
Chinggis Khan Defeated: Plano Carpini, Jūzjānī and the Symbolic Origins of the Mongol Empire



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Abstract

This article aims to clarify an obscure passage in Plano Carpini's text, and subsequently in C. de Bridia's one, referring to a crushing defeat of Chinggis Khan, which has so far not been identified with certainty. The record of such a defeat is found in identical terms under the pen of Jūzjānī, and it actually appears that this strange narrative follows the pattern of the Mongol myth of origin, which is also common to the myths of the Türks, of the Kimeks and others. Here the argument is made that these accounts written outside the Mongol territory are therefore not only the result of confusion and distortion, contrary to what has long been thought. They testify to the existence of a legend of Chinggis Khan, built in an imperial propaganda effort directed at all the nomadic subjects of the Mongol Empire, and which placed the birth of the empire and the story of the origins contained in the myth on the same symbolic level.

Keywords: Plano Carpini's text; Mongol myth of origin

Introduction

In the *Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros apellamus*, which John of Plano Carpini drew from direct observations he made during his trip to the Mongol court in 1245–1247, the fifth chapter stands out from all the others, in that it traces the history of the Mongols, the rise of Chinggis Khan, his conquests and those of his successors. This chapter is therefore not based on the direct testimony of the Franciscan monk, but on the statements of Russian clerics, “or other persons who have remained among the Tartars for a long time”, who have reportedly served as intermediaries at the Mongol court, as its author has repeatedly indicated.¹ This narrative mixes fabulous elements with historical events, identifiable from other sources.² As already

¹Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros apellamus*; *Storia dei Mongoli*, (ed.) Enrico Menestò et al. (Spoleto, 1989), pp. 259, 274; translation Ch. Dawson, “History of the Mongols”, in *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, (ed.) Ch. Dawson (London, New York, 1955), pp. 23, 31; translation Th. Tanase, “Histoire des Mongols”, in *Dans l'Empire mongol*, (ed.) Th. Tanase (Toulouse, 2014), pp. 93, 105.

²Thus, for example, the defeat of the Mongols against the Christians of India ruled by the Priest John and his copper fire-breather mannequins, the meeting of Chinggis Khan's army with dogmen, the passage through the

noted many times, these elements seem to be for many of them borrowed from the *Alexander Romance* of the Pseudo-Callisthenes.³

However, these are not additions by Plano Carpini himself: undoubtedly, the story told in the fifth chapter is of Mongol origin.⁴ This can easily be seen from the text parallel to the *Ystoria Mongalorum*, the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, composed in 1247 by the Franciscan monk from Silesia C. de Bridia, based on a first version of Plano Carpini's work to which he added information gleaned orally from Benedict the Pole and Ceslaus (or Stephen) of Bohemia, Plano Carpini's companions in his journey to the Mongol court.⁵ Indeed, C. de Bridia, unlike Plano Carpini, systematically gives the original names of the marvelous peoples allegedly encountered or the imaginary countries supposedly crossed by the Mongols, and provides Turko-Mongolian etymologies that prove to be perfectly correct.⁶ Benedict the Pole spoke directly to the Russian interpreters, before translating into Latin for Plano Carpini: his story, transmitted to C. de Bridia, was therefore, in all likelihood, closer to the original Mongol story. Michèle Guéret-Laferté even hypothesizes that the informants of the Franciscan monks were themselves Mongols, Plano Carpini having replaced them in his text by Russian clerics, and therefore Christians, in order to better guarantee the truth of his statements.⁷ The fifth chapter of the *Ystoria Mongalorum*, and its counterpart in the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, would therefore correspond to a "Chinggis Romance"⁸ composed in a Mongol

magnetized mountains of the Caspian where the peoples of Gog and Magog are imprisoned, and then the arrival in a country where men live underground, because of the infernal noise that the sun makes when it rises; Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, pp. 258–263; translation Dawson, "History of the Mongols", pp. 22–25; translation Tanase, "Histoire des Mongols", pp. 92–96. A little further on, Plano Carpini recounts how the Mongols, returning from their expedition in Hungary, met the Parossits, who only feed with smoke, men with ox feet and dog faces, and others, finally, whom he calls Cyclopedes, having only one arm and one leg, and who move around doing the wheel; Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, pp. 272–274; translation Dawson, "History of the Mongols", pp. 30–31; translation Tanase, "Histoire des Mongols", pp. 104–105.

³J. A. Boyle, "The Alexander Legend in Central Asia", *Folklore* LXXXV, n°4 (1974), p. 221; M. Guéret-Laferté, *Sur les routes de l'Empire mongol. Ordre et rhétorique des relations de voyage aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1994), pp. 299–300; D. Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality. Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden, 2014) pp. 51–52. See also the introduction to Th. Tanase (ed.), *Dans l'empire mongol* (Toulouse, 2014), pp. 29–34.

⁴A. Yourtchenko, "Ein asiatisches Bilderrätsel für die westliche Geschichtsschreibung. Ein unbekanntes Werk aus dem 13. Jahrhundert (Der "Tschingis Khan-Roman")", *Zentralasiatische Studien* XXVIII (1998), pp. 48–49 in particular.

⁵On the authenticity of C. de Bridia's text, see D. Sinor, "Mongol and Turkic Words in the Latin Versions of John of Plano Carpini's Journey to the Mongols (1245–1247)", in *Mongolian Studies*, (ed.) L. Ligeti (Budapest, 1970), and more recently G. Guzman, "The Vinland Map Controversy and the Discovery of a Second Version of the *Tartar Relation*: The Authenticity of the 1339 Text", *Terrae Incognitae* XXVIII (2008).

⁶The men living underground, in the country where the sun rises in a great crash, are called the Narayrgens, which he translates as "men of the sun", from *nara(n)*, "sun", and *igen*, "people". The land of the dogmen is called *Nochoy Kadzar*, from *Noqai*, "dog", and *qajar*, "land, country". Men with ox feet and dog heads are called *Ucorolon*, "Beef feet", from *üker*, "ox feet", and *köl*, "foot", or *Nochoyterim*, "Dog heads", *terigün* meaning "head"; Bridia, *Hystoria Tartarorum*, (ed.) Alf Önerferos (Berlin, 1967), pp. 10, 13, 16; translation G. D. Painter, "The Tartar Relation", in *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*, (ed.) R. A. Skelton, T. E. Marston and G. D. Painter (New Haven, London, 1965), pp. 64, 70, 74; translation Th. Tanase, "Histoires des Tartares", in *Dans l'Empire mongol*, (ed.) Th. Tanase (Toulouse, 2014), pp. 171, 175–176. In general, all the etymologies proposed by C. de Bridia for the names of peoples or places, including those of real peoples, are correct, or at least plausible and explainable by Turkish or Mongolian. See Sinor, "Mongol and Turkic Words".

⁷Guéret-Laferté, *Sur les routes*, p. 299 n. 39.

⁸As Painter put it in his introduction to the editing and translation of Bridia's text (Painter, "The Tartar Relation", p. 49), taken up by I. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London, 1971), p. 107, and Yourtchenko, "Ein asiatisches Bilderrätsel".

environment⁹ from Turkish, Mongol and Chinese legends, and elements usually presented as drawn from the *Alexander Romance*.¹⁰

Within this “Chinggis Romance”, however, Plano Carpini reports a curious episode that takes place in the early days of Chinggis Khan’s career:

The Mongols on their return to their own country prepared for war against the Kitayans, and moving camp they entered their territory. When this came to the ears of the Emperor of the Kitayans he went to meet them with his army, and a hard battle was fought in which the Mongols were defeated and all the Mongol nobles in that army were killed with the exception of seven. This gives rise to the fact that, when anyone threatens them saying “If you invade that country you will be killed, for a vast number of people live there and they are men skilled in the art of fighting”, they still give answer, “Once upon a time indeed we were killed and but seven of us were left, and now we have increased to a great multitude, so we are not afraid of such men.”

Chingis however and the others who were left fled back to their own country and after a short rest Chingis again prepared for battle and set out to make war against the land of the Uighurs.¹¹

Mongali autem, in terram eorum revertentes, se contra Kytaos ad praelium preparaverunt; qui, castra moventes, terram Kytaorum intraverunt. Imperator autem Kytaorum hoc audiens venit cum suo exercitu contra eos, et commissum est prelium durum, in quo prelio Mongali fuerunt devicti, et omnes nobiles Mongalorum qui erant in predicto exercitu fuerunt occisi, usque ad septem. Unde adhuc quando aliquis eos minatur dicens: « Occidemini si in illam iveritis terram, quoniam populi multido ibidem moratur et sunt homines ad prelium apti », respondent: « Quondam etiam fuimus occisi et non remansimus nisi septem, et modo crevimus in multitudinem magnam, quare de talibus non terremur ».

Chingis vero et alii qui remanserunt in terram suam fugerunt, et cum aliquantulum quieverisset Chingis predictus, preparavit se rursus ad prelium et contra terram Huyrorum processit ad bellum.

We find this same episode, in more or less similar terms, with some variations, in C. de Bridia’s *Hystoria Tartarorum*:

Soon afterward Chingis collected a still more powerful force and entered the eastern country called Esurscakita, the natives of which call themselves Kitai, to whom the Mongols, and the other three provinces speaking their language, had formerly paid tribute. This country is large, very extensive, and was then extremely rich, having a powerful and energetic Emperor who, hearing the news and violently enraged, met Chingis and his army with a numerous multitude in a certain vast desert, inflicting such a slaughter on the Mongols that only seven survived,

⁹The stories in this chapter would indeed have been reported in the Mongol court, as Plano Carpini repeats twice: Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, pp. 259, 274; translation Dawson, “History of the Mongols”, pp. 23, 31; translation Tanase, “Histoire des Mongols”, pp. 93, 105. See also Yourtchenko “Ein asiatisches Bilderrätsel”, p. 49.

¹⁰Painter, “The Tartar Relation”, p. 49; Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 107. According to Boyle, “The Alexander Legend”, the *Alexander Romance* was known to the Mongols, and more generally to Eurasian nomads, thanks to the dissemination in Central Asia by Nestorian missionaries of its version in Syriac, as well as that of a text entitled the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, also known as the *Syriac Legend concerning Alexander*. However, I have serious reservations about this theory; see below. On the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander* in particular, and the spread of the *Alexander Romance* in the East, see K. Czeglédy, “The Syriac Legend Concerning Alexander the Great”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* VII, n°2/3 (1957), and more recently, E. Van Donzel and A. Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Syriac and Islamic Sources. Sallam’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall* (Leiden, 2009).

¹¹Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, p. 255; translation Dawson, “History of the Mongols”, p. 20; translation Tanase, “Histoire des Mongols” pp. 89–90.

though a larger number of other nationalities succeeded in escaping [...]. Chingis, however, fled unnoticed to his own country and for a short time abated his wickedness.¹²

Deinde Cingis mox fortitudine grauiori collecta adiit terram orientalem nomine Esurscakita. Homines vero appellant se Kitai, quibus Mongali et relique tres prouincie lingue eorum quondam fuerant tributarij. Hec terra est magna et spaciosa valde, et erat opulentissima, habens imperatorem strenuum et potentem, qui huiusmodi perceptis rumoribus indignatus uehementer occurrit Cingis et exercitui eius cum multitudine copiosa in quadam uasta solitudine, et tanta strages facta est Mongalorum, quod de viris Mongalis tantummodo septem remanserunt, aliarum tamen nacionum plures homines euaserunt [...]. Cingis vero clam in terram fugiens per temporis modicum sue malicie pacem dedit.

Without a doubt, the term “Kitai” refers here, as in all the texts of Plano Carpini and Bridia, to the inhabitants of Northern China; the one who is called their emperor is the emperor from the Jin dynasty, of Jürchen origin.¹³ However, no other source mentions a defeat of Chinggis Khan against the Jürchen-Jin, let alone of such magnitude. The two campaigns conducted during the Mongol conqueror’s lifetime in northern China were, according to our sources, nothing more than a series of brilliant victories.

Thomas Tanase indeed notes that “this campaign cannot be identified”.¹⁴ If it is not a complete invention, then what can we say about the story of this defeat which is *a priori* a true *hapax* in the literature on Chinggisid conquests? It may be recalled that the *Secret History of the Mongols* reports that Chinggis Khan was defeated in the battle of Dalan Baljut, shortly after his election as khan, around 1187, but by his *anda* (“sworn friend”) and rival, Jamuqa, and not by the Jin.¹⁵ Rashīd ad-Dīn and the *Shengwu Qinzheng Lu* 聖武親征錄 also mention the event, but attribute the victory to Chinggis Khan.¹⁶ For Ratchnevsky, there is no doubt that he was indeed defeated, but it is not so certain that we must follow the version of the *Secret History*.¹⁷ Now this battle is followed, in our sources, by what Paul Ratchnevsky calls “a gap in Temuchin’s life history”, which he attributes to a taboo placed on certain events in Chinggis Khan’s life, which would have damaged his prestige.¹⁸ This documentary void corresponds to a ten-year period, from the battle of Dalan Baljut to

¹²Bridia, *Hystoria Tartarorum*, (ed.) Alf Önnersfors (Berlin, 1967), p. 6; translation Painter, “The Tartar Relation”, p. 58; translation Tanase, “Histoires des Tartares”, p. 168.

¹³On the identification between Kitai/Kitat and the inhabitants of northern China, see for example I. de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden, 2006), p. 300.

¹⁴Tanase, “Histoire des Mongols”, p. 89 n. 35 (“cette campagne ne se laisse pas identifier”).

¹⁵*Secret History* [hereafter *SH*], § 129; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 54.

¹⁶Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi’ at-tawārīkh: Tārīkh-e Ghāzānī*, (ed.) M. Rowshan and M. Mūsavī (Tehran, 2016), p. 299; translation W. M. Thackston, *Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World. Persian Histories of the Mongol Dynasties*, Vol. III: *Rashiduddin Fazlullah* (London, 2012), p. 115; *Shengwu Qinzheng Lu*: “Shengwu Qinzheng Lu jiaozhu 聖武親征錄校注”, in *Wang Guowei yishu* 王國維遺書, Vol. XIII, (ed.) Wang Guowei (Shanghai, 1983) [hereafter *SWQZL*], p. 10a; translation P. Pelliot and L. Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes de Chinggis Khan* (Leiden, 1951), pp. 35–37.

¹⁷P. Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan. His Life and Legacy* (Malden, 2006), pp. 46–47.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 49. Interestingly, it is just after the discord between Temüjin and Jamuqa broke out, and before Dalan Baljut, that Rashīd ad-Dīn places an episode he had already mentioned earlier – and that he certainly places in Chinggis Khan’s youth, but not necessarily in his adolescence as the author of the *SH* does: the capture by the Tayichi’ud, who were at the centre of a coalition with Jamuqa and other groups to defeat Chinggis Khan. He would have been defeated, abandoned by his companions, and finally captured. The account of Rashīd ad-Dīn, even if it makes Dalan Baljut a victory, is therefore perhaps not contradictory with the idea of a “gap” in the life of the Mongol ruler; Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi’ at-tawārīkh*, pp. 163–164, 296; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, pp. 66, 114.

the joint campaign with the Kereyids and the Jin against the Tatars in 1196, during which period Chinggis Khan probably had to take refuge in Jin territory.¹⁹ As Ratchnevsky notes, this reinforces the words of the Song envoy, Zhao Gong, who writes that Chinggis Khan was a slave of the Jin for ten years.²⁰

Another battle could lie behind this strange episode: George D. Painter, in his translation of the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, suggested that it might be a distorted depiction of the battle of Qalqaljid Elet against the Ong Khan of the Kereyids, which was followed by a strategic withdrawal, if not a sorry retreat, of Chinggis Khan and his men, and by the famous “Baljuna Covenant”, when Chinggis Khan and his few followers who remained with him were reduced to drinking the troubled water of the lake, or the river, Baljuna and vowed to “share the sweet and the bitter”.²¹ I will come back to this hypothesis at the end of this article, but the bottom line is that the two texts we have to deal with here are the result of confusion on the part of their authors, or which perhaps occurred during the transmission of the story.²²

Moreover, this passage by Plano Carpini is reminiscent of an episode in the legend of Sariq Khan, a ruler of the Kereyids, as reported by Rashīd ad-Dīn, according to which the Tatars inflicted such a defeat on Sariq Khan that, of the forty *tūmed* (four hundred thousand men) in his army, he could only flee with forty survivors.²³ Should we therefore think that Plano Carpini, consciously or unconsciously, has mixed up several elements including, among others, the legendary account of Sariq Khan’s catastrophic defeat on the one hand and Chinggis Khan’s defeat against Jamuqa or the Ong Khan on the other hand? From authentic elements gleaned from the Mongol court, it would seem, as we may believe, that an episode created from scratch by the Franciscan monk and taken up by his Silesian colleague would emerge.

For Igor de Rachewiltz, it is an episode invented by Russian intermediaries, out of hatred of their new Mongol masters.²⁴ Alexander Yurchenko is not convinced by this explanation, but notes that “it remains unclear how it came about that veterans of Chinggis Khan’s

¹⁹Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, p. 49.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 50; Zhao Gong 趙珙, *Mengda beilu* “Mengda beilu 蒙鞑備錄”, in *Wang Guowei yishu* 王國維遺書, Vol. XIII, (ed.) Wang Guowei p. 3a; translation Olbricht, Pinks *et al.* “Meng-Ta Pei-Lu. Ausführliche Aufzeichnungen über die Mongolischen Tatan von Chao Hung 1221”, in *Meng-ta Pei-lu und Hei-ta shih-lieh*, (ed.) P. Olbricht, E. Pinks *et al.* (Wiesbaden, 1980), p. 12.

²¹Rashīd ad-Dīn is in fact almost the only one to ascribe Qalqaljid Elet (Qalālījīt Elet القلاجلين in his text) as a defeat for Chinggis Khan: Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ at-tavārīkh*, p. 347; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 132. The *Yuanshi* 元史 presents it as a victory in its history of Chinggis Khan but as a defeat, although without naming it, in Ja’far’s biography Khwāja: *Yuanshi* 1: 10, 120: 2960 [all the Chinese dynastic histories are quoted according to the standard Zhonghua shuju edition]. The *SWQZL* and the *SH* (which does not, however, mention the Baljuna Covenant) present it as a victory: *SWQZL*, p. 37a; *SH*, § 171; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 92. Juvaynī describes the two events into a battle that would have taken place near a stream called Baljuna, from which Chinggis Khan emerged victorious, although his forces were smaller in number: Juvaynī, *Tārīkh-i jahān-gushā: The Ta’rīkh-i-Jahān-gushā of ‘Alā’u’-d-Dīn ‘Atā Malik-i-Juvaynī*, (ed.) Mirzā Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Leiden, 1912–1937), I, p. 27; translation J. A. Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1958), p. 37. Now Pelliot describes the battle as “une victoire à la Pyrrhus, qui fut peut-être une défaite” (Pelliot and Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes*, p. 46), and de Rachewiltz concludes from Chinggis Khan’s withdrawal and the diminished position in which he subsequently found himself that the confrontation “was in fact a reverse for the Mongols” (Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, pp. 623–624). See also F. W. Cleaves, “The Historicity of the Baljuna Covenant”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* XVIII, n°3–4 (1955), and below.

²²Painter, “The Tartar Relation”, p. 59 n. 1.

²³Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ at-tavārīkh*, pp. 84 ff.; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 36.

²⁴Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 107.

campaigns, who sat at the campfire in the evening, wrote legends about the campaigns of their Mongol masters, when in those legends the Mongol army suffered complete defeats”, and he does not include the episode in his reconstruction of the “Chinggis Romance”.²⁵ For Michèle Guéret-Laferté, the invention is attributable to the Franciscans themselves, this crushing defeat being part of “pure and simple additions of imaginary events”, and serves to justify the election of Chinggis Khan as emperor, once the emperor of the Kitai had been defeated.²⁶ Paolo Daffinà proposed, in his notes to the Italian translation of the *Ystoria Mongalorum*, to see in this passage a confusion of the Kitai with the Tangut-Xi Xia.²⁷ Faced with the difficulty of identifying the origin of this passage, most of the researchers who have studied the subject therefore agree that it is either a pure and simple invention or the result of confusion. This seems to me too easy a solution, and I will try to show here that it is neither one nor the other.

Jūzjānī and the structure of the myth

Indeed, two other sources present a story parallel to that of Plano Carpini and C. de Bridia, although to my knowledge, no comparison between these different texts has ever been proposed. The first is *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, dictated in French at the beginning of the 14th century by the Armenian monk Hayton, who had most of his information about the Mongols from his uncle, the King of Little Armenia Hethum I, who went to Möngke in Qaraqorum in 1254. Hayton tells how the seven nations of the Mongols, who lived under the yoke of their neighbours, were unified and liberated by Chinggis Khan, how he was defeated by a large number of enemies and owed his salvation only to a bush that served as his hiding place,²⁸ then defeated those same enemies, and how, finally, after that, Chinggis Khan led his people by sea into a vast and fertile land in the West.²⁹ There are certain common points: the essential one of the lost battle, the refuge from which the Mongols then set out again in their conquests, and the seven nations, which echo the seven survivors of Plano Carpini and C. de Bridia.³⁰

The second one offers an even more striking parallel. It is one of the most important that we have at our disposal about Mongol history, and it also evokes a crushing defeat of Chinggis Khan, in a passage hitherto neglected, again because of its appearance, at first sight confusing and contradictory to what can be reconstructed with certainty from the beginnings of Chinggis Khan's career. However, its comparison with Plano Carpini's text reveals a similarity that is too obvious to be the result of chance. It is the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī* of Jūzjānī, written in the 1260s, and more particularly an extract from the first pages devoted to Mongol conquests:

²⁵Yourtchenko “Ein asiatisches Bilderrätsel”, pp. 49–50 n. 12 (“Unklar bleibt, wie es dazu kam, daß Veteranen der Feldzüge Tschingis Khans, die abends am Lagerfeuer saßen, Legenden über die Feldzüge ihrer mongolischen Herren verfaßten, wenn das mongolische Heer in jenen Legenden vollständige Niederlagen”), pp. 80–85.

²⁶Guéret-Laferté, *Sur les routes*, p. 298 (“ajouts purs et simples d'évènements imaginaires”).

²⁷Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, p. 431.

²⁸An episode reminiscent of Chinggis Khan's youth, reported in the *SH*, during which he hid for nine days in a thicket to escape his Tayichi'ud enemies; *SH*, § 79–80; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, pp. 22–23.

²⁹Hayton, “La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient”, in *Recueils des Historiens des Croisades. Documents latins et français relatifs à l'Arménie*, Vol. II, (ed.) É. Dulaurier, pp. 147–154.

³⁰I will address this point in particular in a future article.

When the father of Chingīz Khān went to hell, and the chieftainship devolved on Chingīz Khān, he began to become recalcitrant [to the authority of Altūn Khān] and to desobey, and broke out into rebellion. A squadron was detached from the following of the Altūn Khan to lay waste and exterminate the Mongol groups [*qabā'il* قبایل]. Many of them were massacred, so much so that only a few remained. The survivors who had escaped the sword's blade gathered together, and left these lands. They headed north of Turkestan, and found refuge in such an impenetrable position that, from any direction, there was no road leading to it, except for a single pass. All this expanse was surrounded by huge mountains, and this place and this meadow, they call them *Kelurān* [*k.l.rān* کلران]. They also say that in the midst of these pastures there is a spring of a fairly considerable size, the name of which is *Balīq Jāq*; and, in this pastures, they took up their abode, and dwelt there for a long period. In the course of time, their offspring and progeny multiplied greatly, and among that body a great number of men reached manhood.³¹

چون پدر چنگیز خان بدوزخ رفت و مهتری به چنگیز خان رسید تهر و گردن کشی آغاز نهاد، و عصیان ظاهر کرد، و فوجی از حشم التون خان به نهب و قمع قبایل مغل نامزد شدند و بیشتر را از ایشان به قتل رسانید چنانچه اندک عدد بماندند، جماعتی که از زیر تیغ باقی به مانده بودند باهم جمع شدند و از آن بلاد بطرف شمال ترکستان، بموضع حصین پناه جستند، چنانچه از هیچ طرف راهی نداشت. الا یک دره، و جمله آن موضع بجبال را سیات محفوف بود و آن موضع و چراخور را کلران گویند، در میان این مرغزار چشمه ایست بس بزرگ نام آن بلیق جاق در میان آن مرغزار جایهای بانس ساختند و آنجا مدتها مقام کردند، و به مرور ایام توالد و تناسل بسیار شد و در میان ایشان مرد بسیار رسید.

This is followed by a council of all men, which makes the decision to take revenge on the Altūn Khan. To do this, Chinggis Khan is appointed *amīr*, and after three days of rituals, he leads an army of 300,000 men to conquer the kingdom of the Altūn Khan.³²

This Altūn Khan, or Altan Khan, i. e. the “Golden King”, is undoubtedly the same “Kitai Emperor” mentioned by Plano Carpini, since it is a common designation of the Jin Emperor, which can be found in the *Secret History* for example.³³ In addition, shortly before the passage cited, Jūzjānī describes Altūn Khan as the ruler of Tamghāj, a name that regularly refers to North China among Arabo-Persian authors, and is derived from Tabgach, the original name of the Tuoba-Wei, a dynasty of nomadic origin which ruled on Northern China from 386 to 534.³⁴ The author makes him the suzerain of the Mongols, to whom they owed a tribute,³⁵ just like C. de Bridia in the passage already mentioned.

So we have here, as in the *Ystoria Mongalorum* and the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, an account of a terrible defeat suffered by Chinggis Khan and inflicted by the Jin Emperor; only a few survivors escape the massacre; this is followed for a time by a retreat to a remote place before the conquest resume. Jūzjānī, however, provides much more details about the place of the survivors' retreat. On this subject his translator in English, H. G. Raverty, notes: “The flight of Ҷаіа̄n and Nagūz into Irgānah Ҷūn, is here, evidently meant”.³⁶ Raverty refers here to the

³¹Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, (ed.) ‘Abd al-Hayy Habībī (Kabul, 1964), II, p. 99; translation H. G. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī: 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), II, p. 937, slightly modified.

³²Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, II, pp. 99–100; tr. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, II, pp. 937–959.

³³SH, § 53; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 10, to cite just one example. Besides, the dynastic name *Jin* 金 means “gold” in Chinese.

³⁴P. B., *Golden Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples* (Wiesbaden, 1992), p. 73.

³⁵Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, II, p. 98; translation Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, II, p. 936.

³⁶Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāšīrī*, II p. 937n. 9.

origin myth of the Mongols, as first reported by Rashīd ad-Dīn in his *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, whose text corresponds indeed to that of Jūzjānī, and which deserves to be quoted extensively:

The group [qoum قوم] that has been called Mongol since ancient times started a dispute with other Turkish groups [aqvām اقوام] that turned into outright hostility and war two thousand years ago, more or less.

It is related by trustworthy sources that the other groups [aqvām اقوام] overcame the group [qoum قوم] of the Mongols and so slaughtered them that no more than two men and two women survived. Fleeing from their enemies, those two couples arrived in a wild place surrounded by mountains and forests, with only one narrow, rugged road leading in on every side, which made access very difficult. In the midst of those mountains was a rich grassy plain called Ergene Qūn; *qūn* means “mountain flank”, and *ergene* means “wall”, so Ergene Qūn means a “wall-like cliff”.

The two men were named Nüküz and Qiyan. They and their descendants remained there for years. They multiplied through intermarriage, and each branch of them became known by a specific name and epithet, and became an *obāq* [oboq]. The *obāq* is what comes from a specific bone and lineage. These *obāq* also branched out. And at this time it is said among Mongol groups [aqvām اقوام] that all those who came from these branches are more closely related to each other, and they are the Dürükün Mongols.

The word Mongol was originally broken down into *mong ol*, which means “weary” and “simpleton”. In the Mongolian language *qiyān* refers to a strong torrent that tumbles down from a mountain to the ground and is swift, fast and powerful. Since Qiyan was a courageous warrior and very bold, this word was made his name. *Qiyat* is the plural of *qiyān*. His closest descendants in the direct line were called Qiyat in ancient times. When this group became numerous in those mountains and forests, and the land was constraining them, they took counsel with each other to figure out how to get out of that narrow prison.

They found a place in the mountains where there was an iron mine, where they always used to smelt iron. They gathered together and brought loads of kindling and charcoal from the forest. Then they killed seventy horses and oxen, skinned them, and made ironsmiths' bellows from their skins. They placed the huge amount of kindling and charcoal at the base of the cliff and so arranged it that they could cause the seventy large bellows to blow at once, and thus the cliff was melted, producing immeasurable quantities of iron and opening a road, through which they moved out. From that stricture they emerged into a spacious plain.³⁷

و آن قوم را که در قدیم ایشان را مغول گفته اند به کما بیش دو هزار سال پیش از این با دیگر اقوام اتراک مخاصمتی و معاندتی افتاده، و به مکاوحت و محاربت انجامیده.

روایتی است از معتبران معتمدالقول که دیگر اقوام بر اقوام مغول غالب آمدند و ایشان را چنان به قتل آورده اند که دو مرد و دو زن زیادت نماندند. و آن دو خانه از بیم خصم گریخته به موضعی صعب رفتند که پیرامن آن همه کوهها و بیشه بود و از همه جوانب جز یک راه باریک صعب که به دشواری و مشقت تمام در آنجا توان رفت نبود. و در میان آن کوهها صحرايي نزه پر علف بوده نام آن موضع ارگنه قون. معنی قون کمر کوه باشد و ارگنه تند، یعنی کمری تند. و نام آن دو کس نکوز و قیان بود، سالها ایشان و ذریت ایشان در آنجا مانده اند؛ و به واسطه امتزاج و ازدواج بسیار شده، و هر شعبه ای از ایشان به نامی و لقبی معین مشهور گشته و اوباقی شده و اوباقی آنست که از استخوان و نسلی معین باشد. و آن اوباقها دیگر باره منشعب گشته. و این زمان پیش اقوام مغول چنان مقرر است که آنچه از این شعبه ها پدید آمده اند، ایشان به یکدیگر نسبت خویشی بیشتر دارند، و مغول درلکین ایشان اند.

و لفظ مغول در اصل مونگ اول بود، یعنی فرومانده و ساده دل، و در لغت مغول، قیان سیل قوی باشد که از بالای

³⁷Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, pp. 137–139; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, pp. 56–57, slightly modified.

کوه به نشیب زمین روان شود و تند و تیز و قوی باشد. و چون قیان، بهادر و شجاع و بغایت دلوار بوده، این لفظ نام وی نهاده اند. و قیبات جمع قیان است. آنچه از آن نسل به اصل او نزدیکتر اند ایشان را در قدیم قیبات گفته اند. و چون در میان آن کوه و بیشه آن گروه انبوه شده اند و فسحت عرصه بر ایشان تنگ و دشوار گشته، با یکدیگر کنگاچ کرده اند که به حسن تدبیر و رای مشکل گشای از آن در بند سخت و درغاله تنگ چون بیرون آیند.

موضعی را در آن یافته اند که کان آهن بود و همواره از آنجا آهن می گداخته اند. باتفاق جمع شده اند و از بیشه هیمه بسیار و انگشت به خروار گرد کرده، و هفتاد سر گاو و اسب کشته و پوست درست از آن کشیده و دم های آهنگران ساخته، و هیمه و انگشت فراوان در آن بن کمر نهاده و موضع چنان ترتیب کرده که بدان هفتاد دم بزرگ بیکبار می دمیده اند، تا آن کمر گداخته گشته و آهن بی اندازه از آن حاصل شده و راهی بادیب آمده، و ایشان به جمعیت کوچ کرده اند و از آن تنگنای به فراخ جای صحرا آمده.

Several pages later, Rashīd ad-Dīn adds about the Ergene Qūn:

And among all those who came out from there, there was an important commander who was the leader and lord of some groups [اقوام *aqwām*], named Bōrteh Chīna [Börte Chino].³⁸

و از آن جمله از آنجا بیرون آمدند امیری معتبر بوده مقدم و سرور بعضی اقوام، بورته چینه نام.

The Chinggisid khan of Khiva and historian Abū'l-Ghāzī Bahādur Khān (1603–1663) gives a much more detailed version of this myth, with some variations.³⁹ He thus indicates that it was a blacksmith who discovered the iron vein through which a passage was possible, and that

At that time, the king who ruled over the Mongols was Bōrteh Chīna [Börte Chino], a descendant of Qiyān from the Qōrulās branch [ūrūq].⁴⁰

اول و تدا مغولنیک پادشاهی برته چنه قیان نسلی و قورلاس اوروقیندین ایردی

This Börte Chino, “Blue Wolf” in Mongolian, is none other than the ancestor of Chinggis Khan according to the genealogy that opens the *Secret History of the Mongols*;⁴¹ I will come back to this later. In both of these very closed versions of the myth we find, here again, a terrible defeat to which very few survive, the escape of the survivors to a place of refuge, almost enclosed and extremely difficult to access, where they gradually gain in number and strength, before finally emerging.⁴²

³⁸Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tavārikh*, p. 202; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 81, slightly modified.

³⁹Abū'l-Ghāzī was able to consult abundantly the Persian sources, and Rashīd ad-Dīn's *Jāmi' at-tavārikh* in the first place, during his exile to the Safavids. But he also collected many oral traditions from Kazakhs and Kalmūks, his neighbours. His work is therefore not only a pale copy of the text of Rashīd ad-Dīn, but presents many variants and original contributions; see B. Spuler, “Abū'l-Ghāzī Bahādur Khān”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition. (Leiden, 1954–1960), I, pp. 120–121.

⁴⁰Abū'l-Ghāzī, *Shajara-ye Turk: Histoire des Mongols et des Tatars*, (ed.) P. I. Desmaisons (St Petersburg, 1874), pp. 33–34, 59; translation Desmaisons, pp. 33, 63, slightly modified.

⁴¹SH, § 1; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 1.

⁴²See also the version of Mustowfi Qazvīnī in his *Tārīkh-i Guzīda* (completed in 1330), which closely follows Rashīd ad-Dīn, but adds a variant according to which Qiyān and Nūkūz were two women, who mated in the Ergene Qūn with a wolf, which is then not without reminding one of the origin myths of the Kyrgyz: Mustowfi Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Navā'ī (Tehran, 1983), pp. 562–563; J.-P. Roux, *La religion des Turcs et des Mongols* (Paris, 1984), pp. 193–194). There is also a version very similar to that of Mustowfi Qazvīnī in the *Muqaddima* written by Sharaf ad-Dīn Alī Yazdī around 1419–1420: Yazdī, “Muqaddima”, in *Zafarnāma*, (ed.) Seyyed Sa'īd Mīr Moḥammad Šādeq and 'Abd al-Ḥosayn Navā'ī (Tehran 2008), pp. 55–57. On the revival of the myth of Ergene Qūn among Persian authors after Rashīd ad-Dīn, see M. Dobrovits, “The Turco-Mongolian Tradition of Common Origin and the Historiography in Fifteenth Century Central Asia”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* XLVII, n°3 (1994), pp. 272 ff. There is also a version in *Shajarat al-Atrāk*, a text in Persian probably

Raverty's note to the translation of the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiṛī* implies that Jūzjānī misunderstood or misremembered this legend, and inadvertently integrated it into the body of Chinggis Khan's story; this is at least the opinion held by most researchers who, probably misled by Raverty's comment, saw it only as a distortion of the original myth.⁴³ However, in view of the easily traceable parallel between the text of Jūzjānī on the one hand, and those of Plano Carpini and C. de Bridia on the other, this seems quite impossible to me. Both Jūzjānī and Plano Carpini (and C. de Bridia) report the authentic story of a legendary episode of Chinggis Khan's life, forged at the Mongol court, whose plot follows the myth of the Ergene Qūn as it has reached us through Rashīd ad-Dīn and Abū'l-Ghāzī. It remains to be seen why this myth has been taken up in this form.

We can try to solve the enigma first by comparing these texts with other Turko-Mongol myths. Several other founding myths, next to that of the Ergene Qūn, are indeed known to us.⁴⁴ Thus the origin myth of the Kimeks, which is transmitted to us by Gardīzī in the 11th century:

[As for the Kimeks] their origin was this, that the ruler of the Tatars died leaving two sons. The elder son seized the kingship and the younger son became envious of his brother. The name of that younger brother was Shad. He intended to kill his older brother, but was unable to do so. [After which] he became afraid for his life. This Shad had a young girl, who was his lover. He took away this young girl and fled from before his brother. He arrived to a place where there was a great river, many trees and abundant game. He got off his horse and pitched his tent there. Every day that man and young girl, both of them, would go hunting and they would eat the flesh of the game and they would make garments of skins of sable, grey squirrel, and ermine, until seven men from among the clients [*muvalidān* مولدان] of the Tatars came to them. The first was Imī; the second, Imāk; the third, Tatār; the fourth, *Bayāndur [*B.lānd.r* بلاندر]; the fifth, Qifchāq; the sixth, Laniqāz; the seventh, Ajlād. These were a party [*qowmī* قومی] who had taken their masters' horses to graze, but where the horses were there was no pasturage left and so they had gone in search of grass in the direction where Shad was. When the young girl saw them she came out and said "ertish", which means "dismount yourselves" for which reason this river has been named Ertish [Irtys].

When the party recognized that young girl, they all dismounted and put up their tents. When Shad returned, he brought much game and entertained them, [so that] they stayed there until winter. When the snow came they were unable to go back, but there was abundant grass in that place. They stayed there all winter, and when the world became fair [again] and the snow went away, they sent a person to the camp of the Tatars, that he might bring them news of that party. But when he arrived, he saw that the entire place had become desolate and devoid of people, for the enemy had come and plundered and killed the whole nation [*hama qawm* همه قوم], except for that remnant which had been left and came forward towards him from the foot of the mountain. [These] he told of Shad [*hal-i Shad* حال شد *recte khālī shod* خالی شد] and his own comrades, and

compiled at the court of the Timurid sovereign Ulugh Beg (1411–1449): *Shajarat al-Atrak*; tr. W. Miles, *The Shajarat ul-Atrak, Or the Genealogical Tree of the Turks and Tatars* (London, 1838), pp. 38–43.

⁴³J. A. Boyle, "Some Thoughts on the Sources for the Il-Khanid Period of Persian History", *Iran* XII (1974), p. 186; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow, London, New York, 2005), p. 149; Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, p. 35.

⁴⁴See on this subject the excellent and very complete analysis of Devin DeWeese, many of whose elements are included here: D. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde. Baba Türkes and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, 1994), pp. 39–50, 273–287, 494–502 in particular.

all that folk set out for the Ertish. When they arrived there they greeted Shad as their chief and held him in awe. Then other folk [قوم] who heard this news began to come, until seven hundred people gathered and stayed a long time in Shad's service. Afterwards, when they became [more] numerous they spread out over those mountains and became seven groups [قبیله], named after those seven persons we have mentioned.⁴⁵

اصل ایشان آن بود. است که مهتر تتاران بمرد، و او را دو پسر ماند. مهتر پسر پادشاهی بگرفت، کهتر پسر از برادر حسد کرد. و این کهتر را شد نام بود، و قصد کرد که برادر مهتر را بکشد، نتوانست. برخویشتن بترسید، و کنیزی بود این شد را، عشیقه او بود، و آن کنیزک برداشت، و از پیش برادر بگریخت، و بجایی شد که آنجا آب بزرگ بود و درختان بسیار، و صید فراوان، و آنجا خرگاه بزد و فرود آمد، و هر روز این مرد و کنیزک هر دو تن صید کردند، و از آن گوشت صید همی خوردندی، و جامه از پوست سمور و سنجاب و قاقم همی کردند، تا هفت تن از مولدان تتار بنزدیک ایشان یکی ایمی، دو دیگر ایماک، و سه دیگر تتار، و چهارم بلاندر، و پنجم خفچاق، و ششم لنغاز، و هفتم اجلاد. و این قومی بودند که ستوران خداوندان بچرا آورده بودند، و آنجا که ستور بود، چراخور نمانده بود. پس بر آن جانب شدند که شد بود بطلب گیاه. و چون کنیزک ایشان را بدید بیرون آمد و گفت: ارتش یعنی فرود آید، و آن آب را بدین سبب ارتش نام کردند و چون این قوم آن کنیزک را بدانستند همه فرود آمدند، و خرگاهها بزدند. و چون شد فراز رسید، صید فراوان آورد و ایشان را مهمان داشت، آن آنجا بماند تا زمستان. و چون برف بیامد نتوانستند بازگشت، و آنجا گیاه فراوان بود. همه زمستان آنجا بیبوند، و چون جهان خوش گشت و برف برخاست، بکتن را به بنگاه تتاران فرستادند تا خبر آن قوم بیارد. چون آنجا رسید، همه جایگاه را ویران گشته دید و از مردم خالی شده. از آنچه دشمن آمده بود، و همه قوم را غارت کرده بود و بکشته، و آن باقی که مانده بودند، از کوه پایها سوی او آمدند، و این مرد خالی شد، و با یاران خویش بگفت. آن همه مردمان روی سوی ارتش نهادند. و چون آنجا رسیدند، بر شد بریاست سلام کردند، و او را بزرگ داشتند، و دیگر قوم که این خبر بشنیدند، به آمدن گرفتند، تا هفتصد تن گرد آمدند، و روزگار دراز اندر خدمت شد بماندند. پس چون انبوه شدند، اندران کوهها بپراگندند، و هفت قبیله شدند به نام این هفت تن که یاد کردیم.

A significant number of salient elements of this myth can be found in the account reported by Ibn ad-Dawādārī, a 14th century Mamluk writer, who claims to have received his informations from a book held in great respect by Mongols and Qipchaqs, the *Ulū Khan Atā Bitigi* or “The Book of the Great Father King”. According to Ibn ad-Dawādārī, a woman from Tibet gave birth to a son who was quickly carried into the sky by an eagle to a forest at the foot of Mount Qara Tagh, near a lake where game was abundant, and where he was raised by wild animals. One day, a group of seven Tatars fleeing the destruction of their people went astray in the forest, and was saved by the young boy, who took a wife among them. From the wild boy and the tatar girl was born the ancestor of the Mongols, called Tatar Khan, whose lineage continues to Chinggis Khan, while

the descendants [of the group] reproduced and multiplied on this land and they spread out around the lake.⁴⁶

و تولدوا، و کثر نسلهم فی تلك الأرض، و تفرقوا حول تلك البحيرة

⁴⁵Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār: Tārīkh-i Gardīzī*, (ed.) ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Tehran, 1984), pp. 549–551; translation A. P. Martinez, “Gardīzī’s Two Chapters on the Turks”, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* II (1982), pp. 120–121, slightly modified. It can be noted that the survivors’ flight motif is doubled here, between on the one hand Shad’s voluntary flight to escape his death, and on the other hand the wandering of the seven Tatars, which allows them to escape the destruction of their people.

⁴⁶Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar wa jāmi’ al-ghuwar*, Vol. VII: *ad-Durr al-maṭlūb fī akhbār mulūk banī Ayyūb: Die Chronik des Ibn ad-Dawādārī. Siebter Teil, Der Bericht über die Ayyubiden*, (ed.) Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, Wiesbaden 1972), p. 230. I would like to thank Thomas Bédrière and Paul Neuenkirchen for translating for me these pages from Ibn ad-Dawādārī.

After several generations, these new Tatars came into contact with the “Turks” of the Altūn Khan, and submitted to him.⁴⁷

All these texts contain the same narrative schema, which can be summarized as follows:

- 1- a defeat against a neighbouring people leads to the extermination of the nation.
- 2- only a handful of survivors escapes the massacre.
- 3- they find refuge in a remote place that is difficult to access or even completely enclosed.
- 4- the group of refugees is growing in strength and number.
- 5- the group chooses a leader.
- 6- the group, which has become powerful enough, leaves the refuge.

The recurrence of these elements is particularly visible when a comparative table is drawn up between these different sources:

	Plano Carpini/C. de Bridia	Jūzjānī	Rashīd ad-Dīn/Abū'l-Ghāzī	Gardīzī	Ibn ad-Dawādārī
1	The Mongols are defeated and exterminated by the Emperor of the Kitai.	The Mongols are defeated and exterminated by the Altūn Khan.	The Mongols are defeated by their neighbours/the Tatars.	The Tatars are exterminated and looted by a neighbouring people.	The Tatars are destroyed.
2	“only seven survived”	“only a few remained”	“no more than two men and two women survived”	The seven horse-keepers escape the massacre of their people, as well as a small group of survivors.	Seven individuals escape the massacre of their people.
3	“Chingis however and the others who were left fled back to their own country”	Survivors find refuge in a meadow surrounded by mountains, called <i>Kelurān</i> , and accessible by a single pass.	Survivors find refuge in a meadow surrounded by mountains and forests, called Ergene Qūn, accessible only by a narrow path.	Shad, and then his companions, find refuge in a place rich in pastures, close to mountains.	Survivors find refuge in a forest at the foot of Mount Qara Tagh, near a lake.
4	“and now we have increased to a great multitude”	“In the course of time, their offspring and progeny multiplied greatly, and among that body a great number of men reached manhood”	“They and their descendants remained there for years. They multiplied through intermarriage”	“seven hundred people gathered and stayed a long time in Shad’s service” and then they became even more numerous.	“they reproduced and multiplied on this land”

(Continued)

⁴⁷Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, pp. 228–231. See also U. Haarman, “Altūn Hān und Čingiz Hān bei den ägyptischen Mamluken”, *Der Islam* LI (1974), pp. 22–26, and DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 278–282.

(Continued).

	Plano Carpini/C. de Bridia	Jūzjānī	Rashīd ad-Dīn/Abū'l-Ghāzī	Gardīzī	Ibn ad-Dawādārī
5		The Mongols elect Chinggis Khan as <i>amīr</i> .	Börte Chino is king of the Mongols (according to Abū'l-Ghāzī).	The survivors hold Shad in high esteem and put themselves at his service.	The son of the wild boy and the girl is named Tatar Khan, his descendants rule over the Tatars.
6	“and after a short rest Chingis again prepared for battle”	Chinggis Khan leads the Mongols out of the <i>Kelurān</i> and leads them to war against the Altūn Khan.	The Mongols leave the Ergene Qūn and come out in a large plain.	The seven Kimek groups spread across the mountains.	“they spread out around the lake”, then submitted to the Alṭūn Khan.

The common structure between these founding myths, on the one hand, and the obviously legendary account of Chinggis Khan's rise told by Plano Carpini and Jūzjānī, on the other hand, is very clear. However, the way by which the founding myth passed to a legend that is part of the succession of historical events leading to the formation of the Mongol Empire remains obscure for the time being.

Legend and propaganda: the Türk case:

To better understand, it is probably necessary to take a detour through the origin myth of the Türks. This one is transmitted to us by two Chinese sources in generally similar versions, with some variations: the *Zhoushu* 周書 and the *Beishi* 北史. I quote here the *Beishi* version, slightly more detailed:

The ancestors of the Türks lived to the west of the Western Sea. They constituted an independent group [*buluo* 部落]. No doubt they are a detached branch of the Xiongnu. They wore the surname [*xing* 姓] of the Ashina family [*shi* 氏]. Later they were defeated by a neighboring State, which completely exterminate their lineage [*zu* 族]. There was a boy, who was about ten years old. The soldiers, in view of his youth, could not bring themselves to kill him. So they cut off his feet and arms, and left him in a marsh. There lived a she-wolf who fed him with meat. When he grew up he had sexual intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. The king learned that this boy was still alive, and dispatched someone to kill him. The envoy saw the she-wolf with the boy and wanted to kill her as well. But then it was as if a spirit had suddenly transported the wolf east of the Western Sea. She landed on a mountain northwest of Gaochang. In the mountain there was a cave, and in the cave there was a plain covered with rich vegetation, stretching over several hundreds of *li*, surrounded on all four sides by mountains. The wolf took refuge inside and later gave birth to ten boys. The boys grew up and took wives from the outside. Each of the descendants took a surname, and one called himself Ashina. He was the cleverest among them and he became their ruler. At the entrance to the camp they [the Türks] place a wolf-headed banner to show that they have not forgotten their origins. Little by little they constituted several hundred

families. Several generations later a certain *Axian-she* [*Axian shad*] led the group [*buluo* 部落] out of the cave and submitted to the *Ruanruan* [Rouran].⁴⁸

突厥者，其先居西海之右，獨為部落，蓋匈奴之別種也。姓阿史那氏。後為隣國所破，盡滅其族。有一兒，年且十歲，兵人見其小，不忍殺之，乃刖足斷其臂，棄草澤中。有牝狼以肉餌之，及長，與狼交合，遂有孕焉。彼王聞此兒尚在，重遣殺之。使者見在狼側，并欲殺狼。於時若有神物，投狼於西海之東，落高昌國西北山。山有洞穴，穴內有平壤茂草，周迴數百里，四面俱山。狼匿其中，遂生十男。十男長，外託妻孕，其後各為一姓，阿史那即其一也，最賢，遂為君長。故牙門建狼頭纛，示不忘本也。漸至數百家，經數世，有阿賢設者，率部落出於穴中，臣於蠕蠕。

We find again the same structure as for the other stories:

- 1- The Türks suffer a crushing defeat and are massacred.
- 2- Only a ten-year-old boy survives and is fed by a she-wolf with whom he has sexual relations (which acts as the primary couple from whom the race can be reborn).
- 3- The pregnant wolf finds refuge in a cave, in which there is a plain surrounded by mountains.
- 4- The she-wolf gives birth to ten boys; they grow up, get married, and several generations follow one another.
- 5- The group living in the cave elects Ashina as its leader.
- 6- The group leaves the cave with *Axian shad* at its head.⁴⁹

The filiation between the original myth of the Türks and that of the Ergene Qūn has been noted several times since Pelliot.⁵⁰ It was denied by Denis Sinor, who sought to historicize the Türk myth and saw no historical basis in the Mongol one,⁵¹ and was particularly studied and established by Devin DeWeese, who correctly showed how the Türk myth was linked to a matrix common to the steppe peoples, from which the Mongol myth in its many variants also derived, as well as the Kimek one.⁵² Nevertheless, I think that not everything

⁴⁸*Beishi* 99: 3285; translation D. Sinor, "The Legendary Origins of the Türks", in *Folklorica: Festschrift for Felix J. Oinas*, (ed.) E. V. Zygas and P. Voorheis (Bloomington, 1982), p. 224–225, amended. See also *Zhoushu* 50: 907; translation Liu Mau-Tsai, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken (T'u-Kue)* (Wiesbaden, 1958), p. 5 and *Suishu* 84: 1863.

⁴⁹The stage of the appointment of the chief is doubled here, between the election of Ashina on the one hand, and the exit of the cave under the leadership of *Axian shad* on the other hand.

⁵⁰P. Pelliot, "Neuf notes sur des questions d'Asie centrale", *T'oung Pao* XXVI (1929), p. 214n. 2.

⁵¹Sinor, "The Legendary Origins".

⁵²DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 275–278. Boyle's theory that the motif of the cave or enclosed place of the Turk and Mongol myths ultimately goes back to the legend of the Wall of Alexander, built to enclose the peoples of Gog and Magog, which was transmitted to Central Asia through the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance*, must be rejected; Boyle, "The Alexander Legend", repeated in Jackson, *The Mongols*, p. 150, and Tanase (ed.), *Dans l'empire mongol*, p. 32. That Nestorian missionaries brought with them to the Central Asian nomads, in addition to the Bible, the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander* is an *ad hoc* hypothesis without any tangible basis, and is contradicted by chronology. Indeed, the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, which is the oldest attestation of the theme of the imprisonment of Gog and Magog by Alexander, was elaborated around 629–630 as a propaganda document in favour of Heraclius, the recent winner of the Persians: Czeglédy, "The Syriac Legend"; Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, pp. 18–22. However, the *Beishi* and the *Zhoushu* were compiled at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, in the years 630–650, and are based, for their parts concerning the Türks, on informations collected under the Northern Qi (550–577) and the Northern Zhou (557–581) dynasties. Therefore, it is impossible that the origin myth of the Türks, and furthermore that of the Mongols, was developed under the influence of the legend of Alexander (as already noted by DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 273–274n. 79), especially since at least a certain number of elements of this myth go back well beyond the Türks. Thus the motif of the ancestral cave alone dates back at

that can be drawn from the comparison between these different sets of myths has yet been exhausted. So far we have confined ourselves to comparing stories that present themselves to us as founding myths, without taking into account others, who share their structure and characteristics, such as the passages of Plano Carpini and Jūzjānī that we are discussing here. Another fundamental source for the history of the Türks was thus over looked, whereas it is indeed a foundation tale and includes some passages directly modelled on the founding myth, in this case that of the Türks: that is namely the Orkhon inscriptions.

The eastern side of the Kül Tegin inscription, commissioned by Bilge Khagan (716–734) in 732, tells the story of Qutluğ Elterish Khagan's revolt against the Chinese, leading to the founding of the Second Türk Empire (682–742):

[The Turkish people] were about to be annihilated. But the Turkish Tengri above and the Turkish holy earth and water [spirits below] acted in the following way: in order that the Turkish people would not go to ruin and in order that it would be an [independant] nation again, they held my father Elterish Khagan, and my mother El Bilge Khatum, at the top of heaven and raised them upwards. My father, the kaghan, went off with seventeen men. Having heard the news that [Elterish] was marching off, those who were in towns went up mountains and those who were on mountains came down; thus they gathered and numbered to seventy men. Due to the fact that Tengri granted [them] strength, the soldiers of my father, the kaghan, were like wolves, and his enemies were like sheep. Having gone on campaigns forward and backward, he gathered together and collected men; they all numbered seven hundred men. After they had numbered seven hundred men, [my father, the kaghan] organized and ordered the people who had lost their state and their kaghan, the people who had turned slaves and servants, the people who had lost the Turkish institutions, in accordance with the rules of my ancestors.⁵³

yoqadu barīr ārmis üzā türük tāñrīsī, türük ĩduq yirī subī anča etmis: türük bodun toq bolmazun tiyin, bodun bolčun tiyin, qañım il-teris qağanıñ, ögüm il-bilgä qatunuy tāñrı töpüsintā tutup yüg (g)ärü kötürmis ärinč. qañım qağan yiti yegirmi ärin taşıqmıs. taşra yoriyür tiyin kü äsidip baliq-daqi taşıqmıs, taydaqı inmis, tirilip yetmis är bolmis. tāñrı küč birtük üçün qañım qağan süsī böri

least to the Tuoba-Wei; see R. A. Ford, "The Gaxian Cave 嘎仙洞 Inscriptions: The Perpetuation of Steppe Traditions Under the Northern Wei Dynasty", *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* XX (2013), pp. 24–66. And the theme of the nourishing she-wolf is already present in the myth of the Wusuns reported by the *Shiji* 史記 and the *Hanshu* 漢書; see É. de La Vaissière, "Iranian in Wusun? A tentative reinterpretation of the Kultobe inscriptions", in *Commentationes Iranicae. Vladimiro f. Aaron Livschits nonagenario donum natalicium*, (ed.) S. Tokhtasev and P. Lur'e (St. Petersburg, 2013), pp. 320–325. In addition, the two traditions differ in their meanings. The cave or enclosed place, in the myths of Eurasian nomads, symbolizes, sometimes explicitly, the uterus where the future community is gestating, and from which it must emerge to continue to grow, in what appears to be a true birth. It is therefore an ancestral place in two ways: not only as a place of ancestors, but also as a maternal ancestor itself, or motherland; see DeWeese, *Islamization*, especially pp. 43–44, 273 ff. The Wall of Alexander, on the other hand, is a wall protecting sedentary people from nomads, whose legend is undoubtedly based on a reality common in the Iranian world, in particular (it should be noted that, in all likelihood, the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* was translated from a Pehlevi version; Czeglédy, "The Syriac Legend", p. 241), as for example the wall that surrounded the Bukhara oasis to this end. It is undeniable that the legends composing the *Alexander Romance* have circulated in Central Asia, as Plano Carpini's text attests. It is not said, however, that all of them have circulated in one direction. One may even wonder if it was not the myth of nomadic origin that influenced the Wall of Alexander legend. Nevertheless, there is no indication that the Nestorians were solely responsible for these circulations. On the contrary, the Mongolian version of the *Alexander Romance*, dating from the early 14th century and featuring a certain Sulqarnai (i. e. the Coranic name of Alexander, Dhū'l-Qarnayn), seems to testify to the late transmission of the complete account to the Mongols, and to the fact that it took place throughout the Muslim world; see F. W. Cleaves, "An Early Mongolian Version of the Alexander Romance", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* XXII (1959), pp. 1–99.

⁵³T. Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Bloomington, 1968), p. 233; translation p. 265.

täg ärmis, yaγl̄sī qoñ täg ärmis. ilgärtü qurıγaru sülöp ti[r]m[iš], [q]amaγı yeti yüz är bolmis. yeti yüz är bolup elsirämis qaγansirämis bodunuγ, küñädmiş quladmiş bodunuγ, türük törüsün içγin-mis bodunuγ äčüm apām törüsincä yaratmiş boşγurmiş.

The inscription then passes to the reign of Qapaghan Khagan who succeeds his brother Elterish, during which Bilge was a shad,⁵⁴ to reach the enthronement of the latter, who inherits a difficult situation and launches a series of military campaigns “in order to nourish the people”, “who had gone [in almost all directions]” and “came back utterly exhausted, without horses and without clothes”.⁵⁵

At first glance, there is little proximity to the origin myth mentioned above. This is without taking into account another part of the legend which, in the *Zhoushu*, is reported immediately after the first:

Some also tell that the ancestors of the Türks originally lived in the country of *Suo*, north of the Xiongnu. The prince of this community [*buluo* 部落] was named *Abangbu*, and he had seventeen brothers. One of them was called *Yizhini-shidu* [*Yizhini* shad], and he was born from a wolf. *Bangbu* and his brothers were all stupid, and their state was destroyed. *Ni-shidu* [(*Yizhi*)ni shad] stood out because, touched by fortune, he had the power to control the wind and the rain. He married two women said to be the daughters of, respectively, the Spirit of the Summer and the Spirit of the Winter. One of them became pregnant and gave birth to four sons. One of them changed into a swan, another established a state between the rivers *Afu* and *Jian*, called *Qigu* [Kirghiz]. Another founded a state along the *Chuzhe* river. The fourth dwelled on the mount *Jiansi-Chuzhe-shi*, and he was the eldest. On this mountain lived also a group from the race of *Abangbu* and, as they were destitute, they suffered greatly from the cold. The eldest made fire for them, warm them up and kept them all alive. Then they collectively submitted to the eldest, they elected him ruler, and they called him Türk. It was *Naduliu-she* [*Naduliu* shad]. *Naduliu* had ten wives. Their sons adopted the surnames of their [respective] mothers. Ashina was the son of one of the secondary wives. *Naduliu* died, and the sons of the ten mothers wanted to choose one of themselves to ascend the throne. So they gathered under a great tree, and all agreed on a rule: to jump to [the top of] the tree, and whoever would jump the highest, they would make him king. The son of Ashina [*i.e.* of the secondary wife named like this] was young, so he jumped higher, and they took him as ruler. They called him *Axian-she* [*Axian* shad].⁵⁶

或云突厥之先出於索國，在匈奴之北。其部落大人曰阿謗步，兄弟十七人。其一曰伊質泥師都，狼所生也。謗步等性竝愚癡，國遂被滅。泥師都既別感異氣，能徵召風雨。娶二妻，云是夏神、冬神之女也。一孕而生四男。其一變為白鴻；其一國於阿輔水、劍水之間，號為契骨；其一國於處折水；其一居踐斯處折施山，即其大兒也。山上仍有阿謗步種類，竝多寒露。大兒為出火溫養之，咸得全濟。遂共奉大兒為主，號為突厥，即訥都六設也。訥都六有十妻，所生子皆以母族為姓，阿史那是其小妻之子也。訥都六死，十母子內欲擇立一人，乃相率於大樹下，共為約曰，向樹跳

⁵⁴The title of shad referred to the rank immediately below that of qaghan in the Türk hierarchy, and was granted to members of the sovereign's immediate family to perform essentially military functions. See G. Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford, 1972), p. 866, and P. B. Golden, “The Türk Imperial Tradition in the Pre-Chinggisid Era”, in *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, Sixth-Twentieth Centuries*, (ed.) D. Sneath (Bellingham, 2006), pp. 51–52. This is the title borne by *Axian* shad, and it is also obviously found in the name of the hero of the kimek myth.

⁵⁵Tekin, *A Grammar*, p. 235; translation pp. 267–268.

⁵⁶*Zhoushu* 50: 908; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, pp. 5–6, slightly modified.

躍，能最高者，即推立之。阿史那子年幼而跳最高者，諸子遂奉以為主，號阿賢設。

For Sinor, this is a tradition not only distinct from the one I have already mentioned, but also “which may originally have been hostile” to the previous one, which he believes would probably have been the most widespread among the Türks.⁵⁷ I would tend to think the opposite: in my opinion, these two passages reflect the same mythical whole.⁵⁸ Certainly, they show significant variations from each other. But more than as two distinct legends, these stories appear to me as two versions of the same myth, which also corresponds to different levels of the latter, hence their apparent disparity. The transmission of these two distorted variants by perhaps different informants would have made them two distinct traditions under the pen of the author of the *Zhoushu*.⁵⁹

With this in mind, let us compare the Orkhon inscriptions with the origin myth of the Türks. The Kül Tegin inscription tell us that the “Turkish people were about to be annihilated”, in the same way as in the myth, where the ancestors of the Türks are exterminated except for a young boy; the second account, according to which *Abangbu* and his brothers were stupid, and that consequently their state was destroyed, finds an echo in the previous lines of the inscription, where it is written that to the first glorious khagan of the First Türk Empire of the 6th century succeeded “unwise” and “bad khagans”, and that “their buyruqs,

⁵⁷Sinor, “The Legendary Origins”, pp. 223–224, 230–232, 235–236.

⁵⁸Devin DeWeese too seems to consider them as such: DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 496–498. It should be noted that DeWeese, like Sinor, also analyses a third legend which is not however a myth of origin of a political community, and which therefore does not interest our purpose. See also S. G. Kljaštornyj, “Problemy rannej istorii plemeni türk (Ašina)”, in *Novoe v sovetskoj arxeologii*, (ed.) E. I. Krupnov, A. V. Archihovskij, N. N. Voronin *et al.* (Moscow, 1965), p. 279.

⁵⁹Although the text of *Zhoushu* is not as explicit on this point as Sinor writes, who attributes to the Chinese author the expression “another tradition” to designate the second narrative, probably following Liu Mau-Tsai’s translation: Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 5. It is a little overtranslated. The paragraph in question begins with the characters *huo yun* 或云: *huo* 或 may alternatively mean “or, either” or “someone, some”. I have translated here by “some also tell”, in order to reflect both meanings simultaneously. In general, Sinor’s arguments for making these two stories two separate legends seem unconvincing to me. The comparative tables, which he draws up to illustrate the fact that there is no relationship between the two legends (or rather, in this case, the three; Sinor, “The Legendary Origins”, pp. 231–232), do not demonstrate much, and even if he states that “Others may prefer a different choice or may wish to add to or delete from the list; the essential differences cannot really be bridged”, there are significant points of comparison. In addition to the motive of the ancestor wolf, we find the initial destruction of the people or the State at the beginning of the two stories; if the cave of the first story does not appear in the second, the mountain (where the cave is located?) is indeed present in it (and the mountain is indeed an element belonging to the structure of the myth, as illustrated by the role of the Qara Tagh in the legend of the First Man reported by Ibn ad-Dawādārī: Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, p. 219–27; DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 280–281). Sinor notes that the two passages also have in common the election of the chief on his merit, and that the names of Ashina and *Axian-she* are found in both, but that the fact that the two distinct characters of the first are no longer one and the same person in the second must have been the trace of a “compromise between two traditions which may originally have been hostile” (Sinor, “The Legendary Origins”, p. 230). I think it is again the exact opposite: it has already been noted that the reason for the election of the leader, common to the founding myths of the steppe, was split in the first story, between Ashina and *Axian-she* (cf. n. 45). We can hypothesize that he was originally one and the same character, or even that this duplication is a distortion that occurred somewhere in the chain of transmission from the legend to the *Zhoushu* (for the name of *Axian-she* and its meaning, see *below*). We would more readily refer to Devin DeWeese’s extensive comparative table, which takes more elements into account, and brings the Türk myth into resonance with other legends of steppic origin, including those already mentioned here; DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 508–509. Most of my disagreements with Sinor’s interpretations stem, on the one hand, from his attention, which I think is too great, almost exclusively to the motive of the wolf, to the detriment of others that are just as essential, and on the other hand from his desire to historicize at all costs the Turk legends transmitted by Chinese sources.

too, were unwise and bad”, leading to the ruin of the empire and submission to China.⁶⁰ Elterish Khagan and his wife El Bilge Khatum, protected by Heaven (Tengri) and earthly geniuses, appear as the primordial couple from whom the people are reborn.⁶¹ Elterish, who rises up with seventeen men, is likened to *Yizhini* shad and his seventeen brothers.⁶² This initial group of seventeen supporters grew gradually by adding partisans, passing to seventy men, then to seven hundred, just as in the myth the group grew over the generations.⁶³

We can try to take the comparison even further. If Elterish is assimilated to *Yizhini* shad, then his successor, Qapaghan, should be identified with *Yizhini*'s successor, *Naduliu* shad, who makes fire and thus saves the cold the group of destitute people from *Abangu*'s race. The inscription says:

After my uncle, the kaghan [Qapaghan], succeeded to the throne, he organized and nourished the Turkish people anew. He made the poor rich and the few numerous.⁶⁴

áčim kaŷan olurpan türük bodunuŷ yičä itdin igit(t)i. čiyüŷ bay qılti, aziŷ üküš qılti.

The expression, however, is not specific to Qapaghan: it is found in a few lines below, and this time Bilge applies it to himself, while after inheriting a difficult situation and the Türk people are once again powerless, he finally rectifies the situation after several military

⁶⁰Tekin, *A Grammar*, p. 233; translation p. 264.

⁶¹If the expression “They [Tengri and the earth and water spirits] held my father Elterish Khagan, and my mother El Bilge Khatum, at the top of heaven and raised them upwards” must be taken in a figurative sense, Elterish and El Bilge being politically elevated above the people as their rulers, the image should not be without reminding the contemporary reader familiar with the türk myth the she-wolf held from the ground and carried into the sky by a spirit. Similarly, the image “the soldiers of my father, the kaghan, were like wolves” must have resonated strongly in the mind of the reader, aware that the Türks considered a wolf to be their ancestor, and this all the more so since the guard of the khagan, at least during the First Türk Empire, was called, according to Chinese sources, the *Böri* (*fuli* 附離), “the Wolves”; *Zhoushu* 50: 909; tr. Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 9.

⁶²And not to *Abangu*, whom the legend says is stupid. When the text of *Zhoushu* says that “*Bangbu* and his brothers were all stupid” 謗步等性竝愚癡, it is of course necessary to hear with the exception of *Yizhini*. This one is the son of a wolf (whether it is a wolf or a she-wolf is not clear from the Chinese text), an obvious sign of his divine origin. He is distinguished (*bie* 別: this term and the fortune that favours *Yizhini* are also reminiscent of the distinction enjoyed by Elterish and El Bilge compared to the rest of the people; see previous note) by its power to control wind and rain, which is commonly associated with sovereignty, particularly by the use that can be made of it in war. I would also be inclined to see behind the “fortune”, *qi* 氣 (“breath, manifestation of the soul or of the spirit”, but also “fortune, destiny”; Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 6, translates it by “Geisterhauch”) of the Chinese text, the *qut*, or “sacred fortune”, of the Türks and the Uighurs; on this, see Roux, *La religion*, pp. 158–161. On the divine character of the wolf, see Roux, *La religion*, pp. 188–95. On the association between control of the elements and sovereignty, see Molnár, *Weather-Magic in Inner Asia* (Bloomington, 1994). It should be noted that the ability to control rain and wind most often comes from the possession of a particular stone, called *yat* or *yada*, whose Islamic sources often locate its origin in hard-to-reach places surrounded by mountains; see the discussions on this subject in J. A. Boyle, “Turkish and Mongol Shamanism in the Middle Ages”, *Floklöre* LXXXIII, n°3 (1972), pp. 187–193, and especially Molnár, *Weather-Magic*, pp. 1–59 in particular.

⁶³Seventeen, like seventy and seven hundred, are compounds of seven, a number that can be found with the seven Tatars of the origin myth of the Kimeks or the legend reported by Ibn ad-Dawādārī, with the seven survivors among the Mongolian nobles in Plano Carpini's account, or with the seven Mongol nations in Hayton's text. It should also be noted that in the *Beishi* version of the second story, *Abangu* has seventy brothers (possibly explaining the translation error in Sinor, “The Legendary Origins”, p. 226); *Beishi* 99: 3286. Undoubtedly, the figure seven has strong symbolic power among the nomadic peoples of Central Eurasia, and J.-P. Roux, “Les chiffres symboliques 7 et 9 chez les Turcs non musulmans”, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* CLXVIII, n°1 (1965) multiplies the examples (pp. 35 ff.); the theories he puts forward to explain this symbolic charge (pp. 49–53) nevertheless seem to me to be unfounded, and we can only, in the present situation, note the recurrence and the importance of this figure in our sources.

⁶⁴Tekin, *A Grammar*, p. 234; translation p. 266.

campaigns.⁶⁵ Perhaps *Naduliu's* role as a saviour is shared in the inscriptions by the uncle and nephew, but all in all, this identification is not very conclusive.

Now it can be argued more convincingly that Bilge, who is both the sponsor, the speaker, and the main protagonist of the Orkhon inscriptions, is identified with a character who was perhaps the most important figure in the Turkish origin myth, or was at least sufficiently important to appear in both versions transmitted by Chinese sources: *Axian shad*.

Peter Golden notes that in the name of *Axian shad* 阿賢設, the character *xian* 賢, “wise”, is the same as the one used in the *Shiji* 史記 about the “Wise Kings of the Left and of the Right”, *zuo you xian wang* 左右賢王, being the rank immediately lower than that, supreme, of *chanyu* 单于 in the administrative and political hierarchy of the Xiongnu, and he makes the connection with the Turkish *bilge*, “wise”.⁶⁶ Therefore, *Axian-she* could be not the phonetic transcription into Chinese of an approaching Turkish name, but a translation.⁶⁷ moreover, if in addition, the character *a* 阿 is assumed to be an abbreviation of the surname Ashina⁶⁸ 阿史那, *Axian-she* can be translated by Ashina Bilge shad, “the wise Ashina shad”.⁶⁹ *Bilge* is not a name, it is a regnal title, just like *Axian*, since the second story tells us that Ashina was so styled after he became king; it is constantly found in the royal onomastic of Türks and the Uighurs, insofar as wisdom is, not surprisingly, associated with the ability to govern in the steppic tradition, beginning with the Orkhon inscriptions. As a result, Bilge Khagan, about whom Chinese sources tell us that before his enthronement his name was *Mojilian* 默棘連,⁷⁰ did not choose his regnal name because of *Axian shad*, or at least not only. Nevertheless, if *xian* 賢 indeed translates *Bilge*, the homonymy with this mythical character has certainly served the khagan in the assertion of his power, contested for a time. The ascent to the throne of Bilge is not, in fact, the immediate and smooth ascent described in the inscriptions: at the death of Qapaghan, Chinese sources tell us, it was first his son Bögö (*Fuju* 匍俱)/Inäl (*Yinie* 移涅) Khagan, whom his father had previously made small khagan, who succeeded him; Kül Tegin revolted, took the lead of an army, killed Bögö, had his supporters massacred, and installed his elder brother, Bilge, at the head of the empire.⁷¹ By subtly asserting himself as a new *Axian shad*, Bilge certainly

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 235; translation p. 268.

⁶⁶Golden, *Introduction*, p. 119n. 26; *Shiji* 110: 2890.

⁶⁷With the exception of *she* 設 which, like *shidu* 師都 in *Yizhini-shidu* 伊質泥師都, transcribes the Turkish title *shad*. The specificity of this title easily explains why it would not have been translated.

⁶⁸This hypothesis seems to be reinforced by the fact that *Abangbu* 阿謗步 is called *Bangbu* 謗步 in the following sentence, which would tend to show that 阿 is used here as a surname, *xing* 姓. It could nevertheless be objected that 阿 is a character regularly used to transcribe proper names, especially foreign ones, and not only Ashina; thus, in the same text, the *Afu* River 阿輔.

⁶⁹This hypothesis is all the more tempting if, as we have said before, Ashina and *Axian shad* are the same character (see note 59): in the first story, Ashina is elected king because he is “the most intelligent”, *zui xian* 最賢; and, according to what I suppose, this is precisely what his name, or rather his title, *Axian*, means, as the second story specifies. To my knowledge, the Turkish word *Bilge* is only transcribed in Chinese, in the form of *pījia* 毗伽, from the compilations of the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 and the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, in 945 and 1060 respectively, which would mean that at the time of the compilation of *Zhoushu* and *Beishi*, in the middle of the 7th century, the practice would have been to translate it and not to transcribe it. However, it cannot be excluded that the authors did indeed wish to transcribe an approaching Turkish name, albeit vaguely, by choosing the character *xian* 賢, precisely because it denoted the wisdom that they could detect as a trait of the character

⁷⁰*Jiu Tangshu* 194: 5173; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 171.

⁷¹*Jiu Tangshu* 194: 5170–3; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, pp. 168–171. The ascension to the throne of Bögö following his father, to the detriment of his cousin Bilge, was in principle in violation of the lateral succession in force among the Türks, from the eldest brother to the youngest, then from the sons of the eldest to the

intended to claim a legitimacy equal to that of the mythical hero: that of a sovereign chosen by his people according to his merit.

For the comparison to be complete, the element of the cave, or at least the inaccessible refuge, present in the myth, is still missing from the inscriptions. However, the entire southern face of Kül Tegin's inscription is dedicated to praising the merits of the Ötüken mountains, the only place from which the Türks can be ruled, and out of which death awaits.⁷² I think that the Ötüken mountains, at the foot of which is the Orkhon Valley, represent in the inscriptions the refuge from which the mythical ancestors of the Turk came out. This association of Ötüken with the ancestral place dates back to the First Turkish Empire. We read in the *Zhoushu*:

The khagan usually dwells in the *Yudujin* [Ötüken] mountains. His tent palace is open to the east, because it is in this direction that rises the sun, which they [the Türks] worship. Every year, he leads all his nobles into a grotto to offer a sacrifice to their ancestors.⁷³

可汗恆處於都斤山，牙帳東開，蓋敬日之所出也。每歲率諸貴人，祭其先窟。

One can perhaps infer that the cave in question was in the Ötüken.⁷⁴ From that time onwards, the Ötüken would therefore have been symbolically associated with the ancestral residence of the Turks, the grotto mentioned in the *Zhoushu* representing the mythical cave of the origins.⁷⁵ In the Kül Tegin inscription, Bilge also calls the Türks the “people of the sacred Ötüken mountains”.⁷⁶

That the Orkhon inscriptions do indeed follow the pattern of the origin myth seems to me, moreover, to be proved by the striking similarity that exists between the already mentioned passage on the eastern side of the Kül Tegin inscription and the origin myth of the Kimeks. Probably the latter derives from the original form of the Türk myth, to which we

sons of the youngest. However, that Tonyuquq, the old counselor of Elterish, Qapaghan, and finally Bilge, was first among Böggö's supporters (and was the only one spared), seems to indicate that legitimacy was on the latter's side.

⁷²Tekin, *A Grammar*, pp. 231–232; translation pp. 261–262.

⁷³*Zhoushu* 50: 910; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 10, modified. The *Suishu* 隋書 adds with regard to the Western Türk khagans, who could not go themselves, that “every year they sent an [some?] official to the cave where their ancestors lived to offer a sacrifice” 歲遣重臣向其先世所居之窟致祭焉; *Suishu* 84: 1877; translation É. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux* (St Petersburg, 1903), p. 15.

⁷⁴The text then goes on to talk about an annual ceremony bringing all the Türks together on the banks of the Tamir, a tributary of the Orkhon, and then about a sacred mountain 400 or 500 *li* from the Ötüken. It can be assumed that if the cave had not been in the Ötüken, it would have been mentioned later in the text. Roux, however, places it in the Altai, which is said to be the place of origin of the Türks, as suggested by the first version of the myth as reported by the *Zhoushu*, as well as the *Suishu* 84: 1863; tr. Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 40; Roux, *La religion*, p. 151.

⁷⁵Pace D. Sinor, “A propos de la biographie ouïghoure de Hiuan-tsang”, *Journal Asiatique* CCXXXI (1939), pp. 552–553 et *Idem*, “The Legendary Origins”, pp. 235–236, who, against the opinion of Pelliot, “Neuf notes”, p. 214n. 2, thinks that the grotto, called *ku* 窟, where the ceremony was held, has nothing to do with the cave, called *xue* 穴, where the wolf took refuge, but with the troglodytic habitats of the first Türks, which would be mentioned in passing in the *Tongdian* 通典 (it should be noted however that in the translation he gives of 突厥窟北: “North of the caves of the T'ou-kiue”, the plural is totally arbitrary). And to note, in support of this: “nothing in Legend A [*i.e.* the first version of the myth] suggests that the Türks' ancestor was born in a cavern” (*sic!*); Sinor, “The Legendary Origins”, p. 236. The cave where the khagan and the nobles go once a year to sacrifice to the ancestors is the *same* as the one where the legendary she-wolf found refuge, in the sense that it concretely represents the mythical cave within the centre of the imperial Türk power, thus sacredized; this is what DeWeese calls the “nationalization” of the myth; DeWeese, *Islamization*, p. 277 n. 87.

⁷⁶Tekin, *A Grammar*, p. 234; translation p. 267.

have access only by distorted versions, through Chinese sources, whereas the original form is the one that inspires the Orkhon inscriptions.⁷⁷

Furthermore Étienne de la Vaissière convincingly demonstrated how the discourse carried by the inscriptions on the value of the Ötüken was in fact pure rhetoric, aimed at masking a much less flattering reality, namely that the Türks of the Second Empire, formerly centred on the Yinshan Mountains and the Hohhot Valley (the Choghay Mountains and the Tögül-tün Valley of the inscriptions), had to retreat north of the Gobi Desert under Chinese pressure in 708.⁷⁸ The same is true of the reminder of the foundation of the First Empire by the two brothers Bumiin and Ishtemi, in whose footsteps the other two brothers Bilge et Kül Tegin seek to follow.⁷⁹ The implicit call to the legend of origins is part of the same logic of imperial propaganda, presenting the creation of the Second Turkish Empire and the enthronement of Bilge Khagan as events with a founding power as strong for the community as the mythical birth of the first Ashina and the exit of their mountain refuge.

The construction of a mythical Chinggis Khan:

The Türk case of a transposition of the original myth into the political narrative of the foundation of the Second Türk Empire makes it possible to understand what the passages of Plano Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum* or Jüzjānī's *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāširī* are. They are not vague echoes distorted to the point of no longer being related to historical reality. The intermediaries from whom these authors gleaned their information were well informed and had this curious account of Chinggis Khan's defeat from Mongol sources. It is simply not about *history*, as we understand it. To study these excerpts, we can indeed apply Devin DeWeese's statement about Ötemish Ḥājjī's account of Özbek Khan's conversion to Islam: "Underlying the supposition that some 'historical core' underlies a 'legendary' account such as that of Ötemish Ḥājjī is the assumption that individuals and communities are inclined to organize and remember their experience first and foremost as *history*".⁸⁰

The constitution of the Mongol Empire by Chinggis Khan, as well as that of the Second Türk Empire by Elterish, Qapaghan and Bilge, was a major event that was not only recorded in historical sources in the form of a chronicle, such as the *Secret History* or the *Jāmi' at-tawārīkh*, based on accounts of what may have actually happened according to witnesses, but has also been translated into narratives using the material of the myth to reflect the meaning and significance of this event for the community of the nomadic subjects of the empire: that of a new foundation, equal in its meaning to the very origin of the community that the myth tells. As I have already stated above, the passages in question by Plano Carpini, C. de Bridia and Jüzjānī reflect a legend about the life and conquests of Chinggis Khan, forged at the Mongol court, at the latest in the *interregnum* following the death of Ögödei

⁷⁷Of course it cannot be completely excluded that the Kimeks had more or less directly knowledge of the Orkhon inscriptions and of their contents, and drew inspiration from them to create their original myth. However, this is less likely. The two hypotheses are not, in any case, exclusive to each other.

⁷⁸É. de La Vaissière, "Away from the Ötüken: A Geopolitical Approach of the seventh Century Eastern Türks", in *Complexity of Interaction along the Eurasian Steppe Zone in the First Millennium CE*, (ed.) J. Bemman and M. Schmauder (Bonn, 2015), pp. 458–459.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁸⁰DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 160–161.

(1241) and preceding the enthronement of Güyük (1246), and this for political purposes. While perhaps masking an obscure, and obviously not very glorious, episode of the Mongol conqueror's career, it serves to strengthen his legitimacy and that of his lineage by using the sacred repertoire of the myth to describe his rise. It is anchored in a real geography, since in the same way that the Türks had assimilated the Ötüken to the vast plain located in the cave of their ancestors, the Ergene Qūn is transposed into the sacred heart of the Mongol Empire, the Kerülen Valley, easily recognizable behind the metathetized form *Kelurān* of Jūzjānī's text.⁸¹

Just as the Orkhon inscriptions probably identify Bilge with his ancestor *Axian* shad, this legendary narrative first assimilates Chinggis Khan to his ancestor, Börte Chino.⁸² We have already seen that Rashīd ad-Dīn mentions this character as an "important commander" among those who left the Ergene Qūn. Moreover Abū'l-Ghāzī makes him the king of the Mongols when they leave the Ergene Qūn.⁸³ He therefore clearly occupies a function parallel to that of *Axian* shad in the Türk myth, that of the sovereign leading his people outside the enclosed refuge to their new home. Now Jūzjānī writes that the Mongols who took refuge in the *Kelurān* elected Chinggis Khan commander (*amīr*) (though he was already leading the revolt against Altūn Khan at the time of their crushing defeat) so that he would lead them to victory. The circumstances of the latter take the parallel between this story and the myth of the Ergene Qūn even further: Concerned about the growing strength of the Mongols, Altūn Khan had the only pass leading to the *Kelurān* guarded by an army of 300,000 riders, which Chinggis Khan and the Mongols bypassed by going through a traverse path,⁸⁴ as well as in the myth the Mongols, prisoners of their refuge, end up coming out of it with a trick, by "a passage just wide enough to pass a loaded camel", as Abū'l-Ghāzī says.⁸⁵

The nature, lupine or human, of Börte Chino, "Blue Wolf", is a subject of debate.⁸⁶ Among Muslim authors, such as Rashīd ad-Dīn and his followings, he is undoubtedly a human being, as well as in the later Mongol sources of the 16th and 17th centuries, which link him to the lineage of the legendary Buddhist kings of India and Tibet;⁸⁷ but this is probably a later humanization, in order to make the tradition compatible with

⁸¹The form *Kelüren* itself is regularly found in the *SH*, where it alternates with *Kerülen*. The place of residence of the pre-Chinggisid Mongols was between the *Kerülen* and the *Onan*. The two rivers originate in the sacred mountain of the *Burqaṅ Qaldun*, the burial place of Chinggis Khan, a mountain that the *SH* explicitly identifies as a refuge: it is there that, by the will of Heaven, the still young *Temüjin* escapes the hunt of his *Merkid* enemies; *SH*, § 100–103; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, pp. 31–33. The *Kerülen* River flows into Lake *Hulun*, which in turn feeds the *Argun River* (*Ergüne*), whose name has been approximated by some to that of the Ergene Qūn: thus Tamura J., "The Legend of the Origin of the Mongols and Problems concerning their Migration", *Acta Asiatica* XXIV (1973), pp. 1–19, who presents an attempt to historicize the legend of the Ergene Qūn.

⁸²Although Börte Chino is not, strictly speaking, the direct ancestor of Chinggis Khan: the latter is indeed descended from *Bodonchar*, one of the three sons that *Alan Qo'a*, the widow of the descendant of Börte Chino, *Dobun Mergen*, had from a ray of light entering through the upper opening of her tent in the form of a man, and leaving it in the form of a yellow dog (it is the incarnation of *Tengri*). *SH*, § 17–22; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, pp. 3–5. Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tawārikh*, p. 204; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 82. See also the discussion in Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, pp. 126 ff.

⁸³Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tawārikh*, p. 202; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 81; Abū'l-Ghāzī, *Histoire des Mongols*, pp. 34, 59; translation Desmaisons, pp. 33, 63.

⁸⁴Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiṁ*, II, p. 100; tr. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiṁ*, II, pp. 953–954. As it will be seen later, it is relevant that this path is discovered by Chinggis Khan's Muslim follower and merchant *Ja'far Khwāja*.

⁸⁵Abū'l-Ghāzī, *Histoire des Mongols*, p. 34; tr. Desmaisons, p. 33.

⁸⁶See Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 224.

⁸⁷See for example *Altan Tobči*; translation Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan Tobči* (Wiesbaden, 1955), p. 113.

Islam or Tibetan Buddhism.⁸⁸ Indeed the *Secret History* is more ambiguous. This is because Börte Chino is probably both wolf and human: as Roberte Hamayon elegantly puts it, “the founder of the tribe, [...] is animal by essence but human by fonction, inasmuch as he begets the forefathers of the clan. He originates from the animal part of the supernatural world and takes place above the ancestors in the human part of it”.⁸⁹

The *Secret Story* begins by telling that Börte Chino and his wife Qo’a Maral, “Fallow Doe”, settled on the Burqan Qaldun after crossing the sea, and from there gave birth to the line leading to Chinggis Khan.⁹⁰ This account of a migration, coupled with the role of leader, i. e. of guide, of the Mongols in their exit from the Ergene Qūn according to the myth, suggests that the blue wolf Börte Chino as well as his wife the fallow doe were originally guiding animals, as found elsewhere in various nomadic traditions: in the *Oghuz Nāma* written in Uighur from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, a grey wolf guides Oghuz Khagan’s always victorious armies;⁹¹ Michael the Syrian says in his *Chronicle* that the Oghuz emigrated from their mountains – called “the Breasts of the Earth” and into which one could only enter or leave through two doors – led by “a kind of animal similar to a dog, which walked before them”, and which indicated when they had to move by saying to them “gūs!”, “Stand up!” (Turkish -göç/köç: “to migrate”, “to move a camp”), and when to stop;⁹² Jordanes, quoting Priscus, says that the Huns found a way out of the marshes where they had been relegated towards Scythia, following a deer that appeared to hunters;⁹³ while during their migration the Tuoba wanted to settle in a deep and mountainous valley that was hard to reach, an animal spirit which was shaped like a horse and bellowed like an ox appeared and led them further south for several years before disappearing;⁹⁴ at the end of Juvaynī’s *excursus* on Buqu Khagan, it is said that the Uighurs settled in Beshbalik after hearing the cries of horses, camels, dogs, cattle and birds in which they recognized the expression “köch, köch!”, pushing them to emigrate;⁹⁵ some “Tartars” reported to Riccoldo of Monte Croce that God took them out of their original lands, sending them as messengers “a beast and a bird of the desert – namely a hare and an owl”, which indicated to a hunter a passage through the mountains.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, p. 133.

⁸⁹ R. Hamayon, “Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counterpower in Society”, in *Shamanism, History and State*, (ed.) N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (Ann Harbor, 1996), pp. 83–84.

⁹⁰ SH, § 1; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 1.

⁹¹ *Oghuz Nāma*; translation W. Bang and G. R. Rachmati, “Die Legende von Oγuz Qayan”, *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse XXV* (1932), pp. 10–21.

⁹² Michael the Syrian, *Maktbānūt zabnē*; translation J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)* (Paris, 1905), III, pp. 151–155; see the discussion in DeWeese, *Islamization*, p. 278.

⁹³ Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum*; translation O. Devillers, *Histoire des Goths* (Paris, 1995), p. 49.

⁹⁴ *Weishu* 1: 2; translation J. Holmgren, *Annals of Tai: Early T’o-pa History According to the First Chapter of the Wei-shu* (Cambera, 1982), p. 52. The first place chosen to settle obviously refers to the enclosed space of the myth of origin.

⁹⁵ Juvaynī, *Tarīkh-i jahān-gushā*, I, p. 45; translation Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, p. 61. This same word, which is also pronounced by the Oghuz animal guide, can be found in Rashīd ad-Dīn, precisely with regard to the exit of the Mongols from the Ergene Qūn: *köch karda’and* كچ کرده اند, “they emigrated”; Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi’ at-tawārīkh*, p. 139; translation Thakston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 56.

⁹⁶ Monte Croce, *Liber Peregrationis*; translation R. Kappler, *Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche-Orient. Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d’Acre* (Paris, 1997), pp. 92–93, 98–101; the parallel with the Hunnic legend reported by Jordanes is blatant. On the guiding animals in Centasiatic traditions, see V. Spinei, “Preliminary Notes on the Legend of the Ritual Hunt of the Guiding-Animal in the Mythology of the Eurasian Tribes and the Surroundings

In addition, the crossing of the sea by Börte Chino and Qo'a Maral can be compared to the crossing of the Western Sea by the ancestral wolf of the Türks, which highlights the relationship between Mongol tradition and the Türk myth, but also suggests that the wolf in question was also initially intended to be a guiding animal.⁹⁷ That Chinggis Khan was indeed assimilated to Börte Chino is confirmed to us by another source, the account of Hayton that I mentioned above, which refers to a similar crossing of the sea by Chinggis Khan at the head of his people: it is said that the Mongols spent a night in prayer before the sea at the foot of the Mount Belgian, and that in the morning God had made the sea withdraw over a width of nine feet, giving the Mongols a passage toward a rich plain.⁹⁸ The Armenian monk gives this legend a Mosaic glaze, in order to link the Mongols to the Christian history of salvation, but its background is, as we have seen, quite Central Asian.⁹⁹

The guiding animal is a being belonging to the supernatural world, sent by Heaven. Börte Chino is said by the *Secret History* to be “born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above”,¹⁰⁰ and his blue colour (*börte* : “blue, blue-grey”) expresses its heavenly character. The implicit assimilation of Chinggis Khan to Börte Chino in turn implies the divine character of the person and mission of the conqueror as the guide and sovereign of the Mongol people. It is therefore perfectly articulated with all the imperial Chinggisid propaganda, which constantly insists on the protection of Heaven, Tengri, enjoyed by Chinggis Khan and his lineage, who are the agents on Earth of the heavenly will.¹⁰¹

This narrative then assimilates Chinggis Khan to the blacksmith, a character absent from the version of the myth given by Rashīd ad-Dīn, but very present in that of Abū'l-Ghāzī, in which it is he who discovers the iron mine, and who probably inspires the way to make it melt.¹⁰² This assimilation is made explicit by Hayton, who writes that Chinggis Khan was indeed a blacksmith: “povre home fevre, qui avoit non Canguis”.¹⁰³ Hayton is not, however, the only one to echo a tradition that makes the great Mongol conqueror a blacksmith, since on the contrary it can be found in various sources, independent of each other: in the

Peoples in the Middle Ages”, in *Central Eurasia in the Middle Ages. Studies in Honor of Peter B. Golden*, (ed.) I. Zimonyi and O. Karatay (Wiesbaden, 2016).

⁹⁷An hypothesis already formulated in DeWeese, *Islamization*, p. 496 n. 8.

⁹⁸Hayton, “La Flor des Estoires”, p. 153. The Mount Belgian, which closes the passage to the Mongols, and at the foot of which lies the sea to be crossed, must be identified with Mount Burqan Qaldun, at the sources of the Onan and of the Kerülen, according to Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, p. 61, or with the river or lake Baljuna, according to H. Stang, “The Baljuna Revisited”, *Journal of Turkish Studies* IX (1985), p. 230. It is in fact probably a confusion between the two places. In any case, at least if we agree with Pelliot's opinion that the lake Baljuna was located in the Kerülen basin (Pelliot and Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes*, pp. 46–48), this probably confirms that the Onan-Kerülen region was assimilated to the original enclosed place.

⁹⁹Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, pp. 60–61. I therefore do not fully agree with Stang, “The Baljuna Revisited”, p. 230, that the episode of the partition of waters “must, alas, be discarded as apocryphal”: the withdrawal of waters by divine intervention is probably an addition by Hayton, but the crossing itself, certainly not. For an episode of Möngke's campaign against the Qipchaqs that may have inspired this story, see Juvaynī, *Tarīkh-i jahān-gushā*, III, p. 11; translation Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, p. 554.

¹⁰⁰*SH*, § 1; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 1.

¹⁰¹Roux, *La religion*, pp. 110 ff.; Aigle, *The Mongol Empire*, pp. 173 ff.

¹⁰²In the version of the legend of the Ergene Qūn contained in the epic poem called the *Shāhanshāh Nāma*, commissioned by the Ilkhan Abu Sa'īd (1316–1335) to Aḥmad-i Tabrīzī, it is not stated who in particular discovers the iron vein, but the solution of melting the ore to clear a passage is given by an individualized character, although it is not explicitly mentioned that he was a blacksmith; see Boyle, “Some Thoughts”, pp. 186–187.

¹⁰³Hayton, “La Flor des Estoires”, p. 148.

Franciscan William of Rubruck,¹⁰⁴ the Byzantine chronicler Georgios Pachymeres,¹⁰⁵ the Mamluk historians an-Nuwayrī, aṣ-Ṣafadī and Ibn ad-Dawādārī,¹⁰⁶ and finally in the traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps here again in the same way as in the Türk case, with the homonymy between Bilge Khagan and *Axian* shad, such assimilation has undoubtedly been facilitated by Chinggis Khan's birth name, Temüjin: this name is unquestionably built on the Turko-Mongolian root *temür*, "iron", followed by the suffix *-jin*, former allomorph of *-či(n)* used to designate vocation names, which makes it the equivalent of the Turko-Mongolian *temürčin/tämürči*, "blacksmith".¹⁰⁸

Chinggis Khan's identification with a blacksmith is therefore not without foundation, as it has long been believed,¹⁰⁹ nor does it come from a popular etymology, since it is ultimately based on a deliberate match between the myth of the Ergene Qūn and Chinggis Khan's rising to power.¹¹⁰ It overlaps with the identification to Börte Chino, again making Chinggis Khan the one who ensures the exit of his people from their borders to a greater destiny. But there is more. Indeed, there are many traditions among the nomads of Central Asia to link the blacksmith to the shaman: like him, the blacksmith, by his mastery of iron and fire, is endowed with supernatural powers and has part with the spirit world.¹¹¹ To make Chinggis Khan a blacksmith is therefore to endow him with a sacred royalty whose power extends beyond the political sphere to the fields of magic and religion.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴Rubruck, *Itinerarium*; translation P. Jackson, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck. His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255* (London, 1990), pp. 124, 247.

¹⁰⁵Pachymeres, *Syngraphikai historiai*; tr. V. Laurent, *Relations historiques* (Paris, 1984), II, p. 444–445.

¹⁰⁶Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ārāb fi funūn al-ādab*, (ed.) Sā'id 'Abd al-Fattāh 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1985), XXVII, p. 302; Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*, (ed.) Shukrī Fayṣal (Wiesbaden, 1981), IX, p. 199; Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁷Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*; translation P. Charles-Dominique, "Voyages et périples", in *Voyageurs arabes: Ibn Faḍlān, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa et un auteur anonyme*, (ed.) P. Charles-Dominique (Paris, 1995), p. 715.

¹⁰⁸Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 332; Pelliot 1959, pp. 289–290; *pace* Sinor, "The Legendary Origins", pp. 248–249. Chance does things well here, which gave the future conqueror the name of the enemy his father had just defeated, according to an ancient Mongol tradition; see *SH*, § 59; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 13. It is also to be noted that the Chinese rendition of his name, *Tiemuzhen* 鐵木真, includes the character *tie* 鐵, meaning "iron".

¹⁰⁹P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris, 1959), I, p. 290.

¹¹⁰*Pace* D. Sinor, "Random Remarks on Metallurgical Themes in Pre-Modern Inner Asia", in *Scripta Ottomana et Res Altaicae: Festschrift für Barbara Kellner-Heinkele zu ihrem 60. Geburtstag*, (ed.) I. Hauenschild, C. Schöning and P. Zieme (Wiesbaden, 2002), p. 307, who is therefore doubly mistaken in asserting that "Although it would harmonize with the Ergene qun legend, I have my misgivings concerning the age-old etymology which would link Temüjin, Chinggis Khan's personal name, with the Mongol word *temüči* 'blacksmith'. At best it is a popular etymology based on assonance."

¹¹¹A. A. Popov, "Consecration Ritual for a Blacksmith Novice among the Yakuts", *The Journal of American Folklore* XLVI, n°181 (1933); J.-P. Roux, "Fonctions chamaniques et valeurs du feu chez les peuples altaïques", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* CLXXXIX, n°1 (1976), pp. 83–86; *Idem*, *La religion*, pp. 79–80.

¹¹²The elimination of the great shaman Teb Tenggeri, as reported by *SH*, might be interpreted by this position of the supreme sovereign, whose power is also religious, and who does not suffer from an intermediary in his relationship to Heaven and the supernatural world: *SH*, § 245; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 172. See the discussion in Roux 1987, pp. 153 ff. It would perhaps be tempting to see in the supreme title of the Xiongnu, *chanyu* 单于 > EMC: **dān-yuay*, behind which probably lies the title *tarkhan* (E. G. Pulleyblank, "The Consonantal System of Old Chinese", *Asia Major* IX, 1962, pp. 91, 256–257), the ancient expression of this duality of monarchical power among Eurasian nomads, between political and sacred royalties. However, it would seem that the meaning of *darqan/tarkhan* as "blacksmith" is a derivation of the *darqan* status that blacksmiths, and more generally artisans, received in the Mongol Empire, hence the meaning of "blacksmith, craftsman": Ch. P. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York, 2004), p. 133.

The religious nature of the sovereign's power in connection with metallurgy can be detected from the description given by Rashīd ad-Dīn, immediately following the passage on the Ergene Qūn, of a metallurgical ritual specific to the Chinggisid family:

During the night before the new year, it is tradition and custom within Chinggīz Khān's *uruq* [family] to prepare ironsmiths' bellows, a furnace and charcoal, then to bring a piece of iron to the red, which they strike on an anvil with a hammer to give it an elongated shape. After which they give thanks.¹¹³

و در آن شب که سر سال نو باشد رسم و عادت اوروغ چنگگیز خان آنست که دم آهنگران و کوره و فحم ترتیب کنند، و قدری آهن را بتابند و بر سندان نهاده به مطرقه بزنند و دراز کنند و شکرانه گزارند.

The description of this same ritual can be found in Abū'l-Ghāzī where it appears even more explicitly as a commemoration of the exit from the Ergene Qūn:

[The Mongols] noted the time of the day and the month, and went outside. Since then, the Mongols have been celebrating this date: they throw a piece of iron into the fire and bring it to the red; first the khan takes the iron with pincers, puts it on an anvil and hits it with a hammer, then it is the turn of the begs. They venerate this day with fervour, explaining that it was then that they came out of the confinement and returned to their homeland.¹¹⁴

کون نینگ آی نینگ ساعتین قراب تاشقاری چیغدی لار آندین بری مغول نینگ رسمی تورور شول کوننی عید قیلور لار بیر پاره تیمورنی اوتغه سالب قیزل قیلور لار اول خان انبور بیرلان تیمورنی توتوب سندان اوستندا قویوب چوکوج بیرلان اورار آندین سونک بیک لار اول کونی عجایب عزیز توتار لار قبال دین چیغیب آتا یورتینه کیلکان کون تورور تیب

So we see that kings and nobles of the Chinggis Khan family became blacksmiths themselves every year for a night, and that it was a sacred performance. This ceremony finds parallels in the shamanic initiation rituals of contemporary times.¹¹⁵ It is also reminiscent of the one described by the *Zhoushu*, led by the Türk khagan and gathering the nobility in the ancestral grotto, although the details are not known. There is no question of iron

¹¹³Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, p. 139; translation Thackston, *Rashīduddīn*, p. 57, amended. Thackston's translation "to gather ironsmiths" is based on the text of Karīmī's edition which has *qowm-i āhangarān* قوم آهنگران "a group of ironsmiths": *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, (ed.) B. Karīmī, Tehran: 1959, I, p. 110. We should however prefer the version of Rowshan and Mūsavī (whose edition is based on better manuscripts), *dam-i āhangarān* دم آهنگران "iron-smiths' bellows". That is to say, it is the members of the Chinggisid family themselves who act as blacksmiths.

¹¹⁴Abū'l-Ghāzī, *Histoire des Mongols*, p. 34; translation Desmaisons, p. 33, amended. I would like to express my deepest thanks to Marc Toutant for having kindly translated for me this passage, as well as all the other excerpts from the text of Abū'l-Ghāzī cited in this article. It should be noted that the *Shajarat al-Atrak* stipulates that the Mongols used to return each year to the Ergene Qūn to extract iron: *Shajarat al-Atrak*; translation Miles, *The Shajrat ul-Atrak*, pp. 45–46.

¹¹⁵Popov, "Consecration Ritual", pp. 262 ff. It can also be noted that, in the myth of the Ergene Qūn, the melting of the iron mine by means of seventy bellows made from the skins of seventy horses and sheep, as Rashīd ad-Dīn tells us, and arranged in seventy different places, as Abū'l-Ghāzī tells us (seventy being a numinous number), and that it was blown at the same time, has all a magic operation; see *below*. It is also interesting to note that, according to the *SH* Chinggis Khan made his nightguards the guardians of, among other things, the *gū'ürge* which Rachewiltz translates as "drums": *SH*, § 232, *Index to the Secret History of the Mongols*, (ed.) I. de Rachewiltz (Bloomington, 1972), p. 134; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, p. 160. It would seem that etymologically, the term refers to skins swollen with air in order to serve as floats to cross rivers: it is this idea of crossing, with that of stretched skin, which would be at the origin of a semantic shift towards the drum, and first of all that of the shaman, for whom it is a means of passage towards the other world. Now another meaning of *gū'ürge* is that of "bellows": the ambiguity of the term indicates here again the shamanic nature of the very act of forging; see T. D. Skrynnikova, "Sülde – The Basic Idea of the Chinggis-Khan Cult", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* XLVI, n° 1 (1992–1993), p. 54.

in the Türk myth, as reported to us by the various Chinese sources. However the *Zhoushu* says that after leaving the cave, the Türks “settled on the southern slope of the *Jinshan* [the Altai], and served as blacksmiths for the *Ruru* [Rouran]” 居金山之陽，為茹茹鐵工。¹¹⁶ It can therefore be assumed that the metallurgical element was also present.

From this tradition comes undoubtedly, as Roux had suggested,¹¹⁷ the strange passage found in *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* of Jūzjānī, again, in which Chinggis Khan is depicted as a friend of demons, a practitioner of magic and scapulomancy, and being able to immerse himself in states of trance during which he predicted his victories. Which fits perfectly with the description of a shaman.¹¹⁸ From this sacred nature of the royalty of the conqueror who is identified with a blacksmith also stems, I think, the misperception on the part of some Muslim authors of Chinggis Khan as the prophet of the Mongols. This idea can be found first in the Mamluk historian Ibn Wāṣil, then in the famous Damascene cleric Ibn Taymiyya, but also in the Persian historian Vaṣṣāf, who reports that the Jewish vizier of the Ilkhan Arghun (1284–1291), Sa‘ad ad-Dowla, encouraged him to found a new religion, by trying to convince him that he had inherited the gift of prophecy from his ancestor Chinggis Khan.¹¹⁹

The blacksmith is also in a symbolic way the one who forges the new community, and binds its members together. Taken in this way, the enclosed place is therefore a matrix,¹²⁰ and more particularly a furnace or a forge where this new community is shaped, and of which the blacksmith is in a way the birthing man.¹²¹ We can also see in the fusion of the Ergene Qūn’s iron mine by means of the seventy bellows, and of which the blacksmith is the great organiser, both a magical operation which occupies the entire community in the collection of fuels,¹²² and thus serves to symbolically *weld* it, and a ritual for the dedication of the group called Mongol, whose emergence outside the mountains marks the birth. It is clearly this creative role that, through the figure of the blacksmith, is attributed to Chinggis Khan, whose conquests give birth to a new society.

¹¹⁶*Zhoushu* 50: 907; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 5. See also *Suishu* 84: 1863; translation Liu, *Die Chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 40.

¹¹⁷Roux, *La religion*, pp. 72, 80.

¹¹⁸Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, II p. 199; tr. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, II, pp. 1077–1078. See also the passage describing the moment before the “exit” of the Mongols from Kelurān, during which Chinggis Khan gathered his soldiers at the foot of a mountain and made them fast and invoke Tengri for three days, while he remained isolated in his tent, a rope around his neck: he came out on the fourth day, announcing that Tengri had granted him victory; Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, II, pp. 100–101; translation Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, II, p. 954. This passage is parallel to that of Hayton’s *Flor des Estoires*, describing the Mongol army at the foot of the Mount Belgian, kneeling nine times in front of the sea, then spending the whole night in prayer for a passage to open; Hayton, “La Flor des Estoires”, p. 153.

¹¹⁹See the discussion on this subject in R. Amitai, “Did Chinggis Khan Have a Jewish Teacher? An Examination of an Early Fourteenth-Century Arabic Text”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* CXXIV, n4 (2004), p. 698–699.

¹²⁰See note 52.

¹²¹See DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 273–287 in particular, on the equivalence between the oven in which Baba Tükles entered and emerged unscathed, symbolizing the birth of the new Muslim community of the Golden Horde, and the enclosed place from which the new political group emerged in several Central Asian traditions.

¹²²Abū’l-Ghāzī writes that “a tax in wood and coal was imposed on all the inhabitants of the country”: Abū’l-Ghāzī, *Histoire des Mongols*, p. 34; translation Desmaisons, p. 33.

The founding event: Baljuna

The legend of Chinggis Khan thus constructed tells the mythical origin of the new community that is the Mongol Empire. Following Painter's intuition, it can be said that it is in fact based on a proven event of the Mongol history: the battle of Qalaqaljid Elet and the Baljuna Covenant. In my opinion it is even possible to discern the transition from this historical event to legend.

In his long study on Baljuna, Francis W. Cleaves established less the reality of the facts that took place there than the indisputable importance that the event had for the generations that followed the foundation of the Mongol Empire.¹²³ Though this does not necessarily appear at first glance: the *Shengwu Qingzheng Lu* and the first chapter of the *Yuanshi*, which deals with the reign of Chinggis Khan, are relatively simple in their descriptions, and finally rather laconic as to what happened then.¹²⁴ And if the *Secret History* describes the battle of Qalaqaljid Elet, the Baljuna Covenant is absent of it. Other sources, however, provide a somewhat different picture.¹²⁵ The biography of Ja'far Khwāja included in the *Yuanshi* reads as follows:

Taizu [Chinggis Khan] had a rift with *Wang Han* [Ong Qan] of the *Kelie* [Kereyids]. One evening *Wang Han* came, moving his troops surreptitiously. Taken by surprise and being unprepared, the army [of the Mongols] was completely routed. *Taizu* straightway withdrew and fled. Those who went with him were only nineteen, and *Jabaer* [Ja'far] was included. When they reached the *Banzhuni* [Baljuni] River, their provisions were entirely exhausted and, since the place was desolate and remote, there was no way to obtain food. It happened that a wild horse came northward. The prince *Haja'er* [Qajar, ie Jochi Qasar] shot it and killed it. Thereupon they cut the hide open so it may serve as a cauldron, and they produced fire by means of stones. They drew water of the River, boiled it, and they consume them.¹²⁶ *Taizu* raised his hands and looking up at Heaven swore, saying: "If I am able to achieve the Great Work [*i.e.* to found the empire], I shall share with you men the sweet and the bitter. If I break this word, may I become as the water of the River." Among officers and soldiers there was none who was not moved to tears.¹²⁷

太祖與克烈汪罕有隙。一夕，汪罕潛兵來，倉卒不為備，眾軍大潰。太祖遽引去，從行者僅十九人，札八兒與焉。至班朱尼河，餼糧俱盡，荒遠無所得食。會一野馬北來，諸王哈札兒射之，殪。遂剝革為釜，出火于石，汲河水煮而啖之。太祖舉手

¹²³Cleaves, "The Historicity".

¹²⁴See the passages in question in Cleaves, Cleaves, "The Historicity", pp. 370–372.

¹²⁵On the different versions of Baljuna's account, see Cleaves, "The Historicity", pp. 396–419, and Stang, "The Baljuna Revisited".

¹²⁶It seems to me, although the *Yuanshi* compiler apparently did not realize what it was about, that it is the Mongol cooking technique called *boodog* which is described here: "Cette technique consiste à désosser une bête [...] en ne pratiquant qu'une ouverture aussi réduite que possible de la peau, le plus souvent au niveau du cou. La viande est préparée, découpée et assaisonnée pendant qu'un grand nombre de pierres, de préférence galets de rivière, sont mis à chauffer dans un feu. Une fois les pierres chaudes, les morceaux de viande, des oignons, de l'ail et des herbes aromatiques, parfois un peu d'eau, sont replacés dans la peau avec les pierres brûlantes. L'ouverture est alors refermée et la bête est placée sur le feu, grillée de l'extérieur pendant qu'elle cuit à l'étouffée de l'intérieur. La cuisson varie évidemment selon la taille de la bête, mais est assez rapide (quelques dizaines de minutes). L'ouverture du *boodog* est un moment de grande jubilation, la dégustation du bouillon précédant la distribution des morceaux de viande"; J. Legrand, "La cuisine mongole", in *Cuisines d'Orient et d'ailleurs : traditions culinaires des peuples du monde*, (ed.) M. Aufray and M. Perret (Grenoble, Paris 1995), p. 124. I would like to thank Pierre Marsone and Adrien Dupuis for their helpful comments on the translation of this passage.

¹²⁷*Yuanshi* 120: 2960; translation Cleaves, "The Historicity", p. 387.

仰天而誓曰：「使我克定大業，當與諸人同甘苦，苟渝此言，有如河水。」將士莫不感泣。

Rashīd ad-Dīn, who differs here from his common source with the *Shengwu Qingzheng Lu*, also tells :

This battle is well known and quite famous among the Mongols and they still tell of it as the Battle of Qalālġit Elet. The ground is on the frontier of Khitayan territory, and because of their [the Kereyids'] multitude, Chinggġz Khān was unable to stay there and he retreated. When he withdrew, most of the army deserted him. He went to Baljuna, a place where there were a few small springs, insufficient for them and their animals. Therefore they squeezed water from the mud to drink. After that they emerged from there and went to places that will be mentioned. The group that was with Chinggġz Khān at that time in Baljuna were few, and they are known as the Baljunatu, meaning that they were there with him and did not desert him. Their rights were therefore firm, and they held precedence over the others. When they emerged from there, some of the army and groups regrouped around him.¹²⁸

و آن جنگ پیش اقوم مغول معروف و مشهور است و هنوز به حکایات باز گویند که جنگ قلالجیت الت. و آن زمین به حدود ولایت ختای است، و به سبب کثرت ایشان چینگگیز خان نتوانست ایستادن، [باز گشت]. و چون مراجعت نمود، اکثر لشکر از او جدا شدند و او به جانب بالجونه رفت. و آن موضعی بود که در آن چند چشمه آب اندک بوده، و جهت ایشان و چهار پایان کفاف نه؛ بدان سبب آب از گل می فشرده اند و می جورده. و بعد از آن از آنجا بیرون آمده و به موضعی که ذکر آن می آید رفته. و جماعتی که در آن وقت با چینگگیز خان بهم در بالجونه بوده اند اندک بودند، و ایشان را بالجونتو گویند، یعنی در آن مقام با او بوده اند و از او جدا نشده، و حقوق ثابت دارند و از دیگران ممتاز باشند. و چون از آنجا بیرون آمده، باز بعضی از لشکر و اقوم بر او جمع شده اند [...].

There are several points of the legend, including a military defeat, forcing a retreat with a small group of survivors to a remote place and in each case crossed by a watercourse, which had not been mentioned until then,¹²⁹ and where the group is restoring its forces. Rashīd ad-Dīn goes as far as to mention the “emergence” (*bīrūn āmada* آمده بیرون) outside the place and the growth of the group gathered around Chinggis Khan. Similarly, the providential arrival of a wild horse that allows the group not to starve to death is most certainly not a historical element: it is in fact the motif of the sustantation of the hungry group already found in Plano Carpini – who tells that during the return from a campaign the Mongols, as they ran out of food, were able to survive by discovering by chance the entrails of an animal which they ate¹³⁰ – but which is also present in both versions of the Türk myth, in the

¹²⁸Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, p. 347; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 132, slightly modified. Rashīd ad-Dīn puts the moment when Chinggis Khan and his companions drank the water of Baljuna a little further in his story, during a second visit to this place that he is alone to mention: Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Jāmi' at-tavārīkh*, pp. 354–355; translation Thackston, *Rashiduddin*, p. 135.

¹²⁹DeWeese, however, has not failed to point this out, and even considers it to be an essential motif in the structure of the myth: DeWeese, *Islamization*, pp. 43–44, 273–286, 494–506. Should we go as far as to recognize Baljuna behind Jūzjānī's Balīq Jāq, from Turkish *balık*, “mud” and the onomatopoeia *chak* indicating the idea of shock, from which may be “pressed mud” (to squeeze out the water? see also the OT. *çağ çağ* expressing the sound of flowing water)? See Clausen, *An Etymological Dictionary*, pp. 336, 403–5. Raverty proposes the meaning of “fast, violent spring”: Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsīrī*, II, p. 937n. 8. Baljuna's name itself is to be likened to the Turkish *balchiq*, “mud, swamp”: Pelliot and Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes*, p. 38.

¹³⁰Plano Carpini, *Storia dei Mongoli*, pp. 263–234; translation Dawson, “History of the Mongols”, p. 25; translation Tanase, “Histoire des Mongols”, p. 96; Bridia, 1 *Hystoria Tartarorum*, (ed.) Alf Önnerrfors (Berlin, 1967), pp. 11–12; translation Painter, “The Tartar Relation”, p. 66; translation Tanase, “Histoires des Tartares”, p. 173.

Kimek myth, as well as in Ibn ad-Dawādārī.¹³¹ The borrowing in these two passages of elements of the mythical structure testifies, in my opinion, to the process of transformation of the events of Qalaqaljīd Elet and Baljuna into the founding moment of the Mongol Empire.

Like Rashīd ad-Dīn, in the passage just mentioned above, Juvaynī and the *Yuanshi* tell us that the names of those who participated in the Baljuna Covenant were listed, and that they enjoyed a special status.¹³² Rashīd ad-Dīn does write that in his time this confrontation against the Ong Khan “is well known and quite famous among the Mongols and they still tell of it as the Battle of Qalālījīt Elet”. But there are also a number of indications that this episode was considered *a posteriori* as being at the very origin of the Chinggisid imperial construction. We can see, for example in the biography of Ja‘far Khwāja that this is the moment when Chinggis Khan conceived his “Great Work”. In the second biography of Sübe‘edei of *Yuanshi*, it is said that it is in Baljuna that Chinggis Khan establishes “his rising capital”, *xing du* 興都.¹³³ In an epitaph written by Xu Youren 許有壬 (1287–1364) the event is called “[The most marvelous] achievement in the world! The founding of the empire thereby began” 代工開天伊始.¹³⁴ We can also mention a poem by Ke Jiusi 柯九思 (m. 1365) evoking Qubilai, who had referred himself to the Baljuna episode,¹³⁵ and in which we read:

The *Heihe* [“Black River”, *i.e.* the Baljuna] – the limitless, continuous desert – *Shizu* [Qubilai] was deeply mindful of the difficulties [there experienced] in the founding of the empire.¹³⁶

黑河萬里連沙漠，世祖深思創業難。

Perceived as a founding event, the Baljuna Covenant and the vicissitudes surrounding it thus took the form of the founding myth, to become in their turn the legend of the symbolic origins of the Mongol Empire. The battle against the Ong Khan, of undecided engagement or half victory, has become a clear defeat, and it is not insignificant that the only sources telling us that the Mongols were defeated at Qalaqaljīd Elet are precisely those that borrow other elements from the mythical structure. The location of the battlefield on the border with northern China, according to Rashīd ad-Dīn, probably helped to transform the clash into a campaign against the Kitai and their emperor, a more unifying enemy, including for the Kereyid themselves who were now an integral part of the empire. The swamps of the Baljuna lake, which probably evoked the mythological motif of the marsh already present in the Türk myth, have become a refuge similar to the Ergene Qūn. And the story of the empire’s origins blended with the narrative of the origins at all.

Proof that Painter was not mistaken in his hypothesis, although it seems he had thought it was only a distortion in Plano Carpini’s account, and that this legend of Chinggis Khan’s

¹³¹In the Türk myth the young boy is fed by the she-wolf with meat, and *Naduliu she* saves the group by making fire. In the Kimek myth Shad shares his game with the seven Tatars. In Ibn ad-Dawādārī the young wild boy hunts for the seven refugees: Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, p. 229.

¹³²Juvaynī, *Tarīkh-i jahān-gushā*, I, p. 27; translation Boyle, *History of the World Conqueror*, p. 37; *Yuanshi* 1: 10.

¹³³*Yuanshi* 122: 3008; translation Cleaves, “The Historicity”, p. 398.

¹³⁴Quoted in Cleaves, “The Historicity”, p. 409.

¹³⁵See Cleaves, “The Historicity”, pp. 400, 409–410.

¹³⁶Quoted in Cleaves, “The Historicity”, pp. 417–418.

beginnings and the origins of the Mongol Empire indeed reflects the episode of Baljuna, is provided by a passage from a funeral inscription written by Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348):

As Emperor Taizu began to rise like a Dragon, all the people in his army were subjected to a violent attack. At nightfall, with seven of his men, he arrived at the cliff of a great rock, he loosened his belt and passed it around his neck as a ritual, and he prayed: “As Heaven has created me, when I am faced with the risk of perishing,¹³⁷ there are always signs that He is helping me.” Immediately nineteen men rushed forward to him and asked to put their forces at his service. It was the family of Niegutai [Negüdaï]. The people of Niegutai were divided into four lines: the *Bo'erzhuuu* [*Borju'ud?], the *Ezhiuu* [*Eji'ud?], the *Tuohuolawu* [Toqora'ud], and the *Saha'ertu* [*Saqartud?]. Jingzhou is thus a descendant of the *Bo'erzhuuu*.¹³⁸

太祖皇帝龍興初，一旅之眾嘗遇侵暴。夜與從者七人，至于大石之崖，解束帶加諸領以為禮，而禱曰：「天生我面曼之命，必有來助之兆焉。」俄有十九人者，鼓行以前，請自效，是為捏古台氏。捏古台之人，其族四：曰播而祝吾，曰厄知吾，曰脫和刺吾，曰撒哈兒禿。靖州，則播而祝吾之裔也。

The seven survivors of Plano Carpini are mingled here with the nineteen followers from the biography of Ja'far Khwāja in one and the same legend.¹³⁹

Conclusion

It has so far been difficult to explain these passages that I have tried to study here: Plano Carpini's account referred to an unidentifiable military campaign, Jūzjānī's must have been a distortion of the myth of the Ergene Qūn. In my opinion, there are two main reasons for this. The first is the erroneous conception that has prevailed until now of what the myth of origin among nomads is, namely that it tells the story of the origin of a people, that it is the story of an ethnogenesis. Compared to the myth of the wolf and the cave, or the myth of the Ergene Qūn, which were supposed to tell the ethnogenesis of the Türk people or of the Mongol people, the story told in the Orkhon inscriptions or the legend of Chinggis Khan seemed different in their very nature. However, the myth does not tell the story of the origin of a people but of a political community. In this respect, the legendary stories around Chinggis Khan are completely equivalent to the myth of the Ergene Qūn. I will come back to this point in a forthcoming study.¹⁴⁰

Our difficulty in understanding these various stories then came, I think, from the very fact that neither Plano Carpini, nor Jūzjānī nor Hayton, nor any other Latin ambassador, Arab traveller or intellectual from Mamluk Egypt who heard and transcribed that Chinggis

¹³⁷Read 漫 for 曼.

¹³⁸Yuji, “Jingzhou lu zongguan Niegutai muzhi xian 靖州路總管捏古台墓誌銘”, in *Quan Yuan wen* 全元文 (Nanjing, 2004), XXVI, pp. 525–526. Pelliot quotes this passage in his commentary on the *SWQZL*, but he only had access to it through the simplified version of Tu Ji's *Mengwu'er Shiji* 蒙兀兒史記 (152: 14a-b); Pelliot and Ham-bis, *Histoire des campagnes*, pp. 138–139. I would like to express my deepest thanks to Pierre Marsone for having provided me with the original text of this stele, and for having clarified its obscurities.

¹³⁹We can also notice that we find some elements present in this passage in the *SH*, when Temüjin, pursued by the Merkid, finds refuge on the Mount Burqan Qaldun, and gives thanks to it by kneeling nine times, his belt around his neck: *SH*, § 102–103; translation Rachewiltz, *The Secret History*, pp. 32–33. In Yu Ji's text as in Hayton's work Burqan Qaldun and Baljuna are therefore merged into each other (see note 98).

¹⁴⁰In an article under preparation I will discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from this present study regarding the representations that Eurasian nomads themselves had on their own socio-political organisation.

Khan had been a blacksmith, for example, must have been fully aware of the meaning of these traditions, which they transmitted to us *nolens volens* for what they were not: a detailed description of the facts as they had taken place, that is history. Being foreign to their context of enunciation, these authors could not grasp the full meaning of these narratives, which researchers were soon to qualify as apocrypha, to think of them as the result of popular etymologies and games of assonance, confusions and successive distortions. In other words, to consider them either false or unfounded. In fact, beyond the necessary contingencies of oral transmission, the statements reported by our various sources were accurate; it is their context that we lack to give them a sense.

We can try, and this is what I have sought to do here, to reconstruct this context by cross-checking the bits of information we have at our disposal: this context is that of the *longue durée* that links the entire Eurasian steppe from the Türks, at least, to the Mongols. It is made up of a “savoir partagé”,¹⁴¹ composed of myths whose filiation with each other is obvious, a sacred repertoire, traditions and rituals common to periods and socio-political groups, allowing the expression of an alternative narrative to the historical one, which operates by allusions and understatements well understood by its recipients but unintelligible for an outsider.¹⁴²

This narrative has a political purpose and an immediate efficacy, which makes me think that it is not a popular tradition, but rather a construction coming from the high spheres of the Mongol Empire. It aims to give an understandable meaning to the Mongol conquest initiated by Chinggis Khan not only to the Mongols themselves, but also to all the nomadic subjects of the empire, and thus, by drawing on a common repertoire, to unify them within a pan-nomadic empire, in an effort parallel to that developed by traditional historiography to bring the Turks and the Mongols back to a common root.¹⁴³ Hence the coexistence of such a narrative of the symbolic origins of the Mongol Empire alongside an official history – since, from the *Secret History* to the *Yuanshi*, via the Persian historiography (with the notable exception of Jūzjānī, who wrote from his refuge in India), the vast majority of the sources on which we rely to reconstruct the birth of the Mongol Empire are to varying degrees the work of court historians. The latter was for an elite, or even only for the imperial clan. The former was addressed to all the nomads of the empire in the colourful language of their beliefs, of their mental universe, which they had shared for centuries.

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¹⁴¹F. Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote : essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris, 1991), p. 27.

¹⁴²See A. Bensa, *La fin de l'exotisme. Essais d'anthropologie critique* (Toulouse, 2006), p. 35.

¹⁴³Dobrovits, “The Turco-Mongolian Tradition”.