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## **Male Feathered Headwear of 13th-14th Centuries**

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***Abstract:***

*The article considers Mongol male feathered headwear of 13th-14th centuries discovered at various archaeological sites to determine the validity and diversity of the research subject.*

*As a symbol of significance and status, the Mongol imperial costume consisted of numerous elements and represented an important distinctive feature of a person involved in the administration system.*

*This study identifies headwear variations in the largest group of sources – decorative art – using the comparison technique. Besides, it determines the definitions of words örbelge and otaqa, considers and analyzes various archaeological sites.*

*This work provides new information on feathered headwear, decoration system and wearing specifics.*

**Keywords:** *Male Headwear, Örbelge, Otaqa, Feathers, Sources, Researchers.*

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## 1. Introduction

The Mongols established a vast militarist state “familiar with inequality and hierarchy” (Uvarov, 2012). Therefore, inequality was reflected in the material culture, particularly in the costume. The costume is the most delicate, accurate and unmistakable indicator of the distinctive features of a society representing a small token of a person, country and people. Each epoch creates its own aesthetic ideal, beauty standards, proportions and details (Zakharzhevskaya, 2004). It turns, the costume is an indicator of the social and individual characteristics of a person, his taste, age and gender. It is an integral part of the material culture demonstrating its significance only in relation to a person and consisting of the following elements: underclothes, indoor and outdoor clothing, footwear, hairstyle and headwear (Dudnikova, 2003).

As the civilization developed, the complexity of all costume elements increased, and headwear began to transform from a simple element of the costume to one of the symbols of power. At the same time, the primary and most important function of headwear is protection against snow, rain, sunlight and other natural phenomena. Until now, not many researchers have mentioned this topic in their works, and male headwear is most frequently referred to in works by Gorelik (2010; 2014) and M.G. Kramarovsky (2001; 2012). Male headwear is also touched upon in dictionaries and philological publications. The authors of this work attempted to analyze such element of clothing as 13th–14th century male feathered headwear based on written, decorative and archaeological materials. The goal of this study is to identify which type of hats was worn by men involved in the imperial administration system, and which feathers and feather system they used. It also allowed to reveal the semantics of words *örbelge* and *otaqa*, determine their relation to male headwear and identify the persons who could wear it.

## 2. Methods

To achieve the goal of studying Mongol male feathered headwear, the researchers used a comparative technique of working with various archaeological materials which allowed to determine the differences between the depicted objects. The researchers also used the analysis, synthesis and systematization techniques. The combination of these methods allowed to consider feathered headwear not only as an element of the costume, but also as a significant indicator of involvement in the imperial administration system.

## 3. Results

Mongol headwear is known to researchers based on various materials (decorative, written and archaeological). However, before considering feathered headwear, let us turn to the determination of the semantics of words *örbelge* and *otaqa* and identify their relation thereto. *Otaqa* and *örbelge* are rather frequently referred to in works by

Gorelik (2010; 2014) and Kramarovsky (2001; 2012) containing a definition of the male feathered headwear known as orbelge hat. The initial source of information on the headwear is a work by Vladimirtsov (2002) with a reference to feathered headwear: “Then the Genghis Khanid princes maintained, at least in the first half of the period in question, an ancient tradition of wearing feathered headwear (orbelge), whereas the Saydy wore otaqa, i.e. a long feather on the back of their headwear”. Let us consider references to the words of interest – örbelge and otaqa.

What is the meaning of the word örbelge? According to the Mongolian-Russian-French dictionary (translated from the old-written Mongolian) (Kowalewski, 1844), these are “falcon tail feathers worn in their hats by officials for decoration”. Sundueva (2011) considers the word örbelge as a lexical unit of Mongol languages (Khalkha Mongolian - orvolgo, Buryat - urbelge, Kalmyk - orvlh, Xinjiang Oirat - orvelge, Ordos - örvölgö. The word is spelled and pronounced almost identically in these languages) and translates it as “feathers in headwear” (Sundueva, 2011). The Altan Tobchi (Golden Summary) by Luvsan Danzan (1973) contains a reference to people wearing feathers in örbelge-ten headwear: “They invited a jinong with thirty-three [men of his escort] with feathers on their helmets (örbelge-ten), his forty-four sayds with long feathers on their hats, and sixty-six people with ribbons on headwear to enter through one of the doors...”.

Considering the aforesaid, the word örbelge denotes a feather or feathers in headwear, but not the headwear itself. Let us turn to Turkic-Mongolian dictionaries in search for the definition of the word otaqa. According to Derfer (2005), the Persian word otaqa was borrowed from the written Mongolian language and denotes “peacock feathers on a hat belonging to an official of a high rank and merit”. Malov (1954) mentions an Uyghur word otugat meaning “feathers in a Chinese official’s hat”.

According to Radlov (1898), the Chagatai word otaqa denotes “a tuft of feathers worn on hats or turbans by sultans” composed of heron’s feathers which constituted a commodity item, and the word otaqa derived from otaq - “small feathers, bird fluff. In the Mongolian-Russian dictionary edited by Luvsandendev the word otaqa denotes a “feather or sultan on headwear”, an honourable distinction of feudals and officials (Luvsandendev, 1957).

Having considered the word otaqa as a lexical unit of Turkic-Mongolian languages, the authors determined that its spelling and pronunciation was practically identical, and the word was translated as “a feather or feathers on headwear” (V.F. Ivanov’s “Manuscript by A.A. Popov...”). It can be concluded that from the viewpoint of philology the words örbelge and otaqa have a number of forms with similar pronunciation and semantics in the Turkic-Mongolian languages, and denote “feathers on headwear”.

#### **4. Discussion**

Let us turn to written sources in search of feathered headwear and reasons for wearing feathers. Such headwear is mentioned in various travel notes, reports, etc. by contemporary authors and subsequent researchers. Vincent de Beauvais (2006) was a Dominican monk, theologian, philosopher and pedagogue. In his work *Speculum Historiale* he presented a chronicle from the creation of the world to 1254 which included the latest information obtained from narratives by medieval travelers Giovanni da Pian del Carpine from the Franciscan order. In the chapter on the appearance he provided the following detailed description of the headwear referred to by the Chinese as hu-mao (the northern hat): "their general appearance is as follows: all of them wear low hats like acolyte mitres, lying flat on their heads.

On the back of these hats is a hanging tail one hand in width and length, tapering slightly at the end. The front and side edges of their hats, except the back edge, are folded at the length of a finger, and two ribbons are sewn along the edges directly above the ears, securing the hat tightly on the head when tied underneath the chin, preventing the hat from falling due to the wind or other conditions. There are two small tongues hanging above the ribbons for decorative, or rather, intimidation purposes. This in the appearance of hats worn by the Tatars and those who they live together with".

According to the Yuan Shi, the headwear was subsequently modified by Empress Chabi who appended the northern hat hu-mao with a visor, and the resulting headwear became a standard. «As to the northern cap (hu-mao), formerly it had no visor (ch'ien-yen). The Emperor, on shooting, was blinded by the sun in his eyes. He told the Empress (hou) about it. The Empress (hou) straightway added a visor (ch'ien-yen). The Emperor was very happy and, as a result, ordered that it become a model» (Cleaves, 1979-1980). The described headwear can be seen on Iranian miniature pictures where it is decorated with feathers, as well as on Chinese paintings and archaeological findings.

Hetum Patmic (2006) was an Armenian statesman and historian who wrote *Flower of the Histories of the East* containing the following story in Chapter 5 on why the Tatars wear feathers on their headwear: "When night came, Genghis Khan left his shelter and eventually approached his people whom he told of what had happened to him. He also told that a bird which sat on the bush under which he had found shelter, and that the enemies decided not to search for him there. The Tatars thanked God and since that time have treated this bird referred to as "the Prince" with such reverence that every person is eager to wear her feather on the head. I told this story for everyone to understand why the Tatars wear feathers on their heads." According to this narrative, they decorated headwear with feathers not for the purposes of decoration or fashion, but as a symbol of reverence and remembrance, and the only aspect which remains unclear is the bird species whose feathers are used for decoration.

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (2006) was a Dominican missionary, traveler and writer who visited the Mongol Empire between 1288 and 1301 to write a diary "Journey

across the Holy Land”, where in Chapter 11 "On the Exodus of the Tatars" he described in a peculiar manner the reasons for wearing feathers on headwear by the Tatars: “It was thereby established that all distinguished and noble Tatars wore feathers similarly to caps made of owl skin on top of their heads... and by this the Tatars act like the evil spirits, namely the demons who sew their hats from the skins of animals which serve them, and therefore render evil for good." He considered Mongol headwear through the spectacle of the Christian religion and did not strive to provide more detailed information on its appearance, but even the available short description allows to discover similarities with male headwear depicted on certain Iranian miniatures. One can only be certain of the fact that the Mongols, according to the diary by Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (2006), used owl feathers in their clothing.

The Teuke (2001) “The White History” - a Mongol historical and legal work of 13th–16th centuries on the establishment and development of legal regulations and legislation in the political organization of the Central Asian nomadic society, which contains a reference to headwear, and as it represents a code of laws, it has a mandatory nature: “He who manages the nine banners and faultlessly protects the great state should use owl feathers for decoration." It becomes evident that certain aspects of wearing feathers were specified at legislative level, but the appearance of a cap which should have been decorated with feathers is not described in any sources, which implies a certain flexibility in the selection of headwear. Another reference to the use of owl feathers is as follows.

The last researcher mentioned in this article by the name of Rashid al-Din was a Persian statesperson, doctor and encyclopedist, Minister of the Hulagu State, compiled a historical work in the Persian language known as *Jami al-tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles), representing the most important historical source, concerning the history of the Mongolian Empire and the of Hulagu Iran. Narrative No.35 "On the organization of falconry and hunting" describes a case of conviction in the illegal sewing of feathers on headwear, and the punishment which the persons were subjected to. "The falconers and their chiefs who served at the sovereign's headquarters, who were in possession of hunting birds and occasionally released them in the presence of his highness, consisted of several emirs, kovmas and aymaks joined by a few horsemen, donkeymen, camelmen and villagers.

All of them attached several feathers to their belts and carried a kurabasi, with which they hit the people they encountered on the head, and then spoke to them, taking their turbans and caps. Some of them said: “It is a crime that everyone attaches owl feathers to his cap," and used it as an excuse to take the cap, and others did anything they wanted with no excuse whatsoever." This is the third reference to owl feathers, and the *Compendium of Chronicles* describes another aspect of their wearing, making it clear that there was a regulation according to which not everyone could use them to decorate their headwear, which was strictly observed by designated persons.

It can be concluded that male headwear was decorated with feathers, the number of which varies from several ones to "...caps made of owl skins". The specifics of wearing feathers has been clarified, according to which a man was entitled to pin them onto his headwear, which was stipulated by legislation, whereas according to the *Compendium of Chronicle* by Rashid al-Din (2011) there were 'fashionmongers' ready to break the law and receive punishment for the sake of a beautiful feather system on the cap.

The aforesaid written sources allow to distinguish headwear decorated with owl feathers, but do not give a full picture of the possible use of other types of feathers, and the appearance of these clothing items remains unclear as well, for only a single researcher has provided their thorough description confirmed by both archaeological findings and decorative sources, whereas the others have not described male headwear in their historical narratives.

Decorative sources represent the largest group of materials referred to by researchers in their works. They feature a great variety of feathered headwear, but due to the differences between painting schools and stylistics, and in sometimes the lack of information on the subject possessed by the artist, in certain cases the authenticity of the image is distorted. The first group of sources is Iranian (Persian) miniature paintings. Because miniature paintings had an illustrative nature and were positioned at the intersection of literature and visual arts, painters did not seek true similarity to the object which they painted, but created and painting, the artists did not seek the true similarity of the depicted object, but rather created certain patterns. This reflected in the accuracy of painted objects, in particularly headwear, a great variety of which can be noted, although they were not painted in full detail, and the feather system of this headwear does not always correspond to the status of its owner.

An example of this is an Iranian miniature from the manuscript *Jami al-Tawarikh* (early 14th century, Tabriz) by the name of *A Holiday Feast of Ilkhan* on which the Ilkhan is portrayed with only 2 feathers in his headwear unlike the men who served him featuring a more complicated feather system (2 wings of a bird, possibly an owl, and 3 feathers). Another Iranian miniature from the same manuscript presents another feast scene with all its male characters wearing hats with various feather systems, whereas the system of feathers on Khan's headwear is identical to those on three other men on the painting, suggesting that they were of the same status, if one of them was did not serve the other. It should also be noted regarding Iranian miniature art that apart from copying the technique of Uyghur artists it comprises personal artistic ideas and worldview of local painters. Thus, it can be concluded that most of Iranian miniature paintings feature a great variety of headwear and feather systems, but do not allow to accurately determine the status of their owners and the types of feathers. Therefore, Iranian decorative sources should be approached with certain criticism.

Chinese artists are more authentic and informative with respect to costume images, as they considered painting the most important art. On the one hand, they did strive to

establish a new painting style with the emergence of a new ruling dynasty, but imitated the styles of the preceding epochs, and on the other hand, the multi-component Mongol culture introduced a certain combination of Chinese, Mongol and Tibetan styles into Chinese visual arts.

During the reign of the Mongol dynasty, Chinese artists frequently portrayed riders and hunting scenes. A renowned vertical scroll painted by a portraitist and artist from the imperial costume department Liu Guan-dao in 1280 features the “Hunting of Khubilai Khan”. “As seen from the scroll, the author did not intend to depict a brutal hunting scene, but on the contrary, portrayed the Emperor’s family surrounded by the retinue in delicate, lyrical, captivating and unflattering manner. The painting style of Guan-dao transformed the magnificent example of Chinese art of the Yuan period into a valuable source of information on the court dress and customs of the Mongol period” (Neglinskaya, 2012). Feathered headwear is depicted on the scroll with much clarity and detail, and have been confirmed by archaeological evidence (from Tsagaan Hanan cave in the Omnogovi province, Gobi Desert, Mongolia, and the Wan Family Tomb, Xixian, China).

Another Chinese painting of a hunting scene on silk by an anonymous author of late 13th - early 14th centuries is known as “Wild Goose Hunting”. A noble Mongol man is portrayed riding on a black horse and wearing a feathered fur hat. This headwear image is not as detailed as the one by Guan-dao, and the shape of the hat is concealed by the fur lining, but an exuberant feather decorating the hat, although it is impossible to determine which bird it belonged to, is well outlined, and the three men from his suite are wearing similarly feathered hats. Therefore, it can be concluded that practically all Chinese paintings feature detailed images of the costume and headwear, and unlike Iranian miniatures the feather systems of hats are not as exuberant, which in the opinion of the outer is closer to reality.

European and Russian decorative sources do not provide a true picture of headwear and the costume in general, as their fine artists adhered to certain traditions. For instance, the Illustrated Chronicle of Ivan the Terrible created in the second half of 16th century includes a scene of Prince Yaroslav’s reception by Batu Khan. The miniature is drawn layer-by-layer and features several plots in which the artist attempted to accurately arrange the objects and recognizably depict certain building, but to the costumes of the characters. Yaroslav is wearing a prince's hat, Batu is wearing a crown, Yaroslav’s and Khan’s suites wear identical simple headdresses, and their costumes are similar and drawn with strict adherence to artistic canons. A miniature Great Feast Commemorating the Anniversary of Great Khan Khubilai from the Book of the Marvels of the World by Marco Polo was drawn in accordance with the traditions of the European painting school. The miniature portrays the Khan with a European crown on his head, whereas he and his retinue are wearing European costumes, which is incorrect, as all visitors, guests and others changed into Mongol clothing. The author of a miniature Hunting of Khubilai Khan from the same book attempted to convey his personal view of Mongol costume and headwear, but the

Khan's gown is more like a priest's robe, the headwear is also inaccurately depicted, and the hats are not decorated with feather systems in the illustrations. Summarizing the European and Russian sources, it can be stated that the portrayed objects are incorrect, and European and Russian miniatures cannot be considered as sources for the reconstruction of accurate images

The most authentic portion of sources is archaeological finds, but most them are poorly preserved. The small number of surviving headwear do not contain feathers, as they represent the aforesaid modernized hu-mao hats discovered at the excavations of a 13th century cave burial in Tsagaan Hanan, the Gobi Desert, Mongolia, a boli hat with a flattened crown and wide brims from a late 13th-early 14th century tomb of the Wan Family, Xixian, China. There are several well-preserved finials (and several casting molds for single-feather finials) designed for various feather systems composed of different materials from simple metals to gold, silver and jade, decorated with gems and pearls, demonstrating that headwear was actively decorated, with feathers. As a result, it is evident that the available archaeological material is very scarce due to the poor preservation of organic material, which is not the case with headwear adornments, indicating a great number of hats with various systems of feather, the type of which can no longer be established.

## **5. Summary**

It can be concluded that the people involved in the administration of the Mongol Empire wore not only Mongol gowns, but also headwear, thereby confirming their loyalty to the current regime. The costume reflected the social affiliation of a person and consisted of numerous elements. One of the elements of the costume was headwear emphasizing the status of the person who carried it.

A comparative analysis demonstrated that a rather large amount of the available archaeological material, descriptions, feather and headwear images allow to recreate an owl feathered cap on the basis of written sources, but do not allow to recreate headwear with other feather systems due to lack of information; archaeological sources can be used to reconstruct the so-called modernized hu-mao hat, also known as the boli hat, but the kind of feathers used in its decoration remains unknown; according to decorative sources, there was a great variety of feathered caps, and works by Chinese artists are characterized by particular authenticity and informativity, whereas Iranian miniature paintings also featuring numerous headwear images do not allow to accurately determine the status of their owners due to painting specifics. In both cases, the type of feathers worn on headwear cannot be reliably determined in the absence of archaeological confirmation.

## **6. Conclusions**

Apparently, none of the proposed source groups can provide an accurate and complete historical reconstruction of the research subject, the type of feathers cannot be



determined, or no description of the headwear decorated with certain type of feathers is provided. One can only hope that a greater number of archaeological monuments will be discovered in the future, which will shed light on the issue of male feathered headwear.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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