

Mobility and Immobility in the Mongol Empire

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Abstract

Mobility, and less so immobility, has always been in the focus of socio-cultural analysis of Mongolian societies given their nomadic way of live and the interconnectedness of its various communities scattered all over Eurasia, in particular in the apogee of the Mongol Empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Yet, what are the tangible manifestations and the limits of mobility, how can we measure them? This chapter will briefly readdress some well and perhaps lesser-known topics of the medieval Mongolian world generally related to mobility in a wider sense before attention is given to the epistemological arenas of culture transfer and long-distance trade. In the first part of this article, the dialectics of mobility is discussed as socio-cultural mobility, e.g., carrier making, loyalty, integration by difference, models of inclusive ethnicity and exclusive descent (the 'Chinggisid Principle'), invention of genealogies, marriage alliances, and religious tolerance (until Islamisation). The second part deals with spatial mobility, in particular in terms of tribute relations and military service, culture transfer and travelling ideas, movement control and population transfer, and the flow of goods and peoples.

Introduction

Mobility in Mongolian societies, and less so immobility, has always been in the focus of social and historical studies given the nomadic way of life and the political encroachment of the Mongols into various parts of Asia and Europe. The Mongol Empire in particular has continuously attracted attention as a result of its expansion speed and establishment of a *Pax Mongolica* (roughly 1270–1360) in a relatively short period of time.¹ During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Mongols not only launched an early Mongol state,² but within just a few decades had extended

¹ On the concept of *Pax Mongolica* and Mongolian world domination see Klaus Sagaster, "Herrschaftsideologie und Friedensgedanke bei den Mongolen," *Central Asiatic Journal* 17, no. 2-4 (1973): 223–42 and the references provided there. For a recent reevaluation of the concept see Nicola di Cosmo, "Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53 (2010): 83-108. I am grateful to Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz for pointing this out to me.

² Lawrence Krader, *Formation of the State* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968); idem, "Mongols: The Governed and the Governors," *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'Histoire Comparative des Institutions* 22 (1969): 512–26; idem, "The Origin of the State Among the Nomads of Asia," in *The Early State*, ed. Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 93–107; Herbert Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God: The Legitimation of the Yüan-Dynasty* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978); Anatolii Mikhailovich Khazanov, "The Early State Among the Eurasian Nomads," in *The Study of the State*, ed. Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 155–75; Nikolai Nikolaevich Kradin, "The Origins of the State Among the Pastoral Nomads," in *Ethnohistorische Wege und Lehrjahre eines Philosophen: Festschrift für Lawrence Krader zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Dittmar Schorkowitz

their hegemony into China, Central Asia, Persia, Caucasia, Eastern Europe, and Siberia – culturally very diverse areas that now became closely interconnected.³

If we may call this a success story in medieval empire building, then mobility – “the ability of people, ideas, and artifacts to move or be moved across both space and society”⁴ – surely played a decisive role. The question is, how can we measure mobility, and what are its concrete manifestations? In order to define the capacities and limitations of mobility, in this chapter I shall readdress several topics, both well-known and less familiar, from the medieval Mongolian world related to mobility in a wider sense before turning to the epistemological arenas of culture transfer and long-distance trade. In the first part the dialectics of mobility and immobility will be discussed as ‘social and cultural mobility’ in terms of career-making, loyalty, integration, ethnicity, descent, genealogies, marriage, and religion. The second part will focus on ‘spatial mobility’ in terms of tribute relations and military service, culture transfer and travelling ideas, movement control and population transfer, and the flow and restriction of goods.

Social and Cultural Mobility in the Mongol Empire

Social mobility can be defined as “the movement in time of individuals, families, or other social units between positions of varying advantage in the system of social stratification of a society”⁵ including class, status groups, kinship units, and social origins; it thus provides us with an analytical tool that can be applied not just to the present, but also to societies of the distant past. The relevance of social and spatial mobility for the late Middle Ages in Europe has been securely established,⁶ and it is

(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 163–77; idem, “The Transformation of Political Systems from Chiefdom to State: Mongolian Example, 1180(?)–1206,” in: *Alternative Pathways to Early State: International Symposium*, ed. Institut Istoriei, Arkheologii i Etnografii, Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk (Vladivostok: Dal’nauka, 1995), 136–43.

³ Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). Here I use the classic work of Boyle, although there is a new translation into English: Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rashiduddin Fazlullah’s Jami’u’l-tawarikh (Compendium of Chronicles): A History of the Mongols*, trans. Wheeler McIntosh Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ., Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998–1999); Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror by ‘Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Bertold Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde. Die Mongolen in Rußland, 1223–1502* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1943); idem, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985); Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Thomas T. Allsen, “Prelude to the Western Campaigns: Mongol Military Operations in the Volga-Ural Region, 1217–1237,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983): 5–24; idem, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Michael Weiers, *Geschichte der Mongolen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005).

⁴ Michal Biran, “Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia (MONGOL),” *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2018): 136.

⁵ Walter Müller and Reinhard Pollack, “Mobility, Social,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 15, ed. James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 640.

⁶ David Herlihy, “Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 4 (1973): 625.

even more central for the expanding Mongol empire with its comparatively weaker institutional boundaries and its higher degree of cultural diversity.

An early well-known example of career-making and loyalty is reported in the *Secret History* for the year 1206 when Temüjin was proclaimed Khagan of all Mongols. With the Mongol Empire still at an early stage of state formation, Genghis Khan fundamentally reformed the military organization. When judging over his enemies and allies he said: “To those who sided with me when I was establishing *our* nation, I shall express my appreciation and, having formed units of a thousand, I shall appoint them commanders of a thousand.”⁷ Besides loyalty, other selection criteria were proficiency and leadership in matters of warfare, while ethnic belonging ranked further down, below even family and kinship ties.

Genghis Khan’s military reform included reorganizing his former favorites or bodyguards *khishigten* (*keshig*) into one *tümen* (i.e. 10,000 men) selected from 95 *mingqan* (i.e. 1,000 men) chosen from among the sons of his commanders and the common people based on their combat skills. And he was crystal-clear in his orders to his newly appointed commanders on how to choose men for military service: “When guards will be recruited for Us, and the sons of commanders of ten thousand, of a thousand and of a hundred, or the sons of ordinary people, will enter Our service, those shall be recruited who are able and of good appearance, and who are deemed suitable to serve by Our side.”⁸ The *khishigten* was a vanguard of multiethnic composition and ranked above normal troops; it was divided into three departments: the privileged night watch (*kebtegül*, totaling one *mingqan*), the archers or quiver bearers (*qorčïn*, also one *mingqan*), and the day watch (*turqa’ut*, eight *mingqan*). The remarkable career of Chormaqan-Qorči, a high-ranking officer from the second department, is illustrative of the social mobility that was possible. Originating from the Sunud (Sonid, Sönid, Sünit) clan of the Ötegen (Oteget) Mongols, he was first decorated by Genghis Khan after the siege of Urgench in 1221. Subsequently Ögedei Khan sent him to Persia in 1229, where he became famous for conquering Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia in the 1230s, although he was not himself a member of the ruling Borjigid lineage.⁹

⁷ Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. with a historical and philological commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 133–34.

⁸ Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 152–53.

⁹ Erich Haenisch, *Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1948), 33, 77–79, 104–11, 131–39; Paul Pelliot, *Notes critiques d’histoire kalmouke: *Texte / **Tableaux généalogiques* (Œuvres posthumes VI), publiées sous les auspices de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres et avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1960), 31–32, 85–86; Klaus Hesse, *Abstammung, Weiderecht und Abgabe: Zum Problem der konsanguinal-politischen Organisation der Mongolen des 13. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 113–16; Dittmar Schorkowitz, *Die soziale und politische Organisation bei den Kalmücken (Oiraten) und Prozesse der Akkulturation vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ethnohistorische Untersuchungen über die mongolischen Völkerschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 60–66; Christopher P. Atwood, “Military of the Mongol Empire,” in *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, ed. Christopher Atwood (New York: Facts On File, 2004), 348–54.

The same selection criteria were applied in the administrative and cultural hemispheres of the Mongol Empire, emphasizing the very same principles of ‘integration by difference.’ There are abundant examples of those ‘able and of good appearance’ who made their way to the upper echelon of the imperial elite irrespective of ethnic or class belonging. The famous judge (*yeke jarquči*) Šigi Qutuqu (1180–1260) responsible for the compilation of the Mongol Code ‘*Yasa*’ starting in 1206 was a Tatar child of noble origin who was adopted into Temüjin’s family around 1182–1183, becoming thus either a stepbrother (according to the *Secret History*) or, more likely, a stepson (*örgömel diüü*) of Genghis Khan (according to Rashīd al-Dīn). Šigi Qutuqu, like many Tatar nobles, learned the Uighur script upon orders of Genghis Khan; he was most probably taught by T’a-t’a T’ung-a, a Naiman *daruqa* who entered the service of Genghis Khan and introduced the script for official purposes after the defeat of Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking (possibly mongolized) people, in 1204.¹⁰ Šigi Qutuqu’s biography is depicted in greater detail by yet another prominent, almost contemporary retainer of the empire, the great historian and statesman Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318) who is himself an example of the possibilities of social mobility. Born into a Jewish family of Hamadan in northwest Persia, he converted to Islam by the age of thirty and entered the court of the Ilkhanids as a physician, becoming an influential advisor to Abaqa Khan (1265–82) and later a vizier to Mahmud Ghazan (1295–1304) and Öljeitü (1304–16). Rashīd al-Dīn has been credited with designing and implementing the reforms of Ghazan Khan on the basis of “Iranian traditions of a centralized feudal form of government [and] the necessity for a just taxation policy.”¹¹

In spite of all this, it has often been said that the Mongols could conquer the world on horseback, but that “it cannot be ruled from a horse,”¹² as Ögedei Khan was told. This is suggestive of a revealing kind of immobility. The Mongols main strategy was in fact limited to the extraction of resources and taxes from peasants, urban dwellers, and merchants. However, to achieve this aim, their rulers were flexible enough to adapt to local experience, to integrate cultural techniques and governmental expertise from the region, and to change their official faith either to Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam when necessary. But by doing so, the Mongol elite underwent various forms of cultural change, too.

The dynamics of Mongol expansion and conquest followed a few simple rules, not invented but rather elaborated by Genghis Khan and his successors at a time when economic growth and infrastructure in Eurasia had reached levels unparalleled in earlier

¹⁰ Paul Ratchnevsky, “Šigi-Qutuqu, ein mongolischer Gefolgsmann im 12.–13. Jahrhundert,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 10, no. 2 (1965): 87–88, fn. 2, 90–91, 96; Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, XXXV–XXXVII, 58, 134–35.

¹¹ Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky, “Rashīd al-Dīn’s Conception of the State,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, no. 1–3 (1970): 151; cf. also the entry “Rashīd ad-Dīn,” in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. Micropædia: Ready Reference, 15. ed., vol. 9 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010), 946.

¹² Bira Shagdar, “The Mongol Empire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: East-West Relations,” in *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*, ed. Vadime Elisseeff (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 131.

empires, such as the Xiongnu or Rouran Khanate. As with preceding steppe empires, local rulers could either assent to his demand for surrender or face subjugation and destruction. Those who surrendered in good time were offered positions, while those who changed allegiance too late were often regarded as not reliable and deployed at the front lines of the battlefield. They then were the first to attack their neighbors when the Mongol command decided to move on, a situation which local rulers were generally anxious to avoid at any cost, offering an alliance instead. But even then, they were obliged to provide troops, horses, food, and services to the Mongol army and collect taxes for the Khan, a burden that was compensated only in part by plunder and the spoils of war (Mong. *sauqa*) they could gain for themselves. The effects of this snowball dynamic have often been cited as an explanation for the rapid drive of empire building from the Mongolian to the Hungarian plains within little more than three decades, and rightly so. Indeed, the conquest into ever-new territories and their subsequent exploitation by victorious auxiliary forces was a decisive factor in the empire's success as well as its eventual collapse. However, the origins of imperial overstretch cannot be attributed to territorial expansion alone. Accelerating contradictions between core and peripheries, between cultural continuity and change, as well as a weakening resilience of long-tested integration strategies produced limitations of their own.

These dynamics are very well documented in the historical records of the *Secret History*, the *Altan Tobči*, and *Erdeni-yin Tobči*. The Oirat people, for example, who in 1201 were still part of the opposing Jamukha camp, but were among the few who submitted in good time, are a case in point. They entered the services of the state in 1207, contributing significantly to early empire building, and received a privileged place among the tributary peoples. Rewarding the military merits of this cooperation, Genghis Khan made Quduka Beki, the most prominent Oirat noble, his kinsman. He gave Qoluiqan, the daughter of his eldest son Jochi, to Quduka Beki's eldest son Törölchi, whose younger brother Inalchi received his daughter Checheyigen.¹³ Thanks to these marriage alliances, which spread to other Borjigin lines in the following generations, the Oirats received a distinguished status. In the Mongol Empire they now formed the left or 'eastern wing,' *je'ün qar* (pronounced like *zun gar*, hence Zungharia), of the westernmost part of the empire. After the collapse of the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Oirats were still an important player and among the first to engage in feudal warfare: following Elbeg Nigülesügchi khagan's death in 1399, Toghon tayishi (Tosor) declared himself khagan of all Mongols and the Oirats formed an independent yet short-lived khanate (1401–04).

¹³ Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 62–64, 163–65. See also Charles R. Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan Tobči: Text, Translation and Critical Notes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1955); Sayang Sečen, *Erdeni-yin Tobči: Mongolian Chronicle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); George Qingzhi Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 39, 129–31; Biran, *Mobility*, 144.

While this account tells us much about the Mongol model of inclusive ethnicity and integration by difference (as opposed to the principle of ‘integration by sameness’ typical of the modern nationalizing state),¹⁴ it also highlights some of its limitations, such as exclusive descent and the politics of kinship. Though various groups and individuals could achieve high positions in the imperial hierarchy through merits and awards, the affiliation with a Chinggisid lineage – preferably by blood, otherwise through marriage – remained the essential condition for the acquisition of political power. This has been called the ‘Chinggisid Principle,’ which implied that “only male descendants of Chinggis khan were entitled to call themselves khans.”¹⁵ However, this ultimately led to fierce succession wars and resulted in a very ‘creative’ usage of genealogies. Hence, the ‘Chinggisid principle’ became dysfunctional over time and was gradually replaced by the ‘divine’ legitimation and authentication of the Dalai Lama following the late sixteenth-century re-invention of Tibetan Buddhism among the Western Mongols.¹⁶

Marriage alliances, fictive kinship (*andanar*), polygyny, adaptation, and the fusion or fission of clans were principles widely practiced in nomadic social organization in order to maintain social and political mobility. However, what worked well on a communal basis for providing asylum and shelter to widows, war orphans or refugees, often became counter-productive when applied to society as a whole in an imperial context. Polygyny resulted in unclear claims to power and spurred succession struggles among competing lineages. Marriage alliances, though frequently used as a device to reinforce bonds that bridged rivaling polities, often turned into a source of intrigue and conflict among the participating parties.¹⁷

Spatial and Economic Mobility in the Mongol Empire

If we turn now to spatial and economic mobility, the relations between expansion and conquest on the one hand and local governance and tribute collection on the other are quite obvious. In order to rule, the Mongols had to introduce check-and-balance-systems at their peripheries. In order to tax local populations, tax collectors and census takers were needed. And in order to communicate with foreign powers

¹⁴ Cf. Günther Schlee, *Ruling over Ethnic and religious Differences: A Comparative Essay on Empires* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper No. 143). Halle/Saale: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2013.

¹⁵ Junko Miyawaki, “The Chinggisid Principle in Russia,” *Russian History* 19, no. 1–4 (1992): 266. See also Denis Sinor, “The Acquisition, the Legitimation, the Confirmation and the Limitations of Political Power in Medieval Inner Asia,” in *Representing Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission and the Sacred*, ed. Isabelle Charleux, Grégory Delaplace, Roberte Hamayon, and Scott Pearce (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2010), 37–60.

¹⁶ Zahiruddin Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo Oriente, 1970), 99; Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 105–07, 120–21; Miyawaki, “The Chinggisid Principle,” 269–72.

¹⁷ Dittmar Schorkowitz, “Konsanguinal-politische Organisation und Grenzen der Souveränität bei den Kalmücken-Oiraten,” in *Altaica Berolinensia: The Concept of Sovereignty in the Altaic World*, ed. Barbara Kellner-Heinkele (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 229–39.

in Asia and Europe, expertise in foreign languages and diplomatic conventions was indispensable. To put it in a nutshell, the Mongols were able and flexible enough to combine and re-combine the principles of their own political organization with the institutions, practices, and inventions of the peoples they brought under their rule. They not only adapted to and learned from sedentary civilizations, but also hired foreign experts when needed and relocated populations and war prisoners for their own purposes, happened to farmers from Central Asia and China, German craftsmen from Transylvania, or carpenters and goldsmiths from Russia.¹⁸

As a result, the *Pax Mongolica* created a situation of intensified culture transfer, travelling ideas, and an enhanced flow of goods in which all parts of the empire could participate. The empire thus acted as a mediator of ‘cultural goods’ from China, Central Asia, and Persia for a highly ambitious elite, significantly shaping cultural identity in western Eurasia and the *Slavia Asiatica* in particular.¹⁹ The Ulus Jochi, for instance, known also as the Golden Horde and located northwest of the Chagatai khanate, designated the Qipchaq language as the *lingua franca* of its newly subdued subjects, as well as of Volga Bulgarians and to some degree the Rus’ as well. The Uighur script, introduced to imperial bureaucracy by Genghis Khan, was widespread until the Golden Horde’s Islamisation, when it was replaced by Arabic writing. Official correspondence and decrees, known as *yarlyks*, were translations from the Mongol into the Qipchaq language that were written down in Uighur script. The Mongols introduced the supply and postal system *jam* with a network of stations that enabled the Italian traveller Plano Carpini to cover 3,000 miles in 105 days, the *tarkhan* (*tarxanliq*) privileges that served as an award for princely services and a tool for elite group-building, and, last but not least, the offices of *basqaq* and *daruqa* in the Golden Horde, the first designating a governor of an administrative-territorial unit, the latter a tax collector or a commander.²⁰

¹⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn *Successors*, 69–70; *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Sinica Franciscana 1), collegit, ad fidem codicum redegit et adnotavit Anastasius Van den Wyngaert (Quaracchhi-Firenze, Bonaventura, 1929), 224–25, 252–53; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 144–46, 182; Giovanni di Pian di Carpino, *Storia dei Mongoli*, edizione critica del testo latino a cura di Enrico Menestò, traduzione italiana a cura di Maria Christiana Lungarotti, e note di Paolo Daffinà, introduzione di Luciano Petech (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’ alto medioevo, 1989), 305–12, 316–19, 324–25, 331; Johann de Plano Carpini, *Geschichte der Mongolen und Reisebericht, 1245–1247*, trans. Friedrich Risch (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1930), 220–24, 229, 236, 239–40, 253–54, 262; David M. Robinson, *Empire’s Twilight: Northeast Asia Under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 31, 44, 50.

¹⁹ See Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191; idem, “Mongols as Vectors for Cultural Transmission,” in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen Frank, and Peter Benjamin Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144–145; Dittmar Schorkowitz, “Cultural Contact and Cultural Transfer in Medieval Western Eurasia,” *Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia* 40, no. 3 (2012): 84–94; idem, “Akkulturation und Kulturtransfer in der Slavia Asiatica,” in *Akkulturation im Mittelalter*, ed. Reinhard Härtel (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014), 137–63.

²⁰ István Vasary, “The Golden Horde Term *daruqa* and Its Survival in Russia,” *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 30 (1976): 187–97; idem, “The Origin of the Institution *basqaqs*,” *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 32

Based on these innovations and their transcontinental rule and integration strategies, the Mongols also determined the trading terms for ‘commercial goods’ along the ‘silk roads and spice routes’ for a long time. With territorial expansion coming to a close in the mid-thirteenth century, faltering incomes from heavily taxed populations, and the drain on financial reserves due to the continuous financing of the military retinue, long distance trade between Asia, Africa, and Europe became more and more important for the Chinggisid elites, who initially showed a great interest in the free flow of commodities and the skimming of profits. To this end, they guaranteed the safe movement of foreigners and caravans within their respective territories and the maintenance of communication and infrastructure, and thus considerably increased the conditions for mobility within the Mongolian Empire.²¹

However, by the fourteenth century the once symbiotic relationship between khan and merchant had turned into a mutually dependent relation in which the former granted protection and the latter financed the many skirmishes of the Chinggisid lineages, who were competing over Caucasian and Middle Asian trade revenues and trade control.²² Religious belonging now became a criteria for exclusion from privileged trade-offs and thus for higher tariffs on trade. This paved the way for the Islamisation of the Golden Horde, which expanded the silk road from Urgench to Sarai, to Tanais (Azov), and Kaffa (Feodossija). Jani Beg’s raids against Genovese and Venetian commercial settlements on the Crimea in 1343 as well as Tamerlane’s destruction of trade centers in Sarai, Astrakhan, and Tanais in 1395 are striking examples of these conflicts.²³ The loss of long-distance trade generally resulted in a rapid collapse of the central power – illuminating yet again the limitations of mobility in the *Pax Mongolica*.

(1978): 201–6; idem, “Bemerkungen zum uighurischen Schrifttum in der Goldenen Horde und bei den Timuriden,” *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 7 (1987): 115–26; Colin Heywood, “Yarligh,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 9 (2002): 288–90; Peter Benjamin Golden, “Some Notes on the *comitatus* in Medieval Eurasia with Special Reference to the Khazars,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 28, no. 1 (2001): 153–70; Shagdar, “Mongol Empire,” 133.

²¹ On the intensifying commercial aspects of this transcontinental empire see particularly Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). My thanks go to Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz for reminding me on this eminent piece of literature.

²² Elizabeth Endicott-West, “Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The Ortoy,” *Asia Major* 3rd Series 2, no 2 (1989): 127–54; Virgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Samuel Willcocks (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²³ For more entangled history aspects of the Italian Black Sea “emporia” and Mongol-controlled continental trade, see Di Cosmo, “Black Sea Emporia.”

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