

## **Teaching Chaghatay Turkish** **(Dr. Nicholas Walmsley)**

During the academic year 2015/16 Post-doctoral Research Fellow Nicholas Walmsley has been leading an informal but committed group of students through a series of readings in Chaghatay Turkish. The course is designed to help students who already have a background in Arabic and/or Persian (and who are therefore familiar with the script and a large proportion of the lexicon) gain a basic reading knowledge of Chaghatay for research purposes.

Originally, the term “Chaghatay” was used to describe the Turkish literary language of the later Chaghatay Khanate and the Timurid dynasty (ca. 1300–ca. 1500). But now it is used to describe all Turkish language materials written in Arabic script in Islamic Central Asia from the early fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries. In this instance, Islamic Central Asia means the regions of Khorezm (Khiva), Mawarannahr (or Transoxiana), Eastern Turkestan, and the Kazakh steppe.

While there is no shortage of manuscript and published materials in Chaghatay, there is a shortage of textbooks that guide students through the study of the language. Similarly, there is an absence of materials based on reading and translation exercises of increasing difficulty. By contrast, there is a broad range of reference materials, including a pair of grammar guides by Jan  Eckmann and Andr  Bodrogligeti (both in English), and a number of dictionaries in French, German, Russian, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish.

Therefore, there is a great onus on the instructor to provide a strong foundation in the orthography, phonology, morphology, grammar, and lexicon of Chaghatay without recourse to what we would recognize as a proper language textbook.

Over the course of two semesters, the instructor and students are reading in chronological order a series of edited texts from the early fourteenth to the late nineteenth century. The earliest text is the *Qısaş al-anbiyā* (Stories of the Prophets) by al-Rabguz. Although this is classified by linguistic historians as a Khorezmian Turkish text on the basis of particular linguistic and orthographical features, it is a good starting point because of the comparative simplicity of its syntactical elements and the familiarity of the material to anyone with a background in Islamic studies.

The reading group is focusing on prose works of a historiographical and biographical nature. These include a hagiography of a prominent Yasavi shaykh that probably dates to the second-half of the fourteenth century; ‘Al Shr Nav’s pair of biographical dictionaries on poets and Sufis; and the memoirs of Bbur, founder of the Mughal dynasty.

Although all these works were produced after the heyday of the unified Mongol empire and its successor states, many of them were produced in political environments, e.g., Chinggisid dynastic courts, that had historical links to the Mongols and so provide a post facto outlook on the Mongol period. Furthermore, as more and more historians begins to engage with Chaghatay as a way of exploring Central Asian history, more and more sources are being unearthed that open up fresh perspectives on the Mongol legacy in Central Asia.

It is hoped that this reading group will encourage students of the Mongol empire and its successor states to engage with Chaghatay texts.