
*The Queen of the Chaghatayids: Orghina Khātūn and the rule of Central Asia*¹

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Abstract

When Chinggis Khan died in 1227, his sons inherited different parts of the empire that had been built by their father. Chinggis Khan's second son, Chaghatai (d. c. 1241), became the ruler of the lands of present-day Central Asia, conforming the origin of what became to be known as the Chaghataid Khanate. After the death of its founder, this political entity experienced a long succession crisis that lasted for a decade until a woman, Orghina Khātūn, took control of the khanate in the name of her son. Although a ruling woman is not an exceptional case in the Mongol empire, she was the first and only woman that ruled over the Chaghataid Khanate, and that did so peacefully and without major upheavals for nine years. Additionally, she did not adopt a passive role but was involved in the running of the khanate, playing her cards in the always-unstable political arena of the Mongol empire. This article looks at the ascension to the throne, the reign and the legacy of this Mongol woman in Mongol Central Asia by contextualising her rule within the history of the region in general and in that of the Mongol empire in particular.

Introduction

The prominent position that some noblewomen acquired in pre-modern nomadic societies has caught the attention of scholars for some time, and especially since the 1970s. Some of them have suggested that certain socio-economic circumstances of nomadic life were behind the fact that nomadic women “were more important in society than their settled sisters”.² They argue that this active role in society is behind the accounts of ancient historians such as Herodotus in his description of the tribes of Amazons and Scythians.³ Yet, apart from this account, the majority of women’s presence in historical records from Antiquity is circumscribed to figurine representations of female goddesses in prehistoric times or narratives that have more to do with legend than with historical characters.⁴ For later periods also, a certain degree of climatic determinism has been used to explain why

¹ It is a great pleasure to participate in this collection of articles in honour of Professor David O. Morgan. Through his academic contribution he has been responsible (without his knowledge) for initiating my fascination with the history of the Mongol Empire. For that I will always be grateful.

² R. Frye, “Women in pre-Islamic Central Asia: The Khātūn of Bukhara”, in G. R. G. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York, 1998), pp. 55–59, 61.

³ Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus of Halicarnassus*, Book IV, Melponeme (London, 1935), §§ 114–115.

⁴ See Frye, “Women in pre-Islamic Central Asia”, pp. 55–59.

women from Inner Asia had a prominent role in different aspects of their own society if compared with sedentary social organisations.⁵ However, the dynamics of the role of women in medieval nomadic societies of Inner Asia appear to be more complex than that, intertwining traditions of women's role in society, native religious beliefs and the particular historical context of a given place and time.⁶

In recent years, a number of studies have been carried out of the role of women in the Mongol Empire.⁷ They generally reflect how women of noble stock among the different Mongol peoples were prominent individuals who actively engaged in different aspects of society such as politics, economy or religion. More importantly, this active role can be observed across all the territories of the Mongol Empire and, with variation, from pre-imperial times in the late twelfth century up to the end of Mongol rule in China and Iran in the fourteenth century.⁸ In many of these territories, there is a constant among women's role in society regarding female regency. Women assuming political control of a territory in the name of a male heir is a constant that was confined neither territorially nor temporally to the Mongol Empire but is documented in and around the Mongol territories before, during and after the Mongol conquest of Eurasia.⁹

The amount of information we possess on these ladies is conditioned by the nature of the available sources. With the majority of accounts on the Mongols coming from either China or Iran, it is not surprising that the majority of research on female rule has been restricted to the Yüan dynasty and the Ilkhānate. However, from within the vast territories that are considered as Eurasia, the Ferghana Valley, with its fertile lands and important cities has been a place of close interaction between sedentary and nomadic societies for millennia. Ever since the arrival of Islam in the seventh century CE up to the establishment of Tamerlane's capital in Samarqand in the second half of the fourteenth century, empires have risen and

⁵See, for example, P. Ratchnevsky, "La condition de la femme mongole au 12e/13e siècle", in D. Sinor, W. Heissig *et al.* (eds.), *Tractata Altaica* (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 510; and M. Rossabi, "Khubilai Khan and the women in his family", in W. Bauer (ed.), *Studia Sino-Mongolica. Festschrift für Herbert Franke* (Wiesbaden, 1979), p. 153.

⁶B. De Nicola, "Unveiling the Khātūns: Some Aspects of the Role of Women in the Mongol Empire", PhD dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2011).

⁷G. Zhao and R. W. Guisso, "Female anxiety and female power: The political involvement of Mongol Empresses during 13th and 14th centuries", *Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia* 7 (2005), pp. 17–46; G. Q. Zhao, "Control through conciliation: Royal marriages between the Mongol Yuan and Koryŏ (Korea) during the 13th and 14th centuries", *Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia* 6 (2004), pp. 3–26; G. Q. Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty* (New York, 2008); B. De Nicola, "Women's role and participation in warfare in the Mongol Empire", in S. Förster, K. Latzel and F. Maubach (eds.), *Soldatinnen: Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis Heute* (Paderborn, 2010), pp. 95–112; Y. Brack, "A Mongol princess making hajj: the biography of El Qutluğ daughter of Abagha Ilkhan (r. 1265–82)", *JRAS* 21:3 (2011), pp. 331–359; B. De Nicola, "Ruling from tents: The existence and structure of women's ordos in Ilkhanid Iran", in R. Hillenbrand, A. C. S. Peacock and F. Abdullaeva (eds.), *Ferdowsi, The Mongols and the History of Iran: Art, Literature and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia* (London, 2013), pp. 116–136; and B. De Nicola, "Patrons or murids? Mongol women and shaykhs in Ilkhanid Iran and Anatolia", *Iran* 52 (2014), pp. 143–156.

⁸See, for example, the roles of Chinggis Khan's mother and wife in B. De Nicola, "Las mujeres mongolas en los siglos XII y XIII: Un análisis sobre el rol de la madre y la esposa de Chinggis Khan", *Acta historica et archaeologica mediaevalia* 27–28 (2008), pp. 37–63.

⁹See the case of Sultan Raḡiyya in northern India analysed by P. Jackson, "Sultān Raḡiyya bint Iluttmish", in Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 181–197; for this phenomenon among the Ayyubids, see also A. Levanoni, "Ṣaḡar ad-Durr: A case of female sultanate in medieval Islam", in U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (eds.), *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III* (Leuven, 2001), pp. 209–218. On women in pre-Mongol Iran, see A. K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia. Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History* (New York, 1988), esp. pp. 258–296; and C. Hillenbrand, "Women in the Saljuq Period", in G. Nashat and L. Beck (eds.), *Women in Islam. From the Rise of Islam to 1800* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 103–120.

fallen in the area we generally refer to as Central Asia. Among the empires that dominated this region was that of the Mongols, who conquered the area and settled there during the first half of the thirteenth century, when Central Asia regained its role of connecting east and west Asia under the domination of the Mongol royal family descended from Chinggis Khan. At the peak of Mongol supremacy and expansion in Inner Asia, this region had the particularity of being ruled by a woman named Orghina Khātūn. The ascent to power and government of this lady in the thirteenth century will form the focus of this paper. However, we will also try to show that her rise to power was due not only to a variety of internal Mongol political circumstances, but also to the fact that this was not an isolated event in Central Asian history.

Women between myth and history: Some notes on female rule in Central Asia before the Mongols

The first relevant case of female rule in Central Asia documented in written sources goes back to the period of the Islamic conquest of Central Asia. At the time of Caliph Mu'āwiya I (r. 661–80), Arab troops were conquering territories across Asia and North Africa, finding little opposition on the way.¹⁰ At the end of the year 53/673 or the beginning of 54/673–74, Arab troops under the command of 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād (d. c. 685) crossed the Oxus River and arrived at the gates of Bukhara.¹¹ To their surprise, the Arabs found that the city was ruled by a woman, who has been acting as regent for her infant son. The Arab sources mainly refer to this woman with the generic Turkish term of 'Khātūn' and provide little if any information about her.¹² Mostly contained in this scarce Arabic material, the story of 'The Khātūn of Bukhara' has raised controversy regarding the authenticity of the account. Different anecdotes regarding this lady and her encounter with the Muslim newcomers are described in the most important source from the area that has come to us. Written by Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhī (d. 959), the *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā* is an account of the city written originally in Arabic for the Samanid rulers and later translated into Persian in the eleventh century.¹³ Although the account was produced almost three hundred years after the events, as a record of the city's history it is unique.¹⁴

Narshakhī enumerates all the rulers of the city starting from the rule of a certain Bīdūn or Bandūn (d. 680), whose widow succeeded him to the throne in the name of their son Tughshāda. Narshakhī specifically mentions that she was the sole ruler of the city, exercising all the political, administrative and diplomatic duties of the ruler.¹⁵ For example, she is portrayed as being in charge of signing the peace agreement with the Arab invaders,

¹⁰For an overview of the conquest of Central Asia, see H. Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquest: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in* (London, 2007), esp. Chapter 8.

¹¹C. E. Bosworth, "Bukhara ii. From the Arab invasions to the Mongols", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IV, pp. 513–515. For a study on early Islamic Bukhara, see R. Frye, *Bukhara, the Medieval Achievement* (Norman, OK, 1965).

¹²The term 'khātūn' is a Turkic or Sogdian word meaning 'lady': see J. A. Boyle, 'Khātūn', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition (Brill Online, 2014) (accessed 11 November 2014).

¹³On this source see the short overview in S. C. Levi and R. Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Indianapolis, 2010), pp. 23–28.

¹⁴Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, translated R. Frye (Cambridge, MA, 1954), pp. xi–xx. [hereafter Narshakhī]

¹⁵Narshakhī, pp. 9–10.

dispensing justice in her kingdom and issuing decrees for the administration of her realm. Further, she did all this “sit[ting] on a throne, while before her stood slaves, masters of the seraglio (i.e. eunuchs) and the nobles”,¹⁶ lending an aura of legitimacy to her rule in the eyes of her subjects. Despite this, there have been arguments denying the historical existence of the lady as a ruler of Bukhara, supported by the different account provided by Ṭabarī on the arrival of the Arab offensive in the city. He identifies the lady as Qabj Khātūn, who was only the wife of the ruler of Bukhara, but makes no mention of her ascension to rule.¹⁷ These two different accounts have fuelled arguments regarding the veracity of Narshakhī’s account in view of the authority of Ṭabarī’s text. However, some time ago, Frye showed that even if the role of this lady was exaggerated in some aspects, there is no reason to believe that the rule of the Khātūn is a fabrication.¹⁸

In fact, a tradition of female rule in the area survived the Arab conquest of Central Asia and the battle of Talas in 1334/751 between the Chinese Empire of the Tang dynasty and the newly established ‘Abbasid Caliphate.¹⁹ In the twelfth century, the appearance of women exercising political power in the court becomes more apparent. At the court of the Great Saljuq Turks, a number of women are documented as being politically influential, but this phenomenon becomes especially relevant for our purpose during the reign of the Western Liao or Qara Khitai.²⁰ This political entity conquered and settled in Central Asia after the Khitan were displaced from their domains in northern China by the Jurchen people, who established the Jin Dynasty of northern China (r. 1115–1234).²¹ The Western Liao became the most important political power in Central Asia, ruling as a Buddhist dynasty over a majority Muslim population in relative peace.²² They brought with them a set of nomadic practices from the Far East that seems to have amalgamated with those of Central Asia.²³ If we look at the succession of rulers among the Qara Khitai, it is clear that a certain receptivity towards female rule can be observed. Out of the five rulers of the Qara Khitai dynasty of Central Asia, two were women who acted as *de facto* rulers of the empire for a number of years.²⁴

¹⁶Narshakhī, p. 9.

¹⁷Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XVIII, *Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu‘āwiyah*, translated M. G. Morony (Albany, NY, 1987), p. 178.

¹⁸Frye, “Women in pre-Islamic Central Asia”, pp. 66–67.

¹⁹D. M. Dunlop, “A new source of information on the Battle of Talas or Atlakh”, *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 36 (1964), pp. 326–330.

²⁰On the Saljuq women, see Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, esp. pp. 258–96; Hillenbrand, “Women in the Saljuq Period”, pp. 103–120; and O. Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), pp. 67–69. On the Qara Khitai Empire, see M. Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2005); and M. Biran, “Between China and Islam: The administration of the Qara Khitai (Western Liao), 1124–1218”, in D. Sneath (ed.), *Imperial Statecraft: Political Doms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia Sixth-Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 63–83.

²¹On the Jurchen people, see J. Tao, *The Jurchen in Twelfth-Century China: A Study of Sinicization* (Seattle, WA, 1976).

²²M. Biran, “True to their ways: Why the Qara Khitai did not convert to Islam”, in R. Amitai and M. Biran (eds), *Mongols, Turks and Others. Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 175–199.

²³According to Juwaynī, the exodus was embarked upon by the emperor and 80 members of his family. For a discussion of the terminology, see ‘Ala’ al-Dīn Aṭā Malik Juwaynī, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, translated J. A. Boyle, reprint with new introduction by David O. Morgan (Manchester, 1997), I, p. 354, n. 3. [hereafter Juwaynī/Boyle]

²⁴Biran, *The Empire*, pp. 160–161.

In a situation similar to that narrated by Narshakhī regarding the city of Bukhara, we are told that after the death of the first emperor of the Qara Khitai, Yeh-lü Ta-shih (r. 1124–43), the Empire found itself with an under-age heir. Apparently in accordance with her husband's will, his widow, Empress Kan-t'ien (r. 1144–50), assumed control of the empire.²⁵ It seems, however, that enthronement of a woman as the head of one of the powers of the region was not a common occurrence and therefore did not go unnoticed by Persian and Arabic sources alike.²⁶ For example, Juwaynī describes the coming to the throne of this lady by using a formula similar to the one he uses when he later refers to the enthronement of Mongol ladies. In his description, the Persian historian mentions that as soon as she took control of the empire, acting “as his [Yeh-lü Ta-shih's] successor . . . [she] began to issue commands [and] all the people yielded obedience to her”.²⁷ She stayed in power for seven years, during which the political situation of Central Asia did not see any significant change or political turmoil. By the year 1150 CE, the empress peacefully passed the throne to her son I-lieh (r. 1151–63), who continued to rule for another thirteen years.

When the new emperor passed away, his son was also at a young age. In this case, and “with her brother's expressed will”, it was the sister of I-lieh who assumed control of the empire in the name of her nephew.²⁸ We know that Empress Ch'eng t'ien (r. 1164–77) ruled for fourteen years, but information about her ability to rule or her political agenda is scarce. The scattered evidence we have suggests that during her reign, the empire kept its strength, political unity and diplomatic strategy between China and the Islamic world. The Qara Khitai continued to be a powerful political entity in the area after the empress was killed in 1177, and continued as the major ruling entity in Central Asia for almost fifty years until Chinggis Khan conquered it in the second decade of the thirteenth century.

It should be mentioned, if briefly, that in the territories of the major enemies of the Qara Khitai, at least one woman acquired a relevant political role. The Khwārazmshāh dynasty was a tributary kingdom of the Qara Khitai during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.²⁹ Among the Khwārazmshāhs, there is the famous case of Terken Khātūn, a woman of Turkish origin who was the mother of Sulṭān 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad II (r. 1200–20).³⁰ Although she never officially acquired the title of empress nor sat on the throne, she was an influential and energetic political actor in the empire ruled by her son. We know that she sent and received diplomatic embassies and negotiated peace with the

²⁵See the *Liao Shih* or ‘Official History of the Liao Dynasty’, quoted in K. A. Wittfogel and F. Chia-Shêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1225)* (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 643.

²⁶'Alā' al-Dīn Aṭā Malik Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā*, (ed.) M. Qazwīnī (Leiden and London, 1912–37), II, pp. 88–9 [hereafter Juwaynī/Qazwīnī]; Juwaynī/Boyle, I, p. 356; Minhāj-i Sirāj Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Kabul, 1963–4), II, pp. 95–96; Minhāj-i Sirāj Jūzjānī, translated H. G. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, Including Hindustan, from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.), to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam* (London, 1881), p. 911 [hereafter Jūzjānī/Raverty]; and 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī'l-Ta'rīkh*, translated D. S. Richards (Aldershot, 2006–8), I, p. 363.

²⁷Juwaynī calls her Kūyūnk, which Boyle transliterates as ‘Kuyang’; see Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, II, pp. 88–89; and Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356.

²⁸Wittfogel and Chia-Shêng, *History of Chinese Society*, p. 644.

²⁹Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, II, p. 88; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356. According to Juwaynī, he paid 3,000 *dinars* annually. This was established at the time of the rulers Yeh-lü Ta-shih and King Atsiz of Khwārazm.

³⁰Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, (ed.) M. Rawshan and M. Mūsawī (Tehran, 1373/1994), I, p. 474 [hereafter Rashīd/Rawshan]; *Jāmi' u't-Tawārīkh: A Compendium of Chronicles*, translated W. M. Thackston, (ed.) Selim Sirri Kuru (Cambridge, MA, 1998–9), p. 234 [hereafter Rashīd/Thackston].

Qara Khitai on certain occasions.³¹ It is possible to speculate, then, that the geographical proximity and close vassalage relationship between the Qara Khitai and its subject Muslim state could be among the reasons behind the high status acquired by Terken Khātūn in the Khwārazmshāh kingdom, and that the interaction with the female rulers among the Western Liao might have contributed to the empowerment of this Turkish lady.³²

This brief overview of female rule and political activity in Central Asia before the Mongols does not fully clarify the nature or the reasons for the existence of a common appreciation among these Central Asian empires of women as rulers or important political actors. However, it serves to establish a context regarding the role of women in politics at the time when the Mongols conquered and occupied the region. The precedent of these women situates the rise of Orghīna Khātūn as ruler of the Chaghataid *ulus* within the context of a local Central Asian tradition of female rule.

Early Mongol politics and the rise to power of Orghīna Khātūn in Central Asia

When Chinggis Khan died in 1227, the territories of the empire that he built were divided among the offspring of the conqueror, with the four sons by his chief wife obtaining the larger parts of the territories (*ulus*). These lands corresponded to the different regions where appanages or fiefs were allocated to a son after each successive conquest in the territories of today's Mongolia, northern China and Central Asia.³³ Among them, the territories of Central Asia became known as the *ulus* of Chinggis Khan's second son Chaghatai (d. 1242/44) and his descendants. The *ulus* corresponded to the territories in west Turkestan, had fiscal control over the rich Ferghana valley and, over time, would become an increasingly important territory due to its strategic position at the crossroads between China, Mongolia and the western Mongol lands in Russia and the Iranian plateau.

The history of the *ulus* of Chaghatai is marked by turmoil and confrontation between different members of the royal family after the death of Chaghatai in c. 1242/44.³⁴ The origins of the *ulus* go back to the time in which the second son of Chinggis Khan received eight thousand people as subjects and pastures lands in the vicinity of the city of Almaligh in the present region of Xinjiang in north-west China.³⁵ From then on, the territories of Central Asia would be subject to constant dispute between the Ögödeyids and the Toluids first and between Arigh Böke (d. 1266) and Qublai Khan (d. 1294) during the inner Toluid civil war in 1260 and 1264.³⁶ It is within this historical context that the rise of a lady as ruler of the *ulus* emerged. Unlike the elusive references we have for the 'Khātūn of Bukhara'

³¹Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, II, p. 90; and Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 358.

³²P. Jackson, "Sulṭān Raḍīyya", p. 190.

³³P. Jackson, "From Uluṣ to Khanate: The making of the Mongol states, c. 1220-c. 1290", in R. Amitai and D. Morgan (eds.), *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 12–38; M. Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia from Chinggis Khan's invasion to the rise of Temür: The Ögödeid and Chaghadaid realms", in N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank and P. Golden (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 46.

³⁴Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 767; Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, translated J. A. Boyle (New York and London, 1971), p. 149 [hereafter Rashīd/Boyle]

³⁵See I. de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols. A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), I, p. 167, and II, p. 864.

³⁶The terms 'Ögödeyids' and 'Toluids' are used to refer to the descendants of the third and fourth sons of Chinggis Khan, respectively Ögödei (d. 1241) and Tolui (d. 630/1232–3).

mentioned above or the scattered information on the rule of the Qara Khitai regents, for Orghina Khātūn (r. 1251–60)³⁷ we have a more comprehensive body of sources.

Orghina was of noble origin, born of Törelchi,³⁸ one of the sons of Qutuqa Beki, the ruler of the Oyrat people, and Checheyigen, a daughter of Chinggis Khan.³⁹ According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Orghina was born in Mongolia but moved to Central Asia when a marriage was arranged between her and Qara Hülegü (d. 1252), grandson of Chaghatai through his son Mö'etügen (d. 1221).⁴⁰ We have only scant information about her life before arriving in the Chaghatai *ulus*. However, we know that she was sent to Central Asia to marry Qara Hülegü during Chaghatai's lifetime because of a reference in the sources to an alleged close relationship with the *ulus*'s founder. We are told that Chaghatai highly esteemed Orghina, whom he "loved very much and called *Orghina Bāri* [*bāri* meaning daughter-in-law]".⁴¹ This might be an *a posteriori* construction on the part of Rashīd al-Dīn, who, writing almost fifty years after the events, was trying to portray an image of Chaghatai supporting her (and implicitly her husband) in the political confrontations that she had to endure during her lifetime. Yet it also suggests that she was brought into the *ulus* with the agreement of Chaghatai and while he was alive.

The interest of Chaghatai in marrying his heir to Orghina becomes more evident when we look at her family background. Apart from the obvious importance of marrying a granddaughter of Chinggis to his son Qara Hülegü (a great-grandson of Chinggis Khan), the line of Chaghatai was part of a broader marriage alliance between the Oyrat tribe and the Chinggisids.⁴² One of Orghina's sisters was married to Arigh Böke, while one of the daughters of the latter was married to a nephew of Orghina.⁴³ Rashīd al-Dīn also mentions another account about the family connections of Orghina which stated that she had other sisters and step-sisters who would become influential in other parts of the Mongol Empire. For example, Qutui Khātūn and Güyük Khātūn, both wives of the Ilkhan Hülegü (d. 1265), are mentioned respectively as a sister and step-sister of Orghina.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Orghina became the niece of the future Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251–59) when he married her aunt, Oghul Qaimish, a daughter of Qutuqa Beki.⁴⁵ These family connections would play a fundamental role in promoting Orghina to a higher position among the Mongols of Central Asia. Thanks to the close intermarriage between the Oyrat women and the descendants

³⁷The name can also take the forms Orghana, Orqina or Ergene, among others. In the Persian sources she is referred as Ūrghina Khātūn in Rashīd/Rawshan, II, p. 801. Waṣṣaf uses the name Hurghina: 'Abdallāh ibn Faḍlallāh Waṣṣafī, *Tāḥrīr-i tārikh-i Waṣṣafī*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Muḥammad Āyatī (Tehran, 2004), p. 335. In Juwaynī's *Tārikh-i Jahān-Gushā*, her name is spelled Ūrqina, see Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, III, p. 97. Here I will refer to her as Orghina.

³⁸In Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100, the name appears as Tūrālchī. On the intermarriages between the Oyrats and the Mongols see Zhao, *Marriage*, pp. 127–148.

³⁹See Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100; and Rashīd/Thackston, p. 56. Checheyigen was the wife of both Qutula and, after his death, of his son Törelchi; Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia", p. 48.

⁴⁰Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 752; Rashīd/Boyle, p. 138.

⁴¹Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100; and Rashīd/Thackston, p. 56.

⁴²Zhao, *Marriage*, pp. 127–148.

⁴³Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100; and Rashīd/Thackston, p. 56.

⁴⁴According to other sources, Checheyigen, daughter of Chinggis Khan by his chief wife Börte, was also their mother: see De Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, § 239. She is also mentioned by Waṣṣaf and Rashīd al-Dīn as having a sister who was married to Batu Khan (r. 1227–55) of the Golden Horde, though her name is not given. See Waṣṣafī, *Tāḥrīr*, p. 13; Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100; Rashīd/Thackston, p. 56.

⁴⁵Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 100; Rashīd/Thackston, p. 55. She is to be distinguished from her namesake, Güyük's wife and regent of the empire (1248–50).

of Tolui, Orghīna found herself able to gather strong support from the Toluids when this faction carried out a *coup d'état* against the Ögödeyids in 1251–2.

But before she could secure support, she had to go through some difficult times in the company of her husband Qara Hülegü. According to some sources, her new husband was named heir of the realm during Chaghatai's lifetime when the heir apparent Mö'etügen died prematurely.⁴⁶ However, the dynamics of factional rivalries among the Mongols would prevent a peaceful transition in the *ulus*. Qara Hülegü assumed control of the area after his grandfather's death and, together with his wife Orghīna, began to actively rule in the *ulus*. For example, the couple removed and executed Körgüz, the governor of Khurasan, and appointed the famous Arghūn Aqa to the post, in a move that would have profound implications for the future of the Mongol Empire.⁴⁷ Yet only a few years later, with the accession of the Güyük Khan (r. 1246–48) to the position of Great Khān of the Mongols, rivalries broke out in the territories of Chaghatai. Without going into detail, Güyük promoted his friend and brother-in-arms Yesü Möngke (d. 1252), fifth son of Chaghatai and uncle of Qara Hülegü, and removed Qara Hülegü from the throne.⁴⁸ Apart from friendship, Rashīd al-Dīn gives another reason for Qara Hülegü's replacement, suggesting that it was the result of enmity between Yesü Möngke and Möngke Khan.⁴⁹ It was in this context of internal enmity among the descendants of Chinggis Khan that Orghīna emerged on the political scene of thirteenth-century Central Asia.

Hence, after enjoying the position of principal khātūn of the *ulus* for a short period after the death of Chaghatai and during the time when Qara Hülegü was ruler of his grandfather's territories, Orghīna found herself, only a few years later, relegated as the wife of a deposed ruler.⁵⁰ The sources are silent about her actions during this period but it is clear from later developments that she remained in Central Asia while her husband went into forced exile.⁵¹ She seems to have remained out of the spotlight of Mongol political life during the turbulent years of Güyük Khan and his wife Oghul Qaimish. Eventually, however, the situation changed and her connections with the Toluid branch of Chinggisids paid off. When Möngke Khān emerged triumphant from the succession struggle between the Toluids and Ögödeyids in 1251, she was once again in the right place at the right time.⁵²

Qara Hülegü was determined to recover the throne of the *ulus*, and the opposition of the Toluids provided him with a good opportunity. As the representative of the Chaghatayid line of Chinggis Khan's descendants loyal to the Toluids, he assisted the alternative *quriltai* or assembly in electing the new Great Khan who replaced Güyük.⁵³ This gave legitimacy to the

⁴⁶Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 752; Rashīd/Boyle, p. 138.

⁴⁷Rashīd/Rawshan, II, p. 801; Rashīd/Boyle, p. 177; Jūzjānī/Raverty, p. 1149, n. 7. In Juwaynī's account however, it is Töregene Khātūn who sends Arghūn Aqa to Khurasān to replace Körgüz. See Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, II, p. 274; and Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 538. On Körgüz, see Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 72–75, 189–190; On Arghūn Aqa, see G. Lane, "Arghun Aqa: Mongol Bureaucrat", *Iranian Studies* 32:4 (1999), pp. 459–482.

⁴⁸Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia", p. 48.

⁴⁹Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 760; and Rashīd/Boyle, p. 143. Waṣṣaf mentions the replacement without giving particular reasons: see Waṣṣafī, *Tāhīrī*, p. 335.

⁵⁰Qara Hülegü and Orghīna maintained their position as rulers of the Chaghatayid *ulus* during the regency of Töregene Khātūn (r. 1241–46).

⁵¹Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia", p. 48.

⁵²Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, I, p. 220; and Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 265.

⁵³T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands*, 1251–1259 (Berkeley, CA, 1987), p. 26.

Toluid aspirations for the throne of Great Khan and secured their support for Qara Hülegü and Orghina's claim for the Chaghatayid territories. Given the shift in line of succession and the apparent personal enmity between Yesü Möngke and Möngke Khan, what happened next comes as no surprise. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, "when Möngke Qa'an became Qa'an, he gave Qara Hülegü a *yarligh* (decree or command) commanding him to put Yesü Möngke to death and, as heir-apparent, to become the ruler of that *ulus*".⁵⁴ In this newly favourable situation, however, a fresh turn of events occurred when Orghina's husband Qara Hülegü died on his way back to Central Asia with Möngke's orders to put Yesü Möngke to death. Under these circumstances, Orghina Khātūn did not hesitate and it was she who "put Yesü-Möngke to death in accordance with the *yarligh* and ruled herself in her husband's stead".⁵⁵

With Qara Hülegü's death, the Chaghatayid khanate was once more without a ruler. Both Chinese and Islamic sources agree in recognising that after the death of her husband Orghina was immediately appointed as regent of the *ulus* of Chaghatay in the name of her son Mubārak Shāh (r. 1266).⁵⁶ As we will see in the following section, she engaged with her new position and navigated the turbulent waters of Mongol political instability. In doing so, it is difficult not to see a parallel in nomadic practices here which seems to stretch across centuries. The succession formula appears to be similar here to that of the previous cases of early Islamic Bukhara and the Qara Khitai empire. Women assumed control of government when their husbands perished and their sons were too young to rule. The continuity of female regency practices in Central Asia appears to stretch from the early medieval period to the Mongol Empire.

The *ulus* of the Khātūn: Orghina's rule in Central Asia

In order to understand the period in which Orghina ruled in the Chaghatayid *ulus*, it is worth mentioning that she was not the first Mongol woman to assume regency in the name of her son in the Mongol Empire. During the 1240s, two women were in charge of the administration of the whole empire after their husbands passed away. Although there had been politically influential women among the Mongols since the time before Chinggis Khan set out to conquer the world, the first woman to actually acquire both political power and official recognition as regent was Töregene Khātūn (r. 1241–46). A similar situation occurred when the next Great Khān, Güyük, died in 1248 and had no mature sons to succeed him. His wife Oghul Qaimish also assumed control of the empire and, despite not receiving a particularly good press in the Persian sources, did her best to secure the accession of her sons to power and to control the political destiny of the empire.⁵⁷ However, the opposition to

⁵⁴Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 767; Rashīd/Boyle, p. 149; Waṣṣāfī, *Tāḥrīr*, p. 335.

⁵⁵Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 767; and Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 149–150. One of Yesü Möngke's wives, called Toqashi Khātūn, was brutally executed by Qara Hülegü: see Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, III, p. 59; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 588–589. In Rashīd/Rawshan, II, p. 839, and Rashīd/Boyle, p. 213, the story is also narrated, but the lady is mentioned as the wife of Yesunto'a (brother of Qara Hülegü).

⁵⁶Song Lian, *Yuan Shi [The Official History of the Yuan]*, (Beijing, 1976), 134/3247–9, quoted in M. Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of an Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Richmond, Surrey, 1997), p. 16, n. 92; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, I, p. 230; and Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 274.

⁵⁷On Töregene and Oghul Qaimish, see De Nicola, "Unveiling the Khātūns", pp. 68–81.

her rule was too great, and the Toluid *coup d'état* succeeded in placing Möngke Khan on the throne.

With the support of the new Great Khan Möngke, Orghīna found herself at the top of the chain of command in the Chaghatayid *ulus*. Overall, her nine-year reign gives the impression of being generally quiet, and the sources do not report relevant upheavals in the region or internal opposition to her reign. However, before discussing her reign further, it should be mentioned that there has been some debate among scholars regarding the extent to which this woman's prestige went so far beyond the Mongol and Central Asian sphere of influence as to make her name synonymous with the reign. This debate centres around a reference found in the account of the Christian friar William of Rubruck on his way from the Russian steppe to the court of Möngke Khan in Mongolia.⁵⁸ He mentions that once he rested in the city of *Cailac*, which was in a country that “used to be called *Organum* and [. . .] it may be that they get their name *Organa* from the fact that they used to be very fine musicians or organists; so I was told”.⁵⁹ *Cailac* is Qayaligh, corresponding to the modern town of Kopal in eastern Kazakhstan.⁶⁰ The toponymy of the area where Rubruck was staying bears striking similarities to the name Orghīna Khātūn. In the face of this evidence, Dawson and other scholars have suggested that the name of the country was derived from the name of Orghīna, who indeed was ruling the Chaghatayid *ulus* at the time when Rubruck was travelling in the area.⁶¹ On the other hand, Jackson claims that the name is a corruption of that of the capital of the Khwārazmshāh Empire, Ürgench, while Rockhill's translation suggests that ‘Orghanun’ refers to the Uighurs near the city of Kulja in north-western China.⁶² Further, as can be seen, Rubruck himself is not entirely sure about his attribution of the name to the skills of musicians that he is told about. Consequently, the issue might still be open, with Jackson's approach, being the latest, constituting a more comprehensive explanation. However, even if *Orghanun* only refers to the city of Ürgench, the similarity in the terminology between Orghīna and what Rubruck was told is a remarkable historical coincidence.

Returning to the reign of Orghīna itself, it might be argued that this lack of references to turmoil in her reign is due to the lack of accounts of her reign, as after all no contemporary sources produced in Central Asia have come down to us. However, we encounter several references to her active role in office during this period. As mentioned earlier, she was fully recognised as the ruler of the region, a detail that is not a minor one as this recognition certainly provided her with the necessary political backup to carry out her duties. She ruled from the vicinity of the city of Almaliq in eastern Turkestan, in between the modern city of

⁵⁸On William of Rubruck's life and work, see the “Introduction” in P. Jackson and D. Morgan (eds.), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, translated by P. Jackson (Cambridge, 1990; reprint Indianapolis, 2009), pp. 1–55 [hereafter Rubruck/Jackson].

⁵⁹C. Dawson, *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London and New York, 1955), p. 137; Rubruck/Jackson, pp. 148–149.

⁶⁰Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 137, n. 1.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 137, n. 2. Rockhill and Yule also link the area with the Khātūn. See William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–1255, as Narrated by Himself, with Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John of Pian de Carpini*, translated by W. W. Rockhill (London, 1900), p. 140, n. 4 [hereafter Rubruck/Rockhill]; Sir H. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China* (London, 1913–1916), IV, pp. 160–161, n. 3.

⁶²Rubruck/Jackson, p. 148, n. 3; Rubruck/Rockhill, p. 141, n. 3.

Yining (伊宁) (Gulja/Qulja) in the Republic of China and the border of the Republic of Kazakhstan.⁶³ As seen with the examples mentioned above of pre-Mongol female regents, an important area in which the role of ruling women can be observed in the sources is diplomacy. For example, at the beginning of Hülegü's military campaign to conquer Khurasān, Iran and west Asia, when his armies coming from Mongolia "arrived in the vicinity of Almalıq, Orghīna Khātūn came out to greet them and hosted a round of banquets, presenting them with suitable gifts".⁶⁴ It is difficult to determine to what extent the reception laid on by Orghīna for the convoy was due to the fact that she was the ruler of the Chaghatayid khanate, to her relationship as sister of one of Hülegü's chief wives, or to a need to show loyalty to the new Toluid-oriented empire. In any case, it is safe to imply that possibly all of these elements played a role, enhancing her connection to the Toluid branch of the Chinggisid family.

The religious affiliation of Orghīna has also attracted the attention of scholars. It has been suggested by some scholars that she was a Muslim.⁶⁵ However, it needs to be said firstly that her faith is not mentioned anywhere in the sources that I am aware of, but on occasion she is portrayed as being generous towards Muslims.⁶⁶ No religious tensions or confrontations are recorded during her reign, despite the fact that it is well known that when she left office, some religious leaders such as Burhān al-Dīn, the son of the great shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī, were executed by opposing members of the Chaghatayid family.⁶⁷ In fact, Orghīna's son, Mubārak Shāh, was among the first Mongols who ruled a Chinggisid *ulus* to convert to Islam.⁶⁸ This makes Mubārak Shāh a pioneer in the complex relationship between the Mongols and Islam that would develop in the second half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁶⁹

The favouritism towards Islam and the confession of her son do not necessarily imply that Orghīna was a Muslim. In fact, it has been attested that on many occasions, the faith of the

⁶³E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources* (London, 1910), I, p. 161, n. 440. On the city of Almalıq, see W. Barthold, "Almalıq", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition.

⁶⁴Rashīd/Rawshan, II, p. 978; Rashīd/Thackston, and pp. 479–480. Also mentioned by Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, III, p. 97; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 612; Waṣṣāfī, *Tāhrīr*, p. 323. It is worth mentioning that a later source, Mustawfī, takes note of the banquets offered to Hülegü in Central Asia but does not mention the presence of any women. Since Mustawfī had access to Rashīd al-Dīn's and Juwaynī's accounts, this seems to me to be an intentional omission by Mustawfī. See L. J. Ward, "Zafarnāmah of Mustawfī", PhD dissertation (Manchester University, 1983), p. 17.

⁶⁵V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia* (Leiden, 1956–62), I, pp. 46–47; P. D. Buell, "Some royal Mongol ladies: Alaqa-beki, Ergene-Qatun and others", *World History Connected* 7:1 (2010), online publication, available at <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/7.1/buell.html> (accessed 6 November 2014).

⁶⁶Waṣṣāfī, *Tāhrīr*, p. 15.

⁶⁷Only after her reign had ended: see Rashīd/Rawshan, II, pp. 882–883; Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 257–258. Burhān al-Dīn was killed by Alghu (d. 662/1263–64) at the time of the Toluid civil war. The reasons for his execution are not given but these might have been political rather than religious.

⁶⁸Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 758; Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 142–143. The first Muslim Mongol ruler was Berke Khān (r. 1257–66) of the Golden Horde. He was almost a contemporary of Mubārak Shāh and, interestingly enough, his conversion seems to have happened in the city of Bukhara in the early 1250s. See J. Richard, "La conversion de Berke et les débuts de l'islamisation de la Horde d'Or", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 35 (1967), pp. 173–184.

⁶⁹On the Islamisation of the Mongols, see among others C. Melville, "Pādshāh-i Islam: The conversion of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan", *Pembroke Papers* 1 (1990), pp. 159–177; R. Amitai, "The conversion of Tegüder Ilkhan to Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001), pp. 15–43; J. Pfeiffer, "Conversion Versions: Sultan Oljeitu's conversion to Shi'ism in Muslim narrative sources (709/1309)", *Mongolian Studies* 22 (1999), pp. 35–67; and J. Pfeiffer, "Reflections on a 'double rapprochement': Conversion to Islam among the Mongol elite during the early Ilkhanate", in L. Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 369–389.

mother of Mongol rulers did not correspond with that of their sons.⁷⁰ In addition, Mongol women who were, for example, openly Christian occasionally patronised Islamic buildings and Muslim scholars.⁷¹ However, it seems that both the preferential treatment of Islam and the Muslim faith of Mubārak Shāh were among those early examples of Mongol converts that preceded the closer Chinggisid involvement with Islam that occurred in Central Asia, the Golden Horde and especially in Iran and Anatolia at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. This closer relationship with Islam also included women from the Mongol royal family of the Ilkhanate interacting closely with Sufi shaykhs in Azerbaijan and Eastern Anatolia, or women among local *elites* subject to the Mongols, like the Saljuqs of Rūm, in close contact with Sufi orders in areas under Mongol control such as Anatolia or Kerman.⁷²

If the information on Orghīna's reign is scarce in the early years, special political circumstances cause references to her realm to appear more often in the sources in the second half of the 1250s. These events reveal the importance of the position acquired by Orghīna Khātūn within the institution of regency in the Mongol Empire. In 1259, Möngke Khan died, triggering a new conflict for succession within the empire which was, however, different from the conflict that catapulted Orghīna to the throne of the Chaghatayid *ulus* in the early 1250s. On this occasion, the conflict was between contenders for the succession within the line of Tolui. Two of Möngke's brothers, Qubilai (d. 1294) and Arigh Böke (d. 1266), respectively second and fourth sons of Tolui and Sorqoqtani Beki, claimed the throne of Great Khan. Qubilai based his strength on the armies given to him by Möngke to continue the war in central and southern China and on his mother's appanages in the north of that country, while Arigh Böke had the support of the territories of his forefathers in Mongolia. The conflict reshaped once more the alliances between the different branches of Chinggis Khan's family.⁷³

If the accession of Möngke was precipitated by an alliance between the Jochids and the Toluids, and brought about the decline of the Ögödeyids and, in part, of the Chaghatayids, in the new struggle the Jochids aligned themselves with Arigh Böke, while Qubilai gained the support of the new political entity headed by Hülegü in Iran.⁷⁴ In this political scenario, the support of the *ulus* of Chaghatai under the command of Orghīna Khātūn became critically important for both Qubilai and Arigh Böke. The former sent Abishqa, grandson of Chaghatai, to marry Orghīna Khātūn and rule Central Asia in support of his aspirations to the throne. However, Abishqa was intercepted on the way and killed by Arigh Böke's supporters.⁷⁵ Initially, Orghīna did not take part in the conflict between the brothers directly, but after they had both proclaimed themselves Khans, Arigh Böke too tried to secure

⁷⁰See De Nicola, "Unveiling the Khātūns", pp. 212–223.

⁷¹See, for example, the case of Sorqoqtani Beki in Rossabi, "Khubilai Khan", pp. 153–180.

⁷²See B. De Nicola, "The Ladies of Rūm: A hagiographic view of women in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Anatolia", *Journal of Sufi Studies* 3:2 (2014), pp. 132–156; De Nicola, "Patrons or murids?", pp. 143–156.

⁷³P. Jackson, "The accession of Qubilai Qaan: A re-examination", *Journal of the Anglo-Mongolian Society* 2:1 (1975), pp. 1–10.

⁷⁴It is not clear whether Hülegü's first choice for the Great Khanate was Qubilai at the beginning, but once the Golden Horde supported Arigh Böke, the Qubilai alternative seemed the most appropriate way to gain legitimacy for the establishment of a new khanate in Iran. See D. Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2007), p. 104.

⁷⁵The person who killed him was Asutai, one of Möngke Khan's sons; see Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 754; and Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 138–139.

Chaghatayid support for his cause and gave Alghu (d. 662/1263–64), another grandson of Chaghatai, control over the Chaghatai khanate in order to organise the dispatch of supplies from Central Asia to his troops fighting in the struggle.⁷⁶

On the arrival of Alghu as head of the *ulus* of Chaghatai supported by Arigh Böke, Orghina, in her position as ruler of the Central Asian territories, decided to go to Arigh Böke's *ordo*, where she complained about her removal, vindicated her right to rule, and stayed with him until at least 1263, when she was with Arigh Böke near the city of Atbash.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Alghu decided to keep the supplies he was ordered to collect for Arigh Böke, rebelling against his authority and changing sides to support Qubilai.⁷⁸ With this betrayal, it is safe to suggest that Orghina's position and legitimacy grew in the eyes of Arigh Böke, who tried to move against Alghu while Qubilai was busy suppressing a revolt in China. Initially defeated and then partially victorious in his campaign in Central Asia, Arigh Böke was unable to remove Alghu from Central Asia and eventually had to surrender to Qubilai, who pardoned his brother but executed most of his followers. However, Orghina was spared from the purge and, interestingly enough, Alghu was required by Qubilai to marry Orghina if he wanted to have "absolute possession of the throne of the *ulus* of Chaghatai".⁷⁹ This suggests that Orghina might have had a good number of strong supporters in the *ulus* after her reign, which allowed her to be pardoned for her alliance to Arigh Böke and be a recognised source of legitimacy for the rule of the *ulus*. Further, although we have no direct reference to this fact, her close family affiliations among different members of the Toluid branch of the Chinggisids might have given her some room to manoeuvre her political survival, especially considering the fact that her sister was a wife of Arigh Böke himself as mentioned above.

With the final recognition by all parties of Qubilai as Great Khan in 1264, Alghu and Orghina were confirmed as rulers of the Chaghatayid *ulus*. However, Alghu died shortly after this in 1265–6,⁸⁰ leaving Orghina as the senior and most prestigious political figure in the realm once more. As a final political decision and "in agreement with the emirs and viziers", she placed her son Mubarak Shāh on the throne of the Chaghatayid *ulus*.⁸¹ By the time she died shortly afterwards in 1266, she had been an active political actor in Central Asia for more than fifteen years.⁸² During this time, she was recognised as the supreme authority of the *ulus*, effectively ruled Central Asia peacefully for nine consecutive years as a single ruler and emerged successfully from two civil wars. Her family connections and political influence contributed to making her the depository of legitimacy in the region, necessary

⁷⁶For more details on the succession, see Biran, *Qaidu*, pp. 21–23; and Barthold, *Four Studies*, I, pp. 122–124.

⁷⁷The location of this place seems to be in the vicinity of the modern town of At-Bash in the Republic of Kirgizstan. For a reference to the presence of Orghina and Arigh Böke in the region, see the reference to an unspecified manuscript of Jamāl al-Qarshī, *Mulhaqāt al-surāh*, in Barthold, *Four Studies*, I, p. 123. Rashīd al-Dīn also refers to this, even mentioning that Orghina was with Arigh Böke in 661/1262–3, see Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 768; and Rashīd/Boyle, p. 150.

⁷⁸Rashīd/Rawshan, I, pp. 767–769; and Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 150–151.

⁷⁹Rashīd/Rawshan, I, pp. 767–769; and Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 150–151. Orghina seems to have remained loyal to Qubilai during the civil war and therefore is represented as the repository of legitimacy in the Chaghatayid khanate.

⁸⁰Biran, *Qaidu*, p. 23. Rashīd al-Dīn mentions his death in 662/1263–4; Rashīd/Rawshan, I, p. 769; and Rashīd/Boyle, p. 151.

⁸¹Rashīd/Rawshan, II, p. 885; Rashīd/Boyle, pp. 260–261; Barthold, *Four Studies*, I, p. 47.

⁸²Monique Kervran has recently suggested that a burial monument found in eastern Kazakhstan might be the tomb of Orghina Khātūn: "Un monument baroque dans les steppes du Kazakhstan. Le tombeau d'Örkina Khatun, princesse Chagatay?", *Arts Asiatiques* 57 (2002), pp. 5–32.

for Alghu to be recognised as ruler. Finally, her marriage does not seem to have damaged her political influence, but rather the opposite, for she succeeded in gathering the support she needed to promote her son to the throne, which indicates that right up to her death she remained a fundamental political figure in Central Asia.

Conclusion

The rule of Orghīna Khātūn in Central Asia during the thirteenth century was certainly reinforced by the high status provided by being a granddaughter of Chinggis Khan and by the fact that she was well connected across the Chinggissid imperial family. However, if these circumstances favoured her accession to the throne at a particular moment, her role as head of state, her duties and legitimacy need to be seen in the context of a longer-standing tradition of Central Asian women: a tradition of outspoken women often involved in politics that can be traced back into Antiquity and that mixes legends and history from the stories of the Khātūn of Bukhara to historical precedents in the Qara Khitai Empire. Orghīna embodies many of the characteristics of Central Asian women that have been mentioned in literary and historical sources since Antiquity. What sets her apart might be the fact that she was not a legendary heroine but a real member of the Chinggisid dynasty who, as a result of her own *savoir-faire*, managed effectively to rule Central Asia singlehandedly for more than a decade. bdn@st-andrews.ac.uk

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