

Qaraqorum in Yuan Times

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Abstract: The Mongols' establishment of a capital in the thirteenth century indicated their desire not only to plunder but to rule the domains they had conquered. The placement of the capital in Qaraqorum, in their own native land, appears to have been optimal, and merchants and craftsmen flocked to the city to ply their wares. As Qaraqorum flourished and the population increased, a major flaw became apparent: its hinterland could not fulfill its needs, and in 1267, Qubilai Khan moved the capital to Dadu, which had nearby supplies. Yet Qaraqorum was not abandoned, as it signified the Mongols' attachment to their own land. In the early fourteenth century, the Yuan dynasty court sought to protect and incorporate it as part of the provincial system. However, the city was unable to govern and tax mobile herders and thus to secure the essential revenue for its needs. It faced considerable difficulties, and the Yuan dynasty itself declined due to internecine struggle, natural disasters, and corruption among Mongol princes. Rebellions erupted, and the founders of the Ming dynasty forced the Yuan court to withdraw from China and to retreat to Qaraqorum. Conflicts between the Ming and the so-called Northern Yuan court finally resulted in the destruction of Qaraqorum in 1388. Yet it retained its appeal and aura for the Mongols and led them to establish their first Buddhist monastery around the site in the sixteenth century.

Keywords: Mongolia, Mongol Empire, Yuan, local administration, intra-mongol warfare

Mongolia, with its lush vegetation and pristine environment, offered a sustainable location for the Mongols, although winter snows and summer droughts, on occasion, threatened them and their animals. Nonetheless, they returned to their homeland both after trade with peoples in China and after wars with the Xia (or Tangut) or Jin (or Jürchen) dynasties. Changes in their lifestyles started with their campaigns against the Khwarazmian shah in Central Asia. Seeking direct rule over territory and people that had put up stiff resistance, Chinggis Qan left behind an occupying force in the region as he returned eastward.¹ His son and successor Ögödei (r. 1229-1241) eventually stationed troops in Russia and in other distant lands, but he and his successor Möngke (r. 1251-1259), who also became a *qa'an*, spent most of their lives in Mongolia and maintained their courts in the steppes. Mongolia remained the center until Qubilai Qa'an's (r. 1260-1294) reign.

¹ On these campaigns, see J. Boyle, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror by Ata Malik Juvaini* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp. 81-132.

However, the construction of a capital signaled a change in Mongol policies. Nomadic pastoralism did not require a central location for a government. As the empire expanded, however, perhaps Chinggis Qan (1162?-1227) and certainly Ögödei recognized that rule, rather than plunder, required an administrative center. Moreover, the establishment of a capital would contribute to greater Mongol legitimacy as rulers. Yet Mongolia itself did not become centralized, as it remained the migrating pastoralists' domain. Difficulties in transport and bitter winters precluded control over the vast majority of herders who roamed over considerable distances to find grass and water for their animals.

Ögödei had decided to construct his capital in Mongolia near the Orkhon river and started to build a palace, after which he built city walls around what would become Qaraqorum in 1235.² The founding of a capital city signaled a transformation to a somewhat more sedentary society.³ Earlier pastoral nomadic societies had established capitals in the steppes, but none had conquered the sizable territory that the Mongols now sought to rule from one center. The Uyghurs had founded a capital city as early as the eighth century, and its capital was only about twenty-five kilometers from Qaraqorum. One scholar has suggested that the siting of the Mongol capital was based on Uyghur influence.⁴ Even before the construction of Qaraqorum, the Mongols had gathered Chinese artisans and farmers to establish a new settlement in Western Mongolia. Because the Nestorian Christian Chinqai (ca. 1169-1252) was the principal commander who supported this site, it became known as Chinqai Balgasun ("Granary of Chinqai" or "City of Chinqai").⁵ The Mongol rulers also moved weavers they had captured in their conquest of Samarkand in 1221 to a new settlement in Xinmalin near present-day Kalgan in Inner Mongolia.⁶

The most prominent buildings in Qaraqorum would have been the Wanangong, Ögödei's palace, which was surrounded by walls and was isolated from the rest of the town, and a Buddhist temple, but the latter was not completed until 1256. The construction of walls around a city was characteristic of Chinese cities, an indication of the Chinese influence in the building of Qaraqorum. The inhabitants also built a north-south stone paved road that facilitated transport and communication, as well as trade. The authorities, on several major occasions, raised and repaired the road

² Song Lian, et al. *Yuanshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 34. For more on the Chinese version of events, see W. Abramowski, "Die chinesischen Annalen von Ögödei und Güyük – Übersetzung des 2. Kapitels des Yüan shih." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 10 (1976), 117-67.

³ On an earlier work on Qaraqorum, see P. Pelliot, "Note sur Karakorum." *Journal asiatique* 206 (1925), 372-5.

⁴ Th. Allsen, "Spiritual Geography and Political Legitimacy in the Eastern Steppe." in *Ideology and Formation of Early States*, eds. H. Claessen and J. Oosten. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 126-8.

⁵ P. Buell, "Cinqai." in *In the Service of the Qan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol Yuan Period (1200-1300)*, ed. I. de Rachewiltz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), p. 100.

⁶ P. Pelliot, "Une ville musulmane dans la Chine du Nord sous les Mongols." *Journal asiatique* 211 (1927), 261-79.

to improve drainage and remove mud, as the road was battered with sand and other impediments in the difficult Mongolian winters. These efforts revealed their view of the importance of the road.⁷ However, as Mongol rule declined in the early to mid-fourteenth century, the repairs and renovations were not well done, which naturally fit in with the decline of the town.

Craftsmen and craft quarters lined both sides of the road. The objects found in the recent German Mongolian archeological expeditions attest to the production of numerous kinds of craft articles. Pottery, glassware, and gems and precious stones have been found, and artisans also fashioned gold and silver bracelets and necklaces. One of the golden bracelets displayed a phoenix, a quintessential Chinese motif, still another indication of the presence and prominence of Chinese craftsmen. A flourishing bronze industry produced bronze seals and other objects.⁸

The court moved craftsmen and construction workers from various parts of its domains to construct the capital and to set up craft shops. Thousands of Chinese, Central Asians, and Persians collaborated on the structures, with the result that Qaraqorum became a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic religious center. A Muslim bazaar, a mosque, and a Chinese artisan area also attest to the city's cosmopolitanism.

The variety of peoples in the town is readily confirmed in numerous writings, but the sources on religion are limited. Yet the available data indicate the presence of diverse groups. Buddhism certainly played a significant role in Mongolia following its contacts with China, and it is no accident that a Buddhist temple in Qaraqorum was one of the most significant buildings in the town. Support for Buddhism persisted well into the fourteenth century. In 1311, the five-storied pagoda was repaired, and in 1342, the Yuan dynasty emperor ordered a further restoration of the pagoda.⁹ Archeologists had originally believed that the remains were of Ögödei's palace, but recent excavations have confirmed that the building was a Buddhist temple. Stupas and the configuration of the temple as a mandala, as well as the numerous depictions of Guanyin or Avalokiteshvara, attest to the building's identity as a Buddhist site.¹⁰ The

⁷ E. Pohl, "Interpretation without Excavation – Topographic Mapping on the Territory of the First Mongolian Capital at Karakorum." in *Current Archaeological Research in Mongolia*, eds. J. Bemmann et al. (Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2009), 505-33. pp. 505-506.

⁸ Some of these objects are provided with full color illustrations in W. Fitzhugh et al. *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 137-45. See also S. Reichert, "Imperial Policies toward Handicraft: The Organization of Production in the old Mongolian Capital Karakorum." in *Craft Production Systems in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, eds M. Benz and T. Helms (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 2018), pp. 185-208. For the latest work on the excavations of Karakorum, see J. Bemmann and S. Reichert, "Karakorum, the First Capital of the Mongol World Empire: An Imperial City in a Non-urban Society." *Asian Archeology* (can be accessed as *Asian Archeology* (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41826-020-00039-x>).

⁹ F. Cleaves, "The Sino-Mongol Inscription of 1346." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952), pp. 30-2.

¹⁰ S. V. Kiselev, the prominent Soviet archeologist, had excavated Qaraqorum in 1948-1949 and had assumed that the building was Ögödei's palace, but the discoveries of the German Mongolian Arche-

discovery of Buddhist statues in sections of the site provides additional confirmation of the religion's significance. An Islamic cemetery yields even greater evidence of religion in Mongolia. In addition, several ceramics were adorned with attempts to use Arabic script, still another indication that foreigners of Muslim extraction had reached Mongolia. Evidence of Nestorian Christianity is limited to written sources, including the travel account of William of Rubruck,¹¹ but several prominent women among the Mongol elite, as well as some men, were Nestorians, an indication that this religion was found in Qaraqorum.¹² Written sources also confirm that the native practices, whether we call them shamanism or use another term, persisted. Festivals associated with the New Year, the commemoration of Tengri, the sky god, and of the ancestors, as well as the scattering of mare's milk at the outset of a military campaign remained significant.¹³

Although Ögödei had signaled his intention to govern by setting up a capital city in Qaraqorum, the site was too far from the center of the Mongols' newly subjugated domains, which by 1234 included North China and by the end of his reign had expanded to much of Russia. Moreover, it required vast expenditures of resources to supply the city because it was not in an economically viable area for a growing population. Although the government encouraged agriculture by providing tools for farmers, the weather, the short growing season, and the limited arable land precluded efforts to sustain a large population. In a 1260 memorial to Qubilai Qa'an, his Confucian adviser Hao Jing wrote that "the central government ought to be based in North China because that is the true heartland, but a subsidiary administration should be retained in Qaraqorum, and military districts should be established on the border."¹⁴

The conventional view concerning Qaraqorum after the transfer of the Mongol capital starting in the late 1260s is that the city declined. The struggles between Qubilai and his younger brother Ariq Böke and the later attacks by his cousin Qaidu led to occupations of Qaraqorum, and the destruction wrought on the steppes and in Qaraqorum allegedly harmed the Mongol population and caused damage to the old capital.

ological Expedition in the early twenty-first century challenged his identification. See H.-G. Hüttel, "Royal Palace or Buddhist Temple? On Search for the Karakorum Palace." in *Current Archaeological Research in Mongolia*, eds. J. Bemmam et al. (Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2009), p. 542.

¹¹ See P. Jackson ed., *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990) pp. 150-2, 212-6. William adopted a condescending attitude toward the Nestorians.

¹² On Nestorianism and on Mongol women, see M. Rossabi, "Khubilai Khan and the Women in His Family." in *Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. W. Bauer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), 153-180. and two recent studies of Mongol women in the Mongols' Middle Eastern domains: A. Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and B. de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206-1335* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

¹³ Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 242.

¹⁴ M. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 70; D. Schlegel, *Hao Ching (1222-1275): Ein chinesischer Berater des Kaisers Kublai Khan* (Bamberg: Offsetdruckerei Kurt Urlaub, 1968) for a biography of this prominent adviser.

Yet recent archeological excavations in Qaraqorum seem to belie this image of the capital. Archeologists have confirmed that Qaraqorum was still a town of some importance until its destruction by Ming dynasty forces in the 1380s. The European traveler William of Rubruck (fl. 1248 – 1255) did not find the city remarkable and wrote that “discounting the Chan’s palace, it is not as fine as the town of St. Denis [currently, a suburb of Paris], and the monastery of St. Denis is worth ten of the palace.”¹⁵ However, the imposing religious buildings, bazaars, and artisan quarters attest to a lively commercial and artistic life. The various times the city was occupied seem not to have overwhelmed it or to have ended its role as a center for the Yuan dynasty, as evidenced by wall paintings, porcelains, and metal vessels. One possible reason for its survival was the scale of warfare during this time. The actual engagements consisted of relatively few troops because the steppes and Qaraqorum itself could not support a substantial force. Battles were likely small-scale events, which basically explains the limited damage to Qaraqorum. The Chinese sources tended to exaggerate the numbers of those captured and killed, so it is important to discount those statistics.

The 1260 to 1264 struggle between Qubilai and Ariq Böke to be the *qa’an* showed the weakness of relying almost exclusively on Mongolia and Qaraqorum. Ariq Böke’s troops were based in the steppe lands, and if he had emerged victorious, the center of power would have remained in Mongolia. Rashīd al-Dīn revealed Ariq Böke’s weakness in noting that five hundred carts daily reached Qaraqorum with provisions for its inhabitants.¹⁶ If Ariq Böke had any hopes for success, he would have to safeguard these supply lines. Yet Qubilai had substantial advantages because of the availability of resources from the sedentary civilization of China. Thus, he prevented the delivery of grain in order to put Ariq Böke on the defensive and denied him access to critical and nearby regions, which could supply provisions. As a result, Ariq Böke’s troops suffered from a famine in 1263, and Qubilai actually laid siege to Qaraqorum. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Qubilai “intended to go in pursuit of Ariq Böke, but messengers arrived and reported that because of his absence, madness and confusion had appeared in the land of Khitai.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, Ariq Böke was forced to surrender in 1264.¹⁸ Qaraqorum could no longer be the center of the empire. Three years later, the capital was moved from Qaraqorum to Dadu in China.

Qubilai then sought to stabilize Qaraqorum and the areas around it to bring these regions under central government control. He set up a Pacification Commission and a General Regional Command (*xuanwei shisi du yuanshuai fu* 宣慰使司都元帅府), with two Commissioners, two Registrars, two Chief Clerks, and a Recorder and

¹⁵ Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 221.

¹⁶ J. Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 62.

¹⁷ J. Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, p. 258.

¹⁸ On Arigh Böke’s supply problems, see J. Dardess, “From Mongol Empire to Yüan Dynasty: Changing Forms of Imperial Rule in Mongolia and Central Asia.” *Monumenta Serica* 30 (1972-73), 117-165.

Concurrent Files Supervisor, to promote the local economy.¹⁹ He was eager to have Qaraqorum supply itself and established local agricultural colonies in the region and furnished them with tools and draught animals. Yet these efforts proved insufficient. The Yuan court still needed to allocate funds for the purchase of grain or to order shipments from North China. Corrupt officials hindered Qubilai's efforts by pocketing the funds to be used to supply Qaraqorum. In 1301, granary officials at Qaraqorum were indicted for the illegal embezzlement of grain. In 1303, a government transport contractor was found guilty by the Court for having stolen 250,000 piculs of grain and 130,000 ingots of cash in the course of supplying grain for the Qaraqorum garrison.²⁰

Qubilai would eventually face forays by Qaidu from Central Asia into Mongolia and Qaraqorum, but he was determined to preserve control over Qaraqorum and Mongolia for symbolic reasons.²¹ Qaidu, a descendant of the line of Ögödei, Qubilai's uncle, had been disenchanted with the rise of the Toluid branch of the Chinggisids, and from a base in Central Asia, challenged the Yuan dynasty, which had just been established in 1271. Moreover, he had supported Ariq Böke during his struggle with Qubilai, undermining relations with the first Yuan emperor. Seeking an advantage over Qaidu, Qubilai attempted to create a buffer zone by gaining control over the Tarim river basin, and, at the same time, to establish a blockade by preventing Qaidu from accessing food from that region. He even dispatched his son Nomuqan to set up garrisons and agricultural colonies (*tuntian* 屯田) in the Tarim region, but this assignment proved difficult.²² In addition, a few years later, Nomuqan's top commanders detained Nomuqan and sent him to the Golden Horde in Russia.²³ He was eventually released, but Qubilai was compelled to abandon his control over Kashgar, Khotan, and other towns in what is now southern Xinjiang. Without a buffer zone, Qaraqorum was vulnerable.

As Qaidu solidified his control over Central Asia and the Tarim basin, he became a greater threat to Qaraqorum. Qubilai was aware that anyone who aspired to be the Great Khan needed to govern the traditional homeland, although it was not a key economic or administrative center. The legitimacy of Qubilai's position as great khan depended on his governance over Mongolia. Thus, in 1289, when Qaidu initially occupied Qaraqorum, Qubilai quickly headed to Qaraqorum to oust Qaidu, and his large force prompted Qaidu to withdraw. Nonetheless, Qaidu and his forces continued

¹⁹ *Yuanshi*, p. 2309; D. Farquhar, *The Government of China under Mongol Rule: A Reference Guide* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), p. 412.

²⁰ Dardess, "From Mongol Empire", p. 156.

²¹ On Qaidu, see M. Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997).

²² *Yuanshi*, p. 265; Tu Ji, *Mengwuer shiji* 76, 8b

²³ I. de Rachewiltz, "Muqali, Böi, Tas, and An-t'ung." *Papers on Far Eastern History* 15 (March, 1977), 57; J. Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, p. 161, 266; Yanai Wataru, *Mōkoshi Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Publishing house, 1930) pp. 515-6. For an account of these efforts, see Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, pp. 107-10.

to raid Qaraqorum, and in 1299, Ulus Buqa, one of his commanders, actually reached the city and did considerable damage to its food supply and markets.²⁴ He too withdrew, but in 1301, Qaidu set forth on another campaign that proved to be inconclusive, and once again he was unable to gain control over Qaraqorum. His death in 1301 ended Central Asian threats to Yuan domination over Mongolia.²⁵

The Yuan emperors recognized that such combat had harmed the city and sought to promote the recovery of Qaraqorum. In 1307, the Yuan court devised a new administrative structure for the inhabitants of Mongolia. It is difficult to judge the effectiveness of this structure to rule the steppes. Nomadic pastoralists were scattered throughout the vast domains of Mongolia. If the Qing dynasty and the Mongolian People's Republic, with better transport and communications and a larger military force, could not enforce their will on the herders, it seems unlikely that the few small towns and surrounding regions and the almost endless grasslands would have abided by the Yuan policies described. Nonetheless, in 1307, the Yuan court established a province known as Lingbei and abolished the Pacification Commission and the General Regional Military Command by which it had earlier ruled Mongolia. The new structure meant that Mongolia would be a regular part of China and not a military outpost or colony. The court set up a Branch Secretariat in Lingbei (*lingbei xing zhongshu sheng* 嶺北行中書省) in that year, and two years later it changed its name to Branch Secretariat for Qaraqorum and Other Places (*helin xing shangshu sheng* 和林行尚書省), based in Qaraqorum.²⁶ However, this structure differed from other areas in China in that it did not create lesser administrative units, thus leaving considerable power and authority in the hands of the Mongol princes²⁷. Within a few years, it also established a Recorder's Office for the registration of births and deaths, a Judicial Proceedings Office, an Administrator of the Archives, and a Superintendency of Confucian Schools, all in Qaraqorum.²⁸ The Superintendency of Confucian Schools not only supervised the schools but also ensured the performance of rituals. The government apparently hoped to foster Confucianism among Qaraqorum's inhabitants, but this effort would not be successful. Part of the reason for the proliferation of these agencies was control, but, in addition, the population of Qaraqorum had increased, placing additional strains on supplies and provisions for the town.

These offices were not effective, partly because Mongol princes often were the key powers in the region, and the Yuan officials were unable to control them. In

²⁴ J. Boyle, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, p. 327.

²⁵ These events are dealt with in Biran, *Qaidu*.

²⁶ *Yuanshi*, p. 1383; Farquhar, *The Government of China*, pp. 396-8.

²⁷ See Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, "Mid-Yuan Politics." in *Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, eds. D. Twitchett and H. Franke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 491, on the frequent negative roles of the Mongol princes in the fourteenth century.

²⁸ *Yuanshi*, 2305, 2312; Farquhar, *The Government of China*, p. 397.

addition, the new administration required taxes, but it proved difficult to collect these from herders who roamed around a vast domain. The herders particularly resented the government's demand that they maintain postal stations, a vital institution in the Mongol empire. Postal stations facilitated communications and the transmission of intelligence information for the Mongols, but supplying and maintaining them with food, accommodations, and animals for messengers fell heavily on the herders.²⁹

The damage Qaraqorum suffered during the struggles between Qubilai and Arigh Böke and Qubilai and Qaidu also undermined proper governance. A plague around 1313, which claimed more than three thousand deaths, and an earthquake in 1317 further contributed to instability in the city.³⁰ Similarly, within China itself, instability increased in the early fourteenth century. Assassinations of emperors and struggles between brothers to claim the throne also weakened the court and also had a destructive influence on Qaraqorum. Many of the conflicts arose between Sinicized Mongols from China and the upholders of the traditional Mongol lifestyle and values. Princes from the Chinggisid lineage, as well as others to whom the emperors had granted titles, also contributed to the difficulties.³¹ They received payments from the government and continued to demand higher rewards. Corruption and bribery persisted, undercutting the government's prestige. Tax evasion resulted in revenue shortfalls, preventing the dynasty from maintaining dams and irrigation complexes, which resulted in floods. The most damaging development was a change in the course of the Yellow River, which flooded arable land, created a sizable homeless population, and interfered with grain deliveries from South to North China. The infectious and parasitic diseases that accompanied the floods created even greater misery. Rural poverty led to a disgruntled population, which, in turn, generated banditry and the development of millenarian movements and rebellions. Zhu Yuanzhang, one of the rebel leaders, emerged victorious and overthrew Mongol rule to establish the Ming dynasty in 1368.

The turbulence in China naturally had an impact on Qaraqorum. The local government weakened as a result of revenue shortfalls, the infrastructure was not well maintained, and the earlier craft industries and commercial enterprises faltered. Yet the Yuan imperial family fled to Mongolia and eventually to Qaraqorum. Toghon Temür (r. 1333 – 1368), the last Yuan emperor, reached Yingzhang in Inner Mongolia and died there in 1370. His son Ayushiridara succeeded him and moved the capital to Qaraqorum, where he was enthroned. The deposed Yuan emperors still laid claim to China and called themselves the Northern Yuan dynasty but had been weakened

²⁹ On the postal stations, see P. Olbricht, *Das Postwesen in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1954).

³⁰ H.-G. Hüttel, "Im Palast des ewigen Friedens – Die mongolisch-deutschen Ausgrabungen." in *Expeditionen in vergessene Welten. 25 Jahre archäologische Forschungen in Afrika, Amerika, und Asien* (Aachen: Linden Soft, 2004), p. 186.

³¹ Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, "Mid-Yuan Politics", pp. 490-560.

because of disunity. They could not rely on support from other Mongol domains. The Ilkhanate in Persia had collapsed, the Chaghadai Khanate in Central Asia had weakened and was soon to be ruled by Temür, or Tamerlane, and the Mongols in Russia were too far away to be of much assistance. Conflicts also bedeviled the inhabitants of Qaraqorum. The Mongols who had returned from China, perhaps consisting of 100,000 people, were at odds with those who had remained in Qaraqorum. This new group competed with the residents for local authority, the commercial base, pastureland, water, and herds. Nonetheless, Ayushiridara defeated a Ming dynasty army allegedly consisting of 150,000 men in 1372, as well as in several battles near Qaraqorum. Yet Ming forces seized Ayushiridara's son and consort, who were then delivered to Zhu Yuanzhang". Nonetheless, "Despite periodic Ming strikes, the capture of his son, the loss of China's vast resources, and the increasing autonomy of his generals, Ayurishiridara as the ruler of the Great Yuan *ulus* still posed the greatest single foreign threat to Zhu Yuanzhang..."³²

When he sought assistance from Goryeo against the Ming, it appeared that he might have considerable leverage against the enemy dynasty in China. However, the king of Korea rejected such assistance, as did his successors and indeed there were some battles between the Koreans and the Mongols.³³ Meanwhile the Mongol commander Naghachu moved into the Liaodong peninsula in 1375, blocking Ming access to Korea. Ayushiridara averted a few minor Ming raids until his death in 1378, but, without allies, increasingly became less of a threat.³⁴

Yet the Ming attacks generated shortages for the Northern Yuan because land, as well as a supply center in Qaraqorum, had been damaged. Ayushiridara's half-brother Tögüs Temür took power in 1378, but was in a much weaker position. Meanwhile, the Ming dynasty needed time to establish itself in China but was determined to preclude any threat from the Northern Yuan to restore control over China. It initiated raids from 1380 to 1382, but its most important campaign was launched against Mongol forces in Liaodong. In 1387, capitalizing upon a famine in Liaodong, a Ming army attacked the region and compelled Naghachu to submit. In 1388, another Ming army defeated Tögüs Temür, and he was captured and killed by a fellow Mongol and descendant of Arigh Böke. The Ming army then headed toward and destroyed the capital at Qaraqorum.³⁵

³² D. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 286.

³³ D. Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming." in *Cambridge History of China: Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part 2*, eds. D. Twitchett and F. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 274-5.

³⁴ For greater detail about the so-called Northern Yuan, see M. Rossabi, "Mongolia in Yuan Times." in *Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, eds. M. Biran and Kim Hodong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). L. Hambis, *Documents sur l'histoire des Mongols à l'époque des Ming* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969) translates the *Mingshi* sections on these events.

³⁵ See the Hambis translations for these developments.

Despite its destruction in 1388, the legacy of Qaraqorum was not extinguished. In the early sixteenth century, Batu Möngke, with the title of *dayan qan*, sought to reunify the Eastern Mongols and organized his forces into six *tümen*, three in the left wing and three in the right wing. He may have conceived of a restoration of Mongol control over China, and, on a number of occasions, threatened the Ming. He selected a site in the old capital of Qaraqorum as his main stronghold and no doubt bolstered his appeal by capitalizing on the Mongol legacy and history.³⁶ In 1586, Abtai Sayin Qan, the Tüsheets Qan, chose Qaraqorum as the site of the first Buddhist monastery, after the Altan Qan had selected a Tibetan Buddhist sect as the new religion among the Mongols.³⁷ Some stones from the destroyed Yuan dynasty buildings were used in the construction of parts of the Erdene Zuu monastery. The geographical location in Qaraqorum may have offered legitimacy for Buddhism in Mongolia. The archeological excavations, which were conducted by Mongolians, Russians, and Germans, in turn, boosted Mongol pride because they revealed a remarkable cultural efflorescence in thirteenth and fourteenth century Qaraqorum.³⁸

The Mongols' establishment of a capital in the thirteenth century indicated their desire not only to plunder but to rule the domains they had conquered. The placement of the capital in Qaraqorum, in their own native land, appears to have been optimal, and merchants and craftsmen flocked to the city to ply their wares. As Qaraqorum flourished and the population increased, a major flaw became apparent: its hinterland could not fulfill its needs, and in 1267, Qubilai Qan moved the capital to Dadu, which had nearby supplies. Yet Qaraqorum was not abandoned, as it signified the Mongols' attachment to their own land. In the early fourteenth century, the Yuan dynasty court sought to protect and incorporate it as part of the provincial system. However, the city was unable to govern and tax mobile herders and thus to secure the essential revenue for its needs. It faced considerable difficulties, and the Yuan dynasty itself declined due to internecine struggle, natural disasters, and corruption among Mongol princes. Rebellions erupted, and the founders of the Ming dynasty forced the Yuan court to withdraw from China and to retreat to Qaraqorum. Conflicts between the Ming and the so-called Northern Yuan court finally resulted in the destruction of Qaraqorum in 1388. Yet it retained its appeal and aura for the Mongols and led them to establish their first Buddhist monastery around the site in the sixteenth century.

³⁶ On him, see Okada Hidehiro, "Life of Dayan Khan." *Acta Asiatica* 11 (1966), 46-55; Wada Sei, "A Study of Dayan Khan." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 19 (1960), 1-42; and H. Serruys, *Genealogical Tables of the Descendants of Dayan-qan* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1958).

³⁷ For sources on Altan Khan, see M. Rossabi, "Altan Khan." in *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. A. Embree (New York: Macmillan Company, 1987), Vol. I, p. 50. and H. Serruys, "Four Documents Relating to the Sino-Mongol Peace of 1570-1571." *Monumenta Serica* 19 (1960), 1-66.

³⁸ See S. V. Kiselev, *Drevne mongol'skie goroda* (Moskva: Nauka, 1965) and Bemann, *op. cit.*