

THE HÜLEGÜIDS 1258-1335
AND
THE CHALLENGE OF EXTENDED LINES OF COMMUNICATION

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SYNOPSIS

Communication and contact between the two ancient civilizations of Iran and China have a long, if sometimes sporadic, history. From the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE -220 CE) 'strategic' communication - communication networks that are essential to the survival of a state - have been a significant aspect of statecraft as rulers over a millennium ago endeavoured to defend their dominions and sustain their power. The interdiction of communication networks could lead to governance becoming paralysed as the ability of rulers to maintain contact with far-flung officials and collect vital intelligence about challenges to their power would be jeopardized.

The thesis that is presented here is that whilst there are features common to most pre-modern communication systems, that of the Chinggisids' displayed some unique characteristics. It will be further argued that the sheer extent of their conquests was the *Achilles Heel* of the imperial project since it resulted in the dangerous overstretch of the communication network. This was exacerbated not only by the limited technology available but also by internecine strife within the imperial family which further endangered already vulnerable communications.

Such factors, it will be argued, were an aggravating issue for the successors of Hülegü, the third son of Chinggis Khan's youngest son Tolui and founder of the Hülegüid realm in Western Asia. It complicated their efforts to secure and sustain their domain, because the Qa'an, their theoretical overlord, fount of their legitimacy, ally, close relative and the supposed *yeke gol* or 'great pivot' of the Chinggisid *imperium* was thousands of miles distant across inhospitable and often hostile terrain.

Though this study is firmly positioned in the pre-modern period, the central focus on the perennial problem of creating, maintaining and safeguarding efficient strategic communication networks, without which no government can function, continues to have resonance today.



The Exhaustion of
Long-Distance
Travel

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TRANSLITERATION AND CHRONOLOGY

In the course of their travels the Mongols encountered a number of different dating systems though their preference was for the Türkic version of the twelve-year Animal Cycle. For the sake of simplicity only two dating systems have been utilised here, the Gregorian/Western calendar and where appropriate the Muslim Hijrī year. This latter is only an approximation since the exact day is required for complete accuracy.

Dates relating to individuals are either reign dates e.g. (r.) or birth/death dates.

A decision has been taken here to follow in general the transliteration of a well-regarded and widely read work. The choice has fallen on Thomas T. Allsen's *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*. This uses the Library of Congress system for Persian, Arabic and Russian. For Mongolian he follows the system in Cleaves' translation of the *Secret History* and for Turkic he has followed Nadeliaev et al, *Drevnetiurkskii slovar*. Chinese names are generally in Wade Giles as the more familiar but Pinyin on occasion.

INTRODUCTION

Inception of the Study

In his paper on ‘Sino-Western contacts under the Mongol Empire’, Herbert Franke questions whether ‘cultural contacts and interchange between China and the West were really more frequent and easy under the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than under the Six Dynasties and the Tang when no Eurasian universal empire like that of the Mongols existed’.¹ This present work seeks to examine the latter element of this proposition; that of the supposed ease of contact between the extremes of Eurasia during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century period of Chinggisid domination of much of Central and Eastern Eurasia. Nonetheless, the earlier period of contact cannot be completely ignored.

Franke’s observation, moreover, provided a stimulus for an already intense interest in trans-Eurasian communication networks and the associated navigational difficulties across deeply inhospitable terrain in the pre-modern period. What is termed ‘cognitive mapping’ is a topic of much academic interest today² though such communications are more often than not studied by historians as conduits of commerce or cross-cultural exchange - ground well-trodden by scholars.³ The interest here,

¹ Herbert Franke, ‘Sino-Western Contacts under the Mongol Empire’. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Hong Kong Branch) vol. 6 (1996) and *China Under Mongol Rule*, Ashgate, Variorum, 1994, Ch. VII

² See especially the July/August 2015 edition of the Magazine of the Royal Institute of Navigation which is devoted to ‘cog nav’.

³ Michael Loewe in his article ‘Spices and Silk: Aspects of World Trade in the First Seven Centuries of the Christian Era’ has given a timely warning that the exchange of ideas, skills and material goods between the cultures of the East and the West will probably never be more than a matter of surmise’ ‘the full story of these exchanges can never be told for the evidence is sadly deficient’ in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, New Series*, vol. 103, issue 02 April 1971, pp. 166-179

however, is rather on their 'strategic' significance. Directly arising from this latter aspect is the intriguing issue of what might have been the implications for rulers when such vulnerable networks were interdicted.

It is important to note that here 'strategic communications' refer to communication networks that are essential to the survival of a state. In the context of such survival, the US Department of Defense has identified as 'strategic vulnerabilities' six vital instruments of power as being susceptible to strategic vulnerability. According to this assessment, states can be 'politically, economically, informationally (especially intelligence), sociologically and militarily vulnerable'.⁴ It will be immediately noticed that this list takes for granted the legitimacy of the power-holder. In the course of this work, however, it will be argued that the Hūlegüids in Western Eurasia were not only vulnerable in each of the above spheres, but crucially, their core strategic vulnerability was their tainted legitimacy as rulers, a factor which, it will be contended, was compounded by their extended lines of communication.

A word of caution should perhaps be interpolated at this juncture in that there is a considerable difference between 'strategic communications' and the current preoccupation with 'communicating strategically'.⁵ Thus whilst the Mongols well understood that the command and control of their extensive conquests depended on a functioning communication network, it has to be conceded that their

⁴ US Department of Defense, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/dodict/data/s/05206.html> the complete list includes political, geographic, economic, informational, scientific, sociological or military factors thus the only missing one above is 'scientific'.

⁵Whilst security of their communications in cyber space is a pressing issue for governments and military strategists today, at the same time so is 'communicating strategically'. For this latter see e.g. a Chatham House report of 2011 by Paul Cornish, Julia Lindley-French and Claire Yorke on *Strategic Communications and National Strategy* which focuses on governments informing, persuading and influencing audiences both internal and external. Also Lawrence Freedman, *Adelphi Paper* for the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) 2006 'The Transformation of Strategic Affairs'. Ch. 5 on 'Strategic Communications'.

interpretation of ‘communicating strategically’ was less to ‘persuade their audience’ than inform them of their duties of submission.⁶

Thus the premise underpinning this work is that communication networks form a critical constituent of statecraft as rulers endeavour to retain and sustain their power as well as defend their dominions, an issue which remains constant to this day. The focus, however, specifically embraces the *historic* contacts between the empires of Eurasia, especially those between the two ancient civilizations of China and Iran. It thus precludes more recent developments and what has been dubbed the ‘Electronic Silk Road’⁷

Despite the antiquity of these interactions one of the most remarkable periods is the short and complex late thirteenth- and early fourteenth century Chinggisid Imperium.⁸ This was a time of particularly cordial Sino-Iranian relations because, uniquely in the history of Eurasia, the ‘overlords’ of the then masters of the Iranian plateau and its hinterland were cousins of the far-distant Yuan emperors in China.

This relationship, however, raises a number of significant issues, one of which is the implication of the extended and vulnerable lines of communication that linked the Yuan court and the far-flung Hūlegüid court, that is between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’. The distance which had to be traversed between the two courts was not just immense but was also across some of the most inhospitable terrain in Eurasia, in itself a considerable challenge. Furthermore, before embarking on their conquests in the first half of the thirteenth century, the Mongols had relatively limited geo-political horizons, which meant they could keep up-to-date on affairs in their immediate area fairly efficiently by word of

⁶ Perhaps the most famous Mongol example of ‘communicating strategically’ is the purported speech by Chinggis Khan to the assembled notables of Bukhara after its fall. Juvaynī, *Tarīkh-i Jahān-gushā*; trans. Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror I*, p.105

⁷ See for example Anupam Chander, *The Electronic Silk Road*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, also www.jstor.org/stable/ctt32bgn9 accessed 05/06/2013

⁸ The period of ‘empire’ is not straightforward and is considered in Chapter X.

mouth. As these horizons expanded to encompass most of Eurasia, communications, news, commands, intelligence, people and goods had to be transmitted over increasingly vast distances whilst often taking considerable time to reach the recipient.⁹

The fundamental issue is whether it was possible, in view of the limited technology available, for a theoretical overlord located at best many months or at worst several years' journey time distant to control his supposed underling and ensure the timely and efficient administration of their far-off dominion. The corollary is that, because of the vast distance and time-lag, the rulers of the peripheral domain could find they were unable to function because of their duty to their overlord to consult, inform, pass on taxes and receive instructions. For the Hūlegüids there was also the major complicating issue of the legitimising function of their far-off overlord. There was thus an in-built tension in such long-distance relations including the temptation for the distant outpost to 'go it alone' if communications became problematic.

The second impetus, immediately arising from the first and in particular the vulnerability of such strategic lines of communication, is that alarm bells inevitably start to ring over a statement in a letter from the penultimate Hūlegüid Khan in Iran, Öljeitü (r.703-716/1304-1316) to the French king, Philip IV 'the Fair' (r.1285-1314) in 1305. In his letter to Philip, Öljeitü conveyed the tidings of the general peace agreed between the rulers of the various Chinggisid khanates, thereby restoring forty years or so of fractured Chinggisid unity. However, the

⁹ The Chinggisid communication network has been investigated by D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, 1986 pp. 103-111 and particularly his chapter 'Reflections on Mongol Communications in the Ilkhanate' in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, vol. II, *The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2000; Silverstein has a chapter in his *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, CUP, 2007. Allsen has a long and important review of Silverstein's work entitled 'Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A review Article' of Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*,. Olbricht is interested in the Chinese portion of the network in his *Das Postwesen in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft im 13 und 14 Jahrhundert* (1954)

crucial statement for present purposes is "*Naran urgakhui Nankhiyasiin ornoos avan Talu dalai khurtel ulus barildaj zamuudaa uyuulav*" thus announcing that from Nangiyas (i.e. Southern China) where the sun rises, as far as the Ocean Sea the roads were once again open between the warring cousins.¹⁰ The ramifications of this piece of intelligence are potentially immense since for a theoretically subordinate ruler such an interdiction of the trans-Eurasian routes could potentially mean either a welcome independence of action or conversely being abandoned to his fate. For the 'centre' such an interdiction in the lines of communication to the 'periphery' could lead to a catastrophic loss of control.

That the *Yām* horse relay network had indeed been interdicted is confirmed in the sources. Rashīd al-Dīn (645-718/1247-1318), in his capacity as vizier and director of the history project culminating in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* should have been particularly well-informed.

Nonetheless, there is an aside in the section on the then Yuan emperor Temür Qa'an (1294-1307) that, 'Temür had many wives and concubines in his *ordos* but on account of the *great distance and the closure of the roads (emphasis added)* the names of all of them have not so far been ascertained'.¹¹ Similarly, apropos the offspring of Jochi, (d.1227) the eldest of Chinggis Khan's four chief sons, whose *ordo* was centred on the Qipchaq Steppe, Rashīd al-Dīn remarks that 'because of the great distance and that no authority could be found it was not possible to ascertain their genealogies with exactitude'.¹²

It was not unknown, however, for the 'roads' to be 'closed' as an act of statecraft for either security reasons or as a means of applying pressure on obdurate rival rulers. Marvazī (d. c.514/1120) records closure of the roads for security reasons. Thus during the time of Sultan Mahmūd of

¹⁰ The letter is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, France. D'Ohsson, *Histoire des Mongols, depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour Bey ou Tamerlan*, vol. 4. pp. 587-589. See also Mostaert and Cleaves, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3-4, (Dec., 1952) pp.419-506

¹¹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 319.

¹² Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 99

Ghazni (r.388-421/998-1030) he remarks that ‘the kings of Khitai and Uighur, in spite of the fact that their countries are situated far from the countries of Islam and that the roads leading to them are cut off, do not feel safe on the side bordering on the kings of Islam and Islamic armies.... therefore they protect themselves and their country by *closing the road and stationing guards*’.¹³ Such a policy could have drawbacks as the Khitan ruler found in circa 1024 when he wished to make overtures to Sultan Mahmūd in distant north Afghanistan, he then had to order his subordinate, the Ilig Uighur-Khan, to ‘open’ the roads to allow the Khitan envoy passage.¹⁴

Furthermore, on the death of a ruler, the order could be given that the roads should be closed, not necessarily as a mark of respect, rather more as a security precaution. Theoretically this meant that all travellers and potential rivals were required to stay exactly where they were until the succession was clarified.¹⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn records that this occurred after the death of Güyüg Khan, when a *yarliḡh* or instruction was issued that everyone should halt in whatever place he had reached, ‘whether it was inhabited or desert’ and this was also observed on the death of Hūlegū.¹⁶

Moreover, roads could also be closed as a hostile act by rival rulers as an application of pressure. Thus, Ibn al-Athīr (556-630/1160-1233) in his *al-Kāmil fī’l-ta’rīkh*, records that after the then Khwārazmshah had conquered Transoxiana from the Qarakhitai ‘he closed the routes from Tūrkestan and the lands beyond it’.¹⁷

¹³ Emphasis added. ‘*Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir Marvazī on China, the Turks, and India*. Arabic text with an English translation and commentary by V. Minorsky. Royal Asiatic Society, 1942 p. 19

¹⁴ ‘we have ordered Qadir khan to open the road to our envoy to him (i.e. to Mahmud)’ Minorsky, *Sharaf al-Zamān* p.19

¹⁵ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 205

¹⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 185

¹⁷ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3. p.205

Clearly, the interdiction of the communication networks at the behest of a ruler – therefore acts under his control and which can be regarded as ‘state’ policy - are in a different category to those that might be described as *ad hoc* insecurity. Even during the time of the great Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazni official travel appears to have been hazardous. Indeed, the memoirs of a senior Ghaznavid official, Abū ‘l-Fazl Beyhaqi (385-469/995-1077) provide one of the most illuminating pre-Tīmūrīd examples of the efforts of rulers in asserting their control and the role of communications in such endeavours.¹⁸ Thus, the aforementioned Ilig Uighur-Khan added his own envoy to the Khitan initiative and explained in his letter to Sultan Mahmūd that ‘We have not entrusted any presents to our envoy because *there is no safe road*’.¹⁹ Indeed it seems that the return journey of the envoys took somewhere between three to four years.²⁰

That the trans-Eurasian routes were also hazardous during the early period of the Chinggisid domination of Eurasia is apparent from reports by the intrepid friars who travelled to Mongolia during the 1240s and 1250s - in particular William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini and Benedict the Pole. They record the stresses, strains and difficulties of travel encountered on the overland routes in the mid-thirteenth century when the going was supposedly secure and their experiences confirm that it is no coincidence that the derivation of the word ‘travel’ is derived from the French *travail*, meaning toil or labour.

Whilst such travellers were on quasi-state business on behalf of the papacy and nominally under the protection of the Mongols, others such as traders and their customers could be seriously inconvenienced should some routes be closed. Jūzjānī remarks that in 621/1224 he was sent by Malik Tāj-ud-Dīn to reopen one of the caravan routes

¹⁸ *The History of Beyhaqi*, trans. C.E.Bosworth, revised by Mohsen Ashtiany, 2011 in 3 vols

¹⁹ Minorsky, ‘Sharaf al-Zamān’, p. 20

²⁰ Minorsky, ‘Sharaf al-Zamān’, p. 19

closed by the struggle with the incoming Mongols which had led to scarcities.²¹ Marco Polo's father and uncle in circa 1262 found themselves stranded in Bukhārā in the Chaghadaid khanate for three years, unable to go forward or go back until they were allowed to join a caravan of envoys on its way to the court of the Qa'an.²² Whilst traders are renowned for their resourcefulness in rescheduling their operations to markets that were still accessible, as indeed the example of the Polos shows, a change of destination was not really an option for those travelling on 'official' business. On the other hand, even a temporary suspension of trade could prove catastrophic for merchants, since goods in the East were often taken on credit.²³

Thus, though travellers and traders could be incommoded if there was an interdiction in the communication network, for rulers it could fatally compromise their authority and control. When communications could not be guaranteed, governance could well be endangered with the corollary that the survival of the dynasty might also be imperilled. This worst-case scenario was noted by the fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldūn (732-808/1332-1406) when analysing the life-cycle of conquest dynasties in his *Muqaddimah* of c.779/1377.²⁴

He argued that not only defence and protection of the community from its enemies²⁵ should be amongst the top priorities of a ruler but also maintaining the security of the roads.²⁶ An interdiction of communications could impinge on the circulation of the profits of empire whether in the form of taxes or tribute or embassies bearing

²¹ Juzjānī, (tr. H. G. Raverty) *Tabakāt-i-Nāsiri* 2 vols. London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881, Elibron Classics print on demand 2012) p. 1197

²² *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Henry Yule, Henri Cordier, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd. 2 vols. 1998. Vol. I, p.10 of the text.

²³ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 395 comments that at the beginning of the 13th century overland trade with China was of greater importance than the maritime trade, since there was a dispute between the rulers of the ports of Hormuz and Kish, each of whom in every possible way prevented merchants from setting out from the port belonging to the other.

²⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 1969.

²⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, 1969. p.5

²⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, 1969. 189

gifts as well as on the market place if merchants were unable to obtain their merchandise, whether luxury goods, raw materials or foodstuffs to the detriment of the ruler's finances.

As most rulers down the ages have realized, there were also critical security issues involved if their lines of communication were at risk. Sargon II of Assyria (r. 722-705 BCE) has a heartfelt account of what it was like when communications were lost with his troops when on campaign:

"I could not give ease to their weariness, I could not give them water to drink, I could not set up the camp, I could not organize the defence of the headquarters and could not direct my advance guards."²⁷

Communication issues, however, did not only include the difficulties encountered by Sargon II. Rulers recognised that they had to keep their borders safe, to control their population, to keep abreast of political developments abroad as well as ensure the internal security of their own regime. In order to do so they needed to collect the intelligence which enabled them to make informed decisions in order to avoid that dangerous condition which has been graphically described as 'the fog of uncertainty.'²⁸ If communications were paralysed such objectives could well prove unachievable.

Whilst security and control are a consistent concern for rulers and though it could be said of most eras that uneasy lies the head which wears the crown, this was especially so in the period between the Arab conquests in the seventh century and the death of the last of the great

²⁷ Alan D Crown, 'Tidings and Instructions: How News Travelled in the Ancient Near East' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Sept., 1974), pp. 244-271

²⁸ For an outstanding examination of the role of intelligence in the ancient world, see R. M. Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World*, 2003 and *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome*, 2005

conquerors, the Amir Tīmūr in 1405. The challenges facing such rulers have been pithily summarised by Patricia Crone in her discussion of the genre of mirrors for princes. As she observes, 'Most mirrors think of governance (*Siyāsa*) as the art of staying in the saddle. The king must ensure that his underlings do not conspire against him, that brigands, robbers, rebels and heretics do not evict him, that foreign rulers do not invade his lands, that nobody fleeces his sheep and that generally speaking he is always in control.' It required, says Crone, endless vigilance.²⁹

Rulers perforce had to become their own grand strategists. To survive they had to identify threats to their crowns and devise politico-military means to fend off the inevitable extinction of their dynasty. As Nizām al-Mulk, (d.485/1092) was only too well aware, the

‘government will change and pass from one house to another, or the country will be thrown into disorder through seditions and tumults; opposing swords [will be drawn and there will be killing] burning, plunder and violence’.³⁰

These considerable challenges were not made any easier during this period as rulers had an almost kleptomaniac approach to enhancing their dominions at the expense of their rivals. One of the most honest allusions to this lust for conquest came from the youthful great-great-grandson of the Amir Tīmūr, the future emperor Bābur, who remarked in his memoirs that “there was in me ambition for rule and desire of conquest’.³¹ Likewise, Ibn al-Athīr was moved to comment that the

²⁹ Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 2004, p. 156; Babur’s experiences in his early years graphically illustrate such issues. *Bābur-nāma*, (tr. A. S. Beveridge), 4 vols. London, Luzac, 1922

³⁰ *Siyar al-Muluk* or *Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk. The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, trans. H. Darke, 2002 Chapter XL, p. 139

³¹ Bābur, *Bābur-nāma*, trans. A. S. Beveridge p. 92

Khwārazmshah's son, Jalāl-al-Dīn constantly challenged his princely neighbours for their kingdoms.³²

On rare occasions, however, conquests did not always bring unalloyed pleasure to the victor and some conquerors found that the command and control of the conquered territory was hard-work. This was vividly made clear by the king of Khotan (r. 356-366/967-977) whose kingdom on the southern rim of the Taklamakan Desert had defeated the Qarakhanid army in 359/970 thereby winning control of the important commercial oasis of Kashgar. In reporting back to his uncle, the ruler of Dunhuang, now in Xinjiang Province of China, he wrote unhappily "that maintaining the government [of an alien territory] was great and difficult. And as an alien we do not secure control."³³ Despite taking Kashgar and enumerating the considerable plunder obtained, the king had discovered to his cost that his resources were spread too thinly to maintain and secure his prize.

Such blunt realism can also be seen in the rebuke which the great Seljūq vizier Nizām al-Mulk, (d.485/1092) attributed to his master, Sultan Alp Arslān (r.455-465/1063-1072). Alp Arslān allegedly admonished his officials 'I have told you over and over again that you Türks are the army of Khurāsān and Transoxiana and you are foreigners in this region; we conquered this country by the sword.....'³⁴

Conquest 'by the sword' did to some extent simplify the issue of legitimacy for conquest regimes, since it was based on the well-understood concept of *Macht geht vor Recht*.³⁵ On the other hand, an underlying *leitmotif* of Juvaynī's *Tarīkh-i Jahān-gushā* is the transience

³² Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 303

³³ Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road, A New History*, 2012, p.227

³⁴ *Siyāsat-nama of Nizām al-Mulk*, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, trans. Hubert Darke, 2002 p.160

³⁵ Bismarck was accused by Count von Schwerin in 1863 that his motto was *Macht ger vor Recht*, loosely translated as 'might trumps right'. For a comprehensive examination of the acquisition of territory through force see the excellent work by Sharon Korman, *The Right of Conquest: The Acquisition of Territory by Force in International Law and Practice*. 1966

of empire.³⁶ Certainly, most states today regard the protection and security of their lines of communication, whether physical or virtual, as a top-ranking priority, allowing them to communicate, trade and engage globally.³⁷ It is this capability which is defined here as ‘strategic communications’ – and which become increasingly vulnerable when the ‘lines of communication’ to be protected become progressively more extended.

Chinggisid Strategic Over-stretch?

This correlation between domination, power and communication has a particular resonance in terms of one of the most expansionist of land-based conquest dynasties of the pre-Tīmūrid era, that of Chinggis Khan and his descendants. A shocked contemporary observer of the events triggered by the incident at Otrar³⁸ in 614/1218 which compelled an outraged Chinggis Khan to unleash his forces in pursuit of the Khwārazmshah was Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233).³⁹ However, what is important in the present context is that in his horror at the Mongols performance of their own version of *Macht geht vor Recht*, Ibn al-Athīr unintentionally put his finger on what was potentially the greatest vulnerability of these seemingly invulnerable forces:

‘these Tatars had done something unheard
of in ancient or modern times. *A people
emerges from the borders of China and
before a year passes some of them reach the*

³⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle II, pp. 637. 681

³⁷ A particularly good example of this are New Zealand’s ‘Seven key objectives’ underpinning a comprehensive concept of national security, in which protection of their lines of communication comes second after preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity.

³⁸ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II pp. 56-58 for geographical information on Otrar

³⁹ This is when an outraged Chinggis Khan unleashed his fury and his forces against the Khwārazmshah, Muhammad b. Tekish ‘Alā’ al-Dīn (r.596-617/1200-1220) who, he had good reason to believe, had been complicit in the murder of his envoys and the plunder of his trading caravan.

*lands of Armenia in this direction and go
beyond Iraq in the direction of
Hamadhan.....*⁴⁰.

From ‘the borders of China’ which for present purposes will be construed as Qaraqorum, the complex built by Ögödei Qa’an in what is today central Mongolia, to Hamadan in Central Iran which is where Hülegü retired after the Fall of Baghdad, is in the region of 4,497 miles/7,237 kilometres by vehicle today but undoubtedly more difficult by quadruped or on foot across an exhaustingly inhospitable terrain of deserts, steppe and mountain ranges. If no crises were encountered en route and an average of 25 miles/40 kilometres a day could be kept up a traveller could theoretically make the return journey in twelve months. Thus, after his dispatch west by his brother, Möngke Qa’an (r.1251-1259), whatever the intention of Möngke as far as Hülegü’s tenure in West Eurasia was concerned, the lines of communication between Hülegü and his supreme commander were of heroic proportions.

The Extent of the Chinggisid Domains contrasted with other pre-modern Eurasian land-based empires

Whilst the empire conquered by Chinggis Khan and his successors is often cited as being the largest contiguous land empire in pre-modern history – a supposition that is disputable since it rests on the definition of empire⁴¹ – the Mongols incontrovertibly controlled great swathes of Eurasia. When the Hülegüids made Tabriz their main centre, the fastest motor route today between there and Ulaan Baatar, thus more or less between Hülegü and his brother Möngke Qa’an, is 4,693 miles/7,552 kilometres travelling south of the Caspian or 4,429 miles/7,128

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 215 (italic emphasis added)

⁴¹ The problem of the period of ‘empire’ will be discussed in Chapter XII on the security of the communication system and the *Pax Mongolica*.

kilometres⁴² taking the route north of the Caspian. It may be instructive to compare how the Chinggisid extended lines of communication compared with those of other pre-modern empires.

The hegemony of the Kushan Empire (130 BCE-300 CE) stretched from northern India to the borders of the Han Empire whilst the First and Second Türk empires (552 CE – 630 CE and 683-734 CE) were also extensive, at their greatest extent their writ ran from the Black Sea to the borders of China. Other far-flung empires included the Roman, the distance from their outpost of York to Rome being a comparatively modest 1,365 miles/2197 kilometres⁴³, whilst between the furthest extremes of the Roman empire, the distance between, for example, York and Antioch, was 2,889 miles/4,651 kilometres. The Sasanian Empire (224 – 651 CE) controlled the Iranian plateau, Khurāsān, Transoxiana and Soghdia with their capital at Ctesiphon, near today's Baghdad. From Ctesiphon to Samarkand, the distance today by road is 1,696 miles/2,730 kilometres.

The Umayyad Caliphate's (41-133/661-750) capital at Damascus was over 3,264 miles or 5,253 kilometres from Fez in Morocco. The Tang (618-907 CE) were able to project their power into Central Eurasia despite the considerable logistical challenges. The other notable empires were more 'compact'. Thus the Uighur Empire (744-840 CE), the Qara Khitai (1124-1218 CE), the Muslim Empires of the Sāmānids (204-395/819-1005), the Qarakhanids (382-609/992-1212) controlling Transoxiana through to Kashgar, the Ghaznavids (366-582/977-1186), Būyids (320-454/932-1062) nor the Seljūqs (431-590/1040-1194) had such extended lines of communication as between the Chinggisid realms in China and West Eurasia.⁴⁴ More

⁴² Distances calculated by Google Maps if available for driving by car, otherwise by air, which is noted 'as the crow flies'.

⁴³ Courtesy of Google Maps

⁴⁴ A June 2010 Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the US House of Representatives noted that 'In

recently, the Russian Empire became arguably the most extensive contiguous land empire in history since the distance between St Petersburg, then the centre of Russian power, and Vladivostok on the furthest side of the Eurasian land mass, is roughly 6,000 miles/9,600 kilometres⁴⁵ - roughly a third more distant than Tabriz from Qaraqorum.

Even though the Russians had many of the same logistical challenges in the eighteenth century that the Mongols had faced five hundred years previously, the Russian Empire was the product of a far higher economic, technological and intellectual base-line than that of the Mongols. Thus in the Mongol instance, it could be argued that this was a case, if not of 'strategic over-stretch'⁴⁶ then of 'strategic over-reach' on an Olympian scale since tight centralised control is well-nigh impossible when it could take anything from six months to five years to receive a response to a communication from the periphery to the centre and vice versa. Given the natural hazards en route as well as the resources and technology available to Chinggis Khan and his successors – essentially muscle power – any risk assessment could well have concluded that the Chinggisid enterprise was doomed to failure simply on the basis of the vulnerability of these extraordinarily extended lines of communication alone.

The thesis that is presented here, then, is that the sheer extent of the Chinggisid dominions was the *Achilles Heel* of the imperial project since it resulted in the dangerous over-reach of the communication networks. This was particularly the case in the Chinggisid version of Sino-Iranian relations, that is between the Hūlegūids and the Yuan. This over-reach

Afghanistan, the US military faces one of the *most complicated and difficult supply chains in the history of warfare.....* across a difficult and hostile terrain with only minimal road infrastructure' emphasis added.

⁴⁵ First Atlas of Russia, pub. 1745

<http://www.davidrumsey.com/blog/2011/7/11/first-atlas-of-russia-published-in-1745>

⁴⁶ 'strategic' defined as the coherent use of power resources to attain desired objectives

was exacerbated not only by the limited technology available and the nature of the hazards on both the overland and the alternative maritime routes but also by internecine strife within the imperial family which further endangered already vulnerable communications. It will be argued that such considerations had potentially serious repercussions for the imperial family's tradition of command, control and consultation.

This latter, it will be further argued, was an aggravating issue for the successors of Hülegü, the grandson of Chinggis Khan, who founded the Toluid branch ruling in Western Eurasia. The view taken here is that the Hülegüid extended lines of communication complicated their efforts to secure, sustain and enlarge their domain since it had an adverse impact on the six strategic vulnerabilities referred to above including the most crucial, though not listed, which was their legitimacy.

METHODOLOGY

For such a seemingly straightforward topic there are a surprising number of pitfalls for the unwary. Chief amongst these - at least for the historian - is the reminder by the renowned Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski, that "the 'Past' is an "ocean of events that once happened." Those past events, he mused, "are reconstructed by us on the basis of our present experience - and it is only this present experience, our present reconstruction of the past that is real, not the past as such."⁴⁷ Historiographically, when considering approaches to the Mongols over the past thousand years or so, there is much truth in this statement. Chaucer's (c.1345-1400) *Squire's Tale*, written in the 1390s is generous

⁴⁷ A remark made in a speech delivered in 2004 when he was awarded the Kluge Prize by the Library of Congress, quoted in John Carter Brown Occasional Newsletter, No. 35. Spring 2005

in its characterisation of a Mongol Khan.⁴⁸ Five hundred years later, the Mongol episode was considered an abomination by such luminaries as the Swedish/Armenian historian, Constantin d'Ohsson (1779-1851)⁴⁹ and the English scholar E.G. Browne, (1862-1926)⁵⁰ whereas in recent years there has been something of a reassessment of their 'rivers of blood' reputation, at least in the Hūlegüid west, led by George Lane.⁵¹

There is a further, perhaps double-edged issue, which historians have to resolve, since these days they have the luxury of approaching the past from many perspectives and within a choice of frameworks. Examples of the former include those of political, military, economic, maritime, gender, cultural, intellectual, religious or regional history. The approach taken here, of focusing on the timeless aspect of strategic communications may, to some extent, mitigate the 'baggage of present experience' alluded to above. This is partly because 'strategic' and 'communications', whilst not being value-free concepts, are a central feature of governance whatever the period and place.

Similarly, for the historian, there are a multiplicity of frameworks including the Grand Narrative, the French Annales School or a plethora of 'isms' including Marxist-Leninism, Post-Modernism, Conceptualism and so on. It can thus be fairly said that 'the writing of history is a process of highly selective reconstruction of features of the past.' Clearly, this is one reason why 'historiography is a contested terrain at many levels, not least that of competing interpretations, but also at the level of the assumption historians make about what constitutes

⁴⁸ He appears to have been a Jochid khan; Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, reissued.2008, p. 169

⁴⁹ Baron Constantin d'Ohsson was a leading proponent of the 'sang et des ruines' view of the Mongols. In his *Exposition* in Vol. I *Histoire des Mongols depuis Tchinguiz-Khan jusqu'à Timour bey*, Elibron Classics facsimile reprint of a 1834 edition

⁵⁰E.G. Browne's view of the Mongols as 'cunning, ruthless, bloodthirsty marauders' in *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, 1928 p. 4-5

⁵¹ George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth Century Iran, A Persian Renaissance*, 2003

particular varieties, versions, visions, re-visions, and conceptions of history.’⁵²

The theoretical framework adopted here is one that could be termed ‘Nizām al-Mulkian’. It too has a timeless aspect since this vastly experienced vizier to the early Seljūqs in the latter part of the eleventh century had a particularly clear-sighted vision of the perils of loss of control by a ruler.⁵³ Less than two hundred years later this *leitmotif* of the transience of power can be found, as has been noted above, throughout Juvaynī’s *Tarīkh-i Jahān-gushā/ History of the World Conqueror*.⁵⁴ The experienced Florentine diplomat, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), also writing in turbulent times in 1513, understood that one of the prime concerns of a prince was to stay in the saddle. Thus in his advice to his *Prince*,⁵⁵ written in the chaos of fifteenth century ‘Italy’, he held to the belief that survival was the highest objective for a ruler.

It is probably undeniable, therefore, that this study may be thought of as coming within the genre of ‘rises and falls’. However, there is a fundamental difficulty inherent in ‘decline and fall’ literature, in that ‘the fall’ is an acknowledged event in the historical record. As far as the Hülegüids are concerned, David Morgan concedes that he is in ‘barefaced defiance’ of what he calls ‘Gibbon’s Law’ of decline and fall, by taking the view that the Hülegüids ‘fell without having previously declined’.⁵⁶ This is in contradistinction, as he acknowledges, with the

⁵² Alan Munslow *The Oxford Companion to Historical Studies*, 2000 pp. 133-135

⁵³ See p. 18 above on Nizām al-Mulk’s observation on the transience of dynasties.

⁵⁴ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 681

⁵⁵ Drafted in 1513 but not published until 1532. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, eds. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price, Cambridge, CUP, 2000

⁵⁶ David Morgan, ‘The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire’ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct., 2009) p. 433

view of Charles Melville, who ‘considers it all explicable in terms of long-term decay, factional struggle and disintegration’.⁵⁷

There is a potential danger, then, for historians searching with the benefit of hindsight for evidence with which to account for the ‘decline and fall’ rather than focusing on the endeavours of a dynasty to ‘stay in the saddle’. Indeed, ‘the danger of overdosing on hindsight’ is a temptation that Peter Jackson has identified as something which bedevils all backward glances at the past, since historians’ access to sources sometimes affords them an eyrie more commanding than any vantage-point available to the people they study.⁵⁸ Furthermore, anachronism, or the action of attributing something to a period to which it does not belong, can perhaps be as great a danger as hindsight.

Yet another challenge has been identified by Chase Robinson apropos the Arab conquests of the seventh century. He has observed that ‘so far as reconstructing conquest history is concerned, we must set our sights relatively low’. The reason he gives is that whilst it is possible to make out the general contours of conquest history and infer some generalities, it has to be remembered that it was a discourse generated by elites and for elites.⁵⁹

Thus the framework here is ‘Nizām al-Mulkian’ in that, whilst recognising the transience of dynasties, there should also be an appreciation that a ruler’s main concern was expanding his power or at least holding on to what he had and fending off for as long as

⁵⁷ Charles Melville, *The Fall of Amir Chupan and the Decline of the Ilkhanate, 1327-37: A Decade of Discord in Mongol Iran*, Bloomington, 1999 and David Morgan, ‘The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire’ p. 433

⁵⁸ Peter Jackson, *Mongols and the West 1221-1410*, 2005. p.6. Jackson also makes the important point that it is only hindsight on the part of historians that has elevated the territorial and subject people assignments of Chinggis Khan’s four senior sons to the status of official division of the Mongol empire at an early date. ‘From Ulus to Khanate’ in R. Amitai-Preiss & D. O. Morgan (eds) *The Mongol Empire & its Legacy*. p. 35

⁵⁹ Chase F Robinson, *Empires and Elites after the Muslim Conquest – The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia*, 2000, p. 31

possible the demise of his dynasty. In the meantime, the chosen perspective is that of strategic communications within a Sino-Iranian context. These have dictated a 'forensic' and 'conceptual' approach which, it has to be said, also poses its own challenges for historians.

Part I is short but pivotal and attempts to analyse what aspects of Hülegüid governance could have been compromised or complicated by problems due to the extended lines of communication. Part II onwards dissects the issues and challenges in 'communicating' for the Chinggisids' as their conquests took them beyond the confines of Mongolia. Part III is particularly 'forensic' since it has involved collecting data to underpin the rather involved section on routes and travellers as well as on hostilities for the section on security aspects and the *Pax Mongolica*. Such data is presented in tables in the appendices.

Concepts

Until comparatively recently there has been an inherent tendency amongst historians to avoid so far as possible the use of concepts as an organising device within their works with the result that 'the studies were inevitably descriptive and rarely produced a satisfactory understanding of events or issues.'⁶⁰ It is, however, impossible for most historians to avoid the use of such terms as 'state' or 'empire' and there is of course the problem of translation of unfamiliar terms

⁶⁰ Claude Bélanger, Concepts in Social Science and History,
<http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/events/concepts.htm>

such as the Mongol *ulus*. Historians, moreover, have to bear in mind that within the disciplines in which such terms feature most prominently such as the Social Sciences and most particularly Political Science, International Relations and Anthropology, concepts such as ‘power’, ‘state’, empire and ‘tribe’ can be highly contentious.

Furthermore, this is not the only difficulty with concepts, since there are also the dangers attached to the inevitably heavy burden of cultural baggage with which they are loaded at any point in time, which in turn relates back to the comment above by Leszek Kolakowski. The realisation that such concepts have inherent perils for the unwary has necessitated the clarification of the more contentious before progressing further since they are fundamental to this work. These are ‘strategic’ and ‘communication’. Equally fraught are such terms as Inner Asia versus Central Asia/Eurasia so that the choice opted for here also needs an explanation.

Strategy/Strategic

As far as the term ‘strategic’ is concerned, a problem that has been identified by Lawrence Freedman, one of the leading Western strategic thinkers today, is that ‘strategy’ has few suitable synonyms, and for this reason it has become a multifarious term that has been ‘...diluted through promiscuous and often inappropriate use.’ Freedman argues that strategy is essentially the ‘art of creating power’, which in the present context can reasonably be expanded to creating, *sustaining* and *retaining* power, (stress added) while other strategists emphasise that the objective of strategy is simply ‘control.’ Thus when Mongke Qa’an is referred to in this work as a ‘grand strategist’ this is because he masterminded the expansion of Chinggisid power utilizing all the resources at his disposal.

However, it has to be recognised that ‘power’ is in itself a contentious concept. The definition that is utilized here is that ‘power’ simply

defined is 'the ability to control people and other assets'⁶¹ with 'control' used in the sense of bending to one's will even the unwilling and antagonistic. Such a definition of 'raw power' would seem to adequately describe the approach to statecraft of, for example, a Chinggis Khan or Amir Tīmūr.

It is also important to differentiate between, 'strategy/strategic', 'tactic', 'stratagem' and 'plan'. Freedman strongly emphasises that a 'strategy' is not a 'plan', the latter implying a certain rigidity in moving through a list of actions to the foreseeable conclusion. 'Strategy' however, comes into play, he argues, through the inherent unpredictability of human affairs, due to chance, the efforts of opponents or the 'miss-steps' of friends which provide strategy with its challenge and drama.⁶²

Communication

The concept of communication, it should be swiftly acknowledged, is another multi-faceted concept that defies easy definition. The fundamental idea is one of 'transmission', which includes both the 'what', as in what was communicated, and the 'why' it was communicated as well as the 'how' it was communicated. It implies inter-connectedness - whether tangible or intangible - through speech or by technical means or indeed physically. What was transmitted could include the exchange of information and conveyance of orders and instructions; the sharing of intellectual property or ideas, for example, religion, art, scholarship, design, technology, medical knowledge, or the inadvertent transmission of disease, a particularly horrific example during the Chinggisid period being that of bubonic plague.⁶³

⁶¹ Philip Pomper, *The History and Theory of Empires*. Source: *History and Theory*, vol. 44. No. 4, Theme Issue 44: Theorizing Empire (Dec. 2005). Pp. 1027. Pub. Wiley for Wesleyan University. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3590855>

⁶² Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy, A History*, OUP, 2013, p. xi

⁶³ For bubonic plague and the probable Mongol role in its dissemination see for example William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 1977 pp. 146-190 and in particular pp. 160-163

Physical ‘transmission’ could include travellers, including the reassignment of troops or officials, the transfer of goods, including horses and flocks; pilgrims, the relocation of captives and artisans as well as the dispatch of envoys and brides. All three of these elements of communication, the ‘what’, the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ will inform the analysis below.

There is also a presumption in the idea of communication of comprehension, that what is being communicated will be understood. The conquest of a number of peoples speaking different languages and with different writing systems could therefore be something of a challenge for both conquerors and conquered, an important issue that will be examined in Chapter IV.

Geographical Terminology – Inner v Central Asia/Eurasia

Even the geographical terminology is not immune to contestation. The idea of “Asia” is a peculiarly European notion and the terminological delineation of the geographic area of the Chinggisid conquests is problematic. Generally speaking, there have been two main approaches to identifying the vast area conquered by the Chinggisids, either geographical or cultural.⁶⁴ For Iranians, the region beyond the Oxus/Amu Darya was identified with Tūrān and historically, there has been a tension between ‘Iran’ and ‘Tūrān’. This can be seen, for example, in Firdawsī’s epic, the *Shāhnāme*.⁶⁵ In the *Shāhnāme* these two terms appear to refer to areas of linguistic, ethnic and cultural difference. Thus when Firdawsī refers to Tūrānian, for example the Tūrānian king Afrāsīyāb, he meant Tūrkish. Tūrān thus equated to areas controlled by Tūrkic rulers, which in turn complicated the

⁶⁴ These are discussed by Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia*, 2nd revised edition, 1971 Chs. I & II, and Andre Gunder Frank in *The Centrality of Central Asia*, 1992

⁶⁵ Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh, the Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis, 2007

boundaries of Tūrān, since such control fluctuated. 'Iran' on the other hand, referred to the area of the Persian cultural and linguistic *oecumene*.

To complicate matters even further, 'Tūrān' was identified in Arabic as *Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, or the land beyond the river, a 'geographical' rather than a 'geographic' term. In Western scholarship some geo-historians have used the term Inner Asia for this area. It was so described by the scholar Owen Lattimore in 1953 as being a region that has neither a frontage on the sea nor navigable rivers leading to the sea.

Under this definition, he regarded northern, but not southern Iran and western, but not eastern Manchuria as Inner Asian regions.⁶⁶ The Harvard Inner Asian programme expands this somewhat to include the history of the culture of the peoples in the steppe, mountain, forest and oasis areas between China, Russia, western Iran and Pakistan, including former Soviet Central Asia, Xinjiang, eastern Iran, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, northern regions of Pakistan, Tibet, eastern Sichuan, Gansu and northwestern Yunnan, Mongolia and Manchuria.

However, even this extensive area still excludes some of those conquered by the Chinggisids. The preferred term here for the extent stretching from the Caucasus to the Pacific is 'Eurasia'.⁶⁷ The chosen term for the central swathe from the Black Sea to Mongolia can be thought of as Central Eurasia, this last based on that of the David Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University apropos their Central Eurasian Studies World Wide programme as well as the Central Eurasian Studies Society. The former define the region as:

'Central Eurasia' is 'a not-too-neatly circumscribed domain in the *interior* of the Asian continent'. Though 'the domain

⁶⁶ Owen Lattimore, 'The New Political Geography of Inner Asia', *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 119, No. 1 (Mar., 1953), pp. 17-30

⁶⁷ See discussion in Sinor, *Inner Asia*, pp. 102

encompasses great diversity, there is also cultural continuity across the broad region, as well as shared history and contemporary problems.’ Amongst the characteristics of the region are: Linguistic and cultural roots deriving from Iranian and Türkic culture; Türkic dynasties and Türkic language predominating in many regions and periods, with Persian remaining a *lingua franca* over much of the region; The dominant religion in the area was Islam, Tibetan Buddhism and variant forms of Christianity⁶⁸

Geographically, this includes the Black Sea region, the Crimea and the Caucasus in the west, through the Middle Volga region, Central Asia⁶⁹ and Afghanistan, Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet in the east. In the view of Denis Sinor, Central Eurasia is more of a cultural concept than a geographical entity and its sole unifying factor is the continental climate characterised by extremes of cold in the winter and heat in the summer.⁷⁰ However, even the above expanded area still does not wholly delineate the Chinggisid conquests which included some large chunks of territory that are geographically excluded from Central Eurasia such as southern China and Korea.

⁶⁸Italic emphasis added. This can be found at:
http://cesww.fas.harvard.edu/ces_definition.html

⁶⁹ Defined by the European Society for Central Asian Studies in 1985 as encompassing the previous Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the adjacent areas of Mongolia, Northern Iran, Northern Afghanistan and Northwestern China.

⁷⁰ Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia*, pp. 7-8

REVIEW OF THE SOURCES

We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size

(Bernard de Chartres)

At the present time, despite the strategic importance of both China and Iran, the Sino-Iranian nexus is a field that is seldom trod in western academia⁷¹ though cartographic⁷² and art historians⁷³ have become increasingly interested in trans-Eurasian cultural exchange relevant to their particular fields. Moreover, as the note on concepts above suggests, anyone attempting this subject is confronted by many perils, as neither the Mongols' conquests nor their communications network respect academic, linguistic nor latter-day political boundaries.

Possibly the most dangerous hazard is that relating to academic boundaries, since this is a subject that treads on a rather large number of scholarly toes. These include not only regional experts, but also political scientists, geographers, cartographers, 'silk road' scholars, and military historians, as well as those whose fields focus on

⁷¹ One key reason being access, both linguistically and for the documents. John Garver, in his *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*, 2006, has commented precisely on this point. He notes that in the past forty or so years, only two books on the Sino-Iranian relationship have been published, one in English and one in Chinese. Today, interest is as often as not the preserve of 'think-tanks' and economic/intelligence communities as well as foreign policy specialists especially those concerned with nuclear proliferation, the security of cyber space and the global economic system, for example, Laura Schuurmans' article on 'The Future of the Sino-Iranian Detente', Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, 2012, <http://cenaa.org/analysis/the-future-of-the-sino-iran-entente/>

⁷² Eg. H. de Weerdt, "Maps and Memory: Readings of Cartography in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Song China", *Imago Mundi*; Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds*; *History of Cartography*: eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward vols. I, 1987, II III

⁷³ Eg. Sheila Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World*, 1995

communications, travel writing, transport, security, intelligence, international relations, law and governance. The only available defence is that strategic communications do not operate in a void. They are embedded in the cultures, institutions, technologies, security and geo-historical context of the ruler whose objective is to sustain his power. Such widespread interests clearly have implications for the sources which will be examined here with reference to these aspects.

The Mongol Cultural Milieu

The development of the Chinggisids' *Yām* network is not only about 'transmission' but is also about the development of the Mongols themselves as they adjusted from their somewhat rough-edged existence on the steppe to their responsibilities as rulers of much of Eurasia. It will be argued that the Mongol 'mindset' was a significant factor both in the idiosyncrasies of the *Yām* network when compared to other early communication networks and that it also coloured their approach to many aspects of their increasing responsibilities. This means that some probing of the early Mongol *weltanschauung* is unavoidable.

In this context it will be contended that one factor above all others characterised the Mongols who - like their steppe predecessors, the Xiongnu and the Türks - were a supremely equestrian society. The Mongol debt to these forerunners should be acknowledged, especially the Xiongnu. For this the Han Dynasty historian, Sima Qian's (c. 145 or 135 – 86 BCE), *Records of the Grand Historian*⁷⁴ is pivotal. Moreover, since warriors from the steppe caused problems not just for the Middle Kingdom, but also rulers further to the west, mention should also be made of the advice and experience of a seasoned campaigner against

⁷⁴ Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, trans. Burton Watson, rev. edition, New York, Columbia University Press, 1961

the steppe warriors, the Byzantine emperor Maurice's (r. 582-602) *Strategikon*.⁷⁵

One consequence of this equestrianism is that the key to the Mongol psyche as well as the most characteristic feature of the Mongols' cultural, physical and emotional milieu was a symbiosis between Mongol and horse.⁷⁶ Accordingly, it would be a dereliction of duty not to examine this profound relationship and - as importantly - the needs as well as the limitations of the rugged little horses whose trusty hooves not only carried the conquerors across Eurasia but also underpinned the Chinggisid communications network. Interestingly, despite their pivotal role in the Mongols' life they do not seem to have produced an equivalent of the *adab al-furūsiyya*⁷⁷ literature of the Abbāsids and the Mamluks which not only covered all aspects of horsemanship but also horse welfare. There are, however, some modern works which are useful. One such by a Mongol, Bekhjargal Bayarsaikhan, on *Travelling by Mongol horse* is a practical guide for foreign riders but with useful insights and there is a constructive work by Natasha Fijn, *Living with Herds, Human-Animal coexistence in Mongolia*. Bat Ochir-Bold, also a Mongol, has provided valuable insights from a Mongolian perspective in his *Mongolian Nomadic Society, A Reconstruction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia* and articles on issues such as livestock and the Mongolian social structure in the early period.

That there were limitations insofar as Mongol horses were concerned can be gleaned from, for example, Marino Sanudo Torsello's *Secreta fidelium Crucis*, written between 1300 and 1321. Though primarily a work of strategy for regaining Jerusalem, it also has several insightful references to the problems the Hūlegūids encountered with their horses

⁷⁵ Maurice's *Strategikon*, Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy, trans. George T. Dennis, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984

⁷⁶ This can be seen in the extensive genre of the Mongols' somewhat doleful songs centred on their horses

⁷⁷ See e.g. Shihab al Sarraf, 'Furusiyya Literature of the Mamluk period', *Furusiyya*, Vol. I. ed. D. Alexander, Ryad, 1996 p. 118-135

in Western Eurasia. John Masson Smith Jr. has dissected in minute detail aspects of the Mongols equestrianism, some of which are referred to in the text. Lastly, despite the dearth of Mongol source material on the upkeep, limitations and capabilities of their horses, because such requirements have not dramatically changed in a thousand years it is possible to examine these issues in a ‘non-documentary’ form in Mongolia today ‘straight from the horse’s mouth’.

Although the Mongols did not succeed in forcing submission from the Mamluks in Egypt, nor the submission of rulers in Western Europe and neither did they conquer North Africa, Japan nor parts of south and southeast Asia, in one way or another their activities touched all these areas. Thus one corollary of their far-reaching presence is a difficulty they themselves faced, which was the multiplicity of languages which will be discussed in Chapter IV. This was not resolved, as in the Roman and British empires for example, by the language of the conquerors becoming a *lingua franca* of the conquered areas except for the small number of those in the service of the imperial family. Even so, these officials did not write for posterity in Mongolian. Inevitably, therefore, any scholar examining strategic communication networks in a historical context owes an enormous debt to those who have dedicated their lives to linguistic research and the nuances of the languages and cultures affected by the Mongols.

Unfortunately for posterity the Mongols themselves did not produce much in the way of ‘primary source material’ as they settled down to enjoy the profits of empire. Fairly early in their conquest career Chinggisid princes had scribes who daily wrote down all their profound but often convoluted utterances. Rashīd al-Dīn records some of the maxims, or *biligs*, of Chinggis Khan⁷⁸ and a few of those of his

⁷⁸ Trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Jāmi‘u’t-tawīrikh*. II, pp. 293-301; also D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, p. 99

successor Ögödei.⁷⁹ Of Chinggisid official correspondence only a handful of documents are extant in the form of diplomatic letters.⁸⁰ Neither is there a copy of the controversial *yasa* available for scholarly consultation. Thus there is undue reliance on their epic *Secret History of the Mongols*,⁸¹ which has been minutely examined and commented on by Igor de Rachewiltz amongst others.

Whilst the *Secret History* is invaluable in providing scholars with crucial access to the Mongol milieu during the rise of Temujin/Chinggis Khan it does have problems as a resource, not necessarily because of its unknown authorship⁸² or revisions⁸³ but because in the view of De Rachewiltz it is an epic chronicle – rather than a heroic epic.⁸⁴ Conversely, Larry Moses has examined the epic themes in the *Secret History* in the context of those normally present in the genre of *quest epic* and those of the *heroic warfare epic* genre. He argues that elements of both feature in the *Secret History* which was meant to be sung to the assembled Mongol elite - possibly in 1229 - in order to deify Chinggis Khan by proclaiming the supernatural forces that had produced and guided his lineage as well as to inspire and motivate his descendants. Because of these ‘epic’ elements, he questions what in the *Secret History* constitutes epic legend, predating Chinggis Khan and common to the peoples of the region and what is historical fact.⁸⁵ Despite these misgivings, from the viewpoint of the focus here, the *Secret History* provides invaluable insights.

There are, however other, less epic, Mongol sources, including the seventeenth century *Erdeni-yin tobchi* or *Precious Summary* by Prince

⁷⁹ Rashid al-Din/Boyle p. 76-94

⁸⁰ See e.g. Mostaert, and Cleaves, ‘Trois documents mongols des Archives secretes vaticanes’

⁸¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, vols I and II

⁸² SH vol. I Discussed by de Rachewiltz in his introduction, pp. xxv-xl

⁸³ SH vol. I. pp. xl-lxx.

⁸⁴ SH, vol. I, p. lxx

⁸⁵ Larry W. Moses, ‘Epic Themes in the Secret History of the Mongols’, *Folklore*, vol. 99, No. 2 (1988) pp. 170-173

Saghang Sechen (1604-?) which is a general history of the Mongols composed, however, after the Mongols were influenced by Tibetan Lamaism.⁸⁶ Around the same period were promulgated the ‘Mongol-Oirat Regulations’ or *Monggol-Oirad Chaaji* of 1640⁸⁷ and because they were based on earlier practices, also provide useful insights into Mongol regulation.

The situation does, nonetheless, become critical for the authentic voice of the Mongols after the period of the *Secret History*, the dating of the original text of which is controversial but in all probability was 1228⁸⁸ with further additions and editing. Ghāzān’s (r. 694-703/1295-1304) aim in his encouragement of the *Jāmi al- t-Tavārikh* project overseen by his vizier Rashīd al-Dīn (643-718/1245-1318) may well have been to preserve the Mongols’ identity and knowledge of their past though it was not written in Mongolian. Nonetheless, it had considerable ‘Mongol’ input both from Ghāzān’s own extensive familiarity with his family history as well as that of the Yuan emissary, Bolad and the Amir Nowruz. Even this, however, does not really get inside the mind of a Mongol Khan or Sultan in quite the same way as the *Secret History*, or for instance the founding Mughal Emperor, Bābur’s (888-937/1483-1530) memoirs which are particularly forthright on the problems faced by a ruler fighting to gain, regain and retain his throne.⁸⁹

Whilst the ‘authentic’ voice of the Mongols is conspicuous by its absence and the Mongol Imperium must be observed through the prism

⁸⁶ Ssanang Ssetsen, *The Bejewelled Summary of the Origins of the Khans*, tr. John R. Krueger

⁸⁷ These were formulated by an assembly in Western Mongolia attended by the most powerful khans of the Khalkha (Outer Mongolia), the Oirat rulers and twenty other senior nobles to provide the laws of a *toro*, or ‘state’ but one without a sovereign, a capital nor a centre. It was a joint project of rulership by powerful aristocrats and what was shared was a common law code and an aristocratic social order. The confederation lasted forty-eight years though the laws remained in force with the Oirat and among the Volga Kalmyks until 1892. (Sneath, *The Headless State* Ch. 7)

⁸⁸ See de Rachewiltz’s introduction, *SH*, p. xxxiii

⁸⁹ Bābur, Zahiru’d-Din Muhammad, *Bābur-nāma*, tr. A. S. Beveridge, 1922

of those whose lives were changed or shaped by the Mongol irruptions, Uli Schamiloglu has pointed out that some Turkic narrative sources have survived from the Later Golden Horde, a period of the successor states to the Jochids. He argues that these are of fundamental importance for the study of the history of western Eurasia in the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries and include the *Umdet ül-ahbar*. Whilst this was composed in Ottoman Turkish by Abdülgaḥḥar al-Kirimi of the Crimean Khanate in the eighteenth century he used a wide range of Arabic, Persian and Turkic sources to survey the reign of each of the rulers of the Golden Horde thus preserving historical traditions from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He includes an important account of the negotiations between the Jochid amirs and Hūlegū prior to the accession of Berke Khan (Ir. 1255-1266).⁹⁰

This dearth of sources from the Mongol perspective is confounded by a problem articulated by Lane - of the lack of 'hard administrative data and the subjective nature of much of the narrative material' leading to 'speculation and clever interpretation which can rarely be backed up by hard statistical data and reliable figures'.⁹¹ Though this may be even more of an issue for economic historians of the period, such evidence is also required on how their extended lines of communication may have complicated Hūlegū and his successors' attempts to sustain their domination. Such 'hard data' ideally needs to come from within the ruling circle from those who appreciated, like the Seljūq vizier, Nizām al-Mulk, the efforts entailed in order to stay in the saddle' or from insiders such as Beyhaqi's (385/469/995-1077) exposé of the problems of rulership in uncertain times.

⁹⁰ Uli Schamiloglu, 'The Umdet ül-ahbar' in Paksoy, H. B., *Central Asian Monuments*, Istanbul, Isis Press, 1992 pp. 81-93

⁹¹ G. Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran*, 2003, pp. 2-3

The ‘insiders’ writing with close proximity to the Hülegüid rulers are the Persian bureaucrat ‘Atā Malik Juvaynī,⁹² and Rashīd al-Dīn, the vizier of Ghāzān (r.694-703/1295-1304) and his brother Öljeitü (703-716/1304-1316). The former’s work was composed between 650-58/1252-60 and his chapters on Kōrgūz and Arghūn Aqa come close to Beyhaqi in giving a flavour of the difficulties under which bureaucrats laboured, though unlike Sultan’s Mas’ūd’s bureaucrats, the Chinggisid officials come over more as ‘the enemy within’ with their toxic rivalries. It was almost fifty years later before another ‘insider’ account became available in the form of Ghāzān’s project overseen by his vizier Rashīd al-Dīn. He had been at the epicentre of the politics of the Hülegüid Court for twenty years (698-718/1298-1318) and before that had been associated with the Hülegüids for at least twenty years as a physician in the service of Hülegü Khan’s successor Abaqa.

Juvaynī’s *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā* was a source for other historians of the period who included in their works the early history of the Mongols. These included not only Rashīd al-Dīn, but also Hamdallāh the Mustawfi or State Accountant of Qazvin’s *Tārīkh-i Guzīda*, completed he says in 730/1330 and which essentially covers the history of the Dār al-Islām from the creation to Abū Sa’īd, though with the rather ominous comment ‘and let who will hereafter write the conclusion of their history’.⁹³ It was also a source for the *Chronography* of the Syriac Orthodox bishop, Bar Hebraeus (1226 –1286) which is essentially a saga of the perfidious milieu in the areas under Hülegüid control.

Included amongst the insiders who put pen to paper were the mathematician and Director of the Maragha Observatory under the first two Hülegüids, Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, (1201-1274). Refugees such as the Ghurid, Minhāj al-Dīn Juzjānī (589-?663/1193-?1265) who found

⁹² Juvaynī/Qazwīnī) *Tārīkh-i-Jahān Gushā* & Boyle, *The History of the World Conqueror* in 2 vols

⁹³ *The Ta’rīkh-i-Guzīda* or ‘Select history of Hamdullāh Mustawfī-i Qazwini. Eds. E. G. Browne and R. A.Nicholson, p. 6

sanctuary in the Sultanate of Delhi also provide insights on the conquest period since his intelligence sources on the Mongols seem to have been quite wide-ranging.⁹⁴

The Cilician and Greater Armenian historians have been extensively utilised here and pull few punches when it comes to showing what it was like to live under an occupying power. King Het 'um (r. 1224-1269),⁹⁵ the ruler of Cilician Armenia and his brother Smbat sought an accommodation with the Mongols as a counterbalance to the neighbouring Muslims and both travelled to Qaraqorum. Their recollections fed into such works as that of their nephew, the Cilician Armenian historian Het 'um's *History of the Tartars*, or *The Flower of Histories of the East* which was dictated in French in Poitiers in 1307 but also included his first-hand knowledge of the Hülegüids and has some useful intelligence, economic and 'communications' related insights. Vardan Arevelts'i in his *Compilation of History* records an interview he had with Hülegü. Grigor of Akner's *History of the Nation of Archers* has a plausible but probably spurious account of why Hülegü was enthroned and gives the reason for the hostilities with the Jochids. Kirakos Ganjaketsi was captured by the Mongols and forced to serve them in a secretarial capacity and his experiences and insights in his *History of the Armenians* have proved invaluable.

The later sources emanate from second or third generation historians who not only had time to adjust to the trauma of conquest but were also were ruled by ostensibly Muslim Mongols. The Court Panegyrist or Vassaf-e Hazrat (fl. 1299-1323) - actually a tax collector with pretensions - presented to Sultan Öljeitü his *Tārīkh-i Vassaf*, as incomprehensible to the Sultan as to students today. Slightly later is Abu 'l-Qāsim Kāshānī's *Tārīkh-i Uljāytū* which for present purposes

⁹⁴ Juzjānī, *Tabakāt-i-Nāsirī*

⁹⁵'Journey of Hethum, the Pious King of the Armenians to Batu and Mangu Khans', Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, volume I

helpfully indicates the Sultan's annual peregrinations between the seasonal Royal Camps.⁹⁶

There are comparative riches to be found in the accounts of the long-suffering trans-continental travellers during this period. Amongst those who left important accounts of their travails and who are mentioned many times in the text are Ye-lu Ch'u Ts'ai, who travelled in 1219, Wu-ku-Sun, (1220-1221), Ch'ang Ch'un, (1221-1224), Chang Te who travelled 1259, and from amongst the clergy, William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, Benedict the Pole, Rabban Bar Sauma, (d. 1294) (travelling east to west).

Despite the latter-day interest in the commercial benefits of the supposedly *Pax Mongolica*, there are few accounts from merchants with the controversial exception of the Venetian, Marco Polo, though his commercial perspective does not bear comparison with the later Florentine Francesco Balducci Pegolotti's *La Pratica della Mercatura* completed in the late 1330s or early 1340s CE. Pegolotti, however, did not travel himself across Eurasia but culled his information from his fellow merchants who had 'used the road'. Ibn Battuta, for present purposes, is of rather less interest since much of his peregrinations were by sea and there is more doubt as to whether he did actually reach China than with Marco Polo. On the other hand, Ibn Battuta did take the opportunity of joining the *mahalla* or travelling court of Abu Sa'id for which he is an important source. Also of some interest is his 'take' on the collapse of the Hülegüid polity after the death of Abu Sa'id.⁹⁷

The dangers of such journeys did not abate with the demise of the Yuan and Hülegüids, meaning that accounts from later travellers can offer useful insights. The embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (d. 1412) for Henry III of Castile (r. 1390-1406) to the Amir Tīmūr (771-807/1370-

⁹⁶ His peregrinations have been examined in some details by Melville, 'the Itineraries of Sultan Oljeitu', 1304-16, *Iran*, vol. 28

⁹⁷ Ibn Battūta, *The Travels of Ibn Battūta*, vol II, pp. 335-346

1405) is particularly important.⁹⁸ He not only travelled on the efficient Tīmūrid successor to the Chinggisid *Yām* network via Tabriz to Samarkand between 1403-1405 but was also one of the most prestigious travellers – unlike poor Rubruck for example – to leave an account of their experiences.

A slightly later, but equally important embassy though only travelling a fraction of the distance, was that dispatched by the Tīmūrid ruler of Herat, Mirza Shahrukh (r. 1404–1447), to the Court of the Yongle Emperor (r. 1402–1424) in 822/1419 arriving back in 825/1422 travelling via Samarkand and Sairam, Turfan and Hami. This embassy was recorded⁹⁹ by the official diarist Ghiyāth al-dīn Naqqāsh and is an important source for contact and travel as well as for early Ming China.

In spite of the passing of the centuries it would be unwise to completely ignore eighteenth and nineteenth century explorers, geographers and travellers since very often their experiences were not dissimilar to those of the thirteenth and fourteenth travellers since the terrain and hazards had not changed substantially and the old transmission systems were still in use. Allsen firmly makes the case for studying later imperial postal communications. He emphasises that later travellers have much to teach us about the institution in the last centuries of its extraordinarily long life. Moreover, ‘some of the practices were truly frozen in time, surviving intact into the very recent past such as feed requirements, mortality rates, speed and carrying capacities of post animals as well as the longevity of routes and distances between the relay stations’. He also makes the important point that these latter imperial posts are far better documented than those of their

⁹⁸ Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406* tr. Guy le Strange

⁹⁹ Bellér-Hann, Ildikó, *A History of Cathay: a translation and linguistic analysis of a fifteenth-century Turkic manuscript*, Bloomington: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995 Hāfiz-i Abrū, *A Persian embassy to China, being an extract from Zubdatu't tawarikh of Hāfiz Abrū*, tr. K. M. Maitra, 1970

predecessors.¹⁰⁰ This is a substantial genre of varying quality and those consulted appear in the text.

Cartography and Itineraries

Cartography is often overlooked as potential source material partly, perhaps, because it is a specialism in its own right. Cartography, however, along with itineraries, is a valuable tool for several reasons. One of these is that, in association with itineraries, it provides an indication of what the Islamic and Chinese worlds knew of their conquerors before the inundation. There is also the often forlorn hope that cartography and itineraries can firm up references in the sources to the likely routes taken by the *Yām* and earlier communication networks which the *Yām* may have utilised.

It may be wise to caution at this stage that when reference is made to cartography in this early period it should be borne in mind that these are not ‘maps’ in the sense of navigational aids as can be deduced from the al-Īdrīsī Miniature Map of the World based on the famous map which al-Īdrīsī (493-560/1100-1165) laboured on for Roger II of Sicily (1097-1154).¹⁰¹ Locales closer to home are more accurate than China, the Far East and South-East Asia. That there was also a serious deficiency of up-to-date information on China can be judged by al-Īdrīsī’s geographic compilation that underpinned his world map, his *Kitāb Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-afāq* or *The Pleasure of He who Longs to Cross the Horizons*, also known as *al-Kitāb al-Rujari* or *The Book of Roger*.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Allsen, ‘Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A review Article’ of Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, ed. Thomas T. Allsen, P. B. Golden, R. K. Kovalev, and A. P. Martinez, 17 (2010), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag pp. 237-276

¹⁰¹ Sicily had been in Christian hands since the early twelfth century and Roger had Greek and Arab tutors. His court became a venue for both Christian and especially Muslim scholarship. S. Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p. 164



al-Idrīsī Miniature Map of the World
With South at the Top
Sicily bottom right, with the Black Sea centre left of Sicily¹⁰²

Difficulties include the identification of place names, many of which are no longer extant or have changed beyond recognition. A Geographical Gazetteer is included in the appendices, which gives some of the main alternatives to the places referred to in the text but this effort cannot possibly be regarded as definitive. Cartography, however, is useful as a primary source because maps, although symbols of power and status illustrating the extent of a ruler's domains were also created in a particular cultural context and can provide a snapshot of changing political realities and understandings as well as the level of knowledge at a particular time. Many happy hours can be spent poring over those early cartographic efforts - as well as more recent maps, though alas, there are many questions still unresolved.

¹⁰² Well illustrated with brief commentary in Jerry Brotton, *Great Maps* London, DKP, 2014, p.47-49. S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Cartography of al Sharīf al-Idrīsī' ch. 7 of *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 1, Book 1, pp. 156-174 and Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p. 164

Pre-Mongol Geographical Knowledge

The early thirteenth century Mongols were illiterate and cartography had no place in their campaigns of conquest though later Möngke Qa'an, Qubilai and the latter's successors under the Yuan recognised the importance of both geography and cartography. Both of these subjects had nonetheless flourished for centuries in the extremes of Eurasia. A number of scholars have taken an interest in the history of cartography of the Islamic world and Eastern Eurasia and volumes one and two of the *History of Cartography* edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward¹⁰³ are indispensable for both these regions.

Rashīd al-Dīn's Geographical Data

For the specific period here, Thomas Allsen's chapter on geography and cartography in his *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* includes an examination of the body of geographical data incorporated into Rashīd al-Dīn's *Collected Chronicles*. Indeed, as Allsen remarks, one of the greatest losses is that Rashīd al-Dīn apparently completed a geography entitled the *Suvar al-āqālīm* or "Configuration of Climes" describing the different climes of the world, the routes linking them and an enumeration of the way stations established throughout Eurasia by the Chinggisids.

Whilst some scholars have doubts as to whether this work was actually completed, Allsen, Togan and Jahn regard it as having existed, possibly completed around 1310 CE, and subsequently lost.¹⁰⁴ Tantalisingly Hamdallāh the Mustawfī may have been involved in that project, and indeed he mentions the works of Rashīd al-Dīn as a source for his information on Jurjat in Manchuria in his own *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*. This

¹⁰³ J. B. Harley and David Woodward eds. *The History of Cartography* Volume 2, Books 1 & 2, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmet Zeki Validi [Togan] 'Islam and the Science of Geography', *Islamic Culture* 8 (1934) pp. 514-15, 517, 522 n. 17 and 525, note 29; Karl Jahn, 'Study of the Supplementary Persian Sources for the Mongol History of Iran' in Denis Sinor, ed. *Aspects of Altaic Civilization* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1963, p. 197

was compiled in 740/1340 and although derivative from earlier geographical descriptions of places also touches on the state of cities and towns in his own period along with the revenues and some itineraries.

Rashīd al-Dīn's source for his geographical information is inevitably regarded by Allsen as Qubilai's ethnic Mongol emissary Bolad, who arrived in Azerbaijan in late 1285. What is noticeable, however, is that the section on Qubilai's grandson, Ananda, effectively khan of his own *ulus* in the old Tangut territory south of the Gobi, is one of the most comprehensive parts of the history of Qubilai. Given Ananda's association with Islam and by deduction from his own connections with his Hūlegüid cousin Ghāzān (r.694-703/1295-1304 it seems highly likely that Rashīd al-Dīn used a so far unknown source with connections to Ananda.¹⁰⁵

For present purposes one significance of Mustawfī is that for a period in which trans-Eurasian communication had apparently flowed, he was notably exceptionally weak on the highroads to the east. He ventures no further than the Oxus/Amu Darya and the Yuan centre of Dadu is disposed of simply as a great, mighty, cold and populous town which produced excellent cereals.

There is thus no obvious surviving equivalent for the Chinggisid period of, for example, the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a thirteenth century copy of a route planner based on earlier Roman sources which has been comprehensively examined by Emily Albu in her *The Medieval Peutinger Map*. Thus the way stations of the *Yām* network and the general direction of travel have had to be gleaned from the reports of travellers

¹⁰⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 323-326

including the clerics, especially William of Rubruck as well as Juvaynī, and others who are mentioned in the text.

PART I

Chapter I

The Sino-Iranian Nexus

Pre-Mongol Trans-Eurasian Communication and Contact

When Chinggis Khan's grandson, Hülegü, rode west from Mongolia on 24th of Sha 'ban, 658/19th October, 1253¹⁰⁶ at the head of the imperial forces dispatched by his brother, Möngke Qa'an, contacts between the ancient civilizations of Iran and China had already had a long and tortuous history.¹⁰⁷ A history which, as Herbert Franke has noted, is still far from sufficiently studied¹⁰⁸ though perhaps oddly, in view of the strategic importance of these states today it is these early contacts that have long fascinated scholars. Even so, there has been a tendency to view this initial period of communication between eastern and western Eurasia through the prism of the history of commerce and 'cultural exchange'.¹⁰⁹

This is particularly the case for the zenith of the so-called 'Silk Road'¹¹⁰ from the opening of the route west through the Tarim Basin by Chang Chien/Zhang Qian (d. 113 BCE) during the reign of Han Wudi (r. 140-187 BCE) to the Arab conquests in the mid seventh century CE.

¹⁰⁶ The date given by Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 611

¹⁰⁷ As Franke has remarked in his 'Sino-Western Contacts under the Mongol Empire,' p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ Franke, 'Sino-Western Contacts' p. 49

¹⁰⁹ See especially Joseph Needham *Science and Civilization in China*, all volumes; Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, 2001; Berthold Laufer, *Sino Iranica, Chinese contributions to the history of civilization in ancient Iran*, 1919; Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 1963

¹¹⁰ Daniel Waugh has cautioned that the 'father of the Silk Road concept', the German geographer, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) used the term sparingly based on his source, Marinus of Tyre and then only for the period of the Han. It appears on his *Karte von Centrale Asien* of 1876 and designates one road, that between Chang'an and across the Tarim as *die Siedenstrasse von Marinus*. Daniel, Waugh, *The Silk Road*, vol. 5 Number 1, Summer 2007. Leading article on 'Von Richthofen's Silk Roads: Toward the Archaeology of a Concept'.

Recently, however, the extent of the commercial and cultural exchanges exemplified by the vision of silk laden caravans traversing Central Eurasia has been robustly challenged by historians examining the documentary evidence. One of the leading ‘Silk Road’ scholars today, Valerie Hansen, has tartly observed that ‘The Silk Road was one of the least travelled routes in human history and possibly not worth studying – if tonnage carried, traffic or the number of travellers at any time were the sole measures of a given route’s significance’.¹¹¹

She is not alone in being sceptical. Warwick Ball, too, has remarked with some irritation that ‘nowadays it has become fashionable to lump the study of the routes and movements in to the one catch-all term, ‘The Great Silk Road.’ In his view, the term ‘is largely a modern construct with little foundation in history or archaeology that is nonetheless now almost universally used both in popular and scholarly literature; the former understandable, the latter inexcusable’.¹¹²

Early Trans-Eurasian Contact predicated on Reasons of State

Such scepticism has a two-fold value here since it cautions against taking at face value the Victorian propensity for labels including such misnomers as ‘Silk Road’ and ‘Pax Mongolica’ - the latter being a particularly unfortunate term as will be seen in Chapter X. As Franke forcefully remarks, ‘historical tags’ such as these lose much of their seemingly incontrovertible truth when the historical facts are considered.¹¹³ It also brings into question scholarly enthusiasm for the commercial aspects of trans-Eurasian communication, where grand edifices categorised as ‘world trading networks’ have been erected by economic historians who, as Abu-Lughod herself admits, have ‘imaginatively combined and recombined the same limited number of

¹¹¹ Hansen, *Silk Road*, for her revisioning of the history of the Silk Road, see p. 235.

¹¹² Warwick Ball: *The Monuments of Afghanistan, History, Archaeology and Architecture*, 2008, p.13

¹¹³ Franke, ‘Sino-Western Contacts’ p. 44

informational scraps'¹¹⁴ whereas the statistical evidence to support such ambitious claims is extremely slim. Such an approach not only neglects the evidence in the sources that such contacts were instigated and largely sustained for 'Reasons of State' but also as Abu-Lughod acknowledges, accounts such as Marco Polo's are 'responsible for a distorted definition of the thirteenth century as a period of Commercial Revolution'.¹¹⁵

Such dubiousness at the level of the commercial aspects of trans-Eurasian communication suggest that it is the historic relations at state level between these two far distant polities over two millennia ago which are of significance. These inter-state contacts are regarded here as exemplifying some timeless aspects of statecraft as conquest dynasties endeavoured to retain and sustain their power by searching for allies, collecting intelligence, repelling enemies and taxing their populations in their attempts to fend off for as long as possible the inevitable moment foretold by 'Ata-Malik Juvaynī:

Now to every fortune there is a
limit and to every cause a term,
which has been fixed by God
Almighty in His perfect knowledge
and power at the beginning of time
and until the appointed hour is
come abundant strength and gear
and equipment will accomplish
nothing¹¹⁶

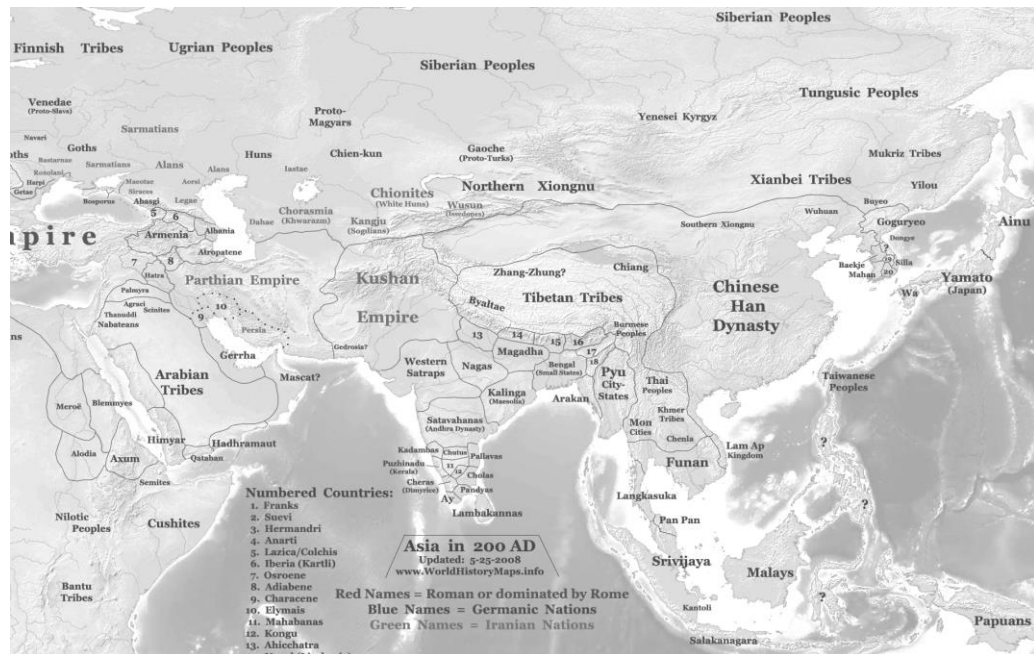
Whilst some rulers might share Juvaynī's fatalism, in fact sustaining and increasing their power can be shown to have been the driving force in the earliest trans-Eurasian contacts as is shown by Han Wudi's

¹¹⁴ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony, The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 299

¹¹⁵ Abu-Lughod, p. 30

¹¹⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle, II p. 681

attempts to seek out his former steppe allies, the Yuezhi¹¹⁷ who had been forced to flee after being defeated by the Xiongnu.



ii. Eurasia in 200 CE

Xiongnu (209 BCE – c. 48 CE)

Split into Northern and Southern Branches (48-155) CE

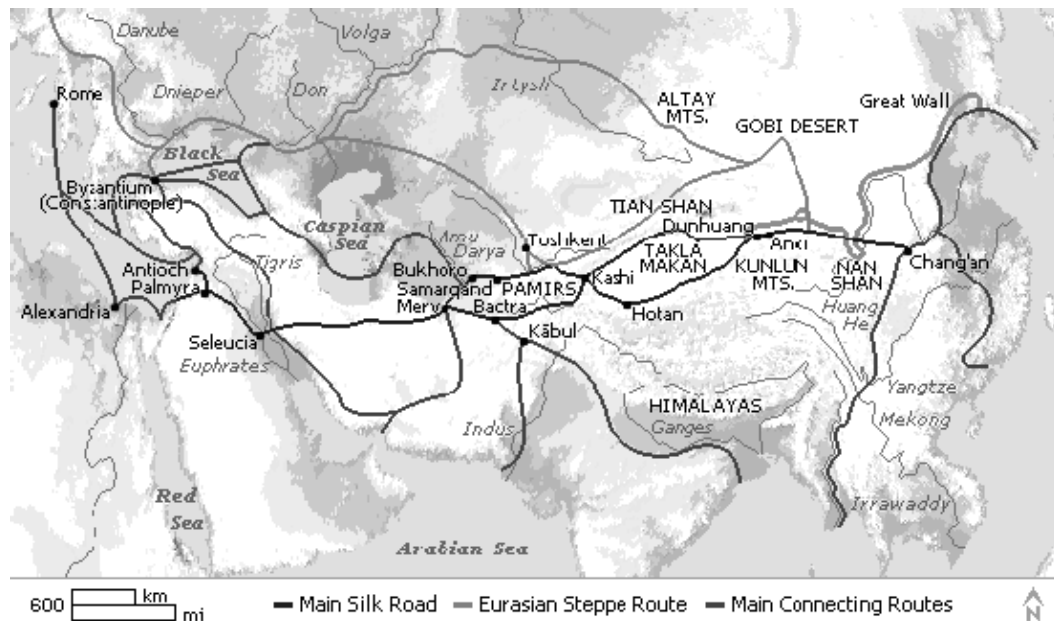
Former and Later Han (206 BC – 220 CE); Kushan Empire (c.100 – 224 CE)

Though Han Wudi's emissary to the Yuezhi, Zhang Qian, failed in his diplomatic objectives, one consequence of his missions was to have far reaching implications for the subsequent history of Central Eurasia and trans-Eurasian communications. This is because the Tarim Basin route which Zhang Qian traversed on his way westwards was something of a *terrae incognitae* for the Middle Kingdom. Indeed, some historians have argued that the earliest routes of transmission by which languages, genes and lifeways were exchanged between east and west Eurasia¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ C & S Benjamin have comprehensively examined the evidence for the migration of the Yuezhi in their *The Yuezhi, Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria*, Silk Road Studies XIV, Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols Publishers, 2007

¹¹⁸ David Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History", *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring, 2000)

were the more northerly steppe bridge paths rather than via the particularly inhospitable Tarim Basin. Thus one result of Zhang's mission was that this latter route was consciously developed by Han for reasons of state.



iii. Silk Roads versus Steppe Roads

It was these historic links that were co-opted by Premier Zhou Enlai when Sino-Iranian relations were re-ignited in 1971 after a prolonged period of abeyance. In April of that year, the then Shah of Iran's sister, Princess Ashraf, visited China and in his speech of welcome, Zhou Enlai stressed the ancient ties between the two countries whilst also observing how both had been brought low by "foreign aggression", but that 'longstanding historical contacts and traditional friendship' had existed between China and Iran dating back "more than two thousand years".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ *Xinhua*, April 14, 1971, China Mainland Press – Survey of China Mainland Press, No. 71-17, April 26-30, 1971, 32-34. Quoted in Garver, *China and Iran*, p. 9

Though the mention by Zhou of ‘foreign aggression’ was a not so subtle reference to the trials and tribulations suffered by Iran and China at the hands of foreign powers over the past two hundred years or so, the two states did indeed have ‘long-standing historical contacts’, both diplomatic and cultural. These latter were manifested during the first half of the eighth century when there was a fashion amongst the Tang elite for Iranian objects and customs of all kinds: foodstuffs, clothing, furniture, music and dancing as well as Iranian influence on the visual arts.¹²⁰ It is on the basis of such cultural contacts and exchange that led Franke to question whether such contacts ‘were really more frequent and easy under the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than under the Six Dynasties and the Tang when no Eurasian universal empire like that of the Mongols existed’.¹²¹

A particularly intense period of Sino-Iranian interaction occurred between 638 CE and 729 CE after the intrusion of Arab forces into western and central Eurasia brought a new player into the already complex ‘international relations’ of the region. The Arab conquests initiated an explosion of contacts between the Tang and increasingly desperate Sasanian rulers seeking an alliance as the latter tried to negotiate the treacherous path between the incoming Arab forces and the omnipresent Turks. There appear to have been more embassies traversing Eurasia on Sasanian missions to Tang in this period than at the height of the later Hülegüid/Yuan interaction which took place during the reign of the last Hülegüid ruler, Abū Saʿīd (r. 716-735/1316-1335).¹²²

¹²⁰ See especially B. Laufer, *Sino Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization* and Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 1963. Sasanian motifs on silver vessels strongly influenced Tang metalwork and pearl-bordered roundels almost certainly derived from Sasanian models.

¹²¹ Franke, ‘Sino-Western Contacts’ p. 44

¹²² For the embassies towards the end of the Hülegüid era see chapter herein on Contacts. Yazdegerd III/Yi-si-si (632-651 CE) sent envoys in 638 CE pleading for help from Tang. His son, Pērōz/Bilusi took refuge in Tokarestan and sent an embassy to Tang in 661/662 CE asking for Tang intervention against the Arabs but was offered

The Trans-Eurasian Toluid Nexus 1260-1335

These seventh and early eighth century relations between two ancient and illustrious powers were consummated by one forged in steel and blood in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Uniquely in the history of Eurasia, from 656/1258 to 735/1335, both China *intra mures*¹²³ and the Iranian plateau were theoretically under the sway – albeit for a comparatively short but complex period – of the same supreme authority, the Yuan emperors who descended from Chinggis Khan’s youngest son, Tolui, by his chief wife, Börte. This important Toluid lineage of the estranged Chinggisid imperial family produced not only the Mongol Yuan emperors, the first of whom was Qubilai Qa’an, but also the Hülegüids in West Asia, descendants of Qubilai’s younger brother Hülegü.

instead the governorship of Po-ssu – in fact Sistan. From there he sent a number of further embassies to the Tang. Pērōz subsequently fled to Chang’an to join his son, Narseh/Ninieshi who was a hostage there. The Tang supported Narseh in his efforts to regain Sasanian territory, remaining for twenty years or so in Tokarestan from where he sent regular embassies to the Tang court, to which he returned, dying in Chang’an between 707 and 709 CE. His son also attempted to reconquer the Empire in 728-729 CE.

¹²³ Prior to Qin, each state had tried to surround itself with walls as well as to provide a defence along the northern frontier. Qin linked these frontier walls though the “Great Wall” in its well-known form was only established during the Ming. See e.g. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, p. 32



‘Close Relations’
The Yuan in East Eurasia
Overlords of the Ilkhans/Hülegüids in Western Eurasia
1260 and 1335

The Toluids in the West – Möngke’s Grand Strategy

The death of Ögödei Qa’an’s son and successor, Güyüg (r.1246-1248 CE) resulted in the acrimonious accession of a non-Ögödeid successor, Chinggis Khan’s grandson Möngke and son of Tolui, the youngest son of the Conqueror, albeit with the support of the senior branch, the Jochid khan, Batu. Relationships thereafter within the Imperial Family became increasingly fraught even though Batu’s reasons for supporting a non-Ögödeid Great Khan rather than a youngster from the Ögödeid branch cannot be faulted.

...the administration of so vast an
empire, which stretches from the
East to the West, is beyond the
strength of children’s arms¹²⁴

A purported assassination attempt on Möngke by dissidents from the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid branches, whilst giving the new ruler the opportunity of culling potential rivals and ostensibly enforcing his authority, had the presumably unforeseen consequence of further

¹²⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 203

fracturing the Imperial Family. This in turn was confounded on his own death by the succession dispute between his brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke.

In the meantime, the account in Rashīd al-Dīn of Möngke despatching his two brothers, Qubilai and Hülegü eastwards and westwards respectively to the imperial 'collegiate' territories with large armies, albeit with representatives from the other branches is, to put it mildly, somewhat opaque.¹²⁵ As far as the reasons for Hülegü's expedition are concerned, Ch'ang Te, Möngke's emissary to his brother after the fall of Baghdad, admirably remarks that, in the space of six years, Hülegü had succeeded in extending the frontiers of the empire by nearly ten thousand *li*.¹²⁶

Ch'ang Te had inadvertently but pithily summed up Möngke's 'Grand Strategy'. This was not, however, so much the acquisition of territory, rather it was to enforce the subjection of all those who had not yet submitted. That this was clearly realised by some in the west, such as Yvo of Narbonne as recorded by Matthew Paris in 1243 CE, is shown by Yvo's understanding that the Mongols:

'being admonished by an oracle or vision to challenge dominion over the whole earth' they 'all persist in their purpose of subduing the whole world under their owne subjection...'¹²⁷

Such a view is furthermore encapsulated in a letter from Möngke's predecessor, Güyüg (r.1246-1248 CE) to Pope Innocent IV, who had complained about Mongol treatment of conquered Christian peoples. Güyüg responded sharply: "We do not understand these words of yours.

¹²⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp.222 and 246

¹²⁶ Ch'ang Te, 'Si Shi Ki,' tr. Bretschneider, in *Mediaeval Researches* vol. I, p.122.

¹²⁷ C. Raymond Beazley, *The Texts and Versions of John de Plano Carpini And William de Rubruquis, As Printed For The First Time by Hakluyt In 1598*. London, Hakluyt Society, 1903 pp. 41 and 42

The Eternal Heaven (*tengri*) has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples, because they have heeded neither Chingiz Khan nor the Khagan (Ogodei), both of whom have been sent to make known God's command.¹²⁸ It would appear that from this perspective, the Chinggisids were simply the tools chosen by *Tengri* for the task of enforcing the will of Eternal Heaven which in turn implied that there was a sacred dynamic driving Mongol expansion.

Whilst world domination may have been Möngke's grand strategy as decreed by God, he still had to deal with the practicalities. In his pursuit of this goal Möngke could simply have given open-ended orders to his brothers to conquer the remaining 'rebels' in 'the furthest East and West of the world'.¹²⁹ Juvaynī in fact records that Möngke did exactly that in charging Hülegü 'with the conquest of the Western parts'¹³⁰ and Rashīd al-Dīn essentially follows suit.¹³¹

There is, however, an anomaly within Möngke's reported instructions to his brothers. Whilst the campaigns against the Southern Sung, Japan and 'Indo-China' are easily explicable in terms of forcing the submission of those still outside the fold, the Mongols already had an assertive, if less than coherent, presence in Western Eurasia. The extent of this presence can be construed by the responsibilities of Juvaynī's master, the Oirat or Jalayir Mongol Amir Arghun Aqa, duties which were increased by Ögödei's widow, the regent, Toregene Khatūn after the

¹²⁸ Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: cross cultural influences on the steppe frontier, 1304-1589*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 92-94. Jackson believes that David Morgan's contention that the Mongols came to believe in a programme of world-conquest only when they discovered that they were in fact conquering the world may well be close to the truth. David O Morgan, "The Mongols and the Eastern Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Historical Review*, vol. 4, 1989, p. 200. Jackson's chapter on 'The Mongol age in Eastern Inner Asia' in Jackson's chapter on 'The Mongol age in Eastern Inner Asia' pp. 36-37

¹²⁹ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 607

¹³⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 607

¹³¹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp.222 and 246

murder of his mentor, Körgüz, governor of Khurasan shortly before 641/1243-4.¹³²

Arghun's increased remit was territorially extensive and included the region between the Oxus and Fars, as well as Georgia, Rum and Mosul.¹³³ He is also reported by Juvaynī as restoring order in Azerbaijan which had been regarded by the great amirs appointed to administer the region, such as Chormaghun and Baiju, as their own property. Moreover, the Sultans of Rum, Syria and Aleppo sent ambassadors to him and sought his protection and favour.¹³⁴

There is also the problem of hindsight which makes Rubruck's account of the essence since he arrived in the Imperial encampment in the midst of these events. Whilst at Möngke's Court in 1254 Rubruck picked up the local gossip and from this he may have discerned, albeit unintentionally, a rather more sophisticated approach on the part of Möngke. This was in the context of an exchange between a purported cleric, one Theodolus who was originally from Acre and who had made his way east in the wake of Andrew of Longjumeau in 1249 remaining at least until Rubruck's arrival in 1253. This cleric was interrogated by Möngke about his reasons for traversing Eurasia to Qaraqorum during the course of which Theodolus told the Qa'an that 'there were Saracens between him and the Franks, blocking the way and that if they were opened up they [the Franks] would send envoys and of their own accord make peace with him'.¹³⁵

This intelligence, albeit spurious, sparked Möngke's interest sufficiently to arrange for Theodolus to accompany an envoy back to the west to substantiate these assertions. The deal which Möngke was prepared to

¹³² Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 507

¹³³ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p.507 and Lane, 'Arghun Aqa: Mongol Bureaucrat', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 32, No. 4 p. 461

¹³⁴ Juvaynī/Boyle II, pp. 507-508

¹³⁵ Rubruck, p. 186

offer to King Louis IX of France, a friend and patron of Rubruck,¹³⁶ was that the Mongols would conquer the territory of the Saracens as far as that of the king's and then grant Louis the remaining land to the west. If the king refused the deal, he was to be warned that the Mongols would, in effect, come after him.¹³⁷

Such a condominium arrangement was in fact mooted by Chinggis Khan himself circa 1217 CE *vis- a-vis* the Khwarazmshah when he responded to the latter saying 'I am the sovereign of the sunrise and thou the sovereign of the sunset. Let there be between us a firm treaty of friendship, amity and peace....'¹³⁸ This probably devious suggestion catastrophically failed when the latter was complicit in the murder of the Mongol envoys and the looting of the accompanying caravan. In view of Möngke's expansionist objectives such a proposal in respect of carving up the rest of the world then known to the Mongols between the Chinggisids and King Louis does seem inconceivable and as it happened it was never put to the test. The envoy managed to get as far as John III Vatatzes, emperor of Nicaea, but then fell ill and died and though the emperor sent back his attendants to Möngke, his 'offer' presumably did not get as far as Louis. On the other hand, Hülegü's actions after the Fall of Baghdad, apparently on the advice of King Het'um, in attacking Aleppo followed by Damascus, were arguably in accord with his instructions from Möngke.

Möngke's Military Objectives for Hülegü in the West

As a tested military commander it is unlikely that Möngke sent off his younger brother without specific objectives to further the overall grand strategic vision. This is rather more convoluted than might appear and

¹³⁶ *Rubruck*, Jackson's Introduction, p. 4 which is presumably one reason why Rubruck took such an interest in the incident.

¹³⁷ *Rubruck*, p. 186

¹³⁸ Jūzjānī p. 966

it may be worth trying to untangle the various pieces of evidence since the Toluid presence in western Eurasia for upwards of eighty years was in turn bedevilled by the conceptions and misconceptions of his Imperial relatives as to what was Hülegü's actual remit.

Thus the Persian sources noted above give the impression that Hülegü had *carte blanche* in his efforts to force the submission of the western 'rebels'. Again, one of the problems of hindsight is that there is the supposition that the two major objectives were in fact those that were subsequently vanquished that is, the Isma'ilis and the Caliphate. Post-event Western and Chinese sources indicate, somewhat more rationally than Juvaynī, that Möngke had indeed given his commanders precise strategic/military targets. On these the Chinese sources are succinct and to the point. Thus the *Yuan shi* states under the year 1252:

The emperor (Möngke) sent the general K'ie-di-bu hua (Kit-buka) to attack the Mu-li-hi (Mulahida or Isma'ili's) and to lay siege to the fortress Mo-lai Ghi-rh-du-k'ie (Ghirdkuh of the Mulahida). The prince Hu-lie-wu (Hulagu) received orders to subdue the countries of the west belonging to the dominions of the su-dan (Sultan)¹³⁹

Under the following year the *Yuan shi* further states that Hülegü was ordered to set off for the *Si yü* or western Asia and subdue *Ha-li-fa Ba-ha-da*, that is, the Caliphate, and other countries. This somewhat terse record should not be dismissed since Kit-buka, who was initially charged with the destruction of the Ismā'ili fortresses had not made sufficient progress by the time of Hülegü's arrival despite besieging their fortress of Ghirdkugh for two years. It was only after Hülegü came to his aid that the Ismā'ili threat was dealt with.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, vol. I p. 121

Interestingly, it could be argued that the *Yuan shi* version of the 1252 orders could be taken as vindicating Rubruck that Hülegü's objective was the Sultan's domains rather than specifically destroying the Caliphate itself though doubt is immediately cast on this in view of the comment under the year 1253 above. On the other hand, when Hülegü's emissaries reached the Jochid camp with the portion of the loot destined for Berke, Batu's successor, the Jochid khan was so incensed at the murder of the Caliph that according to Jūzjānī, he slew the emissaries. Berke's fury, according to Jūzjānī was because he had been brought up as a Muslim¹⁴⁰ and indeed Rubruck had heard that Berke made himself out to be a Saracen.¹⁴¹ From this it can be deduced that the Jochids – or at least the Muslim convert Berke, had not signed up for the destruction of the Caliphate per se but for the submission of the caliph and territorial control.¹⁴²

Notwithstanding Berke's anger at the turn of events, post-Baghdad rationalisations are given in the sources for the attacks on the Ismā'ilis and the Caliph. Though these vary there appears to be a common thread. This is that Mongol aid was beseeched by influential individuals and Jūzjānī is one of the prime movers of this view. It seems that this usually well-informed refugee in the Delhi Sultanate viewed Hülegü's attack on the Caliph as being at the instigation of the traitorous Shī'ī *wazīr* of the Caliphal Court. This individual purportedly clandestinely wrote to Hülegü when already in the region asking him to advance on Baghdad.¹⁴³

According to Jūzjānī, the main targets were nonetheless the Ismā'ili fortresses but these targets were also, so it appears, at the behest of other supplicants, in this instance the qādī of Qazwin, a city not far distant from the key Ismā'ili fortress of Alamut. The qādī was a devout

¹⁴⁰ Jūzjānī p. 1283

¹⁴¹ *Rubruck*, p. 127

¹⁴² Jūzjānī, pp. 1256

¹⁴³ Jūzjānī, pp. 1229-1252

Sunni who, for unknown reasons, appears to have made several trips to Qaraqorum. It was not until Möngke ascended the throne, however, that he seems to have plucked up courage to paint a sensational picture of the conflicts between the townspeople and their neighbours¹⁴⁴ and ask for Mongol aid in destroying the Ismā'īli spiritual and physical menace.

His powers of persuasion were finely tuned to Chinggisid sensibilities as they were based on 'reasons of state' and the risk to Chinggisid power in western Eurasia if the Ismā'īlis were allowed to continue unmolested:

They [the Ismā'īlis] parade their riches and they wait in expectation of this, that, if your power should sustain any decline or reverse, the sect will rise in the midst of those mountains and in those fortresses and overthrow the remainder of the people of Islam and not leave the trace of a Musalman'¹⁴⁵

There is a slight possibility that Jūzjānī was right in portraying the attack on the Caliphate, as distinct from the caliphal domains, if not as an after thought, then at least a secondary objective. The account of the Cilician Armenian historian and statesman, Het'um, nephew of King Het'um I (1226-1268 or 9) could be taken in support of this. Het'um records in his 1307 *History of the Tartars* that his uncle the king - who was one of his important first-hand sources - had requested seven favours from Möngke during his visit to Qaraqorum in 1254-1255. Two of these, the fourth and fifth, were that the Holy Land be wrested from the 'Turks' and given to the Christians and that the Mongols should

¹⁴⁴ Juvaynī also comments on the hostility between the Qazvini's and Alamut. Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 700

¹⁴⁵ Juzjānī, pp. 1187-1196

encompass the destruction of Baghdad and the Caliph be done away with.¹⁴⁶

Möngke apparently politely responded that were it possible, he would like to revere the Holy Land in person but being occupied with other matters he would send his brother Hülegü to take it and return the Holy Land to the Christians. Moreover, ‘as for doing away with the Caliph of Baghdad, we entrust that task to Baiju, commander of the Tartars and to his people residing in the realm of the Turks and thereabouts’. This account is repeated by the wealthy, well educated, well travelled and informed Venetian Marino Sanudo Torsello, in his *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, composed sometime between 1307 and 1321. Fifty years earlier, however, in 1255, another Armenian historian, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, interviewed King Het’um personally and there is no mention of these seven favours, only that Möngke gave him a noteworthy edict that no-one dare harass him or his country as well as a document proclaiming freedom for the Church everywhere.¹⁴⁷

A major problem with the Het’um scenario is that he returned to Armenia after spending fifty or so days at the Imperial Court, arriving back in 1255. Crucially this means that he was in Mongolia after Hülegü had left for the west. In fact Het’um met him en route near Talas on his return journey.¹⁴⁸ Under these circumstances it would appear that Möngke could not have given direct orders to his brother to take Jerusalem and Baghdad on behalf of the Armenians.

Hülegü’s actions after he had taken Baghdad and before he received a response from Möngke are instructive. According to Het’um the

¹⁴⁶ Het’um the Armenian, *History of the Tartars – The Flower of Histories of the East*, tr. Robert Bedrosian, <https://archive.org/stream/HetumTheHistoriansFlowerOfHistoriesOfTheEast/Hetum-djvu.txt>. Book 3 section, 32,

¹⁴⁷ Kirakos Ganjaketsi’s ‘History of the Armenians’, in Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, volume I, p. 168

¹⁴⁸ Kirakos Ganjaketsi/Bretschneider, I, p. 169

Armenian historian, Hülegü took time off to relax for a year¹⁴⁹ in the city of Edessa before summoning King Het'um to join him with his troops 'as he planned to go to the Holy Land to deliver it to the Christians.'¹⁵⁰ The king suggested that the initial target should be the Sultan of Aleppo who held sway over the entire country of Syria, in which Jerusalem was located. The reasoning behind this strategy was sound, if one he lived to regret. This was that if Aleppo was taken then Hülegü 'would be lord of the entire country of Syria' which was undoubtedly a tempting proposal.¹⁵¹ Aleppo was not taken until 1260 followed by Damascus and thereafter, according to Het'um, Hülegü prepared to advance on Jerusalem.

But just then, bad tidings from a reliable source reached him regarding the death of his brother and the fact that the throne of the Tartar Khanate was vacant. As soon as he heard this [Hulegu] fell into deep sorrow and advanced no further.¹⁵²

What can be inferred from Hülegü's activities after the Fall of Baghdad is that he continued to apply himself to 'the conquest of the Western parts' as per his orders from the Qa'an. The news of Möngke's demise and the instalment of his brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke as rival Qa'ans, however, dramatically altered the familial landscape. In the meantime, the perplexing issue of quite how Möngke intended to proceed after the destruction of the Ismā'ilis and the extermination of the Caliphate is a subject which has been hotly debated by scholars.¹⁵³ Then again, whilst Möngke's intentions could well be deemed irrelevant as the Eastern Toluids fought for possession of the throne this may not

¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, Hülegü may have been ill after Baghdad, because it seems he spent some time on the plain outside Hamadan recuperating.

¹⁵⁰ *Het'um/Bedrosian*, Book 3, section 28.

¹⁵¹ *Het'um/Bedrosian*, Book 3, section 28

¹⁵² *Het'um/Bedrosian*, Book 3, section 29

¹⁵³ See especially, G. Lane, 'Whose secret Intent?' in Rossabi, Morris (ed), *Eurasian Influences on Yuan China: Cross-Cultural Transmissions in the 13th and 14th Centuries*. Singapore: University of Singapore Press, pp. 1-40

in fact be the case since they underpin Hülegü's appropriation of power in Western Eurasia.

Toluid Appropriation of Power in Western Eurasia

Before Möngke's death on campaign in China the good news of the Fall of Baghdad had been transmitted to him by Hülegü's emissaries/*ilchīs* travelling at speed, whilst his share of the loot trundled more slowly across Eurasia. As far as the aftermath is concerned, there are a number of conflicting rationalizations on the transformation of Hülegü as an Imperial commander-in-chief to a ruler in his own right. One of the most plausible, but unverifiable, is that of Grigor of Akner, in his *History of the Nation of Archers*. This was completed in 1273 and whilst there is some confusion in his history¹⁵⁴ his account does make sense for two reasons. Firstly, the Chinggisid adherence to consultation and secondly, Hülegü was known to have sent *ilchīs*/ambassadors to his brother Möngke with an oral message¹⁵⁵ relaying the news.

Under Hülegü as supreme commander were representatives of other branches of the Imperial Family and according to Grigor, the Jochid princes in particular were out of control and causing mayhem.¹⁵⁶ As Chinggisid commanders including Imperial princes had a duty to consult on major issues it seems highly plausible that Hülegü's envoy to his brother as well as relaying the news on Baghdad also asked:

‘what else do you order us to do?
For if we remain in this way
without *yasa* and headless, the
land will be ruined and Chinggis-
Khan's commands will not be

¹⁵⁴ For example, he makes the Jochid prince Berke the brother of Güyük Khan. Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch. 12 section 13

¹⁵⁵ The report gives the impression that the message was wholly verbal which would be in keeping with Mongol preferences

¹⁵⁶ Grigor/Bedrosian. Ch. 12 section 13

realised. For he ordered us to subdue and hold the land through affection, not to ruin it. But now the command is with you. We will do whatever you order us to.”¹⁵⁷

Hülegü's future and indeed his legitimacy effectively rested on the outcome of this alleged request:

As Baghdad fell in Safar 656/early 1258 a swift emissary could, with a fair wind, have made it to Möngke before the latter's death in the late summer of 657 /1259. Whatever the veracity of Grigor's account, Möngke is known to have sent in his turn an envoy, Cheng Te, to Hülegü in 1259, undoubtedly in response to the glad tidings of his brother's military achievements in Western Eurasia. The mission of Ch'ang Te¹⁵⁸ was exceptionally fast - between eleven and fourteen months for the round trip - and as he must have departed before August, the probable month of Möngke's death on campaign in China, he may well have reached Hülegü in early 1260. This speed ties in with a remark of John of Monte Corvino that a letter from Dadu to the west took six months.¹⁵⁹ He was certainly back in the east in 1263 when his account was written up by one Liu Yu as a *Record of an Embassy to the Regions in the West*.¹⁶⁰

In view of the Chinggisid custom of consultation, Grigor's account has its attractions, perhaps more so than those, for example, of Juvaynī¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Grigor/Bedrosian Ch. 12 section 13

¹⁵⁸ 'Si Shi Ki, Record of an Embassy to the Regions in the West', E. Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, I, Ch. IV, pp. 109-156. Chang Te-hui was tutor to Qubilai's eldest son and the future ambassador and icon of cultural exchange, Bolad/Pülād chīngsang

¹⁵⁹ First Letter of John of Monte Corvino, in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, ed. H. Yule, pp. 200-201

¹⁶⁰ 'Si Shi Ki, Record of an Embassy to the Regions in the West', E. Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, I, Ch. IV, pp. 109-156.

¹⁶¹ Juvaynī/Boyle, II p.607

or Rashīd al-Dīn¹⁶² and on dates alone Grigor's account could be credible. Moreover, Möngke's purported response seems completely in character in view of his record of not condoning defiance, insubordination or unruliness. This was to despatch his judges/*yarguchis* with the full weight of his authority to

“Go and put my brother Hūlegū [in the position of] khan of that country. Impose the *yasa* on whomsoever does not submit to him”.¹⁶³

The judges accordingly traversed Eurasia although the timescale is imprecise and on arrival held a great *quriltai* at which Hūlegū was enthroned. Of those summoned to attend by the judges' emissaries were Hūlegū's followers, plus the king of the Georgians, the Mongol commander Baiju and the out-of-control Jochid princes. Here Grigor parts company with his fellow Armenian Kirakos Ganjakets'i as well as Rashīd al-Dīn. According to the former, three of the Jochid princes did not want Hūlegū to be khan, refused to submit and were strangled and the fourth, a child was incarcerated. Moreover, the judges, whose authority appears to be without limit, ordered the Georgian, Armenian and Hūlegū's troops to destroy the troops of the dissident princes.¹⁶⁴

Hūlegüid Governance: Complicating Factors

If there is any truth in Grigor's account, then Hūlegū's authority in western Eurasia as supreme commander was not sufficient to discipline his relatives. Hence the perhaps spurious but not impossible reaction of an exasperated Möngke was to give his younger brother more 'clout'. However, Möngke's premature death in 1259 followed by the Toluid

¹⁶² Rashīd al-Dīn for example explains that Mongke always expected Hūlegū to remain in the west and his instruction to return to the homeland was a diplomatic cover. Rashīd/Karīmī, vol. II, p. 687

¹⁶³ Grigor/Bedrosian <http://rbedrosian.com/ga2.htm#10> ch. 12 section 13

¹⁶⁴ Kirakos Ganjakets'i/Bedrosian ch. 65 p. 11 of 12

succession crisis effectively abandoned Hülegü to his fate in western Eurasia to carry out as best he could his orders to continue with the 'conquest of the Western parts'. This he had to do without the authority of his brother in Qaraqorum nor, after the death of Batu and the disgust of his successor Berke at Hülegü's actions in Baghdad, without the support of the Jochids.

His brother's demise and ensuing squabble for the succession could in fact have proved advantageous to Hülegü. There is evidence in the sources that not only officials but also Chinggisid princes and princesses took advantage of interregnums to act more independently than would be allowed under an elected Qa'an.¹⁶⁵ This is in contradistinction to the Chinggisid custom of consultation which was enforced during the reign of Ögödei Qa'an (r. 1229-1241), an archetypal 'charismatic khan', as well as in his nephew and eventual successor Möngke's (r. 1251-1259) though both had to make efforts to stamp out unauthorised activities that occurred during the period before their accessions. On this score Hülegü could have regarded himself lucky to be able to act on his own initiative free of the problems of the exceptionally long lines of communication between himself and Qaraqorum.

Hülegü and his successors, however, had a major complicating factor which was to test their efforts to remain firmly in the saddle. This was not made any easier by the success of Qubilai in gaining the throne and his ill-judged removal of the political centre of gravity even further away to Dadu in far-off China – giving rise to a strategic overreach which was unique amongst conquest dynasties of the era. Chief amongst the possible challenges to Hülegüid governance that are identified here and which would have been complicated by the extended lines communications between the 'periphery' and the purported 'centre' was

¹⁶⁵ For example, *Juvayni*/Boyle, II, p. 508-509

the flawed basis of their right to being in the saddle in the first place, at least so far as some members of the Imperial Family were concerned.

Legitimacy

Both the Yuan and the Hūlegüids' control of their polities was bedevilled by a tainted legitimacy which was compounded in the case of the Hūlegüids by the perception of the neighbouring Jochids that Hūlegü had muscled in on their area of influence. That the Jochids could have a genuine grievance against Hūlegü is indicated by the generally well-informed Jūzjānī, who specifically remarks that after Möngke's death 'all the cities of the east and west and in the countries of 'Ajam, Mawara-un-Nahr and Khurāsān, the *Khutbah* is read for Barka Khan'.¹⁶⁶ Equally, Juvaynī tells of close links between Chinggisid officials in Central Eurasia and Batu's Court.¹⁶⁷

The fundamental issue revolved around the apportionment of the conquered areas and peoples by Chinggis Khan. Tolui's older brothers, Jochi, Ögödei and Chaghadaï, received specified territories,¹⁶⁸ some as yet unconquered, as their personal *ulus* or pasturage for their herds, whilst Tolui as the *Otchigin* or Hearth Prince received Chinggis Khan's original *yurt* which included the *ordos*, property, treasury, horsemen, emirs and private army of his father.¹⁶⁹ Crucially, however, the Conqueror's apportionment did not include Northern China or Iran, then coming under Chinggisid control. These two regions were expected to be administered by Chinggis Khan's successors for the benefit of all the Chinggisid branches, each of which enjoyed control of subjected households and income located in Iran and China.

¹⁶⁶Jūzjānī, p. 1291

¹⁶⁷ For example see Juvaynī/Boyle, vol. II, p. 487 and 488.

¹⁶⁸ For Jochi, see Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 117; for Chaghadaï, p. 145 and Ögödei, Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 43

¹⁶⁹Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 163

However, with the ascendancy of the Toluid grandsons of Chinggis Khan, this relatively tidy arrangement began to unravel. The contested elevation in 1251 of the eldest of Tolui's sons, Möngke, to the supreme Qa'anate – albeit with the support of the Jochid Khan, Batu – initiated an extended period of intra-Chinggisid conflict with the rejected Ögödeids in alliance with the Chaghadaids.

What is important for present purposes, however, is that Hülegü did not receive Azerbaijan and his wider Western Eurasian interests in a dispensation from Chinggis Khan. For this reason, the events surrounding the foundation of Hülegü's newly minted *ulus* have led to much scholarly deliberation on whether Möngke had a 'secret intent' in sending his brother as commander-in-chief to deal with issues of Chinggisid control in Western Eurasia¹⁷⁰ rather than the grand strategy outlined above. If Hülegü's purpose, either on his own initiative or at the instigation of Möngke, was to create a new *ulus* in Western Eurasia to counterbalance the Chaghadaids and Jochids, it could be seen as a deeply provocative action because it was not within the terms of the Founder's original dispensation.

In Chinggisid terms it would be considered 'unlawful'.¹⁷¹ To make matters worse for Hülegü, assuming his new *ulus* was established either at Möngke's instigation or with his blessing, and thereafter supported by Qubilai, such support could have been considered doubly provocative since Möngke and Qubilai were regarded as usurpers by some elements of the Imperial Family and especially by surviving Ögöeid dissidents. The view taken here is that it was Möngke, rather than Qubilai, who directed Hülegü to combine his military status of

¹⁷⁰ See also particular Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, pp. 18-23, Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*, ch. 2; ; P. Jackson "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire,"

¹⁷¹ Allsen in *Culture and Conquest* also takes the view that using the dignity of *Il-qan*, hence not giving them equal status with their cousins who had received their dispensations directly from Chinggis Khan, was a contrivance to avoid the charge that they had violated the will of the founding father, p. 22. Lane, however, argues that the Jochids did not exploit this lack of legitimacy or apparent usurpation of Jochid rights. *Early Mongol Rule*, p. 15

commander-in-chief with that of khan since the former role did not give him the status to control his unmanageable relatives. It may possibly be significant in this context that in his letter to King Louis in 1262 Hülegü was referred to as '*dux milicie Mungalorum*' or commander of the Mongolian military forces¹⁷² which aptly describes his role on arrival in the West but also as 'khan' which perhaps, albeit tentatively, lends credence to Grigor's account.

The major rift with the Jochids occurred, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, in 660/1262 but only after the supposed poisoning of the above Jochid princes in Hülegüid-held territory in revenge for Jochid support of Arīq Böke.¹⁷³ Kirakos confirms the deaths of the Jochid princes, but by the sword, giving a number of reasons: that it was partly prompted by the Jochid Khan Berke's support for Arīq Böke against Qubilai, partly at the instigation of the Chaghaidaid Khan, Alghu (r. 1260-1265) and quite plausibly, because the Jochid princes appear not to have accepted Hülegü's authority.¹⁷⁴

Despite the uncertainties surrounding these important events, there was a significant issue for the Hülegüid extended lines of communication. Het'um, in his *History of the Tartars*, mentions three routes leading to and from Hülegüid territories into the 'realm of Greater Asia'. 'One goes from Turkestan requiring passage of many days through the desert and no fodder for the horses is to be found there at all. From the context this was under the control of the Chaghadaids. The second route was via [Derbend on the western Caspian]... and the Iron Gate...' which he says is negotiable only in wintertime and was the Jochid route. The third route passed through the Black Sea which no

¹⁷² Paul Meyvaert "An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Ilkhan of Persia to King Louis of France", *Viator* 11 (1980), 253; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 21

¹⁷³ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 123

¹⁷⁴ *Kirakos Ganjakets'i/Bedrosian* ch. 65

invader contemplating attacking Hülegüid dominated territories had attempted.¹⁷⁵

Firstly and critically for the network, when hostilities broke out between the Hülegüids and Jochids the fastest route to East Eurasia from Azerbaijan via the Iron Gate, Northern Caspian/Jochid domains was endangered as reported by John of Monte Corvino from Dadu.¹⁷⁶ Secondly, the route via Turkestan was dependent on the goodwill of the Chaghadaids and the third route, which was used by the senior Polos on their first, unplanned trip to East Asia, also went via Jochid held territory. In effect, the Hülegüids were isolated except for the dangerous sea route.

That the Yuan continued to consider the Hülegüids in military terms as their supreme commanders in western Eurasia until the final years of their tenure in Azerbaijan and beyond is spelled out in the *Yuan Shih*, in the context of Hülegü's holdings in the Yuan. Here the current ruler, Öljeitü (703-716/1304-1316) is referred to as *guarding* 'a far distant corner'¹⁷⁷ – by inference on behalf of the Yuan emperor. Thus it would be a mistake to equate a Chinggisid Khan with the 'Just Prince' of the Muslim genre of 'Mirrors of Princes'.¹⁷⁸ Such 'guard duties' in their corner of the fractious and fractured imperium also included the duty of consultation with the supreme commander, the Qa'an.

¹⁷⁵Het'um/Bedrosian, section 47

¹⁷⁶ First Letter of John of Monte Corvino, in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, ed. H. Yule, pp. 200-201

¹⁷⁷YS, ch. 85, pp. 2141-42, Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 49

¹⁷⁸ E.g. *The Sea of Precious Virtues (Bahr al-Favā'id) A Medieval Islamic Mirror for Princes*, ed. Meisami, 1991. *Sulwan al-Muta' fi'Udwan al-Atba, al-Siqilli*, tr. Kechichian & Dekmejian, 2003

The Duty of Consultation

What should be noted in this connection is a statement by Het 'um the Historian in his *The Flower of Histories of the East* - though it should be borne in mind that this was composed in 1307 CE:

Temur Khan 'resides in the great city of Cathay called Eons [Beijing], built by his father..... *There are three kings, rulers of large lordships, who obey this emperor, everything being referred to him and resolved by him.* [They are: Chapar [Khan of Chagatai, 1300-8], Totay [Toqta Khan, ruler of Qipchaq 1291-1312], and Tarbanda [Muhammed Uljeitü Gharbanda or Khar-Banda/Khuda-Banda, Ilkhan of Persia 1304-16]¹⁷⁹

That consultation with the 'centre', that is the Qa'an, was considered mandatory is shown by Möngke's actions immediately after his accession 649/1251 when he commanded that in future his relatives were not to write or issue instructions in any matter relating to the administration of the provinces without consulting the ministers of the Court.¹⁸⁰ What is particularly pertinent for this study, however, is that matters of import were to be referred - and indeed according to Het 'um should continue to be referred - to the Court of the Qa'an in far-off Dadu.

As can be judged from these edicts, communication between Tabriz/Sultaniyya and Qaraqorum/Dadu should not be conceived in terms of the occasional missive containing family news, but was a pivotal requirement within the Chinggisid ruling order, hence the crucial importance of 'communication' and the security of the roads. Juvaynī, in fact, in his rendition of Batu's speech to his relatives at the *quriltai* of 1251 encouraging them to support Möngke's election as Qa'an specifically refers to him as one whose 'sound judgement and

¹⁷⁹ Emphasis added. Het 'um the Historians *History of the Tatars, The Flower of Histories of the East*, ch. 47 trans. Robert Bedrosian.

¹⁸⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 219

penetrating counsel might control the lands *and guard the roads*' (emphasis added).¹⁸¹

Unfortunately, it is not easy to ascertain how much weight Möngke's surviving relatives gave to this edict. What it does illustrate, however, is that Möngke was prepared to stamp on the bid amongst some princes for independence of action and re-establish the tradition of consultation with the centre. This in turn required an efficient communication system even if it did not permit for efficient administration. Thus whilst the idea of consultation is all very well¹⁸² there are practical aspects too, including that of the sheer physical feasibility of the process, both in terms of the difficulties of transmission and in terms of the time factor involved, both of which were considerable so far as the Hülegüids were concerned.

This latter consideration, even without the complicating factor of intra-Chinggisid hostilities impeding communications, would arguably provide an impetus towards 'autonomy' though this is another concept that needs to be treated with care. In this context, however, it refers to a polity that is free to make its own rules and regulations, but within the confines of a larger government structure¹⁸³ - in the Chinggisid instance this would be an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the Qa'an - whilst formal independence would imply sovereign power over all aspects of the state.

Further Critical Vulnerabilities

There were, however, other aggravating factors which complicated Hülegüid governance and were directly related to communication 'overreach'. Firstly, the transfer of their income from their interests in

¹⁸¹ Juvaynī/Boyle, vol. II, p. 559

¹⁸² Examples of consultation: Juvaynī/Boyle, pp. 596, 598, 599-606

¹⁸³ Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* (Procedural Aspects of International Law) University of Pennsylvania Press; Revised edition 1996

China was, as will be seen, caught up in the 'closure of the roads'. Secondly, there may have been problems in 'reinforcements' and this will be briefly examined in the 'Resupply Function' of the strategic communication network in Part III, Chapter IX.

Lastly, it should also be recognised that there were factors which were not a result of the distance of the Hülegüid rulers from Dadu but were rather a product of their journey within the short space of forty years from the Otrar incident in 1218 to the conquest of Baghdad in 1258. Thus from their early rough-edged, impoverished, illiterate, superstitious, status-conscious and marginal existence on the steppe the conquerors had to overcome more 'developmental' challenges than their conquest predecessors. As will be examined below in the context of their communications, many of these issues were faced head-on.

PART II

INCEPTION OF CHINGGISID STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

CHAPTER II

The Mongol Worldview in the Late Twelfth Century

In this chapter it will be argued that the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century were also a history of expanding horizons, in geographical as well as in intellectual terms. Compared to other conquerors between the first millennium CE to the time of the Amir Tīmūr, the Mongols' unique characteristics, tucked away in their remote backwater of Eurasia, were both their marginality and their limited geographical and geopolitical horizons. Whilst their intellectual adjustment to their role on a wider stage than Mongolia is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Mongol phenomenon, it is beyond the remit here. What is relevant, however, is an examination, as far as is possible, of the geopolitical element of Chinggis Khan's *Weltanschauung* before he embarked on his conquests of much of Eurasia.

The Mongols in the Late Twelfth Century

Four hundred years before the birth of Temujin, Al Jāhiz's (169-225/776-868) description of the Tūrks of his time succinctly summed up the characteristics not only of the Tūrks, but also the twelfth century Mongols:

Uninterested in craftsmanship or commerce,
medicine, geometry, fruit-farming, building,
digging canals or collecting taxes, they care only
about raiding, hunting, horsemanship,

skirmishing with rival chieftains, taking booty and
invading other countries.¹⁸⁴

Almost four hundred years later Zhao Gong, the Sung envoy to Chinggis Khan in 1221, noted that there were three branches of 'Tatars', the White, the Black and the Raw. In Zhao Gong's considered view the 'Tatars' of his time were 'very simple and barbarous'¹⁸⁵ though the White Tatars were of a more delicate appearance and were respectful, cautious and filial.¹⁸⁶ These were not the branch to which Chinggis Khan belonged, indeed Zhao specifically refers to Chinggis and his generals and great ministers as being Black Tatars.¹⁸⁷

Whilst all Mongols were considered barbarous by Zhao, some were clearly more so than the rest. Thus the 'Raw Tatars', who from his description were still clearly Mongol horsemen and thus were of some standing he considered:

'very poor, crude and incompetent' whose
only talent was mounting their horses
and following along with the rest.....¹⁸⁸

This to some extent may have reflected the traditional Chinese disdainful categorisation of their non-Han neighbours, particularly those on their north-eastern borders, into either 'cooked' or 'uncooked' barbarians.¹⁸⁹ The 'cooked' barbarians were those living close to China and were influenced by Chinese civilisation, such as the White Tatars, or Onggut *irgen*¹⁹⁰. The 'uncooked' or 'raw' Tartars included those living

¹⁸⁴ *Al Jāhiz: The Life and Works of Jāhiz* - trans. of selected texts by Charles Pellat, trans. from the French by D M Hawke, p.97

¹⁸⁵ Zhao Gong's "A Complete Record of the Mong Tatars." (Unpublished translation by Christopher P. Atwood with assistance from Lynne Struve, 2010)
<https://www.eastwestcentre.org/sites/all/NEHMongol2014/1.Zhao.pdf>. p. 3

¹⁸⁶ See following paragraph on their identification

¹⁸⁷ Zhao Gong, p. 2

¹⁸⁸ Zhao Gong, p. 2

¹⁸⁹ Morgan, *The Mongols*, 1986 p. 35

¹⁹⁰ Morgan, *The Mongols*, 1986 p. 35

on the margins of the steppe and forest further from the benefits of Chinese civilisation¹⁹¹ whilst the Black Tartars, though also ‘simple and barbarous’ were not quite as crude and incompetent as their ‘uncooked’ or ‘Raw’ compatriots.

Moreover, even their steppe neighbours considered the Mongols uncouth.¹⁹² Whilst there is the possibility that elements of such views could be ‘literary tropes’¹⁹³ illustrating the rise of a great leader from exceptionally humble beginnings, such reports of the early Mongols by those acquainted with them in their pre-and-early imperial days unanimously concur that the pre-imperial Mongols were exceptionally rough even by the standards of the steppe. Not just ‘uncooked’ and uncouth¹⁹⁴ as well as illiterate but regarded with contempt and scorn, tributary to everyone, with the apparent height of their opulence being iron stirrups for their greatest amirs.

Moreover, Zhao also implies that the Mongols had fallen on very hard times since ‘In olden times there was the Monggus kingdom.... [which] once harassed the [Jurchen] causing distress’ but it appears the Mongols were bought off in the time-honoured fashion by presents of gold and silk.¹⁹⁵ By the time of Zhao, however:

The Tatars today are very primitive and barbarous and have almost no institutions. I (Gong) once looked into that statement and learned that even the remnants of the

¹⁹¹ Owen Lattimore remarks on the importance of the margins, either between steppe and sown or between steppe and forest, and comments that the Khitan Liao, the Jurchen Chin and the Manchus were all masters of the marginal terrain before taking over northern China. Lattimore, ‘The Geographical Factor in Mongol History’. 1938, p.13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1787812>

¹⁹² Juvaynī,/Boyle, p.21; Jūzjānī p. 936; Het’um/Bedrosian, ch.16.

¹⁹³ In his ‘Epic Themes in the Secret History of the Mongols’, Larry Moses does not list a theme based on an impoverished outcast hero amongst his criteria for identifying ‘epic’ themes. *Folklore*, vol. 99, No. 2 (1988), pp. 170-173

¹⁹⁴ When the Roman Empire was threatened by the Turkic Huns, they too were described as being ugly and with ragged clothes which were worn until they disintegrated because of their habit of never washing.

¹⁹⁵ *Zhao Gong*, p. 3

Mong were ravaged and eliminated long ago.”¹⁹⁶

Such poverty and marginality, however, are curious since sixty years before the 1206 *quriltai* confirming the election of Temujin as Khan, the *Ta-Chin Kuo-chih* bears out Zhao’s reference to a high point in Mongol history:

‘It is said that in the year 1147, after much fighting at the northern border of the Chin, the state of the Mongols (*Meng-ku kuo*) was pacified and “its chieftain Ao-lo po-chi-lieh was invested as assisting state ruler of the *Meng*. Only after that peaceful relations were established. (The Chin) gave annually very generous presents. Thereupon Ao-lo po-chi-lieh called himself Ancestral and Originating Emperor (or *Tsu-yuan huang-ti*) and proclaimed the era *T’ien-hsing* ¹⁹⁷(Heavenly Rise). The Great Chin had used military force but eventually could not subdue them and only sent elite troops which occupied several strategic points and then returned.” ¹⁹⁸

This ‘Ancestral and Originating Emperor’ was Temujin’s Great-Uncle Qutula Khan.¹⁹⁹ The lineage of Chinggis Khan was thus aristocratic and of the Kiyat/Qiyat branch of the Borjigid Mongols.²⁰⁰ Aristocratic roots do not necessarily a world conqueror make and after Temujin’s father, Yesügei Ba’atur, was murdered by the Tartars, the youngster and his family were abandoned by their distant cousins, the Tayici’ut, whose Borgijid branch had produced a khan slightly earlier than Qutula Khan. At this desperate moment the very survival of the family seemed improbable.

¹⁹⁶ Zhao Gong, p. 3

¹⁹⁷ Franke’s, ‘From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God’ comments that this reign name, apart from one instance, belongs to illegitimate or barbarian usurpers.

¹⁹⁸ Franke, ‘From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God’ p.10

¹⁹⁹ According to the family tree in de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols* between pages 1348 and 1349.

²⁰⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 35

There seems no reason, therefore, to quibble with the view of a modern-day Mongolian historian who has been moved to observe of the period immediately before the rise of Chinggis Khan that ‘the Mongols had no obvious influence in Central Asia before the twelfth century’. In his view, ‘their name before the period of Chinggis Khaan had an extremely limited area of use and was only applied to the members of a small tribe that lived southeast of Lake Baikal as far as the Khentii Mountains.’²⁰¹

This ‘Rise of the Mongols’ from obscurity to ‘World Conquerors’ has been exhaustively examined, not least by contemporaries such as Juvaynī, Jūzjānī and Ibn al-Athīr, who indeed had a vested interest in the predicament in which much of Eurasia was mired. Their despair was further fuelled by the fact that whilst the lately departed Seljūqs and Khwārazmshahs had at least been Muslim, the Mongols palpably were not. Over and above this absorbing ‘rags to riches’ saga, however, is the intriguing question of whether it is possible to determine the ‘worldview’ of the pre-conquest Mongols and Temujin.

The Geo-Political Horizons of the late Twelfth Century Mongols

It is a vast leap from the apparently narrow horizons of north-western Mongolia as articulated in the *Secret History* to the title which ‘Ata-Malik Juvaynī gave his work - *Juvaynī’s History of the World Conqueror*, a world conquest which at the time of his writing in 650-651/1252-1253 in Qaraqorum was proceeding apace. As Ibn al-Athīr famously remarked,

A people emerged from the confines of China
and made for the cities of Transoxania...²⁰²

²⁰¹ Bat-Ochir Bold, 2001, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A reconstruction of the ‘Medieval’ History of Mongolia*. p.82

²⁰² Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 202

Broadening Geo-Political Horizons: The Kereit Connection

The impression gained from the *Secret History* is that there is little evidence that the young Temujin's geo-political horizons extended beyond his immediate environs. The traditional focus of the steppe was China and Temujin was evidently fully conscious of the Jurchen/Chin (1115-1234 CE) in North China. Indeed, according to Zhao Gong, Temujin had been captured by the Jurchen/Chin when he was small and kept in slavery for ten years until he managed to escape, 'thus he has a thorough knowledge of Jin affairs'.²⁰³ Though this captivity is not recorded in the *Secret History*, Zhao's statement does imply that Chinggis Khan was not an ignoramus when it came to northern China. Indeed with his proclivity for vengeance²⁰⁴ this was yet another potential reason for his subsequent attacks on them over and above the unpleasant death as a prisoner of the Jurchen/Chin of Chinggis Khan's Great-Grandfather Qabul Khan's cousin and successor, the Kiyat Borjigin Tayiçi'ut, Ambaqai Khan. As the captive was on his way to being delivered to the Chin Emperor, the Altan Qa'an, the *Secret History* memorably invokes Ambaqai's message to his relatives demanding they avenge his death:

Until the nails of your five fingers
Are ground down
Until your ten fingers are worn away
Strive to revenge me! ²⁰⁵

Whilst it might have been the sacred duty of the Mongols to avenge their Khan, and Chinggis does appear to have taken vengeance rather seriously, there is a serious flaw in this particular vengeance scenario.

²⁰³ This long captivity was not mentioned in the *Secret History* and is complicated by the fact that Zhao says it occurred when Temujin was 'small'. As his father took him to be betrothed at the age of nine it must have occurred after his father's murder but would mean that if captured just before puberty almost his entire teenage years were spent as a slave of the Jurchen/Chin which does not fit in with the account of his early years in the *SH*. Zhao Gong, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ See *SH*, esp. paras 58, 113, 154

²⁰⁵ *SH* para 53

It was the Tayiçi'ut who had abandoned Temujin's family after the death of his father, and who indeed had subsequently determined to eliminate the youngster as he was growing up because, as his subsequent savour told him, he was clever and his Tayiçi'ut kinsmen were jealous of him because

There is fire in your eyes
There is light in your face²⁰⁶

Arthur Waley has identified another and perhaps more plausible motive for attacking the Jurchen/Chin. He postulates, based on the *Meng-ta Pei-lu*, that it was Chinqai, an early adviser to the Conqueror, a Christian and possibly an Uighur, who encouraged Chinggis in his Jurchen/Chin campaigns.

‘a certain native of Tūrkestan with the surname Tien [who] had acquired enormous wealth by commerce. This man had travelled about a great deal in Shantung and northern China. He described to the Mongols the richness of these lands and as his account coincided with that of some levies who had revolted against the rulers of northern Chin and joined the Mongols, it was decided to make an attack on the border provinces of northern China’.²⁰⁷

What is evident is that Temujin, even if not from personal experience as a slave, had access to data on northern China. What is not quite so evident, however, is whether, as an aspiring leader, he had a similar grasp of the geo-political situation in Western Eurasia or indeed

²⁰⁶ *SH* para 82. Jackson & Morgan postulate that Rubruck's mention of the Tangut capturing Chinggis Khan in battle in one of his five campaigns against them between 1205 and 1227 may be a confusion with his capture by the Tayiçi'ut. Rubruck, p.158, note 1

²⁰⁷ Chinkai was at Baljuna and subsequently c. 1222 was deputed to escort the Taoist Ch'ang Ch'un on what for an elderly sage was an epic trans-Eurasian trip from China to north Afghanistan. Li Chih-Ch'ang, trans & ed. Arthur Waley, *Travels of an Alchemist*, p. 37.

whether he had any inkling of the existence of the caliphate or that there was an Islamic world far to his west.

Temujin's Mentor: the Influence of the Ong Khan

In his early manhood Temujin's worldview seems to have been largely constructed through the prism of his patron, who had been his late father's blood brother, or *anda*, the Kereit Khan To'oril (Türkisch: Toghril). In the *Secret History* To'oril, or the Ong Khan to give him the Jurchen/Chin title by which he is generally known, is portrayed as a rather unsavoury character given to murdering his own brothers but he was also one of the most important figures of the eastern steppe. Once he had brutally established himself with the help of Temujin's father, Yesügei Ba'atur, the young Temujin was placed with other youngsters as a 'hostage' to be brought up at the peripatetic court of the Ong Khan. Thus To'oril must have been the most important exemplar for Temujin in his wealth,²⁰⁸ domestic, military and administrative arrangements though as subsequent history was to show, not an ideal model.

As Togan has pointed out, Qutula Khan, then Khan of the Mongols, did not approve of his kinsman Yesügei's support of the Ong Khan, preferring instead the unstained character of To'oril's uncle, the *Gürkhan*, but Yesügei persisted. There is a strong inference that both his and To'oril's accumulation of power was against the established order rather than with the support of the elder statesmen of the lineages.²⁰⁹ For present purposes, however, To'oril was also important to the development of Temujin since the Ong Khan was well travelled, even if not always by his own choosing.

²⁰⁸ Compared to the Mongols. According to the *SH* the Ong Khan is known to have had a gold painted *ger* as well as golden kumiss bowls, Onon, *SH*, p. 83 but such descriptions should be treated with care, since 'golden' could also mean regal or as with Chinggis Khan's reference to his 'Golden Reins' with the meaning of imperial.

²⁰⁹ Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations: The Kerait Khanate and Chinggis Khan*, p. 72, argues that both the Ong Khan and Yesügei made their careers by defending the unusual and not the traditional.

The Kereit *irgen* or people consisted of diverse Türk, Mongol and possibly Tangut *yasun* or lineages. They were located to the south-west of the Mongols on the Orkhon, Kerulen and Onon rivers, and controlled much of Central-Eastern Mongolia stretching southwards towards the Gobi Desert. Rashīd al-Dīn regarded them as being of the “tribes of the Türks” as well as having cultural ties with the Nestorian communities among the Uighur, Qarluq Türks and the Qarakhitai Empire.²¹⁰ As Isenbike Togan remarks, the Kereits ‘were not at all an isolated tribe roaming aimlessly on the Mongolia steppes. On the contrary they had connections with most of the neighbouring people in Inner and East Asia’.²¹¹ The Ong Khan’s brother Jaqa Gambu had been brought up amongst the Hsi Hsia/Tanguts.²¹²

Such connections were not always from choice as the Ong Khan’s early career graphically shows - as well as illustrating both the hazards of life on the steppe and providing an insight into how horizons could be broadened through adversity. At the age of seven To’oril was kidnapped by the Merkit peoples, (who were also involved in the kidnap of Temujin’s own wife) until To’oril’s father raided the Merkit and rescued his son. His days of being captured continued, when he was thirteen years old, he was carried off together with his mother, though this time by Ajai Qan of the Tatar who made him look after his camels until he managed to escape.²¹³

²¹⁰ According to Abū’l-Faraj (Bar Hebraeus) in the *Syriac Chronicle* and *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* repeating earlier legends the Kereit khan converted to Christianity in 1007 - also found in *Kitāb’l-Mijdal*, or *Book of the Tower*, by Mari b. Sulaiman, a Nestorian of the twelfth century who wrote in Arabic. See D M Dunlop in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London vol.11, no. 2 (1944) 276-289. Bar Hebraeus’s account is disputed by Erica Hunter who regards it as an interpolation by Bar Hebraeus himself. See ‘The conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in A.D. 1007’, *Zentralasiatische Studien* 22 (1989), 142-163

²¹¹ Isenbike Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations: The Kerait Khanate and Chinggis Khan*, p. 78

²¹² The Tangut state of Hsi Hsia founded in 1032 CE was destroyed by the Mongols in 1227. It had comprised part of the Ordos and Shensi, as well as Kansu and Ninghsia. Its capital was Chung-hsing, the former Ning-hsia hsien (now Yin-ch’uan in Ninghsia) known to the Mongols as Eriqaya.

²¹³ *SH*, para. 152, de Rachewiltz II p. 561

To'oril's adventures were not yet over since he was forced to flee on at least three further occasions. Once, before 1161 when, after killing his half-brothers who were the sons of a Naiman princess, to the outrage of her Naiman relatives, he fled to the frontiers of the Jurchen/Chin for around seven years until restored with the help of Chinggis Khan's father, Yesügei Ba'atur. Secondly, after attempting to murder another half-brother, he was forced by the hostile Naiman to disappear again, this time to the *Gürkhan* of the Qarakhitai in Tūrkestan, possibly between 1173-1174, followed by a rather longer period in circa 1194/1196 which lasted perhaps two years.²¹⁴ As Temujin himself pointed out, travel to the comparative security of Qarakhitai territory was a long and arduous journey which ended with To'oril's return, albeit in desperate straits. He was then restored, though shakily, to his previous eminence by Yesügei.²¹⁵

The Ong Khan, on the occasion of this last flight, had covered a lot of ground, possibly because of having to make extensive detours to avoid the hostile Naiman *irgen* situated to his west whose territory. Thus "[Ong Qan] in his wanderings (Mongolian *Bitün yorciju* – gone wandering about) had already passed three cities and has made his way to the *gürkhan*/universal qan of the Qarakhitai. From there, having rebelled against the *gürkhan*, he passed through the cities of the Uyiquit (Uighurs) and the Tangut."²¹⁶ The Ong Khan, then, was also a source of considerable information on the 'outside' world.

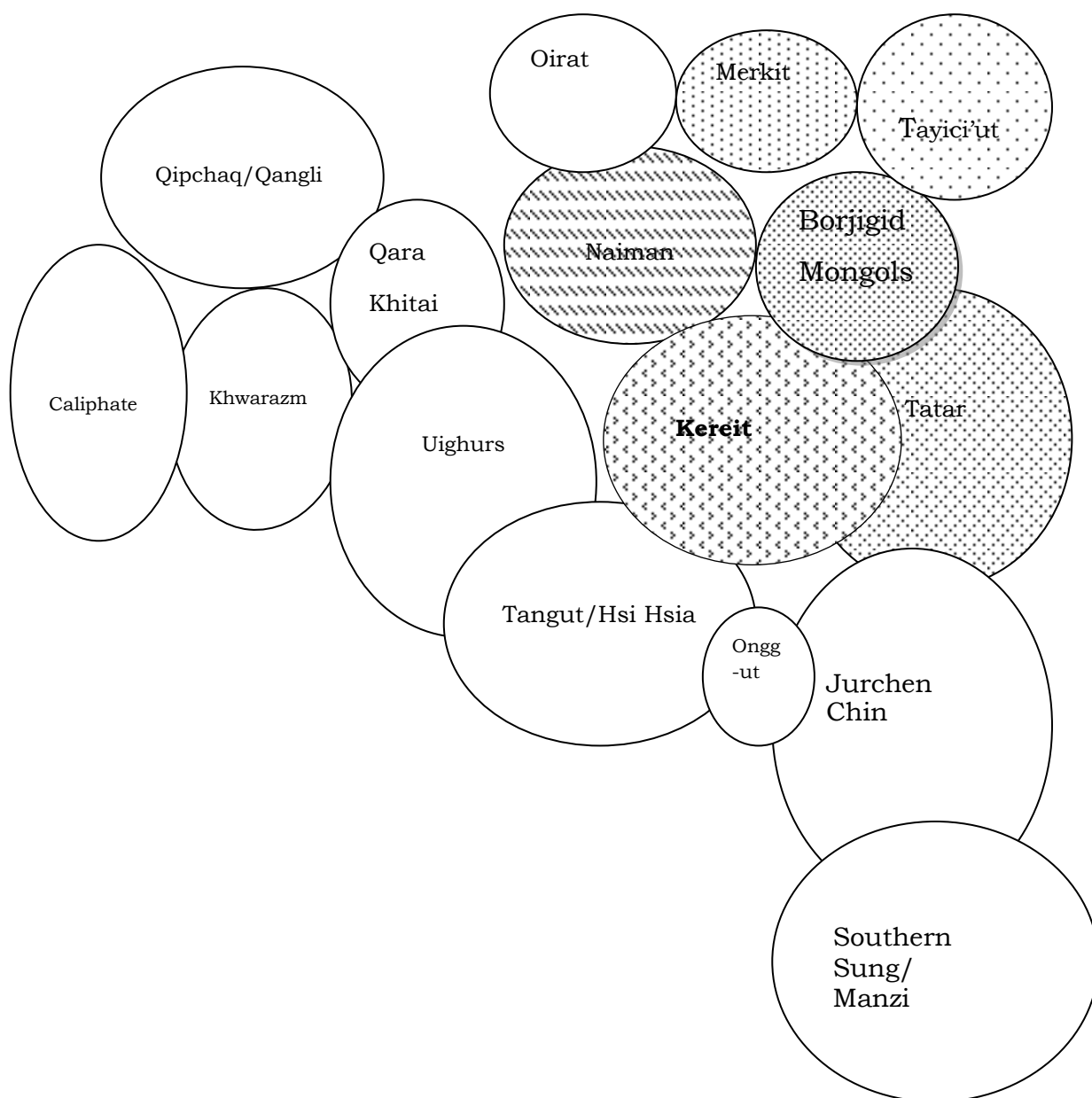
Given Chinggis Khan's thirst for intelligence and close contacts with the Ong Khan, by 1206 he would have absorbed and mentally worked out a geographical, political and topographical schema derived from To'oril's travels as well as his own recent contacts.

²¹⁴ SH, paras. 151, 152; Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations* p. 87

²¹⁵ SH, para. 164

²¹⁶ SH, para. 152

Chinggis Khan's Worldview in the late Twelfth Century



Key: patterned circles = main interactions of the Borjigid Mongols in late 1100s

Diagram adapted from Isenbike Togan, p. 16

Early Contacts between Mongols and Muslims

How far the Dār al-Islām was *terrae incognitae* for Chinggis Khan is not easy to ascertain. In the *Secret History* Muslims are generally referred to as *Sarta'ul irgen* or *sartaq* which designated any native of Central and Western Asia and after Chinggis Khan's commanders Jebe and Sübe'etei Ba'atur clashed with the troops of Khwārazmshah Muhammad in 1216/17, this term also designated Khwārazm.²¹⁷ The *Secret History* also has references to *sartaq* sheep, (*sartaqchin qonin*) which are the fat-tailed sheep of Uzbekistan and the Kirghiz steppe.²¹⁸

The Ong Khan's furthest travels westwards were to the Qarakhitai, the elite of whom were Buddhist, at least until the usurpation of the Naiman refugee prince, Küchluk, though the population was primarily Muslim. However, the earliest known actual contact between Temujin and a Muslim was in the desperate days following Temujin's forced retreat to Lake Baljuna in c.599/1202. There has been much discussion as to the location of Baljuna, with the two leading possibilities being 51°N 113/114°E which would place it in today's Buriat Republic or 48°N 119°E which, in view of the Onggut connection below, would place it more plausibly on the border between today's Mongolia and Inner Mongolia.²¹⁹ This latter location has the added advantage of casting some light on Temujin's first recorded acquaintance with the Islamic world in the form of an encounter with a Muslim trader.

According to the *Secret History*, a Muslim trader, Asan the Sartaq, whose identity has also generated much discussion amongst scholars,²²⁰ providentially appeared mounted on a white camel driving a

²¹⁷ *SH*, De Rachewiltz II, pp. 845 and 931

²¹⁸ *SH* para 181, de Rachewiltz II, p.654

²¹⁹ For overview of the scholarly debate see de Rachewiltz, *SH* II, p. 655-658; Perlee, Kh. 'On some Place Names in the Secret History', tr. L. Moses, *MSt*.9: 1985-8, 83-102

²²⁰ *SH*, De Rachewiltz II, pp. 657-658.

thousand sheep downstream thereby supplying Chinggis Khan and his remaining loyal adherents with food.²²¹

The critical piece of information, however, gained from the *Secret History*, is that this Muslim had reached Baljuna from the Onggut *irgen*²²² whose vast domains paralleled the Great Wall of China. This slight evidence could imply that Asan/Hasan may not have toiled from Central Eurasia to providentially save Chinggis Khan from starvation but either from Jurchen/Chin territory to the east or possibly from the Tarim basin, skirting the southern Gobi to enter the Onggut region.²²³ However, driving a vast herd of sheep from the Onggut lands across the Gobi to Baljuna would be a difficult enterprise. Whilst Asan/Hasan needs to be treated with caution, there seems no reason to doubt that some time later *bona fide* Central Eurasian Muslims were persuaded by potential profit margins that travelling to the court of Chinggis Khan was worth the potential risks.

For the Islamic world such ventures were to prove a mixed blessing. As Juvaynī remarks, in their early rise the Mongols regarded Muslims with respect and would even erect for them clean tents of white felt but, to his regret, such respect did not last.²²⁴ Juvaynī gives as a reason the grasping behaviour of three Muslim traders who had taken the opportunity of putting together ‘an immeasurable quantity of merchandise’ including gold embroidered fabrics, cottons and Zandan cloth to tempt Chinggis Khan to part with some of his new-found

²²¹ *SH* para 182.

²²² *SH* para 182. The Onggut were a Turkish tribe, converted to Nestorian Christianity who had been settled by the Tang court in the great bend of the Yellow River in the 9th century and were very much Sinicized. In 1204 they allied with Chinggis Khan which was sealed by a marriage between Chinggis Khan’s daughter Alaqaï Beki and the son of the Onggut Khan, Boyoqa, marriage alliances continuing for several reigns. See *SH*, II de Rachewiltz, p. 656

²²³ The Taklamakan oases – Kashgaria - had been conquered by the Muslim Qarakhanids in the mid-tenth century until they were conquered in turn by the Khitan Liao in 1130 so this particular Muslim trader may just have come from Kashgaria, skirting the southern Gobi to enter Onggut territory and hence to Baljuna.

²²⁴ Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 78

wealth. These traders irritated the conqueror to such an extent that they were lucky to escape with their lives. Hence Juvaynī's resigned observation that 'today on account of their calumny one of another and other defects in their morals they have rendered themselves thus abject and ragged'.²²⁵

Notwithstanding his exasperation, Chinggis Khan utilised the return of the traders in c. 1218 by putting together a trading caravan of his own 'in order to engage in commerce' and 'acquire strange and precious wares' from the territory of the Khwārazmshah. However, despite its role as a historical watershed, what is also interesting about this ill-fated caravan to Otrar was that four hundred and fifty Muslims were allegedly gathered from amongst the entourages of the Chinggisid elite to accompany it.²²⁶

Before Baljuna in 599/1202 or 1203, then, it is quite possible that Chinggis Khan's geo-political awareness of western and central Eurasia was, somewhat unexpectedly, predicated on sheep. Nevertheless, through subsequent contacts with Muslim traders he was becoming increasingly conversant with Muslims, if not reliably *au fait* with the geo-political composition of Western Eurasia nor was his view of Muslims necessarily positive. This particular geo-political horizon was to become considerably broadened, however, because of the actions of the Muslim Khwārazmshah Muhammad (r. 596-617/1200-1220).

By the time of his confrontation with the Khwārazmshah in 1218, the putative world conqueror had the incumbent Jurchen/Chin dynasty in northern China effectively on the run. He had also forced the Tangut/Hsi Hsia to submit after campaigns against them in 1205, 1207 and 1209 which would have given his commanders experience of

²²⁵ Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 78

²²⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 79

difficult logistics since they were located south of the Gobi.²²⁷ These and the campaigns against the Chin thus helped to develop not just the Chinggisids' military and diplomatic skills, as well as introducing them to possible administrative templates,²²⁸ they also considerably contributed to the expansion of their geographical and geo-political horizons.

Widening Horizons – the Mongols and the Dār al-Islām

West of the Pamirs, the Khwārazmshah, whose alleged ambitions also included the conquest of Chin, despatched envoys/spies under the leadership of Bahā ad-Dīn Rāzī to verify Chinggisid activities in Eastern Eurasia.²²⁹ The embassy reported back that Northern China was in a state of devastation but that Chinggis Khan considered the Khwārazmshah to be the ruler of the West as he himself was ruler of the East. Furthermore, it was suggested such a policy of peaceful co-existence would enable trading relations to be established between the two sides. De Rachewiltz argues that there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Chinggis Khan. This, however, is not necessarily for the reason he gives, that only two nomad empires, the Xiongnu and the Tūrks had embraced both the eastern and western parts of Central Asia. It is more likely to have been because the Khwārazmshah had not yet given Chinggis Khan a reason for either punishment or revenge.²³⁰ Alternatively, it is quite possible that Chinggis Khan was biding his time

²²⁷ The Tangut's ruler, Burqan Qan, reneged on his submission when he refused to provide military assistance in 1226, leading to the invasion and destruction of the Hsi Hsia state.

²²⁸ The selective adoption of Chinese practices can be seen in the career of the son of Chinggis Khan's supreme commander in the Far East, Muqali, who had Chinese tutors and under Qubilai mediated between Mongol and Chinese administrative practices. Within the imperial family, the most prominent beneficiaries of such practices were Tolui's widow Sorqoqtani Beki (d. 1252) and their sons who were allotted as part of their share of the profits of empire Chen-ting in Hopei province, the administration of which provided administrative insights into governing northern China for Qubilai in particular.

²²⁹ from whom Jūzjānī received his first-hand information

²³⁰ See *SH*, esp. paras 58, 113, 154

by waiting for a *casus belli*, though it is equally possible that his geopolitical horizons simply did not embrace western Eurasia at this period of his career of conquest.

The pre-Chinggisid Mongols then appear to have had no more than a local presence around the time of the birth of Temujin with limited geopolitical horizons though the steppe love of gossip and heroic epics would have provided some degree of geopolitical awareness. Temujin's own *weltanschauung*, it has been argued, was at first influenced by his relations with the Ong Khan in his capacity as mentor, ally and inadvertent traveller and his horizons subsequently broadened through his early campaigns.

‘... a commander should have itineraries of all the war zones very fully written so that he may thoroughly acquaint himself with the intervening terrain, as regards not only distance but standard of roads and may study reliable descriptions of short-cuts, deviations, mountains and rivers.’

Vegetius’s ‘De re militari’ c. 383-95 CE²³¹

CHAPTER III

The Challenge of *Terrae Incognitae* - Mongol Orientation and Cognitive Navigation

Though the *Secret History* can be considered simply as an ‘epic’ account of the rise of the Borjigid Mongols and of their early campaigns,²³² it is also a history of movement and communication, of overcoming inadequacies and problematic logistics. Moreover, whilst the Chinggisids did not pioneer new routes between east and west Eurasia, they still had to ‘discover’ these ancient channels of communication for themselves. One incidental conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that the Mongols ‘discovery’ of Western Eurasia with the limited technology available to them is one of the unsung achievements of exploration and navigation.

Thus the focus of this chapter and that following is to explore from a Mongol perspective some of the underlying practicalities and constraints on travel and communication. These include navigation, orientation and the limitations of their transmission technology as they faced up to challenges of their expanding mental and geographical horizons. This will, it is hoped, go some way towards an appreciation of the constraints of their subsequent *Yām* network.

²³¹ Vegetius *De re militari* (Military Institutions of the Romans) quoted in the *History of Cartography*, vol. I, pp. 236-237

²³² De Rachewiltz, in his introduction to the *SH* believes that it is safe to state that the *SH* is an ‘epic chronicle’ rather than an ‘heroic epic’ p. lxix

Mongols and Maps

Juvaynī, at best ambivalent about the new order, marvelled how Chinggis Khan had ‘sallied forth, a single man, with few troops and no accoutrement, reduced and subjugated the lords of the horizons from the East unto the West.’²³³ Whilst intelligence and guides are both essential requisites in planning campaigns in unfamiliar territory they do not give the kind of overview provided by a map. It was thus even more remarkable that Chinggis Khan, as commander-in-chief, had to do without the luxury of ‘itineraries of all the war zones very fully written out’ as recommended by Vegetius in his *Military Manual* of c. 383 CE.

This was not because cartography was unknown in Eastern Eurasia. Nor was it unknown in Western Eurasia though the *jūghrāfiya* tradition was less an aid to navigation than a visual representation of the Dār al-Islām or a visual expression of a ruler’s power. In Eastern Eurasia, however, there was a long history of the military applications of maps (*tu*).²³⁴ Chinese commanders and senior officials had experience going back hundreds of years of using maps as strategic tools enabling them to plan their campaigns, analyse the difficulties of the terrain, check distances and secure their communications. Whereas the early Chinggisid commanders gave their reports orally, their opposite numbers in the Middle Kingdom were expected to produce written reports to the throne and as a much later gazetteer from 1894 exhorted “Narration of events without maps is not clear; and maps without explanation are not intelligible.”²³⁵

²³³ *Tarīkh-i Jahān-gushā/Juvaynī* I, p. 24

²³⁴ Cordell D.K. Yee, Chinese Maps in Political Culture, Ch. 4 in *History of Cartography* p. 72 note 9: Cordell explains that the character for *tu* can be ambiguous but by the early Han was used in the sense of a plan or chart whilst *ditu* = land+drawing denoted geographic maps.

²³⁵ *Guangping fu zhi*, 1894. Cordell D.K. Yee, Chinese Maps in Political Culture, Ch. 4 in *History of Cartography* p. 91

In the *Guanzi*, or the book of Master Guan, dating from the third century BCE, in an instruction reminiscent of that of Vegetius above, there is an explicit direction that:

All military commanders must first examine and come to know maps. They must know thoroughly the location of winding mountain passes; streams that may inundate their chariots; famous mountains, passable valleys, arterial rivers; highlands and hills; the places where grasses, trees and rushes grow; the distance of roads, the size of city and suburban walls; they should completely store up [in their minds] the ways in and out of and the contrasts in the terrain..... This is the constant value of maps.²³⁶

The military success of the Western Jin (265-317) was attributed by the cartographer Pei Xiu (223-271) to accurate maps of rival states²³⁷ and the use of three-dimensional maps for military tacticians was known from at least 32 CE. After their enforced move south, the Southern Sung were very aware of the possible security implications of maps falling into the wrong hands and took drastic action to ensure that this did not occur. Unfortunately, there is no confirmation that the first duty of officials when an invasion was in the offing was to ‘burn the maps’.

Much has been made in modern works on the Mongols of their military adaptability such as learning how to take walled cities, the use of trebuchet, siege engines and so on with the help of local experts and collaborators.²³⁸ Möngke Qa'an, who seems to have had a scientific turn of mind, ordered the submission of a map of the Dali kingdom in

²³⁶ Yee, *History of Cartography*, ch. 4 p.73

²³⁷ Yee, *History of Cartography*, ch. 4 p.82

²³⁸ Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War*, p.78

southwest China from its ruler in 1255. Twenty years later, Bayan initiated an inventory of maps [*tu*] and books after the fall of the Sung city of Lin-an²³⁹ but as yet there is no evidence that in their *quriltais* or assemblies the Chinggisids and their commanders planned their campaigns by poring over charts and gazetteers. One potential reason for this is that the early conquest commanders, including Chinggis Khan himself, as well as Jebe and Sübe'etei Ba'atur, were illiterate.

The Challenges: Orientation and Navigation

This lack of access to maps to assist them in finding 'the ways in and out of and the contrasts in the terrain.....' raises some intriguing questions in view of the Mongols' extreme mobility, the extent of the terrain covered and Chinggis Khan's scant lack of sympathy for late arrivals. As one scholar of medieval travel has graphically written, if early travellers wanted to survive in an unfriendly world they had to have the right information.²⁴⁰ This was not just how to find the way through woods and over narrow boulder strewn mountain tracks and about the location of supplies of fresh water for the animals and themselves as well as fords, ferries, bridges, they also needed to know the most dangerous areas where robbers operated, both freelance and the local avaricious lord. Not least amongst the hostile forces facing such travellers were the elements: heat, cold, sand and dust storms, early snows, rivers in flood, drought and pestilence.²⁴¹

A fundamental difficulty facing movement and communication across the vast *terrae incognitae* with which the Mongols were engaged was how to determine their position and direction. An associated conundrum is how they approached the all-important problem of time-

²³⁹ YS. Ch. 166, p. 3910, ch. 162, p. 3802 and ch. 127, p. 3112; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest* p. 106

²⁴⁰ Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, p. xi-xii

²⁴¹ Norbert Ohler, p. xi-xii

keeping so that all their forces arrived at the designated destination present and correct at the appointed time.

The Challenge of Orientation

Orientation in essence has two dimensions: firstly, being able to determine the current location²⁴² the corollary of which is determining the direction to take for onward travel – always assuming there is an actual destination. This was not necessarily the case for the Mongols, most particularly in their pursuit of the Khwārazmshah since he was literally a moving target or indeed for Sübe'etei Ba'atur and Jebe on their epic reconnoitre beyond the Caspian.

The Mongols were also technologically limited. Though the science behind the compass was known in China since at least the Western or Former Han dynasty (202 BCE- 9 CE) and Eastern or Later Han (25 CE – 220 CE) its original purpose was geomancy to ascertain the most favourable locations for burials, buildings and lucky days. It was only around 1119 CE that there is evidence a magnetic needle compass as an aid to navigation at sea documented by Zhu Yu in his *Pingzhou Table Talks*.²⁴³ The party travelling with the sage Ch'ang Ch'un at the summons of Chinggis Khan in the early 1220s from north China to northern Afghanistan checked the moment of the summer solstice by the shadow of the gnomon²⁴⁴, which could also have been used to calculate the time, months and seasons as well as ascertaining north.

However, such advanced technologies do not seem to have been disseminated to the Mongols who had no obvious orientational or navigational aids apart from what are termed today 'natural navigation'

²⁴² The classic example being Christopher Columbus who claimed in his famous 1493 letter that he assumed he had reached Cathay 'Quando yo llegue a la Juana segui io la costa della al poniente y la falle tan grande que pense que seria tierra firme, la prouincia de Catayo' when he was actually in the West Indies. *The Spanish Letter of Columbus: To Luis De Sant' Angel Escribano de Racion of the Kingdom of Aragon Dated 15 February 1493*, Michael P. Kerney, Bernard Quaritch 1893

²⁴³ Robert Temple, *The Genius of China*, p. 150

²⁴⁴ Si Yu Ki – Ch'ang Ch'un tr. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, I, p. 52

or conversely what scientists call ‘allocentric navigation’. This latter, also known as geocentric frames of reference,²⁴⁵ overlaps to some extent with the former, which is mainly predicated on spatial orientation with reference to the stars, moon, sun, wind, landmarks etc.

Nonetheless, the Mongols managed to pilot themselves around much of Eurasia and more to the point, find their way home again.

Mongol Directional Orientations – The Cardinal Points

Rubruck comments that before a drinking session, a steward was deputed to go outside and sprinkle some of the drink three times towards the south, in honour of fire; next towards the east, in honour of the air; next towards the west, in honour of water; and some was thrown northwards for the sake of the dead.²⁴⁶ Clearly the steward had to get his cardinal points right.

One key to understanding how the Mongols’ approached orientation is through the concepts of *o’mino* and *nar’zo*. *Nar’zo* is the direction in which the sun moves and almost all ritual movements follow a clockwise rotation, considered the correct direction - for example around an *ovoo*.²⁴⁷ Similarly, *o’mino* also has ritual significance as well as being the orientation of the felt tent or *ger*, the entrance of which is generally facing south or south-east.²⁴⁸ This clockwise rotation is also maintained in the limited confines of the *ger*, where on entering the movement should be to the left, not to the right and never between the two central supports.

²⁴⁵ ‘Spatial memory: the role of egocentric and allocentric frames of reference’ Gennaro Ruggiero, Tina Iachini, Francesco Ruotolo et al.
http://www.academia.edu/628138/Spatial_memory_the_role_of_egocentric_and_allocentric_frames_of_reference, accessed 2011

²⁴⁶ *Rubruck*, p. 76

²⁴⁷ This is a pile of stones sometimes designating a boundary but more often with spiritual significance and the clockwise rotation is to ensure good luck or success in an enterprise.

²⁴⁸ *Rubruck*, p. 74

The head of the household sits at the back but facing the entrance, which is therefore in front of him, thus in the body terms of the head of the household, *o'mno* means front, *hoit* means back, *baruun* right and *zu'un* left.²⁴⁹ Thus when reference is made to the right wing of the army, *bara'un qar-un tumen*, this in fact should be 'the right hand side' rather than translated as the 'west' wing.²⁵⁰ However, the correlation of cardinal points and bodily direction, such as right and left is not always scientific. For as Yule remarks apropos the Khalkas, Kirghis and Kalmucks in his supplementary notes to Prejevalsky's travels in Mongolia, they all pitched their tents facing east as the prevailing wind, in winter, is from the westward which means that 'left' would in fact mean north.....²⁵¹

If this is not confusing enough, in actual fact the direction also depends on the landscape. Thus, in some parts of Mongolia, the basis of direction is the course of a river, since the summer and winter flock movements are either upstream or *deeshee* and then downstream or *dooshoo*. Also confusingly, Tibet Proper was called by the Mongols *Baron-tala*, the Right, i.e. west quarter whereas it is actually to the south-west, whilst Mongolia was *zu'un-tala*, the left, i.e. east quarter.²⁵² Mongolia proper, however, or at least that part of it situated between the Onon and Kerulen rivers was - during the period of Chinggis Khan - also known as 'ulus of the centre' (*qol-un ulus*)²⁵³ though the centre of gravity moved westwards under Ögodei to the Orkhon basin.

Chinggis Khan's son, Tolui, was the youngest son and therefore the Hearth Prince or *Otchigin* whose inheritance consisted of the family

²⁴⁹ Futaki Hiroshi & Kamimura Akira eds. *Landscapes Reflected in Old Mongolian Maps*, Tokyo, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2005, pp. 17-18

²⁵⁰ *SH*, para. 190, de Rachewiltz, II, p. 685, 815 left wing is *je'un ar-un tumen*

²⁵¹ Prejevalsky, Lieut.Col. *N. Mongolia, The Tangut Country and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet*, trans. E. Delmar Morgan

²⁵² Prejevalsky, Lieut.Col. *Mongolia, The Tangut Country and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet*, trans. E. Delmar Morgan p. 278

²⁵³ P. Jackson has examined in detail the provision of pasture and peoples made during the early Chinggisid period. See his chapter 'From Ulus to Khanate' in R. Amitai-Preiss & D. O. Morgan (eds) *The Mongol Empire & its Legacy*. pp. 12-37.

heartland. He was designated the Prince of the Centre whilst his older brother Jochi was a prince of the right or west wing since his *ulus* was the Qipchaq Steppe and Central Asia. Chinggis Khan's half-brothers and full brother Qasar had their domains in north-east Mongolia, adjacent to Manchuria, hence their denomination as princes of the left wing or east wing. Such placement of the princes was clearly not random though Tolui's was the least random of all, since his was customary through inheritance.

The cardinal points, at least in their 'bodily' format also had implications for the all important subject, at least for the Mongols, of status. This was certainly so within the *ger*. Chinggis Khan sat in the middle of the north side of his own tent, facing south and the next highest status seat was that immediately on his right or west. This was initially occupied by Father Mönglik who may have been his step-father but who in any case had been held in high esteem by Temujin.²⁵⁴ Thus the higher status side was to the right (or west) which was always the men's place with the women on the eastern side, or the left, of the master.

Whether the cardinal points also had status implications with reference to the wings of Mongol armies is not entirely clear though the main army was referred to as the *qol cherik* or army of the centre. The great commander Muqali (d. 1223) had been given ten thousand men on the east wing or left flank (*je'ün qar-un tümen*) and, though it may have been coincidental, made his career subduing Northern China.

On the same occasion, the 'second shaft' of Chinggis Khan's allegorical 'cart', Bo'orchu, who was one of his oldest and trusted companions, was made commander of ten thousand on the right or west wing (*bara'un ar-un tümen*). Naya'a, who had impressed Chinggis Khan by his adherence to one of the great principles – that of loyalty – was given command of

²⁵⁴ *SH*, para 204 and de Rachewiltz, II, p. 775

the most important of the three divisions, that of ten thousand men of the centre (*tüb-ün tümen*).²⁵⁵ Thus from this slight evidence but taken together with the disposition of the princes as well as the seating arrangements in a *ger* there seems to have been a pecking order associated with the cardinal points with the Centre being the highest status, followed by West or Right and then East or Left.²⁵⁶

Cardinal directions were also associated with colour but interestingly, though both the steppe denizens, or at least the Mongols, and the Han both adhered to a system of direction associated with colour²⁵⁷, the former seem to have developed their own approach since there are some interesting departures from that of the Middle Kingdom.

The Chinese had a long and complex history of associating cardinal directions, colours, elements and manoeuvres which was set out in the Eight Formations according to Tai Po Yin Ching. Thus heaven was associated with *yin*, a north-west direction and the colour black²⁵⁸ though in Mongolia 'Heaven' was associated with the colour blue. The element earth was also *yin* and had a south-west direction and the colour yellow; wind was *yin* too but was a south-east direction and associated with the colour red. Clouds, as well as being *yin* were associated with north and the colour white.

The Mongolian predilection for blue, then, was not replicated in China, whilst Chinggis Khan's 'white' standard with nine tails' *yisün költü*

²⁵⁵ *SH* paras 205, 206 and 220; de Rachewiltz p. 815 – Naya'a succeeded Muqali on the latter's death in 1223

²⁵⁶ When the Ong Qan agreed to join in the rescue of Temujin's wife Borte, he announced that he would form the right wing of the army and his younger brother Jamuqa would form the left leaving Temujin, presumably, to form the centre though any conclusions from this are necessarily speculative. *SH*, para 104.

²⁵⁷ See also Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain*, pp. 70-71

²⁵⁸ Interestingly, the QaraKhitai polity which was founded by elements of the defeated Liao and had departed north-westwards, finally settling in today's Kirgizstan, were referred to as 'Qara' which potentially could mean either north-west Khitai or black – the latter suggested by Bose, *Subjects and Masters*, p. 75. This interpretation has been disputed by Michal Biran in her chapter 'the Mongols and nomadic identity: The case of the Kitans in China', in R. Amitai and M. Biran (eds), *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change* (Honolulu, 2015), n. 6 p. 173, citing a paper by D. Kane.

čaqqa'an tuq ²⁵⁹ was a deeply inauspicious colour in Han terms as well as not being the lucky number 'eight'. Furthermore, for the Mongols, riding a white gelding was a mark of status as well as a special privilege.²⁶⁰

The association between colour and cardinal point was utilised by the Mongol forces in a rather unusual manner when campaigning, since the mounts were allegedly grouped according to coat colour. This did not, however, correlate with the system set out by Tai Po Yin Ching. Thus the south was represented by red sorrels, the north, by black, the horses stationed to the east were grey being the nearest colour to blue and the west, by white.²⁶¹ This last included a colour called *sharga* or yellowish which seems to have been the colour of the 'epicentre' and though it could include whitish *sharga*, brownish *sharga* and reddish *sharga* perhaps golden palomino would be the closest term. Chinggis Khan had eight *sharga* coloured horses but, as the *Secret History* pointedly comments, the horse from which he fell hunting wild asses en route to campaigning against the Tangut/Xi Xia was *Josotu Boro* or Reddish Grey.²⁶²

The nuances of cardinal points and colour can provide a window into the Mongol milieu that would otherwise be missed. This can especially be seen in the symbolism in the *Secret History* surrounding this campaign against the Tanguts and especially the abrupt account of the demise of the conqueror during its course; it may well be that his fall bruised more than his body. As De Rachewiltz ruminates, the emphasis in the *Secret History* on the fall - followed eighteen months or so later by

²⁵⁹ *SH* para 202

²⁶⁰ *SH*, para 216, de Rachewiltz vol. II, p. 808

²⁶¹ Fijn, Natasha, *Living with Herds, Human-Animal coexistence in Mongolia*, Cambridge, CUP, 2011, p.157

²⁶² *SH* para 264, de Rachewiltz *SH II*, p. 967

his death - may have been taken by his following that Heaven had withdrawn its protection or *ihe'el* from the great conqueror.²⁶³

This snippet of information may also involve nuances and superstitions which are difficult to detect from this distance and it is just possible that Chinggis Khan was not riding the correct colour of horse for his status or indeed for a particular 'cardinal point' and was thus pushing his luck. The record that he was riding *Josotu Boro* could equally be a post-facto signal that could be deciphered by the immediately succeeding generations attuned to the critical importance of a particular mount of some political problem or, as de Rachewiltz postulates, provide an indication that his powers were failing.

What is clear from this digression, however, is that the Mongols were conversant with the cardinal directions as such and had a system, perhaps not as complex as that of Han China, of associating colours, directions, status and auspicious days. What is also apparent too is that 'direction' in Mongol terms was not entirely straightforward but depended on extraneous factors such as terrain.

The 'Navigational' Challenge

Having some idea, however rough, of directional bearings is essential for orientation but does not necessarily guarantee safe arrival at a pre-determined destination. This can only be achieved through navigational – and survival – skills. There are hints in the *Secret History* as well as in the geo-historical literature mentioned above, particularly that referring to the Türks, about the navigational skills of the steppe peoples.

Marvazī gives one of the clearest indications of the methods used when he remarks apropos the customs of the Pechenegs that:

Between the Pechenegs and the Khazar there is a distance of ten days, the country being steppes and forest. There is no beaten track between the two territories, and they travel over (the distance)

²⁶³ *SH* para 267, de Rachewiltz, *SH* II, p. 983

by means of the stars, landmarks or at random.²⁶⁴

Landmarks

Within their home range it is apparent from the *Secret History* that familiarity with the terrain was a major element in Mongol navigation. Named topographical landmarks abound in the *Secret History*, generally rivers and mountains, though most are unreliably identified today despite strenuous scholarly efforts. There are a number of references to the use of landmarks as meeting places or to describe where an event occurred. Thus when Jamuqa arranged for his forces to meet up with those of Temujin and To'oril Ong Khan on the mission to rescue Temujin's bride, Börte from her Merkit kidnappers, he is quite specific in his instructions. They were to make their way by the south side of the Burqan-Qaldun,²⁶⁵ then travel up the Onon River to its source which was to be their *rendez-vous* point.²⁶⁶

The challenge for the Mongols was of navigation when out of range of familiar landmarks. If the supposition in the previous chapter is well-founded, that the Mongols were not particularly cognizant geographically, it raises the fascinating question of how the early Chinggisid commanders initially piloted themselves and their forces across Eurasia bearing in mind that in 1218 most of western Eurasia would have been *terrae incognitae* to them.

Stars

There are no clear references in the *Secret History* to Mongol navigation by the stars. Later on, after the Toluids had settled into their respective

²⁶⁴ Sharaf al-Zamān Tahīr Marvazī *On China, the Turks and India* Trans. V. Minorsky, The Royal Asiatic Society 1942 p. 33

²⁶⁵ The sacred mountain identified by de Rachewiltz as Khentei Khan in the Great Khentei Range in northeastern Mongolia (48° 50' N 109° E) overlooking the sources of the Onon, and Kerulen rivers. *SH* II, de Rachewiltz, p. 229

²⁶⁶ *SH*, I para 106,

dominions in east and west Eurasia they sponsored the observatories of Marāgha, under the direction of the polymath Khwāja Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī and the Muslim Astronomical Observatory in China. What may have attracted the attention of the Mongols to Tūsī were his abilities in the field of geomancy since he also wrote a treatise on geomancy in Arabic, Persian and Tūrkish.²⁶⁷ Thus geomancy rather than navigation would seem to have been the most likely ‘Mongol’ objective of these observatories.

Tracking and Guides

Though the main aids to orientation may not have been stars Prejevalsky casts some light on how the pre-mid twelfth century Mongols may have found their way around. He observes that from his own experience they ‘will extricate themselves from the most desperate situation, foretell rain, storms, and other atmospheric changes; follow the almost imperceptible tracks of a stray horse or camel and are sensible of the proximity of a well.’²⁶⁸

The Mongols were, and many still are, skilled trackers²⁶⁹ and the *Secret History* has several references to tracking. Thus, after Temujin’s father, Yisūgei Ba’atur, had kidnapped his mother, Ho’elun, and she was bewailing her fate, his younger brother, Daritai Otchigin remonstrated with her that her former bridegroom was by now far away and even ‘if you look for his tracks, his trail you will not find them’.²⁷⁰

There are also several references in the *Secret History* to the then Temujin’s own tracking abilities; thus when he escaped from the captivity of his hostile Tayyici’ut kinsmen, he found his fleeing family by following their tracks in the grass. Shortly afterwards he and his new friend Bo’orchu managed to locate the family’s stolen geldings by

²⁶⁷ For a brief overview of the importance of Nasir al-Din Tusi and Maragha see G. Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran*, ch. 7, pp. 213–225

²⁶⁸ Prejevalsky, *Mongolia, The Tangut Country* p. 63

²⁶⁹ Based on personal experience after getting ‘misled’ in the Gobi

²⁷⁰ *SH I* para. 56

tracking them for four days to the camp of the thieves.²⁷¹ His brother, Jochi Qasar does not seem to have had quite the same skill as he is said to have rejoined him with some difficulty around the time of the Baljuna episode. His efforts to find Temujin nonetheless illustrate the two main methods of communication in the forests and on the steppe:

I looked for my elder brother, but he had
disappeared. I looked for his tracks, but
I could not find them. I shouted for him,
but my voice could not be heard²⁷²

Tracking and shouting, as the Mongols discovered, had their limitations beyond the familiar environs of the steppe.²⁷³ According to Ibn al-Athīr, after Chinggis Khan took Samarkand in 617/1220-1221 he despatched twenty-thousand armed horsemen with orders to ‘Pursue Khwārazmshah, wherever he may be.....’ These pursuers, commanded by Jebe and Sübe’etei, came to be known as ‘the westward’ as they travelled west of Khurāsān and penetrated deep into Muslim lands.²⁷⁴ The hunt for Khwārazmshah Muhammad took place across what was to the pursuing Chinggisid forces at that time alien territory but there are hints in the sources as to the *modus operandi* employed by these commanders. This may have included tracking but as Chaghadaï found when trying to locate Sultan Jalāl-al-Dīn after he crossed the Indus, tracking had shortcomings and the ‘westward’ forces did indeed fail, losing the trail of the Khwārazmshah somewhere in the region of Hamadan as he fled north to his natural death on an island in the Caspian Sea.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ *SH*, I, para. 90 de Rachewiltz I, p. 27

²⁷² *SH*, I, para. 183, de Rachewiltz, II, p. 659

²⁷³ In fairness, it should be mentioned that during the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods in Western Eurasia, what was in effect a shouting signalling system was practised from high lookout posts within shouting distance of each other and manned by those with very loud voices reducing to one day the thirty days it would otherwise have taken to reach the troops. Diodorus XIX. 17.6f

²⁷⁴ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 210

²⁷⁵ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 141

Since tracking proved to be less than effective in finding the Khwārazmshah the main means of hunting him down seems to have been through a combination of intelligence and the procurement of guides. Thus when Chinggis Khan arrived before Samarkand he received high-value intelligence that the Khwārazmshah had crossed the river at Termez and had dispersed the greater part of his army.²⁷⁶ However, even with such excellent information, as Chaghadai discovered, locating their quarry was no easy matter. One obvious option was simply to enquire of the locals whether the Khwārazmshah had passed that way but even this may have been fraught, not just because there may have been communication problems but also because there may have been no locals available to question, they having either fled or been killed.

Nonetheless, the pursuers were able to gather the Khwārazmshah's general direction through information gathered at the towns which they had sacked or which had submitted. Then, as Juvaynī and Ibn al-Athīr indicate, guides would be procured as at Balkh²⁷⁷ and Darband.²⁷⁸ This is well illustrated when, in their pursuit of Sultan Jalāl-al-Dīn, some Chinggisid forces arrived in Ghazna and finding the town undefended spent a desultory day setting fire to the Friday mosque whilst others killed some of the inhabitants, but clearly not all, since they managed to obtain a guide to lead them to the Sultan at Parvan.²⁷⁹ The importance of guides in lieu of maps or itineraries is also indicated by Juvaynī, who remarks when referring to the impending attack on Bukhārā, that a Turcoman who 'had a perfect knowledge of the roads and highways, led them by a little frequented road'.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 142-143

²⁷⁷ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 144

²⁷⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle*, tr. Richards, Pt.3, p. 222

²⁷⁹ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 463. Juvaynī helpfully places Parvan on the border of Bamiyan where many roads met and where the Sultan hoped to get intelligence about the course of events.

²⁸⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 100

Guides, however, are only useful when you know where you want to go, which raises the interesting question of navigation when the destination is unknown. Thus a great historical loss is that there are no first-hand reports from Sübe'etei Ba'atur or Jebe of their pursuit across the Iranian plateau to Azerbaijan, the Moghan Steppe (south of the Aras on the western coast of the Caspian) Georgia, the Qipchaq Steppe, and the lands of the Rus in 1223-1224. They eventually joined up with the forces of Chinggis Khan's eldest son Jochi and found their way back to the conqueror then based at Samarkand though there was a high cost. Having set off with purportedly twenty-thousand horsemen - according to Ibn al-Athīr,²⁸¹ or thirty-thousand according to Juvaynī²⁸² - and joined on their way by Muslim and infidel troops as well as opportunists, this force suffered heavy losses in the siege of Hamadan. Moreover, according to Ibn al-Athīr, whose source is unknown, by the time they had finished with the Rus in 620/1223-1224 and been severely mauled by the Bulgars, of the surviving 'westward Tatars' who had set off in pursuit of the Khwārazmshah only four thousand made it back to Chinggis Khan at Samarkand.²⁸³

Sübe'etei Ba'atur²⁸⁴ and Jebe's epic expedition, essentially unplanned, through uncharted territory which they barely knew existed beforehand, was not just a remarkable military probing/intelligence collecting expedition but constituted an extraordinary challenge to their navigational and survival skills as well as a testament to their physical robustness.²⁸⁵ Jebe and Sübe'etei Ba'atur in particular amassed an extraordinary amount of intelligence as well as 'local knowledge' personally gained from their campaigning throughout Eurasia - ranging from Khitai to the Crimea to Hungary. Indeed Sübe'etei, who survived

²⁸¹ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3. p. 210

²⁸² Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 143

²⁸³ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3. p. 224

²⁸⁴ See Paul Buell, 'Sübötei Ba'atur (1176-1248)' in Igor de Rachewiltz (ed), *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period (1200-1300)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1993, pp. 13-26

²⁸⁵ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3. pp. 210 ff. records this expedition

into his early seventies, may well rank as the most travelled commander in history, having seen active service over a period of fifty years or so in what are today's northern China, Manchuria, Khurāsān, Mazandaran, Azerbaijan, Arran, Georgia, Russia, the Qipchaq steppe, Crimea, Ukraine, Hungary, and the Tangut/Hsi Hsia territory south of the Gobi.²⁸⁶ As Carl Sverdrup observes, Sübe'etei could only have achieved what he did by developing a strategic-geographic map in his mind²⁸⁷ which enabled him to overrun more territory, about 16,000 square kilometres and move further in person than Alexander the Great, Chinggis Khan himself or Tamerlane.²⁸⁸

As Jebe and Sübe'etei were exploring *terrae incognitae* and did not return the same way they would not have been assisted in finding their way back to Mongolia by constructing numerous *oboo* along their line of march to make the return trip easier. Though these are generally regarded as sacred stone mounds, often situated in a position of high elevation dedicated to heaven and local deities, they have also been used as boundary markers, directional markers or indicative of a dangerous area to which additional stones were added by travellers to ensure their own safety.²⁸⁹ Whilst the *Yām* network criss-crossed Eurasia it did not, as will be seen, necessarily follow clearly defined 'roads' and the travellers for whom accounts exist were escorted on their journeys by those who were familiar with the general direction implying that even during the period of more organised travel guides were still necessary.

²⁸⁶ Carl Sverdrup has remarked that between 1216 and 1224 the feat Sübe'etei accomplished in covering a distance of more than 13,000 kilometres, at times over 5,000 kilometres distant from his supreme commander, Chinggis Khan and fighting around thirteen battles is unparalleled in the annals of war. Carl Sverdrup, 'Sübe'etei Ba'atur, Anonymous Strategist' *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 47, No. 1 (2013), p. 39

²⁸⁷ Sverdrup, p. 47

²⁸⁸ Sverdrup, p. 48

²⁸⁹ Uyjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) and Kevin Stuart 'Rethinking the Mongol Oboo' in *Anthropos*, Bd. 90, H. 4./6 (1995), pp. 545 & 550

Whilst Chinggis Khan's forces in pursuit of the Khwārazmshah were not exactly lone travellers, much of the above would still apply to them as they traversed previously uncharted territory. Nevertheless, by the time that Hülegü marched west in c. 650/1252-1253 the Mongols had grasped the geographical and geopolitical specifics of central and western Eurasia and Chinggisid commanders, emissaries and officials had considerable experience of criss-crossing the inhospitable wastes of Eurasia.

The logistical experience which the Chinggisid forces had acquired in the northern China campaigns as well as their hard-won knowledge of the terrain and conditions that were encountered as they pursued the Khwārazmshah can be seen in the well-planned and executed progress of Hülegü's forces westwards. Indeed, so well ordered were these logistical solutions that Juvaynī recounts that along the route which it was calculated the Hülegüid forces would pass, thorns and boulders were cleared, bridges were built over the rivers and streams and boats held in readiness at the ferries.²⁹⁰ Neither pasturage nor supplies were neglected since suitable grazing grounds were identified and reserved whilst arrangements were made for adequate supplies of *qumiz* to be available for the advancing forces.²⁹¹

Mongol Time-Keeping

Navigation to the desired destination is one thing, but arriving when expected is another issue entirely, especially as one of the more noteworthy traits of the steppe commanders was an insistence on punctuality. This is well illustrated by the above mentioned *rendez-vous* between Temujin, To'oril and Jamuqa where the *Secret History* relates that the two former commanders were berated by Jamuqa for being three days late:

²⁹⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 610

²⁹¹ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p.610

Did we not agree that we won't be late
 At the appointed meeting
 Even if there be a blizzard;
 At the gathering
 Even if there be rain?

Are we not Mongols,
 for whom a "yes" is the same
 as being bound by an oath?²⁹²

For present purposes, Jamuqa's stinging comment has several implications. Firstly, the destination was identifiable to all the parties; secondly, that they would be able to find their way there; equally importantly, that they knew when to get there and thus assess how long it would take. Furthermore, as Jamuqa angrily pointed out, by agreeing to both the place and time this was tantamount to an oath emphatically underlying the point that arrangements for a *rendez-vous* had to be adhered to at all costs.

The twelfth-century Mongols had their own customary ways for measuring distances and time. As Prejevalsky noted, the unit in the Mongol's scale of distances was a day and a night and a Mongol had no idea of dividing them into hours. Time and distance were estimated by comparison either with the human body, with nature or horse-related. Thus a short-day would be the distance travelled by a horse in half-a-day or five or six hours, perhaps 24-31 miles/40-50 km depending on the terrain. As Prejevalsky also observed, even in the nineteenth century:

They calculate distances by the time occupied in travelling with camels and horses and have no other accurate scale of measurement. If you ask how far it is to any given place, the answer is always so many days' journey with camels, or so

²⁹² *SH*, de Rachewiltz, para 108, I p. 39 *SH*, Onon, p. 32;

many days' ride on horseback. But as the rate of travelling and length of marches vary according to circumstances and the disposition of the rider, they never fail to add 'if you ride well.' Or 'if you travel slowly.'²⁹³

Jamuqa's anger is also interesting in the light of an observation by the Armenian historian, Het 'um, who was writing in c. 1307 and had first-hand experience of the Mongols:

Let no one be surprised that I have not placed dating in this part of the narration. Although I asked many people about such, I was unable to find anyone who could fully inform me about it. I believe that this is because the Tartars then were unfamiliar with accurate chronology, for they had no script. Thus events and their dates passed by without being recorded by anyone and so were forgotten.²⁹⁴

This view was partially confirmed by Zhao Gong, the Sung envoy to Chinggis Khan, writing in 1221, as he found it was the custom of the Mongols to acknowledge the passing of the years based on each time the grass grew green. Furthermore, 'whenever they see a full moon, they consider it one month.'²⁹⁵ Furthermore, according to Zhao Gong, the annual programme during this period of the campaigns and conquests of the Mongols was dictated by 'the moon'. Thus preliminary meetings were held in the third or fourth moons; this was followed by a full strategy meeting held by the Mongol high command on the fifth of the fifth moon they held an assembly with feasting and planned together

²⁹³ Prejevalsky, *Mongolia* p. 64

²⁹⁴ Het 'um/Bedrosian Book III, section. 16

²⁹⁵ *Zhao Gong*, p. 2

the next campaign. After this ‘everyone returns to his country to avoid the summer heat and raise their livestock. When it comes to the eighth moon, they all gather at the capital in Yanjing and only then set out.’²⁹⁶

Het ‘um, however, was not entirely correct when saying that the Mongols were chronologically challenged since it is clear from the *Secret History* that they were familiar with the Chinese Civil Calendar with its Twelve Year cycle though in its popular Sino-Türkish astrological form of twelve animals. This ancient Chinese method functioned as a ‘day-count’ and did not, as Needham has emphasised, depend on the sun and moon but was a sexagesimal cyclical system with twelve characters or branches and ten stems which together could be combined into sixty combinations. At the end of the cycle it started all over again.²⁹⁷ The twelve year cycle in itself can be a cause for confusion as even the compiler/s of the *Secret History* was caught out, for example, in crediting the wrong Year of the Ox for Sübe’etei’s expedition against the Merkit Toqto’a’s sons to 1205 rather than 1217.²⁹⁸

What is not clear is exactly when the Mongols adopted this calendar. Though the earliest date in the *Secret History* is 1201 CE, the Year of the Cock, this is, of course, retrospective since the *Secret History* was not compiled until much later.²⁹⁹ Though it is generally assumed that the Mongols were introduced to it through the Uighur Türks³⁰⁰ who themselves had used it since the eighth century, Zhao Gong, the Sung envoy to Chinggis Khan in 1221 observes that:

²⁹⁶ Zhao Gong, p. 8

²⁹⁷ Needham has a lucid explanation of the sexagenary cycle system in his *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. III, esp. 396 ff.

²⁹⁸ *SH*, paras.198 & 199. De Rachewiltz commentary, *SH*, II, p. 735

²⁹⁹ Dating is controversial and is discussed in detail by De Rachewiltz in *SH* Introduction, pp xxix-xxxiv

³⁰⁰ Charles Melville, ‘The Chinese-Uighur Animal Calendar in Persian Historiography of the Mongol Period’ in *Iran*, vol. 32 (1994), p. 83

Whatever name for the kingdom they
use, whatever year name they use
and whatever writings they circulate,
is all solely that the fugitive
ministers (i.e. Jurchen high officials)
who know writing, strive with their
cleverness and understanding to
teach them. ³⁰¹

Moreover, this system was taken extremely seriously both at Marāgha in the west as well as by the Yuan and later under the Tīmūrīds at Ulugh Beg's observatory at Samarkand. Indeed, it has been observed that it was 'one of the least conspicuous but most durable results of the Mongol conquest of Iran' since it was not officially abrogated until March 1925.³⁰²

It would appear, then, on an evidential basis that the Mongols had not even rudimentary technology to help them or indeed an elementary knowledge of the geography and topography of western Eurasia. Whilst Columbus may only inadvertently have discovered the American landmass he at least had the benefit of navigational instruments such as the astrolabe, quadrant, compass, chronometer, charts and a globe as well as the advantages of literacy. As has been argued here, however, the Mongols' early efforts at travel and communication were achieved without the benefits of maps or itineraries and were achieved through their own talents at tracking, 'natural navigation' or 'geocentric frames of reference' as well as guides.

³⁰¹ Zhao Gong, p. 4

³⁰² Melville, (1994), p. 84. But see also the cautionary article on calendars in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* which spells out the different dating systems in use in the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods in Eurasia.

Chapter IV

Language and Literacy: The Challenges of a Multilingual Empire

Language is rooted in history, politics, religion, traditions and it should perhaps be added, commercial contacts, but there is evidence in the sources, which will be discussed below, that the Chinggisid leadership was monolingual. Thus the oft-repeated statement that the Mongol Empire was the most extensive contiguous land-based empire in the pre-modern era implies not only challenges in transmission because of the extended lines of communication but also the considerable challenge of communicating with the subjected peoples. It may thus be prudent to state the obvious: that in efforts to communicate it is clearly imperative that the ‘message’ is comprehensible to the recipient otherwise it is a waste of time and effort.

The act of sending a message might seem relatively straightforward in that it is composed and is then dispatched to the recipient by whatever means available. The reality, however, is rather more complex. There are three key elements: language, form of transmission (verbal or written) and finally comprehension of the message on the part of the recipient. All are intimately linked since problems can arise, as an interpreter with first-hand experience of interpreting for occupying military forces has pointed out, when the languages involved are not only disparate but so is the cultural milieu of the protagonists.³⁰³

To give the Chinggisids their due, they understood from an early stage that a problem arising from their extensive conquests was communicating with peoples with a multitude of languages, scripts and customs. When Chinggis Khan famously harangued the unfortunate

³⁰³ Sulaiman Murad, *Far Beyond Words: Stories of Military Interpreting in Iraq*, Lincoln, USA, Infusionmedia, 2013

inhabitants of Bukhārā after its capture in 616/1220, his message that he was ‘the punishment of God’ since ‘they had committed great sins’³⁰⁴ must have been bellowed in Mongolian because, according to his son Ögödei, he spoke no other languages.³⁰⁵ He did, however, have an interpreter though what language the interpreter translated it into is not immediately obvious.³⁰⁶

Language **Mongols and ‘Mongolian’**

One particularly notable feature of the Chinggisid Imperium is that Mongolian never came to occupy a position similar to Arabic during and after the Arab conquests. Whilst the process of ‘Arabicization’ - which should be distinguished from that of Islamicization - was not immediate and varied from place to place, it was nearly irresistible. As Robinson has remarked, ‘during the first centuries of Islamic rule, Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim - indeed, virtually anyone with any intellectual ambitions to speak of - adopted Arabic as the language of high culture’.³⁰⁷

An impetus for this was the action of the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik (65-86/685-705) in the year 81/700, sixty or more years after the earliest conquests, when he decreed that Arabic and Arabic alone was to be used in the administration. Kennedy remarks that this ruling was surprisingly effective as thenceforward those ‘wanting a position in the expanding bureaucracy of the Islamic state, whether they were Arab or non-Arab by descent and upbringing, needed to be able to read and write in Arabic.’ Moreover, even the roadside milestones had to be in

³⁰⁴ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 105

³⁰⁵ See below. Juvaynī/Boyle, I p. 225

³⁰⁶ The writings of the satirist Shams al-Din Muhammad b. ‘Alī of Samarkand d. 562/1166 reveal that amongst the cultured elite, as well as Persian, a knowledge of Arabic was taken for granted and his frequent use of Turkish words show how widely known that language was. *Cambridge History of Iran*, 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, 1968, p. 561

³⁰⁷ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 2003 p. xvii

Arabic.³⁰⁸ Unlike the Arabs, whose elite were equally self-confident in their own destiny and cultural superiority during and after the period of conquest, the Mongol-speaking elite does not seem to have been compelled to assert the dominance of Mongolian either as the language of prestige, or for the efficient transaction of business, or indeed as a language of daily contact.

A clue to the Chinggisid attitude to their polyglot subjects may be found in two complementary versions recounting a well-known incident which was related by both Juvaynī and Jūzjānī which ostensibly confirms that Chinggis Khan was ‘monolingual’. The episode involved an Arabic-speaking apostate intent on causing trouble for Muslims who was brought before Ögodei:

In the night I saw Chinggis Khan in a dream and he said: “Tell my son to slay the Moslems, for they are evil”. After reflecting a while Qa’an asked whether he had spoken to him through an interpreter or in his own person. ‘With his own tongue,’ said the man. ‘Dost thou know the Mongol and Türkish languages?’ asked Qa’an. ‘No,’ said the man. ‘Neither am I in any doubt,’ said Qa’an, ‘but that Chinggis Khan knew no language save Mongolian. It is clear therefore that what thou sayest is nothing but lies.’ And he ordered the man to be put to death.³⁰⁹

Whilst this could have taken place as described, the important point in Jūzjānī’s record is that Ögodei turned to the hereditary Mongol grandees whose lineage and descent were from *pure Mongols* (emphasis added) and asked them ‘unto ye it is certain and clear, that

³⁰⁸ Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests*, 2008, pp. 13-14

³⁰⁹ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p 225

the Chingiz Khan used not to understand any language whatever save the Mughali language?’³¹⁰

There is an insinuation in Jūzjānī’s account that ‘pure’ Mongols, not only aristocrats of the steppe but world conquerors, could hardly be expected to stoop to speaking to the subjected populations, who were in Mongol terms *Muu Khun* or ‘bad people’, in their own languages. Such ‘bad people’ had more often than not become ‘bad’ because they had been captured or were *bo’ol*/slaves.

On the other hand, Ögodei did refer to Türkish as well as Mongolian. Whereas Mongolian and its dialects were confined to a comparatively small area of Eurasia, with an equally small number of native speakers, Türkic and Persian had been jostling for position in Central Eurasia for upwards of two hundred years. In the 1070s, the Türkish nobleman al Kāshgarī compiled in Baghdad his encyclopaedic lexicon of the Türkic dialects, *Diwān Lughāt at-Türk* or *Register of the Dialects of the Türks* in which he remarked on the importance of learning Türkish.³¹¹

In his view, this was because the Türkish elite was gaining increasing influence in the Islamic world though since Kashgari lists at least five Türkic dialects plus the Royal language of the Qarakhanids of Kashgar, which ‘Türkish’ was learnt must have depended on location as well as the Türkic-speaking elite of the moment. Furthermore, he noted that though “the people of Machin and Chin have a separate language, their natives excel in Türkish and their letters to us are written in Türkish (*bi-khatt al-Türkiyya*)”.

The importance of Türkic is also emphasised by De Rachewiltz who argues that the Türkic title of Qa’an which was conferred on Ögodei during his lifetime was not surprising since he was not only the

³¹⁰ Jūzjānī, p. 1114

³¹¹ Robert Dankoff examines the *Diwān Lughāt at-Türk* in his chapter ‘Adab Literature’ in ed. H. B. Paksoy, *Central Asian Monuments*, Istanbul, Isis Press, 1992

supreme ruler of a vast empire but one in which the élite was largely, if not predominantly, Türkic-speaking. It was also the language of the Uighur advisers and dignitaries at Ögödei's Court.³¹² Moreover, since interpreters are never mentioned in his relations with Temujin, the Ong Khan was presumably bilingual in Türkic and Mongol; in view of this intensely Türkic milieu it is almost inconceivable that Chinggis Khan did not speak – or at least understand – a dialect of it. It is, however, more than possible that Mongol aristocrats insisted on speaking Mongolian as an expression of their aristocratic status.

This may also have been the case in Hülegüid western Eurasia. That the Mongols were not linguistically challenged is illustrated by the few references to those who were able to understand and presumably speak other languages, such as Hülegü's great-grandson, Ghāzān, reputed to have known Arabic, Hindi, "Kashmiri", Tibetan, and Frankish as well as smatterings of other languages. The famous Dörben Mongol Bolad Aqa (ca 1240-1313) who had been educated with Qubilai's eldest son and who was dispatched to the West was able to orally translate Chinese into Mongol.³¹³ Interestingly, Chinggis Khan, despite his possible captivity by the Jurchen/Chin, could not hold a conversation with the sage Ch'ang Ch'un since he had had to use the Khitan, Yeh-lu A-hai, as his interpreter into Mongolian.³¹⁴

Nonetheless, that the Hülegüid establishment was dominated by Mongols even during Ghāzān's reign has been ascertained by Melville. In the comprehensive listing of those who heard Ghāzān's last testament at the time of his death in 1304 there were sixty or so top officials in his household establishment, of whom all but 'two or three

³¹² *SH II*, de Rachewiltz, p. 986

³¹³ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 64

³¹⁴ Li Chih-Ch'ang (tr. A. Waley) *Travels of an Alchemist*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1931, p. 113

were evidently Mongols. Only Malik Nasir al-Din, listed as one of the *bitikchis* and a certain Amir ‘Ali, an *idachi*, have non-Mongol names’.³¹⁵

Interpreters and Translators

If the Mongols did remain attached to Mongolian as their language of choice, this obviously was not going to be a problem for communications within the Imperial Family, since they understood Mongolian. However, it was clearly going to pose problems for their officials who were not ethnic Mongols but a disparate group drawn willingly or unwillingly to the Chinggisid cause from amongst the submitted peoples. Thus senior administrators had to learn enough Mongolian to communicate with their masters otherwise government would have to be conducted through an extensive use of interpreters and translators.

A passage from Qashani’s history referring to the reign of Ghāzān’s brother and successor Öljeitü hints that either Öljeitü spoke Persian and/or Türkish or the deputies of his minister Taj al-Din ‘Ali Shah spoke Mongolian. This supposition is based on an alleged exclamation by the Amir Choban: “O for the days of Hülegü and Abaqa, when if anyone wanted to say something to the ruler, he could only do so after consultation with all the Mongol amirs. *Now affairs have reached such a pitch that a non-Mongol (Tazik) goes to the ruler in private in the middle of the night* without first consulting a single amir, and the opinion of the amirs counts for nothing”!³¹⁶ (emphasis added). It seems highly unlikely that Öljeitü went to bed with an interpreter on hand in case of nocturnal visits from his officials.

³¹⁵ Charles Melville, “The *Keshig* in Iran: the survival of the royal Mongol Household”, p. 153

³¹⁶ Quoted in Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia*, I. B. Tauris, 1988, p. 55

The experience of the intrepid friars, John of Plano Carpini and Benedict the Pole in their journey to Güyüg's enthronement in 1246 casts some light on the complex linguistic situation during the early Mongol Imperium. Thus 'at first sight it is surprising, in view of the formidable language barriers, that the friars could travel many thousands of miles into Mongol and Türkish-speaking Asia and return with a vast body of detailed and valuable information derived from word of mouth.'³¹⁷ One explanation for this is that the two friars were apparently excellent linguists; Carpini is thought to have spoken 'Italian, (his native language) Latin and probably German, French and Spanish' whilst Benedict 'spoke at least Latin and his native Polish and probably had a working knowledge of German, Czech and Russian'.³¹⁸

As neither spoke Mongolian, en route to Qaraqorum the friars were given interpreters, with Russian most probably the common language, and Benedict's Russian skills were certainly put to good use after their arrival in Qaraqorum, 'since as interpreters with Güyüg they had Duke Yaroslav's knight Temer, his priests Duboslav and a Russian priest in the service of Güyük himself.' Another Mongol-speaker was Güyüg's Russian goldsmith Cosmas.³¹⁹ Rubruck confirms the preponderance of captive eastern Europeans at Möngke's court, including Hungarians, Russians, Georgians and Armenians³²⁰ including a woman from Lorraine but who was born in Hungary and who could speak French and 'Coman'.³²¹ Carpini furthermore records that Güyüg demanded to know whether the Pope had anyone who could understand Russian, 'Saracen' or Mongolian in order to translate the letter he was proposing to send back with the Friars.³²²

³¹⁷ George D. Painter's introduction to *The Tartar Relation*, p. 43

³¹⁸ Painter, *The Tartar Relation*, p. 43

³¹⁹ Painter, *The Tartar Relation*, p. 44

³²⁰ Rubruck, pp. 212-213

³²¹ Rubruck, pp. 212-213

³²² Rubruck, p. 141

En route, whilst at Batu's court 'they were supplied with interpreters, including a Russian from Susdal, for the translation of Pope Innocent's letter into Russian, Türkish and Mongol and also met Alexander Nevsky's attendant knight Sangor, a Coman converted to Christianity who would have known at least Türkish and Russian.'³²³ The friars combined language skills stood them in good stead after their arrival at Qaraqorum since:

“We learned many of Güyüg's secrets from persons who came with other princes; numerous Russians and Hungarians who knew French and Latin and Russian priests and others who had been with the Mongols some for thirty years, in their wars and other deeds and were acquainted with all their affairs because they knew their language and stayed with them constantly for ten or twenty years, some for longer and some for less, by means of whom we could examine everything. And they told us all voluntarily and sometimes without questioning, because they knew our wishes”.³²⁴

Two points immediately stand out from the friars' linguistic experiences: perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of Batu's location, the papal communication was translated into Russian, but also Türkish and Mongolian. It is not clear which 'Türkish' this could have been. Al-'Umarī (d. 1348/9) when referring to the Jochids, observes that although they made the Qipchaqs their subjects, 'all (of them) became like the Qipchaq' and whilst Mongolian was the chancery language, the *lingua franca* was Cuman-Qipchaq Türkish, but interleaved with Khwārazmian Türkic.³²⁵ The linguistic perspectives of the Jochids can perhaps best be seen in the late thirteenth century *Codex Cumanicus*

³²³ Painter, *The Tatar Relation*, p. 43

³²⁴ Painter, *The Tatar Relation*, p. 43

³²⁵ Peter B. Golden, 'Ethnogenesis: clan, tribe and state organization in Inner Asia', chapter in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: the Chinggisid Age*, 2009 pp. 114-116

which consists of two parts, the first contained a handbook of Cuman-Qipchaq with glossaries in Cuman, Persian and Italo-Latin. Rubruck, however, found that at Batu's son Sartaq's court there were Armenian priests who knew Syriac, Turkish and Arabic.³²⁶

Whilst interpreters and translators were thus the way forward it should be emphasised that this was fundamentally a practical course of action. Much has been written on both the Abbāsid and Sāmānid translation movements, the former lasting from the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries both of which are seen by scholars as essentially legitimising exercises.³²⁷ The Mongols had no such legitimising scruples – their legitimising philosophy was brutally simple: *Macht geht vor Recht*. Interpreters and translators were there to further Chinggisid imperial business.

In this multilingual environment, as the conquerors remained determinedly monolingual, linguistic skills were in heavy demand and were both a means of captives saving their skins and/or a means for the furtherance of a career. This is vividly shown by the experience of the Armenian historian Kirakos Ganjakets'i, whose fate after he was captured was to serve their secretarial needs, writing and reading letters.³²⁸ That this did not always work either to the conquerors' benefit or to that of their newly conquered subjects is shown by Rubruck's despair at his own interpreter's incompetence³²⁹ since Chinese and foreigners who succeeded in gaining a superficial knowledge of Mongolian could act as interpreters and collect revenue.³³⁰ There was also the problem that even a competent interpreter with a good command of Mongolian also needed to have some understanding of Mongol customs and the nuances between the vocabularies.

³²⁶ Rubruck, p. 118

³²⁷ Peacock gives a useful overview in his *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy::Bal'ami's Tarikhnama*, 2007, p. 169.

³²⁸ Kirakos/Bedrosian ch. 25

³²⁹ Rubruck, pp. 142, 171, 180; De Rachewiltz, 'Personnel and Personalities', p. 138.

³³⁰ Rubruck, pp. 142, 171, 180; De Rachewiltz, 'Personnel and Personalities', p. 138.

A further issue was that some interpreters and translators had their own agendas. Thus Rubruck's experience of interpreters was not encouraging since he discovered they were either inadequate or not available when he urgently needed them.³³¹ He also pinpointed one enduring problem with interpreters and translators, which was checking the accuracy of their work. He found with the translation of King Louis IX's letter to the Qa'an that, because the translators had been Armenians from Greater Armenia, uncompromisingly hostile to the Muslims, they had turned the translation of King Louis' letter to their own advantage by making a more forceful rendering than the original.³³²

It is not surprising then, that the extent of the Chinggisid dominions also gave rise to a thriving industry in multi-lingual glossaries and grammatical studies which could be utilised in the chancelleries of Dadu, Tabriz, Sarai and Mamluk Cairo. How far these were utilized by those on the ground however, is unknown, even assuming that all interpreters were literate, which is unlikely. One such famous glossary was published a generation after Chinggisid domination had ceased in western Eurasia and compiled in the Yemen by or for the sixth Rasulid ruler of Türkic descent (r. 764-779/1363-1377). The *Rasûlid Hexaglot*³³³ provides a snapshot overview of the languages that were considered important, at least in the commercial maritime environment of the Yemen. These included Arabic, Persian, and Türkic, (in three dialects including Qipchaq, Oghuz and Khwārazmian). Also included was a dialect of Mongol, Greek (colloquial Byzantine Greek) and Western Armenian/Cilician.

As monolingual conquerors involved in hostilities with non-Mongol speakers the Chinggisid commanders were not able to communicate

³³¹ Rubruck, pp. 180, 196

³³² Rubruck, pp. 118, 171

³³³ *The King's Dictionary: The Rasulid Hexaglot*, trans Tibor Halas Kun, P. Golden, Louis Ligeti, Edmund Schutz, 2000

their demands for submission or negotiations for surrender in the local languages. In his campaigns in China, the Chinggisid supreme commander Muqali, whilst being notably sympathetic to Chinese culture, is recorded as having had two interpreters, one of whom was a Khitan and the other a Chinese.³³⁴

At the other end of Eurasia, the linguistic skills within the administrative elite in the Hūlegüid dominions have been considered by DeWeese in the important context of Ibn al Fuwatī's (1244–1323) biographical dictionary, *Majma' al-ādāb fī Mu'jam al-alqāb*, composed in Arabic sometime between 1316 and 1322.³³⁵ Ibn al Fuwatī himself is an exceptional example of the career of a young captive, having been captured as a child of fourteen at the Fall of Baghdad. At the young age of 18 in 660/1261-62 he was installed by Nasīr al Dīn Tūsī (d. 672/1274) as head of the library at the great observatory established in Maragha by command of Hūlegü where he remained for twenty years keeping notes of the scholars who visited the library. Whilst Ibn al Fuwatī's first language must have been Arabic, DeWeese particularly notes the preponderance of those mentioned in the *Majma* as having linguistic skills are of Muslim Türkic origins.

One of the most eminent of these was Mahmūd Yalavach Khwārazmī, whom the *Secret History* specifically mentions as coming from Urgench/Gurganj.³³⁶ According to Ibn al Fuwatī, Yalavach “wrote in Mongol, Uighur, Türkic and Persian, and spoke Chinese, ‘Hindi,’ and Arabic.”³³⁷ Another outstanding linguist was Ghiyāth al-Dīn Qutlugh Khwāja al-Kāshgharī whose family of merchants originated in Kashgar but who was brought up in Bukhārā. He was proficient in “the Persian, Türkic, Mongol and Chinese languages (*lūghat al-furs wa al-türk wa al-*

³³⁴ De Rachewiltz, ‘Personnel and Personalities’, p. 108.

³³⁵ Devin DeWeese, ‘Cultural Transmission and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: Notes from the Biographical Dictionary of Ibn al-Fuwatī’, in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff, p.11-29

³³⁶ *SH*, II, de Rachewiltz, p. 962

³³⁷ DeWeese, ‘Cultural Transmission’ p. 24

moghūl wa al-khitā) and came to Baghdad in the service of the Mongol noyon Aruq when the latter came to Iraq as governor under Arghun (r. 684-90/1284-91) in 683/1284.³³⁸

Captives who were literate as well as competent Mongol speakers could have glittering if precarious careers though fate decreed where such educated captives spent their careers. Thus another Khurāsāni, but this time from Balkh, one Po-te-na, arrived in Cathay where his son Ch'a-han/Chaghan was born. Ch'a-han knew "the letters of all countries" became a high official, reached Annam (today's Vietnam), worked as translator and interpreter and wrote historical and chronological studies. He was ordered to translate the Mongolian chronicle *Tobchiyan* (the 'Summary') into Chinese and a Chinese book of Tang edicts into Mongolian or Uighur."³³⁹ Another captive, who found her way by chance to Qaraqorum where she was a 'procuress in the market' and who was presumably a Persian-speaker³⁴⁰ since she had been captured at Meshed, was the notorious Fatima, subsequently in the service of Güyüg's mother, Töregene.³⁴¹

One of the important aspects of imperial court life were the *biligs* or sayings and aphorisms of the ruler or imperial prince. Rashīd al-Dīn observes that it was the custom in those days to write down day-by-day every word that the ruler uttered, despite the rhythmical and obscure language, and every one of note had appointed one of their entourage to write down their *biligs*. This implies that the secretary/*bitikchi* would have to be able to understand obscure Mongolian. Chaghadaï was especially fond of *biligs* and had acquired as a *bitikchi* to write down his *biligs* a Khitan captive who came to wield immense influence, albeit coming to the inevitable unpleasant end. Ögödei's equivalent was his minister, Chinqai, either a Kereit or an Uighur, who served as one of the

³³⁸ DeWeese, 'Cultural Transmission' p. 24

³³⁹ Gyorgy Kara, *Books of the Mongolian Nomads*. p.39

³⁴⁰ Though Bar Hebraeus says in his *Chronography* that she was an Arab woman

³⁴¹ Her influence over Güyüg's mother led to her downfall and a particularly nasty end. *Juvaynī*, I, p. 243.

most influential advisers not just of Ögödei and Güyüg but of Chinggis Khan as well.³⁴² Rubruck also noted that when he was being interviewed by Batu his replies were written down.³⁴³

It seems, then, that at least some officials could hold their own with their masters. Furthermore, since rulers who had submitted were required to send their sons as hostages to Court, presumably there was an increasing pool of non-Mongols who could at least get by in the language as these hostages were educated and grew-up in the Imperial encampments, though it has to be said that Juvaynī's grasp of Mongolian is not much in evidence.

In the assessment of Martinez, the rank and file Mongol soldiery, scattered in garrisons across the land, became Islamized and Türkicized by the mid-690s/1290s, earlier than the more insulated Mongol elite who maintained their native tongue up to the twilight years of the dynasty. This, however, may be a flawed assumption since few 'Mongol soldiery' were likely to have been ethnic Mongol³⁴⁴ and Juvaynī, who must have known his Mongols from his Türks, refers several times to non-ethnic Mongol forces.³⁴⁵

Memory

That 'memory' had a central role in the early Mongol milieu is suggested by an after-dinner entertainment much enjoyed by the Mongol elite in the thirteenth century. These were competitions based on reciting the memorised *biligs* or sayings of Chinggis Khan or senior imperial princes.

³⁴² Rashid al-Din/Boyle, pp. 154-155

³⁴³ Rubruck, p. 133

³⁴⁴ A.P. Martinez, 'Changes in Chancellery Language' 1987-1991, p.108; Rubruck for example estimated Batu's following at five hundred heads of household who would accompany him when out riding. These may not all have been ethnic Mongols. Rubruck, p. 136

³⁴⁵ Juvaynī/Boyle I, pp. 98, 178 (in this instance Tajiks are referred to) also p. 608 when amongst Hülegü's troops marching west with him were a large number of Oirats (Mongols) and 1,000 'households' of Khitayan mangonel-men. Kirakos Ganjakets'i in his *History of the Armenians* Ch. 20 refers to Ögödei recruiting a motley crew to form three invasion armies.

The recitation of poems and epics was another aspect of Mongol get-togethers and as late as the twentieth century it has been recorded that ‘the memory of storytellers could hold entire epics, among which one can find tales of nine or ten thousand verses’. This is the size of the *Abai Geser Khübüün* epic, the 10,592 verses of which were written down in 1906 by Zhamtsarano from the words of a Kuda Buryat storyteller.³⁴⁶

Shagdaryn Bira has observed that the Mongols in ancient times customarily transmitted most messages orally ‘in a rhythmic and allegorical speech which was known as *da ‘un bari ‘ulhu*, that is, to entrust to the voice’. Bira also stresses the importance of such “oral letters” since they also ‘served to reproduce the historical past and to perpetuate the memory of outstanding personalities, famous particularly for their sharp-witted oratory and messages.’³⁴⁷ This oral historiography created by the Mongols replaced written documents and the authors of such early sources as the *Secret History* looked on such recitations as important historical documents set forth in an oral form, hence the repetition of such ‘messages’ in the *Secret History*.

Notwithstanding the Mongol attachment to such *da ‘un bari ‘ulhu*, there were going to be long-term problems with relying on memory insofar as the embryo imperial records were concerned. Thus as each generation of secretaries passed away, they would have had to ensure that their successors had memorised the records. This may have been practical for one generation but as the administration expanded would have been problematic thereafter. The other problem with memory is that because an administrative career under the Chinggisids could be precarious, there was the danger that with the death of an official, the record would prematurely die with him. Moreover, the designated memoriser would have to be continually available either to memorise new records or to recite those required. None of which would have been entirely practical

³⁴⁶ Gyorgy Kara, p.21

³⁴⁷ Shagdaryn Bira, *Mongolian Historical Writing from 1200 to 1700*, trans. from the Russian by John R. Krueger, 2002, p.6

for the keeping of population registers essential for the distribution of subjects to the elite as profits of empire.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, messages emanating from the early Mongols were delivered orally from memory, 'with even the envoys not daring to add or subtract even a single word from their message' because 'according to their law, he who lies, dies'.³⁴⁸ The *Secret History* records for example an intense exchange of 'oral' messages when Chinggis Khan's relationship with his mentor the Ong Khan was under serious strain.³⁴⁹ Juvaynī notes too that when his party was travelling with the Amir Arghun to Möngke's Court in 1251-1252 and finally made it through the snowdrifts the Amir made an oral report on the chaotic condition of the finances in Khurasan.³⁵⁰

This attachment to the supposed veracity of oral messages – even if accompanied by a document – is of major importance to any understanding of the physical transmission of messages and the *Yām* network since it provides a confirmation of sorts that emissaries had to complete the entire journey themselves in order to deliver the oral content of their message. It was clearly impracticable to teach it to messengers at every change-over across a distance of 5,000 miles/8,000km. Thus the 'relay' system could not have been a relay of messengers but of fresh mounts. The choice of messengers was thus of some importance and this will be examined in the next chapter.

Literacy

One reason for the Mongols' attachment to oral messages is that possibly the steepest mental adjustment they had to face as they conquered much of Eurasia was learning to trust the written word. This

³⁴⁸ Cleaves, 'A Chancellery Practice', p.501

³⁴⁹ *SH*, I, paras. 179, 180, 181.

³⁵⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle, II p. 516

is a significant difference between the early Mongol conquerors and for example, their Arab conquest predecessors. In the Arab case, messages from ‘Umar included written instructions, for example with orders to commanders to move on such-and-such a day and halt at such-and-such a place as well as detailed descriptions from commanders of the terrain and local conditions.³⁵¹ There is also specific mention of ‘Umar (13-23/634–644) ordering his commander Sa’d to ‘inform me in writing about the situation of the troops’.³⁵²

In contradistinction, in the early Chinggisid period, as the Sung envoy Zhao Gong makes clear, the Mongols had ‘absolutely no writing, so whenever they issued orders or dispatched envoys back and forth, they reckoned with their fingers to remember things.’³⁵³ Ch’ang Ch’un’s travelling companion too observed that in the early 1220s ‘They have no writing. Contracts are either verbal or recorded by tokens carved out of wood’.³⁵⁴ Thus if ten horses were being despatched, then ten incisions were made on the stick.³⁵⁵

This was somewhat retrograde since Sima Qian, the 100 BCE Han dynasty historian, remarks apropos the Xiongnu that a defecting Han envoy had taught them not only how to make an itemized account of the number of persons and domestic animals in the country but he also makes clear that the two sides corresponded in writing on wooden tablets. The Xiongnu tablets were carefully measured so as to be one inch longer than those of Han and composed in the most extravagant manner.³⁵⁶

³⁵¹ See in particular, *Tabarī*, pp. 23-24

³⁵² *Tabarī* p. 16

³⁵³ Reckoning with their fingers was clearly an aide memoire, but how it operated is not clear. *Zhao Gong*, p.3

³⁵⁴ *Travels of an Alchemist*, trans. Waley, p. 67

³⁵⁵ Francis Woodman Cleaves, ‘A Chancellery Practice of the Mongols in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 14. No.3-4 (Dec. 1951) p. 501

³⁵⁶ Sima Qian, II, p. 143

By the time Chinggis Khan was middle-aged he had, however, certainly grasped the value of written records. The *Secret History* records his giving his adopted son, Sigi Qutuqu, in 1206, the role of overseeing the apportionment of the *irgen* or subject people amongst the Imperial Family to be recorded in registers with *kökö bichig* or blue writing.³⁵⁷ De Rachewiltz, for his part, is of the view that the actual writing in the registers was done for Sigi Qutuqu by *bitikchis* under his supervision.³⁵⁸

Furthermore Chinggis Khan appointed a tutor for Ögodei to teach him to write,³⁵⁹ possibly an added encouragement in choosing Ögodei as his successor. That Chinggis Khan had an eye for posterity is shown by his reaction to his conversations with the sage Ch'ang Ch'un. One of Chinggis Khan's earliest adherents, Chinqai - who was to become a very influential adviser and chief scribe under the first three Mongol rulers - was with Chinggis Khan during his conversations with the sage. The Conqueror is recorded as having specifically asked that Ch'ang Ch'un's words of wisdom be written down in *Chinese characters*, that they might be preserved from oblivion.

Ch'ang Ch'un's travelling companion, Li Chih-Ch'ang, also records that as the Taoist Master stoically journeyed west, he received in c. 1220 CE what appears to have been a written message from the Conqueror - though presumably penned by one of his aides not least because it must have been written in Chinese characters. If this remarkable document was actually dictated by Chinggis Khan, then the kindly concern and literary style cast the conqueror in a rather more mellow light than that in which he usually basks:

'Now that your cloud-girt chariot has
issued from Fairyland, the cranes that
draw it will carry you pleasantly through

³⁵⁷ *SH*, I, para. 203, II, de Rachewiltz, p. 772-774

³⁵⁸ *SH* II, de Rachewiltz, p. 773

³⁵⁹ *SH*, II, para. 203, de Rachewiltz p. 773

the realms of India.... The way before you,
both by land and water, is indeed long; but
I trust that the comforts I shall provide will
make it not seem long. This reply to your
letter will show you my anxiety on your
behalf.....³⁶⁰

As de Rachewiltz points out, as early as 1206 there were at least three literate individuals supporting Chinggis Khan: the Türkic/Chinese speaking Chinqai, (ca 1169-1252) who was quite plausibly an Onggüt though described variously as an Uighur or a Kereit;³⁶¹ T'a-t'a T'ung-a, an Uighur who was captured from the Naiman and the Kereit Sira Oqul who was appointed *bitikchi* not later than 1206.³⁶² However, the supposed literacy skills of Sigi Qutuqu³⁶³ may, or indeed may not, be confirmed by an altercation which took place in north China between the monk Hai-yun and the chancellor Hsia-li in the context of a government decree that only such as were able to read the religious scriptures should be allowed clerical status. The monk asks the possibly ironic question: 'Is his Excellency the Grand Officer (Sigi Qutuqu) able to read?'³⁶⁴

Scripts

Reading, of course, is only one aspect of literacy; the more difficult side of the coin is learning how to write. This was compounded for the illiterate Mongols because they also had to decide which of the plethora of scripts in circulation³⁶⁵ they were to use for transcribing their own

³⁶⁰ Li Chih-Ch'ang trans. & ed. Waley, Arthur, *The Travels of an Alchemist*, p. 60

³⁶¹ For his biography see *In the Service of the Khan*, ch. 7 by P. Buell, pp. 95-111 especially pp. 96-97 for his ethnicity

³⁶² *Yuan shih*, 134, 25a, also De Rachewiltz, 'Personnel and Personalities in North China in the Early Mongol Period' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 9. No.1/2 (Nov.1966) p. 101 and *SH II*, de Rachewiltz, p. 773

³⁶³ In his biographic chapter on Sigi Qutuqu in *In the Service of the Khan* Paul Ratchnevsky is unequivocal that he was one of the first Mongols to learn the Uighur script

³⁶⁴ Y. H. Jan's chapter on Hai-yun in *The Service of the Khan*, p. 234

³⁶⁵ The Orkhon Alphabet or Turkic Runes believed to be derived from noncursive Sogdian in the early 8th century; the Khitan Liao *Ihe Bichig* or large script using

language. A multiplicity of languages and scripts has been one of the hazards of empire but what imperialist-minded conquerors had to avoid, which the Mongols barely did, was the complication of multiple scripts.³⁶⁶

Unfortunately, so far as the choice of script and its adoption are concerned, the circumstances surrounding this great leap forward for the Mongols are shrouded in uncertainty since there are no precise references in the *Secret History* - though there are references in 1206 to 'writing' or *bichig*.³⁶⁷ In view of the literacy of Chinqai and his colleagues, especially the captured seal-keeper of the Naimans, T'a-t'a T'ung-a, the assumption has tended to be that it was the latter who introduced writing ca. 1204 to the Mongols since his duties included affixing the seal to all imperial edicts, thus implying they were written.³⁶⁸ This first script was adapted from the Uighur script which in turn was descended from Syriac via Soghdian³⁶⁹ though unlike these the Uighur script is written vertically from left to right. The Franciscan, Friar Pascal of Vittoria, writing from 'Cumania' to his brethren in 1338 refers triumphantly to his mastery of the Cumanian language and the Uighur characters 'which language and character are commonly used throughout all those kingdoms or empires of the Tartars, Persian, Chaldaeans, Medes and of Cathay'.³⁷⁰

logographic script based on Chinese characters or the *Bagha Bichig* or small script which was a syllabic script both developed in the tenth century; Tangut, developed in 1037 using logographic characters; Jurchen/Southern Tungusic script developed in 1120, the Uighur script; Chinese characters etc.

³⁶⁶ Written Mongolian has had an adventurous career since 1206 as it has been transcribed into at least a dozen different scripts including lately Cyrillic.

³⁶⁷ *SH*, para. 203 and *SH II*, p. 773

³⁶⁸ This is the influential view of De Rachewiltz, in his 'Personnel and Personalities in North China in the Early Mongol Period', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 9. No.1/2 (Nov.1966) pp. 88-144, see esp. p. 100.

³⁶⁹ In his *Books of the Mongolian Nomads*, p. 28, Gyorgy Kara refers to the Naiman being in submission to the Qarakhitai and using an old Mongolian written language, a Khitan dialect in Uighur graphics and it was this language that was transmitted to the Mongols by T'a-t'a T'ung-a.

³⁷⁰ Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Letters and Reports of Missionary Friars, vol. I, p. 232

Qubilai in China decided to tackle the problems associated with the Uighur/Mongol script which was in use alongside Chinese characters. In a decree of 1269 he ‘emphasized the importance of writing for the perpetuation of speech and for recording events’. At the same time he blamed ‘the “simple mores of the North” for the lack of a proper writing system (suitable for Mongolian)’ whilst stating that the alien Chinese and Uighur characters were inadequate for recording Mongolian speech.³⁷¹

His solution was to command a prominent member of the Tibetan Buddhist Sa-skya order, ‘Phags-pa (Holy) Blo-gros rgyal-mts’an (1235-1280) whom he had invited to Dadu before he became emperor, to devise a new script in which both Mongolian and Chinese would be written based on the Tibetan alphabet. This was written vertically and grouped in syllables like the Khitan Small Script and has had several designations including the “New Mongolian Alphabet” in Chinese *meng-ku hsin-tzu*, as well as the “National” or “Imperial Alphabet” (Chin. *kuo-tzu*) and, from its external shape, the “Square Script” (Mong. *dörbel jin üsüg*, or *dörvoljin bichig*, Khalkha *dörwoljin üseg*) and the “Phags-pa’s letters”.³⁷²

It was adopted not just as the script for Mongolian but also a universal script in which all the languages of the empire were to be written and was, therefore, compulsory for all official documents. Subsequently, in 1270, a school for teaching the New Mongolian Alphabet was established by Qubilai in the imperial capital which became the Yuan Mongolian Academy in 1275 with Sa-ti-mi-ti-li (Uighur Satimitiri, Skr. SatYāmitra ‘Friend of Truth’) at its head.³⁷³ This particularly farsighted undertaking could have had incalculable implications for sustaining Chinggisid centralised imperial control in much the same way that

³⁷¹ The Chinese version of the Decree is found in the *Yuan Shih*, ch. 202. See also *Books of the Mongolian Nomads* by Gyorgy Kara trans. from the Russian by John R. Krueger, Indiana University Bloomington, 2005, p. 52, note 1.

³⁷² Gyorgy Kara, p. 51

³⁷³ Gyorgy Kara, p.36

Chinese characters have knit together the different dialectical groupings in China. The script, however, was not popular despite its accuracy and unambiguity and faltered after the death of Qubilai, in the event not surviving the dynasty.

It is thus to their credit that some of the complications of an imperium operating in a multilingual, partially literate, environment were faced head-on by the Mongols. The difficulties of communication inherent in an extensive and polyglot Imperium were successfully tackled at an early stage of conquests which, with the provision of a communication network, provided the crucial underpinning of the vast Chinggisid enterprise. Without these initiatives, Chinggisid control would have been unviable.

‘The messenger deserves neither death nor punishment, so long as he faithfully reports what he has heard. For this messenger is merely a spokesman, and when the spokesman transmits his message, he is not killed but is left alone’

1069 CE Yūsuf of Balasaghun, *Qutadghu Bilig*³⁷⁴

CHAPTER V

Long-Distance Transmission Options

Shortcomings and Advantages of the Alternatives

Whether the message was to be delivered orally, in writing or a combination of both, to be acted upon it required transmission. In the pre-wireless and pre-combustion engine era this relied on muscle power, whether four-legged, two-legged, winged, rowed or sailed - though brief messages could be transmitted through, for example, whistling arrows, drum beats, smoke signals and optical devices such as mirrors or flags or indeed shouted over short distances.³⁷⁵ The options available to the Chinggisids in setting up their trans-Eurasian communications were thus varied but the main method of transmission was muscle powered and included horses, runners, carrier pigeons, camels, oxen and, in the northern fastnesses even dogs, though all these bar the pigeons required human involvement in the actual process of transmission.

³⁷⁴ Quoted in Robert Dankoff ‘Qarakhanid Literature and Turco-Islamic Culture’ in Hasan B. Paksoy, ed. *Central Asian Monuments*, Istanbul, Isis Press, 1992 p.79

³⁷⁵ Tabarī describes how the Persian sovereign, Yazdegird, dispensed with the messenger system, or Barīd, replacing it instead with a relay system of ‘shouters’ stationed between the ruler and his foe, Rustam. The latter’s every move was then shouted by relay back to Yazdegird. (Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk) *The History of al-Tabarī*, volume xii: *The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine 14-15 AH/635-637 CE*. Trans. by Yohanan Friedmann. New York, State University of New York Press, 1992 pp. 82-83

It may well seem superfluous to examine these options in any detail but there are two key reasons for doing so. Firstly, in today's inter-connected world, it is easy to lose sight of the shortcomings or relative advantages of earlier means of transmission and secondly, any limitations on the means of conveyance of messages inescapably constrain the efficiency of the communication network. Moreover, despite the rapid advances in technology, some, if not all, of these means of transmission have been in use into the modern era³⁷⁶ thereby making it possible to verify, as well as assess, the comparative advantages and disadvantages to the Mongols of the available alternatives. It is thus proposed to briefly investigate these 'muscle-power' alternatives in the context of their potential utility for communications between the Hülegüids and the Yuan.

The Messenger

Apart from the courier pigeon, the backbone of all pre-modern communication networks was the human messenger even if they were not delivering the message in person, but by signal. However, the advantage of human point-to-point delivery of a communication was that, unlike pigeons, they could carry oral messages and if needs be, they could answer questions.

Messengers versus Envoys

The *Secret History* has references to *elçi/elçin*³⁷⁷ - a term which is variously translated as messengers, couriers, envoys, emissaries or ambassadors. Such diverse meanings can have the unfortunate side-

³⁷⁶ See e.g. Carruthers, *Unknown Mongolia*, 1910 p. 279 on the *ortoo/yam stations* still functioning in Mongolia. *The Times of India* reported in February 2002 that the Orissa Courier Pigeon Service was being discontinued.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Orissa-to-retire-its-pigeons/articleshow/900187.cms>

³⁷⁷ See especially *SH*, de Rachewiltz's commentary in Vols. I and II, pp. 466 and 923

effect of distorting latter day conceptions of the *Yām* network. As far as the term is used in the *Secret History*, De Rachewiltz observes that the one hundred³⁷⁸ merchants under the leadership of one Uquna or Billy-Goat who were massacred at Otrar by the governor of the Khwarazmshah actually bore credentials from the Mongol court. This meant that from the Mongol point of view they had the status of envoys or *elcîn*³⁷⁹. As he points out, the status of the victims as ambassadors made their murder an inevitable *casus belli*.

That *elcîn* was a widely accepted term for ambassadors is confirmed by the Armenian Grigor of Akner who, in his *History of the Nation of Archers*, recounts how Hülegü sent ‘*elch’is*’/ambassadors to his brother Möngke after the Fall of Baghdad.³⁸⁰ Six hundred and fifty years later, this term is consistent with the experience of Captain John Wood on his expedition to discover the source of the River Oxus who was accompanied for some of his journey by an individual he refers to as an Elchi or ambassador from Dost Mohamen Khan to Murad Ali Beg of Kunduz.³⁸¹ There seems little doubt, then, that the use of the term ‘messenger/s’ to translate *elcî*/*elcîn* rather under-rates the role.

During the Chinggisid era there seem to have been four main categories of *elcîn*. Firstly, communications between the Imperial Family were delivered by close associates of the correspondent and such ‘messengers’ were generally regarded as ‘ambassadors’; secondly, ‘envoys’ carrying messages between the various steppe polities; thirdly, ‘informants’ who delivered *kele* - in Mongolian meaning ‘tongue’ but in context refers to oral and secret information, presumably ‘intelligence’.³⁸² Lastly, according to Jūzjānī, there were ‘swift

³⁷⁸ *SH*, de Rachewiltz’s commentary, Vol. II, p. 923

³⁷⁹ See especially *SH*, de Rachewiltz’s commentary in Vols. I and II, pp. 466 and 923

³⁸⁰ Grigor/Bedrosian, Ch. 12, section 13.

³⁸¹ John Wood, *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus*, Elibron Classics, [1872] 2005 p. 119

³⁸² *SH*, de Rachewiltz, p. 521

messengers' or *musri 'ān*, who, from the context, were despatched as military messengers when there was urgency or a state of emergency.³⁸³ Thus Chinggis Khan received military intelligence from northern China whilst he was on campaign in Turkestan in 1224-1225 CE. Such messengers may have been attached to the military/secret stations, the *Narin Yām/Na-lin zhan*, or may simply have been chosen on an ad hoc basis from amongst a commander's forces when on campaign.

In the preceding chapter the emphasis the Mongols put on oral messages was noted and a corollary of this was that the messenger would have to complete the entire journey rather than the message being relayed by a succession of couriers. That is not to say that relay couriers were unknown to the Chinggisids. They have been famously described by Marco Polo but rather in the context of the network taken over by the Yuan from its predecessors within the Great Wall.

Over six hundred years later, when writing of his travels in 1905 in Qing Dynasty China, Bruce comments that whilst there was a telegraph line from Beijing to Kashgar 'the Imperial courier post still survived. By it the transfer of information or special orders was extraordinarily rapid. An Imperial despatch, wrapped in the well-known yellow silk and tied round the waist of a succession of mounted couriers, would reach Liang-chou in Gansu/Kansu province under nineteen days from Peking. The time usually taken for the same journey by well-equipped travellers was forty-three days.'³⁸⁴ Eight hundred miles was not unknown.³⁸⁵ In western Eurasia, the Ghaznavid official Beyhaqi (995—1077 CE) also has numerous references to the arrival of the couriers of the postal and

³⁸³ Jūzjānī p. 1217,

³⁸⁴ Major C D Bruce, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*, p. 210

³⁸⁵ *Stanford's Compendium of Geography and Travel: Asia*, Augustus H. Keane, 2nd ed. 1886 p. 595. The strictly disciplined Būyid messengers did Baghdad to Shiraz, around 683 miles/1,100 kilometres, in around eight days, or 140 km a day. By way of contrast, the express messengers towards the end of the Ottoman empire between Constantinople and Baghdad, a distance of 1100 miles/1770 km was completed in twenty days by four 'Tartars' riding day and night. *Marco Polo*, Yule/Cordier, I, pp. 433-438

intelligence services with their despatch bags closed with a ring and with seals in several places.³⁸⁶

That delivering state communications could be a hazardous enterprise is incidentally confirmed by Beyhaqi who has an enlightening report of one unfortunate messenger whose task was to deliver a message from Sultan Mahmud to his son Mas'ud:

The Amir (Mas'ud) reined back his horse and one of the senior officers took the letter and gave it to him and he began to read it. When he had come to the end, he said to the courier, *"It's five or six months since this letter was written; where have you tarried all this time and what is the reason for this late arrival?"* (emphasis added)

The courier replied: "When I set out from Baghlan for Balkh, I fell ill and had to stay for a while at Balkh. When I reached Sarakhs, the Commander-in-Chief of Khurasan, the General Ghazi was there and the news arrived of Sultan Mahmud's decease. He went off to Nishapur, taking me with him and not allowing me to proceed, saying that 'The Lord will arrive with auspiciousness; there is no point in proceeding, since the roads have become unsafe and it is inadvisable for a solitary rider to travel lest some outrage occur.' When the letter reached Ghazi with the news that the lord had set out from Ray, he gave permission for me to continue my journey. The road to here from Nishapur is very disturbed. I took very keen precautions so that I was able to arrive here in safety." ³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ For example, under the year 431, *Tarikh-e Mas'udi*, I, p. 350

³⁸⁷ *Beyhaqi*, vol. I, p. 108

There are a number of interesting implications arising from this account; not least that the Ghaznavid messenger was apparently travelling solo and was clearly expected to deliver the written message himself whatever the difficulties encountered.

The apparent Chinggisid preference for oral communications thus immediately impinged on their transmission since such messengers would also have had to be point-to-point. This aspect brought into play the Mongol fixation on 'status'. That this was the default position of the 'seed of Chinggis Khan' can be seen in two encounters. The first was between Kōrgüz, travelling yet again to Court away from his responsibilities in Khurasan. En route he had a dispute with one of Chaghadaï's chief amirs, who unfortunately for Kōrgüz turned out to be a descendant of Chinggis Khan. As Juvaynī remarks, 'with such persons words are finer than a hair of the head or a sharp sword'; the emir took grave exception to a response of Kōrgüz, leading to his subsequent arrest, trial and death.³⁸⁸

Another not dissimilar incident occurred between Ögödei's grandson, Qipchaq Oghul and one Jalayirtai - who described himself as the servant of Baraq, the Chaghadaid khan who had recently deposed his cousin.³⁸⁹ When Jalayirtai took issue with Qipchaq, the latter's insightful response was 'when has a *qarachu*³⁹⁰ ever argued with the seed of Chingiz Khan, for a dog like thee to give me an unmannerly answer'.³⁹¹ As a *qarachu* was deemed the lowest of the low this was a serious case of *lèse-majesté*.

On the evidence of such incidents it was extremely unlikely that members of the Imperial Family would communicate with each other, with grandees of the Imperium, governors, commanders and high

³⁸⁸ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, pp. 502-503

³⁸⁹ In another example of status, the cousin had been humiliated by being reduced to the position of head cheetah-keeper.

³⁹⁰ whose status is not clearly definable and which may have varied over time *SH*, para 191; De Rachewiltz, II, p. 692

³⁹¹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 152

officials or *vice versa* via a mere postal courier. A message delivered in such a fashion would not have the required gravitas, would have reflected ill on the sender and hence would not be taken seriously. Thus in order not to cause offence to prickly Imperial sensibilities, emissaries had to be chosen with great care.

The Implications of Mongol Social Stratification and the choice of Envoys

As the episode involving the *qarachu* shows, the Mongol elite enforced their social stratification inherited as part of the long-held traditions of the steppe milieu. These included what has been called ‘grand-domestication’ in which strong groups of nomadic herders had an ethos which exalted the ruling aristocracy, condoned power play and legitimized warfare, subdued and took control of peoples and settlements who were then managed as if they were some kind of herds.³⁹² This was the tradition into which Temujin was born and of all the customs which the Mongols carried with them as they conquered the world could well have been the most problematic - not just for their ‘victims’ - but a contentious challenge to the traditional outlook of the Mongols themselves as they had to adapt to different kinds of human ‘herds’.

Steppe society, however, was not simply divided between aristocrats and ‘herds of people’ – the aristocratic lineages were at the summit but beneath this summit there were surprisingly complex social strata.³⁹³

Based on later evidence but on earlier custom in Khamag

³⁹² Quoted in *Uighur Stories from Along the Silk Road* by Cuiyi Wei and Karl W. Luckert, 1998, p. 9. Karl Luckert was the originator of the idea of five evolutionary phases or strata in the development of folklore and religions: era of gathering-hunting; domestication; over-domestication; universal salvation religions and democratic revolts;

³⁹³ This passion for the stratification and classification of subject populations can also be seen in the Yuan where not only were there categories dependent on when each submitted but also sub-categories dependent on function, such as civilian, military, postal relay and artisan. The latter were then sub-divided into three further categories of what were hereditary servitors. See e.g. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, p. 32.

Mongolia³⁹⁴ the lower orders beneath this Borjigid pinnacle consisted of at least three different social groupings. Thus under the aristocratic Borjigid elite were the *Sain khun* or good people; under them were the *Dund khun* or average people and right at the bottom were the *Muu khun* or bad people. A particularly complicated category was *bo'ol* or hereditary slaves.

Emissaries were not likely to have been chosen from the categories of *Dund khun* or the *Muu khun* or 'Bad People'. Black or *khar (qara) yastan* or black bone lineages is a term that stretches back at least to the Türk empires, in which *kara bodun* was the term for subjects. In the *Secret History* they are the *qarachus*, whose status is not clearly definable and which may have varied over time.³⁹⁵ There are indications that the *Muu Khun* originated as captives but the waters are considerably muddied by a category with the status of *bo'ol* who also originated as captives³⁹⁶ who were not quite slaves, nor freemen, but a form of bondservant or serf.

The *Dund khun* or 'Average People' included some rich people and those who performed moderate or lowly civil and military services, for example, *lubchitan*, *dugulgatan*, *demch* etc. These may have been the 'ordinary people' or *düri-yin gü-ün* mentioned in the *Secret History*, whom if talented or well-built could be of use to the khan.³⁹⁷

The *Sain Khun* constituted the 'Good People' and could be used as emissaries. These included high-ranking nobles of non-Chinggisid descent and other high-ranking official princes of ordinary descent – the vast majority of whom did not have the right to obtain offices by inheritance. They are known in the chronicles by the names *darkhad*, *tabunang*, (*son-in-law*) *khonjin*, *shigchin*, *aimgiin akhas*, *tushmel*, *zaisan* and *shuulenge*.

³⁹⁴ That is, the confederation of Mongolian tribes before 1206, Bold, p. 82

³⁹⁵ *SH*, para 191; De Rachewiltz, II, p. 692

³⁹⁶ The term *bo'ol* was a complex term, which though it is often translated as slave, could refer to someone either very menial or to someone with a very responsible position see also note 448

³⁹⁷ *SH*, para 191; De Rachewiltz, II p. 692

The *darkhad* (sing. *darkhan*) were a group mentioned several times in the *Secret History* as one whose members had been awarded special rights by the Chinggis Khan for services rendered, possibly by performing outstandingly in battle. Unlike household serfs and grooms, the *darkhan* were freemen, and were allowed to carry quivers and participate in formal drinking.³⁹⁸ It is believed that these *darkhan* along with the *noyans* provided the 'officer class' of the Chinggisid armed forces.³⁹⁹ This was a category with a long precedent amongst steppe empires, including that of the Türk in the sixth to eighth centuries and amongst their rights was that of being allowed to keep war booty and members of conquered tribes.⁴⁰⁰

It is something of a shock, however, to discover that not all high-ranking commanders were *Sain Khun* as some conquered nobles had *bo'ol* status. For example, the Jalayir, an ancient lineage defeated by the Chinggisids in the mid-eleventh century, held high office under the Yuan, the Chaghadaï khanate and the Jochids but their status was that of dependent vassals or slaves, *ötögü bo'ol* - where *ötögü* has a similar meaning to *yeke*, or great.⁴⁰¹

Two of Chinggis Khan's most trusted generals, Jelme and Muqali of the Jalayir had *bo'ol* status. The Jalayirs had apparently been hereditary serfs of the Mongols since the time of Chinggis Khan's ancestor Qaidu and were thus 'hereditary slaves or *emchu bo'ol*'.⁴⁰² Indeed Muqali's son was actually called *Böl – Bo'ol*. Even the commander-in-chief in western Eurasia in 1231, Chormaghan Noyan, (d. c. 639/1242) was an *ötögü bo'ol*.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ De Rachewiltz, *SH*, para 187; II. Commentary, p. 672

³⁹⁹ H. Desmond Martin, p. 78

⁴⁰⁰ Bold, p. 110

⁴⁰¹ *SH*, para 230, De Rachewiltz, II, p. 833

⁴⁰² *In the Service of the Khan* eds. de Rachewiltz, Hok-lam Chan, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing and Geier, ch. i. p. 3.

⁴⁰³ *SH*, De Rachewiltz II, p. 955. Though it has been repeatedly said that under the Chinggisids any man of ability, whether Mongol, Chinese, or Persian, the road to command lay open,⁴⁰³ the careers of the *ötögü bo'ol* would indicate that this is clearly a complex category within the social intercourse which needs further examination

Notwithstanding the complexities of Mongol social classifications, Biran, in her significant article on diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chaghadaid khanate confirms that their diplomatic contacts were conducted through envoys or ambassadors (Mon. *ilchiyan*; Ar. & Pers. *rusūl*; Persian, *fīristādahgān*, Chinese *shī*). She found that of the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid envoys mentioned in the sources the majority were invariably members of the appropriate *keshig* or military entourage of the sender though relatives delivering the communication gave it the most elevated status. She is undoubtedly correct that the high number of Chinggisid aristocrats, who were of course ethnic Mongols, selected as Chaghadaid envoys was to ensure that their reception and message were treated with the proper respect.⁴⁰⁴

For specialised missions the emissaries would be selected to ensure that they interacted with the recipient thus the Hülegüid Arghun Khan despatched the Nestorian Rabban Sawmā to the Pope in 1287. Qubilai carefully chose a member of his *keshig*⁴⁰⁵ or personal guard, who was the son of the Uighur who had taught Qaidu's father, as his emissary to Qaidu, which was the main reason Qaidu spared his life.⁴⁰⁶ Other envoys to Qaidu from both Möngke and Qubilai were selected from amongst their *keshig* for their personal links with the recipient.⁴⁰⁷ Jūzjānī refers to 'confidential persons' being despatched by the sons of Chaghadaid to Möngke before his elevation⁴⁰⁸ and one can only assume that they were members of the *keshig* of the individual Chaghadaid princes.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ Biran, 'Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices,' p. 379

⁴⁰⁵ This functioned as a bodyguard, elite troops, household establishment and provided administrators.

⁴⁰⁶ YS, ch. 134, p. 3246 and Biran, 'Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate: Some Preliminary Remarks' pp. 381-382

⁴⁰⁷ See especially p. 381 Biran 'Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices' for further examples of envoys chosen for their personal links to the recipient.

⁴⁰⁸ Jūzjānī, p. 1182

⁴⁰⁹ Rashid al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 150

Nevertheless, the Imperial Family had a somewhat ambivalent attitude to emissaries since they were perceived as being close to the sender of the communication and thereby redolent with the sender's prestige. In the context of the purges following Möngke's contested elevation one of the recipients of an ominous demand from Möngke to appear at Court was Khwāja Oghul, the son of the deceased khan, Güyüg. His immediate reaction was to murder the messenger, Shilemun Bitikchi. He was constrained by one of his wives who pointed out to him 'it is the messenger's duty to deliver his message and in no age have men molested the messengers even of rebels. How then can one make an attack upon an *ambassador* (emphasis added) who has come from Möngke Qa'an? And by the killing of one person what harm can be done to his kingdom.....'⁴¹⁰ Fortunately for Khwāja, he heeded the advice and against very considerable odds, survived his summons.

Such prudent sentiments were not, however, much in evidence during the Ariq Böke crisis from 1260 onwards following the death of Möngke. Although practically every member of Möngke's personal *keshig* supported his youngest brother, Ariq Böke,⁴¹¹ who was Tolui's youngest son and thus the *Otchigin* or Hearth Prince, Qubilai contested the leadership. Rashīd al-Dīn records that 'a hundred messengers were appointed to represent the princes and sent to Ariq Böke, to whom they delivered the following message: "We, the princes and emirs, having taken counsel together, have set up Qubilai Qa'an as Qa'an'.

These messengers continued to pass to and fro between the protagonists until the defeat of Ariq Böke and his army who 'took fright and scattered in disorder, having first put to death the two princes that had been imprisoned and the hundred envoys'.⁴¹² This was not an isolated incident of the insecurity of envoys in the unfolding drama. In 661/1262-1263 Ariq Böke sent as envoys Buritei Bitikchi and Shadi to

⁴¹⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 214

⁴¹¹ Thomas T. Allsen, 'Guard and Government' p. 520

⁴¹² Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 253 and ff.

levy cattle, money and arms for his army from his purported ally, Alghu, a Chaghadaid prince. These envoys were able to assemble some of the items until Alghu changed his mind imprisoning the ‘ambassadors’ and subsequently having them killed.⁴¹³

Thus emissaries did not only have to overcome the hazards of terrain, climate and insecure roads but also as dangerous, the character and disposition of the recipient. It seems then, that despite Chinggis Khan’s view on the sacrosanct nature of envoys, not all sovereigns or would-be rulers went along with this including his own grand-children.

The Means of Transmission

Having selected an emissary the next problem was getting the message to the addressee. The transmission options available to the sender depended not only on the urgency but also in large part on availability, distance and terrain. As one of the participants in the above embassy of Shāhrūkh observed, from the border city of Suzhou in the Hexi Corridor to the capital there were ninety-nine stages between which were *qarghus*, or signalling towers with sight-lines to each other. In the event of invasion, a signal could be transmitted over a distance of three months journey in the course of a night and day. Even so, a ‘hard-copy’ written message was also sent by relays of runners to confirm the signal.⁴¹⁴

Despite the speed by which signals could convey urgent messages, communicating by signal from Tabriz to Dadu or vice versa, for reasons which will be amplified below, was not an option, especially if it was more complicated than simply relaying the news that the Qa’an was dead. This meant that any communication had to rely on muscle power

⁴¹³ Rashid al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 258

⁴¹⁴ Hāfiz-i Abrū, *A Persian Embassy to China*, p. 33

for delivery - either runners or the four-legged variety both of which will be examined below.

The Mongol and His Mount

In the order of importance to the Mongols of their five kinds of livestock (*tabun qosighu mal*) the horse/*morin* is most valued, followed by the camel/*temegen*, the ox/*üker*, the sheep/*qonin* and lastly the goat/*imaghan*. The ratio between the number of horses and for example sheep was reportedly one horse for every six or seven sheep.⁴¹⁵

As travellers amongst the Mongols have noted time and again, from their earliest days Mongols are inseparable from their mounts. Natasha Fijn, in her study on Mongol herding customs notes that a 'man was known by his horse. Mongols did not judge a man by his clothes or his accent. They looked carefully at his horse and by its proportions, colour, gait and by the look in its eye they could tell all the essentials about its owner. Knowing this, people chose and educated their riding horses with almost unbelievable care.'⁴¹⁶

Moreover, writing in the nineteenth century, the Russian explorer, Colonel Prejevalsky, observed:

The Mongol is so indolent that he will not walk any distance, no matter how short, if he can ride; his horse is always tethered outside the yurt, ready for use at any moment; he herds his cattle on horseback and when on a caravan journey nothing but intense cold will oblige him to dismount and warm his limbs by walking a mile or two. His legs are bowed by

⁴¹⁵ quoted in Bat-Ochir Bold, 'The Quantity of Livestock Owned by the Mongols in the Thirteenth Century' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 8, Part 2, July 1998 p. 245

⁴¹⁶ Natasha Fijn, *Living with Herds, Human-Animal coexistence in Mongolia*, Cambridge, CUP. p.151

constant equestrianism and he grasps the saddle like a centaur. He loves and understands horses; a fast galloper or a good ambler is his greatest delight and he will not part with such a treasure, even in his direst need. His contempt for pedestrianism is so great that he considers it beneath his dignity to walk even as far as the next yurt.

This horror of pedestrianism to some extent shaped the Tūrco-Mongol character since the horse was absolutely pivotal to what was an extreme form of equestrian society. Indeed, the implication from Prejevalsky is that an unhorsed Mongol would forfeit not just his means of transport but also his status – hence Temujin’s dismay when he discovered his family geldings had been rustled after the death of his father.⁴¹⁷

Zhao Gong, the Sung envoy, noted in 1221 that ‘the Tatars are born and grow up among saddles and horses.....’⁴¹⁸ The Chinese official Sū-T’ing, travelling through Mongolia during the 1230s observed “I, T’ing, have never seen during my journeys through the steppes a single man going on foot”.⁴¹⁹ From the *Secret History* it is obvious that it was not only hunting that occupied the thirteenth century steppe dwellers. As Captain John Wood was told during his mid-nineteenth century travels in the Pamirs, a good horse was a great blessing for without the horse, it would be impossible to raid and there would be no occupation and no glory, an utterance which undoubtedly applied six hundred years earlier in Mongolia.

The dangerous corollary to a man’s status and character being judged by his mount was that those who had to go about on foot, in effect most

⁴¹⁷ Prejevalsky, *Mongolia, The Tangut Country* p. 60

⁴¹⁸ Zhao Gong, p. 7

⁴¹⁹ Sū-T’ing was a co-author of *Hei-Ta shih-lüeh*, quoted in Bat-Ochir Bold, ‘The Quantity of Livestock Owned by the Mongols in the Thirteenth Century’ p. 243

of the settled populations of Eurasia except for elements of the military elites, were held in contempt. As Zhao Gong observed, the 'Tatars despise the aged and love the strong'. John of Plano Carpini also noted that towards other people, the Tartars were 'most insolent' and were of a 'disdainful nature'. Even when visitors were of high rank, 'they scorn and set nought by all other noble and ignoble persons whatsoever.....'⁴²⁰

Such an attitude inevitably had serious repercussions for unfortunate civilians in conquered areas who acquired the dubious status of a 'herd' or 'flock'. When a city fell, each cavalryman was required to take ten prisoners who were then forced to work from earliest morn to night for the Mongols 'and the slow ones are killed'.⁴²¹ Likewise, Ibn al-Athīr recounts with disgust that after the fall of Bukhārā, the survivors were taken prisoner and were 'made to travel on foot in the most wretched fashion. All who became exhausted and unable to walk they killed'.⁴²² The Armenian historian Kirakos Ganjakets'i also discovered that despite being saved because of his literacy he was harassed and harried, travelling on foot whilst his Iranian guards would strike the skull or body of any captive who paused even for a moment.⁴²³ For such 'herds' of captives their forced relocation was tantamount to a death march.

On the other hand, the much vaunted Tūrco-Mongol mobility may need to be revisited. In the context of the Chinggisid conquest of much of Eurasia, the fourteenth century Venetian geographer and strategist, Sanudo Torsello (c.1270-c.1334), remarked that foot soldiers made up the greatest part of their forces whilst 'the lesser part sat in ox-carts and least of all were the asses, pack animals and foals'.⁴²⁴ That carts were a not insignificant mode of transport when on campaign is

⁴²⁰ John of Plano Carpini, (tr. C. Raymond Beazley) *The Texts and Versions of John of Plano, Carpini and William de Rubruquis, As printed for the First Time by Hakluyt in 1598*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1890, pp. 110 & 111

⁴²¹ Zhao Gong, p. 8

⁴²² Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 209

⁴²³ The hatred of the Muslim Iranians for the Christian Armenians is one of the undercurrents in the Armenian sources. Kirakos, ch. 24

⁴²⁴ Sanudo Torsello, p. 374

confirmed by the Armenian Kirakos Ganjakets'i who remarks that a substantial Jochid force crossed through the Derbend Gate/Iron Gate and 'levelled and made easy all the passes on the route they travelled, for they were coming by cart'.⁴²⁵ The famed Mongol hordes galloping across Eurasia could well have been a rather less mobile and more motley force than is sometimes envisioned.

Even the mobility of the elite mounted horsemen, however, did not come cost-free, since horses, and even sturdy Mongol ones, are not all-terrain vehicles able to keep going day and night without the need for refuelling and rest breaks. They too have needs as Chinggis Khan recognised in his military directive of c.1205 CE against unnecessarily fatiguing the horses before reaching their destination.⁴²⁶ This was to be done, according to his instructions, by removing the bit and crupper so that the horseman would not be able to direct nor control the animal and indeed would probably fall off if travelling too fast.⁴²⁷

In view of their equestrian lifestyle it stands to reason that the first choice of transport for the Mongols were their sturdy little Mongolian horses on whose trusty hooves they had conquered much of Eurasia. Even so, like most forms of transport, these had their limitations which it is important to recognise as they formed the backbone both of the Chinggisid conquests and their communication network.

Equus Caballus or the Mongol Horse

There are two types of horse in Mongolia: the *Takhi* or *equus przewalski*, which is the truly wild horse and the free-ranging Mongolian horse, *equus caballus*, a distinctive breed indigenous to Mongolia ranging between twelve to fourteen hands (forty-eight to fifty-six inches or one hundred and twenty-two to one hundred and forty-two cm) high. There are chromosomatic differences between the two since

⁴²⁵ Kirakos Ganjakets'i/Bedrosian Ch. 59 section 310

⁴²⁶ *SH* para 199 and de Rachewiltz, *SH* II, p. 737

⁴²⁷ *SH* para 199 and de Rachewiltz, *SH* II, p. 737

the Mongolian horse has sixty-five and the Takhi has sixty-six whilst an ass has only sixty-two.



Photographed in 2013

A small band of Mongolian Horses above compared to the Takhi or Przewalski Horse below



Przewalski's Horse photo courtesy of the World Wildlife Fund

Bold has computed the number of geldings and stallions available in Mongolia at the turn of the thirteenth century as constituting thirty percent of the entire horse stock giving a figure of 420,000. He

estimates that the number of males and females younger than four years stood at 616,000 and the number of mares older than three years as 364,000 giving a grand total of 1,400,000 horses.⁴²⁸ Bold's figures have implications for the number of mounts available to the Chinggisid forces though any computation is complicated by a number of factors, some of which are undoubtedly beyond our reach today including how many geldings were left behind in Mongolia.

John Masson Smith has calculated that 'Chinggis Khan's army in 1206 numbered some 135,000 men, approximately the whole adult male population of Outer Mongolia, which implies, multiplying by five, a total population of perhaps 675,000'.⁴²⁹ As a comparator, Prejevalsky observes that whilst in the 1870s there are no reliable statistics for the population of Mongolia, in his estimation 'If the whole nation were called out for military duty, Mongolia ought to supply 284,000 men (but less than one-tenth that number would be available)'.⁴³⁰ If Bold's statistic for the number of horses in Mongolia in the thirteenth century is anywhere near correct and taking a figure between that of Prejevalsky and Masson Smith for those available for military duty say of 150,000 men, assuming all were mounted on geldings, each would only have a maximum of 2.8 mounts each. Or, on Masson Smith's lower figure, then a maximum of 3 mounts. Taking into account the inevitable losses this seems a precarious number of mounts with which to conquer the known world.

⁴²⁸ Bat-Ochir Bold, 'The Quantity of Livestock', p. 242. To compute this he takes the supposed number of warriors in 1210 as being approximately 120,000 (out of a possible population of 695,000) and multiplies this by 3.5 horses taking the average of a warrior having between two and seven mounts depending on his circumstances, making in all 420,000 horses. For the other figures he looks at the ratios for which statistics are available in the late twentieth century. Carl Sverdrup has also computed the numbers of the Mongols available for action making a nominal total of 70,000 for the Mongol army in 1219. Carl Sverdrup, 'Numbers in Mongol Warfare', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 8 (2010), pp. 109-117

⁴²⁹ J. Masson Smith jr "Mongol Manpower and Persian Population" in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18 (1975) 271-299; pp. 282-283 and

⁴³⁰ Prejevalsky, *N. Mongolia, The Tangut Country and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet*. Trans. E. Delmar Morgan with introduction and notes by Colonel Henry Yule CB. London, Sampson p. 88

In view of the calculation above on numbers of horses it is interesting to note that apparently each horseman on campaign took along with him five mounts though some put the figure rather higher, at between ten and twenty.⁴³¹ Zhao Gong simply remarks that when they go to war each man has several horses 'and each day they alternate using one horse as a mount and therefore their horses do not become weary or exhausted.' When on the move in Mongolia today a horseman can easily lead four horses⁴³² so leading spare mounts would not cause any difficulties.

On the other hand, General Ferrier, writing from personal experience in the nineteenth century, observed that when the Tūrkomans took to the field, they each had two horses, one a charger and the other a *yābū* or pack-horse used for burden.⁴³³ This may have been, however, because these chargers were not pastured when on campaign but were fed a special diet consisting of balls of raw sheep-tail fat mixed with barley and maize flour which presumably the pack-horse had to carry. There was thus a disincentive for taking extra mounts requiring extra rations and extra pack-horses to carry it all.⁴³⁴

Upkeep

As far as horse upkeep is concerned, the horses manage themselves while grazing throughout the day and are free to roam wherever they choose therefore much of a herder's time is spent in finding the location of the individual bands each day. Mongolian horses tend to be an independent and self-directing group who mainly engage with other horses in small bands overseen by a stallion whose harem contains

⁴³¹ Peter P. Golden's chapter on 'Migrations, Ethnogenesis' in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia, the Chinggisid Age*, 2009,

⁴³² Personal observation

⁴³³ General Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Beloochistan*, London, 1856, p.84

⁴³⁴ This was precisely the problem identified by Major Bruce attempting to travel in the *Footsteps of Marco Polo*, that the more animals taken the more feed was required which meant more animals had to be taken to carry the feed thus requiring even more feed....p. 19

between one to twenty-six mares plus young. Stallions were gelded when they were four years old and strong. Bachelor bands of young males or geldings range from one to seventeen individuals and it is the geldings that are primarily ridden – individual geldings being selected from a whole herd and then only ridden over the course of two or three days and then left to rejoin their band to roam freely for months at a time. Bat-Ochir Bold observes that Mongols traditionally do not use horses of less than four years of age as mounts and then only taken on long journeys after the sixth year.⁴³⁵

Pasture:

This factor to some extent explains the *modus operandi* of the *Yām* stations. The Mongol horse is bred in pasture throughout its life and because they eat selectively among plants and grass they do not graze for long at one place and once grazed the grass does not grow back thus the herd requires new pasture. From this viewpoint, it would be interesting to know how feasible the oft-repeated suggestion that Ögödei's generals wanted northern China turned into pastureland⁴³⁶ would actually have been. Evicting the incumbent farmers and ploughing up their small-holdings would not have been the end of the task since collecting the seeds of the preferred plants and grasses would have been a well-nigh impossible undertaking given the area to be sown.

Pastures similar to those in Central Asia produce 500 kg/ha or 445 lbs an acre, which means that a Mongol *tümen* would have needed access to around 1124 acres – 1.75 square miles a day to obtain 10 lbs of (dry) grass for each of its 50,000 horses at the possibly generous figure of five horses per horseman. Thus the amount of sustenance required would be enormous for a full-strength *tümen*. Feeding the horses of a *tümen*

⁴³⁵ Bat-Ochir Bold, 'The Quantity of Livestock Owned by the Mongols in the Thirteenth Century', p. 244

⁴³⁶ Allsen, *Imperialism*, p. 159; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 28

the nutritional equivalent of grass in barley or hay, at 5 lbs of barley and 5 more of hay comes to 250 tons, meaning 1250 camel-loads of 400 lbs each which is enough barley to feed 83,000 humans.⁴³⁷ Although the horses also require some salt, this can be obtained from plants and grass or drinking water at the rate of 5 grams a litre. Though the *Yām* stations were only supported by units of a thousand, this still goes some way to explaining why the *ger* encampments which did duty as *Yām* stations tended to move about so as not to be too far away from where the horses were in pasturage.

Implications for the *Yām* Network of relying on pasture-fed horses

Ögödei had commanded that the responsibility for the *Yām* stations were to be the units of a thousand. This unit of a thousand was primarily a military unit which presumably had to be prepared at all times to fulfil the duty of providing fighting men on demand and if near a boundary between polities, they also had border-guard duties. In the meantime, they had to 'guard the roads' as well as man the *Yām* stations. When Ögödei stipulated that twenty keepers be supplied for each post station, as the units of a thousand would have been scattered over their designated pasturelands with their families in reality these would have been twenty families or fewer if the families could provide sufficient manpower. Each family would have supplied the *Yām/örtöö* horses out of their own herds which could average fifty horses so the number of horses roaming the pastures would have been in the region of a thousand.

Though Möngke stipulated that great ambassadors were not to be given more than fourteen mounts, these had to be fresh mounts, geldings as specified, meaning that the herds had to include not just the fourteen

⁴³⁷ John Masson Smith Jr. 'Mongol Nomadism and Middle Eastern Geography', in the *Mongol Empire and its Legacy* p. 48.

geldings but also hold a reserve of geldings. Because they also had to supply *kumiss* the herds would have included milch mares and these would have been pastured in small herds overseen by a stallion. The families may well have had to provide camels and would have had at least one hundred sheep per family for their own use as well as for provisions as specified by Ögödei.

An example of the ramifications of such figures is offered by the nineteenth century example of the one hundred and sixty-two families who managed five of the twenty stations on the military relay line towards the Altai (Mong. *Altai zamyn buukhia örtöö*).⁴³⁸ These five military relay-stations averaged thirty-two families per relay-station and each station had upwards of between four thousand and eight thousand five hundred animals. Admittedly, this was an above average number of families per station even for the period. This may have been because it was a military line since the average number of families responsible for postal relay stations seems to have been between five and seven. Ögödei's number of post-horse keepers, then, was well above the Qing period average for postal stations in Mongolia.

Furthermore, each unit of a thousand mentioned by Ögödei would have had pasture reserved for its usage, but out of that pasture-land some would have had to be reserved for the *örtöönii nutag* or relay stations. The one hundred and thirty-four relay postal stations in Mongolia during the nineteenth century (including the military relay westwards) had reserved for their pasturage the huge amount of 74,564 square miles/120,000 square kilometres.⁴³⁹ In some areas where there were many relay lines non-*örtöö* pasture lands for the remaining members of the units of a thousand became scarce.

⁴³⁸ This military relay line expanded into sixty-four stations between the Chinese Gate Station in the Great Wall and the city of Uliastai in western Mongolia. Bold, p. 168

⁴³⁹ Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, p. 45

There was the possible option of fodder fed horses and this has been explored in the context of China after Qubilai by Masson Smith with some interesting conclusions. He has done some very detailed calculations on the equation between the calorie requirements of the horses, the calorie requirements of the soldiers and the 75 acre land grants given to returning soldiery. In short, his conclusion is that the Yuan's eventual dependency on fodder-fed horses meant that the Yuan were unable to campaign without prodigious quantities of fodder and supply trains which in his opinion they neither had the time nor the ability to raise. As importantly, they would not have been able to outmarch the pursuing rebels.⁴⁴⁰ Thus in his view the Yuan initiative of turning away from pasturing their horses was a major factor in the demise of the dynasty.

On Campaign

For Chinggisid commanders 'refuelling' the horses when on campaign, particularly in areas of scarce pasturage, could have serious implications especially for those campaigning in the rice paddies of the Southern Sung since the fodder available in rice paddy areas does not contain beta-carotene nor possibly salt, which the animals require to flourish.⁴⁴¹ That unfamiliar and harsh terrain could seriously affect a campaign is shown to some extent by a comment of Sanudo Torsello, who puts the setbacks suffered by Chaghadaï campaigning in 'Lesser India' down to the many deserts, mountains and arid and inhospitable lands' where he lost a great number of men and pack animals.⁴⁴²

Thus the Chinggisid conquerors were on the horns of a dilemma. The greater the geographical extent of their conquests and the more varied

⁴⁴⁰ Masson Smith, 'From Pasture to Manger: the evolution of Mongol cavalry logistics in Yuan China and its consequences' in *Pferde in Asien*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009, pp. 72-73

⁴⁴¹ Xinru Liu and Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Connections Across Eurasia: Transportation, Communication and cultural Exchange on the Silk Roads*, 2007, p. 248

⁴⁴² Sanudo Torsello's *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross* trans. Peter Lock, Ashgate, 2011, p. 376

the terrain, the greater the likelihood that their Mongol horses would become vulnerable to local conditions, especially the humidity of southern China or the hot, dry Mediterranean littoral where summer fodder and most especially water were in short supply. The Mamluks did not have this problem because they not only generally confined themselves to one mount but also were not reliant on pasture. Indeed, Sanudo Torsello specifically notes that on a number of occasions that the 'Tatars' 'could not stay in [Syria] in the summer. This was because of the intense heat and because of a shortage of grazing for their suffering horses and flocks'.⁴⁴³

For the Hülegüids one further consequence of their domicile in Western Asia was that their annual cycle became disrupted. Mongol horses in East Asia were used to roaming free to fatten up during this summer period in Mongolia whereas in the Hülegüid heartland of Azerbaijan, from summer on much of the extensive grasslands were becoming increasingly desiccated.⁴⁴⁴ Rubruck noted that every commander was familiar with the 'limits of his pasturelands and where he ought to graze in summer and winter'⁴⁴⁵ and the routine of moving between summer and winter pastures was still continued in Western Asia. There was an important proviso, however, which was that the new grass did not start appearing until the winter. Thus rather than fattening during the summer, the horses had to fatten during the winter and spring which in Mongolia used to be the campaigning season.

Such issues – as Michal Biran has identified – may have been a factor at the time of the Battle of Herat in 1270 between the forces of Baraq, the Chaghadaid khan and those of the Hülegüid Amir of Khurāsān, Arghūn Aqa. According to Rashīd al-Dīn the reason for Baraq's eventual defeat was the unreadiness of his horses. He had been continuously

⁴⁴³Sanudo Torsello, pp. 73,79,152

⁴⁴⁴ Personally inspected – and though these grasslands are very extensive as the summer progresses they become increasingly dry and desiccated and water may also be an issue.

⁴⁴⁵ *Rubruck*, p. 72

complaining that he was short of pasturage for them and was feeding those he had confiscated in Transoxiana and Herat with grain meant for the city dwellers and, humiliatingly, was reduced to ordering his troops in Khurāsān to ride donkeys and asses until the horses had fattened.⁴⁴⁶

Hardening the Horses

Natasha Fijn in her study on the herding culture in Mongolia⁴⁴⁷ records the regime used for hardening horses before the festive *Naadam* horse races in Mongolia which is instructive since it may well have been that used for hardening the horses before campaigns. Thus after roughly a month long training regime the fat becomes solid and the horse should be able to gallop at full strength without losing its breath. It should also be able to participate in battles as well as go without sufficient (but still requiring some) water or grass for eight or nine days without exhausting its strength.

Without this hardening even if a horse is in good shape it has been estimated that nine-tenths might collapse or die when run fast for a long distance.⁴⁴⁸ Allowances almost certainly need to be made for some exaggeration but even far lower statistics have worrying implications for the courier service. Rubruck himself notes that of the twenty or thirty horses available at the change-over, he and his party were invariably given the most inferior which were exhausted before reaching the next stopover. At least in the 1250s the implication being that not all the horses were fit for purpose and the much vaunted Mongol *Yām* rested on somewhat shaky equine foundations.

Eight or nine days on starvation rations, however, is an emergency regime rather than a long-term solution to lack of adequate pasturage.

⁴⁴⁶ Michal Biran, 'The Battle of Herat (1270): A Case of Inter-Mongol Warfare' in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)* ed. by Nicola di Cosmo. Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2002, pp. 189 and 208

⁴⁴⁷ Natasha Fijn, *Living with Herds, Human-Animal coexistence in Mongolia*, Cambridge, CUP, 2011

⁴⁴⁸ Bayarsaikhan, p. 244

Such difficulties were overcome for Hūlegü's march westwards. As Juvaynī observed, 'īlchīs were sent on in advance to reserve all pasturage and meadowland wherever the World-King's troops might be expected to pass, from the Qanghai mountains between Qara-Qorum and Besh-Baligh; and all animals were forbidden to graze there lest the pastures might be harmed or the meadows injured'.....⁴⁴⁹

Water Requirements:

Though they have a reputation for hardiness, even Mongol horses need to drink, and regardless of age, are watered once a day. During warm seasons, they are watered in the middle of the day and afternoon. In winter, they are generally watered at noon. A fully adult horse would require between 33 and 45 litres (45 litres = almost 10 imperial gallons) of water a day during the summer and autumn while a three year old would require between 25 to 30 litres. For a full-strength *tūmen* this would clearly be a lot of water to carry across waterless tracts.

Water for the horses also had major logistical implications for the Chinggisid forces in Western Asia. Both Reuven Amitai-Preiss in his *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* and John Masson Smith in his review of that work have minutely dissected the logistical problems encountered by such forces in Western Asia, especially in Syria. Masson Smith concludes that pasture was less a problem than the water supply. In his estimation the 325,000 Mongol horses probably in the field against the Mamluks in 1299 needed at a minimum five gallons each.⁴⁵⁰ Indeed, Sanudo Torsello identified lack of

⁴⁴⁹ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 609

⁴⁵⁰ Nomads on ponies versus slaves on horses' review article in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1998), pp. 54- 62 of R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281*. p.62

water supplies as a major vulnerability for any forces attempting to invade Egypt.⁴⁵¹

Water, however, was not just a logistical issue for the horses. Their riders needed up to two litres or so per day, particularly in the heat and with dry rations. This is vividly portrayed by Beyhaqi in his history of the Ghaznavids under the year 431/1039-1040. Beyhaqi emphasises the critical role caused by the dearth of fodder, food and decent mounts but particularly water available to the Ghaznavid forces of the Amir Ma'sud. These shortages caused such massive discontent before the Battle of Dandānqān that the battle was effectively lost even before the Seljūq forces were engaged.⁴⁵²

In waterless areas, though the Mongols are famous for slitting a vein on their mount to obtain nourishment, to obtain two litres a day from the blood of their mounts was impracticable since it would seriously weaken the animal. A possible alternative was mares' milk. According to the Sung envoy to Chinggis Khan, Zhao Gong, the milk of a single mare could satisfy three people's thirst. Rubruck for his part noted that so long as 'their *comos* holds out, they care for no other food'⁴⁵³ but the difficulty here was this was only available during the summer months after foaling.

Stamina

A useful indication to the speed of travel comes from John of Plano Carpini who noted that remounts were less of a problem as they approached Güyüg's *Orda*. Their guides had been commanded to bring the Papal Legates to the Imperial Court with all speed hence they

⁴⁵¹ Sanudo Torsello, p. 79

⁴⁵² *Beyhaqi*, vol. II, Year 431.

⁴⁵³ *Rubruck*, p. 79

travelled from early in the morning to late at night, without food and ‘as fast as our horses could trot’.⁴⁵⁴

In the early twentieth century, A.S. Kent in his travels in Mongolia found that an experienced rider mounted on a Mongol horse could cover five miles an hour with ease. Setting out after sunrise and going until sunset, though with a break at midday of a couple of hours, Mongol horses could cover distances varying from 35 to 45 miles/56-72 km without being unduly fatigued, depending on the nature of the terrain.⁴⁵⁵ This was partly predicated on the gait of the animals. Masson Smith points out that Chinggis Khan wanted his warriors to be mounted comfortably ‘on fluid paced mounts’ though Masson Smith has a less than generous view of the Mongol horse’s capabilities in this respect including the jolting ‘death trot’.⁴⁵⁶

Five gaits have been identified with forty-two associated descriptive terms. For long-distance travel a particularly hard-to-come-by gait was preferred, that of the amble or *joroolokh*. This is smoother and more comfortable for the long-distance rider since the horse strikes the ground with its hooves on first one side and then the other, unlike the trot, where opposing legs strike the ground. Such amblers would form an important element of the “top herd” that is, the herds belonging to the noble elite and the khan himself. Thus the pace of Hülegü’s journey westwards was likely to have been a ‘stately amble’.

Sickness

There are few references in the sources to sick Mongol horses though Sanudo Torsello has a somewhat cryptic comment in relation to a siege in 1313 of two Mamluk occupied castles ‘beyond the Euphrates. The ‘Tartars’ had to raise the siege after a month on account of food

⁴⁵⁴ *John de Plano Carpini*, p. 135

⁴⁵⁵ A.S. Kent, *Old Tartar Trails 1919*, p.45

⁴⁵⁶ John Masson Smith Jr., ‘From Pasture to Manger’, ch. in *Pferde in Asien* and especially note. 26

shortages but most especially lack of grass for the mounts and 'other animals' but also because of a disease which afflicted the horses called *pedana*. Without any indication of the symptoms this is difficult to identify. A hint may be detected in the draconian outcome when the commander of Öljeitü's forces had the horses killed. If Sanudo Torsello's figures can be trusted this may have amounted to as many as a thousand animals.⁴⁵⁷

Loads

Stamina is also closely related to load. Thus William of Rubruck's experience of the *Yām* network was rather coloured by, as he himself confessed, his corpulence as he had to be provided with the strongest mount available, some clearly not being up to the job and Rubruck was forced to transfer from the exhausted animals onto pack horses.⁴⁵⁸

John of Plano Carpini also noted that after riding a horse for one day the Mongols did not ride the same animal for several days thereafter.

One rule of thumb for estimating the load which a sturdy Mongol horse can cope with is that it can carry a weight equal to one third of its body for a long distance, unlike other breeds, which can bear the weight equal to/or less than one fourth of their body weight. If the average weight of a Mongol horse is six hundred pounds then theoretically it could carry two hundred pounds/fourteen stone/ninety kg. However, this is regarded by some experts today as overloading and the consensus amongst such nineteenth century explorers as Major Bruce is that the load should not exceed one hundred and fifty pounds/just under eleven stone/sixty-eight kilograms or the animal will become exhausted. John Masson Smith, on the other hand is very much more conservative in his estimation of the load the Mongol horses could carry, suggesting that seventeen percent of body weight was the

⁴⁵⁷ Sanudo Torsello, p. 387

⁴⁵⁸ Rubruck, p. 140

maximum⁴⁵⁹ with the implication that most riders were too heavy for the horses, hence the requirement for so many mounts.

This may have been a factor in an aside in the *Secret History* relating to Sübe'etei's command of an expedition in 1217 to finish off the Merkit who had fled to the Qipchaq Steppe. Sübe'etei was apparently furnished with a cart with an iron frame and iron covered wheels for this long and arduous journey. As it is hardly likely that Chinggis Khan would have despatched a sick man on such a mission it seems that Sübe'etei too was overweight for the Mongol horses. Whether he continued using his cart, drawn either by slow-moving oxen or by a faster team of horses or even camels, is not clear. What it does imply, however, is that the image, certainly amongst military tacticians such as Basil Liddell Hart,⁴⁶⁰ of the supposedly *blitzkrieg* tactics used by the Mongols may need to be revised since the top long-distance speed of oxen is about one mile per hour with rest periods, not exactly speedy. One implication of the loading issue is that overweight Mongols, including Qubilai,⁴⁶¹ would have difficulty in taking to the field if mounted on Mongol horses.

It is possible that the *Tergen Yām* or wagon station network used horse-drawn carts to transport people as well as goods. As the early twentieth century explorer, Major Bruce, laconically remarked, this was not a mode of travel for the faint-hearted. The passenger was jolted and bumped for twelve or even sixteen hours at a stretch, day after day for three or four months on end, a fate for all whom duty or the emperor's fiat sent from Peking to Xinjiang. It was, 'if not the tortures of the

⁴⁵⁹ John Masson Smith jr. 'Nomads on ponies versus slaves on horses' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1998), pp. 54- 62, p. 58

⁴⁶⁰ B. Liddell Hart, *Great Captains Unveiled*, Da Capo Press; New edition, (22 Mar 1996) ch. I, esp. p. 16

⁴⁶¹ Qubilai had to resort to elephants, four in fact, with a platform balanced between them.

damned at least as good an imitation of them as this world could provide'.⁴⁶²

The Rider

Whilst the load carried by the horse is an important aspect of their well-being, the experience of the traveller should not be overlooked as in the case of poor Rubruck above. Thus if Chinggisid trans-Eurasian communications were in part to convey envoys, the many ambassadors seen by Carpini's party and Rubruck's at Court were only there because they had invariably used the facilities of the *Yām* infrastructure, including, for present purposes, the mounts. Though Rubruck himself had problems with mounts because he was overweight he also refers to a further hazard in which a gelding or indeed unruly packhorse, if not held firmly during dismounting or unloading, could bolt off through forests and over hills. If the disappearing animal was a packhorse then it could take everything with which it was loaded. Similarly, when Ch'ang Ch'un was returning from his summons to Chinggis Khan, the horse that he was riding bolted to the north-east and his followers were unable to catch it.⁴⁶³

One obvious mishap but which curiously is seldom mentioned by travellers but which must have occurred is being thrown or simply falling-off the horse. That this was not unknown, even for such experienced riders as Chinggis Khan himself, is briefly mentioned in the *Secret History* and it was clearly a heavy fall.⁴⁶⁴ That this must surely have been a more common occurrence than is mentioned in the sources can be ascertained today when riding on the steppe and must have been even more dangerous when fording rivers or scrambling up and down mountains. The grasslands in particular can be deceptive for even where they appear level there are not only untold millions of flies but

⁴⁶² Major C D Bruce, *In the footsteps of Marco Polo*, p.226

⁴⁶³ Li Chih-Ch'ang trans. & ed. Waley, Arthur, *The Travels of an Alchemist*, p. 121

⁴⁶⁴ *SH*, para 265

also unseen ruts and ridges, marmot holes, slippery stones and marshy ground which could cause even the most alert Mongol horse to stumble.

Shod or Unshod?

Before leaving the Mongol horse some consideration should be given to the thorny issue of shod versus unshod, though so far as the former are concerned, iron horseshoes should be differentiated from 'hipposandals'. These latter covered the hooves with a material such as leather, rope or even wood and might be difficult to prove since these were perishable materials.⁴⁶⁵

Denis Sinor has examined the evidence for iron horseshoes and in his succinct view the presence of the horseshoe cannot be established with certainty before the Mongol conquest in Inner Asia and then can only occasionally be attested. He is reasonably certain that the device is a western invention and that the lines of penetration into Inner Asia run from the west and the south and not from China. Interestingly he further notes that there is no common Turkic word for horseshoe though in Coman, Turkish, and Türkmen a loanword from Arabic, *nal*, is used. In a number of other Türkic languages *taka* refers to horseshoe with the Turkic etymology of 'to fix' or to 'attach'.⁴⁶⁶ *Taka* passed into classical Mongol where it could possibly refer to a temporary horseshoe used for grip on ice or in the mountains.⁴⁶⁷

A considerable and obvious challenge for the Mongols was that shoeing their vast herds of horses would require a considerable amount of iron, of which they were not over-supplied and in any case the first requirement was its use for weapons. As Sinor sagaciously remarks, the steppe provided the warrior with his mounts, which were the key factor

⁴⁶⁵ Denis Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 101, No. 2, April-June, 1981, pp. 138. For hipposandals and the protection of horses hooves see Paul Vigneron, *Le Cheval dans l'Antiquité Gréco-Romaine. (Des guerres médiques aux grandes invasions)*, I, Nancy, 1969, pp. 45-50

⁴⁶⁶ Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' n. 40, p. 139

⁴⁶⁷ Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' n. 40, p. 139

in his military success, but denied him the means necessary for the development of his weaponry.⁴⁶⁸ The same could be said for horseshoes and there is some evidence that Mongol horses were unshod.

For example, Thomas, archdeacon of Spalato (1200-1268) was contemporary to the events he recounts though not always as an eyewitness. He observed that Mongol horses could 'race over rocks and crags without horseshoes as though they were wild goats.'⁴⁶⁹ A further allusion is from an anonymous Latin poem composed on the occasion of the Mongol invasion of Hungary which notes that the Mongol horses were unshod.⁴⁷⁰

There is some debate today in equestrian circles as to the relative advantages and disadvantages of 'barefoot' versus 'shod' animals. A leading proponent for the 'barefoot' school, Professor Robert Cook who has authored numerous pro-barefoot articles, is an advocate for keeping all horses barefoot since hooves are healthier when unshod.⁴⁷¹ He argues that 'nature has developed the perfect design for grip and slide in all conditions and provided for unsurpassable shock absorption' – which may go some way to account for Thomas of Spalato's vision of Mongol horses happily scrambling over difficult terrain. Moreover, neither can the foot expand and contract with each step when shod. One compromise was that observed by Captain John Wood during his travels in mid-nineteenth century Central Eurasia in which the Kunduz breed of horse, the description of which fits in with the Mongol horse, was shod only on the fore feet and in the shape of a perfect circle.⁴⁷² It seems, however, that the main reason for a horse being shod is that, if

⁴⁶⁸ Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' p., 144

⁴⁶⁹ James Ross Sweeney, 'Thomas of Spalato and the Mongols: A Thirteenth-Century Dalmatian View of Mongol Customs' in *Florilegium* vol. 4 (1982): p. 168

⁴⁷⁰ Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' p. 138

⁴⁷¹ In 2002 Tufts University convened a seminar for farriers and vets to review barefoot hoof care. A lively discussion was recorded between Professor Cook and a leading farrier in *The Horse* on Barefoot vs. Shod by Marcia King in August 2008. <http://www.thehorse.com/articles/22019/barefoot-vs-shod>.

⁴⁷² John Wood, *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus*, p. 143

it is stabled, the unshod hooves will rot through standing around in the detritus of the stall. It is interesting, therefore, that Kirakos of Gandzak mentions that the Mongols in Armenia levied one horseshoe per inhabitant.⁴⁷³

Oxen and Carts

Though horses may have been the transport of choice for the Mongols, Sübe'etei's possible use of travel by ox cart and Chinggis Khan's references to the shafts of his cart suggest that the alternative means of travel should not be overlooked. These included the camel which was second in the Mongol scale of the value of their livestock whilst the oxen, in third place, were more common than camels.

Rubruck in Constantinople was given the choice between travelling with pack horses or wagons drawn by oxen for the first stage of his journey east. He opted for the oxen, reasoning that this would not mean having to unload and reload the pack horses at each change-over, to his subsequent regret since the first stage of his journey took twice as long.⁴⁷⁴

The Mongols famed mobility also came at a price for those bringing up the rear in the baggage train since travel was by either ox or camel cart and clearly this too was not for the faint-hearted. The early twentieth century traveller, A.S. Kent, who used both means of transport describes the experience with some horror:

.... the phenomenally uncomfortable camel cart long shafts are attached to this vehicle to permit harnessing a camel, but the peculiar stride and gait sets up a motion similar to that experienced on board ship in a choppy

⁴⁷³ The French translation by Brosset of *Kirakos de Gantzac*, (St Petersburg 1870 p. 158) under the year 1256 (Armenian year 705) includes under the taxes levied on the Armenians, one horseshoe per household which is accepted by Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' p. 138 but Bedrosian, in his translation of Kirakos Ganjakets'i's *History of the Armenians* does not mention horseshoes under the taxes levied in the same section (ch. 59 year 705 of the Armenian Era).

⁴⁷⁴ *Rubruck*, p. 68

sea, and in consequence of the vehicle itself being springless, the sensation is extremely unpleasant.

....An ox-cart was a kind of two-wheeled trolley with shafts. The wooden wheels very soon lose their round shape over stony roads becoming in turn octagonal, hexagonal, pentagonal and at this stage the Mongol begins to think that it is time he had new wheels Travel by ox-cart is slow and tedious, the tortures en route increasing with the transformations in the shape of the wheels⁴⁷⁵

Rubruck, on his own painful journey to the court of Möngke not far from Qaraqorum, was fascinated by the use of teams of oxen to move the tent-carts of the Mongols. According to his reckoning one of these dwellings could be as much as thirty feet across, protruding beyond the wheels of the wagon by at least five feet on either side and was pulled by a team of twenty-two oxen driven by a woman. Since up to twenty or thirty wagons could be lashed together the whole convoy could be driven by one woman driving the lead wagon.⁴⁷⁶

Rubruck also refers to chest wagons which could be pulled by either oxen or camels. These chests were made waterproof and contained the bedding and family valuables whilst the wagons were high so as to enable them to ford rivers without soaking the contents. According to Rubruck a rich Mongol could easily have a hundred or two hundred chest wagons.⁴⁷⁷ At the same time, a Chinggisid prince would have numerous wives, each of whom would have had a large tent-wagon, plus the smaller ones behind for the maids. Thus for the tent wagons alone, if twenty wives were on the move with twenty oxen per tent wagon, then a minimum of four hundred oxen would be required, not to mention either oxen or camels for pulling the chest wagons.

Thus when summoned to a *quriltai* accompanied by a full entourage, the princely encampments needed vast amounts of space. Not only

⁴⁷⁵ A. S. Kent, *Old Tartar Trails* 1919, p.44

⁴⁷⁶ Rubruck, p. 73

⁴⁷⁷ Rubruck, p. 74

whilst plodding along at the stately pace of around a mile an hour or nine miles or so a day but also on arrival for pasturing their mounts as well as for the oxen, accompanying flocks and not least, the tent city. Furthermore, all this equipage was highly vulnerable, something which Chinggis Khan was well aware of since he ordered that when hunting one half of the nightguards was to remain behind to guard the tent-wagons.⁴⁷⁸

Apart from their stately pace and vulnerability to attack there was a third problem for the Mongols with their wagon-borne tent cities which was the terrain. When John DeFrancis tried to follow in the footsteps of Chinggis Khan in the 1930s he discovered, particularly when crossing Black Gobi,⁴⁷⁹ the track could be clearly made out thanks to the deep ruts made by carts that were also able to negotiate this area. Deep ruts, however, could also overturn a wagon and the time-honoured solution of moving parallel to the ruts led to ever-increasing parallel sets of ruts. At least these functioned as direction finders since as DeFrancis found, in areas of especially hard-packed soil, it was not easy to find the way.⁴⁸⁰

Bulliet has also pointed out that west of an imaginary line between Bukhārā and Karachi wagons were of little use because even up to the late nineteenth century and beyond there was a lack of developed roads. One reason for this was because pack camels and mules were cheap and efficient carriers over long distances where it would have been very expensive to develop wagon roads.⁴⁸¹

Not just a dearth of tracks could cause problems with oxen. Ch'ang Ch'un's party travelling at the urgent behest of Chinggis Khan from northern China to northern Afghanistan had to abandon their oxen

⁴⁷⁸ *SH* para. 23

⁴⁷⁹ Gobi refers to dry, stony or gravelly terrain and from personal experience it is very easy indeed to get lost in black gobi – which takes its nomenclature from the black basalt chippings.

⁴⁸⁰ John DeFrancis, *In the Footsteps of Genghis Khan*, 1993, p.211

⁴⁸¹ R. Bulliet, *The Camel and The Wheel*, Cambridge, Mass., 1975 p. 26

because they became exhausted struggling up mountains and crossing hundreds of sand-dunes, thereafter presumably refusing to budge. The travellers decided against using oxen and replaced them by harnessing horses to their wagons.⁴⁸²

Yak

Yak (*Bos grunniens*) tended to replace oxen for higher altitude journeys though 'One of the drawbacks of yaks is that they are easily over-marched and then go off their feed. Their favourite pace can only be described as funereal'⁴⁸³ Neither Rubruck nor Carpini mention yak being deployed in Mongolia proper, though Rubruck does mention shaggy short-legged cattle with horns being used to haul the dwellings on carts in the Tangut country, north-east of Tibet.⁴⁸⁴ The Yuan do appear to have established a relay network in the heights of Tibet soon after 1269 in which both horses and yaks were used as mounts.⁴⁸⁵

Camels

Though there are sparse mentions of camels in the *Secret History*, except the famous incident of the Muslim Hasan riding on a white camel⁴⁸⁶ the main references are to them as haulers of the chest wagons rather than as fast riding camels. When the Tangut ruler, Burqan Qan offered many camels 'reared in the shelter of the tall feather-grass' as a levy to Chinggis Khan these were almost certainly the Bactrian variety rather than the one humped dromedary

An experienced camel, like a horse, can remember even very difficult roads for several years and every *farsākh* (just over 4 miles or 6 kilometres) they urinate to mark the spot for following camels.

⁴⁸² Ch'ang Ch'un, *Si Yu Ki*, tr. E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches* p. 64

⁴⁸³ Major C. D. Bruce, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*, p. 38

⁴⁸⁴ Rubruck, p. 158

⁴⁸⁵ Luciano Petech, 'Tibetan Relations with Sung China and the Mongols', in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries*, Berkeley, California, 1983, pp. 187-90.

⁴⁸⁶ *SH* para 182.

Nevertheless, whilst the Mongols appear to have primarily used the camels as draught animals, despite the reputation of Bactrian camels as indefatigable transports across inhospitable terrain they too cannot be driven night and day without some care and attention.

Food and Drink Requirements

Camels are famous for their ability to withstand waterless periods and can go without water for up to thirty percent of their body weight since in difficult conditions they can resolve their hump fat averaging 50 kilograms each in a fit camel – equivalent to 700 kg of hay - and turn it into 100-200 litres of water. Normally, however, they cannot go without water in the autumn and winter for more than seven days, drinking up to 40 litres at a time often after nightfall. During the height of summer they need to drink every other day. They also cannot survive without salt but can obtain this from the soil on the steppes.

Though camels can also go without food for several days, this should only be *in extremis* as if severely hungry they will simply collapse within forty-eight hours. That camels could be lost through lack of good grazing was recorded by A.S. Kent when travelling in Mongolia in 1919. He came across a camel caravan that had started its journey from Uliassutai in western Mongolia with twenty-five camels but had lost ten en route because of the poor state of the grazing grounds.⁴⁸⁷

On the other hand, they do have some advantages over horses. It is thus interesting to note that during the winter, Bactrian camels had to be used to deliver the Russian mail between Beijing and Kiakhta across the Mongolian desert until the early twentieth century instead of horses.⁴⁸⁸ Moreover, they only need to feed for three hours or so. Camels, however, do need recovery time after arduous journeys, up to two months after a desert crossing before they are fit enough for the

⁴⁸⁷ A.S. Kent, *Old Tartar Trails*, p. 75

⁴⁸⁸ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, vol. I, p. 150, n. 404

next stage and their sagging humps have recovered to become firm again.

Loading and stamina

Jūzjānī mentions that when Chinggis Khan made overtures to the Khwārazmshah, he despatched five hundred camels laden with gold, silver, silks, *khass-i Khitai* (a coarse kind of woven silk), *targhu* (a silken fabric red in colour) *kunduz* (beaver) samur (sable) and raw silk and elegant and ingenious things of Chin and Tamghaj, along with merchants of his own, the majority of whose camels were laden with gold and silver.⁴⁸⁹

These were presumably the Bactrian camels, whose load could be between 375-400 pounds 170/181 kg. A fit pack animal could manage roughly ten to twenty-five miles or sixteen to forty kilometres a day - roughly twice the speed of an ox wagon.

Dogs

In 1293, when north of Tabriz, Marco Polo may have had contact with an embassy to the Court of Geikhatu from the chief of the White Horde, a great-grandson of Jochi. This could explain Polo's reference to Mongols living in an immense but tranquil area somewhere to the north where, because the country was impassable for horses because of the lakes, ice, mud and mire, dog sledges formed an important component of the communication network. The courier sat on the sledge on a bear-skin with the post-house keeper who guided the dogs by the best route to the next post-house station where the next relay dogs were waiting.⁴⁹⁰ Clearly, such a dog-sledge relay was only suitable for the immediate area in which it was situated and the envoys from the White

⁴⁸⁹ Jūzjānī, p. 965

⁴⁹⁰ Marco Polo, II, pp. 479-480

Horde would have used more conventional means on their journey to Tabriz. It is, however, an important indication how far-reaching were some parts of the Chinggisid communications network.

Though not used as transport on the steppe, dogs were an ubiquitous and extremely dangerous aspect of travel on the grasslands especially when approaching encampments. Chinggis Khan himself was terrified of them⁴⁹¹ and travellers arriving at a *ger* would be unable to dismount until the dogs had been restrained. Apart from their guard duties, however, the dogs were a vital element of navigation since their barks could be heard from some distance thus acting as inadvertent guides to the way-stations.

Pigeons

Of all the pre-modern means of transmission the fastest, most dependable and efficient were, as Youssef Ragheb makes clear in his classic *Les messagers volants en terre d'islam* the 'couriers of the sky'⁴⁹² or the carrier/homing pigeon.⁴⁹³ The role of carrier pigeons in the midst of hostilities as late as the Second World War is widely documented. Moreover, there were reports in 2011 that a special unit of the Chinese People's Liberation Army based in Chengdu was training upwards of 10,000 pigeons. Their role was deliver vital military communications in the event of the country's communication systems breaking down as they were the "most practical and effective short and medium distance tool for communications if there is electromagnetic interference or a collapse in our signals".⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ *SH*, para 66

⁴⁹² Youssef Ragheb, *Les messagers volants en terre d'Islam*, Paris, 2002, ch. I

⁴⁹³ So effective that when the Amir Tīmūr conquered Iraq in 1400 CE he famously ordered all the pigeon lofts be destroyed.

⁴⁹⁴ *Daily Telegraph*,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8356921/China-trains-army-of-messenger-pigeons.html> accessed 2013

Advantages of Pigeons:

Pigeons as couriers have a number of advantages: they are fast, can fly through all weathers, and are also determined, even if badly injured, to get back to their loft.⁴⁹⁵ At the same time they do not require much in the way of feed nor an expensive infrastructure. They are also relatively inconspicuous and as they fly high, can overfly hostile territory without being shot down⁴⁹⁶ though this could be offset through losses from raptors. As Ragheb remarks, 'Grace aux pigeons, la rapidité des communications fut de tout temps prodigieuse.'⁴⁹⁷ Their cruising speed is approximately a mile a minute, though some have been recorded faster in short hops of a hundred miles or so, and they can cover considerable distances.

By way of comparison, dromedaries used as swift courier mounts between Baghdad and Mecca could apparently achieve 200 miles/321 kilometres a day whereas pigeons over the same distance could achieve up to 750 miles/ 1207 kilometres.⁴⁹⁸ Ragheb has examples of Abbāsīd, Byzantine, Mamluk and Ottoman pigeons performing prodigious feats. In 329/940 a pigeon carrying a message from near Rayy in Iran informing the Sāmānīd ruler in Bukhārā of the death of the rebel, Mākān b. Kākī flew more than 621 miles/1,000 kilometres.

Within the *Dār al-Islām*, pigeons were extensively used under the Abbāsīds. However, the height of the air courier service was under the Mamluks when Sultan Baybars organised his pigeon post in parallel with his mounted courier service in 659/1260-1261. Likewise, some of the very scarce references to Mongols and carrier pigeons were Mamluk related. There was the incident when an exhausted Mamluk pigeon with

⁴⁹⁵ The highest number of recipients of the Dickin Medal to honour the role of animals in war in WWII were pigeons, 32 in all and the determination of pigeons such as Cher Ami in 1918, Winkie in 1942 and many more has become the stuff of legend.

⁴⁹⁶ During WWII, the American Signal Corps deployed 54,000 pigeons who carried 30,000 messages of which 96% reached their destination.

⁴⁹⁷ Youssef Ragheb, *Les messagers volants en terre d'Islam*, p. 184

⁴⁹⁸ See Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 113

a message warning the fleeing ruler of Mosul that he was about to be attacked by Hülegüid forces landed in Mongol-held territory and even more unfortunately chose as his perch one of the large Mongol catapults where his message was promptly discovered.

Despite such occasional hiccups, a fine example of the use of pigeons in strategic communications occurred in 682/1284 when envoys from Hülegü's son and second successor Ahmad Teguder met with the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun. However, in the course of the meeting the Hülegüid envoys were put at a considerable disadvantage since Qalawun received a message via carrier pigeon reporting on Ahmad's death, vitally important intelligence in the negotiations which was not revealed to the visiting envoys.

It is perhaps suggestive that Juvaynī only mentions their use once. This was again not in the context of the Mongols but in that of Sultan Jalāl-al-Dīn's approach to Baghdad in 622/1224. Rather than the Commander of the Faithful coming to the Sultan's aid as the Sultan had assumed, he instead despatched a force to expel Jalāl-al-Dīn from his territory and at the same time 'carrier pigeons were despatched to Irbil with the message that Muzaffar-ad-Dīn should likewise send 10,000 men so that the Sultan might be caught between them'.⁴⁹⁹ However, Mongke's envoy to Hülegü in 1259, Ch'ang Te, has a passing reference to 'pigeons which transmit news to a distance of a thousand li in one day' but without giving details in whose service they operated.⁵⁰⁰

Whilst there are references in pigeon-related literature to a trans-Eurasian pigeon courier service set up by Chinggis Khan, it has to be said that the logistics would be interesting. Pigeons require a base, their loft, and they only fly a one-way trip, that is, from their point of take-off back to their loft. Whilst such aerial couriers formed an important element of Baybars' strategic communications network, he had the

⁴⁹⁹ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 422

⁵⁰⁰ Ch'ang Te, 'Si Shi K'i, Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, I, p. 151

advantage of fixed points to establish their lofts which the Mongols certainly did not have in the time of Chinggis Khan.

There were other, less obvious disadvantages, one of which was pigeons could not memorise messages, which as has been seen was a favoured means of transmission for the Mongols even though literacy was making inroads. Furthermore, they could only carry light loads though under the Abbāsids a script for pigeon-carried messages was devised which compressed information into the smallest possible space, the *ghubar* script which could be written as fine as a single hair.

These constraints meant that pigeons could not be used as messengers when, for example, Chinggis Khan was on campaign and wanting to keep in touch with his commanders and sons. Whilst a human messenger could be told to 'find Tolui' there was little chance of a pigeon delivering the message even if Tolui had a mobile loft to which it could return. Such mobile lofts were experimented with during the First World War when it was found that confusion was a major issue if the pigeon's loft at the front had been moved two or three times which disorientated the birds.

On the other hand, as the Chinggisids became more settled, it was theoretically logistically possible to set up a pigeon relay between the Yuan and the Hülegüids by having lofts at way stations perhaps every six stages or so. However, this seemingly ideal solution does not seem to have been put into practice. One reason may have been that the communication system of an enemy was a prime target which is illustrated by reports in Maqrīzī and Qalqashandī. They both point out that when the Amir Tīmūr devastated Damascus in 804/1400-1, one of his key objectives was to 'clip the wings of the *Barīd*' by destroying the stations, including the pigeon lofts, thus obliterating the network in

Egypt and Syria.⁵⁰¹ Thus whilst courier pigeons were an ideal means of transmission for short urgent messages over medium to long distances, in the Chinggisid context there were serious constraints in their use.

Runners

The means of transmission could also include runners and, like the alternatives, runners have both advantages and disadvantages. Where mounts were scarce or their upkeep problematic, such as in southern China, runners could come into their own since they were comparatively cheap as well as being more easily replaced hence runners formed a crucial component of the communications networks of the Jurchen/Chin, Sung and Yuan. As Marco Polo points out with reference to the *Yām* in China, runners ran extremely fast relays but only for a distance of around 3 miles or 4.82 km before handing the message over to the next runner.⁵⁰²

Furthermore, unlike pigeons, runners could be interrogated by the recipients. Juvaynī records an incident in the period leading up to the fall of Merv when runners delivering messages to the defending grandees from a supposed ally were interrogated ‘one by one’ so clearly several had been despatched on this one mission. On finding that the ally had in fact gone over to the Mongols, the unfortunate runners were slain.⁵⁰³

Runners, however, seem to have had a patchy history in Islamic western Eurasia in contradistinction to China. Al Jāhiz implies that during the reign of Harun al-Rashīd runners were unknown in the Abbāsīd Barīd⁵⁰⁴ possibly being introduced under Iranian influence during al-Mu ‘tasim’s Caliphate 218-227/833-842. In the Hūlegūid

⁵⁰¹ Maqrīzī, *Khitat*, Vol. I, p. 616; Qalqashandī, *Subh*, vol. XIV, p. 370; Quoted by Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 184.

⁵⁰² *Marco Polo*, I pp. 433-436

⁵⁰³ Juvaynī/Boyle p. 157

⁵⁰⁴ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 78

domains in the west, Ghāzān had relay runners or *payks* who could cover between 112 to 150 miles/180 to 240 kilometres a day with two runners located at each station. Allsen makes a case for a chiliarchy of Bekrin mountaineers from the Tian Shan who had submitted to Chinggis Khan some of whom accompanied Hūlegū west and served as mountain couriers in the Caucasus. Allsen assumes this meant that they were runners.⁵⁰⁵

However, to arrange such a network of runners across the wastes of Eurasia would have been administratively extremely difficult. Even with the Chinggisids' logistical expertise it would have been extremely testing to organise and maintain a chain of runner relay stations at 3 mile/5 kilometre intervals each with at least two runners, across thousands of miles/kilometres between Tabriz and Dadu with the attendant subsistence problems, hostile terrain, meteorological extremes and other hazards.

Beacons

These could be a very fast means of communicating brief, uncomplicated messages. Whilst following in the footsteps of Marco Polo at the beginning of the twentieth century, Major Bruce quotes a story of a dervish traveller to China in about 1560 AD. The dervish related that questions were put to the merchants with whom he was travelling about what they were carrying, whence had they come and how many of them were there?" The answer being given, the king's guards passed it by signal – smoke if in daylight, by fire if by night – to the next watch tower; then to the next and so on 'until in a few hours the message reaches the king at Cathay; a thing which would by any other communication require many days. The king sends back his orders in

⁵⁰⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi 'al-tavārīkh*, ed. A. A. Romaskevich, A.A. Khetagurov and A. A. Alizade Moscow, 1968, I/1, pp. 343-345 also Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' p. 248

the same manner and with equal rapidity, saying whether all shall be admitted or only a part, or the whole put off.'⁵⁰⁶

Perhaps more frequently beacons were used to warn of impending hostilities and the Qing had a chain of beacons stretching from Yarkand in the Tarim Basin to Beijing. Watchtowers were erected along the Government Courier Roads every three miles.⁵⁰⁷ Beacons were also utilized by the Mamluks until the Mongols were no longer a threat by the peace treaty of 1323. The Mamluks had a line of beacons stretching from the Euphrates to Gaza - roughly 793 miles/1277 km - on high mountains on which men were stationed and paid for by the sultan. If the Mongols showed any sign of movement, the beacons would relay smoke signals to Gaza from whence it would be flown by pigeon to Egypt, with the information arriving the same day.⁵⁰⁸

The Qing beacon relay system covered a distance roughly half of the way to Iran of 2727 miles/4389 kilometres but between Yarkand and western Eurasia were the Pamirs which could be an insuperable barrier for such beacon communications.

Whistling Arrows

There are references in the sources to whistling arrows which commentators tend to regard as having a short-range military signalling function. However, two of the main references have a different connotation. When the young Temujin was eleven years old he and his friend Jamuqa had sworn friendship and had sealed this with by exchanging arrows which each had made. Jamuqa's present to his new *anda* was a whistling arrowhead.⁵⁰⁹ In a not dissimilar vein, Rubruck has an interesting aside on whistling arrows being presented with a subliminal message. In this latter instance, Möngke Qa'an is reported

⁵⁰⁶ Major C D Bruce, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*, p. 249

⁵⁰⁷ L. Richards, *Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire*, p. 426

⁵⁰⁸ Ansārī, *Tafirij*, pp. 12-13, pp. 46-47 and Silverstein, p. 176

⁵⁰⁹ *SHI* para 116 and commentary, p. 437

by Rubruck to have dispatched an envoy to the French king accompanied by a cleric, Theodolus, about whose credentials Rubruck was extremely sceptical. Möngke had a 'very strong bow made that could scarcely be drawn by two men and two arrows [*bousiones*] with silver heads full of holes, so that when fired they whistle like pipes'.⁵¹⁰ It is Möngke's instructions to his envoy, however, which are significant:

You will go to the king of the French, to whom this fellow will escort you and you will present him with these things on my behalf. If he wants peace with us, we shall conquer on the one hand from the Saracens the territory as far as his and we grant him on the other the remaining land to the west. If not, you will bring back to us the bow and the arrows and tell him that with bows like this we shoot far and hit hard.⁵¹¹

Putting together the strands of evidence, including the preference for an oral dimension even if a written message was being sent and the Mongol obsession with status, suggests that the Chinggisid communication network was not a relay courier postal service though it did rely primarily on mounts and emissaries.⁵¹² In fact, it appears to have operated not dissimilarly from the Roman *cursus publicus* which Kolb forcefully argues was an 'infrastructure' for use by state officials and which had three purposes, also replicated in the *Yām* network. These were to secure state communications, transport government agents and

⁵¹⁰ *Rubruck*, p. 185

⁵¹¹ *Rubruck*, pp. 185-186

⁵¹² Carruthers on his journey through unknown Mongolia at the turn of the 20th century remarks that the khan's 'messenger' in this sense an escort, who accompanied them had precedence over all that came their way and as the khan's word was law, the requests of the 'messenger' were promptly carried out. Carruthers, *Unknown Mongolia*, pp. 279-281

the movement of certain goods.⁵¹³ Similarly, the primary role of the *Yām* stations was to supply remounts and subsistence for emissaries rather than act as postal courier interchanges. This means that the *Yām* did not replicate the function of the *Barīd*, which Allsen regards during the Umayyad period (AH 661-750) in particular as being primarily designed to convey information rather than the movement of goods or people.⁵¹⁴

The fixation that it was a 'postal courier' network, presumably on the basis that this was the form of most other similarly organised pre-modern communication systems⁵¹⁵ can be illustrated, for example, by C. Raymond Beazley's translation of Carpini's mission. In the Latin it states *Hinc equi nobis dati sunt & tres Tartari, qui nos ducerent festinanter ad ducem Bathy*. Beazley, however, translates this 'Here certain *post* horses [emphasis added] and three Tartars were appointed for us to conduct us from hence with al speede unto duke Bathy'. The Latin, however, simply refers to 'horses'

Though it cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt, the conclusion is thus that the vision of the *Yām* network comprising a courier service regularly galloping across Eurasia may have to be modified.

⁵¹³ Anne Kolb 'Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *cursus publicus*' in eds. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, *Travel & Geography in the Roman Empire*, London and New York, Routledge, [2001] 2011 pp. 95 and 98

⁵¹⁴ Thomas Allsen, 'Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A review Article of Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*. *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, ed. Thomas T. Allsen, P. B. Golden, R. K. Kovalev, and A. P. Martinez, 17 (2010), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag pp. 237-276, p. 238

⁵¹⁵ Even Silverstein assumes that it was a 'postal' system. Ch. 4, 'The Mongol Yam and its legacy' in *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*.

PART III

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTIONS OF THE YĀM NETWORK

CHAPTER VI

The Yām Network: From *Ad Hoc* to Formal

[A ruler] must have postmasters; and in every age in the time of ignorance and of Islam, kings have had postmasters, through whom they have learnt everything that goes on, good and bad.

Nizām al-Mulk⁵¹⁶

Although it was argued in the previous chapter that the Chinggisid communication network was *not* a postal courier service, the quotation above from the great Seljūq Vizier, Nizām al-Mulk (409-485/1018-1092) encapsulates a key reason rulers instituted an officially organized communication network. As Patricia Crone observed earlier, a ruler needed to be vigilant to ensure the security, not just of their realm but also of their throne.⁵¹⁷

Such a strategy required not just endless vigilance but also a reliable and robust system of communications so that rulers ‘received information as full, accurate, up-to-date and speedily conveyed as possible’⁵¹⁸ on the activities of their enemies, allies, families, officials,

⁵¹⁶ Nizām al-Mulk (tr. Hubert Darke) *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* p. 64

⁵¹⁷ Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 156

⁵¹⁸ Norbert Ohler, *the Medieval Traveller*, p. 64

the state of the harvest or the mood of the bazaar. Thus a communication system was intimately connected to the challenge facing all rulers of retaining their thrones and metaphorically as well as literally 'staying in the saddle'.

The Chinggisids were certainly not exceptions to these pressures and as their dominions expanded, their arrangements evolved to take account of the extended lines of communication and the responsibilities of governance. This development can be divided into three main phases: the period from Chinggis Khan to Ögödei Qa'an's accession in 1228/29; the period between the improvements Ögödei made to his father's system and Qubilai's accession in 1260 when the latter moved the centre of gravity from the sacred soil of Mongolia to Dadu in northern China. This latter event initiated a third period which encompassed the re-ignition of Sino-Iranian relations within a Yuan-Hülegüid nexus. The main aim in this chapter, then, is to analyse the development of the Chinggisid network which will be approached from a number of aspects. These will include the impetus within statecraft towards the establishment of an organised network of communications as against an arrangement whereby a trusted and resourceful messenger was plucked from an entourage and forced to use his own initiative in overcoming any perils to safely deliver his message.⁵¹⁹

The Two Archetypal Communication Systems

Historically there have been two main approaches to organising pre-modern state communication systems: a formally incorporated network, with professional messengers and way-stations charged with providing the transport, provisions and so forth which was overseen by state officials and with the expenses largely borne by the state. The courier service could either be a relay service or one in which a single courier

⁵¹⁹ The example of the trials of the messenger mentioned in the previous chapter by Beyhaqi nicely illustrate this aspect.

carried the message the entire route. Examples of such formally constituted networks include the Chinese, Roman *cursus publicus*, the Sasanian, the Abbāsid Barīd, the Ghaznavid and the Venetian. Alternatively, it could be 'informal' whereby either an oral or a written message was entrusted to a resourceful member of the ruler's household who was sent to find his own way to the recipient armed only with an authorisation such as a *pa'iza* permitting the requisition of replacement mounts and subsistence from the populace.

This latter, somewhat *ad hoc* arrangement appears to have been the system under Chinggis Khan before Ögödei's reforms between 1229 and 1234. The impetus towards a more organised system seems to have been twofold: to expedite the delivery of important communications and to establish a more efficient means of providing mounts and subsistence for the emissaries. Moreover, as domains become more extensive, communications have to reach further thereby becoming more vulnerable. There is thus an intrinsic stimulus impelling rulers towards more formalised communication networks as the hazards and limitations inherent in a haphazard system become apparent. Such a dynamic can be detected in the early conquests of both the Arabs and Mongols. The incoming Arabs in the first century AH/seventh century CE - and six hundred years later, the Mongols - were conquerors who were strangers to bureaucracy. Nonetheless, as Silverstein has pointed out, 'conquest movements' tended to develop rudimentary postal systems even before establishing a stable administrative framework into which such a system could be incorporated.⁵²⁰

⁵²⁰ Silverstein, 2007, p. 50

**The period up to the death of Chinggis Khan: Improved
Communication Networks in the Early Conquest Period**

Silverstein regards the Mongol conquests as a valid historical paradigm for the Islamic conquests,⁵²¹ though for present purposes the opposite is rather more apt. Whereas through their trading interests the Arabs had wider geo-political horizons than the Mongols, both sets of conquerors - at least in the initial stages of their conquests - had four important characteristics in common. In their distinctive ways each was emblematic of 'Men of the Sword' rather than 'Men of the Pen'. Both had their roots in inhospitable regions and came from backgrounds where lineage was all important and the elites operated within an 'aristocratic' milieu.⁵²² Equally both had to consolidate their conquests from a basis of little experience in administering ancient, settled and bureaucratic societies. Thus the Arab precedent, especially as far as their communication systems were concerned, could potentially offer some useful insights into an investigation into the later Mongol experience.

There were also, however, some important areas of divergence between them. Initially, the Mongols were not literate and even when not on campaign continued to be peripatetic. Moreover, it appears from al-Tabarī's (224-310/839-923) *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* that the second caliph 'Umar (r. (13-23/634-644) was rather less 'hands-on' than Chinggis Khan and essentially directed the Arab conquests by post from Medina.⁵²³ Furthermore, the Mongols had to overcome a serious impediment to the efficient management of a communications network which the Arabs did not have to confront in that the scattered Chinggisid Imperial Family had an entrenched sense of entitlement. The Arabs, conversely, were in the happy position at least at first - and

⁵²¹ Silverstein, 2007, p. 50

⁵²² An interesting reference to this is in the speech of Al-Mughīrah b. Zurārah b. al-Nabbāsh al-Usaydī to the Persian sovereign, Yazdagird, recorded by Tabarī, in his *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, trans. Yohanan Friedmann, p. 37

⁵²³ He did, however make at least four trips to Syria. *Al-Tabarī* 1992, pp. 149-154, 188

uniquely amongst conquerors – of not having to make allowances for the reward and conciliation of an ‘imperial’ family. That this sense of entitlement amongst the close relatives and followers of a khan was deeply-rooted in steppe society is made clear in the *Secret History*⁵²⁴ and this particular issue will be addressed under the development of the *Yām*.

The Early Chinggisid Experience

In the early days of Temujin’s rise, the *Secret History* has several references to messages being sent and received including the important occasion when the Ong Qan agreed to help Temujin rescue his wife Borte from the Merkits. On that occasion, Temujin is recorded in the *Secret History* as sending his brothers Qasar and Belgutei to deliver a rhyming verbal plea soliciting help from his blood brother and the Ong Qan’s associate, Jamuqa.⁵²⁵ Such comparatively localised communication between neighbouring allies must have been achieved without too much difficulty using as messengers trusted members of the inner circle who would not only have been conversant with the context but also with the topography.

The communication system operating before the death of Chinggis Khan is described by the Sung envoy to the conqueror, Zhao Gong. In his report of c.1221 he refers to *xuancha* who, from his description of their treatment as they travelled, were not ‘postal couriers’ as such but appear rather to be ‘emissaries’ from Chinggis Khan or his ‘viceroy’ in northern China, Muqali. As envoys of such august personages they were clearly treated with great respect by those whose areas they

⁵²⁴ *SH* para 242 for the apportionment of the profits of the conquests to date and CK’s mother’s dissatisfaction with her share

⁵²⁵ *SH*, para 105, de Rachewiltz I, p. 35. Jamuqa was the childhood *anda* of Temujin and distantly related through their common ancestor Bodonchar. He was in his own right a chief of the Jadaran or Jajirat and thus potentially a serious rival to Temujin. See de Rachewiltz para. 104, p. 409 and para. 40, p. 278 for background to Jamuqa.

passed through, entertained and lodged with some magnificence and were also able to exchange their mount if they came across one they preferred which, according to Zhao, was called 'riding a stationed horse' or *cheng pu ma*. This, he helpfully explained, is what in ancient times was meant by 'riding relay', thus confirming that this referred to horses rather than messengers.⁵²⁶

A system that relied on hospitality from local dignitaries and the requisition of mounts was not only a burden on the populace but as the field of operations expanded must have been put under considerable strain. Silverstein argues that the travel account of Ch'ang Ch'un, summoned from Shantung province in north-eastern China to northern Afghanistan to discuss the prospects of immortality with Chinggis Khan, confirms that delineated post routes were in place as early as the 1220s. Certainly Chang's companion remarks that on their return journey they 'finally came out upon the post road previously taken by us, where it followed the course of a great river to the south of the Chin Shan.'⁵²⁷

This would place the Yü-ēr-li or 'long-lasting way' just south of today's Ulaan Baatar. If so its eastward trajectory would take it in the general direction of the ruined Uighur capital of Ordu Baliq/Karabalghasun on the western bank of the Orkhon River, a few miles NNE of Qaraqorum. That the Yü-ēr-li was an ancient way even before the Uighurs is suggested by the history of the Orkhon River Valley. This is now an UNESCO site recognised for its cultural importance as a centre for the Xiongnu and the Eastern Türk Empire, including the 8th and 9th century Orkhon Inscriptions, as well as for the Chinggisids and Buddhism in Mongolia.

Ch'ang Ch'un's allusion, however, would seem to have two ramifications: firstly, it implies that for much of their journey they

⁵²⁶ *Zhao Gong*, p. 11

⁵²⁷ *Travels of an Alchemist*, trans. Waley, p. 121

simply followed tracks going off in the general direction of their objective. Secondly, it underlines the problem that 'delineated post routes' might not actually go anywhere near the traveller's proposed destination even if the objective happened to be Chinggis Khan's current command post. This is a point which has been rightly observed by Allsen who remarks that 'even with a fully elaborated and "routinized" communication system, much government business is conducted off the beaten track by officials travelling in areas beyond the reach of the post'.⁵²⁸ What is not clear, however, is whether the turn-off which the party took after joining the main route towards the south-east somewhere in the region of the key way station of Bishbalik/Urumchi was also part of the Yām network or simply a travellers' pathway.⁵²⁹

This track took Ch'ang Ch'un's party near the northern frontier of the Tangut country which must mean they were crossing the Gobi. If it was indeed a formal *Yām* route, it does not seem to have much to recommend it. The party were forced to split into three groups travelling a week apart to ensure each party had enough water. There were no organised way-stations for changing mounts since they had to change their horses at a *fu-lu*, a rough shelter of stones or skins and even when civilisation of sorts was reached, they had to rely on the hut and tent dwellers for fresh mounts.⁵³⁰

This was in stark contrast to Ch'ang Ch'un's experience in 1224, when the Governor of Chungdu /Middle Capital/Beijing suggested that the sage take up his residence in that city. Though the Chin had removed their capital to Nanching/Southern Capital/Kaifeng in Honan in 1215 there was still armed resistance in northern China, which indeed had affected Ch'ang on his outward journey since many of the roads had

⁵²⁸ Allsen 'Imperial Posts' p. 252.

⁵²⁹ Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, p. 27

⁵³⁰ *Travels of an Alchemist*, trans. Waley, p. 126-128

been blockaded. Nevertheless in 1224 arrangements were made for him to travel by post. Equally the Khitan Yelu Chucai travelled to Yen, the former Jin capital, 'riding by stages [*chichuan*]' as well as by post horses or *chiji*.⁵³¹ Thus despite the tremendous upheavals in northern China it seems that a residual Chin postal network was more or less operational.⁵³²

Ögödei: From an Improvised to a Formalised Communication System

That the early Chinggisid communications network was under pressure in his father's lifetime was effectively confirmed by Chinggis Khan's successor, Ögödei. Following his enthronement at the *quriltai* of 1229 he made some much needed improvements to his father's organisational efforts which included his communications:

'Further, when the messengers ride in haste We allow them to ride moving freely among the population, and as a result the pace of these riding messengers is slow and they are an affliction on the people. Now We shall settle matter once and for all by providing post-station masters and post-horse keepers from the various units of a thousand of different areas, by setting up a post station at every stage, by not allowing the messengers to move freely among the population unless on urgent business but instead by having them ride in haste through the post stations...'⁵³³

However, what Ögödei had in mind was a radical departure from the *ad hoc* arrangements of his father and neither were they within the customary remit of an elected khan.

⁵³¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., "The Hsi-yu lu of Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai," *Monumenta Serica* 21 (1962) pp. 17, 19, 112 (1a) and 114 (1a). Also Allsen 'Imperial Posts' p. 243

⁵³² See *Rashid al-Din*, trans. Boyle, p. 34 for a brief note on the situation in northern China in this period

⁵³³ *SH*, para 279, de Rachewiltz I, p 214 and II, 1027-1028

The Duties of a Charismatic Khan

Ögödei was particularly careful not to proceed with the projected networked communication system without the support of his elder brother, Chaghadai. His caution was understandable since what was being suggested could be construed by the Mongol elite as Ögödei overstepping the mark in what were considered to be the customary duties of a khan, hallowed by tradition.

On the steppe each aristocratic polity 'had its council the *ey-e*, *eyedekhui* and later *khurildai/quriltai*. This council, when occasion demanded, nominated a leader, the khan, whose most important duty was to head operations during large-scale *otor* or migrations, in raids or in times of war.'⁵³⁴ The khan's leadership role also included the distribution of plunder⁵³⁵ as well as the planning, organisation and control of the production process including the digging of wells.⁵³⁶

What is noticeable is that the duties in the above 'role description' are essentially 'military' rather than what would be termed today as 'civil'. The charismatic khan was thus more 'commander-in-chief' than 'ruler' and whilst he had absolute 'command and control' over his own *keshig* as well as his immediate family, within the wider aristocracy of the steppe obedience was predicated on a number of factors including his perceived 'legitimacy' as well as how he performed his duties.

The legitimacy of such a khan was predicated on the attendance of the assembled grandees at a *quriltai* and even if the decision was not unanimous, the decision was binding on all present including those

⁵³⁴ Bold, 2001, p. 80

⁵³⁵ *SH* e.g. paras. 273, 179, 162, 163,

⁵³⁶ *SH*, para 281

unable to attend but who had representatives present.⁵³⁷ He could, however, expect absolute obedience to a decision at a *quriltai* reached in consultation with the *aqqa* or most senior members and the *ini*, or lesser members.⁵³⁸ Theoretically, then, ‘obedience’ was an attribute of the decision-making process but even so there was an inherent tension in any steppe formation between the duties of the khan and the customary rights of the *aqqa* and *ini*.

Hence the care in which the *Secret History* records details of the attendees, distribution of goods, rewards and appointments associated with the elevations of Chinggis Khan and Ögödei. In circa 1184 Temujin was unanimously chosen to be their leader that is, Khan of the Borjigin Mongols⁵³⁹ by three of his cousins, who were the most senior members of the Borjigin. Temujin’s subsequent rise to the position of ‘a charismatic’ khan was within the steppe tradition of one who had the ability to form and lead federations of rival noble houses and this was consummated in 1206, the Year of the Tiger, when he was appointed the supreme leader of a greatly enlarged following with the title of ‘Chinggis’ Khan.

Notwithstanding securing nomination as leader of a federation the charismatic khan was not entirely secure in the saddle. If he upset enough of his ‘electoral college’ (its use here understood to be somewhat anachronistic) his tenure could well be a short-term contract with a bloody ending⁵⁴⁰ or if his good fortune deserted him⁵⁴¹ there was every

⁵³⁷ Florence Hodous has investigated the legal aspects of *quriltais* in ‘The Quriltai as a Legal Institution in the Mongol Empire’, *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 56 (2012/2013) pp. 87-103.

⁵³⁸ For example, Chaghadai told Ögödei that ‘we, all of us, *aqqa* and *ini*, spoke great words in the *quriltai* and gave written undertakings that Ögödei was the Qa’an and we should tread the path of loyalty and obedience and in no way oppose him’. Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 148

⁵³⁹ The context implies that the cousins were spokesmen for those who followed Temujin at this stage and the choice was not purely on their own behalf.

⁵⁴⁰ The *SH* records Jamuqa being abandoned by his allies after he allegedly plundered some of them. *SH*, I, para. 144; de Rachewiltz I, pp. 526 and 527

possibility that they would simply abandon him.⁵⁴² Chinggis Khan's successor Ögödei was appointed Khan in the Year of the Rat, 1228/29 over the heads of at least two eligible brothers and he well understood that such issues were magnified for the successors of the 'charismatic' founder of a dynasty. Thus, when his 'Pillars of the Court' remonstrated with him over his generosity Ögödei, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, responded realistically if cynically "It is known of a certainty to all mankind that the *world is faithful to none* (emphasis added) and that wisdom requires a man to keep himself alive by the perpetuation of a good name."⁵⁴³

That 'good name' was dependent on how the incumbent khan performed the customary duties mentioned above. There is no evidence whatsoever that it included imposing a postal/intelligence network through the domains and pasturage of his imperial relatives or noble followers, who would be held responsible for their particular sections. Indeed, this may perhaps account for the uneven development of the horse relay system. Thus the *Secret History* is careful to record the unanimous approval, after Chaghadai⁵⁴⁴ had given the project his blessing, of the princes of the right and left hands, the princesses and sons-in-law of the centre and all the commanders.

Possible Models

The justification for the institution of a more regularized communications network came from Ögödei himself though Juvaynī

⁵⁴¹ de Rachewiltz has also pointed to the brief account of CK's death on active duty in the *SH*, possibly because it implied that Chinggis Khan had lost Heaven's favour. *SH*, Part II, Commentary, p. 983

⁵⁴² Rashīd al-Dīn has a potent example of such abandonment when Arīq Böke's amirs abandoned his cause after the central pole of his audience tent broke, injuring many, which was taken as an omen predicting a decline in his fortunes. *Rashīd al-Dīn*/Boyle, p. 260

⁵⁴³ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 76

⁵⁴⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn mentions that Ögödei was so impressed by Chaghadai's adherence to his position as Qa'an that he would undertake nothing without his advice and approval, sending messengers to consult him on every decision, which he is also alleged to have done with his sister-in-law Sorqoqtani Beki. *Rashīd al-Dīn*/Boyle, pp. 148-149

added his own gloss. Moreover, it was clearly for reasons of state rather than a nod to the welfare of his subjects. This formal justification included the collection of intelligence, the efficient delivery of communications and the distribution of the profits of empire⁵⁴⁵

When the extent of their territories became broad and vast and important events fell out, it became essential to ascertain the activities of their enemies and it was also necessary to transport goods from the West to the East and from the Far East to the West'.⁵⁴⁶

Scholars are divided on possible models. Allsen noted that while the composite character of the Mongol network is readily apparent, postal relay systems had deep roots in eastern Asia with conquest dynasties such as the Liao (907-1124), the Jurchen/Chin (1115-1234) and the Tangut (1038-1227) fashioning their own versions.⁵⁴⁷ The sources reveal some of these predecessor systems. Ibn Khurradādhbih in his *Kitāb al-Masālik wa l-Mamālik* compiled before 232/846-847 refers to a journey from Kopal to the frontiers of China taking fifteen days by caravan but via 'la poste türque' the journey took three days.⁵⁴⁸ This, however, was three hundred and fifty years earlier than the *Yām* though there may have been residual vestiges. Amongst other 'local' models was that of the Uighurs, which is known from Tamīm ibn Bahr's mission to them c. 821 CE. They seemingly had a *Barīd* which at that time came complete with *sikak*/postal stations and was in the charge of *ashāb al-sikak* living in tents.⁵⁴⁹ What is noteworthy is that Tamim ibn Bahr's

⁵⁴⁵ Each member of the imperial family had been allotted a portion of the conquest booty, whether people, animals, luxuries or land - not necessarily contiguous to their own bases thus the 'income' from such assets had to be conveyed to them.

⁵⁴⁶ Juvaynī, *Tārikh-i-Jahān Gushā* I, 160-25; tr. Boyle, I, p. 33

⁵⁴⁷ Allsen 'Imperial Posts' p. 242

⁵⁴⁸ Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-mamālik* was edited by Michael Jan de Goeje (*Liber viarum et regnorum*), Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, vol. 6 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1889; reprinted, 1967). p. 30 (Arabic) p. 26 (English)

⁵⁴⁹ 'Tamim ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uighurs' by V. Minorsky, *BSOAS* vol. 12. No. 2, 1948 pp. 275-305

description of his journey to the Uighur Khan in 821 CE could easily be superimposed on the later Chinggisid *Yām*.

Closer in time was the Abbāsid *Barīd* though this had long since fallen into decay whilst the Ghaznavid courier/ intelligence postal service had disappeared from the scene with their demise. The late Seljūqs were not enamoured of the idea of having their own intelligence postal service and it is doubtful that the Khwārazmshah Muhammad had time to build up a sophisticated organisation in the short period of his own career of conquest between (r.596-617/1200-1220). Moreover, his predations had not only severely disrupted trans-Eurasian routes but after conquering Transoxiana from the Qara Khitai, he had, according to Ibn al-Athīr, closed the routes from Tūrkestan and the lands beyond it⁵⁵⁰ not only hampering commerce but also in all probability intelligence gathering as well.

Such factors would imply that over and above what remained of the sophisticated Jurchen/Chin system there were no immediately operational postal/intelligence services available to serve as models for an uncomplicated system of *Yām* stations in western Eurasia. Indeed Morgan, de Rachewiltz and Buell⁵⁵¹ have all persuasively argued for the role of the Khitans in providing expertise and guidance in the rise of the Mongols. Gazagnadou, for his part, follows Olbricht in firmly proposing the Jurchen/Chin as the exemplars. This is on the basis that after the Jurchen were defeated by the Mongols the latter observed that ‘ces fonctionnaires-lettrés de la bureaucratie Jin utilisaient, pour la transmission des documents officiels, le système chinois des relais de

⁵⁵⁰ Ibn al-Athīr/Richards, Pt.3 p. 205

⁵⁵¹ D. Morgan, ‘Who ran the Mongol Empire?’ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1982 p. 129; De Rachewiltz, ‘Personnel and personalities in north China in the Early Mongol Period’, *JESHO*, IX, and P. Buell, ‘Sino-Khitans administration in Mongol Bukhara’, *JAH*, XIII, 2, 1979

poste qu'ils avaient hérité de la dynastie chinoise Song, lui-même basé sur celui des Tang'.⁵⁵²

On the other hand, it could also be persuasively argued that the Chinggisids were simply conforming to the historic pattern in which expanding horizons needed more formalised communication networks to speed the flow of intelligence and the profits of empire.⁵⁵³ If such was the case and the network was simply the logical outcome of the expansion of territories and of the 'important events' mentioned by Juvaynī, then the scholarly endeavour devoted to ascertaining 'the model' may have been in vain. This is not the view taken here and since the Chinggisid version had some interesting variants it may be worth exploring the provenance and inception of the *Yām* network in a little detail as well as such features as the *pa'iza* tablets of authority.

Provenance of the term 'Yām'

Inevitably, there is also scholarly contention as to the provenance of the term used to describe this Chinggisid network. Paul Pelliot regards *jam* as the Mongol form with *Yām* being the Türk form. B. Vladimircov published an article on the subject in 1929 with which Pelliot concurs but he parts company with Vladimircov in establishing at what date and in what form the word *jam* appeared for the first time. Pelliot for his part regards the term as emanating from the Wei Dynasty period in China at the beginning of the sixth century CE derived from the Chinese *hien-tchen* which he argues represents *Yām-chi*, or postal relay officer.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² Gazagnadou, *La poste et relais en Eurasie*, p. 54, Olbricht, *Das Postwesen in China unter der Mongolherrschaft*, p. 39

⁵⁵³ As Morgan sagaciously points out, anyone faced with running a large empire is likely to think, without being prompted, that a system of efficient couriers might be an idea worth considering. Morgan, *The Mongols*, p. 107

⁵⁵⁴ See Pelliot, 'Sur *yam* or *jam*, for the intricacies of his argument. pp. 194-195

Allsen for his part cautions that the history of the word *jam* should immediately alert us to the complex origins and lengthy maturation period of this institution'.⁵⁵⁵ He does, however, affirm that the Northern Wei (386-535 CE) Tabgach language contained a specialised vocabulary concerning the postal network which included *yiamchin*/relay station chief which is closely related to the Mongolian *jamuchi[n]*. In Allsen's opinion Serruys put forward cogent and compelling arguments that the Mongolian *jam* was borrowed into Chinese rather than vice versa. His view was based on transcriptions in Chinese texts using several different characters but all pronounced *zhan*. During the Yuan (1271-1268) *zhan* was transcribed using the character for "to stand" or "to stop" which became the permanent transcription because it was associated with the idea of a "stopping place" or "stage of a journey".⁵⁵⁶

Though the etymology is disputed, what is of some importance is what is to be inferred from the term. Pelliot is in agreement with Vladimircov when he refers to the Mongol *jam* as a "relais postal" or post station rather than a 'route'. The word for 'route' in the Chinggisid period was *mör* which can be found in the *Secret History* though at the beginning of the Ming a later term was used, *targa'ur*, being the Sino-Mongol translation of *houa-yi yi-yu* or "grand' route".⁵⁵⁷ Today, the "relais postal" is designated by the word *ortoo*.⁵⁵⁸ However, in the sense of a 'relais postal' the original meaning was forgotten after the demise of the Chinggisid Imperium thus *Yām* became synonymous with 'route'. In this present study, *Yām* has been used to designate the *relay stations* rather than the routes on which they stood which are called here the *Yām* network

⁵⁵⁵ Allsen, 'Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A review Article' of Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, ed. Thomas T. Allsen, P. B. Golden, R. K. Kovalev, and A. P. Martinez, 17 (2010), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag p. 241

⁵⁵⁶ Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' pp. 241-242

⁵⁵⁷ Pelliot, Sur *yam* or *jam*, "Relais postal" p. 192

⁵⁵⁸ Bat-Ochir Bold defines an örtöö as a relay line and relay station – also a unit of distance: thus one örtöö = about 18 miles/30 km p. 177

The provenance of the *pa'iza* or 'tablets of authority

So far as the *pa'iza* are concerned there are a couple of matters to consider. Firstly, since logic would seem to point to messengers needing some sort of official identity in order to prove their credentials it could certainly be thought that most courier systems would come round to having such verification without having to have a precedent. Thus the use of *pā'izas* need not necessarily be conclusive evidence that the *Yām* simply copied the Chinese postal service or *Yi*. Silverstein indeed dismisses the view that the *Yām* replicates the *Yi* tablet of authority - generally translated as *pā'iza* from the Persian but *gerege* in Mongolian and *p'ai-tse* in Chinese. He has found evidence that such tablets were ubiquitous throughout Eurasia since a golden tablet of authorisation was used as early as the first century CE on a journey made by Apollonius of Tyana from Ecbatana/Hamadan to India.⁵⁵⁹

Whilst the concept may have been ubiquitous it is the timing, format and authorisations which may provide the best indication of its provenance. the practice of granting silver, gold and golden tiger tablets of authority seems to have begun in the lifetime of Chinggis Khan perhaps as early as 1212 or shortly thereafter and the Mongol *pa'iza* clearly emulates those of the Jurchen/Chin. Moreover, from the travels of Zhao Gong and the travels of Ch'ang Ch'un it is clear that such tablets were an important feature in officialdom in north China even during the upheavals of the first two decades of the thirteenth century - especially amongst envoys who had need of an immediately recognisable proof of their credentials.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁹ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 143

⁵⁶⁰ *Zhao Gong*, p. 10; Li Chih-Ch'ang, trans. Waley, *Travels of an Alchemist* p. 48

Thus the idea of the *pa'iza* may have been introduced to Chinggis Khan either by his Khitan advisers, most probably Yeh-lü A-hai or even directly from the Jurchen/Chin through emissaries. By 1221 Zhao Gong refers to Chinggisid high officials who wore a gold or silver *pā'iza* on their waists so it could not have been him. The highest officials wore a gold "tiger-head" one which had two tigers facing the words written in Chinese characters variously translated as: 'The decree of Emperor Chinggis, endowed by heaven: the bearer shall take initiative on his own authority'⁵⁶¹ or: 'This man is empowered to act with the same freedom as I myself should exercise, had I come in person'.⁵⁶²

One such high functionary was Liu Wen who, complete with a golden tiger-head tablet, was dispatched by Chinggis Khan to urgently 'invite' the elderly Taoist sage, Ch'ang Ch'un to meet with him whilst he was still engaged on the Western Campaigns. It would thus appear that the Mongols had come into contact with *pā'iza*'s early on in their career of conquest. Rubruck described a golden seal given by Möngke Qa'an to his envoy to the king of France in the mid-1250s. It was 'the breadth of a palm and half a cubit long, on which his commission is engraved: anyone who carries it may issue what order he likes, and it is carried out instantly.'⁵⁶³ Marco Polo remarks that his father and uncle were granted a tablet of gold on their first return from Qubilai's Court on which was inscribed an instruction that the ambassadors should be supplied with everything that they should require. On reaching Iran on their second return journey from the east, they were given four golden tablets of authority, two of which bore gerfalcons, one bore lions, whilst the fourth was plain though they all had inscriptions requiring supplies be rendered to them.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ *Zhao Gong*, p. 10

⁵⁶² *Travels of an Alchemist/Waley* p. 48

⁵⁶³ *Rubruck*, p. 186

⁵⁶⁴ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, I, Yule/Cordier, p. 35

Provenance of the Yām Relay Station network

So far as the provenance of the Chinggisid relay network is concerned there is rather more speculation than hard fact. Morgan tends towards the system operated in north China by the Khitan Liao dynasty whose similarities to the *Yām* are striking.⁵⁶⁵ Silverstein remarks that it is generally regarded as having a close affinity with the Chinese *Yi*⁵⁶⁶ which, it is argued, was introduced to the Mongols through their Khitan and/or Uighur advisers.⁵⁶⁷ Such views he regards as being misleading and even unhelpful and proceeds to comprehensively demolish the arguments used to substantiate this view⁵⁶⁸ - albeit eventually, if reluctantly, coming to the conclusion that the Chinggisids' Uighur and Khitan officials were indeed behind the establishment of a more organised communication system.

Silverstein's attempted demolition of the argument that the *pa'iza* was a copy of the *yi* arrangements has been aired above but his argument that bureaucratisation was atypical of traditional (pre-Chinggis) Mongol society is incontestable. As he notes, manning permanent stations goes against the grain of Central Asian custom, particularly along roads that did not overlap with the pastoral routes. Moreover, as was seen earlier, a charismatic khan had to be extremely careful if he wished to foist relay station at their expense onto his imperial relatives and aristocratic supporters.

⁵⁶⁵ Morgan, *The Mongols*, p. 107

⁵⁶⁶ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 142

⁵⁶⁷ Influential is de Rachewiltz who in his 'Personnel and Personalities in North China in the Early Mongol Period' argues that Khitan (and Chinese) defectors played a major role in bureaucratic practices inspired by Chin and Khitan examples. See p. 112, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 9. No.1/2 (Nov.1966) pp. 88-144

⁵⁶⁸ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, p. 142

Ögödei's improvements to his father's communication system have at their heart an interesting conundrum. Though De Rachewiltz points out in his commentary on the *Secret History* that the funerary inscription for the Khitan adviser, Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts-ai, gives him credit for the important measures to curb the abuses of government couriers⁵⁶⁹ this does not fit well with the *Secret History*. In this there is a reference to Ögödei proposing to overcome the difficulties encountered in the transmission of messages on the advice of Chanai and Bolqadar, who were 'well informed' on such matters. These measures, it has to be said, do not evoke the highly sophisticated Chinese *yi*:

Providing post-station masters and post-horse keepers from the various units of a thousand of different areas, by setting up a post station at every stage, by not allowing the messengers to move freely among the population unless on urgent business but instead by having them ride in haste through the post stations'.⁵⁷⁰

Since Ögödei was acting on the recommendation of these two officers there may be clues in their backgrounds or experiences as to why they were 'well-informed' on such matters. Chanai was related to the Uru'ut or Oirat chief Jurchedei. He not only shared a common ancestor with Chinggis Khan⁵⁷¹ but was also married to Ibaqa Beki,⁵⁷² sister of Tolui's remarkable widow, Sorqoqtani Beki. Chanai was clearly not one of the 'Bad People' and not only had powerful relations at Court which gave him some sway, he was also one of the commanders of the day guards tasked with guarding the person of the conqueror on the left-hand or eastern side of the *ordu*.

At the 1229 *quriltai*, however, Chanai was given new duties though these are somewhat confusing since he was put in charge of the camp

⁵⁶⁹ *SH*, II, de Rachewiltz, p. 1031

⁵⁷⁰ *SH*, I, para 279, p 214 and de Rachewiltz II, 1027-1028

⁵⁷¹ *SH*, I, de Rachewiltz, p. 480

⁵⁷² Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 64

masters or *yurtchis* in the *Col* country that is, the Gobi, which lay between the old Naiman territories and those of the Xi Xia/Tangut. These camp masters, as well as choosing suitable stopping places and arranging for the establishment of the travelling encampment were also tasked with providing replacements for mares as well as being the herders of the milch mares. At the same time, he was ordered to dig wells to make that vast area habitable. This command was immediately followed by Ögödei's measures on the transmission of his communications.

What is not totally clear at this stage is whether the two are linked but could well be since the *Secret History* reports that the third of Ögödei's 'good deeds' centred on well-digging. Assuming there was a linkage, this would have been a particularly clever manoeuvre on the part of Ögödei. This is because 'well-digging' was within the remit of a khan, thus to link it to the proposal of a communication network which was an innovation, provided some reassurance to the assembled grandees that he was conscious of the traditional parameters of his position and it says a lot for Ögödei's political abilities.

Bolqadar, about whom virtually nothing is known, was also one of the commanders of the left-side or east night guard. One important duty of the night guards was guarding the tent-carts of the Palace. In addition the camp masters from among the night guards were sent ahead to set up the sleeping quarters for Ögödei if he went out hunting.⁵⁷³

Though both these men had some logistical experience there is very little to explain their interest in persuading Ögödei to institute a more organised messenger system. However, revealingly, Chanai was appointed to his Gobi tasks in tandem with Ui'urtai, the 'Uighur'. According to de Rachewiltz, Ui'urtai was the son of Qutluq Buqa and

⁵⁷³ *SHI*, para 278, de Rachewiltz, p. 210

thus grandson of the great viceroy in Khurāsān, Kōrgüz,⁵⁷⁴ though this relationship has been questioned.⁵⁷⁵ Ui'urtai's grandfather was not just a literate and highly competent Uighur but as noted above, the Uighurs historically had what appears to have been a recognisable *Barīd*. That the Uighurs who submitted to Chinggis Khan three hundred years later retained vestiges of this *Barīd* is perhaps improbable but not impossible. On the other hand, Kōrgüz could have been so fed up with the facilities on his several journeys to Court that at an opportune moment Ögödei was encouraged to institute improvements.

Against this scenario, however, Juvaynī records that it was only from 1239 onwards, that is ten years after Ögödei's pronouncement, that Kōrgüz in his capacity as viceroy in western Eurasia, 'laid a firm foundation in the administration of affairs'. This included the establishment 'of *Yāms* in various places, complete with horses and other necessities in order that the people might not be put to inconvenience by the ambassadors.'⁵⁷⁶

Whatever the actual provenance, Ögödei's *Yām* was a lasting memorial to him since it survived in Mongolia until 1954 and indeed became the basis of the very efficient Russian postal relay system.⁵⁷⁷

The Yām Stations

There appear to have been at least three different types of 'station'. Firstly was the *Morin Yām* or horse station, in Chinese *mo-lin* or *mu-lin zhan* which has been taken to have as its primary function the

⁵⁷⁴ *SH*, De Rachewiltz, p. 1027

⁵⁷⁵ Peter Jackson, private note, April 2015. Clearly, if there was no relationship, then the Kōrgüz link and influence does not stand scrutiny.

⁵⁷⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 501. There is a cryptic comment in Rashīd al-Dīn implying that Kōrgüz and his fellow amirs protected their positions through bribery though whether money passed in order to set-up the *Yām* is not clear. Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 189

⁵⁷⁷ Frederick Burnaby, *A Ride to Khiva*, Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1876

movement of officials and envoys.⁵⁷⁸ Allsen believes it had the same function as the *Tāyān Yām*, a term which is used by Rashīd al-Dīn and which has an uncertain origin but which has been taken to mean just a relay station though it could also imply a station fit for the passage of envoys.⁵⁷⁹ This may be the envoys' lodgings or *yām-khānah*⁵⁸⁰ mentioned in the Persian text of Shahrukh's embassy of 1420-1422 to the Ming.

A second type of station was the *Tergen Yām* or wagon station, in Chinese *tie-li-gan* or *tie-li-jian-zhan*. This clearly was to provide animals such as oxen to pull the carts used either for provisioning, such as the convoys of carts used to bring in foodstuffs to Qaraqorum or for the wagon loads of the 'profits of empire' or loot trundling slowly across Eurasia as occurred after the Fall of Baghdad.

Furthermore, there was also a military arm, the *Narin Yām*, in Chinese *na-lin zhan*, meaning careful [handling] station. Allsen regards this arm of the system as handling goods and communications meant for the person of the qa'an.⁵⁸¹ However, these stations have also been described as military or secret stations,⁵⁸² to be used for urgent military matters though *narin* in another context has been translated by de Rachewiltz as 'punctilious' which at a stretch could be used to describe either a military network or for direct communication with the ruler.⁵⁸³

So far as these latter are concerned, Rashīd al-Dīn has a perplexing comment apropos the internecine conflict within the Imperial Family. Four years after the accession of Qubilai's successor, Temür Qa'an, that is, in 1298, Rashīd al-Dīn reports that the Yuan emperor had *Yāms* set

⁵⁷⁸ Allsen's conclusion, after comparing the 'division of labour' within the *Yām* as found in the *Yuan Shih* and the *Collected Chronicles* of Rashīd al-Dīn. 'Imperial Posts' p. 257

⁵⁷⁹ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 62

⁵⁸⁰ K. M. Maitra, trans., *A Persian Embassy to China, being an Extract from Zubdatu't Tawarikh of Hafiz Abru* (repr. New York, 1970) pp. 27 ff. Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' p. 263

⁵⁸¹ Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' p. 258

⁵⁸² Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 62 and Olbricht, p. 45, note 101.

⁵⁸³ *SH*, II, de Rachewiltz, p. 868

up between the *sūbe* or strategic choke points defended by Ajīqī and Chūbei in the extreme west to the *sūbe* of Muqali in the east in which couriers were stationed.⁵⁸⁴ These clearly had a military purpose so may have been *Narin Yām* whose main purpose was intelligence collecting and its despatch up the chain of command.⁵⁸⁵

Development of the Yām

Despite the agreement of Chaghadaï and Batu, it seems that Ögödei was in fact rather slow in developing an efficient and secure communication network. In the event, if Rashīd al-Dīn is correct, it was only in the Year of the Horse, in 1234, that:

as there was [much] coming and going of ambassadors both from the princes and from the Court to the princes upon important and necessary business, *Yāms* were set up in all the lands which were called *tayan Yāms*⁵⁸⁶, and for the setting up of those *Yāms*, ambassadors were designated and appointed on behalf of the princes⁵⁸⁷

Rashīd al-Dīn also refers to amirs being appointed for each branch of the family to oversee the setting up of the network through their dominions, thus Bitikchi Qoridai was appointed on behalf of Ögödei himself, Emergelchin Tayichi'utai on behalf of the Chaghadaids, Batu's appointee was Suqa Mulchitai and for the Toluids, Alchiqa was appointed at the command of Sorqoqtani Beki.⁵⁸⁸ Additionally, *Tayan Yāms* were established between Qaraqorum and 'Khitai' from 1234 after

⁵⁸⁴ Rashid al-Din/Boyle p. 326 and p. 299 note 231

⁵⁸⁵ Rashid al-Din/Boyle p. 62

⁵⁸⁶ Boyle considers a *tayan yām* to be an ordinary post station, though the thought could be ventured that it could be one that was slightly more comfortable than a *morin yām* or horse station. Rashīd al-Dīn, p. 62

⁵⁸⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 55

⁵⁸⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 55-56

Ögodei ordered a 'great city to be built on the banks of the Orkhon to rival Baghdad and given the name of Qaraqorum.'⁵⁸⁹ Ögodei also commanded that *Tergen Yāms*, or wagon *Yāms* be set up in order to provision Qaraqorum around the same period.

Twelve years after the order for the set-up of the *Tayan Yāms* there was certainly a *Yām* network of sorts between the environs of Qaraqorum and the West. Amongst the earliest non-Mongol trans-Eurasian travellers were the long-suffering friars Carpini and Benedict, travelling in 1246, who give mixed messages on the state of the *Yām* network. On the one hand Carpini reports that the khan's subjects 'must without delay find [messengers] horses and other necessities' whilst at the same time ambassadors suffered great misery, 'in much want of both of victuals and apparel' and also had to have provided for them horses, carriages and expenses. Whether this was because the dignitaries and emissaries had left the relay routes or that the relay stations simply could not provide the necessities is not easy to discern.⁵⁹⁰ On the other hand, as he was nearing Batu he remarks that they were provided with three 'Tartar' escorts and had fresh horses three or four times a day.

Further into their journey, Carpini's party were assigned two 'Tartar' escorts, changing horses five times a day on the steppe though when crossing deserts they were allowed better and stronger horses which could manage the traverse in one go.⁵⁹¹ Carpini also gives the impression that there was a dearth of accommodation for travellers since his party on their return during the winter had no sort of roof over their heads and perforce had to lie 'in the deserts oftentimes upon the snow, except with our feete wee made a piece of ground bare to lye upon'.⁵⁹² Despite Ögödei's best intentions, then, it seems up to and

⁵⁸⁹ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 62

⁵⁹⁰ *Carpini*/Beazley, p. 121

⁵⁹¹ *Carpini*/Beazley p. 134

⁵⁹² *Carpini*/Beazley p. 143

beyond 1246 the *Yām* network was patchy and its operation unpredictable.

Rubruck's experiences ten years or so later were not dissimilar to that of Ch'ang Ch'un's miserable traverse of the southern Gobi. The outward journey was so terrible that before starting on the return journey to King Louis IX of France from Möngke's court his colleague begged to be left behind since he could not face the 'unbearable hardship' of the journey. This was heightened by the discouraging advice of Möngke's chief secretary that they might arrive at a postal station or *Yām* which would not provide for them⁵⁹³ though this may realistically have been because of pressure caused by grander attendees at the *quriltai* returning home.

Since it was suggested to the colleague that he remain until some envoys arrived with whom he could travel back at a gentler pace and by a route along which there were towns it would appear that there was a more southerly route for dignitaries which as will be seen was undoubtedly via Taraz and Samarkand.⁵⁹⁴ In the meantime, Rubruck and his small party, consisting only of his interpreter, a guide and one servant, were despatched westwards via Batu, albeit on a more northern trajectory than his outward journey which had taken place during the winter.

The misgivings of Rubruck's colleague were only too prescient since the long-suffering friar comments that 'on occasions our situation was very hazardous since we were unable to find any people and our provisions were running out and our mounts exhausted'.⁵⁹⁵ Though the party had a tablet of authority entitling them to a sheep every four days, a *pa'iza* which somewhat oddly was in the possession of the servant, this arrangement does not seem to have been foolproof since the party had

⁵⁹³ *Rubruck*, p.250

⁵⁹⁴ *Rubruck*, p. 250

⁵⁹⁵ *Rubruck*, p. 254

to subsist on ‘*comos*’ for several days. Furthermore, for two months and ten days they only had one day’s rest and this only because no horses were obtainable, which at least indicates that there was generally no shortage of mounts even if Rubruck’s modest party were forced to take the dross of what was available.

Rubruck, however, was a comparatively insignificant though intrepid traveller compared to a great amir like the Mongol Oirat Arghun, who had been put in control of territories from the Oxus to Fars, Georgia, Rum and Mosul by Ögödei’s widow, Toregene Khatun. Arghun was also travelling to the east for Möngke’s enthronement but his party does not seem to have fared particularly well either. Juvaynī reports that the party travelled ‘an immense distance fraught with terrors and menaces [and] arrived in Court on 20th Safar, 650/2nd May, 1252, after the *quriltai* had dispersed.’⁵⁹⁶

Such accounts do not inspire confidence in the development and improvements of the *Yām*. Moreover, disturbingly, those forced to endure its discomforts during this period did so at what was the height of the unified empire, that is, twenty-five years after the initial proposal to institute a *Yām* had been agreed by Ögödei and ten years or so before the fault-lines within the Chinggisids ignited forty-five years of internecine conflict.

Subsequent to the grand affair and impressive turn-out for the *quriltai* sanctioning the appointment of Güyüg (r.1246-1248 CE) most of the attendees would have barely returned home before he died.

Nevertheless, Ögödei’s *Tayan Yām* for ambassadors and the relay *Morin Yām* had been established after a fashion and played a crucial but testing role in the emergent crisis which was to shape the future of the entire Chinggisid Imperium and the Hūlegüids in particular. Face-to-face discussions were a problem as the senior ‘aqa’ Batu had mobility

⁵⁹⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle, p. 514-515

problems and because of this, either the scattered Imperial Family had to travel to the Qipchaq Steppe for consultations or the negotiations had to take place using emissaries. What was graphically revealed, however, during the subsequent contentious negotiations was how the extended lines of communication added to the difficulties. The negotiations had to be conducted by emissary, almost certainly delivered orally and the whole process was clearly unsatisfactory, since as Rashīd al-Dīn observes, ‘because of the great distance between them there was no possibility of mutual consultation’.⁵⁹⁷

Because of the vast distances involved and Batu’s base not being within the sacred Mongol heartland the only members of the Imperial Family to make their way to his *ulus* were Möngke and his brothers, despatched by their mother, Sorqoqtani Beki, on a strategic and highly successful visit. Batu duly decided that Möngke was the ideal candidate for the vacant Qa’anship and pronounced ‘It is in the interest of the *ulus*, the army, the people and us princes that we set him up as Qa’an’.⁵⁹⁸ The fall-out from these negotiations will be examined in more detail in the chapter on the *Pax Mongolica*, but suffice for the moment to say that Batu’s decision was deeply contentious to some elements of the Chaghadaid and Ögödeid branches. Though ostensibly carrying the day by having Möngke enthroned, one outcome was that Batu became the godfather of what were to become five virtually autonomous – as distinct from independent – khanates since his actions exposed the tensions inherent in the traditional duties of an appointed khan and the realities of the role.

Following Möngke’s accession in 1251, apart from his attempts to reform the abuses in the *Yām* network, there is no mention of further development in this area, partly no doubt because his focus was on campaigns to subjugate ‘the farthest East and West of the world’. Just

⁵⁹⁷ Rashid al-Din/ Boyle, p. 203

⁵⁹⁸ Rashid al-Din/ Boyle, p. 203

over twelve years after his death, Marco Polo with his father and uncle travelled to Qubilai's court from Hormuz via Kerman. Whilst the route after Kerman is contentious, the journey took, according to Polo, a good three and a half years because of the bad weather and severe cold. What is odd, however, is that despite Marco's enthusiastic account of the postal relay system and rest houses within the Great Wall, unlike other travellers who remark on the discomforts, the mounts and the relay stations, Marco makes no mention of the *Yām*, or changing mounts.⁵⁹⁹ Whether this is because he was travelling 'off-piste' or, as Wood suspects, he simply got his information from a presently unknown itinerary is contentious though as such proponents of his travels as de Rachewiltz⁶⁰⁰ and Morris Rossabi⁶⁰¹ aver, omission is not conclusive evidence that he did not reach China.

The development of the *Yām* network westwards under the first four Chinggisid rulers may have been patchy but it seems from references to the Chaghadaid *ulus* that they had embraced the idea. Juvaynī remarks that during the lifetime of Chaghadaï (r. 1227-1242) 'for fear of his *yasa* and punishment his followers were so well disciplined that during his reign no traveller, so long as he was near his army, had need of guard or patrol on any stretch of road'.⁶⁰² In c.1281 the governor of Bishbalik, a grandson of Chaghadaï, asked Qubilai for thirty new *Yām* stations for a route out of Bishbalik implying that these were additions. Moreover in 1283, also in the Chaghadaid *ulus*, four more *Yām* stations were established in Uighur territory⁶⁰³ also giving the impressions that these

⁵⁹⁹ Frances Wood's 'Did Marco Polo Go to China?' has been discredited not least by Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Her latest position given in a lecture in 2013 to the art history students at SOAS is that Polo's purported travels east may be based on a so far undiscovered source or itinerary, not dissimilar to the background to Mandeville's Travels.

⁶⁰⁰ Igor de Rachewiltz "Marco Polo Went to China" *Zentralasiatische Studien* 27 (1997) pp. 34-92

⁶⁰¹ Essay in response to Frances Wood's Did Marco Polo Go to China? http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/pop/polo/mp_essay.htm

⁶⁰² Juvaynī, Boyle, vol. I, p. 272

⁶⁰³ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 26

were additions. The *Yuan shih*, c. 1274, states that thirteen stations were established by imperial order between Khotan and Yarkand in the Tarim Basin apparently to facilitate communications by water⁶⁰⁴ and two land stations.

The Hülegüid Section of the Yam

Towards the end of the 1230s Ögödei's representative in Khurāsān, Kōrgüz established himself in Tus, which was then in ruins, and rebuilt and restored the town. Included in his process of reconstruction were the establishment of *Yāms* in various places, 'complete with horses and other necessities in order that the people might not be put to inconvenience by the ambassadors'.⁶⁰⁵ Juvaynī remarks how he had put Hülegü's interest and pleasure in restoring ruins on his march westwards to his own ends. Juvaynī clearly had an eye for a good investment because he observes that he had purchased a quarter of the town of Khabushan, northwest of Mashhad in eastern Iran, from its inhabitants after its destruction in the first incursion of the Mongols. He persuaded Hülegü to issue a *yarligh* for

the repair of the qanates, the erection of buildings, the establishment of a bazaar, the alleviation of the people's lot and their re-assembly in the town. All the expense of rebuilding he met with cash from the treasury so that no charge fell upon the people⁶⁰⁶

Apart from not being involved in any of the expense of restoration himself it is noticeable that there is no mention of the *Yām*. Quite what can be deduced from this omission is difficult to ascertain but since the

⁶⁰⁴ These locations were under the control of Qubilai but there is no obvious water communication between them today. See Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, vol. II, Part III, pp. 47-49

⁶⁰⁵ Juvaynī/ Boyle, II, p. 501

⁶⁰⁶ Juvaynī/ Boyle, II, p. 617

progress of the imperial forces did not need the services of *Yām* stations it is possible that this requirement was simply overlooked.

Once ensconced in his new domain, however, Hülegü is reported to have started to rebuild the destroyed places,⁶⁰⁷ including establishing a network of *Yām* stations since he took 'from each cultivated (*shen*) village one householder, one from the small villages, two or three from the large ones and called them *Iam*.⁶⁰⁸ And he sent them to all the ruined places to undertake construction. They paid no tax whatever, but provided only bread and *t'an* (a yoghurt beverage) for travelling T'at'ars'.⁶⁰⁹

This excellent sounding arrangement would seem to have a fundamental flaw since it does not mention the supply of remounts. There are hints in the sources that the Hülegüids may have been short of horses though whether of horses generally or of their trusty little Mongolian horses is difficult to quantify. That the Hülegüids may have had a 'horse deficit' is one implication of remarks made by the Armenian historian, Kirakos, with reference to the Chinggisiid forces that the 'fanatical and wily army divided up by lot all the lands of Armenia, Georgia and Aghbania, each chief according to his importance receiving cities, districts, lands and fortresses..... each [chief] went to his allotted area with his wives, sons and military equipment where they remained without a care, polluting and eating all the vegetation with their camels and livestock'.⁶¹⁰ Livestock is generally thought of as sheep and cattle and it is thus distinctly odd that Kirakos mentions camels but not horses. This differential is confirmed when, during this same period after the fall of the city of Shamk'or, the Armenians were

⁶⁰⁷ The Armenian historian Kirakos in his *History of the Armenians* mentions the devastation caused not only by the Mongols but also by Sultan Jalāl-al-Dīn and that the conquerors ordered the rebuilding of Ray and Isfahan - ch.20 also ch. 28 for the order for survivors to return to their own place and to rebuild their villages and cities

⁶⁰⁸ This is confusing the relay station *Yām* with the personnel, who were *Yāmchi*.

⁶⁰⁹ *Grigor/Bedrosian*, ch. 12 section 14

⁶¹⁰ *Kirakos/Bedrosian* ch. 22 section 199

ordered to provide the Mongols with 'horses and livestock and whatever else they demanded'.⁶¹¹

If there was a shortage of the Mongolian horses in the Hülegüid controlled areas there were problems with changing to other breeds, even to Arabian horses which are also renowned for their stamina. This was identified by Al Jāhiz almost five hundred years earlier. Though he was assessing the capabilities of the Tūrks as against those of the rebel Khārijites his views are equally applicable to the steppe horses used by the Chinggisids of the thirteenth century and early fourteenth centuries.

In the first place the *Khārijite*'s horse has not the staying-power of the Tūrks's pony; and the *Khārijite* has no more than a horseman's knowledge of how to look after his mount.

The Tūrks demands so much of his mount that only the toughest of his horses is equal to the task; even one that he had ridden to exhaustion, so as to be useless for his expeditions, would outdo a *Khārijite*'s horse in staying-power and no Tukhari pony could compare with it.....

The Tūrks is at one and the same time herdsman, groom, trainer, horse-dealer, farrier and rider; in short, a one-man team..... he is also a professional farrier and better than a trainer at getting what he wants from his pony⁶¹²

As Al Jāhiz noted, if mounted on a 'Khārijite' or for present purposes a larger 'western' horse, the horseman would immediately lose the advantages of his small steppe horse – not just their staying-power or the ability to scramble sure-footedly up and down hills, but also the many years of careful training. Furthermore, the larger, hand-fed,

⁶¹¹ Kirakos/Bedrosian, ch. 23 section 204

⁶¹² *Al Jāhiz: The Life and Works of Jāhiz* - trans. of selected texts by Charles Pellat, trans. from the French by D M Hawke Berkeley, University of Berkeley Press, 1969 pp. 92-94

Mamluk horses were essentially static platforms from which to shoot rather than the galloping archery of the Hūlegüid forces.

Thus, whilst there is some controversy over potential models for the *Yām*, what was in fact established was an uncomplicated system of remount and subsistence stations designed to facilitate the onward travel of emissaries. What evidence there is indicates an uneven development and despite Ögödei's best intentions, up to and beyond 1246 the *Yām* infrastructure appears to have been both basic and erratic.

In the Hūlegüid west, Chinggisid viceroys and then Hūlegü himself, attempted to establish or reinstate a communication network in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by both their own forces as well as by the predations of the Khwarazmshah amongst other destructive forces. Moreover, abuse of the system, which will be discussed below, was apparently rampant and there is some slight evidence that the Hūlegüids had a deficit of mounts. Hūlegü's difficulties may have affected internal communications rather more than the trans-Eurasian traffic which, when relations with the Jochids were not hostile, would have taken the fast and apparently quite efficient Jochid route east.

Chapter VII

The *Yām* Network: Administration, Upkeep and Infrastructure

The Imperial Relatives and Imperial Rights

It was argued above that Ögödei had to tread carefully with his proposed establishment of a more organised communication network. However, there was one issue that was to bedevil the efficient administration of the *Yām* network: imperial relatives had imperial rights.

As Bat-ochir Bold has affirmed, the group which formed the core of the steppe aristocracy were the blood relatives of the charismatic khan whose status increased with the victory or appointment of their khan as the khan of a federation. The closest family members of Chinggis Khan were designated *altan urug* or the ‘golden family’ whose role at the summit of the social order gave them not only immense status but also power and ‘rights’⁶¹³ including, for those of the same lineage as the ‘charismatic’ khan, a share in the benefits and profits of empire.⁶¹⁴ As Khazanov points out, not only the ‘state’ but also its populace belonged to all members of a ruling clan or an extended family, as their corporate property.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹³ Bold, pp. 84, 112

⁶¹⁴ There are several references in the *SH* to the sharing out of the profits of empire, e.g. para. 279, *SH*, Vol. I

⁶¹⁵ Anatoly M. Khazanov, ‘The Scythians and Their Neighbors,’ ch. 3 in *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change* University of Hawai’i Press, p. 38

What was unresolved was whether such ownership also included use of the newly instituted *Yām*, the very nature of which meant that the trails criss-crossed the domains of the entire Imperial Family who, perhaps understandably, felt entitled to avail themselves of it as they were paying for their portion. On the other hand, the publicised purpose of the *Yām*, as far as Ögödei was concerned, was to expedite communications without disrupting the populace.

That the Imperial Family had abused the system was observed by both Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn,

After the death of Güyüg Khan many of the khatuns and princes had issued *yarlıghs* and *paizas* without number to the people, had dispatched ambassadors to all parts of the Empire and had given protection to noble and base on the pretext of their being *ortaqs*, etc.⁶¹⁶

Möngke Qa'an was determined to resolve what he clearly regarded as the exploitation of the *Yām* facilities. Möngke is regarded by Allsen as the most successful of the Chinggisid Qa'ans, not least because he was a 'systemiser' and a 'regulariser'. Möngke's control was exercised through his Central Secretariat⁶¹⁷ which was divided in subsections, each dedicated to a different facet of administration and the *Yüan shih* records that there was an officer in charge of the communication system, a *Jirwōdai* (Chih-erh-wo-tai).⁶¹⁸ What is salient here is that as Allsen emphasises, this Central Secretariat was a 'creature of the Qa'an' without officials from other princely lines whilst its 'main functions were to advise the ruler and to keep under close and continuous surveillance

⁶¹⁶ Juvaynī/Boyle p. 598; Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 219

⁶¹⁷ Allsen, 'Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251-1259' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 46, No. 2 (Dec., 1986) p. 507

⁶¹⁸ Allsen, 'Guard and Government' p. 505

the activities of the administration in the interests of the throne'.⁶¹⁹ As Allsen also points out, however, the Central Secretariat contended with the regional administrations which represented the interests of the entire imperial clan and whose officials sought to 'defend and advance their own master's particular sets of interests'.⁶²⁰

Möngke was at the very limits of his already contentious powers of control in his attempt to reserve usage of the *Yām* for reasons of state and not the personal affairs of his relatives. Moreover, this was clearly a line that had many grey areas and Jirwōdai may have had a thankless task enforcing Möngke's solution which was to issue

a *yarliḡh* instructing each one of them to conduct an inquiry in his own territory and call in all the *yarliḡhs* and *paizas* which the people had received from them and the other princes during the reigns of Chingiz-Khan, Ogetei Qa'an and Güyüg Khan.⁶²¹

As for the great ambassadors, they were not to have the use of more than fourteen post horses: they should proceed from *Yām* to *Yām* and not seize the people's animals en route. In the reign of Qa'an it had been the custom for merchants to come to Mongolia on post horses. He denounced this practice, saying: "Merchants journey to and fro for the sake of gain. What is the point in their riding post horses?"⁶²²

Following Mongke's death his imperial household/*keshig* opted for the loser, Ariq Böke, with the inevitable result that they were purged by Qubilai. This had the rather important consequence that those personnel within the Central Secretariat with experience of the

⁶¹⁹ Allsen, 'Guard and Government' p. 507

⁶²⁰ Allsen, 'Guard and Government' p. 519

⁶²¹ Juvayni/Boyle p. 598; Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 219

⁶²² Juvayni/Boyle p. 598; Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 219

difficulties involved in trying to control the princely lines were eliminated.⁶²³ As Allsen observes, this lack of administrative continuity at the highest levels should be taken into consideration when considering the ‘dissolution’ of central control after the death of Möngke though what impact this might have had on the *Yām* network is impossible to evaluate.

Amongst the abuses of the *Yām* were inflated receipts for goods in exchange for bribes, corrupt *buka’uls*, that is those who distributed the spoils of conquest and later, food and rations, so that the households of the ruler and his *khatuns* were in danger of running short of supplies as also were the military.⁶²⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn complained that the number of *īlchīs* or messengers circulating in the Hūlegüid lands was so enormous that ‘even if five thousand mounts had been stationed at each *Yām* they would not have been enough for them’.⁶²⁵ Moreover, they travelled with huge escorts, all of whom required mounts and even the Mongol horse herders could find their herds requisitioned undoubtedly without adequate compensation, further leading to their impoverishment.⁶²⁶

Those accused of sending out hordes of messengers included not only governors but also members of the *keshig* such as the *qorchis* or quiver bearers, *barschis* or keepers of hunting leopards, *qushchis* or falconers and so on.⁶²⁷ Even *bone fide* messengers or *īlchīs* were exploiting their privileges,⁶²⁸ leading the contemptuous populace to sabotage the *Yām* by delaying the official emissaries as well as ensuring that they only had broken-down nags to accomplish their missions. Assuming this is not simply hyperbole, the conclusion has to be that – as far as the *Yām* was concerned – anarchic conditions existed in Hūlegüid western Eurasia.

⁶²³ Allsen, ‘Guard and Government’ p. 520

⁶²⁴ Melville, ‘The Keshig in Iran’, p. 151

⁶²⁵ *Rashid al-Din*, ed. A.A. Alizade 1957, vol. III, pp. 480-483; also Silverstein, p. 158

⁶²⁶ Morgan, ‘Reflections’, p. 381

⁶²⁷ Melville, ‘The Keshig in Iran’, p. 160

⁶²⁸ Morgan, ‘Reflections’, p. 381

The abuses were tackled by tightening up procedures so that documents had to be officially authorised with the appropriate *tamghā* or seals in order to obtain remounts and the *ilchīs* rate of travel was also noted by a paid official on the documents he carried.⁶²⁹

Whilst there is some cynicism amongst scholars as to Rashīd al-dīn's motives in painting quite such a dire picture of the situation prior to his reforms during the reign of Ghāzān,⁶³⁰ the Armenian sources do tend to validate the view that the situation was somewhat unruly in Hülegüid administered territories. On the other hand, Grigor of Akner remarks, perhaps wistfully, that during the reign of Hülegü's son Abaqa, 'there was an abundance of everything throughout all the countries'.⁶³¹

Administration of the *Yām* Provisions

Once Ögödei had received approval from his imperial relatives for the establishment of the *Yām* he had to equip and sustain it within the parameters of customary steppe tradition though as Silverstein quite rightly pointed out above, manning permanent stations goes against the grain of Central Asian custom.⁶³² Ögödei's efforts will be examined below under 'expense' but at least the administrative oversight was not bureaucratically top-heavy since according to the *Secret History* in 1234 he appointed only two officials, Arajan and Toquchar, to be in charge of the network.⁶³³

Neither have been satisfactorily identified but since such posts would normally be filled from the ruler's *keshig* this is presumably their qualification for the job and equally clearly neither were the original

⁶²⁹ Morgan, 'Reflections' p. 383

⁶³⁰ See especially David Morgan, 'Rašīd al-dīn and Gazan Khan', in Denise Aigle (ed.), *L'Iran face à la domination mongole* (Tehran, 1997), 179-88.

⁶³¹ *Grigor/Bedrosian* ch. 14 section 16.

⁶³² Silverstein, p. 144

⁶³³ *SH*, I para 280

proposers of the project.⁶³⁴ However, it is not easy to ascertain what their duties were since, as was seen above, Rashīd al-Dīn also refers to amirs being appointed for each branch of the family to oversee the setting up of the network through their dominions and neither of these two are mentioned as being Ögödei's personal representatives.

On the face of it, supplying a way-station should not have been particularly onerous since these were simply small encampments of *gers*. In his promulgation Ögödei commanded that the *jamuchin* (Mongolian plural of *jamuci*) and *ula'achin* (Mongolian plural of *ula'achi*) should be provided out of the units of a thousand. The former refers to the person in charge of a relay station whereas the latter refers to those in charge of the relay horses, or *ula'a*, usually geldings.⁶³⁵ Thus 'at every stage there had to be a relay station with twenty relay-horse keepers each' and they were also responsible for measuring the distance between each stage.

The transport and provisions were similarly to be provided including geldings for use as remounts, along with carts and the oxen to be harnessed to them. When Ögödei arranged for additional post stations to be established between Qaraqorum and 'Khitai' to resupply Qaraqorum - which needed five hundred wagon loads of food and drink daily to restock the stores - these *tergen yām* or wagon stations had to have six or eight oxen for each wagon.⁶³⁶

Provisions included sheep and milch mares for *kumiss*.⁶³⁷ According to the *Yuan Shih*, regulations were issued in 1229, during the first year of Ögödei's reign and confirmed by Qubilai in 1264, envoys were to receive as their daily ration one catty or pound of meat, one pound of flour, one pint of rice and one jug of rice wine.⁶³⁸ Rubruck's party, travelling

⁶³⁴ See *SH*, II, de Rachewiltz, 1030-1031

⁶³⁵ *SH*, II de Rachewiltz, p. 1028

⁶³⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 62-63.

⁶³⁷ *SH*, I para 280

⁶³⁸ *Yuan shih*, ch. 101, p. 2584 and Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' p. 267

mostly through Jochid held territory most certainly did not enjoy such largesse. If Rubruck's route had taken him more extensively through the Chaghadaid dominions he might have fared better as a permit, albeit dating from 1353, entitled the bearer not just to the use of remounts but also to grape wine as well as two legs of meat and three *batman*⁶³⁹ of food.⁶⁴⁰

This basic plan was adhered to in Mongolia until 1954. According to Tumorjav, 'When it operated, every *sum* (a small administrative unit of the *aimag* during the Qing dynasty which had to supply one hundred and fifty fighting men) had households with responsibility for performing relay-duty. Typically, the distance between relay stations was about 18 miles/30 kilometres. At each station, responsible household members would quickly feed the rider, change his horse and send him on his way.'⁶⁴¹ That such basic facilities endured up to the twentieth century is confirmed by travellers such as Kent whose experiences exactly paralleled those of the Friars eight centuries earlier. Thus on his journey from Iliassutai, west of Ulaan Baatar to Kobdo in western Mongolia, the first 'stage' out of Iliassutai consisted of 'a number of horses tethered to a line stretched between two stakes driven in the ground and a single *ger*' guarded by the ubiquitous vicious dogs.⁶⁴² Light refreshments were available in the form of cold fat mutton or mutton heated in water for about ten to fifteen minutes. Further stations consisted of between two to three *gers*, in which case there would be an 'official' *ger* which operated as the 'station'.⁶⁴³ This is also confirmed by Carruthers, in his travels through unknown Mongolia, who remarks that what he calls guard-houses, but which seem to have

⁶³⁹ See Appendix on Measurements and Weights

⁶⁴⁰ Michael Weirs, 'Mongolische Reisebegleitschreiben aus Čayatai', *Zentralasiatische Studien* I, 1967, p. 34-35 and 39-40; A. P. Grigor'ev, *Mongolskaia diplomatika XIII-XV vv*, Leningrad, 1978, pp. 107-108, Allsen 'Imperial Posts, p. 268

⁶⁴¹ Myatavyn Tumorjav, 'Traditional Animal Husbandry Techniques Practiced by Mongolian Nomadic People' ch. 5 in *Mongolia Today, Science, Culture, Environment and Development* p. 103

⁶⁴² Kent, *Old Tartar Trails*, pp. 106-107

⁶⁴³ Kent, *Old Tartar Trails*, p. 109

operated exactly like relay stations but close to the frontier, were simply *gers* about 30 miles/48 kilometres apart and every fifth ‘guard-house’ had a resident official with control over the other four.⁶⁴⁴

Ögödei may have had doubts as to the competence of his *jamuchin* since he laid down that for transgressions the perpetrator would have half their goods confiscated.

If one causes even a piece of string to be
lacking He shall be guilty and liable To
“splitting in half along the top of the head” If
one causes even a spoon-shaped spoke Of a
wheel to be lacking He shall be guilty and
liable To “splitting in half along the nose.”⁶⁴⁵

Möngke, as part of his reforms, additionally appointed two Muslim *bitikchis*, ‘Imād al-Mulk, who had occupied the same position under Ögödei Qa’an and Güyüg Khan and the Amir Fakhr al-Mulk, described as an ancient servant of the Court. Their duties seem to have been to issue *paizas* to officially sanctioned travellers. Later on, in the Hüle güid west as part of Ghāzān’s drive to eliminate abuses in the network in his domains, he appointed an Amir to oversee each *Yām*. Quite how this supervision operated in practice is unclear, as is the number of stations devolved on each grandee. Gazagnadou, without giving his source, reckons on around five hundred ‘relais de poste’ serving the Hüle güid sphere of influence.⁶⁴⁶ As the number of top officials, presumably Amirs, present at the reading of Ghāzān’s last testament was in the region of sixty and even if there were not as many as five hundred *Yām* stations, each Amir must have had a ‘portfolio’ of stations under his supervision otherwise there would not have been enough great amirs to go round. Despite Ghāzān’s attempts to tame the *Yām* in his own domains by introducing administrative reforms, little is known of the

⁶⁴⁴ Douglas Carruthers, *Unknown Mongolia*, p. 260

⁶⁴⁵ *SH*, para 280

⁶⁴⁶ Gazagnadou, *La poste à relais en Eurasie*, p. 67

day-to-day operational practicalities of the Hūlegüid communication system.

The *Yām* in Jochid domains

Tantalisingly, there is circumstantial evidence that the Jochid *Yām* may have been the most developed of the Chinggisids outside the Yuan. Alef is of the view that the creation of a system of communications was one of the most significant achievements of the reign of Ivan III (1440-1505).⁶⁴⁷ However, Alef also makes clear that after the conquest of the Russian northeast in the thirteenth century by the Mongols, the *jam*, which he regards as a tax at this period, was inflicted on the inhabitants.

Donald Ostrowski, for his part, argues that there is sufficient evidence to show that fourteenth century Muscovite government and administrative practices were overwhelmingly influenced by Mongol political institutions and practices⁶⁴⁸ and he agrees with Halperin on the Mongol antecedents of the communication system rather than, for example the Kievan *povož*.⁶⁴⁹ Ivan III's *Yām* also used some of the same terminology as its predecessor. In the early sixteenth century Sigismund von Herberstein, a Hapsburg envoy, who was sent on two missions to Muscovy, in 1517 and in 1526, lavishly praised the official communication system in his influential *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*⁶⁵⁰ and he refers to the relay-station master as the *yamshchik* and the way stations are referred to in documents as *jam*,

⁶⁴⁷ Alef, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Muscovite Postal Service' p. 6

⁶⁴⁸ Donald Ostrowski, 'The Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions', *Slavic Review*, vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter, 1990) pp. 525, 526, 537

⁶⁴⁹ Ostrowski, 'The Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions', p. 535

⁶⁵⁰ Herberstein, Sigismund von, *Notes upon Russia: being a translation of the earliest account of that country, entitled Rerum moscoviticarum commentarii by the Baron Sigismund von Herberstein*, trans. and ed. by R. H. Major, London, Hakluyt Society, 1851-1852, 2 vols. Also: *Description of Moscow and Muscovy, 1557, Sigmund von Herberstein*, ed. Bertold Picard, trans. by J. B.C. Grundy, London, Dent, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966; Gustave Alef, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Muscovite Postal Service'

Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge, Bd. 15, H. 1 (Marz 1967) pp. 1

What is of interest for present purposes, however, is that the logistical support of Ivan III's *Yām* seems to have been very sophisticated though how far it was based on Jochid precedents is not clear. Halperin points to the wide-ranging diplomatic and commercial interests of the Jochids, including fifty major embassies to Mamluk Egypt in which the Jochids observed all the niceties of Islamic diplomacy⁶⁵¹ but also importantly would surely have been able to observe at first hand the *Barīd*.

Alef reports that in the Muscovite *Yām* knowledgeable clerks in the capital kept up-to-date information on the routes to be used by native and foreign official travellers. They also kept abreast of information of conditions beyond the frontiers so that they might direct outgoing missions along relatively safe roads. They knew of existing inventories to be found at the relay stations and the availability of transportation – horses, wagons and so on – for the use of envoys. And they exhibited considerable knowledge of what should be provided for foreigners.⁶⁵² The clerks 'calculated the number of conveyances needed for handlers and supplies, and estimated the food and fodder required for the journey. The occasional similarities in menus for different missions along the same routes arouse a suspicion that check lists existed and the clerks only varied the quantities of provisions depending upon the number of travellers. They were also aware of dietary differences between Christian and Moslems. The dispatching officer in Moscow armed the overseer (*pristav*) assigned to conduct official parties within the connives of Muscovy with necessary letters, instructions and requisitions so that he might obtain clearances to travel through the provinces'⁶⁵³

Allsen has also noted the efficiency of the Muscovite communication system which he argues rests on the well-documented fact that the

⁶⁵¹ Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History*, Indiana University Press, 1987 p. 27

⁶⁵² Alef, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Muscovite Postal Service' p. 13

⁶⁵³ Alef, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Muscovite Postal Service' p. 12

Russians had long-term, first-hand knowledge of the *Yām* which was first organised in the 1240s. The almost identical correspondence between the operational orientation of the two communication networks can be explained, in his opinion, by the Mongols' governing strategy in the region that relied heavily on long-distance communication. This Allsen puts down to a change in governance around 1300 when the Jochid resident agents in the Russian principalities were replaced with envoys, or *elchin*, Russian *posoly*, whom they sent on frequent but temporary missions to the Russian princes to make known their demands.⁶⁵⁴ Conversely, there was a constant stream of the Russian elite en route for the Jochid centre at Sarai or to the travelling encampments or *ordu*. This meant that 'as a result of these techniques of governance, which lasted for well over two hundred years, all strata of Russian society, from grand princes to the general population, were intimately acquainted with Mongolian methods of moving and treating officials, messengers and foreign envoys'.⁶⁵⁵ Such administrative support made the Muscovite communication system one of the most efficient of its time in the West.

It is, however, highly unlikely that, for example, Ögodei's officials Arajan and Toquchar, who were appointed by him to be in charge of the network⁶⁵⁶ had similar duties to those of their later Muscovite counterparts. On the other hand as the Jochid *Yām* was the fastest route east, it may have developed a more sophisticated system than when travelled by, for example, a generally hungry Rubruck in the mid 1250s, when it seems to have been a very basic, self-supporting, locally administered network.

⁶⁵⁴ Charles Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History*, Bloomington, Ind. 1985, pp. 31-32, 33, 39-40 and 139-40, no. 37 and 38. Also, Allsen, 'Imperial Posts', p. 263-264

⁶⁵⁵ Allsen, 'Imperial Posts', p. 264

⁶⁵⁶ *SH*, I para 280

Upkeep and Expense of the *Yām*

Ögodei's blueprint for ensuring the viability of the communication network had three elements. The most important of these, from which the other two flowed, was that it should operate within the traditional economic framework of the steppe. At the same time this meant there was no cost to his treasury to set it up and it would be self-supporting. So far as the first is concerned, he ordered that the various units of a thousand in the appropriate areas would provide the basic relay-station, later known as an *örtöönii nutag*.⁶⁵⁷ Such *Yām* stations were under the charge of units of a thousand, allocated grazing and had to supply the 'staff', remounts and subsistence for the envoys and emissaries passing by. There was thus supposedly minimal cost to the 'treasury'.

That the 'centre' was not involved in the expense of the establishment and upkeep of the *Yām* stations is confirmed by a reference in the *Yuan Shi* relating to the Jochids. In 736/1336 Uzbeg Khan (r. 713-744/1313-1343) sent an embassy to the Yuan soliciting the payment of his income from his lands in China for the establishment of relay-stations to facilitate the movement of troops. His envoy reminded the emperor that the *Yām* stations were not kept in repair by handouts from the Yuan but the Jochid khan had to meet the expense himself.⁶⁵⁸ This underscores the responsibility of the Imperial Family for the network in their domains – as also shown in Hūlegü's efforts to organise his communication network in the area under his control. That the Hūlegüids did not receive any expenses for the upkeep of their section of the network from their overlords in China is indicated in Ghāzān's reforms where he allotted funds for the upkeep of each station as well as fodder.⁶⁵⁹ Having to supply the latter may actually have made the Hūlegüid element of the network one of the more expensive to run since

⁶⁵⁷ Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, p. 45

⁶⁵⁸ *Yuan Shi*, ch. cxvii. Also Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, p. 14

⁶⁵⁹ Rashid al-Dīn III, 482-3

the animals apparently were not at pasture throughout the year or were in areas of poor pasture.

Over and above the economic burdens imposed by the relay stations on the 'landowners' through whose domains the routes lay, they may also have had a more positive but perhaps infrequent economic impact on the units of a thousand. This was provided by opportunities to importune gifts and bribes. Travelling envoys provided a useful source of 'income' in the form of extorted 'gifts' if John of Plano Carpini and later Rubruck's experience of 'miserie and tribulation' is anything to go by.⁶⁶⁰ The Papal Legates travelled for a good part of their journey east within the Jochid *Ulus* and amongst the adversities encountered was the behaviour of the 'Tartars' themselves whose behaviour was both 'uncivil and horrible'.

Bribery in the form of gifts was the order of the day, from the start of their journey when gifts had to be bestowed before they were allowed to use relay horses and a guide, an arrangement which continued to be the only way to proceed. The mission not only had to justify their journey to every armed group of Tartars who came across them, they also had to part with some of their precious stores of supplies to get rid of their inquisitors. Furthermore, whilst there are frequent mentions of horses this should not be taken to mean that this was an efficiently administered transmission of ambassadors. To obtain mounts and a guide on one occasion Carpini had to hand over the usual 'gifts' only to find that these were to be the same horses from which the Tartars had just dismounted.⁶⁶¹

Though Rubruck remarked with some resentment on the venality of the Tartars, he also noted that 'admittedly they take away nothing by force, but when they see something they ask for it in a highly persistent and

⁶⁶⁰ Carpini/Beazley p.107

⁶⁶¹ Carpini/Beazley p. 129

impudent fashion. If a man gives it to them it is wasted because they feel no gratitude; for they regard themselves as the masters of the world and think that nobody should deny them anything.'⁶⁶²

Infrastructure⁶⁶³

The basic infrastructure requirements were established by an early proponent of the relay courier service - Cyrus the Great (r. 559-529 BCE). Xenophon records that when Cyrus wanted to establish a relay messenger system his method was to see how far a horse ridden hard could cover in a day without collapsing. When this distance had been ascertained he erected way stations equipped with mounts, supplies and grooms together with an official to receive and forward the post by relays of mounted couriers or runners who were supplied with one day's worth of rations. Express royal couriers, according to Herodotus, could complete the distance from Ecbatana, modern day Hamadan, to Persepolis in nine days, covering up to 186 miles or 300 kilometres a day which was ten times faster than troops marching between the two destinations. This was destined to be the basic pattern of all pre-modern communication networks modified according to local conditions and requirements.

Some early communication networks had a highly developed infrastructure in terms of both highways and facilities. Thus the Roman *cursus publicus* had possibly the longest system of civil engineered highways of any pre-modern polity with the distance between the Antonine Wall on the borders of Scotland to Jerusalem estimated by

⁶⁶² *Rubruck*, p. 98

⁶⁶³ Some elements of this section are in response to a pointed question by Prof. Robert Hillenbrand on the lack of Mongol infrastructure on the *Yām* network arising from a paper given by the candidate on the *Pax Mongolica* at the Symposia Iranica 1st Biennial Iranian Studies Graduate Conference at the University of St Andrews, 13-14 April 2013

Gibbon as being 3,740 miles/6,018 kilometres.⁶⁶⁴ The *cursus publicus* was equipped with *mansiones*/rest houses and *mutationes*/stables every ten miles or so. Needham observes that, remarkably, the Chinese were aware of the Roman system as one Yü Huan in circa 264 CE wrote that in Roman Syria:

They hoist flags, beat drums, use small carriages with white canopies and have post-offices, mounted couriers, cantonal offices and post stations just as we do in China. Every ten *li* there is a cantonal office and every thirty *li* there is a post station⁶⁶⁵

The Han interest in their communication network, which was based on earlier antecedents, may not be entirely unrelated to the fact that the founder of the Han, Liu Bang, the Emperor Gaozu (r. 202–195 BCE) was reputed to have been a cantonal officer/*thing chang* whose duties included guarding the roads.⁶⁶⁶

In the second century BCE the *Chou Li* or Record of Institutions of the Chou Dynasty observes that:

In principle, along all the roads of the Empire and the (feudal) states there is a rest house (*lu*) every ten *li* where food and drink may be had. Every thirty *li* there is an overnight rest-house with lodgings (*lu shih*) and a government grain-store. Every fifty *li* there is a market and a station with an abundant stock of supplies.⁶⁶⁷

This basic pattern was to persist for another two millennia.

Needham regards the Han dynastic period as the pinnacle of Chinese road building though in circa 493 CE the Northern Wei, who also took

⁶⁶⁴ Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. IV, *Physics and Physical Technology, Part II: Civil Engineering and Nautics*, CUP 1971, p. 15., Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 12 vols. London, 1790 (1st ed. 1776-88) vol. I, p.81

⁶⁶⁵ Needham, vol. IV, p. 34

⁶⁶⁶ Needham, vol. IV, p. 36

⁶⁶⁷ Needham, vol. IV, p. 35. Needham observes that the short distances were undoubtedly so that drum and flag signals or fire smoke signals could be heard or observed.

an active interest in highway construction rather splendidly appointed a Regius Professor of Geographical Communications.⁶⁶⁸ After the Han, however, there does appear to have been an inexorable decline in the highways as their role was taken by the immense system of artificial canals and navigable rivers leaving only the mountain highways to continue their age-old function.⁶⁶⁹ There also appears to have been a steep drop in the total mileage of the Chinese network post-Han. Thus, during Tang the total mileage of roads has been computed at approximately 13,550 miles/21,806 kilometres, a drop from the 22,000 miles/34,505 kilometres of road network of the Han which was already considerably less than the probable 48,000 miles/78,000 kilometres of the Roman system.⁶⁷⁰

That the state highways depended on settled conditions for their efficient maintenance may be a factor in what appears to have been a major deterioration in the later Qing period. Stanford's 1886 *Compendium of Geography of Asia* points out that the main highways in the 1880s in China were little more than beaten tracks left to take care of themselves whilst roads as understood in the West scarcely existed anywhere in Central and Eastern Eurasia.⁶⁷¹ These sentiments are reiterated in Richard's 1907 *Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire*. Here it is stated with conviction that 'in no civilised country of the world are communications so difficult as in China'. Except for the Government courier roads, or Public Horse Great Roads, traffic had to use what were no more than footpaths, sometimes laid with flagstones while others were only beaten tracks through the fields.⁶⁷² These observations could well be taken at face-value as they are based on the first-hand experience of Victorian travellers in the Celestial Kingdom.

⁶⁶⁸ Needham, vol. IV, p. 31

⁶⁶⁹ Needham, vol. IV, p. 3

⁶⁷⁰ Needham, vol. IV, p. 29

⁶⁷¹ *Stanford's Compendium of Geography and Travel, Asia* by Augustus H. Keane, 2nd ed. 1886, p. 594

⁶⁷² Louis Richard, *Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire and Dependencies*, p. 425

On the other hand, the byways maintained by local ‘worthies’ were admired by Needham himself who observed from his own travels in China that the landscape was shot through ‘with millions of miles of well-paved paths suitable chiefly for pedestrians, porters with carrying poles, pushers of wheelbarrows and men carrying litters. In his experience, rough unpaved cart-tracks tended to predominate only in the eastern plains.’⁶⁷³

In Western Eurasia, the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I (r. 86-96/705-15) had reservoirs built to serve way-stations on the Syria-Mecca route.⁶⁷⁴ Milestones were also placed along the routes, both as distance markers and directional aids which, as Silverstein comments, were also evidence to the populace both of imperial efforts in creating stability within the realm as well as signifying a potent imperial presence. In the Hūlegūid domains, it seems that improvements to the main highways, though perhaps mainly in the conquerors’ heartland of Azerbaijan had to wait until Öljeitü (r. 703-716/1304-1316) since Mustawfi reports that he had routes measured and milestones erected,⁶⁷⁵

Chinggisid efforts in contrast to those of other great empires do seem somewhat pitiful. Ögödei commanded the establishment of way-stations in the form of easily relocated *ger* encampments but as far as other elements of infrastructure were concerned references are few and far between. The envoy Chang Te dispatched to Hūlegū in 1259 by Möngke does indicate, however, that there were built structures on his route since some way-stations as he proceeds further west had the appearance of bathing-houses with glass windows.⁶⁷⁶ These were presumably inherited possibly from the Qarakhitai.

⁶⁷³ Needham, vol. IV, p. 32

⁶⁷⁴ Ibn al-Faqih, *Buldan*, p. 106

⁶⁷⁵ Hamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, ed.tr. G. Le Strange, vol. II pp. 161-2 including the distance between the milestones

⁶⁷⁶ Ch’ang Te, ‘Si Shi Ki’, tr. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, I, p. 130-131

It should perhaps be borne in mind that the communication infrastructure was not necessarily regarded as an unmitigated benefit by the local populations. It could have a negative connotation since the postal routes could be seen as symbols of oppressive conquerors. In China, as Needham points out, the population in general showed a passive hostility to the road authorities and all their works because of the burdens of corvee labour and taxation. Moreover, as Han troops inexorably penetrated into non-Han areas, it was not unknown, especially in southern China, for the conquered peoples to cut the roads and destroy the post-stations whenever they could.⁶⁷⁷

Paved Roads

During their invasions of northern China in the first quarter of the thirteenth century the Chinggisids could not have failed to notice the state controlled highways. However, one noticeable element that was missing in the Chinggisid *Yām* was the construction of paved roads. As the *Tabula Peutingeriana* mentioned earlier indicates, the Romans appreciated the merits of engineered roads as an aid to efficient communication and the initial section of the first great Roman road, the Via Appia, was completed around 312 BCE with the network finally covering 49,709 miles/80,000 kilometres. The Emperor Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE) and his successors 'recognised the link between this road network and imperium' in that the roads played a critical role in the creation, maintenance and proclamation of the Roman Imperium as well as fully understanding 'that Roman roads sustained the *Pax Romana*'.⁶⁷⁸ This ideological dimension does not appear to have occurred to the Chinggisids who regarded the *Yām* network in purely utilitarian terms.

To be fair to the conquerors, however, Chinggis Khan is reported by Rashīd al-Dīn as having uttered a *bilig* in which one of his aims was to

⁶⁷⁷ Needham, vol. IV, p. 38

⁶⁷⁸ Emily Albu, *The Medieval Peutinger Map*, 2014

straighten and clear the “royal roads and highways”.⁶⁷⁹ Allsen argues for the Mongols’ civil engineering capabilities based on a comment by Ch’ang Ch’un that, when accompanying his father on the Western Campaign, Chaghadai constructed a road through a ravine near Lake Sairam which required forty-eight timber bridges.⁶⁸⁰ There is some further evidence that the Mongols were capable of rudimentary ‘civil engineering’ projects as was shown in the preparations for Hūlegū’s advance westwards⁶⁸¹ where bridges were organised and boulders removed from tracks. Without disparaging Chaghadai’s achievement in clearing a pathway for the troops and building the bridges in what must have been difficult terrain it is evident that, despite having a potential workforce in the shape of captives, none of this appears to have been translated into the construction of a transcontinental network of paved roads.⁶⁸²

Building materials may have been a problem, though maintenance in the harsh conditions would also have been an issue, as can be seen in Mongolia today. Whether cost was also an issue is always possible since both the Roman and Chinese civil engineering efforts were extraordinarily expensive if the computations of between £55,000 and £109,000 per mile at 1960s values for Chinese roads constructed between 130 BCE and 65 CE and £105,000 per mile for the Roman Via Appia are anywhere near accurate.⁶⁸³

Additionally, there may be a convoluted Mongol reason for this oversight. The Armenian Grigor of Akner affirms that a reason that the

⁶⁷⁹ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi’ al-tavārikh*, 2 vols., Ed. B. Karimi, Tehran, 1959) I, p. 439. Quoted by Allsen, ‘Imperial Posts’ p. 244

⁶⁸⁰ Allsen, ‘Imperial Posts’ p. 244

⁶⁸¹ Juvaynī/Boyle, II, p. 610

⁶⁸² Qubilai in China could draw on expert civil engineers on whose advice he ordered the building of an extension to the Grand Canal complete with sluices and a paved road running alongside so that ‘beasts of burden would not get stuck in the mud’. *Rashīd al-Dīn*/Boyle, p. 276

⁶⁸³ These figures are quoted by Needham, with due reservations in *Science and Civilisation*, vol. IV, p. 30 based on those of Lo Jung-Pang, ‘Communications and Transport in the Chin and Han Periods’, Unpub. Ms.

tracks had to be cleared of obstacles was for the movement of the Mongols' wagons and carts.⁶⁸⁴ On the other hand, whilst roads tend to be regarded as a great convenience for travellers, especially for wheeled transport, the Mongols were also horsemen who were used to operating in wide open spaces and whose *modus operandi* was cross-country travel. It is thus highly unlikely that even if Ögödei had decreed the construction of paved roads they would have been utilised by horsemen except perhaps as direction markers.

Conversely, the Roman legions were foot soldiers; hence the building of roads was an aid to marching, especially through difficult terrain. Moreover, Roman messengers travelled by wheeled vehicles. Another factor is that throughout much of the Roman Empire the climate was not as extreme as in the midst of Eurasia which even today takes a huge toll on the road network.

Perhaps the most important contention in this section is that the *Yām* network should be considered an *infrastructure* rather than a postal service. In this respect, Allsen observes that the caliphal *Barīd* was 'primarily designed to convey information rather than the movement of goods or people' though it did, of course, also constitute an infrastructure.⁶⁸⁵ In contradistinction, Ann Kolb in her chapter on 'Transport and Communication in the Roman State' has firmly emphasised that the widely held view that the *cursus publicus* was a postal delivery service is wrong.

In the Roman instance, Kolb has argued that the *cursus publicus* could not be considered a postal system *per se* since couriers were employed

⁶⁸⁴ Robert P. Blake and Richard N. Frye, trans., 'The History of the Nation of Archers by Grigor of Akanc', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12 (1949), p. 327, Allsen, 'Imperial Posts' p. 245

⁶⁸⁵ Thomas T. Allsen, 'Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A review Article' of Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, ed. Thomas T. Allsen, P. B. Golden, R. K. Kovalev, and A. P. Martinez, 17 (2010), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag p. 238

by the sender, not by the *cursus publicus* and that ‘those travelling by means of the *cursus publicus* were not using a transportation system. They were using an infrastructure based on the facilities of the *cursus publicus*’.⁶⁸⁶ Similarly, it is resolutely considered here that though on a rather more modest scale, the Chinggisid *Yām* should be considered an *infrastructure* rather than a postal service per se⁶⁸⁷ since it operated in a similar fashion to the Roman *cursus publicus* in that way-stations did not operate as ‘post-offices’. Those ‘staffing’ the Roman and the Mongol networks were necessary for the operation of the way-stations, including those responsible for the care, issue and maintenance of the animals and to guard stretches of the route. Thus this view is in opposition to, for example, Gazagnadou, who consistently refers to the ‘Mongol postal service’ and ‘couriers of the *yām*’.⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, whilst it can probably be safely said that the Chinggisid *Yām* network may have been one of the most extensive pre-modern land-based communication networks, it was also one of the least ‘fancy’.

⁶⁸⁶ Anne Kolb: ‘Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *cursus publicus*’, p. 98

⁶⁸⁷ Anne Kolb: ‘Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *cursus publicus*’ in eds. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*. London and New York, Routledge, 2001. In the *cursus publicus* it appears from Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan that the issue of warrants was extremely restricted and such warrants were only issued to messengers or other officials on a case-by-case basis and for important matters alone. (Kolb p. 100) The use of state-owned facilities was reserved for those persons specifically authorised by the emperor to do so. This right was documented by writs called *diplomata* or *evectiones*, which detailed what contingent of wagons and animals could be called upon, which route was to be taken and the period during which the warrant was valid. Only those services noted in the pass could be demanded. (Kolb, p. 97)

⁶⁸⁸ D. Gazagnadou, *La Poste à Relais en Eurasie*, éditions Kimé, and YAM in *Encyclopaedia Islamica* 2, p. 268

Chapter VIII

The Yām Network: Routes

In spite of the relatively uncomplicated set-up and the utilization of the ancient highways across Eurasia there is no getting away from the fact that in strategic terms the *Yām* network was overstretch on a heroic scale. This chapter then will attempt to examine, so far as possible, the main routes on which *Yām* stations had been established.

Caveat

As Lattimore and Ball have cautioned, routes were merely directions of travel⁶⁸⁹ and ‘*anywhere* – barring unscaleable precipices – qualified as a route’.⁶⁹⁰ This is an important caveat when attempting to map the exact tracks used by early communication networks. Such an endeavour is further complicated because, as Bretschneider has remarked, geographical names mentioned in the sources ‘escape critical investigation, owing to the scantiness of our knowledge with respect to these tracts from other sources, ancient or modern’.⁶⁹¹ Thus even if place names are mentioned, identifying the exact locations beyond reasonable doubt can be well nigh impossible either because they are today little more than indistinguishable heaps of rubble⁶⁹² or refer to places whose names have changed multiple times as they fall under the domination of different sets of rulers.⁶⁹³ Additionally, because of the

⁶⁸⁹ Lattimore, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, p. 52

⁶⁹⁰ Ball, *The Monuments of Afghanistan* p. 23 This is something that can still be observed in Mongolia today, particularly in the Gobi, where roads are rare but also on the main highways which often have as many vehicles driving in the grassy hinterland beside the road as on it.

⁶⁹¹ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II p. 330

⁶⁹² For example, one of the main centres of Chinggisid power, the Jochid headquarters, Sarai, on a branch of the Lower Volga founded c. 1253 and later at New Sarai c. 1310 were destroyed by the Amir Timur in 1395, rebuilt but totally destroyed by the Russians in 1490.

⁶⁹³ Ayas the chief port of Cilician Armenia on the Gulf of Scanderoon is variously called Layas, Ayacio, Aiazza, Giazza and La Jazza; Almaliq, one of Chaghatai’s chief

vagueness of the references, some locations are sheer guess work. Such challenges have been met with relish by historians, geographers and explorers, on occasion causing uproar when deliberated by the distinguished Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society.⁶⁹⁴

The sources for the Roman *Cursus Publicus* or the *Barīd* in its various manifestations⁶⁹⁵ may not enable an exact mapping of the routes and stages but from, for example, the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, it is at least possible to establish a fairly precise line of march during the Roman period.



Fragment from the surviving eastern section of the 5th century CE
*Tabula Peutingeriana*⁶⁹⁶

Bactria top right. The routes go no further east than Merv and Kabul

centres has been known as Kuldja and Yining. It is not to be confused with Almaty/Alma Ata/Vernoye which was founded as a Russian military post in 1854.

⁶⁹⁴ E.g. Dr. M'Cosh, On the Various Lines of Overland Communication between India and China, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* vol. 5., no. 2 (1860-1861), Marco Polo's route has also caused considerable contention see especially Yule-Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, I, pp. 172-176

⁶⁹⁵ For example the *Tabulae Peutingeriana* and Ibn Khurdādhbeh's *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-mamālik*

⁶⁹⁶ Codex 324 Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Hofburg, Vienna. There are a number of accessible images on-line. This is from the Bibliotheca Augustana. https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost03/Tabula/tab_or11.html.

By contrast, the surviving references to the *Yām* network do not provide detailed itineraries of the overland tracks and trails used between the Hūlegüid domains and the Yuan.⁶⁹⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn, in the best traditions of his predecessors, had apparently included in Volume III of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* a section on *Suwar al-Aqālīm*, or the 'climes'. This purportedly contained 'not only a geographical and topographical description of the globe as it was then known....., but also an account of the system of highways in the Mongol Empire, with mention of the milestones erected at imperial command and a list of postal stages'.⁶⁹⁸ For present purposes the loss of such a work is almost unbearable.

Thus the view that is taken here is that definitively charting the *Yām* network with any exactitude will never be realisable. This is partly on the grounds given above but also for an important reason given to an early twentieth traveller in 'High Tartary' by his guides, that the relay stations were continually shifting, hence the necessity of taking guides who knew the latest positions of the stages.⁶⁹⁹

What scarce information there is has to be teased out of the sources or from the few clues which can be gleaned from the accounts of the travellers, some of whose itineraries – such as Marco Polo, are very confused. Neither is there much in the way of archaeological evidence since an encampment of *gers*, which constituted the horse relay stations, left no footprints. On the other hand, though it is not feasible to indicate each individual relay station, it is sometimes possible to trace the general route from snippets of information wrested from the

⁶⁹⁷ In this context, Donald Ostrowski in his *Muscovy and the Mongols* p. 111 remarks that John of Plano Carpini joined the Bukhara-Samarkand-Tashkent main road at Otrar but there is no solid evidence for this assumption in Carpini's account of his outward nor his return journey. It may well have been Taraz.

⁶⁹⁸ Boyle, introduction to *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, p. 8 quoting K. Jahn: 'The Still Missing Works of Rashid al-Din', *Central Asiatic Journal*, IX/2, pp. 113-133

⁶⁹⁹ Kent, *Old Tartar Trails*, p. 114. Carruthers in his *Unknown Mongolia* of 1910 also remarks on the impermanence of what he calls guard houses but which seem to have functioned as relay stations which could shift long distances from their original positions. P. 260

accounts of such travellers as the friars as they uncomfortably trotted their way to Qaraqorum.

A further complication is that it was not only the *Yām* stations that shifted their whereabouts. Unlike the courier roads in China, which spread like a web in straight lines from the capital to the provincial centres, or indeed the ninth century network emanating from Baghdad, the principle actors in the Chinggisid Imperium did not have ‘fixed abodes’ but themselves moved between several locations, the implications of which will be examined below.

Lastly, it should also be borne in mind that there were four different divisions of the communication network, each having different roles. Thus it should not be taken for granted that the *Morin Yām*/horse station, the *Tergen Yām*/wagon station, or the *Tayan Yām*/ambassadorial stations and the *Narin Yām*/secret communications all followed the same itineraries, especially this last. It is also unclear whether the caravans of traders, large or small, plodded along the *Tergen Yām* or wagon station tracks or found their way independently along ancient caravan trails; though it was equally likely that the wagon trails in some areas followed the caravan tracks if heading towards the same destinations. Potentially, then, at least five different sets of itineraries could be involved.

There are a number of ways to engage with such issues. The decisive factor, from which all else flows, is that the purpose of the network was to enable the ‘centre’ to retain control. Thus the whereabouts of the Khan or Qa’an was pivotal to the operation of the communication network though this was complicated, as will be seen, by the peripatetic nature of Chinggisid power as well as their propensity for campaigning. It is, however, generally safe to say that a route is dictated by the starting point and the presumed destination.

Secondly, the itinerary was also predicated on the accessibility of mountain passes even more perhaps than traversing deserts or rivers, or indeed the availability of a way-station/ *Yām*. The time of year would also have been a factor because of weather conditions at points along the way such as the dreaded dust storms blowing off the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts during the spring as well as snow melt coming off mountains making rivers impassable. Polo comments that his father and uncle took three years on their return trip from Qubilai's Court arriving back in Venice in 1269 because of snow, heavy rains and the great torrents which they found impassable.⁷⁰⁰ The third means of accessing the Chinggisid communication routes, especially during the Ögodeid period, is through his justification for establishing the network, which could provide clues to the general direction followed.



Eurasia in the 1220s

The Ögödeid Period 1228 – c.1244

Thus one means of overcoming the intrinsic difficulties of mapping the Chinggisid communication network is through Ögödei's foremost reason

⁷⁰⁰ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Yule/Cordier, Book I, p.16 and p. 25

to instigate a more efficient communications system.⁷⁰¹ As this was to expedite messages, and since he is said to have continually consulted his elder brother Chaghadaï⁷⁰² and his younger brother Tolui's widow, Sorqaqtani Beki⁷⁰³ it follows that his emissaries would have travelled repeatedly between himself and these imperial relatives. Initially, therefore, the chief routes must have been between these personages and since these were not 'contingency' networks they must have been either *Tayan Yām*, *Morin Yām*/horse relay *Yām* and/or *Tergen Yām*/Wagon *Yām*.



Disposition of the main centres of
Ögödei and his most senior relatives

1. Chaghadaï; 2. Chinggis Khan's birthplace inherited by Tolui; 3. Ögödei, near Qaraqorum, 4. Sorqaqtani Beki and Ariq Böke in the west Altai foothills and 5. the route to Batu on the Volga

Rashīd al-Dīn emphasises that during the thirteen years that Ögödei was on the throne he would consult his elder brother Chaghadaï on every important undertaking and would take no action without his advice and approval.⁷⁰⁴ The implication of this is that tracks between

⁷⁰¹ This is examined in Part IV, Chapter VIII

⁷⁰² Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 149

⁷⁰³ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 199

⁷⁰⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 149

the environs of Qaraqorum and Chaghadaï's *ulus* would have been especially well-trodden. However, Ögödei was not static but moved between his several residences. He spent around three months each at his summer base or *yailāq* of Sira-ordu in the meadows of Örmügetü, south-east of Qaraqorum. His winter quarters or *qishlāq* were on the Ongqin river, some distance to the south of Qaraqorum, whilst four to five weeks were spent at other retreats such as Qarshi-yi Sūrī, built for him in 1237 about 25 miles/40 kilometres north of Qaraqorum. In the autumn he could be found at Koke-Na'ur, four days' journey from Qaraqorum.⁷⁰⁵

Chaghadaï was similarly peripatetic. His original *ulus* awarded by his father was in the strategically important lush Ili River valley south of Lake Balkhash and to the north of Tien Shan⁷⁰⁶ though Juvaynī was firmly of the opinion that Chaghadaï received the territory extending from the land of the Uighur to Samarkand and Bukhārā.⁷⁰⁷ Chaghadaï's annual schedule involved spending the spring and summer in his quarters or *yailāq* in Almaliq - more recently Khuldja and now Yining, lying to the north of Kucha across the Tien Shan Mountains from the Taklamakan Desert - whilst he spent the autumn and winter on the banks of the Ili.⁷⁰⁸ Previous occupants of this area had included the Wusun, the objective of the Han-dynasty general Zhang Qian and more recently it had been the Qarakhitai⁷⁰⁹ and Qarluk heartland.

At its height, this extensive Chaghadaïd *ulus* was bounded in the north by the Jochid *ulus* of Orda, Batu's elder brother, with Lake Balkhash as the 'boundary'. Westwards it stretched beyond Lake Balkhash towards Khwārazm and north eastwards beyond Lake Zaisan and the western slopes of the Altai. To the south it had contentious control over an area

⁷⁰⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁰⁶ It is in what is today the Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture in north-west Xinjiang.

⁷⁰⁷ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 43

⁷⁰⁸ Juvaynī/Boyle, I, p. 272

⁷⁰⁹ The northern limit of control of the Qarakhitai was Lake Balkhash and the southern just to the south of Lake Issyk-Kul; East as far as the Altai and west to the Syr Darya.

from Balkh to Kābul whilst in the east, Chaghadaid control continued as far as Hami at the north-eastern edge of the Taklamakan Desert. After Möngke's disputed election, the Chaghadaid and Ögödeid territorial holdings became contested territory. Alghu, a grandson of Chaghadaid, had seized control of the Chaghadaid *ulus* between c.1260 and 1264, and dominated an area between the Amu-Darya and the Altai, effectively subsuming both the Ögödeid inheritance and that of Qubilai's younger brother, Ariq Böke. By the 1260s then, the Chaghadaid *ulus* theoretically dominated an area which incorporated much of the entire central section of the trans-Eurasian routes.

To the north-east of the Chaghadaids was Ögödei's original *ulus*,⁷¹⁰ which lay to the east of Lake Alakol on today's Kyrghiz- Xinjiang border. Thus after the death of Güyüg when Batu paused near today's Kopal, just south of Lake Balkhash,⁷¹¹ the Ögödeids and the Chaghadaids were in fact within easy reach. Though the Ögödeid *ulus* had been to all intents and purposes dissolved by Möngke after his contested succession, Ögödei's son Qaidu fought back to re-establish the ancestral dispensation from his grandfather. In this endeavour he was so successful that when he became the senior partner in an alliance with the Chaghadaid Du'a against Qubilai, Qaidu effectively controlled an area extending from the Amu Darya to beyond the Altai in the east as well as the Tarim Basin. Thus the Tuluids in eastern and western Eurasia had a hostile bloc sitting squarely on the most strategically important section of the communication network.

Sorqaqtani Beki's whereabouts is more problematic. Her late husband, Tolui, as the youngest son or keeper of the hearth (*M.otchigin*) inherited his father's *yurt* and great *ordo*, including the army and treasury, in the Mongolian homeland on the Onon and Kerulen Rivers, north-east of today's Ulaan Baatar and just south of the Russian border. As Carpini

⁷¹⁰ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 43

⁷¹¹ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 557

remarks, it was the custom that the courts of princes were not dissolved on their deaths but governed thereafter by a widow,⁷¹² in this instance, Sorqaqtani Beki. In the meantime, Tolui's youngest son, Ariq Böke, had his main residence in the far west of Mongolia on the western slopes of the Altai Mountains with his winter quarters on the Urunge River, north of the Chaghadaid's Besh Baliq, with his summer and winter quarters only two to three days apart.⁷¹³

Rubruck understood that Ariq Böke occupied the residence of his mother and inherited all her possessions⁷¹⁴ which must have included the original *ordo* of Chinggis Khan though somewhat confusingly, he remarked that during his visit to Möngke's encampment, Möngke decided to visit his mother's camp which was close by and where he was greeted by Ariq Böke. As Rubruck did not go further east than Qaraqorum this could not have referred to the Onon-Kerulen area and it is unlikely that Möngke would have crossed the Altai which implies that Sorqaqtani Beki must have had one of her *yurts* in the region of Qaraqorum.

In addition, in 1236, Ögodei had presented Sorqaqtani Beki with Chen-ting fu/Aq-Baliq or White Town, in Hopei, northern China, which had previously been given to Tolui who had campaigned in Khitai during the lifetime of his father. Sorqaqtani Beki took a deep personal interest in its administration⁷¹⁵ though how often she visited is not certain. What these various residences imply, however, was that those wishing to communicate with Sorqaqtani Beki had to contend with at least four locations which were hundreds of miles/kilometres apart from each other.

⁷¹² *Carpini*/Beazley p. 134

⁷¹³ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 310. This was stated in the context of his having gone to his brother Qubilai Qa'an seeking forgiveness for his rebellion.

⁷¹⁴ *Rubruck*, p. 224, and *Carpini*, Beazley, p. 134

⁷¹⁵ Details of the administration of this allotment can be found in the chapter on Shih T'ien-Tse (1202-1275) in *In The Service of the Khan*, Igor de Rachewiltz, Hok-Lam Chan, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing and Peter W Geier, p.31 ff

During Ögödei's lifetime the most distant of the senior princes was Batu, who was comfortably ensconced on the River Volga.⁷¹⁶ His father, Chinggis Khan's eldest son Jochi, had been allotted as was customary, the most distant parts of the family domains. These, according to Rashīd al-Dīn, included all the countries and *ulus* which lay in the region of the Irtysh and the Altai mountains with a directive that he should take possession of the Qipchaq Steppe and the countries that had been conquered in that direction.⁷¹⁷ Juvaynī is rather more expansive, including Khwārazm, as well as Qayaligh/Qayaliq, the Cailac of Rubruck, south of Lake Balkhash and thus arguably under Chaghadaid control. Rubruck was told by the son of a commander of a thousand, deputed to take him from Batu's Court to Möngke's that the journey, leaving Batu in September, would take four months on horseback with two packhorses between the three of them.⁷¹⁸ The *Yuan shih* remarks on how little known were the Jochid domains because of their remoteness and that they were two hundred days or almost seven months distance from Dadu/Beijing.⁷¹⁹

Neither were the Hülegüids permanently settled in Baghdad. One reason for a peripatetic lifestyle is put forward by Fazl Allah Khunji, a late fifteenth century biographer of the Aq Qoyunlu sultan Ya'qub, who lists the qualities which demonstrate a ruler's distinguished origin. One of these is that:

He was not a town dweller affected by dirty habits, as was the case with many rulers of Khurasan, Fars and Kerman, but followed the seasons wandering in open spaces going from summer quarters to winter quarters.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ *Rubruck*, pp. 130-131

⁷¹⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 117

⁷¹⁸ *Rubruck*, p. 136

⁷¹⁹ *Yuan shih*, ch. cxvii, biography of Jochi and Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, I p. 8

⁷²⁰ Fazlallāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī, *Tārīkh-i 'Ālamārā-yi Amīnī* tr. v. Minorsky as *Persia in AD 1478-1490*, London, 1957, p 20. B. O'Kane, *From Tents to Pavilions*, p. 249

Scholars such as Charles Melville and Bernard d O'Kane have taken an interest in the 'geochronology' or 'movements over time' of the Hülegüid rulers⁷²¹ noting that the entire court spent around a hundred days a year moving between summer and winter quarters over and above being extensively involved in military operations.⁷²² In their respective Imperial *uluses*, the summer quarters seem to have been the more important of their centres. Thus, for the Hülegüids in Azerbaijan - at least from the time of Ghāzān Khan - these were initially Ujān, to the east of Tabriz. His brother Öljeitü, however, favoured and developed Sultāniyya, 211 miles/339 kilometres south-east of Tabriz and situated in a long, fairly wide plain surrounded by hills and in fact rather reminiscent of the area around Qaraqorum with the advantage that it was more suitable than Tabriz for accommodating the encampments of the Court. Nonetheless, Öljeitü only spent forty percent of his time at Sultaniyya.⁷²³

There are repeated references in the sources to the Mongols wintering on the Mūghān steppes north-east of Tabriz⁷²⁴ and west of the Caspian or the pasturage at Arrān. Between 709/1309-10 and 713/1313-14 however, Öljeitü overwintered at Muhawwal, to the west of Baghdad.

Since these were regular annual progresses they may not have proved that dysfunctional for communications. On the other hand, the departure dates were not fixed and they could vary within a month or so

⁷²¹ See for example, Charles Melville, *The Itineraries of Sultan Oljeitu, 1304-1316*, *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, vol. xxviii, London, 1990 and Bernard O'Kane, 'From Tents to Pavilions: Royal Mobility and Persian Palace Design' ed. Gülrü Necipoglu, special issue, *Ars Orientalis*, 23 (1993) pp. 249-268

⁷²² Of the more distant campaigns, Öljeitü, for example, was on campaign in Gīlān, a province adjacent to the Caspian Sea, in the summer of 706/1307 and the winter of 713/1313-14 he was in Māzandarān.

⁷²³ O'Kane, 'From Tents to Pavilions', p. 249

⁷²⁴ The Armenian historian Kirakos remarks that the plain of Mughan was full of all kinds of water, wood, fruit and prey and was settled by the intruders with the whole mass of their families and goods during the reign of Ögodei. *Kirakos Ganjakets'i/Bedrosian* ch. 20.

whilst the actual transfer could take as long as two months.⁷²⁵ Thus every year there could be around six months of uncertainty as to the actual location of the principal figures. For contact and communication within each individual *ulus*, this may not have been an issue, not least because this was not just a ruler on the move but the entire apparatus of governance as well. For long-distance communication, however, it was yet another impediment to the problems of contact.

For these reasons there was an inherent complication with the Chinggisid network - unlike the *Barīd* or the Chinese relay courier network- in that the routes were not between two fixed points. Moreover, these locational difficulties were compounded when campaigning. The worst case scenario was when an emissary had to deal with two moving targets such as Hülegü on his slow progress towards Western Eurasia urgently needing to contact Möngke who was then engaged in northern China in 653/1255.

However, it is possible to determine from the dispositions of his imperial relatives in relation to Ögödei's own annual schedule the general direction in which the envoys/*ilchīs* between the senior members of the Imperial Family would have travelled. What cannot be determined, though, are the exact pathways which were followed or the locations of the individual *Yām*. Likewise, if it is not possible to accurately identify the exact trails used during the Ögödeid period - which was one of communication within a relatively circumscribed area- as the Imperium expanded after his death there seems little hope in charting with any degree of accuracy the increasingly extended lines of communication.

⁷²⁵ Melville, 'The Itineraries of Sultan Öljeitü' Table I, p. 59

Post-Ögodei East-West Communications⁷²⁶

After Ögödei's death, provided there was harmony between the Imperial relatives, theoretically there was a choice of East-West communication routes reaching beyond Ögödei's original network. The problem remains, however, of ascertaining with any exactitude which were the *Yām* routes. This is regarded here as insoluble but the data in the Table on Travellers and Routes in the Appendices identifies patterns including strategic points on the network. It is culled from a number of sources and there are inevitably a number of cautions. Firstly, the routes of many of the travellers are not known and in some cases it is not even possible to say whether the traveller went overland or by sea. Secondly, where the actual starting point is not known, assuming that the mission is between the Hūlegūids and the Yuan then the start and finish are specified simply as Tabriz to Dadu. Lastly, what is significant is that the journeys are those that are alluded to in the sources and there is a strong impression that trans-Eurasian journeys were actually quite rare even during the supposedly easier conditions of the Chinggisid period.

⁷²⁶ No one map has provided all the detail required for this section. Yuri Bregel summarises the issues in the preface to his *Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, Brill, 2003, and he was driven to making his own maps. His Atlas can only be, however, the starting point. The Royal Geographical Society's map of the Mountains of Central Asia, 1986, scale 1:3,000,000; is useful and Keane's *Asia*, Stanford 1886 is essential.



Map from own collection

The Virtue Map of Lakes Balkhash and Issyk-Kul

Designated in this work as
'The Balkhash Knot'

The Balkhash Knot: ⁷²⁷

If the emotional heartland of the Chinggisid Imperium was Chinggis Khan's birthplace close to the Onon River in north-eastern Mongolia⁷²⁸ the 'political' heartland was the location of the Qa'an and his Court. There is, however, a strong argument for a 'strategic' heartland. This

⁷²⁷Geo-historically for this (as well as for wider Eurasia) Stanford's *Asia*, 1886 provides an important overview. Also useful is Semenov's 1856 *Travels in the Tian-Shan*, Hakluyt, 2nd Series 189.

⁷²⁸ As was argued by the sons of Güyüg and Chaghadai in the negotiations leading to the accession of Möngke. See Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p.200. Located east of today's Dadal which is situated just west of 122° longitude and just north of 42° latitude.

was the area between Lakes Alakol, Balkhash, and Zaysan with the epicentre at Chaghadai's base of Almaliq. It was effectively the hub of the *Yām* network not only in the Chinggisid period but also historically, since it exploited the ancient migration routes between the Dzungarian Alatau and the Tarbagatai Mountains.⁷²⁹

It was the route that Chinggis Khan took with his armies on the campaigns in pursuit of the Khwārazmshah 1219-1221 and his commander Sübe'etei is also supposed to have returned this way in c. 1225/ after subduing the peoples north of the Caucasus.⁷³⁰ It was visited by Ch'ang Ch'un in 1221 and the Amir Arghun and Juvaynī returned from the Court of Möngke Qa'an via Almaliq 651/Oct-Nov. 1253 where they halted for a few weeks at the *ordo* of the then Chaghadaid khan Yesu to celebrate his nuptials.⁷³¹ Hülegü passed through Almaliq in 1253 after his despatch westwards by his brother Möngke, where he was welcomed by Orqina, the widow of Chaghadai's son, Qara Hülegü. The Cilician monarch, King Het'um I, journeyed to Qaraqorum in 1254-1255 and passed through on his way home. It was also a stopping place for the Papal Legate, Giovanni de Marignolli in 1341, a year after the murder of the Latin bishop and six Minorites.

Moreover, not far from modern day Kopal, just to the south of Lake Balkhash, was where Batu paused on his way to meet Güyüg Khan after hearing of the latter's death. It was here that he summoned the princes for a consultation⁷³² and as Juvaynī points out, the sons of Güyüg were already in the neighbourhood and the grandsons and wives of Ögödei were also in the region. Both Carpini and Rubruck travelled

⁷²⁹ Semenov, *Travels in the Tian-Shan*, p. 234 conveys the crucial geo-historical importance of the steppe routes to the north and south of the Tarbagatai Mountains

⁷³⁰ *Yuan Shih* ch. cxxi under the biography of Sübe'etei and in Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II, Part III, p. 43

⁷³¹ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 275 and II, p. 481 and p. 513

⁷³² Juvaynī/Boyle II, p. 557

via Lake Alakol of which Carpini has left a vivid description⁷³³ and Rubruck mentions the island, the brackish water and the wind.⁷³⁴

The main thoroughfare seems to have led between Almaliq and Lake Alakul via the Sayram Hu/Lake Sairam/Sutkul to the north-east of which was a settlement which is mentioned by several travellers including Rubruck, Ye-lu Chu' ts'ai, and Ye-lu Hi liang and called variously Bolat, Bu-la and Pulad.⁷³⁵ There is today a town called Bole just to the west of the ancient migratory trail through the Dzungarian Gate.

Gazagnadou incorporates a map in his *La Poste a Relais en Eurasie* of the 'Principaux réseaux de relais de poste dans l'empire Mongol (XIII et XIV siècles)' in which the 'réseaux de relais de poste' rather curiously completely avoid the Lake Balkhash area, traversing Jochid territory considerably further north and Chaghadaid territory considerably further south.⁷³⁶

Though the 'Balkhash Knot' up to the 1260s was within Chaghadaid controlled territory it was thereafter an area of dispute which had serious implications for the viability of the communications network. For nervous travellers it was, however, possible to avoid it by travelling north of Lakes Alakol and Balkhash through the Jochid *ulus* following another ancient migration route slightly further north than the Dzungarian Gate – that is the 'Zaysan Gate' between the Tarbagatai and Altai mountains.⁷³⁷ Semenov regards this as the logical route that the Russian princes such as Yaroslav and Alexander Nevsky travelled to Qaraqorum. This took them through Jochid controlled territory, from the Volga to the Irtysh River entering upland Asia through the above historically important Lake Zaysan Gate. Alternatively, the Jochids and

⁷³³ *Carpini*/Beazley, p. 134

⁷³⁴ *Rubruck*, p. 165 and n. 4

⁷³⁵ *Rubruck*, p. 146, says it was a month's journey from Taraz.

⁷³⁶ Didier Gazagnadou, *La Poste a Relais en Eurasie*, editions Kime, [1994] 2013 Annexe II, p. 151

⁷³⁷ This is when travelling westwards.

Russian princes could have travelled south-east via Khwārazm following the line of the Amu Darya before turning due east through the Chaghadaid *ulus* providing they had friendly relations with the latter.

The Hülegüids meanwhile had an interesting dilemma since theoretically they could despatch their envoys eastwards starting from Tabriz either through Georgia and around the north of the Caspian and into Jochid controlled territory or south of the Caspian via Mashhad and then through Chaghadaid controlled territory. In Rubruck's time, he remarks that 'all the Saracens who come from Persia and Tūrkiā on their way to Batu' on the Volga pass through Berke's camp which was situated in pasturelands to the north of Derbend (the Iron Gate) on the western shore of the Caspian.⁷³⁸ If the Hülegüids were in conflict with both sets of relatives simultaneously or if the status of their envoys to the Yuan was not respected as they travelled across the domains of their imperial relatives then the only alternative was to go by sea.

The effectiveness of Qaidu's control of both the Pamirs and the Tarim Basin is difficult to gauge but on paper it would appear that every route but the sea route was problematic for the Hülegüids from the early 1260s until the early fourteenth century. If the Polos' experience is to be believed, taking to the seas was not for the faint-hearted. It was not only time-consuming but the attrition rate was dramatic. Polo remarks that in 1291, of those who boarded ship with him in China when he returned west with a bride for Arghun (r. 683-690/1284-1291), six hundred died on the voyage of nearly two years.⁷³⁹ The hazards of a sea voyage are also confirmed when during a subsequent mission despatched to the Yuan by sea by Ghāzān between 696/1297 and 704/1305 two of the three envoys died on the return voyage.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ Rubruck, p. 127

⁷³⁹ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, I, Yule/Cordier, p. 35 and note 5 on p. 38

⁷⁴⁰ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 34

The Traditional Route between East and West Asia

From the Han Dynasty onwards the traditional land route westwards emanated from Xian/Chang'an, through the Hexi/Gansu Corridor to Dunhuang and the Tarim Basin. It then followed either the northern edge of the Taklamakan desert at the base of the Tien Shan or the southern edge, skirting the Altun Shan and the Kunlun Shan. These two routes met again at Kashgar before diverging again. One funnelled through the Altai Mountains via Sary-Tash⁷⁴¹ following the Kyzyl-Suu or Red River in the Alai Valley turning south-west at what is today Dushanbe leading eventually to Balkh and Termez. The second track turned north-west at Sary-Tash leading to the Ferghana Valley where four tracks led to passes in the direction of Osh, Kokand or Andijan. A third track turned north at Dushanbe continuing northwards before branching west to Samarkand or north to Tashkent/Chach.

Additionally, there were two ancient routes running parallel with the northern foothills of the Tien Shan which are of considerable interest here. Thus from Hami⁷⁴² in the north-eastern Tarim Basin, the route took advantage of breaks in the Tien Shan with one wending through Turpan/Turfan, then Urumqi to the Chaghadaid centre of Yining/Kulja/Almaliq. It then continued to what is today Alma-Ata/Almaty, Bishkek/Balasagun and Otrar⁷⁴³ from whence it kept westwards to Khwārazm, south of the Aral Sea or alternatively dropped down from Otrar to Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhārā. Bretschneider, however, rather undermines this option since he remarks that Turfan seems to have been unknown during the Chinggisid period.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴¹ East of 72° longitude and south of 40° latitude

⁷⁴² This is the Camul in Marco Polo, Kamul in Turkish and Khamil in Mongolian. It was within Yuan control.

⁷⁴³ Pegolotti in his *Pratica della Mercatura* mentions that to travel with pack asses between the Ural River and passing to the north of the Aral Sea to Otrar took thirty-five to forty days. Allan Evans, *Francesco Balducci Pegolotti*, p. 21

⁷⁴⁴ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II, p. 193

The second route left Korla, which is located on the northern rim of the Taklamakan at the junction of the trans-Tarim Basin crossing; it traversed the Tien Shan via the Narat Pass then crossed the Lesser Yulduz plateau before joining the Turfan route at Yining/Kulja/Almaliq in the Ili valley. The mid-Tien Shan between Kucha/Kuqa and Kashgar has no passes. The Florentine merchant, Pegolotti, in his *Pratica della Mercatura*, compiled around 1340, allowed forty-five days' journey with pack asses between Otrar and Almaliq 'and every day you find Mongols' with a further seventy days from Almaliq to Kanchou/Zhangye in the Gansu/Hexi corridor.⁷⁴⁵

Routes between Qaraqorum and the West

If travelling westwards from Qaraqorum⁷⁴⁶ the initial obstacles to be overcome were the Altai and the Junggar Pendi or Dzungarian Plateau. Though it is impossible to prescribe the exact route it may well have been along a variety of trails leading in the direction of today's Uliassutai⁷⁴⁷ or further to the north-west, Hovd/Kobdo in what had been Naiman territory.⁷⁴⁸ The latter route would have crossed the Altai in the region of Lake Zaysan and continued north of Lake Balkhash in Jochid held territory whilst the former could either have crossed the Altai further south and headed towards Urumqi and Almaliq or conversely crossed the Altai in the region of Lake Alakol.

There was a third possibility which is touched on by Marco Polo though it is not clear whether he took this route himself since he was aiming for Dadu. It appears, however, that there was a direct track at that time from Qaraqorum via Etzina/Khara Khoto⁷⁴⁹ located on the southern the edge of the Gobi. This was a Tangut centre as well as an important

⁷⁴⁵ Allan Evans, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, p. 21; H. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. III, Hakluyt Society pp. 138, 143, Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II, p. 38

⁷⁴⁶ West of 103 degrees longitude and just north of 47 degrees latitude

⁷⁴⁷ C. 97° longitude and south of 48° latitude

⁷⁴⁸ This extended from Hovd to the upper Irtysh and upper Selenge rivers.

Hovd/Kobdo is West of 92° longitude and on 48° latitude

⁷⁴⁹ Longitude 101° 09' East and 41° 46' north

crossroads: northwards it led to Qaraqorum across Gobi landscapes, or eastwards to Dadu and southwards down the river Hei Shui to two important Gansu/Hexi corridor settlements, Suzhou/Jiayuguan and Kanchou/Zhangye. Though Bretschneider's preferred 'highway' from Qaraqorum to Transoxiana and Iran was across the Altai, Bishbalik/Urumqi, Sairam Lake, Almaliq, Chu River, Taraz,⁷⁵⁰ Sairam, Tashkent and Samarkand⁷⁵¹ as will be seen this was not followed by the Friars. On the other hand, this may well have been the more relaxed route followed by ambassadors which was suggested to Rubruck as a possibility for his colleague's return west.⁷⁵²

When Qubilai moved the centre of gravity to northern China, the eastern segment of the network became rather trickier. Four main possibilities are conceivable though at least one can be discounted. These four are the northern Lake Baikal route; the Qaraqorum/Uliastai route as above; the Etzina route and a speculative route followed by Marco Polo route leading from Dunhuang to the Huang Ho/Yellow River.

The Lake Baikal route is the most unlikely. The first part of this route was fast and much travelled. It was latterly the Qing postal route and chief trade route from Beijing towards the north-west which went via Zhangjiakou, formerly Kalgan, the main egress through the Great Wall to the north-west of Beijing, then across the Gobi to the west of Urga/Ulaan Baatar. The Qing postal couriers continued on their north-western trajectory to the Siberian border which was crossed at Kyakhta, between Urga/Ulaan Baatar and Lake Baikal. Qing couriers carrying the light mail on two horses mounted by Mongol riders, travelling at full speed, with changes at relays every 20 miles/32 kilometres took eight

⁷⁵⁰ Mentioned by Rubruck who bypassed it. He had hoped to find the Chaghadaid prince Buri's German slaves there. *Rubruck*, p. 144

⁷⁵¹ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, II, Part III p. 94 and p. 331

⁷⁵² *Rubruck*, p. 251

days in summer and nine and a half in winter to cover the distance.⁷⁵³ However, whilst this may have been a well-galloped route between Urga/Ulaan Baatar and Beijing the continuation towards the west via Kyakhta, that is between Lake Baikal and Lake Zaysan, strategically located as seen above to the north-west of the Dzungarian Basin, was long and difficult taking two hundred and two days. Both the terrain and the inhabitants west of Lake Baikal were regarded in the tenth century with some horror,⁷⁵⁴ a view confirmed by a late nineteenth century traveller, who had to negotiate choking primeval forest and dismal fen.⁷⁵⁵ Thus if the total travel time between Beijing and the Jochid centre at Sarai on the Volga was actually two hundred days⁷⁵⁶ then this was clearly not the route taken.

Rather than head north across Mongolia and turning west at Kyakhta, another option was to head for Qaraqorum and then pick up the Uliassutai or Hovd route and thence through the Dzungarian Gate.⁷⁵⁷ On the other hand, Bishbalik, today's Urumqi⁷⁵⁸ formerly one of the major centres of the Uighurs but at that time under Chaghadaid control and located on the southern edge of the Dzungar plateau is mentioned by travellers coming from the general direction of Beijing such as Ye-lu Ch'u ts'ai, accompanying Chinggis Khan in 1219 to western Asia.⁷⁵⁹ Ch'ang Ch'un⁷⁶⁰ also mentions it in 1221. In contrast Urumqi is not mentioned by those travelling to Qaraqorum from the west since they would have turned off north-east in the region of Almaliq.

⁷⁵³ Richards, *Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire*, pp. 518-519

⁷⁵⁴ *Hudūd al-Ālam*, Minorsky, p. 283

⁷⁵⁵ Carruthers, *Unknown Mongolia*, ch. III pp. 73-93

⁷⁵⁶ *Yuan shih*, ch. cxvii, biography of Jochi. Bretschneider, II, Part III *Mediaeval Researches*, p. 8

⁷⁵⁷ Richards, *Geography* pp. 518-519

⁷⁵⁸ Urumqi, west of 88 degrees longitude and on the 44th parallel

⁷⁵⁹ Ye-lu Ch'u ts'ai, 'Si Yu Lu' trans. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches* I, pp. 9-24

⁷⁶⁰ Ch'ang Ch'un, 'Si Yu Ki', Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches* I, pp. 35-108

The problem remains how travellers reached Urumqi from Dadu, that is, whether the main *Yām* route from Beijing followed the Huangho Ho/Yellow River or cut across the Gobi close to the wall of Genghis Khan to Etzina and then dropped down to the track to Hami, which was under the control of the Yuan. From Hami the choice could be made dependent on circumstances and destination whether to continue via Urumqi or indeed Kashgar.

Travellers known to have taken the Balkhash Knot Route

Güyük's (r.1246-1248 CE) impending elevation to the imperial throne was a watershed for the Chinggisid communication network since it was the first big test of the *Tayan Yām*. Once again it is a great loss that so few attendees wrote of their experiences. Amongst those who did so were the friars John de Plano Carpini and his travelling companion Benedict the Pole, travelling on behalf of Pope Innocent IV between 1245-1247.

There are, however, some essential points to be borne in mind concerning the progression of grandees traversing Eurasia for reasons of state. They can be divided into roughly three groups. Firstly, they were either imperial princes or princesses travelling on imperial family business; secondly, were the ambassadors, 'four thousand' of whom were reported by Carpini attending Güyük's (r.1246-1248 CE) enthronement; lastly, there were senior officials summoned to Court such as the several trips of Körgüz (d.1242) in his capacity as *sahib-dīwān-i-mamālik*. Some of the former would have been accompanied by considerable impedimenta, in the form of baggage trains, entourages and so on. Rubruck observed Batu's son Sartaq's progress to Möngke's Court with his flocks, herds, wives, and offspring, although the more sizeable of his dwellings had been left behind.⁷⁶¹ Since such imperial progressions were akin to the annual seasonal migrations and would

⁷⁶¹ Rubruck, p. 255

have been self-sufficient as far as provisions and remounts were concerned they may not have been a burden on the *Yām*. It was only small groups of envoys who would have required the whole *Yām* package of mounts, sustenance and guides.

The most such data can do is provide a pattern and even this may be too optimistic. What does emerge, however, is that in the earlier Hūlegūid period, the trans-Eurasian traffic emanated from the western regions to Qaraqorum and Dadu rather than the reverse and travelled via the geostrategically crucial Balkhash Knot. From the limited evidence available it seems that all the main routes, including the steppe/Jochid route, funnelled into the area of the Balkhash Knot. This latter route was, as John of Monte Corvino remarked, the shortest, fastest and probably the safest route⁷⁶² but seems to have been used only for smallish groups or those having to travel via the Courts of the Jochid khans.

⁷⁶² First Letter of John of Monte Corvino, in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, ed. H. Yule, vol. I, pp. 200-201

CHAPTER IX

The Function of the *Yām* Network: Yuan-Hülegüid Contacts 1260-1335

Thus far, Chinggisid strategic communications have been dissected in terms of the establishment, development, infrastructure, upkeep, and potential routes of the *Yām* network. It was, however, established for a purpose, and in the *Secret History*, the major reasons for the incorporation of the *Yām* are that it would expedite communications without inconveniencing the populace;⁷⁶³ equally, that it would also expedite the comings and goings of ambassadors to Court.⁷⁶⁴ Juvaynī, on the other hand, also had no doubt that intelligence gathering was a key function since he remarks that setting up the *Yām* was to enable the khans to ‘ascertain the activities of their enemies.’ A further purpose was to transport the profits of empire to the scattered members of the imperial family⁷⁶⁵ bearing in mind that this latter could cover a multiplicity of items. These included not just plundered luxury goods but also herds and flocks, as well as individuals, including captives, especially artisans, but also brides, wrestlers, ‘scientists’ and so on.

Though Juvaynī firmly states that ‘ascertaining the activities of their enemies’ was high on the list of reasons for the incorporation of the *Yām* the remaining five strategic vulnerabilities identified by the US Department of Defense mentioned in the Introduction – that is, political, economic, sociological and military – were also issues for the Hülegüids. The extent to which their governance was complicated by the extended lines of communication in these areas will be examined below.

⁷⁶³ *SH* para. 279

⁷⁶⁴ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, p. 55; Juvaynī/Boyle II p. 501

⁷⁶⁵ Juvaynī/Boyle p. 33

Intelligence Function of the Yām Network

‘Intelligence’ is a term which needs to be handled with care since there are no hard and fast definitions. It should be differentiated from the ‘information highway’ which disseminates news and gossip but which is not of strategic importance in sustaining the ruler’s hold on the polity. Here intelligence is taken to refer to the intelligence ‘cycle’ – a series of steps including the acquisition of information which is then interpreted and analysed, disseminated to the policy maker/s on whose ‘judgement’ rests the value of the intelligence. That this latter has been a constant is borne out by a comment from a thousand years ago by the Ghaznavid historian Abū’l Fazl Beyhaqi “Don’t account as veracious any news which does not tally with one’s sense and judgement.”⁷⁶⁶

Juvaynī’s justification for the *Yām* network is, however, fully in line with precedent. Procopius (500 – c. 560 CE) regarded the decline in the Byzantine version of the Roman official courier system or *Cursus Publicus* during the reign of Justinian (r. 527-565 CE) as a disaster, since external affairs ‘being reported both with difficulty and too late to give opportunity for action and behind the course of events, cannot be dealt with at all’.⁷⁶⁷ In the view of Nizām al-Mulk, d.485/1092 the fall of the Umayyads was because of the ‘cessation of intelligence’ since “No kingdom has ever lost its power except with the cessation of [the flow of] intelligence’.⁷⁶⁸ Such verdicts are a salutary warning of the dangers of failing to maintain a viable state system of communications.

Not all rulers, however, were convinced that the establishment of a communication system and its role in the transmission of intelligence was necessarily a good thing, most notably the Seljūqs (431-590/1040-

⁷⁶⁶ Beyhaqi, Under the year 428 AH, Vol. II. p. 175

⁷⁶⁷ Procopius, *Anecdota*, XXX: 11 but ‘Umarī also states that the Umayyad Caliph, Mu ‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān established his version of the *Barīd* with help from Persian *dihqāns* or landed gentry and people of the Byzantine provinces...Silverstein, p. 53

⁷⁶⁸ Silverstein, p. 87

1194). In this context, the Seljūq argument for not re-establishing such a system is worthy of note. For their politically realistic vizier, Nizām al-Mulk, the timely receipt of news was of paramount concern. In his view, 'Couriers must be posted along the principal highways and they must be paid monthly salaries and allowances. When this is done, everything that happens throughout the twenty-four hours within a radius of fifty farsangs will come to their knowledge.'⁷⁶⁹ Unfortunately for the vizier, the Seljūq ruler, Alp Arslan disagreed with him, using the equally politically realistic argument that intelligence agents are potentially untrustworthy since they either could be motivated by selfish interests or could simply be bribed with the result that they reported adversely on friends of the Seljūqs and warmly on their enemies. Thus, as far as Alp Arslan was concerned, an expensive network of agents was pointless.

That Chinggis Khan appreciated the role of intelligence is shown in the *Secret History* though largely in the context of plans overheard by informers or enemy movements ascertained by scouts rather than through espionage. In view of his appreciation that 'knowledge is power' it is curious that in 1206 at the time of the *quriltai* in which the Conqueror distributed rewards to his family and entourage, there is no mention in the list of his 'appointments' of any that implied intelligence duties.⁷⁷⁰ On the other hand, the *Secret History* does record that Chinggis Khan said of his adopted son/brother, Sigi Qutuqu, that he would be:

Eyes for me to see with
Ears for me to hear with⁷⁷¹

De Rachewiltz explains this as a set phrase describing a person who performs important services and delicate missions though it equally

⁷⁶⁹ *Siyasat-nama*, Nizām al-Mulk, tr. Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, p. 87

⁷⁷⁰ *SH*. Onon pp. 122-123

⁷⁷¹ *SH* I, para 252 and de Rachewiltz, II, p. 770.

may point to Sigi Qutuqu being seen as an embryo chief of intelligence.⁷⁷²

Whilst at Möngke's Court Rubruck was most indignant at being asked numerous questions about

the kingdom of France: whether it
contained many sheep, cattle and
horses – *as if they were due to move
in and take it all over forthwith*⁷⁷³

Rubruck's alertness to the Mongols intelligence collecting methods has also left to posterity the most succinct report on the subject. In 1253, when in Möngke's encampment in Mongolia, the Qa'an proposed sending an envoy to the king of the French accompanied by a somewhat dubious cleric called Theodolus who had made his way east in the wake of Friar Andrew of Longjumeau's mission to the Mongols from King Louis in 1249. Möngke was overheard to say to his envoy:

You will go with this man (i.e.
Theodolus); be sure to take stock of
the routes, the terrain, the towns and
castles and the people and their
weapons.⁷⁷⁴

In response Theodolus announced that they would travel by sea to avoid any possibility of espionage. The erstwhile spy seems to have got as far as John III Vatatzes, emperor of Nicaea where he died. The emperor sent back to Möngke the envoy's attendants with the gold *pa'iza* so Möngke would presumably have received some sort of intelligence reports.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷² *SH I*, de Rachewiltz II, p. 770

⁷⁷³ *Rubruck*, p. 180 emphasis added

⁷⁷⁴ *Rubruck*, p. 186 also note 2 p. 230

⁷⁷⁵ *Rubruck*, pp. 186-187

Intelligence deficit versus interdiction of the communication network

As far as the Hülegüid experience is concerned, intelligence is a deeply problematic subject. One reason is that it is not always possible to identify the role of intelligence in keeping a ruler securely in the saddle or, conversely, leading to their downfall. Thus in the Hülegüid instance even Nizām al-Mulk would be hard-pressed to ascribe the period of turmoil following Abū Saʿīd's death and the subsequent demise of the dynasty to an intelligence failure.

It is therefore hard to argue that the strategic communication network and interdiction in communications between the Yuan and the Hülegüids was implicated in the latter's implosion after 1335. Indeed, Abū Saʿīd's reign was also the most intense period of interaction between the Toluids since the early 1260s. Thus it could be argued that the Hülegüids were as up-to-date on events and Yuan activities as at any time in the previous sixty years, notwithstanding Bolad's, Baiju's and Bayan's earlier arrivals in the west, since much of the 'intelligence' as distinct from 'information', news and gossip these personnel brought with them would soon have become outdated.

The role of intelligence *vis à vis* the communications network in sustaining the Hülegüid polity for almost eighty years is not at all easy to assess. One reason for this is that the Hülegüids' default intelligence condition appears to have been that of 'intelligence deficit', a condition implied by Amitai-Preiss who has taken an interest in the intelligence activities of both the Mamluks - whose organisation especially under Sultan Baybars⁷⁷⁶ was the benchmark for intelligence activities in the region - as well as the Mongols. In his view, the pro-Mongol sources have no information whatsoever on Mongol espionage among the

⁷⁷⁶ Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawd al-zāhir fī sīrat al-malik al-zāhir*. 135, Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 140-141

Mamluks.⁷⁷⁷ Neither do these sources have accounts, such as appear in virtually every page of Beyhaqi, of the comings and goings of the postal intelligence officials nor of the analysis of the intelligence received and the decisions based on it. Thus a coherent account of Hülegüid intelligence-based activity is very difficult.

Over and above the Mamluks it would have been in the Hülegüids' interests to at least have some idea of what their Jochid and Chaghadaid relatives were up to, amongst others. From the scant evidence it seems that the Hülegüids relied to a major extent on such trusted and tried sources of information on enemy activities as scouts and border patrols. Thus Vassaf reports that a Mamluk scout had been captured on the march from Aleppo and had provided important intelligence. This was supplemented by the account of a pilgrim returning from the hajj, who had seen the Mamluk army in Damascus.⁷⁷⁸

Moreover, the Mongol propensity for revealing their plans continued to haunt them.⁷⁷⁹ In this context, the Armenian historian, Het 'um, writing at the beginning of the fourteenth century, suggested that Mamluk successes in war were because the Mamluks could keep a secret better than could the Mongols. The reason for this was that when the Chinggisid high command met each year in council to consider plans for forthcoming military expeditions, they could not refrain from publicly discussing their campaigns.⁷⁸⁰

However, one obvious impact of the Hülegüids' extended lines of communication is that events can have a habit of moving faster than transmission of intelligence on them. Thus when Hülegü received news

⁷⁷⁷ Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 140, 152

⁷⁷⁸ Reuven Amitai, 'Whither the Ilkhanid Army? Ghazan's First Campaign into Syria (1299-1300)' in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)* ed. by Nicola di Cosmo. Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2002, p. 229

⁷⁷⁹ *SH*, para 154, De Rachewiltz, I, p. 76-78

⁷⁸⁰ Amitai-Preiss, p. 156; Het'um 2:251-2; D. Sinor, 'On Mongol Strategy' p. 240 in Ch'en Ch'ieh-hsien, ed. *Proceedings of the Fourth Altaistic Conference*, Tainan, Taiwan, 1975, pp. 238-249 [Rpt. in Sinor, *Inner Asia*. Art. No. XVI].

that his brother Möngke Qa'an had died, he discontinued his operations in Syria, returned to Azerbaijan and set off for Mongolia. Before he had ridden very far, he heard that Qubilai had already been enthroned and turned back to Tabriz. Hülegü may well have found the time-lag in trans-Eurasian communication in the period following Möngke's death extremely frustrating since, as will be seen below, by the time he received intelligence from East Asia on the activities of the rival claimants to the throne it had been overtaken by events.

Moreover, an intelligence failure may not be a failure of communications. What also has to be balanced are factors that are associated with, but are outside of, the communication network. An example of this is an incident recorded by Rashīd al-Dīn when, in 1288, Arghun Khan set out from his winter quarters in Arran for his summer quarters when he had news of a great Jochid force approaching and was thereby forced to turn back to deal with them.⁷⁸¹ Though this clearly complicated Arghun's annual schedule it was less an outcome of the 'closure of the roads' than an intelligence failure on the part of the Hülegüids. The implication being that the Hülegüids had neither agents nor indeed any sources of information about the intentions of the Jochid camp which seems to be borne out by Rashid al-Dīn in his careful genealogy as he was unable to provide details of the marriage and offspring of some of the Jochid princes.⁷⁸²

Whilst interdictions in the strategic communication network leading to a cessation in the flow of intelligence may not have led to the downfall of the Hülegüids this is largely because they do not appear to have had an effective intelligence operation in the first place. The fact that they managed to sustain their rule for upwards of eighty years without either being dispossessed of their domains by the Mamluks or taken over by

⁷⁸¹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle. p. 124

⁷⁸² Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle. pp,99-106

their cousins the Jochids or Chaghadaids does not seem, from the slender sources, to be down to any foreknowledge of enemy intentions.

This is not to say that the Hülegüid Court operated on the Seljūq principle in being reluctant to establish a postal/intelligence network since there are slight indications that they tried to monitor Mamluk activities ⁷⁸³even if their efforts were not as efficient as the network operated by Baybars. Indeed, if the exhausted pigeon episode mentioned earlier is anything to go by, Hülegüid intelligence activities as far as the Mamluks were concerned were founded more on luck than good management.

The Hülegüid Court, nonetheless, was clearly a hub of intelligence activity but not necessarily instigated by, or in the interests of, the ruler. The Cilician King, Het 'um, is reported by Grigor of Akner as having secret messages conveyed to him from the Armenian princes who were at the court of Abaqa Khan.⁷⁸⁴ Baybars considerable efforts in this direction have been studied by Reuven Amitai-Preiss in whose view Baybars ran a regular, professional intelligence service. Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, the contemporary biographer of Baybars mentioned that on several occasions intelligence collecting had led to early warnings of impending attacks (by the Ilkhans and the Armenians) and to the uncovering of enemy spies. Amitai-Preiss remarks that he is inclined to trust Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir in this instance since (not unlike Beyhaqi under the Ghaznavids) he was Baybars's *kātib al-sirr* (privy secretary) and thus would have had at least some knowledge of such activities.⁷⁸⁵ More importantly, his evidence is corroborated by other sources.

Two further factors need to be borne in mind. Firstly, as far as intelligence activities are concerned the Yuan and the Hülegüids were

⁷⁸³Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 152-156

⁷⁸⁴ Grigor/Bedrosian ch. 14 section 19

⁷⁸⁵ Amitai-Press, *Mongols and Mamluks* p. 140

not adversaries and thus intelligence on hostile intentions was not an issue unlike the Hūlegüids' fraught relations with the Jochids, the Ögödeids or the Chaghadaids. Intelligence on these latter was almost certainly gained from border scouts rather than spies in the opposing camps - who in any case would probably have had difficulty in relaying any intelligence back to Hūlegüid commanders. The conclusion thus has to be that any interdiction in the trans-Eurasian communication networks does not seem to have unduly complicated the Hūlegüids' intelligence collecting activities. The second factor has less to do with communication networks and intelligence gathering for the policy decision making process. It is rather that the superstitious mindset of the Mongols, including their propensity for making decisions based on auguries from burning sheep bones⁷⁸⁶ and other omens, needs to be taken into account when examining their actions and decision-making processes.

Political Vulnerability and the Yām Network

The Political/Imperial function of the *Yām* network was manifested primarily in the conveyance of ambassadors on imperial business and of all the functions of the *Yām* network, this, it will be argued, was for the Hūlegüids the most important aspect of their strategic communications.

As was seen in the first chapter, the conveyance of ambassadors was historically one of three major functions of a communications network. The term 'ambassadors', however, can be an all embracing expression for a number of exchanges at state level. Whilst the Mongol term *ilchiyan* (Arabic and Persian *rusūl* or Persian *fīristādahgān*, Chinese *shi*)

⁷⁸⁶ Jūzjānī, pp. 1046-1047

has been employed in the context of ‘messengers’⁷⁸⁷ it was argued above that these were not postal couriers or ‘messengers’ per se but emissaries on state business as “envoys” of the ruler either to rulers outside the Empire⁷⁸⁸ or to the imperial relatives.⁷⁸⁹ The missions of ‘ambassadors’ however, travelling in state and engaging in a formal, choreographed exchange should be differentiated from those of ‘envoys’ or ‘emissaries’ travelling at speed and engaged on a political mission.

Ambassadorial contact has been categorised by Biran in her significant paper on the diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chaghadaid khanate into two types, political or formal. As far as the former is concerned, she detects three kinds of political missions: to discuss alliances and submissions or to ask for military help, as well as, unofficially, gathering intelligence. In her researches into the practice in the Chaghadaid khanate, almost all of the Chaghadaid embassies recorded in the Muslim sources had practical political functions, had fewer envoys and returned more swiftly than the formal missions. These latter were sent to announce deaths and accessions,⁷⁹⁰ pay honour and express friendship or submission and to facilitate trade relations.⁷⁹¹

With Hülegü’s arrival in western Eurasia there was kindled more diverse communications than say, during the Sasanian and Tang

⁷⁸⁷ Michal Biran is one of the few scholars who carefully makes the distinction that *ilchiyan* were not messengers per se but emissaries, envoys and ambassadors. See Biran, ‘Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices’ p. 373. As does Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.73

⁷⁸⁸ Despite their efforts at world conquest there were still rulers not subservient to the Mongols such as those of Western Europe, also the Pope and the Mamluk and Delhi Sultans.

⁷⁸⁹ Michal Biran has examined the functions and conduct of Chaghadaid diplomacy, including the role of emissaries in her article on ‘Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate: Some Preliminary Remarks’ in *Oriente Moderno*, LXXXVIII, 2008, p. 369-393 esp. p. 373

⁷⁹⁰ For a concise examination of the importance of these functions to Chinese dynasts and especially on Sung and Khitan-Liao relations see Herbert Franke *Diplomatic missions of the Sung State 960-1276*, Presented as a Public Lecture of the Australian National University on 25 March 1981

⁷⁹¹ Biran, ‘Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate: Some Preliminary Remarks’ *Oriente Moderno*, LXXXVIII, 2008, 2, p. 373

periods in which the exchanges were primarily ‘formal’ and/or ‘political’. The new element in relations between Hülegüid Iran and Yuan China could perhaps best be described as ‘imperial family business’.

Strategic Communications between the Yuan and Iran during the Ariq Böke Crisis

The Hülegüid/Yuan ‘nexus’ was triggered by Möngke’s death in 657/1259 which was followed by claims to the throne from his brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke and this intra-Toluid conflict heralded a turbulent period in trans-Eurasian communication. Ariq Böke’s attempts to summon a *quriltai* of all the princes failed⁷⁹² and his supporters impatiently decided to set Ariq Böke ‘on the throne of the Khanate’ at his summer residence in the Altai. In 658/1260 Qubilai’s supporters also set their candidate ‘on the throne of the Empire’ at his summer residence of K’ai-p’ing fu/Shang-tu.⁷⁹³

Inevitably, hostilities broke out between the two brothers. The protagonists dispatched ‘political’ rather than formal missions to each other to diplomatically resolve the *impasse*. Hülegü may have wobbled but came down on the side of Qubilai, in the meanwhile sending emissaries to his younger brother trying to restrain him. The problem with these contacts is one of time and distance since these must have been complicated by the concurrent Hülegüid/Jochid hostilities from 1262 which probably precluded Hülegüid use of the ‘express’ route. This meant that responses to these urgent communications may well have been more protracted than, for example, Chang Te’s return trip of fourteen months or so⁷⁹⁴.

⁷⁹² Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle pp. 250

⁷⁹³ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle pp. 252

⁷⁹⁴ Si Shi Ki, Record of an Embassy to the Regions in the West’, E. Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, I, Ch. IV, pp. 109-156.

The threat from Arīq Böke to his position forced Qubilai in c.1262 to issue an order to his allies, Hülegü and the Chaghadaid Khan, which to all intents and purposes was a military command. It has, however, been employed by scholars as Qubilai's authorisation that Hülegü should have a similar status to that of the 'lawful' khanates:

'From the banks of the Oxus to the gates of Egypt the Tāzīk lands must be administered and well guarded by thee Hülegü; from the Altai on the far side to the Oxus *el* and *ulus* must be administered and maintained by Alghu; and from the Altai on this side to the shores of the Ocean-Sea [all lands] will be maintained by me'.⁷⁹⁵

By 662/1264 Arīq Böke's cause was lost and he submitted to Qubilai, at which point the Chinggisid tradition of consultation meant that the communication network became a matter of life and death for him and his followers. Coincidentally present at Arīq Böke's submission was an envoy from Hülegü, one Chingqur, who on his return to Hülegü reported this event. Hülegü then dispatched a further emissary to express his dismay at the Qa'ans lenience.⁷⁹⁶ Though the chronology of the east-west communications is difficult and highly suspect, Rashīd al-Dīn reports that either in late 1264 or early 1265 Qubilai dispatched a royal *yarlıgh* to the senior Chinggisid princes, Hülegü, Berke and Alghu – which neatly encapsulates both the Chinggisid consultative tradition as well as the problems of distance when important decisions have to be made:

Since your presence was not possible because of the distance of the road and the multiplicity of

⁷⁹⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle pp. 255-256

⁷⁹⁶ Arīq Böke is supposed to have been banned from Qubilai's presence for a year but the chronology is confusing. Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 262

your preoccupations and since to wait longer might have introduced into the affairs of the Empire such weakness and confusion as might not be put to rights we have therefore executed their emirs and have examined them both. We now consult you on this matter. We, that is all the *aqqa* and *ini*, are agreed that we should spare Arīq Böke's life and release Asutai. What do you say to this?"⁷⁹⁷

The same emissaries delivered the communication to the senior *aqqa* of the Imperial Family, first to the Chaghadaid Khan, Alghu, since he was the nearest, proceeding thereafter to Hūlegū who added his own envoys as they set off for their final recipient, Berke, in order to arrange a meeting place so that they could travel together to the *quriltai*. The envoys then returned to Qubilai with the agreement of the three *aqqa* that a *quriltai* was necessary and the date would be predicated on how long it took Berke to reach Qubilai.

This would not be earlier than 1267 since he planned to leave the Qipchaq Steppe in 1265 and hoped to arrive in 1267.⁷⁹⁸ It is a moot point whether he actually did set off but events overtook the *quriltai*. By the proposed date three of the leading players, Arīq Böke, (d. 664/1265-1266, ostensibly from natural causes though Rashīd al-Dīn at one point suggests he died in 662), Hūlegū (d. 663/1265) and Berke (d. 665/1266-1267), were dead and Alghu was seriously ill.

⁷⁹⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 264 emphasis added

⁷⁹⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 265

Strategic Communications between Yuan and Hülegüids:

Accessions

After Hülegü's death in 1265 his son Abaqa took the throne. The dispatch of envoys to his uncle Qubilai requesting a *yarliḡh* to legitimise his accession, together with the traditional accoutrements of power such as a robe of honour had a degree of urgency since his brother Yoshmut was also an interested claimant. Such a *yarliḡh* would not have helped to legitimise his position vis-a-vis the other branches for the reasons given earlier. That the Chaghadaid Khan, Baraq's (r.1266-1271)⁷⁹⁹ attempt to wrest some of Abaqa's dominions had the approval of both the Jochid Möngke Temür and the Ögödeid Qaidu, because they were considered to have been taken by force rather than acquired by inheritance - gives some indication of Abaqa's legitimacy issues.

Where it was crucial, however, was to confirm his legitimacy amongst both the Mongol elite in his late father's domains as well as reassure submitted rulers that he was firmly in the saddle. Until its arrival his authority would have been fragile since there were potentially other claimants, including his brother Tegüder as well as Yoshmut.

This anxiously awaited event had to wait a long five years when, in October 1270,⁸⁰⁰ the returning envoy eventually located Abaqa at the future site of Sultaniyya. The mission, however, almost came to grief as the envoy/s only just escaped captivity by Abaqa's cousin and enemy, the Chaghadaid Khan who, in association with the Ögödeid Qaidu was increasingly antagonistic towards the Tuluids. That Abaqa's authority was shaky in those intervening five years is perhaps shown by the prompt enthronement ceremony which followed the receipt of Qubilai's

⁷⁹⁹ Michal Biran, 'The Battle of Herat (1270): A Case of Inter-Mongol Warfare' in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)* ed. by Nicola di Cosmo. Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2002

⁸⁰⁰ *Het'um*/Bedrosian has Abaqa confirmed as ruler by Qubilai in 1264

approval and symbols of authority.⁸⁰¹ Despite the great distance between Qubilai and himself, Abaqa maintained what was essentially 'a fiction of Yuan overlordship' in both his coinage and in his diplomatic correspondence.⁸⁰²

One of the disadvantages of pre-modern communication networks was demonstrated on the demise of Abaqa in 1282.⁸⁰³ This is when a potential claimant can take advantage of the distance of rivals to seize the throne. The rival in this instance being Abaqa's son Arghun who was guarding the eastern marches against the Ögödeid khan Qaidu and was, as Marco Polo points out, forty days march away from his late father's Court. In the interim Bar Hebraeus implies that Tegüder, (r. 681-683/June 1282- August 1284) Hülegü's eldest surviving son, was appointed Abaqa's successor at a *quriltai* in June 1282. As a convert to Islam Tegüder designated himself Sultan Ahmad, whilst he overcame a possible hiccup to his accession by buying off the Mongol elite and troops through the simple expedient of dividing the treasury amongst them.⁸⁰⁴

Importantly, for present purposes, this succession does not seem to have been followed by another urgent dash across Eurasia to seek a *yarliḡh* confirming Ahmad's succession. Whilst Bar Hebraeus mentions the dispatch of ambassadors to the Mamluks and other regional grandees, there is no mention in the Chinese or Iranian sources⁸⁰⁵ of an emissary from Ahmad to Qubilai either to inform him of the death of his

⁸⁰¹ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 25

⁸⁰² Reuven Amitai-Preiss, 'An Exchange of Letters in Arabic between Abaqa Ilkhan and Sultan Baybars,' *Central Asiatic Journal* 38 (1994) 16-17, 21-23 and 26-27; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest* p. 26

⁸⁰³ His son Arghun believed he had been poisoned by the historian Juvayni's brother, Shams al-Din, who was the Master of the Diwan', possibly to make way for Ahmad/Teguder; *Bar Hebraeus* ch. xi, p. 472

⁸⁰⁴ *Marco Polo* II p. 467 may be doing Ahmad an injustice since Bar Hebraeus confirms that his appointment was not a coup but properly confirmed at a *quriltai* at the same time confirming the largesse which followed this confirmation. *Bar Hebraeus* ch. xi, p. 467

⁸⁰⁵ Allsen postulates that his accession as a Muslim sultan was not recognised by the Yuan since there is no mention of him in the table of Chinggisid rulers of Iran. YS, ch. 107, p. 2720. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 26

brother or to announce his own accession. Indeed, the Chinese sources do not list his reign at all.

Polo hints at a possible explanation for this *lacuna* as well as the basis of Sultan Ahmad's legitimation when he 'quotes' the response to Arghun's demand to his uncle to surrender the throne. Ahmad was dismissive, allegedly saying that he '..... had helped to conquer it as much as his father did'.⁸⁰⁶ If this was indeed his response, he was effectively co-opting *Macht geht vor Recht* as his legitimising principle. After Arghun's subsequent defeat and capture in battle there was, for Ahmad, a fatal delay in his execution of his nephew. Whilst the actual motives of the group of Mongol Amirs who turned against Ahmad are somewhat speculative the immediate trigger may relate to Ahmad reneging on an oath not to hurt Arghun, who was saved from imminent execution by an amir close to his father, the Amir Buqa, who then swore allegiance to Arghun.⁸⁰⁷

Thus after a reign of only two years Ahmad was forced to flee, captured en route to Egypt, taken to Tabriz and killed in 683/August 1284 either by the immediate command of Arghun or by the sons of one of his victims.⁸⁰⁸ These events triggered one of the more important examples of strategic communication between the Courts since it appears that Qubilai had started to make arrangements for a high-level embassy to the West in the spring of 1283, that is, eighteen months before the death of Ahmad. Thus if Ahmad had not sent a formal embassy to Qubilai's Court announcing the death of his brother Abaqa, either someone else did so, possibly Arghun (r.683-690/1284-1291) himself asking for assistance since he was stationed in Khurāsān on the

⁸⁰⁶ *Marco Polo II*, p. 467

⁸⁰⁷ *Chronography of Bar Hebraeus completed by Bar Sauma*, ch. xi, pp. 471,477; *Marco Polo*, II p.471

⁸⁰⁸ Bar Hebraeus/*Chronography* ch. xi, p. 472 says that Arghun did not want any part in the killing and left it to the sons of Ahmad's brother, whom he had murdered to do the job. *Marco Polo II* pp. 472-474 has Arghun giving the order without consultation.

ambassadorial route or envoys reached the Yuan Court from Mongol Amirs who were concerned at Ahmad's conversion. Though this is pure speculation there is some circumstantial evidence to back up the possibility that Qubilai was intervening in the succession of his distant underlings.

The embassy was led by the *ilchī-i Qā'ān* or ambassador of the Great Qa'an, Bolad Noyan/ Pūlād *chīnksānk* (c.1240-1313).⁸⁰⁹ This embassy included Isā *kelemichi*, (d. 1308) or Jesus the Interpreter who, though Syrian, had travelled to Mongolia in the 1240s, and during Qubilai's reign had established the Bureau of Western Astronomy and the Imperial Dispensary in Peking. Moreover, he was an experienced envoy and could also act as interpreter.⁸¹⁰ After a hazardous journey the ambassadors arrived late in 1284 or early 1285 to find Arghun safely ensconced on the throne and in his winter quarters in Arrān. They started back to Qubilai with the gifts sent by Arghun in early 1286 but the ambassadors became separated because of the hostilities with Qaidu and Du'a, with only Isā making it to Dadu in 1287 as Bolad was forced to turn back and spent the last twenty-eight years of his life serving the Hūlegūids.

There are some unanswered questions about this high-level embassy, not least being what exactly was its purpose since within weeks of their arrival, Ūrdūqiyā, an envoy whom Arghun himself had dispatched to Qubilai in January 1285⁸¹¹ returned in early January of 1286, together with the *yarlīgh* confirming his accession. If it was in response to a plea for help from Arghun it shows again the disadvantages of extended lines

⁸⁰⁹ Allsen has examined Bolad's career in some depth in view of his importance not only as a 'major political player' in Sino-Iranian relations during this period but also for his role as a pivotal figure in the flow of science, technology and culture between east and west Eurasia'. See Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest* chapters 9, 10 and 11.

⁸¹⁰ This is presumably the same Isā who is described by Rashīd al-Dīn in the context of his role in China in persecuting Muslims pre-1291 as one of the mischievous, wicked, and corrupt men of their age. Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p. 294

⁸¹¹ Bar Hebraeus/*Chronography* ch. xi,

of communication since Bolad's mission did not arrive until December 1285 by which time his services as intermediary between the claimants to the throne were no longer required.

This role of arbitration is probably the most satisfactory explanation of why someone of Bolad's stature should have been chosen, or put himself forward, for such a mission. Moreover, if Ūrdūqiyā also brought back the grant of the prestigious Yuan designation of chancellor or *chīnksānk* – an honour which had not previously been conferred in the Hūlegüid domains – for Arghun's saviour, the Mongol Amir Buqa, then Qubilai would hardly have expected Bolad, his own *chīnksānk*, to remain in the west.

Meanwhile, during Arghun's seven years at the helm at least two further missions between the extremes of Eurasia are known. Qubilai dispatched one to Iran in 1286 though the objective is not known⁸¹² and Arghun in his turn sent a famous request to Qubilai for a bride after the death of his wife Bulughan in April 1286.⁸¹³ Bulughan had asked that she be replaced by a girl of her own family, the Bayaut, and when Arghun's three emissaries reached Qubilai at an unspecified date their request was graciously received.

Once again the hazards of such extended communications became apparent when the ambassadors, who according to one account set out on the return journey via the overland route with a great escort, were forced to turn back after eight months because of the internecine Chinggisid hostilities in Central Eurasia.⁸¹⁴ Arrangements were therefore made for the bride to be carried back to Arghun by sea, escorted not just by his envoys but also the Polos. This nightmare voyage had a purported fatality rate of six hundred including two of

⁸¹² YS, ch. 11, p. 293. Also Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 29

⁸¹³ *Marco Polo I*, p. 32 and p.33 note 2

⁸¹⁴ *Marco Polo I*, p. 33 note 3

Arghun's envoys and most of the ladies apart from the bride.⁸¹⁵ The party finally made landfall at Hormuz where the Polos discovered that the groom, Arghun, had died in 1291 and thus perforce had to hand over their charge to his son, Ghāzān, then on guard duty in Khurāsān in c.1294.

The death of Arghun yet again exposed the weakness of early communication systems. Of the three claimants, Arghun's son, Ghāzān, like Arghun himself on the death of his own father, was in Khurāsān. Also like Arghun, there was a brother of the deceased sovereign in the frame, this time Geikhatu, and finally Baidu, a cousin. According to Marco Polo, Geikhatu, seized the throne⁸¹⁶ though Bar Hebraeus records he was appointed by the assembled princes in 691/June 1292. Although Ghāzān was barely in his twenties and, as indeed happened, could claim the throne again, Geikhatu seems to have been a curious choice since he was quite content to lead a life of undisturbed debauchery in his own domain of Rum. Bar Hebraeus also heavily implies that he engaged in sodomy,⁸¹⁷ a grievous fault to the Mongols and to add to the general disillusion his *sāhib-dīwān*, the Persian Sadr al-Dīn, was busily bankrupting the kingdom to feather his own nest⁸¹⁸ - a poisoned chalice inherited by the eventual successor, Ghāzān and his renowned vizier, Rashīd al-Dīn (643-718/1245-1318).

Unsurprisingly, Geikhatu was 'hated with a very great hatred by all those who held the reins of his kingdom'⁸¹⁹ and quite possibly with the connivance of both his rivals for the throne in 1291, Ghāzān and especially Baidu, Geikhatu was deposed and killed in 1295. What is important for present concerns, however, is that he apparently waited for his succession to be ratified by Qubilai before his enthronement in

⁸¹⁵ *Marco Polo I*, p. 36 and p.38, note 5

⁸¹⁶ *Marco Polo II*, p. 475

⁸¹⁷ *Chronography of Bar Hebraeus completed by Bar Sauma*, ch. xi, p. 494, more explicitly on p. 504

⁸¹⁸ *Bar Hebraeus* ch. xi, p. 496

⁸¹⁹ *Bar Hebraeus* ch. xi, p. 494

691/29 June 1292⁸²⁰ and he was subsequently included, unlike his predecessor Ahmad, in the list of Hülegüid rulers in the *Yuan shih*.⁸²¹

Predictably the succession to Geikhatu was not straightforward, and once again the problems surrounding communications played a prominent role. According to Bar Sauma, one of the key claimants, Ghāzān, was quartered 'a long way off, it was still the time of winter and the roads were destitute of grass and provender' thus he was hampered in travelling to claim the throne leaving those around Baidu to suggest that he took the throne instead.⁸²² When Ghāzān finally made it through the elements he was justly aggrieved that his exhausting travels to claim his throne had been wasted since Baidu had duly been enthroned.⁸²³

Whilst Baidu (r. 694/1295) has a good press in the *Chronography* which describes in some detail Baidu's convoluted religious beliefs, his reign only lasted upwards of eight months. In that short period, the *Chronography* reports that though Baidu was favourably disposed towards Christians he decided to become a Muslim - even if he never really grasped the essentials of Islam - the reason being that the Mongol nobles and their following in their entirety had become Muslims and had already been circumcised.⁸²⁴ By September 1295, however, his brief, albeit chaotic, reign was over.

Even if Baidu had the inclination and opportunity to dispatch ambassadors to the Yuan announcing his succession it is highly unlikely that they would have been able to circumnavigate either Ghāzān's troops who were situated on the main route east or the hostile armies of Qaidu and Du'a. At the same time, though good relations had been established with the Jochid Khan Toqta (r. 690/712/1291-1312)

⁸²⁰ P. Jackson, Gaykātū Khan, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*,

⁸²¹ YS, ch. 107, p. 2721, Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 29

⁸²² *Bar Hebraeus*, ch. xi, p. 500

⁸²³ *Bar Hebraeus*, ch. xi, p. 500, 501

⁸²⁴ *Bar Hebraeus* ch. xi, p. 506

this route east had also been interdicted because of intra-Jochid battles.⁸²⁵

Ghāzān finally made it to the throne, reigning for nine years (r. 694-703/1295-1304) but dying at the early age of thirty. Whether the internecine warfare had any influence on Ghāzān's subsequent actions and indeed inaction is possible but not proven. Qubilai had died in 1294, and was succeeded by his grandson Temür (r.1294-1307) but at what stage the western Tuluids were informed of the death of the Qa'an is unclear nor whether they appreciated he had been succeeded by a grandson. There is no evidence, however, that Ghāzān urgently dispatched either by land or by sea ambassadors to the Yuan to announce his succession and request from Temür Qa'an the traditional approval.

This may not only have been because of logistical difficulties, he also had a lot on his mind. Along with the throne his inheritance included the legacy of financial mismanagement mentioned above,⁸²⁶ and the continuing hostilities with the Ögödeids and Chaghadaids but as was seen in the short reign of Baidu, a watershed had also been reached in the Mongol elites' mental adjustment to Islam. Moreover, as Mustawfi catalogues, Ghāzān was also making inroads into his Mongol amirs and princes by executing dissidents, including his mentor, the Oirat Amir Nawruz, as well as other serving ministers throughout his reign.⁸²⁷ On the other hand, whilst there has been much scholarly deliberation on what Allsen has well described as a 'domestication of the bases of Hülegüid legitimacy' under Ghāzān he also notes that many passages in

⁸²⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle pp.102-103 and pp. 126-130

⁸²⁶ This included the dire straits in which many of the Mongols who had accompanied Hülegü west found themselves, even being reduced to beggary.

⁸²⁷ *The Ta'rikh-i-guzida* or Select history of Hamdu'llah Mustawfi-i Qazwini. Eds. Browne, Nicholson Pt. II, pp. 145-147

the *Yuan shih* make clear that the Yuan considered Ghāzān and his successors, Öljeitü and Abū Saʿīd, to be subordinate rulers.⁸²⁸

All these factors came together at one of the most crucial points for any conquest dynasty, that of inter-generational transformation. Ghāzān was a great-grandson of Hülegü, thus a third generation dynast and though in the Mongol tradition he was a trained commander he was also quadri-cultural. His strong Mongol roots were tempered by Türkic influences within a Persian milieu whilst his education had been overseen by a Chinese tutor, one Bāraq, arranged by his grandfather Abaqa so that he could become literate in Mongolian and Uighur, as well as Chinese sciences and manners.⁸²⁹ Included in this already diverse mix of influences was his support⁸³⁰ of Islam from mid-1295 onwards. An equally critical factor may have been the more cordial relations between the Jochid Khan, Toqta (r. 1291-1312)⁸³¹ and the Hülegüids. These were predicated on their joint concern at the activities of the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid khans on their respective frontiers.

Whilst Allsen is up-beat on relations between the two Toluid entities⁸³² during the Ghāzān period, the actual extent of the contact is perplexing. The first seems to have been the despatch of Baiju from Dadu on secondment from Temür Qaʿan (r. 1294-1307) to Ghāzān.⁸³³ In 698/1298-99 Ghāzān sent by sea as his envoys Fakhr-al-Dīn Ahmad and Bocai Ilchi to Temür Qaʿan returning in 704/1305. Baiju appears to have returned to the Yuan possibly as the emissary of Ghāzān in 703/1304 but there are three further possible 'returns to Iran' of missions between that date and 1306 which are difficult to account for.

⁸²⁸ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 55

⁸²⁹ Rashid al-Din/Jahn II, pp. 3-4

⁸³⁰ Perhaps a more ingenuous term than conversion since he continued to hold fast to Mongol traditions.

⁸³¹ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, pp. 129-130

⁸³² This period was, according to Allsen, one of the high points in the cultural exchange between China and Iran. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, pp. 33 and 34

⁸³³ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 34

Thus in nine years there were really only two confirmed missions from Ghāzān to the Yuan.

Given Ghāzān's exposure to the eastern influences, it is curious that during his tenure on the throne not just the Yuan, but Bolad too, seem to have suffered something of an eclipse. It was only in the reign of Ghāzān's successor Öljeitü and Temür Qa'an's successors that Bolad was honoured by the Yuan Court with a 'dukedom'.⁸³⁴ Also telling is the numismatic evidence in which Ghāzān omitted the name of the Qa'an on some, but not all, coins as well as in his diplomatic correspondence.⁸³⁵ Explanations for the apparent distancing of the Hūlegüid periphery away from the Yuan centre can only be tentative. Such factors as the death of Qubilai in 1294, the closure of the roads, the move towards Islam, the *rapprochement* with the Jochid khan, Toqta, and other sundry issues must have played a part. On the other hand, it has been hinted above that there may have been some irritation on the part of Ghāzān with his ostensible overlords, possibly because of some perceived lack of support in his two attempts to gain the throne or even because he was not impressed by stories of the young Qa'an Temür's rather dissolute youth.⁸³⁶

There is also some oblique evidence that Temür, initially at least, may have been less than happy with the Mongols' drift towards Islam. Rashīd al-Dīn records that Temür was very annoyed at reports that his cousin Ananda, who had been given Tangut, had converted to Islam and was enforcing it with some vigour.⁸³⁷ Temür ordered Ananda's imprisonment but in his defence Ananda retorted 'If it was a devil that guided me, who was it who guided Ghāzān Khan, who is my *aqā*?' Whether news of this incident ever reached Ghāzān is not known though it could certainly account for a cooling of relations. In fact,

⁸³⁴ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 76

⁸³⁵ Mostaert and Cleaves, "Trois documents"

⁸³⁶ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, pp. 301-302

⁸³⁷ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, pp. 323-326

Temür did eventually come to terms with both Ananda and Ghāzān's conversions.⁸³⁸

After Ghāzān's death in 1304, for the first time distance and the communication network did not come between the heir apparent and the throne as Ghāzān's brother Öljeitü (r. 1304-1316) then aged 23, who was also in Khurāsān when news of his brother's death arrived, was enthroned in Tabriz on Dhu'l-Hijja 15 703/19 July 1304.

It could well be argued that Sultan Öljeitü's twelve years on the throne were not only the longest period of regnal stability since his grandfather Abaqa's reign between 1265 and 1281 but also ushered in Ibn Khaldūn's third dynastic stage.

The third stage is one of leisure and tranquillity in which the fruits of royal authority are enjoyed.... All the ability of the ruler is expended on collecting taxes; regulating income and expenses.... erecting large buildings, big constructions, spacious cities and lofty monuments; presenting gifts to embassies⁸³⁹

Whilst not necessarily quite such an idyllic period of 'leisure and tranquillity' it was certainly one of the creation of lasting monuments.⁸⁴⁰ Öljeitü's predecessor, Ghāzān, had addressed the 'regulation of income and expenses' whilst as will be seen below, the 'Profits of Empire' providentially arrived from the Yuan after a lull of fifty years with the surviving envoy Fakhr al-Dīn Ahmad's return by ship. As Ibn Khaldūn also astutely noted, this was also the last stage during which the ruler was in complete authority. This 'calm before the storm' was not entirely

⁸³⁸ Rashid al-Din/Boyle, pp. 323-326

⁸³⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 141-142

⁸⁴⁰ As Mustawfi remarks, Öljeitü founded Sultaniyya, Sultanabad and Uljaytu Sultanabad, near Mughan. *The Ta'rikh-i-guzida* or Select history of Hamdu'llah Mustawfi-i Qazwini. Eds. Browne, Nicholson Pt. II, p. 147

of Hülegüid making since they were not involved in the most sensational event, which was the ending of intra-Chinggisid hostilities by Chabar, the son of the late Qaidu and his ally, the Chaghadaid khan, Du'a (r. 1282-1307).

If one of the most dramatic traverses of Eurasia was Hülegü's dispatch of envoys to inform Möngke of the Fall of Baghdad, the dispatch of envoys by Temür Qa'an to let the Hülegüids have the glad tidings that the Chaghadaids and Ögödeids had formally submitted in October 1304 was also of great import. In 1305 Öljeitü passed on the news to Philip the Fair of France that the descendants of Chinggis Khan were at peace after forty-five years of civil war and, crucially, that the relay stations had been reconnected.⁸⁴¹

The period that followed the cessation of hostilities was not, as will be seen in the Table of Military Operations during the period of Intra-Chinggisid Conflict in the Appendices (Table VI) quite the cessation of hostilities that Öljeitü's letter implied since they flared up again with the Chaghadaids around 1313 with the last recorded clash taking place in 1326.⁸⁴² It is substantially true, however, that during the reigns of Öljeitü and Abū Sa'īd period formal Sino-Iranian relations reached a peak of cordiality and contact. A further embassy arrived from Temür in the west in early 1306. The embassy of 1308 almost certainly announced the demise of Temür Qa'an in 1307 and the accession of his nephew Qaishan (r.1307-1311). From the speed of these journeys it appears they took the overland route rather than travelling by sea. After 1307, however, there seems to have been a pause in formal embassies until 1314, three years after the accession of Qaishan's successor and brother, Buyantu (r. 1311-1320).

⁸⁴¹ Mostaert, Antoine, and Cleaves, Francis Woodman, *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des Ilkhan Arzun et Öljeitü à Philippe le bel*. Cambridge, Mass., 1962

⁸⁴² Biran, 'Diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chagataid khanate: Some preliminary remarks' *Oriente Moderno*, 88, 2008, p. 375

Following a familiar pattern, on Öljeitü's demise in December 1316 aged thirty-nine, his twelve year old son, Abū Sa'īd, was in Khurāsān. The child, the last Hülegüid ruler with a mention in the *Yuan shih*, succeeded to the throne (r. 716-735/1316-1335) with the powerful Oirat Mongol, the Amir Chuban as regent though the enthronement did not take place until spring of the following year, possibly because immediately after departing from Khurāsān the throne had been promptly seized by two Mongol grandees.⁸⁴³ Between Abū Sa'īd's accession and his death in 1335 there was a somewhat rapid turnover of Yuan emperors, including Gegen, (r. 1320-1323), Yesun-Temür (r.1323-1328), Toq-Temür (r.1328-1329), Qutuqtu (r.1329-1332), Irinchinbal (r.1332) and the last Yuan emperor Toghan-Temür (r. 1332-1370). There was thus plenty of scope for formal condolence and succession announcement embassies. However, of the twenty or so 'embassies' that have been noted in the Chinese annals between the Toluid polities during this period only one seems to have had a 'congratulatory' objective, that of 24 July 1330.

Allsen has tabulated seventeen of these embassies together with the reciprocal gifts exchanged with the first dated 22 April 1324 and the last November 1332. Thus these seventeen embassies took place over a period of eight years which is even more frequent than the mention by the anonymous Franciscan in his *Book of the Estate of the Great Caan* c.1330.⁸⁴⁴ Here he comments that embassies were sent annually to the 'Caan their lord' by the Emperor of Armalech, which must be the Chaghadaids khan,⁸⁴⁵ by the Emperor Boussay, that is Abū Sa'īd, as

⁸⁴³ *The Ta'rikh-i-guzida* or Select History of Hamdu'llah Mustawfi-i Qazwini. Pt. II, p. 148

⁸⁴⁴ The author of the *Book of the Estate of the Great Caan* was long believed to have been the Archbishop of Sultāniyya, Jean of Cori but this has been discredited. See Christine Gadrat, 'De statu, conditione ac regimine magni canis. L'original latin du <Livre de l'estat du Grand Caan> et la question de l'auteur', *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes* 165, 2007, 355-71.

⁸⁴⁵ Biran notes that most of the documented Chaghataid formal relations with the Yuan took place between 1304 and 1333. Biran, 'Diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chaghataid khanate p. 375 and YS. Ch. 21, pp. 462, 463, 466, 468. Ch. 24, p.

well as the Emperor Usbech, that is, Özbeg (r. 1313-1341) the Jochid Khan.⁸⁴⁶ As the Archbishop was based in the Hülegüid heartland, albeit in the dynasty's latter days, his view is important since it appears that despite the difficulties of the extended lines of communication, as well as the Hülegüids' shift to Islam and not least, the apparent autonomy of the later 'Sultans', he has no doubt that the 'peripheries' acknowledged the 'centre'. This relationship is perhaps most clearly spelled out in the *Yuan Shih*, in the context of Hülegü's holdings in the Yuan. Here the current ruler, Öljeitü (703-716/1304-1316) is referred to as *guarding* 'a far distant corner'⁸⁴⁷ for the Yuan emperor.

Economic Vulnerability and the Profits of Empire Function of the Yām Network

Amongst the scattered references in the sources are those which relate to the transmission of 'the profits of empire'. This category covers a multitude of circumstances but one of the most important for the Imperial Family was receipt of the proceeds of their scattered apportionments or share/*bakhsh* or *qubi*, allocated to them by Chinggis Khan, Ögödei and Möngke. The Timurid historian Natanzī neatly summarised these when he remarks that after dividing the empire among his four sons 'he [further]assigned each son several possessions in the territory of the others so that in this way envoys would continuously pass to and fro between them.'⁸⁴⁸ As Jackson has pointed out, this eventually led throughout the empire to 'an extremely complex pattern of rights over tribal elements, colonies of enslaved subject

550, 551, 555. Ch. 27, p. 615, 620; ch. 28, p. 629; ch. 29, p. 640, 644, 648, 653, 658; ch. 30, p. 669, 670, 673, 680, 681; ch. 35, p. 794. Ch. 36, p. 800-801;

⁸⁴⁶ Yule, 'The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan, Set forth by the Archbishop of Soltan'ia, in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, 2010, p. 238

⁸⁴⁷ YS, ch. 85, pp. 2141-42, Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 49

⁸⁴⁸ Mu'in al-Dīn Natanzī, *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh-i Mu'inī*, ed. Jean Aubin, Tehran, Khayyam, 1957, p. 427; Cited in Biran, 'Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices', pp. 374, n. 2 and 375; Allsen, "Sharing out the Empire", p. 184

peoples and grazing-grounds, possibly with the addition of adjacent cities' together with their cultivated land.⁸⁴⁹

This thoughtful gesture to ensure his descendants kept in contact heavily relied on the Imperial Family respecting each other's portions and passing on the proceeds however frosty the relationships. The Ögödeid heir, Qaidu, locked in hostilities with the Yuan and the Hülegüids, had particular problems in this respect. The proceeds due to him for his inheritance in the Yuan territories were frozen but were restored to his son Chapar after his submission to the Yuan in 709/1310.⁸⁵⁰ The dispossessed Ögödeids as well as the Chaghadaids had interests in Hülegü's newly acquired *ulus* and before the Battle of Herat in 668/1270 the two protagonists sent an emissary, Mas'ūd Beg, to collect their share of the revenues. It is not clear whether his mission was successful though Biran remarks nothing more is heard of their possessions in Iran.⁸⁵¹

After 633/1236 the Imperial Family received as part of their share of the profits of empire⁸⁵² households in northern China which are enumerated in the *Yuan shi*⁸⁵³ and in 655/1257 Hülegü was given by Möngke an annual income of a hundred ingots of silver and three hundred rolls of cloth. He also received 25,056 households in Chang-te of the category known as 'five household silk households though by the time of Abū Sa'īd, the Yuan policy of asserting control of these allotments had reduced the number of the Hülegüid allotment to only 2,929 households.⁸⁵⁴ The Yuan emperor also had holdings in the West which consisted, at least until the time of Ghāzān, of herds, including

⁸⁴⁹ Peter Jackson, 'From *Ulus* to Khanate' in R. Amitai-Preiss & D. O. Morgan (eds) *The Mongol Empire & its Legacy*. pp. 27-28

⁸⁵⁰ Biran, *Qaidu and the rise of the Independent Mongol State* p. 78

⁸⁵¹ Biran, 'Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices', p. 374

⁸⁵² This has been examined by Peter Jackson in his chapter 'From *Ulus* to Khanate' in R. Amitai-Preiss & D. O. Morgan (eds) *The Mongol Empire & its Legacy*. pp. 12-37.

⁸⁵³ YS, ch. 95, pp. 2417-18; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.46

⁸⁵⁴ YS, ch. 95, pp. 2417-18; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.46

camels and it may be that the camels dispatched to the Yuan by Abū Saʿīd were actually their own animals.⁸⁵⁵

As was seen above, if the communications network was interdicted for any reason the receipt of the revenues from such holdings could be at risk. Because of the hostilities on the overland route Ghāzān's 696-704/1297-1305 embassy had to go by sea but returned with silks as his share of the imperial manufacture which had not been paid since Hülegü departed for the west in 1253 and presumably were the income from the above holdings. The return journey also had to be by sea, incurring yet again a heavy death toll, since Ghāzān's ambassador, Malik Fakhr al-Dīn died two days out from Malabar and the Qa'an's ambassador also died on the voyage. It is not clear how far these silks bolstered Öljeitü's finances but it could well be that they defrayed some of the costs of his building programme.

Of all the Hülegüid rulers, Abū Saʿīd should have had the fewest financial worries since between 1324 and 1332, when there was the most intense burst of contact between the Hülegüids and the Yuan, he received from them in total 340 rolls of multicoloured silk and 61,300 ingots of cash. His offerings in return were comparatively modest being mostly of animals, though pearls and precious stones also appear in the list.⁸⁵⁶ The camels have been mentioned above but the horses, which are divided into 'horses and 'western' horses are rather intriguing especially as the *Yuan Shih* lists them as arriving in four tranches between February 1326 and April 1327.⁸⁵⁷ That this was one mission which arrived in dribs and drabs is likely and they must have travelled overland.

One particular facet of the 'profits of empire' function which can be overlooked but which should be mentioned is the transference of

⁸⁵⁵ YS, ch. 95, pp. 2417-18; Allsen/*Culture and Conquest* Table 2, p. 44

⁸⁵⁶ YS, ch. 95, pp. 2417-18; Allsen Table 2, p. 44

⁸⁵⁷ YS, ch. 95, pp. 2417-18; Allsen Table 2, p. 44

captives and capitulated populations to further the objectives of the conquerors. The Mongols were not the first and certainly not the last, to deport or relocate populations. This tragic but important aspect of conquest has been examined by Allsen⁸⁵⁸ in the context of dislocation of populations but also importantly for present purposes for the forced movement of what were described in Chapter V above as 'human herds' of captured artisans and troops.

Allsen, and before him McNeill in his seminal *Plagues and Peoples*, make the critical point that population movements between different disease pools, especially if those involved were already debilitated through malnourishment and ill-treatment provided 'an optimum social and biological matrix for the outbreak and transmission of infectious disease.'⁸⁵⁹ This may account for what appears to have been the high rate of attrition of these wretched souls, a conclusion reached from reading between the lines in Rubruck and examined below.

Many of these unfortunates were forced to trudge hundreds if not thousands of miles/kilometres from their homes, undoubtedly traumatised, ill-shod and ill-fed - if the Armenian historian Kirakos Ganjakets'i⁸⁶⁰ experience is anything to go by - brutally treated. It is hardly surprising that, according to Sayfī, in one particular incident which occurred in the unsettled conditions of the Chaghadaid Khanate circa 1314/714 which involved thousands of captives of the Chaghadaid prince Yasa'ur, vast numbers perished on the forced marches.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁸ Thomas T. Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' in *Nomads of Agents of Cultural Change*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2015, pp. 119-151

⁸⁵⁹ W.H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, Garden City, NY, 1976, pp. 132-175, 263-264; M. W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, Princeton, 1977, pp. 35-68, Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 137

⁸⁶⁰ Kirakos Ganjakets'i/Bedrosian ch. 24 section 211

⁸⁶¹ Sayf b. Muhammad b. Ya'qūb al-Harawī, *Ta'rikh-i namah-i Harat*, ed. M. Sidiqi, Calcutta, 1944, pp. 643-644. Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 136-137

Rubruck also found, when he finally made it to Möngke's encampment after his own slightly less demanding journey across Eurasia, that for those captives, such as the woman from Metz in Lorraine who had been captured in Hungary, unheard-of destitution was the norm not only on the forced march.⁸⁶² He was shocked to find that for captives who had survived to reach the comparative comforts of the Mongol Court, starvation was their lot and he felt bound to share his meagre rations with 'so many starving people who are not provided with food'.⁸⁶³

Such relocations generally consisted of three rough categories: to supply troops or military specialists; to repopulate devastated regions as was the intention of Yasa'ur above and to further the economic (or indeed sexual) objectives, of the Chinggisid elite.

The largest groups on the move were those in the first category when tens of thousands of troops were relocated from western to eastern Eurasia. Thus 'ten thousand' Alans from north of the Caucasus were dispatched to China in the late 1230s where they were formed into the Asud Army. One hundred and thirty years later the Yuan 'could mobilise an army of six thousand Alans' some of whom accompanied the last Yuan emperor back to the steppe.⁸⁶⁴ Other troops from western Eurasia included Qipchaqs who were first heard of in Mongolia after Sübe'etei returned from the western steppe in 1223 as well as Russians. Allsen concludes that as these groups did not assimilate over five generations they must have travelled east with their women and children.⁸⁶⁵

That there were any survivors at all from urban populations forced to march across Eurasia is extraordinary. The tribulations of the second group, namely deportations to repopulate devastated areas, have been

⁸⁶² *Rubruck*, p. 182

⁸⁶³ *Rubruck*, p. 188. Not all captives were in such desperate straits since William Buchier the master craftsman originally from Paris had a skill valued by the Mongols.

⁸⁶⁴ Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p.122

⁸⁶⁵ Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 123

graphically described by Raverty based on an account in 'Awfi in connection with Ögödei's order that the cities of Khurasan ruined during the Mongol campaigns should be restored. When Herat surrendered to Tolui in 618 AH, the weavers had been relocated to Beshbalig/Urumchi in the Chaghadaid dominions and it appears they amounted to about two hundred and fifty families. One of their leaders, 'Izz-ud-Dīn, had been to Ögödei's Court and was ordered to return to Herat, taking fifty of his people along with him and furnished with a mandate to collect people from all parts of Khurasan so that Herat would quickly be re-peopled and restored to something like its former self again. Quite how such a mandate would have worked in practice is not immediately clear but having made some progress, in the following year (636 AH) 'Izz-ud-Dīn set out for the Court of Qa'an 'to arrange 'certain matters' in connection with the restoration of the city. He also requested that he might be permitted to remove to Herat his own family and also the two hundred other families located in Turkistan and Mughalistan'.⁸⁶⁶

Some of those forced to trek across Eurasia were seen by Li Chih-Ch'ang when he accompanied his Master, Ch'ang Ch'un, who in his turn had been summoned to Chinggis Khan, whose campaign headquarters were then near Kabul. Li reports that in December 1221 the party reached Samarkand, the population of which had been depleted to such an extent that only a quarter remained:

These people are quite unable to manage their fields and orchards for themselves and are obliged to call in Chinese, Kitai and Tanguts.... Chinese craftsmen are found everywhere..... A number of Chinese came to pay their respects and they once had an astronomer with them⁸⁶⁷

⁸⁶⁶ Juzjānī, p. 1127, footnote 6

⁸⁶⁷ Li Chih-Ch'ang trans. & ed. Waley, Arthur, *The Travels of an Alchemist*, pp. 93-94

Mustawfi in 1340 in turn praises the grapes and Payghambari pears of Khoi in Azerbaijan which were produced by fair-skinned Khitans⁸⁶⁸ whilst Rashid al-Dīn confirms that during the Hūlegüid period Khitans were relocated to the west, including Merv and then Tabriz, thus a very long way indeed from 'home'. At the opposite side of Eurasia Rashīd al-Dīn is particularly well informed on Qubilai's building activities which included a winter palace, named Qarshi, and a summer residence about 50 parasangs from Dadu. One of the roads between these palaces passed near a small town called Sinali, the people of which, he says, were mostly from Samarkand.⁸⁶⁹

Artisans and industrial workers were amongst some of the most prized 'profits of empire'. One of Rubruck's objectives⁸⁷⁰ was to give succour to a group of Saxons who had been employed in Transylvania for their metallurgical skills and who had been captured in circa 1241 by Chaghadai's grandson, Buri, who wanted to use their skills for himself. They were first frogmarched to Talas/Taraz between Tashkent and Bishkek and then after the Buri's execution were transferred to Fūlad/Bolad to the north of the Lake Sairam where they were forced to mine gold and make weapons for the Mongols.⁸⁷¹ Rubruck mentions other captives whom he met at Möngke's Court, including Master William of Paris, who was by then the slave of Arīq Böke after being captured in Hungary and appropriated by Arīq Böke's formidable mother, Sorqoqtani Beki.⁸⁷² Though a slave it is interesting to note that Master William was actually paid by Möngke the sum of a thousand marks (or elsewhere in Rubruck's report three thousand marks) for his

⁸⁶⁸ Hamd-Allah Mustawfi, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat al Qutlub*, trans. Le Strange, pp 86-87; Rashid al-Din, ed. Karimi, vol. 2, p. 687, Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 131

⁸⁶⁹ Rashid al-Dīn /Karimi, vol. 1, p. 641; Rashid al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 276, Pelliot "Une ville musulmans dans la Chine du Nord sous les Mongols," *Journal Asiatique* 211 (1927) pp. 261-179, Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 131

⁸⁷⁰ *Rubruck*, p. 226 'Bolai' 'where those Germans are to be found who were my chief reason for going there'

⁸⁷¹ *Rubruck*, pp. 144-146 where he observed that Möngke relocated them with Batu's permission. Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 132

⁸⁷² *Rubruck*, p. 183 and 223

masterpiece consisting of a large silver tree that discharged different drinks from its branches.⁸⁷³

What is valuable about Rubruck's account is the realisation that despite captives apparently being herded here, there and everywhere he actually encountered few western Eurasians in Mongolia. In Qaraqorum Rubruck noted two quarters, that of the Saracens, which had bazaars and seems to have been frequented mostly by traders and a second quarter for the craftsmen, who were from Khitai.⁸⁷⁴ As far as European captives are concerned, these included a German slave-girl, a poor German, Master William's wife, who was a Lorrainer but born in Hungary and Basil, the son of an Englishman but also born in Hungary. There were clearly other captive Christians since Rubruck remarks on them in the context of a great crowd including more Hungarians, Alans, Russians, Georgians and Armenians, who had not set their eyes on the sacrament since their capture.⁸⁷⁵

So far as the Imperial 'sexual objectives' function of the *Yām* are concerned, Li Chih-Ch'ang also records his Master's distress when he discovered that those escorting him from northern China to Chinggis Khan's command headquarters near Kabul proposed to take along all the girls that had been collected for the Khan's harem. One of the four Mongol officials of the escort was dispatched with an urgent appeal from the horrified Taoist to the Conqueror pleading for this arrangement to be rescinded.⁸⁷⁶ Alas, no indication is given as to how many of these unlucky girls had been 'collected' nor how they were to be transported, but presumably by cart as far as the terrain allowed since it would not have been wise to have marched them across much of Eurasia with the danger of delivering 'damaged' goods intended for harem.

⁸⁷³ Rubruck, p. 183 and p. 209

⁸⁷⁴ Rubruck, p. 221

⁸⁷⁵ Rubruck, p. 212, 213, 245, 246

⁸⁷⁶ Li Chih-Ch'ang trans. & ed. Waley, Arthur, *The Travels of an Alchemist*, pp. 54-55

Allsen observes that the deportation of Eastern Eurasian residents to the west was part of Mongol efforts at reconstruction after the destruction of their military campaigns whilst residents of Western Eurasia were dispatched to the east as human booty to produce speciality goods. Thus 'the Mongols sent East Asians to the west to increase the *quantity* of production and Westerners to the east to improve the *quality* of production' geared to 'Mongol tastes, preferences and priorities'.⁸⁷⁷

What is missing from the equation is how such transfers actually operated in practice, such as, for example, whether those charged with shepherding the human flocks to their destination followed the *Yām* infrastructure and how their rations were obtained since clearly humans cannot graze in the same manner as sheep. Another intriguing statistic which is, however, impossible to calculate is the number of escapees. Allsen refers to a 'loosely structured refugee state' that functioned for decades as a buffer between the Hūlegüids and the Delhi Sultanate. The disparate elements became known as Qara'unas or Negüderis, who were originally formed by Jochid troops fleeing Hulegu and thereafter attaching themselves to the Jochid commander stationed in Khurasan, Negüder. They in turn were joined by disparate desperadoes who must have deserted their commanders but whilst such desertions may have been possible for small numbers of men clearly whole families attempting to return to northern China from say Azerbaijan was highly improbably.

⁸⁷⁷ Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' p. 134

Imperial Business Function and The *Yām* Network

The peak period for officials traversing Eurasia either to answer a summons to Court to clear their names or to slander their colleagues was during the Ögödeid and Güyüg periods. The view that there was a continuous stream of officials' criss-crossing Eurasia during the Hülegüid period is not supported by the surviving evidence. Bolad has already been mentioned above as an ambassador from Qubilai to Arghun and his entourage may well have included officials and other personnel. Qubilai is also recorded by Rashīd al-Dīn as sending for a young Mongol commander then serving under Abaqa Khan, who had fallen 'to the lot and share of Qubilai Qa'an' on the death of Möngke.⁸⁷⁸ Sartaq Noyan and 'Abd al-Rahmān were dispatched on this mission and Sartaq returned in 1265 with Bayan leaving his colleague behind in Western Eurasia to 'settle the accounts'.⁸⁷⁹ Though the twenty-eight year old Bayan, an ethnic Mongol, was to prove himself a distinguished soldier-statesman serving the Yuan,⁸⁸⁰ that he was urgently requested by Qubilai because he was desperately needed to energise the campaign against the Southern Sung is less likely than that Qubilai recognised Bayan's qualities on his arrival.⁸⁸¹

Rashīd al-Dīn also reports that 'a Frankish' mangonel-maker called Tālib from Baalbek and Damascus was instrumental in the capture by Bayan of the town of Sayan-Fu/Siangyang. Two catapult makers were allegedly dispatched by Abaqa to Qubilai but in view of the travelling difficulties and the long wait endured by Abaqa for his own accession, it

⁸⁷⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 270-271

⁸⁷⁹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 271

⁸⁸⁰ On Qubilai's death it was purportedly Bayan who stood on the steps of the audience hall, sword in hand and enforced the enthronement of Qubilai's informally nominated successor, his grandson, Temür. See the biography of Bayan in De Rachewiltz, Hok-lam Chan, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing and Geier eds. *In the Service of the Khan*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1993, p. 602

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 585

appears far more likely that these mangonel makers were actually in Bayan's party. Rashīd al-Dīn also records an incident which occurred in the context of the persecution of Muslims during the vizierate of the Buddhist Senge/Sangha (downfall 1291) in which Qubilai was alerted to a verse in the Qur'ān about attacking those who join other gods with God.....⁸⁸² This warning to Qubilai to be on his guard against Muslims was ascribed to a letter from Abaqa (r.1265-1281) though as it had clearly not been seen by Qubilai before it was suddenly produced it could well have been a forgery.

Another military secondment noted only in the Yuan sources was the dispatch of an officer, one Baiju, in 1296 by Temür Qa'an (r.1294-1307) to Ghāzān (r.1295-1304). It is tempting to assume that Baiju was bringing congratulations to Ghāzān on his accession but there is no mention of a decree or the accompanying symbols. Baiju returned to the Yuan, possibly after the Peace of 1304 but was again dispatched west in 1313, this time to consult with Öljeitü as well as bestow honours and a gold seal on Bolad, who had in fact died in April 1313.⁸⁸³ Honours were also requested by Abū Sa'īd for his beleaguered ex-regent, the Oirat Amir Chuban. The request seems to have been received in the Yuan in November 1324⁸⁸⁴ and a title, gold tablet and silver seal duly arrived in Iran in 1327 via the Chaghadaid and Jochid khanates.⁸⁸⁵

Remote administration of the Hūlegüid *qubi* and *fen-ti* in the Yuan and presumably elsewhere could be problematic. Ögödei had been persuaded that the recipients of his largesse might install their own agents or *darughachi* in their *fen-ti* but only court-appointed officials could actually collect the revenues and would then disburse the proceeds. In the early 1260s Hūlegü had been involved in prolonged long-distance negotiations with a Chinese scholar to administer Cheng-

⁸⁸² Qur'ān ix, 36 *Rashīd al-Dīn*/Boyle, p. 295

⁸⁸³ Yuan Chueh, *Ch'ing-jung chu-shih chi*, ch. 34, p. 22b; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.77

⁸⁸⁴ YS, ch. 29. p. 651; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.39

⁸⁸⁵ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.39

te on his behalf, requiring three trans-Eurasian missions before the candidate was persuaded to accept the role.⁸⁸⁶ Hülegü also had worries over the seven thousand families of hunters and falconers which had been placed under his control. Arrangements were made in 1261, possibly at the same time as the above, for their administration but for unknown reasons an envoy of Abaqa's asked in 1275 that their administration be undertaken by the Court. By Abū Sa'īd's time these households too had been reduced to seven hundred and eighty.⁸⁸⁷

The Resupply Function And The Yām Network

As noted earlier, Ögödei commanded that Qaraqorum be resupplied by five hundred wagon loads daily of food and drink.⁸⁸⁸ The Hülegüids, however, did not need 'home comforts' brought in by the wagonload from Mongolia since mutton broth and *kumiss* could be obtained in Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, as will be shown, the resupply function impinged on two key vulnerabilities, one military and the other sociological both deriving on the Hülegüids isolation from the Mongolian heartland which impacted on reinforcements for the Mongol elite.

Militarily, the Tūrko-Mongol forces that traversed Eurasia with Hülegü do not appear to have been reinforced in any numbers. Whilst the Hülegüids could rely to some extent on enforced allies including the Cilician Armenians, Armenians and Georgians as well as those more distant such as the Karts of Herat they also raised troops locally but even so, all these had to be overseen by Mongol amirs. How far these amirs were an endangered species in Hülegüid controlled territories and what the rate of attrition was is not entirely clear but statistically a

⁸⁸⁶ YS, ch.160, p. 3758; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.46

⁸⁸⁷ YS, ch. 101, p. 2600; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.47

⁸⁸⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 62

thirty-year old accompanying Hülegü west in the mid-1250s would almost certainly be dead by Ghāzān's accession in 1304.

It is instructive that of those who heard Ghāzān's last testament at the time of his death in 1304, sixty or so were top officials in his household establishment, all but 'two or three were evidently Mongols. Only Malik Nasir al-Din, listed as one of the *bitikchis* and a certain Amir 'Ali, an *idachi*, have non-Mongol names'.⁸⁸⁹ This does not necessarily mean that there were only sixty ethnic Mongols in senior positions but at the same time, as Ibn Khaldun pointed out when referring to the period of consolidation after a conquest:

A ruler can achieve power only with the help of his own people. They are his group and his helpers in his enterprise. He uses them to fight against those who revolt against his dynasty.... They help him to achieve superiority. They participate in the government. They share in all his other important affairs⁸⁹⁰

What is fairly obvious is that without reinforcements the supply of ethnic Mongol amirs was down to the reproductive capacities of those who either accompanied Hülegü west or were already in situ.

To exacerbate an already conceivable dearth there was always the possibility of a disaffected or endangered amir absconding. Allsen regards such defections from the Hülegüid domains to those of the Mamluks' as so common that they became institutionalized with such defectors known as *wāfidiyya* or new arrivals who were without too

⁸⁸⁹ Charles Melville, "The *Keshig* in Iran: the survival of the royal Mongol Household", in Linda Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, Leiden 2006, pp. 135-64. p. 153

⁸⁹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, (tr. F. Rosenthal) *The Muqaddimah*, p. 146 though Ibn Khaldūn does go on to say that in the second stage the ruler pushes his own people away from him as they could challenge his power

much ado drafted into the Mamluk forces.⁸⁹¹ The most dramatic exit occurred in 1296 under the leadership of the grandson of the Mongol Oirat commander Temür Buqa who had come west with Hülegü. Temür Buqa had not supported Ghāzān's (r.694-703/1295-1304) succession and undoubtedly rightly decided that moving out of his reach to Mamluk territory would be wise, absconding forthwith with 'ten thousand' Oirat troops and their families.⁸⁹²

Ann Lambton has noted that 'the Mongols appear to have declined in number and, apart from a few groups, to have virtually disappeared in Persia after the fall of the Ilkhans....' further observing that 'the apparent disappearance of the Mongols' is 'puzzling'.⁸⁹³ She is not entirely happy with the view of al-Umarī or Vassaf, or indeed Professor Cahen,⁸⁹⁴ that the Mongols either assimilated to the local population or were absorbed by the Turkomans. Her preferred explanation is that once the Hülegüids cut their links with Qaraqorum 'and frontier marches were established between them and the Golden Horde in the northwest and the Chaghadaï Khanate in the east, there was little possibility of a replenishment of the military manpower needed to sustain the Mongol hegemony over Persia'.

She also takes account of the McNeill suggestion that the plague may have been a factor in undermining Mongol military might since he wonders whether if, from the mouth of the Amur to the mouth of the Danube steppe nomad populations suffered population decay as a consequence of their new exposure to highly lethal infection'.⁸⁹⁵ Though this cannot be totally discounted the Mongols were a robust lot. They

⁸⁹¹ Thomas T. Allsen, 'Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia' in *Nomads of Agents of Cultural Change*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2015, p. 127

⁸⁹² Allsen, 'Population Movements' p. 127.

⁸⁹³ Ann K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia: Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History, 11th-14th century*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1988, p. 24

⁸⁹⁴ In his chapter 'The Mongols and the Near East' in K. M. Setton (ed.) *A History of the Crusades*, ii. 720

⁸⁹⁵ W. H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 1970, p. 178

mainly suffered, as far as medical disorders can be identified, from alcoholism,⁸⁹⁶ fever and what they tended to put down to 'poisoning' but which could equally have been a combination of an ailment and the efforts of shamans or indeed 'doctors' to cure them.⁸⁹⁷

Some ethnic Mongols are known to have successfully accomplished the dangerous trans-Eurasian crossing though perhaps they should not be regarded as 'resupply' as such. The most well-known is probably Bolad, who was a Dörben Mongol,⁸⁹⁸ also Bayan a Barin Mongol⁸⁹⁹ and Baiju, who seems to have been descended from Muqali.⁹⁰⁰ Bolad was expected to return to the Yuan but turned back because of hostilities en route but the others certainly did so. They do not seem to have travelled at the head of large forces though they must have travelled with an escort, the size and composition of which is not evident. Thus one consequence of their extended lines of communication may have been that the Hülegüid self-perpetuating elite had to ensure that they indeed 'self-perpetuated' – otherwise they were in danger of becoming extinct as indeed eventually occurred with the Hülegüids themselves.

A further 'resupply' implication of their sojourn in their far-flung outpost is not dissimilar. As has already been noted, the Hülegüids may have been either short of horses or short of the right sort of horses. On the other hand, during the reign of Abū Saʿīd they were shipping 'horses' and 'western' horses to the Yuan as 'Gifts'.⁹⁰¹ This 'resupply' function of the strategic communications network requires further examination as well as more data.

⁸⁹⁶ Juvaynī remarks on Ogodei turning to wine and drunkenness to assuage his grief after the death of his brother Tolui (Boyle, II, p. 550) and Rubruck has references to the Mongol propensity for drunkenness and their addiction to alcohol and refers to Möngke Khan being drunk. See p. 77 n. 3 and p. 180,

⁸⁹⁷ Chinggis Khan's father was, however, almost certainly poisoned. *SH* paras 67 & 68 and Ögödei actually admits to 'secretly harming' Doqolqu i.e. poisoning him. *SH* para. 281

⁸⁹⁸ Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 63

⁸⁹⁹ *In the Service of the Khan*, p. 584

⁹⁰⁰ Louis Hambis, *Le chapitre CVIII du Yuan che; les fiefs attribués aux membres de la famille impériale et aux ministres de la cour mongole* Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1954 p. 74

⁹⁰¹ Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, Table 2, p. 44

The conclusion here is that although the Hülegüids were undoubtedly a regional power in western Eurasia their geopolitical situation was uneasy, surrounded by hostile neighbours as well as far distant from their Toluid allies in the Yuan. It has been argued that this isolation had an impact on several aspects of the Hülegüids efforts to sustain their rule, not only for their legitimacy, but also politically, militarily, economically and sociologically.

CHAPTER X

The Yām Network:

Security Issues - The *Pax Mongolica*

If communications are the vital blood stream that keep governance running and intact, then the corollary is that the security of the communication arteries has to be of critical importance to rulers. During the Chinggisid period there are indications in the sources that despite natural hazards, the hostile terrain and the vast distances, their extended network was safe and secure for travellers and thus by inference was securely functioning for reasons of state. Such a conclusion is generally based on three authorities. Balducci Pegolotti, in his merchant's handbook written around 1335 famously remarked that the route between Tana and Khitai was secure, thus *Il cammino d'andare dalla Tana al Gattaio è sicurissimo e di e di note secondo che si conta per li mercatanti che l'anno usato....*⁹⁰²

Seventy years or so earlier Juvaynī harked back – albeit with some hyperbole – to the latter part of the reign of Chinggis Khan (d.1227), remarking that he had brought about ‘complete peace and quiet, security and tranquillity, and had achieved the extreme of prosperity and well-being; the roads were secure and disturbances allayed....’⁹⁰³ Moreover, Juvaynī also mentions that Chaghadaï had brought security to travellers, since his followers, for fear of his *yasa* and punishment were so well disciplined that during his reign ‘no travellers, so long as he was near his army, had need of guard or patrol on any stretch of road...’.⁹⁰⁴ On the evidence of these authorities there

⁹⁰² Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Practica della Mercatura*, tr. Allan Evans 1936

⁹⁰³ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p.77

⁹⁰⁴ Juvaynī/Boyle I, p.272

would seem to be no doubt that the security and tranquillity of the *Yām* network had been assured.

There is, however, a problem with these assurances. What will be immediately noted is that they refer to periods over a hundred years apart. Thus the period between 1227, or the death of Chinggis Khan, and the demise of Abū Saʿīd in 1335, which is the period popularly thought of as the *Pax Mongolica*, is excluded. This *lacuna* is critical since these years not only cover the entire Hülegüid period in which Sino-Iranian relations were re-established but also those of the intra-Chinggisid conflicts. It will be argued that the security of the roads linking the Hülegüids to the Yuan was most certainly *not* assured. Moreover, since there is a close association between ‘security’ and the alleged *Pax Mongolica*, it will be further argued that the concept of a *Pax Mongolica* is misconceived.

Provenance of the Term *Pax Mongolica*

Since the idea of a *Pax Mongolica* with its connotations of untrammelled communication and exchange has become almost as emblematic of the Chinggisid conquests as their reputation for ‘rivers of blood’ it is proposed to briefly examine here its antecedents as well as the elements which are generally thought to underpin such a ‘Pax’.

The expression *Pax Mongolica* has a distinguished provenance as well as a somewhat indeterminate ancestry since the first use of the term has proved elusive. More importantly, perhaps, it has carried with it into the twenty-first century a certain amount of ‘historical baggage’. What is proposed here is to test the apparently perfectly reasonable assumptions implied by the term ‘Pax’ in the Mongol context.

Before turning to the critical examination of these contending perceptions it may be constructive to look briefly at the distinguished antecedents of this 'label'.

The *Pax Romana/Pax Augustae* and the Gates of War

The provenance of the term originates in ancient Rome. There, the Temple of Janus in the Forum had doors at both ends, named the Gates of War, which remained open when Rome was at war and closed when Rome was at peace.⁹⁰⁵ Before the time of the first Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus (44 BCE-14 CE) they had only been closed twice since the foundation of the city, remaining open at one time for four hundred years until they were closed after the First Punic War in 235 BCE but reopening again eight years later. Augustus records in his autobiographical *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* that the Gates of War had been closed on three occasions during his rule, in 29 and 25 BCE and again at an unknown date but possibly 7 BCE.⁹⁰⁶

This closure was celebrated in Augustus's lifetime by the magnificent altar of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. Some scholars such as Arnaldo Momigliano have noted that the message of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* is more complex than that of the closing of the Gates of War since it also incorporated Greek ideals of peace as prosperity and fecundity, neither of which Augustus in fact explicitly claimed to have brought to Rome in his *Res Gestae*.⁹⁰⁷ These in reality came about because the 'peace' was underpinned by a complex set of legal, economic and cultural processes some of which were instigated by Augustus.⁹⁰⁸ This period outlasted the first Emperor, continuing for upwards of 200 years, that is from 27 BCE to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE. Thus the 'Augustan Peace', which was to transmogrify into the *Pax Romana*, was predicated on

⁹⁰⁵ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, eds. Brunt and Moore, para 13 and notes pp. 54-55

⁹⁰⁶ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, eds. Brunt and Moore, para 13

⁹⁰⁷ Arnaldo Momigliano, 'The Peace of the Ara Pacis' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 5 (1942), pp. 228-231.

⁹⁰⁸ In fact he spent much of his wealth in bailing out the treasury. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, eds. Brunt and Moore, paras. 17 and 18 p.27

pacification both internally and externally - 'to spare the conquered and vanquish the proud in war'⁹⁰⁹ as well as crushing internal dissidence. It also came to incorporate the Greek ideals of peace as prosperity but at the same time was also dependent on traditional Roman 'mores'⁹¹⁰ or customs.



The Altar *Ara Pacis Augusta*

Whilst the first use of the term *Pax Romana* has been traced to the writing of Seneca the Younger⁹¹¹ in 55 CE it was Edward Gibbon in his immense *History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*⁹¹² who described the *Pax* at some length and he constantly refers to public peace, universal peace and so on. In the meantime, the first use of the term *Pax Mongolica* has eluded discovery. It may well be that the cessation of hostilities between the branches of the Imperial Family as relayed by Öljeitü in a letter to Philip the Fair of France in 1304/1305 was the origin of the term amongst Western scholars.⁹¹³

⁹⁰⁹ Virgil, Aen, VI, 853, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* quoted in Res Gestae, Brunt and Moore, p.41

⁹¹⁰ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, eds. Brunt and Moore para 8, p. 23

⁹¹¹ Omnes considera gentes in quibus *Romana pax* desinit

⁹¹² Edward Gibbon, intro. D. Womersley. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*...Penguin Classics 1995

⁹¹³ Mostaert, Antoine, and Cleaves, Francis Woodman, *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305 des Ilkhan Arjun et Öljeitü à Philippe le bel*. 1962

The Pax Mongolica: A Period of Peace, Security and Prosperity?

The association between 'Peace' as in the absence of insecurity, with prosperity has continued to be central to the concept of a 'Pax'. Thus Warwick Ball argues that the *Pax Kushanacae* (2nd century BCE – 3rd century CE) was also a period that saw an enormous upsurge in prosperity and stability.⁹¹⁴ Moreover, statements such as those of Pegolotti above on the security of the roads seem to have caught the imagination both of historians of trade and world systems and some historians of communication and exchange since it is implied that the Chinggisid period offered similar benefits to those of the earlier 'Pax'.

Of the 'contact and exchange' historians, Dru Gladney, writing under the auspices of the Silk Road Heritage Foundation, asserts that 'Throughout the period of Mongol rule the region prospered as an important overland trade center in the midst of the peace insured by the Pax Mongolica'.⁹¹⁵ For their part, Komaroff and Carboni argue that for over a century, the Mongols created a unique opportunity for an unrestricted cultural exchange.⁹¹⁶

Such a view is also pervasive amongst trade and commerce historians. The general tenor of these latter is summarised by a comment in Findlay and O'Rourke. They argue that 'despite competition and conflict between the components of the empire as a whole, particularly the Golden Horde and the Ilqans, there was a reality to the *Pax Mongolica* since the Mongols always wanted to encourage trade and the routes across Central Asia were safer and busier than previously or subsequently'.⁹¹⁷ This view is echoed by Virgil Ciocîltan in his *The*

⁹¹⁴ Warwick Ball: *The Monuments of Afghanistan, History, Archaeology and Architecture*. London, New York, I. B. Tauris, 2008, p. 80

⁹¹⁵ Dru Gladney, 'Xinjiang: China's Pre-and Post-Modern Crossroad' Silk Road, Vol. 3.1

⁹¹⁶ Linda Komaroff & Stefano Carboni, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, p. 7

⁹¹⁷ Findlay and O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty, Trade, War and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* p.106; Janet Abū-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250-1350*;

Mongols and the Black Sea Trade where he remarks that ‘transcontinental trade developed at this time at a dizzying rate’⁹¹⁸ not least because the *Pax Mongolica* was indispensable to the safety of foreign travellers. Even more extravagant claims for the *Pax Mongolica* are made by William Bernstein, a ‘financial theorist and historian’ who claims that for about a century, beginning around 1260 after the conquests of Chinggis Qan’s grandchildren and ending with the dissolution of Mongol dynasties from internal strife and the plague, the *Silk Road* lay unobstructed. He goes on to observe that large numbers of Europeans and Muslims exploited this relatively brief opportunity to shuttle with ease between China and the West.⁹¹⁹

The economic benefits of Chinggisid rule are outside the remit of this work, since trade, though critical for the financial health of a polity, is not easy to quantify from the scattered references in the sources.⁹²⁰ Moreover, there is strong evidence that the bulk of Sino-Iranian trade during the Chinggisid period took to the high seas⁹²¹ rather than following the overland routes which are of interest here. It also seems that for those who followed Hūlegū west there is little sign that the ‘profits of empire’ were cascaded down since there are references to the dire economic straits in which some such Mongols found themselves in the Hūlegūid domains.⁹²²

⁹¹⁸ Virgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014, p. 2 and p. 32

⁹¹⁹ William Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World*, p. 91;

⁹²⁰ Even Ciociltan in his *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade* accepts that ‘examination of the sources leads to an inescapable conclusion: the volume of trade-related information is far too small to allow any scholar to write a ‘compact’ history of trade in the Mongol period.’ p. 5.

⁹²¹ Not only commerce but travellers too, see section on after the Peace of 1304 below. Hyunhee Park has argued persuasively for the maritime routes in *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds*.

⁹²² Sneath remarks that not all Mongol commoners benefited from the profits of empire and often found themselves so impoverished they had to sell their children to meet their obligations. *The Headless State*, p. 165

The Period of ‘Empire’

Together with the elements of peace and prosperity in the concept of *Pax* is the unwritten assumption that it takes an ‘Empire’ to achieve this desirable state of affairs. Empire, in this context is defined as a supreme political power over several countries exercised by a single authority. This definition, however, poses a problem when considering the exact period of the Chinggisid Imperium since not all members of the Imperial Family recognised a ‘single authority’ in the person of the Qa’an after the contentious elevation of Möngke to the Qa’anate in 1251. This situation was further aggravated by challenges to the authority of his successor, Qubilai.

What is today in Mongolia referred to as the *Ikh* (Great) Mongol Empire was declared as such by Chinggis Khan in 1206 but at that time the extent was barely the area of what is now sometimes referred to as (Outer) Mongolia. At the death of the Great Qa’an Möngke in 1259, the extent consisted of more or less directly dominated territory which reached from Azerbaijan in Western Asia to Northern China but did not include the whole of present day China, which was not completely conquered until 1279.

Though Möngke had sons⁹²³ his death precipitated a major rift in the Toluid camp when his two brothers who had remained in Eastern Eurasia, Qubilai and Ariq Böke, contested the succession. This painful episode was eventually resolved in favour of Qubilai, whose focus under his older brother had been China. Qubilai moved the centre of gravity to Dadu when the denotation changed and this period is known in Mongolia today under the dynastic title chosen by Qubilai in 1271 of ‘Yuan’ though the Toluids were effectively in control between 1260 and 1368. This understandable error of judgement of Qubilai’s was one of

⁹²³ Baltu pre-deceased his father and Ürüngtash and Asutai declared for Ariq Böke

the factors in diminishing the control of the Qa'an over recalcitrant members of other branches of the Imperial Family. Thus Biran notes that at the *quriltai* of the Ögödeid, Chaghadaid and Jochid dissidents in 1268⁹²⁴ Baraq referred to Qubilai as a "regional" Khan ruling in the east, effectively reducing Qubilai to being one khan amongst many, albeit a particularly powerful one.

Moreover, under the Yuan the Mongolian steppe gradually became marginalised,⁹²⁵ whilst the 'Empire' fractured into separate, more or less autonomous Khanates. The major khanates included the Yuan and that of the Hūlegüids, both ruled by descendants of Chinggis Khan's youngest son Tolui; the Jochid Khanate, ruled by descendants of his eldest son Jochi, and the Chaghadaid Khanate, ruled by descendants of his second son, Chaghadaid. The dispossessed Ögödeid descendent, Qaidu, fought back to re-establish the Ögödeid inheritance and effectively controlled a fifth khanate. There were also at the beginning of Qubilai's reign lesser khanates including areas under the control of descendants of Chinggis Khan's half-brothers in Manchuria. Qubilai's grandson Ananda, apparently firmly ensconced in his *ulus* in the old Tangut domains, was to all intents and purposes a khan. As Rashīd al-Dīn points out, even though Qubilai's ministers were ostensibly in charge in Ananda's *ulus*, not much of the revenue reached the Divan but was expended on Ananda's armed forces.⁹²⁶

In terms of endurance, however, the Hūlegüids were the first to fall by the wayside with the death of Abū Sa'īd in 1335 without issue. The *Great Pivot* held on until 1368 when the Yuan in East Asia fell to the Ming dynasty; with those Mongol Yuan elite who could do so trotting

⁹²⁴ Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State*, pp.27-28

⁹²⁵ Masson Smith, 'From Pasture to Manger', notes that the Yuan had not been able to abolish the pasture based Five Aymaqs that had provided *tammachi* garrisons in China since Chinggis' time and which still retained their links with Mongolia. They were the only forces that managed to retreat to the homeland in 1368. p.73

⁹²⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 325-326

briskly back to the steppe. In Mongolia today this subsequent post-Yuan period is referred to as the Northern Yuan.

In the terms of the definition above, therefore, the period from 1206 to 1260 is the period of 'Empire' rather than the fall of the Yuan in 1368. This means that the actual period of the Imperium under a supreme single recognised authority was barely fifty-four years. In his pithy article on the 'Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire'⁹²⁷ David Morgan agrees with Peter Jackson's central message in his influential article on 'the Dissolution of the Mongol Empire'⁹²⁸ that the Mongol Empire dissolved around the year 1260. Whilst there continued to be a Great Khan his writ did not 'run the length and breadth of the Mongol Empire' which thus ceased to be a 'unitary state ruled from a central capital by a paramount emperor and his governmental machine'.⁹²⁹ This, to all intents and purposes, agrees with the definition of empire above. Morgan also makes the point that, paradoxically, this was twenty years before it reached its greatest geographical extent after the definitive conquest of the Southern Sung.

In comparison to other conquest dynasties in Central Eurasia in the first and early second millennium, the Sāmānids sustained their dominion for almost two hundred years, from 204-395/819-1005; the loosely federated Qarakhānids, with centres in Samarkand, Balasaghun and Kashghar, staved off destruction and decline for slightly longer, from 382-609/992-1212 when they were defeated by the Khwārazmshah. A similar length of time was achieved by the Ghaznavids, from 366/977 until they were conquered by the Ghurids in 582/1186. The Great Seljūqs from Toghril I in 431/1040 to the defeat of Toghril III by the Khwārazmshah in 1194 rather less at just

⁹²⁷ David Morgan, 'The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct., 2009) p. 429

⁹²⁸ Peter Jackson, 'The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 22 (1978), pp. 186-244

⁹²⁹ Morgan, 'The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire' p. 429

over one hundred and fifty years, though the Seljūqs of Rum held on for longer, from 473-707/1081-1307. The two Türkmen ‘sheep’ dynasties, the Black, Qara Qoyunlu (752-874/1351-1469) occupying much of the territory of the late Hülegüids and the somewhat under-appreciated White, or Aq Qoyunlu (798-914/1396-1508) also dominated much of the same area, each for just over a hundred years.

The Mongols were not entirely alone in lacking endurance. Thus the Ghurids, who conquered the Ghaznavids in 582/1186, were in turn conquered by the Khwārazmshah in 611-12/1214-1216. The Ma’mūnids of Gurgānj, who were patrons of Ibn Sīnā and al-Tha’alibi and a predecessor dynasty of Khwārazmshah Muhammad flourished from 385/995 until conquered by Mahmūd of Ghazna, in 408/1017, barely twenty-two years. The meteoric and highly destructive expansion of the Khwārazmshahs, under Muhammad, from his conquest of the Ghurids in 582/1186 to the demise of his son in 1220, only lasted for a tumultuous thirty-four years.

Whilst the Chinggisid controlled domains were of rather vaster expanse than some of the more compact empires in Eurasia, when considered in purely longevity terms, the Mongol ‘Empire’ under a single authority was clearly in the second division.

The Mongols and ‘Peace’

If the period of the Empire is thus regarded as being between 1206 and 1260, this period must arguably be the period of the *Pax Mongolica*. ‘Pax’ however, has many connotations over and above that of the absence of war including those of concord, lawfulness or non-violence, all of which were implicit in the *Pax Augustae* and in the Roman case were underpinned by Roman ‘mores’ or customs and culture. ‘Culture’ unfortunately is also a particularly contentious concept in academic circles today, and has evolved in recent years to include a body of

sophisticated revisionist work. This recognises culture as a “a sphere of practical activity shot through by wilful action, power relations, struggle, contradiction and change.”⁹³⁰ Modern anthropological studies have shown that even societies deemed ‘simple’ and tribal are highly mutable, full of internal ruptures and power struggles and made by borrowings from outside as well as internal drives. Such characterizations have a deep resonance in the context of the ‘simple’ Mongols and their conquests.

The Mongols’ approach to the idea of ‘peace’ was closely aligned with their imperial mission in that they had a heavenly inspired manifest destiny to conquer and rule the world.⁹³¹ Rulers who had not yet submitted unconditionally were in rebellion and had to be punished through conquest or coerced submission. It would seem to follow that if peace means the absence of conflict, then the Mongols technically could not be at peace until they had conquered every polity in the world. If this view is accepted, then the only circumstances in which the Mongols could ‘Close the Gates of War’ and thereby achieve a *Pax Mongolica* was if there was no-one left to submit. *Ergo*, by this count alone there could not have been a *Pax Mongolica*.

Moreover, during the reigns of Ögödei, Güyüg and Möngke, ‘peace’ defined as the non-existence of war, was conspicuous by its absence. On the other hand, this may well have been the peak of prosperity for the Mongol elite as Ögödei in particular was a khan of the old school who appreciated that his position required the distribution of the profits of empire to the Mongol elite and beyond as Juvaynī records in some

⁹³⁰ Patrick Walker, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes*, London, Hurst & Co. 2009, pp. 14-15

⁹³¹ Those who have discussed this include De Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan’s Empire,” *Papers in Far Eastern History* 7, (1973), 21-36; Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism* (Berkeley, 1987). Reuven Amitai, ‘Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War’ in *Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, Ashgate, Variorum, XII esp. pp. 62-63

detail.⁹³² It could thus be argued that for the Mongols, if not for the conquered peoples, Ögödei's and then Güyüg's short reign were a period of 'abundance' if not of 'fecundity'.

Pax and the Extended Lines of Communication

In strategic terms, especially in relation to the communication network, Möngke's elevation was a tipping point since his authority was not accepted by important elements within the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid *uluses*. This unleashed a period of 'internal ruptures and power struggles' as in the anthropological definition above. A first-hand account of what it was like to be caught up in such succession disputes is that of Ye-lu Hi Liang, the great-grandson of Chinggis Khan's and Ögödei's minister, Ye-lu Ch'u tsai.⁹³³ His career graphically illustrates the vulnerabilities both of those who served the Mongols as well as the communications network. In the meantime, as these ruptures have been extensively examined by scholars⁹³⁴ it is not proposed here to give a blow by blow account of every confrontation but to tabulate the location of the main hostilities. These can be found the Table in the Appendices on Military operations during the period of intra-Chinggisid conflict the aim of which is to provide some indication of the extent of dislocation to strategic communications.

Hostilities do not necessarily and inexorably lead to a cessation of communication and contact since there may be alternative routes or pauses in the intensity of the conflict. There is, however, clear evidence that during this forty-year period the overland communication network

⁹³² Juvaynī/Boyle I, p. 188, 201-202 ff.

⁹³³ Ye-lu Hi Liang, tr. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches* I, pp. 157-163

⁹³⁴ See especially Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State*; Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*; Rossabi in his *Khublai Khan* devotes very little space to the internecine warfare.

was at times severely interdicted on all the main routes between east and west.

The most authoritative references substantiating such a conclusion are from the Hülegüid west whilst important confirmation of the difficulties of communication comes from the Yuan at the opposite side of Eurasia. Firstly, in his capacity as vizier, Rashīd al-Dīn should have been one of the best informed members of Court his information is patchy. Thus he was able to give a thorough account of the activities of the aforementioned Ananda, the Islamisation of those he ruled and his relations with his grandfather, Qubilai as well as the influence of Ghāzān on his young relative.⁹³⁵ On the other hand, whilst Rashīd al-Dīn was clearly aware of the enthronement of Qubilai's grandson, Temūr, which took place in 1294, he nonetheless remarks, apparently before the death Temūr in 1307 that:

Temūr had many wives and concubines
in his ordos *but on account of the great
distance and the closure of the roads* the
names of all of them have not so far
been ascertained.⁹³⁶

The second reference from the Hülegüid west is contained in the famous letter from Öljeitü to Philip IV (The Fair) of France where he says that the communication network had been reconnected.⁹³⁷ The third of these references is contained in the first letter of John of Monte Corvino (1247-1328) first Roman Catholic archbishop of Dadu who left Tabriz in 1291 travelling east by sea via India arriving in the Yuan in 1293. Twelve years later, in January 1305, he wrote somewhat despondently to his Order back in Europe:

⁹³⁵ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, pp. 323-326

⁹³⁶ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle, p. 319 emphasis added

⁹³⁷ Mostaert and Cleaves, *Les Lettres de 1289 et 1305*, 1962

As for the road hither I may tell you that the way through the land of the Goths, subject to the Emperor of the Northern Tartars, is the shortest and safest; and by it the friars might come, along with the letter-carriers, in five or six months. The other route again is very long and very dangerous, involving two sea-voyages; . . . *But, on the other hand, the first-mentioned route has not been open for a considerable time, on account of wars that have been going on.*

It is twelve years since I have had any news of the Papal court, or of our Order, or of the state of affairs generally in the west. . . . (i.e. since 1293)⁹³⁸

There are also hints in the sources of the difficulties such obstacles to communication caused. Mention has already been made of Abaqa's five year wait for the affirmation of his accession from Qubilai, which only just made it to through the hostilities to him in 1270. Five years later Qubilai was clearly in the dark over events in Central Eurasia since he demanded that both Baraq, the Chaghadaid Khan and Qaidu send back to him the *pa'izas* that he had conferred on them, evidently not knowing that Baraq had died four years earlier in 1271.⁹³⁹

As can be seen from the table, there was intense activity in the 1270s in Transoxiana where even before the attack on Bukhārā in 1276 by the sons of Alghu and Baraq which devastated all of Transoxania for seven years, the region had been unstable. By 1274 Yuan forces were involved in a further theatre of operations in the Tarim Basin which caused serious problems for Rabban Bar Sauma and his companion Markos travelling from Dadu westwards in 1278 hoping to reach Jerusalem.

⁹³⁸ Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, I, p. 200-201

⁹³⁹ *Yuan shih*, 8/160; Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State*, p. 39

Their journey was particularly fraught since like the Polos, travelling east, they opted for the Southern Taklamakan route via Khotan and Kashgar. The party were stranded in Khotan for six months because war was then raging between Qubilai and the Ögodeid prince Hoqu. Rabban Bar Sauma laments that ‘the caravan roads and ways had been cut, grain was scarce and could not be found and many died of hunger and perished through want’.⁹⁴⁰ Escaping from Khotan they reached Kashgar, ‘and they saw that the city was empty of its inhabitants, because it had been already plundered by the enemy’.⁹⁴¹

Known Successful Traverses of Eurasia during the Intra Chinggisid Conflicts

On the other hand, some travellers did make it through the maelstrom of internecine warfare between the Yuan, the Jochids and Hūleguids . In the mid-1260s there was a mission from Dadu to Tabriz under the command of Sartaq Noyan and ‘Abd al-Rahmān who returned with Bayan and possibly two mangonel makers. Abaqa’s emissary to Qubilai in the same period took five years for the return trip after which there was a pause in missions for ‘Reasons of State’ until the mid 1280s when Bolad and Isā *kelemichi* had a hazardous journey from Dadu to Tabriz. Only Isā made it back to Dadu as Bolad had to turn back to Tabriz. Also in the mid-1280s Arghun dispatched three emissaries to request a bride who arrived safely but his bride had to return by sea. In 1296 Baiju was seconded to Ghazan by Temür Qa’an though whether he travelled by sea or overland is unclear though Ghāzān sent his 1297 mission by sea.

Rabban Bar Sauma was one of the few travellers who are known to have attempted to traverse Eurasia during this unsettled period who were not travelling for ‘Reasons of State’. Also travelling in the 1270s but as emissaries and in the opposite direction were the Polos. Despite some

⁹⁴⁰ Rabban Bar Sauma, Sir W Budge, trans. *Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China* Ch. I p. 139

⁹⁴¹ Rabban Bar Sauma/Budge Ch I, p. 139

scholarly sceptics, the consensus is increasingly that the second trip to the Yuan by the senior Polos, this time taking along the young Marco did occur, even if there are some anomalies in Marco's memory of his sojourn in China. He, his father and uncle were making their way back to Qubilai also via the southern Taklamakan route having given up trying to reach the Yuan via ship. According to Marco, their journey took them a good three and a half years probably arriving at Shang-tu in May 1275⁹⁴² thus slightly ahead of Hoqu's devastation of the Southern Tarim which may account for Marco's glowing account of the region.

From this examination of the *Pax Mongolica* and the purported security of the roads which reputedly facilitated ease of communication two conclusions in particular stand out. Perhaps unsurprisingly the most far-reaching is that at no time during the Chinggisid period did they slam shut the Gates of War and usher in a time of peace, fecundity and secure communications. For much of the period between Juvayni's comment about the security of the roads and that of Pegolotti the trans-Eurasian routes were impeded by the intra-Chinggisid hostilities. Secondly is that the corollary of hostilities adding to the already considerable dangers of travel there is little hard evidence of large numbers of travellers shuttling with ease between China and the West as was seen in the previous chapter on contacts between the Hūlegüid west and the Yuan east.⁹⁴³

The best that could be said is that the period when strategic communications were least impeded was during the reigns of Ögödei,

⁹⁴² This was partly because of the bad weather they encountered and just possibly because of a year-long sojourn in Kan-chou (Campichu) in Tangut where 'Messer Maffeo and Messer Marco Polo' were on a 'mission' (I, p. 220) or 'business' (I, p. 223, note 5) though when this mission occurred is not evident from the text.

⁹⁴³ William Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World*, p. 91;

Güyük and Möngke, thus a shaky case could be made for a *Pax Ögödeid*. There would, however, be the inevitable comparisons with the *Pax Augustae*. Even the most ardent admirer of Ögödei would be hard pressed to argue that the four proudest achievements in his own *Res Gestae Divi Ögödei* as enunciated in the *Secret History* viz: destroying the people of north China, setting up relay stations, having wells dug and establishing scouts and garrison troops among the people of the cities⁹⁴⁴ - stand with those of the Emperor Augustus in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that on multiple levels the term *Pax Mongolica* is misconceived. As Denis Sinor has starkly pointed out, neither the Turkic nor the Mongol languages have generic terms for war or peace.⁹⁴⁵ It is thus difficult to argue with Franke's judgement that 'like so many historical tags, this is a statement that loses much of its seemingly incontrovertible truth when one considers the historical facts'.⁹⁴⁶ Morgan concurs with Franke's further view, with which it is also difficult to disagree, that 'it seems as if the *Pax Mongolica* is no more than one of those brilliant simplifications that can serve as chapter titles for world history books'.

Demolishing the idea of a *Pax Mongolica*, however, is only half the battle. The important issue is how far the hostilities and interdiction in communication caused complications for the Hülegüids and this will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

⁹⁴⁴ *SH*, para 281

⁹⁴⁵ Denis Sinor, 'The Inner Asian Warriors' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 101, No. 2 (April-June 1981) p. 135

⁹⁴⁶ H. Franke, 'Sino-Western Contacts under the Mongol Empire' Ch. VII in *China under Mongol Rule*.

Chapter XI

CONCLUSIONS

The chosen perspective here has been that of strategic communication between the two ancient civilizations of Iran and China. That the antiquity of such relations was acknowledged even in the Mongol period is shown by a comment in 1263 by Liu Yu, author of Chang Te's account of his mission from Möngke Qa'an to Hülegü in 1259. Whilst Liu Yu gives full recognition to the trail-blazing achievements of Zhang Qian in the inception of relations between China and the *Si yu*, 'the countries of the west', during the reign of Han Wudi, there is an emphasis on continuity as well as change. Thus Liu notes that though 'the countries, their mountains and rivers, have up to our days been the same; but as those times belong to remote antiquity, the names of the countries have changed and it is difficult to inquire into their political changes'.⁹⁴⁷

The geopolitical changes to which Liu referred were the relentless procession of conquest dynasties of which the most recent to devour vast swathes of Eurasia was that of Chinggis Khan and his descendants. The transience of such empires, whose domains were held through the widely understood principle of *Macht geht vor Recht*, was acknowledged by the Seljūq vizier, Nizām al-Mulk in his comment that 'the government will change and pass from one house to another'.

As Ibn Khaldūn observed in his study of the seemingly revolving door of conquest dynasties, not only defence and protection of the community from its enemies⁹⁴⁸ should be amongst the top priorities of a ruler but also maintaining the security of the roads.⁹⁴⁹ An interdiction of

⁹⁴⁷ Chang Te, Si Shi Ki, Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches* I, p. 155

⁹⁴⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, 1969, p. 5

⁹⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, 1969, 189

communications could impinge on the circulation of the profits of empire whether in the form of taxes or tribute or embassies bearing gifts as well as on the market place if merchants were unable to obtain their merchandise, whether luxury goods, raw materials or foodstuffs to the detriment of the ruler's finances.

It has been argued here that Hülegü and his successors indeed faced not only some of these difficulties but also other pressing challenges that complicated their efforts to remain in the saddle. The most crucial of these were the somewhat shaky foundations on which their legitimacy rested, that is, by what right they exercised their authority. Whilst *Macht geht vor Recht* was a perfectly adequate basis for command and control over subject populations, it was less so when it came to rivals for the succession. It was also a deeply troubling factor for their non-Toluid relatives that the Toluid tenure in the west and east was not by the dispensation of Chinggis Khan. Thus in this sense, in Chinggisid terms, the Hülegüid takeover of Azerbaijan and the Yuan occupation of China, both considered 'collegiate' territory to be administered for the benefit of all the imperial family, was unlawful.

The most that could be concluded then is that the extended lines of communication may have been an aggravating issue so far as succession in the Hülegüid west until the accession of Ghāzān was concerned. As Abaqa found, five years is a long time to wait to be confirmed in the rulership but as the last three Hülegüid rulers dispensed with this affirmation from the Qa'an for a number of possible reasons over and above the distance time, this latter would appear to have been a complicating factor only for Hülegü's immediate successors.

This was not their only headache. They also had to contend with hostile neighbours, lack of access to the profits of empire, intra-familial confrontations, problems of reinforcement and a far distant overlord making the Chinggisid custom of consultation well-nigh

impossible. This latter may have been one of the more challenging issues for the Hūlegüids in view of Möngke's strictures on consultation on vital imperial matters. Thus when Qubilai removed the centre of gravity to Dadu, their overlord was 5,000 miles/8,000 kilometres distant across inhospitable and hostile terrain. This over-reach was exacerbated not only by the limited technology available and the nature of the hazards on both the overland and the alternative maritime routes but also by internecine strife within the imperial family which further endangered already vulnerable communications.

It was argued that such considerations had potentially serious repercussions for the imperial family's tradition of command, control and consultation. This not only meant that consultation, requests, responses and news may have been overtaken by events by the time the emissaries returned but also complicated the distribution to them of the 'Profits of Empire'. As has been seen, the Hūlegüids had to wait upwards of fifty years for their accrued income from their holdings in the Yuan to arrive from the China. In this context, what is particularly interesting is that after the economic crises of Ghāzān's reign Öljeitü was able to put in hand an extensive building and infrastructure programme.

Data on the degree of contact and consultation between the Yuan and the Hūlegüid west has been set out in the Table on Travellers and Routes. It should be acknowledged that whilst this may well be a serious distortion of the actual position, taken with the data in the Table on the dates and location of hostilities a cautious conclusion is that Hūlegüid-Yuan relations until the 1320s, that is the reign of Abū Sa'īd, were unexpectedly limited. The main burst of consultative contact occurred during the Ariq Böke crisis in the early 1260s.

A reason put forward here for this seemingly sparse interaction is that the extended lines of communication did indeed complicate the consultative process. The fastest journey of which there is a record is that of Chang Te who took only seventy-four days from Qaraqorum to the Caspian in 1259 and then a further unspecified time to reach Hülegü in Tabriz. Six months for a return trip, providing there were no crises en route, was not a recipe for efficient administration, particularly if counter-responses were required. Neither is there any evidence of enthusiasm to make the journey east from the Hülegüid domains and no Hülegüid prince is known to have made the journey to visit his relatives in Dadu.

There was thus an inherent dynamic within the rulership of distant outposts towards self-governance. 'Autonomy' should not, however, be confused with 'sovereignty' and as will be immediately recognised, there is a serious problem with the Chinggisid experience. The definition of 'Empire' in the section on the *Pax Mongolica*, was that 'it was supreme political power over several countries exercised by a single authority'. It was argued that this definition posed a problem when considering the exact period of the Chinggisid Imperium since not all members of the Imperial Family recognised a 'single authority' in the person of the Qa'an after the contentious elevation of Möngke to the Qa'anate in 1251. This situation was further aggravated by challenges to the authority of his successor, Qubilai. The Hülegüids, however, did not challenge Qubilai. The response time involved in contact with the Yuan may have inhibited the consultative process, meaning that the Hülegüids were in effect self-governing but their recognition of Qubilai and his successors as Qa'an mean that the Hülegüids were not 'sovereign'. Arguably, what held the Chinggisid endeavour together, even at its most fractious, is what Ibn Khaldūn calls '*asabīyah*', that is, group consciousness or perhaps more fittingly, 'corporate spirit'.

Contact, however spasmodic, naturally requires the means, hence the examination of the options, complications and limitations implicit in communication networks such as the Chinggisid *Yām* in the context of the widening geo-political and geographical horizons of the Mongols. It was argued that the Mongols did not open up the trans-Eurasian routes but that the *Yām* network followed the ancient pathways that had been opened up a millennium beforehand. Moreover, whilst it is not possible to prove beyond all reasonable doubt, there is no real evidence that relays of tough couriers galloped bags of mail from *Yām* to *Yām* across Eurasia.

Thus the conclusion here is that the Chinggisid communication network was not a relay courier postal service. It appears to have operated not dissimilarly from that of the Roman *cursus publicus* which, as noted, Kolb forcefully argues was an ‘infrastructure’ for use by state officials and which had three purposes, also replicated in the *Yām* network. These were to secure state communications, transport government agents and the movement of certain goods.⁹⁵⁰ Similarly, the primary role of the *Yām* stations was to supply remounts and subsistence for emissaries rather than act as postal courier interchanges.

Strategic communications, moreover, can only function if secure. From the data in Table VI it was concluded that the security of the roads linking the Hūlegüids to the Yuan was most certainly *not* assured. Moreover, since there is a close association between ‘security’ and the alleged *Pax Mongolica*, it was further argued that the concept of a *Pax Mongolica* is misconceived. Whilst strategic communications were least impeded during the reigns of Ögödei, Güyüg and Möngke, a cautious

⁹⁵⁰ Anne Kolb ‘Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *cursus publicus*’ in eds. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, *Travel & Geography in the Roman Empire*, London and New York, Routledge, [2001] 2011 pp. 95 and 98

case could be made for a *Pax Ögödeid* though it was argued that this would not stand comparison with the *Pax Augustae*.

Whilst extended lines of communication are undoubtedly a complicating issue for governance it should be recognised that they are but one thread in a complicated web of actions and unforeseen consequences as rulers endeavour to retain their hold on power. As far as the ‘transience’ of the Chinggisid polities is concerned, David Morgan has argued that ‘whilst imperial collapse in one form or another may be inevitable there is rarely anything inevitable about the specific circumstances in any particular instance.’⁹⁵¹ Moreover, in his view, ‘an examination of the actual events suggests that the Mongol regimes could perfectly well have continued, had different decisions been taken at various points or had different circumstances prevailed’.⁹⁵²

Neither does Morgan subscribe to the ‘decline’ view of the Hülegüid polity in the period before the death of Abu Sa‘id in 736/1335 CE. In this context, what is intriguing is whether the extended lines of communication had a role in the aftermath following his demise. Morgan cogently argues that there is no compelling reason to suppose that the line of Hülegü would have collapsed if there had been a viable successor to succeed him. Rather, his early death without direct heirs brought about a situation in which ‘essentially the throne was up for grabs and the central government disintegrated as a result’.⁹⁵³

Amongst those who temporarily succeeded in ‘grabbing’ the throne was a descendant of Ariq Böke in 736/1335. He was followed in 736/1336 by a grandson of Baidu who had briefly seized the throne in 1295 who in turn was succeeded by a descendant of Hulegu’s son, Möngke Temür between 736/1336-737-8/1337-38 and in western Khurasan a descendant of one of Chinggis Khan’s brothers.

⁹⁵¹ Morgan, ‘The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire’ p. 437

⁹⁵² Morgan, ‘The Decline and Fall’, p. 437

⁹⁵³ Morgan, ‘The Decline and Fall’ p. 433

A dearth of viable heirs was a potential issue also for the Ottomans to which Morgan draws attention since the 'Law of Fratricide could create its own problems if applied with too much enthusiasm'.⁹⁵⁴ In the worst case scenario of no heirs being available, the proposed solution was apparently to import a Chinggisid sultan from the Crimea, since the 'Chinggisid line represented there was regarded in Istanbul as the only lineage whose prestige was comparable with that of the Ottomans'.⁹⁵⁵

If the Ottomans were capable of putting together such a drastic 'fall-back' plan the mystery is why there was not the same will in the Hülegüid domains to import a Toluid prince from further afield around whom the competing factions could unite when the more local candidates failed to sustain their own attempts on the throne. Thus, despite the supposedly warm Yuan-Hülegüid links, an increase in Yuan-Hülegüid communications during the Abu Sa'id period and the earlier example of a bride being requested by Arghun from the Yuan, the obvious solution of importing a Toluid prince⁹⁵⁶ from afar, however distantly related, seems not to have been contemplated by the power brokers in the disintegrating Hülegüid domains.

On the other hand, even though importing a Toluid descendant may have been the only means of keeping the Hülegüid domains within the Chinggisid sphere, the time factor involved in requesting such a prince from further afield would have meant a vacuum in the interim. It would therefore be possible to argue, perhaps not entirely convincingly, that the extended lines of communication did in fact contribute to the end of the Toluids in Western Eurasia. In the meantime, it is difficult to disagree with Morgan that what actually saw off the Hülegüids were early deaths and inconsistency of procreation followed by infighting amongst the elite.

⁹⁵⁴ Morgan, 'The Decline and Fall' p. 436

⁹⁵⁵ Morgan, 'The Decline and Fall' p. 436

⁹⁵⁶ On the basis that it was extremely unlikely that a Jochid or Chaghadaid prince would be offered the vacant throne.

As far as the *Yām* is concerned, Chinggisid investment in the network resulted in a relatively unsophisticated communication system. Though contacts between the Hūlegüids and Yuan were less than might have been expected, such communication networks were the arteries of Empire and this can be seen during the early period of the Chinggisid Imperium. However, taking account of the period of Hūlegüid-Yuan relations from 1260-1334 being relatively short and their extended lines of communication only equalled by those of the later Russian Empire, the view that ‘perhaps this was the greatest and most efficient communications net known to the pre-modern world’⁹⁵⁷ is not borne out by the evidence. On the other hand, one contention here has been that the Mongols deserve more recognition than they have received for their extraordinary navigational skills, not only with no technology but apparently neither navigating by the stars. Perhaps one of the few really positive spins relating to their irruption onto the world stage should be respect for their ‘cognitive mapping’ skills.

Finally, Franke’s scepticism that interchange between China and the non-China West during the Chinggisid period was not ‘really more frequent and easy under the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than under the Six Dynasties and the T’ang’ mentioned at the beginning of the introduction would seem to be justified. Then again, ultimately it was to Ögödei’s credit that his ‘no frills’ communication system was in operation for upwards of seven hundred years.

⁹⁵⁷ Alef, ‘p. 4

APPENDICES

TABLE I

The Hülegüids

Hülegü (r. 1256-1265)
10 sons not all in the West

Abaqa (r.1265-1281)
Son of Hülegü

Teguder/Ahmad (r.1281-1284)
Sixth (?) Son of Hülegü

Arghun (r.1284-1291)
Eldest Son of Abaqa

Geikhatu (r.1291-1295)
Son of Abaqa

Baidu (r.1295)
Son of Taraqai, son of Hülegü

Ghāzān (r.1295-1304)
Eldest Son of Arghun/great-grandson of Hülegü

Öljeitü (r.1304-1316)
Second son of Arghun/great-grandson of Hülegü

Abū Saʿīd (r.1316-1335)
Son of Öljeitü
Died without issue

TABLE II**QA'ANS/KHANS**

Chinggis Khan (r. 1206-1227)

Ögödeids

Ögodei Qa'an (r. 1229-1241)
Third son of Chinggis Khan

Güyük (r. 1246-1248)
Eldest son of Ögodei qa'an

Toluids

Möngke Qa'an (r. 1251-1258)
Eldest son of Tolui/fourth son of Chinggis Khan

Yuan/Toluids

Qubilai Qa'an (r.1260-1294)
Second son of Tolui

Temür (r. 1294-1307)
Grandson of Qubilai

Qaishan (r. 1307-1311)
Great-grandson of Qubilai

Buyantu (r. 1311-1320)
Brother of Qaishan

Gegen (r. 1320-1323)
Son of Buyantu, Great-great grandson of Qubilai

Yesun-Temür (r. 1323-1328)
Great-grandson of Qubilai

Toq-Temür (r. 1328-1329 and 1329)
Great-great grandson of Qubilai

Qutuqtu (r. 1329-1332)
son of Qaishan, Great-great-grandson of Qubilai

Irinchinbal (r. 1332)
Son of Qutuqtu Great-great-great-grandson of Qubilai

Toghan-Temür (r. 1332-1370)
Son of Qutuqtu, Great-great-great-grandson of Qubilai

TABLE III
THE JOCHID KHANATE
1237-1357

Jochi (d. 1227)
 Eldest son of Chinggis Khan (but disputed parentage)

Batu (r. 1237-1256)
 Second son of Jochi

Sartaq (r. 1254-1257)
 Son of Batu

Ulaghchi (r. 1257)
 Son of Sartaq

Berke (r. 1257-1266)
 Third son of Jochi

Möngke-Temür (r. 1267-1280)
 Grandson of Batu

Tode-Möngke (r. 1280-1287)
 Grandson of Batu

Tole-Buqa (r. 1287-1291)
 Great grandson of Batu

Toqta (r. 1291-1312)
 Brother of Tole-Buqa

Oz-Beg (r. 1313-1341)
 Grandson of Möngke-Temür

Tini-Beg (r. 1341-1342)
 Son of Oz-Beg

Xi Jani-Beg (r. 1342-1357)
 Brother of Tini-Beg

TABLE IV**CHAGHADAI KHANATE
1227-1338**

Chaghadai (r. 1227-1242)
Second son of Chinggis Khan

Yesu-Möngke (r. 1246-1251)
Son of Chaghadai

Qara-Hülegü (r. 1251-1260)
Grandson of Chaghadai

Orghina (1242-1246) - Regent

Alughu (r. 1260-1265/6)
Grandson of Chaghadai

Mubarak-shah (r. 1266)
Son of Qara-Hülegü

Baraq (r. 1266-1271)
Great-grandson of Chaghadai, cousin of Mubarak-Shah

Negubei (r. 1271)
Grandson of Chaghadai

Toqa-Temür (r. 1272)
Grandson of Chaghadai, cousin of Mubarak-shah and Baraq

Du'a (r. 1282-1307)
Son of Baraq, Great-great-grandson of Chaghadai

Konchek (r. 1308)
Son of Du'a

Taliqu (r. 1308-1309)
Brother of Toqa-Temür

Esen-Buqa (r. 1310-1318)
Son of Du'a

Kebek (r. 1318-1326)
Son of Du'a

Elchigidei (r. 1326)
Son of Du'a

Du'a Temür (r. 1326)
Son of Du'a

Tarmashirin (r. 1326-1334)
Son of Du'a

Buzan (r. 1334)
Grandson of Du'a and son of Du'a Temür

Chingshi (r. 1334-1338)
Grandson of Du'a and cousin of Buzan

TABLE V
HAND LIST OF TRANS-EURASIAN⁹⁵⁸ TRAVELLERS
INCLUDING ROUTES WHERE IDENTIFIABLE
1210-1338

Year	Travellers	Route
606/1210 Shiraz to Kashgar	Sa'di of Shiraz ⁹⁵⁹ (580-690/1184-1291) Brought up by the Atabeg of Fars, Sa'd b. al-Mu'izz Zangi r.591/1195	1. allegedly travelled to Kashgar under auspices of Khwārazmshah Muhammad
623-654/1226- 1256	Possible source of travel advice for the Envoys from Southern Iran	2. Balkh, Ghazna, the Panjab, Somnath, Gujerat, Yemen, the Hijaz and other parts of Arabia, Abyssinia, Syria, especially Damascus and Baalbek, North Africa and Asia Minor.
1219-1226 Dadu- Samarkand	Yeh-lu Ch'u ts'ai ⁹⁶⁰ (1189-1243) Accompanied Chinggis Khan and his armies on punitive expedition against Khwārazmshah Muhammad	May-June 1219: Departure of Mongol Army – Eder River – Black Irtysh – Altai Mountains – T'ien-shan (in the Dzungarian Ala- Tau) – Ili valley via the Talki Pass – Emil valley – plain of Qayaliq (west of modern Kopal in Kazakhstan) where all the Mongol forces and those of their allies assembled for the onslaught. – Skirted Lake Sairam – passed Almaliq – Balasagun – Talas – Samarkand.

⁹⁵⁸ This means that e.g Zhao Gong and Ch'ang Ch'un are excluded

⁹⁵⁹ E. G.Browne, *A Literary History of Persia from Firdawsi to Sa'di*, p.525 ff

⁹⁶⁰ E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century*, Vol. I, NY, Barnes and Noble, 1967; repr. of 1888 ed.), pp. 9-24.

		Thereafter based in Samarkand.
1229 + Hamadan to Ögödei's Court	32 wrestlers ⁹⁶¹	Not Known dispatched with relay horses and forage
630/1232-1233 Tus, Khurāsān-Qaraqorum	Körgüz and Amirs from Khurāsān and Māzandarān to Ögödei's court	Via Bukhara Körgüz returned via Batu's brother and Khwārazm
632-633/1234-1235 Kirmān to Ögödei's Court	Rukn al-Din Qutlugh-Sultan, son of the Qutlugh-Khan of Kirmān His cousin Qutb-ad-Dīn followed later Submission	Kirmān, Shāh-Dād, to the east of Kirmān, on the edge of the Dasht-i Lūt.
? Shiraz to Ögödei's Court	Tahamtan brother of <i>Atabeg</i> of Shiraz, Abū-Bakr / 1226-1260 Submission	Shiraz – no details of route
1236 – Autumn Mongolia to Volga	Mongol army campaign against north-western Eurasia, Russia and Eastern Europe	3000 miles in 6 months (assuming a start in spring) at 16.7 mpd. ⁹⁶²
1240s ? to Qaraqorum	Isā <i>kelemichi</i> during Qubilai's reign he established the Bureau of Western Astronomy and the Imperial Dispensary in Peking. Accompanied Bolad west in 1280s	Not Known
1240s Armenia to Qaraqorum	Armenian Prince Awag ⁹⁶³ Georgian princes:	Not Known Via Batu who sent them

⁹⁶¹ Rashīd al-Dīn/Boyle p.89

⁹⁶² John Masson Smith, Jr. *Hülegü Moves West: High Living and Heartbreak on the Road to Baghdad*,

⁹⁶³ Kirakos Ganjakets'i's *History of the Armenians/Bedrosian*, ch.29

Late 1240s Tiflis to Qaraqorum	David Narin Followed by David Ulu ⁹⁶⁴	on to Güyüg
1243-1245 Vladimir (Rus) to Qaraqorum	Constantine, son of the Grand Duke Yaroslav of Vladimir (r.1238-1246) Submission	Via Batu and 'Cumania' then unknown
1245-1247 From Lyons to Güyüg's Court at Syra Orda	Franciscan Friars John of Plano Carpini and Benedict the Pole ⁹⁶⁵ Longest recorded return journey to central Mongolia	Lyons, Bohemia, Poland, Kiev, north of Sea of Azov, Batu's encampment on Volga, north of the Aral Sea, then possibly Taraz to Orda's domain thus north of Lake Balkhash, Dzungarian Gate at Lake Arakol, thence 3 weeks to Güyüg's Court at Syra Orda. Return the same way
1246	Güyüg's (r.1246- 1248)enthronement Ambassadors travelling to attend	
1247-1250 Cilicia to Qaraqorum	Constable Smbat, brother of King Het'um of Cilicia re 'submission' Returned with son of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din (of Rum)	On February 7, 1248, Smbat sent a letter from <u>Samarkand</u> to his brother-in-law <u>Henry I,</u> <u>king of Cyprus</u>
1246 Vladimir to Qaraqorum	Grand Duke Yaroslav of Vladimir ⁹⁶⁶ (r.1238- 1246) To defend himself before Güyüg	Via Batu Died on way back to Vladimir
1240s Azerbaijan to Qaraqorum	General Chormaghun to Ogodei. Booty plus <i>t'obichaut</i> / Turkoman horses	Unknown

⁹⁶⁴ Kirakos Ganjakets'i's *History of the Armenians*/Bedrosian, ch.45

⁹⁶⁵ *Carpini*/Beazley pp. 133-137

⁹⁶⁶ C. Raymond Beazley, *The Texts and Versions of John de Plano Carpini* ... reprint.
from Hakluyt Society Latin p. 103, trans. p. 140

1240s Khurāsān to Qaraqorum	The Amir Arghun made three treks to the east in 1240s to counter intrigues as well as to attend <i>quriltais</i> . also Qadaq Noyan	First return via Merv Outward trip to Court accompanied by Juvaynī's father via Taraz ⁹⁶⁷ where heard of Güyük's death Arghun with Juvayni jnr ⁹⁶⁸ returned from Court via Almaliq and Merv To Güyük to intrigue against Arghun
Returned 1249 Vladimir to Qaraqorum	Son and heir of Yaroslav, Alexander Nevsky and his brother Andrei Invested with rule over Kiev	Presumably via Batu
c. 1248 Cyprus to Emil, south of Lake Balkhash	Dominican friar Andrew of Longjumeau Envoy to Güyük's widow, Oghul Qaimish	Unknown
1250-1255 Cilicia to Qaraqorum	King Het'um	Outwards via Derbend, on the Caspian, Batu, and Sartakh, Ural river, Irtysh river, (the northern steppe or Jochid route) Circuitous route back, paying their respects to Hulegu, Sartakh en route to Mongke and Baiju. Return took eight months via Beshbaliq, Almaliq, Ili River, Alatau mountains, Talas, Otrar,

⁹⁶⁷ Juvaynī/Boyle, II pp. 512

⁹⁶⁸ Juvaynī/Boyle, II pp. 505-525

		Samarkand, Bukhara, Tus, Mazanderan, Ray, Qazvin, Tabriz
1251	Möngke's Enthronement. Ambassadors in attendance	The Great Amir Arghun travelled via Taraz, Besh-Baligh. He met the Amir Mas'ud Beg in Besh-Baligh on his return from Möngke's enthronement arriving too late in 650/1252
c. 1251-1252 Constantinople to Qaraqorum	Baldwin of Hainault Envoy on behalf of Emperor Baldwin II	Unknown Married to a Cuman princess thus probably via Batu?
1249 – mid 1250s Cyprus via Persia to Qaraqorum	A fraudulent cleric, Theodolus pretending to be an emissary to Mongke from Bishop Odo of Châteauroux, Papal Legate on the Seventh Crusade	Unknown route to Qaraqorum but turned up with Mongke's envoy at court of the Emperor John III Ducas Vatatzes, emperor of Nicea who sent back the gold paiza to Möngke after the death of the envoy
651-653/1253-1255 Constantinople to Möngke's encampment which, since it was December was presumably his winter quarters or <i>qishlāq</i> on the Ongqin river south of Qaraqorum.	Friar William of Rubruck's party of 5. ⁹⁶⁹ Mission to bring succour to German Prisoners of Mongols at Taraz but passed them by without stopping. Unofficially travelling on behalf of King Louis IX of France	Constantinople, Black Sea to Soldaia in the Crimea; north-east by the Sea of Azov on their right, ⁹⁷⁰ to Scacatai's ⁹⁷¹ camp. Forwarded to Sartach, Batu's son, taking two months to reach Sartach from Soldaia by ox cart. Forwarded by Sartach to Batu on the eastern bank of the Volga. From Batu's encampment travelled north of the Caspian and 12 days beyond the Etilia/Volga the Iagan/Ural River.

⁹⁶⁹ Rubruck's Report to King Louis IX is a masterpiece of intelligence collection as well as providing the most comprehensive itinerary of all those who have left a record

⁹⁷⁰ Rubruck, p. 108

⁹⁷¹ A relative of Batu's. Rubruck, p. 98

		<p>The next six weeks whilst riding eastwards they were able to obtain remounts and hence following a route provided with <i>Yām</i>. They then turned south towards Kinchac, a small town apparently located near Taraz and the River Talas⁹⁷²</p> <p>Then 'Equius which Minorsky has identified this as Iki-oguz in his commentary on the <i>Hudūd al-Ālam</i> of 372/982, probably to the south of today's Taldi-Korghan⁹⁷³ itself south of Lake Balkhash. According to the <i>Hudūd al-Ālam</i> there were indeed 'stages' <i>manzil</i>, in this area during the period of the Toghuzghuz occupation in the tenth century CE.⁹⁷⁴ Cailac was Rubruck's next pause, identified as Qayaligh but the exact location is disputed though the most likely is near today's Sarqan⁹⁷⁵ on the modern road to Lake Alakol since the next stage of his journey is indeed Alakol thus he too must have used the Dzungarian Gate egress.</p> <p>Rubruck passed north of Güyüg's encampment</p>
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⁹⁷² Rubruck, p. 143

⁹⁷³ *Hudūd al-Ālam*, Minorsky, p. 277 and *Voyage dans L'Empire Mongol*, p. 239. Note 9

⁹⁷⁴ *Hudūd al-Ālam*, Minorsky p. 95

⁹⁷⁵ Rubruck, p.148 and note 1. An interesting assessment is found in *Voyage dans L'Empire Mongol* p.239 quoting Russian and Kazakh sources - M. Bajpakov, *Vestnik de l'Academie des sciences du Kazakhstan*, 1968, no. 7 p. 24

		<p>on the Emil River plain.</p> <p>Despite serious topographical problems with his route at this point⁹⁷⁶ since he appears to have been heading north-east towards the Tarbagatai Mountains Rubruck confirms that this was an established <i>Yām</i> route, since he remarks that they 'no longer came across habitations only the <i>iams</i>'.⁹⁷⁷ He spent the night in a <i>Yām</i> five days journey from Möngke's Court. Rubruck appears to have covered around 1242 miles/2000 km between 30 November and 27 December which, if the case, gives a very respectable daily travel rate of 46 miles/67 km per day.</p> <p>Return journey entirely across Jochid territory, i.e. north of Lake Balkhash</p>
<p>Autumn 1254-22 January 1258</p> <p>Mongolia to Baghdad</p>	Hülegü plus army	<p>5000 miles/8047 km</p> <p>Mongolia, ?Lake Zaysan, Almaliq, (fattened horses during summer of 1255) Samarkand, Kish (now Shahrīsabz, crossed on 2 Jan. 1256 Oxus/Amu Darya, camping at Shiburghan because of heavy snow- and hail-storms. From there to besiege Tun, in Quhistan region of eastern Iran; Tus,</p>

⁹⁷⁶ See *Rubruck* p. 166 and note 1 and p.167 note.2 Also *Voyage dans L'Empire Mongol*, p. 241 note 4.

⁹⁷⁷ *Rubruck*, p. 166

		<p>Radkan, Khabushan (modern Quchan) reaching Bistam on 2 September 1256. Maymun Diz, the Assassin Master's castle, on 7 November 1256. After his victory, Hülegü camped for the winter of 1256—57 near Qazvin and Lammassar.</p> <p>Hülegü started for Baghdad from Qazvin in March 1257. Diverted to Dinavar on 26 April—and then back to Tabriz. Tabriz to Hamadan on 26 July followed by return to Tabriz. Thence to Hamadan again on 21 September and finally set out for Baghdad.⁹⁷⁸</p>
655 & 657/1257 & 1259 Qaraqorum? To Suzdal	Mongol officials to take a census of the population ⁹⁷⁹	Presumably via the 'Jochid route'
656/1258 + Hamadan to Qaraqorum	Hülegü to Möngke informing him of Fall of Baghdad etc. Also dispatch of plunder	Unknown
Feb. 13 657-661/1259-1263 Qaraqorum to Tabriz	<p>Envoy, Chang-te, from Möngke to Hülegü</p> <p>74 days Qaraqorum to Mazanderan</p> <p>Away in total fourteen months</p>	<p>Via country of Wusun i.e. east of Balkhash Knot) Black Irtysh River, Ulungur river, Emil, Lake Alakol, Almaliq northern slope of the Alatau, Sairam, Samarkand, Mazanderan, Tabriz</p>

⁹⁷⁸ John Masson Smith, Jr. has done a time and motion study of Hülegü's move westwards. See *Hülegü Moves West: High Living and Heartbreak on the Road to Baghdad*,

⁹⁷⁹ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, p. 80, note 840

1260 – c. 1265 Constantinople to Dadu	Marco Polo's father and Uncle, traders	Constantinople, Soldaia, Sarai, Bukhara, (trapped for 3 years) then joined envoys from Hülegü to Qubilai. Rest of route unknown.
1260s Tabriz to Dadu	3 trans-Eurasian trips on behalf of Hülegü in his long-distance negotiations for administration of his Cheng-te domain. Also arrangements for falconers	Unknown
1263-1268 Mongolia to Tabriz	Hülegü's son Jumqur and remainder of Hülegü's family	Via Samarkand where Jumqur died Wives arrived after Hülegü's death
662/1264 Dadu to Almaliq and Tabriz	Qubilai to Hülegü and Chaghaidas ordering them to guard and administrate their respective territories against Ariq Böke	To Tabriz via Almaliq
662/1264-1265? Dadu to Tabriz via Almaliq	Qubilai to Hülegü, Alghu and Berke re Ariq Böke	Dadu to Almaliq, Tabriz and Berke on the Volga
?-1265 Dadu to Tabriz and return	Sartaq Noyan and 'Abd al-Rahmān. Returned to Dadu with Bayan Including possibly two mangonel makers	Unknown
1265-1270 Tabriz to Dadu and return to Sultaniyya	Abaqa to Qubilai with request for confirmation of accession	Overland but delays en route because of hostilities
1266-1269	Marco Polo's Father and Uncle	Dadu to Ayas in Cilician

Return trip from Dadu to Venice		Armenia, Acre, Venice
<p>November 1271- May 1275</p> <p>Venice to Shangdu/Xandu</p>	<p>The Polos</p> <p>envoys acting on behalf of both the Pope and Qubilai</p>	<p>Considerable controversy over route.</p> <p>1271 Acre, Ayas, Sivas, Mardin, Mosul, Baghdad to Hormuz. Yule and Cordier are firmly convinced that the party travelled from Hormuz to Khānbaliq via Kerman, the Balkh/Termez region, Badakhshan, - Kunduz, Faizabad, then the Wakhan valley rather than following the Alai Valley, Sary-Tash route. From Tashkurgan the route took them via Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Lake Lob, Tangut⁹⁸⁰ on northern frontier of China, to Kai-ping fu, 100 m. north of the Great Wall</p> <p>The route the party took from Dunhuang is perplexing. Polo mentions Etzina⁹⁸¹ on the Hei Shui River which is where provisions were traditionally taken on for the crossing of the Gobi. Meanwhile, Cordier remarks that in Marco Polo's time there was a direct route from Etzina to Qaraqorum⁹⁸² though this would have meant a double crossing of the Gobi to backtrack if the somewhat testy</p>

⁹⁸⁰ Referred to as Sachiu by Marco Polo

⁹⁸¹ Cordier is satisfied that this was the same as the ancient city of Kara Khoto. *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, II, p. 54 of the supplement and Vol. I, p. 225 note 1.

⁹⁸² *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. I, p. 225 note 1.

		<p>consensus that they followed the Huang He/Yellow River is correct.</p> <p>What is also curious about Polo's account is that there are no mentions of remounts or board and lodging.⁹⁸³</p>
<p>1278-1281(?)</p> <p>Dadu/Beijing to Jerusalem (not reached)</p> <p>Maragha</p>	<p>Rabban Bar Sauma and Rabban Marcos</p> <p>Travelling as private individuals</p>	<p>Dadu thence followed Yellow River southwest to Ningxia, taking two months then the southern track of the Taklamakan Desert to Khotan⁹⁸⁴ (This is an important corroboration of the Polos' route in reverse) where they were stranded for six months because of conflict between Qubilai and H . Finally reached Kashgar which had been plundered. Their next recorded destination was Qaidu's HQ on the Talas River. From Qaidu's camp they headed for a monastery of their order at Tus from whence they continued to the first main centre of the Hūlegūids at Maragha to meet up with their Mar Catholicus or bishop.</p>
<p>c. 1283- 1285</p> <p>Dadu to Arrān</p> <p>Arghun's winter</p>	<p><i>īlchī-i Qā'ān</i> or ambassador of the Great Qa'an, Bolad</p>	<p>Unknown but perilous because of hostilities between Qaidu and</p>

⁹⁸³ Jackson rightly points out that Polo's own perspective on late 13th century Asia would be refracted through the prism of Rusticello's prose and that we cannot afford to lay too much stress on matters that the book does not mention since a copyist might have edited out some information in the narrative. Peter Jackson, 'Marco Polo and his Travels' *Muslims, Mongols and Crusaders*, p. 266

⁹⁸⁴ Sixty years later mentioned briefly by Mustawfi c. 1340 in the Geographical Part of the *Nuzhat-al-Qulūb* p. 251 as a great kingdom with celebrated towns such as Kashgar, but oddly New Talas and Sairam which were an immense distance away northwards across the Tien Shan.

quarters	Noyan/Pūlād <i>chīnksānk</i> (c.1240-1313) ⁹⁸⁵ and Isā <i>kelemichi</i>	Du'a
1286 -1287 Tabriz to Dadu	<i>īlchī-i Qā'an</i> or ambassador of the Great Qa'an, Bolad Noyan/Pūlād <i>chīnksānk</i> (c.1240-1313) ⁹⁸⁶ and Isā <i>kelemichi</i>	Return journey from Arghun. Bolad became separated from Isā and turned back because of the hostilities between Qaidu and Du'a Only Isā made it to Dadu
Arriving Dadu 1286 Tabriz to Dadu	3 emissaries from Arghun with request to Qubilai for a bride	Unknown
1291 Tabriz to Dadu	John of Monte Corvino (1247-1328) 1 st Archbishop of Khānbalīq	Travelled by sea But In 1305 wrote that As for the road hither I may tell you that the way through the land of the Goths, subject to the Emperor of the Northern Tartars, is the shortest and safest; and by it the friars might come, along with the letter-carriers, in five or six months. ⁹⁸⁷
1289 or 1290 Attempted journey from Dadu to Tabriz	Bride for Arghun and escort	Overland but forced to turn back after 8 months because of conflict. Route unknown
1291-1294/5 Dadu to Hormuz	Marco Polo, his Father, Uncle and Bride for Arghun	Bride for Arghun escorted by Polos by Sea to Hormuz arriving 1294

⁹⁸⁵ See Allsen, *Culture and Conquest* chapters 9, 10 and 11.

⁹⁸⁶ See Allsen, *Culture and Conquest* chapters 9, 10 and 11.

⁹⁸⁷ *Cathay and the Way Thither*, translated and edited by Sir Henry Yule, second edition revised by Henri Cordier (London: Hakluyt Society, 1914), Vol. III, Second Series, Vol. 37, pp. 45-51

1291	Geikhatu Possible request for decree on accession	No details
1296 Dadu to Tabriz	Baiju On secondment from Temür Qa'an (r.1294-1307) to Ghāzān (r.1295- 1304	Unknown
1297-1305 Tabriz to Dadu	Melik Mo'azzam Fakhr-eddin Ahmad & Bocai Ilchi Sent by Ghāzān (r.1295-1304)to Temür Qa'an (r.1294-1307) Rashid al-Din mentions that 'such goods and treasures as are still in Khitai and belong to the share of Hulegu Khan and his descendants, the Qa'an has ordered to be registered and kept until they have the means and opportunity to send them'.	By Sea
1304? Tabriz to Dadu	Baiju's return to the Yuan possibly as emissary of Ghāzān	Unknown
1305 Dadu to Tabriz	Possible return of Ghāzān's mission to Iran With letter of John of Monte Corvino	Unknown
1304-1307 Dadu to Hormuz	Return to Iran of 'tribute' mission from Ghāzān	By Sea
1306	Return to Iran of mission from Ghāzān with further	Unknown

Dadu to Tabriz	letter from John of Monte Corvino	
1307-1308 Dadu to Tabriz	Mission possibly to announce death of Temür Qa'an in 1307	A fast journey thus probably the Jochid route?
Arrived February 1312 Baghdad Dadu to Baghdad	Ayadji Chinksank Devlet Shah Ambassadors from Yuan Emperor Buyantu (r.1311-1320) to Öljeitu (r.1304-1317)	Unknown
1312 Baghdad to Dadu	Öljeitu (r.703-716/1304-1316) Envoys To Yuan Emperor Buyantu (r.1311-1320)	Unknown
1313 Dadu to Tabriz	Baiju dispatched west again, to consult with Öljeitu as well as bestow honours and a gold seal on Bolad, who had in fact died in April 1313. ⁹⁸⁸	Unknown
April 1318 Padua to Dadu 3 years in China Returning to Padua in 1330	Odoric of Pordenone	Padua, crossed the Black Sea to Trebizond, Tabriz, Sultaniyya, Kashan, Yazd, Hormuz thence by sea via India to Canton and Zaitoun, Overland by way of Fucheu, the capital of the province of Fokien, to Quinsay, Nanking, Yangchufu, and finally

⁹⁸⁸ Yuan Chueh, *Ch'ing-jung chu-shih chi*, ch. 34, p. 22b; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.77

		travelled by the great canal and the Hwang-ho River to Dadu. Return overland via Tibet, Badakshan, Tabriz and Armenia
1324-1332 Tabriz to Dadu	17 plus embassies Between Abū Saʿīd and Yuan	Unknown
1324-1327 Tabriz to Dadu	Request from Abū Saʿīd for honours for the Amir Chuban ⁹⁸⁹	via the Chaghadai and Jochid khanates
1325-1354	Ibn Battuta Private individual	Last Leg to China by Sea
1332 Tabriz? - Dadu	Khodja Kamareddin (?) Ambassador from Abū Saʿīd (r. 717-736/1316-1335)	Unknown
1336 Dadu to Pope	The Genoese Andalo de Savignon envoy from Yuan emperor Toghon Temur to Pope	Unknown
1338-c. 1347 Constantinople to Dadu	John de Marignolli Papal Legate Envoy to Yuan court from Pope Benedict XI Plus suite of thirty-two persons and a magnificent war horse for the Yuan emperor	Constantinople sailed across Black Sea to Caffa, on to Uzbek Khan at Sarai where they overwintered and were treated royally. Departed spring of 1340 for Almaliq possibly via Urgench, in Khwārazm in 1339. He spent some time in 'Kamul' or Hami. ⁹⁹⁰ This could well be reflected in Marignolli's reference to the Sand Hills. Though his route thereafter to Khānbaliq is not

⁹⁸⁹ YS, ch. 29. p. 651; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p.39

⁹⁹⁰ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. I, p. 211 note 1. Other travellers who passed through include the ambassadors from the famous embassy of Shah Rukh in 1419-1422 as well as Benedict Goes in 1603

		specified. His sojourn in Hami tends to confirm the continuing importance of the Gansu/Hexi corridor route
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TABLE VI
MILITARY OPERATIONS DURING THE PERIOD
OF INTRA-CHINGGISID CONFLICT

Date	Protagonists	Area	Outcome
1260-1262	Rival claimants to succeed Mongke: Qubilai v Arīq Böke	Mongolia Upper Yenisei, Kirghiz country, Almaliq, Altai, Balkhash Knot, Kashgar, Khotan, Tangut, Otrar	Submission of Arīq Böke in 1264
1262	Jochids attack Hülegü	Invasion route, Derbend	Force of 30,000 under Nogai, inconclusive
1261-1266	Huleguids and Jochids: but only in the wintertime, since they were unable to fight in the summer due to the heat and the flooding of the river		
1264 c	Bukhara garrisoned by 5,000 Jochid troops, 3,000 Sorqaqtani Beki troops and 8,000 'collegiate' troops. On Qubilai's orders massacre of Jochid troops stationed in Bukhara	Massacre of Jochid Troops	
1264/65	Berke, Jochid Khan support of Qaidu against Chaghadaid khan Alghu		
1266	Berke, Jochid Khan fought Abaqa	Near Derbend	Berke vanquished
1266	Qaidu	Talas	Talas became one of his power

			centres
1266	Qaidu	Seized Almaliq and advanced on Uighuria, Besh Baliq	Devastated Uighur cities
1268	Qaidu v Qubilai	Qaidu forced to retreat from Almaliq to the west of Talas. Not controlled by Qaidu until c.1282	
Pre 1268?	Baraq the Chaghadaid Khan deserts Qubilai	Show of force by Qubilai at Khotan, southern Tarim Basin, within Qubilai's area of control but Khotan plundered by Barak.	
	Qaidu versus Baraq	Sri Darya	Defeat of Qaidu
	Qaidu reinforced by 50,000 Jochid troops versus Barak	Khojend on Sri Darya	Defeat of Baraq who fled to Samarkand and Bukhārā
1269	Quriltai attended by Qaidu, Baraq and Jochid representative to discuss peace proposal	Talas	Two-thirds of Transoxiana would be held by Barak and remainder by Qaidu and Jochids. Challenge to Qa'an's control of Samarkand and Bukhārā. Qubilai's authority effectively reduced to that of regional khan
1270	Baraq versus Abaqa	Baraq prevented from expanding north or east, could only	

		expand into Hūlegüid held land. First re-occupied Bukhārā; crossed the Oxus and took Khurāsān from Abaqa	
668/1270	Baraq versus Abaqa	July, Battle of Herat, Baraq defeated	
670/1271 August	Baraq versus Qaidu	Almaliq region	<p>Night before Qaidu's attack Baraq died (possibly poisoned)</p> <p>Qaidu enthroned as Ögödeid Khan in Talas, with power to appoint Chaghadaids Khan</p> <p>Dissident Ögödeids and Chaghadaids</p>
1271	Baraq's sons rebel against Qaidu	Rebels rampage between Bukhārā and Khojend	
1271	Qaidu versus Qubilai's son Nomuqan	Almaliq Clash avoided	Qubilai gives up Central Asia as too far for his forces from China. Qaidu reclaims Almaliq
1272	Rebellion of Chaghadaids khan Negubei against Qaidu	Qaidu dispatched army against Negubei, location unknown	Negubei fled east and was killed
1273, January	Abaqa versus Chaghadaids	<p>Abaqa's troops enter Bukhārā</p> <p>Followed by Alghu's sons' troops retaking</p>	Abaqa's troops plundered and destroyed for a week

		Bukhārā	
1274/1275	Qubilai versus Hoqu. Guyug Khan's son	Hoqu based in strategic Hexi/Gansu corridor	Hoqu fled to Khotan and Kashgar where he wreaked considerable destruction
1276, 1278-1283	Qubilai	Reinforced southern Taklamakan Route	
1276 (-1283)	Sons of Alghu and Baraq versus Qaidu.	The sons attack Bukhārā and environs devastating Transoxiana for seven years	
1276-1279	Qubilai versus Southern Sung	Southern China	Qubilai militarily engaged on two fronts, against rebel princes and Southern Sung
1278, 1283, 1286	Qubilai reinforced abandoned Uighur capital	Besh Baliq	Qubilai planted military agricultural colonies in Besh Baliq
1277 - 1282	Qubilai versus rebel Toluid princes, Tugh Temür, grandson of Tolui and another grandson, Shiregi, the son of Möngke	Qaraqorum taken by rebel princes; retaken by Qubilai, scene of conflict for five years	Rebel princes plunder the late Möngke's <i>ordo</i>
1280	A son/grandson of Hoqu v Qubilai	Qara Qocho	Raid on granaries causing severe famine
1281	Qubilai versus Qaidu: defeat of a force of Qaidu	Khotan	
1282	Reconciliation between Qaidu and Baraq's sons	Qaidu appoints Du'a Chaghadaids Khan	

1282	Qaidu/Chaghadaids	Qaidu appoints Baraq's son, Du'a the Chaghadaid khan.	Alliance between Qaidu, Ögödeid khan and Chaghadaids, the latter the junior partners
Pre 1283	Alghu's sons	Submit to Qubilai	
1284	Qubilai versus Qaidu, temporary defeat of Qaidu's forces	Tarim Basin	
1285	Qubilai versus Du'a: Qubilai's forces defeated	Qara Qocho and Uighuria	Six month siege of Qara Qocho
1286	Qubilai versus Du'a and Qaidu: Qubilai's forces defeated	Uighuria, Besh Baliq	Du'a and Qaidu's control of Uighuria consolidated, appropriated revenues of Uighuria and Tarim Basin
Mid-1280s	Qubilai v rebels in Tibet and descendents of Chinggis Khan's half brother in Manchuria Nayan in Manchuria crushed	Tibet Manchuria Qubilai dispatched forces to Mongolia and southern Manchuria	Tibet had been partially controlled by Ögödeids; Qubilai in person led forces against Nayan in Manchuria
1288	Yuan retreat from Tarim basin and Uighuria	Khotan, Kashgar, Besh Baliq	
1288	Incursions by Qaidu's and Du'a's forces into northwest Mongolia	Northwest Mongolia	
1288	Arghun versus Qaidu Attack on envoys from Khurāsān to Arghun by Qaidu's forces under	Balkh, Merv and Nīshāpūr	An autonomous Mongol force, the Qara'unas ruled Balkh, ShAbūrghan, Badakhshan,

	Chaghadaid command		Merv Frequently raided Delhi Sultanate
1289	Qubilai versus Qaidu Qubilai's forces surrounded and retreated	Eastern Altai Qaraqorum	Yuan loss of Mongolian heartland
	Qubilai versus Qaidu Retreat by Qaidu	Qaraqorum	Qaidu lost Qaraqorum but still held much of Mongolia westwards
1289-1291	Arghun versus rebel commander Nauruz Invasion of Khurāsān by Nauruz in 1291 plus Qaidu's forces	Khurāsān, Mashhad, Tus, Nishāpūr, Badghis	Invasion coincide with Arghun's death leaving Nauruz free to pillage for a year
1291	Desertion of Arghun's commander Uighurtai to Qaidu.	Jurjan and eastern Mazandaran	
1290-1293	Qubilai versus Qaidu, skirmishes	Mongolia	
1292	Qubilai versus Qaidu and Melik Temūr, Ariq Böke's son. Defeat of Melik Temūr	West of the Qanghai mountains	
1293	Qubilai versus Qaidu: Qaidu's forces pushed out of Yenisei region	Qirghiz domains on Upper Yenisei Mongolia	Yuan regained control of southern Siberia and Mongolia
1294	Death of Qubilai	China	1295 enthronement of Temūr (1294-1307)
1295	Baidu/Ghāzān versus Du'a Invasion of Khurāsān and	Mazandaran, Khurāsān, south of Herat	Du'a pillaged and slaughtered throughout Khurāsān

	Mazandaran by Du'a		
1297	Temür's border commanders versus Qaidu and Du'a. Retreat of the latter	Area between Yenisei and Irtish on borders of White Horde	
1298 pre	Bayan, khan of White Horde versus his cousin Kuiluk who was supported by Qaidu and Du'a. Numerous military encounters	North of Balkhash Knot and bordering Qaidu's territory	
1298	Temür versus Du'a, Yuan forces defeated.		
1298/99	Temür versus Du'a. Defeat of Du'a's forces	Eastern Altai, near Khovd	
1299	Jochid internal struggle resolved		Toqto, Jochid Khan, support of Yuan and Hülegüids
1300	Ghāzān versus Du'a	Fars, Kirman	Du'a played a leading role in raids on Khurāsān, a region given to his father's Baraq at the <i>quriltai</i> of dissident princes in 1269
1300	Temür versus Qaidu. Major Yuan assault on Qaidu, who beat strategic retreat	Eastern Altai	
autumn of 1301 – battles over several days	Temür versus Qaidu. Qaidu launched major attack on Yuan forces in autumn of 1301. Round one resounding Yuan victory. Round two	South of the Altai	Du'a refused to join Qaidu in major assault on Yuan but eventually turned up Qaidu wounded

	to Qaidu and Du'a. Round three to Qaidu		and died shortly after the battle. Du'a also wounded
1301	Death of Qaidu		
1302	Khan of White Horde, Bayan, suggests Mongol coalition of Jochids, Yuan, Hülegüids , White Horde etc. against Du'a and Qaidu's heir, Chapar		Proposed coalition effectively checkmated Du'a and Chapar
702/1302-03	Öljeitü v Qaidu's son Sarban. Defeat for Sarban	Tus, Meshed, N. Afghanistan	Decisive victory for Öljeitü and Sarban's fleeing forces wiped out by snow and blizzards
sixth of Sha'ban 702/March 26 th , 1303	News of Qaidu's death reached Ghāzān in Syria		
1303 - Autumn	Du'a, Chapar and Arīq Böke's son Melik Temür sent an emissary to the Yuan to seek an end to the fighting.		
1304, late	Chapar and Du'a sent another emissary to Yuan announcing their surrender		
1304, September	Emissaries arrive at Öljeitü's court from Temür Qa'an, Qaidu's heir and Du'a		
1305-1306	Ögödeids versus Chaghadaids	Khurāsān, Samarkand,	Ögödeid princes upset by Peace proposal fought

	skirmishes	Bukhārā, Khojand, Talas,	Chaghadaids Talas laid waste
1306/07	Surrender of Ögödeid khan Chapar to Du'a	Northern and western Mongolia	Ögödeid property distributed between Yuan and Chaghadaids
1307	Qurilatai convened by Du'a	Almaliq	
1307	Death of Du'a Instability in Chaghadaid <i>ulus</i> because of contested succession	Almaliq	Intra-Chaghadaid conflict
1309	Ögödeid princes battle Du'a's son and successor, Kebek	Almaliq	Ögödeid forces defeated
1310	Ögödeid prince Chapar surrendered to Yuan but en route plundered his rival's domain on Emil	Emil River Yuan Court	
1313-1314	Invasion of Khwārazm controlled by Jochids by Baba, descendent of Jochi Qasar	Khwārazm	Baba sought a rift between Jochids and Hülegüids – rejected by Öljeitü and killed
1318	Invasion of Abū Sa'īd's domains by the Jochid Khan Uzbeg	Invasion route Derbend	
1325	Choban, Abū Sa'īd's senior amir, campaign against Jochids	Invasion route Derbend	
1334	Invasion of Abū Sa'īd's domains by the Jochid Khan Uzbeg	Invasion route Derbend	
1337	Chaghadaid succession dispute	West of Almaliq	Friar Pascal's caravan held up in Chaghadaid

			khanate because of fear of war and plunder
1339	Chaghadaid khanate, succession dispute	Almaliq	After succession of Ali Sultan (r.1338-1339), friars martyred

TABLE VII**Some Place Names and their Alternatives**

Polities	Known as today	Alternative Names
Armenia	Armenia South of Georgia	Greater Armenia as distinct from Lesser Armenia or Cilicia, Hermenia
Bolghar	Russia; Left bank of the Volga, 90 miles below Kazan	Bolgara, Great Bulgaria
Cataia	Northern China	Khitai, Cathay
Cilicia	Turkey, bordering the Mediterranean along the Taurus mountains	Lesser Armenia
Cumania	Russia, north-west of Black Seas and north of Caspian Sea	Kun, Polovtsy, Подовцы, Qipchak, Desht Qipchak, Zolotaya orda, Golden Horde, Falones, Phalagi, Valvi
Gazaria	Crimea	
Ilkhanate	Iran and Azerbaijan	Persia, Lords of the East (<i>Levant</i>)
Jebāl/Irāq-i ‘Ajam	Iraq of the Persians or Western Iranian Plateau to be distinguished from “Arab” Iraq or Mesopotamia	
Ulus of Jochi See Kipchak Khanata		
Kao-li	Korea	Koryo,
Khitai	North China	Cathay, Qidān, Liao Dynasty
Khwarazm	Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan	Xwārasm
Kipchak Khanate	Russia	Jochid Khanate, Lords of the West, <i>Ponent</i>
Longa	Possibly South East Manchuria	
Manzi	South China	Man-tze, Mangi; M. Nangiyas from Ch. Nanchia or southern people;

Rum	Turkey	Seljuq Sultanate of Iconium
Seres	China	Great Cataia
Solanga	N. Korea	Solangqa, Koryo
Southern Sung	South China	See Manzi
Tangut	North-western Chinese provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, eastern Qinghai, northern Shaanxi, north eastern Xinjiang and south west Inner Mongolia Separated from Qaraqorum by the Gobi	Hsi Hsia, Xi Xia, Qashi, Minyak, Mji-njaa, Hexi, Great Xia State of the White and Lofty, Ho Hsi (west of the [Yellow] River)
Uighuria	China, Xinjiang	
<i>Ulus</i> of Chaghadaï	Uzbekistan,	Middle Empire, Imperium Medium, Empire of the Medes,
<i>Ulus</i> of Orda	Russia, north of Aral Sea to north of Lake Balkhash	Ulus of White Horde
Yuan	China	
Rivers	Located today in:	Alternative Names
Amu Darya	Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan Rises in the Pamirs and debouches into the Aral Sea via Khwarazm	Охус, Амудария; آمودریا, <i>Ceyhun</i> ; آمو سیند, Jayhoun, Vaksu,
Chu River	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Чүй,
Emil	China, Kazakhstan	Эмель, Emin, <i>Ēmīn hé</i> , 额敏河
Huai He	China (formed border between Jin and Southern Sung)	Hwai Ho, Quiqa Moren
Ili	China, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, S-E Kazakhstan	دهریاسی ند لی, Или, 伊犁河
Irtys	Russia, Siberia	Иртыш, <i>Yertis</i> , بُ یرند ش
Karamoran	China	Yellow River, Black River
Khalka		

Kherlen	Mongolia	Хэрлэн гол
Ob	Russia, Siberia	Обь, Kolta, Umar
Onon	Mongolia	Онон гол,
Orkhon	Mongolia	Орхон гол, Orkhon gol
Ruo Shui/Heishui	China, Gansu Inner Mongolia	弱水, literally: "weak river" Etsin Gol, Ejin River), Black River, Dong He, Xi He
Selenge	Mongolia/Russia	Selenge mörön, Selenge gol, Сэлэнгэ мөрөн
Sri Darya	Rises in Tien Shan and debouches into the Aral Sea. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan	Jaxartes, Seyhun River, Сырдария, سيحون; سیردریا; Yakhsha Arta, Yinchu, Pearl River
Volga	Russia	Волга, Itil, Etil, Sar-su
Yellow River	China, Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Dhandong	Huang He, Хатан гол Ĥatan Gol, Шар мөрөн Šar Mörön
Yenisei	Russia, Siberia, Mongolia	Енисей, Gorlog,
Lakes & Seas		
Alakol Lake	Kazakhstan	Алакөл
Aral Sea		Sea of Sır, Sır Tengizi.
Azov Sea		Sea of Sudak
Lake Baikal	Russia, Siberia	озеро Байкал, Байгал нуур
Lake Balkhash	Kazakhstan Semirechye	Balqaş köli; Озеро Балхаш,
Black Sea		Greater Sea, Euxine, Pontus, Mare Maurum v. Nigrum
Caspian Sea		Bahr-i Khurz, Vatuk, Baku, Darya Ghilani, Mare Seruanicum, Sea of Shirwan, Mare Salvanicum, Sea of Baku, Sea of Sarai, Sea of Bascon

Ebinur Hu	China	Ev nuur;
Issy Kul	Kyrgyzstan (founder of Ghaznavids born at Barskhan on shores of Issy Kul)	Ysyk K�l, Ысык-К�л Иссык-Куль
Pontus	Sea of Marmara	Mare Ponticum
Sairam Lake	China, Xinjiang – N NW of Yining	Sairmam Nor, S�t K�l, 赛里木湖; S�il�m� h�, Blessing Lake
Lake Zaysan	Kazakhstan	Зайсан к�лі, Zaisan nuur, Noble Lake, озеро Зайсан
		Sea of S�r, S�r Tengizi.
Mountains & Passes		
Altai	Western border of Mongolia	Chin Shan
Kirgizskii		Formerly Alexandrovskii range
Nantau	China, between Bejing and Kalgan/Great Wall	
Qara Tau		
Tarbaghatai		
Tien Shan	China, Xinjiang, Between the Tarim Basin and the Jungdar Pendi	T'ien Shan, Tian Shan, Yin Shan
Iron Gates:		
Derbend	Western Shore of Caspian. A pass through the ancient wall from the Castle of Derbend along the ridges of the Caucasus, known as the Rampart of Alexander or <i>Sadd-i- Iskandar, Dagh bary</i>	Iron Gates, Darbandi- Rum, Bab-al-abvab, Demir k�pi, the Sarmatic Gates of Ptolemy, The Claustra Caspiorum of Tacitus,
Kalugah	South of Shahrsabz	
Talki Defile	North of Kuldja/Urumtsi	

Kalgan	China, Gate in the Great Wall north of Beijing	Chang-kia-kau
Nankow Pass	30 miles northwest of Beijing	Chamchiyal
Towns & Areas		
Almaliq	China, western Xinjiang, south of Lake Sairam	Kuldja, Kildzha, Gulja, Yining, Armalec,
Amol-e Shatt Strategic crossing on left bank of the Oxus river where the highroad across Khurasan led to Bukhara	Turkmen Republic	Charzhou
Andkhudh	Eastern edge of Qara Qum desert now near the border of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan. An important assembly and staging post for caravans heading for Transoxiana until recent times.	Andkhuy
Astarābād	Iran, south-eastern corner of the Caspian Sea	Gorgān
Ayas	Turkey, Gulf of Scanderoon, chief port of Cilician Armenia	Layas, Ayacio, Aiazso, Giazza, Glaza, La Jazza, Laiacio,
Balāsāghūn	Qarakhitai capital, exact whereabouts uncertain but probably on the headwaters of the Chu River in the foothills of the Kirgizskii range.	Quz Ordu, (but by the Mongols as Quz Baligh (Good City))
Balkh	South of the middle Oxus	In region known in medieval times as Tokhārestān
Baudas	Iraq	Baghdad, Baldac, (Ch. Bao-da)
Beijing	China, north-east	Chung-tu, Yen-king, (Jurchen/Chin capital)

		Chun king, Ta Ching fu, Chung-tu, Chungdu, Zhongdu, "Imperial city of the centre", Peking, "the northern capital. Khanbalig, Khan Baliq, Cambaluc, Great Capital, Jungdu, Ta-Tu, Dadu, Daidu, Beiping
Besh-Baliq/ Beshbalig	China, northwest Xinjiang, northern slope of the Tien Shan. One of the Uighur's principal cities	Urumtsi, Urumchi, Bishbalik, Bie-shi-ba-li, Pentapolis, Pei t'ing, Wulumuqi, Town of the Five Castles
Bukhara	Soghdian city now in Uzbekistan	
Cambaluc	China	See Beijing
Chungdu	China	See Beijing
Chung-hsing	Tungut/Hsi Hsia capital	Yinchuan
Cimesquinte	Uzbekistan	Samarkand, Siemisekan
Dandānqān	Turkmenistan. Northern Khurasan between Merv and Sarakhs site of decisive battle in 431/1040 between Ghaznavids and Seljuqs	
Dunhuang	China, western end of Gansu Corridor	Tun huang, Sha Chou, Sachiū
Emil	China, Kazakhstan East of Lake Alakol	Ye-mi-shi, Omyl,
Equius	One of the principal residences of the Chaghadaid <i>ulus</i> . Vicinity of Almaligh, (near modern Kuldja)	Quyas
Ghazni	Afghanistan in region of Zābolestān	
Gintarchan	Russia	Gittarchan, Astrakhan
Hami	China, Xinjiang Province	Camul, Kamul, I-wu-lum I-chou
	China, Southern Sung Capital	Hang-chau fu
Herat	Afghanistan on Heri Rud	Harāt
Kai-ping fu	China, near base of	Qubilai's summer

	Khingán Mountains 100 miles north of the Great Wall and c. 367 miles from Beijing	retreat; City of Peace; Shangtu, Upper Court; Shangdu Keibung, Djao-Naiman Sumé
Kalgan	China, Gate through Great Wall	
Kara-jang	China	Mongolian for Yunnan
Kara Khodjo	China, Tarim Basin One of the principal Uighur cities.	Kara Khocho, Qaraqochó Huo-chou, Fire City
Khara Koto	Western Inner Mongolia	Etzina, Hēichéng, 黑城, Black City
Kashgar	China, Xinjiang Province	Cascar, K'o-shi-ha-li
Kayalik/Kopal	Russia	Cailac
Kerman	Persian, province in southeast Iran	
Khan-Baliq	China	See Beijing
Khwarazm	Uzbekistan, Karakalpak region. Located on lower Oxus river	Chorasmia
Khojand	On Syr Daria south-east of Tashkent	Khujand, K'u-djan, Hu-ch'an
Khovd	Foot of Altai mts. On Buyant river	Hovd, Khobdo
Khurasan	Northeastern province of Iran but wider region in earlier times including lands lying between the region of Ray as far as eastern Afghanistan and the frontiers of India	Khorasan
Kiakhta		
Kinjanfu	China, capital of Shensi was in Tangut	Sian, Quengianfu
Kish		Shahrisabz,
Kongi/Konfu	China	Chin-i-Kalan, Great China, Canton
Liang-chou	China, originally a Tangut city on southern edge of the Gobi	Wuwei, Hsi-liang
Merv	Turkmenistan (northern Khurasan) was bastion of Arab power at time of Arab conquests	Marv, Mary
Ning-hsia	Tangut capital	Egrigaya
Ordu-Baliq	Mongolia	Karabalghasun,

Otrar		Oltrarre
Parvān	Afghanistan, lower Panjir valley and a stage on the route from Ghazna and Kabul to Balkh and upper Oxus	
Pulad	North of Lake Sairam in Xinjiang, China.	Bolat, Po-lo, Bu-la
Qamju	China, Kansu, was in Tangut	Kanchow
Qaraqorum	Mongolia	
Qayaligh	Upper reaches of the Chu River right bank of the Ili, west of Kopal. Ogodei's grandson Qaidu's <i>ulus</i> , granted in 1252.	
Quinsai	China	Hangchow,
Sarai	Russia, bank of the Akhutba branch of the Volga, 70 miles above Astrakhan	The Palace; Centre of the <i>ulus</i> of Jochi. Destroyed by Timur in 1395-6
Sarakhs	On frontier between Iran and Turkmenistan on the Tajūn/Tedzhen river	
Semirechye	Kyrgyzstan	Land of the seven rivers, Yeti Su
Shang-tu	S-E Mongolia	K-ai-p'ing fu, Xanadu Qubilai's summer residence
Shash	Uzbekistan	Chach, Tashkent
Shebargān	On the Herat-Merv-al Rudh-Balkh road in the modern Afghan province of Juzjān. In earlier Islamic period was the chief town of Guzgān	Shoborqān, Shoburqān Oshburqān
Sistan	Iran and Afghanistan	Nimruz
Soldaia	Crimea	Soldachia, Sudak
Tabriz	Northern Iran	Tauris, Torissi
Talas (see Tarāz below)		T'a-la-sz
Tana	Russia. 30 kms north of Rostov and on southern bank of the estuary of the Don debouching into Sea of Azov.	Azov, Azaq, Azof

	Starting point for caravans to the Volga and beyond	
Tarāz	Approx. 170 miles NE of Tashkent	Talas
Tauris	Northern Iran	Tabriz
Termed	Uzbekistan on upper Oxus/Amu Darya and of great strategic importance as a crossing place en route from Balkh to upper Oxus right-bank and beyond	Termez
Tokhārestān	Northern Afghanistan/south of the upper Amu Darya with Balkh as its chief city. Today Baghlān is the chief town of Baghlān province	
Tus	Iran, Khurasan on Nishapur-Sarakhs road. Shrine of the Eighth Imam of the Shi'a	Mashhad
Uliassutai		Uliastai
Uzgand	Kyrgyzstan, Ferghana Valley; the seat of the early Qarakhanid khans	Ozkend
Urgench	Khwarazm	Urghanj
Yenching	China	Dadu, Ta-Tu, Peking, Beijing
Zaitun	China	Zayton, Chin-cheu Chuanchow, Caiton,

TABLE VIII
MEASUREMENTS and WEIGHTS

The Definition of “Travel” (<i>safar</i>) According to Islamic Law is based on ‘distance’	<p>Hanbalīs, Shāf’īs and Mālikīs all agreed that the distance of 'travel' was 4 <i>Barīds</i> or 16 <i>farāsikh</i> but disagreed on whether this was covered in one day or two at 8 <i>farāsikh a day</i></p> <p>The majority opinion within the Hanafī school appears to be that five <i>farāsikh</i> can be travelled in a 24-hour period thus taking longer at three days</p>
<i>Rabat</i>	An Afghan term for a caravanserai but also used as a measure of distance, since these are established every four farsakhs or sixteen miles.
<i>Farsakh</i>	Arabicised from the old Persian <i>parsang</i> being the distance which a laden mule will walk in the hour, which varies from three to four miles.
<i>Parasang (farsakh)</i> in Ancient Iran	<p>Between 2 ½ and 3 ½ miles which is equivalent to 12,000 Common Ells or Tailor’s Cubits ((<i>Gaz-i-Khayyat</i>) or equal to 40 Roman stadia, but varying from between 30 to 60 depending on terrain.</p> <p>Originally the distance which could be covered on foot in an hour or ‘marching mile’ which for foot-soldiers was about 2.48/4 km</p> <p>Herodotus refers to an army travelling the equivalent of five parasangs per day</p>
<i>Farsakh</i> (Khwārazm pre Malik Shah)	15,000 paces
<i>Farsakh</i> (Azerbaijan and Armenia pre	10,000 paces

Malik Shah)	
<i>Farsakh</i> (pre Malik Shah in the 2 Iraqs, Kurdistan, Luristan, Khuzistan, Khurāsān, Fars, Shabankarah and Diyar Bakr)	6,000 paces.
<i>Farsakh</i> (as laid down by Malik Shah d. 1092)	6,000 paces
<i>Farsakh</i> (laid down by Öljeitü (r.703-716/1304-1316).	8,000 Tailor's Cubits (<i>Gaz-i-Khayyati</i>)
<i>Farsang</i>	Is a metric unit today of 6 km or 4 miles
<i>Barīd</i>	<p>A <i>Barīd</i> was the distance that a messenger could travel before he needed to stop to allow his animal to rest. Eventually, the term began to be applied to the 'messenger' himself and then to the actual 'message'</p> <p>Four <i>farsakhs</i> made up one <i>Barīd</i></p>
<i>Rabat</i>	An Afghan term for a caravanserai but also used as a measure of distance, since these are established every four <i>farsakhs</i> or sixteen miles.
<i>Dhirā</i> (cubit)	3,000 <i>dhirā</i> to the Arabic <i>mil</i> and 3 <i>mils</i> to the <i>farsakh</i>
Degree and Minutes= <i>darajahs</i> and <i>daqīqahs</i>	
Miles	
Arabic <i>mil</i> /Mile	3,000 <i>dhirā</i> , 6,474 feet or 1 1/15 th geographical mile
<i>Dhirā</i> (cubit)	3,000 <i>dhirā</i> to the Arabic <i>mil</i> and 3 <i>mils</i> to the <i>farsakh</i>

Roman <i>millia</i>	measured as a thousand paces by foot - A 'pace' was defined to be a full stride of a Roman soldier - the distance a Roman legion could march in 1,000 paces or 2,000 steps. A Roman foot was 29.6 cm and a standard pace was 5 Roman feet, thus the Roman mile would have been 4,856 feet or 1,480 metres. But surviving milestones on Roman roads are often closer to 5,000 feet or 1,520 metres.
<i>Marhalah</i> (Arabic)	A day's journey – 25-30 <i>mils</i> (Arabic miles) to the <i>marhalah</i>
<i>majirā</i>	Approx. 100 Arabic <i>mils</i> therefore 4 days journey
English Mile	1,609 m or 5280 feet
Bohemian Mile (probably used by Benedict the Pole)	7 km or 4 and 3/8 English miles = Average distance covered by a pedestrian in 2 hours
League	1,500 paces Adopted by the Western Europe from the <i>Farsakh</i>
<i>Mamzıl</i> / <i>Menzıl</i> (Türkish)	A measure of distance on a time basis. A distance that a caravan could be expected to cover in a single day was a <i>menzil</i> , meaning a day's travel of about 30 km. A caravan could travel this distance in six hours or eight hours in difficult desert terrain. Also 10 manzils = 270 Arabian <i>mils</i>
<i>Potai</i> A Türkic measurement	A <i>potai</i> is the common unit of road measurement amongst the Türkis and it varies according to the nature of the country over which the traveller passed.

	For purposes of calculation, it may be reckoned at between two and a quarter and two and a half miles depending on whether the number of <i>potai</i> was for mounted men riding ponies or for the slower moving as or camel.
<i>Tash</i> A Türkic measurement especially in Tarim Basin	So called from the stones put up by the roadside to mark the distances. Probably about five miles per hour but varied according to terrain
<i>Chi</i>	A Chinese measurement which under the Sung is estimated at 12.28 inches.
<i>Cun</i>	A Chinese inch. Ten Chinese inches or <i>cun</i> make a foot, so the Chinese inch = 1.23 English inches
<i>Li</i>	A traditional unit of distance in China of approximately 1/3 mile or 500 metres.
Degree and Minutes= <i>darajahs</i> and <i>daqiqahs</i>	In the time of al-Ma'mūn it was noted by al-Farghānī that to one celestial degree corresponds on the earth's surface 562/3 miles, of which each contains 4,000 cubits
Arrow Shot	180-275 metres
Mongolia Horse Distances in: Half a day	The distance travelled by the horse in a half day or for 5 – 6 hours - roughly 40- 50 km or 24 – 31 miles
Mongolia Horse Distances in: 10 – 12 hours	The distance travelled by the horse for 10-12 hours is about 100 km or 62 miles
Mongolia Horse Distances: A Short Day	A short day is understood as one day going a distance of 120 – 150 km or 74 - 93 miles

Mongolian Measurements: One tuu	the distance between the ends of outstretched thumb and middle finger
Mongolian Measurements: One span	the distance from the tip of the thumb to the second joint of the middle finger
Mongolian Measurements: One blunt span	the distance from the tip of the thumb to the second joint of the middle finger
Mongolian Measurements: One fathom	the distance between the tips of the middle fingers of the outstretched arms of a man
Mongolian Measurements: One <i>delem</i>	From the tip of an outstretched arm to the tip of the middle finger on the heart or centre of the body
Mongolian Migratory Distances: In Khangai 2 – 6 times a year On the steppe 5 – 19 times a year	Average migratory distance 10 km
Mongolian Migratory Distances: On the steppe 5 – 19 times a year	
Mongolian Migratory Distances: In the Gobi: 10 – 20 times a year	Average migratory distance: 50 km
Silks: Between 3 rd to 10 th centuries a bolt of Chinese silk was 1 Chinese foot wide and 40 Chinese feet long which in today's	Width: 22 inches or 56 cm Length of bolt: 39 feet or 12 metres

equivalent is: This standard-sized bolt fell into disuse after the fall of Tang and the Central Eurasian economic reverted to a subsistence economy	
<i>‘ alafah pl. ‘ ulūfah</i>	Arabo-Persian term for fodder, but equated to food ration under the Mongols and could include the provision of robes
<i>batman</i>	Turko-Mongolian: Equated in the <i>Rasulid Hexaglot</i> with the Arabo-Persian <i>mann</i> , a variably dry measure
<i>tambin</i>	Jug – at one time the amount of the wine ration for official messengers in the Yuan
<i>vedro</i>	Old Russian for bucket and designated the official liquid travel ration.

TABLE IX

Glossary of Terms and Concepts

Appendix I defines the concepts and terms used in this paper plus others that are common in the sources and historiography in the spirit of the OWTRAD Project Glossary where encouragement is given to the more explicit, more consistent use of such terms whilst acknowledging that such definitions are not the only correct or infallible ones. Those concerning communication and travel related activities are based on those defined in the Trade Routes' Glossary, Old World Trade Routes (OWTRAD) project overseen by Dr T. Matthew Ciolek.⁹⁹¹

Abbreviations:

(Af.) = Afghan; (Ar.) = Arabic; (C.) = Chinese; (Fa.) = Farsi; (M.) = Mongolian; (La.) = Latin; (Tk.) = Türkic; (Tm.) = Türkmeni; (Tr.) = Turkish

Adab *Ar)* originally = custom. In early Islam it came to mean good upbringing, urbanity and courtesy, culture based on poetry, oratory, historical and tribal traditions of the ancient Arabs. During Abbasid period the idea was broadened to include Iranian epic and narrative works, Indian fables and Greek philosophy

Aıl: *Yurt (qv)* (Türkic) livestock keeping family

Aimag: *(M)* The meaning of this term has changed over time. In the twelfth century an *aimag* was understood as a group of *ails*, which were essentially blood-related and of related tribes. In addition, *ails* and individual persons, who normally would have been members of another kinship group, could also have belonged to an *aimag*. A large *aimag* can be described as a federation.

According to the *Yuanshi*, the word *aimag* was used in connection with the *olon vang* (many princes) generally in order to emphasise that *aimag* belonged to *olon vang*.

⁹⁹¹ Ciolek, T. Matthew. 2006-present. A Trade Routes' Glossary: Architectural, Geographical and Historical Terms relating to Long Distance Trade, Communication and Pilgrimage Routes. Old World Trade Routes (OWTRAD) Project. Canberra: www.ciolek.com-Asia Pacific Research Online. Version 1.7 (Aug 2009). www.ciolek.com/OWTRAD/trade-routes-glossary.html

	These were the people who had close relations to the golden tribe (<i>altan urug</i>) of Chinggis Khan, the Borjigid
<i>Aiqaq</i>	(M) Informer
<i>Al-tamgha</i>	(M) An official seal to authenticate documents
<i>Altan Urug:</i>	(M) The Golden Family' i.e. the closest family members of Chinggis Khan
<i>Amir</i>	Islamic term for high dignitaries. Used in the Chaghadaï Khanate to designate the head of a clan, while the title khan was reserved for the direct descendants of Chinggis Khan.
<i>Anda</i>	(M) Blood Brother. The duties of an Anda relationship comprised peacefulness, assistance in the event of enemy attack and also support in combat during revenge raids or conquests.
<i>Aqa</i>	(M) Elder Brother or more senior member of a family as distinct from <i>Ini</i> , a junior or younger member of the family
<i>Atabeg</i>	(TM) originally the guardians of Saljuq princes
Authority	Authority is distinct from political power. Legitimate authority generates a duty to be obeyed but effective or <i>de facto</i> authority can exist without being legitimate. The attempt to rule without legitimacy is the exercise raw power - not authority
<i>Avahana</i>	(Fa.)the relay-post system of the Achaemenids (539-330 BC) on the Sardis-Susa/Royal Road (translations and cognate terms: <i>barid</i> (Tr.), <i>cursus publicus</i> (La.), <i>hsin-chu</i> (C.) <i>i-chan</i> (C.), <i>Yām</i> (Tk.)
<i>Ayimaq</i>	(M) A Group of related families camping together
<i>Bahā'dur</i>	(M) Brave, added to the given name of a warrior hero
<i>Bakhsh</i>	(M) share of the profits of empire such as peoples, booty etc.
<i>Barīd</i>	(Tr.) The postal service established in the 13 th c. by the Mamluk Sultans to permit regular and speedy relay of official messages. Translations and cognate terms: <i>avahana</i> (Fa.); <i>cursus publicus</i> (La.); <i>hsin-chu</i> (C.); <i>i-chan</i> (C.), <i>Yām</i> (Tk.)
<i>Basqaq</i>	(M) Chinggisid governor of a conquered territory
<i>Ba'urchi</i>	(M) Cook or steward, title of a member of the <i>Keshig</i> (q.v.)
<i>Bazaar</i> (Tr.)	(Fa.) A Persian variant name for a market place. Translations and cognate terms: Pazar (Tr.) Carsi

Beacon	(<i>En.</i>) A tall structure, such as a tower or cairn, whose during the day and the fire lit at its top at night served as a navigation marker for travellers at sea or those in featureless terrain.
<i>Bilig</i>	(<i>M</i>) wise saying of a dignitary
<i>Bitikchi</i>	(<i>M</i>) Secretary or scribe
<i>Bo'ol</i>	(<i>M</i>) <i>Bo'ol</i> refers in general to members of a conquered tribe who were obliged to serve the victorious tribe by, for example, tending the herds, beating during hunts etc. <i>bo'ol</i> could be voluntarily entrusted by their parents to a lord even as children. Some Russian and Mongolian historians equate <i>bo'ol</i> with slave.
<i>Borjigid</i>	(<i>M</i>) In the Mongolian federation, Borjigid or Khiad/Khiyat Borjigid was the central grouping. The Borjigid consisted of the descendants of Bodonchar, Chinggis Khan was his eleventh-generation descendant. Members of the Borjigid held very influential positions in all <i>aimags</i> of Outer Mongolia up to the 19 th century.
<i>Buke'ul</i>	(<i>M</i>) Food Taster and member of Keshig responsible for supplies
<i>Bulghaq/ Bulgha</i>	(<i>Tr</i>) denoted both 'enemy' or 'in revolt' (<i>M</i>)
<i>cagaan yastan</i>	(<i>M</i>) White bone lineages or aristocrats
<i>Capar/chapar</i>	(<i>Fa.</i>) a post rider. A mode of travel along the 5 Government post-roads in 19 th c. Persia viz 'from Teheran to Resht, Tabriz, Meshed, Kerman and the Persian Gulf port of Bushire. These so-called roads [were], however, often mere caravan-tracks, sometimes totally hidden by drifting sand or snow.'
<i>Chapar-khanehs</i>	(<i>Fa.</i>) postal stations which in 19 th century Persian were placed on average five farsakhs or about twenty English miles apart. Translations and cognate terms: <i>mutatio</i> (La.); <i>sekka</i> (Fa.); <i>Yām</i> (Tk.); <i>yi</i> (C.); <i>zhi</i> (C.) see also <i>Khanqah</i>
<i>Caravan</i>	(<i>Fa.</i>) A convoy of land travellers and their pack animals or wheeled vehicles journeying together as a team. Translations and cognate terms: <i>kafila</i> (Ar.)
<i>Caravanserai</i>	(<i>Fa.</i>) roadside inn providing lodging for caravan traffic, i.e. merchants, their servants, their animals and their merchandise, on the main trade routes. Water for drinking, washing and ritual ablutions was provided, implying a year-round presence of large amounts of drinking water. They also kept fodder for animals and had shops for travellers where they could acquire new supplies.

<i>Cherig</i>	(<i>m</i>) Auxiliary troops
Conquest	<p>Overcoming and taking of control of a place or people by use of military force. Derived from Middle English with the general sense 'acquire, attain' and from Old French <i>conquerre</i>, based on Latin <i>conquirere</i> 'gain, win', from <i>con-</i> (expressing completion) + <i>quaerere</i> 'seek'. It can be seen, therefore, that the element of military force, though implicit today in the term, is not necessarily implicit in the original meaning.</p> <p>Central Asian rulers looked upon war and conquest as the business of displacing rival elites in a process which had little to do with the inhabitants of a territory who were viewed as passive</p>
<i>Cursus publicus</i>	<p>(<i>La</i>). The imperial postal system of the Roman Empire. It was primarily concerned with official business, such as the carriage of government or military officers, government payload such as monies from tax collection and official despatches. It could be made available to private individuals with special permission and for a fee. Translations and cognate terms: <i>avahana</i> (Fa.); <i>barid</i> (Tr.); <i>hsin-chu</i> (C.); <i>i-chan</i> (C.), <i>Yām</i> (Tk.)</p>
<i>Darqhan</i> <i>Pl. Darghad</i>	Persian gentry or landowner
<i>Darughachi</i>	<p>(<i>M</i>) a post generally reserved for Mongols appointed alongside the regular heads of many agencies in both central and territorial administrations as mandatory co-signers of all documents issuing from these agencies. Derived from <i>daru</i>, to press down, possibly referring to one who holds people in subjection, or one who controls subject people as well as the act of fixing a seal</p>
<i>El/Il</i>	<p>(<i>TK</i>) A word common to Mongolian and Türkic with the sense of 'peaceful' or 'pacified/submissive' as distinct to those not yet pacified or brought under submission or in revolt see <i>bulghaq/bulgha</i></p>
<i>Elchi/Ilchi</i>	<p>(<i>M</i>) Envoys who conveyed messages between both friendly and enemy tribes, calling for a common battle against enemies, demanding support for raids and advice on economic problems. In the SHM, two forms of conveyance of messages are described: viz: the speech and the song</p>
Empire	Supreme political power over several countries exercised by a single authority
<i>Farsakh, Farsang</i>	<p>(<i>Fa. Ar.</i>) Persian measure of distance on a time basis, originally the distance which could be covered on foot in an hour, or 'marching mile'.</p>

Grand Strategy	denotes the process of planning, co-ordinating and directing the use of all of the resources of a polity - social, political, economic and military – toward the attainment of a political objective. Political-military means to ends - a state's theory on how it can best "cause" security for itself.... A grand strategy must identify likely threats to a state's security and it must devise political, economic, military and other remedies for those threats. Priorities must be established among both threat and remedies
Hanging path	In earlier times a trestle path built along sheer cliffs and steep sides of inaccessible mountain valleys as in the Karakoram mountains and in Qinling.
<i>Hazāra</i>	Military unit of one thousand troops
<i>Hsin-chu</i>	(C.) literally [people's] letter agencies in Ming and Ch'ing China this was a postal system which handled private communications and documents. Translations and cognate terms: <i>avahana</i> (Fa.); <i>barid</i> (Tr.); <i>cursus publicus</i> (La.); <i>i-chan</i> (C.), <i>Yām</i> (Tk.)
<i>I-chan</i>	(C.) in Ming and Ch'ing China a postal service of mounted government couriers for delivery of official communications and documents complemented by the <i>p'u</i> system of foot couriers. Translations and cognate terms: <i>avahana</i> (Fa.); <i>barid</i> (Tr.); <i>cursus publicus</i> (La.); <i>i-chan</i> (C.), <i>Yām</i> (Tk.)
<i>Il/el</i>	A word common to Mongolian and Türkic with the sense of 'peaceful' or 'pacified' as distinct to those not yet pacified or brought under submission
Ilchi (TK. E Elçi)	Emissary. More a personal envoy rather than a mere 'messenger'
<i>Il Khan</i>	Possibly originating as a Jochid title meaning subordinate to the Khan or Great Khan. Rashīd al-Dīn refers to this title in connection with the Jochid Khans as well as to those of Iran, also used by the Armenian historian Vardan in relation to Hülegü but the Armenians had been close at one stage to the Jochids. Despite these documentary references, and because there are reservations about the exact interpretation of <i>Ilkhan</i> , the least controversial course seems to be to refer to Hülegü and his successors and their khanate/sultanate as the Hülegüids which also has the merit of bringing them into line with their Jochid relatives to the north as well as the Chaghadaids. Possible connection with eleventh century Qarakhanid title of <i>Ilig Khan</i> meaning Territorial Khan
<i>Ini</i>	(M) Younger brother or junior member of a family

<i>Inji</i>	(<i>M</i>) servant given as part of a dowry
<i>Irged/pl.Irgen</i>	(<i>M</i>) Simple people = Members of a livestock keeping family <i>ail</i> or people who do not belong anywhere/‘foreign’ people
<i>Itinerarium pictum</i>	(<i>La.</i>) A Roman travel document with a route-map of the recommended itinerary
<i>Itinerarium scriptum</i>	(<i>La.</i>) A Roman travel document with written instructions issued to officers of the state administration or the army providing the timetable of the journey, details of the approved itinerary (‘viandi ordo’) and secured the bearer access to free meals and accommodation
<i>Keshig</i>	(<i>M</i>) The Guard or Household of the Khan or senior prince
<i>Khabir</i>	(<i>Ar.</i>) A desert guide, caravan leader
<i>Khamag Mongol</i>	Confederation of Mongol tribes before the foundation of the empire in 1206
<i>Khan</i>	Ruler of an <i>Ulus</i> (q.v.)
<i>Khan</i>	(<i>Fa.</i>) an (urban) establishment where commercial travellers could lodge for a period with facilities provided for the sale of their wares, unlike caravanserais which were short-term resting places on a route
<i>Kharita</i>	the bag or pouch in which the couriers of the <i>barīd</i> conveyed letters; <i>black silk pouches were used by caliphal envoys</i>
<i>Khar yastan</i>	(<i>M</i>) <i>Black bone lineages – commoners or low people</i>
<i>Khāssa</i>	Special royal servant or intimate of a ruler
<i>Khāssa Khādem</i>	As above but one who was also a eunuch
<i>Khātūn</i>	(<i>M</i>) Title of Mongol (and Türkish) princesses
<i>Khuree</i>	(<i>M</i>)_A <i>Khuree</i> migration was a large group migration in the 12 th – 13 th centuries which consisted of several hundred paternally (<i>yasan torol</i>) and maternally (<i>cusan torol</i>) related members
<i>Khurged</i>	(<i>M</i>) Sons-in-laws and brothers-in-law - later replaced by the term <i>tabunang</i> . Generally aristocratic men who married women from tribes of good background in order to form valuable connections and friendships
Legitimacy	No single and universally acceptable definition of legitimacy exists. The concept of legitimacy is closely intertwined with a network of normative and empirical concepts in political science, such as power, authority,

rights, obligation, sovereignty, consent, institution and the state.

The transformation of physical coercion into legitimate authority. An attempt to rule without legitimacy is an attempt to exercise power—not authority

War was an effective way of gaining and retaining power because victory provided legitimacy. Pre-modern test of legitimacy: Traditional systems of elite dynastic rule were expected to provide security and economic stability in exchange for obedience.

<i>Li</i>	(C.) a traditional unit of distance in China of approximately 1/3 mile or 576 metres
<i>Malon</i>	(He.) A spot where caravans, individuals or even armies encamped for the night.
<i>Mansio</i>	(La.) A place for an overnight stay along the official Roman network, the <i>cursus publicus</i> . Approximately every 15 miles/24 km was a <i>mansio</i> , which was a full-scale wayside inn with stables, tavern, rooms for travellers and bath houses. <i>Mansiones</i> also housed the detachment of troops that guarded the roads along their whole length. These would check the identities, travel permits and cargoes of road users.
<i>Manzil</i>	(Ar.) the halting place of a stage or march, or a day's stage
<i>Menzil</i>	(Tr.) Turkish measure of distance on a time basis. A distance that a caravan could be expected to cover in a single day which was about 30 km. A caravan could travel this distance in six hours or eight hours in difficult desert terrain.
Migration:	See also <i>Khuree</i> and <i>Otor</i> . Larger nomadic tribes such as the Khamag, Mongol, Jalair, Kerait, Naiman, Merkit, Ongut and the Tartars each possessed its own region of pasturage which extended from the mountains into the lowlands. No livestock keeper could personally choose the seasonal migration paths: these followed the ancient tradition of pasture land use.
Mile	(La.) the distance a Roman legion could march in 1,000 paces or 2,000 steps. A Roman foot was 29.6 cm and a standard pace was 5 Roman feet, thus the Roman mile would have been 4,856 feet or 1,480 metres. But surviving milestones on Roman roads are often closer to 5,000 feet or 1,520 metres.
<i>Moshref</i>	Lit. "one who overlooks, supervises". Either an intelligence agent particularly in the Ghaznavid period, tasked with reporting back to the Sultan on the propensities of officials

and royal relatives or an official with supervisory duties within the palace administration or royal workshops.

<i>Mutatio</i>	(<i>La.</i>) in Roman times a staging post for changing mounts which was roughly every 5 miles or 8 km, the most a horse could safely be ridden hard. It was essentially a stable where mounted messengers could change horses with a tavern to obtain refreshment. Translations and cognate terms: <i>chapar-khaneh</i> (Fa.) <i>mutatio</i> (La.); <i>sekka</i> (Fa.); <i>Yām</i> (Tk.); <i>yi</i> (C.); <i>zhi</i> (C.) see also <i>Khanqah</i>
<i>Nerge</i>	(<i>M</i>) A hunting term for encirclement of prey but also used for a similar formation frequently used by the Mongols in battle
<i>Nöker / Nökhör</i>	(<i>M</i>) privileged personal retainer, companion at arms
<i>Noyan</i>	Commander
<i>Nutug</i>	(<i>M</i>) In Mongolia a herder's customary pastures; place of residence or migration region; nomadic population and its entire livestock; nb: ownership conditions did not relate to property in the economic sense, but rather to access to pasture land. Similar terms to <i>nutug</i> are <i>yurt</i> and <i>etugen</i> which in essence do not differ in meaning from <i>nutug</i> .
<i>Obog</i>	(<i>M</i>) <i>obog</i> and <i>urug</i> are used almost interchangeably in the sources. An <i>obog</i> usually consisted of patrilinear descendants, <i>yaşan torol</i> . It was thus an agnatic kinship group
<i>Oghuz/ Ghuzz</i>	Türk federation known from time of the early Türk empires – included Seljuq family
<i>Oghul</i>	(<i>M</i>) Son in Türk but a title of Mongol princes of the blood
<i>Ordo</i>	(<i>M</i>) Royal encampment of a Chinggisid prince or one of his wives consisting of retainers and their families who were tied to their master/mistress and could not leave of their own volition.
<i>Ortaq</i>	(<i>M</i>) Merchant partner of a prince or other senior official using capital supplied by the prince
<i>Otog</i>	Ancient Türk, Soghdian and Mongolian for homeland, home, hearth and family. An <i>otog</i> consisted of <i>ail</i> groups that were related to one another, family relations, however, not being the decisive criterion for the union. A unit that was obliged to mobilise a definite number of warriors and to collect taxes. More frequently used in the 15 th and 16 th centuries
<i>Otor</i>	(<i>M</i>) An <i>Otor</i> migration is when livestock keepers migrate without their households and with only one species of

	animal in order to make use of feed reserves in distant pastures. They allow their animals to graze at a location until the pasture is exhausted and then they move on
<i>Osh</i>	A hostile relationship between individual persons or tribes.
<i>Paiza/Pa'iza</i>	Chinese <i>p'ai tzu</i> – a tablet of authority similar to a passport though requiring protection for the holder as well as enabling the requisition of mounts, supplies etc. Different grades.
Polity	A state as a political entity; an organized society – used herein instead of state
Power	Political power is the ability of a state or agent to get others to act in ways that they desire even when the subject does not want to do what the agent wants him to do
<i>P'u</i>	(C) In Ming and Ch'ing China a postal service using foot runners as couriers for the delivery of official communications and documents. They were complemented by the <i>i-chan</i> system of mounted couriers.
<i>Qa'an</i>	(TK) Türkic title for the supreme leader
Qarakhanids	Türk federation r. 382-609/992-1212. Established in Transoxiana, Ferghana and Eastern Turkestan
<i>Qara.....</i>	(M) Commoner or black
Qarshi	(M) Palace
<i>Qipchaq</i>	Türkic nomadic peoples conquered by the Jochids. Also known as Cumans, Xifjax, Xbsax (Armenian); Polovsky, (Russian), Pallidi, Falones, (German); Phalagi, Valvi, Xartes (Armenian), Qangli. Closely associated with the Khwarazmshahs and the Qipchaq Mamluks of Egypt-Syria.
<i>Qorchi</i>	(M) Bodyguard – Archer, Quiver bearer
<i>Quriltai</i>	(M) Assembly at which important questions were discussed including nomination of a Qa'an and decisions concerning raids
<i>Rabad</i>	(Tm.) suburbs or trade quarters of a city, surrounding the <i>shakhristan</i>
<i>Ribat/Rabat</i>	(Ar.) A fort, or a fortified rest house on a land route, or a fortified caravanserai. Also a monastic fortress/theological boarding college for volunteer fighters (i.e. jihadis)
Road	A problem arises in a work such as this to articulate the pathways used by travellers since a 'road' is a way between two locations whose surface has been artificially improved, i.e. smoothed, levelled, widened, drained, paved,

	etc. A track, bridle path or pathways are the terms generally used herein.
<i>Robat</i>	(Af.) an Afghan term for a caravanserai but also used as a measure of distance, since these establishments are every four <i>farsakhs</i> or sixteen miles.
<i>Sāhib Dīwān</i>	Senior official, Treasurer
Samanids	Originally Iranian <i>dihqāns</i> or landowners in Transoxiana. Largely autonomous amirs ruling over Transoxiana and Khurasan 204-395/819-1005
<i>Sarai/Serai</i>	(Fa.Hi.) A palace but also a caravanserai especially in India used for a building for the accommodation of travellers with their pack animals
<i>Sardoba</i>	(Uz.) A reservoir with a cupola for drinking water constructed at places used by caravans for short rest periods during a day's journey. The Uzbeki sultan Abdullakhan (1583-1598) is said to have built between 400-1,000 such structures.
<i>Sekka</i>	(Fa.) A relay post station. Translations and cognate terms: <i>chapar-khaneh</i> (Fa.) <i>mutatio</i> (La.); <i>sekka</i> (Fa.); <i>Yām</i> (Tk.); <i>yi</i> (C.); <i>zhi</i> (C.) see also <i>Khanqah</i>
<i>Shagird chapar</i>	(Fa.) A 'post-boy'. A hired guide who rides with a traveller from one <i>chapar-khana</i> or post station to another.
<i>Shahna</i>	(Fa) The Arabic-Persian equivalent of <i>Basqaq</i> (q.v.) Chinggisid Governor
Signal Route	the movement of information via pathways dedicated to the delivery of messages through the use of semaphore stations, beacons, watch-towers, homing pigeons
State	As distinct from a Mongol <i>Ulus</i> . The state is a modern political construction that emerged in early modern Europe, but has been replicated in all other parts of the world. The most important aspect of the state that makes it a distinctive and new form of political association is its most abstract quality: it is a <i>corporate</i> entity with a territory and is considered as an organized political community under one government. One state is distinguished from another by its having its own independent structure of political authority, and an attachment to separate physical territories.
Strategic	The coherent use of power to attain desired objectives
<i>Tabūnang</i>	Sons-in-laws and brothers-in-law - replaced the earlier term <i>Khurged</i> . Generally aristocratic men who married women from tribes of good background in order to form valuable connections and friendships
<i>Tamgha</i>	(M) An official seal to authenticate documents

<i>Taq</i>	(Uz.) a crossroad market place
<i>Tim</i>	(Uz.) A self-contained market place of particular architectural form, distinct from the crossroad markets (<i>taqs</i>) of Bukhārā.
<i>Tuman</i>	(M) Army unit of ten thousand also province under military administration. E
<i>Turqaq/</i>	(T) Day Guard
<i>Ulus</i>	The population subject to a Mongol prince - domain plus people
<i>Uruq</i>	(M) Family, posterity
Watchtower	A regularly manned and well-elevated observation post. It can be a standalone structure or constructed as part of a fort or a caravanserai. Watch-towers could form a part of a signals route
<i>Yabghu</i>	Ancient Turk noble title held by an eleventh century Oghuz rival of Seljuq family based at Jand on lower Syr Darya
<i>Yām</i>	(Tk.) Post station with relay mounts. A standard Yām, under a system established (1206-1227) by Chinggis Khan was manned by a postal master and had 20 horses for use by government couriers. Translations and cognate terms: <i>chapar-khaneh</i> (Fa.) <i>mutatio</i> (La.); <i>sekka</i> (Fa.); <i>Yām</i> (Tk.); <i>yi</i> (C.); <i>zhi</i> (C.) see also <i>Khanqah</i>
<i>Yāmchi</i>	Official in charge of a post station
<i>Yarghuchi</i>	(M) Judge
<i>Yarligh/jarliq</i>	(M) Decree or Ordinance
<i>Yasa</i>	(M) The inviolable decrees of Chinggis Khan binding future generations
<i>Yeke terge'ür</i>	Royal Road – also with the meaning of the road along which Temujin proceeded on his way to supreme power
<i>Yi</i>	(C.) a postal station with relay mounts
<i>Yosun</i>	(M) Often linked with <i>Yasa</i> (qv) as the <i>Yasa</i> and <i>Yosun</i> of Chinggis Khan. Traditions sometimes defined as 'customary law'
<i>Yurt</i>	(T, M) domain of a Mongol prince
<i>Zhi</i>	(C.) a postal station with relay horses that could also provide shelter, fresh horses, food and supplies

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