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The Mental Maps of Mongol Central Asia as Seen from the Mamluk Sultanate*

Michal Biran

This paper deals with mental maps of Mongol Central Asia as they were conceived in the Mamluk Sultanate. That is, it looks at the subjective spatial image of Central Asia under Mongol rule as viewed from Egypt and Syria in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and presents this from two distinct perspectives: a biographical-scholarly perspective and a geographical perspective.

Mental maps are maps of the environment within people's minds, the perceptions and images people have about places, be they places within their own immediate environment or more remote ones.¹ By making a list of the places mentioned in Mamluk sources – biographical dictionaries, geographies and encyclopedias – and marking them on real maps, I hope to explore the perceptions that shaped the mental maps of scholars from the Mamluk Sultanate regarding Mongol Central Asia, as well as the historical value of this information for the study of this sparsely documented region.

The first part of this study reconstructs the scholarly map of Mongol Central Asia as viewed in the biographical literature of the Mamluk Sultanate: it highlights the places in Central Asia that were known for their scholarly input and compares this mental map with the picture we get from the Khanate's few indigenous sources. The second part reviews the geographical knowledge on Mongol Central Asia appearing in Mamluk geographies and encyclopedias, and compares these two prisms.

Mongol Central Asia is defined in this paper as the region stretching roughly from the river Oxus to Uighuria, from the conquest of the region by Chinggis Khan in 1220 to the rise of Tamerlane in the western part of the region in 1370. For the duration of this period, this

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1 Gould / White 1974; Tuan 1975, 209–211.

area is usually referred to as the Chaghadaid Khanate, after the descendants of Chinggis Khan's second son, Chaghadaï, who ruled it during most of this era.²

1 The Scholarly Perspective

My first map portrays the spatial distribution of the scholarly community of Mongol Central Asia: it is based on the ample biographical literature of the Mamluk Sultanate, generally famous for its unmatched scholarly productivity. My main sources are the well-known Mamluk biographical dictionaries, notably the works of al-Birzālī (d. 1339), al-Dhahabī (d. 1349), al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363), Ibn Rāfi' (d. 1372–1373), Ibn Ḥajr (d. 1447), al-Qurashī (d. 1373), Ibn al-Taghribirdī (d. 1470) and al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497).³

In all, I collected references to ca. 70 scholars who were active in Mongol Central Asia and were recorded in the Mamluk sources. The survey includes both people who lived in Central Asia and those who had started their careers there and later migrated to other regions.⁴ It does not include, however, people who bore Central Asian *nisbas* (an adjective indicating the person's place of origin), like al-Bukhārī or al-Samarqandī, who were born in the Mamluk Sultanate, or who were employed in Ilkhanid Iran. The resulting survey appears on Map 1.

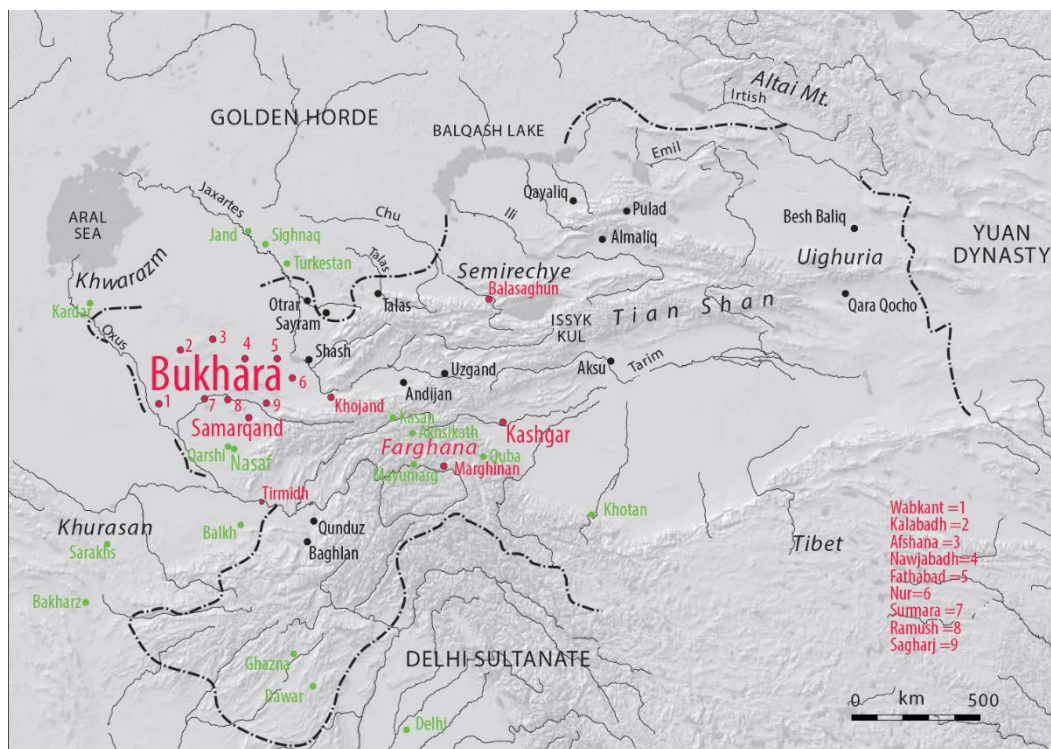
This map shows, quite obviously, that the main center of scholarly activity in Mongol Central Asia according to the Mamluk sources was Bukhārā: more than half of the people in my survey were active in this city. Other centers known to the Mamluks were Samarqand, Khojand, Tirmidh, the various cities of the Farghāna region, and Kāshgar. Nasaf was the birthplace of quite a few scholars, and the Jaxartes region, with Jand and Sighnāq as its centers, began to distinguish itself as a new stomping ground for scholars. People from outside the region who came to study and work there were mainly from Khurāsān, Khwārazm and—in the fourteenth century—also from India.⁵

2 For an introduction to the history of Mongol Central Asia and the Chaghadaid Khanate, see Biran 2009.

3 For all of these works, cf. the references.

4 E.g. Ibn al-Taghribirdī, 1: 164–170, 220, 238; al-Qurashī, 1: 196, 2: 94, 204, 225, 294, 490–491, 507, 585–588, 597, 641, 3: 55, 61, 74, 101, 102, 161–162, 230, 290, 318, 337, 341–343, 349, 350, 351, 453–456, 640; 4: 24, 147–148, 204, 210, 211, 310, 357, 369–370, 404; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 1: 282–283, 2: 268–269, 3: 254; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 4: 359; 5: 365; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23: 364–367; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, 54: 80–81; 56: 367, 58: 78, 116–117; 59: 97, 60: 78–79, 168–169, 490–491; 61: 213; al-Birzālī, 2: 366; 3: 129; al-Sakhāwī, 2: 194–195; Ibn Ḥajr, 1: 303, 2: 352, 360, 496; 3: 47, 124, 171, 185; 4: 26; Ibn Rāfi', 203–204, 213–215.

5 The scholarly community of Khurāsān was closely connected to Transoxania in the pre-Mongol period. See Ahmad 2000. The Mongols delivered a heavier blow to that area and, unlike Transoxania, they never



Map 1: The Scholarly Map of Mongol Central Asia as Viewed from the Mamluk Sultanate.

Samarqand, Tirmidh, Khojand, Marghinan, Kashgar, Farghana, Bukhara and all the places in its environs marked by numbers, are regions where scholarly activity is attested; the remaining names, colored green, are places from which the scholars originated (*nishā*), where they generally received their primary education.

Obviously, the scholarly community is not evenly distributed on the map: the eastern part of the khanate (the region known as Turkestan) does not exist on the Mamluk mental map, despite the fact that the khanate's main urban centers—Almaliq and Talas—were located there.⁶ Bukhārā, on the other hand, appears to be the undisputed center of scholarly activity, despite its marginality in relation to Chaghdaid politics. In spatial terms, Bukhārā's centrality is manifested by the numerous suburbs and neighborhoods in or near Bukhārā mentioned in the sources (and represented by the numbers on the map). Information about important cemeteries is also provided, as well as an occasional name of a mosque or college.⁷

bothered to rebuild it systematically. Khurāsānī scholars therefore had an incentive to relocate to Transoxania (or westward); for Delhi, see al-Qurashī, 4: 147, 210.

6 For the location of Almaliq and Talas in the Chaghdaid Khanate, see Biran 2013.

7 Bukhārā's suburbs include Afshana (see, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, 58: 78), Kalābādh (where there was also a famous cemetery; e.g. al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, 60: 490; Ibn Rāfi', 213–215), Nawjābādh (al-Dhahabī,

The accumulated biographical information enables us to partly reconstruct the learning community of Bukhārā across several generations, as well as to reconstruct the city's relations with the Mongols. For example, prominent teachers of the first generations of scholars in Mongol Central Asia included Ṣāhib al-Hidāya al-Marghīnānī (d. 1196); Qāḍī Khan (d. 1197), the Banū Māza, also known as the Burhān family, who led the city religiously and politically in the twelfth-early thirteenth century; and the al-Maḥbūbī family who succeeded them. Most of these scholars remained respected, and their work was studied throughout Mongol rule. While the Burhān family was eliminated—by local rebels not by the Mongols—in 1238,⁸ other families continued to lead the scholarly community well into the fourteenth century, and in some cases even afterwards. A good example is Ṣāhib al-Hidāya al-Marghīnānī, whose family took part in Mongol administration and held religious posts in Samarqand well into the Timurid period.⁹ Moreover, even in late fourteenth century Egypt, scholars of Central Asian origin retained the exact chain of transmissions that connected them to Ṣāhib al-Hidāya, thereby attesting to the prestige ascribed to the text and its author in the Mamluk sultanate.¹⁰

The luminaries of the second generation, who experienced the Mongol conquest in the 1220s and were active in the United Mongol Empire, included Abū Rashīd al-Ghazzāl al-Isfahānī (d. 1233/4),¹¹ Shams al-A'imā Kardārī (d. 1242), who attracted the largest amount of students,¹² and Sayf al-Dīn al-Bākharzī (d. 1261), the famous Kubrāwī sufi, who, however, was also a jurist and transmitter of prophetic tradition (*muhaddith*; student of al-Ghazzāl), whose family remained in Bukhārā for most of the period.¹³ In 1238 the Maḥbūbī family replaced the Banū Māza as Bukhārā's leading Ḥanafī family (Ṣadr al-Sharī'a), and its members are attested in the city up to the mid-fourteenth century.¹⁴

Ta'rikh, 61: 213), Wabkana/Wabkant (Ibn Rāfi', 203–204), Khudābādh (Ibn Rāfi', 203–204), Rāmūth (e.g. al-Qurashī, 2: 597), Nur (e.g. al-Qurashī 3: 349), Surmara (e.g. al-Qurashī, 2: 204), Sāraghj (e.g. al-Qurashī, 1: 223, 235), and Fathābād (e.g. al-Qurashī, 2: 225).

8 On the Burhān family, see Pritsak 1950. For the importance of these scholars and families in pre-Mongol Central Asia, see Biran 2005, 181–186.

9 Juwaynī / Boyle 1958, 1: 273–276; Subtelny / Khalidov 1995, esp. 219.

10 See, e.g., al-Sakhāwī, 2: 194–195; al-Qurashī, 2: 619, 4: 147, 4: 210; Ibn Rāfi', 50; Ibn Ḥajar, 2: 360.

11 See, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, 54: 80–81 (bio) and many references in his students' biographies, e.g. al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, 56: 387, 58: 116–117, 117–118; 60: 490–491; al-Birzālī, 2: 366; Ibn Rāfi', 213–215; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 5: 365.

12 See, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, 58: 116–117, 60: 168–169; al-Birzālī, 2: 366; Ibn Ḥajar, 2: 360; al-Qurashī, 2: 114–115.

13 On Bākharzī see, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23: 364–367; Algar, "Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī".

14 On the Maḥbūbīs see, e.g., al-Qurashī, 1: 196; 2: 94, 490, 492; 3: 74, 101, 102, 337, 464; 4: 310, 357, 404; Bosworth, "Ṣadr in Transoxania".

The brightest student of Kardārī and Maḥbūbī was Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Kabīr (d. 1294), whose family retained its prominence in the scholarly community up to the Timurid period.¹⁵ Information about the fourteenth century is sporadic, and it is not easy to identify any new intellectual leadership originating from outside those families mentioned above. Scholarly activity continued, but in the 1340s Bukhārā was marginalized, when compared with the learned community of Khwārazm in the Golden Horde.¹⁶ This is not surprising if we remember that the Golden Horde was by that time at its height under Özbek Khan (r. 1313–1341), while the Chaghadaid Khanate was experiencing another period of instability and succession struggles.¹⁷ Interestingly, Mamluk sources attest that by this time the tombs of thirteenth-century luminaries—Kardārī, Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn Kabīr, Bākharzī—had already become the subject of veneration and pilgrimage by scholars who reached the city.¹⁸

It is hard to evaluate the scholarly production in terms of both quality and quantity, but we have a long list of books that were authored by the contemporaneous Central Asian scholars in the fields of law, prophetic traditions, grammar, and Qurʾān exegesis.¹⁹ The funeral of one leading Bukhārī scholar attracted a crowd of 50,000 men in 1268.²⁰ In the following year, at Kashgār, 6,000 people accompanied an eminent scholar on his last journey.²¹ These numbers should not be taken at face value, of course, but they are indicative of the popularity of the scholars and perhaps also of the ratio between the learning circles in Bukhārā and those of Kashgār.

While this can give the impression of a productive academic environment, the Mongol period was not exactly a bed of roses for Bukhārā, and this is certainly also reflected in the Mamluk sources. They describe “the three disasters of Bukhārā:” the Mongol conquest of 1220, the Tarabī rebellion of 1238, and the Ilkhanid retaliation of 1273, following a Chaghadaid attempt to conquer Khurāsān.²² Recovery after the first two disasters seems to have been rather quick: Al-Dhahabī cites Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī as saying that he came to Bukhārā

15 On Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Kabīr, see, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrikh*, 60: 178–179; al-Birzālī, 2: 366; Subtelny 2001, esp. 80–81.

16 Al-Sakhāwī, 2: 194–195.

17 On Chaghadaid political history in that period, see Biran 2009, 58–60; on Özbek’s reign see, e.g., Vasary 2009, 78–79.

18 Al-Sakhāwī, 2: 194–195.

19 See, e.g., Ḥājji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 74, 146, 410, 417, 1246, 1395, 1515, 1634, 1640, 1749, 1799, 1803, 1823, 1849, 1871, 1997, 2033, 2034.

20 Al-Qurashī, 2: 597 (al-Ramūthī).

21 Al-Qurashī, 1: 147; Ibn Taghrībirdī, 1: 238 (Kamāl al-Dīn Muẓaffar, d. 667/1268).

22 For Bukhārā’s conquest and the Tarabī rebellion, see, e.g., Juwaynī/Boyle 1958, 1: 97–115; for the events of the 1270s, see Biran 2002.

soon after it was burned by the Mongols, when there was not one place to stay in the city. Gradually he assembled a crowd of followers and in 622/1225 read for them from the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the most distinguished canonical *ḥadīth* collection, after the reading of Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥbūbī (d. 630/1232–1233), a well-known local authority.²³ After Tarabī's rebellion, Bākhazī was instrumental in securing people from the avenging Mongols, due to the prestige he enjoyed among them.²⁴ The wealth that he soon amassed – including luxury items, slaves and *mamluks* (military slaves) – suggests that the region enjoyed a quick recovery, and the gifts he allegedly received from the last Abbasid Caliph, as well as from the rulers of Shīrāz, Mawṣil, Azerbaijan, Delhi and Sind, suggest that Bukhārā retained a certain amount of centrality.²⁵

The 1273 attack and its repercussions were harder to offset. They resulted in significant emigration from Bukhārā, and while Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Kabir, al-Maḥbūbī, and their students still led the city's academic circles, its importance declined. Some of the emigrants, however, found their way to the Ilkhanate, especially to the city of Baghdad, or the Mamluk Sultanate, where they became the main sources of information on their prior hometowns for the Mamluk writers. One notable example is provided in the person of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Fardī (1246–1300). He was a scholar and Sufi, born and raised in Bukhārā, where he received his education and later taught *ḥadīth*. After 1273, he settled in Baghdad and lived there for more than a decade, during which he also studied in Khurāsān and al-Jazīra. In the early 1280s, after the fall of the Juwaynī family, notable patrons of Baghdādī scholars, al-Fardī migrated to the Mamluk sultanate, dividing his time between Egypt and Syria. When the Ilkhan Ghāzān

23 Al-Dhahabī, *Sijar*, 23: 365. This biography is based on the *Sirat Bākhazī*, written by Sayf al-Dīn's disciple Minhāj al-Dīn al-Nasafī, who migrated to Baghdad following his master's death. It reached al-Dhahabī via Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, the Baghdādī biographer and historian, but is not included in the partial abridgement of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī's biographical dictionary that has reached us, and is unattested in other sources (or studies, as far as I can tell).

24 Bākhazī also retained close connections with the Mongols and won respect not only from Berke Khan, whose conversion he orchestrated, but also from Berke's brothers Batu and Berkechar, from Hulegu, who knew him as the *Uluḡ Sheikh* (Turkic: great sheikh) and from an (unidentified) brother of the Qa'an. The Mongols' administrators – Maḥmūd Yalawāch and his son Mas'ūd – were also among Bākhazī's admirers (al-Dhahabī, *Sijar*, 23: 364–365). From the Mamluk sources, we do not know of other scholars' connections to the Mongols. Yet, at least one scholar whom Sakhawī described in 1340s Bukhārā seemed to have been identical to Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Yāghī, whom Ibn Baṭṭūṭa described as one of the closer Muslim dignitaries to the Chaghadaid Khan Tarmashirin (r. 1331–1334) a few years earlier (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa / De-fremery / Sanguinetti, 3: 38; Gibb 1971, 3: 560), and the respect of the Chaghadaid sultans and kings for Bākhazī's grandson is recorded in Central Asian documents: al-Sakhāwī, 2: 195; Chekhovich 1965, 36; Biran 2002/2003.

25 Al-Dhahabī, *Sijar*, 23: 364–366.

attacked Syria in 1299, al-Fardī, worried about the high cost of living following the invasions, chose to join the Mongols. He moved back to Iraq, but died in Mardīn soon afterwards. In the Sultanate, al-Fardī befriended several prominent Mamluk historians, notably al-Dhahabī. Al-Fardī also wrote a dictionary of his teachers, which included 700 entries. He and his dictionary were by far the main source of Mamluk information on Transoxanian scholars.²⁶ Among the Baghdādī scholars, the famous historian and librarian Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1244–1323) became a prominent source of information for the Mamluks, and his famous biographical dictionary *Talkhīṣ majmaʿ al-ʿadāb fī muʿjam al-aqāb* was well known in the Sultanate.²⁷ Ibn al-Fuwaṭī's information often originated in the writings and sayings of Transoxanian immigrants who had settled in Baghdad.²⁸ Ilkhanid mediation played quite a considerable role in the availability of information on Central Asia and China in the Sultanate.

The Mamluks gave Bukhārā a primary place in Central Asian scholarship, but was this special position a historical fact or a premise shaped by Mamluk presuppositions? Bukhārā held a special position in the Mamluk mind due to its religious prestige, and, more specifically, its position as the hometown of al-Bukhārī (d. 256 / 870), the compiler of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the most famous canonical *ḥadīth* collection. This text was second only to the Qurʾān in its popularity in Mamluk Egypt, where numerous commentaries, abridgements, and studies of it were compiled.²⁹ The Mamluks were therefore more interested in Bukhārā in the first place, and presupposed its eminence. In addition, the presence of Bukharan migrants in the Sultanate assured them of having good sources of information about the place. Paradoxically, the emigration, which must have harmed Bukhārā's scholarly community, made Bukharan scholars – especially of the pre-migration generation – more visible in the Mamluk sources.

One way of validating the Mamluk information is by comparing it to the information from Central Asian sources themselves. Map 2 is based mainly on Jamāl Qarshī (d. ca. 1301), who wrote in Kāshgar, and a few contemporaneous Bukharan endowment (*waqf*) documents and compilations, as well as the fifteenth century *Kitāb-i mullaṣṣadab*, a Bukhārān

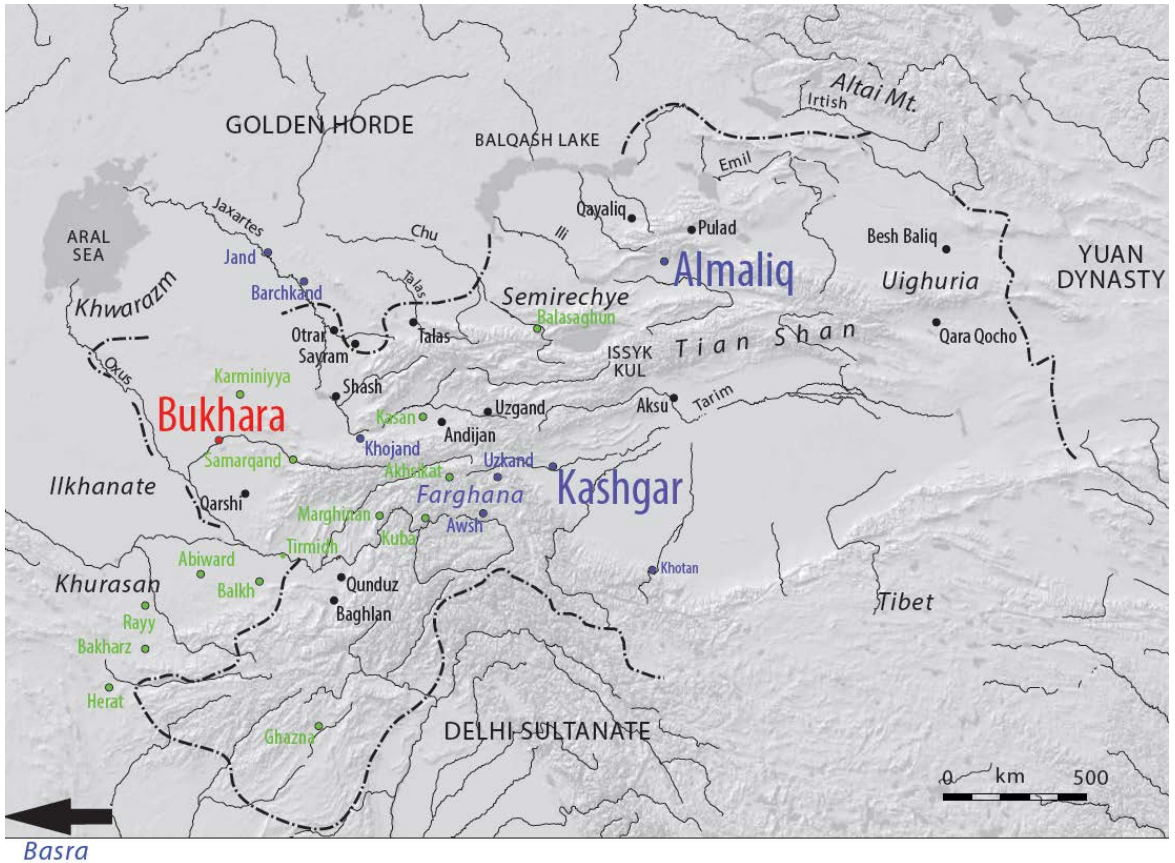
26 See, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, 60: 490; 58: 87, 116–117; 59: 97; 57: 86, 266; Ibn Rāfiʿ, 203; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, (Damascus ed.), 4.3: 451, 4.4: 844; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (Tehran ed.), 4: 531, 5: 102; al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyām*, 5: 365; 1: 171; al-Qurashī, 3: 453; Ibn Ḥajar, 5: 111.

27 On Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, see, e.g., Rosenthal, “Ibn al-Fuwaṭī”; Shabībī 1950; Deweese 2006, 11–29.

28 See, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Sijar*, 23: 364–367; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (Tehran ed.), 1: 72–73.

29 See, e.g., the ample references to the *Ṣaḥīḥ* in *al-Durar al-kāminā* by Ibn Ḥajar, who wrote a commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* – more than 70 mentions in the online edition! On the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, see, e.g., Melchert, “al-Bukhārī”.

tomb guide.³⁰ The list of scholars for this map is shorter than the one for the Mamluk map, of course with a certain overlap.³¹



Map 2: The Scholarly Map of Mongol Central Asia according to Central Asian Sources
Blue place names are mentioned by Qarshī; Bukhārā and Samarqand are taken from the other sources; all remaining names colored green represent *nisbas*.

The picture we get by consulting the local sources is different from that derived from the Mamluk ones: several scholarly centers distinguish themselves – Almaliq, which does not exist on the Mamluk map, as well as Kashgar and Khojand. In addition, the Jaxartes region is better represented here than on the Mamluk map. Bukhārā, which is not mentioned in Jamāl Qarshī's book, is well documented, mainly due to the later tomb guide and the other sources. The picture presented by local sources is that of several parallel centers of scholarship, not of

30 Jamāl Qarshī, *Al-Mulḥakāt bi'l-shurāḥ*, in Muminov 2005. On Qarshī see Jackson, "Djamāl Qarshī". For waqf documents, see Chekhovich 1965; Chekhovich 1979; Bākhārzi, *Anrād al-aḥbāb*, esp. 26–31; Muḥīn al-Fuqārā', *Kitāb-i Mullazādab*.

31 However, we should bear in mind that Qarshī often defined a city as a center of scholarship by enumerating only few specific names.

one dominant city as the Mamluk sources imply, and the eastern part of the Khanate is much better represented. In principle, the Mamluks seemed to have had a source of information about the scholars in the Khanate's eastern parts in the person of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, whose dictionary mentioned scholars from the region of Almaliq and Emil.³² Yet the Mamluks apparently chose not to include information on these lesser-known and newly Muslim regions.

This stress on the western part of the Khanate is attested also in the geographical sources.

2 The Geographical Space:

Mongol Central Asia in Mamluk Geographical Literature and Its Encyclopedias

While some of the geographers, encyclopedists, and historians of the Mamluk Sultanate produced maps that accompanied their works, these maps are not helpful for the study of Mongol Central Asia, as they made do with a few geographical names (mostly of regions, not cities, e. g. *Soghd*), when referring to this region.³³ In fact, the geographical works I checked are also not very illuminating: The short descriptions of Central Asia in the works of al-Dimashqī (d. ca. 1327) and Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1291 or 1457) mainly contain a list of names and a few traditions based on tenth-century information, giving no contemporaneous details and not even acknowledging the existence of the Mongols.³⁴

The situation is only slightly better in Abū al-Fidā's (1273–1331) *Taqwīm al-buldan* ("Survey of the Lands"). The book, compiled in Syria ca. 1321, is a descriptive geography supplemented by physical and mathematical data in tabular form, which became widely popular in the Mamluk Sultanate and beyond. Abū al-Fidā's work includes a chapter titled *The land of Ma Wara' al-Nahr and what had been added to it from the lands of Turkestan*, a region about which he said that its northern and eastern borders are unknown. After a general introduction, Abū al-Fidā brings a table of the main cities (beginning with Bukhārā), each with its coordinates, location, correct pronunciation, and a terse description. All his information is taken from earlier works, which he dutifully references. Abū al-Fidā's main sources in this chapter were Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 988), al-Bīrūnī (d. after 1050), and the anonymous tenth-century *Kitāb al-ʿAtmāl* ("Book of Longitudes").³⁵

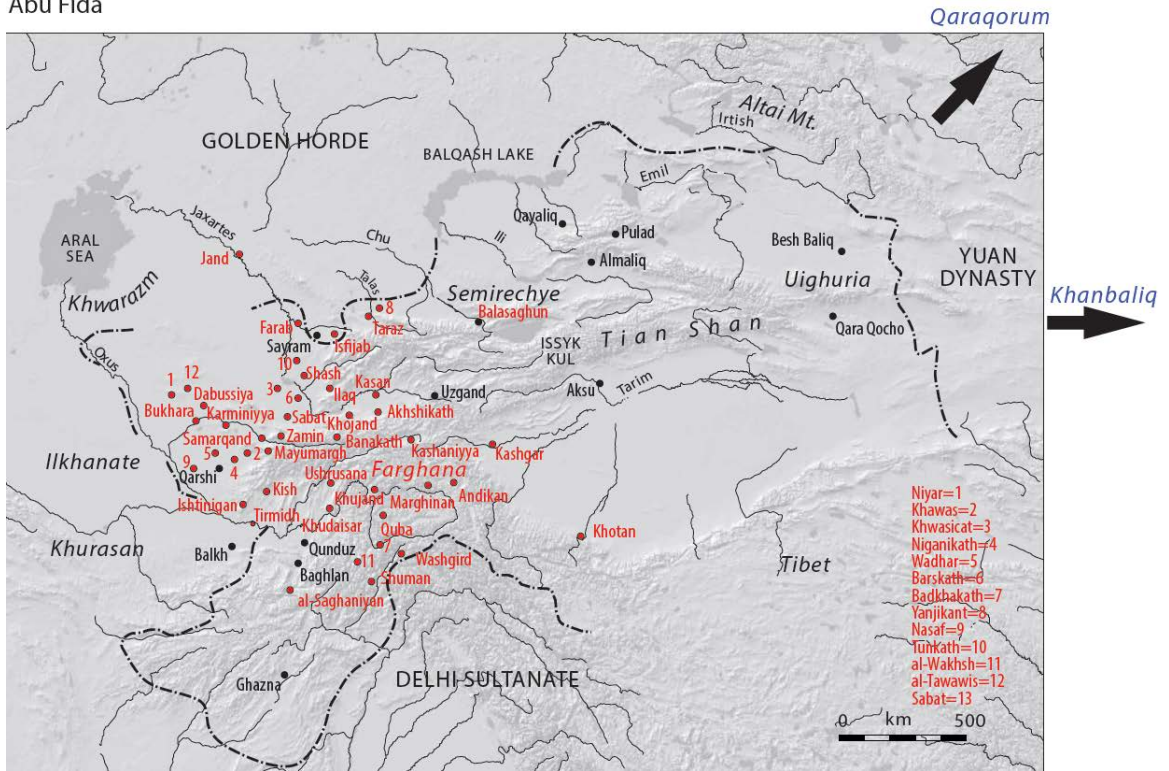
32 See, e. g., Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaʿ* (Tehran edition), 2: 285, 303–304.

33 For Mamluk maps, see Park 2012, 147–151 ('Umarī's map redrawn after the original on p. 149); Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib*, 481.

34 Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbāt al-dahr*, 221–223; Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib*, 125–128. On Ibn al-Wardī (whose book is ascribed to either a scholar of the late thirteenth century or to his grandson) see the book's introduction, 5–8; [EI2 eds.], "Ibn al-Wardī".

35 Abū al-Fidā, *Taqwīm al-buldan*, 483–555; idem, *Kitāb Taqwīm al-buldan*, 264–282. The western border of this region was Khwārazm, the southern Badakhshān.

Abu Fida



Map 3: Mongol Central Asia in Abū al-Fidā's *Geography* (ca. 1331)

Map 3 shows the places mentioned by Abū al-Fidā'. When compared with the scholarly map, it contains many more places, but all of them are located in the Khanate's western part. Moreover, the list of places is badly outdated: since Abū al-Fidā's main sources date from the tenth to the eleventh century, quite a few of the places mentioned were no longer of any importance in the period between the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries, and some had long ceased to exist by that time (e.g., Baykand).³⁶ At the end of this anachronistic list, however, Abū al-Fidā' mentions two contemporaneous cities: Khanbaliq, i.e. Dadu or Beijing, the capital of Yuan China, and Qaraqorum, the capital of the United Mongol Empire until 1260.³⁷ Both entries are based on the authority of Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī (d. 1286), a traveler from Andalusia who visited the East (al-Mashriq) from the mid to late thirteenth century, but never got further than Iran.³⁸ Khanbaliq, which is described as being located in the very far east in the land of Cathay, is portrayed as a huge city famous among merchants, which is

36 Baykand (Paykand) was an important trading center from the Arab conquest to the Samanid period. After the Samanids, it – like various other sites – fell into decay and al-Sam'ānī in the twelfth century found it already deserted and in ruins (Barthold 1968, 118–119).

37 Abū al-Fidā', *Taqwīm*, 555; idem, *Kutāb*, 276.

38 Pellat, "Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī".

populated by Chinese and contains silver mines. South of it are “the mountains of Balhara,³⁹ the king of the kings of India”.⁴⁰ Khanbaliq is not mentioned in Abū al-Fidā’s short description of China.⁴¹ Of Qaraqorum, he says that it is located at the extremity of the realm of the Eastern Turks. Its name means “the black sands”. It is the Tatars’ place of origin and their former capital, which is close to the land of the Mongols.⁴²

The inclusion of information on Khanbaliq and Qaraqorum in this part means that Abū al-Fidā’ acknowledged the Mongol presence in Central Asia, and that he saw this region – Turkestan – as stretching all the way up to the northern and eastern fringes of the world. Yet the exact location of the Mongol-period sites seems to be beyond his ken, as was any valuable information on Mongol Central Asia.

The picture is different in another Mamluk genre, which is closely connected to geography: encyclopedias. In fact, the two most informative Mamluk works about the Mongols belong to this genre. They are the *Nihāyat al-arab* by al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) and the *Masālik al-abṣār* by al-‘Umarī (d. 1348). But while al-Nuwayrī’s work gives very little information about Mongol Central Asia, al-‘Umarī’s is by far our most knowledgeable source.

Al-Nuwayrī dedicated ca. 120 pages to “the dynasty of Chinggis Khan” – *al-dawla al-jinkizkhāniyya* – in the fifth and major part of his encyclopedia, which deals with history.⁴³ However, like many modern writers, he devotes only very few pages to Mongol Central Asia. When he comes to the subject of “the rulers of Transoxania from the seed of Chinggis Khan,” al-Nuwayrī says: “We received no information about them due to the distance of their country [from our own] and the cutting of the [exchange of] messengers between us and them.”⁴⁴ However, in his description of Qaidu, Ögödei’s grandson who was the Chaghadaids’ overlord

39 Balhara, literally possessor of strength, was the title of the rulers of Sind from the eighth to the tenth century, whose capital was Balkh in present day Afghanistan or Manore in Rajasthan.

40 Abū al-Fidā’, *Taqwīm*, 555; idem, *Kitāb*, 276.

41 Abū al-Fidā’, *Kitāb*, 202–204, where Yanzhou is mentioned as “the place where their kings sit” (*maqḡar mulukihim*, 203). He mentioned that the people of *Kitāb al-masālik wal-mamālik* (a name of various geographical-administrative works) mentioned in their books many places in the region (*iqlīm*) of China, but “we cannot ascertain its exact names or places, and it remains unknown to us since there are no travelers from these regions that have come here to inform us about it. Yet those who come from this region have described Khanfu (= Khansa = Hangzhou) and Zaytun (Quanzhou)” (p. 202).

42 Abū al-Fidā’, *Kitāb*, 276; idem, *Taqwīm*, 555. The text suggests differentiation between Tatars and Mongols. It should be noted that Qaraqorum was not in the territory of the pre-Chinggis Tatar tribe.

43 Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 27: 300–420. The other parts of this encyclopedia deal with the universe, man, flora and fauna; the history is the longest (21 volumes out of the 31) and best-studied part of the work. The history of the Mongols is discussed together with that of the Khwārazm-Shāhs (Nuwayrī, 27: 197–420; see Chapoutot-Remadi, “al-Nuwayrī”; Muhanna 2012; Amitai 2001).

44 Al-Nuwayrī, 27: 376.

in the years 1271–1301, he mentions a few eastern places, such as Almaliq and Qayaliq, but gives no indication that he had any idea as to where they were located.⁴⁵

Al-ʿUmarī’s information is on a different scale: he is by far the best informed Mamluk author on Mongol Central Asia.⁴⁶ His long description – 116 pages in Lech’s edition – of “the kingdoms of Chinggis Khan’s family” (*mamālik bayt Jinkiz Khān*), part of a section titled “Chapter on the Kingdoms of Islam”,⁴⁷ is divided between two chapters: one dedicated to a general description of the Mongols and their United Empire, and the other dedicated to “the Two Turans” of the Mongol states, namely the Chaghadaids and the Golden Horde.⁴⁸ The general chapter begins with Chinggis Khan and includes a fairly accurate description of Chaghadaid genealogy.⁴⁹ The second one is part of al-ʿUmarī’s description of the Mongols’ successor states, comprised, according to al-ʿUmarī, of one Iran, two Turans (the Chaghadaid Khanate and the Golden Horde), and one Kingdom of the Great Khan, ruler of China and Cathay (*Mamlakat al-Khāqān, Ṣāhib al-takht, Ṣāhib Ṣin wa-Khatā*), which is sometimes also referred to as Turan.⁵⁰

45 Al-Nuwayrī, 27:336–337, 354–356, 376–378.

46 The whole third volume of ʿUmarī’s encyclopedia is devoted to the Chinggisids. This part has been edited, annotated, and translated to German by Klaus Lech. See al-ʿUmarī / Lech 1968; see also al-ʿUmarī (Beirut ed.), 3:89–185. ʿUmarī was famous in the Mamluk Sultanate as an expert on the Chinggisids.

31 The section is roughly arranged from east to west, starting with India and Sind, moving to the kingdoms of Chinggis Khan’s family (*mamālik bayt Jinkiz Khān*, including China), and then continuing westwards from Jīlān and Anatolia to Africa and Muslim Spain. He ends this part of the book (*al-mamālik*) with a section on the Arabs and where they were found in his day, and then moves to the extensive biographical part of the book (on those who dwell on earth). Transoxania is also succinctly mentioned in his volume dealing with various aspects of cosmography, including the seven climes. Transoxania is described in the fourth clime, where he praises Bukhārā and lists several other cities, commenting that they include anything a man can want and promises to give more details when discussing Turan, as he indeed does. See al-ʿUmarī (Beirut ed.), 2:45–46.

48 Additional chapters deal with the Mongols in China and in Iran, but they do not contain information on Mongol Central Asia.

49 Al-ʿUmarī / Lech 1968, 21–22, 37–38 (intro). The genealogy that goes up to Tarmashirin Khan (r. 1331–1334), is ascribed to Amīr Tayibughā (d. 1338), who in the years 1326–1327 escorted an Ilkhanid embassy throughout its stay in the Sultanate. The only other description of Chaghadaid genealogy in Mamluk sources, as far as I know, appears in Ibn Khaldūn’s work (Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitaḥ al-ʿibar*, 5: 1182ff).

50 Al-ʿUmarī / Lech 1968, 1–116; ch. 1 (general), 1–25; ch. 2 (Qaʿan/Khaqan), 26–34; ch. 3 part 1 (Central Asia) 35–66; ch. 3 part 2 (Golden Horde), 65–84; ch. 4 (Iran) 85–116; for China as Turan, see al-ʿUmarī, *Al-Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalah al-sharīf*, 69; ʿUmarī / Lech 1968, 26.



Map 4: The Mongol Empire as seen by al-'Umarī⁵¹

Al-'Umarī's long chapter on Mongol Central Asia (thirty pages, second only in length to the Ilkhanate chapter) combines geographical and ethnographical details. It is roughly divided in to two parts. The first provides a general description of the region, highlighting its religious situation and referring to political and economic aspects. This section includes various observations by contemporaneous oral informants – primarily traders and immigrants from the former Ilkhanid realm – as well as the author's own remarks. The second part is mostly a description of the chief cities of the Khanate, mainly based on earlier sources, especially the *Sirat ashkal al-arḍ wa-miqdarīha* of the Balkhī-Ibn Ḥawqal school.⁵² Both parts contain a lot of spatial information. The first part starts by defining the region as a noble, full-fledged Islamic area, the place where the Qarakhanid, Samanid, Ghaznawid and Ghurid dynasties originated, and where the Seljuqs rose to power.⁵³ Formerly, the area belonged to the non-Muslim Turks, but since its Islamization, it has been bursting with Islamic institutions – mosques (*maṣjids* and *jami's*), colleges, sufi lodges (*khanqahs*, *zāwīyas*, *ribāṭs*), and endowments – and became famous for its numerous religious scholars as well, whose center was Bukhārā.⁵⁴

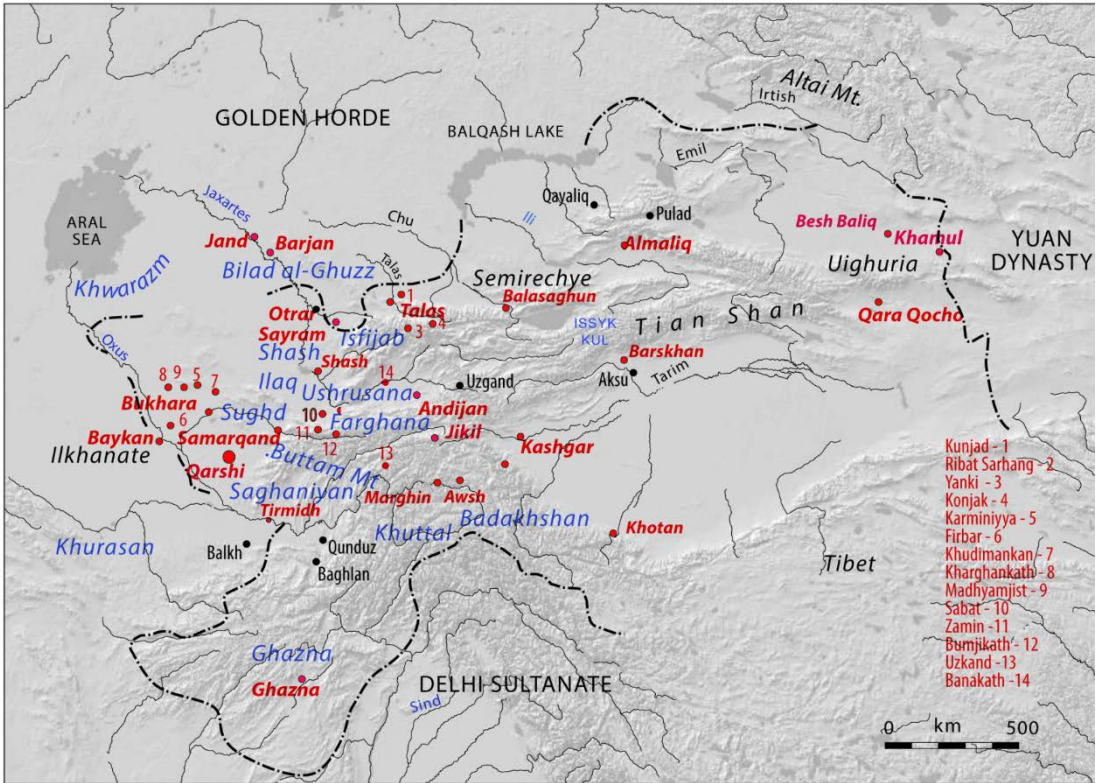
51 Based on Müller 2005, 32; also available on www.paradoxplace.com/Insights/Civilizations/Mongols/Mongol_Images/Maps/1260-1294-Kublai-Khan-BR800.jpg.

52 For al-Balkhī (d. 934?), Ibn Ḥawqal (d. ca. 990), and their geographical school, see, e.g., Park 2012, 73–80, 84, 90, 129, 148.

53 On these dynasties, see, e.g., Golden 2012, 50–75.

54 Al-'Umarī also gives an insightful account of the region's Islamization, culminating in the recent conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (r. 1331–1334) see Biran 2002/2003; DeWeese 2009, esp. 130–131

Mongol Central Asia As Viewed by al-ʿUmarī (d. 1349)



Map5: Mongol Central Asia as seen by al-ʿUmarī (d. 1349)

(Places in red are cities mentioned by al-ʿUmarī; blue places are regions as defined by al-ʿUmarī.)

Yet al-ʿUmarī's mental picture is different from that of Abū al-Fidā' or the scholarly map, mainly because it does include the eastern part of the Khanate. True, he knows much more about Transoxania,⁵⁵ and his information on the East is not always accurate—he says, for example, that Qara Khoja River is another name for the Ili River, although they are a few hundred kilometers apart⁵⁶—but still, he provides information from people who visited Almaliq and is aware of its importance. Al-ʿUmarī is also the only Arabic source that I know of, who refers to the city of Qarshī as the Khanate's capital (abode of royalty—*qaʿdat al-mulk*), and indeed it was built by the Chaghadaid Khan Kebek (r. 1320–1327) as the western capital of the Khanate. Qarshī was located in Kebek's winter pastures, close to the city of Nasaf in Transoxania (which does not appear in al-ʿUmarī's chapter). Al-ʿUmarī, however, enumerates Qarshī among the cities of Turkestan, together with Almaliq, Beshbaliq, Hami, Khotan, and Kashgār, and locates it on the river of Qara Khoja

⁵⁵ He divides it into several sub-regions—*iqlims*—which appear underlined on the map.

⁵⁶ Al-ʿUmarī/Lech 1968, 38.

at the edge of the Khanate.⁵⁷ He was obviously unaware of Qarshī's real location (and perhaps confused it with Almaliq, the eastern capital, located on the Ili).⁵⁸

Another flaw in al-ʿUmarī's information is his combination of past and present. Despite the ample contemporaneous observations presented in his work, its second part is mainly taken from older works. Thus, when enumerating the places next to Bukhārā, for example, he mentions the places known from the tenth century, some of which – like Baykand, Firbar or Numijakth – no longer existed in his time.⁵⁹ The picture of a flourishing economy that he paints also seems to belong more to the tenth century than to the fourteenth.

Despite these reservations, al-ʿUmarī's information represents a quantum leap from the knowledge on Mongol Central Asia available from other Mamluk sources. How does al-ʿUmarī know so much more than the other Mamluk writers, especially al-Nuwayrī? Part of the difference is a matter of timing: al-Nuwayrī completed the first version of his work in 1316, while al-ʿUmarī was writing in the 1330s and 1340s. The interim period bore witness to the Islamization of the Chaghadaid Khan Tarmashirin in the early 1330s and the fall of the Ilkhanate in 1335. Tarmashirin's Islamization brought Transoxania back into the Abode of Islam, and therefore, it merited a full-length description. More practically, as al-ʿUmarī attests himself, Tarmashirin opened Mongol Central Asia to Egyptian and Syrian traders, who in turn became al-ʿUmarī's informants.⁶⁰ The fall of the Ilkhanate also led to the emigration of quite a few former Ilkhanid subjects into the Mamluk Sultanate, and such migrants were also among al-ʿUmarī's sources.⁶¹ The difference was also a matter of genres: al-Nuwayrī writes dynastic history, drawing mainly on written sources that did not exist for Mongol Central Asia. Al-ʿUmarī's description not only relies more on oral informants, but is more geographical in nature, and hence he can augment his contemporaneous information with existing, albeit outdated, descriptions.⁶²

Before concluding, it may be worthwhile to emphasize what the Mamluks did not know about Mongol Central Asia: obviously, they did not know much about the Khanate's eastern part, nor were they aware of any non-Muslim scholars who were active in it

57 Al-ʿUmarī / Lech 1968, 38.

58 On Qarshī and Almaliq as Chaghadaid capitals, see Biran 2013, 261–262, 269–274.

59 Al-ʿUmarī / Lech 1968, 54.

60 E. g. Hasan al-Isʿardī and Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, who were indeed traders.

61 A notable example is Nizām al-Dīn al-Ṭayyārī, a famous musician and calligrapher who was a close companion of Abu Saʿīd and worked in his chancellery, but migrated to Egypt soon after his patron's death.

62 Al-ʿUmarī's other chapters contain far less geographical information and much more contemporaneous observations, probably because his sources for the other Khanates were much better.

(notably the Uighurs who played a prominent role in the Mongol Empire in general).⁶³ More surprising is the fact that they almost completely ignored any information on non-religious scholars: While Yuan and Ilkhanid sources enumerated Central Asian astronomers and physicians, administrators, and translators,⁶⁴ these are hardly ever mentioned in the Mamluk sources. These occupations were probably less prestigious in the Mamluks' eyes and did not fit into their image of Transoxania, which emphasized its pious Islamic character.

3 Conclusion

The mental map of Mongol Central Asia in the Mamluk Sultanate was created by combining thirteenth-century realities with well-established images of the region that had crystallized long before the Mongols appeared on the political scene. The lack of steady, regular contacts between the Sultanate and the Chaghadaid Khanate on the one hand, and migration patterns that brought quite a few Central Asian – as well as Iranian – emigrants to Egypt and Syria on the other hand, were both factors instrumental in determining what the Mamluk writers knew about the region. Yet, the actual information was processed on the basis of former premises about the region ingrained in the Muslim mindset. On the one hand it was seen as a part of Turan, or Turkestan, a land stretching up to the far northern and eastern edges of the earth, populated by many nomads and all kinds of infidels; on the other hand it was seen as a staunchly Muslim region, its religious prestige based mainly on its significant contribution to the canon of Muslim scholarship, and centered in Bukhārā. Both realities and images favored the concentration on the western part of the Khanate that is typical of all our authors, and the focus on Bukhārā and its scholarly community.

Bukhārā was not the only prominent center of religious activity in Mongol Central Asia, where several centers of learning prospered simultaneously, yet Mamluk interest in Bukhārā and the number of emigrants from this city enabled the Mamluk sources to map its learning circles better than any other place. These migrants, together with envoys and traders, and often through Ilkhanid mediation, were also the main contemporaneous source of Mamluk knowledge about Central Asia's geography, politics, culture, and economy. Despite their many limitations and blind spots, Mamluk sources can significantly add to our knowledge of Mongol Central Asia.

63 For the Uighurs in Mongol Central Asia, see, e.g., Liu Yingsheng 2006, 516–542.

64 See, e.g., Brockelmann 1938, 257, 297; Fāsilī Khāfī, *Mujmal-i fāsīhī*, 2: 321, 324; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī' al-tawārīkh*, 2: 706, 718; Rashīd al-Dīn / Thackston, 3: 666; *Yuan shi* 90: 2297; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (Damascus ed.), 4.4: 704–705

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