



JABĠUYA

JABĠUYA, Arabo-Persian form of the Central Asian title *yabġu*. This article will be divided into two sections.

i. Origin and early history.

ii. In Islamic sources.

i. ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

Although *yabġu* is best known as a Turkish title of nobility, it was in use many centuries before the Turks appear in the historical record. The earliest form of the word attested is the Chinese *xihou* (ancient *ṣap-g'u*; Karlgren, pp. 675 q [and variants] + 113a, Early Middle Chinese *xip-γəw*), which is found as a title of various “barbarian” (Wusun, Yuezhi, etc.) rulers in texts referring to events from the 2nd century B.C.E. onwards. The title seems first to have been brought to the Iranian world by the Kushans. The *Han shu*, (chap. 96A, p. 3891), tells that the Yuezhi were ruled by five *xihou*, to which the *Hou Han shu* (chap. 88, p. 2921), adds an account of how Qiujiuque, the “Guishuang *xihou*,” that is Kujula Kadphises the “Kushan *yabġu*,” obtained supremacy over the other four *xihou* and thus established the Kushan Empire (Chavannes, 1907, pp. 189-92; Hulsewé and Loewe, pp. 121-23). As is to be expected, the title is also attested on the coins of Kujula, where it written *yavuga-* or *yaüa-* in Prakrit and *zaouu* (genitive of **zaoos* or **zaoēs*) in Greek. The identity of these forms with the Chinese *xihou* was first recognized by Alfred von Gutschmid (p. 114). Another Prakrit variant, *jaüva-*, may be attested in an inscription from



Taxila (see Konow, p. 27), but the context is not entirely clear. The Bactrian form *iabgo* is also attested in the Kushan period (Livshits and Kruglikova, p. 103); much later, probably at the end of the 5th century, it reappears as a Hephthalite title (Sims-Williams, 1999, p. 255). The personal name Yapġu in the Kharoṣṭhī documents from Niya (e.g., Burrow, *passim* on pp. 92-95; cf. Lüders, p. 789) and the Tocharian B title **yapko* (attested via the adjective *yapkoñe*; see Pinault, p. 12) are likely to derive from the Bactrian form. However, the supposed form *iapgu* in a Bactrian coin legend of the Turkish period (Ghirshman, p. 50) is a misreading, probably for *tagino*, that is, Turk. *tegin* “prince” (Davary, p. 98).

Among the Turks, the title *yabġu* gained a new lease of life. In the Turkish inscriptions of Mongolia, it refers to a noble ranking immediately after the *qaġan*, but in the West the title seems to have been used more generally of tribal chiefs, and was so characteristic that the Chinese came to refer to the Western Turks by expressions such as “the tribes of the *yabġu*” (Chavannes, 1903, p. 95 n. 3). In Tang times, Turkish *yabġu* was retranscribed into Chinese as *yehu* (archaic *ġap-yuo*, see Karlgren, nos. 633d + 784k, Late Middle Chinese *ġiap-xHuəj*), showing that the equivalence with *xihou* was by then forgotten. In the Sogdian version of the Karabalgasun inscription, the Turkish title is transcribed as *ypġw*. In the 7th century, the spelling *cpġw* [*ġabġu*] is attested on Sogdian coins of Chach (Shagalov and Kuznetsov, 2006, pp. 84-86). In a ninth-century colophon to a Manichean hymn-book, *jβġw* [*ġabġu*] is attested as the title of the ruler of Parvān (Āqsu) and the variant *yβġw* as part of a Turkish personal name (Müller, p. 11, ll. 77, 93; cf. also Bailey, 1985, p. 130, where Tibetan, Armenian, and Pahlavi forms are cited).

The ultimate origin of the word *yabġu* has been much disputed. A useful survey of the older literature is provided by Richard Frye, pp. 356-58, who refers to suggested Altaic etymologies but himself favors an Iranian source. Two different Iranian etymologies were proposed by Harold W. Bailey (**yamuka*– “leader,” Bailey, 1958, p. 136, and **yāvuka*– “troop-leader,” *idem*, 1985, pp. 32, 130), but the phonetic equivalence would not be close and both forms are quite hypothetical. A “Tocharian” origin has been suggested by several scholars (e.g., Pulleyblank, 1966, p. 28, who tentatively compares Toch. A *ype*, B *yapoy* “land, country”; Bosworth and Clauson, pp. 9-10), an idea which depends on the doubtful assumption that peoples such as the Wusun and Yuezhi were ethnically related to the speakers of what we now call Tocharian.

Although the title *xihou* is only borne by non-Chinese rulers and is invariably



regarded by Sinologists as a transcription of a foreign form, Helmut Humbach (pp. 24-28) has argued that the word is in fact Chinese in origin, the syllable *hou* being a Chinese title often translated “marquis.” Elaborating on this view, Nicholas Sims-Williams (2002, p. 229) has proposed to interpret *xihou* as “allied prince.” Such an interpretation is particularly suited to some of the earliest attestations of *xihou*. According to the *Shiji* (chap. 19, p. 1021, and chap. 20, p. 1027), the title was bestowed twice by the Chinese emperor, in 147 B.C.E. on a Xiongnu prince and in 129 B.C.E. on a prince of the western barbarians (Hu), both of whom had allied themselves with the Han. However, the *Han shu* provides evidence for the even earlier use of this title: amongst the Wusun in the 170s B.C.E., a period before they were in direct contact with the Chinese (chap. 61, p. 2692; Hulsewé and Loewe, p. 215), and amongst the Yuezhi of Bactria, who had left Gansu or Turfan in the 170s B.C.E. and would therefore be unlikely to use a Chinese title of more recent origin (*Han shu*, chap. 96A, p. 3891; Hulsewé and Loewe, pp. 121-23). Moreover, *xi* “joined, harmonious, etc.” would not have been an obvious word to employ in the political sense “united” or “allied.” The earliest Chinese interpretation of *xihou* (already in the first century C.E., see the *Han shu*, chap. 17, pp. 640, 642) was “marquis of Xi,” Xi being understood as the name of a village in the Huang region (Henan). Although this association must be due to folk etymology or secondary association (cf. Hirth, p. 49), its mere existence is a clear indication that the syllable *xi* was not felt to be meaningful. Later commentators of the Tang period define *xihou* as a Wusun title for a high-ranking general. It seems most likely that this view is essentially correct and that *xihou* is a Chinese transcription of a title used by the Wusun and Yuezhi, peoples from the Gansu or Turfan regions, of whose languages hardly anything is known.

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(NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS and E’TIENNE DE LA VAISSIERE)

ii. IN ISLAMIC SOURCES

The title, found in early Turkic languages from the 8th century (stone stellae in the Orkhon River in Mongolia) onward as *yabġu*, appears as *jabġuya* or *jab(b)uya* in early Islamic sources dealing with the Eastern Iranian fringes and



the steppe lands beyond. Since these sources connect the title in the first place with the Oghuz (see [ĠOZZ](#)) and Qarluq tribes of the Turks, the initial sound change $y > j$ of the form in Arabic presumably accords with the statement by Maḥmud Kāšġari that the Oghuz and Qıpġaq change every initial *yā'* into *alef* or *jim* (Kāšġari, I, p. 31; tr. Dankhoff and Kelly, I, p. 84).

In the old Turkic Empire, the Yabġu was a close relative of the Qaġan and, on the evidence of the Orkhon inscriptions, he held a high administrative rank (Clauson, p. 873). The title had also been borne by Turkic princes in the upper Oxus region in post-Hephthalite (see [HEPHTHALITES](#)) times, appearing on their coins (Ghirshman and Ghirshman, pp. 50-51), and it is at Qondoᡥ in [Ṭoġārestān](#) that the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hūen-Ġuang located Šad, the eldest son of the Yabġu of the Western Turks. At this time (7th century C.E.), the Yabġus ruled over a principality to the south of the upper Oxus, and it is as opponents of the Arabs in [Ṭoġārestān](#) that the Jabbuyas or Jabġuyas appear in such Arabic sources as Ya'qubi and Ṭabari (Gibb, pp. 8-11). The operations of Qotayba b. Moslem in the upper Oxus region in 90-91/708-10 against the Hephthalite chief Ṭarġān Nizak involved the Jabbuya's eventual deportation to Syria as a hostage by Qotayba after Nizak's death (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1206-7, 1220-21, 1225; tr. Hinds, pp. 155, 166, 168, 172; cf. Gibb, pp. 37-38; Bosworth, 1986, pp. 541-42).

Subsequently, it is in connection with the relations of the Arab governors in Transoxania with the Turks of the adjacent regions that the Yabġu of the Oghuz tribe is mentioned there. Thus in the early Abbasid period, the caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775-85) received the submission of various princes of the Transoxanian fringes and the lands beyond, including the Yabġu of the Qarluq and the [Kāqān](#) of the Toghuz-Oghuz; and in 195/810-11, the caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813-33), faced with a coming struggle for the caliphate with this brother al-Amin (r. 809-13), had to conciliate various rulers of the East who had fallen away in their nominal allegiance, including Jabġuya, [Kāqān](#), the ruler of Tibet, and the king of Kabul (Ya'qubi, *Ta'riġ*, II, p. 478; Ṭabari, III, pp. 815-16, tr. Fishbein, pp. 71-72; cf. Barthold, p. 202). In the early 10th century, geographical works mention Jabġukaᡥ, "the town of the Yabġu," located on the middle Syr Daryā in the neighborhood of Šāš (Eᡥᡥakri, p. 330; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 461; Ebn Ḥawqal, tr. Wiet, p. 445; *Ḥudūd al-Ālam*, p. 117; cf. Barthold, p. 173).

The title *Yabġu* for the chiefs of the Oghuz and Qarluq is listed by [Kvārazmi](#), who wrote ca. 366/977 and probably used a Samanid source for this (Bosworth and Clauson, p. 6). The Yabġu, as the head of the Oghuz, who lived as nomads



in the steppes between the lower Syr Daryā and the Aral Sea and the Ural River, is well-known from historical and geographical sources of the 10th and early 11th centuries. The caliphal envoy Aḥmad b. Faḏlān (q.v.) traversed these lands in 309-10/921-23, and he describes the chief of the Oghuz as the Yabḡu (Togan, p. 33, tr. p. 28, Excursus 33a, pp. 140-41; Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 217-18).

The Oghuz in the proximity of Transoxania did not become Muslims until towards the end of the 10th century, and in the early 11th century we find the Yabḡu of the Oghuz ruling from Yengi-kent ('new town') on the lower Syr Daryā. It is also at this time that we learn of the hostility between the two branches of the Oghuz under the Yabḡu and the Saljuq family respectively. In the 1030s, Šāh-Malek b. 'Ali of Yengi-kent and Jand (q.v.) became the ally of the Ghaznavid (see [GHAZNAVIDS](#)) ruler Mas'ud (r. 1031-40) in his struggle with the Saljuqs who were harrying Khorasan. He conquered Khwarazm for Mas'ud in 432/1041, but by that time the latter was already dead; and very soon Šāh-Malek was dislodged by the victorious Saljuqs, who forced him to flee and then killed him (Pritsak, pp. 406-10; Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, p. 239).

The Saljuqs had already appropriated the title of Yabḡu for a member of their own family, Musā, but after the middle of the 11th century, with the constituting of the Saljuq state as a Perso-Islamic empire, this old Turkish title disappeared from use.

See Short References for Ebn Ḥawqal; EsĀṭakri; and Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikò*. W. W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, with additions, tr. T. Minorsky, ed. C. E. Bosworth, 3rd ed., London, 1968.

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(C. EDMUND BOSWORTH)