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978-1-107-68241-2 - A History of Persian Literature Under Tartar Dominion (A.D. 1265-1502)

Edward G. Browne

Excerpt

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BOOK I.

THE MONGOL ÍL-KHÁNS OF PERSIA,
FROM THE DEATH OF HÚLÁGÚ TO
THE EXTINCTION OF THE DYNASTY
(A.H. 663-737 = A.D. 1265-1337).

B. P.

I

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CHAPTER I.

THE MONGOL ÍL-KHÁNS OF PERSIA.

Although to the student every period in the history of every nation is more or less interesting, or could be made so with sufficient knowledge, sympathy and imagination, there are in the history of most peoples certain momentous epochs of upheaval and reconstruction about which it behoves every educated person to know something. Of such epochs Persia, for geographical and ethnological reasons, has had her full share. A glance at the map will suffice to remind the reader that this ancient, civilized and homogeneous land, occupying the whole space between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, forms, as it were, a bridge between Europe and Asia Minor on the one hand and Central and Eastern Asia on the other, across which bridge from the earliest times have passed the invading hosts of the West or the East on their respective paths of conquest. The chief moments at which Persian history thus merges in World-history are as follows :

(1) The Persian invasion of Greece by the Achaemenian kings in the fifth century before Christ.

Enumeration of seven of these epochs (2) Alexander's invasion of Persia on his way to India in the fourth century before Christ, resulting in the overthrow of the Achaemenian dynasty and the extinction of Persia as a Great Power for five centuries and a half.

(3) The restoration of the Persian Empire by the House of Sásán in the third, and their often successful wars with the Romans in the fourth and following centuries after Christ.

(4) The Arab invasion of the seventh century after Christ, which formed part of that extraordinary religious revival of a people hitherto accounted as naught, which in

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the course of a few years carried the standards of Islám from the heart of desert Arabia to Spain in the West and the Oxus and Indus in the East.

(5) The Mongol or Tartar invasion of the thirteenth century, which profoundly affected the greater part of Asia and South-eastern Europe, and which may be truly described as one of the most dreadful calamities which ever befel the human race.

(6) The second Tartar invasion of Tamerlane (*Tímúr-i-Lang* or “Limping Tímúr”) in the latter part of the fourteenth century.

(7) The Turco-Persian Wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which gave Persia at that time so great an importance in the eyes of Europe as a potential check on Turkish ambitions, and caused her friendship to be so eagerly sought after by the chief Western nations.

Of these seven great epochs in Persian history the fourth and fifth are the most important and have had the greatest and most profound influence. In all points save one, however, the Arab and Mongol invasions were utterly dissimilar. The Arabs came from the South-west, the Tartars from the North-east; the Arabs were inspired by a fiery religious enthusiasm, the Tartars by mere brutish lust of conquest, bloodshed and rapine; the Arabs brought a new civilization and order to replace those which they had destroyed, the Tartars brought mere terror and devastation. In a word, the Tartars were cunning, ruthless and bloodthirsty marauders, while the Arabs were, as even their Spanish foes were fain to admit, “Knights...and gentlemen, albeit Moors.”

The one point of resemblance between the two was the scorn which their scanty equipment and insignificant appearance aroused in their well-armed and richly-equipped antagonists before they had tasted of their quality. This point is well brought out in that charming Arabic history the *Kitábul-Fakhri*, whose author wrote about A.D. 1300, some fifty years after the Tartars had sacked Baghdád and

The Arab and Mongol invasions of Persia compared and contrasted

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destroyed the Caliphate. After describing the Arab invasion of Persia and the merriment of the Persian satraps and officers at the tattered scabbards, slender lances and small horses of the Arabs, he relates, *à propos* of this, the account¹ given to him by one of those who “marched out to meet the Tartars on the Western side of Baghdád on the occasion of its supreme catastrophe in the year 656/1258,” and tells how to meet one of their splendidly appointed champions in single combat there rode forth from the Mongol ranks “a man mounted on a horse resembling a donkey, having in his hand a spear like a spindle, and wearing neither uniform nor armour, so that all who saw him were moved to laughter.” “Yet ere the day was done,” he concludes, “theirs was the victory, and they inflicted on us a great defeat, which was the Key of Evil, and after which there befell us what befell us.”

It is almost impossible to exaggerate either the historical importance or the horror of this great irruption of barbarians out of Mongolia, Turkistán and Transoxiana in the first half of the thirteenth century. Amongst its results were the destruction of the Arabian Caliphate and disruption of the Muhammadan Empire, the creation of the modern political divisions of Western Asia, the driving into Asia Minor and subsequently into Europe of the Ottoman Turks, the stunting and barbarizing of Russia, and indirectly the Renaissance. As regards the terror universally inspired by the atrocious deeds of the Tartars, d’Ohsson in his admirable *Histoire des Mongols* observes² that we should be tempted to charge the Oriental historians with exaggeration, were it not that their statements are entirely confirmed by the independent testimony of Western historians as to the precisely similar proceedings of the Tartars in South-eastern Europe, where

Terrible character and lasting effects of the Mongol invasion

¹ For the full translation of this passage see *Lit. Hist. of Persia*, vol. i, pp. 197–8.

² Vol. i, p. vii: “On croirait que l’histoire a exagéré leurs atrocités, si les annales de tous les pays n’étaient d’accord sur ce point.”

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they ravaged not only Russia, Poland and Hungary, but penetrated to Silesia, Moravia and Dalmatia, and at the fatal battle of Liegnitz (April 9, 1241) defeated an army of 30,000 Germans, Austrians, Hungarians and Poles commanded by Henry the Pious, Duke of Silesia. Already two years before this date the terror which they inspired even in Western Europe was so great that the contemporary chronicler Matthew Paris, writing at St Albans, records under the year A.D. 1238 that for fear of the Mongols the fishermen of Gothland and Friesland dared not cross the North Sea to take part in the herring-fishing at Yarmouth, and that consequently herrings were so cheap and abundant in England that year that forty or fifty were sold for a piece of silver, even at places far from the coast. In the same year an envoy from the Ismaʿīlīs or Assassins of Alamūt by the Caspian Sea came to France and England to crave help against those terrible foes by whom they were annihilated twenty years later. He met with little encouragement, however, for the Bishop of Winchester, having heard his appeal, replied: "Let these dogs devour each other and be utterly wiped out, and then we shall see, founded on their ruins, the Universal Catholic Church, and then shall truly be one shepherd and one flock!"

The accounts given by Ibnuʿl-Athír, Yáqút and other contemporary Muhammadan historians of the Mongol invasion have been cited in part in a previous volume¹ and need not be repeated here, but it is instructive to compare them with what Matthew Paris says about those terrible Tatars, who, for reasons which he indicates, through a popular etymology connecting them with the infernal regions, became known in Europe as "Tartars." Under the year A.D. 1240 he writes of them as follows²:

"That the joys of mortal man be not enduring, nor

¹ *Lit. Hist. of Persia*, vol. ii, pp. 426 *et seqq.*

² Vol. iv, pp. 76-78, cited in the Introductory Note to vol. iv of the Second Series of the Hakluyt Society's publications (London, 1900).

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worldly happiness long lasting without lamentations, in this same year a detestable nation of Satan, to wit the countless army of Tartars, broke loose from its mountain-environed home, and, piercing the solid rocks (of the Caucasus) poured forth like devils from the Tartarus, so that they are rightly called 'Tartars' or 'Tartarians.' Swarming like locusts over the face of the earth, they have brought terrible devastation to the eastern parts (of Europe), laying them waste with fire and carnage. After having passed through the land of the Saracens, they have razed cities, cut down forests, overthrown fortresses, pulled up vines, destroyed gardens, killed townspeople and peasants. If perchance they have spared any suppliants, they have forced them, reduced to the lowest condition of slavery, to fight in the foremost ranks against their own neighbours. Those who have feigned to fight, or have hidden in the hope of escaping, have been followed up by the Tartars and butchered. If any have fought bravely for them and conquered, they have got no thanks for reward; and so they have misused their captives as they have their mares. For they are inhuman and beastly, rather monsters than men, thirsting for and drinking blood, tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and men, dressed in ox-hides, armed with plates of iron, short and stout, thickset, strong, invincible, indefatigable, their backs unprotected, their breasts covered with armour; drinking with delight the pure blood of their flocks, with big, strong horses, which eat branches and even trees, and which they have to mount by the help of three steps on account of the shortness of their thighs. They are without human laws, know no comforts, are more ferocious than lions or bears, have boats made of ox-hides which ten or twelve of them own in common; they are able to swim or manage a boat, so that they can cross the largest and swiftest rivers without let or hindrance, drinking turbid and muddy water when blood fails them (as a beverage). They have one-edged swords and daggers, are wonderful archers, spare neither age, nor sex, nor condition. They know no

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other language but their own, which no one else knows; for until now there has been no access to them, nor did they go forth (from their own country); so that there could be no knowledge of their customs or persons through the common intercourse of men. They wander about with their flocks and their wives, who are taught to fight like men. And so they come with the swiftness of lightning to the confines of Christendom, ravaging and slaughtering, striking everyone with terror and incomparable horror. It was for this that the Saracens sought to ally themselves with the Christians, hoping to be able to resist these monsters with their combined forces.”

So far from such alliance taking place, however, it was not long before the ecclesiastical and temporal rulers of Christendom conceived the idea of making use of the Tartars to crush Islám, and so end in their favour once and for all the secular struggle of which the Crusades were the chief manifestation. Communications were opened up between Western Europe and the remote and inhospitable Tartar capital of Qaraqorum; letters and envoys began to pass to and fro; and devoted friars like John of Pian de Carpine and William of Rubruck did not shrink from braving the dangers and hardships of that long and dreary road, or the arrogance and exactions of the Mongols, in the discharge of the missions confided to them. The former, bearing a letter from the Pope dated March 9, 1245, returned to Lyons in the autumn of 1247 after an absence of two years and a half, and delivered to the Pope the written answer of the Mongol Emperor Kuyúk Khán. The latter accomplished his journey in the years 1253-5 and spent about eight months (January—August, 1254) at the camp and capital of Mangú Khán, by whom he was several times received in audience. Both have left narratives of their adventurous and arduous journeys which the Hakluyt Society has rendered easily accessible to English readers¹, and of which that of Friar

¹ Second Series, vol. iv, London, 1900, translated and edited by W. W. Rockhill.

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II



Báltú, the grandson of Chingíz, holds his Court on the Volga

From an old ms. of the
Jámi'ú't-Tawárikh in the
Bibliothèque Nationale

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