
A Mongol in the Cairo Mint?



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Abstract

The name Ilqāy appears on small monetary weights for 1251 and 1252 in Cairo at the beginning of Mamlūk rule. This person was a high official in the treasury, responsible for regulating monetary transactions. However, the name is not Arabic but Mongolian—and at this point, the Mamlūks and Mongols were contesting the Middle East. This article traces the meaning of the unique name and its appearance in Mongol history. It then discusses the hypothetical way in which Ilqāy developed Mongol coinage in his early career. The violent purges of the Mongol civil war may have forced him to escape and enter Egypt's financial system. This biography is hypothetical since there is no literary evidence for mint activity and personnel at this time. Nevertheless, the unusual name and timing create a mystery that invites special consideration.

Keywords: Mamlūk; monetary developments; Mongol refugees; Ilqāy

The presence of a Mongol in the Mamlūk mint of Cairo would be totally unexpected since the Mongols and Mamlūks were often at war with each other,¹ but such an event is a possibility. The mystery at the mint emerges from a series of monetary weights containing a specific person's name and the dates 650 and 651 AH/1252 and 1253 AD. There are no literary sources describing mint activity, so any information about it must be gleaned from disparate artefacts like these, other weights, coins, and capacity measures. Although understanding the administration of the treasury is tentative without corroborating material like a mint manual, the sheer number of products provides a general indication of monetary policy. In the case of the individual of interest here, the items were glass weights that are part of over 2,000 pieces studied in 29 collections from the Middle East, the United States, and Europe.² Even so, his

¹Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhānid War, 1260–1281*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, 1995) relates the constant tensions. Even after this war, however, there were other clashes until, finally in January 1313, the Mongols stopped trying to invade Syria. See J. A. Boyle, 'Dynastic and political history of the Il-Khāns', in *The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, (ed.) J. A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 303–421, p. 403.

²Judith Kolbas, *Mamluk Glass Monetary Weights*, Royal Numismatic Society (London, forthcoming). Hereafter cited as 'Kolbas catalogue'.

items are scarce: only ten are known, located in six museums from Cairo to California.³ The objects are made of round translucent glass the size of a large coin with clear legends written in Arabic script as well as Coptic numerals for one of the years. Despite their rarity, enough samples survive to show that the issues made a complete set of the double, single, and half units to measure the unstandardised silver coinage of the Mamlūks in this period. He, like other officials with their names on glass weights, did not actually produce them, leaving that to specialist workshops, but he was responsible for their reliability, both for a durable substance and for accuracy.

The unusual person was *القاي علي* / Ilqāy ‘Alī whose work is attested by several different inscriptions, the most complete being ‘*Ilqāy ‘Alī fī sana aḥḍa (wa) khamsīn/ Ilqāy ‘Alī in year 51*’⁴ on the double unit. Another one on the single unit standard states ‘*Ilqāy sana 650*’ with the date in Coptic numerals (see [Figure 1](#)).⁵ Only these two specimens provide a year and just one includes his Muslim name, ‘Alī. Eight others hold another inscription of Ilqāy alone, which appears on the half unit weights.⁶ No more information was included on them. Nevertheless, Ilqāy is a Mongol name that raises questions about such a person’s activity in a distant Arab land and deserves an examination of who he might have been. The following pages consider the name Ilqāy, his possible political relationships that led to his suspected move from Mongol to Mamlūk regions, the way in which he could have attained his mint experience and his position among other treasury officials in Cairo. Much personal background is speculative, but his actual existence and work is secure.

The mint in Cairo: structure and relationships

In 650/1252, Ilqāy appears to have been involved in the complicated financial system of Egypt. The Ayyūbids had been overturned just two years earlier in 648/1250 by troops originally brought into Egypt as young slaves or Mamlūks. Each Ayyūbid ruler purchased new slaves, who were mostly Turkish, from the steppes of southern Russia. They were trained for military roles and eventually dominated the court. The Mamlūk Sulṭānate lasted until the Ottoman conquest in 923/1517. Being initially trained by the Ayyūbid establishment, Mamlūk rulers inherited many of the former regime’s administrative structures, including the monetary system, which they did not change for over a century.⁷ Indeed, creating political stability was their chief concern, not changing financial affairs: for 11 years, from 648–658/1250–1260, there were five rulers who came in and out of power until Baybars (r. 658–676/1260–1277) secured the throne. As a result, the state and public had to deal

³There are two in the British Museum in London, two in the American Numismatic Society in New York City, one in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK, one in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Strasbourg, one in the Gayer Anderson Museum in Cairo, one in the Lowie Museum in Berkeley, California, and two in a former private collection in Cairo.

⁴American Numismatic Society no. 1965.144.1, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.21.1.

⁵British Museum no. OA 5408, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.11.1.

⁶British Museum no. OA 5049, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.31.1; Fitzwilliam Museum no. 1242.04, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.31.2; American Numismatic Society no. 0000.999.33752, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.31.3; Strasbourg Bibliothèque, no number, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.31.4; Gayer Anderson Museum, no number, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.32.1; Awad private collection, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.32.2; Awad private collection, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.32.3; Lowie Museum 5.1489, Kolbas catalogue no. 14.32.4.

⁷Warren C. Schultz, ‘Medieval coins and monies of account: the case of large flan Mamluk dinars’, *Al-‘Usur al-Wusta, the Bulletin of Middle East Medievalists* 12 (2000), pp. 29–33, p. 29.



Figure 1. Mamlūk glass weight, British Museum no. OA+5048. Source: © Trustees of the British Museum.

with myriad types of coinage, especially silver, that circulated in the capital and empire. Former currency moved alongside new issues, and even foreign coins were easily circulated, while the weight and purity of each varied.⁸ Since the government was not able or willing to call in all the types for re-coining, officials focused on providing a reliable and state-authorized measure in order to allow transactions to take place. Glass weights solved this problem, a policy that had existed in Egypt even before the Muslim period, although the objects then contained limited information.⁹ For the duration of the practice, each coin weight was carefully made to measure a precise amount. That version continued until 792/1390 when it was cancelled soon after Barqūq (r. 791–801/1390–1399) gained the throne as the first Jirkis (Circassian) or Burjī sultān.¹⁰

However, the organisation in which Ilqāy found himself had moved from providing governors' names or royal titles on these objects to citing only ordinary individuals and sometimes dates and locations. This change had begun under the Ayyūbids, probably during the monetary reform of al-Malik al-Kāmil Muḥammad (r. 615–635/1218–1238) in 622/1225.¹¹ Earlier, oversight of the mint had been removed from the chief *qadi* (or the top religious and legal authority) to a new ministry of finance or Bayt al-Mal.¹² It seems, however, that the ministry continued to follow the practice of the legal profession by attaching salaries to government posts.¹³ Therefore, Ilqāy most probably was a paid treasury official working in a crucial position in the department of the mint.

⁸Warren C. Schultz, 'Mamluk monetary history. A review essay', *Mamluk Studies Review* III (1999), pp. 183–205.

⁹Alexander H. Morton, *A Catalogue of Early Islamic Glass Stamps in the British Museum* (London, 1985), p. 9. Also see Michael L. Bates, 'The function of Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid glass weights', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XXIV (1981), pp. 63–92.

¹⁰The last person to issue coin weights was 'Alī al-Shuwaykh: Kolbas catalogue no. 40.31.1.

¹¹The suggestion is derived from an analysis of Paul Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids*, Special Publication No. 12, Royal Numismatic Society (London, 1980), pp. 157–158 as developed in Kolbas catalogue, 'General commentary'.

¹²Helen M. Brown, 'The medieval mint of Cairo: some aspects of mint organization and administration', in *Late Medieval Mints: Organization, Administration and Techniques*, (eds) N. J. Mayhew and P. Spuford, B.A.R. International Series 389 (Oxford, 1988), pp. 30–39, p. 32.

¹³Kolbas catalogue, 'General commentary'.

After al-Kāmil's reform, the ministry tried several styles of glass weights, including anonymous ones with geometric designs and simulated kufic epigraphy, before settling on a style with personal names in 637/1239.¹⁴ To bolster the beginning of this new style, some of the initial people named on the weights had impressive religious titles, such as *al-ḥajjī*/the pilgrim to Mecca,¹⁵ *al-qafī*/the charitable one,¹⁶ *al-sharbānī*/the one who provided a cool drink after Friday prayers,¹⁷ *al-dā'ī*/the preacher,¹⁸ and even *al-mahdī*/the rightly guided one.¹⁹ However, the weights list only a single name or, rarely, one *ibn* or patronymic so that these people are not found in biographical dictionaries even if they deserved acknowledgement. This holds true for Ilqāy 'Alī, who also cannot be found in any other source.²⁰ Moreover, their rank was not as high as that of the *muḥtasibs*, the regulators of the markets, ensuring commercially, morally, and politically good behaviour. That position was one of the most powerful and respected in any city so that holders were often recognised in literary sources.²¹ Even al-Maqrīzī (764–845/1362–1442) and al-'Aynī (762–855/1360–1451) were *muḥtasibs*, but treasury officials played a quieter role. Nevertheless, these lesser officials assured merchants and the general public that the monetary system was regulated by notables of high moral standing and was also approved by the legal establishment. Because the religious people at the mint encouraged the acceptance of the new type of weights, it seems to have been preferred that the mint masters be Muslim, even if they were not native Arabs. Therefore, Ilqāy qualified with the name of 'Alī even though he was a convert. When he converted is unknown, perhaps earlier in his career, but only one weight has his Muslim name, suggesting that he was better known simply as Ilqāy. In the immediate environment of political and financial transition, he undertook a major public responsibility.

As might be expected at this time, there were various administrative pressures that were reflected in personnel changes. Since the Mamlūks had just come to power in 648/1250, Ilqāy and several other mint officials worked together at about the same time. In fact, ten others besides him issued weights for 15 years from 637–651/1239–1253. Of the six at the beginning of the Mamlūk period for which there are dates—namely Aḥmad (640–648/1242–1250), Sa'īd (648/1250), Qilāj al-'Awdhī (645–649/1247–1251), Muḥammad b. al-'Awdhī (646–661/1248–1262), Ḥusayn al-Mahdī (647–655/1249–1257), and Ilqāy 'Alī (650–651/1252–1253)—three continued after 648/1250 from the Ayyūbid regime. Then with the quick departure of Qilāj al-'Awdhī in 649/1251, there were still two carry-overs: Muḥammad b. al-'Awdhī and Ḥusayn al-Mahdī. It was at this point in 650/1252, two years after the regime began, that a new Mamlūk appointee appeared, namely Ilqāy. He was the only official in 651/1253, while no one at all seemed to have issued weights in 652/1254

¹⁴Kolbas catalogue no. 2, Abū Bakr.

¹⁵Kolbas catalogue no. 3.60, 'Umar 'Abd Allāh.

¹⁶Kolbas catalogue no. 3.50, 'Umar 'Abd Allāh.

¹⁷Kolbas catalogue no. 8.21, Farūkh.

¹⁸Kolbas catalogue no. 16, 'Alī al-Dā'ī.

¹⁹Kolbas catalogue no. 11, Ḥusayn al-Mahdī and catalogue no. 15, 'Alī al-Mahdī.

²⁰The name Ilqāy 'Alī does not appear in the following extensive biographical dictionaries: al-Safadī's *al-A'yān*, Ibn Taghribirdī's *al-Manhal al-Ṣafī*, Ibn Ḥajar's *Durar al-Kāmina fī A'yāni al-Mā'ūti Thāmina*, al-Maqrīzī's *Durar al-'Uqud al-Firikat* or al-Dhahabī's *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*. I appreciate the kind advice of Doris Behrens-Abouseif on this matter.

²¹Ahmad Ghabin, *Ḥisba, Arts and Crafts in Islam* (Wiesbaden, 2009) lists many *muḥtasibs* with dates, none of whom matches the names on glass weights.

since there are none from that date. Nevertheless, it is possible that he was in charge in late 650/1252 and continued into early 652/1254, since eight of the ten specimens associated with him have no date on them and could have been issued in 652/1254. As a result, he filled a gap from 650/1252 to perhaps 652/1254, therefore being responsible wholly or in part for at least two years, and perhaps three, for keeping the monetary system of Egypt ticking along. Then, one Ayyūbid, Muḥammad b. al-‘Awdhī, who had worked in 650/1252 returned in 653/1253; and another, Ḥusayn al-Mahdī, who had also worked in 650/1252 returned in 655/1257. One was a Turk²² and the other a religious figure, clearly illustrating the structure of the administration. These two groups were occasionally, but briefly, later augmented by other agents who did not give hints about their affiliations.

Although it might seem that internal power struggles cut his employment short, Ilqāy ‘Alī was certainly not the only one to have a truncated career at this time. For example, a few others left only one weight specimen that has survived, suggesting much shorter careers. On the other hand, several people in this post had rather long tenures, sometimes up to 30 years,²³ indicating that the position could be much more stable than that of the market inspector or *muḥtasib*. Moreover, it does not seem that Ilqāy would have been sidelined because he was a Mongol. Turks often held the position: the person who ordered most of the weights in the period—Muḥammad b. al-‘Awdhī—had an older brother named Qilāj, meaning ‘sword’ in Turkish, who had issued just before Ilqāy had, as already noted. These two and other al-‘Awdhīs never acquired any religious titles, implying that, as Turks, they also were not part of the original coterie of officials who had launched the programme. The family continued in this post intermittently until the end of the century, an indication of the major role Turks and the Turkish language played in the administration. Having another foreigner, even a Mongol, in the mint then would not necessarily have been anything to worry about.

The name Ilqāy

All references to the name Ilqāy point to it being a specifically archaic Mongol name. It does not appear today. In old Mongolian, Ilqāy meant ‘horse herd’.²⁴ Such a picturesque idea reflected a common practice in Mongolia of naming a newborn after the first thing a mother saw upon leaving the birthing tent. Another instance is that of Hülāgū, which means ‘a brave

²²Muḥammad b. al-‘Awdhī belonged to a family that dominated the office for 40 years in the seventh/thirteenth century, which consisted of the elder al-‘Awdhī (fl. 639–640/1241–1242), Kolbas catalogue no. 5; Qilāj al-‘Awdhī (fl. 645–649/1247–1251), Kolbas catalogue no. 9; Muḥammad b. al-‘Awdhī (fl. 646–661/1248–1263), Kolbas catalogue no. 10; ‘Alī al-‘Awdhī (no date), Kolbas catalogue no. 17; and Abū Bakr al-‘Awdhī (fl. 679/1280), Kolbas catalogue no. 19.

²³For example, ‘Abd al-Malik worked from 756–786/1355–1384, Kolbas catalogue no. 34. Also, Ya‘qūb had a 20-year long career from 750–770/1349–1368, Kolbas catalogue no. 33. The short names are the only information about them, although they had full inscriptions of dates and sometimes location.

²⁴Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, Band 2 (Wiesbaden, 1965) entry 658, pp. 209–210. He gives a pronunciation of *ulghī* or *ulqi*, spelled ابلقى. Historical sources, however, do not suggest that the initial sound at this period was *u* or *yu*. The name should not be confused with ابلخاي/Ilghāy, meaning a common red bush in later Uzbek Turkish, nor should it be confused with *ilig* or *iliq*, ‘king’, which was one of the ranks of titles used by the Qarākhānids of Transoxiana (382–609/992–1212).

and loyal horse'.²⁵ As some names like Mōngke (meaning 'eternal') were particularly favoured then and still are today, Ilqāy also had a long and glorious pedigree within the Mongol state. At this time, Ilqāy shared it with two Mongol generals, Kōke-Ilge and Ilgei. The name Kōke-Ilge, or 'Blue Horse Herd', also followed a custom that can be traced back at least to the tenth century: one group entitled itself 'the tribe of the Chur with bluish horses'.²⁶ Kōke-Ilge is clearly identified as leading one of the first Mongol assaults on the Ismā'īlīs in 651/1253.²⁷ Five years later, another general, Ilgei, was instrumental in the conquest of the area around Amida (Diyarbakir) during Hülāgū's campaigns in Iraq in 656/1258.²⁸ Moreover, this Ilkei/Ilge (or even Ilghay, as written in various sources) was the ancestor of the later Jalayr regime in Iraq from 740–835/1340–1432. This branch of the Jalayr tribe was closely connected to the Il-Khāns of Greater Iran.²⁹ During his lifetime, then, the Ilqāy in Cairo had some prestigious Mongol namesakes in the Middle East.

However, the name went back further, to the founding of the Mongol Empire itself. It can be traced to the son of a person who served both Chingiz Khān (602–626/1206–1229) and his son and successor, Ögödei (626–639/1229–1241). Chingiz Khān transferred not only conquered lands but also the service of one of his Jalayr attendants, Qada'an, to Ögödei as part of his patrimony. One of Qada'an's sons was Ilūgā, who was a tutor of the young Ögödei. Later, under Ögödei, Ilūgā became a commander of 1,000 men as a personal guard of the khān, a great honour.³⁰ The family's significance grew substantially because he had both an influential brother and a son who retained their connection to the Ögödeids.³¹ Importantly, this loyalty was strongly emphasised by Ilūgā's brother, Ilchidāy, who roundly denounced Mōngke's (649–658/1251–1260) accession as a Toluid to the imperial throne. Ilūgā's son continued to serve the Ögödeid house after the Toluid purge in the civil war of 647–649/1248–1250. The son, Dānishmand, was an envoy from Qaydū (late seventh/thirteenth century), the most prominent Ögödeid left, to Abāqā Khan (663–680/1265–

²⁵Mongolian has many terms for horses depicting colour or special characteristics. In this case, the modern pronunciation of *Hülāgū* is *Khuleg*. There are four standard definitions, all of which stress heroism and trust. See https://mongoltoli.mn/search.php?ug_id=117438&opt=1&word=%D0%A5%D2%AE%D0%6B%D0%AD%D0%63# (accessed 16 May 2022). A current children's song relates that the national hero of Mongolia, Sukh Baatar, had a *khuleg moir*, which is reinforced by the equestrian statue in the main square of Ulaan Baatar, the capital.

²⁶Other examples of colour combined with animals are the opening words in Francis Woodman Cleaves (trans. and ed.), *The Secret History of the Mongols* (London, 1982), p. 1: 'There was a bluish wolf which was born having [his] destiny from Heaven above'. Later, in the eighth/fourteenth century, there were the Aq and Qarā Qoyunlū/the White and Black Sheep Confederations (752–914/1351–1508). Aside from wolves and sheep, horse herds were particularly prominent with regard to colours, especially with the earlier Pechenegs of the Volga area. 'The names of the 8 tribal groupings consist of two parts, the name proper, usually a horse-colour, and, with some possible exceptions, the titles of their rulers' and the colours of the horses included not only blue but also grey, black, dark brown, piebald, bark-colour, and even 'brilliant, shining': Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden, 1992), p. 266.

²⁷Boyle, 'Dynastic and political history', p. 343.

²⁸Only Boyle, 'Dynastic and political history', p. 352, seems to have noticed the difference between the two Ilgei generals, who are sometimes confused. Kōke-Ilge was a Uriyangqat and Ilgei was a Jalayr.

²⁹Patrick Wing, *The Jalayrids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (London, 2016), pp. 50–51, provides an extensive account of Ilgei's importance in the early years of the Il-Khānate. The general was one of the most senior commanders and was entrusted with critical decisions like informing Abāqā of the death of his father, Hülāgū.

³⁰Wing, *The Jalayrids*, p. 41.

³¹The tribal name of *Jalayr* was attached to the personal name of many high officials, such as Buqa Jalayr in the Il-Khānate (d. 688/1289) and Mūngkā Noyan Jalayr in the Chaghadaid realm. On the other hand, the eponymous progenitor of the Jalayrs is lost in history.

1282), the Toluid ruler in the Il-Khānate.³² Therefore, the name had an impressive heritage and representation in the Mongol world, especially among the Jalayr clan. Nevertheless, it is not clear to which clan Ilqāy 'Alī himself belonged.

Treasury experience: a hypothesis

Ilqāy could not have been given responsibility for weights and measures, a key post in the Mamlūk treasury, without substantial prior experience. His early career, like that of all agents, is unknown, but perhaps his can be suggested because of his distinctive Mongolian name. We can assume that to have been given that name, he first lived in Mongolia and might have gained experience within the expanding empire. If so, his career may have started 15 years earlier with the imperial coinages of Ögödei and his son, Güyük (644–646/1246–1248). A major financial reform created the first Islamic style of money when Ögödei issued silver in his capital of Qarā Qorum in 635/1237–1238.³³ It was an important innovation, something the Mongols had never done before in the homeland, intended to relay a strong message of legitimacy and sovereignty. With this reform, monetary concepts were imported from the Middle East that included weight and purity standards as well as inscriptions. On one side, a simple legend stated *Allāh* in Arabic script with Ögödei's insignia or *tamgha* of a large sinuous backward-S to the left, while at the bottom was another simple word of *töre*, written in cursive Uighur script. The margin contained the date in Arabic. The other side mentioned the mint at the top in Arabic, but the main field gave the title of the caliph in Baghdad of *al-Imām al-A'zam*/The Greatest Leader.³⁴ Only Ögödei's insignia and the word *töre* indicate that it was official Mongol coinage. After this, there is no other imperial-style coinage securely attributable to Ögödei. Any mint official involved, however, was paving the way for a unified system. Even so, a number of sites in Transoxiana and Adharbayjan struck their own local Mongol types during his reign. The imperial type, nevertheless, expressed a clear concept of the state, drawing from a long-standing steppe tradition, legalising Mongol suzerainty with the word *töre*. This type was expanded by his son, Güyük, who issued coins from Qarā Qorum to cities across the steppe. Basing his style on that of his father, Güyük too did not have his name on the coinage. Instead, he used his insignia of two connected circles, but the word *töre* was on both sides of the coin. Although some coins had and some did not have a mint, much less a date, they certainly circulated across the steppe since they were found as far from Qarā Qorum as the Syr Darya basin in the Otrar hoard.³⁵ As the concept of state power was emphasised twice in official Uighur script on Güyük's money, it is this silver coinage that would have been the responsibility of a mint master sent out to major cities by the central government. He would have supervised the

³²Wing, *The Jalayrids*, pp. 41–43.

³³Paul D. Buell and Judith Kolbas, 'The ethos of state and society in the early Mongol empire: Chinggis Khan to Güyük', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26 (2016): The Mongols and Post-Mongol Asia. Studies in Honour of David O. Morgan, pp. 43–64, p. 60.

³⁴A complete description and photograph appear in Buell and Kolbas, 'The ethos of state and society', pp. 60–61. It was originally announced by Stefan Hedemann, Hendrik Kelzenberg, Ulanbayar Erdenbat and Ernst Pohl, 'The first documentary evidence for Qara Qorum for the year 635/1237–8', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie Ausser-europäischer Kulturen* I (2005), pp. 93–102.

³⁵Buell and Kolbas, 'The ethos of state and society', pp. 62–63, with appreciation to V. Nastich for reference to the Otrar hoard.

amount of silver in each coin or purse and the purity of the alloy, making sure they met certain standards. If Ilqāy was that person, he would have gained invaluable experience. Indeed, as Güyük was finally enthroned in 644/1246, the official and his small entourage had a busy schedule to implement the new types before Güyük's death in 646/1248.

Whoever the mint master was, he was probably involved with another type of coinage as well, this time in Güyük's name. As an official checking production in the Syr and Amu Darya regions, he would have had little further to travel to the other side of the Caspian Sea into Adharbayjan and then into Georgia. In fact, he may well have accompanied Güyük's representative, Eljigidei, who was responsible for Georgia, Armenia, Aleppo, and Mawsil. Eljigidei headed reinforcements for the Mongol contingents already there in order to make sure that vassals dealt directly with him in paying their tribute.³⁶ This required someone who could check the quality of money and certify its weight. Although Eljigidei only reached the Caucuses, certainly some imperial person was instrumental in the Gurjistani treasury when the vassal, David, issued silver in 645/1247. The legend in Arabic script read 'By the power of God/the dominion of Güyük/Qā'ān, the servant/King David'. On the other side was a sedate horse ridden by a king wearing a style of Byzantine crown—definitely not a Mongol. Even though the image and inscriptions indicated that the central authorities allowed the local region to produce its own currency, Mongol treasury officials would have made sure that proper acknowledgement of the khān existed. At this point, Ilqāy could have been part of that mission, inspecting the coinage and accepting the required tribute, especially since Güyük was marching his armies towards the Russian steppe and probably needed money. Shortly thereafter, the Georgians allied themselves more closely with the Rum Saljuqs of Anatolia. Both were semi-independent, having their local rulers confirmed by the khān, and both had significant trade in slaves, honey, and furs with the Golden Horde in southern Russia.³⁷ As a result, the mint master of Tiflis took the 645/1247 design of the Georgian horseman to the Saljūq capital of Sivas and imposed another horseman on its new silver currency in 646/1248. This coinage, however, made no mention of Güyük and had no indication of Mongol suzerainty.³⁸ By the next year, as the position of Güyük's party grew more and more desperate after Güyük's death, one treasury official, who had served the Ögödeids, might have sensed that it was safer to stay with the Rum Seljuqs than to return to Mongolia. Moreover, according to the next coinage in 649/1250, the new khān, Möngke, who opposed the Ögödeids, re-established a more central monetary authority in the region.³⁹

Leading up to 648/1250 then, the Toluid reach was coming closer to Ilqāy, especially if he were an Ögöeid loyalist working for its treasury. The ensuing purges were systematic and violent. Eljigidei was executed as well as two of his sons.⁴⁰ Realising his peril (if he had been with the treasury), Ilqāy had few alternatives to secure his life. For one, he would not have travelled to Sarai on the lower Volga River, Batu's capital, since Batu

³⁶Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220–1335)* (Leiden, 2011), p. 65.

³⁷Vingil Ciolcitan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, (trans.) Samuel Willocks (Leiden, 2012).

³⁸Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu, 1220 to 1309* (London, 2006), pp. 135–138.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.

⁴⁰Wing, *The Jalayrids*, p. 42.

had confronted Güyük and was the major power supporting Möngke. Moreover, Ilqāy probably had no local support or contacts once the military power in Anatolia vanished. Rather, Ilqāy could have chosen to migrate to Egypt. The route most easily taken would have been first to negotiate passage from, perhaps, Sivas through Cilicia or Lesser Armenia in western Anatolia, which supported the Mongols but was not fully incorporated.⁴¹ From there, he could have managed to contact some Genoese merchants trading goods from the steppe and taken a boat with them to Egypt.⁴²

This hypothetical career, moreover, is reflected in other cases. Indeed, he would not have been the only Mongol to leave the empire and seek refuge in Egypt. The migration of some Oirats, usually individuals or small families, had begun in the 640s/1240s.⁴³ Other larger contingents came later, especially in 660/1262 and 696/1296, fleeing persecution. These later Mongol refugees or *wāfīdīyah* were given military contracts. Nevertheless, perhaps Ilqāy is an early example of the individual presence of Mongols in the Mamlūk hierarchy. Indeed, later, Baybars (658–676/1260–1277) and then Qalāwūn (678–689/1279–1290) had marriage alliances with high-ranking immigrant Mongol families of the *wāfīdīyah*.⁴⁴ On the other hand, some Mongols had been captured or sold to the sulṭānate but could still rise to the top echelons of power, for instance, Sulṭān Kitbugha (694–696/1294–1296).⁴⁵ However, it is unlikely that Ilqāy was a Mamlūk himself since the treasury post required special administrative abilities for supervising production and distribution of the weights, something in which the military elite was presumably not interested, and the role was backed by community consensus and understanding of a person's qualifications.

Apparently, then, Ilqāy made a different type of journey from the later *wāfīdīyah*. Especially if he had travelled with slave merchants who supplied the court, he would have been able to contact influential people. Members of the court could have judged his experience and acknowledged his usefulness to the treasury because he would have needed a patron to guide him through the bureaucracy. Moreover, since the Mamlūks had been taken from

⁴¹Kolbas, *Mongols*, p. 182. For Cilician Armenia's original capitulation in 641/1243 that allowed substantial independence as a vassal, see Dashdondog, *The Mongols*, pp. 65–66.

⁴²Later, a reverse trip was recorded when Francesco Pegolotti wrote his merchant's manual in around 1340 of the trade route through Anatolia from the port of Ayas in Cilician Armenia and other cities though Sivas to Tabriz. His Florentine company was challenging the early and dominant supremacy of the Genoese. Jacques Paviot, 'Les Marchands Italiens dans l'Iran Mongol', in *L'Iran Face à la Domination Mongole* (Teheran, 1997), pp. 71–86, p. 72. Also, Nicola Di Cosmo, 'Mongols and merchants on the Black Sea frontier (13th–14th c.): convergences and conflicts', in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, (eds) Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden, 2005), pp. 391–424, concentrating on the Golden Horde and the latter century.

⁴³Ishayahu Landa, 'Oirats in the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk sultanate in the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries: two cases of assimilation into the Muslim environment', *Mamluk Studies Review* 19 (2016), pp. 149–191, p. 159, but he does not give any more detail, saying that 'there had been a continuous stream of Mongol refugees from the Ilkhanate to Syria and Egypt since the 1240s' as 'part of a broader *wāfīdīyah* phenomenon'.

⁴⁴Koby Yosef, 'Cross-boundary hatred: (changing) attitudes towards Mongol and "Christian" *mamlūks* in the Mamluk sultanate', in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History* (Bonn, 2019), pp. 149–214, pp. 152–153, where Yosef notes from original sources that Baybars 'tried to forge a Chingizid genealogy and established marital ties with... families of senior Mongol immigrants'. 'Qalāwūn also married daughters of Mongol immigrants', one of whom 'is sometimes said to have been a descendent of Genghis Khan'. 'Almost all the sultans until the days of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341) married Mongol women, and sons of al-Zāhir Baybars and al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn who became sultans were half Mongol and were probably exposed to Mongol influences in the Mamluk court and the sultan's household.'

⁴⁵Reuven Amitai, 'Mamluks of Mongol origin and their role in early Mamluk political life', *Mamluk Studies Review* 12 (2008), pp. 119–137, shows the importance of the military role played by Mongol immigrants.

the Qipchaq steppe, their language and culture were Turkish,⁴⁶ which were closely related to his own. Since Ilqāy would have been exposed to both, perhaps absorbing some of the language, his transition would probably have been rather easy. The move seems to have been planned as carefully as possible, despite the political uncertainty in Egypt as the Mamlūks took over. More than likely, as a treasury official, he would have accumulated enough financial resources to pay for the journey, solicit introductions to the court, and perhaps even pay for his appointment to the position.

Although the previous analysis is conjectural, there is no doubt that Ilqāy was the first Mamlūk appointee as mint master. He broke the control of the previous Ayyūbid officials, the Turkish family, and religious authorities; yet their inclusion was still necessary, and Muḥammad b. al-ʿAwdhī and Ḥusayn al-Mahdī were reinstated so that the entrenched bureaucracy continued to manage the system after Ilqāy left. Nevertheless, according to his weight dates and number of types, he attained a better position than several other masters at the time. Moreover, he could have had a reasonable tenure since the two whom he interrupted ultimately held the post for 9 and 16 years respectively. However, he had neither of their backgrounds, which may have caused his dismissal. Also, he might have taken another post in the treasury, but there is no source material that lists various officials and their responsibilities. After he left the mint, Ilqāy probably did not join the 200 new Mongol migrants who arrived eight years later in 660/1262 with the permission of Baybars. The group was mainly a military unit, likely housed outside Cairo or on the island in the middle of the Nile. The roles were completely different, and other loyalties differed, even though both rejected Toluid rule. Unfortunately, at this point, all conjecture about Ilqāy's fascinating biography must cease: no more information can be gleaned from any internal Mamlūk sources or other events.

Conclusion

The hypothetical biography proposes that early in his career Ilqāy ʿAlī was a Mongol treasury official loyal to the Ögödeids, working first in Qarā Qorum, the Mongol capital, under Ögödei and then Güyük. Ilqāy may have taken the imperial style with *töre* on it across the steppe, striking silver, and then helped to organise vassal coinages in Georgian and Rum Seljūq territories in 645 and 646/1247 and 1248. Because of the harsh civil war among the Chingizids after Güyük's death, he may have offered his services to the Mamlūks. In Cairo, he was appointed to one of the highest positions in the treasury in 650/1251 as the court began to employ new staff while also keeping former officials of the Ayyūbid regime. As a result, some small objects with a strange name have required an investigation that followed a numismatic trail from Qarā Qorum to Cairo, considered monetary movements as well as messages of legitimacy and rulership, and explored the mint structure in Cairo. In his early career, Ilqāy would have grown more financially sophisticated as he implemented various policies in each new region until he appeared in Cairo as head of the mint. Beyond the two years listed on his glass weights as mint master, almost all else must remain truly

⁴⁶Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden, 1992), p. 349.

unknown. No matter what his detailed biography really is, he spent his life surviving dramatic regime changes throughout Central Asia and the Middle East. Without any literary evidence for his life or even mint activity, only circumstantial clues provide information; yet, a small but poignant glimpse of a possible Mongol refugee has emerged from ten pieces of glass, each the size of a coin.

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