

Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners, 1200–1260

Historians and travelers have long noticed the close association between the pastoral nomads of the Eurasian steppe and the merchant communities of the sedentary world.¹ More recently, scholars have begun to scrutinize the reasons for this association. A. M. Khazanov, for example, argues persuasively that the nomads' economy is "non-autarkic," that is, so specialized in pastoral production that many essentials are lacking. Therefore, since their own economy is "one-sided," nomads are forced into trade to acquire such necessities as winter fodder, textiles, and manufactured wares.² Sechin Jagchid formulates the problem in somewhat different terms but comes to the same conclusion, noting that nomads endeavor to obtain the missing commodities from their sedentary neighbors through raiding, tributary arrangements, and commercial relationships.³

The inability of the nomads to produce domestically all they require and their consequent dependence upon the sown have important political implications. Forced into frequent contact with sedentary populations and governments, the nomads must organize themselves to conduct effective relations with agriculturally based societies and their official representatives. According to Thomas Barfield, the primary purpose of the Hsiung-nu central government was to extract resources from China in the form of booty and tribute or to compel trade on advantageous terms.⁴ Thus the stimulus toward state formation among the nomads was generated externally through economic and political contact with established states along the frontiers of the steppe.

I wish to thank Peter Golden, Rutgers University; Michael Rodgers, The British Museum; Anatoly Khazanov, The Hebrew University; and Tina Endicott-West, Harvard University, for their helpful criticisms and comments. The remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

¹ This association is also mirrored in such Turkic folklore as the Oghuz epic tales. See Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal, and Warren S. Walker, eds. and trans., *The Book of Dede Korkut* (Austin: U. of Texas P., 1972), pp. 41–44.

² A. M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), pp. 68–84 and 202–12.

³ Sechin Jagchid, "Patterns of Trade and Conflict between China and the Nomads of Mongolia," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 11 (1977), pp. 177–204.

⁴ Thomas J. Barfield, "The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederation: Organization and Foreign Policy," *JAS* 41.1 (1981), pp. 45–61.

Given the nomads' concern for economic exchange with the sown and the merchants' desire for new and profitable markets, it is not at all surprising that aspiring tribal chieftains and long-distance traders often were drawn together in mutually beneficial relationships. Indeed, in accounting for the emergence of steppe polities, Omeljan Pritsak views merchants as the primary catalyst, who in association with a charismatic clan actively "promoted the creation of [nomadic] empires."⁵ The expansion of a nomadic empire, frequently seen as a by-product of large-scale tribal migrations, might therefore be more accurately described as the extension of nomadic political control over a long-distance trade network.⁶

These insights into the role of merchants in nomadic states derive for the most part from the study of the pre-Mongolian period of Inner Asian history. Oddly, the position and function of merchants in the Mongolian Empire, the largest of the steppe states, have received little detailed investigation to date, despite the fact that the Činggisids' interest in commerce is well known and readily documented. One statement of such interest, succinct yet unmistakable, is found in a decree sent by Mengü Temür, the *qan* of the Golden Horde (r. 1267–1280), to Yaroslav, Prince of Novgorod (r. 1266–1272): "Mengü Temür, our word, to Prince Yaroslav: Give passage to the European merchants (*nemetskomu gosti*) into your realm." In response to this order, the obedient prince sent the required message, which reads in part:

Yaroslav to the people of Riga, to the great and small, to those who go-a-trading (*gosti*), and to all: Your passage through my realm shall be free (*chist*, lit., "clear"), and whosoever is hostile to me, him I shall deal with myself; but [any] merchant shall have free passage through my realm.⁷

These sentiments, expressed sometime between 1267 and 1272, do not constitute an innovation in attitude or policy; on the contrary, Mengü Temür's concern for commerce gives voice to a long-established tradition among the Činggisids, one that can be traced back to the founding father himself.

The purpose of this investigation is to delineate and explain the character of the relationship between Mongolian princes and merchants during the

⁵Omeljan Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus'* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1981) 1, pp. 10–20.

⁶This possibility was first broached by Peter Boodberg in 1942. See his "Turk, Aryan and Chinese in Ancient Asia," in Paul Cohen ed., *Selected Works of Peter Boodberg* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1979), pp. 1–21.

⁷S. N. Valk, ed., *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova* (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1949), p. 57.

formative decades of the empire, 1200–1260. This will involve addressing a series of interrelated questions: What was the status of merchants at court? What kinds of service did they render the princes? What influence did the merchants exert on imperial policy? How did each party benefit from the association? And finally, did merchants in fact encourage or facilitate imperial expansion? In pursuing this line of inquiry, particular attention is paid to the *ortoy*. *Ortoy* is a term of Turkic origin meaning "partner." It passed into Mongolian and is widely used in the sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to denote a merchant operating with capital supplied by a Činggisid prince or court official.⁸ Some work has appeared on the *ortoy*,⁹ but none to my knowledge explores its contractual basis or attempts to confront the Chinese and Persian data on this institution in an effort to understand the role of merchants in the rise of the Mongolian Empire.

Professor Elizabeth Endicott-West's companion article in this issue, "Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The *Ortoy*," explores this institution from the accession of Qubilai (1260) to the end of the Yüan and includes an epilogue on early Ming notices of these merchant-traders. The relationship between our articles requires a few words of explanation. In addition to the chronological division of labor, we approach our common topic from slightly different angles. First, Professor Endicott-West's contribution is more tightly focused on a particular category of merchants, the *ortoy*, whereas mine investigates the Mongols' association with various types of merchants, as well as their attitudes and policies toward commerce in general. Second, my colleague provides a more detailed examination of the etymology of *ortoy* and related terms found in the Chinese and Mongolian sources, whereas my efforts place greater emphasis on the terminology encountered in the Middle Eastern and Slavic sources. Although the articles are not intended as fully integrated studies, the authors feel that they complement one another in important ways and together offer a comprehensive treatment of the *ortoy* institution and the role of merchants in Mongolian imperial politics.

⁸The Turkic form is *ortaq*, the Mongolian is *ortoy*, Persian *urtāq*, and Chinese *wo-t'o* 斡脫. See Nicolas Poppe, "The Turkic Loan Words in Middle Mongolian," *CAJ* 1 (1953), p. 40, and Paul Pelliot, "Les caractères de transcription 斡 *wa* ou *wa* et 脫 *pai*," *TP* 37 (1944), pp. 125–30. Occasionally the term *ortoy* is used in the sense of "friend" or "comrade." For instance, around 1270, when Abaya and Qaidu ceased fighting and made peace, Rashid al-Dīn reports that "they called one another *ortoy*." Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*, ed. B. Karīmī (Tehran: Eqbal, 1959; hereafter cited as *Rashid* (K)) 2, p. 754.

⁹A short but excellent survey of the term *ortoy* in the Il-Khān sources is in Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963–1965) 2, pp. 25–27. The pioneering work of Weng Tu-chien 翁獨健, "Wo-t'o tsa-k'ao 斡脫雜考," *Yen-ching hsüeh-pao* 29 (1941), pp. 201–19, covers the institution in the Yüan dynasty, but concentrates on the period after 1260.

MERCHANTS AND THE EARLY EMPIRE: THE REIGN OF ČINGGIS QAN

In the centuries before Činggis Qan, ancestors of the Mongols (the Meng-wu 蒙兀 of the Chinese sources) intermittently exchanged goods with the Liao, Chin, and Hsi-hsia dynasties. Little is known of this trade beyond the fact the the Mongols were mainly interested in acquiring ironware, a commodity whose export to the steppe was generally banned by the dynasties of north China.¹⁰ Although the sources provide no further data on these exchanges, it is clear that in the twelfth century the Mongols were still in contact with merchants and were well acquainted with their ways. This is brought out in an episode recorded in the *Yüan Dynastic History*. Sometime in the 1180s Činggis Qan made arrangements to marry his sister Temülün to Butu (Po-t'u 孛術) of the Ikires people. When the latter's envoy arrived to conclude the negotiations, the Mongolian ruler inquired:

"How much have Butu's herds grown?" Ebügentei [the envoy] responded, saying: "He has thirty head of horses and we will be pleased to bring half as the betrothal gift." The Emperor [Činggis Qan] hotly retorted: "To arrange a marriage and to discuss wealth is to behave like a merchant (*shang-ku* 商賈)! The old ones had a saying: a meeting of the minds is made firm by need. I intend to obtain All-under-Heaven. If you, the Ikires people, obey Butu and serve me loyally, that will do. What matter wealth?"¹²

The views expressed here seem at first reading to betray a degree of hostility toward merchants, but that is not necessarily the case. Činggis Qan at this point in his career was intent on building a following and was more concerned with long-term political gain than with short-term economic advantage. In these circumstances, he tells us, the merchant mentality is simply not appropriate. In any event, his later comments and actions reveal a very positive attitude toward commerce and traders.

¹⁰ Paul Ratchnevsky, *Činggis-Khan: Sein Leben und Wirken* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), p. 7 and nn. 28, 29.

¹¹ Po-t'u is the *Yüan shih* 元史 form (see n. 12); in the Chinese transcription of the *Secret History of the Mongols* his name is more accurately transcribed as Pu-t'u 不圖. See B. I. Pankratova, *Juan-chaos bi-shi (Sekretnaia istoriia mongolov)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1962), sect. 120, p. 155.

¹² *Yüan shih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1976; hereafter *YS*) 118, p. 2921. The marriage is not dated in the text but must have occurred in the 1180s, since Butu was an in-law at the time Temüjin assumed the title of qan, ca. 1187–1189. See Francis W. Cleaves, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1982; hereafter *SH*), sect. 120, p. 52.

Činggis Qan's first recorded encounter with a merchant occurred in 1203. Following an abortive assassination attempt by an erstwhile ally, Činggis Qan and a few loyal followers took refuge at Lake Baljuna in northeastern Mongolia. Here the hard-pressed band swore an oath of fidelity and then managed to extricate itself from this difficult situation.¹³ While at the lake, Asan, a Sartay (that is, Central Asian) trader, arrived from the Önggüd territory, bringing 1,000 castrated sheep to exchange for sable and squirrel skins.¹⁴ This Asan, as Bartold long ago concluded, can be identified with the Ḥasan Ḥajjī of the Persian sources.¹⁵ Writing of events surrounding Ḥasan's death at Sughnaq on the Syr Darya, where he had been sent in 1219 as an envoy, Juvaynī introduces Ḥasan as one "who had long been in the service of the emperor in the capacity of merchant (*ba ism-i-bāzargānī*)."¹⁶ Apparently Ḥasan joined Činggis Qan's retinue soon after their first encounter. Nor, it should be added, was Ḥasan an isolated case. Another Central Asian Muslim, Ja'far Khwājah (Cha-pa-erh Huo-che, 札八兒火者), was present at Baljuna. In 1211, on the eve of the Mongolian invasion of the Chin, he was sent into north China on a mission to discover the intentions of the Altan Qan (that is, the Jürchen ruler). In 1215, when Peking fell to Mongolian arms, he became the first imperial agent (*daruyaci*) appointed in the conquered territory.¹⁷ Thus from the very inception of the empire, officially proclaimed in 1206, Central Asian merchants had representation at court and were active participants in the Mongols' imperial venture.

The influence of the merchant interests at court is plainly revealed in Činggis Qan's diplomatic exchanges with the Khwārazmshāh, Sultan Muḥammad. Around 1215 the sultan, concerned and curious about the rising power of the Mongols in the east, dispatched a "good-will" embassy to China to gather intelligence on the capabilities and intentions of these

¹³ On this episode, see Francis W. Cleaves, "The Historicity of the Baljuna Covenant," *HJAS* 18 (1953), pp. 357–421, and H. Siang, "The Baljuna Revisited," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1985), pp. 229–35.

¹⁴ *SH*, sect. 182, p. 111.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Bartold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 3d edn. (London: Luzac, 1968), p. 414.

¹⁶ Atā-Malik Juvaynī, *Ta'rikh-i jahān-qushā*, ed. Mirzā Muḥammad Qazvīnī, (London: Luzac, 1912–1937; hereafter cited as *Juvaynī (Q)*) 1, p. 67, and "Atā-Malik Juvaynī, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. John A. Boyle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1958; hereafter *Juvaynī (B)*) 1, p. 87. For the parallel passage in Rashid al-Dīn, see *Rashid (R)* 1, p. 354.

¹⁷ *YS* 120, p. 2960; Minhāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i naṣīrī*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥayy Habībī (Kabul: Pūhanī maṭba'at, 1949; hereafter cited as *Jūzjānī (H)*) 2, p. 100; and Minhāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i naṣīrī*, trans. H. G. Raverty (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1970; hereafter *Jūzjānī (R)*) 2, p. 954.

potential rivals. The envoys arrived shortly after the fall of Peking and were granted an audience with the Mongolian ruler. After an exchange of pleasantries, Činggis Qan instructed them to relay this message to their sovereign:

I am the ruler of the East and thou the ruler of the West. Between us let there be a firm treaty of friendship, amity, and peace, and from both sides let merchants (*tujjār*) and caravans come and go and let the fineries and wares of my lands be brought to thou and let those of thy lands likewise be directed [to mine].¹⁸

The request for a commercial treaty with his western neighbor was no empty gesture or subterfuge to lull the unwary. Shortly after the envoys departed, Činggis Qan ordered his road guards (*qaraqchīn*) to give safe conduct to all merchants (*bāzargānān*) entering his domain and to direct those with particularly fine goods to his court. These measures soon (ca. 1217 or 1218) attracted three Bukharan merchants to the imperial camp. They were warmly greeted and asked about their wares. When one tried to sell Činggis Qan textiles at exorbitant prices, the Mongolian chieftain was not taken in and heatedly called the merchant to account. Anxious, however, to stimulate trade, Činggis Qan in the end offered generous prices to the Bukharans, including the individual who had endeavored to overcharge him. At the time of their departure the three were enjoined to inform the Khwārazmshāh of the Mongols' desire for peaceable economic exchange.¹⁹

Not content to wait upon events, Činggis Qan shortly thereafter ordered his sons, daughters, wives, and military commanders to select Muslims from their respective retinues and to supply each with gold and silver ingots (*bālīsh*) so that they might trade in the land of the Khwārazmshāh.²⁰ At the same time he readied a diplomatic embassy to reaffirm his desire for friendship and commerce. The envoys, Maḥmūd Khwārazmī, 'Alī Khwājah Bukharī, and Yūsuf Kankā Ūṭrārī, arrived in Transoxania in the spring of 1218 and began discussions. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Činggis Qan's

¹⁸ *Jūzjānī* (H) 2, p. 103, and *Jūzjānī* (R) 2, p. 966. A slightly different version of this message is given elsewhere in the same source. See *Jūzjānī* (H) 1, p. 311, and *Jūzjānī* (R) 1, p. 272. Jūzjānī's information comes directly from Bahā al-Dīn, an embassy member whom he questioned in 1220.

¹⁹ This episode is recounted in *Juwaynī* (Q) 1, pp. 59–60, and *Juwaynī* (B) 1, 78. For parallel accounts, see *Rashīd* (K) 1, p. 342, and Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Abū'l Faraj . . . Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Oxford U.P., 1932), p. 356.

²⁰ *Juwaynī* (Q) 1, p. 60, and *Juwaynī* (B) 1, pp. 78–79; and Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* 1, p. 356.

message opened with a recognition of the Khwārazmshāh's great power and fame and concluded with this declaration:

When the regions between us are cleansed of foes and completely liberated and pacified, and on both sides the obligations of neighbors are affirmed, [then] reason and civility demand that both parties ought to tread the path of concord and that we ought to take it upon ourselves to succor and support one another in perilous times and [lastly] that we should secure the roads against harmful incidents in order that merchants (*tujjār*), upon whose comings and goings the well-being of the world [depends], might ply to and fro with a light heart.²¹

The historian Nasawī, who was private secretary to Jalāl al-Dīn, the son of Sultan Muḥammad, provides another version of the same message:

And thou, greatest of men, [should knowest] that my land has nurseries of soldiers and mines of silver, and that in it there are such riches that there is no need to look elsewhere. And if thou deemest it proper to open the road of visitation to the merchants (*tujjār*) of both sides, then there will be benefit for all and mutual profit.²²

The sultan, perhaps alarmed by the reference to "nurseries of soldiers," later that evening interrogated Maḥmūd Khwārazmī in private, hoping to discover Činggis Qan's true intentions. Following a lengthy examination, during which his life was threatened, the Mongols' envoy managed to convince the suspicious sultan that the goals of his master were, as stated, friendship and trade. The Khwārazmshāh then relented and agreed to the proposed treaty.

The period of amity did not last long. Sometime later in 1218 Činggis Qan's trade caravan, headed by four Muslim merchants, arrived in Ūṭrār (Otrar) on the frontiers of Khwārazm, where it came under the jurisdiction of Ināl Khān (or Inālchūq), the local governor. For reasons of his own, Ināl Khān wrote the Khwārazmshāh claiming that the merchants were spies and provocateurs. The sultan, in response, ordered precautionary measures taken, but Ināl Khān, apparently overstepping his instructions, had the merchants killed and personally appropriated their goods. The complicity of

²¹ *Rashīd* (K) 1, p. 343. Shorter versions of this message are available in *Juwaynī* (Q) 1, p. 70; 2, pp. 99–100; *Juwaynī* (B) 1, p. 79; 2, p. 368; and Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* 1, p. 356.

²² Muḥammad Nasawī, *Sīrat al-Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Mankubirī*, ed. H. Hamdī (Cairo: Dar al-fakr al-'Arabī, 1953), pp. 83–84.

the Khwārazmshāh in the massacre is unclear,²³ but all sources, including Nasawī, who is very anti-Mongol, assert that the merchants did nothing to provoke such reprisals.²⁴

When word of the incident at Ūṭrār reached Činggis Qan he sent another embassy, headed by Ibn Kafrāj Bughrā, to protest and to negotiate a settlement. The envoy opened his discussion with the sultan by stating: "Thou didst give thy signature and thy hand on the security of the merchants and [didst agree] not to hinder one of them but thou hast acted treacherously and broken [thy word]." According to Nasawī, Bughrā went on to declare that if the sultan had no hand in the massacre he could prove his good faith by extraditing Īnāl Khān to the Mongols for punishment. In this event bloodshed could be averted, but if the contrary, the envoy noted, then war would inevitably ensue. Muḥammad considered the proposition and eventually decided that Īnāl Khān was too well connected to turn over so he refused the Mongolian offer and further enraged Činggis Qan by ordering the execution of the embassy.²⁵

In the assessment of the significance of the events surrounding the massacre at Ūṭrār, the military and political repercussions have naturally received the greatest attention. The incident, after all, propelled Mongolian armies westward, and the dazzling victories that followed may well have triggered the Činggisid quest for universal empire. But however momentous its consequences, the incident is crucial in another respect: the light it casts on the role of trade in the formation of a nomadic state. A close examination of this episode tell us much about the Mongols' early concern for commercial exchange and about the character and extent of merchants' involvement with Činggis Qan and his family.

The first point to emerge from such an analysis is that at every stage of the relationship with Khwārazm, it was Činggis Qan who interjected the subject of trade into the talks: in 1215 when the sultan sent envoys to north China, in 1217 (or 1218) when the Bukharan merchants arrived in Mongolia, and in 1218 when the Mongolian embassy reached Transoxania. The wording of the communications sent to the Khwārazmshāh differs in the available sources, but all convey the same message. Even the sources openly hostile to the Mongols — Jūzjānī and Nasawī — concede this point and indeed chastise the Khwārazmians for their duplicity and rashness.

²³ For a discussion of the Khwārazmshāh's role, see Bartold, *Turkestan*, p. 398.

²⁴ Nasawī, *Ṣīrat*, pp. 85–86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Īnālchūq was a maternal uncle of the Khwārazmshāh; *Rashīd* (K) 1, p. 221.

Činggis Qan's dealings with the three Bukharans indicate not only a desire for trade but also a sophisticated appreciation of the ways of commerce. In his response to the merchant who offered his wares at exorbitant prices, the Mongolian ruler angrily declared to those present, "Does this person think that cloth has never been brought to us [before]?"²⁶ The comment is not, of course, to be taken as evidence that Činggis Qan had expert knowledge of the quality and value of textiles, but rather that he had among his followers professionals, such as Ḥasan Ḥajjī, who did. Further, it is apparent from the way the ill-fated caravan was formed that by this time all the members of the imperial family had their own commercial advisers. Although background data on those selected to conduct trade in Khwārazm are lacking, there are indications that a sizable portion were Muslim traders from West Turkestan.²⁷

These merchants obviously had close and official ties to the court. They received their operating capital from the imperial family and therefore functioned as its commercial agents. The official character of their association is well reflected in Jūzjānī's statement that the caravan Činggis Qan dispatched to Khwārazm was accompanied by "merchants of his own" (*bāzargānān-i khūd*) and Juvaynī's depiction of those murdered at Ūṭrār as "merchants (*tujjār*) attached to the Tatars."²⁸ This is why the Mongolian and Chinese sources always refer to these representatives of the court as "ambassadors."²⁹

The size of the despoiled caravan is variously reported. The Persian historians state that 450 met death at Ūṭrār, while the *Secret History of the Mongols* puts the figure at 100. Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai 耶律楚材, who accompanied Činggis Qan to Khwārazm the year after the incident, records that just over 100 merchants (*ku-jeu* 賈人) perished.³⁰ The latter number is probably correct, but it may only refer to the merchant-ambassadors present, whereas the higher figure may well enumerate the entire complement of the caravan, which certainly included servants, security forces, and camel pullers.

²⁶ *Juvaynī* (Q) 1, p. 60, and *Juvaynī* (B) 1, p. 78.

²⁷ The caravan was headed by four Turkestani traders, and Rashīd al-Dīn refers to those killed at Ūṭrār as "Muslim merchants" (*bāzargānān-i muslimān*); *Rashīd* (K) 1, p. 221. Jūzjānī calls them simply "*bāzargānān*." *Jūzjānī* (H) 1, p. 311, and *Jūzjānī* (R) 1, p. 272.

²⁸ *Jūzjānī* (H) 2, p. 103, and *Jūzjānī* (R) 2, p. 96; *Juvaynī* (Q) 2, p. 99, and *Juvaynī* (B) 2, p. 367.

²⁹ In *SH*, sect. 254, p. 189, they are called *eltin*, "envoys," and in *YS* 1, p. 20, *shih-che* 使者, "ambassadors."

³⁰ Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., "The *Hsi-yu lu* 西遊錄 by Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai 耶律楚材," *MS* 21 (1962), p. 21, translation, and p. 115, Chinese text.

According to Jūzjānī, who provides an abbreviated inventory, the caravan consisted of 500 camel-loads of gold, silver, silk, precious furs (such as sable), and "elegant wares from China."³¹ The total value of the goods carried to Ūrār is nowhere tabulated, but clearly a vast amount of the Mongols' hard-won booty was lost there. Viewed in this light, the incident was not merely an affront to Činggis Qan's dignity and an open challenge to Mongolian arms; it was at bottom a pocketbook issue, and it is this grievance, more than any other, that provoked retribution. Such a conclusion is fully substantiated by Činggis Qan's behavior after the massacre: he did not immediately declare war in the face of this outrage and endeavored instead to find a negotiated settlement. Although Bughrā, his envoy, opened discussions in Khwārazm by threatening hostilities, he then plainly declared that if the sultan punished the guilty and made restitution, normal relations would be restored. At this late hour the Mongolian chieftain still preferred economic exchange to military confrontation with the eastern Islamic world.

When war came in 1219, it proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the majority of the inhabitants of Transoxania. Yet for one segment of Central Asian society — the long-distance traders — the war brought in its wake new opportunities, which they were quick to exploit.

There is evidence that by 1221, as military operations in the West were reaching a climax, an active commerce in luxury goods had already developed within the frontiers of the now-expanded Mongolian Empire. Li Chih-ch'ang 李志常, the chronicler of the travels of the Taoist master Ch'ang-ch'un 長春, records the presence of Persian linen (*Po-sso pu* 波斯布) to the west of Turfan and the movement of coral from "the West" into southern Turkestan. Of equal interest, Li notes that when his party encountered coral merchants in the Hindukush, the Mongolian officers in his escort purchased their wares in a straight business transaction.³² No attempt was made to exact them by force. Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai, another eyewitness, reports that in the city of T'uan 搏 (that is, Taliqān, west of Balkh) lacquerware (*ch'i-ch'i* 漆器) with Ch'ang-an trademarks (*č'i-shih* 題識) was found in abundance.³³ At the same time Chinese goods were flowing into Mongolia in

considerable quantities. Chao Hung 趙瑛, a Sung envoy sent to north China in 1221, left a brief description of this traffic:

Inasmuch as their (the Tatars') customs are simple, their neighbors, the Hui-hu (回鶻), whenever they trade in the Two Hos (Hopei and Honan), they sell [these goods] in their (the Tatars') country.³⁴

In this passage Hui-hu probably refers to the Uighurs, although in early texts the term is sometimes used to designate Muslims as well. But however the term is employed in this particular instance, Chao's testimony makes it quite clear that this commerce was in the hands of middlemen and that the Mongols, flush with newly acquired wealth, constituted an attractive market.

The growth of consumerism among the Mongols is affirmed by Li Chih-ch'ang. While traversing the southern Altai in 1221 Li observed that foreign merchants (*ku* 賈) from the "Western Regions" (*Hsi-yü* 西域) imported into Mongolia flour that sold at fifty ounces of silver for eighty pounds.³⁵ At first glance the reported price — approximately 1.6 ounces of silver for only a pound of flour — seems incredible. Further, Li's data run counter to the assumption that long-distance trade in bulk goods is simply not feasible owing to high transportation costs and the low weight-to-value ratio of commodities like flour. Nevertheless, Li was a reliable observer, and there is no reason to dismiss his evidence out of hand. First, he reports that the flour in question had traveled some 2,000 *li*, or about 1,150 kilometers, to reach Mongolia, which accounts for its elevated price. Second, it is obvious from the context of his notice that the purchasers were the wives of Mongolian princes and therefore individuals who commanded the necessary resources to pay the going rate, however high. That they were willing to do so is explained, in my opinion, by the unique conditions that obtained in the early empire. The Mongols, heretofore a society with limited purchasing power, now suddenly found themselves with vast and unaccustomed wealth, and the ruling strata, the main beneficiaries of the booty and tribute, were prone to an extravagance typical of the nouveau riche. And if they wished to remain in the steppe, as many nomads did, and yet enjoy the bounty of the surrounding agricultural world, Mongolian notables had to meet the high costs of transportation. Thus, from the perspective of the merchant, long-distance bulk trade became in these circumstances an economically sound proposition.

³¹ Jūzjānī (*H*) 1, p. 311, and 2, p. 103; and Jūzjānī (*R*) 1, p. 272, and 2, p. 966.

³² Li Chih-ch'ang 李志常, *Hsi-yü chi* 西遊記, in Wang Kuo-wei 王國維, ed., *Meng-ku shih-liao ssu-chung* 蒙古史料四種 (Taipei: Cheng-chung shu-chū, 1975), pp. 292-93, 344; and Arthur Waley, trans., *Travels of an Alchemist* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 79, 103-4.

³³ De Rachewiltz, "The *Hsi-yü lu*," p. 22, translation, and p. 116, text.

³⁴ Chao Hung 趙瑛, *Meng-ta pei-lu* 蒙鞑備錄, in Wang, *Meng-ku shih-liao*, p. 435.

³⁵ Li, *Hsi-yü chi*, pp. 281-82, and Waley, *Travels of an Alchemist*, p. 71. In Waley's translation the character for "ounce" (*liang* 兩) is mistakenly rendered as "pound."

Available sources for the final few years of Činggis Qan's reign place military operations at center stage and commercial matters recede into the background. The data presented, however, show that the evolving relationship between the Mongols and the Inner Asian merchants was both extensive and multifaceted. In the expanding Mongolian state the traders had found a powerful ally that actively promoted commerce by providing patronage, capital, and protection. The merchants also quickly discovered new markets in Mongolia that were readily penetrated and profitably exploited. Well represented at court by commercial agents attached to the *qan* and his family, the merchants conducting business with the Mongols had every reason to be pleased. Their interests had been well served to date, and even better days were still to come.

THE APEX OF MERCHANT INFLUENCE: THE REIGNS OF ÖGÖDEI AND GUYUG

Before his death in 1227 Činggis Qan named as heir his third son, Ögödei, who was duly enthroned two years later. Once the transition was completed, Mongolian military operations, held in abeyance during the interregnum, were resumed. The new campaigns successfully extended Činggisid dominion over the remnants of the Chin realm, northern Iran, Transcaucasia, and the Russian principalities. Evidence indicates that during this period the scale of court-sponsored trade grew apace with territorial expansion. Merchants now exercised a very visible and pervasive influence on imperial policy; moreover, they enjoyed special privileges and reaped great profits.

The scope of the court's involvement with merchants is reflected in the observations of two Sung envoys who traveled to Mongolia in the mid-1230s. P'eng Ta-ya 彭大雅, whose embassy arrived in 1234, relates that the ruling house,

from the Tatar Emperor (Ögödei) to the false princes of the blood, to the false heir apparent, to the false princesses,³⁶ all entrust their silver to the Muslims (Hui-hui 回回). As for [the latter] some lend it out to the populace and make abundant their interest . . . and some buy all sorts of wares and engage in trade and commerce.³⁷

³⁶ P'eng, a representative of the Southern Sung, did not consider the Činggisids or their titles legitimate.

³⁷ P'eng Ta-ya 彭大雅 and Hsü T'ing 徐霆, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh* 黑鞑事略, in Wang, *Meng-ku shih-liao*, p. 493.

The report of Hsü T'ing 徐霆, a year later, confirms and amplifies P'eng's data:

[Whenever] I observed a Tatar there would be only *sauya* (*sa-hua* 撒花).³⁸ There is no one [among them] who knows how to trade. From the Tatar Emperor on down, they give their silver to the Muslims, ordering them to go about on their own to trade and acquire interest. As for the Muslims, some lend it to others, and some conduct trade in numerous locales.³⁹

These reports of an openhanded policy toward merchants are fully corroborated by the Persian sources. According to Juvaynī, an elderly stranger once approached Ögödei and "petitioned for 200 gold ingots to form an *ortoy* [with the *qayan*]." To the dismay of his advisers, the emperor, without inquiring into his new associate's bona fides, immediately granted the request. And on the heels of this transaction, Juvaynī tells us, Ögödei advanced fresh funds to an *ortoy* merchant who through carelessness had already lost 300 ingots of the *qayan*'s capital (*sar-māyah*)!⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the court's largess and lax business practices attracted throngs of merchants (*tujār*) and speculators (*aṣḥab-i intija'*).⁴¹

While many came in quest of capital, others flocked to Mongolia to offer wares for sale. They were not disappointed, for Ögödei ordered that goods purchased from merchants be paid for at 10 percent above the asking price, which was already inflated. When his ministers protested this unnecessary extravagance, the emperor retorted:

The dealings of our treasury with merchants are for the purpose of their finding benefit and acquiring advantage under our protection and indeed this group [of merchants] pays expenses to your scribes and it is their debt to you that I am paying off so that they shall not leave our presence suffering a loss.⁴²

To some degree, Ögödei's frequent displays of imperial largess, extended as well to relatives, officials, soldiers, and commoners, were designed to demonstrate his incalculable wealth and unrivaled generosity and thereby served as

³⁸ *Sauya* is the Mongolian word for "present" or "booty." The term is discussed in more detail below.

³⁹ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 494.

⁴⁰ Juvaynī (Q) 1, pp. 165-66, and Juvaynī (B) 1, pp. 208-10.

⁴¹ Juvaynī (Q) 1, p. 156, and Juvaynī (B) 1, p. 198.

⁴² Juvaynī (Q) 1, pp. 170-71, and Juvaynī (B) 1, p. 214.

a means of proclaiming and enhancing his great majesty.⁴³ In his dealings with merchants, however, Ögödei's liberal pricing policy may have been based on other calculations — chief among them the desire to attract goods to Qara Qorum, the new capital near the Orkhon River, which could not be provisioned locally. The surrounding nomadic economy simply could not meet the basic needs of this somewhat artificial city with its high (by steppe standards) population density. Thus the Mongolian court, a major consumer, regularly offered inflated prices to attract sellers. In any event, the emperor's liberality, whether deliberate or not, had the effect of ensuring a steady flow of commodities, including bulk goods, into the capital and its environs. Hsü T'ing, for instance, notes that merchants (*k'o-jen* 客人) annually brought 1,000 piculs (*shih* 石), or around 130,000 to 140,000 pounds, of hulled rice (*mi* 米) into Mongolia for trade.⁴⁴

There was another incentive, too, that drew merchants toward the Mongolian court — the empire's extensive communications system. In the latter part of his reign, Činggis Qan founded a network of relay stations (Mongolian *jam*) to convey military messengers and foreign envoys from the frontiers to the imperial camp. Further, he set as one of his tasks the clearing and straightening of "roads and highways."⁴⁵ Ögödei, in emulation of his father, took a special and very personal interest in improving the communications of the empire. Under his aegis the relay system, regularized and expanded, became an integral part of the Mongolian administrative machinery. The post stations, laid out a day's march apart, connected Qara Qorum with north China, Turkestan, and the Lower Volga.⁴⁶ Envoys traveling on official business received en route free food, lodging, and mounts.⁴⁷ Ögödei, exceedingly proud of his efforts, considered the elaboration of this network his single greatest achievement.⁴⁸

Juwaynī, who had personal knowledge of this communications system, notes that it was heavily used for commercial purposes. He states that together with the collection and dissemination of intelligence, the primary reason for its establishment was "to transport goods from the West to the

East and from the Far East to the West."⁴⁹ Merchant access to the relay stations is confirmed by the Chinese sources. An imperial decree dated July 1233 addresses various disruptions in the system; it says in part: "If messengers coming from military headquarters meet any trading Muslims, [the messengers], no matter what [the merchant's] business, shall confiscate their horses to ride between stations."⁵⁰ In another decree, from December 1229, Ögödei directed that henceforth "one centurion (*po-hu* 百戶) shall be specially ordered to employ draft oxen to convey [rice] to traveling merchants staying over [at the stations]."⁵¹ According to this same document, the necessary provisions were to be drawn from the households attached to the postal station (*chan-hu* 站戶). From these passages it is evident that merchants used the system extensively, had the right to do so if they did not impede the flow of military orders, and, like other official travelers, received their keep in transit.

The availability of such a service obviously was a considerable inducement to "traveling merchants." In premodern times the most significant expenses of the long-distance trader were transportation and protection costs. Under Ögödei, merchants were able to travel cheaply and securely throughout the empire, and even if "squeezed" occasionally by the postal authorities they could reasonably expect profitable ventures in consequence of such preferential treatment.

For the merchants, these were the best of times, but their rise to a position of privilege and influence at court resulted in extreme hardship for the subject population. Muslim and Uighur merchants were, in fact, the willing agents, if not the chief architects, of the exploitative economic policies pursued by the Mongols in north China. As conditions deteriorated in the latter years of Ögödei's reign, Chinese observers certainly held the ubiquitous Inner Asian merchants mainly responsible for their country's misfortunes. While it is true that these critics overstate the case (particularly those in Mongolian service, who were hardly in a position to openly chastise their overlords, the merchants' sponsors and protectors), their accusations nonetheless were correct in substance. The complaints they lodged can be conveniently grouped under three headings: extortion, usury, and tax farming.

The trading activity of the merchants was not an object of criticism as

⁴³ For additional examples of Ögödei's great munificence, see *Juwaynī* (Q) 1, pp. 149, 156, 160–61, and *Juwaynī* (B) 1, pp. 188–89, 198, 202–3.

⁴⁴ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lieh*, p. 477.

⁴⁵ *Rashid* (K) 1, p. 439.

⁴⁶ For a brief sketch, see Peter Olbrich, *Das Postwesen in China unter den Mongolenherrschaft im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1954), pp. 36–38.

⁴⁷ Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 27.

⁴⁸ This boast is recorded twice in *SH*, sect. 279, p. 225, and sect. 281, p. 227.

⁴⁹ *Juwaynī* (Q) 1, p. 24, and *Juwaynī* (B) 1, p. 33.

⁵⁰ This document is preserved in the early Ming compendium *Yung-lo ta-tien* 永樂大典 (Ts'un-pen fu-pien wen-yüan-ko shu-mu; rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1962), ch. 19416, p. 8b.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7a. The *Yüan Dynasty History* notes among Ögödei's accomplishments that during his reign, "Travellers did not [need] to concern themselves with provisions." See *YS* 2, p. 37.

such, but the ease and frequency with which they fleeced the Chinese populace are indignantly noted. According to Hsü T'ing, a favorite and usually successful ploy of the merchants was to "declare falsely they have been robbed and [then] demand restitution from the households of the locale."⁵² On the surface, at least, the reason this form of extortion was so common seems obvious: the locals, aware that the merchants operated with capital supplied by the court, felt compelled to compensate the traders or face retribution at the hands of the Mongolian military. The situation, however, is more complex and is intimately connected with the Mongols' peculiar attitude toward lost goods. In a nomadic society, herd animals continuously wander off, and in conformity with the rules of mutual aid and reciprocity, custom demanded that neighbors promptly return all strays. In the period of the empire the practice became institutionalized and is described by various travelers among the Mongols. Marco Polo, for instance, relates that when one finds a lost horse, sword, hunting bird, or other item, it is carried to a special officer, a "*bularguci*," who is "the keeper of things who find no master."⁵³ The fullest explanation of the rationale behind this custom is provided by Huc and Gabet, who had personal experience with the practice while journeying through Mongolia in the 1840s:

By a law among the Tartars, when animals are lost from a caravan, the persons occupying the nearest encampment are bound either to find them or replace them. It seems no doubt very strange to European views, because, without their consent or even knowledge, without being even in the smallest degree known to them, you have chosen to pitch your tent near those of a Mongol party, you and your animals, and your baggage, are under their responsibility; but so it is. If a thing disappears, the law supposes that your next neighbor is the thief, or at all events an accomplice.⁵⁴

That this nomadic convention was enforced in north China to protect merchants operating there is made abundantly clear in a passage from the

biography of Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai:

At the beginning of the state (i.e., in Činggis Qan's reign) brigands were very numerous and merchants (*shang-ku* 商賈) could not [safely] travel. Therefore, a decree was issued that in all places where [merchants] were robbed and the true thieves were not captured in a year's time, the populace (*min-hu* 民戶) of the circuit in question had to compensate [the merchants] for their [lost] goods.⁵⁵

Thus by Mongolian law the locals were made collectively responsible for all goods lost by traveling merchants, and the latter were quick to realize that by advancing fabricated charges of theft or robbery they could confidently bully and defraud the subject population. After all, if the case came to the notice of a Mongolian prince or commander, whom would he believe — a merchant in the service of the imperial family or a Chinese farmer?

An even more serious problem in Chinese eyes was the merchants' deep involvement in usury and moneylending. Unlike medieval Christian and Islamic law, which formally prohibited the exaction of interest, the Chinese accepted the practice so long as the rates charged were kept within bounds. However, the Muslim and Uighur merchants in the Han territory lent at premiums that were unprecedented and outrageous by any standard. P'eng Ta-ya formulates their rates in the following manner: "On one ingot (*ting* 錠) of principal, turned over (*chan-chuan* 展轉) for ten years, their interest will be 1,024 ingots."⁵⁶ From this, an annual schedule of payments is easily derived: at the end of year one the borrower owes two ingots; at the end of year two he owes four; after three years eight, and so on. Their standard demand was therefore 100 percent interest compounded annually.

This does not seem credible, but fortunately several other independent and contemporary sources specify, though in somewhat different language, the very same rate.⁵⁷ Still, how could a Chinese peasant or city dweller ever hope to repay a loan outstanding for more than a year or so? The sources offer no guidance on this matter, but it is probable that for the most part the lenders did not desire repayment of the loan, especially the principal; rather they hoped to milk interest payments from the debtors on an indefinite basis, and if, in the end, those so ensnared defaulted on their loans, the merchant could always foreclose and seize the property of his hapless victims.

⁵² P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 494. In the same source, p. 493, P'eng declares that the Muslim traders, "using nighttime pilferage as a pretext, demand restitution from the populace."

⁵³ Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938) 1, p. 230. The Mongolian form is *bularγuci*. For a discussion of the term and the functions of the office, see Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959) 1, pp. 112-14; and Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente* 1, pp. 213-15. Carpini also remarks on this custom. See Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Joseph Gabet and Régis Evariste Huc, *Travels in Tartary, Tibet and China, 1844-6*, trans. William Hazlitt (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1928) 1, pp. 80-81, my italics.

⁵⁵ Su T'ien-chüeh 蘇天爵, *Yüan wen-lei* 元文類 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1967; hereafter *YWL*) 57, pp. 17a-b.

⁵⁶ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 493.

⁵⁷ *YS* 155, p. 3659, and *YWL* 57, p. 17b.

In the Chinese sources these usurious rates are consistently called "lamb interest" (*yang-kao li* 羊羔利).⁵⁸ The term is always defined clearly enough but its origin is never discussed. On balance, it seems unlikely that it derives from Chinese usage, since contemporary Chinese authors usually felt obliged to explain its meaning to their readers. Perhaps the term is a calque translation from Mongolian or Turkic into Chinese and alludes to the growth potential of a young animal or to its ability, once it reaches maturity, to reproduce itself on an *annual* basis. In any event, the term "lamb interest" most probably arose in a pastoral society.⁵⁹

Why Chinese entered into loan arrangements with merchants at such crippling interest rates is directly linked to the Mongols' revenue policies. In the early years of the empire taxes were collected on an ad hoc basis; tithes were levied on newly conquered people, or goods were simply seized as the opportunity and need arose. When Ögödei came to power efforts were made to regularize and equalize the tax burden on the sedentary population. Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai, named head of the regional administration of north China in 1229, proposed a series of reforms designed both to restrict the tax categories to three (household, land, and commercial) and to establish known rates for each. Introduced on a trial basis in 1234, the package yielded increased revenues and won Ögödei's approval.

Although the reforms provided a measure of relief, substantial problems remained. One perennial source of frustration was the Mongols' penchant for special imposts, which were levied in addition to the regular categories of taxation. We know, for instance, that under Ögödei Chinese urban dwellers frequently had "to borrow silver from Muslims to buy sustenance for passing envoys."⁶⁰ Other extraordinary levies, particularly in support of Mongolian military operations, were commonly imposed, and neither Ögödei nor any of his immediate successors ever placed effective curbs on this practice.

In combination, the established categories, whose rates were set high to gain court approval, and the special levies proved to be a crushing burden

⁵⁸ See L. S. Yang, *Money and Credit in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1971), p. 97.

⁵⁹ I owe this suggestion to Professor Denis Twitchett of Princeton University. It is interesting to note in this connection that in later centuries nomads who became indebted to merchants typically paid off the interest on their loans and the carrying costs on their purchases in herd animals, principally sheep. At times the rates exacted reached 100 percent compounded annually. For examples, see Henry Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885) I, p. 316; N. G. Apollonova, *Khoziastvennoe oboznenie Priirytsh'ia v kontse XVI—pervoi polovine XIX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), p. 348; and M. Sanjidorj, *Manchu Chinese Colonial Rule in Northern Mongolia*, trans. Urgunge Onon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 91.

⁶⁰ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 489. See also H. Franz Schurmann, "Mongolian Tributary Practices of the Thirteenth Century," *HJAS* 19 (1956), p. 313.

for both the populace and the Chinese officials charged with revenue collection. In these circumstances many were compelled to turn to the merchants to meet their tax obligations. The situation in 1236 is concisely related in the biography of Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai:

All the time [debts] accumulated and accumulated, reaching a great figure. If local officials took out loans of silver from the Central Asians,⁶¹ then their debt doubled in a year, and the following year it doubled again together with the interest. They call this lamb interest; it accumulates without end.⁶²

Public indebtedness to the Central Asians continued to increase throughout the later years of Ögödei's reign as the influence wielded by Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai, the champion of Chinese interests, steadily declined in the face of the merchants' determined campaign to gain direct control over the revenue system.

The outlines of the struggle between the two factions can be followed in the Chinese sources. The first recorded attempt to displace Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai came in 1237 when a certain A-san A-mi-shih 阿散阿迷失, described only as a Central Asian (Hui-hu), denounced him for misappropriating funds. The accused, however, brought the charges before Ögödei, who decided in his favor and forced A-san to acknowledge his slander.⁶³ The following year the merchants tried another approach. Using their connections at court, they placed "bids" (*p'u-mai* 撲買) for the right to collect various categories of taxes. Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai persuaded the emperor of the dangers inherent in this course of action and for the moment the would-be tax farmers were thwarted.⁶⁴

The Chinese minister had won the opening rounds, but in time the merchants acquired a powerful ally in the person of Činqai (Chen-hai 鎮海), the head of the imperial chancellory. With his backing the taxes of north China were farmed out to the Muslim merchant 'Abd al-Rahmān (Ao-tu-la-ho-man 奧都剌合蠻) early in 1240. Again Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai protested, but this time to no avail.⁶⁵ The following month 'Abd al-Rahmān's victory was complete when he was put in charge of all the tax bureaus of north China. Moreover, the general revenue quota for China, set at 22,000 ingots in 1234, was now raised to 44,000 ingots.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Hui-hu 回鶻 can mean Uighur or Muslim at this time.

⁶² *YWL* 57, p. 17b. ⁶³ *YWL* 57, p. 18b. ⁶⁴ *YWL* 57, pp. 19a-b.

⁶⁵ *YWL* 57, pp. 19b-20a.

⁶⁶ *YS* 2, p. 36, and *Sheng-wu ch'ing-cheng lu* 聖武親征錄, in Wang, *Meng-ku shih-liao*, p. 218.

Under 'Abd al-Rahmān the Central Asian merchant community reached the apex of its power and influence in the empire. Their newly acquired preeminence was not, however, sustainable in the long run, for the economic regime they imposed was by its very nature self-destructive. In point of fact, a more ruinous and exploitative system is difficult to conceive. The tax farmers bid up the revenue quotas to unbearable levels, in consequence of which the populace, unable to pay, had to borrow silver at usurious rates from merchant-moneylenders. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the monies the merchants lent to the hard-pressed taxpayers came from the imperial treasury and that in the first instance the monies in question had been exacted as taxes from the selfsame population.

Not unexpectedly, conditions in north China deteriorated rapidly. Individuals either sold their property, and sometimes their wives and children, or simply fled, joining the growing ranks of the floating population.⁶⁷ Those who remained, of course, now fell further into debt. The situation soon reached crisis proportions, and even Ögödei, by this time much given to drink and dalliance and little concerned with affairs of the realm, was made to realize that the merchants had to be curtailed. In accordance with memorials previously submitted by Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai and Shih T'ien-tse, the governor-general of Hopei, the throne late in 1240 acted to eliminate the public's ever-deepening indebtedness to the merchants.⁶⁸ The *Yüan Dynastic History* provides a brief account of the measures:

This year, because officials and the populace borrowed Central Asian gold to pay official [taxes], annually [the sum borrowed] doubled. This is called lamb interest. The harm [it caused] was severe. There was an imperial decree [ordering that] public funds be used for repayment [of the outstanding debts]. All together [this amounted to] 76,000 ingots. Further it was decreed that [in the case of] all loans out for many years [the amount of interest] should only equal the principal and then stop. This was made known as an ordinance.⁶⁹

This decree is interesting in several respects. First, while it constituted a setback for the merchants, they nonetheless received public funds in repayment of their loans and collected a healthy return — up to 100 percent — on their investment. Second, since we know that the general tax quota for 1240 was 44,000 ingots and the total indebtedness of the Chinese taxpayers to the

merchants was 76,000 ingots, we obtain some notion of the large number of those forced to borrow to meet their obligations to the empire.

The merchants suffered a further rebuff in the fall of 1241 when Ögödei placed Maḥmūd Yalavach (Ya-lao-wa-ch'ih 牙老互赤) in charge of the regional administration of north China. Though a Khwārazmian of merchant background, Maḥmūd was no tax farmer. During his years (1229–ca. 1239) as the head of the regional administration of Turkestan, he had pioneered a new tax system which, like the reforms of Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai in China, endeavored to categorize and restrict the revenue collection in his jurisdiction. Thus his arrival on the scene should be interpreted as a further move to stabilize conditions in the Han territories. However, as Ögödei died a month later, there was little opportunity to effect change. Töregene, the deceased qayan's wife, became regent and promptly dismissed Yalavach, who was forced to find sanctuary with a sympathetic Mongolian prince.⁷⁰ Further, the regent was well disposed toward the merchants, who quickly resumed their former position at court. 'Abd al-Rahmān, a personal favorite of Töregene, received an imperial seal that gave him administrative as well as fiscal control over north China. This development drew protests from Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai, whose influence on events was now at an end: Töregene politely listened to his complaints, granted him honor, then ignored his advice.⁷¹

Töregene's regency lasted until 1246, when she finally engineered the elevation of her son Güyüg to the imperial throne. His selection, however, angered some of the Činggisids, particularly the line of Jöči, and the new qayan was compelled to make several concessions to secure the succession, among them the dismissal of 'Abd al-Rahmān. At Güyüg's order the tax farmer was put to death, and Maḥmūd Yalavach again assumed his former office.⁷²

The change of regimes was not, as it might appear, a major defeat for the merchant faction. They no longer exercised immediate administrative and fiscal authority in China, but Güyüg, like his mother and his father's chief adviser, Činqai, whom he continued in office, pursued policies beneficial to their interests. Upon assuming the throne Güyüg announced his determination to surpass his father's record of munificence. He reaffirmed Ögödei's policy of purchasing commercial wares at 10 percent above the asking price

⁶⁷ Wang Yün 王惲, *Ch'iu-ch'ien hsien-sheng ta-ch'üan wen-chi* 秋潤先生大全文集 (SPTK edn.) 48, p. 13b, and *YS* 98, p. 2510.

⁶⁸ *TWL* 57, p. 17b, and *YS* 155, p. 3659. ⁶⁹ *YS* 2, p. 37.

⁷⁰ *Juayni* (Q) 1, p. 199, and *Juayni* (B) 1, p. 243. See also *Rashid* (K) 1, p. 564, and *Rashid al-Din, The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John A. Boyle (New York: Columbia U.P., 1971; hereafter cited as *Rashid* (B)) 1, p. 177.

⁷¹ *TWL* 57, pp. 21a–b. ⁷² *Rashid* (K) 1, p. 570, and *Rashid* (B) 1, p. 183.

and on some occasions grandly doubled the prices several times over.⁷³ In the manner of his predecessors Güyüg made no distinction between private and public funds; the empire was the patrimony of the Činggisids, and the empire's financial resources, not unexpectedly, were still viewed as personal income and utilized accordingly.

Merchants, naturally, flocked to his court.⁷⁴ According to Juvaynī, business was so brisk that "at one time [the *qayan's* indebtedness to] a group of merchants (*bāzargānān*) who had served him reached a sum of 70,000 ingots (*bālīsh*), for which they wrote drafts (*bārat*) upon the provinces."⁷⁵ The court's preoccupation with commerce extended to the *qayan's* deputies, whom Rashīd al-Dīn notes were constantly "negotiating large deals" with merchants.⁷⁶ Given Güyüg's extravagance and his inattention to administrative matters, it is not surprising that the imperial treasury at times ran short of ready cash.

Güyüg's demise in 1248 after a brief and ineffectual reign occasioned another succession struggle and another regency, this one headed by his widow, Oyul Qaimish. The extent to which merchants pursued the occupations of moneylending and tax farming is not recorded, but there is every indication that their other undertakings continued to prosper during Oyul Qaimish's tenure. In characterizing her administration of the realm, Juvaynī says derisively that public affairs were reduced to the dispatch of tax collectors, the allocation of funds, and "negotiations with merchants."⁷⁷ Elsewhere the same author notes that following Güyüg's death there was a great scramble to cash in on one's position and connections. Princes of the blood, he states, "entered into commercial ventures . . . and individuals high and low sought the protection conferred by *ortoy*-status (*ürtäqī*)."⁷⁸

From the perspective of the merchants, the period extending from the last half of Ögödei's reign to the end of Oyul Qaimish's regency in 1251 must have seemed a golden age. The imperial court offered them good prices for their wares, provided capital for joint ventures, subsidized their transportation, and guaranteed the security of their persons and property. Trade under these conditions was no doubt extremely lucrative, but even greater profits

could be derived from usury and tax farming, activities that the court not only condoned but at times actually encouraged and sponsored.

Merchants were not again to enjoy such privilege or latitude. With the rise of Möngke (r. 1251–1259) the freewheeling practices of the previous decades were circumscribed and a concerted effort was made to bring merchants under the control of the central administration.

THE MERCHANTS CURTAILED: THE REIGN OF MÖNGKE

Möngke, the eldest son of Tolui, came to power in 1251 following a protracted struggle within the ruling house. The new *qayan* with his allies, the descendants of Joči, displaced the Ögödeids, who bitterly insisted that the succession belonged exclusively to them. Once the opposition was overcome, Möngke instituted a sweeping purge, in which numerous princes and their retainers died. His victory signaled a change in both the ruling line and the direction of imperial policy.

As a ruler, Möngke differed greatly from his two predecessors. He was as frugal as they were openhanded, and in contrast to their inattention to administrative detail, he assumed an active and direct role in the governance of the realm. His principal political goal was to reinvigorate the long-stalled campaigns of conquest in eastern and western Asia. To achieve this, the *qayan* needed to mobilize the resources of the empire to fuel the military machine. Toward this end he ordered a new census, levied fresh revenues, and recruited additional troops from the subject population. He also attempted to end lax administrative procedures and official corruption, recognizing that such behavior, which had become endemic under Ögödei and Güyüg, deprived the central government of the means to carry out the program of military expansion. And since the merchants were at the center of many of the abuses, Möngke made it his business to scrutinize their various activities with a critical eye.

He began by issuing a general warning that "those high and low in the ranks of the *ortoy* . . . should be restrained in their dealings with the subject population."⁷⁹ For purposes of oversight, the *qayan* selected a certain Bōral *Qarasun (Po-lan Ho-la-sun 孛蘭合剌孫) to superintend the *ortoy* (*wo-p'o* 斡脫).⁸⁰ Unhappily, further data on Bōral and the organization he headed

⁷³ Juvaynī (*Q*) 1, p. 222, and Juvaynī (*B*) 1, p. 267.

⁷⁴ Juvaynī states that large numbers of merchants were present at Güyüg's enthronement. Juvaynī (*Q*) 1, p. 206, and Juvaynī (*B*) 1, p. 250.

⁷⁵ Juvaynī (*Q*) 1, p. 214, and Juvaynī (*B*) 1, p. 259.

⁷⁶ Rashīd (*K*) 1, p. 598, and Rashīd (*B*) 1, p. 221.

⁷⁷ Juvaynī (*Q*) 1, p. 219, and Juvaynī (*B*) 1, pp. 264–65.

⁷⁸ Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, p. 76, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, p. 598.

⁷⁹ Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, p. 77, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, p. 599 and n. 161. See also Rashīd (*K*) 1, p. 597, and Rashīd (*B*) 1, p. 219.

⁸⁰ *YS* 3, p. 46.

are lacking, but some idea of the scope of his responsibilities can be inferred from the strictures subsequently placed upon the *ortoys*. First, merchants had to return to the court all tablets of authority (Persian *pāizah*, Chinese *p'ai-tzu* 牌子) in their possession. This of course stripped them of their official status and one of the means by which they were able to bully and squeeze the populace.⁸¹ Second, their free use of "post horses" (Turkic *ulay*) was rescinded. As Rashīd al-Dīn phrases it, they were "ordered to ride their own animals."⁸² Third, merchants and *ortoys* were now entered onto the census rolls. This measure was particularly unwelcome in their eyes; it meant that they were to be taxed on a regular basis, as this imperial decree recorded by Juvaynī makes clear:

Inasmuch as they (the *ortoys*) are constantly occupied with their own gain, each one, in the locale in which he has been entered into the census, should share the contributions (*mu'an*) equally with the [other] subjects and should not assume airs or seek ascendancy.⁸³

In the Chinese sources there are two additional references to this decree which confirm the spirit if not the letter of Juvaynī's rendering of the new regulations. The first and longer version comes from Wang Yün 王恽, an influential Chinese official in Mongolian service.⁸⁴ Speaking of the early years of Qubilai's reign, he noted that many Muslim merchants in the capital (Peking),⁸⁵ all of whom had been registered in the censuses of 1252 and 1263, found ways of avoiding their tax obligations. To demonstrate that this practice was illegal and required corrective action, he invoked a decree of the "Late Emperor," that is, Möngke,⁸⁶ which reads in part:

It is proper that the *ortoys*, and the Uighurs and Muslims engaged in trade, should report to the chiliarchs and the centurians of their official places of residence. If it is reported that those with lands and property

do not go [to the commanders, then] in conformity with regulations contained in prior imperial decrees [they should pay] the household tax (*ch'ai-fa* 差發) in their temporary places of residence whether [said residence] is great or small.⁸⁷

The second reference is contained in an imperial decree dated 1271, which refers to "sundry *ortoy* households" (*chu wo-t'o hu* 諸斡脫戶):

[According] to the respectfully received imperial decree of the Late Emperor (Möngke), people engaged in trade in all locales [must pay] their household tax (*tang-ch'ai* 當差) in their temporary places of residence on an equal footing (*i-t'i* 一體) with the civilian population.⁸⁸

An analysis of the three renditions of the now lost and undoubtedly more comprehensive original brings to light several issues calling for further comment. First, by implication at least, it appears that in the period before Möngke merchants did not shoulder their fair share of the tax load. If so, were they formally exempt or was it merely a matter of successful evasion? Juvaynī affirms that some merchants "were exempt from extraordinary levies (*avārizāl*),"⁸⁹ but whether they enjoyed a blanket immunity, such as those the court regularly granted the religious estates, is problematical. To my knowledge there is no direct evidence that they did, and on balance it seems more probable that under Ögödei and Güyük the obligations of the merchants were conveniently overlooked by their lax and friendly administrations.

Second, while the decrees state explicitly that *ortoys* and other merchants were now obliged to pay taxes at the same rates imposed upon the general populace, to what degree was the regulation enforced? No definitive answer is possible, but a close comparison of the decrees themselves provides a useful clue. In the text transmitted by Juvaynī it is said that taxes were to be collected at the merchant's permanent place of residence. Wang Yün's version also notes this provision and then goes on to say that if they do not report to the authorities in their home locales, they should be taxed at their temporary residences. The imperial decree of 1271, significantly, specifies only the temporary domicile as the collection site. From these divergencies in the decrees, several inferences can be drawn: while the central government preferred to tax merchants where officially registered, they could not always do so; merchants, constantly on the move, often had to be taxed at their

⁸¹ Juvaynī (Q) 3, pp. 87–88, and Juvaynī (B) 2, pp. 605–6.

⁸² Rashīd (K) 1, p. 596, and Rashīd (B) 1, p. 219.

⁸³ Juvaynī (Q) 3, p. 88, and Juvaynī (B) 2, p. 606.

⁸⁴ For a brief biographical sketch, see Herbert Franke, "Wang Yün (1227–1304): A Transmitter of Chinese Values," in Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds., *Yüan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1982), pp. 156–62.

⁸⁵ On the growth of such communities, see Paul Pelliot, "Une ville musulmane dans la Chine du Nord sous les Mongols," *JA* 211 (1927), pp. 261–79.

⁸⁶ The identification of the "Late Emperor" (*Hsien-ti* 先帝) with Möngke is guaranteed by a passage in the *Tung-chih t'iao-ko* 通制條格 (Hang-chou: Che-chiang ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1986) 2, p. 4, which refers to another decree issued by the "Late Emperor" dated 1252, i.e., the second year of Möngke's reign. The title is certainly a posthumous name, a practice common among the medieval Mongols. For this custom, see John A. Boyle, "On the Titles Given in Juvaynī to Certain Mongolian Princes," *HJAS* 19 (1956) pp. 146–54.

⁸⁷ Wang Yün, *Ch'iu-ch'ien hsien-sheng ta-ch'üan wen-chi* 88, p. 5b.

⁸⁸ *Tung-chih t'iao-ko* 2, p. 12. ⁸⁹ Juvaynī (Q) 3, p. 89, and Juvaynī (B) 2, p. 606.

secondary residences; and collection was likely a hit-or-miss proposition, but the authorities, alive to the problem, did make the effort.

Tax farming, the cause of much misery in the preceding years, is no longer mentioned in the sources of this period, but another source of abuse, "lamb interest," is still in evidence despite Möngke's command to his officials that they "be on guard against the blemish of usury (*ribā*) and the excess of greed."⁹⁰ The reason for its persistence is that the household tax was set so high in 1252 that the populace had difficulty meeting its obligations and therefore turned again to the Central Asians for loans.⁹¹ The practice, however, never reached its former proportions, and in 1254 the stricture that the accrued interest could not exceed the sum of the original principal was reaffirmed.⁹²

Obviously, the new regulations were not always strictly enforced, and the merchants, in pursuit of their own interests, certainly tested the court's resolve. Nonetheless, they were now enrolled in the census registers, were made liable for regular taxation, and experienced formal revocation of some privileges. More important, whatever the shortcomings of implementation, Möngke introduced new ground rules; as a matter of policy the court no longer sanctioned the unbridled and excessive practices of the past. This conclusion finds support in the fact that whenever merchants got out of hand in Qubilai's reign, his advisers were quick to invoke the regulations of the "Late Emperor" as a guide for remedial action.

It should be stressed that Möngke's measures were never intended to break the merchants or destroy their livelihood. The court still needed their services and took steps to ensure their continued presence and good will. The most dramatic action occurred at the onset of the reign when Möngke confronted the problem of the treasury's accumulated indebtedness to the merchants, which had reached staggering proportions during the regimes of Güyüg and Öyül Qaimish. In their day the practice of paying traders and *ortoys* with "drafts" (*bārat*), presumably on anticipated revenues, was so widespread that according to Juvaynī it produced a debt totaling 500,000 silver ingots. When the holders of these drafts requested a settlement of accounts, Möngke, against the counsel of his ministers, commanded that this obligation be met "from the funds of his realm."⁹³ Further, the court em-

ployed merchants in various capacities. Rashīd al-Dīn informs us that "one group [of merchants] valued gems, another garments, another fur, and a fourth ready cash."⁹⁴ By these gestures the *qayan* informed the merchants that their standing at court, while altered in some respects, remained secure.

Evidence that commerce continued to flourish is provided in abundance by the Dominican friar William of Rubruck, who journeyed across the length of the empire in the mid-1250s. In the course of his travels he encountered traders throughout the realm, from the Crimea and north Caucasia to Cailac (Qayaliq) in the Ili River valley. These merchants, according to the friar, carried textiles from Persia and China and furs from Siberia to meet the Mongols' clothing needs. There was a lively trade, too, in wine and mead, which the Tartars imbibed in winter when their supplies of fermented mare's milk (*kumiss*) ran low.⁹⁵

Traders were equally visible at the imperial capital. Rubruck says that one-third of Qara Qorum was given over to "the Saracens' quarter where the markets are," and "many merchants flock thither on account of the court which is always near it and on account of the foreign envoys."⁹⁶ As before, the traders continued to play a role in providing the capital with foodstuffs — dried fruit, nuts, and most particularly grain, which was always in short supply.⁹⁷

The partnership between the merchant community and the imperial court was still intact. What remains to be investigated is the partners themselves and the contractual bases of their joint enterprises.

THE PARTNERS AND THEIR PARTNERSHIPS

The merchants' princely partners were by no means limited to members of the ruling house in Mongolia. Činggisids throughout the empire forged close ties with commercial interests, and in the manner of the imperial court offered their associates protection, capital, and a ready market.

Hülegü, the first ruler of the Persian Īl-Khāns (r. 1256–1265), exhibited a most accommodating attitude toward merchants operating in his realm. A

⁹⁰ Rashīd (*K*) 1, p. 599, and Rashīd (*B*) 1, p. 222.

⁹¹ Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, pp. 90–91, 96, 101, and 137.

⁹² Ibid., p. 184. See also p. 177, where he mentions "the bazaar" of the Saracen quarter. The Mongolian word for "bazaar" is not mentioned in the sources of the thirteenth century but is attested in a dictionary of the latter half of the fifteenth century; there it is given as *uḡar*, a form going back to Middle Persian *vaḡar*, i.e., bazaar. See Louis Ligeti, "Un vocabulaire mongol d'Istanbul," *AOASH* 14.1 (1962), p. 71.

⁹³ Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, pp. 174, 184, and 186.

⁹⁴ Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, p. 87, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, p. 606.

⁹⁵ Yao Sui 姚燾, *Mu an-chi* 牧庵集 (SPTK edn.) 25, p. 5a.

⁹⁶ Su T'ien-chüeh, *Yüan-ch'ao ming-ch'ien shih-lüeh* 元朝名臣事略 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962) 7, p. 12b.

⁹⁷ Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, pp. 83–85, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, pp. 603–4. See also Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, p. 79, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, p. 600.

decree (*Jarlıy*) issued by Abaya (r. 1265–1281) states with approval that his father and predecessor held *ortoys* in high esteem; encouraged their enterprises, including the conversion of wasteland into cultivated fields; and enjoined his officials to refrain from harassing them in any way.⁹⁸ Hülegü's concern for trade and commerce is further evidenced by his action following the fall of Baghdad early in 1258. As soon as the pillaging ended, he appointed a certain 'Alī Bahādur⁹⁹ to the governorship (*shahnağī*) of the city and placed him in direct charge of the *ortoys* and craftsmen (*ūzān*).¹⁰⁰ The organization of commercial activity held a high priority for the newly established ruler.

The merchants came in droves to the Il-Khān court, particularly after the fabled wealth of Baghdad passed into Mongolian hands. The influx of booty was so sudden and on such a huge scale that opportunities for speculation were plentiful and were quickly seized. Indeed, Rashīd al-Dīn, in explaining the exhaustion of the imperial coffers in the decades before Ghazan (r. 1295–1304), attributes this depletion in part to rampant corruption:

In the first place, the riches Hülegü Qan brought from Baghdad, the lands of the heretics (the Assassins), Syria, and other regions and deposited in the fortress of Tillah and Shāhā (in Azerbaijan), the treasurers gradually embezzled, and they sold the ingots of pure gold and the precious stones to the merchants (*bāzargānān*), and inasmuch as they knew one another intimately, not a soul breathed a word.¹⁰¹

The court's transactions with merchants, though often illegal, were nonetheless extensive, and as another passage from Rashīd al-Dīn shows, the Mongolian elite in the provinces also had regular dealings with commercial agents:

In the time of Hülegü Qan and Abaya Qan the funds for victualing the *ordos* (camps) and *qatuns* (Mongolian princesses) were provided according to Mongolian custom and usage and the funding was neither great nor certain. [In consequence] every time [the armies] brought out

booty from a hostile country they gave them (the *qatuns*) a little something from this and each one [of the *qatuns*] had several *ortoys* and they would bring [the *qatuns*] a little money in the form of interest or someone would give [them] a present.¹⁰²

This datum is of great interest in that it reveals the sometime dependency of the Mongols on the merchants. In this case, the *qatuns*, in order to maintain a lifestyle appropriate to their station, were expected to augment their inadequate allowances by investing their share of the booty in enterprises conducted by their personal commercial agents. Further, since Rashīd al-Dīn considers this practice an established norm in Hülegü's time, it is reasonable to surmise that the custom began much earlier and that it was widely followed in all parts of the empire. As is discussed below, the problem of obtaining a sufficient number of competent financial agents and advisers was a cause for concern among the Mongolian princes and princesses.

The Golden Horde, which embraced the Qipčaq Steppe, north Caucasia, the Crimea, the Russian principalities, and western Siberia, attracted its share of commerce. Carpini, crossing Russia several years after the conquest, found large numbers of traders from Constantinople and central Europe in Kiev, a city heavily damaged during the invasion.¹⁰³ Even greater numbers converged on Sarai, the sprawling tent city on the lower Volga founded by Batu (r. 1241–ca. 1256), the regional *qan*. Sarai contained a merchants' quarter, but since the *qan* continued to favor a nomadic life, a traveling market followed his *ordo* throughout the annual round.¹⁰⁴

Batu's personal involvement with trade was direct and substantial. According to the *Yüan Dynastic History*, in the summer of 1253 Batu applied to Möngke, his sovereign, for 10,000 silver ingots to purchase pearls. He received only 1,000 ingots, which were to be deducted from future annual grants of money and silk derived from designated territories in north China,¹⁰⁵ and a patronizing lecture on the virtues of frugality.¹⁰⁶ The *qayan's* cautionary message was certainly appropriate, for we learn from Juvaynī that Batu regularly and willingly offered elevated prices for wares brought to his court.¹⁰⁷ Berke, Batu's brother and ruler of the Golden Horde between

⁹⁸ Gerhard Doerfer, "Mongolica aus Ardabil," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 9 (1975), p. 191.

⁹⁹ The appointment of 'Alī Bahādur is also recorded in Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* 1, p. 433. In Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī's description of the fall of Baghdad, the new governor is called Āsūtū Bahādur. On the identity of 'Alī and Āsūtū Bahādur, see John A. Boyle, "The Death of the Last 'Abbāsīd Caliph: A Contemporary Muslim Account," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (1961), p. 160 and n. 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Rashīd (K)* 2, p. 714. Karīmī's text reads "*shahnağī va ū-rā tāqān va ūzān*," which is incorrect. The passage is properly read "*shahnağī va ūrtāqān va ūzān*." See Raschid-Eldin, *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, ed. E. Quatremère (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1968), p. 306.

¹⁰¹ *Rashīd (K)* 2, p. 978.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1090. The *qatuns'* participation in commerce is also noted by Marco Polo: "And I tell you that Tartar ladies trade, buy, and sell, and do all the work that is needed for their lords and family and for themselves." See Polo, *Description of the World*, p. 169.

¹⁰³ Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129, Rubruck's testimony. On Sarai, see V. L. Egorov, *Istoricheskaia geografiia Zolotoi Ordı v XIII–XIV vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 114–17.

¹⁰⁵ These lands, first assigned to the imperial princes in 1236, were called *qubi*, "share" or "parcel," in Mongolian.

¹⁰⁶ *YS* 3, p. 47. ¹⁰⁷ *Juvaynī (Q)* 1, p. 232, and *Juvaynī (B)* 1, p. 267.

1257 and 1266, manifested a similar interest in commerce. In 1260, when the Polo family reached his *ordo* on the Volga, Berke doubled the price of the jewels displayed by the Venetians.¹⁰⁸ It is known too that he had his own stable of *ortoys*, some of whom were engaged in trade and commerce in Tabriz, Azerbaijan, when war erupted between the Golden Horde and the Il-Khāns in 1262.¹⁰⁹

The reference to *ortoys* in the Golden Horde raises an interesting question of nomenclature. Given the vast size of the empire and the diverse languages spoken there, it is only to be expected that institutional terminology would vary widely in the sources. In the Golden Horde, with its large Turkic- and Slavic-speaking populations, two forms are found. In the decrees of the *qans*, written in Turkic, one encounters *bāzīrgān ortaḡ*, a hybrid term for the Persian *bāzargān*, "merchant," and the Turkic *ortaḡ*, "partner."¹¹⁰ This usage has an exact parallel in the Mongolian couplet, *bedzirget orto'ud*, "merchant partners."¹¹¹ In the Russian sources the term *ortoy* does not appear; its equivalent in all likelihood is *ordobazarets*, literally "camp merchant," which derives from the Slavic name for the traveling markets (*ordobazar*) attached to the camps of their Tatar overlords.¹¹² The Russian form, first attested in the fifteenth century, can be compared semantically to the expression "camp trading Muslim" (*wo-lu-tu shang-fan hui-hui-jen* 幹魯朵番販回人), which is found in a decree of Ögödei dated 1233.¹¹³ As a formal definition for the Persian *bāzargān* (*bazarets* in Slavic garb), the Chinese could hardly improve upon "trading Muslim."

The trading Muslims and others who served the Činggisids are not on the whole well known. They are often referred to collectively in the sources, but few data are provided on their backgrounds or individual identities. There are, however, occasional clues, which permit a general characterization.

¹⁰⁸ Polo, *Description of the World*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁰⁹ Vassāf, *Kitāb-i mustaṭṭab-i vaṣṣāf* (lithograph edn.; Bombay: n.p., 1852–1853), p. 30.

¹¹⁰ V. Radlov, "Tariki Toktamyshe i Temir-Kutluga," *Zapiski vostochnogo otdeleniia Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva* 3 (1899), pp. 6 and 15. The decree in question, sent by Toqtamish to the Polish King Jagiello, is dated 1393.

¹¹¹ Antoine Mostaert, *Le matériel mongol du Houa i i u de Houng-ou*, ed. Igor de Rachewiltz and Anthony Schönbaum, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 18 (Brussels: Institut Belge des hautes études chinoises, 1977), pp. 9, 25, and 40. This term is found in a document dated 1388.

¹¹² *Slavar' russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987) 13, p. 65, col. 1, discusses both terms. It is interesting to note that Yermak, the Cossack chieftain who led the Russian advance into Siberia, began his career as a despoiler of Tatar *ordobazartsy* in the Lower Volga region. See Terence Armstrong, ed., *Yermak's Campaigns in Siberia* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1975), pp. 40 and 45.

¹¹³ *Ta-Yüan ma-cheng-chi* 大元馬政記 (Kuang-ts'ang hsüeh-chiung ts'ung-shu edn.), p. 29b.

There were two fundamental classes of merchants at the Mongolian courts: private traders selling wares on their own initiative and *ortoys* operating with princely capital and patronage. In Möngke's day the latter group was further divided into "those who have received ingots from the treasury and have agreed to send in a certain amount to the treasury and those who recently have become *ortoys*."¹¹⁴ The rationale underlying this division is not explained; perhaps it was simply a matter of distinguishing the old hands of proven reliability and competence from the newcomers brought in on a trial basis, or it may signify that Möngke, for political or economic reasons, wished to separate the *ortoys* associated with his own regime from those who had made their agreements with his predecessors.

The ethnic background of the merchants is sufficiently clear in broad outline, though often difficult to determine in specific cases because of confusion in the Chinese sources of the thirteenth century. These sources employ the terms Hui-hui, properly "Muslim," and Hui-hu, properly "Uighur," in a very loose manner. In some instances individuals with Muslim names like Ja'far Khwājah are called Hui-hu. A further complication, of course, is that a Muslim may be, among others, a Turk, an Arab, or a Persian.

While these difficulties preclude precise classification, the range and relative strength of the ethno-religious groups involved are discernible. In 1238, when merchants placed bids for the right to farm the taxes of north China, there were three principal bidders: a Hui-hu, Liu Hu-tu-ma 劉忽篤馬, most probably an Uighur with a Chinese surname; She-lieh-fa-t'ing 涉獵發丁, that is Sharāf al-Dīn, a Muslim; and Liu T'ing-yü 劉庭玉, a Chinese.¹¹⁵ That should not be taken as evidence that the three groups were equally represented at court, for the sources overall leave a strong impression that Muslims and Uighurs were the most numerous.

The Uighurs submitted to Činggis Qan in 1209, and from the very inception of the empire they entered Mongolian employ as officials, soldiers, and merchants. The merchants did not come exclusively from the Uighur homeland in the Turfan Depression. Before the Mongolian invasions, the Uighurs, long active in the caravan trade, undoubtedly had established colonies in north China, for several Uighur traders bear Chinese surnames. The tax farmer Liu Hu-tu-ma is one example, and there is a reference to a wealthy Hui-hu merchant named T'ien 田, operating in Hopei and Shan-tung, who went over to the Mongols around 1211.¹¹⁶ Other members of the

¹¹⁴ *Juwaynī* (Q) 3, p. 87, and *Juwaynī* (B) 2, p. 605.

¹¹⁵ *TWL* 57, pp. 19a–b.

¹¹⁶ Chao, *Meng-ta pei-lu*, p. 449.

Uighur trading diaspora surely signed on as Mongolian power spread into the region.

As for the Muslim component, the majority were likely inhabitants of West Turkestan. Certainly the traders and merchants Činggis Qan dispatched to Sultan Muḥammad, when identified, are regularly described as natives of Bukhara or Khwārazm. In the Russian sources the fiscal agents of the Golden Horde, particularly tax farmers and collectors, are called *Besermenin*, a name Carpini explicitly associates with the people of Khwārazm.¹¹⁷ Many of the Turkestanis came over after the conquest of the region, but numerous others joined the Mongols at an earlier date, as is evident from the size and composition of the caravan despoiled at Ūṣrār in 1218.

The names of merchants provide some clues to their backgrounds, but on the whole they remain both nameless and faceless. Of individual merchants mentioned in the period before 1260, the lives of only two can be traced in any detail. While neither is called *ortoy* in the sources, both had commercial ties to the Mongolian ruling strata, and their respective careers raise issues of general interest.

The first, Umek,¹¹⁸ also called Asil, is described in the Armenian sources as a rich merchant whom the Mongols captured in 1242 when they took the city of Karin (Theodosiopolis on the upper Euphrates). Subsequently released, probably in consequence of judicious bribery, he established his residence in Tbilisi, where he formed a close friendship with the Georgian king David Narin. According to a contemporary, Kirakos of Ganjak, Umek "was honored with a license of the Qayan (that is, Güyüg) and with the respect of all [the Mongolian] nobility. He paid a generous tribute to Aryun [Aqa] and his associates and the [latter] tendered him great honor."¹¹⁹ He died in 1266 or 1267, still a wealthy and influential figure. No doubt this pattern was repeated many times. Traders taken by the Mongols in the course of military operations often bought their freedom and made the best of the new circumstances by rendering commercial service to the conquerors.¹²⁰ In Umek's case, this apparently included a bit of revenue

collection; the "generous tribute" he paid to Aryun Aqa, Güyüg's chief fiscal officer in Iran and Transcaucasia, was presumably generated by tax farming, which was widespread at that time.

The commercial career of Simeon, a Syriac physician, is equally instructive. A native of Ka'lah Rhomaita (Rum Qal'a), also in the upper Euphrates, Simeon traveled to Ögödei's court sometime late in the 1230s. Utilizing his medical skills, he ingratiated himself with the *qayan* and then prevailed upon his patron to issue fresh orders to protect the recently submitted population of Armenia and Georgia from further Mongolian harassment. Owing to his influence at court, Simeon received the title *Rabban Ata*, "Teacher-Father."¹²¹ Upon his return to Transcaucasia he oversaw the enforcement of Ögödei's decree, built churches, and converted many Mongols to Christianity. At this juncture he took up a new profession, that of merchant. His success is detailed by Kirakos:

All the Tatar troops respected him as if he were their sovereign. In his absence they planned nothing and did nothing. His trading people, furnished with a *tamya*, that is, an official stamp, and a license, traveled freely in every land; no one dared approach the people who invoked his name. All Tatar military commanders sent him gifts from their war booty.¹²²

His new career is confirmed by other sources. Simon de Saint Quentin, who met Simeon in 1247 while on a papal mission, describes him as a merchant (*mercatur*) and a usurer (*usurarius*).¹²³ When Hülegü arrived on the scene in the mid-1250s, Simeon entered the Īl-Khāns' service and continued to prosper until his death in a political purge in 1290.¹²⁴

Simeon's career shows that some persons, appreciating the new possibilities open to them, became merchants after their initial contact with the Mongols. The sources indeed indicate that not all of those aspiring to be merchants to the crown possessed the appropriate backgrounds. Juvaynī, for one, complains that in Güyüg's time "individuals high and low" desired *ortoy*

¹¹⁷ Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, pp. 28–29 and 59. The word itself is just a Turkic form of "Muslim." For further details, see T. I. Teplashina, "Etnonim Besermiane," in V. A. Nikonov, ed., *Etnonimy* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), pp. 177–88.

¹¹⁸ Umek means "zeal" or "relish" in Armenian.

¹¹⁹ Kirakos Gandzaketsi, *Istoriia Armenii*, trans. L. A. Khanlarian (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), p. 221. See also G. A. Galstian, trans., *Armiānskie istochniki o mongolakh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1962), pp. 26, 28, and 36. Further comment on Umek/Asil can be found in A. G. Margarian, "K voprosu o lichnosti i deiatel'nosti 'nekoego Shadina,'" in *Kavkaz i Vizantiia* (Erevan: Izdatel'stvo A. N. Armiānskoi SSR, 1981) 3, pp. 64–72.

¹²⁰ Examples of merchants purchasing their freedom are numerous. See Ibn Kathir, *Al-bidayah wa al-nihayah* (Beirut: Maktabah al-ma'arif, 1966) 13, p. 202; *Juvaynī* (Q) 1, pp. 81–82; and *Juvaynī* (B) 1, pp. 104–5.

¹²¹ *Rabban* is Syriac for "teacher," and *ata* is Turkic for "father."

¹²² Kirakos, *Istoriia Armenii*, pp. 174–75. For a French translation, see Ed. Dulaurier, "Les Mongols d'après les historiens arméniens," *JA* 11 (1855), pp. 253–55.

¹²³ Simon de Saint Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, ed. Jean Richard (Paris: Librairie orientale, 1965), p. 30.

¹²⁴ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, p. 437, and Galstian, *Armiānskie istochniki*, p. 41. For further data on this figure, see J. M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les mongols (Il-khanat de Perse, XIII^e–XIV^e)*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 362, subside 44 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1975), pp. 6–7; Paul Pelliot, *Les Mongols et la Papauté* (Paris: Librairie Auguste Picard, 1923) 2, pp. 29–66; and Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1971), pp. 13–14 and 18.

status.¹²⁵ And Rashīd al-Dīn reports that because of the Mongols' readiness to supply investment capital, many unexpected faces thronged to court. He cites the example of a Jewish "botcher" (*pārah-dūz*) — a humble patcher of clothes — who applied for and received "funds for weapons" (*vūjuh-i masās*)¹²⁶ from Hülegü's treasurer.¹²⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn is highly critical of the practice of providing these "merchant armorers" (*bāzargānān-i masāschūn*) with government monies to buy weapons that they in turn sold back to the court at a handsome profit, but he is equally incensed that such base people, botchers and other petty tradesmen, were rising above their station in entering the lucrative arms-procurement business.

As the empire grew in size and the imperial family grew in number, there was a measure of competition for commercial agents. Sorqaytani Beki, widow of Tolui and mother of Möngke, Qubilai, and Hülegü, once pestered Ögödei for a certain *ortoy* in his employ; the *qayan* initially refused but eventually gave in.¹²⁸ While personages of her stature could seek out experienced and tested agents, others had to settle for less. Speaking of the period before Ghazan, Rashīd al-Dīn notes that "it had become the custom that the people of the provinces gave their sons to the princesses, princes, and commanders for domestic and commercial service (*inchuyi va irtāqi*) and they obtained in return some small trifle (*chizī*)."¹²⁹ Plainly, not all the *ortoy*s acquired in this fashion were solidly grounded in the commercial arts.

Reviewing the evidence as a whole, it appears that the bulk of the merchants in the empire's employ were Turkestan Muslims and Uighurs, with the balance composed of various ethnic and communal groups — Persians, Armenians, Jews, and Syriac Christians. The first generation of merchants to serve consisted mostly, if not exclusively, of professionals. Later, individuals without commercial experience and from all strata of society pushed their way into the ranks of the *ortoy*s. In the eyes of such well-connected men as Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn these newcomers were upstarts, socially and professionally out of place. But the Mongolian Empire, as yet unencumbered by rigid social norms and often eager to recruit despised outsiders whose very lack of standing encouraged loyalty to the regime, afforded many "base people" an opportunity for upward mobility.¹³⁰

The contractual bases of the joint ventures undertaken by the merchants and their Mongolian patrons are not precisely stipulated in the contemporary sources. What is known of their dealings indicates, however, that some type of formalized partnership often underlay their relationship. The terminological evidence certainly points in this direction. In the various Turkic-Arabic lexicons of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, *ortoy* is uniformly defined as a "partner" (*sharik*) or "partnership" (*shirka, sharika*).¹³¹ Further, the *Codex Cumanicus* gives *socius* (partner) as the Latin equivalent of *ortoy*.¹³²

Granted that a partnership was involved, what form did it take? The most likely candidate is the Islamic *qirad*/*muḍārabā* or its European analogue, the *commenda*. In both, an investor entrusts capital to his chosen agent for a commercial venture, and at the conclusion of the contract the agent returns the capital with an agreed-upon share of the profits. Any loss of capital is borne solely by the investor, so long as the agent acts in a responsible manner. If a loss does occur, the manager of the capital receives no compensation for his time and labor. The principal difference between the two forms is that a *commenda* can be formed with merchandise or money, whereas in the *qirad* only money can be used. The basic purpose of both was to bring together capital and managerial skill. The institution was a flexible instrument, well suited for long-distance trade, inasmuch as the agent-manager had wide latitude in making essential decisions on the basis of local economic conditions and commercial practices. Finally, it eliminated formal interest, prohibited by both Islam and Latin Christianity.¹³³

The *ortoy*, as pictured in the sources of the era, has certain features in common with the *commenda*/*qirad*. It will be recalled that at the time Činggis Qan formed the caravan later seized at Ütrār, he instructed his family to select individuals from their retinues and to give them "capital" (*sar-māyah*) with which they could conduct trade in Khwārazm.¹³⁴ And the Sung envoys who visited the court in the mid-1230s note not only that the

¹²⁵ Maḥmūd Kāshgharī, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects* (*Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*), ed. and trans. Robert Dankoff in collaboration with James Kelly, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 7 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U., Office of the University Publisher, 1985) 3, p. 43; B. Atalay, ed., *Eltühfet-üz-zekiyye fil-lüget-i-Türkiyye* (Istanbul: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1945), f. 21a10; and M. Th. Houtsma, ed., *Ein Türkisch-Arabisches Glossar* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1894), p. 32. See also Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1972), p. 205.

¹²⁶ Geza Kuun, ed., *Codex Cumanicus* (Budapest: Editio Scient. Akad. Hung., 1880), p. 114.

¹²⁷ This discussion is based on Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1955), pp. 157–211; Abraham L. Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1970), pp. 170–249; and John H. Pryor, "The Origins of the Commenda Contract," *Speculum* 52 (January 1972), pp. 5–37. See also the comments of Elizabeth Endicott-West in this issue.

¹²⁸ Juvaynī (*Q*) 1, p. 60, and Juvaynī (*B*) 1, pp. 78–79.

¹²⁹ Juvaynī (*Q*) 3, p. 76, and Juvaynī (*B*) 2, p. 598.

¹³⁰ The term *masās* goes back to the Mongolian *mesē*, pl. *meses*, "sword" or "weapon." See Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente* 1, pp. 499–500.

¹³¹ Rashīd (*K*) 2, p. 1080. ¹³² Ibid. 1, p. 580, and Rashīd (*B*) 1, p. 168.

¹³³ Rashīd (*K*) 2, p. 1045.

¹³⁴ In the Yuan realm petty clerks often rose to prominence in the bureaucracy at the expense of the Chinese scholar-officials. See Paul Heng-chao Ch'en, *Chinese Legal Tradition under the Mongols: The Code of 1291 as Reconstructed* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979), pp. 88–89.

Mongols handed over their silver to the Muslims but also that the latter used this capital for trade or usury.¹³⁸ These data are suggestive, but are hardly decisive in establishing Mongolian familiarity with the *commenda/qirad*. More persuasive is a passage in the *Yüan Dynastic History*, dated 1284:

The [Yüan] government itself, providing ships and capital (*pen* 本), selected individuals to go abroad to trade for sundry goods. As for the profits so obtained, the government, calculating on the basis of ten parts, took as its [share] seven [parts], whereas the traders received three [parts].¹³⁸

While such an arrangement constitutes a *qirad*, or *commenda* contract,¹³⁷ the agents in question are called "traders" (*i-jen* 易人), not *ortoys*. Still, it demonstrates that the institution was known to and used by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and it is likely that some of the *ortoys* of the period before 1260 were formed on this contractual basis, especially in light of the fact that the Mongols' merchant partners were often professional Muslim traders for whom the *qirad* was a common device for acquiring capital.

This is not to say, however, that the *ortoy* can always be equated with the *qirad/commenda*. Many *ortoys* may well have been formed on this basis, but other evidence suggests that the Mongols' commercial associates obtained operating capital in straight loan agreements. According to Juvaynī, Ögödei once told his treasurer that many came to court saying "we shall become *ortoy* and take ingots in order to give interest."¹³⁸ Elsewhere the same author relates that a certain Sayyid from the region of Bukhara "received ingots from the *qayan* (Ögödei) for an *ortoy* and when the time for a payment came due he said that he had [already] sent in the interest."¹³⁹ The term for interest used here, *sūd*, also means "profit" or "gain," and the passages in question could be translated "to give profit" and "to send in profit." In such a case, the basis of the *ortoy* would be a partnership, not a loan. There are, however, good grounds for rendering *sūd* as "interest" in these instances. First, in the passage concerning the Sayyid, mention is made of a payment schedule,

which sounds more like a loan arrangement than a *qirad/commenda* in which the agent is only obliged to hand over the investor's share of the profits in a lump sum at the conclusion of the contract. No periodic payments or progress reports are required. Second, in his reworking of Juvaynī's account of the Sayyid's dealings with Ögödei, Rashīd al-Dīn¹⁴⁰ replaces the Persian *sūd* with *asiy*, a Turkic word also meaning "profit" or "interest."¹⁴¹ In its latter meaning, *asiy* is frequently encountered in Uighur civil documents of the Yüan era, and we know, too, that the term passed into Mongolian, where it is attested in the sense of "interest" in a loan contract of the early fourteenth century.¹⁴² Finally, there is the testimony of the Chinese sources, which report that early in Qubilai's reign the imperial treasurer granted *ortoys* (*wo-t'o*) loans at advantageous rates — 0.8 percent (*pa-li* 八釐) interest per month.¹⁴³ Taken together these data affirm that on some occasions at least *ortoys* took out loans from the imperial court.

The term *ortoy*, therefore, cannot be equated unequivocally with a specific type of commercial agreement. As it is used in the sources of the period, the term is best defined as a merchant operating with capital supplied by a Mongolian prince or government official. The precise character of the contract between the two was not crucial; it was rather the existence of the contract itself that conferred *ortoy* status upon a merchant.

In whatever form it took, the Mongols' provision of capital to merchants raises a further question of terminology, one that turns on the Mongolian word *sauya*. In its narrowest sense it means "a share of the chase" or "a share of the booty." This usage can be seen in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, which employs the term twice; in both instances young boys taken in raids are handed over to Hü'elün, Činggis Qan's mother, as *sauya*.¹⁴⁴ And since *sauya*, in a more liquid form, was the Mongols' initial source of capital, contemporary authors understandably tend to associate booty with commercial investment. Hsü T'ing, for example, states that whenever he saw "a Tatar, there would only be *sauya*; there is no one [among them] who knows how to trade. From the Tatar Emperor (Ögödei) on down, they give their silver to the Muslims."¹⁴⁵ A similar connection is made in Rashīd al-Dīn's discussion of the victualing of the *qatun's* *ordos*: "Every time [the Mongols] brought out

¹³⁸ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 493.

¹³⁹ *YS* 94, p. 2402, and H. Franz Schurmann, *The Economic Structure of the Yüan Dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1967), p. 231.

¹⁴⁰ See K. Sato, "On the Form of Maritime Trade and Commerce in the Near East and the Far East from the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries of the Christian Era," in *Proceedings of the Second Biennial Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia* (Taipei: n.p., 1962), pp. 335-37. See also Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit*, pp. 201-2, which discusses the formal definition of *qirad* in Islamic law.

¹⁴¹ *Juvaynī* (Q) 1, p. 176, and *Juvaynī* (B) 1, p. 220.

¹⁴² *Juvaynī* (Q) 1, pp. 179-80, and *Juvaynī* (B) 1, p. 224.

¹⁴⁰ *Rashīd* (K) 1, p. 497, and *Rashīd* (B) p. 87.

¹⁴¹ *Drematurskii slovar'* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969), p. 60.

¹⁴² W. Radloff, *Uigurische Sprachdenkmäler* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1972), doc. 18, p. 25, and doc. 34, pp. 51-52; and Francis W. Cleaves, "An Early Mongolian Loan Contract from Qara Qoto," *HJAS* 18 (1955), p. 24.

¹⁴³ Yao Sui, *Mu an-chi*, ch. 13, p. 9a. See also Yang, *Money and Credit*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁴ *SH*, sect. 114, p. 48, and sect. 135, p. 64. ¹⁴⁵ P'eng and Hsü, *Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, p. 494.

booty from a hostile land they gave them (the *qatuns*) a little something from this and each one [of the *qatuns*] had several *ortoy*s and they would bring [the *qatuns*] a little money."¹⁴⁶

The term *sauya* also could mean "present" or "gift,"¹⁴⁷ and this meaning in turn influenced the commercial language of the day. When the Mongols transferred their booty to merchants, the presentation of the "investment" was often termed a "gift." Conversely, the term was also used to denote the return on an investment. In his correspondence Rashīd al-Dīn reveals that he made over large sums to "trustworthy merchants" (*tujjār-i amīn*), and when he gives an accounting of his profits he does so under the following rubric: "A listing of presents (*saughat*) sent from the hands of the merchants in the port of Basra." The presents included jewels, textiles, 3,000 *man* of teak, and 1,000 *man* of ebony.¹⁴⁸ No doubt Rashīd al-Dīn was the recipient of many actual gifts from those desirous of currying favor, but in this case profit or gain is plainly meant.

Given this usage, it is not surprising that references to the exchange of "presents" between Mongols and merchants frequently cloak serious business transactions. When, for instance, Kirakos says that "all the Tatar military commanders sent [Simeon Rabban Ata] gifts from their war booty,"¹⁴⁹ he is probably telling us that the officers were investing their *sauya* in joint ventures with this powerful merchant. More explicitly, Marco Polo relates that when his father and uncle "gave" jewels to Berke in 1260, the *qan* was so pleased that

like a gentle lord he made give them for them other things which were well worth more than twice as much as the jewels were worth, and also very great and rich gifts; the which things he sent them in several directions to sell, and they were very well sold in those parts.¹⁵⁰

Here there can be little doubt that the ruler's "gifts" were an investment and that while trading "in those parts" the elder Polos acted as his commercial

agents.¹⁵¹ In other words, the Venetians and the *qan* of the Golden Horde together made an *ortoy*.

MERCHANT INFLUENCE ON THE EMPIRE

Mongolian imperial expansion, a misfortune for many, brought substantial benefits to the merchants throughout Eurasia. True, in the short run military operations disrupted trade and on occasion even resulted in the destruction of caravans.¹⁵² On the whole, however, travel was safer and traders could confidently move valuable merchandise over greater distances. With protection costs reduced by Činggis Qan's guarantee of their person and property, and with transportation expenses partially subvented by the court, merchants reaped a bountiful harvest and commercial exchange flourished.

In the absence of account books and treasury records, the magnitude of their profits cannot be measured, but there is every reason to believe they were considerable. And while Juvaynī's assertion that the imperial court's indebtedness to the merchants had reached 500,000 ingots by the end of Öyül Qaimish's regency may be an exaggeration, it is nonetheless significant and symbolic. The sources leave no doubt that the court invested heavily in joint enterprises and regularly paid elevated prices for wares. For the astute and ruthless entrepreneur, the opportunities for quick gain were numerous — trade, tax farming, usury, and extortion. All were extremely lucrative and at times were condoned, or at least tolerated, by the imperial government.

What became of the profits so obtained poses an intriguing problem. It is possible that the silver entrusted to the *ortoy*s in China may have flowed westward, since many of the merchants originally came from Turkestan and, moreover, the price of silver was high in the eastern Islamic lands at this time. Further research into this complex and important topic is needed before solutions can be offered with any degree of confidence.¹⁵³

For their part, the Mongols derived various benefits from their associa-

¹⁴⁶ *Rashid (K)* 2, p. 1090.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Pelliot, "Sao-houa, Sauya, Sauyat, Saguat," *TP* 32 (1936), pp. 230–37. Both Carpini and Rubruck note that Mongolian officials constantly pestered them for "gifts." If the requests failed, the officials resorted to trickery to obtain the desired commodities. See Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, pp. 28, 39, 53, 54, 106, 107, 108.

¹⁴⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Mukātibāt-i Rashīdī*, ed. Muḥammad Shāfiʿ (Lahore: University of Punjab, 1947), pp. 237 and 182. In the Il-Khān period a *man* was approximately 3 kg.

¹⁴⁹ Kirakos, *Istoria Armenii*, p. 175, and Dulaurier, "Les Mongols d'après les historiens arméniens," p. 255.

¹⁵⁰ Polo, *Description of the World*, pp. 74–75, my italics.

¹⁵¹ Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1960), pp. 77–80, commented long ago that these gentlemanly exchanges were in reality business transactions.

¹⁵² Hansgeerd Göchenjan and James R. Sweeney, *Der Mongolensturm: Berichte von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), p. 77, and Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, p. 402.

¹⁵³ To my knowledge, the first to suggest such possibilities was Robert P. Blake, "The Circulation of Silver in the Muslim East down to the Mongol Epoch," *HJAS* 2 (1937), pp. 327–38.

tions with the merchant community. To begin with, the Činggisids, like all nomadic conquerors, levied taxes on transit trade and other forms of commercial activity. This tax, called *tamya* in Turkic and Mongolian, was introduced in the early years of Ögödei's reign as part of Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai's package of revenue reforms. The rate initially was set at one-thirtieth of the value of the goods.¹⁵⁴ The court certainly imposed the *tamya* on private merchants, but whether it applied to those working for the court is unclear. I suspect that *ortoys*, capitalized by the Mongols, were formally exempted, since by exacting such a tax the imperial family would in effect be taxing itself. The question of immunity aside, the *tamya* constituted an important revenue source, and by Möngke's reign it was collected aggressively, especially in the west Asian domains.¹⁵⁵

The Mongols' interest in trade, however, went far beyond the control of routes and the imposition of commercial taxes. They did indeed milk the transit trade, but in addition they were conscious and active promoters of commerce. The great wealth of the Mongolian notables,¹⁵⁶ generated by the conquests, was regularly recycled through investments with their commercial agents. For the latter, the court's largess became a major mechanism of capital formation. In itself this was not without precedent, but in comparison with their predecessors the Mongols, as was often the case, operated on a much grander scale.

The return realized on these investments was, for the most part, expended in lavish consumption. One reason merchants prospered in the early empire is that the Mongolian elite desired and demanded the best of two worlds. They preferred, whenever possible, to remain in the steppe, pursuing a nomadic life, but they were determined at the same time to enjoy luxuries and products available only in the sedentary world. This attitude is reflected in the willingness of the Mongolian princesses to pay such high prices for imported Turkestani flour. The Mongols' penchant for consumerism was recognized by Juvaynī, a contemporary, who contrasts the poverty and want of their homeland in the pre-imperial period with the vast amounts of merchandise (*bizā'āt*) flowing into Mongolia from east and west in his own day.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ YWL 57, pp. 12b-13a, and Schurmann, *Economic Structure*, pp. 213-14. The tax was first proposed in 1230 and was in place by 1234, if not before.

¹⁵⁵ M. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, 1^{re} partie, *Histoire ancienne, jusqu'à en 1469 de JC* (St. Petersburg: Académie des Sciences, 1850), p. 556, and Kirakos, *Istoriia Armenii*, p. 221.

¹⁵⁶ Carpini in Dawson, *Mongol Mission*, p. 8, notes that "the emperor, the nobles and other important men own large quantities of gold and silver, silk, precious stones and gems."

¹⁵⁷ Juvaynī (Q.) 1, pp. 15-16, and Juvaynī (B) 1, pp. 21-22.

The political ramifications of the alliance of Mongols and merchants were also considerable. Their close and continuous association helped shape the contours of the Mongols' foreign and domestic politics in the formative stages of the empire.

Before the Khwārazm campaign, the Mongols evinced no claims of universal sovereignty. To this point, Činggis Qan seemed content with establishing himself as the paramount ruler in the eastern steppe and north China. In this he was following a centuries-old pattern of interstate relations in East Asia, which saw a succession of Inner Asian dynasties — the T'o-pa Wei, Qitans, and Jürchens — fashion successful frontier polities that were sufficiently powerful to force advantageous tributary relationships upon their Chinese neighbors to the south. The incident at Üřrār deflected the Mongols from the traditional course; the ensuing confrontation not only redirected their military efforts but also widened their political horizons and transformed their political notions.

Speaking of the caravan seized at Üřrār, Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai states categorically that "this was the only reason for the Western Campaign."¹⁵⁸ His assertion is fully corroborated by the Islamic sources, even those openly hostile to the Mongols. Moreover, the diplomatic negotiations preceding the affair are couched in terms of trade and friendship; in the Mongolian overtures no arbitrary demands are made or claims of universal sovereignty advanced. And while Činggis Qan tries to assume a position of seniority in his exchanges with Sultan Muḥammad, this was typical of the diplomacy of the period. In the aftermath of the campaign, however, Mongolian diplomatic practice, in both tone and substance, exhibits a markedly different set of political goals and assumptions. Now all foreign states were expected to submit, without hesitation, to the Mongols' empire-in-the-making. All who refused or procrastinated were deemed to be in violation of the Mongols' heavenly mandate for universal dominion and were punished accordingly.¹⁵⁹ These ideological precepts, long a part of steppe political culture, were made real in Mongolian eyes by the spectacular victories in the West; once embraced, they conditioned the Mongolians' perception of and policies toward the outside world through the remainder of the thirteenth century.

As the Mongolian state expanded and new lands were acquired, the merchants assumed a role in the imperial administration. Činggis Qan fully understood that the "customs and laws of the city" were alien to the nomads,

¹⁵⁸ De Rachewiltz, "The *Hsi-yu lu*," p. 21, translation, and p. 115, Chinese text.

¹⁵⁹ See Igor de Rachewiltz, "Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chinggis Khan's Empire," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973), pp. 21-36.

and he sought help in governing his realm from a variety of sources.¹⁶⁰ Native elites were extensively recruited, but the Mongols, suspicious of their local connections and narrow interests, preferred to staff the lower levels of the imperial administration with a mixture of homegrown and foreign-born officials. For this task, the merchant community was well suited.

As a group, professional merchants were literate, spoke foreign languages, knew how to keep accounts and manage finances, possessed geographical and economic information, and often viewed their new masters as benefactors. Such talents and knowledge were readily transferable to the administrative sphere, and merchants served the empire in great numbers and in many capacities. They functioned as commercial agents (their most visible role), diplomatic envoys, spies, tax collectors, and civil officials. On one occasion when a local dynasty seated in Shabānkārah (in western Iran) failed to produce a suitable heir, the Mongols merely handed over the administration of this small principality to "ortoys and merchants (*bāzargānān*)."¹⁶¹

The preferential treatment accorded merchants thus was not linked exclusively to their commercial activity. They rendered valuable administrative service and, like the religious hierarchies whom the Mongols co-opted in systematic fashion, possessed communication networks and wielded social and ideological influence, all of which the conquerors found most useful in controlling and exploiting their domains.

The merchants' administrative employment, of course, helped solidify and elevate their position at court. The rise of 'Abd al-Rahmān represents the apex of the merchants' political influence, and the policies he pursued while in power engendered an economic and social crisis in north China. The combination of tax farming and moneylending at usurious rates created such turmoil that Ögödei had to yield to his Chinese advisers and issue directives to curb these practices. His measures, however, were limited and temporary, and in Möngke's time a more ambitious program of controls was introduced. The merchants' status waxed and waned, but imperial finance and high politics were continuously colored by their presence.

How did the merchants view Mongolian expansion? On the surface at least, the severe damage to the economies of north China and Khurāsān that accompanied the conquest of these hitherto productive lands would seem to be sufficient reason to turn the commercial community against the Mongols. Yet despite these destructive acts, not all merchants reacted negatively to the

new and aggressive regime. Bartold, noting that the majority of the slain at Üprār were Muslims, argued that thereafter the Turkestani merchants "went over to the side of Činggis Qan and helped him in the conquest of the Islamic lands."¹⁶² The same holds true for the Chinese frontier. In explaining the Mongols' initial incursion into Chin territory in 1211, the Sung envoy, Chao Hung, states:

Further, there was an Uighur (Hui-hu) by the name of T'ien 田¹⁶³ who was [possessed] of abundant wealth. He traded in large sums and came and went in Shantung and Hopei. He related in great detail [to the Tatars] the abundance of the people's goods [in those parts]. Together with the border guards¹⁶⁴ he persuaded the Tatars to ready their armies, enter [Shantung and Hopei], and plunder [the Chin].¹⁶⁵

Chao's explanation cannot be taken at face value because the origins of the invasion are more complicated than presented, but it does tell something about merchant views on the emerging empire. Some merchants no doubt fled for safety, while others joined up for want of choice; but some, like T'ien, clearly encouraged further expansion.

The favorable attitude of part of the merchant community was reciprocated by the Mongols. This is mirrored in the pro-merchant policies of the early rulers and expressed most explicitly in a maxim (*bilig*) of Činggis Qan preserved in Rashīd al-Dīn's history:

Just as the *ortoys*, who come with garments of gold brocade expecting to make a profit, become very knowledgeable about these goods and wares, so ought the military commanders train their sons to shoot arrows, ride and wrestle well, and so instill in them these arts of war that they will become as daring and brave as the *ortoys* are vigorous and knowledgeable [in pursuit] of their own line of work.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ V. V. Bartold, "Mesto prikaspiskikh oblastei v istorii musul'manskogo mira," in his *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1963) 2.1, p. 699. For similar comments, see Ratchnevsky, *Činggis-khan*, pp. 153 and 162.

¹⁶¹ This individual has been identified with Činqai, the famous minister of Ögödei and Güyük, who also bore the surname T'ien. On this complicated issue, see N. Ts. Munkuev, trans. and ed., *Men-da bei-lu: Polnoe opisaniie Mongolo-Tatar* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), pp. 176-77, n. 367, and Waley, *Travels of an Alchemist*, pp. 36-38.

¹⁶² "Border guards" translates the Chinese term *chiu* 戍. They were military units of mixed ethnic origin employed by the Liao and Chin dynasties to protect their northern frontiers. See the discussion of Munkuev, *Men-da bei-lu*, pp. 119-22, n. 77, and Igor de Rachewiltz, trans. and ed., "The Secret History of the Mongols," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 30 (1984), pp. 105-7.

¹⁶³ P'eng and Hsü, *Meng-la pei-lu*, p. 449.

¹⁶⁴ *Rashid (K)* 1, p. 437.

¹⁶⁰ Činggis Qan's concerns on this score are related in *SH*, sect. 263, pp. 203-4.

¹⁶¹ *Rashid (K)* 1, pp. 664-65, and *Rashid (B)* p. 307. This event is dated to the mid-1280s.

Here we have the founder of the empire holding up commercial men as models for the behavior of his closest supporters, the nomadic military elite. No wonder many merchants felt comfortable in the Mongolian camp.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Juvaynī* (B) ʿAtā-Malik Juvaynī, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. John A. Boyle
- Juvaynī* (Q) Juvaynī, *Ta'rikh-i jahān-gushā*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Qazvīnī
- Jūzjānī* (H) Minhāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i naṣīrī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī
- Jūzjānī* (R) Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i naṣīrī*, trans. H. G. Raverty
- Rashīd* (B) Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John A. Boyle
- Rashīd* (K) Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ al-Tavārikh*, ed. B. Karīmī
- SH* Francis W. Cleaves, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols*
- YS* *Yüan shih* 元史
- YWL* Su T'ien-chüeh 蘇天爵, *Yüan wen-lei* 元文類