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Edited by Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank and Peter B. Golden

Excerpt

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Introduction

NICOLA DI COSMO, ALLEN J. FRANK
AND PETER B. GOLDEN

The vast expanse of land that forms the physical setting for the Chinggisid era in Inner Asian history extends from the forests of Manchuria in the east to the steppelands west of the Volga River stretching to the Black Sea. The forest and taiga zones of Siberia constitute the northern boundaries while the agrarian-sedentary world of China, the Islamic world and Christian Eastern Europe frame the region from the south and west. With the exception of the oasis city-states, many of them fabled connecting links in the Silk Road, much of this region consists of grassy prairies, the steppe, bounded by forest-steppe zones in the north and interspersed with deserts and semi-deserts in the south.

The history of this region from antiquity to modern times has primarily centred on the interaction of the nomadic world of the steppes with the much smaller Uralic or Palaeo-Siberian forest populations to the north, the settled, largely Iranian-speaking populations of the oasis city-states to the south and the larger states, often empires, south and later north of the steppe zone. The rise of the Chinggisid Mongol Empire was, in many respects, a culminating point in a long line of nomad-based polities with roots and political traditions going back to the Xiongnu (third century BCE–mid-second century CE). It was the most complex of these polities. The Steppe Imperial Tradition, like Roman political traditions in Europe, provided an ideology, in a number of variants, accepted across the Inner Asian nomadic world and a template for governance. In the aftermath of the Türk and then Uighur Empires, there was a sense of *translatio imperii*, perhaps increasingly muted as time passed. Some sense of the continuity of steppe imperial tradition was probably known to the Mongols of Chinggis Khan's day if only from their Uighur advisers and bookmen – although Mongolic peoples had been part of the Türk Empire. Above all, this tradition consisted of a ruling clan brought to power by conquest. In the Chinggisid era this clan was called the *altan urugh* ('Golden Clan'), led by a supreme, heavenly mandated ruler, the *Qaghan* (later *Qa'an*, *Khan* 'emperor'),

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a title of unknown origin used by Turkic and Mongolic peoples. The Qaghan's person was sacred and his rule was legitimated by military (and diplomatic) success, giving tangible evidence of his possession of charisma, heaven-sent good fortune. After Chinggis, it was expected that ruling houses in Inner Asia would derive from his descendants. The Qaghan's power was also manifested in his establishment of the *törü* (also *töre*), the body of legal practices according to which the ruler was to govern. The Mongol *jasagh* (Turkicized as *yasa*) has been compared with *törü* although the correspondence remains debated.

The Mongol state was primarily based, in the initial stage of its formation, on a military hierarchy that included increasingly larger units from tens to hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands headed by a progressively smaller aristocratic elite, culminating in the family of the Qaghan and his most valued military leaders, known as *nökiüd* (sing. *nökür*) 'boon companions', men who had left their clan and tribal affiliations and pledged loyalty to their overlord. Various institutions upon which the military aristocratic state was modelled, such as the *comitatus*, the bodyguard, and the decimal organization of the army, can be traced back to Inner Asian precedents, and are derived from a political culture that encompasses Inner Asian imperial history, in particular that of the Xiongnu, Türk, Uighur, Khazar and Khitan empires. As in other Inner Asian political formations, the Mongol state was multi-ethnic and inclusive of a wide range of Turkic- and Mongolic-speaking nomads as well as other peoples.

Its emergence had a profound impact on the social organization of the Mongol and Turkic population of Mongolia, as it was preceded by an extended period of internal wars that transformed traditional group identities and continued to manipulate them well into the imperial period. Generally speaking, the militarization of the population of Mongolia led to the formation of a more cohesive and powerful aristocracy coalescing eventually around the person of the Qaghan and reorganized into vertical hierarchies that drew power and authority from their control of military units and appanages of land.

Also along traditional Inner Asian lines, this military aristocracy established a personal bond of allegiance to the Qaghan and aimed at its own reproduction as a military caste. It is in the superimposition of a thick military-aristocratic layer upon traditional nomadic society that one can locate the major impetus for the series of wars and the expansionist drive that is characteristic of the first phase of the Mongol conquests. The imperial system required, in order to survive, the concentration of extensive sources of wealth in the hands of the top echelons of the state. This need, combined with the economic imbalance between resources that could be generated by a reduced productive base and

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the large military establishment it was supposed to support, produced enormous pressure for the acquisition of external resources. The early campaigns of Chinggis Khan aimed at establishing control over international trade and at exacting tribute from neighbouring states, primarily the Tangut state of the Western Xia, and the Jurchen Jin dynasty ruling in North China.

The Mongol conquests of the early and mid-thirteenth century shattered the Turko-nomadic world, breaking down and then reconfiguring its earlier tribal structures. It brought new waves of Turkic groupings into Central and Western Inner Asia as well as the Near East, advancing Turkicization in all those regions.

As the Mongols began to impose their rule upon the settled populations of China, Iran, Central Asia and Russia, different forms of accommodation allowed them to integrate within their system of government various forms of administration based on pre-existing models of civil bureaucracy and social organization. The syncretistic nature of the Mongol governments established over extensive sedentary populations produced varieties of Mongol rule that cannot be assimilated to a single model, except possibly for the common trait that people identifying themselves as Mongols retained an overwhelming presence in the military apparatus of each state, with attendant privileges and high social status. Also, their major and minor courts across the different Mongol states remained remarkably open to multiple cultural influences, and the circulation of ideas, technologies, material goods, religions and even foods and entertainment benefited from the eclectic taste and multicultural environment that Mongol leaders generally favoured. The Mongols, of course, made choices as to what they accepted and what they rejected, a matter that was made painfully clear to Christian missionaries who attempted to convert Mongols but were far less successful than Buddhist monks and Muslim mullahs. Religion eventually became a major source of inspiration for radical changes in the ruling ideology of the Mongols throughout each of their *uluses* (states).

The Mongol world empire created a *pax* across Eurasia that, after the initial devastations of the conquest, revived economies and stimulated trade. It produced the outlines of an 'interlocking set of institutions...or world networks'.¹ The Chinggisid policy of identifying talented individuals among their subject populations and moving them to areas in which they could best serve Chinggisid interests gave far greater opportunities for cultural exchange between East and West. Thus, a Mongol official, Bolad Agha, with a history

¹ Adshead, 1993, p. 4.

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of service in Yuan China, came to Iran and was a major source for Rashīd ad-Dīn's *Jāmi' at-Tavārīkh*, an extraordinary 'world history' as seen from the vantage point of this Ilkhanid official.² In addition to the exchange and transfer of knowledge, intellectual capital, what S. A. M. Adshead has termed 'the basic information circuit',³ this also included religions, long a staple of Silk Road intercourse. The Mongols abroad in Western and Central Inner Asia as well as in Iran all became Islamicized as well as largely Turkicized. It is under the aegis of the Chinggisids that Islam, with a strong nativized Šūfī influence, becomes the dominant religion of the Eurasian pastoral nomadic world – outside of Mongolia.

There was also the transfer of technology, in particular technology that related to the implements of war. This included the initial spread of gunpowder weaponry, which played so critical a role in shaping the modern world. At the same time, the spread of disease across the Old World was facilitated by the relative ease with which people and goods moved across Eurasia and thence into the southern Mediterranean world as well. This 'microbian common market', to use Adshead's pithy phrase,⁴ was fully manifested in the Black Death that struck Europe and the Mediterranean Islamic world in the mid-fourteenth century.

The Chinggisid era in world history was a major step towards Eurasian integration and expanded that world or a larger world-consciousness to realms in North Africa and Southern Arabia, beyond the range of Mongol control. Multi-language dictionaries and grammars were composed within and outside the Chinggisid realms, from Korea, China, India, Russia and the Crimea to Yemen and Egypt. In many respects the Mongol Empire was the culminating point in pre-Modern World systems.⁵ When the system began to fragment in the Timurid era, Europe embarked on its 'voyages of discovery' attempting to create other links with East, South and South-eastern Asia, ushering in the Modern World system.⁶

The political significance of the Chinggisids in Inner Asia remained evident long after Chinggisid dynasts had lost their grip on the region's nomadic and sedentary states. Chinggisid legitimacy was an important political force for the region's non-Chinggisid dynasties. Some, like Temür (Tamerlane),

2 Allsen, 1994b.

3 Adshead, 1993, p. 4.

4 Adshead, 1993, p. 4.

5 Abu-Lughod, 1989.

6 European shortages in gold and silver as well as competition along the trade routes were also major motivating forces, see Frank, A.G., 1998, pp. 56–8.

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maintained puppet Chinggisid khans. Temür, at most, styled himself their ‘son-in-law’. Subsequently, others often retained Chinggisid rulers as vassals, as the Ottomans did with the Crimean khans, or as the Russians did with the Kasimov khanate, and its Chinggisid vassals among the Qazaqs. Indeed, the sixteenth century witnessed the appropriation of the Chinggisid dynastic hierarchy by Muscovite dynasts, who had been erstwhile vassals of the Golden Horde. Chinggisid legitimacy remained a force to conjure with. At the same time, the hegemony of Chinggisid legitimacy elicited challenges from non-Chinggisid rulers, particularly among nomadic political challengers to the khans of the Golden Horde. Beginning in the fifteenth century non-Chinggisids began to invoke Islamic political legitimacy to obtain political support among Muslim nomads. This process first became evident in the Noghay Horde, and was also evident in sixteenth-century Siberia and among the Qazaqs and in Central Asia in the eighteenth century. The political development of Chinggisid successor states also came to have a strong influence on the development of ethnic identity in Inner Asia, particularly among the steppe nomads, where Chinggisid-dominated nomadic confederations became ‘tribal’ confederations claiming common ancestry. This process was closely linked to Islamic legends of origin, especially among the Qazaqs and Siberian Tatars, but the role of Chinggisid politics in these developments cannot be dismissed.

In Mongolia itself, the conversion of Altan Khan to Buddhism in the mid-sixteenth century brought to a head a process of gradual affirmation of a principle of ‘caesaropapism’ between the temporal power of the khan and the spiritual power of Tibetan Buddhist hierarchies that can be traced back to the Mongols, at the very least, to the sodality between Qubilai Khan and the Tibetan hierarch ‘Phags-pa. After the defeat of the Mongols in China in 1368 and the failure of the Northern Yuan dynasty to ‘reimperialize’ the Mongol armies and peoples, fissiparous tendencies set in that could not be overcome, causing repeated failures to unify the Mongols into a new imperial formation. Migratory movements caused by trade opportunities with China led to a substantial increment of the Mongol population along the Chinese northern border, which became a fulcrum of economic and political revival.

In the political culture of Mongolia, the principle of Chinggisid legitimation was gradually diminished by the close political relations established by various tribes (or ethno-political groups) with Tibetan sects, whose support was virtually indispensable for advancing political claims. Non-Chinggisid rulers were thus able to propose themselves as potential rulers and challengers of rightful Chinggisid heirs. The rise of the Manchus, the ‘imperialization’ of

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most of the Mongols under a Qing banner, and the utter destruction of the Zunghars effectively closed the door to any possibility of re-creating a unified Mongol empire.

With the expansion of the Russian and Qing empires and the increasing inability of the nomads to compete militarily with the 'gunpowder empires', the nomads were brought within the orbits of their imperial neighbours. Preferential Chinggisid access to positions of political authority continued to be recognized at the local level within the territorial-administrative divisions created by the Manchus, but this was within the framework and bureaucratic structure of the Qing state. In time, the Qing and especially the Russian Empire sought to exert greater control over their still mobile and occasionally recalcitrant subjects in the steppe and mould them into more obedient servants of the state.

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PART ONE

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THE RISE OF
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I

Inner Asia c. 1200

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Neighbours of the steppe

The steppe, extending from the Danube to Manchuria, has been uncharitably termed the ‘inhospitable land of the barbarian’.¹ These ‘barbarians’ were largely pastoral nomads whose neighbours viewed them as avaricious and violent marauders. In the west, this nomadic world was framed by Hungary and Rus’, the latter an increasingly divided state contested by rival branches of the Riurikid ruling house. Both states included steppe lands and pastoral nomadic populations that had taken service with the Hungarian and Rus’ rulers. South of the steppe lands and the fabled Silk Road cities of its southern rim (Samarqand, Bukhara, Kashghar) were the petty states of the Balkans, the fading Byzantine Empire, the Seljukid state of Rūm (Anatolia), Georgian-dominated Transcaucasia, and the fragmented ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and post-Seljuk polities of the Near East. In the east, China was also politically divided. In the north-west were the Tanguts (Chin. Xixia, 1038–1227) in Ningxia, Shaanxi and Gansu, extending to Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang. They spoke a language related to or a branch of Tibeto-Burmese.² South of the Yangtze River was the ethnically Chinese Southern Song state (1127–1279), with its capital at Hangzhou. The Manchu-Tungusic Jurchen dominated the north-east, its ruling elite moving between five capitals (including Beijing). In 1125, the Jurchen had toppled the Khitan-Liao dynasty (907–1125), another Inner Asian people of Mongolic, or perhaps ‘para-Mongolic’, ethno-linguistic affiliations³ and took the Chinese dynastic name Jin (‘Golden’, 1115–1234).⁴ In Inner Asia, the Jin ruler was called *Altan Khan* (Mongolic ‘Golden Khan’). Like their Liao predecessors, the Jin ruled over a ‘dual-administration empire’,⁵

1 Meserve, 1982.

2 See Dunnell, 1994, pp. 154–8; Dunnell, 1996, pp. 3–7, 27 ff.; Kychanov, 1968, pp. 11–51, 57–64.

3 ‘Para-Mongolic’ languages ‘were collaterally related to Proto-Mongolic’, see Janhunen, 2003b, and Janhunen, 1996, pp. 146 ff.

4 Vorob’ev, 1975, pp. 19–51; Franke, 1990; Franke, 1994a, pp. 215 ff.; Chan, 1991.

5 Di Cosmo, 1999, pp. 32–3.

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employing separate administrations for nomadic and sedentary populations. The Tangut realm was also a 'complex mix'.⁶ Variants of dual administration may have been employed by the Qarakhanids, Khwārazmshāhs⁷ and perhaps the Qara Khitai (1125–1212) in realms that encompassed the steppe and settled world.⁸ Virtually all of the sedentary states around the steppe were afflicted by political instability.

Everywhere, the nomads were uneasy neighbours. Yūsuf Khaṣṣ Ḥājib, a Qarakhanid official, in his *Qutadghu Bilig* (1069), a mirror for princes, warned that they should be treated cautiously for they were not only 'unmannerly and impudent...despicable and ignorant bumpkins',⁹ but dangerous. The plaint of the Rus' chroniclers that nomad raiders killed and enslaved peaceful tillers of the soil¹⁰ was one that could be echoed across the steppe-sedentary frontier. Even in the early modern era, as the Russian Empire advanced into the steppes, the populations of the Russo-Ukrainian borderlands were the second greatest source of slaves in the world after Africa.¹¹

The western zone: the Volga-Ural region and the Qipchaq steppe

Spanning the western and central zones, from the Danube to Khwārazm (Khorezm), Kazakhstan and Siberia, lay the Qipchaq steppe (Pers. *Dasht-i Qipchāq*), the domain of the Cuman-Qipchaq-Qangli tribes. Deriving largely from the earlier Kimek union centred in Western Siberia, this was an acephalous confederation of chieftaincies, divided into regional groupings, which had established its supremacy here in the first half of the eleventh century. By 1200, certain lineages (such as the Sharuqanids) had begun to achieve regional dominance, but none could claim supreme authority. We know little of their internal history. Ibn Khaldūn briefly mentions old feuds between two Qipchaq tribes,¹² giving us a glimpse of tribal rivalries. The Qipchaq groups had carefully integrated themselves into the surrounding state systems, forging close politico-military and marital ties with competing Rus' princely factions, as well as with the Georgian and Khwārazmian ruling houses. Although largely

6 See Dunnell, 1996, pp. 7–8, 145–56; and Kychanov, 1968, pp. 108 ff.

7 On Qarakhanid administration, see Genç, 1981, and Necef, 2005, pp. 235 ff. On the Khwārazmshāh state, see Buniatov, 1986, pp. 88–107.

8 Biran, 2005, pp. 128–31.

9 *Kutadgu Bilig*, pp. 58–59, lines 439–53; Dankoff, 1983, pp. 184–5.

10 PSRL, I, c. 277.

11 Khodarkovsky, 2002, p. 22.

12 Ibn Khaldūn, 1983–6, X, p. 805.

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Inner Asia c. 1200

speaking dialects of north-western (Qïpchaq) Turkic, this was a polyethnic union. Some of the tribes, such as the Ölberli and Qitan-opa, originated in a Mongolic milieu. Others, such as the Baya'ut/Bayawut, had branches in both the Turkic and Mongolic worlds.¹³ In the western zone, proto-towns developed around the chieftains' principal camps. In Central Inner Asia, the Qipchaqs used Jand and Sighnaq as their urban centres.¹⁴

Volga Bulgharia, Muslim in religion and Oghuro-Turkic in origin, was the dominant, commerce-oriented polity of the Middle Volga and neighbouring forest-steppe zone. A rival of the Rus' state in its pursuit of the products of the northern forests (especially furs), it was the main channel of those goods to Khwārazm, on the Oxus, in modern Western Uzbekistan and thence to the larger Islamic world. After the fall of Khazaria (c. 965–9) it also became a commercial intermediary between Rus' and the Muslim lands. The Volga Bulgars, assimilating Volga Finnic groupings, by the early thirteenth century were advancing into the neighbouring Ugrian territories ('Yugra' of the Rus' sources) as well. On the eve of the Mongol invasions, a conflict with Rus' was looming as each side sought advantages in the contested Finno-Ugric forest zone.¹⁵

The central zone: Western and Eastern Turkestan

The Qara Khitai

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Qara Khitai state (1125–1218) was, nominally, the dominant power here. However, control over the 'vassal' Khwārazmshāhs and Qarakhanids was problematic.¹⁶ Yelü Dashi, a scion of the Liao house, retreating with his followers via Mongolia and Uighur Gaochang (Qocho), c. 1130–1, came to the Irtysh and Emil regions. Here, he established the Qara Khitai Empire and styled himself *Gürkhan* ('universal emperor'), a title hitherto not used in Inner Asia. Turko-Mongolian *qara* 'black' could be used to denote 'north' or 'great'. 'Black Khitai' is a variant of Qara Qitan/Qara Khitan used prior to 1125 by the Khitan. Chinese dynastic histories subsequently recognized them as the Western Liao (*Xi Liao*).¹⁷ The transfer of the Liao state, with its rich mix of Inner Asian and Chinese traditions (including Chinese and Khitan-Liao writing systems)¹⁸ as well as Buddhist religion to

¹³ Golden, 1992a, pp. 277–82, and Golden, 2003.

¹⁴ Baypakov, 2001, p. 145.

¹⁵ Petrukhin and Raevskii, 2004, pp. 347–58; Khuzin, 1997, pp. 101–10; Golden, 1992a, pp. 253–8.

¹⁶ Barthold, 1977, pp. 322–80; Bosworth, 1968, pp. 4–11, 14–15, 52, 140–6; Golden, 1990, chap. 13.

¹⁷ Biran, 2005, pp. 1, 19–41, 215–17; Wittfogel and Feng, 1949, pp. 619–74; and Pikov, 1989, pp. 53 ff.

¹⁸ Biran, 2005, pp. 127–8.