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The Persian Khitans of Hangzhou

Hangzhou had been the former Song capital which in 1276 had surrendered peacefully to Qubilai Khan's forces under Bayan Noyan after which the city prospered as the cultural capital of the Yuan Empire. Bayan had been born and raised in Turkestan and as a young man had accompanied his father to Iran circa 1254 as part of Hulegu's forces. He settled in Iran with a wife and child and would have been involved with the establishment of the Ilkhanate. Using experience if not expertise acquired in Iran, Bayan initiated the growth of a culturally vibrant, prosperous multicultural metropolis which included at its heart a small but wealthy and influential Persian community which evidence suggests were given an extremely warm welcome. Their Phoenix Mosque dominated its neighbors on Imperial Street a short distance from the central Drum Tower and its construction had necessitated the demolition of a popular night spot and entertainment centre. The readiness of the locals to welcome these 'foreigners' into the city and their willingness to grant them not only a choice site for their mosque but a particularly idyllic location for a graveyard on former royal land adjacent to the scenic West Lake has long remained a mystery. However the possibility that this Iranian community might be composed of ethnic Khitans would explain much and when the role of the Khitans / Qara khitai in the establishment of the Chinggisid Empire in Iran and China is examined the likelihood that ethnic and family links existed between Iran and Hangzhou is clear. This paper will examine the role of the Khitans in the establishment of the Chinggisid Empire and their connection to the Persians of Hangzhou