

Commodity and exchange in the Mongol empire

A cultural history of Islamic textiles

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the “Book of the Estate of the great Caam,” a short treatise written around 1330 and attributed to William Adam, the archbishop of Sulṭāniyyah, the Mongolian capital in northwestern Iran, the author alludes to the great quantities of “cloths of silk and cloths of gold” to be found in Yuan China. Further on he elaborates on this abundance of fine textiles, noting that the

emperor’s people are very worthily arrayed . . . Although silk and gold are in great plenty, they have very little linen, wherefore all have shirts of silk; and their clothes are of Tartary cloth, and damask silk, and of other rich stuffs, oft-times adorned with gold and silver and precious stones.¹

Similar apparel was known and extensively used in South Asia. Al-‘Umarī, the fourteenth-century Arab encyclopedist, reports that at the court of Delhi “the sultan, the khans, princes and other military commanders wear Tatar clothes [*tatariyyāt*] . . .” A few lines later, he relates that a Muslim merchant, twice in Delhi, informed him that “most of their Tatar clothes [*akṣiyah al-tatariyyah*] are brocaded with gold [*muzarkashah bi al-dhahab*].”²

At the western end of Eurasia, the English too, at least by the fourteenth century, were well acquainted with this type of cloth. In the reign of Edward III, 250 garters of “tarteryn ynde” (dark blue) were made for the Knights of the Garter, on each of which was embroidered the Order’s motto in silk and gold.³ More spectacularly, at the Cheapside Tournament of 1331, sixteen participants rode through the streets of London in the opening procession attired in Tartar clothes and wearing masks painted in the likeness of

¹ “The Book of the Estate of the Great Caam,” in Yule, *Cathay*, vol. III, pp. 98–99.

² Ibn Faḍl Allah al-‘Umarī, *Ibn Faḍlallah al-‘Omarīs Bericht über Indien in seinem Werke Masālik al-abṣar fi mamālik al-amṣar*, ed. and trans. by Otto Spies (Sammlung orientalistischer Arbeiten, vol. XIV; Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1943), p. 35 Arabic text and pp. 61–62 German translation. On the term *tatariyyāt*, see R. P. A. Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les Arabes*, repr. (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, n.d.), p. 94.

³ Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340–1365* (Woodbridge, Sussex: Boydell Press, 1980), p. 45.

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Tartars.⁴ This display, Juliet Barker suggests, might have been inspired by Rusticiano's epitome of Marco Polo's travels which circulated widely in England at the beginning of the fourteenth century and which gives a detailed and informed account of Mongolian dress. The inspiration, however, may not have been entirely literary since the English monarchy at this time had direct contact with the Mongols of Iran with whom they exchanged embassies and gifts.⁵ And if Mongolian diplomatic practice elsewhere in Eurasia is any guide, Tartar cloth was very likely among the articles presented on such occasions.

But whatever the precise source of the inspiration, England's familiarity with this fabric is graphically and colorfully expressed in "The Knight's Tale" in which Chaucer depicts Emetrius, an Indian king

On a bay steed whose trappings were of steel
Covered in cloth of gold from haunch to heel
Fretted with a diaper. Like Mars to see.
His surcoat in cloth of Tartary
Studded with great white pearls; beneath its fold
A saddle of new beaten, burnished gold.⁶

And this reference to "cloth of Tartary," it should be stressed, is only one among the many encountered in medieval West European literature. Paget Toynbee, who first investigated this matter, uncovered mentions of this textile in Dante, Boccaccio, in the works of minor French and Italian poets of the thirteenth century, and in wills and church inventories of the fourteenth century. From these frequent but laconic passages he tried to determine the type of fabric denoted by this term and came to the tentative conclusion that it described some kind of embroidered cloth.⁷

Recently, Anne Wardwell of the Cleveland Art Museum studied numerous specimens of garments and cloths designated as *panni tartarici* in the medieval inventories and demonstrated that while design and technical features vary, "Tartar cloths" were drawloom textiles typically made of silk and gold thread.⁸ Her conclusion is fully sustained by the literary sources of the period, Muslim, Chinese, and European, that make it reasonably certain that the "Tartar Cloth" par excellence was a textile called *nasīj*. This term, derived from the Arabic verb, *nasaja*, "to weave," has the generic meaning

⁴ Juliet Vale, *Edward II and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context, 1270–1350* (Woodbridge, Sussex: Boydell Press, 1982), pp. 62, 70, and 72.

⁵ Juliet R. V. Barker, *The Tournament in England, 1100–1400* (Woodbridge, Sussex: Boydell Press, 1986), p. 98. On the diplomatic contacts between the two courts, see Lawrence Lockhart, "The Relations between Edward I and Edward II of England and the Mongol Ī-khāns of Persia," *Iran* 6 (1968), 23–31.

⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. by Nevill Coghill (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 77.

⁷ Paget Toynbee, "Tartar Cloths," *Romania* 24 (1900), 559–64.

⁸ Anne E. Wardwell, "*Panni Tartarici*: Eastern Islamic Silks Woven with Gold and Silver (13th and 14th Centuries)," *Islamic Art* 3 (1988–1989), 95–133, especially 115–17.

of “woven stuff” or “textile” but by the Mongolian era, as Dozy rightly concludes, it was simply a shortened form of *nasīj al-dhahab al-ḥarīr*, literally “cloth of gold and silk.”⁹ This secondary meaning is attested in a number of contemporary texts. Pegolotti, the author of a fourteenth-century commercial manual, speaks of “pieces of *nacchetti* of silk and gold” when discussing the market prices of textiles in China.¹⁰ Even more informative and explicit are two passages in the chapter on court dress contained in the *Yuan shih*, the official history of the Mongolian dynasty of China. Here, at the first mention of this fabric, the text adds parenthetically that “*nasīj* [*na-shih-shih*] is gold brocade [*chin-chin*].” Some pages later, another non-Chinese term is introduced, *ta-na-tu na-shih-shih*, which is defined as “large pearls basted on gold brocade.”¹¹

In modern usage, brocade is normally defined as a textile to which ornamental threads are added, most often in the weft. These supplementary weft weaves “have a purely decorative function and . . . partially cover the ground threads.”¹² In the case of *nasīj*, obviously, the ornamental threads were of gold.

In its restricted meaning of gilded cloth or brocade, *nasīj* became a true *wanderwort*, spreading throughout the vast Mongolian imperium and beyond. In addition to the Italian and Chinese forms cited above, it is attested in Latin, Qipchaq Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and Mongolian.¹³ In several sources it is paired with the Persian term *nakh* which the famed fourteenth-century Arabic traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭah understood generally as cloth “of silk woven with gold.” In one place, however, he clearly views it as a synonym for *nasīj*: in describing the mantle of one of the wives of Özbek, ruler of the Golden Horde 1313–41, he says that it was made of *nakh* and then adds that “it is also called *nasīj*.”¹⁴

While a measure of terminological ambiguity remains, *nasīj* (and *nakh*), as used in the sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, most often

⁹ R. P. A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 3rd edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), vol. II, p. 666.

¹⁰ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, “La Practica della Mercatura,” in Yule, *Cathay*, vol. III, p. 155, English translation. The Italian text reads “*nacchetti di seta e d’oro*.” See Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Practica della Mercatura*, ed. by Allan Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1936), p. 23.

¹¹ *YS*, ch. 78, pp. 1931 and 1938. The term transcribed as *ta-na-tu* is the Mongolian *tana*, “pearl,” and the adjectival suffix *tu*, that is, “pearled.” This form is attested in the *Secret History* in the construction *tanatu kōnjile*, “pearled bed covering.” See *SH/Cleaves*, sect. 133, p. 63, and *SH/de Rachewiltz*, sect. 133, p. 57.

¹² Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger, *Textiles: A Classification of Techniques* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), p. 98.

¹³ A. Bodrogligeti, *The Persian Vocabulary of the Codex Cumanicus* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1971), p. 171; *SH/Cleaves*, sect. 274, p. 214; and *SH/de Rachewiltz*, sect. 274, p. 165.

¹⁴ Ibn Baṭṭūṭah/Gibb, vol. II, pp. 445 and 503. *Nakh* also goes back to the pre-Mongolian era. In its Georgian form, *nakhlebi*, meaning cloth of gold, it is found in Shot’ha Rust’haveli, *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, trans. by Marjory Scott Wardrop (London: Luzac, 1966), p. 106 and n.6, a work of the twelfth century.

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refer to cloth woven of silk and gold, that is, to some type of brocade. And we have every reason to feel confident as well that these glittering and sumptuous textiles were the “Tartar cloths” of the medieval European texts. Further, and of greater import, this intimate association of the Mongols with a particular textile provides a point of departure for an exploration of both the setting and dynamics of trans-Eurasian cultural exchange in the Middle Ages.

For the Mongols of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the family of Chinggis Qan possessed a charisma, a special good fortune which identified his particular lineage as the sole legitimate leaders of a heavenly mandated venture to bring all the known world under their sway.¹⁵ In pursuit of this goal the Mongols fashioned the largest contiguous land empire in human history. For scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Mongolian Empire has always exercised a great fascination. To begin with, how did a nomadic people, numbering no more than a million, succeed in bringing populous and complex sedentary civilizations such as Iran and China under their control? Equally fascinating and far more contentious is the vexing question of the Mongolian legacy in Eurasian history. To some historians, their expansion was an unmitigated disaster that brought only destruction, death, and cultural decline, a “Tartar Yoke” that constituted a regressive force in human history. Others, on the contrary, have argued that the Chinggisids’ political ambition led to a *pax mongolica* that facilitated and greatly intensified communication between East and West and thus afforded important opportunities for cultural contact, exchange, and enrichment.¹⁶

The debate continues, though hopefully not within the rigid parameters of the past. To make a new start, we must recognize that all premodern empires, including that of the Mongols, were possessed of “multiple personalities,” in large measure because they were constantly and consciously projecting different faces to their multiple constituencies, and that they commonly pursued policies that were, by turn, destructive and constructive, brutal and paternal, exploitative and beneficent, coercive and

¹⁵ On the political ideas of the Eurasian nomads, little studied to date, see Peter B. Golden, “Imperial Ideology and the Sources of Political Unity amongst the Pre-Chinggisid Nomads of Western Eurasia,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2 (1982), 37–76, and Igor de Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chinggis Khan’s Empire,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973), 21–36.

¹⁶ As recently as the 1970s Soviet historians asserted that the Mongols had stifled the cultural and economic development of the conquered lands, while their communist Chinese colleagues argued for their progressive role in history. See Han Ju-lin, “Lun Ch’eng-chi-ssu,” *Li-shih Yen-chiu* 3 (1962), 1–10; S. L. Tikhvinskii, “Tataro-mongol’skie zavoeevanii v Azii i Evrope: Vstupitel’naia stat’ia,” in S. L. Tikhvinskii, ed., *Tataro-mongoly v Azii i Evrope: Sbornik Statei*, 2nd edn. (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 3–22; and Paul Hyer, “The Re-evaluation of Chinggis Khan: Its Role in the Sino-Soviet Dispute,” *Asian Survey* 6 (1966), 696–705.

attractive, conservative and innovative.¹⁷ Thus, while it is a fact that the Mongolian “peace” encouraged some cultural intermediaries – the Polo family, for example – to travel widely through Eurasia, it is also true that many cultural specialists were compelled, much against their will, to leave their homes and take up permanent residence in distant parts of the empire to better serve their Mongolian masters. Even individual events are oftentimes difficult to evaluate in absolute terms: to one scholar the act of looting a local art treasure might well be categorized as simple theft motivated by greed, while to another it might be viewed, quite legitimately, as a mechanism of cultural diffusion.¹⁸ While balance in treating this issue is certainly desirable, selectivity, the very act of defining a problem, determines in large measure which of the multiple faces of empire will be emphasized. The present work, which examines cultural transfer within the empire, tends, of necessity, to accentuate the positive but without, I believe, ignoring or understating the coercive and destructive side of Mongolian policy in conquered lands.

To understand why the Mongols assumed such a pivotal role in trans-Eurasian exchange and to present essential background on the peoples, cultures, and locales mentioned in the text, we must first briefly describe the emergence and growth of a polity that its founders called the *Yeke Mongghol Ulus*, the “State of the Great Mongols.”

In the twelfth century the eastern end of the Eurasian steppe, present-day Mongolia, was politically fragmented; tribal groupings fought one another incessantly, a condition that was actively encouraged by the Jürchens, a Tungus-speaking people from Manchuria whose dynasty, the Chin (1115–1234), ruled over most of Northern China. Such aggressive interference in the steppe zone was, however, a two-edged sword: it could divide and weaken or it might, as it did in this instance, provide an unwanted stimulus toward state formation among the feuding nomads. One of the contenders for leadership in the steppe, Temüjin, the future Chinggis Qan, utilized this political chaos to slowly and painfully fashion a new tribal confederation. By good management, good fortune, and a real ability to attract and retain the services of talented individuals, he succeeded in unifying the eastern steppe by 1206. In that year Temüjin took the title Chinggis Qan, “Oceanic Ruler,” recast and expanded his personal retainers

¹⁷ For the most part, the contradictory swings in Mongolian policy in subject territories have been analyzed solely in terms of court factionalism and debates over methods of exploitation. See, for example, N. Ts. Munkuev, “O dvukh tendentsiakh v politike pervykh mongol'skikh khanov v Kitae v pervoi polovine XIII veka,” in *Materialy po istorii i filologii Tsentral'noi Azii* (Trudy buriatskogo kompleksnogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta, vol. VIII; Ulan Ude, 1962), pp. 49–67.

¹⁸ Compare the comments of Charles Singer, “East and West in Retrospect,” in Charles Singer, et al., eds., *A History of Technology*, vol. II, *The Mediterranean Civilizations and the Middle Ages, c. 700 B.C. to A.D. 1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 765, who notes the technological and artistic influence of the booty brought back to Western Europe following the sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

into an imperial guard *cum* imperial government, incorporated his newly won subjects into decimal-based military/administrative units, and commenced preparations for attacks on the sedentary peoples to the south.

As he began pressuring the Chin and its western neighbor and rival, the Tangut Hsi-hsia dynasty (990–1227) centered in Kansu and the Ordos region, some smaller states hastened to acknowledge Mongolian sovereignty. The most important to do so were the Turkic-speaking Uighurs of the eastern T'ien-shan region. Originally nomads themselves, the Uighurs left Mongolia in the ninth century and many settled amidst the oases of eastern Turkestan, where they took over much of the culture of the indigenous Indo-European-speaking peoples. Consequently, when their leader, the Iduqut, asked for Chinggis Qan's protection in 1209, he became the first ruler of a sedentary people to join the fledgling state. As such, his kingdom was ranked first among the numerous dependent states of the empire, and his subjects, systematically employed as scribes, officials, and court merchants, exercised a pronounced influence on Mongolian political culture during the empire's formative stages.

The ongoing operations in the south also produced welcome results. In 1210 the Tanguts recognized Mongolian suzerainty and in 1215 the Chin capital, Chung-tu (Peking) fell. After this triumph, Chinggis Qan withdrew to Mongolia, leaving his trusted viceroy Muqali to continue the campaign against the still resilient Jürchen regime. While in the homeland, Chinggis Qan was approached by emissaries from the Khwārazmshāh, Muḥammad (r. 1200–20), who was most curious and concerned about the intentions and capabilities of the rising power in the east. Muḥammad, who reigned over a recently and loosely constructed state centered south of the Aral Sea in western Turkestan, initially entered into peaceable commercial relations with Chinggis Qan which, however, soon soured when a Mongolian caravan was despoiled on Khwārazmian territory in 1218. After first clearing and occupying all of eastern Turkestan, the Mongols launched a large-scale invasion of the eastern Islamic world in 1219. The poorly deployed armies of the Khwārazmshāh were soon isolated and defeated and by 1224 the Mongols were in occupation of western Turkestan and Khurāsān (northern Iran and Afghanistan). The latter area was particularly hard hit; the Mongols, in reprisals for resistance and "rebellion," laid waste to many of its major cities and put part of the urban population to the sword.

Leaving garrisons and officials behind, Chinggis Qan returned to Mongolia in 1225 bent on punishing the Tanguts, erstwhile vassals who had not, in his eyes, met their obligations to the empire. The operations against the Hsi-hsia, initiated in 1226, were successfully concluded shortly after Chinggis Qan's death, from natural causes, in August 1227.

With the demise of the empire's founder, all campaigning halted and the surviving Chinggisids, their advisers and commanders, converged on Mon-

golia to select a successor. In 1229 they enthroned Ögödei (r. 1229–41), Chinggis Qan's third son and designated heir. He immediately restarted the campaigns of conquest on all fronts. The first success came in the east when the Chin dynasty collapsed in 1234, allowing the Mongols to occupy all Chinese territory to the frontiers of the Southern Sung (1127–1278). In the west, Mongolian forces seized the Qipchaq steppe, the Volga region, North Caucasia and the Rus Principalities between 1237 and 1241.

At Ögödei's death in 1241, campaigning again halted as discussions were held in Mongolia over the succession. After several years of wrangling the assembled princes and commanders enthroned Güyüg (r. 1246–48), Ögödei's eldest son. No blood was shed on this occasion but great bitterness was engendered by his elevation, especially among the descendants of Jöchi, Chinggis Qan's eldest son, who controlled the western steppe and Russia. Indeed, civil war was only averted by the premature death of Güyüg, who was marching on the Jöchid princes to settle their differences by force of arms when he conveniently met his end.

His demise, however, only delayed a confrontation among the increasingly divided princes. The Ögödeids proposed one of their own for the throne and were supported in this endeavor by the line of Chaghadai, Chinggis Qan's second son, whose territories included western and parts of eastern Turkestan. The Jöchids, determined to prevent any Ögödeid from attaining the throne, proposed a candidate from the line of Tolui, Chinggis Qan's fourth son. Because the Toluids had more military force available in Mongolia, and because they were much the better organized of the two factions, the Toluid candidate, Mōngke (r. 1251–59), prevailed.

In the end, the opposition could not accept what they perceived as an usurpation and attempted a counter-coup. This failed miserably and Mōngke, a ruthless and able ruler, instituted an extensive purge in which many princes of the lines of Ögödei and Chaghadai, together with their retainers, were put to death following "show trials."

No doubt as a means of deflecting attention from his disputed succession, Mōngke was eager to launch a series of campaigns of conquest to further extend the already enormous empire. To the northeast the Korean resistance was broken by 1259 and in the west large forces were dispatched to deal with the Isma'īlīs (Assassins) in western Iran and the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate in Baghdad. Nominally under the command of Hülegü, Mōngke's brother, these forces defeated and nearly exterminated the Assassins, occupied and sacked Baghdad in early 1258, and brought the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate to an end. Meanwhile, in the south, Mōngke and his brother Qubilai began operations in Yunnan and Szechuan in preparation for a large-scale attack on the Southern Sung.

The death of Mōngke in southwest China in 1259 precipitated yet another contested succession, this one within the line of Tolui. The brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke (most likely Mōngke's intended heir) both pro-

claimed themselves emperor and a military confrontation ensued. When the dust settled in 1264, Ariq Böke was forced to recognize Qubilai's sovereignty (and was subsequently killed) but the Toluid civil war had permanently shattered the unity of the empire. The Jochids on the Volga supported Ariq Böke and refused to accept the victor's legitimacy. The Chaghadaids initially vacillated between mild support for Qubilai and an uneasy neutrality, but following Ariq Böke's submission they joined forces with the Ögödeid princes in 1269 in a concerted effort to topple Qubilai. Hülegü in Iran was Qubilai's only firm political supporter and only reliable military ally.

In place of a unified empire the Chinggisid lines now ruled over four, effectively independent qanates: Qubilai (r. 1260–94) in China, where he established the Yuan dynasty in 1271; the Chaghadaid qanate in western Turkestan; the Golden Horde in control of Russia and the western steppe; and the line of Hülegü (r. 1256–65) in Iran and Iraq. These divisions, of course, slowed and finally halted the Mongols' outward expansion as increasingly their military energies were directed inward in a Chinggisid civil war that lasted into the early decades of the fourteenth century.

In characterizing the period before the breakup of the empire, the Persian chronicler Juvaynī, a mid-level bureaucrat in the Mongolian administration of Iran during the 1240s and 1250s, notes with approval and admiration that the sons of Chinggis Qan had achieved their great conquests "through concord and mutual assistance."¹⁹ The upheavals of 1260–64, naturally, undermined this interdependency to a certain extent, but the fact that the Mongolian courts of China and Iran remained in alliance and continued to support one another ensured that the contact and exchange between East and West Asia, begun in the early years of the empire, was sustained and in certain areas intensified.

On the political-diplomatic level, Hülegü and his immediate successors, styled themselves *il-qans*, literally "subservient qans" to advertise their subordination to the emperor Qubilai from whom they sought and received patents of investiture. Even after Hülegü's great-grandson, Ghazan (r. 1295–1304) converted to Islam and ended the practice of requesting investiture, the Persian court's relations with the Yuan dynasty were still militarily important and the two remained in close partnership until the Mongolian regime in Iran collapsed in the late 1330s.²⁰

The continuity in their technical and cultural contacts is nicely illustrated

¹⁹ Juvaynī/Qazvīnī, vol. I, p. 32, and Juvaynī/Boyle, vol. I, p. 43. See also Juvaynī/Qazvīnī, vol. III, pp. 66–67, and Juvaynī/Boyle, vol. II, pp. 592–93, where he expresses these same sentiments at greater length.

²⁰ For an overview of this relationship, see Bertold Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit, 1220–1350*, 4th edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), pp. 220–24; Thomas T. Allsen, "Changing Forms of Legitimation in Mongol Iran," in Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks, eds., *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, 1991), pp. 223–41; and Liu Yingsheng and

by the exchange of military technology. When Hülegü left for Iran in the early 1250s he was accompanied by 1,000 households of Chinese catapult operators who proved very useful in the reduction of the castles of the Assassins and the walls of Baghdad. Later, during the final phases of the Yuan campaign against the Southern Sung, the *il-qans* returned the favor. They dispatched specialists from Syria, familiar with counterweight catapults, to central China, where they materially assisted the Yuan forces during the siege of Hsiang-yang in 1272 and 1273.²¹

The field of medicine is also revealing of the nature of this relationship. Prior to the breakup of the empire, West Asian physicians, principally of Nestorian Christian background were well established in the east, while Hülegü had a contingent of Chinese doctors attached to his court in Iran.²² Thereafter, their activities were sustained by shipments of Chinese *materia medica* to Iran and West Asian medicines to China. More spectacularly, Chinese works on physiology and sphygmology (pulse diagnosis) found their way into Persian translation.²³

Indeed the range of these exchanges is impressive and as yet only partially explored. In addition to medicine and military technology, the two courts exchanged information and specialist personnel in the areas of historiography, cartography, astronomy, agronomy, printing, cuisine, and language, as well as in a variety of the crafts.²⁴ And among this latter category, weaving and textiles were by far the most visible and noteworthy, at least in the eyes of contemporary observers. Many types of fabric circulated within the empire but, as we have already noted, one class of textiles, loosely called "Tartar cloth" acquired a very special fame that rapidly spanned the whole of Eurasia.

Naturally, these "Tartar cloths" were not made by the Mongols, but rather they were made famous and popular by their extensive use among the

Peter Jackson, "Chinese-Iranian Relations, III, In the Mongol Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publisher, 1992), vol. IV, pp. 434–36.

²¹ Juvaynī/Qazvīnī, vol. III, pp. 92–93 and 128; Juvaynī/Boyle, vol. II, pp. 608 and 631; and Joseph Needham, "China's Trebuchets, Manned and Counterweighted," in Bert S. Hall and Delno C. West, eds., *On Pre-Modern Technology and Science: A Volume of Studies in Honor of Lynn White, Jr.* (Malibu, California: Undena Publications, 1976), pp. 107–45.

²² A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), pp. 228–34, and Rashīd al-Dīn, *Die Chinageschichte*, ed. and trans. by Karl Jahn (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau, 1971), plate 2, Persian text and p. 21, German translation.

²³ YS, ch. 37, p. 812; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Mukātabāt-i Rashīdī*, ed. by Muḥammad Saffī (Lahore: The Punjab Educational Press, 1947), pp. 285 and 286; Saburo Miyasita, "A Link in the Westward Transmission of Chinese Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages," *Isis* 58 (1967), 486–90; and Jutta Rall, "Zur persischen Übersetzung eines *Mo-chüeh*, eines chinesischen medizinischen Textes," *Oriens Extremus* 7 (1960), 152–57.

²⁴ The best introductions to their cultural relations are Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1965), vol. I, pp. 188–90 and 214–19, and Karl Jahn, "Wissenschaftliche Kontakte zwischen Iran und China in der Mongolenzeit," *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 106 (1969), 199–211.

ruling elite of the empire, the most powerful polity of the Middle Ages. To understand how the Mongols became so identified with this particular textile, we must address a series of interrelated questions. First, is the image, so far projected here, of Mongols draped in gilded cloth that would gladden the heart of a Liberace really true? To answer this question we need to establish the diverse uses and levels of consumption of *nasīj* in the empire at large. Second, how was the demand for this fabric met by the Mongolian rulers? This will entail an investigation of the various mechanisms of supply – booty, tribute, taxation, and court-sponsored production – used for this purpose. Third, why were the Mongols so attracted to gold brocade? Here we will examine native, nomadic cultural traditions, and the requirements of state in a multi-ethnic empire for possible answers. Lastly, did the Mongols, given the size of their empire and their penchant for moving resources and peoples about Eurasia, facilitate the diffusion of textile styles and techniques? In this instance, there is some interesting data on West Asian influences introduced into Yuan China.

From the nature of these questions, it should be evident that this study is primarily concerned with the cultural history of gold brocade within the Mongolian Empire, the principal goal of which is to elucidate the Mongols' priorities and predilections, and their role in East–West exchange. In other words, I approach this topic from the perspective of a historian of the steppe, not a specialist on textiles. But while I cannot speak to technical matters, looms, weave structures, etc., I am hopeful that those who are so qualified may find the data, arguments, and conclusions presented here suggestive in pursuing their own lines of research.