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"LIKE A MIGHTY WALL:" THE ARMIES OF THE QARA KHITAI (1124-1218)*

Michal Biran

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

A century before the Mongol armies swept over the eastern Islamic world, the Muslims already had to cope with a wave of infidel nomads from the east, the Qara Khitai. Like the Mongols, the Qara Khitai inflicted a great defeat on the Muslims; their greatest victory in 1141 near Samarqand even created an international sensation.¹ Unlike the Mongols, however, the Qara Khitai did not use this victory for further expansion into the Muslim lands, and the Oxus river remained their western border for most of their reign. Unlike the Mongol conquest, the Qara Khitai conquest, while certainly taking its toll in human life and temporary destruction, was not accompanied by systematic slaughter nor by overall devastation of their conquered territories. Those differences were reflected in the distinct treatment of the Mongols and the Qara Khitai in the Muslim literature. While the Mongols are described as the bearers of catastrophes, a common image of the Qara Khitai is that of a mighty wall or dam, which defended the Muslim world from its eastern enemies such as the Mongols.²

This paper discusses the characteristics of the Qara Khitai military machine which gave them the designation of a mighty wall. On the basis of this discussion, and by taking political considerations into account, it aims first to establish the reasons for the Qara Khitai victories over

* I would like to thank Prof. Reuven Amitai, Prof. Irene Eber, Dr. Yuri Pines, Prof. Michael Zand, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Dr. Peter Jackson (Keele University), and Prof. Elizabeth Endicott (Middlebury, VT) for reading drafts of this paper and for their valuable comments. I also thank Mr. Oded Bin-Nun for producing the map. The article is based on my dissertation entitled "China, Nomads and Islam: The Qara Khitai (Western Liao) Dynasty 1124 - 1218," that was submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in March 2000.

¹ The rumors about the great Muslim defeat by a non-Muslim enemy reached the crusaders in Palestine, who interpreted them as a great Christian victory (despite the fact that the Qara Khitai were Buddhists). These rumors gave a boost to the legend of Prester John, the Christian priest-king who was supposed to have hastened to the aid of his coreligionist in the holy land from his remote kingdom in Asia. For more on Prester John see Beckingham and Hamilton (eds.), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* and the bibliography cited there.

² Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 79-80, 89; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 347, 357; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 335; Rashīd/Khwārazm, fol. 165a; *Majma' al-ansāb*, pp. 139, 230; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, vol. 62, p. 330; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 5, p. 71; see also Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 302.

their Muslim foes, and secondly the causes of the differences between their conquest and the Mongol invasion of the Muslim lands.

The last part of this paper examines another aspect of the wall image: the apparent contradiction between this image and the common concept of *jihād*. Nothing elucidates this better than Juwaynī's description of the Muslim scholar who, contrary to the general rejoicing in Khwārazm after a great Muslim victory over the Qara Khitai in 1210, sat sad and silent in a corner of his house. When Juwaynī's cousin, the alleged source of this anecdote, asked him why he grieved he explained:³

Beyond these Turks⁴ are a people stubborn in their vengeance and fury, and exceeding Gog and Magog. And the people of Khitai⁵ were in truth the wall of Dhū al-Qarnayn⁶ between us and them. And it is unlikely, when that wall is gone, that there will be any peace within the realm or that any man will recline in comfort and enjoyment. Today I am mourning for Islam.

While this anecdote certainly seems anachronistic, it is still significant that in a period in which Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn mobilized tens of thousands of Muslims in the name of the *jihād* in Syria and Palestine, Central Asia was mostly indifferent, if not sympathetic, to those infidel conquerors, portrayed as the defenders of Islam. At the end of this paper I will suggest a preliminary explanation for this phenomenon.

I

Background

Before continuing, a general outline of Qara Khitai history is in order.⁷ The Qara Khitai began their march into Central Asia only after the Khitan Liao dynasty, which had ruled Manchuria, Mongolia and parts of North China for more than two hundred years (907-1125), was overthrown by a new wave of Manchurian invaders, the Jurchens, who established the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) in North China. Yelü Dashi, a scion

³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 79-80; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 347.

⁴ I.e., the Qara Khitai. They are often called the Turks or the Chinese (*Ṣīnī* [Arabic] or *Chīnī* [Persian]) or just the Khitans (*Khitā*) in Muslim sources. See below for a further discussion of this issue.

⁵ I.e., the Qara Khitai. See n. 4 above.

⁶ Dhū al-Qarnayn, "He of the Two Horns," was an epithet applied to Alexander the Great, who was said to have constructed a wall of brass and iron to keep out Gog and Magog. Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 347, n. 21.

⁷ For the Qara Khitai, see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam;" Wittfogel and Feng, *A History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 619-74 (hereafter WF); Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu*; Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi gao*; Pikov, *Zapadnye Kidani*; Ji Zongan, *Xi Liao shi lun: Yelü Dashi yanjiu*; Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 323-80.

of the Liao royal house, had chosen not to submit to the new rulers. In 1124 he led his few adherents westward, hoping to return subsequently to restore the Liao dynasty in its former domains.

After nearly six years at Kedun, the Liao's western-most garrison post in Mongolia, Dashi became aware of both his inability to challenge the Jin and the relative weakness of the Central Asian kingdoms. Therefore, he decided to continue further westward. In little more than a decade he succeeded in establishing a new empire in Central Asia, which was known there as the Qara Khitai (the Black Khitans) and as the Xi Liao (Western Liao) in China. Dashi and his successors bore the Inner Asian title *Gürkhan* (*Geerhan*, universal khan), but were also designated as Chinese emperors and had Chinese reign titles.

After their great victory over the Saljūq sultan Sanjar at Qatwān in 1141, the Qara Khitai controlled roughly the area that stretches between the Oxus river in the west and the Altai mountains in the east, reaching even further eastward into the Naiman and Yenisei Qirghiz realm before 1175. The southern territories of the Qara Khitai included Balkh (south of the Oxus river), Khotan and Hami, and in the north it extended to Lake Balqash. Until 1175 it also reached the further northern territories of the Qangli and Qirghiz. This vast territory was roughly equivalent to most of modern Xinjiang, Qirghizstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and south Kazakhstan. It comprised the central territory under the direct rule of the Qara Khitai, which was centered around their capital at Balāsāghūn in the Chu valley of modern Qirghizstan; the subject kingdoms of the Eastern and Western Qarakhanids (the former in Kashgar and Khotan, the later in Transoxania) and the Gaochang Uighurs (around Besh Baliq and Hami), and Khwārazm, more of an "outer vassal" than the other kingdoms. The Qara Khitai also dominated the territories of subject tribes such as the Qarluqs, and at least until 1175 the Naiman and the Qangli.

Yelü Dashi died in 1143 and was succeeded by his wife, Xiao Tabuyan (1143–1151), their son Yelü Yilie (1151–1163), his sister Yelü Pusuwan (1163–1177), and Yilie's second son Yelü Zhilugu (1177–1211). Zhilugu was deposed in 1211 by Güchülüg (Quchulu), a Naiman prince who found refuge in the Qara Khitai realm after Chinggis Khan's victory over his tribe in 1208. At first Zhilugu, threatened by his rebellious vassal Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh (1200–1220) and by his eastern vassals' flirting with Chinggis, welcomed Güchülüg and even gave him his daughter in marriage. Güchülüg, however, was quick to betray his father-in-law, and in 1211 seized the *Gürkhan's* throne as well as his eastern territories. Güchülüg's origin and policies were so different from those of the former *Gürkhans*, that despite his attempts to revive the fortunes of the Qara Khitai empire, his contemporaries in China and in the Muslim world never regarded him as a legitimate Qara Khitai ruler. Simultane-

ously with Güchülüg's usurpation, his ally and then rival Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh took over the western Qara Khitai territories, notably Transoxania, thereby breaching the wall that was supposed to defend the Muslims. Indeed, in 1218 the Mongols came to depose Güchülüg, and soon afterwards with the conquest of Transoxania, they took over what had once been the empire of the Qara Khitai and continued their march into the Islamic world.

Any study that deals with the Qara Khitai must take into account the severe limitations of the sources for their history. Except for a short and problematic chronicle that appears in the official Chinese history of the Liao dynasty (the *Liao shi*),⁸ there are no sources written by historians of the dynasty itself, and only a few sources, none of them strictly chronicles, were written by its vassals. The study of its history is therefore based mainly on what its neighbors from the east and west chose to mention about the dynasty, reports that are often hard to reconcile. Archaeological evidence is also not conclusive: there is no tomb or inscription positively identified as belonging to the Qara Khitai, and Qara Khitai culture, which was identified in northern Qirghistan in the 1950s, is almost overlooked in archaeological literature from the period of the Sino-Soviet dispute onwards.⁹

Moreover, most sources describe military confrontations in a few laconic phrases and are usually less than explicit about the actual fighting methods employed. Due to the nature of the sources there is also more information about Qara Khitai rival armies than about their own. Yet it is hoped that assembling the different scattered references together with the relatively detailed descriptions of two great victories of the Qara Khitai, in Qatwān near Samarqand in 1141, and in Andkhūd, situated between Balkh and Marw, in 1204, will result in a meaningful, albeit incomplete, picture of the armies of the Qara Khitai, and why they would have been considered a "mighty wall."

⁸ LS, 30/355–8. The main problem with this chronicle is the unattested source of its information, together with several obvious chronological problems. See the discussion in P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1, pp. 223–4 or in Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu*, pp. 1–2. However, the content of the information recorded in the chronicle (titles, nominations, census etc.) implies that it was at least partially based on some written documents.

⁹ In the 40s and early 50s Bernshtam unearthed what he denoted as a Qara Khitai culture in the Chu valley's area. (See Bernshtam, *Istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki Tsentral'noy Tian shania i Pamiro-altaia*, pp. 139–42; Idem, *Arkheologicheskii ocherk severnoi Kirgizii*, pp. 168–71. His findings are cited in the 1956 and 1962 editions of the *Istoriia Kirgizii* (history of Qirghizstan), that stress the apparent Chinese influence on this culture (pp. 140–41). The 1984 edition of the same work, however, contains no reference to either Chinese influence in Qirghizstan or to Qara Khitai material culture. (A.K. Karypkulov et al. (eds.), *Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSR*, vol. 1.) The same is true for more recent works, see the treatment of Balāsāghūn in K.M. Baipakov, *Srednevekovye goroda Kazakhstana*, pp. 145–9.

II

The Organization of the Army

a. Assembling and ethnic composition

Yelü Dashi went westward in 1124 with a few followers, enumerating 80 or 200 men,¹⁰ who included several minor members of the Liao royal clan (the Yelü) and the Liao consorts' clan (the Xiao),¹¹ and probably several Chinese men.¹² In the six years during which Dashi stayed in Kedun, he had established a nucleus of several ten thousand men,¹³ who comprised the basis of his army. Those forces were already rather diverse. Among their main components were the Kedun garrison, which had enumerated 20,000 Khitan tribal riders in the days of Liao splendor;¹⁴ the descendants of the 700 banished households of Han, Jurchen and Bohai origins, who were added to the garrison in the 11th century;¹⁵ contingents of the Mongolian tribes who resided in Kedun's vicinity, and who supplied Dashi with more than 10,000 crack troops,¹⁶ and probably some deserters from the Liao.

¹⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 86–7; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 354; LS, 30/355.

¹¹ LS, 30/356–7.

¹² This can be deduced from Dashi's appointing northern and southern officials soon after he left Tianzuo, the reigning Liao emperor (1101–1125). (LS, 29/349, 30/355; Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi gao*, p. 28). The Liao used a dual administration in which the northern administration dealt mainly with the Khitan and nomad components of the empire, while the southern administration controlled the affairs of the Chinese and other sedentary subjects. For Liao dual administration see, e.g., Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 77–80.

¹³ Thus according to a Song estimate from 1128, *San chao*, 98/7a. In 1126 another Song official ascribed to Dashi an army of 100,000 men. Yet this estimation was biased due to the writer's attempt to convince his emperor to cooperate with Dashi, as well as by his erroneous assumption that Dashi had combined his forces with those of another Khitan enemy of the Jin. *San chao*, 58/6b; WF, p. 668; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. I.

¹⁴ LS, 37/451, 14/158, 159; WF, p. 557; Yanai Wataru, "Qidan Kedun cheng kao," pp. 185–98; Haneda Toru, "Xi Liao jianguo shimo ji qi ji nian," pp. 157–61; Chen Dezhi, "Yelü Dashi bei zou shi di za kao," pp. 45–7.

¹⁵ LS, 37/451, 10/159; WF, p. 557.

¹⁶ LS, 30/355–6. The 18 Kedun tribes were: Dahuang Shiwei, Dila (Dilie), Wangjila (Onggirad), Chajila (Jajirad), Yexi, Bigude, Nila, Dalaguai, Damili, Mierji (Merkid), Hezhu, Wuguli, Zubu (Tatars), Pusuwan, Tanggu, Humusi, Xidi and Jiuerbi. While some of these tribes are well known, others (i.e. the Yexi, Nila, Hezhu, Pusuwan, Xidi and Jiuerbi) are only mentioned in this source. For a discussion of the tribes see Liang Yuandong, *Xi Liao shi*, pp. 27–34; Pelliot et Hambis (trans. and eds.), *Histoire des campagnes de Genghis Khan*, vol. 1, according to the index; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. I.

It is unclear how large a Kedun force accompanied Dashi westwards.¹⁷ No doubt some of those initial troops were lost in the first battles in Central Asia in 1130–31, when Dashi was defeated by the Qirghizs, the Uighurs, and the Eastern Qarakhanids. Yet he also gained new adherents. Among them were deserters from the Jin forces sent against Dashi in 1131 under the leadership of another Khitan Yelü Yudu, part of whom escaped to Mobei, i.e. the regions of Mongolia and the Yenisei.¹⁸ In Emil, where Dashi was enthroned in 1131/2 following his alleged victory over the Jin forces,¹⁹ he was joined by "many Turks and tribes," which enlarged his force to 40,000 households.²⁰ After the conquest of Balāsāghūn in 1134, 10,000 Khitans who were already in the west before the immigration of the Qara Khitai and were formerly subjects of the Western Qarakhanid Arslan Khan Muḥammad b. Sulaymān (1102–1130), also joined Dashi, and allegedly "doubled his forces."²¹ Another several thousand riders, some of whom probably of Khitan origin, joined the Qara Khitai with their Khitan commander, after the defeat the Qara Khitai inflicted on the Jurchens in Mongolia in 1135/6.²² Warriors continued to join the Qara Khitai army during their conquests in Central Asia,²³ yet the armies of their subject kingdoms were not dissolved but retained their structure and served as the Qara Khitai auxiliary troops, to be discussed below.

This description of the assembling of the Qara Khitai army demonstrates its multiethnic character. Its main components were Khitans, who held most of the commanding positions despite their relatively small number; Turks, an important segment both in the Qara Khitai main army and in their auxiliary troops; and Mongols, probably from the Kedun tribes, whose presence is mentioned also in the battle of Qatwān.²⁴ Among the Mongols were apparently contingents of the Jaji-

¹⁷ The Kedun tribes' alliance with Dashi did not oblige them to follow him westward. While contingents of at least two tribes, the Dila and the Jajirad, are positively identified in Dashi's troops in Central Asia (LS, 30/357), it is obvious that this was not the entire tribe: most of the Dila surrendered to Jin; Jamuqa, Chinggis Khan's sworn brother and bitter rival, who was the most famous Jajirad, attests that part of the Jajirad remained in Mongolia. This is also apparent in regard to other tribes such as the Merkids. Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. I.

¹⁸ ZXXJ, 10/123.

¹⁹ It is unclear whether Dashi's forces actually met Yudu's Jin troops, but the confused withdrawal of Yudu and his men from Kedun was considered one of Dashi's great achievement. For further details see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. I.

²⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 87; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 355.

²¹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 84.

²² *San chao*, 148/7aff; for the date see Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi gao*, p. 53.

²³ LS, 30/356.

²⁴ LS, 30/355; *Saljūq nāmāh*, p. 45 (*Tatār*); *Mujmal-i Fāsiḥī*, vol. 2, p. 235 (*Moghul*).

rad and Dila tribes,²⁵ and in Güchülüg's time, many Naimans.²⁶ Apart from these groups, the Qara Khitai forces probably included some Chinese members.²⁷ The auxiliary troops of the Qara Khitai apparently included an Iranian component as well.

Since most of the Qara Khitai rival forces (Saljūq, Khwārazmian, Mongols, Jurchens) included ethnic segments similar to those in the Qara Khitai army, some mention must be made of the question of ethnic solidarity. Ethnic solidarity played a role in the joining of both Arslan Khan's Khitans and the Jin deserters of 1135/6 to the ranks of the Qara Khitai.²⁸ Yet it never resulted in large scale cooperation between the Qara Khitai and their more eastern brethren who remained under Jin rule, despite the Jurchens' constant awareness of such a possibility. This was hampered by logistical problems and by Jin resettlement policies, which transferred most of the Khitans to Manchuria. Ethnic solidarity, moreover, was neither the sole nor the main channel of loyalty in 12th century North China.²⁹ Ethnic solidarity might have played a role in Qara Khitai ranks: Juwaynī said that while planning his usurpation Güchülüg obtained the alliance of "all those in the army of the Qara Khitai that had some connection with him,"³⁰ but this one reference is too vague for further conclusions. On the other hand, the sources stress the close affinity between the Qara Khitai and the Turks,³¹ and to a lesser extent between the Qara Khitai and the Mongols.³² Most likely the main difference in the Qara Khitai army was not between the rank and file Khitans and their fellow Turks or Mongols, but between the rank and file and the noble Khitans who held most of the commanding posts.

b. Command, units and ranks

At the head of the Qara Khitai army stood the Gürkhan, who led their most important military operations, e.g., the battle of Qatwān in 1141, or the decisive battles against Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh and

²⁵ LS, 30/357.

²⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 46–7; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 63.

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 85 and see below for further discussion.

²⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 84; *San chao*, 148/7b.

²⁹ See, e.g., JS, 88/1964, 132/2825, 133/2849–51; Chen Shu, "Da Liao wajie yihou de Qidan ren," pp. 302–4; Cen Jiawu, "Jin dai Nuzhen de Hanyu ji qita minzu de jingji wenhua guanxi," pp. 405–8.

³⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p. 47; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 63.

³¹ The Qara Khitai are often referred to as infidel Turks. See, e.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 81; Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, p. 98; Ibn al-Jawzī, vol. 18, p. 19; Ḥusaynī, pp. 93; Ibn al-Qalānisi, p. 275; See also Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, *Jughrāfiya*, fol. 222a where he describes the Gürkhan of the Khitans as a Turk; and the reference to "a Khitan Turk" or "a Turk from the Qara Khitai," in Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 2, pp. 9, 13, 28.

³² Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 2, pp. 93–4; Iṣfahānī, p. 289; Ibn 'Arabshāh, p. 237.

Güchülüg during the years 1210–11.³³ In many other campaigns the Gürkhan delegated power to other commanders, personally nominating both the chief commanders and their deputies.³⁴ Despite Ibn al-Athīr's assertion that the Gürkhan did not nominate a commander over more than 100 men,³⁵ for specific campaigns he certainly entrusted to others leadership of large contingents, even those estimated at 50,000 or 70,000 men.³⁶

Apart from Güchülüg, all the identified commanders of the Qara Khitai army were noble Khitans, belonging either to the Yelü or Xiao clans.³⁷ Most prominent among them were the imperial sons-in-law (Chinese: *fuma*, rendered as a name (*fūmā*) in the Muslim sources).³⁸ A *fuma* named Abensi was in command of the Qara Khitai eastern forces in the early 1170s;³⁹ The *fuma* Xiao Duolubu, the husband of Empress Pusuwan (1163–1177) was in command of the force sent to enthrone Tekish as Khwārazm Shāh in 1172 and of the force which was later sent in the 1170s to depose Tekish in favor of his brother, Sulṭān Shāh.⁴⁰ A *fuma*, either identical to Xiao Duolubu or bearing the same title, was also sent against Khwārazm after the Qara Khitai debacle against the Ghūrīds in 1198.⁴¹ The usurpation of Güchülüg, Zhilugu's non-Khitan *fuma*, further demonstrates the military status the in-laws enjoyed.

Another close imperial relative who figured prominently among Qara Khitai military leaders was Xiao Wolila, Dashi's in-law and the father of the *fuma* Xiao Duolubu. Xiao Wolila headed the Qara Khitai campaign against the Jin in 1134, and the left flank of the Khitan army in the battle of Qatwān in 1141.⁴² While leading the campaign against the Jin, Wolila was denoted as *bingma duyuan shuai*, Grand Marshal, a Chinese title that at the time of the Liao designated one of the most important command posts in the Liao northern administration.⁴³ In Qatwān he

³³ See, e.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 85 (Qatwān); Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 83–84; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 351 (1210–11).

³⁴ LS, 30/356, 357.

³⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 84.

³⁶ LS, 30/357; JS, 121/2367.

³⁷ LS, 30/356–7.

³⁸ The Qara Khitai retained the Chinese custom of calling people not by their name but by their title. This custom confused many Muslim authors, who understood the Chinese or Turkic titles as names. An obvious example is Rashīd al-Dīn's description of the Qara Khitai. Unable to distinguish between the different Gürkhans due to their identical title, he stated that the Gürkhan ruled for 90 years. Rashīd/Alizādah, p. 236.

³⁹ JS, 121/2637.

⁴⁰ E.g., Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 17; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 290; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 378.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 137.

⁴² LS, 30/356.

⁴³ LS, 30/357, 46/735; WF pp. 548–9 (here the title is translated as "general commander in chief of the army"); Ji Zongan, p. 70; for Liao's northern administration

was referred to as *Liu yuan si da wang* (great king of the office of the six divisions), a title which, during the Liao, indicated the control of the civil and military affairs of the six divisions of the Yelü tribe.⁴⁴

Another important command post was that of Tayangu. This Turkic title, meaning chamberlain,⁴⁵ is not in evidence during the Liao rule. The title was, however, held by several Qara Khitai commanders, at least one of whom certainly belonged to the Gürkhan's lineage.⁴⁶ The most famous Tayangu, known only by this title, was the commander of the Qara Khitai forces of Talas. He led the Qara Khitai troops to their great victory in the battle of Andkhūd in 1204,⁴⁷ and his capture by the Khwārazm Shāh in 1210 turned an indecisive battle into a great Khwārazmian achievement.⁴⁸ Muslim writers who described Tayangu of Talas as the commander of the Gürkhan's army,⁴⁹ or as the Gürkhan's deputy,⁵⁰ indicate his important position in the Qara Khitai empire.

Other known military titles of Qara Khitai commanders are of lesser importance. They are all Chinese and have their precedents in the Liao realm.⁵¹ From the titles it can be deduced that the Qara Khitai maintained the bureau for military affairs (*shumi yuan*), an agency that in China controlled the state's military forces and directed military operations.⁵² Dashi's stress on planning before attacking⁵³ suggests that the *shumi yuan* was involved in such planning, but there is no information about the functions of this bureau or about its relation to other military command posts mentioned in the Qara Khitai ranks. It is also

see n. 12 above.

⁴⁴ LS, 30/356. In 922 Abaoji, the Liao founder, divided the Yila tribe into the five and six divisions. The Yelü belonged to the six divisions. The holder of this title during the Liao, however, was not a Xiao but a Yelü, thus the continuation of Liao usage is not necessarily exact. (WF, pp. 473, 665; Ji Zongan, p. 65.)

⁴⁵ Kāshgharī, vol. 2, p. 344.

⁴⁶ This was Ḥamīd Pūr, the brother of Baraq Ḥājib. *Simṭ al-ʿulā*, p. 22. Another bearer of this title was Shamūr Tayangu (Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 56–7; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 74–5), who was perhaps identical with the Tayangu of Talas mentioned above. The title was retained by the Qara Khitai of Kirmān, where it was conferred upon several Kirmānid Sultans. (See e.g. Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, pp. 437–8.)

⁴⁷ See, Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 308; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 55; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 322.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 77, 91; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 344, 360; ʿAwfī, *Lubāb*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 55; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 322; Alfī, fol. 171a.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 267.

⁵¹ Those include the *dubushu* (chief administrator); *dujian* (director in chief); *huwei* (imperial body guard); *shumi fu shi* (military affairs vice-commissioner); *Dila bu qian tongzhi shumi yuan shi* (associate military affairs commissioner of the crack troops of the Dila tribe); *zhaotao shi* (bandit suppression commissioner); *zhaotao fushi* (vice bandit suppression commissioner). LS, 30/356, 357.

⁵² LS, 30/356; WF, 665. For Liao *shumi yuan* see e.g. Twitchett and Tietze, pp. 77–80.

⁵³ LS, 30/357.

apparent that the Gürkhan had a personal bodyguard.⁵⁴ Yet there is no indication of the importance of this unit, or that it in any way resembled the Liao *ordo*.⁵⁵

Every man over 18 years of age could have been enlisted in the Qara Khitai army.⁵⁶ The Qara Khitai army retained the characteristic Inner Asian decimal organization, attested by the fact that their forces are always described in multiples of thousands or ten-thousands.⁵⁷ Those units were subdivided into smaller ones consisting of one hundred men.⁵⁸ Some of the units were organized along tribal lines, as can be deduced from the reference to the commander of the crack troops of the Dila tribe.⁵⁹ The commander of this unit was however a Khitan.⁶⁰

Ibn al-Athīr's assertion that the Gürkhan came to fight in Qatwān with "the armies of the Chinese, the Khitans, the Turks and others,"⁶¹ might be thought to imply that the Qara Khitan army was organized along ethnic lines, as was apparent in the Liao army.⁶² But the situation is more complex. Since the Qara Khitai are often called Chinese⁶³ or Turks⁶⁴ in the Middle Eastern sources, it is hard to determine what Ibn al-Athīr meant by differentiating Khitans, Turks and Chinese. Moreover,

⁵⁴ LS, 30/357, 45/698–9.

⁵⁵ The *ordo* were the personal troops of the Liao emperor and the crack troops of the empire. Generally the Liao army was composed of three main components: a. The *ordo*, the personal troops of the emperor, most of them Khitans who served as the empire's crack troops and were mostly mounted; b. The Khitan tribal army, also mostly mounted, to which the frontier non-Khitan tribes served as an auxiliary force; c. The militia, primarily composed of Chinese or other sedentary citizens, who served as infantry. The Liao army also had special units of catapultiers and of (non-mounted) archers, mostly manned by Chinese soldiers. WF, pp. 513–20; for the Liao army in general see WF, pp. 505–90; Yang Ruowei, *Qidan wangchao zhengzhi junshi zhidu yanjiu*, pp. 1–90, pp. 216–65; Feng Jiqin et al., *Qidan zu wenhua shi*, pp. 355–88.

⁵⁶ LS, 30/357.

⁵⁷ E.g., JS, 121/2637; LS, 30/357; and see the discussion on the size of the armies below.

⁵⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 86; see also LS, 30/356, where it is stated that Dashi organized the 10,000 tribal forces of Kedun into basic (unspecified) units.

⁵⁹ LS, 30/357.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 85.

⁶² See, e.g., LS, 45/744 which speaks about Khitan, Chinese, Bohai (a Manchurian kingdom, subject to the Khitans) and Xi (Turkic tribe, subject of the Khitans) components; WF, p. 519ff.

⁶³ E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, pp. 83, 84; Bar Hebraeus, pp. 347, 351, 353, 354; Ibn al-Qalānīsī, p. 275; al-ʿAzīmī, p. 420. For the different notions of China in the 11th–12th Muslim literature see Biran, "Sinicization out of China?" *passim*; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. IV.

⁶⁴ E.g., Ibn al-Qalānīsī, p. 275; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, pp. 84, 85; Abū al-Fidā', vol. 3, p. 15; Ḥusaynī, p. 93; Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, p. 98; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 43, brings two version of the battle of Qatwān - one in 535/1140 between Sanjar and the Khitans (vol. 43, pp. 216–17) - and the other between Sanjar and the infidel Turks (vol. 43, p. 220) in 536/1141, both of course record the same battle.

while Turkic forces were certainly present among Qara Khitai troops, as was shown above, there is no evidence of extensive Chinese troops (as opposed to individual Chinese fighters) in any other source.⁶⁵

Another important characteristic of the Qara Khitai army was that no permanent Qara Khitai forces were stationed in the conquered territories. The proof for this is that whenever a Qara Khitai army was needed, troops were sent from the Gürkhan's (or Tayangu's) headquarters, not from the subject territory itself.⁶⁶ The basic differentiation in the Qara Khitai army was between the standing army, probably mostly tribal, and their auxiliary troops.

c. Methods of payment

The standing army of the Qara Khitai was salaried.⁶⁷ Moreover, in sharp contrast to the accustomed practice in both Liao China, Saljūq Iran and Qarakhanid Central Asia, the Gürkhans did not allocate appanages to their commanders.⁶⁸ Modern writers perceive this phenomenon as a lesson Dashi learnt from the growing power of appanage holders in the last days of the Liao dynasty.⁶⁹ The obvious advantage of this method of payment was that it enabled the Gürkhan to keep his troops under relatively strict control. Yet this method also laid a huge burden on the Gürkhan's treasury. One of the ways for the Gürkhan to replenish his treasury, as well as to engage his troops, was assigning military help to

⁶⁵ Several references attest to the presence of certain Han Chinese in Qara Khitai ranks; for example the "Han fellow" (*Han er*), who served as Yelü Dashi's emissary to the Tanguts in 1126 (YLDD, 10876/17), or Li Shichang, Zhilugu's assistant to prime minister (YLCC-Zhanran, 2/32, 7/153, 8/171). The mixed population in Yanjing, among Tianzuo's followers, and in Kedun suggest that other Han Chinese were also included. Yet apart from Ibn al-Athīr's quoted report, the only evidence of a more than sporadic presence of Han Chinese in the Qara Khitai realm (but not in their army) derived from the reports of Chinese travellers who visited Central Asia in the early 1220s, i.e., a few years after the final dissolution of Western Liao by the Mongols (Chang Chun), or even in 1259 (Chang De). The large numbers of Chinese farmers and artisans in Samarqand (Chang Chun, 1/40a) or the many Chinese living in Almaliq and Besh Baliq (Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches*, vol. 1, pp. 124, 127, retrieving Chang De) may therefore be a result of a recent Mongol transfer, and not necessarily a continuation of the situation prevalent under the Western Liao. For more on the Mongol transfer policy see Allsen, "Even Closer Encounters," pp. 2-23.

⁶⁶ WF, p. 666.

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 86; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 359.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *loc.cit.*; for the Islamic method of *iqṭā'* see EI², s. v. "Iktā'," (C. Cahen) and the references there. For Liao appanages (*tou xia*) see Chen Shu, *Qidan shehui jingji shigao*, pp. 17-24.

⁶⁹ Ji Zongan, p. 78; Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 149; Pikefu, p. 123; Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi gao*, p. 73.

his vassals in return for certain payment or spoils. In the early 1150s the various rulers of Turkestan sent "gifts and treasures" to the Qara Khitai in order to buy their backing against local rivals.⁷⁰ In 1172 Tekish Khwārazm Shāh was accused of having emptied his treasury to buy Qara Khitai support for his struggle with his brother. Indeed after they manipulated his coronation he sent the Qara Khitai troops back after bestowing them with great wealth.⁷¹ After their conflict with Tekish, Sultān Shāh did not have to pay the Qara Khitai, who had offered to back him. However, when he wanted their help in Khurāsān he had to guarantee appropriate compensation.⁷² The son of Kōzli, a Ghūrid rebel against Khwārazm, who in the early 13th century wanted to ask for the Gürkhan's help against Muḥammad, began his career by pillaging his father's treasury.⁷³ The compensation that the Gürkhan demanded from Tekish Khwārazm Shāh for the Qara Khitai soldiers who were killed in the battles with the Ghūrids in 1198, allegedly 10,000 dinar for each deceased soldier,⁷⁴ certainly sheds light on the relationship between military assistance and its financial reward, despite the fact that the sum mentioned is obviously exaggerated.⁷⁵

Financial considerations probably also determined the main direction of the Qara Khitai military involvement in the last decades of their rule, i.e. mostly in the west, because it was much more profitable to fight in the rich regions of Khurāsān, Khwārazm or Transoxania than to assist one Inner Asian tribe against the other.

d. Discipline

The paid army enabled the Gürkhan to enforce strict discipline among his troops. This was achieved also by the great prestige that the Gürkhan enjoyed among his followers,⁷⁶ and by the harsh punishments inflicted on those who opposed him.⁷⁷ As a result, even during the last years of the Qara Khitai the Gürkhan managed to forbid the pillage of the empire's subject territories.⁷⁸ Enforcing strict discipline was essential in

⁷⁰ Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 2, p. 95.

⁷¹ 'Awfī, *Lubāb*, pp. 41-2; *Majma' al-ansāb*, p. 137.

⁷² Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 380; Dhahabī, *Ibar*, p. 268.

⁷³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 72; Juwaynī/Boyle, vol. 1, p. 339.

⁷⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 136-7.

⁷⁵ Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 344-5, n.4.

⁷⁶ E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 86; *Chahār Maqāla*, p. 22; *Majma' al-ansāb*, p. 230; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 335.

⁷⁷ LS, 29/349; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p. 56; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 74.

⁷⁸ E.g., Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 91; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 359; Rashīd/'Alīzādah, p. 338. Pillaging the lands beyond the empire's border was, however, considered legitimate (e.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 187).

the environment in which the Qara Khitai found themselves, as will be explained below.

e. Auxiliary troops

Apart from their standing army, the Qara Khitai made use of the armies of their subject kingdoms and tribes. The subject kingdoms, and probably the tribes as well, were allowed to retain their armies, but their duties towards their Qara Khitai overlords included occasional mobilization of those armies as auxiliary forces for the Gürkhan. Already in the battle of Qatwān the Gürkhan was described as the commander of the Khitans, Khotan (an important city in the realm of the Eastern Qarakhanids, a Qara Khitai vassal) and the Yaghma (a Turkic tribe).⁷⁹ This description suggests that the vassal troops took part in the Qara Khitai army. Certainly the Qarluqs, a Turkic tribe which was instrumental in summoning the Qara Khitai to fight in Qatwān and later became their vassal, reinforced the Gürkhan troops in Qatwān with allegedly 30–50,000 riders.⁸⁰

In later wars the Qara Khitai's use of vassal troops as auxiliaries is more explicit. The Eastern Qarakhanid ruler, Ilig Türkmen, followed the Gürkhan's order and came to the aid of the Western Qarakhanids in 1158;⁸¹ Sultan 'Uthmān of Samarqand together with other Qarakhanid princes assisted the Qara Khitan army at Andkhūd in 1204;⁸² and around the same time Arslan Khan the Qarluq was asked to help the Gürkhan against the rebellious Sultan of Khotan.⁸³

Apart from these auxiliary armies, another source of potential auxiliaries, applicable both to the Qara Khitai and to their subject kingdoms, was the population in their realm, both tribal and settled. There is evidence for the use of such auxiliary forces both during Liao rule, where they account for the non-Khitan border tribes and for the Chinese militia,⁸⁴ and in Khwārazm, the Qara Khitai vassal and later rival.⁸⁵

The use of tribal auxiliaries among Qara Khitai subject rulers is attested in 1158, when the Western Qarakhanid ruler, Chaghri Khan, (1157–1161) summoned the nomadic Türkmen of the lower Jaxartes to

⁷⁹ Husaynī, p. 93; Iṣfahānī, p. 253.

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 86; Rāwandī, p. 172; Rashīd/Saljūq, p. 85; *Majma' al-ansāb*, p. 110.

⁸¹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 14–15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288.

⁸² Nasawī, p. 66; Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 402; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188.

⁸³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p. 56; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 74.

⁸⁴ WF, pp. 518–19.

⁸⁵ Buniatov, *Gosydarstvo Khorezmshakhov-Anushteginidov*, p. 88; for a general description of the different groups of informal soldiers in Khrasan and Transoxania see Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler*, pp. 93–139.

help him against another rebellious tribe, the Qarluqs.⁸⁶ However, as clearly suggested by the above example, the tribal population, mounted and armed,⁸⁷ was not only a source of auxiliaries but also a potential threat to the Central Asian states. Indeed the attacks of the Qarluq and Qangli on the Eastern Qarakhanids in the 1130s caused them to summon Dashi to Balāsāghūn in 1134,⁸⁸ and the Oghuz attack on Sanjar in 1153, which resulted in his long captivity among them, also demonstrates the same phenomenon.⁸⁹ The tribal population of the Qara Khitai central territory was probably included in their standing army, and so was kept under control. The Qara Khitai also tried to maintain order among the troublesome tribal population in their subject kingdoms. In 1163/4, when the Qarluqs of Transoxania continued to wreak havoc in Transoxania, the Gürkhan ordered them to move into Kashgar, where they were to refrain from taking up arms and to engage in agriculture instead. In this case the policy failed and the Qarluqs were subdued by force.⁹⁰ Yet the Qarluq principality of Qayaliq, Almaliq and Pūlād, not noted before the rise of the Qara Khitai,⁹¹ probably demonstrates a successful implementation of the same policy, perhaps applied to the Qarluqs who had asked for the Gürkhan's help before Qatwān.⁹²

Regarding the sedentary population, fighting urban elements (i.e. "civilian" warriors) are attested in the Qara Khitai empire in Bukhara;⁹³ in the eastern Qarakhanid cities of Kashgar and Kucha;⁹⁴ in Almaliq;⁹⁵ and even in the Qara Khitai capital, Balāsāghūn.⁹⁶ Their warfare was mostly defensive, and at least in the Almaliq case they were well armed.⁹⁷ Again the warlike character of the urban population was not only a benefit, for instance when the Bukharans fought against the Khwārazmians

⁸⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 14–15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288; *Ta'rikh-i Khayrāt*, fol. 243b; *Alfi*, fol. 63a; Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 333–4.

⁸⁷ *Alfi*, f.80b (for the Transoxanian Qarluqs).

⁸⁸ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 87; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 355.

⁸⁹ For the Oghuz attack on Sanjar, see Bosworth, "The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (1000–1217)," pp. 151–7.

⁹⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, pp. 310–11; al-Kātib al-Samarqandī, fol. 213b–214a; *Alfi*, fol. 80b. For details and dating see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. II. Cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 333–4.

⁹¹ *ET*², s.v. "Qayālīq," (J.A. Boyle); s.v. "Almaligh" (W. Barthold [B. Spuler and O. Pritsak]).

⁹² Pritsak, "Die Karakhaniden," p. 43.

⁹³ *Tawassul*, pp. 125–7; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 137–8; Bar Hebraeus, pp. 346–7. Ibn al-Athīr, followed by Bar Hebraeus, dated this episode to 1198, yet it probably related to 1182, i.e., to the same incident described in the *Tawassul*. See Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 341–6; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. III.

⁹⁴ Rashīd/Alizādah, vol. 1, p. 338.

⁹⁵ Qarshī, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 360.

⁹⁷ Qarshī, p. 135.

in 1182,⁹⁸ but also a threat. This was especially true for the Qara Khitai who were ethnically and religiously different from most of their civilian subjects. The threat was apparent: In 1211 the people of Balāsāghūn closed the city gates before the Qara Khitai army that returned from Transoxania,⁹⁹ and after 1211 the people of Almaliq withstood Güchülüg's attempts to conquer the city.¹⁰⁰ It is possible that the Qara Khitai also tried to limit arms among the civilian population in their central territory: in 1175 Uighur merchants from Balāsāghūn told the Jin authorities that in Balāsāghūn they "usually do not bear arms."¹⁰¹

Limitations on arm bearing had been practiced at the time of the Liao, when it affected the Chinese and Bohai subjects.¹⁰² This policy, however, did not exclude the incorporation of these people in the militia. When they were needed for special campaigns, the Liao central administration allocated weapons to them from the imperial arsenals.¹⁰³ Yet there is no evidence for Qara Khitai mobilization of the civilian population of their central territory.

The extent of the threat that those reserves of potential auxiliaries posed on the Qara Khitai (or other's) authority in medieval Central Asia, is vividly demonstrated in the two anecdotes cited below. The first, undated but referring to the pre-Qara Khitai period (either to the early 11th century or to the very early years of the 12th century), describes the rise of Khiḍr Beg. Khiḍr Beg was a son of a *dihqān* (landlord) from Tarim/Yarim, a village near Kucha (Kesh) in modern Xinjiang. Having great military talent, he found the *dihqānate* boring, and turned to other endeavors. After training himself in hunting, he began to raid Uighur villages. He took several Uighurs as captives; he sold them, bought himself a horse and became a rider. Using a bow and arrows as well as a sword he then took over the horses the Uighurs used for their wheat harvest, thereby making a name for himself. When his reputation spread, many people "looking for trouble (*fitna talab*), riders and foot soldiers" gathered around him. With his new troops (700 riders and 2,000 foot soldiers) he conquered Kucha, albeit only in his second attempt. He then became the ruler of the city which formerly belonged to the Eastern Qarakhanids. When the Eastern Qarakhanid ruler was attacked by "the Khan of China,"¹⁰⁴ he asked for Khiḍr's help, promising to confer upon him the title of Khan if he won. Khiḍr won the battle and became a

⁹⁸ See n. 93 above.

⁹⁹ See n. 96.

¹⁰⁰ See n. 95.

¹⁰¹ JS 121/2637.

¹⁰² WF, pp. 519, 539.

¹⁰³ WF, p. 539.

¹⁰⁴ This probably relates either to the Khitan's raid of 1014 or 1017, or to the rebellion of the Khitan subject tribes in the early 12th century.

Khan, a title that he passed on to his descendants.¹⁰⁵

Nearly the same story describes how Ozar (Bozar) khan became the ruler of Almaliq in the early 13th century, when Güchülüg sat on the throne of the Qara Khitai. As Juwaynī relates:

In Almaliq there was one of the Qarluqs of Quyas, a man of great valor, whose name was Ozar, who used to steal the people's horses from the herds and to commit other criminal actions, such as highway robbery, etc. He was joined by all the ruffians of that region and so became very powerful. He then used to enter the villages, and if in any place the people refused to yield him obedience, he would seize that place by war and violence. And so he continued until he took Almaliq, which is the chief city of that region, and subjugated the whole region.¹⁰⁶

Almaliq was formerly under the control of the Qarluqs of Qayaliq, a Qara Khitan subject. When Güchülüg attacked Ozar, the latter transferred his alliance to Chinggis Khan, who confirmed his right over Almaliq.¹⁰⁷

The large reserve of the "looking for trouble" people was therefore a source of threat and of alternative authority no less than a potential auxiliary force.

f. The gender factor

The presence of women warriors in the ranks of the Qara Khitai is suggested by the fact that two of the five Gürkhans were women. Moreover, in China the Liao empresses retained a unique tradition of military authority that began in the days of Yingtian, the charismatic wife of the Liao founder Abaoji (907–926). After Abaoji's death, Yingtian refused to be buried with him, as the Khitan custom demanded. Instead, she cut off her right hand and had it placed in the coffin, while she survived and became an influential regent. Even in Abaoji's time Yingtian had her own private army of 200,000 horseman, with whom she organized and led campaigns against rival tribes.¹⁰⁸ Other empresses also took part in Liao campaigns,¹⁰⁹ and even in the very last days of the Liao, before

¹⁰⁵ 'Awfī, *Jawāmi'*, MS BM Or 2676 fol. 231a-232a; retrieved in Barthold, *Turkestan-Texts*, pp. 94–97.

¹⁰⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 75.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Qarshī, pp. 136–7.

¹⁰⁸ Twitchett and Tietze, p. 68; WF, p. 543; Franke, "Women under the Dynasties of Conquest," p. 25–6.

¹⁰⁹ Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship and Succession under the Ch'i-tan Rulers", p. 52.

evacuating Yanjing in 1122, Empress Xiao Defei, the widow and successor of the ephemeral emperor Yelü Chun (1122) was willing to fight to the finish against the Jurchens.¹¹⁰

Although there is no conclusive evidence that the Qara Khitai empresses actually fought, it is known that Tabuyan, empress Gantian (1143–1151), engaged in hunting, a common royal sport in Inner Asia which often served as a means for military training.¹¹¹ Empress Cheng-tian (1163–1177) certainly made important military decisions. She ordered the expulsion of the Qarluqs from Transoxania in 1163/4, and under her rule the Qara Khitai, together with the Western Qarakhanids, conquered Balkh from the Oghuz in 1165,¹¹² defeated Il Arslan Khwārazm Shāh in 1171/2,¹¹³ enthroned Tekish as his heir in late 1172,¹¹⁴ and around 1177 accompanied Tekish's brother, Sultān Shāh, in a futile attempt to dethrone their rebellious protégé.¹¹⁵

In the early 1170s and at least till 1175, the Qara Khitai also fought in their north eastern frontier against the (unidentified) Yebulian tribe.¹¹⁶ The sources do not tell us who led the Qara Khitai forces in the first two cases. In the last case Abensi, an imperial son-in-law, headed the Khitan army.¹¹⁷ Yet in the cases of Tekish and Sultān Shāh it was the empress who responded to the Khwārazmian requests and nominated her husband to lead the forces.¹¹⁸

The only positive evidence for women warriors in the ranks of the Qara Khitai comes from the period following the dissolution of their empire. When Baraq Ḥājib, a scion of the Qara Khitai ruling house who entered the service of the Khwārazm Shāh and later became the founder of the Qara Khitai successor state in Kirmān (1222–3–1306), headed to India around 1220 he went through Kirmān. When Baraq and his Khitan and Turkic troops arrived at Kirmān, they were attacked by the local governor of the castle of Juvāshīr. Realizing that "the moment had arrived," Baraq "ordered the women also to put on men's clothes

¹¹⁰ QDGZ, 12/129; *San chao*, p. 12/3b-4a.

¹¹¹ JS, 121/2638; for more on hunting as military training see WF, pp. 118, 119; Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 84–5.

¹¹² Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 310–11; *Ta'rikh-i Khayrāt*, fol. 162a; Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 334–5.

¹¹³ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 375; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 16–17; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 289, (who dates the battle to 1170, cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 336); Ḥusaynī, p. 148; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 365; *Ta'rikh-i Khayrāt*, fol. 243b; *Alfī*, fol. 93a; Abū al-Fidā', vol. 3, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 377; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 17–18; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 290.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, pp. 378–9; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 254; Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 308; *Ta'rikh-i khayrāt*, fol. 244a-b; Naṭanzī, fol. 174a.

¹¹⁶ JS, 121/2637.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Naṭanzī, fol. 174a; *Ta'rikh-i khayrāt*, fol. 244b.

and prepare for battle."¹¹⁹ It is possible that women sometimes fought in Qara Khitai ranks, but this fact was not mentioned by the Muslim sources either because, as attested above, the women wore male dress and were not easily distinguishable from the men, or because women warriors were not an uncommon phenomenon among the Turks in 12th century Central Asia.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, none of this suggests that women fighting in the ranks of the Qara Khitai was routine.

g. The size of the armies

Some Muslim sources stress the huge size of the Qara Khitai armies.¹²¹ However, since enlarging the rival's troops may be either a convenient excuse for one's defeat or an easy means to magnify one's victory, these figures should not be taken literally.¹²²

The elusive character of numbers is vividly demonstrated by the different estimates ascribed to the Qara Khitai troops at Qatwān. According to Muslim sources, the Qara Khitai forces (without the Qarluq reinforcements) consisted of either 100,000,¹²³ 300,000¹²⁴ or 700,000 troops,¹²⁵ i.e. they surpassed Sanjar's army by a ratio of 1:3¹²⁶ or 1:10.¹²⁷ The *Liao shi*, however, explicitly stresses Dashi's numerical inferiority vis-à-vis his rivals in Qatwān.¹²⁸ According to this source the Qara Khitai's left and right flanks at Qatwān consisted of 2,500 men each.¹²⁹ In Chinese and Liao strategy, this number suggests a central force of 10,000 or 20,000 men. The total Qara Khitan force would therefore be composed of a maximum of 25,000 men. Even if Dashi deployed his army at Qatwān in an unorthodox manner (i.e., with an especially large center),¹³⁰ there is still a huge gap between the Chinese and Muslim

¹¹⁹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 212; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 477.

¹²⁰ One of the best examples (referring to Khwārazmian women) is Rāwandī, p. 396. See Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. V.

¹²¹ Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 335; and see below.

¹²² In this case it is worth quoting Ayalon's reservations on the nature of numbers in medieval sources, which appeared in his seminal article "Regarding Population Estimates in the Countries of Medieval Islam," *JESHO* 28 (1985): 1–19.

¹²³ *Majma' al-ansāb*, p. 119.

¹²⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, vol. 18, p. 19; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 81; Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, p. 98; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 42, p. 220.

¹²⁵ Ḥusaynī, p. 83; Iṣfahānī, p. 254; Ibn al-Dawādārī, vol. 6, p. 535.

¹²⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, pp. 81, 85.

¹²⁷ Ḥusaynī, p. 83.

¹²⁸ LS, 30/356.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ WF, p. 648.

estimates. Interestingly, some contemporary Muslim authors reported that the battle was fought between forces of equal size.¹³¹

Numerical superiority is suggested by several sources as the reason for the Qara Khitai's second great victory at Andkhūd,¹³² though other reasons, namely the weather or Qara Khitai tactics, are also mentioned.¹³³ The numbers that are mentioned in regard to this battle are however much smaller: Muslim estimates suggest that the Qara Khitai sent a force of either 10,000¹³⁴ or 40,000 men to Andkhūd,¹³⁵ an important segment of which was comprised of the auxiliary Qarakhanid forces.¹³⁶ The rival Ghūrid army is estimated as larger than 50,000 men,¹³⁷ i.e., larger than even the higher estimate for the Qara Khitai forces. The presumed numerical superiority of the Qara Khitai can be explained by the role of the Khwārazmian army, allegedly 70,000 men,¹³⁸ who originally requested that the Qara Khitai take part in the battle. But if this is the case, it can be argued that the Qara Khitai victory was achieved mainly by their ability to coordinate the different armies and not by their mere numerical superiority.

Several other figures are mentioned in regard to the Qara Khitai forces: Dashi's troops at Kedun enumerated several ten thousands,¹³⁹ there were 40,000 households in 1131 at Emil,¹⁴⁰ to which 10,000 Khitans who "doubled his forces," i.e. were a substantial reinforcement, joined around 1134.¹⁴¹ In the same year Dashi is said to have sent 70,000 men against the Jin, a number that did not include all his troops,¹⁴² but perhaps included auxiliaries from the Eastern Qarakhanids, the Qarluq and the Qangli, who surrendered to Dashi around this time.¹⁴³ Yet the number, as well as the whole campaign, certainly appears inflated.¹⁴⁴ Other numbers relating to the campaigning Qara Khitai forces are smaller and

¹³¹ Ibn al-Qalānisi, p. 275; Abū al-Fidā', vol. 3, pp. 15–16.

¹³² Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 402; Ibn al-Sā'ī, vol. 9, p. 122; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188.

¹³³ *al-Ta'rikh al-manṣūri*, fol. 125a; Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 403; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188.

¹³⁴ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 89–90; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 357; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 5, p. 71.

¹³⁵ *al-Ta'rikh al-manṣūri*, fol. 124b.

¹³⁶ Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 402; Nasawī, p. 66; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 55; Juwaynī/Boyle, vol. 1, p. 323.

¹³⁷ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324.

¹³⁸ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, 55; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 322.

¹³⁹ *San chao*, 98/15a.

¹⁴⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 87; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 355.

¹⁴¹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 84.

¹⁴² LS, 30/357; since Dashi did not lead the troops himself, a certain segment must have stayed with him.

¹⁴³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 88; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356.

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of the inconsistencies regarding this journey see WF, p. 624; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. I.

closer to the Andkhūd scale: 50,000;¹⁴⁵ 30,000;¹⁴⁶ 10,000 respectively.¹⁴⁷

Another way to evaluate the size of the Qara Khitai troops is by counting the remaining troops during their post-imperial period. When the Mongols attacked Güchülüg in 1218, they defeated more than 30,000 Qara Khitai troops near Balāsāghūn.¹⁴⁸ Another small contingent of the Qara Khitai main army or of their auxiliary troops had fought by this time with the Mongols. It is hard, however, to estimate the size of this force.¹⁴⁹ A sizable division of the Qara Khitai army was by then incorporated into the Khwārazm army. This segment is estimated at 70,000 men,¹⁵⁰ yet apart from the Qara Khitai it included also other elements, such as the Qipchaqs.¹⁵¹

More puzzling information is supplied by the census that the Gürkhan Yilie (1151–1163) conducted, in which it was found that there was a total of 84,500 households.¹⁵² The census was probably limited to the Qara Khitai central territory around Balāsāghūn,¹⁵³ yet it is hard to evaluate its meaning for two reasons. First, it is unclear how many of the enumerated households were supposed to provide soldiers for the Qara Khitai, i.e., whether the census included only the nomad population or, more likely, the sedentary population as well.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, it is unclear how many men each household had to provide for the army. In the Liao period, the ratio was two men per household,¹⁵⁵ but it is doubtful whether an automatic extrapolation is meaningful here.¹⁵⁶

On the basis of the census previous scholars concluded that the Qara Khitai standing army numbered 80–100,000 men, a number that corre-

¹⁴⁵ JS, 121/2637.

¹⁴⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 91; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 359.

¹⁴⁷ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 14–15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288.

¹⁴⁸ YS, 149/3522.

¹⁴⁹ YS, 120/2969.

¹⁵⁰ *Mir'āt al-zamān*, vol. 8, part 2, p. 583 (cited in Abū Shāma, pp. 109–10; Ibn al-Dawādārī, vol. 7, p. 189; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 62, pp. 14, 327); Ibn 'Arabshāh, p. 237; Nasawī, p. 101, mentions 7000 Khitan commanders (*muqaddams*).

¹⁵¹ Ibn 'Arabshāh, p. 237. The Khitan force is described as headed by the Khwārazm Shāh's maternal uncles, from the family of Turkan Khatun, his mother. While Turkan is usually rendered as Qipchaq, a strong tradition ascribes to her a Qara Khitai origin. (See, e.g., Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 62, p. 335; Ibn Khaldūn, vol. 5, pp. 234–5; Nasawī, p. 101, probably the source of the above-mentioned references, describes the Qara Khitai in the Khwārazmian army as Muḥammad's maternal cousins.)

¹⁵² LS, 30/357.

¹⁵³ Since the population of pre-Mongol Samarqand alone was estimated by Chang Chun as comprising 100,000 men, the census could not have encompassed the whole population under Qara Khitai rule. Chang Chun, 1/32b; WF, p. 659.

¹⁵⁴ Judging by Juwaynī's statement that in 1211 47,000 citizens were killed in Balāsāghūn, the sedentary population, which was not part of the standing troops, was quite sizable. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 360.

¹⁵⁵ WF, pp. 659–60.

¹⁵⁶ In the Liao period, for example, the minimal recruitment age was 15 (LS, 34/397; WF, p. 560), while Yilie's census counted only the men over 18 years of age.

sponds to those given in the sources.¹⁵⁷ To these men should be added the auxiliary armies of the subject kingdoms, that supplied reinforcement of at least several ten thousand men.¹⁵⁸

Though the Qara Khitai army seems sizable, it is smaller in comparison to the numbers given for the warriors enrolled in the *dīwān* of the Khwārazm Shāh, which numbered 400,000 men.¹⁵⁹ One should bear in mind that like the Qara Khitai, the Khwārazm Shāh could also add auxiliaries from the civil population and/or women.¹⁶⁰

III

Warfare

a. Weapons

Several modern scholars have suggested that Qara Khitai victories over their Muslim rivals were achieved through superior weaponry.¹⁶¹ This supposition, however, is not supported by the sources. It is based mainly on an extrapolation that ascribes to the Qara Khitai the armament of the Liao Khitans.¹⁶² According to the *Liao shi* each soldier had to provide himself with nine pieces of iron armor along with saddle clothes, bridles, armor of leather and iron for the horses according to their strength, four bows, four hundred arrows, a long and short spear, a club, axe,

¹⁵⁷ See WF, p. 659; Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 151; Pikefu, p. 125; Ji Zongan, p. 81.

¹⁵⁸ Estimation of the auxiliary forces is not easy. A few numbers, despite the general limitations regarding numbers in medieval sources, can nonetheless be gleaned from the sources. Ilig Türkmen led 10,000 horsemen in 1158, who partially belonged to the Eastern Qarakhanids (Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 14–15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288). The only figure referring to the Western Qarakhanid army is the 12,000 mamlūks of Arslan Khan (1102–1130), (Iṣfahānī, pp. 241–2; Ḥusaynī, p. 92); his successors might have had similar forces. When Chinggis Khan moved against the Khwārazm Shāh in 1220, the combined forces of the Gaochang Uighurs and the Qarluqs in Qayaliq and Amaliq (all former Qara Khitan subjects) are said to have doubled his (sizable but unspecified) forces. (Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p. 63; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 82.) More concretely, we are told that the Uighurs of Gaochang provided Chingis' general who confronted Güchülüg with 3,000 (Rashīd/Alizādah, 338) or 10,000 warriors. (YS, 122/3000; *Daoyuan*, 24/403.) Rashīd al-Dīn also mentioned a Tūmen (unit of theoretically 10,000 men), led by a Sönid Mongol, that consisted of Uighurs, Qarluqs, Türkmen, and troops from Kashgar and Kucha; both cities were formerly under the eastern Qarakhanids, i.e. subject to the Qara Khitai. (Rashīd/Alizādah, p. 154; Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism*, p. 204.)

¹⁵⁹ Buniatov, p. 88.

¹⁶⁰ Buniatov, pp. 88–91.

¹⁶¹ Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 153; Ji Zongan, pp. 81–2; Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu*, pp. 187.

¹⁶² Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 153; Ji Zongan, p. 82.

halberd, small banner, hammer, awl, knife and flint, a bucket for the horse, a peck of dried food, a grappling hook, a (felt) umbrella and two hundred feet of rope for tying up the horses.¹⁶³ This list is certainly impressive, yet it is doubtful whether the Qara Khitai could present a similar arsenal. First, the list seems to portray an ideal picture that did not necessarily materialize in the last days of the dynasty.¹⁶⁴ Second, while each soldier was supposed to provide his own weapons, he was not necessarily responsible for producing them himself. Liao soldiers could purchase weapon from the developed weapon industry, centered in the eastern parts of the country near the rich iron mines of Liaoning, where skilled Liao Chinese and Bohai subjects were employed.¹⁶⁵ As will be explained below, there is no evidence that in Central Asia the Qara Khitai had a similar industry. Nor it is clear how much of this production was indeed available at Kedun, the westernmost Liao outpost, where Dashi's troops emerged. Third, most of Dashi's troops were not Khitans but Turks and Mongols, and it is doubtful whether they produced the same armament. Last but not least, even if the Qara Khitai did possess a similar armament, there is no indication that it surpassed the weaponry of their Muslim rivals, who had their own military industry.¹⁶⁶

Trying to estimate the sources for weapon production in the Qara Khitai territory, one can note that iron ores were available near Farghāna and Shāsh, and in lesser amounts near the Chu river not far from the Qara Khitai capital.¹⁶⁷ Lead and copper were mined in Farghāna, Ushrūsana and the mountains near Bukhara and Balkh.¹⁶⁸ Bukhara was indeed famous for its production of steel and was the seat of weapon workshops in the Mongol period.¹⁶⁹

Small scale sites of metallurgical production (although not necessarily for weapon manufacturing) were found near Shāsh,¹⁷⁰ Talas and the Issyk Kul;¹⁷¹ all were in or near the central territory of the Qara Khitai. None of these centers, however, originated in the 12th century, nor were they especially developed at that period. Another source of tribal weapon industry was the Yenisei area, held by the Qara Khitai from

¹⁶³ LS, 34/397; WF, pp. 559–60; Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 153.

¹⁶⁴ See, e.g., *San chao*, 11/1a, which describes the events of 1122. From this description it is clear that only a small portion of the army wore armor. This was the case even in earlier Liao wars. (WF, p. 531).

¹⁶⁵ WF, pp. 141–4; Qi Xia et al., *Liao Xia Jin jingji shi*, pp. 70–73.

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Buniatov, p. 93, for a description of Khwārazmian weaponry that included armors and helmets.

¹⁶⁷ *Er*², s.v. "Ma'din," (E. Ashtor et al), pp. 965, 971; Vinnik et al., "Raboty na Issyk Kule," pp. 568–70.

¹⁶⁸ *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, p. 203 (text)/ p. 194 (trans); *Faḍā'il-i Balkh*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ Ashtor, p. 971; Waṣṣāf, p. 68; Biran, *Qaidu*, p. 86.

¹⁷⁰ Bulatova et al, "Rabota Tashkentskogo arkheologicheskogo otriada," pp. 411–12.

¹⁷¹ Pikov, *Zapadnye*, p. 125.

the mid 1130s until 1175.¹⁷² In this region, 12th century broad swords, sabres, spears, axes, bows and arrows, as well as a few iron and wood armors, helmets and shields have been unearthed.¹⁷³ Another possible source of weapons was the Tangut kingdom, a Qara Khitai eastern neighbor that was famous for its high quality weapons.¹⁷⁴ All these references do not suggest, however, that the Qara Khitai were technologically superior.

Going back to the sources, the only mention of armor in the ranks of the Qara Khitai is the reference to the 200 warriors who initially followed Dashi to Kedun. They were *tie bing*, i.e., well armed soldiers, who were probably armored.¹⁷⁵ After Dashi had received the 10,000 tribal warriors in Kedun, he provided them with (unspecified) arms,¹⁷⁶ probably from Kedun arsenals. In the battles in Central Asia the Qara Khitai used bows and arrows,¹⁷⁷ swords,¹⁷⁸ lances¹⁷⁹ and daggers,¹⁸⁰ i.e., their weaponry was equal if not inferior to the armament of their Muslim rivals.¹⁸¹ There is no indication that their rivals were impressed by their arms.

Siege machines were an important component of 12th century Central Asian weapons. I did not find any positive evidence that the Qara Khitai ever used mangonels (*manjanīq*), or any other siege-breaking weapon. However, the frequent mentions of mangonels and ballistas (*arādāt*) among Qara Khitai rivals, especially at Khwārazm,¹⁸² and even in their

¹⁷² Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 88; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356; JS, 121/2637.

¹⁷³ Khuduiakov, *Vooruzhenie Eniseiskikh Kyrgyzov*, pp. 46, 58, 65, 77, 100, 102, 111–112, 118, 128–30, 133.

¹⁷⁴ Kychanov, vol. 2, pp. 225–7 (ch.7, article 440). Weaponry was one of the exports which was theoretically prohibited. However, the Tangut codex of 1149–1169, cited above, describes the fines imposed on the messengers of Dashi and Xizhou for purchasing those restricted goods. Since Qara Khitai rulers were known as Dashi, after the name of their founder even after his death, (see, e.g., JS 121/2638), I believe the reference applies to the Qara Khitai (not to Iran, as Kychanov suggested), while Xizhou refers to the Gaochang Uighurs. Yet it is uncertain whether the Qara Khitai purchased weapons or other restricted merchandise such as horses or grain from the Tanguts.

¹⁷⁵ LS, 30/355.

¹⁷⁶ LS, 30/356.

¹⁷⁷ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 78; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 344; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 386; Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 403.

¹⁷⁸ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 57, 78, 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 324, 344, 360; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 386.

¹⁷⁹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324.

¹⁸⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 78; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 344; Rashīd/Khwārazm, fol.165a.

¹⁸¹ For more on the Khwārazmian army see Buniatov, p. 91; for the Ghūrīd army see, e.g., Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 386; Elliot, *The History of India*, vol. 2, pp. 204–43 (reproducing *Tāj al-ma'āthir*).

¹⁸² For siege breaking weapon in Khwārazm see Buniatov, p. 91; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 82, 93, 102; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 106, 119, 129; *Alfi*, fol. 165b, 171a; Ibn

subject territories, such as Almaliq,¹⁸³ together with the fact that the Liao dynasty already had units of catapultiers,¹⁸⁴ suggest that the Qara Khitai possessed siege equipment. This is supported by the literary and archaeological sources which attest to heavy fortifications in many Central Asian towns which the Qara Khitai had conquered.¹⁸⁵ Indeed the sources portray the Qara Khitai drilling a hole in the wall of an Andkhūd castle in 1204,¹⁸⁶ and besieging Tirmidh with the Khwārazmians in 1205.¹⁸⁷

Yet three anecdotes from the last years of the Qara Khitai attest to the absence of regular siege-breaking weapons. When Güchülüg tried to subdue Kashgar soon after his usurpation in 1211, he did not break its walls but rather he burnt the crops in its fields for three or four years until hunger forced the city to surrender.¹⁸⁸ Güchülüg was also helpless in his efforts to break into Almaliq, which was defended by mangonels and ballistas.¹⁸⁹ Even before Güchülüg's time, in 1211, when the people of Balāsāghūn closed the city gates before the returning Qara Khitai army, the Qara Khitai used elephants (i.e. not mangonels) to smash the city gates.¹⁹⁰

This last episode portrays the use of another kind of weapon, unattested in the Liao army, the elephants. The value of elephants was demonstrated in the negotiation which took place after the battle of Andkhūd, in which the Qara Khitai gained elephants from the vanquished Ghūrīds.¹⁹¹ The Ghūrīds, like their predecessors the Ghaznawids, made frequent use of elephants, which they brought from their territories in India.¹⁹² The elephants used by the Qara Khitai in 1211 were booty from Khwārazm,¹⁹³ probably obtained after Muḥammad's

Isfandiyār, vol. 2, p. 144; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 382.

¹⁸³ Qarshī, pp. 135–6.

¹⁸⁴ WF, p. 519.

¹⁸⁵ See e.g. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 71 (Khujand), 82 (Bukhara); 102 (Tirmidh), vol. 2, p. 92 (Balāsāghūn); Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 92, 106, 129, 360; Yāqūt, vol. 1, p. 280 (Uzgand). For archaeological records see e.g. Pīkov, *Zapadnye*, pp. 125, 152; Pikefu, p. 126.

¹⁸⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324. (Other sources which discuss this battle mention a siege but not the breaking of the wall.)

¹⁸⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 231.

¹⁸⁸ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 48–49; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 65; Qarshī, p. 133; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 337.

¹⁸⁹ Qarshī, pp. 135–6.

¹⁹⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 360.

¹⁹¹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 187; Ibn al-Sā'ī, vol. 9, p. 122; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 297; *al-Ta'rikh al-manṣūri*, fol. 125b; Ibn Isfandiyār, vol. 2, p. 171.

¹⁹² EI², "Fīl," (C.E. Bosworth); see e.g. Isfahānī, p. 241 (Sanjar versus Bahrām Shāh al-Ghaznawī); Dhahabī, *Ibar*, pp. 265, 271 (the Ghūrīds plundering Indian elephants); *Majma' al-ansāb*, p. 123 (Shihāb al-Dīn's elephants before Andkhūd).

¹⁹³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 360.

victories over the Ghūrids in the first decade of the 13th century. The Qara Khitai kept the elephants because of their great prestige and their affectivity in siege breaking, despite the fact that these fodder-eating animals were not well suited for nomadic mobile warfare.¹⁹⁴

b. Campaign planning, tactics and strategies

Before starting an important campaign the Qara Khitai customarily sacrificed a grey ox and a white horse, thereby continuing an old Khitan tradition.¹⁹⁵ Also, like the Liao, their troops fought with a special battle dress.¹⁹⁶ In battle the Qara Khitai troops were divided into three divisions: left, right and central,¹⁹⁷ which was also the practice in the Liao army¹⁹⁸ and among the Qara Khitai rivals, the Ghūrids and Khwārazmians.¹⁹⁹ Each division had a commander and a vice commander.²⁰⁰

Apart from the commander and his second in command, at least in the campaign against the Jin two *functionnaires* were added: the *dubushu* (chief administrator) and the *dujian* (director-in-chief), both common titles in the Liao tribal army and northern administration.²⁰¹

Dashi's basic strategies of campaign organization were manifested in the instructions he gave to Xiao Wolila before sending him to the campaign against the Jin in 1134:

Take care to give rewards and punishments strictly and impartially; share with your troops fortune and misfortune;

¹⁹⁴ This stands in sharp contrast to Chinggis Khan's attitude toward the elephants. After his conquest of Samarqand, Chinggis acquired twenty elephants from the Khwārazmian army. Discovering that these animals need special fodder he decided to set them free in the steppes, where they eventually starved to death. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, p. 94; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 120; Bosworth, "Fil," p. 894.

¹⁹⁵ LS, 30/356, 357. Grey oxen and white horses were sacred to the Khitans, since they symbolized the union of their ancestors. See Franke, "The Forest People of Manchuria: Kitans and Jurchens," pp. 405–6.

¹⁹⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 49, 53; vol. 2, p. 84; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 65, 70, 352.

¹⁹⁷ LS, 30/357; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 84; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 351–2; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 136; *Alfī*, fol. 212 b.

¹⁹⁸ See, e.g., *San chao*, 7/5b for the deployment of Dashi's troops against Song; WF, p. 529.

¹⁹⁹ See, e.g., Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, *loc. cit.*; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 136; Buniatov, p. 91, though he gives a much more composite organization, including also vanguard, rear guard and ambushing troops.

²⁰⁰ LS, 30/356.

²⁰¹ LS, 30/357. For *dubushu* see, LS, 45/690, 692, 716, 717; 46/743, 744, 745, 747, 748, 752; for *dujian* see, LS, 45/690, 692, 694, 697, 700, 707, 708, 709, 711, 713.

choose places rich in grass and water for encamping; estimate the strength of the enemy and only then advance; do not bring upon yourself a defeat.²⁰²

The first two instructions deal with the relationship between the commanders and their troops, which should be based on both solidarity and discipline. Those features were especially important when the commander differed ethnically from most of his troops.

The demand to find places rich in water and grass stress the importance of animals to the nomadic Qara Khitai. Indeed, one of Dashi's first acts already in 1124 was to gain control over Liao imperial horse herds in the northwest. He thereby acquired presumably 10,000 horses,²⁰³ which were of prime importance for his Kedun troops. During their conquests the Qara Khitai collected vast numbers of horses, camels, sheep and cows.²⁰⁴ Later, an important source of animals was the tribute of the subject kingdoms. Upon his submission the Uighur king presented Dashi with horses, camels, and sheep,²⁰⁵ and certainly part of the Khwārazm annual tribute was paid in animals.²⁰⁶

The animals assured the mobility of the Qara Khitai, and indeed many references to their troops denote them specifically as horsemen.²⁰⁷ Although in the Liao period infantry was an important component of the campaigning army,²⁰⁸ and even in his battles against the Song Dashi commanded a composite army of riders and infantry,²⁰⁹ I did not find any specific reference to the use of infantry in the ranks of the Qara Khitai. Most of their auxiliary troops were probably mounted as well, as attested by the troops of Ilig Türkmen in 1158.²¹⁰ Although cavalry were dominant also among the Qara Khitai rival armies, especially in Khwārazm, these armies also included a sizable infantry.²¹¹

A rational evaluation of the enemy troops before attacking was an essential element in Dashi's planning of campaigns, an issue he certainly emphasized.²¹² Such estimation led him to attack Song forces in 1122, despite their huge numerical superiority. He achieved his victories by surprise attacks or by deception. For example, his troops would beat

²⁰² LS, 30/357; translated in Bretschneider, vol. 1, p. 217 (with changes).

²⁰³ LS, 60/932; JS, 3/51, 121/2636; WF, pp. 128, 632.

²⁰⁴ LS, 30/356; Ibn al-Qalānīsī, p. 275.

²⁰⁵ LS, 30/356.

²⁰⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 88; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356.

²⁰⁷ E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 81; Ibn al-Jawzī, vol. 18, p. 19; Ḥusaynī, p. 83; Dhahabī, 'Ibar, p. 98; *al-Ta'rikh al-manṣūrī*, fol. 124b; 'Awfī, *Lubāb*, p. 169; *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, p. 257 (text)/ p. 250 (trans.).

²⁰⁸ WF, p. 519ff.

²⁰⁹ *San chao*, 7/5b.

²¹⁰ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288.

²¹¹ Buniatov, pp. 88, 92.

²¹² LS, 30/356.

drums to create the impression that reinforcements were coming, thereby causing the Song armies to retreat.²¹³ The same rational calculations convinced Dashi to avoid the hopeless confrontation against the Jin, to which the reigning Liao emperor had been inclined in 1124.²¹⁴ When the latter declined Dashi's suggestion "to nourish the army, wait for the right moment and then attack,"²¹⁵ Dashi decided to go westward, where he indeed implemented this strategy. This is apparent not only in the incubation period at Kedun but also later. After his coronation at Emil in 1131/2 Dashi let his troops rest for a few years, coming into Balāsāghūn only after he was summoned by its ruler in 1134, therefore ascending "a throne that had cost him nothing."²¹⁶ In similar fashion, Dashi came to Qatwān four years after his former victory in the region, and only after he was summoned by the local forces, either the Qarluqs or the Khwārazm Shāh, who provided him with information (albeit partly biased) on the situation in Khurāsān.²¹⁷

When the Qara Khitai estimated that their force could not overcome their rivals they preferred to refrain from war. This is apparent in the case of Xiao Doulubu who avoided the confrontation with Tekish in the late 1170s,²¹⁸ and in the case of Ilig Türkmen, who in 1158, perhaps due to the initiative of the Qara Khitai, refrained from attacking Il Arslan's forces and instead concluded a peace agreement between the Khwārazmians and the Qarakhanids.²¹⁹

As to military tactics, the usual way to acquire information about the enemy entailed the use of scouts or spies, a well developed tactic in the Liao army, which Dashi certainly used against the Song.²²⁰ There are several references to Qara Khitai scouts who were sent to spy on Jin troops.²²¹ In the west, the Qara Khitai commissioners and tax collectors in their subject and vassal territories also served in this function. For example, in 1209 when Zhilugu sent his vizier Maḥmūd Tai to Khwārazm to demand the tardy tribute, part of the latter's mission was probably to evaluate the Khwārazmian situation.²²² Spying was a common feature in both China and Central Asia in the Qara Khitai period.²²³

²¹³ *San chao*, 10/11a, 7/6a.

²¹⁴ LS, 29/349; QDGZ, 12/133; *San chao*, 21/5a-b.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 87-8; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 355.

²¹⁷ See, e.g., Husaynī, p. 93; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 313.

²¹⁸ E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 378; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 254.

²¹⁹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 15; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 288.

²²⁰ *San chao*, 7/6a, 8/7a; WF, p. 530; Ji Zongan, p. 83.

²²¹ JS, 50/1114; 88/1964.

²²² Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 89; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 357. For another example where a spy was sent under the pretext of demanding belated revenues in the Mongol period see Biran, *Qaidu*, p. 89 and n. 115.

²²³ The most famous example is of course Chinggis Khan's merchants, who in 1218 were condemned as spies and executed by the Khwārazmian governor of Utrār (see e.g.

The few tactical details regarding Qara Khitai wars suggest that their advantages were their mobility and the coordinated action of their flanks. Indeed the Qara Khitai's greatest victory of Qatwān was achieved after their separate flanks acted together to encircle the enemy troops, squeeze them into a narrow *wādī* and then defeat them.²²⁴ The same tactic of encirclement also brought the Qara Khitai their second great victory at Andkhūd.²²⁵ This tactic, practiced in hunting campaigns, was used by the Liao and later by the Mongols.²²⁶ In 1136 the Qara Khitai used the tactic of ambush against Jin forces and managed to cut off the Jurchen provisions. Their ability to endure the cold weather, as well as a fortunate mutiny in the Jin ranks, also contributed to their victory.²²⁷ Although certainly a mobile mounted army, excelling in "riding and shooting,"²²⁸ the Qara Khitai did not refrain from face to face battles, where they used swords and lances.²²⁹

Water warfare and night attacks were among the tactics which led to the Qara Khitai defeats at the hands of their Muslim rivals. Despite the fact that the Qara Khitai were skilled in crossing rivers (they certainly crossed the Oxus and the Jaxartes), and that even in the Liao period Yelü Dashi did not hesitate to cross or block rivers,²³⁰ the Qara Khitai could not handle the Khwārazmian techniques of water warfare. The Khwārazmian method entailed opening the river dikes at their enemy's approach thereby flooding their way. This tactic was instrumental in convincing Xiao Duolobu to withdraw from Khwārazm in the late 1170s.²³¹ It was also practiced quite effectively at the Khwārazmian siege of Ghūrīd Herat.²³²

A major Qara Khitai setback occurred in 1198 when the Ghūrīds attacked by night, catching the sleeping Qara Khitai completely unprepared for battle.²³³ It was indeed customary to fight from morning till dusk,²³⁴ yet at least in Qatwān the Qara Khitai fought for three days and nights,²³⁵ and even one combat in the battle of Andkhūd was fought

Rathchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, pp. 122-3). For Khwārazmian spies see Bunniatov, p. 91; *Alfī*, fol. 165b; for Liao scouts see WF, p. 530; Ji Zongan, p. 83.

²²⁴ LS, 30/356; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 85; Husaynī, p. 94.

²²⁵ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 56-7; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324; Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 403.

²²⁶ WF, pp. 118, 119; Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 84-5.

²²⁷ *San chao*, 137/7a.

²²⁸ LS, 30/355.

²²⁹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 56-7; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324.

²³⁰ *San chao*, 7/5b.

²³¹ E.g. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 20; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 292.

²³² Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 307; *Alfī*, fol. 196b.

²³³ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 136.

²³⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324.

²³⁵ Ibn al-Dawādārī, vol. 6, p. 535.

from sundown till the next morning.²³⁶ The 1198 episode was an obvious case of negligence in protecting the camp.²³⁷

Another interesting insight into Yelü Dashi's strategy is given in the description of Qatwān. After his defeat Sanjar had to pass through the Gürkhan's camp. Recognizing him, the Gürkhan refrained from stopping Sanjar, explaining that blocking the way of a defeated enemy would put the rival in dire straits and would oblige him to launch a desperate battle that would lead him to victory.²³⁸ This classical Chinese attitude²³⁹ was indeed practiced by the Qara Khitai, who at Qatwān as well as at Andkhūd preferred reaching a settlement with their enemies, usually for lucrative compensation, instead of eliminating them.²⁴⁰

IV

Qara Khitai versus Muslim armies

The well-organized, disciplined, mobile and sizable army of the Qara Khitai certainly deserved the designation of a mighty wall. Surface features such as its battle dress and mostly Chinese titles probably added to its awesome appearance.

Although the Qara Khitai army retained features and terminology of the Liao military organization, the differences between these two armies are no less apparent. They reflect the adaptation of the Qara Khitai to their new Central Asian environment. For example, the Qara Khitai army was based on light cavalry. Infantry and heavy cavalry, both important in Liao warfare, were much less significant (if at all) in the ranks of the Qara Khitai. The main divisions of the Qara Khitai army were not along the *ordo*, tribal, and militia lines, as in the Liao case, but between the standing tribal army, under direct control of the Gürkhan, and the auxiliary armies of the Qara Khitai subjects. The difference is apparent even in the form of titles, since two of the main commanding titles in the Qara Khitai army, Gürkhan and Tayangu, were not in use at the time of the Liao.

²³⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188.

²³⁷ WF, p. 660.

²³⁸ Husaynī, pp. 94–5.

²³⁹ See, e.g., *Sunzi bingfa*, the most famous masterpiece of Chinese military literature, which was translated into Khitan and studied under the Liao (as well as in modern military academies). See Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, pp. 180, 182.

²⁴⁰ For Qatwān see Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 2, p. 95; Rāwandī, 174; for Andkhūd see Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324, though it is unclear whether the agreement with the Ghūrīds was initiated by the Qara Khitai or manipulated by their vassal Sultan 'Uthmān.

The Qara Khitai achieved their victory over the rival Central Asian Muslim armies not by a fundamental superiority in weaponry or numbers, but mainly due to their better mobility, organization, coordination and discipline. These features were created by Yelü Dashi. Yelü Dashi cleverly manipulated the fragmented political situation in Turkestan and stressed the dual legitimation of the Qara Khitai as both Gürkhans, nomadic leaders; and Chinese emperors. He also enjoyed the centralistic means at his disposal, such as the elevated position of the Gürkhan-emperor, the nomination of successors, and the non-allocation of appanages. All these enabled the Qara Khitai to retain their empire for 70 years after Qatwān.²⁴¹

These institutional means could not however stop the rise of decentralizing tendencies which occurred towards the end of the dynasty. Nor could they compensate for the decline in the level of leadership. Since the military advantage of the Qara Khitai was not technological but human, the personal authority of the Gürkhan, the army's chief commander and organizer, was essential for keeping the army in good shape. Any decline in the Gürkhan's authority was dangerous in the decentralized and warlike environment of Central Asia, in which many "horse-robbers" and local dignitaries eagerly awaited the deterioration of the central power.

The decline of the Gürkhan's authority was apparent in Zhilugu's reign (1178–1211).²⁴² Zhilugu ascended the throne after a major scandal, in which his aunt, empress Chengtian, was executed by her father-in-law due to an illegal love affair. From the beginning Zhilugu had to defend his position against his manipulative relatives, who also served as his ministers and commanders. Güchülüg's usurpation was the final act of such manipulations, but there are also earlier examples.²⁴³ The deterioration of the leadership found expression in the military front. The Qara Khitai suffered unprecedented defeats at the hands of the Muslims (e.g. in 1198 against the Ghūrīds), and they did not react decisively to provocations against their authority, such as the Khwārazmian occupation of Bukhara and Balkh in the early 13th century.²⁴⁴ Their failure to react definitively especially revealed the vulnerability of the "mighty wall."²⁴⁵

Among those who noted the decline in the Gürkhan's authority were his local commissioners. They took advantage of the decline by increasing their demands from their subject population and retaining a larger

²⁴¹ Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. IV.

²⁴² For Zhilugu's reign see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. III.

²⁴³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 56–57, vol. 2, p. 92; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 74–5, 360.

²⁴⁴ E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 134, 135–7, 259–60.

²⁴⁵ Sinor's assessment of the Qara Khitai army as being "on a par with their Central Asian counterparts" is correct for this period, but not for Dashi's reign. (Sinor, "The Kitan and the Kara Khitay," p. 239).

portion of the taxes in their own hands. These corrupt practices not only harmed the Gürkhan's ability to reward his troops, but also threatened to alienate him from his subjects. Moreover, the Gürkhan's ability to cope with these problems was curtailed by the repercussions of Chinggis Khan's rise to power in Mongolia. Fugitive Mongols fled into the Gürkhan's realm and broke the nomad-sedentary balance he had tried to create. Somewhat later several eastern vassals of the Qara Khitai transferred their allegiance to Chinggis Khan, thereby diminishing both the Gürkhan's revenues and his human resources. The western vassals were more willing to cooperate with Khwārazm. The Qara Khitai could have coped with the Khwārazmian attack, but the combination of Muḥammad's attack and Güchülüg's usurpation overwhelmed them, and thus led to the crumbling of the "mighty wall."

V

Qara Khitai versus Mongols

In terms of mobility, tactics, organization and discipline the Qara Khitai army shared many features with the Mongol troops.²⁴⁶ Yet the Qara Khitai conquest of Central Asia was certainly different from that of the Mongols. The two main differences, as noted above, were that the Qara Khitai conquest was not accompanied by a massive devastation of the conquered territories, and that the Qara Khitai did not use the conquest of Transoxania for further westward expansion. The reasons for these interrelated dissimilarities are closely connected to the different background of the two peoples. Unlike the Mongols, the representatives of pure steppe nomadism,²⁴⁷ the Khitans originated in Manchuria, a region where both nomad and sedentary populations coexisted.²⁴⁸ Moreover, the Qara Khitai arrived in Central Asia after more than two hundred years during which the Khitans ruled not only in Mongolia and Manchuria but also in a part of North China, with its multiple rural and urban populations. Although throughout this whole period the Khitans consciously maintained their nomadic way of life, they were certainly not strangers to "the rules of the cities." In fact they even built many new cities for their sedentary population, thereby enlarging the economic base of their nomadic troops.²⁴⁹ Coming from this background, the Qara Khi-

²⁴⁶ For the Mongol army see e.g. Morgan, *Mongols*, pp. 84-96 and the references listed there.

²⁴⁷ Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," pp. 40-43.

²⁴⁸ For the differences between Manchuria and Mongolia, and their influence on the relationship between their people and the sedentary empires, see Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, *passim*, especially pp. 1-20.

²⁴⁹ For this policy see Jagchid, "The Kitans and their Cities," pp. 21-34.

tai were aware of the relationship between the welfare of their sedentary subjects and the stability and flourishing of their empire. No Yelü Chucai was necessary to convince the Gürkhan not to turn Samarqand into a pasture land; this thought would not have crossed the latter's mind.²⁵⁰ The Qara Khitai were nomads, but not "barbarians." Their ruling strata presented themselves as continuators of refined Chinese culture,²⁵¹ and they had enough power and prestige to enforce strict discipline over their followers. Indeed the non-destructive character of the Qara Khitai conquest is apparent not only in comparison to the Mongol conquest, an atrocious event by any measure, but also in comparison to other nomadic invasions of 12th-13th century Central Asia, e.g., the Oghuz's invasions to Khurasan in the early 1150s²⁵² or Güchülüg's attempts to overcome the former Qara Khitai lands.²⁵³

Another reason for the non-destructive character of the Qara Khitai conquest was their numerically small population. The sizable estimates of the Qara Khitai armies should not conceal the fact that the actual new-comers to Central Asia were not numerous. They were those who followed Yelü Dashi from Kedun, enumerating around 10,000 households according to Ibn al-Athīr, and certainly less than 40,000 households if we believe Juwaynī.²⁵⁴ These numbers are closer to those describing the benign Saljūq conquest of Central Asia rather than those relating to the Mongols.²⁵⁵

The two factors mentioned above also contributed to the modest scale of Qara Khitai expansion as compared with that of the Mongols. Mongol devastation of conquered territories and the fear it engendered were no doubt a major reason for the great success of the Mongol conquests.²⁵⁶ The Qara Khitai refrained from using this shock tactic, and hence their expansion was slower, more limited, and of a different character.

Moreover, the territorial ambitions of the Qara Khitai were originally more limited than those of the Mongols. The world-dominion ideology of the Mongols is by now well known and well studied.²⁵⁷ The Mongols believed that they were chosen by Heaven to dominate the whole

²⁵⁰ This is of course in sharp contrast to the famous Mongol intention to turn the agricultural lands of North China into pasture lands. It was the Mongols' "eastern" Khitan counselor, Yelü Chucai, who finally convinced the Mongol Qa'an to refuse this advice, arguing that regular taxation would markedly increase the empire's revenues. Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire," pp. 375-6.

²⁵¹ Biran, "Sinicization," pp. 1, 14.

²⁵² See e.g. Rashīd/Saljūq, 99; al-Kātib al-Samarqandī, fol. 214a.

²⁵³ E.g. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, pp. 48-49; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 65.

²⁵⁴ Juwaynī/Boyle, vol. 2, p. 88; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 356; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 84.

²⁵⁵ Morgan, *Medieval Persia*, p. 32.

²⁵⁶ Morgan, *Mongols*, p. 93.

²⁵⁷ See the recent contribution of Amitai-Preiss, "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid war against the Mamluks," pp. 57-72, and the references cited on p. 62, note 20.

world, and their military successes further bolstered this claim. The Qara Khitai, coming from China and retaining its imperial tradition even in Central Asia, were supposed to hold a similar claim, namely the right of the mandate holder to rule All Under Heaven (*tian xia*).²⁵⁸

However, in China the pretensions of universal rule were usually more formal than practical. This was especially apparent from the rise of the Liao, i.e., from the early 10th century onward, when the Chinese recognized the coexistence of "Two Sons of Heaven,"²⁵⁹ the Liao emperor in the north and the Song emperor in the south. Since 1005 a strict boundary existed between those two presumably universal empires,²⁶⁰ i.e., rhetoric notwithstanding, the Liao (and the Song) were quite aware of the practical limitation of their dominion.²⁶¹ This pragmatism was maintained also by the Qara Khitai, whose ambitions were initially limited and, moreover, tended toward the opposite direction, away from the Islamic world.

The original *raison d'être* of the Qara Khitai empire was to restore the Liao in its former domain.²⁶² Indeed soon after his first achievements in Central Asia in 1134 Dashi, probably motivated by his homesick Khitans, organized an allegedly grand campaign against the Jin. The colossal failure of that campaign, which Dashi prudently did not personally lead, convinced the Khitans to devote their expansionist energies to Central Asia.²⁶³ But while they were mostly occupied with the West, the Qara Khitai did not neglect their connection to the East. The Qara Khitai proudly refused to acknowledge Jin's superiority in 1146, and showed their continued interest in the Jin border by sending scouts, spies or even small military forces in 1135/6, 1156, 1177 and perhaps also in 1185–6 and 1188–90.²⁶⁴ These actions testify that while acknowledging the futility of confronting the Jin, due to both severe logistical problems and the formidable power of the Jurchens, the vision of restoring the Great Liao was still meaningful for the Western Liao elite. Indeed they maintained

²⁵⁸ For a suggested Chinese origin of the world dominion concept of the Mongols see, e.g., Franke, "From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God," p. 14ff.

²⁵⁹ *Two Sons of Heaven* is the title of Tao Jingshen's book that deals with Song-Liao relations.

²⁶⁰ Standen, "(Re)constructing the Frontiers of Tenth Century North China," pp. 55–79.

²⁶¹ The clearest example of this occurred in 947, when three months after conquering the then Chinese capital of Kaifeng and taking the reign title of *Datong*, (great unity), which publicly announced the Khitan's intention to rule all of North China, they withdrew from Kaifeng. They reestablished their border in the Yanjing region in order to avoid the need of governing a hostile Chinese population that vastly outnumbered them. Twitchett and Tietze, pp. 73–4.

²⁶² LS, 30/356, 357.

²⁶³ LS, 30/357; WF, p. 624.

²⁶⁴ *San chao*, p. 178; WF, pp. 643–4, 646, 647. See Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Chs. I, II, III for full descriptions and references.

many Chinese features, notably the imperial title and tradition throughout their rule; the *Liao shi* included them in the legitimate succession of Chinese dynasties; and unlike their predecessors and successors in Central Asia, they did not embrace Islam. All this suggests that the point of gravity of the Qara Khitai empire remained in China. For this reason their desire to expand further into the Muslim world was limited. Westward expansion would have distanced them from their original domains; and they would have to become involved with the extensive population of different religious and ethnic backgrounds, which could conceivably undermine the stability of their empire.²⁶⁵

VI

Infidels versus defenders of Islam

Even if the Islamic world was not that attractive to the Qara Khitai, the apparent differences between their rule and that of the Mongols were probably responsible for their image of a mighty wall that defended Islam from its enemies. Such a representation of infidels in the medieval Islamic world is, however, unique. It reflects the laxity of the *Jihād* ideology in the Qara Khitai realm and its surroundings, especially when compared to the heyday of the *Jihād* in 12th century Syria and Palestine.²⁶⁶

Jihād terminology is not completely absent from the records of the wars against the Qara Khitai; it is particularly pervasive in the official inter-Muslim correspondence of Tekish Khwārazm Shāh (1172–1200).²⁶⁷ Yet bearing in mind that this ruler owed his crown to the Qara Khitai,²⁶⁸ was blamed around 1196 that he aspired to send the Caliph's head to the Qara Khitai,²⁶⁹ asked (and obtained) Qara Khitai military help against the Muslim Ghūrīds in 1198²⁷⁰ and ended his reign as a Qara Khitai obedient vassal,²⁷¹ his excited words should be taken with a grain of salt.

Two reasons account for the laxity of the *Jihād* ideology in the 12th century eastern Islamic world. First, the policies of the Qara Khitai, and second, the fragmented situation of the eastern Islamic world.

The Qara Khitai conquest did not originate from religious zeal, nor did the Qara Khitai have anything against Islam. They retained the

²⁶⁵ Cf. the Liao reaction in 947, quoted in n. 261 above.

²⁶⁶ For the Ayyūbid *Jihād* see e.g. E. Sivan, "Islam and the Crusades," pp. 207–16.

²⁶⁷ *Tawassul*, pp. 125–7, 159, 174.

²⁶⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 11, p. 377; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 17–18; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 290.

²⁶⁹ Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 301.

²⁷⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 135–6.

²⁷¹ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 89; Juwaynī/Boyle, vol. 1, p. 357; Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 302; Rashīd/Karīmī, p. 335; Abū Ghāzī, p. 50.

Inner Asian policy of religious tolerance and the sources attest that they respected Islam and its scholars.²⁷² Thus, talented Muslims could reach high positions even in the central administration of the Qara Khitai: the vizier of the last Gürkhan was a Muslim merchant called Maḥmūd Tai;²⁷³ and the Gürkhan's court doctor was the Muslim judge (*qāḍī*) Shams al-Dīn Maṣṣūr b. Maḥmūd al-Uzgandī.²⁷⁴ The doctor's willingness to serve the infidels is not recalled in a negative light but is taken as proof of his political wisdom.²⁷⁵ On the local level, the Qara Khitai deliberately nominated Muslims as their commissioners in the subject Muslim territories, thereby minimizing religious tensions.²⁷⁶

In Bukhara they even accepted the local religious-administrative leadership of the Burhānid *ṣadrs*, who served as their commissioners.²⁷⁷ Because of the extensive autonomy permitted in the subject territories, their originally modest financial demands and their religious tolerance, the Qara Khitai gained a firm reputation of just rulers in the Muslim world.²⁷⁸ Due to these policies, the Muslims sometimes preferred to side with the Qara Khitai against a harsher Muslim ruler.²⁷⁹

The Khwārazm Shāh, who in 1182 raided Bukhara, complained that its apostatized population preferred "the net of unbelief" over his pious forces.²⁸⁰ Indeed the signs of religious dissatisfaction in Transoxania²⁸¹ appeared only in the last years of the Qara Khitai, and only after

²⁷² E.g., Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 2, p. 96; *Chahār Maqāla*, p. 22; *Faḍā'il-i Balkh*, p. 372ff. This (as well as the rest of the paragraph) stands in contrast to the Crusaders' attitude towards the Muslims. For Muslim's position under the crusades see Kedar, "The Subjected Muslims of the Frankish Levant," pp. 135–74; Talmon-Heller, "Arabic Sources on Muslim Villagers under Frankish Rule," pp. 103–17, and the references cited in n. 1.

²⁷³ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 89; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 357.

²⁷⁴ 'Awfī, *Lubāb*, pp. 165–6.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Isfahānī, p. 255 ("the governors of the infidel dominion are Muslims: *wa-al-wulāḥ muslimūn min qabl wilāyat al-kufr*); and see the examples of Ismaili, (Ismā'īl) the Muslim *basqaq* (commissioner) of Kāsān (YS, 120/2969–70); Amtatigin, a Muslim Turk, who was the Gürkhan's representative in Bukhara after Qatwān. (*Chahār Maqāla*, p. 22). Similarly, the Qara Khitai commissioner among the Buddhist Uighurs of Gaochang was a Buddhist priest. (YS, 124/3049; Ouyang Xuan, 11/5a).

²⁷⁷ For the history of the Burhān family see Pritsak, "Āl-i Burhān", 81–96; *EIr*, "Āl-e Borhān (C. E. Bosworth); *EI*², "Ṣadr in Transoxania," (C. E. Bosworth).

²⁷⁸ *Chahār Maqāla*, p. 22; Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 2, p. 96; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 90; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 358; *Jahān Arā*, p. 166. The emphasis on justice, especially when combined with religious tolerance, (i.e. undisturbed implementation of the *Sharī'a*) can also serve as a legal justification for the Qara Khitai rule (i.e. excluding their realm from that of *dār al-ḥarb*). For a further discussion of this subject see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Ch. VI.

²⁷⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 137–8; Bar Hebraeus, pp. 346–7.

²⁸⁰ *Tawassul*, pp. 125–127.

²⁸¹ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, 259; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 74, 123; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 341, 393–4.

their local commissioners, manipulating the decline of the Gürkhan's power, greatly increased the financial demands and adopted a haughty attitude.²⁸²

Moreover, the Qara Khitai usually left their Muslim (and other) subject dynasties intact, and even let them take part in their army. *Jihād* against the Qara Khitai was therefore also directed against Muslim auxiliaries, not only against the infidel overlords of the latter, a consideration that doubtless tempered the severity of the *Jihād*. Nor could the Muslim rivals account for the religious solidarity of the Qara Khitai auxiliaries.²⁸³

This low degree of Muslim solidarity, i.e., the domination of political and economic considerations over religious ones, partly derived from and was reflected in the fragmented political situation of the eastern Islamic world in the 12th century. This is the second basis of the non-*Jihād* policy towards the Qara Khitai. During the reign of the Qara Khitai, the 'Abbāsid Caliphs, especially when revived under Nāṣir (1180–1225), the declining Saljūqs and the rising Khwārazm Shāhs contested the leadership of the eastern Islamic world.²⁸⁴ In this competition the mighty wall of the Qara Khitai was more valuable as an ally than as a unifying factor. Not only did any united Muslim front not coalesce, but competition also discouraged each of the potential participants to challenge the Qara Khitai alone. After Sanjar's death in 1157, his successor, the Saljūq Sultan Mas'ūd, suggested to the Khwārazm Shāh Il Arslan to cooperate against the Qara Khitai. Despite Il Arslan's enthusiastic acceptance of the offer, it never materialized. The failure to join forces was mainly due to Mas'ūd's strained relations with the Caliph, as a result of which he refrained from moving most of his troops eastward; and because Il Arslan refused to accept Mas'ūd as his lord.²⁸⁵ After Tekish Khwārazm Shāh won over the Baghdadi forces in 1195–6, the 'Abbāsid Caliph addressed

²⁸² Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp. 75, 90; Juwaynī/Boyle, pp. 342, 358; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 259.

²⁸³ The sources retain only one notable example of Muslim solidarity: when the Ghūrid ruler, Shihāb al-Dīn, was defeated in Andkhūd, Sultan 'Uthmān, the Qarakhanid ruler of Samarqand, intervened and convinced the former to surrender, apparently refusing to let a Muslim ruler fall into the hands of the infidels. The different versions of 'Uthmān's actions do not allow us to decide whether his mediation was positively unfavorable to the Qara Khitai cause, (Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188; Ibn Isfandiyār, pp. 170–1; *al-Ta'rikh al-manṣūrī*, fol. 125b) or actually served their interests (as can be deduced from Juwaynī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 403; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 57; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 324; Rashid/Khwārazm, fol. 163a; Mīrkhwānd, vol. 4, p. 386; *Alfi*, fol. 174a). In any case, before this mediation 'Uthmān (as well as other Muslim princes) took part in the battle, and fought with the Qara Khitai against his coreligionists. (Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, vol. 1, p. 402; Nasawī, p. 66; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 188; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 55; Juwaynī/Boyle, vol. 1, p. 323.)

²⁸⁴ For a general description of this period see Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," pp. 1–202.

²⁸⁵ *Inshā'*, pp. 30–33; Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 332.

the Qara Khitai, calling upon them to attack Tekish,²⁸⁶ a request they had no reason to comply with at the time. Around the same time the Caliph also tried in vain to incite the Ghūrids to cooperate with the Qara Khitai against Khwārazm.²⁸⁷ After the great Ghūrīd defeat at Andkhūd, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ghūrī waged *Jihād* against the Qara Khitai. His efforts were cut short, however, when he was slain by an Ismā'īlī assassin,²⁸⁸ one more example of inter-Muslim conflicts.

The relations between the Khwārazm Shāhs and the Qara Khitai were more complicated. Forced into a Qara Khitai vassalage in 1142, the Khwārazmians tried several times to defy their overlords. At the same time they also enlisted these same overlords' help both to solve Khwārazmian disputes (e.g. the struggle between Tekish and Sultān Shāh, his brother, on the Khwārazmian throne from 1171 onward) and in overcoming their Muslim rivals, the Saljūqs and the Ghūrīds.²⁸⁹ Only after he eliminated the Ghūrīds, and after the increasing demands and haughty attitude of the Qara Khitai both enraged him and alienated some of the Qara Khitai subjects' from their lords, did the Khwārazm Shāh dare go against the Qara Khitai, although he was long aware of the apparent contradiction between his desire to lead the Islamic world and his status as the Infidels' vassal.²⁹⁰

In 12th century Central Asia there was no apparent threat to the peaceful existence of Islam and no Jerusalem to unite around its liberation. Thus the religious factor remained markedly inferior to political and economic considerations. The Qara Khitai won over the Muslims due to their better mobility and organization. As long as the Gürkhanes were able to effectively control their tribal army and their local officials, and to maintain stability through the practice of religious tolerance and reasonable financial demands, they enjoyed the support of their subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In a 13th century retrospect, the striking differences between the Qara Khitai and their successors, the Mongols, enabled Muslim authors to consider those first infidel rulers as defenders of Islam.

²⁸⁶ Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 120; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 390.

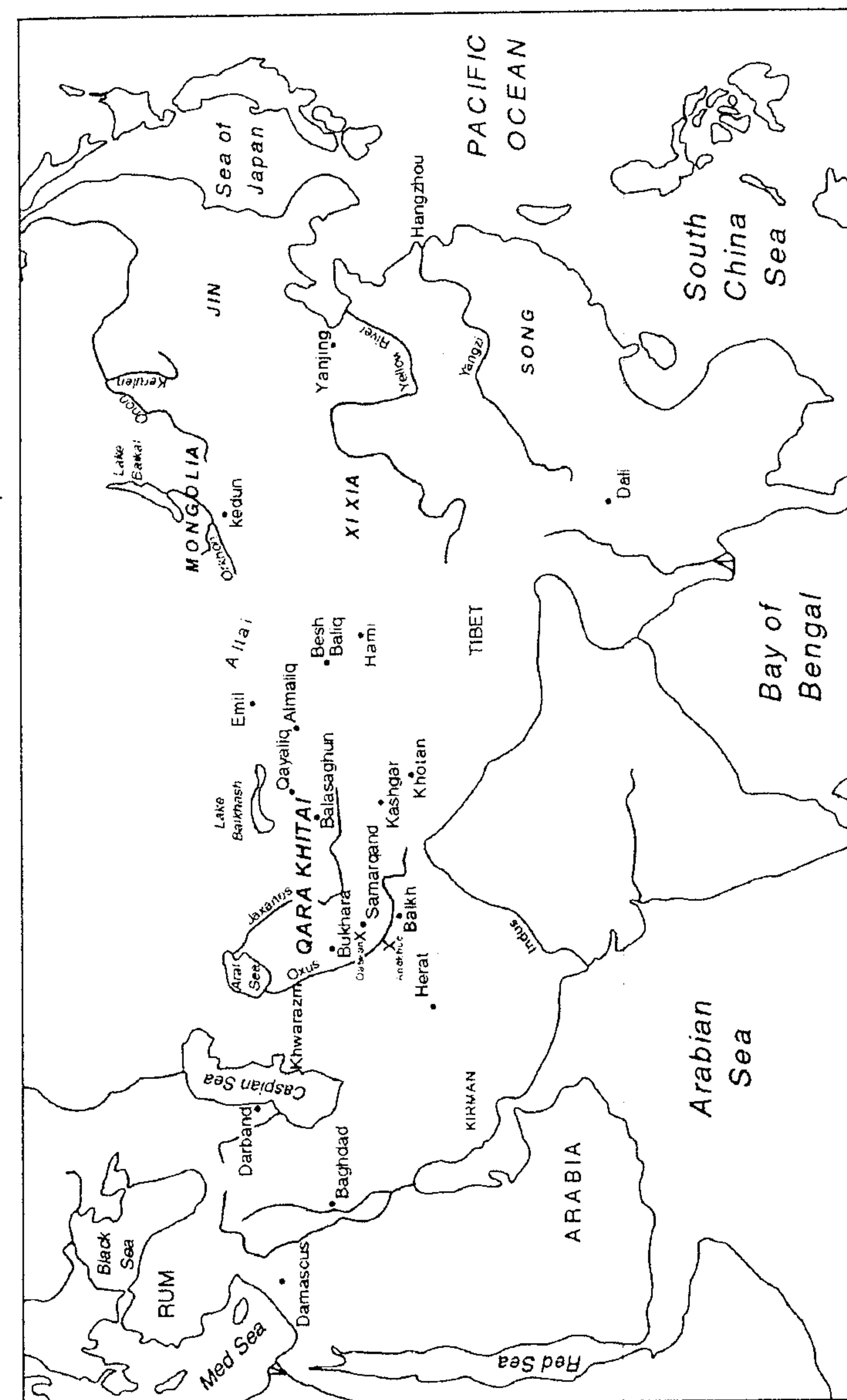
²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, p. 213. According to another version, also given by Ibn al-Athīr, Shihāb al-Dīn was killed by an infidel Khokar. Cf. Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p. 59; Juwaynī/Boyle, p. 325; Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 403.

²⁸⁹ For Khwārazmian history in the Qara Khitai period see Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," pp. 185–94; Bunniatov, 32–80; Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," Chs. I–III.

²⁹⁰ See the Muslim criticism of the Khwārazm Shāh, which started at the latest in 1196: Jūzjānī/Habībī, vol. 1, p. 301; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 12, pp. 136–7, 231.

Asia in 1142: The Qara Khitai Empire



After Tan Qixiang. Zhongguo lishi ditu ji (Shanghai, 1982). VI, 42–43 (with changes).

Glossary of Chinese Characters

Abaoji 阿保機
 Abensi 阿本斯
 Bigude 鼻古德
 Bingma duyuan shuai 兵馬都元帥
 Chachila 茶赤剌
 Chengtian 承天
 Dalaguai 達刺乖
 Damili 達密里
 Da tong 大統
 Dahuang shiwei 大皇室章
 Dila 敵剌
 Dilabu qian tongzhi shumi yuan shi 敵剌部前同知樞密院事
 Dubushu 都部署
 Dujian 都監
 Fuma 駙馬
 Gantian 感天
 Geerhan (Gürkhan) 葛兒罕
 Haner 漢兒
 Hezhu 合主
 Humusi 忽母思
 Huwei 護衛
 Isimaili 易思麥里
 Jin 金
 Jiuerbi 紮而鼻
 Kedun 可敦
 Li Shichang 李世昌
 Liao 遼
 Liao shi 遼史
 Liu yuan si da wang 六院司大王
 Mierji 密兒紀
 Mobei 漠北
 Nila 尼剌
 Pusuwan 普速完
 Quchulü (Güchülüg) 屈出律

Shumi yuan 樞密院
 Shumi fushi 樞密副使
 Song 宋
 Tangu 唐古
 Tianxia 天下
 Tianzuo 天祚
 Tiebing 鐵兵
 Touxia 投下
 Wangjila 王紀剌
 Wuguli 烏古里
 Xi Liao 西遼
 Xidi 奚的
 Xiao 蕭
 Xiao Defei 蕭德妃
 Xiao Duolubu 蕭朵魯不
 Xiao Tabuyan 蕭塔不
 Xiao Wolila 蕭斡里剌
 Yanjing 燕京
 Yebu lian 葉不輦
 Yelü 耶律
 Yelü Chucai 耶律楚才
 Yelü Chun 耶律淳
 Yelü Dashi 耶律大石
 Yelü Pusuwan 耶律普速完
 Yelü Yilie 耶律夷列
 Yelü Yudu 耶律余睹
 Yelü Zhilugu 耶律直魯古
 Yexi 也喜
 Ying tian 應天
 Zhaotao fushi 招討副使
 Zhaotao shi 招討使
 Zubu 阻卜

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