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0521842263 - The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World

Michal Biran

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## Introduction

The early twelfth century was a time of turmoil in both China and Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> In north China the Khitan Liao dynasty that had ruled Manchuria, Mongolia and parts of north China for more than 200 years (907–1125) was overthrown by a new wave of Manchurian invaders, the Jurchens, who established the Jin dynasty (1115–1234). Under these circumstances, one Khitan prince, Yelü Dashi (1087–1143), chose not to submit to the Jurchen conquerors. Instead, he led his few adherents westward, hoping to return subsequently to restore the Liao dynasty in its former domains. After six years in western Mongolia, Dashi recognized his inability to challenge the Jurchen Jin dynasty, and, becoming aware of the relative weakness of the Central Asian kingdoms, he decided to seek a political future further to the west. In a little more than a decade he successfully fashioned a new empire in Central Asia that was known to the Muslims as the Qara Khitai (the Black Khitans) and to China as the Xi Liao (Western Liao).<sup>2</sup>

After completing their conquests in 1141, the Qara Khitai empire ruled the area roughly between the Oxus river in the west and the Altai mountains in the east, i.e., a territory equivalent to the larger part of modern Xinjiang, Qyrghyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and south Qazaqstan. Dashi and his successors bore the Inner Asian title *Gürkhan* (*Geerhan*, universal khan), but were also designated as Chinese emperors. The empire existed for nearly ninety years, and was finally vanquished by the Mongols in 1218.

The Qara Khitai period is one of the least known in the history of Central Asia, yet it is also one of the most fascinating periods: The Qara Khitai dynasty is the only Central Asian dynasty to have been considered a legitimate Chinese dynasty by Chinese official historiography. As they ruled over a mostly Muslim population, the history of the Qara Khitai provides a unique window on the extensive cross-cultural contacts between China, Inner Asian nomads and the Muslim world, and permits an assessment of the relative appeal of Chinese and Muslim cultures for the

<sup>1</sup> The term Central Asia in this study refers to the area between the Oxus and the eastern border of modern Xinjiang. Inner Asia denotes the broader region stretching from Manchuria to the Caspian sea including Mongolia, south Siberia and Central Asia.

<sup>2</sup> The terms Qara Khitai and Western Liao are used throughout the book as complete synonyms; for the different names of the dynasty see appendix 1.

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Inner Asian nomads. Moreover, since the Qara Khitai ruled over Central Asia in the period that immediately preceded the rise of Chinggis Khan, a better understanding of the Qara Khitai period can provide further insights into the nature of the Mongol empire. It can also reexamine the claim, raised first in the nineteenth century but never fully developed, that the Qara Khitai empire was the prototype of the empire established by Chinggis Khan.<sup>3</sup>

This study is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first part provides a fuller narrative history for the Qara Khitai, firmly locating them in their complex historical context between the worlds of Islam and China on the eve of the Mongol invasion. The chronological framework chosen for this purpose is wide: it begins in 1124, when Yelü Dashi left for Mongolia, enthroning himself merely as a king, not yet as an emperor (which he did in 1131/2), and ending in 1218, when the Mongols eliminated the Naiman prince Güchülüg, who seized the Qara Khitai throne, rather than in 1211 when Güchülüg deposed the last Gürkhan, Zhilugu, or in 1213 at Zhilugu's death. Güchülüg's reign is a peculiar period in Qara Khitai history: his ethnic origin and policies were so different from those of the former Gürkhans that, despite his attempts to revive the fortunes of the empire, his contemporaries in China and in the Muslim world never regarded him as a legitimate Qara Khitai ruler.<sup>4</sup> Yet the polity over which he ruled was still called the Western Liao, and I therefore decided to document its history down to its final dissolution in 1218.

The second part examines the main components of the multicultural milieu found within the Qara Khitai realm: the Chinese; the nomadic or Inner Asian; and the Islamic. This is organized around three questions, not hitherto addressed in the literature: Why did the Qara Khitai retain their Chinese characteristics in the new Central Asian environment? How did these "infidel" nomadic rulers acquire legitimization among their mostly Muslim sedentary population? And why, unlike their predecessors and successors in Central Asia, did they not embrace Islam? In trying to find answers to these questions certain Qara Khitai institutions, principally their administrative, army and religious policies, are described in detail, while aspects of economic and social history are also touched upon.

This close examination of Qara Khitai history and institutions permits a preliminary evaluation of Qara Khitai influences on the Mongol empire, a theme dealt with in the conclusion.

### Methodological problems, sources and previous scholarship

Despite the uniqueness and importance of the Qara Khitai empire, research about it is relatively meager, and has generally not been undertaken by scholars with

<sup>3</sup> H. H. Howorth, "The Northern Frontiers of China Part III: The Kara Khitai," *JRAS* 8 (1876), 262–90; P. D. Buell, "Sino-Khitai Administration in Mongol Bukhara," *Journal of Asian History* 13 (1979), 121–51; and, less categorically, D. O. Morgan, "Who Ran the Mongol Empire?" *JRAS* (1982/2), 124–36.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 80–6.

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direct access to the entire range of sources. This is mainly due to the character of the sources for the study of the Qara Khitai.

Except for the chronicle in chapter 30 of the official history of the Liao dynasty, the *Liao shi*, a rather problematic text (about which see below), there are no sources compiled by historians of the dynasty itself and only a few, none of them strictly chronicles, that were written under its vassals. The study of Qara Khitai history is therefore mainly based on what its eastern and western neighbors chose to mention about it. These reports, nearly always fragmentary and often contradictory, are scattered mainly among Chinese, Arabic and Persian sources. Moreover, even after completing the painstaking work of collecting the scattered accounts and combining different historiographical traditions, several problems remain apparent.

First, the amount of information at our disposal is not evenly divided, in terms of either time or space. While Chinese sources supply relatively ample information on Yelü Dashi's early career and on his formative years in Mongolia, and Muslim sources describe in greater detail the fall of the Qara Khitai, the middle period of the Qara Khitai is only partially covered by either of these sources, leaving many lacunas. In spatial terms, we know much more about the situation in the Qara Khitai western territories, mainly Transoxania,<sup>5</sup> than about the situation in the central territory of the Qara Khitai or on their eastern border. Many intriguing details regarding the relations of the Qara Khitai with the Mongols, therefore, remain unknown.

Second, the number of contradictions contained in the sources is unusually large.<sup>6</sup> These are apparent not only when juxtaposing eastern and western information but also within each category of sources: Juwaynī, a major Muslim source, presents two contradictory versions of the fall of the Qara Khitai, and details in the chronicle of the Qara Khitai in the *Liao shi* are challenged by inconsistent evidence from other of its chapters as well as by other Chinese (and Muslim) works.

Third, a considerable part of what we know about the Qara Khitai derives from people foreign to them, who did not always understand their background. Thus, for example, the Chinese fashion of calling the ruler and his officials not by their first names but by their titles confused Muslim historians. An experienced historian, Rashīd al-Dīn, recounted that the same Gürkhan ruled from the death of Yelü Dashi (1143) until the rise of Güchülüg (1211), ascribing a considerable part of Güchülüg's success to the Gürkhan's aging, a marginal factor at best.<sup>7</sup>

Due to these limitations, the resulting history is less unequivocal than the political and institutional histories of other regions and periods, and more than once my notes refer to an alternative reconstruction of the events. Yet, systematic and

<sup>5</sup> The term Transoxania in this study refers to the region between the Oxus and the Jaxartes, excluding the upper reaches of the Oxus, which belonged to Khwārazm.

<sup>6</sup> In the words of Pelliot: "The history of the Qara Khitai . . . is crammed with uncertainties and contradictions which come to one's notice as soon as he tries to make sure of a fact, a name or a date." P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris, 1959), 1:221.

<sup>7</sup> Rashīd/Karīmī, 1:236.

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comparative reading in a large variety of contemporary and later works partially compensates for the sources' deficiencies and results in a meaningful picture of Qara Khitai political and institutional history.

Of the many works consulted, only a few important ones and some principal genres can be described below.<sup>8</sup>

*Chinese sources*

The basic source for Qara Khitai history is the chronicle of the Western Liao included in chapter 30 of the *Liao shi*, which reviews the political history of the Qara Khitai from the early rise of Yelü Dashi to Güchülüg's usurpation.<sup>9</sup> The *Liao shi* itself is ranked very low in comparison with other Chinese official histories, due to the irregular record keeping of the nomadic Khitans and the unusually long time that passed from the end of the Liao (1125) to the compilation of its history in 1344–5.<sup>10</sup> As early as the Qing period (1644–1911) scholars complained that it was marred by both internal and external contradictions.<sup>11</sup> But apart from these general deficiencies, the Western Liao chronicle suffers from unique problems of its own, namely the unattested source of its information<sup>12</sup> and chronological inconsistencies, which become apparent when it is compared with the relevant Muslim sources.<sup>13</sup> Those reasons led Pelliot to describe the *Liao shi* 30 as a romanticized biography of Yelü Dashi.<sup>14</sup> The content of the chronicle, however, is far from romantic. A considerable part of it is dedicated to administrative

<sup>8</sup> Full references for the sources mentioned below appear in the bibliography. For earlier reviews of Qara Khitai sources see *XLSYJ*, 1–25; *ZK*, 1–52; and the relevant items in Barthold, *Turkestan*, 1–58.

<sup>9</sup> *LS*, 30/355–8.

<sup>10</sup> The Chinese official history of a dynasty was usually written by the subsequent dynasty on the basis of the daily records of the vanquished dynasty. The Liao dynastic history, however, was compiled only in 1344–5, more than two centuries after the Liao had come to an end, after the Mongol Yuan rulers had finally decided to accord it legitimate status in the succession of Chinese dynasties (H. L. Chan, "Chinese Official Historiography at the Yuan Court: The Composition of the Liao, Chin and Sung Histories," in J. D. Langlois [ed.], *China under Mongol Rule* [Princeton, 1981], 56–106).

<sup>11</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," in *CHC6*, 667–8; for a recent reappraisal, see Li Xihou, "Liao shi yu Liao shi yanjiu," *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiushengyuan xuebao* 1995/5, 63–73, and see below.

<sup>12</sup> The *Liao shi* is based on three earlier compilations: 1. Liao's *Veritable Records* (*shi lu*), compiled under Yelü Yan in 1103; 2. an incomplete Liao history presented to the Jin throne by Chen Daren in 1207, which was reworked in the Jin office of history on the basis of an 1148 compilation, based on the remaining Liao records; 3. the still-extant *Qidan guo zhi* ("History of the Khitan state"), a Song unofficial history of the Liao compiled around 1247 in which Ye Longli, a Southern Song scholar, reviewed Liao history on the basis of Song written materials and from a Chinese viewpoint. (Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," 667–8). None of these compilations contained all the information included in the *LS* 30 regarding the Qara Khitai. (*XLSYJ*, 1–2).

<sup>13</sup> The most obvious example is the date of Yelü Dashi's enthronement. According to the *LS* 30, Yelü Dashi was enthroned in the year *jiachen*, 1124, after he had defeated the Muslim *Huer-san*, i.e., the ruler of Khurāsān, Sultan Sanjar. This reference recalls the famous battle of Qatwān which, according to the detailed accounts of the Muslim chronicles, took place only in 1141 (see pp. 41–5. For further examples see *ZK*, 13–17).

<sup>14</sup> Pelliot, *Polo*, 1:223–4.

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measures: nominations and titles, so characteristic of Chinese history; and even census results are given. This kind of information strongly suggests that the chronicle was at least partially based on some surviving written documents. What those documents were like; where they originated; how and where they were preserved in the more than hundred years that elapsed from the fall of the Qara Khitai to the compilation of the *Liao shi*; how and why their chronological framework was corrupted – all these questions are at the moment unanswerable.

Apart from the *Liao shi*, other official histories, those of the Jin and, to a lesser extent, those of the Yuan and Song are also major sources for the history of the Qara Khitai. Of great importance are also the unofficial histories written under the Song. First among these is the *San chao bei meng hui bian* (“Compilation of documents on the treaties with the North during three reigns”) by Xu Mengxin (1126–1207). This book collects extracts from 196 contemporary works (e.g., diaries, memorials, letters, all preserved in their original form) and narrates with many details, sometimes even day after day, the fall of the Northern Song and its alliance and war with the Jin from 1117 to 1161, a period that corresponds to the reigns of three successive Song emperors.<sup>15</sup> The work contains many details regarding Yelü Dashi’s early career in China, his departure for Mongolia, and his attempts to forge alliances with the Song and Xi Xia.

Other important unofficial histories include the *Qidan guo zhi*, one of the major sources for the *Liao shi*;<sup>16</sup> Yuwen Mozhao’s *Da Jin guo zhi* (“History of the great Jin kingdom”), written around 1234, which narrates the history of the Jin from the Song point of view;<sup>17</sup> and the *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* (“A Record of important affairs since the beginning of the *Jianyan* [1127–30] period”) by Li Xinchuan (1166–1243), an annalistic work that covers the 1126–63 period. Among other topics, this work offers a most detailed description of Yelü Yudu’s campaign against Yelü Dashi in the 1130s and of Jin and Song reactions to Dashi’s strengthening at Kedun.<sup>18</sup>

Other significant genres of Chinese sources include literary collections (*wenji*) by Song and Jin scholars and official documents (e.g., the *Song hui yao*). Of special importance are the travelogues, mainly reports of envoys sent from one Chinese state to the other or from Jin or Song to the Mongols. The *Song mo ji wen* (“Record of hearsay on the pine forest in the plains”), for example, records the personal experience of Hong Hao (1088–1155). Hong was a Song envoy to the Jin who was detained by the Jurchens from 1129 to 1143.<sup>19</sup> His work contains unique

<sup>15</sup> Y. Hervouet (ed.), *A Sung Bibliography* (Hong Kong, 1978), 86–7; see also Zhong Weimin, “*San chao bei meng hui bian*,” in Cang Xiuliang (ed.), *Zhongguo shixue mingzhu pingjie* (Jinan, 1990), 2:57–78; Liu Pujiang, “*San chao bei meng hui bian yanjiu*,” in *LJSL*, 373–401.

<sup>16</sup> Hervouet (ed.), *Sung Bibliography*, 90; for more on this work see Liu Pujiang, “*Qidan guo zhi de ruogan wenti*,” in *LJSL*, 322–34.

<sup>17</sup> Hervouet (ed.), *Sung Bibliography*, 90–1; and see Liu Pujiang, “*Zai lun Da Jin guo zhi de zhenwei*,” in *LJSL*, 335–56.

<sup>18</sup> Hervouet (ed.), *Sung Bibliography*, 81; see also Wu Huaqi, “*Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu*,” in Cang Xiuliang (ed.), *Zhongguo shixue mingzhu pingjie*, 2:79–94.

<sup>19</sup> Hervouet (ed.), *Sung Bibliography*, 109–10.

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information about Yelü Dashi's capture by the Jin in 1123 and his subsequent escape.

Other relevant travelogues narrate the journeys of Chinese envoys or visitors to the Mongols, most of whom went to see Chinggis Khan during his stay in Transoxania in the early 1220s. As their authors passed through the Western Liao territory soon after its dissolution, most of them retain some reference to its history. The two most important travelogues are those of Chang Chun and Yelü Chucai. Chang Chun (1148–1227), the patriarch of the Daoist Quanzhen sect who was summoned by Chinggis Khan due to his erudition in the science of elixirs, set out for Central Asia in 1220. He met the Mongol Khan at Samarqand in 1222, and came back to north China in 1224. The record of his journey contains several references to Qara Khitai history as well as a vivid description of the lands formerly under their rule.<sup>20</sup> Yelü Chucai (1189–1243), later the famous councilor of Chinggis Khan and his son Ögödei, and himself a descendant of the Khitan royal family, was naturally interested in Qara Khitai history. Accompanying Chinggis Khan in his campaign against Khwārazm in 1219 and remaining in Central Asia until 1226, Yelü Chucai visited most of the former Qara Khitai territories. His *Xi you lu* (“Account of a journey to the west”), and many poems in his literary collection, preserve unique details about Qara Khitai administration and language, as well as about the economic situation in their former regions.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from contemporary or nearly contemporary works, important later Chinese compilations, mainly from the Qing period, were also consulted. Qing historians, aware of the inadequacy of the *Liao shi*, accumulated materials from other Song, Jin and Yuan works and tried to eliminate the inconsistencies of the *Liao shi*. While their results for Liao history are impressive, the treatment of the Western Liao is less successful. Important Qing works are the *Liao shi shi yi* (“Supplement to the *Liao shi*”) of Li E (1692–1752); the *Liao shi shi yi bu* (“Addendum to the Supplement to the *Liao shi*”) of Yang Fuji (1727–1820), the richest work with regard to the Qara Khitai; and the *Liao shi ji shi benmo* (“The complete history of the Liao”) of Li Yutang (1843–1902), who mainly rearranged his predecessors' work in topical order. None of those records, however, used non-Chinese sources for reconstructing Qara Khitai history, and they are cited in this study only when their information adds to more contemporary sources. Also important are later compilations for the history of the Xi Xia, the Western Liao's southeastern neighbor. Those include mainly Wu Guangzheng's *Xi Xia shu shi* (“Historical record of the Xi Xia”), completed in 1825–7, and the *Xi Xia ji* (“Record of the Xi Xia”) of Tai Xichang, completed in 1927, an annalistically arranged work whose compiler carefully identifies his (mainly Song, Liao and Jin) sources.<sup>22</sup> The Tangut codex of 1148–69, available in both Chinese and Russian translations, provides important

<sup>20</sup> On Chang Chun see I. de Rachewiltz and T. Russell, “Ch'iu Ch'u-chi,” in *In the Service of the Khan*, 208–23.

<sup>21</sup> On Yelü Chucai see I. de Rachewiltz, “Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai, Yeh-lü Chu, Yeh-lü Hsi-liang,” in *In the Service of the Khan*, 136–75.

<sup>22</sup> R. W. Dunnell, “The Hsi-Hsia,” in *CHC6*, 675.

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indirect information on Qara Khitai trade.<sup>23</sup> Although I have checked most of the existing indices for Liao, Song and Yuan works, very few new Chinese sources can be added to the meticulous work by Wittfogel and Feng and by modern Chinese scholars.

### *Muslim sources*

This study uses a large variety of Muslim sources, some of them hitherto not consulted with regard to the Qara Khitai. Yet the major works remain the chronicles of Juwaynī (d. 1283 in Baghdad), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233 in Mawṣil), and Jūzjānī (d. after 1265 in Delhi). As in the case of the *Liao shi*, however, the sources for the information on the Qara Khitai in these three major Muslim works are not always clear.

Juwaynī, an administrator in the service of the Mongols, is by far the most knowledgeable Muslim source on the Qara Khitai. Still, his existing record ignores their most remarkable victory, that over the Saljūqs at Qatwān in 1141, and, as mentioned above, includes two contradictory versions of their fall.<sup>24</sup> The only work Juwaynī mentions as a source for his information on the Qara Khitai is the *Mashārib al-tajārib wa ghawārib al-gharā'ib* ("Places of refreshment of the experiences and zeniths of the marvels"), of Ibn Funduq, a lost history of Khurāsān. The same book is quoted also by Ibn al-Athīr, although in both cases the writers refer to information for the years 1172–89, while Ibn Funduq himself supposedly died in 1169.<sup>25</sup> The surviving works of Ibn Funduq which I have consulted hardly mention the Qara Khitai.<sup>26</sup>

Ibn al-Athīr's great annalistic work, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh* ("The complete history"), includes unique information about the consolidation of Qara Khitai rule in the Muslim world as well as a detailed description of their fall, which happened during his lifetime. Apart from one mention of Ibn Funduq and a few of unnamed "historians of Khurāsān," Ibn al-Athīr did not document the sources for his information on the eastern Islamic world.<sup>27</sup> His colleague al-Nasawī (d. after 1241), the biographer of the last Khwārazm Shāh, Jalāl al-Dīn, and himself a major source for the fall of the Qara Khitai, praised Ibn al-Athīr's treatment of Khwārazm and

<sup>23</sup> E. I. Kychanov (ed. and tr.), *Izmenennyyi i zanovo utverzhdennyyi kodeks deviza tsarstvovaniia nebesnoe protsvetanie (1149–1169)* (Moscow, 1987), 2:225–7 (ch. 7, art. 440); Shi Jinbo et al. (eds. and trs.), *Xi Xia tiansheng lüling* (Beijing, 1994), 7/174.

<sup>24</sup> On Juwaynī see, e.g., D. O. Morgan, "Persian Historians and the Mongols," in D. O. Morgan (ed.), *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and the Islamic Worlds* (London, 1982), 113–18.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion in C. Cahen, "The Historiography of the Seljuqid Period," in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), 64–6.

<sup>26</sup> For a full list of Ibn Funduq's works see H. El-Saghir, *Abū al-Ḥasan Baihaqī und seine Sprichwörterammlung Gurar al-amtāl wa-durar al-aqwāl* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 26–48. The neglect of the Qara Khitai in Ibn Funduq's extant works, however, might be due to their non-chronicle genre.

<sup>27</sup> D. S. Richards, "Ibn al-Athīr and the Later Parts of the *Kāmil*: A Study of Aims and Methods," in Morgan (ed.), *Medieval Historical Writing*, 87–8.

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the east, and suggested that Ibn al-Athīr had used Persian histories since “the historical material he put in his book is more than could be culled from the mouths of men.”<sup>28</sup>

The third important source is Jūzjānī’s *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāširī* (“The Nāširī tables”), a general history from the creation till 1259; most of its chapters (or tables) deal with individual dynasties. The work includes a special chapter on the Qara Khitai, and they are also mentioned in the chapters dealing with their contemporaries. Jūzjānī’s description of the rise of the Qara Khitai is completely different from other versions of this subject, and his work includes unique details on Qara Khitai attitudes towards Islam. As a young man in Ghūr (modern Afghanistan), Jūzjānī witnessed the first Mongol invasion of the Muslim world, and might have been aware of the fall of the Qara Khitai which preceded it. Writing in Delhi, where, according to his own testimony, several Qara Khitai achieved important positions,<sup>29</sup> he might have gathered his information from them or from other refugees from the former Qara Khitai territories who, like Jūzjānī, escaped to Delhi after the Mongol invasion.

Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318), an Ilkhanid vizier whose *Jāmi’ al-tawārīkh* (“The collection of histories”) is a sweeping world history, belongs to a later generation, and his reliance on Juwaynī and Ibn al-Athīr can easily be traced. Yet his usage of the term Qara Khitai suggests that he had used Mongol sources as well. While his history of the Mongol and Turkic tribes is essential for understanding the environment of the Qara Khitai and for details of their fall, his specific treatment of the Qara Khitai is quite disappointing. In his history of Chinggis Khan Rashīd al-Dīn included an often-cited paragraph about the rise of the Qara Khitai. Yet he hardly gave any further information on the dynasty’s rulers, nor did he try to synthesize information on the Qara Khitai which appears in other parts of his *magnum opus*.<sup>30</sup>

To supplement these major works I have used many other sources. They include mainly literature of different kinds written in the territories of the Qara Khitai (manuals for courtiers, local histories, *adab*<sup>31</sup> works, Muslim legal works); contemporary or nearly contemporary works from other parts of the Muslim world, mainly chronicles of the Saljūqs, ‘Abbāsids, Ayyūbids or local histories;<sup>32</sup> collections of

<sup>28</sup> Richards, “Ibn al-Athīr,” 84, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Jūzjānī/Habībī, 2:9,13,19, 22, 28 and see p. 143. For Jūzjānī as a historian see Morgan, “Persian Historians,” 110–13.

<sup>30</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn’s history of Khwārazm is simply a reworking of Juwaynī’s chapter on the same topic, while his history of the Saljūqs mainly follows Nishāpūrī’s *Saljūq nāmāh*, whence Rāwandī’s *Rāḥat al-sudūr*, although it sometimes adds new information. For a recent translation of the Saljūq part see Rashīd al-Dīn, *The History of the Seljuq Turks from the Jāmi’ al-tawārīkh*, tr. K. A. Luther (Richmond, 2001). On Rashīd al-Dīn see Morgan, “Persian Historians,” 118–21; D. O. Morgan, “Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb,” *EI2* 7 (1995), 458–9 and the many references there.

<sup>31</sup> *Adab* is a genre of literature dealing mainly with the general knowledge needed for the well-bred members of the medieval Muslim elite, which includes many historical anecdotes. See C. Pellat, “Adab,” *EI* 1 (1985), 431–44.

<sup>32</sup> For the Saljūq sources see Cahen, “Historiography,” *passim*, which also covers most of the Iraqi important works; Ayyūbid chronicles usually follow Ibn al-Athīr (or his sources) in their limited coverage of eastern affairs.



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contemporary official documents, mainly from Khwārazm; geographical works; and biographical collections.

Of this latter genre, 'Awfī's *Lubāb al-albāb* ("Quintessence of hearts") is of special importance. 'Awfī (d. ca. 1232) spent much of his youth in Qara Khitai Transoxania, and his uncle Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Adnān wrote the now lost *Tārīkh-i Turkistān* ("History of Turkestan"), which recounts the history of the Qarakhanids, who were Qara Khitai's vassals.<sup>33</sup> 'Awfī's work is an anthology of poets which also contains a biographical introduction on each poet. In addition, it includes biographies of and poems by people for whom poetry was only marginal to their other careers as rulers or administrators, including those little known from other sources such as some Qarakhanid rulers. His biography of Shams al-Dīn al-Uzgandī, a *qādī* from Farghāna who became the Qara Khitai court doctor, is most valuable, providing us with a rare insight into Qara Khitai administration.

The works of al-Sam'ānī (d. 1166) also deserve to be mentioned here. Although he never discussed the Qara Khitai, his information on the religious life in Qara Khitai Transoxania, where he spent several years in the 1150s, is indispensable for understanding the relationship between the Qara Khitai and their Muslim subjects.

Whereas geographical works are important for determining the image of China in Central Asia, contemporary Muslim travelogues are rather disappointing, especially when compared to their Chinese counterparts. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1169/70), who visited Khwārazm, Balkh and Bukhara in 1153–5, never mentioned the Qara Khitai, and al-Idrīsī (d. 1165), who wrote in Sicily in 1154, did not reach Central Asia. His information on Transoxania and beyond is based on tenth-century reports, mainly following Ibn al-Faṭḥ.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from contemporary or nearly contemporary works I have also consulted later Muslim works, since medieval Muslim writers often preserved earlier information in relatively late compositions. Most of the later Muslim works follow either Ibn al-Athīr (in Arabic) or Juwaynī (in Persian), although they sometimes include meaningful variants. Of special importance is the *Tārīkh-i alfī* ("A millennial history"), compiled in the early seventeenth century by a team of historians in Moghul India to mark the millennium of the Prophet Muḥammad's demise. This

<sup>33</sup> For Majd al-Dīn's biography see 'Awfī, *Lubāb al-albāb* (Tehran, 1954), 154–5, and 511, 571, 600–1; Barthold, *Turkestan*, 17–18. Barthold suggested that the same uncle wrote also another lost book, *Tārīkh-i Khitāi* ("A history of Khitai"), which Barthold understood as relating to the Qara Khitai. His assumption is based on the data of Ḥājji Khalīfa, who in the seventeenth century mentioned *Tārīkh Khitāi wa-akhwāl mulūkīhā* ("History of Khitai and record of its kings"), a Turkic work written by Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Qūshī, but based on the work of Majd al-Dīn (*Kashf al-zunūn* [Istanbul, 1941], 'an asāmī al-Kutub wa'l-funūn, 1:292, 289. Unlike the "History of Turkestan," however, the latter book is never quoted by 'Awfī. I agree with Qazwīnī that Ḥājji Khalīfa was actually referring to one of several fifteenth-century *Tārīkh-i Khatāy*, which record the missions of Timūrid ambassadors to Ming China, and thus this book has nothing to do with either Majd al-Dīn or the Qara Khitai (Niẓāmī, *Chahār maqāla* [Tehran, 1954] 186–7, n. 2; on the later works see I. Bellér-Hann [ed. and tr.], *A History of Cathay* [Bloomington, 1995], 1–23).

<sup>34</sup> E. Levi-Provencal, "Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī," *EI* 2 (1960), 122; G. Oman, "al-Idrīsī," *EI* 3 (1971), 1032–4.

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## 10 Introduction

compilation combines traditions of Juwaynī and Ibn al-Athīr, yet since its authors seemed to have had direct access to Ibn Funduq's *Mashārib al-tajārib* it includes many details unavailable in earlier sources.<sup>35</sup> The information contained in the semi-legendary *Majmū'al-tawārīkh* of the sixteenth century and the unique personal names retained in the seventeenth-century *Ta'rikh-i Ḥaydarī* probably reflect oral traditions.

The two main Turkic works of the eleventh century, al-Kāshgharī's *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk* ("Compendium of the Turkic dialects") and Yūsuf Ḥāṣṣ Ḥājib's *Qutadghu bilig* ("Wisdom of royal glory"), consulted in translation, are invaluable for shedding light on the society and culture of Central Asia on the eve of the rise of the Qara Khitai.

*Archaeological literature*

The archaeological sources for Qara Khitai history are nearly as problematic as the literary sources. There is no tomb or inscription positively identified as belonging to the Qara Khitai, and early identification of Qara Khitai culture in the Chu valley was almost totally ignored in studies published after the outbreak of the Sino–Soviet dispute, including post-Soviet works.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, certain archaeological findings, especially numismatic and epigraphic, can enrich our knowledge of the Qara Khitai and their subjects. The Chinese-type coins of the Qara Khitai and the rare Muslim coins on which the Gürkhan's name appears as the Western Qarakhanid ruler's overlord are unique examples of Qara Khitai material culture.<sup>37</sup> Numismatic findings are also essential for the study of the Qarakhanids, important Qara Khitai vassals. The epigraphic literature contains important evidence for Central Asia's relations with China and with the Muslim world under the Qara Khitai. General archaeological literature is useful for reconstructing the economic situation under the Qara Khitai, and their relations with their neighbors, including China.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For the *Ta'rikh-i alfī* see S. A. A. Rizvi, "Tarikh-i alfī," in M. Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India* (New Delhi, 1968), 113–23.

<sup>36</sup> In the 1940s and early 1950s Bernshtam unearthed what he called Qara Khitai culture in the Chu valley area. See A. N. Bernshtam, *Istoriko-kul'turnoe proshloe severnoj Kirgizii po materialam bol'shogo Chujskogo kanala* (Frunze, 1943), 25–26, 44; A. N. Bernshtam, *Istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki Tsentral'nogo Tian'-Shania i Pamiro-Altai*, MIAS, 26 (Moscow, 1952), 169–72; A. N. Bernshtam, *Trudy Semirechenskoj arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii Chujskaia dolina*, MIAS, 14 (Moscow, 1950), 47–55, 139–42. His findings are cited in the 1956 and 1962 editions of the *Istoriia Kirgizii* (M. P. Viatkin et al., *Istoriia Kirgizii* [Frunze, 1956, 1962], 1:140–1), which stress the apparent Chinese influence on this culture. The 1984 parallel work (A. K. Karupkulov et al., *Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSR* [Frunze, 1984], 1:298–303) contains, however, no reference at all to either Chinese influence in Qyrghyzstan or to Qara Khitai material culture. See pp. 174–5 for further discussion and examples.

<sup>37</sup> See ch. 2; ch. 4, introduction and p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> See especially the works of Kochnev, Goriacheva and Nastits in the bibliography; for Chinese archaeological literature see the annual *Zhongguo kaogu xue nianjian* (Yearbook of Chinese archaeology) and, since 1996, also the journal *Archaeology and Art Index* published in Hong Kong.