

Encounters Among Enemies: Preliminary Remarks on Captives in Mongol Eurasia<sup>1</sup>

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Captives – persons taken and held as prisoners of war (Arabic and Persian: *asīr*; Chinese: *fu*; Old Slavic: *polon*)<sup>2</sup> – were an inseparable part of Mongol warfare, both raids and conquests, from the days of Temüjin onwards. For the steppe nomads, humans were a resource scarcer than territory. They formed a valuable part of the booty not only due to their potential skills – as labor force, arrow fodder or experts of various kinds – but also for their value as merchandise that could profitably be sold in the Empire's slave markets or – in the case of high-class captives – be ransomed for a considerable price. While the collective experience of Mongol prisoners is one of agony and desperation, not all captives suffered such a grim fate. Skilled captives could advance even in captivity, while others used their captivity to acquire connections or skills that helped them in their future careers. Captivity was therefore a major channel of mobility, both physical and social, in Mongol Eurasia.

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<sup>1</sup>The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007-2013) / ERC Grant Agreement no. 312397. I would like to thank Prof. Rotem Kovner (Haifa University) who provided me with extensive bibliography on modern and pre-modern captives and Profs. Nimrod Luz (Western Galilee College) and Yuri Pines (The Hebrew University) for their insightful comments.

<sup>2</sup> These are the common terms; variants exist in all languages; often the sources refer not to the noun but to the verb- to take captive, to be taken captive etc.

Based on a large corpus of multi-lingual sources, this study aims to provide a preliminary analysis of the fate of captives in Mongol Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, both in the United Empire (1206-60) and in the four successor states centered in China, Iran, Central Asia and the Volga region. It seeks to explain who was taken captive, why and when? How were captives treated? How did captivity end? And what can be learnt from the captives' stories about Mongol society and social mobility under Mongol rule? I am well aware, however, that the topic far exceeds the scope of this current study, so that the presentation and conclusions are provisional only. Moreover, our data is obviously biased in favor of the skilled or high-ranking prisoners who made a name for themselves before or after their captivity and does not do justice to the myriad rank and file captives who ended their life in enslavement or slaughter. In addition, I have more data on the western side of Eurasia than on its eastern. This is not only due to my database's limitations, but also because a ransom culture had already developed in the Middle East and Europe

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by the thirteenth century, but not in China.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while there is a huge amount of - albeit often laconic - material on captives taken by the Mongols, captured Mongols are less frequent in the sources. This is not only because the Mongols won in most documented battles, but also because their warfare ethos required that they fight to the death and not surrender to the enemy. Several examples do exist, but they will

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<sup>3</sup> Y. Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies : Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden, Boston, 2002); R. Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013); J. Dunbabin, *Captivity and Imprisonment in Medieval Europe 1000-1300* (New York, 2002); O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death : A Comparative Study* ( Cambridge, Mass, 1982), pp. 105-110.

not be dealt with here.<sup>4</sup> Despite these reservations, however, hopefully this study will shed some light not only on Mongol attitudes towards captivity, but also on patterns of social mobility in Mongol Eurasia.

### **Taking Captives: When, Why, Who**

A typical description of a Mongol campaign can be summarized as "they killed, pillaged, and took captives."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, captives were taken in nearly every Mongol battle and raid on all fronts, as well as in internal raids on their own subjects in the Khanates' period. Avoiding capture – just like avoiding pillage – required a special edict.<sup>6</sup>

While most prisoners of war were captured on the battlefield, captives were sometimes taken in other circumstances, such as tribal feuds, inter-Mongol rebellions or during "cold war": Temüjin himself spent part his youth as a captive of the Tayi'chiuts and won his first important battle when rescuing his wife from the Merkits.<sup>7</sup> In the post-1260 period, rebels betraying their leaders could capture them and send them to a rival ruler in order to gain his favor.<sup>8</sup> In other times of internal

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, R. Amitai, "Mamluks of Mongol Origin and Their Role in Early Mamluk Political Life," *Mamluk Studies Review* 12 (2008), pp. 119-37; Ch. Atwood, "Pu'a's Boast and Doqolqu's Death: Historiography of a Hidden Scandal in the Mongol Conquest of the Jin," paper read at Conference on Middle Period China, 800- 1400, Harvard University, June 5-7, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi` al-tawārīkh*, ed. B. Karīmī (Tehran, 1959), 2:691 (hereafter Rashīd/Karīmī); tr. W.M. Thackston, as *Jami'u't-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles* (Cambridge Mass. 1998-99), 2:482 (hereafter Rashīd/Thackston).

<sup>6</sup> Song Lian 宋濂, comp. *Yuanshi* 元史 (Beijing, 1977), 3/53 (Möngke's edict in 1258). [Hereafter: YS].

<sup>7</sup> P. Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, tr. T. N. Haining (Oxford, 1991), pp. 24-28, 34-37.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. M. Biran, *Qaidu and the rise of the independent Mongol state in Central Asia*, (Richmond, Surrey, 1997), pp. 38-41; Rashīd/Karīmī, 1:657-8; Rashīd/Thackston, 2:454.

strife, certain princes or commanders were captured by their rivals, often by deceit or during

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banquets.<sup>9</sup> Diplomatic emissaries of hostile polities could be detained and held captive, sometimes for years.<sup>10</sup>

The Mongols took captives when they thought that they would be more useful alive than dead. They did not differentiate between warriors and civilians – from either urban or rural areas – and in both cases the survival rate was not high. The most popular captives were women and children, who could be kept for domestic or military use, sold as slaves, or distributed as booty.<sup>11</sup> Women were kept according to

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Abū al-Qāsim Qāshānī, *Ta'rikh-i Uljaytū*, ed. M. Hambly (Tehran 1969), pp. 35-36, 37, 39-40; Shihāb al-Dīn Waṣṣāf, *Tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf* (Tehran, 1959), pp. 516-17, 519.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. YS, 126/3083;153/3619; Yuan Jue 袁桷. *Baizhu yuanshuai chushi shishi* 拜住元帥出使事實 (*The Narrative of the Missions of the Marshal Baiju*), in his *Qingrong jushi ji* 清容居士集 (Yuan Jue's Literary Collection). Yuan facsimile edition, Shanghai, n.d., 34/512-14.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra*, ed. D.S. Richards (Berlin, 1998), pp. 48, 394; Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l-Faraj. . . commonly known as Bar Hebraeus*, tr. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1932), p. 599; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām* (Beirut, 2003), 56: 261-2; 60:94; 61: 45-6, 210-212; Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Akhbār-i Mughūlān* (Qum, 2010), pp. 36-7; Rashīd/ Karīmī, 2:730; Rashīd/Thackston, 3:510; Sayf b. Muḥammad al-Harawī, *Ta'rikh-nāmah-i harāt*, ed. M. Ṣiddīqī (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 407-10 ; Song Zhizhen 宋子貞, "Zhongshuling yelü Gongshendaobei 中書令耶律公神道碑 (*The Spirit-Way Inscription of Secretary General Duke Yelü*)", in *Quanyuanwen 全元文* (Complete Yuan Literature), ed. Li Xiusheng 李修生, (Nanjing, 1999), 1:171; Jamāl Qarshī, *al-Mulḥakāt bi'l ṣurāh*, in A. K. Muminov (ed.), *Istoriia Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakh, vol. 1* (Almaty:2005), p. CXCIII; Ibn Faḍlāllah al-'Umarī, *Das Mongolische Weltreich: al-'Umarī's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik al-absār fī al-mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. and tr. Klaus Lech (Wiesbaden, 1968), p. 69; Qāshānī, pp. 69-71; YS, 117/2911; 146/3456; 154/3631.

their age, attractiveness and health,<sup>12</sup> and children according to age (usually early teens or earlier)<sup>13</sup> and strength. By the mid-thirteenth century, these criteria were known across Eurasia.<sup>14</sup>

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As is well known – and amply studied by Allsen – another useful group was formed by artisans, who were often separated from the rest of the population, and transferred to a different region to work for the Mongols. This was done not only in the grand campaigns of the United Mongol Empire, but also in later internal struggles within the Khanates.<sup>15</sup> Farmers, less valued than artisans, were also captured and

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<sup>12</sup> J. M. Bak and M. Rady, tr. and annot., *Epistola in miserabile carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta / Magisteri Rogerii = Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tartars*, in their *Anonymus and Master Roger* (Budapest ; New York, 2010), p. 213 (hereafter: Master Roger); D. Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca, 2003), p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhīṣ majma' al-ādāb fī mu'jam al-alqāb*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1995), 2:222; 4:242; 5:107; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī a'yān al-mi'a al-thāmina* (Cairo, 1966), 3:86, 2:364; Anonymous (Pseudo Ibn al-Fuwaṭī), *Kitāb al-Ḥawādith* (Beirut, 1997), p. 134 (Hereafter: *al-Ḥawādith*).

<sup>14</sup> See the attempt of the Hungarian "better ladies, dressed as beautifully as they could" to ask- in vain- the Mongol prince not to kill them (Master Roger, p. 219 ) or the escape of the future Mamluk Sultan Baybars (r. 1260-77) and the commander Qara Sunqur from Mongol captivity after 1258, when the younger person gave his better horse to the older Baybars, saying: "Mount thou the good horse and flee. I am a stripling, and Ibn al-Fuwaṭī the Tatars catch me they will not kill me, but will take me away as a captive." (Grigor of Akner, as, tr. R. P. Blake and R. N. Frye, " History of the Nation of the Archers (the Mongols)," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 12 (1949), pp. 355ff.).

<sup>15</sup> For the transfer of artisans see T.T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: the Policies of the Grand Khan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251–1259* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 213-16; T. T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 30ff.

transferred to repopulate devastated lands.<sup>16</sup> In general, many of the people moved from place to place by the Mongols began their career as captives. However, the distinction between, say, transferred captive farmers and allegedly free farmers, who were also transferred, is not always clear.

Apart from those "collective takings", there are quite a few cases, in which individuals were captured for specific reasons. This was obviously true for enemy spies or scouts,<sup>17</sup> but the most common case, amply documented especially in the Chinese front, is that of enemy generals, useful mainly for obtaining intelligence and/or prestige for the captor.<sup>18</sup> Commanders' families were also distinguished captives, used either to threaten the commander or for securing ransom. Sometimes they were taken by chance, and then separated from other prisoners due to their higher value; in other cases, they were specifically targeted.<sup>19</sup> Other individuals were kept alive for their specific skills: from scribal abilities to engineering, entertainment, or holiness.<sup>20</sup> Rich people who suggested ransoming themselves were sometimes able to have their life spared, though not always for long.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For repopulating and population movement in general, see T. T. Allsen, "Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia", in *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change*, ed. R. Amitai and M. Biran (Honolulu, 2015), pp. 119–151; Also, e.g. Harawī, pp. 641-4; Dhahabī, 60:225.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., YS, 117/2908; *al-Ḥawādith*, p. 51; Qāshānī, pp. 205-8.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., YS, 2/31, 34; 121/2980, 2985; 123/3030; 127/3100, 3114; 133/3234; 220/3102; Rashīd/Karīmī, 2: 723-4, 727; Rashīd/ Thackston, 3:506-7, 508; Harawī, pp. 706-9.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Rashīd/Karīmī, 2:724; Rashīd/ Thackston, 2:462-3; 3:506; YS, 118/2925, 128/3136, 210/4666-7.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. Kirakos Gandzakets'i's *History of the Armenians*, tr. R. Bedrosian (New York, 1986); online edition at [https://archive.org/stream/KirakosGanjaketsisHistoryOfTheArmenians/Kirakos\\_Gandzaketsi\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/KirakosGanjaketsisHistoryOfTheArmenians/Kirakos_Gandzaketsi_djvu.txt), (last accessed September 20, 2015), pp. 201-213; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 3:281; YS, 119/2932; Minhāj al-Dīn s, *Ṭabaqāt al-nāṣirī*, ed. `A. Ḥabībī (Kabul, 1963-64), pp. 123-4; tr. H. G. Raverty. (repr. New Delhi, 1970), 2:1039.

## **The Experience of Captivity**

Captivity by the Mongols was no picnic, though different groups received different treatment. First, in many cases, captivity ensured only temporary survival: people who were no longer useful, were systematically slaughtered. Muslim and European sources describe how each Mongol soldier was assigned a certain number of captives to execute and obediently fulfilled his duty.<sup>22</sup> This was often also the fate of the commanders, after being questioned and providing the Mongols with the intelligence they desired; and sometimes of defeated leaders, who were executed after being humiliated by the victors.<sup>23</sup> Captives also served as arrow fodder: they were sent at the head of the Mongol troops to be the first to meet the enemy; others were located in the middle of the army, carrying banners to create the impression of a huge force.<sup>24</sup> While some managed to escape death,<sup>25</sup> the survival rate must have been low. Captives were used as guinea pigs on other occasions, experiencing dangers such as crossing swamps or rivers before the Mongols.<sup>26</sup> Some captives also had the chance of meeting

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<sup>21</sup> *al-Ḥawādith*, pp. 229-30; Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi'l-wafāyāt* (Beirut, 1987-1991), 13:29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh* (Beirut, 1965-7), 12:359, 366, 377; John of Plano Carpini, *The History of the Mongols*, in *Mission to Asia*, ed. Ch. Dawson (New York, 1955), pp. 36-38; Baraz, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> The famous example is that of the Abbasid Caliph, executed by Hulegu after an alleged dialogue that praises the winner-captor, see e.g. G. Le Strange, "The Story of the Death of the Last Abbasid Caliph, from the Vatican MS. of Ibn-al-Furāt," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1900), pp. 293-300; a similar dialogue allegedly preceded the execution of Kitbuqa, Mongol commander in the battle of Ayn Jālūt (1260) by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars; see also the references in n. 18 above. Other leaders, e.g. the Song imperial family, fared better.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Plano Carpini, pp. 36, 42; Ibn al-Athīr, 12: 367, 395.

<sup>25</sup> e.g. Ibn al-Athīr, 12:380.

<sup>26</sup> Plano Carpini, p. 42.

a more exotic death: Matthew Paris accused the Mongols of devouring their captives' flesh,<sup>27</sup> while prisoners of war might end their life as sacrificial victims.<sup>28</sup>

Captives who survived became the property of their captors. The leader of the campaign might present important or exotic prisoners before the court.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they could be sent *en masse* to work for the state. For the most part, though, the prisoners would be assigned, collectively or individually, to his kin (including

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women) and commanders as booty.<sup>30</sup> The captor or the new owner could keep them as slaves (or bond servants, Chinese *qukou* 驅口 or *nubei* 奴脾).<sup>31</sup> In this capacity, the prisoners filled various roles, such as domestic servants, herders, or more professional jobs like scribes.<sup>32</sup> The master could also sell them in the thriving slave markets. In fact, demand for slaves, both within and outside the Mongols' borders, was so high, especially once the empire ceased to expand, that raids were even conducted against the Khanates' subjects. At times, kidnapped children and wives

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<sup>27</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1872), 4:76-77, cited in Baraz 2003, p. 98; torture and cannibalism seem to have been more frequent in medieval armies or in the Crusaders case than among the Mongols; See, e.g., Friedman, p. 128; Baraz, pp. 96-102.

<sup>28</sup>YS, 127/3114; F. W. Cleaves, "The Biography of Bayan of the Barin in the *Yuan Shih*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19 (1956), p. 268; Jūzjānī/Habībī, 2:177-8; Jūzjānī/Raverty, 2:1174 [in both cases there was no sacrifice after all].

<sup>29</sup>E.g. YS, 121/2980; see also Baybars al-Manṣūrī, p. 70 (Sultan Baybars sending Mongol captives- and giraffe- to the Byzantine emperor).

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 2:56, 3:475, 4:366; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, tr. P. Jackson with D. O. Morgan (London, 1990), pp. 144-146, 223, 226, 230-234, 245; YS, 118/2915, 153/3609.

<sup>31</sup>Li Xihou 李锡厚, Lun Qukou 论驱口 [On Bond Servants], *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究, 1995/2, pp. 68-77; Ebisawa Tetsuo 海老澤哲雄, "Bondservants in the Yüan," *Acta Asiatica*, 45 (1983), pp. 27-48.

<sup>32</sup>Plano Carpini, pp. 36, 42-3; Kirakos, p. 219; Rashīd/Karīmī, 1:104-5; Rashīd/Thackston, 1:74; Hāfiz Ḥusayn Ibn Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-jinān wa jannāt al-janān* (Tehran, 1965-70), 1:131, 145.



were placed into bondage.<sup>33</sup> Women (and sometimes also men) were often exposed to sexual abuse: rape was common, and particularly rape in front of husbands, fathers, and sons; gang rape and the rape of nuns were described as Mongol recreation.<sup>34</sup> However, noble women, such as the daughters of the Caliph al-Musta`sim, were "kept pure on account of their rank."<sup>35</sup>

Unless sold near the battlefield, prisoners were compelled to follow their new masters, often over great distances, especially during the United Empire. Jūzjānī, referring to Ögödei's reign (1129-41), depicts the results of this policy:

There is not a person among the Maliks [Kings, high officials], Noyans [nobles], Bahadurs [heroes, top-warriors], and Ḥarbiyān [warriors], that has not a great number of Muslim captives, and they [the Maliks, etc.] are dispersed in various parts of the territories of Chin [South China], Tamghaj [North China], Turkistan, Iran, and `Ajam [Iranian-speaking regions].<sup>36</sup>

Song Zizhen reports that in 1234, after the Jin conquest, the number of bond servants owned by Mongol princes, ministers, and army leaders "in the various

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perfectures" comprised no less than half of north China's population.<sup>37</sup> While scholars are unable to assess these figures, ten of thousands of humans were reportedly uprooted

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Baybars al-Manṣūrī, 5; Ibn Ḥajar, 2:10; al-Dhahabī, 60:597-8; For the results of the high demand of slaves in the Yuan see Ebisawa, pp. 35-47; in the Golden Horde, `Umarī/Lech, pp. 72-3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, 12:383, 392; Master Roger, p. 209; and see the discussion in Baraz, pp. 95-96, 100-102, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 1:388-9. The daughters were sent to Mōngke Qa'an. See below for their fate.

<sup>36</sup> Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, 2:155; Jūzjānī/Raverty, 2: 1112; See also, 'Aṭā-Malik al-Juwaynī, *The History of the World Conqueror*, tr. J. A. Boyle (rpt, Manchester, 1997), p. 13; hereafter: Juwaynī/Boyle.

<sup>37</sup> Song Zhizhen, p. 74; I. deRachewiltz "Yeh-lu Chu-tsai," in *In the Service of the Khan*, ed. I. deRachewiltz wt. al. (Wiesbaden, 1993), p. 154.

during the enormous campaigns.<sup>38</sup> According to Chinese sources, the assigned captives to each commander were often numbered in the thousands, thereby forcing the commander to establish specific administrative means for their management.<sup>39</sup>

The journey was harsh: The Armenian historian Kirakos, taken captive in 1236, describes the miserable way in which the Armenian prisoners were made to walk barefooted, supervised by Iranian Muslims, who flogged those who could not meet the pace.<sup>40</sup> In other cases, prisoners were marched around naked,<sup>41</sup> and sometimes they suffered even more severe humiliation: In 1300, a Damascene qadi captured during Ghazan's invasion was paraded through the city naked, bare-headed, and with a bridle attached to his neck.<sup>42</sup> The inhumane character of the captives' treatment is stressed especially in European sources, which concluded that the Mongols treated their captives as "beasts of burden." This refers not only to their travel conditions but also to their fate at their destination, where they had to work hard, and were "flogged like donkeys" if they did not obey their master's command.<sup>43</sup> Receiving minimal food and clothing even in the harsh winter, women sometimes working "naked and hungry," some were reduced to thieving while others perished in the harsh conditions.<sup>44</sup> Later, at least in the Ilkhanate's urban areas, the fate of the

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<sup>38</sup> E.g. YS, 119/2936-7; 149/3525 ; and see Meng, Siming 蒙思明. *Yuandai shehui jiejizhi zhidu* 元代社會階級制度 (The Class System in Yuan Society) (rpt. Shanghai, 2005), pp. 151-2 for further examples.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. YS, 118/2915; 128/3134.

<sup>40</sup> Kirakos, pp. 196, 210-13; also Plano Carpini, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Black and Frye, p. 305.

<sup>42</sup> Dhahabī, 60:86.

<sup>43</sup> Plano Carpini, pp. 42-43; Matthew Paris, 4:76-77, cited in Baraz, p. 98.

<sup>44</sup> Plano Carpini, pp. 42-43; Rubruck, pp. 84, 102, 213, 215; Gregory G. Guzman, "European Captives And Craftsmen Among The Mongols, 1231–1255," *The Historian* 72 (2010), pp. 122 - 150, esp. 136.

captives seems to have been more favorable: Some were able to acquire a basic education – study Qur'an and Ḥadīth – in captivity,<sup>45</sup> while others, like Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, the Baghdadi historian captured in 1258, enjoyed a certain freedom of movement, being sent on various missions and meeting different people during his short stay in captivity.<sup>46</sup>

Treatment varied according to the captives' status and skills: Noble or high-ranking prisoners – princes, generals, diplomatic envoys – who had political or economic value (or both), were treated with respect and kept in much better conditions.<sup>47</sup> In cases of prolonged captivity, such captives often functioned as their captor's

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companions and councilors, so much so that sometimes they were even questioned about their behavior after returning to their homelands.<sup>48</sup>

But even lesser - but talented - captives could have a somewhat better lot: While "regular" captives were taken as individuals, more valuable captives, such as artisans or scribes, were often taken – and later transferred – with their families,<sup>49</sup> or allowed to marry and have children in their new location. While in principle they and their children remained slaves, they earned money for their work, enjoyed a certain freedom of movement and proximity to the Mongol elite.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for example, the

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<sup>45</sup> Dhahabī, 61:100; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 2:150, 5:107.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 3:400; 4:242.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Dhahabī, 60:119-20; Black and Frye, p. 369; YS, 118/2925.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. YS, 126/3083; 153/3619.

<sup>49</sup> Rubruck, pp. 182-3; Plano Carpini, pp. 42-3.

<sup>50</sup> Rubruck, pp. 182-3; Dhahabi, 60:119-20.

woman from Metz who hosted William of Rubruck near Qaraqorum in the mid-1250s had been captured in Hungary ca. 1241 and suffered "unheard-of destitution." But when Rubruck met her, she was employed in the household of the Khan's Christian wife, was married to a young Russian artisan with whom she had three boys, and was "well enough off."<sup>51</sup> The famous French goldsmith William Buchier, who also had a family in Qaraqorum, received generous payment and high esteem for the metal toys he built for Möngke.<sup>52</sup> In Kirakos's case, the Mongols, impressed by his scribal skills, suggested to fetch his wife for him, if he had any, or offered to confer upon him one of their own. He was also given a tent, a servant, and was promised a horse, and treatment like that of "one of the grandees."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the importance of talent in determining a captive's lot is apparent from the stories of several domestic slaves who managed to change their fate through their qualifications: Thus Fatima, a captive from Mashhad, Iran, sold at Qaraqorum's slave market, managed, due to her cleverness, to become a close advisor to Töreğena, Ögödei's wife, who served as regent in 1241-45. Many princes and commanders came to consult her. All her wit and connections, however, proved futile when her patroness died, and she was executed for sorcery soon afterwards.<sup>54</sup> More picturesque is the story of Chinggis Khan's Tangut general, Buda:

When he was thirteen years old he was taken captive from Tangqut, and then he herded cows in the *ordu*. One day while hawking, Genghis Khan saw him

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<sup>51</sup> Rubruck, pp. 182-3.

<sup>52</sup> Rubruck, pp. 45, 46, 48, 49, 183, 185, 192, 203, 209-10, 215, 217-19, 223-4, 245-6, 252-3; Guzman, 143-4.

<sup>53</sup> Kirakos, p. 214. He prefers to run away though. see below.

<sup>54</sup> Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, 1:200-201; Juwaynī/Boyle, 244-6; Rashīd/Karīmī, 1:564-6; Rashīd/Thackston, 2:390-1.

put his hat on the end of a stick, stand before it, and offer it a cup. Genghis

Khan asked him, “What are you doing, and what is this?”

“I am a boy who was taken captive from the Tangqut,” he replied. “I get bored from being alone, so I put my hat on the end of a stick and say, ‘Of

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us two one is bigger, and it is better for me to serve the hat, [which is a sign] of greatness.’ ”

Genghis Khan liked this reply, and since he saw in him signs of competence and maturity, he took him to his great *ordu* and to Börte Fūjin [Chinggis' wife], where he was given work preparing food in the kitchen. Since his ascendant was favorable, he gradually rose to the rank of commander of a hundred, and thereafter he became an officer of the personal regiment. During Ögödei Qa'an's time, when all the realm of Cathay had been subdued and rendered submissive, that region and all the soldiers there were turned over to him.<sup>55</sup>

While Buda's position in Ogodei's reign seems overstated,<sup>56</sup> his advancement from a captive herder to a commander of the Khan's personal troops is certainly meteoric.

Especially skilled captives – those who had already made a name for themselves – could even skip the stage of captivity altogether, and be recruited immediately to the conqueror's ranks through the mediation of the military commanders. Thus in 1235, during an early invasion of Song De'an (Hubei), Ogodei appointed special commanders to recruit scribes, Buddhists, physicians, brewers, artisans and musicians from among the captives for service at court. The most famous

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<sup>55</sup> Rashīd/Karīmi, 1:104-5; Rashīd/Thackston, 1:74.

<sup>56</sup> I was unable to identify him in the Chinese sources nor is he mentioned in Rashīd al-Dīn's chapter on Ögödei.

recruit was Zhao Fu (fl. 1235-57), an outstanding neo-Confucian, who was recognized by the Chinese commanders Yao Shu and Yang Weizhong. Broken by the loss of his family, he agreed to go north only after Yao Shu saved him from suicide. In Beijing he won great fame and became "the apostle of Neo Confucianism in China." Another recruit, the scholar-physician Dou Mu, became an eminent adviser of Qubilai.<sup>57</sup> A similar fate, on the Ilkhanid front, was that of Falak al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sayf al-Dīn Aydamir al-Musta`ṣimī (1240-1310), a commander and scribe (*amīr kātib*) of the last Abbasid caliph who excelled in calligraphy, *belles-lettres* and horsemanship, and was famed for his beauty. The Georgian king who fought with Hülegü in Baghdad captured this valuable person and brought him to the Khan, who appointed him as "the supervisor (*shihna*) of the wise men (*ḥukama'*) who found refuge in his court and were dealing with chemistry."<sup>58</sup> The same preferential treatment was given to the famous calligrapher, Yāqūt Musta`ṣimī, in the same campaign.<sup>59</sup> The fate of many military units that surrendered to the Mongols and were incorporated into

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their troops can be seen as a variant of such preferred treatment, in a much larger scope.

The Mongols' crave for talents meant that captives who acquired skills appreciated by the Mongols during their captivity had a chance to improve their

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<sup>57</sup> YS, 146/3467; 158/3711; 189/4313-5; H.L. Chan, "Yang Weizhong," in *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 187-8; H.L. Chan, "Tou Mo," in *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 407-15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 3:281.

<sup>59</sup> On Yāqūt see e.g., Sheila R. Canby, "Yāqūt al-Musta`ṣimī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/yakut-al-mustasimi-SIM\\_7972s](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/yakut-al-mustasimi-SIM_7972s)

condition: As shown by Allsen<sup>60</sup>, learning the Mongol language and script was a good investment. Many captives had a "working knowledge" of their captors' language,<sup>61</sup> but excellent linguistics fared better: Thus Zhang Hui, captured in Sichuan in the 1250s, studied "the languages of all states" in captivity. He was therefore recommended to Qubilai, even before the latter's accession, and eventually pursued an illustrious career in Qublai's army and administration, moving freely between "men of the pen" and "men of the sword."<sup>62</sup> Kirakos' ability to impress his captors was also connected to his linguistic abilities- he devoted a full chapter in his history to Mongol vocabulary; and additional examples exist,<sup>63</sup> enough to justify Juwaynī's famous assertion that any nobody who knows the Uighur script could rise to prominence.<sup>64</sup>

Other captives turned to another favorite field of the Mongols – astronomy, though this was probably due to the identity of their captor. Thus Amīd al-Dīn al-Baghdādī (d. 1294), was captured at a young age during the conquest of Baghdad. He was attached to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (who might have chosen him because of his eminent family), and studied astronomy with al-Ṭūsī in Marāgha. Probably through al-Ṭūsī's recommendation he went to serve the Ilkhan Abaqa. The latter "honored him, made his life comfortable and even dressed him with his own clothes."<sup>65</sup> Sheikh `Abd al-Rahmān, also captured in Baghdad in 1258, who later converted the Ilkhan Teguder (r. 1282-84), also used his years in bondage to improve his scientific skills,

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<sup>60</sup> T. T. Allsen, "The *Rasulid Hexaglot* in its Eurasian Cultural Context," in P. B. Golden, ed., *The King's Dictionary: The Rasulid Hexaglot – Fourteenth Century Vocabularies in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian and Mongol* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 25-49.

<sup>61</sup> Guzman, pp. 145-6.

<sup>62</sup> YS, 167/3923-4.

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 3:475; 4:366.

<sup>64</sup> Juwaynī/Qazwīnī, 1:4-5; Juwaynī/Boyle, 7-8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 2: 222.

especially in chemistry. He was therefore able to perform impressive tricks that the Mongols viewed as miracles, and which greatly enhanced his position in the Ilkhanid court.<sup>66</sup>

Other captives turned to trade during or after their period of captivity: Thus Maḥfūz b. Ma`tūq al-Buzurī (d. 1294-5) used the connections and skills acquired during his captivity at "the land of the Turks" (probably Central Asia) after 1258 for building a trading career that took him from Damascus to China.<sup>67</sup> And the future

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sheikh Ḥasan Bulghārī, captured in Azerbaijan in the 1230s, became – after three years of herding – his captor's *ortaq*,<sup>68</sup> running a successful trading business among the Mongol camps and in nearby Tabriz, where he received his formal Sufi education. He did not forget to reward his fellow captives from the fruits of his new wealth.<sup>69</sup> It seems that the ability of both `Abd al-Raḥmān and Bulghārī to win followers among the Mongol nobility and rank and file must have been facilitated by their close, continuous and direct acquaintances with the Mongols during their confinement. Captivity was therefore also a channel of acculturation.

### **How Did Captivity End?**

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<sup>66</sup> al-*Ḥawādith*, p. 467 (the only source referring explicitly to his captivity); Dhahabī, 59:146-9; Rashīd/Karīmī, 2:787-8; Rashīd/Thackston, 3:546.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 1:288,4:245; Dhahabī, 60:231-2; `Alam al-Dīn al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafā` alā kitāb al-rawḍatayn al-ma`rūf bi-ta`rīkh al-birzālī*, ed. `U. `A. Tadmūrī (Beirut, 2006), 2:382-3; Rāfi`al-Sulāmī, *Muntakhab al-mukhtār* (Beirut, 2000), pp. 133-134.

<sup>68</sup> *Ortaq*, literally partner, is a merchant trading with his patron's capital for a certain amount of the profits. See T. T. Allsen, "Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners 1200-1260," *Asia Major*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 2 (1989), pp. 83-126.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn Karbalā`ī, pp. 131-2.



It is hard to say how long people were kept in captivity. In the fourteenth-century Middle East, captivity periods are often glossed over with the phrase "he spent a while in the Mongols' captivity"<sup>70</sup> and with the person's biography then continuing, thereby suggesting that it did not last long (nor was too traumatic). When we have more accurate data, the period varies from several months to twenty-eight years,<sup>71</sup> and in cases of, for example, transferred artisans, the line dividing captivity from freedom is not always clear-cut. This is also due to the different ways of terminating captivity.

Apart from death, captivity could end in escape, redemption, or release. While descriptions of escape vary according to time and place, several things are common: First, the fugitives knew they were risking death if caught; second, the Mongols did not always bother to search for long for escaping captives, probably because they had so many. Therefore, quite a few took the chance, especially when the Mongol force was about to depart, and the captives were supposed to follow it.<sup>72</sup> The most personal description of escape that I found is that of Master Roger (d. 1266), a Hungarian clerk who escaped in 1241 on the border between Cumania and Hungary, after spending nearly a year in Tatar captivity, and before the Tatars began their march back home:

As I had no hope of survival, and a bitter and cruel death was already waiting at the door, I thought it were better to die here than to be tortured by the steady stings [of fear]. Therefore, I left the highway as if following the call of nature, and rushed towards the dense forest with my only servant and hid in the hollow of a creek, covering

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<sup>70</sup> E.g. Ibn Ḥajar, 2:358, 361; 3:52, 446; 4:137.

<sup>71</sup> E.g., YS, 126/3083 (28 years); YS, 153/3619 (7 years); Yuan Jue, 34/512-14 (8 years); Ibn Karbalāʾī, 1:131-7 (7 years). Roger and Kirakos were each held for about a year before escaping; Ibn al-Fuwaʾī for two years, which seems a rather common time frame.

<sup>72</sup> See the examples below; also Song Ziren, p. 173.

myself with leaves and branches. My servant hid farther away, so that the chance detection of the one should not cause the unhappy capture of the other. We lay thus for two full days, as in graves, not raising our heads and heard the terrible voices of those who, following the footprints of erring beasts, passed close by in the forest and often shouted after the prisoners who were in hiding. And when we could no more repress in the deep silence of our hearts the very just demands of hunger and the troubling desire for food in the closed silence of our hearts, we lifted our heads and began to crawl like snakes, using legs and arms.<sup>73</sup>

The two remained fugitives for quite a while, slowly making their way back through desolate Hungary, experiencing various hardships. Eventually, however, Roger managed to return to the church, and was even appointed as archbishop of Split, in Dalmatia. His ordeal had a happy end.<sup>74</sup> Kirakos also reports that escape became more common when the Tatars were about to leave Armenia and return to Mongolia and did not stop even after two fugitive priests were caught and executed in front of their followers.<sup>75</sup> He gives no details of his own escape, though, vaguely suggesting that he was helped by a miraculous cross.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Master Roger, p. 221.

<sup>74</sup> On Roger's biography see the introduction in *Master Roger*, pp. XLI-LIII.

<sup>75</sup> Kirakos, p. 214.

<sup>76</sup> Kirakos, pp. 213-14.

At least one hagiographic story ascribed a Safadi sheikh's ability to flee from the Tatars in the 1260s – after releasing his peers – to divine help.<sup>77</sup> Yet a later escape story that took place in Tabriz around 1300 is of a more mundane character: The Damascene *qadi* Ibn al-Qalānisī, captured during Ghazan's invasion of Syria in 1300, escaped after two years, encouraged by the successful flight of his friend. The *qadi* escaped disguised as a dervish (*faqīr*). He changed his name – calling himself Yūsuf – as well as his attire and way of speaking. The Mongols looked for him and announcements were made to find him, but he hid for two months in Tabriz and when the search for him relaxed, made his way back to the Mamluk sultanate, where he was enthusiastically received.<sup>78</sup> The difference between Roger's escape story to Ibn al-Qalānisī's reflects the changing context of the Mongolian commanders who moved from the Steppe to a more urban setting. Other escapes are reported more laconically.<sup>79</sup> In China, escape of bond servants, some of them former captives, was a widespread phenomenon, especially towards mid-late Yuan, and contributed much to the social unrest.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥman al-'Uthmānī, *Ta'rikh Ṣafad* (Damascus, 2009), pp. 157-8.

<sup>78</sup> Dhahabī, 61:320-321; Birzālī, 3:174.

<sup>79</sup> E. G. YS, 158/3728-9; Rashīd/Thackston, p. 430; Ibn al-Athīr, 12:380; S. A. Zenkovsky and B. J. Zennkovsky, *The Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 3 (Princeton, N. J. 1984), vol. 3:34-5; Ibn Rāfi' al-Sulāmī, *al-Wafayāt* (Beirut, 1982), 1:171.

<sup>80</sup> Li Gan and Zhou Zhizheng, 李幹,周祉征, Yuandai nubei shenguo 元代奴婢探讨 (On Yuan Bondservants), *Heilongjiang minzu congkan* 黑龙江民族丛刊, 1990/4, pp.47-52; F. W. Mote, "Chinese Society under the Yuan," in *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 6: *Alien Regimes and Border States 907–1368*, ed. H. Franke and D. Twitchett (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 661-4.

**Redemption:** Another way of ending captivity was redemption, usually involving ransom. Redemption was a private matter: Captives could redeem themselves if they had enough money – and the Mongols even suggested it on certain occasions<sup>81</sup> – but they were mostly redeemed by their kin, usually fathers or brothers, who often had to go to the enemy's territory for this. This was more feasible when the journey was from Damascus to Baghdad, not from Hungary to Mongolia, but was still a dangerous course.<sup>82</sup> Local citizens were sometimes able to redeem their fellow townsmen – and if the price was low also those of neighboring cities.<sup>83</sup> Mongol officials – Muslim or Chinese – as well as local dignitaries (Sheikhs, local rulers, scholars) and non-Mongol generals often redeemed captives of similar religion or ethnic origin, who arrived at their towns. This was sometimes done due to the moral or religious value of the act,<sup>84</sup> but also on the basis of lineage or talent: Thus, the daughters of the last Abbasid Caliph, who were sent by Hülegü to Möngke, were both redeemed by Muslim sheiks: Fāṭima was bought in Bukhara by Sayf al-Dīn al-Bākharzī, famous for converting Berke, Khan of the Golden Horde, but died in his house soon afterwards in 1259. Her sister Khadīja was released in "Turkestan," allegedly after she had reached Möngke, by the efforts of a certain Shams al-Dīn al-Khālīdī, probably a Mongol courtier, who married her to his son.<sup>85</sup> Famous preachers, pious sheikhs and Confucian scholars

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<sup>81</sup> al-*Hawādith*, p. 228; Kirakos, p. 214.

<sup>82</sup> e.g. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 1:105; Ibn Ḥajar, 3:311, 4:55-6; al-Safadī, *A 'yān al- 'aṣr wa-a 'wān al-naṣr*, eds. A. Abū Zayd et al (Beirut and Damascus), 4:275; Dhahabī, 60:426, 485 (in both cases the redeemer died before reaching his destination).

<sup>83</sup> Qāshānī, p. 71; Dhahabī, 56:53; YS, 210/4656-7.

<sup>84</sup> E.g., Dhahabī, 60:93; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 4:263; Birzālī, 3:158; YS, 119/2932; 131/3191.

<sup>85</sup> Dhahabī, 56:352; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 1:388-9; 5:112; The happy couple returned to Baghdad with Abaqā's blessing in 1272 and lived there for the rest of their life, the husband employed as a librarian in al-

were redeemed by members of local elites.<sup>86</sup> Former captives who considerably improved their position were very active in redeeming newer captives.<sup>87</sup>

In two recorded cases redemption occurred – or was planned – as an exchange of prisoners: the Qa'an's son-in-law who fell into the hands of the Chaghdadids in 1298 was supposed to be exchanged for a son-in-law of Du'a, the reigning Chaghdadid Khan (r. 1282-1307), but Yuan's son-in-law died before the deal materialized.<sup>88</sup> The Mamluk Sultan Baybars, however, managed to implement a more complicated transaction, in which he exchanged the Armenian prince he had captured

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for his old friend Qara Sunqur, who was held in the Ilkhanate by the Armenians' overlords.<sup>89</sup>

The price of captives varied considerably: it was most expensive during the actual battle – the tutor of the Abbasid caliph's sons paid 10,000 dinars for his head during the conquest of Baghdad to redeem himself, and Russian princes also paid considerable sums.<sup>90</sup> When the battle ended, and there was a huge supply of captives, prices went down – thus in 1299 Damascus captives were redeemed for a few dirhams, and after the Yuan invasion of Burma in 1277, the price of a hat or boots sufficed.<sup>91</sup>

Several other prices are mentioned, but there is no trace of the institutionalized formal

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Mustanşiriyya college. Cf. Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī, 2: 198-9; Jūzjānī/Raverty, 2:1258 (perhaps referring to the third daughter, Maryam).

<sup>86</sup> e.g. Amīr Iqbāl Sistānī, *Chihil majlis-i Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī* (Tehran, 1957), pp. 130-31; Dhahabī, 61:210; YS, 167/3914.

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Karbalā'ī, p. 132; YS, 167/3923-4.

<sup>88</sup> YS, 118/2925; Rashīd/Karīmī, 2:724; Rashīd/ Thackston, 2:462-3.

<sup>89</sup> Black and Frye, p. 369; Baybars al-Manşūrī, p. 115; Dhahabī, 60:119-20.

<sup>90</sup> Şafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 13:29.

<sup>91</sup> Dhahabī, 56:53; YS, 210/4656-7.

system of ransoming, with fixed prices and negotiation patterns, that existed, for example, among the Crusaders or in fifteenth-eighteenth century Crimea.<sup>92</sup> The Mongols simply had too many captives to bother about such nuances. Moreover, the religious aspect of the ransoming, so central in the Crimean or Crusader case, was also much less emphasized: Conversion was not a means of ending captivity. Before the Mongol embraced Islam, the issue was irrelevant, and apparently Islamization did not deter neither Ghazan nor the Muslim Chaghdadid prince Yasawur (d. 1320) from capturing fellow Muslims.

**Release** seems to have been the most common way of ending captivity. Initiated by the captor, it might result from a gesture of good will – either at the imperial level, e.g. when Möngke Qa'an freed captives and prisoners to celebrate his accession in 1251<sup>93</sup> – or at a very local and personal level: Thus during the Mongol conquest of Baghdad a Khwārizmian soldier in Hülegü's troops searched among the captives for relatives of the late Amir Qushtemur. The latter, the commander of the Abbasid troops in earlier skirmishes against the Mongols, had helped the soldier's father. When a grandson of Qushtemur identified himself, the Khwārizmī immediately released him.<sup>94</sup> In general, the commander on the field had the authority to release captives on the spot, and his

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<sup>92</sup> On Crimea see M. Ivanics, "Enslavement, slave labour and treatment of captives in the Crimean Khanate," in *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders, Early Fifteenth – Early Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. G. Dávid and P. Fodor (Leiden, 2007), pp. 193-219.

<sup>93</sup>YS, 3/16; Rashīd/Karīmī, 1:597; Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism*, p. 82.

<sup>94</sup> *al-Hawādith*, p. 134. For other examples of local/personal release see, e.g. Dhahabī, 60:93; Ibn al-Fuwatī, 1:288.

retinue often urged him for this.<sup>95</sup> Release could also result from a successful plea of the conquered population to the invading Khan.<sup>96</sup>

In China, from Ogödei's time onward, captives were released more formally by edict of the Qa'an or of a prince, which turned the captives (e.g. transferred people assigned to officials and princes or bond servant in general) into regular citizens

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(*min* 民, *liangmin* 良民). Sometimes only educated captives – Confucian scholars or former officials – were eligible for this preferred status.<sup>97</sup> In addition, when the captor died, his captives, while theoretically inherited by his/her heir, could be released.<sup>98</sup> In various other cases, however, the line differentiating captives and freemen was rather blurred, especially in the cases of valuable captives who advanced due to their skills.

Many of the released captives are recorded as returning to their homes and pursuing impressive careers,<sup>99</sup> thus captivity was not necessarily a "social death" nor an irremovable stain.

## **Conclusion**

Captives were among the largest human groups to be herded up by the Mongols. Not surprisingly, then, their fate is reflective of Mongol warfare and society: cruel, large-

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<sup>95</sup> E.g. YS 119/2932-3; 131/3191.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. Baybars al-Manṣūrī, 158; Rashīd/Thackston, 2:442.

<sup>97</sup> E.g., YS, 2/ 37, 4/69, 6/108, 8/149; 115/2891; Confucian scholars tried to assert that scholars would not be enslaved like regular captives, but it did not always work. (e.g., YS, 126/3085); When Yelü Chuc'ai organized the imperial exams in 1237 he allowed captured scholars to take part in it. Those who passed- about one out of every four scholars- were released (YS, 146/3461).

<sup>98</sup> Rashīd/Thackston, 2:442; cf. Rubruck, pp. 223-4.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Ibn Ḥajar, 2:358, 361; Birzālī, 4:456-7; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, 4:60.

scale, pragmatic, and meritocratic. Just as the Mongols swiftly rose from obscure steppe nomads to stand at the helm of the largest continental empire in the annals of the Earth, so too their captives could lose their entire world in one fell swoop. Legions of people were expelled from their conquered homelands and would spend the rest of their lives- or at least part of it- in captivity. That said, a much smaller yet significant cohort of these hostages transformed themselves from lowly shepherds or servants to, say, close advisers of the Mongol leadership and important generals and scholars. The importance of lineage and wealth notwithstanding, desirable skills that were acquired either before or during subjugation, as well as personal connections with the masters, were the key to social advancement.

These stories also betray the importance that the Mongols placed on the institution of marriage and family. Thus “valuable” prisoners were either transferred with their kin or were permitted and/or encouraged to marry while in bondage, thereby enabling them to retain their identity under the new circumstances.

Redemption was by and large a personal matter. Subjects can gain their freedom by escaping on their own, or via ransoms that were arranged by kith or kin. Talent and status also increased the chances for emancipation, and the personal preferences of the commander on the field were also important. In China, imperial edicts were a more formal channel for releasing captives.

Although ransoming was systematized in the Middle East and Western Europe well before the Mongols swept in, the empire eschewed this route because this policy was incompatible with its truculent style of warfare, far-flung borders, and profusion

of captives. From the fifteenth century onward, though, the Crimean Tatars—successors of the Golden Horde—played a major role in an established repatriation



mechanism that encompassed Muscovy, Poland, Hungary, and the Ottomans. This turn of events epitomized the changes that the Mongols had undergone since the days of Chinggis Khan. More specifically, the days of the United Empire's monumental campaigns, in the aftermath of which hosts of prisoners were transported across the vast steppes, were over, and the Khanates' period was informed by more urban seats of government.

What is more, the often long and protracted relations between Mongols and their wide array of captives triggered a considerable amount of mutual acculturation. Quite a few captives became proficient in their captors' language and etiquette. In turn, these expatriates used these proficiencies to interest the Mongols in their own native cultures, not least Islam or Confucianism.