

ON THE INITIAL *h* IN THE YÜAN-CH'AO PI-SHIH

NICHOLAS POPPE

Common Altaic **p*- is represented in Goldi as *p*, in Manchu as *f*, in most Tungus languages as *h*, but in most Mongolian languages spoken at the present time it has disappeared.¹ It is still preserved as *f* before rounded vowels, but otherwise represented by *x* (*s'* before **i*, and *s* before consonants) in Monguor, one of the conservative Mongolian languages in Kansu. It is still *x* in some dialects of the Dagur language in Manchuria, but it has disappeared without any trace in Khalkha, Buriat, Kalmuck, and most of the other Mongolian languages.²

Ramstedt was the first to notice that initial *h* in Middle Mongolian as represented in Arabic (or Persian) – Mongolian glossaries of the XIII–XIV centuries and in the language of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih was a further development of that initial **p*.³ A special article on *h*- in the Mongolian language of the XIII–XIV centuries as represented in Chinese sources was published by Pelliot.⁴

The development described is well known. What still remains to be answered is the question about the exact phonetic value of *h*. What kind of a fricative was it? Thus, it could have been a velar, pharyngeal, laryngeal etc. fricative.

In Monguor (Mngr.), as said above, in most cases a voiceless deep-velar fricative corresponds,⁵ which has converged with *q* (> *x*), e. g., Mngr. *xarwan* "ten" = MMo. (Middle Mongolian) *harbān* same; Mngr. *xara* "black" = MMo. *qara* same.

1 G. J. Ramstedt, "Ein anlautender stimmloser Labial in der mongolisch-türkischen Ursprache", *JSFOu* 22.2 (1916), pp. 1-10; G. J. Ramstedt, *Einführung in die altaische Sprachwissenschaft, I, Lautlehre*, Bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Pentti Aalto, Helsinki 1957, pp. 39-40; Pentti Aalto, "On the Altaic Initial **p*", *CAJ* 1 (1957), pp. 9-16.

2 N. Poppe, *Introduction to Mongolian Comparative Studies*, Helsinki 1955, pp. 96-98.

3 "Ein anlautender stimmloser Labial in der mongolisch-türkischen Ursprache", p. 8.

4 P. Pelliot, "Les mots à *h* initiale aujourd'hui amuie dans le mongol des XIII-e et XIV-e siècles", *JA* 1925, pp. 193-263.

5 A. de Smedt, C. I. C. M. et A. Mostaert, C.I.C.M., *Le dialecte monguor parlé par les mongols du Kansou occidental, II-e partie, Grammaire*, Peking 1945, p. 6.

That Mngr. *x* goes back to two different phonemes is evident from the following developments:

1. MMo. *h* is preserved as *f* before rounded vowels, whereas *q* is always *x* in this position, e. g., Mngr. *fulan* "red" = Mu.¹ *hula'an/hulān* same, but Mngr. *xulaGat's'i* "thief" = Mu. *qulayai* same.

2. MMo. *h* is Mngr. *s'* before **i* but **q* is *t's'* in this position, e. g., Mngr. *s'ürö-* "to say a benediction" = Mu. *hirēbe* "he gave his good wishes to someone", but Mngr. *t's'iDoGuo* "knife" = Mu. *qituyā* same.

The conclusion from this is that Mngr. *x* goes back to two different phonemes which, in other positions, are still reflected as different consonants. That Mngr. *x* in the cases concerned has developed from **h* is evident from the correspondence of Mngr. *x-* to Tibetan *h-* in loan-words.²

In Dagur (Dag.), Middle Mongolian *h* is represented by *x*, a deep-velar fricative, i. e., exactly as **q* is now also *x*, cf. Dag. *xarban* "ten" = Mu. *harbān*, and Dag. *xarba-* "to shoot" = Mu. *qarbuba* "he shot". It is interesting to note that in the Tsitsikar dialect of the Dagur language the phonemes **q* and **h* are still distinguished between, e. g., *qara* "black" but *xārba* "ten".³ However, this observation does not yet provide clues regarding the exact phonetic value of MMo. *h-*.

The Arabic sources of the XIII-XIV centuries are more promising in this respect. The Arabic alphabet has three different letters for as many fricatives which might impress a non-linguist as being "identical with" or "close to" *h*. The letters in question render the following phonemes: 1. *[x]* which is an unvoiced velar fricative, 2. *[ħ]* which is an unvoiced pharyngeal fricative, and 3. *[h]* which is a simple aspiration. Of the three letters concerned, the one for Arabic *[h]* is used to render the Middle Mongolian initial fricative, cf. the following examples:

Mu. 45 *hirār* "basis" = Y 76⁴ *hiru'ar* "bottom",

Mu. 45 *hünegen* "fox" = Y 79 *hünegen* same,

Mu. 45 *hümekei* "ill-smelling" = Y 79 *hümegei* same,

1 Mu. = *Muqaddimat al-adab*, see N. N. Poppe, *Mongol'skij slovar' Mukaddimat al-Adab, I-II*, Moskva-Leningrad 1938, p. 187.

2 A. Róna-Tas, *Tibeto-Mongolica, The Tibetan Loanwords of Monguor and the Development of the Archaic Tibetan Dialects*, Budapest 1966, p. 128.

3 N. N. Poppe, *Dagurskoe narečie*, Leningrad 1930, pp. 97, 129.

4 Y = Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih, cf. E. Haenisch, *Wörterbuch zu Manghol in Niuca Tobca'an, (Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih)*, *Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*, Wiesbaden 1962. The numbers here and elsewhere refer to the pages.

Mu. 187 *humin* "smoke" = Y 79 *humi* same,

Mu. 187 *hurbaba* "he turned" = Y 79 *hurba-* "to turn".

The conclusion drawn from the forms in Arabic transcription is that *h-* was probably a simple aspiration.

Turning to *h-* in the language of the 'Phags-pa Script, let it be remarked that **q* is rendered with *q*, whereas Middle Mongolian *h* is rendered with the Tibetan letter for /h/.¹ Thus, there is found *qa'an* "emperor" = Mo. (Written Mongolian) *qayan* same; *qoyar* "two" = Mo. *qoyar* same; *qulaqayi* "theft" (129) = Mu. 309 *qula'ai* "thief". On the other hand, 'Phags-pa 124 has *harban* "ten" = Mu. *harbān* same; *hirü'er* "benediction" = Mu. *hirēbe* "he gave his good wishes to someone"; *hon* "year" = Mu. *hon*.

Consequently, the 'Phags-pa Script distinguishes between *h* and other phonemes.²

It has been observed that the language of the monuments in 'Phags-pa Script is identical with that of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih or Hua-yi yi-yü.³ Therefore, one would expect *h* and the other phonemes to be distinguished between in the Chinese transcription. Indeed, the syllables with *q-* and *h-* are rendered in Chinese transcription of the XIV century with the same characters but with the diacritical mark *chung* for *q-*, and without the diacritical mark for *h-*. As for *h-*, Haenisch,⁴ Pelliot,⁵ and Lewicki⁶ transcribe it as *h*, but *q* is rendered by them in three different manners. Haenisch uses the grapheme *h*, Pelliot has *q*, and Lewicki uses *x*. Laying aside the different renditions of *q* as irrelevant for the purpose of this paper, let it be remarked that the above mentioned diacritical mark is often omitted. Lewicki found that in the Hua-yi yi-yü the diacritical mark had been omitted in 187 cases, whereas in 480 cases it had been used, this leading to the conclusion that almost in one half of the total number of examples the diacritical mark was lacking.⁷ The inconsistent use of the diacritical mark

1 N. Poppe, *The Mongolian Monuments in hP'ags-pa Script*, Second Edition translated and edited by John R. Krueger, Wiesbaden 1957, p. 22.

2 It should be added that the 'Phags-pa Script has also a special letter for *ɣ* which corresponds to Modern Mandarin *h*, e. g., *ɣoŋ t'ay ɣiw* "Empress Dowager" = Chin. *huang t'ai hou*, cf. Poppe-Krueger, *op.cit.*, pp. 22, 96.

3 N. Poppe, "Die Sprache der mongolischen Quadratschrift und das Yüan-ch'ao-pi-shi", *Asia Major, Neue Folge*, 1 (Leipzig 1944), pp. 114.

4 *op.cit.*

5 P. Pelliot, *Histoire Secrète des Mongols, Restitution du texte mongol et traduction française des chapitres I à VI*, Paris 1949.

6 M. Lewicki, *La langue mongole des transcriptions chinoises du XIV-e siècle, Le Houa-yi yi-yu de 1389*, Wrocław 1949.

7 Lewicki, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

results in erroneous reconstructions of forms both in Pelliot's and Haenisch's editions of the text of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih. Thus, Pelliot (p. 12, §59) gives *qatqun* instead of *hadqun* "holding in the hand" (cf. Haenisch, p. 75 *hathuhu* "to hold in the hand" which is correct). On the other hand, Haenisch has misunderstood the verb *horuhu* "to flee" as being etymologically connected with *horhu* "to hide oneself" (p. 77), although these are two different words, cf. *horu-* "to flee" = Mo. *oru-* "to flee", but *qor-* "to take refuge" = Mo. *qor-* "to be afraid", Kalmuck *xor-* same.

The text of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih has preserved numerous forms with initial *h*. Haenisch's dictionary contains exactly 118 entries of words with *h-*, including different stems derived from the same primary stems. However, some words occur in the text with and without initial *h*. Here are a few examples:

hadqu- (p. 75)¹ and *adqu-* (p. 10) "to grasp, to hold",
hasaγ- (p. 75) and *asaγ-* (p. 9) "to ask",
heki (p. 75) "head" and *ekin* (p. 43) "brain, head",
ho'ara- (p. 76) and *o'ara-* (p. 120) "to retreat",
hülüd- (p. 79) "to exhaust" and *ülüd-* [*ülid-* (p. 163) "to end",
hüsün (p. 80) and *üsün* (p. 167) "hair".

Comparison with the Hua-yi yi-yü yields more inconsistencies of this kind,

e. g.,

H 49² *hači* "grandson" = H 8 *äci* same = Y 2 *ači* "bodyguard",³

H 49 *halša-* "to be hindered" = Y 5 *alša-* same,

H 50 *hečüs* "the end" but H 13 *ečül-* "to end, to cease to be", *ečülge-* "to put an end to something" = Y 41 *ečültele* "to the end, until ends" = 'Phags-pa 124 *hečültele* "to the end, until ends".

Lewicki was the first who noticed these inconsistencies in the Hua-yi yi-yü and believed them to prove that in the XIV century *h-* was already disappearing.⁴ There is also other evidence that, in the XIV or even in the XIII century, in some dialects *h-* was disappearing. Proof can easily be found by comparing the

1 Here reference is made to Y, *vide* Haenisch, *op.cit.*

2 M. Lewicki, *La langue mongole des transcriptions chinoises du XIV-e siècle, Le Houa-yi yi-yü de 1389, II, Vocabulaire-index*, Wrocław 1959.

3 Obvious confusion of *ači* "grandson" and *hači* "retribution, recompense", *vide* H 49 *hači* "grandson" and *hači* "retribution". These are two different words, cf. 'Phags-pa *hači* "retribution" = Y 74 *hači* same, and Y 2 *ači* "bodyguard".

4 Lewicki, *La langue mongole des transcriptions chinoises du XIV-e siècle*, etc., Wrocław 1949, p. 112.

data of the different glossaries such as the Leiden Manuscript, Muqaddimat al-Adab, the Istanbul glossary published by Ligeti, etc.

The few examples quoted from the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih and Hua-yi yi-yü demonstrate clearly that some forms were used with the initial *h* and without it rather indiscriminately. In other words, *h*- in such cases had become irrelevant or, to speak better, non-phonemic.

There is also other evidence which is provided by the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih and some documents in 'Phags-pa Script. This evidence is found in the available specimens of poetry. One of the most important features of Mongolian poetry is alliteration of the initial syllables in two or more adjacent lines or even at the beginning of two halves of the same line. In most cases the alliteration manifests itself in complete identity of the syllables in question. This has been observed regarding the poetic passages in the Chronicle of Sayang Sečen¹ and in folk poetry.² There are specimens of poetry in 'Phags-pa Script. These are the stanzas of the text of the well-known Chü-yung-kuan inscriptions. On the other hand, the text of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih contains also a large number of fragments of poetry. The verses of the Chü-yung-kuan inscriptions and the poetical fragments scattered in the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih comply fully with the rules of alliteration. Thus, the stanzas 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, etc. of the Inscriptions are perfect examples of alliterating verses, e. g.,

Stanza 15 : ene xa'an bodhisividun altan jorix čiyun tulada
eldeb keregüd tegüs bütü'en čabča'al dotora
e'üri urtuda bayixuyin čila'un kürüsiyer
ene supurjani ülü uda'ulun tegüs bütü'ebeyi³

Perfectly alliterating verses are also found in the text of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih, e. g.,

qoǰi'ulas tutum || qong i'ud
hünǰi'üles tutum || hüngši'üd P 8⁴

kei ö'ede || kegüliyen keyisümser

- 1 J. R. Krueger, *Poetical Passages in the Erdeni-yin Tobči, A Mongolian Chronicle of the year 1662 by Sayang Sečen*, Mouton & Co., 1961, 'S-Gravenhage, pp. 19-21, 35, *passim*.
- 2 N. N. Poppe, *Xalxa-mongol'skij geroičeskij épos*, Moskva-Leningrad 1937, pp. 115-117.
- 3 M. Lewicki, *Les inscriptions mongoles inédites en écriture carrée*, Collectanea Orientalia, No. 12, Wilno 1937, p. 54. Reference is made to this publication because there the text is divided into quatrains. Some minor inaccuracies have been corrected. Cf. Poppe-Krueger, *op.cit.*, p. 64.
- 4 Reference is made to Pelliot's edition of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih. The numbers refer to pages.

ke'er qaĭara || ke'eliben ölösümser büliyi P 12

uyılaydaqu činu || usud olon ketülbe
qayıla'asu || qarayıĭu ülü üĭegü čimayi
qayıbasu || qa'uluqa inu ülü olqu či P 12

nu'un kö'üd manu || nuntuĭ qarayu
ökin kö'ün manu || öngge üĭegdeyü P 13

qarbisuban qaĭaqu || qasar noqai metü
qadatur dobtulqu || qablan metü
a'uriyan darun yadaqu || arslan metü P 17

quladu mawu šibawun || quluqana küčügüne idegü ĭaya['a]tu bö'etele
qun toqura'uni idesü ke'en ĭešin aĭu'u.
qunar mawu čilger bi || qutuĭtai sutai uĭini
quriyaĭu iregü bolun || qotola merki[d]te huntawu bolba P 28

In all these and in many other cases the word after || in the middle of the line, or the first word in the subsequent line begins with the same syllable as the first word in the preceding half-line or line respectively.

The same is observed regarding verses beginning with words with *h* at the onset, e. g.,

horayitala boĭtalaĭu || hoĭitala büseleĭü P 16
harban quru'udun kimul anu || ha'udtala P 114
helige ba anu || hemtülbe bida P 29

hodutai tenggeri || horčiču büle'e P 103

irgene bü || ine'e'ülüdkün
harana bü || habqari'uludqun P 104

However, Luvsanbaldan has made the interesting observation that in the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih words with *h* at the onset alliterate also quite often with words with an initial vowel, e. g.,

onan müreni tolkistala
hoi ĭubur dawuristala¹

1 X. Luvsanbaldan (Ulaanbaatar), "Èrtii mongol xèlnii ügiin èxnii h-giin tuxai asuudald", *Studia Mongolica*, IV, fasc. 4, Ulaanbaatar 1962, pp. 115 ff.

The conclusion drawn by Luvsanbaldan is that "*h* was probably acoustically indistinct" (*h* giigüülegč balarxai sonsogdoĭ baisnaar tailbarlagdax magadgüi)¹ or, as he says in his Russian résumé, at the time when the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih was being written, *h* was probably disappearing and no longer perceived "as a separate sound"², i. e., was no longer phonemic.

To substantiate this statement, more examples are given here. First of all, let it be remarked that words with and without initial *h* alliterate also in several quatrains in the Chü-yung-kuan inscriptions. These are the stanzas 1, 5, and 8. Not quoting them in their entirety, only the first word of each line is marked here:³

1.	5.	8.
Özge	ax'obi	alibe
üŭ'ür . . .	abida	alimayin . . .
ünen	harban	arbayin
huĭa'ur . . .	adi'ditan . .	hači

Here are a few additional examples of this kind from the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih:

oroban || hoĭtorqu boldaĭda'a bi

önör nikenten busudu bida

ösüliyen ker || ösükün

ebüriyen || hemtülde'e bi

heligenü uruĭ busudu bida

hačiyān ker || hačilaqun bida P 25

"I have suffered my bed becoming empty.

Are we not of common kinship?

How shall we take revenge?

I have suffered the tearing of my breast open.

Are we not close relatives? (lit. "relatives of the liver")

How shall we take revenge?"

helige ba anu || hemtelbe bida

1 *op.cit.*, p. 119.

2 *op.cit.*, p. 121.

3 Lewicki, *op.cit.*, p. 52-53.

oro ba anu || hoγtorqui bolγaba P 29

"We have torn to pieces their livers.
We have made their beds empty".

e'üdeneče činu || heyilü'esü
eligel anu || edkeļü gedkün P 38

"If they go away from your door
cut up their livers and abandon [them]!"

hod qaraļu || urbang deretü bolļu gebtemü bi P 62
"I am lying, looking at the stars and having a knoll¹ for a cushion".

alalduqui üdür || haranu miqa ided
gürülčegü üdür || gü'ünü miqa günesüled P 70

"On a day of battle, they eat human flesh,
on a day of reaching together, they make provisions of human flesh".

ļidatu ereyi || ļi'uļu
čisutu tonoy tonoyčün
üldütü ereyi || hüldeļü unaγaļu alaļu
üb tonaγ abuγčün
uru'ud mangγud ke'egded tede P 70

"Overtaking a man armed with a spear,
they strip him of his blood-stained garments.
Chasing after a man armed with a sword,
they fell and kill him and take his valuables and garments.
They are called the Uru'ud and Mangγud".

oyčadču raruyšani || hontučaļu oro'ulqu büle'e P 96

"He would shoot at a long distance at those who flee in fear, and make
them surrender".

The Mongolian text of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih was undoubtedly first written

1 *urbang* = Buriat *orbong* "rhizome, the basis of a tree, that portion of it where the roots come out of the trunk".

in Uighur script and in Written Mongolian. This results quite clearly from a careful analysis of the mistakes which occur in it, e. g., Y 17 *bököre* "loins" instead of *bö'öre*, cf. Y 16 *bö'ere* id. = Mo. *bögere* "kidneys"; Y 114 *neke*—"to open" instead of *ne'e*-, cf. Y 114 *ne'e*—same; Y 151 *tolkis*—"to make waves, to be stormy" instead of *dolgis*-, cf. H 35 *dolgiyan* "wave"; Y 55 *qada'uji*—"to be careful" instead of *qata'uji*-, cf. H 45 *qata'uji*—"to make efforts" from *qata*—"to become hard, to harden" = Y 63 *qata'uji*—"to be careful", *qatangγu* "hard", *qatan* "steel" (= "hard iron"); Y 19 *boroqan* "blizzard" instead of *boro'an*, cf. Y 19 *boro'an* "blizzard"; Y 79 *hutan* "willow-tree" instead of *hudan*, cf. Khalkha *ud*, Kalmuck *udγ* same, etc.

These and many other mistakes occur mostly in words which in Written Mongolian have the consonants *k/g*, *t/d* or the vowels *u/o*. The Mongolian alphabet does not have special letters to distinguish between *k* and *g*, between *t* and *d*, between *u* and *o*. These six phonemes are rendered with only three graphemes. Therefore, to read or transcribe a word correctly, one must know its exact pronunciation. Mechanical transliteration is impossible. The mistakes mentioned prove that the original text was in Uighur script. Later, when the text was transcribed with Chinese characters some words were misread and, consequently, transcribed erroneously.

It is known that the Mongolian (originally Uighur) alphabet in its oldest shape did not have a letter for *h*. Initial *h* was unmarked in the oldest Written Mongolian language. Therefore, verses with alliterating words with the initial *h* and without it were perfect when written in Mongolian script, but they were not perfect when written in 'Phags-pa Script or when transcribed with Chinese characters. Nevertheless, such verses occurred. This was possible only because initial *h* was already becoming non-phonemic, and forms with *h*- were used side by side with forms without *h*-.

In conclusion, the following remarks can be made. First of all, it can be assumed that in the second half of the XIII century in some Middle Mongolian dialects *h*- had become non-phonemic and begun to disappear. This stage is reflected in the language of the Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih and Hua-yi yi-yü and in the 'Phags-pa Script. Second, in other Middle Mongolian dialects, namely those the descendants of which are, i. a., Dagur and Monguor, *h*- converged with *x*- which goes back to **q*-. The phoneme **q* must first have become a deep-velar fricative *x*, and afterwards *h* converged with it.

