
The Ethos of State and Society in the Early Mongol Empire: Chinggis Khan to Güyük

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Abstract

*The following joint article is a departure from standard studies, in that historical research is put side-by-side with numismatic evidence. It reflects the growing awareness of the underlying concepts of steppe society that significantly shaped the formation and endurance of the Mongol Empire. With new analysis, it is apparent that the society was clear about these concepts and expressed them in very public pronouncements. They are most evident in the early period of the empire; during the formation of the state by Chinggis Khan and his first two successors, Ögödei (r. 1229–41) and Güyük (r. 1246–48). However, the cataclysmic civil war in the middle of the thirteenth century between the Ögödeyids and Toluids removed direct acknowledgment of such a social ethos. Indeed, after 1250 khans strongly focused on pragmatic issues and relied less on philosophical theories of legitimacy, at least Mongolian ones. By contrast, the first three rulers were keenly aware of the theory of the state and the way society functioned within it. They developed this ethos into a fairly cohesive form that provided moral strength to a nascent regime. The evidence for this development emerges from the study of two particular words, *tengri*, “Heaven”, and especially *töre*, “grand principle”. *Töre* in this usage was the equivalent of the ‘binding and unbinding’ and the *sunna* of the messenger, *Muḥammad*, in medieval Islamic societies and of democracy in modern times. *Tengri* and *töre* are culturally defined theories closely related to the Aristotelian sense of positive law. In all cases, reality required various approaches to them at a given period of time. As a result, the concept of *töre* had existed before the empire and continues to this day, always implying the correct order of good governance.*

The two sections of the following article consider first the implications of these words during Chinggis Khan’s time and secondly developments during Ögödei’s reign and that of his son, Güyük, as the Mongol Empire became just that, an empire. In the first section, evidence comes from the prime literary source, *The Secret History of the Mongols (SH)*, which concludes about the time that other evidence emerges for Ögödei. That later material is numismatic, in particular a coin from the capital of Qara Qorum with the inscription *töre*. It demonstrates, along with the literary evidence and documents of the time, the broad reach of the concepts across the empire. Together, the two parts explore the decisive evolution of the early Mongol concept of the state and society from differing perspectives. The fact that the concept was made explicit in the early imperial period suggests that

there was a much deeper understanding of political theory than has been observed so far.¹

Part I: Founding an Empire

Seal of Güyük Khan



Möngke-Tengri-yin Küchün-tür Yeke Monggol Ulus-un Dalai-yin qan-u jarliγ il bulqa irgen-tür kürbesü busiretügüü ayutuyai

By the Power of Eternal Heaven, the *jarliγ* of the Universal *Qan* of the Great Mongol Patrimony. If this reaches a pacified or a rebellious people, it must respect [it] [and] it must fear.

Heaven (*Tengri*) and Human Ordering (*Töre*): how the Early Mongols Saw Their Tasks and Set about Accomplishing Them According to the *SH*²

Heaven and Earth have taken counsel together, saying Temüjin must be the lord of the patrimony (*Secret History*, 121)

Cinggis-qahan, when he granted Ibaqa-beki to Jürchedei, when he spoke to Ibaqa-beki he said: “You [have been conferred] not because you have no character or because you are poor in beauty, but [because] I indeed having entered the front and foot, and gone to place myself in the proper ordering,³ when I granted you to Jürchedei I was thinking of the great *töre*... (*Secret History*, 208)

¹Note that while in the present paper the authors follow Chinese transcriptions and reconstructed Middle Mongolian within passages quoted directly from the relevant primary sources, the Turkicised spelling Chingiz Khān for the founder’s name is well attested on his coins.

²The *SH* text used here is in Louis Ligeti (ed.), *Histoire Secrète des Mongols* (Budapest, 1971). See also the translation by Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols, A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, 3 vols (Leiden, 2004–2013). I would like to thank Eugene Anderson, Timothy May and Dagmar Schäfer for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. Professor Schäfer suggested the framework for the study.

³This implies that the *qan* too is subject to a proper ordering of society and is conscious of his role.

The Mongol Empire and Post-Imperial Worlds

The Mongols created the largest empire in history in a relatively few years.⁴ It embraced, by 1259 when Möngke Qa'an died (r. 1251–59), much of Eurasia: most of Russia, Iran, all of Turkistan, Tibet, Mongolia, adjacent parts of Siberia, north and west China and even, marginally, Vietnam and what is now Yunnan 雲南 province, then still not formally part of China. After the breakdown of the unified empire in 1260 due to a series of civil wars, successor states appeared. In China, the Yuan 元 Dynasty (1260–1368) was founded by Möngke's younger brother, Qubilai (r. 1260–94). It ruled north China, after 1279 south China, and nearby areas including Mongolia, eastern Turkistan, Tibet and Korea. In southern Siberia, the khanate of Qaidu was founded. Qaydu was a scion of the defunct house of the second *qaghan*, Ögödei, pushed aside during the political process that brought Möngke, son of Tolui, youngest son of Chinggis Khan, to the throne. In western Turkistan, there was the Chaghatayid khanate and in Russia the Golden Horde, ruled respectively by the house of Chaghatai, from another son of Chinggis Khan, and the house of Jochi, from the oldest son of Chinggis Khan. In Iran, the Mongol state was the Ilkhanate,⁵ ruled at first by Qubilai Qa'an's younger brother and long recognised as the authority of the Yuan Dynasty in China. All successor states further expanded the territories that they had inherited. The largest advance was in China. Qubilai unified it under his rule for the first time since the Tang 唐 Dynasty. He continued conquest, moving into Burma and overseas against Japan, Vietnam, Champa and Java, the furthest so far reached by warships from China.

Although Qubilai's successor, Temür Öljeitü (r. 1295–1307), gave up the maritime advances, they had become irrelevant by 1300 due to an active Yuan trade across the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf. Such trade resulted in the first great maritime era in world history, lasting from the end of the thirteenth century until approximately 1350 when Mongol Iran collapsed, severing one axis of the trade. This made it impossible for the Genoese to continue their role via Tabrīz, Trebizond and the Black Sea as middlemen to a truly world trade.⁶

The Mongols of Iran moved into Syria, where they found the Mamlūks a serious foe, and into Saljuq Turkey, which became a satellite. In Russia, the Golden Horde remained the great power of Eastern Europe, which it dominated, turning Bulgaria into a satellite state and also expanding into Siberia. The Chaghatayids had fewer options for expansion but eventually gained strength after the collapse of the empire of Qaidu, in the early fourteenth century.

⁴On the Mongol Empire, see Paul D. Buell, *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire* (Lanham, MD, 2003).

⁵An *il*, also *el*, was a pacified population and the term was used with reference to China's provinces by Rashīd al-Dīn. See Paul D. Buell, "Tribe, *Qan* and *Ulus* in early Mongol China: Some prolegomena to Yüan history", doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1977.

⁶See, as an introduction, Paul D. Buell, "Qubilai and the Indian Ocean: A new era?", in Salvatore Babones and Christopher Chase-Dunn (eds.), *Handbook of World-Systems Analysis* (London, 2012), pp. 42–43. Virgil Ciolcitan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, translated by Samuel Willcocks (Leiden, 2012).

How did they do it?

How did the Mongols, who never numbered more than a million (perhaps as few as 700,000), organise themselves for conquest and respond to the many tasks that conquest entailed? This included dealing with an amazing variety of cultures and ways of life. A connected problem is how they adapted what they already had, and what they found, to create an imperial system. Under the unified empire at least, the system was remarkably uniform from one part of the Mongol world to the other. Even after 1260, the imperial system not only persisted with variations but continued to be recognisable in the systems of the successor khanates. On another level, the Mongol imperial culture even pervaded the old world, as did Mongol tastes from clothing to food and drink.

How did they do it, and why were they successful for so long? That is a major question of great importance for understanding world history since Mongol influences have persisted long after the empire itself. One sees this in many places: in the Chinese province system, for example, in the Russian and later Soviet systems of rule, in a revitalised Iran, leaving entirely aside major cultural influences resulting not so much from what the Mongols themselves did but from the cultural exchanges that their empire and world order made possible.⁷

Sources—The *SH*

To answer this question, since the Mongols touched so many people, research is required in sources in a great many languages. These include Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Mongolian, Tibetan, Old Church Slavonic, Old French, Latin, Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Syriac, and Uighur. In addition, to fully understand our topic, the different periods of the history of the Mongolian Empire and its successor states require specialised knowledge and considerable regional experience. Mongol Iran, for example, was a Mongol successor state; but it was also Iran, an Iran more powerful and more self-aware than it had been in almost 600 years, since before the Islamic conquest. Both the Mongol and the Iranian sides of the Ilkhanate must be taken into consideration. China too remained Chinese at the same time that it was Mongol at the top, except that its ethnic structure was even more complex than that of Iran, leaving aside the major distinction between north and south China.

In the present paper, to reduce the larger problem to a manageable size, we will only consider the earliest era of the Mongolian Empire, namely that of its steppe beginnings through the reigns of Ögödei and Güyük. The former was in most ways the real creator of the Mongolian Empire. The period ending with his death in 1241 is also that covered by our most important Mongolian source, the *SH*. It offers Mongolian history from a Mongolian point of view.

In its present form, as reconstructed (but there is Mongolian script text contained in a later chronicle and now a large Mongolian manuscript found in Tibet) from a transliterated Ming 明 Dynasty translators' training manual, the *SH* is a collection of material from various sources. It has been nearly seamlessly woven together by an editor and writer

⁷On the cultural exchanges, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2001); and Paul D. Buell, "How Genghis Khan changed the world," digital at <http://www.mongolianculture.com/>

working probably at the end of Ögödei's reign.⁸ A major part of the *SH*, now making up perhaps thirty percent of it, is a text that seems to have been known as the "Origins of Chinggis Khan" (*Cinggis qaghanu'ijahur*) and offers the earliest history of the conqueror and considerable information about his ancestors. To this has been affixed a great deal of additional material, some historical but much in the form of apparently actual documents (about sixty percent of the entire text), followed by what are apparently selections, about ten percent of the *SH* as a whole, from what once was a chronicle of the reign of Ögödei Qa'an.

Contents of the *SH*—The *SH* and Mongol Society

Reviewing the *SH*, two facts strike us: one is the clear importance of the structure of Mongolian society during the period of imperial formation and the other, growing from the first, is the pervasiveness of two key concepts that seem to reflect the higher-level social thinking of the Mongols. These concepts are *Tengri*, "Heaven", which provides the overall spiritual order of the world and has allowed the very success of the Mongols, and *töre*, a word now meaning government but in the thirteenth century designating a man-made structure of the universe. It worked in connection with Heaven, to be sure, but in particular with the institutional and social approach and genius of Chinggis Khan and his house.

At the time that the *SH* begins its account, the steppe was dominated by small associations of nomads of varying power. These are the *bölök irgen*, "small groups" of people mentioned several times at the beginning of the *SH*, there for the taking by those more powerful:

One day Duwa-soqor and Dobun-mergen with their younger brothers came down from Burqan spring. When Duwa-soqor came from down on Burqan source, he caught sight of a *bölök irgen* that he saw trekking up Tüנגgelik riverlet.¹⁰ When he spoke, he said: in that group trekking in the front part of a black cart is there not a beautiful girl? If she has not been given to anyone let me ask for her for you . . . (*SH*, 5–6).

The lady in question, who had not been given to anyone, turned out to be Alan-qo'a, one of the most important of Mongolian ancestral figures and a direct ancestress of Temüjin, the later Chinggis Khan. She was known for having children after the death of her husband with a little help from a yellow man, a personified *Tengri* appearing like a dog.¹¹ Later one of her heavenly offspring, Bodonchar, working with his brothers, took control of another *bölök*

⁸See also the discussion in De Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, pp. xxv–cxiii.

⁹After it was written, the *SH* underwent considerable editing, including the insertion of additional, sometimes anachronistic material, and also factual and terminological "corrections". For example, Chinggis Khan was never a *qaghan*, pronounced in Middle Mongolian as *qahan* or *qa'an*, a Turkish term meaning emperor. It was later widely used to designate the Mongol ruler of China, among others, and because of the later prestige of the title, the *qan* of the text of the *SH* has been dutifully corrected in many places.

¹⁰Nomadic patterns of movement among the early Mongols were generally what the Turkic peoples call *yailaq-qishlaq*, a regular alternation between summer pastures, *yailaq*, at higher altitude, and winter pastures, *qishlaq*, at lower altitude. Sometimes, as obviously occurred here, this meant movement along a river or stream. A rarer variant to such movement was a circular movement over quite large territories to maximize access to limited pasturage without much altitude change. See Buell, *Historical Dictionary*, pp. 1–2.

¹¹Tabooing is at work here. Yellow means yellow, but also white, one of the colours of *Tengri*, and a dog is here a stand-in for wolf, a Mongolian tribal totem.

iregen which was, in the view of the brothers, “like a body without a head, a robe without a collar, without a distinction between great and small, between bad and good, without a head and foot” (*SH*, 33, 35). The brothers made up for what it lacked by taking control and feathered their own nests at the same time.

Thus the early steppe was not only characterised by small, disorganised groups but also by violence, in which the more powerful or the better organised could look out for their own interests by seizing or controlling others. Most of the pragmatic (real) groupings of early Mongolian society came into being in this way, with constant competition, since rights to pastures were key. A pragmatic social unit might exist but not have grazing rights or too little access to pasture, thus meaning more violence or possibly alliance.

However, force and the outcome of violence were not the only organising element in the early steppe. Also important was a complexity of kinship structures, reflecting real descent, but also fictional organisations established for various reasons. Here again there were pragmatic issues at stake, since the early Mongols were widely exogamous, requiring that careful track be kept of descent and a careful delineation made of which groups were too close for intermarriage and which unrelated or only distantly related and thus acceptable for marital alliances. A knowledge of kinship was also important since, as the pronouncements of Temüjin, the later Chinggis Khan, make clear, hereditary associations were often the rule rather than the exception, although this changed to some extent later as the *qan* reorganised Mongolian society for more effective rule by himself and his house.

Two structures were key in the organisation of early Mongolian society, *oboq* and *uruq*. An *oboq* was a maximal descent group traced from a common ancestor who might be largely or entirely mythical, for example, Bodonchar, whose father was a yellow dog-man and who was born magically after his father's death. Bodonchar was considered the founder of the Borjigin, the lineage of the Mongol ruling house. By contrast, an *uruq* was a patrilineal descent group from a well-known, real common ancestor; and *uruq* were connected with each other through *oboq*. Associated with the system of *uruq* and *oboq* were the *yasun*, “bones”. The concept was used largely to separate the elite from commoners. The elite usually had an unquestioned blood-line relationship with an *uruq*; for example, commoners – that is, common herdsmen – might have an association with it primarily through political control and were virtually owned. Thus elite and commoners were members of different *yasun*. Nevertheless in some cases, intermarriage was even possible.¹²

As already mentioned, the kinship system was important for its role in keeping the elements of society separate, at least in terms of intermarriage with strict exogamy. Kinship connections were also very useful as a real or fictive means for recognising hereditary connections or at least for justification of actions in terms of supposed hereditary connections. Examples will be given below. Also, the traditional kinship structure of the early Mongols remained the primary way that pasture resources were distributed. Real or fictive membership in a kin group was the way that the many disembodied units of the steppe knew where to graze their

¹²See Buell, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 5. The fullest treatment of the Mongolian social and kinship system is D. Gongor, *Khalkh Tovchoon*, 2 vols, BNMAU Shinlekh Ukaany Akademiyn Tüükhijn Khüreele (Ulaanbaatar, 1970–1978).

animals along paths that were recognised and clearly delineated and so unlikely to result in conflict.

The early steppe also was replete with collective names, sometimes associated directly with *oboq* names but often not. By Temüjin's time, membership in groups such as the Tatar or the Kereyid was important. Such groups were often dominated by one or more key lineages with large groups of retainers held together by tradition and over-group control of pasturage. In addition, a primary function of such larger groupings in society was to serve as a platform for negotiation and compromise. This platform included the outside world, e.g., the Jin 金 Empire, which was constantly meddling in steppe politics and even creating groups of allies for its own purposes. Among them was Temüjin for a time. Indeed, among the larger groups, particularly important were those known as Mongol. They even grew large enough to have a *qan*. The early history of this Mongol confederation is given in the *SH*. How cohesive it actually was remains to be seen. It was certainly noticed by the outside world, Chinese commentators and historians, for example.

Force or the threat of force was, of course, important; but contrary to the popular conception of Mongols, negotiation and deal-making were important too. This tradition was heavily influenced by the structure of kinship long after the former net of the more traditional kin structures had broken down. As will be shown, one continuing feature of the Mongolian kinship system was a substantial role for women. Due to the lack of an established central authority, marriage links could be of dominant significance and were established whenever possible even if women other than daughters were involved, e.g. Ibaqa-beki.

Examples from the Text and Discussion

Although the material above and below is not taken from all periods of the text, the contents of the *SH* have four distinct periods. First is a mythic era of super-human ancestors down to Alan-qoa and her son, Bodonchar. Then follows a semi-historical period down to the birth of Temüjin (1162?) and the poisoning of his father, Yesügei, by Tatar enemies. The next period traces the survival of Temüjin and his family in difficult times when they were abandoned by Yesügei's people, the Tayici'ut. Then comes Temüjin's subsequent gradual rise to power and the wars of steppe unification and political consolidation at their end, after 1206, when Temüjin became Chinggis Khan.¹³ Finally, tacked on is the era of Ögödei Qa'an.

In parts three and four of this historical account, two overriding themes are, first, the importance of *Tengri*, "Heaven", since Temüjin is favoured by Heaven from the beginning, and Heaven is associated with Earth (*gadzar*), also a major spiritual force. The second theme is the stress on the right of a Heaven-empowered *qan*, universal ruler, to set the norms of human order, *töre*. These two themes and the historical experiences of the era are of subsequent importance.

¹³On the *qan*'s title see Igor de Rachwiltz, "The title Činggis Qan/Qayan reexamined", in W. Heissig and K. Sagaster (eds.), *Gedanke und Wirkung. Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Nikolaus Poppe* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 281–298.

The way in which the Mongols determined the structure of their empire was heavily dominated by their *Tengri*-worship and by the perceived Heaven-sent mission of the ruling house to establish social order, by conquering the world if necessary. *Tengri* and *töre* in turn determined how the Mongols saw tasks and went about trying to organise themselves to fulfill them just as did the “let’s make a deal” tradition of kinship-dominated Mongolia.

Heaven, *Tengeri*, also *Möngke Tengeri*, “eternal Heaven” (172, *Möngke Tengeri medtügei*, “Eternal Heaven must know”), is everywhere in the *SH*. In Chapter One appear the two most ancient Mongolian ancestors, Gray Wolf (Borte Cino) and Beautiful Doe¹⁴ (Qo’aimaral) who were born from *Tengri*, Heaven, “with a fate”. Later, when Temüjin enters the story, he is admonished and protected by Heaven and defers decisions to it (80, 145, 172, 179, 187, 203, 206, 207, 208, 254, 281). Later Heaven and Earth (*Tengri gadzar*) give him strength in his endeavours (113, 125, 163, 177, 199, 248, 260), as does Eternal Heaven (199, 203, 240, 265, 267, 275), and Heaven is responsible too for defeats (143, 167) sent for a purpose, another form of admonishment of a favoured personage, Temüjin. Heaven is also called as witness along with the sun and the moon (189). In Chapter 224, the theme is even expanded with the first appearance of the standard phrase *Möngke Tengeri-yin gücün-tür*, “by the power of Eternal Heaven”, later almost universally the first words of imperial edicts which call upon it and the spiritual potency of the ancestors, with which Heaven was by then equated. This is apparent in the Seal of Güyük Khan reproduced at the beginning of this article (note the Classical Mongolian spellings).

However, there was more. Heaven could sometimes not express itself clearly, so certain individuals needed to interpret its will and also provide guidance to mortals in conducting themselves in accordance with the will of Heaven. Such individuals were most often shamans who had the responsibility of speaking to Heaven on behalf of Temüjin and his house and his empire in general. This included outright shamans such as Teb-tengri, “High-Heaven”, who grew so powerful that he had to be executed. The following passage, which introduces the second key term under discussion, *töre*, Heaven-based social order, also must refer to a shamanic intervention. Although nothing in the text directly calls Üsün a shaman, he has a white robe and a white gelding. White was a colour associated with Heaven along with *köke*, sky-coloured. In addition, the function of the *beki* appears in determining the proper days and months for actions, a primary function in the Mongolian religion of the time.

Also, Cinggis-qahan, when he spoke to Üsün the old he said: Üsün, Qunan, Kökös, and Degei, these four, not hiding what they saw and what they heard, were announcing what was hidden. They were speaking about what they understood and what occurred to them. The *töre* of the Mongols has a way as a principal path for becoming a *beki*.¹⁵ The Ba’arin are the *uruq* of an older brother. The path of the *beki* has existed among us since ancient times, and Üsün the old must become a *beki*. Raised up as a *beki* he and having put on a white robe, and having been shown the honour of having been caused to ride a white gelding and having been seated in a superior position, he will also determine the years and the months; and this it must be. Thus, he issued a *jarliq* (edict).¹⁶ (216)

¹⁴Or fallow doe.

¹⁵This term occurs here and in female names. No one is quite sure what it means.

¹⁶A *jarliq* was an imperial pronouncement pertaining to the total *ulus* of the Mongols, the *Yeke Mongol Ulus*, or “Great Mongol Ulus”.

Thus Üsün's position was part of the Heaven-given ordering of the universe as established by Chinggis Khan, a part of the *töre*.¹⁷

The term *töre* is not as pervasive in the *Secret History* as *Tengri* is, but it occurs at very important places in the text. The first part of one of the most interesting occurrences has already been given in one of the quotations introducing this paper. In it, Chinggis Khan tells Ibaqa-beki, who had previously been a wife, not to fret about his giving her to Jürcedei. He was, he claims, thinking of the *yeke töre*, the great or supreme ordering of things, when he did so.¹⁸ He continues:

Jürcedei has his virtues:

His virtue was being as a shield,
On the day of battle;
His virtue was that he was
My protection against the enemy people;
His virtue was that he unified
The scattered patrimony,¹⁹
His virtue was that he made unharmed,
The dispersed patrimony

Thinking of *töre*, I conferred this on you. After this time our *uruq* will be sitting on our throne. And they will be thinking of *töre* that such a benefit has been conferred [by Jürchedey]. And if nothing is contrary to my words, from *uruq* to *uruq*, Ibaqa's throne must not be cut off. Thus saying, he issued a *jarliq*. Also, Cinggis-qan, when he spoke to Ibaqa, said: your father, Jaqagambu, has given you two hundred as bridal dowry and the two cooks,²⁰ Asiq-temür and Alciq. Now, as you go to the Uru'ut, as a parting gift, I say go and take with you, from the dowry people given to me, Asiq-temür and a hundred which I have given. Also, when Cinggis-qan spoke to Jürcedei saying, my Ibaqa I have given to you. Will you not take charge of four chiliarchies of Uru'ud? Thus he did him a favour and issued a *jarliq*.

Thus *töre* was not just social order in an abstract sense but involved the proper maintenance of a complex net of relationships. In this case, Jürcedei had served the *qan* well and deserved a reward. There was an obligation to reward him, and this involved the granting of a high-status woman who through her alliance with Jürcedei was to cement a key alliance within the Mongolian empire. It was not just with an individual, Jürcedei, but with a large collection of subject people granted to Jürcedei, a sub-khanate that was still part of the whole.

This episode very much involved marriage politicking. On one level, the men of the ruling house could conquer and accumulate people for their own use, making the whole

¹⁷The discussion here is largely drawn from Paul D. Buell, "Some aspects of the origin and development of the religious institutions of the early Yuan period", unpublished master's thesis, University of Washington, 1968.

¹⁸*Töre* also occurs elsewhere in the *SH*. *Yeke töre*, for example, is also found in 220 with much the same meaning. Alone *töre* in 121 and 178 occurs in a general sense as circumstances, conditions, perhaps an older, a less specialised meaning. In 263, this meaning of *töre* occurs as a binome in *yosun töre*, "preferred ways", in this case meaning the "preferred ways" of the cities of the Islamic world and China, i.e., the proper ways for cities. For a complete, historically-driven discussion of the word see Caroline Humphrey and A. Hürelbaatar, "The term *töre* in Mongolian history", in David Sneath (ed.), *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, 6th-20th Centuries* (Bellingham, WA, 2006), pp. 263–292.

¹⁹Patrimony is *ulus*, the empire as the joint property of the imperial clan at one level and the holdings of individuals at another. See Buell, "Tribe, *Qan* and *Ulus*".

²⁰Cook is something of a misnomer. *Bawurci* comes from *bawur*, liver, and means dispenser of delicacies.

stronger; but the women were expected to hold it all together through marriage alliances, part of the *töre* that Chinggis Khan mentions.

The way this could work out in practice is perhaps best seen from the example of the various partnerships of Alaqa-beki, a daughter of Chinggis Khan, who eventually became one of the most powerful figures in early Mongol North China, the only woman in her position. She even led her own army, much to the chagrin of Chinese commentators. She was originally sent out to secure a key alliance between the Mongols of Chinggis Khan and the Önggüd, a Turkic people strategically positioned in the Inner Mongolian borderlands. As political realities shifted, she married first an Önggüd prince and then another, completely dominating the group. Later, after her death, her children ruled and became major figures, in some cases in the China of Qubilai Qa'an.²¹

The pattern of complex relationships revealed above is replicated again and again in the *SH* as the empire was organised and as tasks were planned and accomplished. Few things could be done without a collective determination of what needed to be done to begin with, a consensus even if the *qan* already had every intention of determining what *töre* called for and giving the order. At a macro level, this meant a *quriltai*, a convening of the imperial clan and all associated with it, to do such things as elect a new *qan*, enthrone him, or make a major decision on the next stage of conquest. At the micro level, this involved meetings of those immediately connected, sometimes highly informal. It was a semi-clothed Börte, the main wife of Chinggis Khan, who made the decisive contribution when the *qan* had to break the power of the shaman Teb-tengri (245), for example. In this connection, the power and influence of the women of empire was a profound shock to the Chinese, among others. Qubilai Qa'an's successor, Temür Öljeitü, not only loved his main wife, but she practically ran the court during much of his reign. Earlier, Töregene Khatun, who started as a slave, came to rule the entire Mongolian Empire for more than four years.

Any decision worth making not only started with a careful delineation of a task but also required a statement of the decision in alliterative prose or verse with proper poetic references and many metaphors. Thus the general, Sübe'etei (1176–1248), was sent on his way to pursue enemies with the following words in the *SH* (199):

That same ox year [1205], when Cinggis issued a *jarliq*, he sent Sübe'etei with iron [reinforced] carts to pursue the sons of Toqto'a headed by Qudu, Qal, and Cila'un. When he did that, Cinggis-qahan issued a *jarliq* to Sübe'etei, when he sent him with advice, [he said]: "the sons of Toqto'a headed by Qudu, Qal, and Cila'un are going in fear, are turning back and exchanging shots [with their pursuers]. They have gone, [like] lassoed wild horses, [like] an ox [wounded] with an arrow. If they take wings and fly, if they go up into the sky, you, Sübe'etei, becoming a falcon, fly; and will you not seize them? If they become marmots, if they enter the earth, having dug with a claw, [then you] having become a shovel, boring into the ground, will you not overtake them? If they become fish, if they enter into the ocean depths, you, Sübe'etei, becoming a saddle cloth fish net, fishing them in, will you not catch them?"

²¹See "Some royal Mongol ladies: Alaqa-beki, *Ergene-Qatun and others", *World History Connected*, 2010, digital at <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/7.1/buell.html>. On the Öng'üt see now Christopher P. Atwood, "Historiography and the transformation of ethnic identity in the Mongol Empire: The Öng'üt case", *Asian Ethnicity*, digital at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2014.939333>

Also, considering the distance, [since] I have sent you crossing over high passes and fording broad rivers, be sparing lest the horses of [your] army are starving, be sparing, lest your food supplies are finished. It is not good, when the horses are already exhausted, to be sparing. It is not good, when provisions are exhausted, to be sparing. In your path certainly there will be wild animals in abundance. When you go, thinking about this, you must not send your army's men after wild beasts. You must not take them in numbers. If you are thinking, let there be increase and supplementing for the provisions, if you hunt, [then] you must hunt, separating out the wild. Except for a regular hunt, do not strap on the tail straps of the saddles of the army men. Do not travel having the bit inserted. If you travel with the bit inserted, how can the men of the army go fast? When you have managed like this, you must take and beat ones gone beyond the regulations. [Of] ones gone beyond our *jarliq*, those known to us, you must come giving such people to us. All those not known to us: just behead them on the spot. Across the river you must disperse, you must go in that manner. Beyond the mountains, you must separate. You must think of nothing else.

If your power is increased in Eternal Heaven, if you subjugate the sons of Toqto'a into your hands, what purpose [keeping them] until you have brought them to us. [Kill them] and leave then there [on the steppe]. Thus speaking, he issued a *jarliq*.

When Cinggis-qahan also spoke to Sübe'etei, [he said:] "When I send you on this campaign, [it was because] I, when I was small, was made to fear three times by the Uduyt of the Three Merkit surrounding Burqan spring. I have now taken an oath saying that [in the case of] such hated people: He must meet up [with them], at the end of distance, at the base of the sun".

So saying, when he sent them in pursuit, going to the end, having built the iron carts, the ox year, he sent them out to war. He issued an edict saying: "If you go thinking that when We are [left] behind, it is as if We are near, and when We are distant, it is as if We are close, then you will indeed be protected by Heaven above".²²

The task here is to wipe out a threatening enemy, but it is highly ritualised and calls upon Heaven and also a public for support. It is almost as if the *qan* uses his ritual pronouncement to justify a task to those listening; this is not book poetry but an alliterative public pronouncement. *Töre* in this case is reestablishment of peace and good social order violated by the enemies. Enemies pursued by Sübe'etei have not only resisted the Heaven-supported mission of Chinggis Khan but have also outraged public morality and order; thus the need to exterminate them.

The example above of the appointment of Üsün as *beki* also has a collective character and that of a public announcement. The *qan* is seeking public approval and asserting that events were taking place in accordance with *töre*, as the proper ordering of the universe.

²²On this campaign see Paul D. Buell, "Early Mongol expansion in Western Siberia and Turkestan (1207-1219): A reconstruction", *Central Asiatic Journal* 36 (1992), pp. 1-32, and *idem*, "Sübötei-ba'atur", in Igor de Rachewiltz, Chan Hok-lam, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing and Peter W. Geier (eds.), *In the Service of the Khan. Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period (1200-1300)* (Wiesbaden, 1993), pp. 13-26.

Government

As Chinggis Khan established his steppe regime and it grew, the empire became larger and acquired more structure. Part of this involved the replacement of an older organisational model based upon individual holdings and kinship links with a new one based upon pragmatic tribes (*mingan*, thousands, initially called *güre'en*, originally referring to a circular structure of men and their families), each technically a unit of 1,000 warriors plus families and retainers. These were largely divorced from the old kinship systems, but the old terminology persisted as did perceived relationships between the elites of the new tribal bodies. Rashīd al-Dīn's great list of who's who misidentified these relationships as 'tribes' of the Mongolian world. He wrote in the early fourteenth century, when most of the connections were little more than memory but still a source of prestige and importance for family history. The tribal units were also grouped into larger units, purely artificial ones such as myriarchies, loose regional groupings. Unlike their component thousands, they were never intended to nomadise as units but were connected with *tanma*, tribal occupation and reaction forces, and their advanced scouts, *alginci*.²³

At the same time the Mongols built a central government and sent delegates from it to occupied areas as the empire grew, in particular into sedentary areas. The Mongol central government grew from the *qan*'s bodyguard, a force small at first but later much larger. Its members were expected to serve the *qan*, his family and entourage but also actively participate in governing. This included hearing cases as a court of law²⁴ and providing specialised cadres where necessary, as delegates, that had to go out to occupied areas and govern. There they collaborated with other interested parties, e.g., representatives of the princes and even locals looking out for their own interests, Chinese warlords for example.²⁵

The *qan*'s bodyguard included representatives from all social groups both inside and outside of Mongolia. Technically many were hostages, but in practice the bodyguard was a school of national assimilation. The bodyguard was thus a people in and of itself and able to approve decisions and participate in them, at least witness them. As such, the bodyguard was not only at the centre of imperial governance but actively collaborated in it. It was a central institution which was one of the reasons it was so important in delegating functions outside the steppe.

Thus the process by which the bodyguard was created involved many of the same procedures as already noted above in beginning other activities. The task was to govern and serve and protect the *qan* but was a collective task that required ritual and social participation. Chinggis Khan re-appointed Önggür, the cook (*bawurchi*), to a court post in the following terms:

Also, when Cinggis-qahan spoke to Önggür the cook, when he said "you Önggür are a son to Möngketü of the kiyān [*uruq*] of the three Toqura'ut and five Tarqut, and you had a *güre'en* for me formed from the Cangsi'ut and the Baya'ud. You Önggür:

²³See Buell, "Tribe, *Qan* and *Ulus*".

²⁴See Paul D. Buell, "Chinqai (1169–1252): Architect of Mongolian Empire", in Edward H. Kaplan and Donald W. Whisenhunt (eds.), *Opuscula Altaica, Essays Presented in Honor of Henry Schwarz* (Bellingham, WA, 1994), pp. 168–186.

²⁵Discussion in Buell, "Tribe, *Qan* and *Ulus*".

You indeed did not lose your way in the fog,
 You indeed did not separate in the battle,
 When it was damp you became damp,
 You indeed were exhausted suffering from the cold.

Now, what kind of reward will you receive? When he said that, when Önggür spoke, when he said, “If I can choose a reward, my elder brother and younger brother, Baya’ut, are scattered about among all kinds of foreigners. If you are going to reward me, I should collect together my Baya’ut elder and younger brothers”, [Cinggis-qan] issued a *jarliq* saying, “Let it be so, you collecting your Baya’ut elder and younger brothers, take charge and be the chief of a thousand”. Also, when Cinggis-qahan issued a *jarliq* saying, “Önggür and Boro’ul, the two of you, are to my right and left side, you two as cooks when you prepare food, when there is no deficiency for those who sit positioned on the right side, when there is no deficiency for those in a row on the left side, the two of you are thus distributing, let me rest my mind, my throat not constricting [from hunger].²⁶ Now, Önggür and Boro’ul, the two of them, may they distribute food to the many men as they are riding off and departing”. Thus he issued a *jarliq*. He said, “When they take their positions, may they position themselves to the right and left sides of the great drinking pot and take charge of the food. You must sit looking towards the north along with Tolun and his people”. So saying he indicated positions for them.²⁷ (213)

Conclusions

Thus in early imperial Mongolia, the process of planning and task performance, in this case appointing court officials, touched upon a variety of areas. This included Mongolian kinship structure, demonstrated past achievement and loyalty, often used to create allied groups, a sense of what was needed and of public acceptability. Also important was public recognition, particularly when something new was being created. There was also a strong ritualistic sense to what was accomplished. For example, real decisions had to include long passages of alliterative prose or verse to have any actual validity.

Although the examples here come from the last years of unification and the early years of empire, the pattern described persisted long after the death of Ögödei Qa’an in 1241. Qubilai Qa’an, for example, inherited the imperial bodyguard, and its functions at court continued. Moreover, thanks to Marco Polo and many other writers and artists, we know how the court looked and functioned, for example, what the Mongols said when they all took a drink in the *qa’an*’s presence. The important thing is that despite efforts to Sinify them or to present their actions in Chinese terms, particularly in Chinese sources such as the *Yuanshi* 元史, “History of the Yuan 元”, the Mongols were never Chinese. They remained very much part of a different world. They even perversely continued to nomadise to the end. Beijing 北京 was only the winter capital. They really only came alive on the trek between it and summer pastures in Inner Mongolia.

Thus culturally, an old style persisted. Also persisting, even if under changed circumstances, were an interest in *Tengri* and *töre*. *Tengri* was often clothed in Buddhist terms in East Asia and its cultural imagery. *Töre* remained the proper order of the universe and of the imperial

²⁶This implies that the *qan* himself was not going to eat until his retainers are satisfied.

²⁷That is, positions in the *qan*’s *ger*. Such positioning was also expressed when regular palaces were built.

system as established by Chinggis Khan and his family. As Humphrey and Hrelbaatar have shown, the word continued in use up to the present day with a variety of meanings, and not just in Mongolian but as a loan word in a variety of Turkic languages everywhere, it continues to have a connotation of law, proper order, system.

Part II. Maximising State Theory and Centralising Imperial Rule after Chinggis Khan



Хархорум хэмээх араб үсэгтэй зоос

“Coin in Arabic Script said to be from Kharakorum,” 635/1237 [Silver]: Kharakorum Museum no. Kar 2-2004-3960. Reproduced by permission.

Introduction

The Mongol Empire developed from its very beginning a structure significantly different from previous steppe empires in order to centralise control in the hands of a few people. They had earned their positions through revising existing mechanisms of government including pre-imperial political concepts such as *Tengri* and *tre* and having the ability to implement programmes. The main evidence for this assertion lies in the early policies that attempted to incorporate new populations into a unified whole that was subject to Mongol political ideals. This process was manifested in the oft-proclaimed statement that *Tengri* had given the Mongols the right to rule the world, but this was not just a slogan: there was an embedded rationale behind an actual belief. To put it into effect, as soon as the major military campaigns were completed, urbanisation was encouraged. Cities were newly built or restored as people were returned to their former activities and sites.

In Mongol terms, this was ‘pacification’ into a state of *il/el*, which did not mean just the absence of rebellion but a condition of integration. Thus government changed its involvement in the economic activities of its subjects. Initially, it had taken in-kind products that met daily and ceremonial needs along with gold and silver bullion, stored in

a treasury. Much of this was gathered only in yearly tribute payments. The change to a more sophisticated and reliable source of income was reflected in new forms of taxation and increased emphasis on how, 'when' and 'what' to collect; the 'what' quickly became coinage. Below, the changes in the empire during the immediate years after Chinggis Khan's death in the reigns of Ögödei and Güyük are described in terms of these two major developments, an ongoing urbanisation or re-urbanisation that allowed among other improvements a comprehensive fiscal administration. The reforms were revolutionary for a steppe empire that involved an understanding of the complete state as a viable entity in itself. This understanding was clearly represented in the terms *töre* and later *ulūsh*. This section presents the new concepts that developed from already existing ideas described in the first part.

Ögödei's First Reform of the Civilian Government

Ögödei was elected *qa'an* at a *quriltai* in 626/1229. It formally acknowledged the major conquests and vast steppe belonging to his authority. The exercise of that authority was ultimately placed in a Central Secretariat, a *Zhongshu sheng* 中書省, in Chinese sources. It was administered by senior bodyguard officer (*cerbi*) Chinqai, possibly an Önggüd,²⁸ assisted by the Sinified Khitan, Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材. Chinqai controlled a central province, the *yeke qol*, "great pivot", and two regional authorities. One was headquartered in the old Jin 金 central capital of Zhongdu 中都. The other was located in Turkistan at Khojanda and run by the Khwārazmian, Maḥmūd Yalavach. These administrators had provided long and distinguished service under Chinggis Khan. They continued their careers through Ögödei's reign and that of his son, Güyük, and beyond in the case of Yalavach and his son.

At first, Ögödei was preoccupied by military matters. The Mongol position had deteriorated in China during the regency of Tolui (1227–29). It needed to be refortified, including dealing with a rump Jin regime, finally conquered in 1234 in campaigns initiated by Ögödei himself. As he consolidated his rule, Ögödei was able to devote more attention to civil government, especially after his and Chinqai's return to Mongolia in 629/1231. Only then did the court begin to develop a coherent and pervasive civilian government. In north China, the bureaucracy was revised in 629/1231 from that established by Chinggis Khan and at approximately the same date in Turkistan. Meanwhile, from the Greater Iranian campaigns, a third regional province had emerged by 630/1232, soon run by Körgüz, possibly an Önggüd and Nestorian like Chinqai.²⁹ At that point, three chief administrators reported to Chinqai at the centre.

Fiscal Administration

In the Second and Third Provinces, administrative reform meant taxation. Riches there were to be calculated not only in luxury goods but also in a more substantial form of money, an object that could be easily transported and stored. A new coinage was fully deployed

²⁸Buell, "Chinqai", *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 95–111.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 103.

by 630/1232. The normal type had an obverse with an ornate arabesque at the top, and below it was the *shahāda* or Islamic profession of faith, *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (“there is no deity but God”). The reverse initially had *خانی / Khānī* or *قأن / Qā’an -i*³⁰ at the top that indicated the type of coinage, the term first being implemented under Chinggis Khan. Otherwise, there was no indication that the coinage was actually Mongol money. *Qā’an -i* was followed by the caliphal title and name of *الامام الاعظم الله الناصر لدين* / *al-Imām al-A‘ẓam, al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh*. This statement had also occurred during Chinggis Khan’s time. This pale gold coinage was issued in Samarqand, then Bukhara, Khojanda, Otrar,³¹ Isfarā’in, Nīshāpūr, Tūs and finally Astarābād.³² Some of these 630/1232–3 types began to drop the name of the caliph, who had been long deceased by this time, and retained only the first part of the title. This simplification was again similar to coinage struck in Transoxiana at the end of Chinggis Khan’s life.³³ Since the coinages were in precious metal and employed close if not exact standard types, it seems they were lump-sum or tribute-like payments from each region, not necessarily planned as a regular occurrence. As a result, it was a very simple tax system that, nevertheless, followed a common general policy directed from the top administration.

The Censuses

Rather than having one payment from a whole group or living from pillage, Yelü Chucai championed a different, more reliable strategy and a more lucrative one, a Chinese-style system of taxing families. It was gradually introduced during the early years of Ögödei’s reign, particularly during the year 631–2/1234. An important part of his efforts at reform rested on the ability to find the missing population that had dispersed because of continuous fighting. Thus there was a second or perhaps a third census in China that also canvassed populations in the west acquired after the conquest of Jin.³⁴ In China and elsewhere, this census was the key to advancing finance and central authority across the empire until trade revenues dominated much later.³⁵ Plans for such censuses were one of the main points covered at Ögödei’s second *quriltai* of 632/1234. Once again, all the governors,

³⁰Such an inscription, using Turkic *khan* and the Middle Mongolian form *qa’an, qayan* in Classical Mongolian, was largely for the consumption of the world outside Mongolia, which was used to Turkic titles. *Qayan* was not used as a formal title by the Mongols until later although it already appears on some of the coins of Cinggis-qan.

³¹For an example, see the Oriental Coin Database (zeno.ru), no. 5002.

³²Although there was a regular style, there were variations. The *Shahāda* coinage seems to have actually begun with billon as represented with the Timurid coin of 628/1231: Pavel N. Petrov, *Ocherki po numizmatike mongol’skiikh gosudarstv XIII-XIV vekov* (Nizhny Novgorod, 2003), p. 109, no. 68. However, the main group was electrum. The whole series was short-lived but geographically extensive: Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khān to Uljaytu, 1220-1309* (London, 2006), pp. 92–96. In this paper, the mints do not have diacritic marks that would represent Arabic spelling.

³³At the death in 623/1226 of the Caliph al-Zāhir, Mongol coinage from Samarqand did not cite the new caliph. Only the title remained as a continuation of Islamic practice. See Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, p. 65.

³⁴In Chinese sources, the population from the older census (or censuses) in China is called *jiu hu* 舊戶, “old families”, and newly-enumerated population *xin hu* 新戶, “new families”. Population belonging to the great warlords and princes was not counted: Otagi Matsuo 愛宕松男, “Mōkojin seikenji shita no kanchi ni okeru hanseiki no mondai 蒙古人政權治下の漢地に於ける版籍の問題, *Asiatic Studies in Honour of Torū Haneda*, 383–429; Buell, “Tribe, Qan and Ulus”; and the overview in Thomas T. Allsen, “The rise of the Mongolian empire and Mongolian rule in north China”, *The Cambridge History of China, VI, Alien regimes and border states, 907-1368* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 321–413 (at pp. 373–379). Note that no Mongol census was a complete canvass but focused on new population elements first available for distribution after a conquest.

³⁵Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, p. 229.

generals and princes convened and this time approved censuses in order to collect direct taxes.³⁶

There is documentary evidence for the First (North China) and Third (Greater Iran) Provinces but not for the Second (Turkestan) or Central ones. Nevertheless, presumably those areas underwent censuses as well. In fact, evidence for a census in Turkestan comes from various types of silver coinage that appeared almost immediately, for example at Pūlād in 633/1235–6 and perhaps at nearby Imil.³⁷ The second (or third) census in China was completed two years later in 634/1236; and at about the same time, Körgüz was ordered to proceed with a census in Greater Iran. However, it was not until a year after the dangerous Tārābī Revolt in Bukhara that he held a census and produced electrum and silver coinage. It appeared first at his capital, Ṭūs in Khurāsān, in 637/1239 and then only silver in Adharbayjan from late 637 to 640/1239 to 1242.³⁸

Urbanisation

The new emphasis on knowing the number of people required settling the population, which led to a pro-urbanisation policy. It started almost immediately in Qara Qorum. City walls were erected in 633/1234–5, in effect establishing it as the sedentary capital of the Mongol Empire. Ögödei actually stayed there, but for only a short time, about a month each year, moving to other nearby locations with the grazing cycle, this later became standard practice. Nevertheless to emphasize the city's status, Ögödei also built a ceremonial “white” palace. Earlier during Chinggis Khan's lifetime, Chinqai had set the example by founding two large settlements between the Hangai and Altai mountains on the steppe.³⁹ Next in 634/1236 in the west, the government re-established Ganja, Ṭūs and Herat.⁴⁰ Therefore by 635/1237, the policy of settling the population in urban centres and producing a census was well established across the empire and even in the Mongolian heartland. That the Central Province also had a census is proven by a recently excavated coin reproduced at the beginning of this section.

Taxation in the Central Province

The apparent purpose of the money represented by the excavated coin was to tax residents, mostly captive craftsmen or merchants from Central Asia. The physical form and accounting method of payment represented by this coin was similar to those obtaining

³⁶In 632/1234, after the first *quriltai*, taxes were simplified in the extreme so that it took about two years after the second one to develop the full policy: Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, pp. 96–97.

³⁷For Pūlād, Oriental Coin Database (zeno.ru), no. 4789; for Imil, no. 47899.

³⁸Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, pp. 108–111.

³⁹Buell, “Chinqai”, p. 100.

⁴⁰Herat had been in ruins from 1222 and began to be re-established in 634/1236. Tolui had taken 1,000 weavers to Besh Baligh, where they had made fabric for the court. Finally, a noble was allowed to lead a small group of 100 families back to the city. In 636/1239, 200 more families joined them; and remnants from the countryside started to swell the population. A census was taken, and by 637/1240 there were 6,900 people. The city continued to grow. In another case, Körgüz greatly encouraged the rebuilding of devastated Ṭūs: Henry H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols, from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century*, III, *The Mongols of Persia* (London, 1888), pp. 40–41.

in western Mongol domains.⁴¹ The coin came to light in 2004 and in 2005 the joint German–Mongolian team excavating at Qara Qorum published it as the first known coin from the imperial Mongol capital.⁴² The design and calligraphy on both sides of it are decisive, clear and executed by a skilled hand. The coin was not a copy of anything, nor hastily conceived. Moreover, it was neither *bālīsh* nor cash but the normal medium of exchange in Western and Central Asia and consisted of precious metal, silver. The first known coin from the capital has all the features of a proper Islamic coinage with date, mint, shape, metal and type name. As important, the two main inscriptions appear regularly on other Mongol coinage, which has no minting information, thus providing some evidence for their attribution and the widespread implementation of the reform.

The obverse of the coin has a marginal inscription in Arabic, but only the bottom portion can be read as the date of *خمس وثلاثين* / *khams wa thalathīn*, that is 635/1237–8. After that, there is a linear square that surrounds a linear circle. At the top of the main field is a winged palmetto with a long trunk extending down between the two *lams* of *Allāh* that ends in a small circle. The main inscription is simply *الله* / *Allāh*. To the left of *Allāh* is the sinuous backward-S insignia or *tamgha* of Ögödei⁴³ and at the bottom a word in Uighur script that will be explored shortly. The reverse also has a marginal legend in Arabic, but the only word that can be fully deciphered is *mithqāl* / (...?) / *المثقال* / (...) / on the bottom, which in numismatic terms means ‘standard accounting weight’, clearly showing that the coin conformed to the *mithqāl* system of the Middle East. It is not a *mithqāl*, however, being only 1.25 grams rather than being close to 4 grams.⁴⁴ Perhaps the preceding word indicated some sort of relationship to a normal ponderal system, like ‘a third’; but that does not exist. The main inscription is also in Arabic stating *الامام العظم* / *al-Imām al-A‘zam* (“The Greatest Leader”), the caliph’s title in Baghdad, and above it the mint of *قره قرم* / *Qara Qorum*. Below the field is a delicate knot and to the right is a triangle of three balls, which suggests that Ögödei had brought the engraver and mint master from Herat.⁴⁵

⁴¹Later in 651/1253, Rubruck noted a thriving Muslim section of the town with shops and an open-air market. He does not, however, indicate their origin. See Peter Jackson, translation and edition, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, The Hakluyt Society, no. 173 (London, 1990), p. 211.

⁴²Stefan Heidemann, Hendrik Kelzenberg, Ulanbayar Erdenebat and Ernst Pohl, “On ‘The first documentary evidence for Qara Qorum for the year 635/1237–8’”, *Zeitschrift für Archäologie ausseruropäischer Kulturen* 1 (2005), pp. 93–102. Also presented by Mark A. Whaley, “The first documentary evidence for Qara Qorum from the year 635/1237–8”, *Acta Mongolica* 11 (2011), pp. 113–128. The key word *töre* on the coin was first read for the authors by Timothy May in 2009 and later confirmed by Paul Buell. Stefan Heidemann, however, in the article as well as in personal communication, continues to consider the script illegible.

⁴³Pavel Petrov and Vladimir Belyaev have discovered and analyzed Ögödei’s *tamgha* on other coin series: P. N. Petrov and V. A. Beliaev, “K voprosu o personalizatsii tamg na monetakh Chagataiskogo ulusa”, *Trudy Mezhdunarodnykh Numismaticheskikh Konferentsii: Monety i denezhnoe obrashchenie v mongol’skikh gosudarstvakh XIII–XV vekov* (2001), pp. 79–95.

⁴⁴One coin is not enough to determine the position of the issue in the 24 carats that constituted the *mithqāl* system; however, because of its weight and size, the coin is about a third of the presumed complete *mithqāl* weight, making it a rather light coin for the period.

⁴⁵See the progression of this symbol on coinage from Kurram to Herat during the period that Ögödei was in command of Zābulistān: Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, pp. 91–95.

Töre and Tamgha

The coin by its simple existence gives much information about the Mongol interpretation and implementation of government at that time, but the inscription gives an even more concise testimony to the emerging Mongol theory of the state. All of these events of urbanisation, census-taking, re-arranging taxation and issuing new coinage culminated around the time of this coin in 635/1237–8. The crucial change in policy was signified by the word under *Allāh*. It is not a religious word but a political one about government theory and operating structure. That word, written in Uighur script, is Mongol *töre*, a noun, meaning “system, imperial system” and, here, “government authority”.⁴⁶ Its occurrences and meanings in the *SH* have already been discussed. A first version of the *SH* was almost certainly compiled during Ögödei’s reign; some parts may have been gathered as early as the time of his second *quriltai*.⁴⁷ Therefore, expressing imperial authority was a significant concern at this time. Moreover, the word gave a strange-looking object with an even stranger script for a nomadic land the sign that it was a Mongol coin. Otherwise, there is no indication of its source especially since the Mongols were not in the habit of putting their names or even a title on money. If the administration planned to monetise some of the economy and especially taxes, it needed to be able to identify its own product. The word was written in the official Uighur script used for edicts.⁴⁸ Thus, ‘government’ – by implication ‘government issue’ – expressed the expanded and imperial sense of identity and authority.

⁴⁶Igor de Rachewiltz (*Secret History*, III, p. 133, n. 41) considers that the word is not *töre* but *yön*, the second person imperative of Turkic *yör*, “to walk, move”. He takes this as imitating the *tong* 通, “pass through”, and *xing* 行, “move”, on Chinese coins. He cites an Ögödeyid silver issue inscribed on one side as *da chao tongbao* 大朝通寶, “currency of the great court”. The authors of this article suspect that the purpose of that Ögödeyid joint-language issue was to tax the Chinese population, but the issue did not combine two numismatic traditions on the same side. Therefore, a direct Chinese instruction was probably not transferred to this Islamic-style coinage. Rather, this one Uighur word and the *tamgha* were the only items on the excavated coin not influenced by external factors. Moreover, the later Güyük coins, which were much more prolific, do not have any counterparts with Chinese characters. After further examination of several more coins, this author re-confirms that the first letter is ‘t’. Its initial form in Uighur is a small circle with a short upward stroke on its left side. There is no beginning base line. After that letter, in the word under discussion, comes the much larger and oblong open form for ö that is like an Arabic *ص/sad* so that the ‘t’-circle is often overshadowed by it. Depending on the calligraphy, the first letter looks like an open English ‘o’ (Oriental Coin Database [zeno. ru], no. 121161) or ‘c’, but more often a filled-in ‘o’ that melts into the short vertical stroke (silver coin from the British Museum, no 1967.0112.2, 3.19 grams). The open circle is visible, for example, on the reverse of the gold coin owned by Terry Lee. Some examples, however, have an unfinished circle pushed into the short line, such as on the reverse of the British Museum coin. Moreover, since many coins start the letter on a base line, two other forms appear: one has an anvil shape (Oriental Coin Database [zeno. ru], no 121210, with illegible reverse); another makes a single upward sweep to the top left of the letter. This last shape creates a solid right triangle (Oriental Coin Database [zeno. ru], no 121171, with the mint Qara Qorum at the top) that matches the initial ‘y’ that Igor de Rachewiltz has read. Vladimir Nastich has also studied many of these coins. Of particular interest is his Table 2 on page 20 of his report, giving the calligraphy for this word from coins of the Utrār hoard. Of the eleven examples, not one quite matches another one, which is further visual proof of the difficulty in deciphering the word. In spite of such a detailed study, Dr Nastich declined to provide a confident reading of the word (reconfirmed by private communication). However, the largest and best circle of all existing specimens appears on the 635/1237 Qara Qorum coin itself. Therefore, the authors consider that this wider survey combined with the 635/1237 coin bears out the reading of *töre*. This argument and some of the previous discussion with illustrations are also covered by the authors in “Töre and Ulūsh: Discovering the emergence of a Mongol state ethos through coinage”, in *Golden Horde Numismatics* (Kazan) 3 (2013), forthcoming (p. 7).

⁴⁷See the discussion above.

⁴⁸For example, Chinqai instructed Yelü Chucai in the script: Buell, “Chinqai”, p. 102.

Although that word made the money Mongol in terms respected by steppe society, the *tamgha* of Ögödei also identified the ruler, reminding everyone of his particular Heavenly good fortune and legitimacy.⁴⁹ This symbol was a numismatic innovation and partial compliance with Islamic traditions. Nonetheless, his actual title and name still did not appear following customary practice for Chinese money. Nevertheless, he started a practice that later *ulus* rulers often followed. His *tamgha* may have appeared slightly earlier on coinage from Imil in his personal domain. The development of these two points, the word *töre* and the *tamgha* combined religious and ethical legitimacy in a dated setting. It indicates that the Mongols were advancing their thinking far beyond the earlier political organisation of Chinggis Khan. They were prominently placing a particular person, Ögödei, at the head of the government. That government was centralising control over a vast empire and acknowledging a specific person as leader, making clear that the former loose arrangements no longer existed.

Güyük Expands the Imperial Concept and Terms

There is no other secure coinage from Ögödei's reign with this word in spite of the massive reorganisation efforts of the court. Continuation of the policy is evident, nevertheless, in the coinage of his son, Güyük. However, for five years after Ögödei's death, the chief ministers were so insecure in their posts that they retreated to safe places until they could return.⁵⁰ Probably shortly after his inauguration then, Güyük also issued silver coins from Qara Qorum; but unfortunately they have no date. The obverse was clearly derived from Ögödei's type of الله / *Allāh*, but the *ha'* is rather more ornate than on Ögödei's coin apparently in order to fill the space of Ögödei's *tamgha*. Instead, Güyük transformed the palmetto's trunk into his *tamgha* or symbol of two connected circles. Below *Allāh* is the stamp of the government with the word *töre* in Uighur script. The other side has the mint at the top as in the case of Ögödei's Qara Qorum issue, but the central inscription reads الأردو الاعظم / *al-Urdū al-A'ẓam* ("the greatest *ordu*", that is, the royal court). The word *töre* is again at the bottom.⁵¹ Advancing in the political understanding of the importance of inscriptions, Güyük's ministers finally removed even the caliph's title and replaced it with a reference to the real seat of power. Significantly, Güyük called upon *töre* twice.

Other undated issues of the same type were also minted in Qara Qorum sometimes with the mint abbreviated to قرم / *qāf, rā', mīm* or *qorum*.⁵² Then these early silver issues developed a common type that did not cite the mint.⁵³ Both types had wide circulation,

⁴⁹ "... the Mongols' ideology ... of special good fortune, or royal charisma, ... (was) a concept that passed to the Turkic nomads through the agency of the Sogdians. ... It was a central element in the quest for legitimacy. In this respect, ... the Mongols closely followed their Turkic predecessors": Thomas T. Allsen, "A note on Mongol imperial ideology", in V. Rybatzki *et al.* (eds.), *The Early Mongols: Language, Culture and History: Studies in Honor of Igor de Rachewiltz* (Bloomington, 2009), pp. 1-8 (at p. 1).

⁵⁰ Buell, "Chinqai", p. 106.

⁵¹ For an example with the mint of Qara Qorum at the top and *töre* starting with a base line, see Oriental Coin Database (zeno.ru), no. 121161.

⁵² Note the discussion in Heidemann, "On the first documentary evidence", p. 95, of the Utrār hoard and other excavation finds at Qara Qorum.

⁵³ Some people, including Heidemann, consider that the mint is referred to in the main inscription. However, the mint is rarely alone in the middle of the main field; and the preceding similar types indicate that the main inscription did not indicate the ruler's *ordo* as the mint site.

extending at least to the Syr Darya in Turkestan since they were found in the Otrar hoard of 1974.⁵⁴ Moreover, apparently there were even contemporary imitations. In particular, a gold issue without date has the Islamic *shahada* on one side and something resembling *al-Urdū al-A‘zam* in Arabic on the other that is actually elegant gibberish. However, at the bottom on both sides, *töre* is clearly inscribed in Uighur script.⁵⁵ Since the Great *Ordu* was the specific message of Güyük’s coinage as compared to Ögödei’s, it seems that Güyük’s administrators stressed that the royal court more than the city of Qara Qorum was the centre of political power, but both rulers referred to *töre* as a guiding principle.

Importantly, a moving *ordu* can cover a good deal of ground; and that imperial concept was pushed further. Before Güyük’s official accession to the throne in 644/1246, there was another crucial statement about territory and people. From 642 to 646 /1244 to 1248, with a brief hiatus in 643/1245,⁵⁶ coins from an astonishing number of seventeen mints in Adharbayjan and Georgia⁵⁷ had a type with a Mongol horseman stating الغ منقل الوش /*ulugh Munqul ulūsh* [the great Mongol patrimony/state]. The message had to be understood beyond the confines of the homeland, so the Mongolian phrase was written in Arabic not Uighur script this time. Although most of these issues were made at the far southwestern end of the empire, there was also an emission in 646/1248 in Bulghār on the middle Volga River.⁵⁸

Conclusion

From father to son and then to grandson, the theme went from *töre*, in *SH* as *yeke töre*, designating imperial government or rule, to *al-Urdū al-A‘zam*, the khan’s court or camp as the centre of government, to its control over the *ulugh Munqul ulūsh*, the great Mongol state. The coinage of the Ögödeyids, therefore, shows the emergence and transition of a theory of the all-encompassing state, the way the Mongols perceived their empire as one vast entity under a single order. However, once Möngke ascended the throne (r. 649 to 658/1251 to 1259), *töre* and *ulūsh* no longer appeared on coinage. Their meaning of a powerful and united Mongol state operating under a legitimate mandate and social consensus had already been made explicit. By this time, the political concept had evolved dramatically from all previous steppe empires. The ethos or understanding of their rule received legitimacy from

⁵⁴K. M. Baipakov and V. Paul D. Buell, Charite Universitäts Medizin and Max Planck Institute, Berlin, and Judith Kolbas, Central Asian Numismatic Institute, Cambridge. N Nastich, “Klad serebrianykh veshchei i monet XIII v. iz Otrara”, in *Kazakhstan v epokhu feodalizma (Problemy etnopoliticheskoi istorii)* (Alma-Ata, 1981), pp. 20–62.

⁵⁵Terry Lee, Canberra, private collection; also Oriental Coin Database (zeno.ru), no. 90114. Because of the *shahāda*, it seems that the gold type was struck further west, perhaps closer to Samarqand than to Qara Qorum. There is no indication that the type was issued under Güyük, but it does try to follow his common reverse inscription.

⁵⁶Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, pp. 124–128.

⁵⁷Giorgi Janjava and Irakli Paghava, “Ahar: A new mint issuing Ulugh Mangyl Ulus Bek type coins”, *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 215 (2013), pp. 22–23.

⁵⁸Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, p. 134.

the supreme god, *Tengri*, even acknowledged on some early coinage,⁵⁹ but the method was theirs through *töre*. pbuell@mpiwgberlin.mpg.de

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⁵⁹The Pulad (6)33/1235-6 silver coin does not state *Allāh* but instead has Ögödei's *tamgha* at the bottom. Above it is the Mongolian phrase (in awkward Arabic script) *kuchigdur Tengri* ("By the power of Heaven"): Oriental Coin Database (zeno.ru), no. 47899.