

**ARAM POGHOSYAN**

*Yerevan State University, PhD researcher*  
arampoghosyan.hist@gmail.com

## **THE SYSTEM OF TAMMA IN THE CAUCASUS (ACCORDING TO ARMENIAN SOURCES)**

**Key words:** “*Tsunami Strategy*”, *tamma*, *Chormaqan*, *vanguard troops*, *ulus-states*, *Mongolian Empira*, *Mongol conquest*.

Since the Mongols created the largest contiguous empire in history, it is important to explore the process through which they incorporated territory into this empire. The study of the sources reveals that the Mongols possessed a standard strategy initiated during the reign of Ögedei Khan (1229–1241), although antecedents evidently existed since the period of Genghis Khan, whereby they invaded a region and caused considerable devastation but only intended to keep a small portion of the area they conquered. Meanwhile, in this new borderland the Mongols established a military force known as *tamma*, then used the region to control the Mongol frontier as well as launch raids or intimidate the neighboring powers. This strategy is known as “*Tsunami Strategy*”<sup>1</sup>. One of the characteristic features of the “*Tsunami Strategy*” is the establishment of the *tamma* military system. *Tamma* first of all was a military unit separated from the main army of the Mongols<sup>2</sup>. The forces of *tamma* were usually situated in the newly conquered lands. Indeed, the *tamma* was the main instrument with the help of which new territories were incorporated into the Mongol Empire and became its constituent part. The *tamma* often remained in its post for several years. The *tamma* system was implemented in the Mongol military system during their conquests in Korea (1231/1232)<sup>3</sup>, Tibet

---

<sup>1</sup> **May T.**, *Mongol Conquest Strategy in the Middle East*, *Islamic History and Civilization*, v. 127, *The Mongols' Middle East, Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, Brill, 2016, p. 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> **Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao**, *The Military Establishment of the Yuan Dynasty*, Harvard University, London, 1978, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> **Ledyard G.**, *The Mongol Campaigns in Korea and the Dating of the Secret History of the Mongols*, *Central Asiatic Journal*, IX, 1964, pp. 1–22.

### **The System of Tamma in the Caucasus (According to Armenian Sources)**

---

(1240)<sup>4</sup>, Dasht-i Qipchaq(1237)<sup>5</sup> and China (1234/1236).<sup>6</sup> During these conquests by the nomads in the newly occupied territories the *tamma* accomplished<sup>7</sup>:

- a) military supervision,
- b) civilian governance,
- c) tax collection function,
- d) preventive actions of possible rebellions,
- e) the expansion of the borders of the empire.

*Tamma* was established on the borders between nomadic and sedentary cultures on the fringes of the empire<sup>8</sup>. The geographical expansion of regional achievements made the governance of the border areas safer and easier, and later the *tamma* ruling system was replaced by a more rigid administrative one, and the first official figure –*darughachi*, was nominated to rule<sup>9</sup>.

And *tamma* troops had to leave the occupied territories and often resisted the central powers that had to provide them with new pastures for the nomadic economy. Such patterns were found in the Caucasus. Interestingly, there were two military units of *tamma* in the Caucasus. The Caucasus Mountains were the unique border between them. Later, this unique boundary, which, with some changes, stretched from Derbend to the Black Sea, became the reason for territorial conflicts and wars between the two Mongolian states – the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde.

---

<sup>4</sup> **Wilye T.**, The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1977, pp. 114–115.

<sup>5</sup> **May T.**, Mongol Conquest Strategy in the Middle East, The Mongol's Middle East, Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 127, Brill, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> During the conquest of the Jin Empire (1206–1234), Mongols appointed here “*tammač in*”-commander of *tamma* (The Secret History of Mongols, § 273, p. 266–267), **Buell P.D.**, Kalmyk Tanggeci People: Thoughts on the Mechanics and Impact of Mongol Expansion, Mongolian Studies 6, (1980), p. 48):

<sup>7</sup> **Buell P.D.**, Kalmyk Tanggeci People: Thoughts on the Mechanics and Impact of Mongol Expansion, p. 45

<sup>8</sup> According to P. Buell, the term “tamma” derived from “mtah-ma” or “mtah-khol”, which means “a border area occupied by non-civilized peoples”. It was borrowed from the Chinese in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (**Das S.C.**, A Tibetan-English Dictionary, Cal-Cutta, 1902, pp. 596–598, **Buell Paul D.**, op. cit., p. 45): According to Chinese linguist and historian Ch. Hsiao, the term has been used in the sense of “scout horse” or “military vanguard” (**Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao**, The Military Establishment of the Yuan p. 137).

<sup>9</sup> **Buell P.D.**, op. cit., pp. 45–47.

The investigation “*The Secret History of the Mongols*” provides some information concerning the establishment of the *tamma* military system in the North Caucasus. Accomplishing the conquest of the North Caucasus (1237–1240) Batu Khan appointed *tammachi*, a commander of *tamma*, in the country of Alans (Asud)<sup>10</sup>. According to Rukn al-Dīn Beibars<sup>11</sup>, and Al-Nuwayrī<sup>12</sup>, this border spread from Cuban to the lower stream of the Terek river and to Dagestan<sup>13</sup>. In T. May’s opinion, the areas belonging to *tamma* were geographically larger and stretched up to modern Hungary<sup>14</sup>.

Another military unit of *tamma* functioned in the South Caucasus. The commander of this troops was Chormaqan (?–1241/1242). The latter, as *tammachi*, i.e. commander of *tamma*, firstly referred to in “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, functioned during the conquest of Northern Iran (1230–1231). Chormaqan was appointed as a *tammachi* by the order of Ögedei Khan<sup>15</sup>. According to the historian and maphrian-catholicos Bar Hebraeus, Ögedei Khan sent “Sharmaghon” (Chormaqan) to the West in 1228<sup>16</sup>, and as Rashīd al-Dīn states, Chormaqan was appointed as *lashkar*<sup>17</sup>-*tamma* along with an army (*Tümen*)<sup>18</sup> of 40,000 soldiers and was sent to “*that side*”<sup>19</sup>. According to the same

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Secret History of the Mongols*, § 274, p. 267.

<sup>11</sup> Рукнад-Дин Бейбарс, СМІЗО, т. 1, с. 116.

<sup>12</sup> ан-Нувейри, СМОЗО, т. 1, с. 160.

<sup>13</sup> Рашид ад-Дин, т. 2, , с. 74–85.

<sup>14</sup> May T., *Mongol Conquest Strategy in the Middle East*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> *The Secret History of the Mongols*, § 274, p. 267, Buell P.D., *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol Empire*, The Scarecrow Press, 2003, pp. 42–43.

<sup>16</sup> Bar Hebraeus’ *Chronography*, translated from the Syriac by Budge E., vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 394.

<sup>17</sup> *Lashkar*-(Persian لشکر) In Ghaznavid and Seljuq period, Arabian and Persian historians used this term to refer to “army” or “troops” in general. (The Encyclopedia of Islam, ed. by Bosworth C. E., Donzel E., Heinrichs W. P., Volume V, KHE-MAHI, Brill, 1986, p. 685).

<sup>18</sup> *Tümen*-Mongolian army unit consisting of 10,000 soldiers. Later, a military-administrative territorial unit, that could provide 10,000 soldiers (Buell P. D., *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire*, The Scarecrow Press, 2003, p. 111).

<sup>19</sup> “*that side*” is referring to the “Baghdad land” mentioned in the source. It can also refer to the Middle East, where Chormaqan was acting (*The Secret History of Mongols*, p. 267). According to Rashīd al-Dīn, *lashkar*, wherever he was sent, had to stay as long as needed (Рашид ад-Дин, т. 1, кн. 1, с. 98–99). The Georgian anonymous chronicle mentions these four commanders: “*Chormaghan, Chaghat’a, losur and Bicho*” (Kartlis Tskhovreba, Georgian National Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 329).

### **The System of Tamma in the Caucasus (According to Armenian Sources)**

---

source, Chormaqan was replaced by Baijunoyan, who was one of Jebe's relatives.<sup>20</sup>

Armenian and Georgian sources provide information which, though small in amount, however not of less significance. In particular, speaking about Chormaqan, Kirakos Gandzakets'i presented him as "*the chief overseer*" (arm. «գլխաւոր վերակացոյ»), "*the great figure who was the head and the commander of all the troops*" (arm. «գլխաւոր վերակացոյ», «մեծ, որ գլուխ և հրամանաւորուն էր ամենայն զօրուն») without mentioning the term *tamma*. However, he attributed the functions of the *tammach*<sup>21</sup> to him.

According to a Georgian source, when in 1256 Hulagu arrived, he met "*Chormaghon, Iosur, Bicho and Anguragnoins in Adarbadagan and both parties of the Tatars – the ones who had been there formerly, who were called Tamachs and those who came with Khan Ulo, joined together*"<sup>22</sup>. Continuing, the historian notes: "*At first the subject countries lived under these four tamachnoin: Romgur, which is Khorasan, Iraq, Adarbadagan, Movak'an and Bardav, Shirvan, all of Georgia, Khlata and Greece right up to Asia, and were ruled by these four noins*"<sup>23</sup>. According to Juvaini, Chormaqan and Baiju viewed the occupied territories as their property<sup>24</sup>. In Rashid al-Din, during the conquest of Baghdad in 1258 Baiju "*made specific jealousy*" and Hulagu gave rich pastures in Anatolia to the latter and appointed him the commander of troops, consisting of ten-thousand soldiers, while freeing him from the duties of the commander of *tamma*<sup>25</sup>. It is obvious, that with the arrival of Hulagu, the military system of *tamma* was no longer necessary in the conquered territories, since: "*when Ulo came, he managed the country, and governed it in accordance with his position as Khan*"<sup>26</sup>. Armenian historian Grigor Aknerts'i, speaking about the conquest of Baghdad, mentions the letter that Hulagu sent to Möngke Khan (1251–1259). It is

---

<sup>20</sup> **May T.**, *The Mongol Presence and Impact in the Lands of the Eastern Mediterranean*, Crusaders, Condottieri, and Cannon, Medieval Warfare in Societies Around the Mediterranean, edited by Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrew Villalon, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> **Կիրակոս Գանձակեցի**, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, Ե., 1961, էջ 234, 275:

<sup>22</sup> **Kartlis Tskhovreba**, p. 340.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 340–341.

<sup>24</sup> **Juvaini**, Genghis Khan, History of the World-Conqueror, Boyle J. (ed.), Manchester University Press, 1958, p. 505.

<sup>25</sup> **Рашид ад-Дин**, т. 1, кн. 1, с. 99:

<sup>26</sup> **Kartlis Tskhovreba**, p. 341.

clear from the content of the letter that Chormaqan and Baiju's military forces – “old *T'emaych'ik' cavalry*” (arm. «*qhhū hēdētū' qloṭmāyṣhpū*») had to leave the previously occupied lands for the “new” troops to settle there and look for new pastures in other places<sup>27</sup>. According to Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvinī, the relations between Baiju and Hulagu were tense. In Ḥamdallāh Qazvinī, Baiju had to move to the Sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor<sup>28</sup>. Vardan Arevelts'i, speaking about Hulagu's arrival, mentioned that he “issued a decree” for the “*first arrived troops*” (arm. «*նախ եկեալ զօրոն*») to leave the already occupied pastures and move to Anatolia<sup>29</sup>. It is not difficult to understand that the phrase “*first arrived troops*” referred to the military unit of *tamma* the commander of which was first Chormaqan then Baiju. Bar Hebraeus also mentioned this situation. According to the historian, Baiju's troops had to move to Erzurum and look for new pastures because Hulagu wanted to winter in Moḡān plain, which was occupied by the *tamma*<sup>30</sup>. The Armenian historian Hayton of Corycus also provided information about *tamma*. Speaking about the conquest of western countries, the historian pointed out that Ögedei Khan selected a certain general, brave and wise, named “Payton” (Baiju) and entrusted him with 30,000 tatar soldiers, termed “*Camachi*” (“*tamma*”) or “*conquistores*” (“*reconnaissance*”) army<sup>31</sup>. According to the historian, if the forces of the *tamma* had not been enough, instead of fighting they would have made “*a camp in some good country and notify one of his (Ögedei Khan) sons nearby, send them for help, and then they could safely begin the battle*”<sup>32</sup>. In general, it should be noted that the members of the Khan's family and their relatives who anticipated some interest from the conquests, were also involved in the *tamma*. After the conquests, according to the will of Genghis

---

<sup>27</sup> Գրիգոր Ակներցի, Երուսաղեմ, 1974, էջ 43:

<sup>28</sup> The chapter on the history of the Mongols, the last of Hamdallah Mustaufi's “Zafar-nameh” was not published and it has been translated by L. Ward and attached to the appendix of the dissertation (Ward L., “The Zafar-nameh of Hamd Allah Mustaufi and the Ilkhan dynasty of Iran”, Ph.D diss, University of Manchester, 1983, vol. 2, p. 62).

<sup>29</sup> Վարդան Արևելցի, Տիեզերական պատմություն, Ե., 2001, էջ 198:

<sup>30</sup> Bar Hebraeus, p. 424.

<sup>31</sup> Hayton, La Flor Des Estoires Del la Terre d'Orient, Recueil, des Historiens des croisades, documents arméniens tom second, Paris, 1906, Chapitre XI, p. 158.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

### **The System of Tamma in the Caucasus (According to Armenian Sources)**

Khan, the occupied territories were included in appropriate ulus-state<sup>33</sup>. And in this regard, it should be mentioned that the military system of *tamma* was temporary. From Hayton's words, it is not clear which ulus-state is meant in this case. The word "sons" is referred to the sons of Genghis or Ögedei Khan and their immediate heirs, who led the main forces and if necessary, they would provide assisting forces as it was decided in Kurultai (1235). But then, Hayton, states, that in these regions the Jochids (Golden Horde) were dominant<sup>34</sup>. It can be assumed that after the vacate of *tamma* the Caucasus should have been included in Jochidulus, taking into account geographical proximity and their activity in the Caucasus<sup>35</sup>.

## **ԹԱՄՄԱՅԻ ՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳԸ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՈՒՄ**

ՊՈՂՈՍՅԱՆ Ա.

### **Ամփոփում**

**Քանալի բառեր՝** «Յունամիի» ռազմավարություն, թամմա, Չարմաղան, առաջապահ ջոկատ, ուլուս-պետություններ:

Մոնղոլական նվաճումների բնորոշ գծերից է թամմայի ռազմավարչական համակարգի հաստատումը գրավված երկրներում: Թամման, առաջին հերթին ռազմական ստորաբաժանում էր, որն առանձնացվում էր մոնղոլական հիմնական բանակից: Այս համակարգը նվաճված տարածքներում պահպանվում էր այնքան ժամանակ, մինչև պարզ էր լինում, թե մոնղոլական որ ուլուսի կազմի մեջ այն պետք է ներառվեր: Իսկ ինչ վերաբերում է թամմայի զորքերին, ապա նրանք ստիպված էին լինում թողնել զբաղեցված տարածքները, և հաճախ էին դիմադրում կենտրոնական իշխանություններին, որոնք ստիպված էին լինում նրանց տրամադրել քոչվորական տնտեսության համար նոր արոտավայրեր: Մոնղոլները թամմայի համակարգ հաստատեցին նաև Կովկասում: Հետաքրքիրն այն է, որ Կովկասում գործում էր թամմայի երկու զո-

<sup>33</sup> Jackson P., The Mongols and the West, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>34</sup> Hayton, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> We thank the professor of the University of North Georgia T. May for a useful online discussion.

րամիավորում, որոնց միջև յուրահատուկ սահման էր Կովկասյան լեռնաշղթան: Հետագայում հենց այս յուրահատուկ սահմանը, որը, որոշ փոփոխություններով, ձգվելով Դերբենի քաղաքից մինչև Սև ծով, դարձավ մոնղոլական երկու պետությունների՝ Հուվսյանների և Ոսկե Հորդայի միջև տարածքային հակամարտության և պատերազմների պատճառ:

## СИСТЕМА «ТАММА» НА КАВКАЗЕ

ПОГОСЯН А.

### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** стратегия «Цунами», тамма, Чормагун, авангардные войска, улусные государства.

Одной из характерных черт монгольских завоеваний является создание стратегической системы таммы в оккупированных странах. Тамма, прежде всего, была воинской частью, изолированной от основной монгольской армии. Эта система сохранялась на оккупированных территориях до тех пор, пока не стало ясно, в какой монгольский улус должны включаться эти завоеванные страны. Что же касается войск тамма, то им пришлось покинуть оккупированные территории и нередко оказывать сопротивление центральным властям, которые должны были предоставить им новые пастбища для кочевой экономики. Монголы создали систему тамма и на Кавказе. Интересно, что на Кавказе имелись две воинские части тамма. Границей между этими двумя подразделениями были кавказские горы. Позднее эта граница частично была изменена и простиралась от Дербента до Черного моря, став причиной территориального конфликта и войн между двумя монгольскими государствами-Хулагуидами и Золотой Ордой.