are well researched, only a brief description is provided here to help the reader understand how the introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula – this old Mongolian legacy – evolved into a distinct Crimean *tuğra* under the influence of Ottoman chancellery practices.

The *tuğra* was the traditional corroborating sign of imperial documents, decrees, orders, and other official acts issued by the sultans of the Ottoman Empire from the fourteenth century until 1927. A *tuğra* was placed beneath the invocation and above the main body of the document. The earliest examples of these corroborating signs were simple, consisting of the name of monarch and his father's name. As a distinguishing visual element, three vertical lines were drawn high above the script, symbolizing a *tuğ*, or 'standard'. These lines later evolved into a characteristic stylized form, which included the name and patronym of the sultan, the title *khan*, and the Arabic expression *muzafer dā'ima* ('ever victorious'), one element placed above the other. The vertically drawn *tuğ* remained a central element of *tuğras*, but was later joined by additional ornamental components: an S-shaped flourish called *zülfe* ('beard'), two upward-curving loops on the left side known as *beyze* ('egg'), which passed through the body of the *tuğra* and ended in on the right side in pointed stroke called *hancer* ('dagger'). The term *dā'imā* was inscribed within these loops. Due to the significance as a personal sign of the sultan, *tuğras* were usually drawn by specialist calligraphers known as *tuğra-keş* in the imperial court.⁴⁵

Scholarship connects the above-mentioned visual shift of the initial *sözüm/sözümüz* formula – the tightly packed *ductus* of the text and elongated vertical letters – to the adoption of Ottoman chancellery practices by Crimean Tatar scribes. Kołodziejczyk even introduced the term "proto-*tuğra*" to categorise this evolution of the initial *sözüm/sözümüz*

44 Ivanics Mária, "Die Beglaubigungsmittel der krimtatarischen Urkunden," in *Proceedings of the 35th Permanent International Altaistic Conference September 12–17, 1992 Taipei, China*, ed. Chieh-hsien Chên (Taipei: National Taiwan University, Center for Chinese Studies Materials, 1992), 175–184. 178. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 345–346.

45 For a comprehensive work on Ottoman *tuğras* see Suha Umur, *Osmanlı padişah tuğraları* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1980).

formula.⁴⁶ It is important to stress that the evolutionary process – from initial formula through proto-*tuğras* to fully developed Crimean *tuğras* in the Ottoman style – was gradual, lasting for several decades, from approximately the 1550s to the 1630s.⁴⁷ By the end of this process, a distinct Crimean *tuğra* had emerged, both in terms of visual appearance and structural composition.

The elements of the Crimean *tuğras* were arranged in a triangular shape, with the components placed one atop the other. Similarly, instead of multiple elongated letters, as was the case in proto-*tuğras*, Crimean scribes standardised the use of three *tuğs*, to which *zülfe*s may or may not have been added. There are, however, minor differences between the Ottoman and Crimean examples, as well as subtle variations. While some Crimean *tuğras* display all decorative elements found in Ottoman versions, others are drawn with slight modifications: many Crimean examples lack the *beyze*, and instead of curving upwards and ending on the right-hand side of the sheet in a *hancer*, the line goes vertically to the left side reaching the margin of sheet. There is no consistency in the position of the Crimean *tuğras* on the sheet. Some, like Ottoman ones, are situated at the centre of the sheet above the main body of the text; others were placed at the right-hand margin, where the initial *sözüm/sözümüz* formula and the proto-*tuğra* was traditionally located.⁴⁸

Differences aside, Crimean *tuğras* show a clear resemblance to Ottoman ones in terms of structure and appearance. In terms of content, major change to the initial *sözüm/sözümüz* formula was the inclusion of patronymic of the owner with Arabic *bin* ('son of'). Although limited in number, some Crimean scribes – for example, those employed by Cānıbek Girey Khan – experimented with the inclusion of the phrase *muzaḫfar dā'ima*, a fact that clearly shows the intent to imitate Ottoman practice. Regardless of these experiments, the established pattern of Crimean *tuğras* included the inherited phrase of Mongol and Golden Horde *yarlıqs sözümüz* ('our word') in majestic plural. The phrase was situated on the upper-left side of the *tuğra*, where Ottoman ones have the word *dā'imā* – a fact that shows a conscious decision to incorporate indigenous chancellery traditions into newly adopted Ottoman model.⁴⁹

46 Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 346.

47 Сагид Фаизов, "Тугры крымско ханского двора XVII – начала XVIII ст. в протоколе и художественного стурктуре грамот ханов и принцев," in *Марра mundi. Збірник наукових праць на пошану Ярослава Дашикевича за нагоди його 70-річчя* (Львів–Київ–Нью-Йорк: Видавництво М. П. Коць, 1996), 427–434.

48 Ivanics, *Die Beglaubigungsmittel*, 180–184.

49 *Ibidem*, 180.

In the Ottoman Empire, the use of *tuğras* was the exclusive prerogative of the reigning sultans. The power structure of the Crimean Khanate, however, was much more decentralised; as a result, not only the khans but also the *kalğas* and *nūreddīns* (second and third dignity after the khan) issued their decrees and documents, each corroborated by their personal *tuğra*, bearing the title *sulṭān*, instead of *hān*, optionally including the word *ḥazretlerimiz* ‘our majesty’.⁵⁰ In the same period as the Crimean *tuğras* evolved, ladies of the Girey-dynasty, however, kept using the well-established introductory *sözüm/sözümüz* formula according to customs previously described.

Conclusion

The evolution of the initial protocol found in early imperial Mongol decrees into the Crimean *tuğra* represents a gradual yet striking example of cultural and institutional continuity intertwined with change. As demonstrated in the article, both the Golden Horde and later Crimean chancelleries retained key elements of their Mongol heritage, while simultaneously incorporating Islamic and Ottoman diplomatic conventions. Features such as the *honorific lift* and the use of the phrase *sözüm/sözümüz* highlight how shifts in religious and political affiliations reshaped long-standing administrative traditions. This blend of traditions resulted in a uniquely Crimean practice – one that preserved reverence for the Genghisid past within an Islamic and Ottoman framework. Nonetheless, Crimean *tuğras* remain a little-studied topic, that deserves further research in order to fully grasp the phenomenon Mongol cultural continuity and change.

50 Examples of *kalğa* and *nūreddīn tuğras* are (still) small in number. For examples already published, see: Josef Matuz, *Krimtatarische Urkunden im Reichsarchiv zu Kopenhagen, mit historisch-diplomatischen und sprachlichen Untersuchungen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1976). Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 936, 942. Further examples of such *tuğras* can be found in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, I. HA Rep. II Geheimer Rat Auswärtige Beziehungen Akten Nr. 10517/4, Nr. 10517/6, Nr. 10517/8, etc. A Crimean Tatar chronicle written in the mid-18th century, ‘Abdulḡaffār Kırımī’s *’Umdetü l-aḥbār* ‘Essence of History’ claims that *beys* of the Şīrīns, the leading clan of the Crimean Tatar tribe aristocracy also issued documents with ‘small *tuğras*’: Абдулгаффар Кырыми, *Умдет ал-ахбар. Книга I: Транскрипция, факсимиле*. Дерья Дерин Пашаоглу (Казань: Институт истории им. Ш. Марджани АН РТ, 2014), 223–224. To my knowledge, no such document has been found yet.

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