At the beginning of the thirteenth century before the Mongol invasions only two great states in the Islamic world were ruled by Turkic dynas-
ties: the Sultanate of Rûm under the minor branch of the Grand Seljukid
dynasty; and the state of the Khârazm-shâhs in Central Asia. By the
middle of the century, the Khârazm-shâhs were wiped out by the Mong-
gols; and the Sultanate of Rûm became a vassal state of the great Mongol
Empire. It was the new state, the Mamlûk Sultanate of Egypt that became
the last hope of the Muslim world facing the unprecedented onslaught
of the heathen Mongols. The Mamlûks finally defeated the army of the
Īlkhân Hülegû (the Īlkhân himself was absent at the moment) near 'Ayn
Jâlût in Syria in 1260.¹

It is less widely known, or perhaps less appreciated, that the Mamlûk
state rarely called itself ‘mamlûk’, literally ‘slave’. One of the official names
of the Mamlûk Sultanate was dawla al-turkiyya, ‘The State of the Turks’.
In particular, one of the chief Mamlûk historians, Rukn al-Dîn Bay-
bars al-Manşûrî (d. 1325),² himself a former mamlûk of Sultan al-Malik
al-Manşûr Qalâ‘ûn (1279–1290), entitled one of his historical works
Kitâb al-tuhfa al-mulûkiyya fîl-dawla al-turkiyya, ‘The book of state-
craft (lit—‘the royal gift’) in the kingdom of the Turks’.³ If the Mamlûk
state was officially called ‘Turkic’, where did these Turks come from?

The common answer is simple: these Turks were Cumans, or Kıpçaks
of the Arab and Persian sources, the Polovtsians of the Rus’ chronicles,
and they came from the steppes of Eastern Europe, the territory between

¹ On the battle at ‘Ayn Jâlût, see Amitai-Preiss 1995, 26–48; Thorau 1992, 75–88. On
the Mongol advance westward, see Jackson 2005, 31–57 and 74–75.
² During his turbulent career, Rukn al-Dîn Baybars was once appointed dawâdâr
(chief of the chancery) and acted as the sultan’s deputy in Egypt (nâ‘îb al-saltâna). On
him, see Ashtor 1960, 1127–28; Richards 1998, xviii–xix; Brockelmann 1949a, II:44;
³ The book deals with the history of the Mamlûk sultans and covers the period 647–
709 AH (1249–1310) with brief additions concerning the year 721 AH (1321). See Rich-
the Danube Vinto and the Caspian, called ‘Dasht-i Kıpçak’, the ‘Kıpçak Desert’. It was from among those Turks that young men were captured and sold as slaves in the Crimean ports, brought via the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to the Mamlûk kingdom, and then militarily trained in Egypt. Yet such simplifying definitions can only be accepted with some reservations. In 1342 the famous Arabic scholar Shihâb al-Dīn Abû al-‘Abbâs Aḥmad b. Yahyâ Ibn Faḍl Allâh al-‘Umarî (d. 1349) wrote his great compendium *Masālik al-ābār fī mamālik al-āmsâr* (‘The routes

---

4 One of the best descriptions of the geographical limits of the Dasht-i Kıpçak maybe found in *La flor des estoires de la terre d’Orient* composed in 1307 by the Armenian prince Hethum of Korykos (Hayton) (ca. 1235–ca. 1314), the nephew of Hethum I (1226–1269) and cousin of Leo III (1299–1307), the kings of Cilician Armenia. I cite him in the sixteenth-century English translation: "The realme of Comany is on of the greyst realmes of the worlde. This lande is yll inhabited for great distemperaunce of the ayre of the same lande. For some partes of the same be so colde that nother man nor best may lyue in the same for excessyue coldnes, and some other partes and countreys be in the same lande which be so hote in somer that no man may endure there for grete hete and for flyes which there abounde. This lande of Comani is all playn; but no tree there groweth wherof men may make tymber, nor no busshe there groeth, saue in some certain places where the inhabytauns haue planted some trees for to make gardens and orchyards. A great part of the people dwelleth in tents, and theyr chefe fuell for fyre is beestes donge dryed. This lande of Comany on the est part marcheth on the realme of Corasme, and in parte of the same syde on a great desert; toward the west it marcheth to the Grete See, and to the see called the see of Reme; toward the northe it marcheth to the realme of Roussy; and on the southe part it extendeth vnto the grettest flodde which men knowe in the worlde, which is called the flode of Etyll" (Burger 1988, 10). It is the French and Latin versions that display the geographic limits of the Dasht-i Kıpçak in a more convenient way:

1. the ‘realme of Corasme’ is represented in the French original as ‘le roiaume de Corasine’ (Khurasân) and as ‘regno Corasme’ (Khwārezm) in the Latin version (in general, the term meant Central Asia);
2. ‘the Grete See, and to the see called the see of Reme’ is ‘la Grande Meir, que on nomme en cestui pays le mer Maure et la mer de Ganna’ (French version) and ‘mare Maius sive Maurum et mare de Tanna’ (Latin version). The two sea names mean ‘The Great, or Black, Sea’ and ‘the Sea of Azov, or Tana’ respectively, the latter being derived from the name of the famous Italian colony of Tana (Karpov 1997, 12–18);
3. the ‘realme of Roussy’ means Russia;
4. ‘the flode of Etyll’ is more correctly reproduced in the Latin version as ‘Etil’, whilst the French original contains a mistake: ‘le fleuve de Thanai que il appelent droit le Ethil’ (‘the river of Tanais which is called Ethil’), thus naming Thanais (modern Don) as Volga (‘Etil’).

See Dörper 1998, 194–95. Hethoum’s description was influenced by, if not directly borrowed from, the text of the *Itinerary* of Fr. Guillaume de Rubrouck, the envoy of Louis IX of France to the Great Khân in 1253–1255. He wrote that the Cumans, called Capchac/Capchat, lived between the rivers Don (Tanay) and Danube, and also between Don and Volga (Etilia). See Wyngaert 1929, 194–95; Kappler and Kappler 1985, 112.

5 Brockelmann 1949a, II:141; Brockelmann 1949b, II:175–76. See also Tiesenhausen 1884, I:207–08.