

# The Mongol Peace and Global Medieval Eurasia<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACTS

Der Mongolische Frieden (*pax mongolica*) bezieht sich auf die Zeit, in der die Nachfahren von Dschingis Khan den Großteil der eurasischen Landmasse beherrschten. Er war ein bedeutender Moment des globalen Mittelalters, denn er verwandelte die humane Landschaft Eurasiens und verband das Mittelmeer mit Indien und China. Die Mongolen stimulierten neue Formen des Fernhandels, indem sie Vereinbarungen mit den Mamluken, Byzantinern, Italienern und anderen abschlossen. Unter ihrer Herrschaft entstand eine neue Wirtschaftsordnung, die nicht als bloße Wiederbelebung der „Seidenstraßen“ der alten Welt angesehen werden kann. Die Forschung hat den Mongolischen Frieden als kontinentales Phänomen eingeordnet, aber nur wenige Historiker haben neuerdings versucht, dieses Phänomen über die Feststellung eines gegenseitigen Interesses der Mongolen und der Kaufleute hinaus zu analysieren. Dieser Artikel vertieft das Verständnis dieser Interdependenz, indem die praktischen Aspekte des *ortaq*-Systems genauer untersucht werden. Er soll, allgemeiner gesehen, das Konzept des Mongolischen Friedens durch einen neuen Ansatz wiederbeleben, der das Handeln der Nomaden in der kommerziellen Wirtschaft in den Blick nimmt. Dies schließt eine Neubewertung der „spirituellen“ Motivationen der Mongolen und ihrer politischen und diplomatischen Fähigkeiten bei der Integration des nördlichen Eurasiens in das größte ökonomische Netzwerk der Landmasse ein.

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The Mongol Peace refers to the period when the descendants of Chinggis Khan dominated most of the Eurasian landmass. It was a major moment of the global middle ages for it transformed the human landscape of Eurasia and connected the Mediterranean Sea to India and China. The Mongols stimulated new forms of long-distance trade by concluding agreements with the Mamluks, the Byzantines, the Italians, and others. Under their domination a new economic order emerged that cannot be seen as the mere revival of the “silk roads” of the ancient world. Scholarship has classified the Mongol Peace as a continental phenomenon, but few historians have actually attempted to analyse it beyond noting a mutuality of interest among the Mongol leaders and merchants. This article deepens understanding of this interdependency by scrutinising the practicalities of the *ortaq* system more closely. The more general aim is to reinstate the concept of Mongol Peace through a new approach that attends to the nomads’ agency in the commercial economy. This includes a reassessment of the Mongols’ “spiritual” motivations, and of their political and diplomatic skills in integrating northern Eurasia into the biggest economic network of the landmass.

## Introduction

The Mongol moment has found its place in new scholarship on early forms of globalisation in Eurasia. It is increasingly recognized that those formerly dismissed as “predatory nomads” in fact initiated economic activities and intensified processes of connectedness on a hemispheric level. In general, however, even revisionist global historians confine the role of the Mongols to acceleration of the links between China and Europe. They tend to see medieval globalisation as a precursor of larger globalization processes, including the Colombian Exchange and the modern world-system. In this article, I approach the Mongol moment without employing the lens of the modern world-system which it supposedly anticipated. To avoid misrepresentation, it is instructive to analyze global medieval Eurasia by focusing on the political and economic motivations of Mongol leaders as they organized their empire.<sup>2</sup>

I begin with three preliminary observations. First, the socio-economic integration of Eurasia in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries correlated with the post-conquest stability of the Mongol empire. Rooted in the policies of Chinggis Khan between 1206 and 1227, the Chinggisids ruled a territory that stretched from the Sea of China to the Black Sea for

2 On a pre-1500 “world-system”, see Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York/Oxford 1989); and the critical review of Victor Lieberman, *Abu-Lughod’s Egalitarian World Order. A Review Article*, in: *Comparative Study of Society and History* 35 (1993): 544–550; see also Thomas Allsen, *Ever Closer Encounters: The Appropriation of Culture and the Apportionment of Peoples in the Mongol Empire*, in: *Journal of Early Modern History* 1 (1997): 19–23; on the notion of “global middle ages” and extent bibliography on the topic, see *The Global Middle Ages. Past & Present Supplement* 13, ed. Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, Oxford 2018 and esp. Simon Yarrow, *Economic Imaginaries of the Global Middle Ages*, 214–231. For an overview of the commercial exchange between the Mongols and western Europe, see Roxann Prazniak, *Siena on the Silk Roads: Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the Mongol Global Century, 1250–1350*, in: *Journal of World History* 21/2 (2010): 177–217.

roughly a century (1260s–1360s).<sup>3</sup> Scholarship has identified a *Pax Mongolica* modelled on the notion of *Pax Romana*. Yet the latter, a historical concept with its own limits and pitfalls, can hardly be transferred to an empire run by steppe nomads.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the Mongol term for peace, *ili* or *el* also meant “submission.” To accept their peace implied submission to a new economic order, which the rulers stimulated and attempted to the best of their abilities to control. To this end, the Mongols changed the rules of exchange in Eurasia, transforming not only trade routes but also diplomatic conventions, monetary and measuring systems, and scripts and languages. In effect, in the 1260s the Mongols adapted their empire to the new world that had emerged from the conquests – a world they intended to dominate long term and to convert to their own social system. The Mongol Peace must therefore be investigated as a state of subjection to a new social order. This article will contribute to this goal by reconstructing key elements of the Mongol domination.

Third, recent studies have revealed a deep contradiction in the classical view of the periodization of the Mongol empire. According to this paradigm, the unified empire lasted from 1206 to 1260, when succession struggles burst into a war (1261–64) that led to the “dissolution” of the empire and its division into four sub-empires: the Great Khans or Da Yuan, the Golden Horde, the Ilkhanate, and the Chagatay khanate. During the period of the Peace, the descendants of Chinggis Khan were thus simultaneously engaged in bitterly fighting one another whilst successfully promoting new forms of exchange across the landmass. This periodization and the historical narrative of “dissolution” have to be reconsidered.<sup>5</sup> If the Mongols were able to maintain and even intensify their exchanges after 1260 as Thomas Allsen, Hodong Kim, and others have demonstrated, the socio-political structure of the Chinggisid empire or the *Yeke Mongghol Ulus* as the Mongols called it, requires what Kim calls “a holistic approach”.<sup>6</sup> The Mongols themselves saw this as one single system with a complex hierarchy of lineages. The “golden lineage” cre-

3 Chinggis Khan founded the Mongol empire in 1206 but the Mongol domination of most of the landmass was achieved by Chinggis Khan's sons and grandsons. On the economic system of the empire, see the pioneer studies of Thomas Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*, Cambridge 1997; *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, Cambridge 2001; Michal Biran, *The Mongol Empire and Inter-Civilizational Exchange*, in: *The Cambridge World History. Volume 5: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500CE–1500CE*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Cambridge 2015, 534–558; Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (eds), *Eurasian Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change*, Honolulu 2015.

4 Nicola Di Cosmo, *Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica*, in: *JESHO* 53 (2010): 91.

5 The necessary reappraisal has recently been launched in several important studies. See Christopher Atwood, *How the Mongols Got a Word for Tribe – and What It Means*, in: *Studia Historica Mongolica* 10 (2010): 63–89; David Sneath, *The Headless State. Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*, New York 2007; Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene, *Where Did the Mongol Empire Come From? Medieval Mongol Ideas of People, State and Empire*, in: *Inner Asia* 13 (2011): 211–237; *The Rise of the Chinggisid Dynasty: Pre-Modern Eurasian Political Order and Culture at a Glance*, in: *International Journal of Asian Studies* 15 (2018) 1: 39–84. On the notion of “dissolution”, see Peter Jackson, *The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire*, in: *Central Asiatic Journal* 32 (1978): 186–244.

6 Hodong Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire and Continental Exchange over Eurasia*, in: *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 1 (2009): 33.

ated by Chinggis Khan had supremacy over all others. Its four major branches (Jochid, Ögödeyid, Toluid, Chagatayid) went back to Chinggis' four sons who had received their own *ulus* (people) from their father. The constituent *uluses* were based on bounded territories and, despite localised conflicts on particular borderlands (notably in the Caucasus and the Tarim basin), they never laid claim to each other's territories during the long century of their domination. Consistent with this, the Jochids and Chagatayids never claimed the title of Great Khan.

To reappraise this complex period, a redefinition of the concept of "peace" was critical. A major step was Kim's essay, published in 2009, in which he showed that four decades of political struggle between the Toluids and the Ögödeyids were marked by very few battles and no continuous armed clashes. The opponents lined up their armies as deterrents occasionally raided one another. Yet, "neither side made serious plans to attack the capital area of the enemy."<sup>7</sup>

Also important were the contributions of Nicola Di Cosmo.<sup>8</sup> When the Genoese and Venetian trade colonies are given their proper place within the larger schemes of Global Eurasia, the concept of the Mongol Peace appears in a different light. Di Cosmo analyzed the creation of the *comptoirs* of Caffa and Tana, the extent of their trading networks, and their duration. He also offered a more accurate estimation of the role of individual merchants in the building of new connections between Europe and Asia, distinguishing between the individual Italian traders working in Central Asia, Persia, and China and the strategic interests of the Italian powers vis-à-vis the settlements they created in western Asia. Noting that the Italian Republics did not invest beyond the lower Volga, he pointed out that the khans never renounced their ruling prerogatives in these regions.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the Mongol elite and the foreign merchants contributed to the consolidation of the empire. Historians have provided thorough studies of the *ortaq*s, merchants licensed to run business for the Mongols, and of the Italian traders who settled in the Crimea and the lower Volga in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This article argues that these phenomena, previously studied separately, were two sides of the same coin: the *ortaq* status implemented by the Mongols generated competition among merchants which both triggered the Italians to invest more in transcontinental trade and set limits to their expansion. The Italian settlements and trade networks were both a reaction to the "unifying" effect of the Mongol empire and a response to the privileges of the *ortaq*s.<sup>10</sup> To demonstrate this, I shall explore three key aspects of Mongol domination: their distributional and ideational drivers, their use of mobility, and the institutions they established to support the unification process of the empire. The first part of the article analyses how a complex system of beliefs shaped Mongol economic activity.

7 Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 19.

8 Di Cosmo, *Black Sea Emporia*, 83–108; Mongols and Merchants on the Black Sea Frontier in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Convergences and Conflicts, in: *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, Leiden 2005, 391–424.

9 Di Cosmo, *Black Sea Emporia*, 104–106.

10 *Ibid.*, 85.



Map 1: The Northern and Southern Routes during the Mongol Peace.

The Chinggisid rulers were market-oriented and attempted to control finance, but I shall show that they were not driven by criteria of economic efficiency in the sense of maximizing pastoral production or hoarding wealth. The second part investigates the institutions associated with the northern land route from China to Europe, which we now realise were more secure than the equivalent overseas routes.<sup>11</sup> At every hub along these long routes, merchants stimulated the local economy. Finally, the third part analyzes the contents and consequences of the trade treaties the Mongols granted to Venice. I show that the terrestrial north-Eurasian connections were of utmost importance for the global trade system that flourished under the Mongols.

## Redistribution, Happiness, and Order

The Mongol khans shared a political system and an economy, both of which were underpinned by the principle of redistribution.<sup>12</sup> The act of redistributing was crucial in the political culture of the time: a khan redistributed booty, animals, and war captives during great assemblies called *quriltai*. Participants received their share according to their status in the social hierarchy. The major change that Chinggis and his successor Ögödei (1229–41) introduced in the steppe political culture was a change in the conception of hierarchy. Formerly, hierarchy was based on age seniority, but under Chinggis this was supplemented by a new notion of status. This was the prerogative of the khan.

### *The Qubi system*

One central mechanism in this status hierarchy, introduced by Chinggis Khan himself, was the system of *qubi*, shares.<sup>13</sup> Each of his sons had possessions in the territories of others and received revenues from them. Thus, under Great Khan Ögödei the three other sons of Chinggis and their descendants received taxes and tributes from regions that were under the direct supervision of the Great Khan. This system was extended when the Mongols finally crushed the Jin and took control of North China in 1236. The Jochids, Ögödeyids, and Chagatayids were allocated territory and people in western Shanxi Province, while the Toluids were granted the south of Hebei, and the brothers of Chinggis Khan received eastern Shandong. As Yihao Qiu has recently established, Batu,

11 Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 24–30.

12 On the complex redistribution system of the Mongols, see Thomas Allsen, *Sharing out the Empire: Apportioned Lands under the Mongols*, in: *Nomads in the Sedentary World*, ed. Anatoly M. Khazanov and André Wink, Richmond 2001, 172–190. For redistribution in theoretical terms as a “form of integration” of the economy, see Karl Polanyi, *The Economy as Instituted Process*, in: *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad Arensberg, and Harry Pearson, Glencoe 1957, 243–70.

13 Allsen was probably the first to appreciate the significance of the Mongolian system of shares. See his review of Isenbike Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations: The Kerait Khanate and Chinggis Khan*, Leiden 1998, in: *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 10 (1998–1999): 242–244.

the head of the Jochids dwelling in the area of the lower Volga, personally received 41, 302 households located in north-western China.<sup>14</sup>

The Mongols originally distinguished the steppe – a space where they lived, raised herds, celebrated, and rested – from the sedentary areas that they ruled but did not colonize.<sup>15</sup> The most densely populated regions of the empire were China, Khorasan, South Caucasus, Khwarezm, and the Russian principalities. Here the Mongols divided up the cities, villages, fields, orchards, vineyards and other valuable resources among the descendants of Chinggis Khan. The grantees received not only tax incomes in silver, gold, coins or goods but also people: more precisely, a specific number of households that they could move to other areas and relocate according to the needs of the elite. After 1264, when the frontiers of the four *uluses* crystallized, one might have expected the *qubi* system to disappear. In fact, it continued until the fall of the Da Yuan in 1368. Not only the revenue streams from China and Central Asia continue to flow to the Jochids, Toluids, and Chagatayids, but additional incomes were generated from the newly conquered regions. Soon after Qubilai (c.1260–94) conquered Song China, he apportioned households according to the *qubi* system. The Jochids, still living in the lower Volga, were allocated 60, 000 families in Yongzhou in today's Hunan, from whom they received their assigned revenues until well into the fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

### The Circulation of Happiness

Although the Mongol khans accumulated commodities in their treasuries, their ultimate purpose was not to retain but to circulate wealth. Rashid al-din (1247–1318), vizier of Ghazan Khan, recorded several anecdotes emphasizing the liberality of his masters:

*One day, when he [Great Khan Qubilai] had laid the foundations of Qaraqorum, he went into the treasury and saw nearly a hundred thousand bars [of silver]. “What benefit do we derive from all these stores?” he asked. “They have to be constantly guarded. Have it announced that everybody who wants a bar should come and take one.” The people of the city, high and low, rich and poor alike, all rushed to the treasury, and everyone got an abundant share.*<sup>17</sup>

14 Yihao Qiu, Independent Ruler, Indefinable Role. Understanding the History of the Golden Horde from the Perspectives of the Yuan Dynasty, in: REMMM 143 (2018): 33.

15 On Chinggis Khan's original apportionment of his empire to his next of kin, see Allsen, Sharing out the Empire; Ever Closer Encounters, 2–11.

16 Qiu, Independent Ruler, shows that Pingyang and Yongzhou remained the Jochids' most important possessions in China. After 1227, the Jochids also received revenues from Shazhou, a city of the old Tangut kingdom that Batu had contributed to submit. Along with several other dispersed places that were too small (10, 000 households or less) or too remote, the Jochids lost these possessions in the second half of the thirteenth century when they were integrated into the dominions of the Great Khan. In 1336, Özbek Khan sent his emissaries to the court of the Great Khan to recover the Jochids' share.

17 Rashid al-Dīn, Jami' u't-tawarikh. Compendium of Chronicles, tr. W. M. Thackston, Cambridge, Mass. 1998–9, 338.

According to Rashid al-din, the Great Khan claimed that what he had given to his subjects would return to him anyway.<sup>18</sup> Other anecdotes show that the khans often gave silver and golden ingots (*balish*) to their subjects as capital to begin a trade or a new business.<sup>19</sup> The Great Khan even acted as guarantor for his subjects: creditors were entitled to claim from the treasury the private debt due to them. The debtor was then liable to repay the ruler, who was more likely to accept delays but who could also legally impose other sanctions, including servitude and slavery. Khans wanted creditors to have trust in the system and continue the business of lending money. For similar reasons, they provided warrants for their traders and compensation if heavy losses were incurred in commercial transactions. The same security was extended in the event of a bad harvest: “if there is no harvest, they may take full compensation from the storehouses.”<sup>20</sup>

The contemporaries who witnessed and described the khans’ impressive generosity sometimes misunderstood it. Ögödei had a reputation for overpaying for war equipment like arrows and arrow heads.<sup>21</sup> Not only court historians but foreign travelers and envoys depicted the khans as non-profit oriented buyers, who often offered more than the economic value of the goods they acquired. As I shall argue below, this was a strategy to lure merchants away from older circuits. In the steppe world, the role of the ruler was first and foremost to create the best possible conditions for the circulation of things, and especially luxuries. The fluidity of the redistribution system embraced not only the living but also the dead, whose spirits needed to be properly fed through everyday rituals. The capital in which the Mongols were interested was not only material but spiritual and immaterial. The khans’ wealth derived mainly from the incomes of their personal workers, herds, taxes, and war spoils. Long distance trade fulfilled a different need. While free Mongols were by definition able to sustain themselves, their families, and their servants, the elites needed luxuries, including silver and gold ingots, precious textiles, furs, and pearls, for their political economy. The khans recycled the goods the merchants brought to their courts in the wider circle of their acquaintances and followers, who in turn passed them on to their subordinates. This fulfilled a triple function: reward for loyalty, royal distribution to bolster the khan’s prestige, and symbolic food to sustain society. The redistribution was supposed to penetrate all levels through the *tümen*, decimal order, that Chinggis Khan had established: “they have divided all the people into companies of ten,

18 Ibid., 337.

19 Ibid., 336. It seems that in the early empire, the Mongols minted and used silver and gold coins for tax payments only. For trade and for exchange in general they used *balish*, ingots of gold or silver. In the 1250s “the *balish* is worth fifty misqals of gold or silver, round about seventy five rukni dinars, the standard of which is two thirds.” Juvayni, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle, Manchester 1953, I, 23. In Turkish, the Persian word *bālīsh* became *yastuq*, meaning “cushion”: see Peter Jackson (ed., with David Morgan), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255*, Cambridge 1990, 156; Paul Pelliot, *Le prétendu mot ‘ascot’ chez Guillaume de Rubrouck*, in: *T’oung Pao*, XXVII (1930) 190–92. On money in the early empire, see Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History*, London 2012, 128.

20 Rashid al-Din, *Jamī’u’t-tawarikh*, 342.

21 Ibid., 339: “Someone brought him [Ögödei] two hundred bone arrow heads. He gave him a like number of bars (of silver).”



appointing one of the ten to be the commanders of the nine others; while from among each ten commanders one has been given the title of ‘commander of the hundred’, all the hundred having been placed under his command. And so it is with each thousand men and so also with each ten thousand, over whom they have appointed a commander whom they call ‘commander of the tümen.’” Thus the khan distributed to those who attended the *quriltai*, among whom were the commanders of Tens of Thousands, who then passed on luxury items to the men of a lower rank, and so forth.<sup>22</sup> *Quriltai* redistribution was modelled on traditional meat sharing.<sup>23</sup> To receive their share of booty, tax revenues, diplomatic gifts, and other luxury products, members of the elite had to participate in these meetings, which were held at least twice a year.<sup>24</sup> From the end of the thirteenth century onwards, war spoils became rare as the Mongols were at peace with most of their neighbours. The majority of the commodities redistributed at court were diplomatic gifts and special commodities that were, in Allsen’s words, “an absolutely essential ingredient in the nomads’ redistributive political culture.”<sup>25</sup> The circulation of luxuries was both a pillar of the social order and its reflection.

There was more to this than the circulation of material luxuries, which are better viewed as the receptacle or medium of something immaterial. In the Mongol conception, the circle of redistribution brought happiness.<sup>26</sup> The things they shared, apportioned, and circulated among themselves had a direct impact on the well-being of the society and its vital hierarchy. This was the key to maintain social order, and to repair social disorders. It is hard to reconstruct how the Medieval Mongols defined collective happiness, but they certainly believed that the circular movement of things was crucial in producing it.<sup>27</sup>

22 Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle, 31.

23 The medieval Mongols were a non-egalitarian society divided between *ochigin* or *ini* (younger brothers) and *aqqa* (older brothers); when they shared, they took into account gender, age seniority, and kinship position. On this crucial distinction between juniors and seniors, see Tatyana Skrynnikova, *Relations of Domination and Submission: Political Practice in the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan*, in: *Imperial statecraft: Political forms and techniques of governance in Inner Asia, sixth-twentieth centuries*, ed. David Sneath, Bellingham, WA, 2007, Chapter 3: 87.

24 The commodities redistributed were seldom steppe products, but commodities acquired through war and trade. Precious textiles were in high demand at the Mongol courts, as a piece of textile could be cut into small pieces to be distributed to more people - each part of it retaining some of the magic of the whole. Artisans working for the Mongols made luxury textiles called *nasij* (gold threaded silk brocades) which their masters used for themselves and offered to their guests as “robe of honors”: see Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*; Zvezdana Dode, *Tkani ‘zar andar zar’ (zolotom po zolotu) v kontekste ‘mongol’skogo tekstilya’*, in: *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta* 8 (2016) 2: 123-134. On contemporary meat sharing and clan sacrifices, see Sandrine Ruhlmann, *L’appel du bonheur. Le partage alimentaire mongol*, Paris 2015; on possible links with medieval rituals, see esp. 230-233.

25 Allsen, *Isenbike Togan, Flexibility and Limitation*, 244.

26 On the herders’ definition of happiness in contemporary Mongolia in connection with food sharing and food circulation, see Ruhlmann, *L’appel du bonheur*, 176-78. See also, 308: “A trop accumuler le bonheur, on s’attire du malheur.” As Ruhlmann explains, in contemporary Mongolian the terms used for this notion of happiness are *bujan hishig*, *zhargal*, and *az* (luck) *zhargal*. Today this notion is enmeshed with the Buddhist notions of “blessing, merits, virtues,” but in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries this was not necessarily the case. The metaphor of the circle of redistribution is mine.

27 The medieval Mongols practiced the cult to the ancestors, and believed in the spirits of the dead. Under Chinggis Khan, most of them were apparently polytheists and held in great esteem diviners (or maybe shamans – still a matter of debate). In the second half of the thirteenth century, an increasing number of Mongols became

Sharing was thus a way to invoke human flourishing and to attract it to oneself and closest kin. According to the Mongol worldview, things that circulated always came back. In the steppe, the accumulation of wealth was widely accepted, yet it only made sense in terms of its redistribution. As Great Khan Ögödei reportedly declared: there is no difference “between buried treasure and dust.”<sup>28</sup> The Mongols believed in the rebirth of their souls: putting into circulation and sharing with a huge number of guests would bring the host happiness and prosperity not only in his everyday life but also in his afterlife, as it increased his chances of an optimal rebirth. The spirits of the dead had to be continuously appeased to protect the living from a negative interference of the “bad” or “ill dead.” The aim of circulation was both to attract happiness and repel hardship and misfortune. During the redistribution assemblies, participants received not the mundane things of everyday life, nor some kind of salary, but rather a portion of the social happiness to which they themselves contributed. By circulating it, they increased their own part.<sup>29</sup> The Mongol elites did not need the redistribution system to feed themselves in any literal way – the nomadic household, though seldom isolated, was highly self-sufficient – but rather to survive as a group and to perpetuate their social hegemonic order. Finally, the ideology of ‘circulation’ was a necessary element of the Mongol economic system. In this system, mostly based on the extraction of tributes and taxes, the Chinggisids asked their subjects and tax payers to produce the money-type goods – such as metal coins, silk, salt, furs – in which they had to pay their taxes and tributes. Thus by putting some of these goods back into circulation the system developed a mechanism that allowed the formation of reciprocity circuits. As we shall see, next to the redistributive institutions of *quriltai* and *tümen*, the Mongols used the merchants as another channel of circulation. The link between the happiness of the *ulus* and the socio-political imperative of redistribution is key to understand how the Mongol system was able to reproduce itself on the long run.<sup>30</sup>

Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslims, but they seemed to have maintained their old belief system. For new research and general bibliography on the medieval Mongols’ belief system, see Christopher Atwood, *Validation by Holiness or Sovereignty: Religious Toleration as Political Theology in the Mongol World Empire of the Thirteenth Century*, in: *The International History Review* 26 (2004) 2: 237-256; Florence Hodous, *Faith and the Law: Religious Beliefs and the Death Penalty in the Ilkhanate*, in: *The Mongols’ Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, ed. Bruno de Nicola and Charles Melville, Leiden/Boston 2016: 106-129; Jonathan Brack, *Theologies of Auspicious Kingship: The Islamization of Chinggisid Sacral Kingship in the Islamic World*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60 (2018) 4: 1143–1171.

28 Rashid al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-tawārikh*, 334. On Ögödei facing the problem of storage, see May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 116.

29 Allsen, *Ever Closer Encounters*, 20-21; Hodous, *Faith and the Law*, 107-109; Ruhlmann, *L’appel du bonheur*, 176-178.

30 Obviously, the notion of ‘public wellness’ associated with circulation of wealth and legitimate governance is not typical of the Mongols and can be found in diverse societies under a variety of shapes. Most helpful here are Polanyi’s concepts of redistribution and reciprocity in pre-industrial societies, and his analysis of the importance of non-economic motivations in socio-economic systems underpinned with the institutional patterns of symmetry and centrality, in which the economy is “a mere function of social organization”: see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston 2001, 49-58 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York 1944].

## A Unified Landmass

The climatic and ecological continuities of the Eurasian steppe belt do not suffice to explain how the Mongols achieved an unprecedented scale of territorial integration. In this section I attend to their organizational innovations, in particular their synergies with merchants through the institution known as *ortaq*.

### Institutional coordination of the territory

The Mongol khans were nomadic rulers and the way they moved was different from the mobility of sedentary rulers – the Mongols probably moved less.<sup>31</sup> The khans visited their next of kin and other Mongol leaders but not their sedentary subjects and vassals. The latter were expected to come to the court, wherever it had settled. *Quriltai* were not necessarily held in the capital or near big cities, but more often in the steppe. In times of peace, the khans' mobile courts practiced seasonal migration: they went north in summer, and south in winter. In the western steppe, they followed the great valleys of the Irtysh, Syr-Daria, Ural, Volga, Don, Dniepr, Dniestr and Danube rivers, while in the eastern steppe they practiced transhumance. These migrations occurred at roughly the same time everywhere in the empire.

To communicate between courts, the Mongols dispatched express envoys across the steppe. The major obstacles to travel were not the mountains (which the Mongols were well able to pass even with heavy loads, as they had several times demonstrated during the conquest) but the major rivers. The frozen water could be easily traversed in winter, but in summer serious logistical challenges had to be met. Travellers were impressed by the Mongols' ability to cross rivers at any season of the year:

*When they come to a river, they cross it in the following manner, even if it is wide. The nobles have a circular piece of light leather, round the edge of which they make numerous loops, though which they thread a rope; they draw this up so that it makes a pouch, which they fill with their clothes and other things, pressing them down very tightly together; on top of these, in the middle, they put their saddles and other hard things. The men also sit in the middle and they tie the boat they have made in this way to the tail of a horse. They make one man swim in front with the horse to guide it, or sometimes they have a couple of oars with which they row to the other side of the water and so cross the river. The horses, however, they drive into the water, and a man swims by the side of one horse, which he guides, and the others all follow it; in this way they cross both narrow and wide rivers.*<sup>32</sup>

To be able to communicate across their vast empire, the Mongols developed a complex relay system that allowed a horseman to go from Qaraqorum to the Volga in several

31 On power projection and mobility, see Christopher Atwood, *Imperial Itinerance and Mobile Pastoralism. The State and Mobility in Medieval Inner Asia*, in: *Inner Asia* 17 (2015): 293–349.

32 John of Plano Carpini, *The Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Dawson, London 1955: 35.

weeks.<sup>33</sup> The *yam* embraced two kinds of network: one allowing officials and members of the ‘golden’ (Chinggisid) lineage<sup>34</sup> to communicate with each other; and the other facilitating the provisioning of military posts, courts and cities.<sup>35</sup> Under the Great Khans Ögödei, Güyük (1246–48), and Möngke (1251–59), the Mongols expended both networks on the scale of the landmass:

*when the extent of their territories became broad and vast and important events fell out, it became essential to ascertain the activities of their enemies, and it was also necessary to transport goods from West to the East and from the Far East to the West. Therefore throughout the length and breadth of the land they established yams, and made arrangements for the upkeep and expenses of each yam, assigning thereto a fixed number of men and beast as well as food, drink, and other necessities. All this they shared out amongst the tümen, each two tümen having to supply one yam.*<sup>36</sup>

The *yam* made long-distance connectivity more predictable and thus contributed to the unification of the empire. It created horizontal mobility (west-east-west) which intersected with the north-south migration routes of the khans’ mobile courts. The *yam* formed part of a larger system that integrated different kind of mobilities. By making horses, food, and drink available to envoys who were also able to cross the great rivers, the Mongols built a system that allowed a diversity of circulations. While special envoys usually needed to travel at full speed, merchants, pilgrims, ambassadors, and other travelers could opt for a different tempo. As a result, the *yam* came to be a symbol of the Chinggisids empire, and they themselves saw it as a reflection of peace. In 1304, the khan Öljeitü, who ruled Iran, Azerbaijan, and Seljuq Anatolia, explained in a letter to the king of France Philip the Fair how this connectivity worked to unify the Mongols:

*Now under the inspiration of the Sky (Tengri), we Tëmur qaan [the Great Khan], Toqta, Chapar, Du’a, and others, descendants of Chinggis Khan, while since forty five years until recently we used to recriminate against each other, now, under the protection*

33 The journey from the lower Volga to Qaraqorum took Plano Carpini 80 days; it took Rubrouck between 70 and 75 days; a Mongol horseman would go faster.

34 On the notion of Chinggisid lineage also known as the golden lineage, see Marie Favereau and Liesbeth Geevers, *The Golden Horde, the Spanish Habsburg Monarchy, and the Construction of Ruling Dynasties*, in: Prince, Pen and Sword. Eurasian Perspectives, ed. Maaik van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam, Leiden/Boston 2018, 454–455.

35 On the imperial *yam*, see *Secret History*, § 279–281, 297; Juvayni, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J.A. Boyle, 33. On the origins of the term, Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupersischen*, Wiesbaden 1963–1975, iv: 110–118, nr. 1812. On the *yam* as a practice of power, and its diffusion across the landmass, see Didier Gazagnadou, trans. by L. Byrne, *The Diffusion of a Postal Relay System in Premodern Eurasia*, Paris 2016, 47–63 [First edition: *La Poste à relais. La diffusion d’une technique de pouvoir à travers l’Eurasie*. Chine, Islam, Europe, Paris 1994]; also Adam Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, Cambridge 2007), reviewed by Thomas Allsen, *Imperial Posts, West, East and North: A Review Article*, in: *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 17 (2010): 241–242; Márton Vér, *The Origins of the Postal System of The Mongol Empire*, in: *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 22 (2016): 227–239; *The Postal System of the Mongol Empire in Northeastern Turkestan*, PhD Dissertation, Szeged 2016.

36 Juvayni, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J.A. Boyle, 33. A *tümen* was the largest military and administrative unit of the empire; it was theoretically composed of 10 000 men.

*of the Sky, [we] elder brothers and younger brothers, reached a mutual agreement; our states are but one from southern China, where the sun rises, as far as the Talu Sea [the legendary ocean surrounding Eurasia] and now our postal stations (yam) are connected once more.*<sup>37</sup>

Öljeitü correlated the unity of the Mongols with the circulation of goods, people, and information through the communication and supply system which, in his view, not only covered the entire landmass but forged unity between the descendants of Chinggis. Öljeitü did not see this unity as the domination of one ruler but of one lineage, the golden lineage. He saw peace as a direct emanation of circulation, and the *yam* as a concrete instrument to facilitate the circulation of happiness.

In addition to the *yam*, the Mongols implemented a host of policies to enhance the security of trade routes, to stabilize not only diplomatic conventions but also means of payment, weights and measures, and the use of common scripts and languages.<sup>38</sup> The pacification of the territory resulted not just from the Mongols' superior mobility and unique technologies but also from their capacity to create and maintain unifying institutions. Chinggisid accountants and financiers connected and merged Islamic and Chinese systems of measurement, the first time this had been accomplished on a hemispheric scale. Financial reforms were only half successful and the Mongols could never persuade Muslims in the Middle East to trust banknotes. Yet, the monetarization of northern Eurasia – including the Russian principalities where the citizens began to use coins under the Jochids – was a direct consequence of the Mongols' economic domination. The peak of monetarization coincided with the flourishing time of the long-distance trade (roughly the first half of the fourteenth century).<sup>39</sup> The overarching institutions were carefully cultivated by the khans, even during periods of extreme conflicts within the golden lineage, since they were determined at all costs to avoid economic isolation.

### Attracting the Merchants and creating the *ortaqs*

The collection of taxes and tribute in the form of cash, goods, and people was the main resource of the empire in its formative period. Trade revenues gradually increased in importance from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. The Mongols transformed the

37 Antoine Mostaert and Francis W. Cleaves, *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilhan Arghun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, 55-56 (Mongolian Text), 56-57 (French Translation). This is a quotation of lines 21-29; it was quoted also in Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 35.

38 These policies cannot be reviewed here for reasons of space. On the Mongols' weight system, see Dai Matsui, *Unification of Weights and Measures by the Mongol Empire as Seen in the Uigur and Mongol Documents*, in: *Turfan Revisited – The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Simone-Christiane Raschmann, et alii, Berlin 2004, 197-202. For a fine-grained analysis of the Mongol monetary system, see Richard von Glahn, *Monies of Account and Monetary Transition in China, Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53 (2010): 463-505.

39 In 1292–1293, the imperial administrators decided to introduce Chinese paper money in the Ilkhanate. It was first tried in Tabriz for two months but after a general strike of eight days, the reform of paper money was finally abandoned, see Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu, 1220–1309*, London / New York 2006, 290.

most productive trades of their regions into quasi-monopolies: they controlled the grain, rice, and silk trades in the east; the fur, slave, and salt trades in the north-west; and the spice, silk, cotton textile, and slave trades in the south. This meant that Mongol political leaders needed to attract merchants and their caravans to their camps.<sup>40</sup> They thus transformed their hordes into major redistribution centres. To facilitate access to Qaraqorum and to connect central Mongolia more closely to north-western China, Great Khan Ögödei established wells with brick walls in the Gobi Desert.<sup>41</sup> In this period, the Great Khan gained a reputation for paying in excess of the value of the merchandise:

*Ögödei ordered further that the merchants be paid a premium of ten percent over the total of their sold merchandise. His courtiers notified him that he already bought their merchants over their value: "Merchants deal with the treasury in hopes of a profit," the Qa'an said, "and they have an expense to pay off you bitigchis [secretaries]. It's the debt they owe you I'm discharging lest they come away having taken a loss in dealing with us."*<sup>42</sup>

Like Chinggis Khan before him, Ögödei included the costs of administration and transportation for the merchants who would come to them, thus enabling the latter to make more accurate calculations of the costs of their long distance trade. To obtain these generous prices, the merchants had to be physically present at the court.<sup>43</sup> To make this even more attractive, Chinggis Khan and his successors adapted the *ortaq* partnership, a traditional form of interpersonal credit, and raised it to a new level. Wealthy members of the golden lineage and their close relatives invested private capital into partnerships with merchants.<sup>44</sup> The partners – the Mongol investor and the merchant(s) – shared the final benefits on various terms. This was not a contract made on equal terms, since the *ortaqs* in fact became the dependent private traders of the elites. These "licensed merchants" soon came to dominate commercial transactions across the empire. Ögödei and his successor Güyük went a step further to attract such merchants by maintaining very light taxation with numerous exemptions. The trade in currencies – textiles, silver, gold, precious stones and pearls – was not taxed at all in order to support their use and circulation.

These khans created patrols to protect the traders and their goods. Even more importantly, they let merchants access the facilities of the *yam* and thus the long-distance logistics of the empire. Safe-conduct documents and requisition orders were issued in the

40 May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 110: "The Mongols created a scenario where the trade came to them."

41 May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 117, based on Igor de Rachewiltz (trans. and ed.), *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Leiden 2004, 214.

42 Rashid al-Din, *Jami'u't-tawarikh*, 338.

43 On the trade during Chinggis and Ögödei's rules, and the move from Chinggis old capital of Avarga on the Onon-Kerülen river valleys, to Qaraqorum and the Orkhon valley under Ögödei: May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 110-119.

44 Many members of the ruling family, including khatuns (women of the Mongol elites) and emirs or begs, developed *ortaq* partnerships. On the *ortaqs* under the Chinggisids, see Thomas Allsen, *Mongolian Princes and their Merchant Partners, 1200–1260*, in: *Asia Major*, third series, 2 (1989) 2: 83-126; Elizabeth Endicott-West, *Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The Ortoq*, in: *Asia Major* 3 (1989) 2: 127-153; Christopher Atwood, *Ortoq*, in: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, New York 2004, 429-430.

form of passes (made of gold, silver, bronze or wood) which the Mongols called *gerege*.<sup>45</sup> The *gerege* gave the bearer authority to requisition animals, goods and services from local populations and other officials. One only had to show the pass to claim what one needed and access the *yam*. In the early thirteenth century this privilege was restricted to a small number of officials, but it was inflated as the imperial administration grew and by the time of Ögödei (1229–41) it had been extended to merchants working for the elite. The right to bear a *gerege* and use the *yam* was a huge advantage for these merchants as it entirely erased their transportation costs. It promoted long distance trade, including the development and formalization of many new trade routes.

With the opening of the *yam* to merchants, power became increasingly open to abuse and the administrators working for the Great Khan lost control on the *ortaqs*. To reduce the number of *gerege* in circulation, a new ruler would order the collection of all existing passes before issuing his own. Great Khans and khans implemented several rules inconsistently.<sup>46</sup> Möngke specifically prohibited merchants from using them:

*When he [Möngke] became Khan and the key of Empire was placed in the hand of his severity and justice, the order was given that paizas [gerege] should not be given to merchants so that a distinction might be made between them and those engaged in the affairs of the Divan. That merchants should make use of ulaghs [yam] was inequitable in the extreme...*<sup>47</sup>

While friction between *ortaqs* and administrators was often considerable, the khans never expelled the licensed merchants from the *yam* system. Many merchants were closely related to members of the golden lineage and played a key role in the empire's economy. Under Qubilai (1260–94) merchants continued to use the *yam*, most famously Marco Polo. The major problem of the *gerege* was the fact that they were anonymous and thus easily transferable. In the Ilkhanate, Ghazan Khan (1295–1304) required *gerege* holders to exchange old ones for new passes which had the names of the bearers on them and were to be sent back at the end of the bearers' missions. The Great Khan decreed that the best horses should be reserved for express couriers and secret envoys, who were to enjoy preferential service over all other travelers.<sup>48</sup> Despite these measures, until the early fourteenth century *ortaqs* working for the Mongol elites were still allowed to hold *gerege*. After Ghazan's reform, only *ortaqs* working for the khan were supposedly authorized to use the *yam*.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, after Chinggis Khan many merchants who resided in the empire and were in possession of lands, places, and people were considered "*tarkhan*", protected sub-

45 On the proliferation of the *gerege* (*paiza* in Chinese) and the later corruption of the system, especially under the regency of Töregene Khatun, see May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 119–122 based on Juvayni.

46 Juvayni, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J.A. Boyle, 255, 257, 508–509, 551, 598–99; Atwood, *Paiza*, in: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 433–434.

47 Juvayni, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J.A. Boyle, 606.

48 Rashid al-Din, *Jami'u't-tawarikh*, 716–717; Atwood, *Paiza*, 433–434.

49 Rashid al-Din, *Jami'u't-tawarikh*, 714–715, 727–730.



jects who benefited from partial or total tax-exemption. Great Khan Möngke introduced some restrictions to the more liberal system of his predecessors, requiring merchants to be administratively registered through the census, and to pay taxes on their possessions. Yet the *ortaq* system persisted until the end of the Mongol empire. Even during wars and internal conflicts, *gerege* enabled merchants, both Mongol and non-Mongol, to be mobile across Eurasia. Foreign emissaries, who had less freedom, often joined trading caravans to cross troubled areas.

### The routes of long-distance trade

To stay safe and maintain their wares under protection, merchants abandoned insecure itineraries and followed the routes formalized by the Mongols, including specific bridges and crossing points. Two trade arteries traversed the whole empire: the southern and northern routes. The first one combined land and sea itineraries while the second one was exclusively terrestrial. They largely reflected the land partition between Jochids and Toluids, the two most powerful Chinggisid lineages.

The southern route was mostly under the control of the Toluid lineage, except between Hormuz and China where the territories in question fell under the authority of the Ögödei leader Qaidu (c.1260–1301), whose relations with the Toluids were unstable.<sup>50</sup> Tabriz, Kashan, Yazd, Kirman, and Hormuz were the main hubs along this southern route. Western merchants usually departed from Trebizond to reach Tabriz. Once in Hormuz, they could either go by land to China or by boat from Hormuz to Kollam and on to Quanzhou. The maritime section of the route was reputed to be long and dangerous and so western travellers generally preferred the land route, which was also quicker.<sup>51</sup> To promote terrestrial connectivity between Iran and China the Great Khan Qubilai improved the facilities and postal stations in the Tarim basin, especially between Hami and Khotan. However, since this road passed through the territories of Qaidu, it was only intermittently open to traders. In 1275, Qaidu was at war with Qubilai and links between their territories were fraught. News spread quickly and merchants responded by choosing the maritime route. In 1288–89, Qubilai finally abandoned his project of controlling and securing this part of the route.<sup>52</sup> From then on, travellers, ambassadors, and merchants who journeyed across Eurasia had the choice between the southern land

50 The Persian portion of the southern route belonged to the Hülegüids, a branch of the Toluids, and its Chinese portion to the Great Khans, another branch of the Toluids.

51 The land journey between Tabriz and Khanbaliq (Beijing) took at least 100 days. Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 27–28; Yule, *Sir Henry, Cathay and the Way Thither*, London, 1913–16, vol. 3, 49. On the eastern portion of the sea route, see Roderich Ptak, *The Northern Trade Route to the Spice Islands: South China Sea – Sulu Zone – North Moluccas* (14<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century), in: *Archipel* 43 (1992): 27–56; From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone and Beyond: Questions Related to the Early Fourteenth Century, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29 (1998) 2: 269–294; Kenneth R. Hall, *Sojourning communities, ports-of-trade, and commercial networking in Southeast Asia's eastern regions, c. 1000–1400*, in: *New Perspectives on the History and Historiography of Southeast Asia*, ed. Michael Arthur Aung-Thwin and Kenneth R. Hall, London 2011, 56–73.

52 Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 29–30.



and sea route, a journey which lasted two to three years, and the northern steppe route, which took seven to eleven months.<sup>53</sup>

The northern route was mostly in the hands of the Jochids. Its main hubs were the Crimean harbour of Sudak, Azaq and Tana on the Don River, Hajji Tarkhan (later As-trakhan) and Saray on the Volga River, Saraychuq on the Ural River, Khiva-Urgench on the Amu-Daria River, and Otrar on the Syr-Daria River. Otrar was the most easterly city of Jochid territory and the last stop before the journey to north-western China. It took ten days from Tana to reach Hajji Tarkhan on horseback (or twenty-five days by camel-carts), one day by boat on the Volga to reach Saray from Hajji Tarkhan, and twenty days by camel-carts to reach Saraychuq-Urgench.

The testimony of contemporary travellers is revealing. When the inland route from China to Iran became too perilous because of the political tensions between Qubilai and Qaidu, they preferred the northern route across the steppe to the maritime alternative.<sup>54</sup> In January 1305, Montecorvino, who came to China by the maritime route, wrote:

*As for the road: I report that the way by the land of Cothay [Toqta, the Jochid khan], the emperor of the Northern Tartars, is safer and more secure, so that travelling with envoys, they might be able to arrive within five or six months. But the other route [the southern sea route] is the most long and perilous since it involves two sea voyages, the first of which is about the distance of Acre from the province of Provence [Hormuz-Malabar], but the second is like the distance between Acre and England [Malabar-China], and it may happen that the journey is scarcely completed in two years.*<sup>55</sup>

Several Italian traders reported insecure conditions in and around the city of Tabriz. Their complaints and experiences were recorded in Francesco Balducci Pegolotti's trade manual, *La Pratica della mercatura*. The Florentine trader, noting that the Mongol ruler was unable to ensure order and protect foreign traders, strongly advised the merchants to take the northern route on the grounds that it was not only faster but safer.<sup>56</sup> In the first half of the fourteenth century, the entire southern route was considered hazardous by westerners, while the northern route became the most secure and direct channel across the empire.

Global history usually focuses on commercial exchange between West and East – often summed up as “silver against silk” – but it should be born in mind that merchants sometimes made greater profits in local and regional seasonal fairs and intermediary

53 The total journey from Saray to Khanbaliq (Beijing) was around 200 days along the inland route for a horseman, but a trade caravan would need at least 270 days. See Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 25–26. Although the southern land route through the cities of the Tarim basin was intermittently insecure, even foreign merchants like the Polos were able to trade and pass.

54 On the dangers of the overseas trade and especially the navigation on the Indian Ocean, see Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 27–28. Shipwrecks were common.

55 Also quoted in Kim, *The Unity of the Mongol Empire*, 28. Diplomacy between the three *uluses* intensified after 1304–1305, the time when communication on the northern route accelerated (30).

56 Francesco Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. A. Evans, Cambridge, Mass. 1936. Pegolotti composed his trade manual around 1336 on the basis of information that dated back a.1315.

hubs. Long-distance trade across Eurasia should be represented as a “loop” rather than as a return trip from Europe to China. The traders’ aim was not necessarily to travel quickly from west to east and back, for profits could be amplified by multiplying small commercial transactions along the way. Pegolotti described the practice of “long-distance bulk trade,” a model in which a trader carried with him a number of *balish*, which were used to purchase and sell goods along the outward journey in order to fructify his initial capital. After arriving in eastern Asia, he would buy the commodities that would maximize returns back in Europe.<sup>57</sup> The whole business was not simply one of connecting the end points (China, India, Italy). Rather, multiple transactions were necessary to cover the costs of transportation and survival in distant lands, while minimizing the risk of loss. Pegolotti always attempted to calculate merchants’ transport costs for long distance trade, as this was a crucial requirement of those in the west who financed them.<sup>58</sup> His manual was addressed to merchants who were not *ortaq* and did not benefit from the *yam* facilities – outsiders who needed advice on how to compete with the *ortaq*s.

### Commercial treaties with non-*ortaq* merchants

Mongol leaders were always keen to formalize trade. Guaranteeing merchants legal security was part of the general strategy to control and stimulate the exchanges. Already under Chinggis Khan commercial negotiations were a prime purpose of the Mongols’ diplomacy. In order to change commercial relations to their advantage, they developed their own tributary system with both vassal and neighbour states.<sup>59</sup> The Mongol leaders maintained a clear distinction between *ortaq*s and other merchants, irrespective of whether they were locals with only modest capital resources or more lavishly endowed foreigners. They made another clear-cut distinction between “real” foreigners, such as the Venetians, and non-Mongols who have been based in territories of the empire since before the conquest such as the Russians, the Qipchaqs, and the Chinese. The latter were the Mongols’ old subjects, ruled by laws that dated back to the conquest, while the others were newcomers who had to negotiate their status, sometimes on an individual basis, and were liable to be expelled from the empire. At the same time, however, the Mongols welcomed foreign traders who wanted to become *ortaq* and associate with a wealthy *noyan* (“aristocrat”). The *ortaq*s were thus a very mixed category. In Central Asia they were mostly Muslim, but in the Toluid and Jochid dominions we know of several cases of Christian, Buddhist, and Jewish *ortaq*s.<sup>60</sup> In the last quarter of the thirteenth century, non-*ortaq* traders, especially Venetians and Genoese, became increasingly active

57 Allsen, *Mongolian Princes*, 93.

58 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 182; May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 110.

59 May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 124–125. In several cases, Mongol trade expansionism led to military conflicts: the war with the Khwarezmshah is a case in point.

60 See, for instance, the cases mentioned in Benjamin Kedar, *Segurano-Sakrân Salvaygo: un mercante Genovese al servizio dei Sultani Mamalucchi, c. 1303–1322*, in: *Fatti e idee di storia economica nei secoli XII–XX. Studi dedicati a Franco Borlandi*, Bologna 1976 [Reprint. in *The Franks in the Levant, 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Aldershot 1993, Art.

in the Eurasian trade. The opening of the *yam* to non-*ortaq* merchants in 1304-5 had far-reaching consequences. I will focus here on the Venetians, as they constitute the best-documented case for the first half of the fourteenth century.

### Tabriz, Tana and the rise of the northern route

The first khan to offer the Venetians extended trading rights was Öljeitü. The *yarliq*, treaty, was signed at Mughan, modern day Azerbaijan, in the year of the snake (November 1306).<sup>61</sup> The Venetians did not go to Öljeitü's court to ask for rights. Rather, the Mongol khan himself sent his envoys to Venice to offer better conditions to trade in his land. He granted the Venetians special rights that were valid throughout his territory and sanctioned by the death penalty. These rights included light taxation;<sup>62</sup> freedom to sell to whom the traders wanted; freedom of religion; freedom of movement (including the right for the Venetians to let their animals graze free of charge for three days); personal security;<sup>63</sup> the transmission of property – if a Venetian died, his belongings and goods should not be taken by officials but handed over to the Venetian consul;<sup>64</sup> justice – if a Venetian had committed a crime and asked that the Mongols judged him instead of his own people, he was allowed to go to the great *yarghuci*, the khan's judge; and personal liability, in the sense that one was responsible for oneself.<sup>65</sup>

This political overture corresponded to alterations in the western section of the trade route. During the first years of Öljeitü's reign, northern Anatolia and hubs in the Black Sea commercial circuits became more active than Mardin, Mosul, and other cities across northern Iraq.<sup>66</sup> At that time Tabriz – with more than 200, 000 inhabitants in the early fourteenth century – attracted an increasing numbers of merchants and foreigners.<sup>67</sup> But the route between Ayas, and later Trebizond, to Tabriz was dominated by the Genoese.<sup>68</sup> To counter their power, Öljeitü introduced more competition. In order to attract new foreign traders, and especially the archenemy of the Genoese, the Venetians, he granted

XXI; Marie Favereau, *Venecianskie istochniki po istorii Zolotoj Ordy: novye perspektivy izuchenija*, in: *Golden Horde Review / Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie* 1 (2016): 39-54.

61 For the full text of the treaty, see Archivio di stato di Venezia (ASVe), *Commemoriali* f.289 [1306, Novembre primi – Traduzione di diplôma presentato da un messo dell'imperatore dei Tartari].

62 The treaty specified no extra customs duties, no extra tolls, and no taxes on imported wine for personal consumption.

63 The Venetians were under the protection of Mongol officials. In case of robbery, Mongol officials were expected to assist the merchants and/or to reimburse them.

64 The *noyans* were forbidden to ask the Venetians for gifts or any other forms of tribute.

65 Di Cosmo, *Mongols and Merchants*. 409-411.

66 This change and the decline of the route across northern Iraq was perhaps a consequence of Ghazan's last campaign in Syria. See Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran*, 366, who reaches this conclusion on the basis of numismatic evidence.

67 May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 127.

68 Since the 1290s, the Hülegüids had an alliance with the Genoese who soon became out of control. On this alliance and its consequences, see Virgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Leiden / Boston 2012, 95-96; 114-138. In 1321, the Mamluk troops occupied Ayas (Laiazzo) in Cilician Armenia – one of the greatest commercial hubs of the area – and they expelled the Genoese who had to seek for another entry point to Tabriz and the southern route.

them similar privileges to those of the *ortags*.<sup>69</sup> But there was more: after 1306 the Mongols wanted to deal with the Republic of Venice and not with the Venetians as private entrepreneurs. The expansionist economic and diplomatic policy of the Toluids was part of a larger ideological agenda. To assert themselves as Eurasia's only super-power in Eurasia, they sought to establish a new tributary system in which Venice was cast as their principal commercial partner.

However, the Venetian senate refused to invest public finances in Öljeitü's domain until 1320, when a second treaty was concluded with Abu Sa'id, the successor of Öljeitü.<sup>70</sup> The Genoese, who remained powerful in Trebizond and Tabriz, prevented them from penetrating a market they considered their own. When the Venetians began to invest the southern route after 1320, they soon complained about the lack of security on the route to Hormuz and especially in Tabriz.<sup>71</sup> The policy was a failure not only because the Venetians had no local support in Tabriz, but also because they could not control the entry point to the route while the Genoese had their own well-established private merchants in the whole area. Given their inability to penetrate Mongol markets via Tabriz, the Venetians turned north. In 1333 the Venetian Senate negotiated their first treaty with the Jochid khan Özbek, who allowed them to build a permanent settlement along the steppe route near the small town of Azaq. There the Venetians founded Tana, the Latin designation of the Don River, located close to the mouth of the Don and the sea of Azov.<sup>72</sup> By granting new trade privileges to the Venetians, Özbek had several purposes in mind: to weaken the Toluids, to divert traders and investors towards the northern route, and to limit the expansion of the Genoese based at the Crimean harbor of Caffa. The main clauses of Özbek's grant included a territorial concession, for which the Venetians paid annual rent, and the right to build houses, to trade and to practice their religion. Taxation was favourable – the commercial fees, *comercium imperiale* or *comerclum* collected by the Jochids from the merchants were fixed at a rate of 3% of the value of the merchandise sold.<sup>73</sup> No taxes were levied on gold, silver, and precious or semi-precious stones. Goods were to be weighed by both Venetian and Mongol parties

69 In 1305, Öljeitü also sent an embassy to inform the Mamluk sultan that he was ready to allow Mamluk merchants into his lands. He also offered an exchange of war captives. On the relations between the Mamluks and Ilkhan Öljeitü, see Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, Cambridge 2008, 94-98.

70 For the full text of the treaty, see ASVe, *Libri Pactorum: Liber Albus*, f. 244 [Pactum cum Monsait, imperatoris Tunisi, per Michaelem Delphino, ambaxadorem illustris domini ducis Veneciarum celebratum]; Louis de Mas-Latrie, *Privilège commercial accordé en 1320 à la République de Venise par un roi de Perse, faussement attribué à un roi de Tunis*, *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes* 31 (1870): 95-102.

71 Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, 133-34.

72 Tana was only 30 kilometers from the mouth of the Don and 16 kilometers from the sea of Azov.

73 This tax policy served the interests of the Jochids, also because many products were re-sold several times over. On the eight treaties granted by the Jochid khan to the Venetians, and on their background and consequences, see Louis de Mas-Latrie, *Privilèges commerciaux accordés à la république de Venise par les princes de Crimée et les empereurs mongols du Kiptchak*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 29 (1868): 580-595; A.P. Grigor'ev, V.P. Grigor'ev, *Kollekcia zolotoordynskikh dokumentov XIV veka iz Venecii*, St Petersburg 2002; István Vásáry, *Immunity charters of the Golden Horde granted to the Italian towns Caffa and Tana*, in: *Turks, Tatars and Russians in the 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Aldershot/Burlington 2007, XII: 1-13; Di Cosmo, *Mongols and Merchants*; Marie Favereau, *Convention constitutive. L'approche historique des contrats: le cas des Vénitiens et de la Horde d'Or*, in: *Diction-*

to an exchange. Personal liability was guaranteed. Disputes between Venetians and locals were to be solved by the Venetian consul and “the lord of the land,” the khan’s deputy.<sup>74</sup> This treaty – the first of the eight *yarliqs* Özbek and his successors concluded with Venice between 1333 and 1358 – shows that the Jochid lineage developed strategies that differed from those of the Toluids. Indeed, the latter focused on the freedom of the traders, and their grants appeared to be hugely advantageous for the Venetians, who were offered unheard of freedom of movement in the Mongol empire. Yet, because Venice had no local agency in Tabriz and beyond, this policy was insufficient to initiate new commercial dynamics. By 1333, when Özbek issued his *yarliq*, Tabriz was already in decline. By granting the Venetians a permanent trading post at Tana, the Jochids delivered a final blow to the Toluids’ commercial ambitions and the southern route lost its attraction. The Venetians began to invest massively in the northern route. The hubs on this route were all located in river valleys that the Mongol leaders knew intimately as a result of their seasonal migrations. The Jochids allowed western traders to access the *yam* route and shared their horizontal mobility in order to benefit from the traders’ activities, but they retained exclusive control over vertical mobility, i.e. the north-south routes (which involved the Russian principalities, the Baltic, and the far-north). By letting the non-*ortaq*s penetrate only parts of their networks, the Jochids were able to sustain the dynamics of the Mongol Peace for many years, beyond the collapse of the Toluids in the second half of the fourteenth century.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to shed new light on the Mongol Peace, a phenomenon that triggered a new phase in the globality of Eurasia. I began by drawing attention to the underlying principles of Mongol economic behaviour, in particular commercial and taxation practices. Beyond the valuation of certain luxury goods, spiritual motivations cannot be overlooked. The Mongols did not value economic efficiency for its own sake, just as they disdained hoarding. These features were noted by numerous contemporary sources. Dealing with the afterlife and the spirits of the dead in order to increase their own chances of the best possible rebirth in the shape of their own descendants was a major concern. Yet, the circulation of happiness is not only illustrative of the Mongol system of beliefs, it was also a necessary ideological condition for their domination system to be able to reproduce itself over time. Because the process of circulation was key to their social hegemony, the Mongols solicited and protected traders – not necessarily *any* trader, but their *ortaq*s or “partners”. I have thus argued that the ideology of circulation,

naire des conventions, ed. Philippe Batifoulier et alii, Villeneuve d’Ascq 2016, 82-87. For the original documents, see ASVe – Libri Pactorum: Liber Albus, ff.249, 250, 251; III, ff.225, 236, 247; V, f. 160; Commemorialis: VI, ff.80-81.

74 Di Cosmo, *Mongols and Merchants*, 411.

the redistribution order, and the technical organization of merchants' operations in the Mongol world were interconnected.

It is often asserted that the Chinggisids created a unified empire that stretched from China to Europe in which the Eurasian trade routes were more secure than ever before. This was true, but it was not equally true for all. Merchants from outside the empire had a lower status and did not enjoy the same protection and privileges as the *ortaq*s. In Mongol territories, the status of *ortaq*s reached a level unseen before in west Eurasia and China. The main reason was the fact that they contributed directly to the most important value of Mongol society: happiness, in the sense of human flourishing. The Mongols closed off this possibility to other private and foreign traders.

In the final section, I examined why the Mongols decided to open the system to non-*ortaq* merchants. After 1305 the political competition between Toluids and Jochids, the two most powerful Chinggisid lineages, created an opportunity for non-*ortaq* traders to penetrate the Mongol markets. This internal competition had direct consequences for the trade routes. Conflicts between Mongol leaders certainly affected these routes but, contrary to a commonly held view, the outcome – at least temporarily – was beneficial to the northern steppe route at the expense of the maritime route via India and the Persian Gulf. Global historians exploring the links between Europe and China have neglected terrestrial Eurasian connectivity. I hope to have demonstrated in this article that under the Mongol Peace the most important trade routes converged in the valleys of northern Eurasia. It was here that Mongol leaders settled their courts and permanently resident merchants made substantial profits.

I began by noting that the concept of “peace” for the Mongols entailed “submission to our economic system.” This system was based on the circulation of people, money, and goods; on the mobility of the ruling elite and the administration, including the *ortaq*s who had access to the *yam*; and on exchange with the outside world according to a new mixture of tribute and trade. The Chinggisids constrained official relations with foreign merchants working with private funding. They also tried to force the states of these merchants to formalize diplomatic relations by means of treaties, which were elaborated through the exchange of envoys, letters, and gifts. I focused on the agreements concluded with the Venetians, but similar treaties were signed with the Genoese, the Byzantines, the Mamluks, and others. The long run goal of the Mongol rulers was to maintain overall control through commercial competition. The Jochids and Toluids opened local markets to competition while cementing long-term trust by repeatedly confirming established treaties. They created favourable conditions for foreign merchants to establish trading posts within their empire, and they engaged actively with their finances and traders. This added up to new new forms of commercial connectivity across Eurasia. Of course, the trade routes were embedded in socio-political contexts. The resilience of the Jochids' domination in the north was based on the restriction of certain privileges to their leaders and close associates. Territorial control; safe passage for merchants, travelers, and local landholders; effective justice; and selective access to resources: these were the *sine qua non* of Mongol power.