

Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia

MONGOL

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- 60 months

Proposed summary:

This project seeks to study the Mongol Empire in its full Eurasian context. It combines a world history perspective with close reading in a huge array of primary sources in various languages (mainly Persian, Arabic and Chinese) and different historiographical traditions, and classifies the acquired information into a sophisticated prosopographical database, which records the individuals acting under Mongol rule in the 13th and 14th centuries. On the basis of this unique corpus, the project maps and analyzes mobility patterns, and the far-reaching effects that this mobility generated. More specifically, it aims:

(a) to analyze modes of migrations in Mongol Eurasia: why, how, when and into where people - along with their ideas and artefacts - moved across Eurasia, portraying the full spectrum of such populations movements from the coerced to the voluntary.

(b) to shed light on the economic and cultural exchange that this mobility engendered, with a stress on the religious, scientific and commercial networks both within and beyond the empire's frontiers.

(c) to reconstruct the new elite of the empire by scrutinizing the personnel of key Mongolian institutions, such as the guard, the judicial and postal systems, the diplomatic corps, and the local administration.

These issues will be studied comparatively, in the period of the united Mongol empire (1206-1260) and across its four successor khanates that centred at China, Iran, Central Asia and Russia.

The result will be a quantum leap forward in our understanding of the Mongol empire and its impact on world history, and a major contribution to the theoretical study of pre-modern migrations, cross-cultural contacts, nomad-sedentary relations and comparative study of empires. Moreover, the re-conceptualization of the economic and cultural exchange in Mongol Eurasia will lead to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern era.

Section 1d: Extended Synopsis of the project proposal

This project seeks to study the Mongol Empire in its full Eurasian context. It combines world history perspective with close reading in a huge array of primary sources in various languages (mainly Persian, Arabic and Chinese) and different historiographical traditions, and classifies the acquired information into a sophisticated prosopographical database, which aims to record the pertinent individuals acting under Mongol rule in the 13th and 14th centuries. By dint of this unique corpus, the project will map and analyze mobility patterns, and the profound transformations that this mobility generated.

In the early 1200s Chinggis Khan and his heirs created the largest contiguous empire the world has ever seen, a polity that at its height stretched from Korea to Hungary. The Chinggisids not only conquered the whole Eurasian steppe, home of the nomads, they also united under their rule three other civilizations: the Chinese *in toto*, the Islamic, where they conquered the former center, Baghdad, and a large chunk of the eastern Islamic lands, and the Orthodox Christian, where they ruled only the hinterland not the Byzantine center. Moreover, as the only superpower of the 13th century, the Mongols had a noticeable impact even on regions and civilizations well outside their empire, not least Europe, India and the Arab Middle East.

The empire existed as a unified entity for less than 60 years (1206-1260), and was eventually divided into four khanates, each of them a regional empire headed by a Chinggisid branch: the Khanate of the Great Khan, later known as the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), centred in China and enjoyed a nominal primacy over the other three: the Ilkhanate (1260-1335) centred in Iran; the Chaghadaid Khanate (1260-1678) centred in Central Asia, and the Russia-based Golden Horde, whose seat of power was in the Volga region. Despite the many, often bloody, disputes among the four lesser empires, they retained a strong sense of Chinggisid unity. In the mid 14th century all four khanates were embroiled in political crises that led to the collapse of the Ilkhanate (1335) and of Yuan China (1368) and markedly weakened the steppe khanates. The fall of the Yuan is usually considered to be the end of the Mongol period in Eurasia. This gives the Mongols a short span in Imperial terms, but their considerable impact on world history has been much more enduring.

State of the Art:

The Mongol empire has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention over the past few decades,[1] yet works that put the empire at large at the focus of their inquiry are few. Due to its colossal dimensions and bewildering linguistic variety, scholars tend to choose one corner of the empire, to base their work on the sources in one of the two major languages of the empire – Persian or Chinese – and to frame their inquiry in a dynastic or national context. This situation can easily result in a fractured picture of the empire, which underscores its local components at the expense of its Mongol character, especially since information about the Mongols was mostly penned by their sedentary subjects, bounded in the models of their own civilizations. Mongolian institutions and policies, therefore, often tend to be obscured in the sources that either did not approve of them or were not too interested: Chinese and Muslim historians made great efforts to portray the Mongols as a “normal” Chinese or Iranian dynasty, while the Russian chronicles adopted the “ideology of silence” namely they nearly totally ignored Mongol control over their lands. Reading sources from different parts of the empire together, with full awareness of the various historiographical traditions involved, is thus indispensable for reconstructing a fuller picture of Mongolian institutions and policies. Adopting such a Eurasian perspective is also essential for tracking continent-wide processes, such as the movements of people, ideas and artefacts.

Indeed, the major breakthrough in the study of the Mongol empire in the last decades came from the works of Thomas T. Allsen. Equally familiar with the Persian and the Chinese sources, Allsen looked at the empire from a holistic perspective, putting the Mongols and their nomadic culture at the center of his inquiry and highlighting the cultural exchange that took place under their rule. Allsen's seminal works [2] demonstrated that the Mongol empire was not merely a passive medium that, by virtue of its expansive size and the relative ‘*Pax Mongolica*,’ provided a propitious setting for trade and cultural interaction. Instead, the Mongols were the principal agents that advanced, cultivated, and directed such contacts and served as a filter that determined which particular cultural elements would be disseminated across the steppe and beyond. Allsen has been also the one to highlight the importance of mobilization and population movements for the empire's development. [3] His work constitutes the point of departure for the proposed project.

It is mainly thanks to Allsen and several magnificent art exhibitions’ testimony to the abundance of cultural endeavor under the Mongols, that recent studies have accentuated not only the massacres and devastation that these nomads left in their wake, but also their contribution to intensive and fruitful cross-cultural ties across Eurasia. The Eurasian perspective has contributed greatly to specialized works based on either Chinese or Muslim sources,[4] and while scholars that integrate eastern and western sources are still few, it seems that this approach will dominate the new generation of historians of the Mongol Empire.

In recent decades, there has also been an upturn in the amount of works devoted to the relations between the Mongols and their neighbouring civilizations, be it Europe, Russia, the Arab Middle East or India. Mongol conversion to Islam and Buddhism has also commanded scholarly attention, and the same can be said for economic exchange, particularly the maritime trade in both the Indian Ocean and the Black Sea. With respect to Mongol institutions, the imperial guard, the diplomatic corps, and especially the postal system have merited research. Yet another topic that has attracted some academic interest is Populations movements, mainly the presence of non-Chinese in China.[5] Recent years have also seen a great advance in the study, publishing and translation of sources for Mongol history, including not only new literary sources (especially in Iran), but mainly documents - from Muslim *waqf* (endowment) documents and edicts of the Golden Horde to Uighur and Mongolian contracts, edicts and Buddhist sutras from north-west China - as well as multilingual tomb inscriptions. The fruits of archaeological excavations, conducted mainly in Mongolia and Russia, were also published recently. Most of these variegated findings have yet to be incorporated into the study of the Empire.

The project at hand is intended to build on and significantly extend these recent trends in Mongolian studies. It combines holistic Eurasian perspective and a strikingly broad scale with direct access to sources in Chinese, Persian, Arabic and Russian; full awareness of the extant sources in other languages; and advanced computer technology that will help us see the forest for the trees. In particular, the study stands out for its extensive use of Arabic sources. The voluminous Mamluk compilations, the texts of the Ilkhanid school of Iraq, and religious and scientific works from Iran and Central Asia, constitute a largely-untapped reservoir of information about the empire. As shown mainly by Amitai, Melville, DeWeese and Biran, such material can significantly add to our knowledge, not only of the Ilkhanate, but of other Mongol polities as well. Their immense potential for the study of the empire's cultural and economic exchange has hitherto hardly been exploited. While Russian chronicles are of limited direct importance for the study of the empire, much archaeological and numismatic literature, especially on the Golden Horde and the Chaghadaid Khanate, is written in Russian. The extensive use of sources in these - and other - languages guarantees that the project will shed new light on the less documented Steppe Khanates.

In addition, I will fully utilize sources in other languages, notably Mongolian, Uighur, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Latin and other European languages, which will be read mainly in translation. As a historian of the least documented Mongol state, the Chaghadaid Khanate, and due to my general works on the empire and my future work on *the Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, I am well aware of new developments in the study of such sources, which often remain the domain of philologists or scholars of religion. Lastly, the sophisticated prosopographical database in which the far-flung information is slated to be stored will enable me to assay the Mongol empire on the micro, meso, and macro levels and to compare developments within and outside its borders on an unprecedented scale.

Objectives:

The crux of the project is mobility, a pivotal concept of Mongolian culture and way of life. The Mongols, a demographically-marginal people, were able to create their vast empire only by fully mobilizing the resources- both human and material- that they were able to extract from the regions under their control. The formation of the empire, its continued expansion and the establishment of its administrative apparatuses, thus entailed a huge mobilization of people – as well as goods, techniques, institutions, texts and ideas - throughout the empire and further afield. This gigantic array of movements resulted in far reaching transformations, both intended and otherwise. It created countless opportunities for cross-cultural transfer and enhanced identity changes such as the robust expansion of Islam and the considerable overhaul of the steppe people's ethnic makeup. Furthermore, the movement triggered significant demographic changes, swayed the politics, economy and culture of neighboring states, and expedited the spread of the Black Death across Eurasia.

As already noted, this project endeavors to assay mobility patterns under Mongol rule and the substantial changes it wrought. More specifically it focuses on three interrelated themes: modes of migrations, which was partially responsible for the next two developments; the cultural and economic transfer; and the creation of a new imperial elite and institutions.

(1). *Human mobility in Mongol Eurasia: Modes of Migration in the Pre-Modern World* . My analysis of human mobility will be informed by insights from current migration theory,[5] and grounded on a unifying paradigm of movement ecology developed for studying movements of organisms of all kinds. [6] This paradigm introduced a conceptual framework depicting the interplay among four basic components of movement: the internal state; motion; navigation capacities and external factors. This is translated into a few basic questions that are relevant to humans, namely, *why move?* (combining internal motivation and external factors); *how to move?* and *when and where to move?* Under the *why* section, political, economic, ideological and ecological factors that encouraged mobility will be examined. The *how* section will elucidate different

forms in which migrations took place: by foot, on horseback or by boat; by individuals, families, or different collectivities; and will portray certain demographic characteristics of various migratory groups. The *where and when* section will illustrate different scopes of migration; its principal directions; duration; types of settlements (settlers, colonists, sojourners, or itinerants) and preparations for the voyage. On the basis of these questions, the study suggests a typology of migrations, along the continuum between coerced and voluntary migrations. This includes refugees, military deployment, civilian transfer, slave trade and imprisonment, as well as the voluntary migration of “experts” (in the fields of religion, commerce and science), nomads and conquerors, each examined on a continental scale. This more accurate and comprehensive picture of human mobility and its spatial patterns will open a myriad of promising avenues for future inquiry. Among others, it will make possible to assess the impact migration/s had on various regions; to study the basis for ethnic and religious changes; and to explore the emigrants' use of social and cultural capital, and some aspects of the era's labour markets.

(2) *Economic and Cultural Exchange in Mongol Eurasia*. This section will begin in a series of studies devoted to different professional groups in the Mongol empire, such as translators, astronomers, physicians, musicians, religious and military experts, and merchants. It seeks to explore the social context of bearers of such highly-prized skills in the Mongol world: their background; training; career patterns; patronage; relations to the Mongols; connections with other professional and social groups in their local and regional communities and with their co-professionals in other polities. Besides sifting through the biographical data, the research team will also examine major texts that these individuals compiled or used. The objective behind this undertaking is to uncover connections that turn up in the sources and those implied by common backgrounds, origins, or the use of a certain text or technique. With respect to commerce, we will turn to literary texts as well as archaeological and visual information. An emphasis will be placed on determining major trade routes, means of exchange, exchanged goods, and commercial infrastructure. Moreover, the scientific, religious, and commercial networks that were active throughout the empire—be they local, regional, and continental—will be reconstructed. Lastly, we will attempt to reveal the intellectual milieu of the “experts” elite in the different khanates. Other research possibilities include focusing on a particular commodity or text, thereby analyzing the mobility of artefacts and ideas and creating cultural biographies of objects.

(3) *The Empire's Elites: Institutions and Administration of the Mongol Empire*. This part, highlighting social mobility, will take stock of the new elite of the empire by following the personnel of leading Mongol institutions in the united Mongol empire and in the four khanates. The principal targeted institutions are the ruler's guard (*keshig*), which served as an incubator for both the military and civilian elite; the postal system (*jam*), the juridical institution (*yarghu*); the diplomatic corps of envoys (*Ilchis*); the *ortagh* (trading partners); and the officials of the local administration, both direct and indirect (through the posts of *darughachi*, *shihna* and *basqaq*), as well as the sons-in-law (*küregen*) who fulfilled important military and political functions. The data will be collected along the axis of both time and space and in continental scope. The study of indirect administration, for example, will compare the functions of officials working in Korea, Tibet, Anatolia, Georgia and the Rus principalities. The study traces the development of the Imperial institutions; their changing functions and functioning, as well as the background (ethnic, geographical, social and religious) of their personnel; their recruitment policy and career patterns. It will assess the change in the elite composition *vis-à-vis* the pre-Mongol period, and suggest tentative answer to the question as to what extent was Mongol treatment of their subjugated territories determined by uniform, centralized policies, and to what extent was it a by product of a numerous localized, *ad hoc* arrangements?

Impact

The significance of the project extends well beyond its immense value for the study of the Mongol empire. It will contribute significantly to the study of the social, economic and intellectual history of China, the Muslim lands and Europe, in periods (Yuan China and the late medieval Islamic world) that are relatively understudied. Moreover, it will galvanize the following areas of research: migration theory, where studies focused on non-Western experiences in the pre-modern world are rare; the study of cross-cultural contacts, highlighting the role of nomadic culture in the Eurasian cultural exchange; the comparative study of empires; and the study of communication, networks, and the formation of intricate social relations over large distances.

Taken together, the three strands of this research enterprise will illuminate a crucial stage in world history: Allsen, Subrahmanyan, and Kuroda [8] have suggested that the Mongol empire ushered in the early modern period by virtue of the expansion of long-distance commercial and financial exchange, its growing interest in maritime power, its formation of new collectivities, and the accelerated rates of diffusion or “connectivity” among different regions. Whether we choose to display the Mongol empire as the final curtain of the Middle Ages or as the opening act of the early modern period, a broader and more nuanced

understanding of its social and economic realities will enhance our understanding of the pivotal transition from the medieval into the early modern world.

Methodology

The project follows "the humanistic approach to world and global history", [9] namely it combines a world history perspective with rigorous philological tools and close acquaintance with different historiographical traditions, thereby transcending the boundaries between different area studies. At one and the same time, it gains insights from the fields of movement ecology, global migration, sociology of knowledge, historical anthropology of nomadism, and comparative study of empires. Practically speaking, the research will be based on close readings in a large variety of primary sources in various languages, genres and disciplines, and its classification into a sophisticated prosopographical database. The project aims at recording the surviving information about individuals that were active under Mongol rule in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The database's key building blocks will be the rich biographical literature of Yuan China, Ilkhanid Iran, and Mamluk Egypt (in Chinese, Persian and Arabic), while the rest of this edifice will be comprised of a panoply of genres, such as multilingual chronicles, travelogues, local histories, and gazetteers; hagiographies; and religious, literary and scientific works (multi-lingual dictionaries, cookbooks, medical treatises, agricultural guides, astronomical works). The literary sources will be supplemented by multi-lingual documents, tomb inscriptions, visual resources (mostly paintings and miniatures) and archaeological and numismatic literature. These kinds of sources are of special value, since they can partially compensate for the pro-elite and gender-biased proclivities of the literary sources.

The database will utilize the infrastructure of the *Jerusalem Prosopography Project (JPP)*. Accessible throughout the world, the *JPP* is a fully-relational internet-based database that enables many users to work simultaneously in multiple languages. This reservoir is conducive to a highly-nuanced classification of people and reports. Each subject has "an ID card" listing his common name, alternative appellations, period and dynasty, tribe (if applicable), and ethnic origin (if known) as well as the specific project/s he or she is affiliated with. Below each card, there is a space for biographical notes and a list of persons, places, tribes and keywords that are connected to the person at hand. This is followed by reports about the same subject. The major strength of this database is the user's ability to attach keywords - and complex sub-keywords - to the different reports. This enables scholars to retrieve evidence in many creative ways and record information that is not prosopographical *per se*.

Originally designed by Michael Lecker for studying the people of first Islamic centuries, The *JPP* has already solved some of the technical problems connected to the database's organization, such as the inclusion of different names for the same person or the differentiation between figures who share the same name. I already have my own domain in the *JPP*, and will upgrade and adjust it according to the project's specifications with the help of an IT professional. Intended upgrades include adding demographic information, whenever available, as well as visual representation of kinship, scholarly and political relations (i.e genealogical tables, teacher-students and ruler-officials diagrams), to the person's ID. I will also add a GIS platform, provided and maintained by the GIS center at the Hebrew University. This platform will be used not only for spatial representations of various searches (e.g., maps of all the places where silk trade is mentioned, from which people migrated to Baghdad, where both Sufi and Buddhist missionaries were active), but also for more advanced analysis that will take into account the physical environment in which the historic migrations and interactions took place. This ecologic-based analysis will include parameters such as the availability of sustainable resources; trade assets and optimal-route analysis.

My team and I will upload materials to the database in two ways: systematic uploading of works, and sub-project uploading. Systematic uploading will be based on a list of texts I will define, beginning with the biographical sections of *The official history of the Yuan dynasty*, and the parts dealing with Mongolian history in Rashid al-Din's *Collection of chronicles*. Texts will be chosen according to their relevance for the project and their degree of readability. Scholarly translations, indices, electronic texts and searchable databases will be used whenever available. The team members will be trained in a concentrated course, and will meet at least monthly for discussing the study's progress. Concomitant to the updating of the database, several small or medium-sized sub-projects—some of which are already underway—will be examined as case studies for different facets of the project. These case studies will be completed within the first three years of the project. Together with the accumulated data and emergent literature on the Mongols from across the globe, the case studies will bolster the three main strands of this study. Within this framework of this enterprise, we will hold annual workshops as well as a summer school and two large international conferences during the 3rd and 5th years.

Key References (for fuller list see B2; for Biran's publications see pp 5-6)

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and exchange in the Mongol Empire: A cultural history of Islamic textiles, Cambridge; 2001. *Culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia*. Cambridge; [3] T. T. Allsen, 1987, *Mongol imperialism*. Berkeley; 1997a; 1997b. 'Ever closer encounters: The appropriation of culture and the apportionment of peoples in the Mongol Empire,' *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1: 2-23; forthcoming, 'Population movements in Mongol Eurasia,' in Amitai and Biran; [4] C. Melville, 2006. 'The *keshig* in Iran: the survival of the royal Mongol household', in L. Komaroff, ed., *Beyond the legacy of Genghis Khan*, Leiden: 135-65; D. Robinson 2010. *Empire's twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols*. Cambridge MA; [5] e.g., A. Sh. Kadyrbaev, 1993, *Ocherki istorii srednevekovykh uigurov, dzhalairov, naïmanov i kireitov*, Almaty; I. Vásáry 2005. *Cumans and Tatars*, Cambridge; M. C. Brose, 2007. *Subjects and masters: Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire*. Bellingham, Wash; Zhang Peizhi 2009. *Yuan dai semuren jiazu ji qi wenhua qingxiang yanjiu*, Tianjin; Biran, forthcoming Khitan articles. [6] D. Hoerder, 2002. *Cultures in contact: World migrations in the second millennium*. Durham; P. Manning, 2005. *Migrations in world history*. New York; J. Lucassen and L. Lucassen, eds. 2005. *Migration, migration history, history: Old paradigms and new perspectives*. Bern, 3rd ed.; J. Lucassen, L. Lucassen and P. Manning, 2010. *Migration history in world history: multidisciplinary approaches*. Leiden; [7] R. Nathan et. al., 2008. 'A movement ecology paradigm for unifying organismal movement research,' *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* December 9;105 (49): 19052-19059; [8] Allsen 1997b; S. Subrahmanyam, 1997. 'Connected histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia,' *Modern Asian Studies* 31/3: 735-62; Kuroda Akinobu, 2009. 'The Eurasian silver century, 1276–1359: Commensurability and multiplicity,' *Journal of Global History*: 245–269; [9] S. Subrahmanyam, 2010, 'Intertwined histories: *Crónica* and *tarikh* in the sixteenth century Indian Ocean world,' *History and Theory* 49: 118-145.