




The History of Moghul – Oirat Relations (from the Mid-14th to the Early 16th Century)

S. Akhmetkul^a  , G. Zhapekova^a , Z. Dzhandosova^b 

^aEurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov, Astana, Kazakhstan

^bSt Petersburg University, St. Petersburg, Russia

^aakhmetkulsergazy@gmail.com

Abstract: The history of the Moghulistan state remains an underexplored area of study in medieval historiography, despite its significant role in understanding the political, economic, and cultural processes that shaped Central Asia in the post-Mongol era. This article analyzes the political, ethnic, and economic relations between the Moghuls and the Oirats from the mid-14th to the early 16th century. The main goal of the study is to identify and systematize information on the nature of interactions between these two major nomadic confederations. To achieve this goal, the authors used key historical sources such as Persian works *Zafar-nama* by ‘Ali Yazdi, *Tarikh-i Rashidi* by Muhammad-Haidar, the Chagatai work *Babur-nama* by Babur, the Chinese chronicle *Ming Shi*, and the Mongolian chronicle *Erdeniin Tobchi* by Sagang Sechen. In addition, modern scholarly literature on the political and cultural history of the region was reviewed. The research is based on descriptive, comparative-historical, and source-critical methods, allowing for a more nuanced view of Moghul–Oirat interactions. The findings reveal that their relations were complex and often contradictory. Alongside frequent military conflicts, there were also periods of peaceful coexistence, alliances, and ethno-cultural exchange, which illustrate the multifaceted nature of their interaction. One of the key causes of tension was the struggle for control over strategic trade routes – especially the region of Hami, a crossroads of major caravan paths – highlighting both economic and political stakes. Special attention is given to the ethno-religious factors, such as the migration of Moghul tribes to the Oirats in the 15th century. Some scholars interpret this as a result of presumed shared ancestry. Furthermore, internal religious divisions among the Oirats played a role in fueling conflict, culminating in the 1472 raid on Moghulistan. In conclusion, the study of Moghul–Oirat relations provides valuable insights into the complexity of historical developments in Central Asia. It contributes to a broader understanding of the mechanisms of nomadic state-building and regional politics in the post-Mongol period. This topic holds great potential for future comparative research on steppe empires across Eurasia and offers a richer insight into the region’s medieval past.

Keywords: Moghuls; Oirats; Moghulistan; Ming China; Ming Shi; Tarikh-i Rashidi; Erdeniin Tobchi; Majmu‘ al-Tawarikh

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История могуло-ойратских взаимоотношений (середина XIV века – начало XVI века)

С. Ахметкул^а, Г. Жапекова^а, З. Джандосова^б

^а*Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан*

^б*Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия*

Аннотация. История государства Могулистан остается недостаточно изученной областью средневековой историографии, несмотря на её важное значение для понимания политических, экономических и культурных процессов в Центральной Азии в постмонгольскую эпоху. Данная статья посвящена анализу политических, этнических и экономических взаимоотношений между могулами и ойратами в период с середины XIV до начала XVI века. Цель исследования – выявление и систематизация сведений о характере связей между двумя крупными кочевыми объединениями, отраженных в ряде ключевых источников. Для достижения поставленной цели авторы использовали разнообразные исторические документы: исторические хроники на персидском языке «Зафар-наме» Али Йазди и «Тарих-и Рашиди» Мухаммада Хайдара, мемуары Захир-ад-Дина Мухаммада Бабура «Бабур-наме», написанные на чагатайском языке, китайскую хронику «Мин ши» и монгольскую летопись Саган-Сэцэна «Эрдэнийн Тобчи». Дополнительно привлекалась современная научная литература, позволяющая расширить взгляд на сложные процессы, происходившие в регионе. Применение описательного, сравнительно-исторического и источниковедческого методов позволило более глубоко раскрыть многообразие форм взаимодействия между могулами и ойратами. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что отношения между двумя народами носили сложный и противоречивый характер. Наряду с частыми вооруженными столкновениями, имели место периоды мирного сосуществования, союзнические договоры и этнокультурное сотрудничество, что подчеркивает многогранность их взаимодействия. Значительным фактором противостояния стала борьба за контроль над стратегически важными торговыми маршрутами, особенно в районе Хами, где пересекаются основные караванные пути и где на кону стояли как экономические интересы, так и политическая власть. Особое внимание в статье уделено этнорелигиозным аспектам, связанным с миграцией могульских племен к ойратам в XV веке. Это может быть объяснено общим происхождением этих групп, что добавляет дополнительное измерение к анализу могульско-ойратских взаимоотношений. Внутренняя религиозная напряженность среди ойратов также способствовала возникновению конфликтных ситуаций, кульминацией которых стал набег ойратов на территорию Могулистана в 1472 году. Таким образом, проведенный анализ демонстрирует, что сложность исторических процессов в Могулистане определяется не только военными столкновениями, но и активным культурным обменом, отраженным в письменных источниках и археологических данных. Полученные результаты могут стать прочной основой для дальнейших сравнительных исследований степных регионов Евразии и способствовать пересмотру традиционных взглядов на историю Центральной Азии, что подчеркивает высокую актуальность изучения Могулистана для понимания глобальных исторических процессов.

Ключевые слова: могулы; ойраты; Моғулистан; минский Китай; «Мин ши»; «Тарих-и Рашиди»; «Эрдэнийн-тобчи»; «Маджму ат-таварих»

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Моғол-ойрат қарым-қатынастарының тарихы (XIV ғасырдың ортасынан XVI ғасырдың басына дейін)

С. Ахметқұл^а, Г. Жапекова^а, З. Жандосова^б

^аЛ.Н. Гумилева атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан

^бСанкт-Петербург мемлекеттік университеті, Санкт-Петербург, Ресей

Аңдатпа: Моғолстан мемлекетінің тарихы ортағасырлық тарихнамада жеткілікті зерттелмеген сала болып табылады, сонда да ол моңғолдардан кейінгі дәуірдегі Орталық Азиядағы саяси, экономикалық және мәдени процестерді терең түсінуде ерекше маңызға ие. Осы мақала XIV ғасырдың ортасынан XVI ғасырдың басына дейінгі кезеңде моғолдар мен ойраттардың саяси, этникалық және экономикалық қарым-қатынастарын талдауға арналған. Зерттеудің мақсаты – екі ірі көшпелі бірлестіктің арасындағы байланыстардың сипатын анықтап, жүйелеп, оларды бірқатар негізгі деректерде көрініс табатын тарихи құжаттар арқылы зерттеу. Мақсатқа жету үшін авторлар Әли Йаздидің парсы тіліндегі «Зафар-наме» еңбегін, Мұхаммед Хайдардың «Тарих-и Рашиди» еңбегін, Захир-ад-Дин Мұхаммед Бабурдың шағатай тіліндегі «Бабур-наме» мемуарларын, қытайлық «Мин ши» шежіресін және Саган-Сэцэннің моңғолша «Эрдэнийн Тобчи» жылнамасын қолданды. Сонымен қатар, заманауи ғылыми әдебиеттердің көмегімен өңірде орын алған күрделі тарихи процестерге қатысты көзқарас кеңейтілді. Сипаттамалық, салыстырмалы-тарихи және дерекқорлық әдістерді пайдалану моғолдар мен ойраттардың өзара әрекеттесуінің алуан түрлі формаларын тереңірек ашуға мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеу нәтижелері екі халық арасындағы қарым-қатынастардың күрделі әрі қайшылықты екенін көрсетеді. Жиі қайталанатын қарулы қақтығыстармен қатар, бейбіт қатар өмір сүру кезеңдері, одақтастық келісімдер мен этномәдени ынтымақтастықтың да болуы олардың қарым-қатынастарының көпқырлылығын дәлелдейді. Қарсыласудың маңызды факторы ретінде стратегиялық маңызы бар сауда жолдарын бақылау үшін күрес, әсіресе Хами өңірінде, негізгі керуен жолдарының тоғысқан жерінде экономикалық мүдделер мен саяси билікке талас айқын көрінді. Мақалада сондай-ақ, XV ғасырда моғол тайпаларының ойраттарға көшуімен байланысты этно-діни аспектілерге ерекше назар аударылды. Кейбір зерттеушілер бұл құбылысты осы топтардың ортақ тегінен туындаған деп бағалайды, осылайша олардың қарым-қатынастарын талдауға қосымша өлшем береді. Ойраттар ішіндегі ішкі діни шиеленістер де қақтығыстардың пайда болуына ықпал етті, оның ең айқын мысалы – 1472 жылы Моғолстан аумағына жасалған шабуыл. Осылайша, жүргізілген талдау Моғолстандағы тарихи процестердің күрделілігінің тек қарулы қақтығыстардан емес, сонымен қатар жазбаша деректер мен археологиялық мәліметтерде көрініс тапқан белсенді мәдени алмасудан да қалыптасатынын дәлелдейді. Алынған нәтижелер Еуразия далалық аймақтарын салыстырмалы түрде зерттеуге және Орталық Азия тарихына

дәстүрлі көзқарасты қайта қарауға мықты негіз болмақ. Бұл Моғолстанды зерттеудің жаһандық тарихи процестерді түсінудегі жоғары маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, бұл зерттеу болашақтағы ғылыми ізденістер үшін жаңа перспективалар ашып, аймақтың тарихын жан-жақты талдауға ықпал етеді.

Түйін сөздер: моғолдар; ойраттар; Моғолстан; миндік Қытай; «Мин ши»; «Тарих-и Рашиди»; «Эрдэнийн-тобчи»; «Маджму ат-тауарих»

Introduction

From the earliest days of Oirat domination in Western Mongolia at the end of the 14th century, relations between the Moghuls and the Oirats were far from straightforward. Despite occasional lulls, Moghul–Oirat armed clashes took place throughout almost the entire existence of the Moghulistan state. The principal cause of these confrontations was economic, as both sides fought fiercely over the principal trade routes and the cities at their crossroads. Alongside the struggle for economic dominance, religious factors also influenced Moghul–Oirat conflicts. Differences in faith deepened divisions and served as an additional incentive for military actions.

The aim of this study is to identify the distinctive features, stages, and overall character of Moghul – Oirat relations from the mid-fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, with particular attention to their political, military, and religious dimensions. To accomplish this aim, the research sets the following objectives.

(1) Analyze the activities of key actors – namely leaders and khans – and evaluate their roles in shaping bilateral relations by examining the political and military contacts between Moghulistan and the Oirats during the period in question.

(2) Determine the influence of the religious factor on the evolution of conflict and cooperation between the two sides, in order to clarify the repercussions of Moghul–Oirat interaction for the political map of Central Asia.

(3) Propose a periodization of Moghul – Oirat relations on the basis of primary sources and the events under review.

The state of Moghulistan arose in what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia, in close proximity to Oirat territories. This geographic adjacency heightened tensions between the two polities. Each side sought to expand its influence and secure stable economic connections, while simultaneously curbing the opportunities of its rival. The quest to gain and maintain authority over profitable trading centers was closely tied to collecting customs revenues, set favorable trade regulations, and regulate the flow of valuable resources.

Beyond the economic dimension, religious differences also played a substantial role. Commercial and political disagreements remained the primary drivers of conflicts. However, differences in religious practices and beliefs compounded these frictions and were frequently used to legitimize military campaigns. In this respect, religion became yet another instrument of influence, fostering population mobilization and bolstering the power of rulers.

The timeline of these hostilities spans nearly the entire existence of Moghulistan. Throughout this period, the state underwent periods of ascendancy and decline, as well as shifts in dynastic rule and internal political alignments. Nevertheless, despite such domestic reorganizations and transitions of power, the external threat posed by the Oirats (and vice versa) remained a persistent challenge, necessitating not only military measures but also diplomatic initiatives.

Geopolitical, economic, and religious considerations combined to make Moghul–Oirat relations multifaceted and unpredictable. Occasional episodes of reconciliation – when alliances were formed – might give way to fierce struggles that persisted for years. Consequently, the region of present-day Central Asia in the late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries repeatedly became a stage for military campaigns, city sieges, and negotiations aimed at political settlements.

Examining the history of these conflicts offers deeper insights into the distinctive characteristics of medieval Central Asia. This region, inhabited by both settled and nomadic peoples, fostered a unique cultural and political mosaic, in which diverse economic structures and methods of legitimizing authority coexisted. Understanding how and why tensions arose between the Moghuls and the Oirats is crucial not only for clarifying internal political processes but also for illuminating broader patterns of inter-state relations and economic competition across the Eurasian continent.

Thus, the subject of Moghul–Oirat interactions in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries extends beyond isolated battles and military campaigns. It encompasses factors ranging from conflicts over trade revenues to the impact of religious differences, and it demonstrates how regional disputes could escalate into large-scale confrontations with far-reaching consequences. Investigating these developments enriches our understanding of Moghulistan’s multifaceted political history, as well as the intricate interplay of economic, religious, and power-related interests that shaped the destinies of entire states.

Methods and Materials

The primary sources used for this study include the medieval Persian chronicle *Tarikh-i Rashidi* (1542-1546) by Muhammad-Haidar (905AH/1499 – 958AH/1551), the Chinese historical record *Ming Shi* (1739), and the Mongolian chronicle *Erdeniin Tobchi* (1662) by Sagang Sechen (1604–after 1641). These works are invaluable repositories of information for understanding the complex interactions between the Moghuls and the Oirats. Drawing upon these sources, numerous scholars have analyzed historical events that shed light on the multifaceted nature of Moghul–Oirat relations.

In the course of examining the political, military, and religious dimensions of Moghul–Oirat relations, a multidisciplinary suite of historical methods was employed, grounded both in source criticism and in the socio-political reconstruction of processes. The historico-genetic method was applied to trace the origins and evolution of interactions between Moghulistan and the Oirats. This approach enabled us to reconstruct early contact forms, identify the causes for the conflict emergence, and understand how political authority was institutionalized under external pressures. The comparative-historical method helped identify similarities and differences in the political practices of the Oirats and the Moghuls, as well as in their attitudes toward Islam and Buddhism. These comparisons highlighted the particularities of each khanate’s internal policy that influenced patterns of conflict and alliance. Semiotic and discursive analysis of narrative sources (notably genealogical accounts and chronicle episodes) facilitated the identification of symbolic codes of power, religious identity, and the sacral status of the khan. Spatial analysis provided insight into the geopolitical context: territorial shifts, the relocation of courts, and strategic flashpoints such as Turfan, Aksu, Kashgar, Zhetisu. Finally, a socio-cultural and religious-studies approach to the role of Islam, shamanism, and Buddhism

in motivating the parties revealed how religious differences were transformed into ideological and political barriers. Conversely, religious differences sometimes served to consolidate elite cohesion – particularly through the Islamization of the Oirat aristocracy and its ramifications for internal tribal struggle.

Literature Review

The history of Moghul–Oirat relations has been extensively documented in both classical and contemporary scholarly works. Prominent historians such as Emil Bretschneider, Dmitry D. Pokotilov, Vasily V. Barthold, Konstantin I. Petrov, Ilya Ya. Zlatkin, and Klaudia A. Pishchulina have conducted in-depth analyses of the political and cultural interactions between the Moghuls and the Oirats. Their research offers a detailed accounts of the dynamics that shaped the complex and often turbulent nature of relations between these two groups.

In addition to these foundational studies, recent research by Kalmyk scholars such as Dorji G. Kukeev and Baatr U. Kitinov has introduced fresh perspectives to the discussion. These modern studies delve deeper into the role of economic factors, exploring how competition over trade routes, pasturelands, and other resources influenced the course of Moghul–Oirat relations. They also shed light on the ethnic identities and religious beliefs of the interactions, revealing how identity and belief systems contributed to both conflict and cooperation.

Of particular note are the works of Ilya Ya. Zlatkin, including his seminal book, *The History of the Dzungar Khanate* (Zlatkin 1983), which provides a comprehensive examination of the rise and expansion of Oirat power in Central Asia. Similarly, Dorji G. Kukeev's doctoral dissertation (Kukeev 2008), which focuses on the history of the Oirats from the 13th to 16th centuries, emphasizes the deep and sustained ties between the Oirats and Moghulistan. His research underscores the importance of economic rivalry as a key driver of tensions, suggesting that behind many political confrontations lay competition for dominance over trade and control of strategically important territories.

Together, these classical and contemporary studies contribute to a fuller understanding of the long-standing and multifaceted relationship between the Moghuls and the Oirats. They highlight the necessity of approaching this historical subject not only through political and military narratives but also through the lenses of economic motivations, cultural interactions, and religious influences.

Results

For the purposes of systematization, the following periods in the history of Moghul–Oirat relations have been distinguished:

- I. The Onset of Moghul–Oirat Relations and the Establishment of Oirat Hegemony (1360-1399)
- II. Active Conflict and Religious Tension (1399-1462)
- III. Temporary Stabilization and Influence (1462-1487)
- IV. The Final Surge of Moghul Activity and the Decline of Relations (1487-1504)

I. The Onset of Moghul–Oirat Relations and the Establishment of Oirat Hegemony (1360–1399)

Several scholars, including Ilya Ya. Zlatkin and Dorji G. Kukeev, suggest that Moghul–Oirat relations were established during the reign of Khan Tughluq Timur (Ruler of Moghulistan, 748AH/1347 – 764AH/1362–1363). Zlatkin notes that some Turkic sources mention unsuccessful Oirat raids on Moghulistan during Tughluq Timur's rule at the end of the 14th century (Zlatkin 1983: 27). However, Zlatkin does not specify these Turkic sources, and given that Tughluq Timur died in 764AH/1362–1363, these attacks likely occurred during the reign of his son Khizr Khoja (791AH/1389 – 802AH/1399–1400). Nevertheless, an interesting fact from Tughluq Timur's biography is worth to be noted. Muhammad-Haidar Dughlat, in *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, recounts a Moghul legend stating that the Dughlat amir Bulaji brought Tughluq Timur from the Kalmyks at the age of sixteen (Dughlat 1895: 23). However, Muhammad Haidar provides no further information about Tughluq Timur's life or activities during his sojourn among the Kalmyks. Kukeev, for his part, explains Tughluq Timur's presence among the Oirats by noting that his grandfather and great-grandfather maintained allied relations with them (Kukeev 2008: 72). Also, Kukeev's suggestion that Oirat Kereits served in the Moghul army under Tughluq Timur is based on a misunderstanding: the Kereits in question were in fact Moghuls, not Oirats. In his 2008 study Kukeev attributes the leadership of the Kereit tribal cavalry in Tughluq Timur's first Mawarannahr campaign (761AH/1360) to Hajji Bek (Kukeev 2008: 72), when Tughluq Timur commanded the Kereits, and Hajji Bek led the Arkenuts (Yazdi 2008: 20). Although Veniamin P. Yudin later listed the Kereits among Moghul forces – citing their involvement in Tughluq Timur's campaigns, Amir Timur's (772AH/1370 – 808AH/1405) expedition (772AH/1371) against the Kereits near Almaty, and the appearance of a Kereit leader in Ulugh Beg's 825AH/1425 expedition against Moghulistan (Yudin 2001: 73) – these sources do not support Kukeev's notion of an Oirat Kereit presence. Rather, they confirm that the Kereits were a Moghul tribe whose members occasionally allied with Moghul rulers, without any evidence of an Oirat affiliation.

Sources do not specify the year when Khizr Khoja Khan's reign began. According to Barthold, Khizr Khoja – who was saved by Amir Khudaidad Dughlat (754AH/1353 – 836AH/1433) from Qamar ad-Din (767AH/1366 – 792/1390) – was recognized as Khan of Moghulistan around 1389 (Barthold 1963: 82). British scholars W. Erskine, E. Oliver, and N. Elias also mark the beginning of Khizr Khoja's rule as 1389 (Erskine 1854: 42; Oliver 1888: 107; Dughlat 1895: 39). In 1390, Khizr Khoja began consolidating his authority in Moghulistan when Timur's troops, sent to pursue Qamar ad-Din, forced the usurper amir out. Timur, being preoccupied with his western campaigns, did not impede Khizr Khoja's restoration of Chagataid khanate authority. Barthold notes that in 799AH/1397 Khizr Khoja sent his eldest son, Sham'-i-Jahan (802AH/1399–1400 – 810AH/1407–1408), as an envoy to Timur, who requested and subsequently married Khizr Khoja's daughter, Tavakkul-aga, giving her the title *Kichik-Khanum* at Timur's court (Barthold 1963: 84; Atygayev et al. 2024b: 27). With the western border relatively secure, Khizr Khoja pursued active policies in the east. Muhammad Haidar reports Khizr Khoja's successful campaign against the border towns Kara-Khoja and Turfan, which resulted in the forced conversion of their inhabitants to Islam (Dughlat 1895: 52). According to the Chinese source Ming Shi, Khizr Khoja exchanged several diplomatic missions with the Ming emperor starting in 793AH/1391, indicating tense bilateral relations (Bretschneider 2000: 236). Though written sources do not

explicitly mention clashes between Khizr Khoja's forces and the Oirats, his activities in eastern border areas could have provoked Oirat responses.

Ming Shi provides the earliest accounts of the Oirats following the Yuan dynasty's collapse in 1368, describing them as a Mongolian tribe living to the west of the Eastern Mongols. In the early Ming period, the Oirats united under Mengke-Timur, a former Yuan official. After Mengke-Timur's death, power among the Oirats was divided among Ma-ha-mu (Mahmud), Tai-ping, and Ba-tu-bo-lo ([Bretschneider](#) 2000: 161). Mengke-Timur, called Gui-li-chi in *Ming Shi* and Ugechi-Khashiga in Mongolian sources, is considered the same figure by Kukeev ([Kukeev](#) 2015: 415). Researchers differ on Mengke-Timur's sub-ethnic identity. *Erdeniin Tobchi* identifies the Kerguts among the "four Oirats," whom Konstantin I. Petrov classifies as Kyrgyz ([Petrov](#) 1961: 27), whereas H. Howorth associates the Kerguts with the Kereits ([Howorth](#) 1876: 351–352). Conversely, M. Courant identifies Ugechi-Khashiga as a Torghut prince ([Courant](#) 2014: 13).

In 1399, a pivotal event occurred: Oirat leader Mengke-Timur killed the East Mongol khan Elbek and unified the Oirats and Eastern Mongols under his rule. Dmitry D. Pokotilov identifies this year as marking "the loss of independence by East Mongol khans and the onset of Oirat hegemony" ([Pokotilov](#) 1893: 15). Yet, Mengke-Timur's authority was not absolute; significant opposition arose from other Oirat leaders. Kukeev clarifies the complex political dynamics of the Oirats and East Mongols, noting that in 1403 Gui-li-chi (also known as Ugechi-Khashiga, i.e., Mengke-Timur), allied with East Mongol nobility led by Aruktai, killed Gün Timur and seized the throne (1403–1408). This alliance was actively opposed by Mahmud, Tai-ping, and Batu-bolot ([Kukeev](#) 2008: 85).

II. Active Conflict and Religious Tension (1399–1462)

During this period, Sham'-i-Jahan (1399–1408), the son of Khizr Khoja, ruled Moghulistan. He ascended the throne in 1399 following a victorious succession struggle against his brothers. According to Klaudia A. Pishchulina, "he attempted to combat the Timurids and reclaim the western part of Moghulistan (the Ashpara, Yanghi-Taraz region) occupied during Timur's preparation for a campaign against China" ([Pishchulina](#) 1977: 93). After Timur's death (807AH/1405), Sham'-i-Jahan aimed to conquer Mawarannahr and in 809AH/1407 dispatched an embassy to China, seeking an alliance against the Timurids ([Barthold](#) 1963: 84; [Pishchulina](#) 1977: 94). According to *Ming Shi*, Sham'-i-Jahan sent an embassy with gifts to the Ming court just one year after ascending the throne ([Bretschneider](#) 2000: 239). Meanwhile, in 1405, Mongol Khan Guilichi (Mengke-Timur, Ugechi-Khashiga) poisoned Anko-Timur, ruler of the principality of Hami, which was contested by the Ming Dynasty, Moghuls, and Oirats. Consequently, Sham'-i-Jahan initiated war against Guilichi ([Bretschneider](#) 2000: 180, 239). Sham'-i-Jahan likely emerged victorious, as *Ming Shi* mentions the emperor expressing gratitude and requesting Sham'-i-Jahan to maintain good relations with Hami's new ruler, Toto ([Bretschneider](#) 2000: 239).

Drawing on Chinese sources, H. Howorth notes that in 1405, Alutai (Aruktaï) and his allies, including Mahamu, attacked and forced Guilichi, the usurper, to flee ([Howorth](#) 1876: 353). As a result, Alutai installed Uljay-Timur (1405–1412), a descendant of the Yuan emperors, as the Mongol khan. Despite his defeat, Guilichi remained leader of the Kergut Oirats. Petrov offers an interesting perspective, suggesting that Ugechi-Khashiga was compelled to oppose the strengthening Moghul Sham'-i-Jahan Khan due to their mutual claims over Hami and Sham'-i-Jahan's alliance with Uljay-Timur. Around 810AH/1408, the Eastern Mongol and Moghul armies

defeated Ugechi-Khashiga near Bishibali and installed Uljay-Timur as khan (Petrov 1961: 30). Kukeev shares a similar view, indicating that during this period, Eastern Mongols also established relations with Moghulistan. A coalition of Eastern Mongols, Moghulistan, and Ming China confronted the Oirat alliance of Mengke-Timur and Aruktai (Kukeev 2008: 74). According to *Ming Shi*, Sham'-i-Jahan died in 810AH/1408, succeeded by his younger brother as khan (Bretschneider 2000: 240).

According to Barthold, Muhammad Khan (810AH/1408 – 818AH/1415–1416), the younger brother of Khan Sham'-i-Jahan, sent an embassy to Shahrukh Mirza (the ruler of the Timurid empire, 811AH/1409 – 850AH/1447) in the early years of his reign to demonstrate submission yet simultaneously supported rebellious amirs in Mawarannahr (Barthold 1963: 84). Barthold also asserts that under Muhammad Khan, the Moghuls nearly went to war with the Oirats, which was prevented only through mediation by Ming China (Barthold 1963: 86). Significant details of this event are given in *Ming Shi*: “In 1410, imperial envoys heading towards Sa-ma-khan passed through Bi-shi-ba-li and were warmly received by Ma-ha-ma, who in the following year sent an embassy to the Chinese court offering fine horses and a leopard. When the embassy returned, it was accompanied by An, who brought silk garments embroidered with gold for the King. At this time, the envoy from Wa-la (Oirats) complained that Ma-ha-ma was arming himself for an attack on Wa-la. The Emperor sent a warning to him” (Bretschneider 2000: 240). Although this account does not specify which Oirat leader sent the envoy, the event clearly took place around 1411–1412. Mongol and Chinese sources indicate that during this period Ming China closely allied itself with Choros prince Mahmud after the Eastern Mongols under Aruktai and Uljay-Timur earlier refused Chinese supremacy (Howorth 1876: 353–354). In 1412, Mahamu killed Uljay-Timur and installed Delbeg as khan (Bretschneider 2000: 164). If the suppositions of Petrov and Kukeev regarding the existence of a Moghul-Eastern Mongol alliance are correct, Muhammad Khan's intended attack on the Oirats was probably related to the assassination of the Eastern Mongol khan and Mahamu's growing dominance over Mongolia. Apparently, the emperor's intervention was effective, and direct conflicts between the Moghuls and Oirats were avoided. According to Chinese sources, Muhammad Khan died in 818AH/1416 (Bretschneider 2000: 240), while Mahamu was killed by Ugechi-Khashiga in 1418, who himself survived only briefly afterward (Howorth 1876: 357). Muhammad Khan was succeeded by Sham'-i-Jahan's son Naksh-i-Jahan (818AH/1415–1416 – 821AH/1418), who was assassinated two years later by Vais Oghlan (821AH/1418 – 824AH/1421, 828AH/1424–1425 – 831AH/1428), son of Shir-Ali Oghlan. Mahamu was succeeded by his son Togon (1418–1440), and Ugechi-Khashiga by his son Esekhu (1418–1425).

Under Vais Khan, the Moghul conflict with the Oirats intensified. Muhammad Haidar describes Vais Khan as an extremely pious Muslim, noble and courageous. Haidar suggests that religion was the primary cause of his wars with the Oirats – Vais Khan forbade Moghuls from fighting fellow Muslims and consistently opposed the ‘infidel’ Oirats (Dughlat 1895: 65). Religious identity during this period was shaped not only by personal beliefs but also by social and cultural conditions. Muhammad Haidar argues that Vais Khan's decisions significantly influenced Moghul politics and warfare, with religious motivations becoming central to conflicts of that era. However, Pishchulina disagrees, stating that Vais Khan “was forced to repel Oirat incursions that had started in the late 14th century” (Pishchulina 1977: 112). After he became khan, Vais moved Moghulistan's capital to Turfan, and in 1422 the Oirats attacked Hami (Bretschneider

2000: 164–165, 241). Zlatkin views these events as part of a struggle for dominance over trade routes between Oirat and Moghul nobility (Zlatkin 1983: 28). Kukeev similarly explains the Oirat attack on Hami as a preventive measure against Moghulistan's ambitions to control the principality (Kukeev 2008: 93). Vais Khan primarily fought the Oirats led by Esen-taishi (1440–1455), son of Togon. Muhammad Haidar mentions 61 battles between Moghuls and Oirats during Vais Khan's reign. Vais Khan was captured twice by the Oirats and was eventually compelled to marry his sister, Maktum Khanim, to Esen. Esen converted to Islam, and their sons Ibrahim Ung and Ilyas Ung were raised as Muslims (Dughlat 1895: 91).

The intensity of the wars between the Oirats and the Moghuls during this period is reflected in Saif ad-Din Akhsikendi's *Majmu' al-Tawarikh*. In this work, the Oirats –referred to as the Kalmaks – are depicted as the principal adversaries of the Moghuls. For example, it recounts a raid (undated) against the Moghuls by a forty-thousand-strong Kalmak detachment led by Tondzhi Kalmak, whom Tagirdzhanov and Romodin identify with the aforementioned Togon (Tagirdzhanov 1960: 52; Romodin 1963: 82). Vais Khan died in battle in 831AH/1428 against Satuk Khan (appointed ca. 1420s – 831AH/1428), the nominal Khan of Samarkand.

After Vais Khan's death, his younger son Esen-Buqa (833AH/1429–1430 – 866AH/1461–1462) became Khan of Moghulistan following intense internal conflict against supporters of his elder brother Yunus (873AH/1468–1469 – 892AH/1487) (Atygayev et al. 2024a: 12). Initially Esen-Buqa lacked authority over Moghul amirs, and regional rulers fortified their territories independently. For example, Amir Mir-Karim-Berdi established a stronghold at Alabuga, while Amir Mir-Haqq-Berdi-Bekichek built a fortress on an island in Lake Issyk-Kul (Barthold 1963: 87). At this time, Churas and Barin amirs switched allegiance with Amassandzhi-taishi (1455–1478), the head of the Kalmyks, indicating possible shared origins between these groups and the Oirat Choros (Kitinov 2017: 373).

In his *Baburnama*, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur observes that a number of Barin and Churas begs attached themselves to the Timurid court rather than to the Oirats. According to Babur, Irazan (dates unknown) – one of the Barin begs – and Mirek Turkmen (dates unknown) – a Churas beg – escorted Yunus Khan to Ulugh Beg (the ruler of Timurid empire, 850AH/1447–853AH/1449) with some three to four thousand Moghul families (Babur 1958: 20). Yunus's elder sister had earlier been married to Ulugh Beg's younger son, 'Abd al-'Aziz Mirza (d. 30 October 1449). However, upon their arrival these Moghuls were taken captive, and many were later resettled across Timurid-controlled regions.

In the late 1440s, Esen-Buqa consolidated power and raided Timurid territories. Reacting to instability, the Oirats under Esen invaded Zhetisu in 1452. Zlatkin notes that the Oirats advanced down the Syr Darya valley, raiding Tashkent and neighboring areas before retreating without significant resistance due to internal conflicts within Moghulistan (Zlatkin 1983: 41; Pishchulina 1977: 125). In 1457, the Oirats under Ash-Timur-taishi (possibly identified with Amassandzhi-taishi) again attacked cities along the Syr Darya after passing through Moghulistan (Barthold 1963: 87; Pishchulina 1977: 125). Pishchulina interprets these raids as evidence that 15th-century Oirat nobility could pillage but not permanently seize territories (Pishchulina 1977: 125).

Notably, during Esen-Buqa's reign, 200,000 Uzbek–Kazakhs led by Jochid sultans Girey and Janibek settled along the Chu River (Dughlat 1895: 82). Pishchulina argues that Esen-Buqa sought to leverage the Kazakhs militarily against the Oirats (Pishchulina 1977: 266). Regarding these events, Mahmud ibn Vali states the Kazakhs earned their name due to their raids on

Kalmyks and Kyrgyz shortly after settling in Moghulistan ([Materials on the History...](#) 1969: 353). Esen-Buqa died of natural causes in 1462.

III. Temporary Stabilization and Influence (1462–1487)

The subsequent clashes between the Moghuls and Oirats occurred during the reign of Yunus Khan, ruler of a unified Moghulistan (1472–1487). Yunus, after losing an earlier struggle for power in Moghulistan, was first taken by his supporters to Mawarannahr under Ulugh Beg and subsequently sent by Ulugh Beg to Persia in 838AH/1434 ([Barthold](#) 1963: 88). During his stay in Persia, he studied under historian 'Ali Yazdi, author of *Zafar-nama*. In 860AH/1456, the Timurid ruler Abu Sa'id Mirza (855AH/1451 – 873AH/1469) sent Yunus to Moghulistan to counter Esen-Buqa Khans's raids into Ferghana, Shash, and Turkestan ([Dughlat](#) 1895: 85). Some Moghul amirs sided with Yunus, but he was defeated by Esen-Buqa. Abu Sa'id granted Yunus the city of Jitikend, located on the border between Ferghana and Zhetysu ([Barthold](#) 1963: 88). After the death of Dost Muhammad Khan in 873AH/1468/1469, Yunus took control of the city of Aksu. Dost Muhammad's son, Kebek-oghlan (873AH/1468 – 877AH/1473), fled to Turfan, where he ruled for four years before being killed by his subjects who sent his head to Yunus ([Barthold](#) 1963: 88). Around 877AH/1472, Yunus united all Moghulistan under his rule.

According to Dorji G. Kukeev, "from this point, Turfan emerged as a significant political player in Central Asia, becoming a serious opponent to the Oirats and Ming China in the struggle for the principality of Hami" ([Kukeev](#) 2008: 141). Taking advantage of the fragmentation among the Oirats after Esen's death in 859AH/1455, as well as a power vacuum in Hami, Yunus Khan (referred to as A-li-khan in *Ming Shi* and by Pokotilov) attacked Hami. In his campaign he captured the former regent Nu-wen-da-shi-li and the princely golden seal ([Bretschneider](#) 2000: 181; [Pokotilov](#) 1893: 125; [Kukeev](#) 2008: 141). After subjugating Hami, Yunus Khan brought 10,000 Oirats under his control who maintained friendly relations with the inhabitants of Hami ([Pokotilov](#) 1893: 128; [Kukeev](#) 2008: 141). Kukeev believes the Moghul conquest of Hami disrupted Oirat trade with Ming China, compelling them to seek alternative routes toward Central Asian markets ([Kukeev](#) 2008: 141). This, according to Kukeev, explains the 1472 Oirat incursion into Moghulistan under Amassandzhi-taishi, who defeated Yunus's forces on the banks of the Ili River ([Kukeev](#) 2008: 141).

However, Barthold, referring to Muhammad-Haidar, considers internal Oirat strife as the main reason for Amassandzhi-taishi's invasion. As previously mentioned, Esen-taishi's sons Ibrahim and Ilyas, raised as Muslims, triggered conflicts between their followers and Amassandzhi-taishi's supporters. Amassandzhi fled with his people to Moghulistan, where they clashed in 1472 with Vais Khan's army.

An important aspect of these events is the influence of religious identity on political and social relations. In this context, Muslim identity emerged as a critical factor shaping loyalties and political alliances. Understanding religious identity as part of a broader social and cultural identity enables us to view these developments as components of a dynamic process of personal and collective identity formation under conditions of political instability, interpreted through the lens of an individual's belonging to a religious community and their comprehension of their place within it ([Zhapekova et al.](#) 2018).

Muslim identity is formed not only through personal spiritual self-identification but also under the influence of external factors such as the prevailing religious climate, cultural

transformations, and processes of socialization. For Muslims, the preservation of their religious identity is a high priority. This imperative can itself become a source of conflict when it comes to safeguarding Islamic traditions (Zhade & Kumpilov 2019).

Kitinov also emphasizes the religious factor influencing Amassandzhi-taishi's move to Moghulistan, contradicting Kukeev's claim that economic motives drove the 877AH/1472 invasion. The Oirats gained no territories and withdrew from Moghulistan after two years (Kitinov 2017: 374–375).

Chinese sources confirm Yunus Khan's growing power after capturing Hami, enabled him to negotiate equally with the Chinese Emperor (Pokotilov 1893: 127–128). Yunus occasionally raided Timurid territories, and after Abu Sa'id Mirza's death, intervened in disputes between his sons Ahmad Mirza (873AH/1469–899AH/1494) and 'Umar-Shaykh (873AH/1469 – 899AH/1494), annexing Sairam (1482) and Tashkent (1485). Yunus Khan died of paralysis in 1487.

IV. The Final Surge of Moghul Activity and the Decline of Relations (1487–1504)

The last significant Moghul–Oirat conflicts occurred under Ahmad Khan (890AH/1485–909AH/1504), ruler of Eastern Moghulistan. Barthold notes that by Yunus Khan's end, most Moghul tribes favored Ahmad as his successor due to his steppe upbringing (Barthold 1963: 89). Muhammad Haidar records Ahmad Khan's successful raids against the Kalmyks; he defeated Taishi Isan twice, thus earning the nickname "Alachi Khan," meaning "The slaying Khan" (Dughlat 1895: 121; Atygayev et al. 2024a: 14).

In 908AH/1503, Ahmad Khan aided his brother Sultan Mahmud Khan (892AH/1487–14AH/1508–1509) in Tashkent against Muhammad Shaybani Khan (c. 855AH/1451–916AH/1510; r. 905AH/1500–916 AH/510). Both brothers were captured but later released to Moghulistan. Ahmad Khan died of paralysis in Aksu in 909AH/1504.

Discussions

Analysis of the presented sources and research findings allows for the assertion that Moghul–Oirat relations were characterized by complexity and multilayered dynamics shaped by economic, political, religious, and ethnic factors. Economic competition over control of key trade routes, particularly in the strategically crucial Hami region, was one of the pivotal elements fueling armed conflicts. The struggle for economic dominance, documented through numerous military campaigns, has been confirmed by data from the *Ming Shi*, *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, and other sources, repeatedly referencing raids, conquests, and shifts in control over frontiers.

Political ambitions of both Moghuls and Oirats were evident. Each side attempted to expand its power – for instance, by seeking unification and forming alliances with Eastern Mongols and Ming China – which sometimes led to temporary regional stabilizations without resolving underlying tensions. Specifically, during Khizr Khoja Khan's rule, active foreign policy and successful military campaigns indicate that internal competition persisted even during periods of temporary peace. Subsequent rulers, including Muhammad Khan, Sham'-i-Jahan, Yunus, and Ahmad Khan, adopted increasingly assertive policies, transforming economic rivalry into overt political conflict, where control over trading hubs became synonymous with political authority.

The religious factor was equally significant. The adoption of Islam by the Moghuls and the Oirats' retention of traditional beliefs created additional division between them. This dynamic is

validated by historical accounts of conflicts and documentary evidence highlighting systematic isolation and hostility of Islamized khans towards the 'infidel' Oirats. Religious disagreements often served as justifications for warfare, underscoring the importance of spiritual and cultural identity in shaping state ideology and political decisions. Additional confirmation of this phenomenon lies in the policies and prohibitions regarding warfare against followers of different faiths, serving as a means of consolidating internal Moghul power.

Ethnic dimensions significantly influenced overall relations. Common ancestry among certain Moghul and Oirat tribes, such as the Churas and Barins, indicates that inter-ethnic interactions were not limited solely to conflict but occasionally resulted in tribes shifting allegiances. This phenomenon highlights the complexity of identities and multifaceted cultural relationships within the region, where political competition often intertwined with ethnic solidarity and kinship.

Finally, internal fragmentation within both communities, notably among the Oirats, exacerbated instability and contributed to rapidly shifting political dynamics. Internal turmoil, leadership struggles, and disagreements over religious identity rendered each side vulnerable, even when external alliances were present.

Thus, a comprehensive analysis of the sources demonstrates that Moghul–Oirat relations constituted a dynamic process where economic competition, political ambitions, religious disagreements, and ethnic ties continually reshaped regional politics. These multifaceted processes were interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming a unique model of interethnic and interreligious interactions in Central Asia from the late 14th to early 16th century. A deeper understanding of these processes not only facilitates the reconstruction of historical regional dynamics but also enhances comprehension of contemporary interethnic and interfaith conflicts.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be noted that Moghul–Oirat relations were characterized by considerable complexity, marked by both significant military conflicts and peaceful interactions between the two peoples. During the reigns of Tughluq Timur Khan and partially Khizr Khoja Khan, the relationship between the Moghuls and the Oirats can be described as generally peaceful. However, the rise of the Oirats in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, when they gained dominance over the Eastern Mongols, led to direct confrontations with the Moghuls. The Oirats became involved in the struggle for control over the principality of Hami, an area of influence for both Moghulistan and Ming China. Particularly fierce armed confrontations occurred during the reigns of Vais Khan and Yunus Khan.

Notably, despite repeated defeats at the hands of the Oirats, the Moghuls maintained a defensive stance and Oirat incursions did not result in permanent territorial gains. Additionally, economic factors were not always the primary cause of Moghul–Oirat disputes; in some instances, ethno-religious factors emerged prominently. Religious differences between the Islamized Moghuls and the traditionally non-Islamic Oirats contributed significantly to tensions and conflicts. The Moghul khans who embraced Islam regarded the Oirats as 'infidels,' leading wars either for the spread of Islam or for the defense of Muslim interests, causing further dissatisfaction among the Oirats.

The migration of certain Moghul tribes, such as the Churas and Barins, to the Oirats at the beginning of Esen-buqa Khan's rule highlights shared ancestral ties between some Moghul and

Oirat groups. Moreover, the 1472 expedition led by Amassandzhi-taishi into Zhetisu occurred due to internal religious divisions among the Oirats, where some factions supported the Muslim sons of Esen-taishi, whose mother was a Moghul princess.

The present study introduces several scholarly innovations. Foremost, it proposes a well-grounded periodization of Moghul–Oirat relations, derived from correlating primary sources with key religious, military, and political conflicts. This periodization enables a more systematic organization of a complex and insufficiently structured historical narrative. The role of Islamization is identified as both a factor in internal differentiation within the Oirat elite and one of the pretexts for incursions into Moghulistan.

The study uncovers the mechanisms of conflict and mobilization, namely amorphous power structures, fragile alliances, and authority exercised through kinship ties and nomadic loyalty and thus contributes to the political anthropology of steppe societies. It demonstrates the interdependence of events in Moghulistan and crises in the Oirat milieu, the disintegration of the Yuan dynasty, and Timurid policies. By refining the “regional picture” of fifteenth-century Asia, it illuminates the dynamics of steppe diplomacy.

Accordingly, throughout the period under review, Moghul–Oirat relations unfolded against a backdrop of continual shifts in Central Asia’s political landscape. Initially, contacts were unstable, characterized by episodic military skirmishes and raids, even as the parties maintained mediated alliances amid a general climate of volatility.

From the late fourteenth century onward, this interaction grew more complex: the Oirats began to intervene actively in Eastern Mongol affairs and to assert hegemonic claims, intensifying tensions with Moghulistan. Rivalry sharpened when both sides vied for control over strategic regions and trade routes.

In the early fifteenth century, relations assumed the character of military-political confrontation – often in the form of broad coalitions that included third-party actors such as the Chinese or Timurid supporters. Simultaneously, religious differences emerged as a source of conflict: the Oirats retained allegiance to traditional belief systems, whereas Islam had consolidated its position in Moghulistan. This divergence fostered an ideological confrontation and, in some instances, efforts to employ Islam as an instrument of integration.

By the mid-fifteenth century, a temporary equilibrium prevailed. However, renewed internal crises and the collapse of central authority in both camps soon rekindled active hostilities. At the close of the period, relations reached their climax of military intensity, yet remained episodic in nature – marked by incursions and defensive reactions. Although the religious factor continued to carry weight, it gradually yielded to more pragmatic motives tied to the struggle for trade routes, political influence, and regional domination.

Thus, Moghul history was intricately intertwined with the history of the medieval Oirats, and the multifaceted nature of their relationship exemplifies the complexity of interethnic and interfaith dynamics in Central Asia.

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Information about authors

Sergazy Akhmetkul – Doctoral Student, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 11, Satpaev Str., 010000, Astana, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3384-5504>, akhmetkulsergazy@gmail.com

Gulfairus K. Zhapekova – Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associated Professor, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 11, Pushkin Str., 010000, Astana, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1090-8373>, gulfairusk@mail.ru

Zarine A. Dzhandosova – Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associated Professor, Head of Central Asian and Caucasus Department, St. Petersburg State University, 11, Universitetskaya naberezhnaya Str., St. Petersburg, Russia, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4834-1360>, z.dzhandosova@spbu.ru

Авторлар туралы мәліметтер

Серғазы Ахметқұл – докторант, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Пушкин к., 11, 010000, Астана, Қазақстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3384-5504>, akhmetkulsergazy@gmail.com

Гүлфайрус Қабдолқызы Жапекова – тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, қауымдастырылған профессор, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Пушкин к., 11, 010000, Астана, Қазақстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1090-8373>, gulfairusk@mail.ru

Заринэ Әлиқызы Жандосова – тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, доцент, Орталық Азия және Кавказ кафедрасының меңгерушісі, Санкт-Петербург мемлекеттік университеті, Университет жағалауы к., 11, Санкт-Петербург, Ресей, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4834-1360>, z.dzhandosova@spbu.ru

Сведения об авторах

Серғазы Ахметқұл – докторант, Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, Пушкина, 11, Астана, Казахстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3384-5504>, akhmetkulsergazy@gmail.com

Гульфайрус Кабдуловна Жапекова – кандидат исторических наук, ассоциированный профессор, Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, Пушкина, 11, Астана, Казахстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1090-8373>, gulfairusk@mail.ru

Заринэ Алиевна Джандосова – кандидат исторических наук, доцент, заведующая кафедрой Центральной Азии и Кавказа, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Университетская набережная, 11, Санкт-Петербург, Россия, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4834-1360>, z.dzhandosova@spbu.ru

Authors' contribution

Akhmetkul, S. – contributed to the development of the topic, identifying the goal and objectives of the study, relevance and novelty of the problem, developing and designing the research questions, the methodology, methods and theoretical basis of the study, an extensive review of pertinent sources and literature, managing and coordinating the planning and conducting the research, distributing responsibilities and monitoring their execution, analyzing the results of the study and their discussion, concluding and finalizing the manuscript.

Zhapekova, G. – contributed to determining the research topic, outlining its structure, planning and conducting the study, data collection, their classification and analyses, developing the methodology section, reviewing relevant literature and sources, writing the initial draft, writing, formatting and finalizing the manuscript.

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