

## BELT AND ITS USAGE IN THE MEDIEVAL MONGOLS

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**Abstract:** When examined in its historical context, the belt, initially utilized as an accessory, has found its place in nearly every language and has been used as a significant garment for centuries under various names. As a complement to the elegance of clothing, this element has taken different forms depending on the region and geographical conditions, thus establishing itself with distinct identities in different cultures. Typically worn by wrapping around the waist in a thick structure, this accessory has various forms that can be fastened through tying or with a front buckle. It is a well-known fact that belts not only facilitate the ease of wearing clothes but also provide many clues about the culture from which they emerge. Undoubtedly, one of the societies that places importance on the belt within the framework of its cultural values is the Mongols. The belts, enriched with animal motifs, have materials such as gold, silver, leather, and silk in their general structure, varying according to the individual's status and wealth. Evolving and differentiating through interactions among constantly changing and developing societies, these belts carry varying meanings for Mongol men and women.

**Keywords:** Belt, Art, Mongol, Clothing, Culture.

### ORTA ÇAĞ MOĞOLLARINDA KEMER VE KULLANIMI

**Öz:** Tarihsel sürecine bakıldığında bir aksesuar olarak kullanılmaya başlanan kemer, hemen hemen her dilde kendine yer edinmiş ve farklı isimlerle anılmak suretiyle yüzyıllar boyunca önemli bir giyim parçası olarak kullanılmagelmiştir. Giysilerdeki zarafetin tamamlayıcısı olan bu unsur, bulunduğu yöre ve coğrafi koşullara göre şekil almış bu nedenle de farklı kültürlerde farklı kimliklerle kendine yer edinmiştir. Genellikle kalın bir yapıda beli saracak şekilde bele dolanarak kullanılan bu aksesuarın bağlamalı ve önden toka vasıtasıyla tutturulabilen farklı birçok şekli bulunmaktadır. Sadece kıyafetlerin daha kolay bir şekilde kullanılabilir olmasını sağlamakla kalmayıp ortaya çıkıp şekil aldığı kültür hakkında da birçok ipucu verdiği bilinen bir gerçektir. Kültürel değerleri çerçevesinde kemere önem veren toplumlardan biri de hiç şüphesiz Moğollardır. Hayvan üslubu ile zenginleştirilen kemerlerin genel yapı malzemeleri kişinin

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statü ve zenginliğine bağlı olarak altın, gümüş, deri ve ipek çerçevesinde değişim göstermektedir. Sürekli değişen ve gelişen toplumlar arasında etkileşimler sonucunda farklılaşan kemerler gerek Moğol erkeği gerekse Moğol kadını için farklı anlamlar ölçüsünde değer taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kemer, Sanat, Moğol, Giyim, Kültür.

### Introduction

Belts, emerging with aesthetic considerations and undergoing changes based on the conditions of the time, constitute one of the essential components of a society's cultural values. Beyond their diverse functionalities, such as securing clothing to the body, enhancing outerwear, and closing the front of garments, belts also play a role in facilitating the carrying of tools, equipment, and weapons. Examining the use of waist accessories reveals a well-established fact: belts are employed for symbolic reasons such as aesthetic concerns, power, rank, status, good fortune, and abundance<sup>1</sup>. Belts, crafted to align with an individual's identity, feature patterns at both ends referred to as "üstem"<sup>2</sup>. The personalized design and usage of belts, varying in forms, correlate with the individual's societal status and value.

### 1. The Etymological Identity of The Word "Belt"

The term "belt" is used in various languages such as Persian (کمر)<sup>3</sup>, Arabic (حزام)<sup>4</sup>, Russian Пояс (пояс: belt), remen (ремень: strap)<sup>5</sup>, and is defined as a band or waist strap. The spelling and interpretation of the word "belt" are shaped as KM büse 'band, belt' (OM MGTbüse, HYbüse, BYbüs, ZYbüsi, MEBüse, ŞLbüse, İMbüse, RSBüse, Hlh. бус(ән), Ма. -) || GT bōz 'fabric, cloth, linen fabric', BT \*ber 'linen fabric' (> Chuv. pir)<sup>6</sup>. Throughout history, these ties, wrapped around the circumference of garments such as dresses or kaftans, have

<sup>1</sup> Melda Özdemir, "Gerde İlçesinde Deri Kemer Yapımı", *Turkish Studies International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, Bahar, 2016, s. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Necdet Sakaoğlu-Nuri Akbayar, *Derinin Anadolu'da Bin Yıllık Öyküsü*, Creative Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2002, s. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Kanar, *Farsça-Türkçe Sözlük*, Say Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, s. 1229.

<sup>4</sup> Serdar Mutçalı, *Arapça-Türkçe Sözlük*, Dağarcık Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, s. 296.

<sup>5</sup> *Boşoy Turetsko-Russkiy i Russko-Turetskoy Slovar*, Sostaviteli Bogaçanskaya N. N.- Torgoşova A. S., Dom Slavyanskoy Knigi, Moskva 2009, s. 786.

<sup>6</sup> Orçun Ünal, "Klasik ve Orta Moğolca Söz Varlığında Türkçe Kökenli Kelimeler I (A-D)", *Journal of Old Turkic Studies*, cilt 3, sayı 2 (Summer), 2019, s. 551.

been referred to by different names such as kur, kadış, kayış, ilersik, toka, akyış bil bağı, and bel bağı<sup>7</sup>.

In the *Divanu Lûgat-it-Türk*, the word “qur” corresponds to the meanings of belt or strap, and the word “Tûş” denotes the gold or silver buckle attached to the end of belts or straps<sup>8</sup>. The term “bel bağı” is also used interchangeably with the words belt, strap, or tie. In the Kyrgyz dialect, it is referred to as bilboo, and in Anatolia, it is known as bilbo, showcasing a linguistic interaction example across different geographies<sup>9</sup>. In *Kamus-ı Türki*, the word “belt” is defined as an accessory that only embraces or wraps around the waist with a buckle<sup>10</sup>. In the military context, belts used in the military are expressed as “kayış” (kadıhş) due to their function<sup>11</sup>. Specifically, the Mongolian term “byse/büse” (ᠪᠦᠰᠡᠪᠦᠰᠡ)<sup>12</sup> is used to describe the belts used by Mongols, and belts made of precious materials such as silk and gold are referred to in Mongolian as “altan büse”<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. The Usage Areas of Belts in Mongols

Undoubtedly, one of the indispensable accessories in Mongolian attire is the belt. Belts and sashes, wrapped around the waist of kaftans or dresses<sup>14</sup>, were crafted from various materials, including metal or silk threads interwoven with gold. Belts considered significant accessories in clothing, were adorned with different motifs to impart a distinctive appearance to the attire. Particularly during

<sup>7</sup> Salim Koca, “Eski Türklerde Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayat”, *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, c. III, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, Ankara 2002, s. 32-33; Sakaoğlu-Akbayar, a.g.e., s. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Kaşgarlı Mahmûd, *Divan-ü Lûgat-it-Türk*, Çev. Serap Tuba Yurteser-Seçkin Erdi, Kabaıcı Yayınevi, İstanbul 2007, s. 450, 596.

<sup>9</sup> Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Kültür Tarihine Giriş Türklerde Köy ve Şehir Hayatı (Göktürklerden Osmanlılara)*, c. 5, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 1991, s. 73; Menekşe Sakarya-Hamide Tuba Kızılkaya, “İslam Öncesi Türklerde Kemer Kullanımı ve Özellikleri”, *Ulakbilge*, sayı 53, Ekim, 2020, s. 1211-1229.

<sup>10</sup> Şemseddin Sami, *Kâmûs-ı Türk-i*, Haz. Raşit Gündoğdu, Niyazi Adıgüzel, Ebul Faruk Önal, İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2017, s. 913.

<sup>11</sup> Ögel, a.g.e., s. 74.

<sup>12</sup> F. D. Lessing, *Moğolca-Türkçe Sözlük*, c. I, Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2003, s. 151; N. N. Poppe *Mongol'skiy Slovar' Mukaddimat Al-Adab (Çast' I-II) (Trudi Institutu Vostokovedeniya XIV)*, İzdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moskva-Leningrad 1938, s. 128.

<sup>13</sup> F. W. Cleaves, “The Sino-Mongolian Inscription of 1362 in Memory of Prince Hindu”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, c. 12, sayı 1/2, (1949), s. 66-67.

<sup>14</sup> M. V. Gorelik, “Ranniıy Mongol'skiy Dospeli (IX-Pervaya Polovina XIV v.)”, *Arheologiya, Etnografiya i Antropologiya Mongolii*, A. P. Derevyanko, Ş. Natsagdorj (Ed.), İzdatel'stvo “Nauka” Sibirskoe Otdelenie, Novosibirsk 1987, s. 26.

pattern-making, predatory animal figures such as lions and falcons were prominently utilized<sup>15</sup>. Examining Mongolian clothing culture reveals that the use of belts and sashes holds as much importance as the use of headgear<sup>16</sup>. Mongols emphasized the use of belts to tighten their pleated garments, ensuring a more organized and comfortable attire<sup>17</sup>.

Mongols often infused a mystical essence into the belts they used. An illustrative example is the story of Temüjin, who, after being left alone with his tribe following his father's death, was abducted by another Mongolian tribe. Temüjin managed to escape, wearing his belt around his neck and hat on his arm, turning towards the sun. He kneeled nine times, striking his chest with his hand as a gesture of repentance<sup>18</sup>. Mongols climbed sacred peaks to be close to God and make their voices heard. During these rituals, Mongols would remove their headgear, tie their belts around their necks, and declare their loyalty to God<sup>19</sup>. Atmospheric phenomena significantly influenced Mongol leaders, and to avoid displeasing the gods, they climbed high peaks during thunderstorms, kneeling with belts over their shoulders, and praying for divine assistance<sup>20</sup>. Mongols wore belts with precious stones to protect themselves from thunderstorms and lightning. These details emphasize the religious connection between Mongols' belief systems and the belts they used. The different fabrics and materials for belts were directly proportional to the individual's status and wealth. Mongols, known for their affinity for silk, also incorporated it into their belts, creating a variety of colorful silk belts. Belts were crucial accessories for Mongol men and women, providing a vibrant contrast to the attire when worn in different colors, especially

<sup>15</sup> J. C. Y. Watt- A. E. Wardwell, *When Silk was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1998, s. 127.

<sup>16</sup> P. Hrapačevskiy, *Tsentr po İzučeniyu Voennoy i Obşçey İstorii, Arabskie i Persidskie Soçineniya*, Moskova 2003, s. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Richard, *Simon de Saint-Quentin Histoire des Tartares*, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris 1965, s. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Manghol-un Niuça Tobça'an, *Moğolların Gizli Tarihi I*, Çev. Ahmet Temir, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 2010, s. 41; Eric Haenisch, *Wörterbuch zu Manghol un Niuça Tobca'an (Yüan-cha'o Pi-shi) Geheime Geschichte Der Mongolen*, Otto Harrassowitz. Leipzig 1939; A. Konstantin D'Ohsson, *Moğol Tarihi: Denizler İmparatoru Cengiz*, Çev. Bahadır Apaydın, Nesnel Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, s. 35; Mustafa Akkuş, *Moğollarda Din ve Siyaset: İlhanlı Hanlarının Dini Kişiliği ve Uygulamaları*, Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları, Konya 2020, s. 50-51; George Vernadsky, *Moğollar ve Ruslar*, Çev. Eşref Bengi Özbilen, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, s. 39; Curt Alinge, *Moğol Kanunları*, Çev. Coşkun Üçok, Sevinç Matbaası, Ankara 1967, s. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Leo De Hartog, *Cengiz Han Dünyanın Fatihii*. Çev. Serkan Uzun, Dost Kitabevi, Ankara 2003, s. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Harold Lamb, *Moğolların Elendisi Cengiz Han*, Çev. A. G. Bozkurt, İlgı Kültür Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, s. 38.

in shades of blue, yellow, red, and purple. Women fastened their belts by connecting them with another strip across the chest, adding a dynamic element to their clothing<sup>21</sup>.

Belts were typically long and wide, extending from the waist to the shoulder level. Mongols often used yellow belts made of Damascus silk (黃綾帶) and red silk sashes with golden embroidery (紅組金綬紳)<sup>22</sup>. After marriage, Mongolian women refrained from wearing belts, only donning them in necessary situations, such as cold and windy weather during travels. Beyond being a fashion accessory, belts served practical purposes for carrying weapons such as bows or swords. The luxury of a bow belt could be determined by examining the material used. Notably, during the reign of a new Mongol Khan, neighboring states' envoys would bring belts made from special fabrics named *nesic*<sup>23</sup> or *sericum*<sup>24</sup> as gifts. The abundance of colorful silk belts showed the Mongol preference for silk. The information suggests that belts served as symbolic items and practical accessories for Mongol men and women. Another function of the belt was to carry wallets. In Mongol belts, there were sometimes two wallets hanging downwards, one on each side, sometimes rectangular and sometimes round in shape. These wallets were called "kalta" or "kaptarga"<sup>25</sup>.

Belts played a crucial role in the Mongolian postal system, where foot messengers covering distances of up to 4-5 km would carry letters on their belts and exchange duties at specified stations. Mongols also used worn-out and old coins to make belts during the reign of Kublai Khan, highlighting the adaptability of belts as functional accessories<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, belts had ceremonial significance during naturalization ceremonies after the election of a new Khan. The

<sup>21</sup> T. D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention (Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan)*, Cornell University East Asia Program, New York 2001, s. 159-163.

<sup>22</sup> P. Jackson, - D. Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253-1255*, Hakluyt Society, London 1990, s. 89.

<sup>23</sup> Red fabrics embroidered with gold are referred to as 'Nashishi [納石失 (Nesic)]' see; Song Lian 宋濂, Yuanshi 元史, ed. Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, Beijing 北京 1976, s. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Silk threaded with gold.

<sup>25</sup> V. Wyngaert- P. Anastasius, *Sinica Franciscana I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, Quaracchi-Firenze 1929, s. 120; Haenisch, *Wörterbuch zu Manghol un Niuca Tobca'au (Yüan-cha'o Pi-shi) Geheime Geschichte Der Mongolen*, s. 23; T. T. Allsen, "Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia", *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change*, Reuven Amitai, Michal Biran (Ed.), University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu 2014, s. 18-19; Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 27; Oktay Berber, "13. Yüzylda Moğolların Diplomasi Anlayışı Üzerine Bazı Notlar", *Eskişehir Os-mangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, cilt 19, sayı 2, 2018, s. 88.

<sup>26</sup> Marco Polo, *Marko Polo Seyahatnamesi*, Haz. Filiz Dokuman, c. I, Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser, Kervan Kitapçılık, İstanbul 1980, s. 125-133.

tradition involved removing belts and headgear as a formal gesture to express loyalty to the newly elected Khan. This tradition persisted during each Khan's succession<sup>27</sup>. Three influential figures would come forward and seat the person who became Khan by holding onto their hands and belt (D'Ohsson, 2008: 148; Vladimirtsov, 1995: 122-123). From this perspective, we can say that the belt also serves a function of showing respect<sup>28</sup>. Mongols, when appointing someone as a vizier, would gift them not only stamped charters but also belts<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, belts sometimes served as healing objects for Mongols. After regaining control of Körgüz, Horasan, and Mâzenderân, Körgüz aimed to win the trust of Ögeday Khan. After presenting a belt that he had crafted himself, Ögeday Khan noticed relief from his back pain after wearing the belt around his waist. This incident indicated that belts were regarded as gifts and objects with healing properties<sup>30</sup>.

### Conclusion

Throughout history, humans have felt the necessity to cover themselves, laying the groundwork for the emergence of a culture under the umbrella of clothing. Over time, this culture has evolved into a more artistic identity, transforming clothing from a mere necessity into a style where visual aesthetics take precedence. Undoubtedly, various states throughout history have had unique clothing norms and conventions. One such example is the Mongols, who are meticulous people when it comes to clothing and accessories. Particularly in belts, the Mongols showcase their penchant for elaborate fabrics and materials, adorning belts with silk or precious stones, turning each into a work of art.

The belts used by the Mongols should not be solely evaluated as clothing accessories. Examining the belts worn by postal service workers or those used by soldiers to secure their weapons reveals a different dimension of utility. The belts given as gifts during exchanges, appointments, post-election visits, and the assignments of viziers signify that these objects possess a significant identity beyond being a mere component of attire.

<sup>27</sup> Berthold Spuler, *İran Moğolları Siyaset, İdare ve Kültür İlhanlılar Devri, 1220-1350*, Çev. Cemal Köprülü, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 2011, s. 289-335.

<sup>28</sup> D'Ohsson, a.g.e., 2008, 148; Vladimirtsov, a.g.e., 122-123

<sup>29</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Medhâl*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 1988, s. 209.

<sup>30</sup> Atâ Melik Cüveynî, *Târîh-i Cihângüşâ*, Çev. Mürsel Öztürk, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 2013, s. 412.

In summary, the Mongols' meticulous attention to clothing and accessories has elevated belts to art. The belts, adorned with luxurious fabrics and materials, reflect a sense of style and cultural significance. Gifting belts occasionally underline that these objects hold a respectable identity beyond being a mere part of clothing, highlighting their cultural and ceremonial importance.

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**EKLER**

**Görsel 1.** *A set of belts made of silver and gilded bronze. From a tomb in the Bayrağı region, Chelimu County, Inner Mongolia, People's Republic of China<sup>31</sup>.*



**Görsel 2.** *A set of belts made of jade and gilded bronze. From the tomb of Princess Chen and her husband Xiao Shaoyu in the early 11th century, Institute of Monuments<sup>32</sup>.*

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<sup>31</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 47.



**Görsel 3.** *A miniature depicting ceremonial and award belts for Mongol men. From the early 14th century in Tabriz. Prussian Cultural Heritage, Berlin<sup>33</sup>.*



**Görsel 4.** *A set of gold belts adorned with Yakut and jade stones. The belt is meticulously crafted, using precious materials, and is truly at a khanate level<sup>34</sup>.*

<sup>33</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 65.

<sup>34</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s.65.



**Görsel 5.** *A bronze child's belt set from the 13th century Yuan Dynasty period. Moscow<sup>35</sup>.*



**Görsel 6.** *A gold belt buckle from the Yuan Dynasty<sup>36</sup>.*

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<sup>35</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 66.



**Görsel 7.** *A jade stone frame used in Mongol belts from the Yuan Dynasty period. Metropolitan Museum, New York. The pearls on the edges of this motif, crafted by a Chinese artist, are a characteristic detail of Mongol metal accessories<sup>37</sup>.*



**Görsel 8.** *A jade belt set from the Yuan Empire, 13th-14th centuries, Beijing<sup>38</sup>.*

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<sup>37</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 66.



**Görsel 9.** *A set of gold belts from the Great Mongol Empire, 13th century. Beijing<sup>39</sup>.*



**Görsel 10.** *Set of gold belts. First half of the 13th century. A Chinese-style belt with two buckles<sup>40</sup>.*

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<sup>39</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 67.





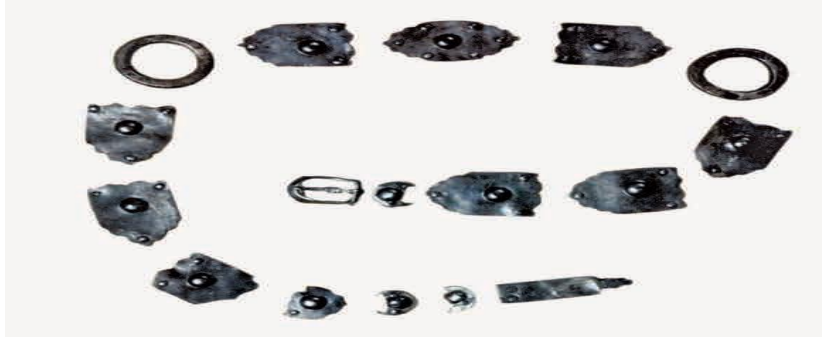
**Görsel 11.** *Gold plates from a Mongol belt made in the 13th century, with a "zamak" buckle. D.N. Khalili Collection, London<sup>41</sup>.*



**Görsel 12.** *A Mongol belt adorned with gold-plated silver ornaments<sup>42</sup>.*

<sup>41</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 67.



**Görsel 13.** *A silver belt set from the Belorechensky mounds (Prikuban, Golden Horde). Late 14th century - early 15th century. GIM (State Historical Museum), Moscow<sup>43</sup>.*



**Görsel 14.** *A palace costume from the early 14th century, drawn from archaeological findings<sup>44</sup>.*

<sup>43</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 67.

<sup>44</sup> Gorelik, a.g.m., s. 77.