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The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives

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FOR all that has been written about the Mongols of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, some fundamental questions continue to intrigue us. What set them in motion? Why did they wreak so much more destruction than the other nomad conquerors who had preceded them? Why did they become Muslims in Muslim lands but not—apart from a few individuals—Confucianists or Taoists or Chinese Buddhists in China, or Christians in Rus'? Why did they stop when and where they did? Why did their empire disintegrate so quickly?

There are, of course, many other interesting questions about the Mongols—concerning, for example, their military techniques and strategy, the nature and objectives of their rule, or the effects of their conquests and dominion upon world history—but the five questions that I have posed at the outset are of particular importance if one wants to understand the Mongols' behavior in the Middle East. My purpose in this paper is to suggest some partial answers. What follows is a flight of the imagination, going beyond my sources. I shall write in the indicative, hoping thus to provoke discussion, but my spirit is properly that of the subjunctive or the interrogative.

To begin, it will be helpful to have a look at the ecological and

This article was completed by Professor Fletcher in 1982. It is here published for the first time, with the permission of his executrix.—Ed.

social setting from which the Mongols first arose as a world power in the early thirteenth century.

ECOLOGY

For the purposes of this essay, and without losing sight of the fact that in reality the differences between the environments to which the Eurasian steppe nomads have adapted are virtually infinite, I should like to distinguish between two pastoral habitats, which for the sake of convenience, I shall refer to as deserts and steppes. The desert habitat is characteristic of Central Asia (a region that includes, roughly, present-day Afghanistan, Soviet Central Asia—which does not include Kazakhstan—and Sinkiang south of the T'ien Shan mountains) and of the Middle East. The steppe habitat covers a wide zone running from Europe to Manchuria along roughly the fiftieth parallel north latitude, its main regions being the south Russian steppe, Kazakhstan, Zungharia, much of Amdo (present-day Tsinghai province), and Mongolia north and south of the Gobi.

Steppes are much less arid than the deserts of the Middle East and consist mainly of extensive prairies and mountain slopes in which towns and farming settlements are—or were, before early modern times—negligible. Typically, they were unsettled grasslands, far removed from the villages and fields of sedentary agriculture.

It is impossible to identify linguistic or ethnological groups like the Turks or the Mongols with any specific type of nomadism. Within the broad and complex variety of environments in which they have lived in different times and places, various Turkish-speaking and Mongolian-speaking populations have adapted themselves to the entire spectrum from intensive cultivation to strict steppe pastoralism, a spectrum in which the sharp nomad-peasant dichotomy disappears. Turks and Mongols have been nomads, semi-nomads (practicing various forms of transhumance but with some fixed places of abode), and cultivators.

In the twelfth century, the Mongghols (whence our word Mongol) were not a linguistic or an ethnological group but simply the dominant tribe of one of the tribal confederations that inhabited

the Mongolian steppes. Probably neither the Mongghol tribe itself nor the other tribes in the confederation to which the Mongghols gave their name consisted entirely of ethnological Mongols or of people whose first language was Mongolian.

Nor were the ethnological Mongols and native Mongolian speakers confined to the Mongghol confederation. The other three main confederations in Mongolia—the Tatar, the Naiman, and the Kereyid—also contained Mongols in the ethnological and linguistic meaning of the term. Mongols (in these senses) probably constituted a majority of the Mongolian (in the regional sense) population, but the proportion of these to those who were, ethnologically or linguistically, Turks is unknown. The *Secret History of the Mongols* speaks of people of “nine tongues,”¹ presumably both dialects and languages.

For members of the Mongghol tribe, members of the Mongghol confederation, and for the Mongolian (in the regional sense) population in general, the pastoral habitat was the steppe, and the ecology was steppe pastoral nomadism and hunting. Adaptation to the steppe environment required the entire population to move on seasonal migrations in search of “water and grass,” as the Chinese historians put it. The nomads had no villages, no fixed houses, although their migration routes were for the most part fixed. Such a life was hard and uncertain. The livestock of a camping group, most of the animal wealth of a tribe, even most of the herds of an entire confederation, could be lost virtually overnight to disease or starvation.

Aside from its unceasing migration, pastoral nomadism may have more in common with agrarian sedentarism than is commonly acknowledged. Even the steppe nomads practiced some cultivation, sowing crops in suitable places and coming back later to harvest them. But migration produces its own cultural and social dynamics and leads, therefore, to qualitative differences between the cultures and societies based on these two ecologies.

Animal husbandry and migration encourage two of the main characteristics that have distinguished the Eurasian steppe nomads

¹ F. W. Cleaves, tr., *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1982), p. 178.

throughout history: their initiative and their quick adaptability. To be constantly on the move, camping in strange places, was to force oneself to adapt constantly—and fast. Pastoral nomads had to adapt their culture to regular and seasonal changes of environment in times of peace and to abrupt and radical changes of environment in times of war. A kind of “natural selection” accustomed the nomads to revel in a feeling of freedom. They liked to move and were able to do so.

Migration meant leadership, constant readiness to meet unforeseeable dangers, and being ever ready to fight. Leaders were accustomed to keeping their people and their herds in motion along their regular migration routes, a talent that helped them keep armies and herds of captives in motion too. Migration promoted martial qualities, the equestrian archer, the coordinated hunt in times of peace, the tactical army in times of war. When the men were on campaign, they could leave the herding to their women and children: pastoralism was not labor-intensive. The nomads were not obliged to defend any fields of crops or fixed dwellings, and they could, if they chose, easily sustain war in their own territory. In the steppe environment, war was not so destructive as it was in the sedentary world.

When it came to fighting, everybody was involved. The distinction between soldier and herdsman did not exist. War and raiding—and the “vengeance” (*ös*) that justified them—were the glory of the tribe and of the nation. The Mongolian culture of the thirteenth century was a warriorist culture that esteemed heroes most.

Ecologically, no social organization was needed above the level of the tribe. Any would-be supratribal ruler had to bring to heel a highly mobile population, who could simply decamp and ignore his claims to authority. Tribal chiefs were not eager to forfeit their autonomy so that a confederal potentate might rule and tax their tribes. Unlike agrarian societies, which could amass wealth and store it, steppe society rested on animal wealth, which had to be pastured extensively and could not be concentrated in a governmental center of power. Nor, for the same reason, could a supratribal ruler maintain a standing army at his beck and call.

SOCIETY

The tribes' obedience could not be held indefinitely by force. It had to be bought. To buy the obedience of the tribes, he who would be ruler must give them something that they could not obtain by themselves. Self-defense was not enough to induce them to enter into a durable supratribal polity. Temporary alliances would suffice for that, and often the best defense was simply to disperse.

Wealth was another matter. But here too, to rob wealth from other nomads a supratribal polity was not essential. Nomadic wealth was pastoral wealth, and it might be necessary to seize the animals of a neighboring tribe if one's own capital of livestock dropped below the minimum number (about twenty to forty animals for each unit family), but plundering other nomads was not a durable means for enriching the membership of a tribe. Raiding meant reprisals, and in any case the spoils could not be stored. Stolen animals had to be distributed for pasturing, and if the tribe was already rich, they added to its pastoral obligations without providing any diversification of resources.

To extort wealth from an agrarian society, however, steppe nomads needed a supratribal polity. True, a tribe might raid a farming village or a town, obtaining animals in times of need or, in times of plenty, obtaining wealth of a kind that the steppe economy did not produce. But villages and towns were usually defended by a government, so that raiding, in the normal course of events, could be only an occasional expedient.

Long-term extortion of agrarian wealth was beyond the powers of a single tribe, but even here the ability to carry on peaceful trade, exchanging pastoral surpluses for agrarian produce and urban products, muted the tribes' willingness to give up any of their autonomy for the sake of supratribal entanglements. It was in the case of China, where the steppe-sown dichotomy was sharper than anywhere else in the Eurasian steppe, and where the agrarian government usually monopolized or greatly restricted external trade, that the tribes' desire to extort was strongest.

Three alternative policies were available to the steppe nomads for the continuing acquisition of China's agrarian wealth: invasion, threat of invasion, and outright dependence. A fourth policy, com-

monly practiced by the desert nomads of Central Asia and the Middle East, namely conquest and dominion, was impractical for the nomads of the steppe because of the geographical separation of the steppe from the world of their sown. In fact, it was not until the Mongols themselves conquered and ruled China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that a fully nomadic steppe-based empire—as opposed to kingdoms of what the anthropologist T. J. Barfield has referred to as “Manchurian” dynasties—first implemented a conquest and dominion policy in East Asia.²

For outright dependence on the Chinese state, no supratribal polity was required, although it was helpful in securing better terms from the Chinese government, but for invasions or the ability to pose a credible threat of invasion, tribal coordination was essential.

The logic of the foregoing analysis is that the main purpose of the tribe was to exploit the pastoral habitat and that the main purpose of the supratribal polity was to extort wealth from agrarian societies.

THE TRIBE

The tribe was the basic unit of society. It had its own traditions, institutions, customs, beliefs, and myths of common ancestry. These, if the tribe was of mixed linguistic or ethnological origin, promoted unity and the idea of a shared identity. All members of the tribe, including the common people (*haran*), were, by tradition, considered descendants of a single ancestor. Especially close was the fictive kinship ascribed to the leading families, who were usually regarded as nobles. The leading or noble families bore surnames that purported to designate clans (*obogh*) and subclans (*yasun*) in the tribal kinship system (whether commoners also belonged to *obogh*

² Much of the thinking that underlies the present paper has been profoundly influenced by half a decade of conversations with T. J. Barfield, who developed the concept of “Manchurian” conquest states and is preparing a book-length study of the “Manchurian” factor in the relationship between steppe and sown in East Asia. He has talked me out of various errors—one being the idea that the cohesion of steppe tribal confederations (as opposed to steppe “empires,” a distinction that I shall develop in the course of the present essay) required war. In this connection, see his “Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy,” *JAS* 40.1 (Nov. 1981): 45–61. The works of Radloff, Barthold, Vladimirtsov, and Owen Lattimore are essential background. Discussions with F. W. Cleaves, O. Pritsak, and Chin-fu Hung have also taught me a great deal, but none of these can be blamed for the inadequacies of this essay.

and *yasun* is unknown), and dominant among these was the chiefly lineage, from whom the tribal chief (*noyan* and, I suspect, *beki* as well as other titles) was customarily chosen.

Choice of the tribal chief was, in a manner of speaking, electoral, being governed by the principle of tanistry,³ a central element in the dynamics of Turkish, Mongolian, and Manchurian politics that historians of Asia have too often overlooked. Put briefly, the principle of tanistry held that the tribe should be led by the best qualified member of the chiefly house. At the chief's death, in other words, the succession did not pass automatically, in accordance with any principle of seniority such as primogeniture, but rather was supposed to go to the most competent of the eligible heirs. By custom, a father's personal property passed, at his death, by "ultimogeniture" to his youngest son by his principal wife. Chieftaincy did not.

The existence of two mutually contradictory traditions of succession—patrilineal and lateral—constantly reinforced this element of choice. By patrilineal tradition, the succession was expected to pass from father to son. By lateral tradition, the chieftaincy was expected to pass to the chiefly house's senior male. By the lateral tradition, in other words, at a chief's demise, the succession was to pass to his next eldest brother and so on down to the youngest brother before passing on to the next generation, namely the eldest chief's sons. Needless to say, such a contradictory system could justify any choice that the leading members of the tribe might make.

Unless the tribe was very large, most tribal interests were usually best served by a timely resolution of the succession question, and the tribal leaders must ordinarily have managed to keep disruptions to a minimum. But in a large tribe, rival candidates for the chieftaincy, each closely backed by his own retinue of personal supporters (*nökör*), might occasionally split the tribe, either temporarily or permanently. In a succession struggle, the rival candidates and

³ I take liberties with a Celtic institution, following a suggestion of Jeanette Mirsky, who "gave" it to me during a chat at Princeton in 1972. Some useful reading is suggested in Jack Goody, ed., *Succession to High Office* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), editor's introduction, p. 54, n. 15. My development of the concept is to be found in "Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire," in *Eucharisterion: Essays Presented to Omeljan Pritsak*, ed. Ihor Ševčenko and Frank E. Sysyn, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3-4 (1979-80), Part 1, pp. 236-51.

their *nökör* competed for the support of the tribe's leading men and formed factions that could either compromise or fight. Nor were the rivals limited to the backing of members of their own tribe. If a tribe were part of a confederation, a given candidate might win the backing of the confederal ruler or other powerful elements within the confederation. Tribes or leading tribal families also commonly had special relationships with tribal (or even non-tribal) elements outside the confederation and sometimes even beyond the edges of the steppe. These too could be called upon for support or for asylum in the event that a given candidate met defeat.⁴

Not just members of the chiefly lineage but also leaders of the tribe's noble clans not infrequently surrounded themselves with *nökör* and held a potential for usurping the chieftaincy or breaking away, taking their *haran* with them, and forming a new tribe. Commoners themselves, however, followed the leaders of one or another of the noble clans and rarely formed secessionist factions on their own initiative.

Another important figure in tribal politics was the shaman (*böge*). The nomads' need to know the unknowable under quickly changing conditions and their need to deal with the whims of fortune and the forces of nature lent power to the shaman's role. The shaman commonly belonged to a kind of shamanic "guild," which provided links with other tribes that could benefit the chief and the tribal membership—links that bolstered the shaman's influence within the tribe. Being in touch with the supernatural world, the shaman's support for a given candidate for the chieftaincy might carry weight if the shaman decided to involve himself in the succession choice. Shamans chose auspicious days for battle, healed the physically sick and the emotionally disturbed, enabled childless women to conceive, warded off evil, and the like. Their roles probably ranged from that of *nökör* of the tribal chief to one of rivalling him for authority. Sometimes the shaman might himself become the tribal chief, combining both roles in one person.

Once the succession had been established, the chief's main

⁴ For a fascinating study of tribal politics, see Beatrice F. Manz, "Politics and Control Under Tamerlane," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1983); also her article, "The Ulus Chaghatay before and after Temür's Rise to Power: The Transformation from Tribal Confederation to Army of Conquest," *Central Asiatic Journal* 27.1-2 (1983): 79-100.

responsibilities were to provide leadership, assign pasture, and determine the routes of migration. His authority was both counter-balanced and confirmed by the tribe's other leading men, who may be regarded as a tribal council, and also by the shaman. The tribe's organizational structure would seem to have been a compromise between, on the one hand, the authority of the chiefly and noble clans, each of which retained control over its own commoners, and, on the other, the requirements of grazing and migration. In most tribes of any size there were probably at least two administrative levels of tribal subdivisions between the level of the tribal chief and that of the individual tenthold.

THE SUPRATRIBAL POLITY:
NATION, CONFEDERATION, EMPIRE

To some degree the supratribal polity was a macrocosm of the tribe. Its traditions and institutions, its beliefs, practices, and myths of common origin were derived for the most part from tribal prototypes. Like the tribe, the supratribal polity found reinforcement in political alliances, matrimonial ties, and traditional rivalries and enmities both inside and outside itself. Like the tribe, it promoted the idea of a common ethnicity and social identity.

It had a royal lineage (the Mongols called theirs *altan urugh*—"golden lineage"), from whom the supratribal ruler was expected to be chosen by tanistry, and the choice would be justified by one of the two opposing traditions of succession, patrilineal or lateral. A ruling tribe (the Mongghol tribe, for example) dominated the polity and gave it its name. The ruler's clan (Borjigid, in the case of Chinggis Khan), to which the royal lineage belonged, headed the fictively related clans that composed the tribe. The other component tribes, each headed by a chiefly lineage, were referred to—by the Mongols, at least—as "submitted" (*il*), whereas tribes outside the polity were spoken of as "unsubmitted" (*bulgha*). Outside groups and non-tribal population could be incorporated into the polity in one of at least three main ways: as a component tribe under its own indigenous leaders; as "shares" of booty that were distributed among the component tribes; or as non-tribal military forces under the command of the ruler or one of the polity's other leading figures.

Like the tribal chiefs and nobles, the supratribal ruler and all contestants for his office had personal retinues of *nökör* who served their master as his eyes and ears and hands—as military commanders, administrators, secret or public agents, and specialists of all kinds who formed the nucleus of what could become, if need be, an extended imperial administration. *Nökör* directed their master's personal guard-cum-household, being, as it were, his slaves and companions. They derived their power and authority exclusively from his person and might be recruited from any social origin, nomadic or sedentary, noble, commoner, or slave. But if they were noblemen, they were not likely to be tribal chiefs (although Chinggis Khan himself, after reaching a certain level of power, deviated from this pattern), inasmuch as the possession of an autonomous basis of power would make for an unreliable *nökör*.

Like the tribe, the supratribal polity had its shaman, whose role might be anything from the ruler's *nökör* to his competitor for power.

Among the early Aryan (Indo-Iranian) peoples of the steppe, from whom the Turks and the Mongols ultimately derived much of their culture, the leadership role of the priest had rivalled that of the warrior. Eventually kingship was assigned to the warriors, but the priests, in compensation, were accorded the higher ritual status and were influential in the legitimation of kingship; so they retained the ability to pose ideological challenges to kingly power. A parallel is to be found among the early Arabian tribes, for whom the role of the *kāhin* (shaman or soothsayer) stood, to some degree, in opposition to the authority of the *sayyid* (tribal chief). The *kāhin* approved tribal decisions and legitimated the sayyid's authority.

At the supratribal level among the steppe Turks and Mongols, the paramount shaman stood in a similar position to legitimate the ruler or challenge his authority. Even the most powerful supratribal ruler might find himself limited or even threatened by a paramount shaman backed up by the intertribal shamanic "guild."

Given the mobility of nomadic life, the inessential character of supratribal social organization, and the fissiparousness of steppe politics, supratribal polities—being based on segmentary opposition⁵—were unstable and frequently dissolved altogether. So there

⁵ See the presentation of this idea by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in *The Nuer* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).

could be long periods when the largest effective unit was the tribe. But even in such periods of lapse, traditions of supratribal society persisted, and tribesmen thought of themselves as belonging to “nations” (*ulus*) that had existed in the past and might at any time be reconstructed under a new or an old name. *Ulus*, the root meaning of which was “people,” could designate a tribe or, more likely, a supratribal “nation,” even though such a nation might be nothing more than an idea in people’s minds. *Ulus* could also designate an existing supratribal polity—either a loosely organized “confederation” or a tightly organized “empire.” Supratribal society slipped back and forth between supratribal anarchy (a “nation” of purely imaginary existence) and supratribal polity, which in turn fluctuated between loose confederacy and (more rarely) tight autocracy.

Steppe empires came into existence only through the efforts of individual aspirants for the office of supratribal ruler, who, so to speak, conquered the tribes of the supratribal society and then, to keep them united, had no choice but to keep them busy with lucrative wars.

From the rise of the Hsiung-nu at the end of the third century B.C., the East Asian steppe tribal confederations had shown a growing trend toward empire, and the Mongols were its culmination. In the Hsiung-nu confederation, the tribes had forfeited very little of their autonomy—just enough to seem united for the sake of extorting wealth from the Chinese—and in warfare each person had kept whatever plunder he seized. Among the Hsien-pi, who came to the fore in the third century A.D., the ruler had held the right to distribute the booty to the participants. With the rise of the Turks in the sixth century, the ruler’s authority had been tighter, with pretensions to absolutism, and his role had been more fully martial. The Khitans, a “Manchurian” empire in Barfield’s sense of the term, had carried this trend still farther in the tenth century, introducing a tight military organization and setting a precedent of absolutist centralism that must still have cast its shadow over the Mongolian steppes in the late twelfth century.

THE KHAN

A confederation might be formed on the initiative of the tribes so as to win concessions from China, and, if so, the supratribal ruler

might be little more than a nominal sovereign. But the formation of a steppe “empire,” in which the supratribal ruler truly ruled, required a steppe “emperor” backed by capable *nökör* and supported by a powerful coalition of tribal chiefs.

As our present-day experience recedes from the time when individuals as such played the leading parts in history, historians have increasingly tended to downplay the historical roles of individuals, trying to see them and their actions as merely the products of deeper social and economic forces. It is now sometimes difficult even to imagine a historical setting in which society and politics were so structured as to put immense power to initiate into the hands of individual persons, whose personalities and eccentricities thus played a major part in determining the course of history. But in the twelfth-century Mongolian steppes, the population was small—probably no more than about a million or so people.⁶ Political structures were fragile, and rule was highly personal.

Being the ruler’s creation, a steppe empire—as opposed to a confederation—depended for its existence upon his person. When he died, it ran a risk of collapse. If he failed to meet the expectations of the tribes, who looked forward to sharing in the wealth that he would extort, the empire might dissolve back into a confederation. The continuation of an empire therefore depended heavily upon the ruler’s person, much less upon his office. Nor was the office of supratribal ruler reinforced by a single title to remind people of its existence at times when it lay vacant. Appellations like *kha* or *khan*—sometimes preceded by such qualifiers as *ong* (Chinese *wang*, “king”), *gür* (“universal”), or *chinggis* (perhaps a shamanic word)⁷—and *khahan* or *khaghan* or *kha’an* and also other words like, for ex-

⁶ See N. Ts. Munkuev, “Zametki o drevnikh mongolakh,” in *Tataro-mongoly v Azii i Evrope*, 2nd. ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 394–95; A. M. Khazanov, “Notes on the Emergence of the Mongolian State under Genghis Khan,” *Production pastorale et société: Bulletin de l’équipe écologie et anthropologie des sociétés et pastorales*, Supplément à MSH-Informations (N° 5 Automne 1979): 14–15. Cf. J. M. Smith, Jr., “Mongol Manpower and Persian Population,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18.3 (1975): 287.

⁷ In several of his lectures at Harvard, F. W. Cleaves has suggested that this was a shamanic word (which, as he has pointed out, does not exclude an etymology from the Turkish *tinggis*, “sea”). T’ang Ch’i, who attended some of these lectures, has amplified Cleaves’s suggestion in his “‘Ch’eng-chi-ssu’ shih-i” *Kuo-li cheng-chih ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 36 (1977): 149–97.

ample, *tayang* (Chinese *t'ai-wang*, "great king") were not necessarily employed strictly as titles but commonly rather as the epithets or sobriquets of individual rulers. "Khan" is a convenient generic term for the supratribal ruler, but it should not be thought that the tribes of every steppe "nation" thought of themselves as being necessarily ruled by one.

The steppe khan was surrounded by no pomp, ceremony, or mystery to clothe his kingship in a nimbus of the divine in the way that Iranian, Roman, or Chinese emperors were revealed. His purpose was down-to-earth: to obtain and distribute wealth. Great emphasis was placed on the quality of generosity. (Ögödei, for example, as portrayed in the Persian sources, seems profligate to modern readers, but generosity was essential to popularity—and thus to an empire's cohesion—in the context of pastoral society.) Even more basic was the quality of warrior and leader of men. As the head of a confederation, the ruler might not have to fight, but as autocrat of a steppe empire, the essential qualities were martial ones. An "imperial" khan had to lead his subjects to success on the field of battle and in the extortion of wealth from sedentary governments.

In a steppe empire—as opposed to a confederation—the bond between the khan and the tribal chief was the bond between leader and follower, between general and regimental commander—but between the two men as persons not as offices. So personal was this bond—upon which the integrity of the steppe empire was based—that at the khan's death, unless his successor recreated the empire on a similar personal basis, the empire soon dissolved.

Being himself the general, the khan of an empire could not delegate his military function to a military specialist. Military and civilian were not divided. The army was society. In his capacity as general, as "imperial" autocrat, the khan's authority was theoretically absolute. This meant that his jurisdiction to the extent to which he could make it do so, extended directly to everybody and was not limited to a contractually defined set of obligations that the khan had a right to demand only of the tribal chiefs.

Autocracy is, of course, an ideal rather than a system—unlike confederacy or bureaucracy or oligarchy. No single person was ever equal to the task of being a thoroughgoing autocrat. Delegation of authority has always been unavoidable, and as autocrats succeeded

one another on the thrones of empires, the amount of delegated authority tended to increase so that bureaucrats or oligarchs gradually drained away the autocrat's power. In agrarian empires, dynastic founders most closely approached the autocratic ideal, and their successors distanced themselves from it more and more, unless, as usurpers, they refounded their dynasty and repersonalized the substance of their authority.

But in steppe empires the underlying potential for continuing autocracy was greater. If the empire survived from generation to generation at all, it was because each successor tried not to be a successor in the agrarian empires' sense but rather a refounder. Without a refounder, who—ordinarily by struggle—brought his own personal retainers, administrators, and allies with him rather than inheriting those of his predecessor, it was unlikely that the empire would long endure. A steppe empire ruled by an autocrat had good chances for survival, but a steppe empire ruled by an oligarchy—in which the monarch's personal power did not dominate—was in danger of reversion to a confederation or even to a “nation” without a supratribal polity. The inessential nature of the supratribal polity saw to this fragility, as did also the custom of tanistry. Chinggis Khan, Ögödei, and Möngke probably came as close to being true autocrats as any rulers in history.

SUCCESSION

At the tribal level, succession to the chieftaincy was a relatively straightforward matter. The tribal members were all agreed that their tribe had to have a chief. The only question was who. But at the supratribal level, the problem was more difficult. If it was the ruler of a confederation who had died, the tribes had to decide whether they wanted the confederation to continue and, if so, on what terms, and then also which of the eligible candidates for the khanship would make the best choice. If it was the ruler of a steppe empire who had died, it was up to one of the eligible candidates for the succession to establish his authority and forge the nomads once again into a united empire. In such a context, succession struggles were likely to be violent and protracted.

In a confederation, the tribal chiefs might meet and accept a suc-

cessor to the khanship designated by his father, the late khan. Similarly, a confederation might peacefully endorse a lateral succession, passing the khanship on to the senior male of the nation's ruling lineage. Occasionally a tribal chief or other leader not of the khanly line might seize supratribal power and rule *de facto* in the name of a puppet khan—the best known examples (long after the time in question) being Tamerlane, who ruled as *amīr*, and Esen, who held the title of *tayishi*.⁸ A confederal council might even, by common consent, choose one of the tribal chiefs to reign over them, thus bringing a new ruling lineage into being. In rare circumstances a freebooter from outside the “national” establishment altogether might conquer enough tribes to usurp the confederal “throne.”

But for the most part, successions to supratribal rule functioned as a choice, made by compromise, default, murder (usually fratricide), skirmish, or all-out tribal war, from among several candidates belonging to a generally acknowledged khanly lineage—a limitation to avoid what might otherwise become a debilitatingly open-ended struggle. Following a khan's death, his brothers and sons and sometimes also his uncles and nephews, were candidates to succeed him, and usually some form of struggle was involved.

Nor was the succession struggle necessarily delayed until after the old khan had died. Foreseeing the upcoming choice, a khan's sons normally started to factionalize and jockey for position before their father's death, and the nature of the struggle might range from political maneuverings to parricide. A famous later example of this—although historians seem not to have recognized it as a function of the institution of tanistry that Turks, Mongols, and Jurchens (or Manchus) shared—was the trouble that the K'ang-hsi emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty had with his sons.⁹ Not uncommonly, the father himself played an active part in his sons' upcoming tanistry struggle by transferring the command of military forces or weighting the odds in other ways in favor of the candidate of his choice. Carrying this principle to its logical conclusion, as Selim the Grim of the

⁸ For *tayishi*, see Henry Serruys, “The Office of *Tayisi* in Mongolia in the Fifteenth Century,” *HJAS* 37.2 (Dec. 1977): 353–80.

⁹ See, e.g., Silas H. L. Wu, *Passage to Power: K'ang-hsi and His Heir Apparent* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979).

Ottoman empire did by killing off all his sons except the one whom he wanted to succeed, was probably very rare.

When a khan died, the concept of a regency might reinforce the integrity of a steppe empire fragmented by a struggle for succession, but more than one person was eligible to serve as regent: the deceased ruler's principal widow, also his youngest son by his principal wife (by "ultimogeniture" the inheritor—called *odchigin*, lord of the "fire," namely the tenthhold—of his personal property), also the senior male (*akha*—literally "elder brother") of the ruling lineage. What is more, such regents were themselves usually committed to one or another of the parties of the succession struggle—if not, in the case of the *odchigin* or the *akha*, a candidate himself—so the empire's stability under such circumstances might be no more than a semblance.

To formalize their submission to a candidate for the succession and declare rival factions to be rebels, a candidate's supporters convened an assembly (*khuriltai*)—also used to plan campaigns—at which they acclaimed him sovereign. Sometimes these assemblies were genuinely plenary and consisted of representatives of all the steppe nation's tribes. In such circumstances they may occasionally have been electoral. But the convening of a *khuriltai* without its outcome being a foregone conclusion was probably rare. Much more commonly they were merely acclamation ceremonies for a given candidate, acting in the steppe nation's name.

Legitimist historians, coming from sedentary civilizations in which the pattern of succession followed a more automatic course, write of "usurpations" and tend to date the reign of a given khan from the time of the *khuriltai* that acclaimed him. But this fails to take account of the lapse in supratribal government that occurred while the outcome of the steppe succession struggle was being decided. The overthrow of a sitting ruler by an eligible member of the ruling lineage was not "usurpation" in the steppe nomads' eyes. A reign's real beginning dated from the winning contestant's definitive triumph over the last of his serious rivals.

The succession period was a fateful time in the life of any steppe empire because of the potential that it held for dissolution. It might occasion a change in the tribal composition, gaining tribes or losing them or parts of them to other empires or confederations. Sometimes

an empire or confederation might split—on relatively amicable terms—into a compound confederation, with, for example, eastern and western realms under two brothers, one of whom would be nominally subordinate to the other.

But in view of the recurrent disintegrations that succession struggles brought about, and in view of the weakness of the regency as an integrating institution, it is remarkable how well the continuity of tribal empires was preserved. Indeed, to some degree, succession struggles—participation in a common enterprise—reinforced the continuance of ecologically unnecessary supratribal polities. Only when all the members of a given tribe fought for a losing candidate was there any likelihood that the victor might break up a tribe or that a tribe might, in consequence of the succession, secede from the empire, but this must have been extremely rare. Usually each tribe was divided in its support of candidates for the khanship. Temporarily, the tribe would divide. One faction would support one candidate. Other factions would support others. When one of the candidates achieved victory, he might then reward the leader of the faction that had supported him by making him the tribal chief.

In the absence of any generally acknowledged supratribal ruler, participation in the electoral process constituted membership in the supratribal polity, no matter whether the election was held by tribal compact or by civil war. The recurrent, difficult, and often protracted and violent electoral process politicized tribal society down to the level of the *haran*, whose sentiments the tribal chiefs and nobles could not avoid taking into account. During this process, the integrity of the supratribal polity continued through the medium of the succession struggle itself. (The sources, it should be noted, do not present such struggles in this light. The majority of the sources—the Persian histories and the more voluminous but less exploited material in Chinese—are pro-Toluyid and might therefore be expected to emphasize tanistry and the legitimacy of struggles for succession, but they were written not by nomads but by sedentary historians and therefore reflect the legitimist conceptions with which these historians and agrarian societies generally were imbued.)

The succession dispute at the supratribal level was not just internal but sometimes became an extraimperial or an extraconfederal affair. Candidates for the khanship usually called upon temporary

or long-standing relationships with tribes or other powers outside the polity and, if successful, ordinarily reciprocated in turn by according support or refuge to their external allies.

Whereas succession within a tribal confederation was usually peaceful, succession to a steppe empire usually entailed civil war. In fact, a strong potential for succession war was always present even in the most harmonious confederations too, because every candidate for supratribal rule probably at least dreamed of making himself a steppe autocrat, breaking the autonomy of the tribes, and leading his united nation in glorious and lucrative war.

When steppe empires were built, they were built by men with such ambitions, and tribes submitted in hopes of sharing in the fruits of victory. So to rule an empire successfully—rather than merely reign over a confederation—a khan had to possess a keen eye for war and politics, the personality to command a following, and the ability to conquer his own people and subjugate them to his absolute rule. The best way to find a ruler with such qualities was to see who prevailed in a civil war of succession.

CONSOLIDATION OF A STEPPE EMPIRE

Before setting out upon the campaigns that would justify his existence, the would-be steppe autocrat had first to create his autocracy. Steppe autocracies were the fruit of civil wars. The phase of the nation's victories and plunder had to be preceded by a phase in which the violence was turned inward. Intertribal steppe war was not so destructive as warfare was in agrarian societies, but during a succession struggle, the tribes' collective energies were neutralized, and the nation was vulnerable to predation from outside.

A succession struggle was, by its very nature, one of the high points of tribal autonomy, but as a given candidate for the khanship began to win out, the pendulum would start to swing in the other direction. Uncommitted elements would go over to him. The more he won, the more factions would rally to his banners. Supporters of rival candidates, having been proclaimed rebels by his *khuriltai*, could now be legitimately despoiled and the booty distributed among his supporters. Booty and privileges thus began to be distributed to the members of the winning faction from the outset,

but even factions on the losing side or sides would eventually be consoled once the consolidation phase was ended and the energies of the united nation began to be turned outward and there was outside plunder to be shared.

The crucial moment arrived when the khan finally overcame all his rivals. The tribal chiefs probably always felt some degree of ambivalence about the virtues of an absolutist empire. A strong ruler meant weak chiefs, and strong chiefs meant a weak ruler; so the chiefs would try to force the khan to play the tribes off against one another, thus increasing tribal autonomy. But if the khan was strong beyond a certain point, candidates for tribal chieftaincies would need his support. A supratribal autocrat could even appoint the chiefs of the tribes under his rule.

Not uncommonly, when opportunity presented itself, tribal chiefs rebelled, but it was customary for the khan to take a more or less tolerant view of such circumstances, understanding that a chief's popularity with his tribesmen often required him to try to maintain as much autonomy as possible for his tribe.

Once a khan's rivals had been eliminated, he could start organizing his people for external war and forge his steppe nation into an autocracy by absorbing the other tribes and confederations on the steppes. At this point, when the tribes' energies began to be directed outward, the ruler's position became more secure and, with luck, his task somewhat easier. External tribes, seeing a powerful war machine in the making, would sometimes voluntarily surrender. A leader who won battles won followers. A leader who lost battles lost followers. Everyone wanted to be on the winning side. Everyone wanted a share of the spoils.

Two important and time-honored devices were available to the builder of a great steppe empire that would help him bind his nation's tribes to his will and incorporate within his realm the other peoples of the steppes. One was structural and the other ideological.

The structural device was decimal military organization, which steppe rulers had used, off and on, from as far back as the time of the Hsiung-nu confederation. Decimal organization did not replace the tribes. Not even Chinggis Khan was ever powerful enough to have done that. The tribes and tribal chiefs continued to exist, but, under the decimal organization, it was possible for the ruler's

military commands to bypass the channels of tribal and intratribal authority. This was a mighty weapon in a steppe ruler's hands and could enormously increase his power.

Decimal organization also facilitated the incorporation of outside forces. In 1203, after defeating the powerful ruler of the Kereyid confederation, Chinggis Khan divided his followers into commands of thousands (*mingghan*), hundreds (*jaghun*) and tens (*harban*). Three years later, having brought all the steppe nomads except the "forest people" under his authority, he added three commands of ten thousands (*tümen*): left, right, and center.¹⁰ In 1203–1206 the tens may in fact each have comprised ten men, and the hundreds one hundred, but the higher the number of the command, the less likely that it remained (or even began) at full strength.¹¹ In general, a commander of a thousand or of ten thousand was likely to have been a tribal chief, and the size of his command would have reflected the importance of the man or the strength of his tribe rather than the actual number of warriors under his command. This can be seen, for example, in the discrepancy between the Turco-Mongolian *dhāt* and *sawār* rank systems of the Mughals under Akbar, which is visible in the full light of history because of descriptions by Abu'l-Fadl, Badā'ūni, and others.¹²

The ideological device for consolidating a khan's control was belief in Tenggeri or Tengri (scribally, Tngri), the universal victory-granting sky god, which—like horse nomadism, fire worship, exposure of the dead, the etymologies (perhaps) of all the Turco-Mongolian terms for chiefs and rulers, and, I suspect (although diffusionists may ascribe them to Egypt and anti-diffusionists to independent invention in each of the major civilizations), the concept of universal dominion and also monotheism itself—came from the early Aryans, some of whom eventually migrated into Iran and India and some of whom remained in the steppes.

The idea of a universal supreme god—of which Semitic mono-

¹⁰ See Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao, *The Military Establishment of the Yüan Dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 9–11 and the bibliography cited in n. 44 on p. 130.

¹¹ Cf. Smith, p. 287, who argues that "the lists of Mongol *tümen*s of whatever sort, nomad or sedentary, are at once counts of soldiers, estimates of manpower and military potential, and indicators of the size of the general population."

¹² See I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughul Empire* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1966), Chapter 5: "The Mansabdārī System," pp. 88–113.

theism is only one form—contains within it the potentiality of a single universal realm on earth and the potentiality that the supreme god may destine a single ruler to establish his dominion over that entire universal realm.¹³ If such a ruler were seen as a conquering warrior, as he was in the tradition of the steppes, the guiding ideology would hold no bias against violence and slaughter, nor would it insist upon any institutional limits to the absoluteness of his autocracy. The ruler's purpose would be to establish Tenggeri's order in the world, and if the tribes—inside or outside the ruler's nation—believed that he had received Tenggeri's destiny, they would rally to his banner.

(Possession of Tenggeri's mandate was demonstrated by success in battle, and in this respect it differed from the European idea of the divine right of kings, which adhered even to unsuccessful monarchs.)

Tenggeri did not bestow his mandate in every generation; so an ambitious ruler's claim to have received it was likely to be received with skepticism. Legitimation of such a claim was one of the possible roles of the shaman. The shaman could confirm the khan's claim to have received Tenggeri's mandate, or, more convincingly, Tenggeri could confer his mandate upon the khan, using the shaman as

¹³ For some fascinating discussions of the Tenggeri belief and its socio-political implications, see Mori Masao, "The T'u-chüeh Concept of Sovereign," *Acta Asiatica* 41 (1981): 47-75; J. J. Saunders, "The Nomad as Empire-BUILDER: A Comparison of the Arab and Mongol Conquests," in his *Muslims and Mongols*, ed. G. W. Rice (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1977), pp. 36-66 (esp. 42-45); Jean-Paul Roux, "La religion des Turcs de l'Orkhon des VII^e et VIII^e siècles," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 161.1 (Jan.-Mar. 1962): 1-24, and 161.2 (Apr.-June, 1962): 199-231; his "Tängri. Essai sur le ciel-dieu des peuples altaïques," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 149.1 (Jan.-Mar. 1956): 49-82, and 149.2 (Apr.-June, 1956): 197-230, and 150.1 (July-Sept. 1956): pp. 27-54, and 150.2, (Oct.-Dec. 1956): 173-212; N. Pallisen, "Die alte Religion der Mongolen und der Kultus Tschingis-Chans," *Numen* 3.3 (Sept. 1956): 178-229; Osman Turan, "The Ideal of World Domination among the Medieval Turks," *Studia Islamica* 4 (1955): 77-90; and Wladyslaw Kotwicz, "Les Mongols, promoteurs de l'idée de paix universelle au début du XIII^e siècle," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 16 (1950): 428-434.

My working hypothesis is that the idea of a single universal god and a related concept of universal dominion stemmed from the early Aryans and remained in the steppe with those who remained there (Scythians, etc.). Those who entered Iran and India carried it with them, whence it reached the Near East (Jews, Christians, Muslims), Greece (Alexander), and the Romans (one God, one world, one religion, one empire). The "son of Heaven" and "mandate of Heaven" concepts would have reached China either from the steppe nomads or from Iran or India (Asoka).

an intermediary. In such a case, the role of the shaman would be that of priest. He would inform the khan (and everybody else) of Tenggeri's choice. As priest, the shaman was a powerful figure who might, at some later date, question the ruler's legitimacy and challenge his power. If the shaman were sufficiently docile, he would continue to be an asset to the khan, but if not, the khan would have to eliminate him and become both priest and emperor himself. The universal ruler had no need of any intermediary between him and the supreme god from whom his universal dominion derived.

But in the long run, neither victory in a war of succession, nor the incorporation of other steppe tribes and confederations, nor the establishment of a decimal military organization, nor Tenggeri's mandate for universal conquest and dominion could preserve the steppe autocrat's power and the integrity of his realm unless he used his power and his people to seize the wealth of the settled agrarian world. For the sake of mere extortion, a confederation with a nominal ruler would suffice. But if the tribes were to remain under the discipline of a steppe autocrat, he must raid and invade. The price of autocracy was that the autocrat could not stop. He must continue to enrich and engage his subjects by continuing war.

Now to the questions with which we began.

WHAT SET THE MONGOLS IN MOTION?

What set any of the steppe nomads in motion? Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao has published an elegant article listing seven basic reasons that have been adduced to explain why the pastoral nomads repeatedly invaded China over the course of history.¹⁴ Briefly, they are: (1) the nomads' greedy and predatory nature; (2) climatic change (desiccation); (3) overpopulation of the steppe; (4) interruptions of trade on the part of the Chinese (pastoral surpluses could not be sold); (5) a need to supplement the low-level productivity of the fluctuating pastoral economy by plundering the surpluses of the more stable agrarian economy; (6) to build a supratribal polity; (7) nomad

¹⁴ "Pei-Ya yu-mu min-tsu nan ch'in ko-chung yüan-yin ti chien-t'ao," *Shih-huo yüeh-k'an* 1.12 (Mar. 1972): 609-19.

psychology—a desire to feel equal to the Chinese and a belief in the divine destiny of their own steppe kings to conquer the world.

All of these reasons (which are to a considerable degree inter-related) may have been variously applicable to the sudden eruption of the Mongols into East, Southeast, and Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East in the thirteenth century. But the reason that I regard as central and develop in this paper is the sixth.

The dynamics that I attribute to the Mongolian ecology and society of the twelfth century make the Mongols' sudden invasions seem nothing less than the natural thing. What else was to have been expected from a society with a warriorist culture whose entire population was perpetually on the move, whose economy was highly fragile, and whose wider society was not only highly fragile but dependent upon the extortion of agrarian wealth for its very existence? A society whose custom promoted succession to kingship by struggle, whose history had tended steadily toward absolutism and empire, and whose empires (in contradistinction to confederations) were predicated upon war for their continued cohesion? Whose empires, if ever they conquered all the steppes, had only one course remaining open to them—expansion into the sedentary world?

If I am correct about these things, the real question is not what set the Mongols in motion but why had such vast conquests never occurred before? Historians do not, by and large, enjoy explaining why a certain conjuncture of events did *not* occur at times other than when it did or why the full potentiality of any historical situation was not always realized, and I intend to leave aside that question for later consideration. Yet it would not be amiss to suggest briefly some of the reasons why I think the Mongols' martial potentiality *was* realized under Chinggis Khan and his first two successors, Ögödei and Möngke. (Güyük, for reasons that I shall mention below, I do not regard as having fully attained the succession.)

First, climatic change may have played some part if Gareth Jenkins is right that there was a "steep decline in the mean annual temperature in Mongolia in the years 1175–1260," adversely affecting "the extent and height of steppe grasses crucial for both flocks and game," so that the Mongols' "enthusiasm for the task of conquest may well have been fueled by a climatic defeat at their

backs.”¹⁵ This suggestion is climatic, but it should be distinguished from Hsiao’s second reason because the change here is one of temperature, not aridity. On the other hand, any climatic reduction of pasture would have brought Hsiao’s third and fifth reasons into play, providing a motive for his sixth.

Second, Chinggis Khan’s personality must have played a central role, especially in view of the personal nature of the bonds that tied a candidate for the khanship and his supporters together, that linked the general to his officers, and that invested all supratribal rulers and leaders with their measure of authority. Chinggis Khan must have been a leader of extraordinary talent, capable of iron discipline and the ability to inspire loyalty, and superior in these respects to other steppe leaders of his time.

He must also have been possessed by an infectious sense of his own Tenggeri-sent destiny. Kōkōchū, alias Teb Tenggeri,¹⁶ the Mongghols’ paramount shaman, who probably invented the title of “Chinggis Khan,” bestowed this title and confirmed Chinggis Khan’s acclamation at the *khuriltai* of 1206. “God has spoken with me,” Kōkōchū proclaimed, “and has said: ‘I have given all the face of the earth to Temüjin and his children and named him Chinggis Khan. Bid him administer justice in such and such a fashion.’”¹⁷

But Chinggis Khan could never rest secure in his mandate while such a shaman-turned-priest lived. What Tenggeri had given through Kōkōchū, Tenggeri might also revoke through the same intermediary. The conqueror’s best course of action would be to do away with him altogether, communicate with Tenggeri himself directly, and thus, becoming priest and emperor, monopolize both religion and empire. Chinggis Khan’s fear of Kōkōchū is well attested in the *Secret History*. That he had grounds for fear is shown by

¹⁵ “A Note on Climatic Cycles and the Rise of Chinggis Khan,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 18.4 (1974): 217–26.

¹⁶ “Tenggeri” here probably means nothing more than “Lord,” in “Lord Teb” or “Lord Cunning,” as F. W. Cleaves has argued in his “Teb Tenggeri,” *Ural-altaische Jahrbücher*, 39.3–4 (1967): 248–60. Note the objections of Igor de Rachewiltz, “The Secret History of the Mongols: Chapter Ten,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 26 (Sept. 1982): 75–76, but there is no proof that Teb Tenggeri was not a posthumous appellation, and usage of a cognate term in Turkish is not conclusive for Mongolian usage in any given instance.

¹⁷ ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn Juwaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr., J. A. Boyle, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1:39. I have changed the spelling from Boyle’s “Chingiz-Khan” to conform with the Mongolian orthography.

the fact that Kōkōchū poisoned Chinggis Khan's mind against his brother Khasar, that Kōkōchū assembled a large number of people in his own service, and that he openly humiliated Chinggis Khan's youngest brother Tēmuge.

When Kōkōchū had been killed, Chinggis Khan was careful to make the point that the shaman had lost his life because he had tried to make trouble between the khan and his brothers and was therefore "no longer loved by Tenggeri."¹⁸ But even in Chinggis Khan's grandsons' generation, the Mongols still invoked Teb Tenggeri's name as the intermediary who had first revealed Tenggeri's mandate to Chinggis Khan—the mandate that the conqueror's successors believed themselves to have inherited—as is to be seen in Hülegü's letter of 1262 to Louis IX of France:

God . . . hath in these last days spoken to our grandfather Chinggis Khan through Teb Tenggeri (a name which is understood to mean prophet of god), his kinsman, miraculously revealing future events of the times [and] calling him, announcing through the said Teb Tenggeri: "I alone am god almighty in the highest and have . . . set thee over the nations and . . . the kingdoms to be made ruler and king of the entire earth, to root out, and to pull down, to thrown down, and to destroy, to build and to plant."¹⁹

As Chinggis Khan attached his "golden tether" (*altan arghamji*) to the necks of the peoples that he subdued, he and the Mongols and surely many of those whom he conquered believed that it was by divine destiny that he did so.

Third, chance must not be omitted from the equation. It was by chance that in Chinggis Khan's youth the Mongghol confederation had disintegrated so that the followers whom he won were even more personally attached to him than they would have been if he had merely been a contestant for an established khanship, fighting it out among his brothers. Not being of the senior ruling lineage, he was in a position to become, in effect, a dynastic founder, the creator of a steppe autocracy with the stamp of his own personality upon it, and keep the support of his brothers in the bargain. It was by chance that his father had died early in Chinggis Khan's life so that the conqueror could begin to build his following straight-

¹⁸ See *Secret History*, p. 182.

¹⁹ See Paul Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-Khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France," *Viator* 11 (1980): 245–259, esp. 252.

away without having to wait for his father's death, perhaps at an advanced age, before starting his career. (Tamerlane subsequently enjoyed similar advantages.)

It was by chance that Chinggis Khan contracted no dread ailment and that no well or badly aimed arrow happened to kill him. It was by chance, despite his unsteppelike predilection for pitched battles, that he never sustained a prestige-destroying defeat. It was in some measure by chance, therefore, that Chinggis Khan's pendulum of empire-building swung as far as it did, to the conquest and consolidation of the steppe, by which time the power of any steppe emperor would have been almost invincible, given the military technology of the time—so long as he kept moving.

Fourth, although every ruler probably tried to designate which of his sons should inherit the khanship, Chinggis Khan succeeded in doing so. Jochi and Chaghadai, Chinggis Khan's two eldest sons, had quarreled over the spoils of war, and Jochi was already behaving insubordinately to his father during the khan's lifetime, but Chinggis Khan nevertheless managed to obtain a commitment from his four sons by his principal wife concerning the succession. So great was Chinggis Khan's prestige, so ably had he adjusted the political scene, and so acceptable was Ögödei, Chinggis Khan's third son and choice for the succession, that the Mongols followed his choice (of designated patrilineal rather than lateral succession) and acclaimed Ögödei ruler at the *khuriltai* in 1229. So tanistry, nemesis of steppe empires, did not, at Chinggis Khan's death, bring civil war to destroy what he had made. Had it done so, Chinggis Khan's name would be known to historians but not to history, as may be seen from the example of Tamerlane, who conquered more territory than Chinggis Khan but lost most of it, after his death, to tanistry.

This is not to say that tanistry did not make itself felt at all. Ögödei may well have done away with his youngest brother Tolui, who had held 101,000 of the 129,000 men that had comprised the Mongols' army at the time of the interregnum. (Ögödei himself had held no more than 4,000.) Juwayni reports that Tolui died of drink,²⁰ but the drink that he died of—to judge by the *Secret History*, Rashīd ad-Dīn, and the *Yüan shih*²¹—was poisoned. The only ques-

²⁰ The *History of the World-Conqueror*, 2:549 (esp. n. 5).

²¹ *Secret History*, pp. 211–14; Rashīn ad-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, tr., J. A. Boyle

tion is who ordered the poison, the shamans on their own initiative or on the orders of Ögödei?

Fifth, Ögödei was a good choice. Beginning with him, the ruler's title was upgraded from *khan* to *khaghan* (or *kha'an*—rendered as *qā'an* by Juwaynī and Rashīd ad-Dīn). Perforce he had inherited many of his commanders and retainers and, unlike his father, had not been able to choose them all on the basis of personal relationships, but Ögödei succeeded nonetheless in enlarging what his father had built. (There was, of course, no turning back.)

Chinggis Khan had divided the territory of his realm into four “nations” (*ulus*), which he gave to his four sons, but Ögödei mounted new campaigns, knowing that the only way in which he could preserve the empire's unity was to direct the Mongols' energies outward and provide new spoils of conquest. He succeeded in maintaining the decimal military divisions, and a Sung envoy to the Mongols in 1236 spoke of these divisions as a “system of civilian households,”²² showing that the decimal military system included the households of the military commands, not just the warriors themselves. The tribes, however, continued to exist independently of this decimal system, and the *Secret History* seems to indicate that Ögödei still distributed “pastures and waters” (*nuntugh usu*) to the tribe (*ulus irgen*) rather than assigning them on the basis of the decimal units.²³

Sixth, Güyüg—Ögödei's son and choice for the succession—died before the impending succession war between himself and his cousin Batu (the eldest son of Jochi) could shatter the empire, and a timely compact between the Jochid and Toluyid houses reunited the Mongols for campaigns into China and the Middle East.

Ögödei, however talented he may have been in keeping the Mongols united, was no Chinggis Khan and was not able to overcome the custom of tanistry and deliver the succession into the

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 167–68; *Yüan shih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1976), 10.2887. See also F. W. Cleaves, “The Expression *jōb ese bol-* in the *Secret History of the Mongols*,” *HJAS* 11.3–4 (Dec. 1948): 317–19, esp. n. 18.

²² See Hsiao, *Military Establishment*, p. 131, n. 61.

²³ See *Secret History*, p. 224. Cf. Hsiao, *Military Establishment*, pp. 10–11, who suggests that grazing land and water resources were assigned to the decimal units. The *Secret History* does say, however, that *nuntu'uchin* (pasture keepers?) were to be chosen from each of the thousands (*mingghad mingghad-acha*).

hands of his chosen heir. If the *Secret History* is to be believed, Chinggis Khan himself had already suggested the possibility that the succession struggle might be widened beyond Ögödei's family after the latter's death by asking rhetorically: "If Ögödei's descendants should be born [so lacking in the qualities of leadership that] if one were to wrap [them] in grass they would not be eaten by an ox or if one were to wrap [them] in fat they would not be eaten by a dog, will there not be born among my [other] descendants someone [who will be] good?"²⁴

The maneuverings for succession lasted from Ögödei's death in 1241 until about 1252 or 1253. Chaghadai died in 1242. Chinggis Khan had expressed a preference for Köden, Ögödei's second son.²⁵ Ögödei had chosen his son Köchü, but Köchü had died; so Ögödei had designated Köchü's son Shiremün.²⁶

Töregene, Ögödei's chief widow and regent, won over a considerable number of followers for her eldest son, Güyüg. Many, however, implacably opposed Güyüg because of his enmity with Batu, who was now *akha* and one of the most powerful figures in the empire. (This enmity had probably arisen in anticipation of the tanistry struggle that Chinggis Khan's grandsons could already foresee.) Temüge, Chinggis Khan's younger brother, was also an eligible contender, and it was he who first gathered an army around himself and made a bid for the throne. When it became clear that he could not succeed, he withdrew.

Determined that one of her sons should succeed instead of Shiremün, Töregene managed to delay matters for several years until, in 1246, she convened a *khuriltai* to acclaim Güyüg, whom she favored over Köden, the latter not being in good health. Batu sent his brothers to attend the *khuriltai*, and they apparently took part in the acclamation, but he did not attend it himself. Güyüg, realizing that the question of succession could not be settled until Batu was destroyed, set out against his cousin but died along the way in 1248, cutting short the succession struggle before its conclusion. Although the *Yüan shih* clearly reckons him an emperor, Juwaynī and Rashīd

²⁴ See *Secret History*, p. 197. I have taken liberties with the Cleaves translation only to underscore my interpretation of the passage's significance.

²⁵ See Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Successors*, p. 181.

²⁶ See Rashīd ad-Dīn, *Successors*, pp. 19, 180, and 201.

ad-Dīn withhold from Güyüg the title of *qā'ān* and place after his name the lesser title of khan, as they do also with Jochi, Chaghadai, Tolui, and Hülegü, none of whom was ever considered a *khaghan* by anyone.

Before the empire could disintegrate, Tolui's widow struck a bargain with Batu, who allowed her son Möngke to succeed. Batu's and Möngke's supporters convened their *khuriltai* in 1251, acclaimed Möngke, and won the advantage over the less organized supporters of Shiremün and other possible contenders. By the end of 1252 or early in 1253, after the elimination of several princes of the houses of Ögödei and Chaghadai, the struggle was over.

The price of this bargain was Batu's autonomy. The *ulus* of Jochi began to drift away from the empire, becoming, in effect, a separate confederation. For a time, at least, the Jochids continued to hold properties (called *t'ou-hsia* or *t'ou-hsiang*) in Toluyid China, and in one way or another some of Jochi's descendants continued to play a role in the succession struggles for the Toluyid throne, but increasingly it was the role of outsiders.

Thus, although not without difficulties, the empire cohered and continued to do the only thing that such an empire could do if it were to survive: push on and continue to conquer.

WHY DID THE MONGOLS WREAK SO MUCH DESTRUCTION?

At first glance, one might have expected the Turks and the Mongols to have followed a common pattern in the Middle East. Both peoples came from Mongolia. They spoke cognate languages, shared common elements of folklore, had practiced the same range of nomadic adaptations, and had both first viewed the sedentary world from the perspective of the nomad face to face with China.

In fact, the difference between the behavior of the Turks in the Middle East and that of the Mongols could hardly have been greater. The Turks came in gradually, in groups of limited size, over a substantial period of time, and entered into the Muslim culture and politics of the region as full-fledged members. In the process they did comparatively little damage.

Not so the Mongols. They came as an avalanche, a cyclone, massacred large numbers of people, and did such destruction that

the effect of their mayhem is arguably still perceptible. Much of the explanation for this contrast lies in the different conditions under which these two peoples made their entry.

The Turks had started westward mainly as refugees who had lost out to stronger nomads in struggles to control the East Asian steppes. They came in individual groups, and, before reaching the Middle East, they first tarried in Central Asia, where they encountered the desert pastoral habitat mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

The deserts are arid and contain little vegetation; pasture is to be found mainly along the edges, where there is water, and in these more hospitable areas are to be found not just water but farms, villages, and towns.

In the desert habitat, nomads and settled peoples had frequent and repeated contacts. The desert constricted all agriculture, both pastoral and agrarian, so that wherever pasture was to be found, it was likely to be interspersed with towns and cultivated fields. The nomad, whose pastoralism would, under such conditions, require him seasonally to return to the same places, wanted peace with his sedentary counterpart so as to be annually welcomed back and so that exchanges, which occurred mainly in markets and eye-to-eye between the individual nomad and the merchant or farmer, could continue with a minimum of difficulty. Living as part of a relatively tight nomadic-sedentary continuum, which, using his military strength, he of course tried to control, the desert nomad understood agrarian cultivation and urban society. In response to his habitat, he developed a distinct pattern of interaction with his sedentary neighbors, one that stressed control.

Long before the arrival of the Turks and the Mongols in the Middle East, bedouin tribes had ruled settled populations in accordance with this desert pattern (control) as a matter of course. Subsequently, with the rise of Islam, the Arab conquests had brought the Arabs' form of this desert pattern, along with their religion, to western Central Asia, going eastward until they reached the desert's limits and the beginning of the steppe. The Turks, coming slowly and in groups of limited size, thus met with a cultural environment, already prepared by previous nomads, that offered them the role of ruler in a relatively peaceful nomadic-sedentary world, and they en-

countered Islam, a universal religion open to nomad tribesmen, which could facilitate their transition into full membership in that world.

By the time the Turkish-speaking nomads had filtered through Central Asia into the Middle East, they were already at least nominally Muslim and so shared some important common interests with sedentary Muslim society. They had fallen heir to the desert pattern of control that the Arab conquests had bequeathed to them. They had spent enough time in the vicinity of settled populations to understand sedentary society, and they regarded themselves to some degree as its protectors.

But this transformation had taken them a good deal of time. In the steppes, their perspective had been radically different. The steppe habitat also partook of a nomadic-sedentary continuum, but it was a far looser one than in the desert. Steppe nomads lived apart from settled peoples, and friendly contacts between them were less the rule. Nomad and farmer or townsman were not usually acquaintances. Geography did not force steppe pastoralists and settled folk together in seasonal reunions. It separated them. At the eastern end of the steppe zone, where the lines between nomad and sedentary were most sharply drawn, Mongolia and China confronted one another through much of history as worlds apart.²⁷

The ordinary steppe nomad had little or no motive to develop an understanding of agrarian agriculture or of urban society, and he did not view his fortunes as tied to their prosperity. The steppe pastoralist's political ideology did not equip him to try to govern the agrarian world; so he left the settled peoples to their own political devices.

For him, raiding was as important as trading. The main peaceful contacts between pastoralist and agrarian, apart from trade, occurred at the governmental rather than the individual level. Here, the supratribal ruler performed the only function for which the steppe nomad needed him (apart from his role as the organizer of predatory campaigns): to conclude agreements with settled govern-

²⁷ Note, however, that the current PRC position considers Mongolia to have been part of China until the 20th century. Such a claim seems particularly bizarre with regard to the Hsiung-nu, but see Lin Kan, *Hsiung-nu shih* (Hohhot: Nei Meng-ku jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1979).

ments on terms of extortion. The settled government delivered wealth (commonly cloaked as return gifts and concessions in return for the face-saving device of nomad tribute), and in return the nomad withheld his raids. But when the steppe pastoralist did invade the settled world, he looted and destroyed as much as his heart desired so as to remind the agrarians of the wisdom of rendering peaceably the wealth that he wanted.

The Mongols were no less adaptable than the Turks. The legacy of the Khitans (who had ruled Manchuria, much of the Mongolian steppe, and a small part of north China) and the influence of the Jurchens (who ruled Manchuria and all of north China and who understood the steppe) had probably opened the Mongols' eyes at least slightly to the possibility of conquest and exploitation as opposed to the mere extortion of agrarian wealth from the sidelines of the steppe. Khitan, Jurchen, and Uighur advice and the contact with Muslim merchants from Central Asia, who could point to the example of Turkish-speaking nomads ruling settled populations, must also have prepared the way for the Mongols' adaptation to the desert pattern of interaction with the sedentary world.

But the Mongols simply came too fast. Unlike the Turks, they entered the desert habitat suddenly, en masse, in centrally-planned campaigns, phases of a concerted and temporally compact effort. There was no time for them to acculturate themselves to the desert habitat; so they carried with them, directly into the middle East, attitudes nurtured in the East Asian steppe: disdain for peasants, who like the animals that the Mongols herded, lived directly off what grew from the soil. (The Mongols were not the only ones who have compared the agrarian population to *ra'āyā*, "herds.") With the steppe extortion pattern in mind, the Mongols did violence with a will and used terror, reinforced by their ideology of universal dominion, to induce their victims to surrender peaceably.²⁸

Once inside Central Asia, the Mongols embraced Islam and came to understand settled society no less quickly than had the Turks, but by that time the Mongolian juggernaut had done its dreadful work, destroying cities that had resisted, massacring their people, and strewing death and destruction all along the path.

²⁸ See, e.g., Eric Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245-1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1940-1941): 378-413.

J. J. Saunders was surely on the wrong track when he suggested that the Mongols wreaked their havoc out of some “blind unreasoning fear and hatred of urban civilisation.”²⁹ Their havoc proceeded logically from the legacy of steppe wisdom about how nomads could best obtain what they wanted from the agrarian world. But in the Middle East, where the desert pattern of nomadic-sedentary interaction was the rule, the behavior of the Mongols must have seemed incomprehensible.

WHY DID THE MONGOLS CONVERT TO ISLAM
BUT NOT TO OTHER RELIGIONS?

The Mongols’ conversion en masse to Islam in the Qipchaq steppe, Central Asia, and the Middle East—and their failure to convert, except on an individual basis,³⁰ to Confucianism, Taoism, or Chinese popular Buddhism in China or to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Rus’—can be attributed mainly to two factors: (1) the extent to which these religious traditions had already been adapted for nomadic consumption by the time that the Mongols first encountered them, and (2) the nature of the contacts between Mongols and the adherents of these religions.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese popular Buddhism were specific to Chinese culture and to the pale of Chinese agriculture. They were not proselytizing religions, and to the extent that each of them possessed its own vision of the ideal social order, each of these visions was utterly alien to the nomadic social ethos of the steppe. Although garrisoned in China, and therefore exposed to contacts of many kinds with the conquered Chinese population, the occupying Mongols could not but view the Chinese and their culture as remote from the standards and values that the Mongols’ traditions had conditioned them to respect.

Christianity, on the other hand, was a proselytizing religion, and in its Nestorian form it had long ago been adapted to the nomads’

²⁹ *Muslims and Mongols*, p. 48.

³⁰ See, e.g., John W. Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), who speaks of a few Mongols as “Confucians,” but the term (doubtful even here) is applicable only to Mongols of high rank.

culture and had won numerous adherents among Mongols in high places. But the Mongols had found it expedient to control Rus' from the Qipchaq steppe, where the indigenous Islamic culture in its Turkish-speaking steppe nomadic form quickly transformed them, so that the Mongols were neither exposed to sustained contact with Eastern Orthodoxy nor ideologically disposed to consider its merits.

Islam was different. By origin it was as much the religion of the nomad as of the townsman. Arab tribesmen had brought it as far east as Central Asia, and the Turks, coming from the eastern steppes had adapted the Islamic tradition in a way that made it attractive to the Mongols. By the time the Mongols reached the Qipchaq steppe, Islam was already widespread among the Turkish-speaking nomads. Similarly, in Central Asia and Iran, Islam had permeated the nomadic population and was not merely the religion of the Turkish rulers.

Islam reached the Mongols by way of proselytizing sufi shaykhs, who spoke to them in terms they understood, who presented the religion in ways designed to make it most acceptable, and who knew how to fit themselves into the role of the shaman. For the sufi it was comparatively easy to replace the Mongols' conception of the universal god as Tenggeri with the Semitic conception of him as Allāh.

In these respects, the Mongols' conversion to Islam invites comparison with their adoption of Tibetan Buddhism, which some of them embraced in the thirteenth century and (notwithstanding dGe-lugspa efforts to represent the proselytization of the Yellow church among the Mongols in the sixteenth century as a "second" introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia) probably never altogether relinquished thereafter. Tibetan nomads had already adapted Tibetan Buddhism for nomadic consumption, and the monks who propagated it among the Mongols understood the Mongols' pastoral culture and knew how to take the place of the shamans. To make things easier, Tibetan Buddhism has, at its popular level, much in common with Mongolian shamanism.

In the Qipchaq steppe, the Mongols were outnumbered and swallowed up by the Turkish-speaking Muslim majority and became, in effect, Qipchaqs. In Central Asia and the Middle East, Islam eased the transition from steppe conqueror to desert ruler for

the Mongols just as it had done for the Turks who had preceded them. The Middle Eastern Muslim tradition held a place for such conquerors at the top, and they did not need to abandon their nomadic traditions to occupy it. In the long run, however, in Central Asia and the Middle East, as also in the Qipchaq steppe, adoption of Islam went hand in hand with the cultural assimilation of the Mongols to the Turks.

WHY DID THE MONGOLS STOP WHEN AND WHERE THEY DID?

The Mongols came into Central Asia, into Rus', and into the Middle East like a series of avalanches. Ahead of them lay the fabulous wealth of India, the riches of western Europe, and Egypt rich in agricultural production and commerce. There is nothing to suggest that the Mongols, who had defeated the armies of the Jurchens' Chin empire (probably the strongest military forces, apart from the Mongols themselves, anywhere in the thirteenth-century world), viewed the Delhi sultanate or the European princes or the Mamluks as too strong to conquer. Yet the Mongols withdrew from their raids into India after destroying Lahore in 1241; they turned back from Europe a year later, before reaching Vienna; and they failed to punish the Mamluks for defeating them at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260.

Why? The old wisdom, found, for example, in Grousset,³¹ attributed the Mongols' halt to the politics of succession, but more recently, other explanations have been offered. I. H. Qureshi and S. M. Ikram attribute the Mongols' failure to mount a real invasion of India to the Delhi sultanate's military might and fortifications.³² Denis Sinor, contradicting Plano Carpini's testimony that the Mongols evacuated Hungary because of Ögödei's death, asserts that their withdrawal in the spring of 1242 was "an operation for which no satisfactory explanation exists" and suggests instead that it "was motivated by Batu's logistical difficulties and his recognition of the fact that the Hungarian pastures were insufficient

³¹ *L'empire des steppes* (Paris: Payot, 1939), p. 333.

³² I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, 4th ed. (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1958), pp. 136 and 140; S. M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 44-45, 59, and 63.

to provide for his army's needs.''³³ Saunders, who refers to the battle of 'Ayn Jālūt as "merely a skirmish" and acknowledges "the troubles which followed the death in China of the Great Khan Mōngke," nevertheless assigns the Hülegüids' failure to pursue their conquests in the Middle East to the Greek recapture of Constantinople in 1261 and Baybars's alliance with the Jochids.³⁴

In the case of India, it has further been claimed: (1) that the Mongols withdrew from India in 1222 (having reached Multan) because of the heat, and (2) that when Chinggis Khan entered India again in 1224 he withdrew once more because a rhinoceros (or "unicorn")³⁵ was sighted and his Khitan adviser Yeh-lü Ch'ü-ts'ai persuaded him that this was a bad omen. (Given the beliefs of the time and the important role of the individual leader in the Mongols' political culture, the latter explanation is by no means an impossibility.)

Undoubtedly each of these arguments contains parts of the explanation, and the heat of India was certainly a factor, but arguments based on the strength of the potential victims or insufficiency of pasture or a hot climate do not make very satisfactory answers to the question of why the Mongols withdrew from such promising fields for plunder precisely when they did, namely in 1242 and 1260.

In view of the strength of the powers that the Mongols did subdue, the remaining defenders in India, Europe, and the Middle East do not seem too daunting—although, as Saunders points out, Hülegüid rivalry with the Jochids (intensified by Mōngke's death) could to some degree have had a neutralizing effect on the Mongols' military potential in the Levant. The Europeans were so divided against themselves that Plano Carpini's primary reason for not wanting to bring an ambassador from Güyüg back to Europe was fear "lest seeing the dissensions and wars which are rife among us, they might be all the more encouraged to attack us."³⁶ The Mongols could not but have known this already. North India was raided in

³³ "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," *Oriens Extremus* 19.1-2 (Dec. 1972): 181.

³⁴ "The Mongol Defeat at Ain Jalut and the Restoration of the Greek Empire," in *Muslims and Mongols*, pp. 67-76.

³⁵ See Chun-chiang Yen, "The *Ch'eh-tan* as Word, Art Motif and Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89.3 (July-Sept. 1969): 589-91.

³⁶ "History of the Mongols," tr. by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey, in *The Mongol Mission*, ed. Christopher Dawson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 68.

1297, again in about 1300, 1303, 1304, 1305, and 1327, by the Chaghadayids, who although far weaker in this period than the united Mongols had been in 1241, carried out depredations in the Punjab and penetrated as far as Delhi.

Even if Sinor is correct about Hungarian geography, neither insufficiency of pasture nor a hot climate prevented the Mongols from mounting campaigns on horseback through the rice paddies of south China and Vietnam or on elephants into Burma, and lack of fodder did not deter them from launching naval expeditions against Japan and Indonesia, even if the real purpose of these expeditions may perhaps have been to get rid of the surrendered military forces of the Sung.

The old wisdom is best. The Mongols stopped where they were in India and Europe in 1242 because of Ögödei's death at the end of 1241. They stopped where they were in the Middle East in 1260 because of Möngke's death in August of 1259. The decease of a steppe emperor, as all the Mongols knew, was no small matter. The classic pattern of the steppe empire, as I have suggested above, was one so closely tied to the ruler's person that when he died, it stood in real danger of collapse. If it were to be preserved, the preservation would have to be based on political maneuvering, struggle, and probably civil war. All of these followed the deaths of Ögödei and Möngke. The Mongols had little choice but to break off their campaigns.

A corollary question, which I shall not pursue here, is why the Mongols, having stopped to deal with the problems of succession, did not resume their conquests and continue to expand. For this, geopolitical factors, the dynamics of steppe imperial politics, the small size of the "Mongghol" population, the heat of India and Southeast Asia, and other reasons, including those given by Qureshi, Ikram, Sinor, and Saunders, will help to provide an answer.

WHY DID THE MONGOLS' EMPIRE DISINTEGRATE SO QUICKLY

It should be apparent from all that has preceded that, as compared with what was to have been expected from a steppe autocracy, the Mongols' empire, which lasted through at least three generations, did not disintegrate quickly. The question should

rather be: how did it endure so long? (A question that I shall not discuss here.)

Factors for disintegration—such as mobility, tanistry, and the lack of any ecological necessity for the existence of a supratribal polity—have been developed at length throughout this essay. What I should like to stress here, as forces for the disintegration of the huge (a factor in itself) empire of the Mongols, is the importance of Chinggis Khan's division of his realm into four "nations," one for each of his four principal sons, and the importance of acculturation in each of these distinctive habitats.

The division, although following pastoral custom, was an interesting retrograde step for an autocrat who wanted to keep his empire united for posterity. At first, these divisions seem to have been little more than military administrative commands within a steppe autocracy in which all authority was vested in the person of the ruler. Settled populations belonged directly to the crown, and non-Mongolian realms that had been incorporated into the empire on the analogy of component "tribes" were directly ruled by the emperor. But at Ögödei's death, or perhaps even before, control of the settled populations and component "tribes" began gradually to pass to the possessors of the four fraternal "nations." At about the same time the original tribal entities also began to disappear, and new tribes came into being as constituents of the "nations," each of which eventually formed a supratribal polity in its own right.

In the early stages of their empire, the Mongols were a single people who established their rule over populations of several different cultures: But administrative—evolving into political—division into "nations" combined with the power of acculturation to turn them into several different peoples.

Jochi's "nation" received a territory that consisted mainly of steppe, inhabited by a Turkish-speaking Muslim population. The proximity of the steppe to Rus' and to the commercially important lower Volga, Khwārazm, and the Georgian and Armenian realms of the Caucasus enabled the Jochids to remain in the steppe, where they were quickly assimilated by the Turkish-speaking population and converted to Islam. Their geographical setting allowed them to exercise dominion over their sedentary possessions without giving up their lives as pastoral nomads.

Chaghadai's and Hülegü's "nations" (Chaghatay and the Il

Khanate)—Hülegü received a territory that should, according to the terms of the original division, have belonged to the “nation” of Jochi³⁷—received a mixture of deserts, oases, and pastures that would force the Chaghadayids and Hülegüids into a tightening pattern of nomadic-sedentary relations characteristic of the desert habitat and would assimilate them to the Turkish-speaking Muslim population of the two regions.

Ögödei’s “nation” received sparsely inhabited pastures in which the Mongols, their language, their religion, and their culture could hold their own. So long as the empire was truly Mongolian and truly a steppe empire, the Ögödeyids could continue to dominate.

By “ultimogeniture” Tolui’s “nation” received Mongolia, the paternal pastures, but the Toluyids’ footholds in Korea and north China presented them with a choice: either to live in the steppe and exploit the agrarians’ wealth in the traditional manner—by extortion—or to conquer and rule, shifting the center of their realm out of the steppe and into the sown. The latter alternative would mean reorganizing their polity and refounding their power on a different basis, fatal to the integrity of the empire as a whole.

The accession of Möngke accelerated the process by which the Mongols of the several “nations” were transformed into separate peoples because, in effect, it permitted the secession of Jochi’s Qipchaq steppe from the empire and created an enmity between the Jochids and the Hülegüids over rights to the Middle East (Möngke’s gift of Jochid patrimony to Hülegü)—not a rivalry between two lineages for succession to the throne of a common empire but an enmity between two separate realms for the possession of territory.

Meanwhile, a basic issue confronted the Mongols of the Hülegüid, Chaghadayid, and Toluyid “nations”: should they adhere to their nomadic traditions and remain an empire—or at least a nation—of the steppe, or should they create a mixed society (fundamentally the “desert pattern” of exploiting the agrarian world)?

Politics tended to polarize around these two positions.³⁸ At Möngke’s death, the nomadizers of the Toluyid realm based

³⁷ See Peter Jackson, “The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 22.3–4 (1978): 186–244. Jackson ignores tanistry.

³⁸ See the interesting treatment of this problem in N. Ts. Munkuev, “O dvukh tendent-

themselves in Mongolia and supported Arigh Böke for the succession over Khubilai, darling of the “cohabiters.” When Khubilai prevailed, the nomadizers found a champion in Khaidu, the last serious contender of the Ögödeyid line, and thus merged the contest for empire-wide succession with an empire-wide struggle between cohabiters and nomadizers.

In the Hügüid realm the issue was more muted. Adoption of Islam and the desert pattern that the Turks had already established eased almost all the Mongols into the position of cohabiters. But in Chaghatay the issue was as acute as it was in China, possibly more acute, because Chaghatay, like China, adjoined the steppes but, unlike China, was dominated by Turkish Muslim culture. To cohabit was to become a Turk and a Muslim. To nomadize meant staying in or returning to the steppe and remaining a Mongol and a believer in the universal sky-god Tenggeri—at least until the late fourteenth century, when the assimilative power of Turco-Muslim culture became too strong to resist. From the 1260s Chaghatay politics revolved around this question—to cohabit or nomadize? As in Mongolia, the nomadizers rallied to the support of Khaidu, and the issue remained alive until, toward the middle of the fourteenth century, the Chaghatay “nation” itself split permanently in two: a cohabiters’ realm based in Mawarannahr (the Ulus Chaghatay) and a nation of nomadizers in Moghulistan.

Had the *khaghan* and the bulk of the Mongolian population remained “nomadizers” in the steppe and followed their traditional steppe pattern to exploit the agrarian world, their empire might have had a longer lease on life. But the bulk of the Mongols moved into the agrarian world, where, as “cohabiters,” they pursued the “desert” pattern and were transformed into several peoples, several separate realms. Speaking different languages, putting their trust in different religions, and pursuing different aims in different habitats, they could no longer form a single polity. The steppe, which had been their center, became a periphery. The defeat of Arigh Böke and Khaidu and the triumph of Khubilai foreshadowed the empire’s doom.

siiaxh v politike pervykh mongol'skikh khanov v Kitae v pervoi polovine XIII v.,” in *Trudy Buriatskogo kompleksnogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta* 8 (1962): 49–67.