

What a Source Says, When It Says Nothing at all: Extracting Information from Jochi Khan's Biography in the 117th Chapter of the Yuan Shi

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The realization that the *Yuan Shi*, the official history of Yuan dynasty, contains a biography of Jochi Khan is sure to be met with enthusiasm by Mongol scholars. Despite his historical significance, information on Jochi is fragmentary in the sources (Persian, Latin, Mongolian etc.), so a biography originating from a Chinese source should prove invaluable.

Initial excitement turns to disappointment upon reading the text. Jochi's "biography" offers little information, and even among the most cursory and laconic biographies found in the *Yuan Shi*, his stands out for superficiality. Instead of the life of Jochi, we encounter a general sketch of the Jochid dynasty in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Nonetheless, I contend that this short text actually does offer some information on the Mongol Empire, especially when used in a comparative approach with other sources. First its structure offers a powerful literary testimony to the breakdown of communication between the various khanates from the mid-thirteenth century onward. Secondly, when we compare it with material found in the biography of the Mongol general, Subutai, it helps to understand how information on Europe and the West entered Chinese sources in the first place. Finally, it contains statements which provide us insight regarding the historical mystery of the Mongol withdrawal from Europe in 1242.