ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The History of the Mongol Conquests

J. J. Saunders

Routledge Revivals

The History of the Mongol Conquests

First Published in 1971 *The History of the Mongol Conquests* presents a general history of the Mongols of the thirteenth century. By using primary and secondary sources, J. J. Saunders fills up a major gap in the English historical literature on the subject. It goes without saying that the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century turned the world upside down. The book opens with a chapter on Eurasian nomadism and an account of the Turkish conquests, seven centuries before those of the Mongols. The author deals fully with Chingis Khan and his achievements both as a soldier and as an administrator and goes on to describe the Mongol drive into the Europe and the Christian response to it. Mongol rule in China and Persia and their dominance in Russia are also covered. Rich in archival sources, this book is a must read for scholars and researchers of Asian and Central Asian history.

The History of the Mongol Conquests

J. J. Saunders

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1971
by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

This edition first published in 2023 by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer
The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LCCN: 43031233

ISBN: 978-1-032-52729-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-40809-3 (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-52730-7 (pbk)

Book DOI 10.4324/9781003408093

The History of the Mongol Conquests

J. J. Saunders

Department of History,
University of Canterbury, Christchurch

Routledge & Kegan Paul London

First published 1971
by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd
Broadway House, 68–74 Carter Lane
London EC 4V 5EL
Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd
London and Southampton
and set in Plantin (110) 11 on 12 point

ISBN 0 7100 7073 X

Contents

TO MY GRANDSON MARK

Illustrations

Plates

Maps

Glossary

All the names listed are Turkish unless otherwise stated.

Adak, Azak, Ayak	leg, foot. Sea of Azov (Azak) at *foot* of Don.
Agha	elder brother, in Ottoman Empire chief or master, later used as a military title. Cf. Agha Khan.
Ak	white.
Alp	hero.
Altin, Altun	gold. Altin-yish, 'golden mountains'.
Anda	sworn (adopted) brother (Mongol).
Aral	island.
Arslan	lion.
Ata	father, ancestor.
Atabeg, Atabak	'father-guardian'.
Bahadur	hero. Other forms are *baghatur*, *batur*, *ba'atur*, in modern Mongolian *bator*, as in Ulan Bator, 'Red Hero'.
Balik	town. Cf. Khan-Balik, 'Khan's City', i.e. Peking.
Balish	Persian 'cushion'; gold and silver coin circulating in the Mongol Empire; 1 gold balish = 2,000 dinars, 1 silver balish = 200 dinars.
Beg, Bey, Bek	lord, chief, governor, commander. Feminine *begi* or *beki* in Mongol, *begum* in Mogul India. Probably a loan word from Persian *bag*, 'divine', title of Sassanid Shah.
Beki	shaman (Mongol).

Besh	five. Cf. *Besh-balik*, 'Five Towns'.
Bilik	sayings or maxims, especially of Chingis Khan.
Bökö, Böge	strong.
Bolar	Mongol name for Great Bulgaria on the Volga, *not* Poland.
Borte	wolf (Mongol).
Buka, Buqa	steer, bull.
Chagan	white (Mongol).
Choban, Chopan	shepherd.
Dalai	ocean, hence universal, supreme (Mongol). Cf. *Dalai* Lama of Tibet.
Darugha, Darukhachi	commissioner, police chief, leading official in Mongol-controlled town or district. From *daru*, to press or seal (Mongol).
Deniz, Teniz, Derya	sea.
Dokuz, Toquz	nine. *Toquz-Oghuz*, 'Nine Clans'.
El, Il	submissive, subordinate. Cf. *Il*-khan State in Persia, subordinate to the Great Khan.
Elchi	envoy, ambassador.
Erküt, Ereke'ün	Mongol name for Christians, perhaps from Greek *archon*, 'priest'.
Gurkhan	'universal lord'. *Gür* or *kür*, wide, general. Title of thirteenth-century ruler of Turkestan.
Hui-hui	Chinese name for Muslims, perhaps derived from *hui-ho*, Chinese for 'Uighur'.
Idikut	'holy majesty'. Title of some medieval Turkish princes in Central Asia.
Ikhshid	prince, lord. Title of Persian origin assumed by some Turkish rulers; name of Turkish dynasty which governed Egypt from 933 to 969.
Ilig, Ilak	king.
Kand	town. Often found as second part of place-names like Samarkand, Yarkand, Tashkand (Tashkent). Iranian word adopted into Turkish.
Kara	black. Cf. Kara-Korum, 'Black Rock'.
Keler, Kerel	Mongol name for Hungary, from Hungarian *király*, 'king', itself derived from Karl (Charlemagne).
Keshik	Mongol imperial guard.
Khan	king, prince, chief. Most common sovereign title in medieval Asia. Probably shortened form of *khagan*, *kaghan* or *kha'an*.

Khatun	queen, princess, lady.
Kizil	red.
Kök	blue, sky.
Köl	lake. Cf. Baikal, 'rich lake'.
Kum	desert, sand. *Kizil-kum*, 'red desert'.
Kuriltai	national assembly, diet (Mongol).
Möngke	eternal, common title of Tengri, the sky-god.
Naiman	eight (Mongol); name of tribe probably composed of eight clans.
Nökör, Nöker	comrade, knight, free warrior (Mongol). Plural *nököt* or *nököd*.
Nor	lake (Mongol). Cf. Lop-Nor.
Noyan	general, commander, official (Mongol).
Obok	clan.
Oghul	son, child, descendant, prince of the blood.
On	ten.
Ordu	camp; in English 'horde'.
Ortak, Ortaq	a partner, member of a company of merchants.
Paiza	tablet of authority, of gold, silver or wood.
Sarai	palace (Persian).
Sira	yellow (Mongol).
Solangqa	Mongol name for North Koreans.
Su	water.
Tagh	mountain.
Tajik or Tazik	Turkish name for Persians and Persian name for Arabs; hence *Ta-shi*, Chinese name for Arabs.
Tamgha	seal, die, tribal badge.
Tanga	small silver coin in use in Mongol age.
Tarkhan	commander with right to fixed share of booty.
Tarsa	Muslim name for Asian Christians, from Persian *tars*, 'fear', i.e. 'God-fearers'.
Tash	stone. Cf. Tashkent, 'Stone City'.
Tegin	prince. Cf. Alp-tegin, 'hero prince'.
Tengri	heaven, sky, God.
Timur, Temür	iron.
Toghril	kite (rather than falcon).
Tumen	10,000; hence an army division.
Ulus	people, land, territory.
Yabghu, Jabghu	prince.
Yam	post-station (Mongol).
Yarlik	decree, order, law.
Yasa	code of law, specifically that of Chingis Khan (Mongol).

Yasun	bone; *chagan yasun*, white bone, i.e. noble; *kara yasun*, black bone, i.e. commoner (Mongol).
Yer	earth.
Yil	year.
Yurt	territory, appanage.

A note on chronology

The commonest systems of reckoning time in Mongol Asia were by:

(1) The Muslim era, the starting-point of which is 16 July 622 AD, the year of the Prophet Muhammad's flight or emigration (hijra, hegira) from Mecca to Medina. As the Muslim year (AH = Anno Hegirae) is a lunar one of 354 days, it is steadily catching up on the Christian solar year of 365¼ days. Mongol public documents (at least outside China) were usually dated by this era, e.g. the Great Khan Küyük's letter to Pope Innocent IV bears the date AH 644 = AD 1246. On this method of chronology and the Christian era equivalents of Muslim dates to AD 2000, see W. Haig, *Comparative Tables of Muhammadan and Christian Dates*, London, 1932, and C. H. Phillips, *Handbook of Oriental History*, London, 1951.

(2) The Twelve-Year Animal Cycle, widely used among the Turkish-Mongol peoples and also to some extent in China. Each year was named after an animal, always in this order: mouse/rat, ox, tiger/panther, hare, dragon/crocodile, snake, horse, sheep/goat, monkey, chicken, dog, pig/boar. This system has obvious drawbacks: thus, when we read that the *Secret History* was completed in the Year of the Rat, we are uncertain whether this refers to AD 1228, 1240, 1252 or 1264. See E. Chavannes, 'Le cycle turc des douze animaux', *T'oung Pao*, 1906.

(3) The Christian Nestorians, who were so prominent in Asia

in Mongol times, used the Greek or Seleucid or Macedonian era, so called after Seleucus Nicator, who secured Babylonia out of the wreck of Alexander the Great's empire in 312–11 BC. It is usual to deduct 311 years from the Nestorian date to get the ordinary Christian era equivalent (e.g. 1586 Nestorian era = AD 1275), but this gives no precise reckoning, since the beginning of the Seleucid era is not exactly fixed and lies somewhere between 313 and 309 BC.

A note on transliteration

The problem of transliterating Oriental names in English is well-nigh insoluble, yet some principles ought to be followed and in general the form adopted should be that nearest in sound and spelling to the original. Consistency has often to be sacrificed to clarity.

In the Mongol history five principal Asian languages are involved: Mongol, Chinese, Turkish, Persian and Arabic. A whole group of dialects is classified as Turkish: only a few have a written literature.

As the Mongols were illiterate before the time of Chingis Khan, their names were first written down in other languages and some became fixed in that form. Thus the Conqueror's name is properly spelt Chinggis, but as Arabic has no ch, the Arabic form is Jinghiz, which in the eighteenth century became transformed in the West into Genghis. Mongol names in such forms as Hulagu, Mangu and Uljaitu represent the Perso-Arabic spelling: I have preferred the forms Hülegü, Möngke and Öljeitü as being closest to the original.

Mongol and Turkish ö and ü are pronounced as in German.

Persian has the same alphabet as Arabic, with the addition of four letters: p, ch, zh and g. Some of the letters they have in common are pronounced differently in the two languages. Thus the Persian town Ispahan is Isfahan to the Arabs, and the Persian historian Vassaf is called Wassaf in Arabic. The Persian province

of Azerbaijan is sometimes spelt Adharbaijan, but the dh is pronounced z and so spelt in Arabic.

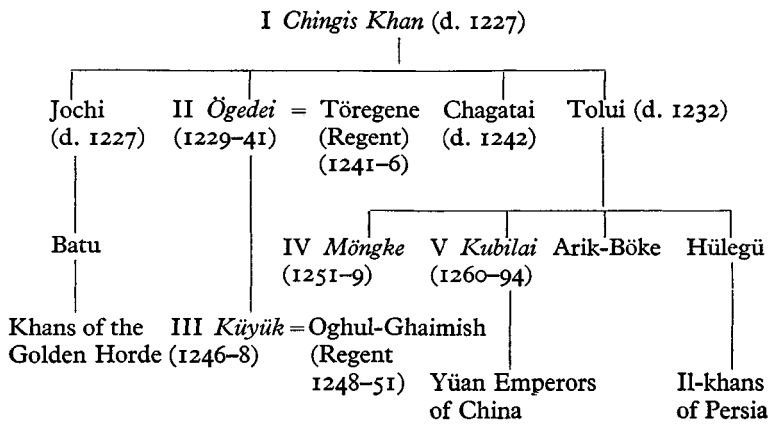
Arabo-Persian kh is pronounced like the ch in Scottish 'loch', but Mongol ch as in English 'church'; the dh, as noted, as z in Persian and the gh like the French r, a virtual gargling.

Chinese names are very difficult to represent in a romanized alphabetic form: I have usually followed the Wade-Giles system and shown the aspirate by an apostrophe, e.g. T'ang. In Chinese, ch is pronounced nearly as dj, and ch' like the ch in 'church'.

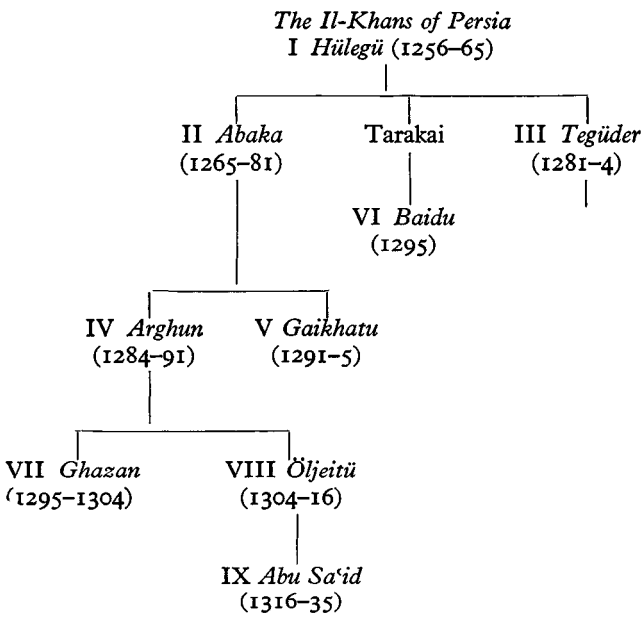
In Czech and cognate Slavonic languages, I transliterate the letters ž, č and š by zh, ch and sh respectively.

Genealogical tables

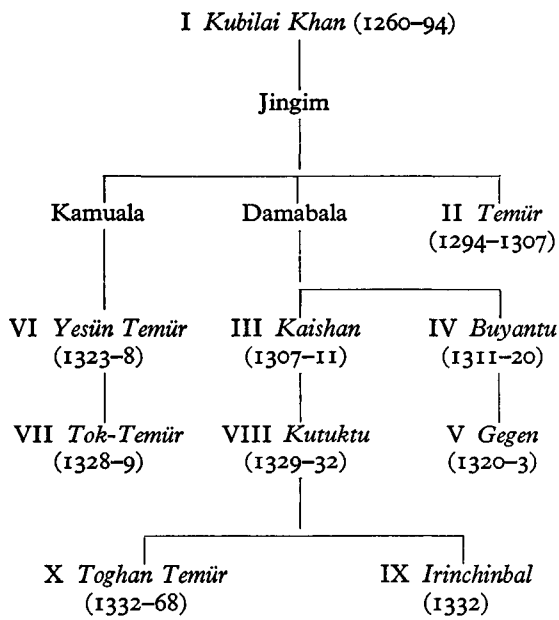
The Great Khans



The Il-Khans of Persia



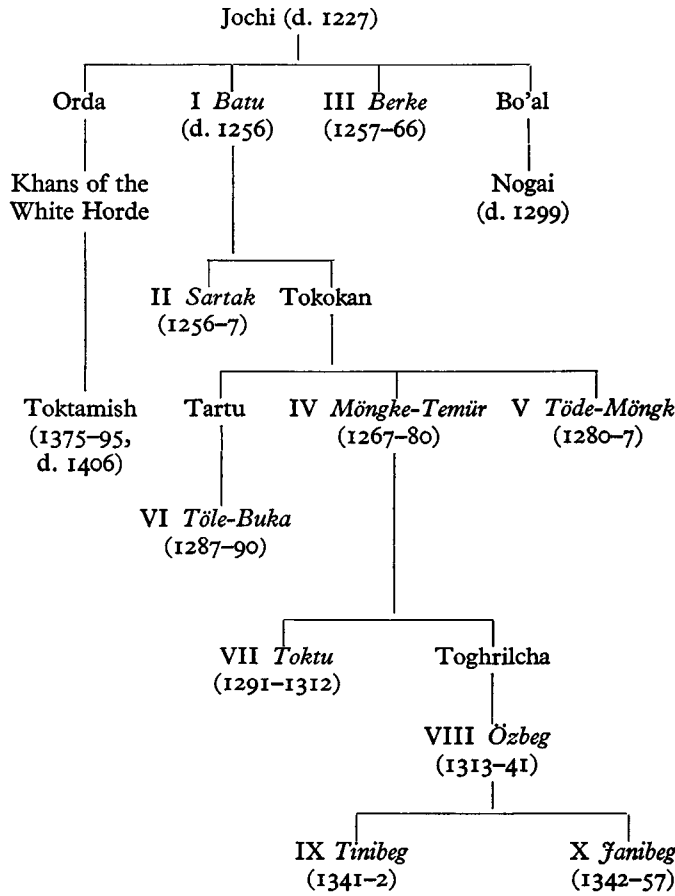
The Mongol Emperors of China



Note: The Mongol rulers of China were all given Chinese reign-names, but these are not included.

The Khans of the Golden Horde

(only the more prominent included)



Preface

The Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century turned the world upside down; they spanned the globe from Germany to Korea, they destroyed kingdoms and empires wholesale, and left the greater part of the Old World shaken and transformed. Yet the literature of the subject is surprisingly meagre. Few documented studies (as distinct from popular, romanticizing biographies)[1] exist of the amazing career of Chingis (or, as he is better known Genghis) Khan; no scholarly life of his famous grandson Kubilai Khan, immortalized by Marco Polo and Coleridge, exists in any Western language,[2] and even the best general histories of the medieval world deal very cursorily with these tremendous events. The reasons for this strange neglect are probably the vast scope of the subject and the daunting character of the linguistic problem. In bulk, the original sources are not unmanageable, but they are extant in so many languages that only a linguistic prodigy could claim a mastery of them all. He who would undertake to write a history of the conquests that fully measured up to the exacting standards of modern scholarship must be fluent in Chinese, Mongol, Japanese, Russian, Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Latin and several forms of Turkish. Such a Mezzofanti would be hard to find. However, during the last 200 years or so a small but able band of scholars, who have cultivated intensely small portions of this vast field, have published critical editions, translations, commentaries and learned annotations and so have built up a substantial body of accurate knowledge.

The French were the honoured pioneers; more particularly, the French Jesuit missionaries at Peking, who did so much to introduce China to Europe in the age of the Enlightenment. Father Antoine Gaubil published in 1739 the first reliable Western life of Chingis (*Histoire de Gentchiscan*), based on the Chinese sources,[3] and the posthumous *Histoire générale de la Chine*, by Father Joseph de Mailla, which came out in thirteen volumes at Paris between 1777 and 1785, is essentially a translation of the *T'ung Chien Kang Mu*, the fullest single collection of Chinese historical records, which was put together over a period of many years. This valuable publication instructed contemporary European writers like Voltaire and Gibbon in the Eastern side of the Mongol conquests, and the fact that it has been recently reprinted (1969) indicates that its usefulness is not yet exhausted. In the post-Napoleonic age the French Sinologist Abel-Rémusat examined the relations between the Mongol khans and the Western kings,[4] and the earliest general survey of Mongol history was compiled by Mouradja d'Ohsson (1780–1855), who came of a family of diplomats and savants of Armenian origin and ended his career as Swedish minister in Berlin; exploiting for the first time the rich Perso-Arabic sources, his *Histoire des Mongols* from Chingis to Tamerlane was published in four volumes in 1824. It impressed Goethe among others, and is mentioned with respect in the *Conversations with Eckermann* (12 October 1825); it was comprehensive and critical, has needed relatively little subsequent correction, and remains to this day the best treatise on the subject in any European language. The second edition, much enlarged and improved, dates from 1834; a third followed in 1852. Regrettably, it was never translated into English, but a reprint of the 1834 edition has been announced.

D'Ohsson's *History* stimulated fresh research: this was the age of Ranke and the critical evaluation of source material. The narratives of the great Franciscans Carpini and Rubruck, who travelled through Asia in the 1240s and 1250s at the height of the Mongol conquests, were printed in full in the original Latin in 1839. The indefatigable Austrian orientalist Baron Josef von Hammer, who possessed more industry than criticism, wrote the first detailed studies of the Golden Horde of Russia (1840) and the Il-khans of Persia (1841–3), the French savant Étienne Quatremère translated the section of Rashid ad-Din's History embracing the reign of

Hülegü (*Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1836) and the part of Makrizi's voluminous history of Egypt dealing with the early Mamluks (*Histoire des sultans mamelouks*, 2 vols, 1837–45), whose conflict with the Mongols of Persia was of such decisive importance in world history, and the German scholar Franz von Erdmann produced a critical if ponderous life of Chingis (*Temudschin der Unerschütterliche*, 1862), based mainly on the Persian historian Rashid ad-Din. England was slow to contribute to Mongol studies, but between 1876 and 1888 Sir Henry Howorth (1842–1923) brought out in four volumes a massive *History of the Mongols*, one of the most disappointing, or at least exasperating, works in historical literature. Howorth was a man of immense industry and vitality and ardent interest in Asian antiquities, but he was expert in no Asian language and his book is a huge, ill-digested repertory of facts from second-hand sources, with little attempt at critical discrimination and inexcusably destitute of an index or even a table of contents. (A posthumous supplementary volume, with an index to the whole work, came out in 1927.)

Before the nineteenth century closed, the Russians, who under the last Tsars had absorbed into their empire one by one the Turkish khanates of Central Asia, had made impressive intellectual conquests in historical studies. Barthold's *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasions* (1900) is a classic work, and indeed almost everything he wrote threw fresh light on the rise and fall of the nomadic empires of inner Asia. Vladimirtsov tackled the crucial and difficult question of the social and economic background of the conquests, and translations into English of his life of Chingis (1930) and into French of his *Régime social des Mongols* (1948) carried his findings to the West. The debates these two great scholars opened up have not yet been concluded, but more recently Russian attention has been diverted to archaeological investigation on numerous prehistoric and medieval sites in Turkestan, Mongolia and Siberia and to studies of nomadic art, inquiries which are enabling us to reassess the life and culture, trade and contacts, of many pastoral peoples of the Turco-Mongolian family who have left little or no written record. All too slowly the history of Central Asia is emerging from obscurity.

Yet such written records as we have of the Mongol age have not yet been adequately published or elucidated. Our primary authority on Chingis, the *Secret History of the Mongols*, has not

yet received the honour of a critical edition, though Professor Cleaves is understood to be preparing one at Harvard; specialists are not even agreed on its approximate date;[5] incomplete translations in French and English exist, but to the non-Mongolist this precious and artless memorial of the Conqueror is available in full only in the German of Erich Haenisch (*Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*, 1948). Of the great Persian historians of the conquests, Juvaini can now be read in Boyle's excellent translation (*History of the World Conqueror*, 1958), but only fragments of Rashid ad-Din's wonderful universal history (*Jami 'al-Tawarikh*) have appeared in the languages of Europe, chiefly Russian and German. Some of the Armenian, Georgian and Egyptian Arabic chronicles are accessible in French or English; the Latin travellers have been carefully edited and re-edited, and the fascinating narrative of Marco Polo, a library of medieval lore on Asia, has been supplied with a full scholarly apparatus in the richly annotated edition of Yule and Cordier, which has not been wholly superseded by the later work of Moule and Pelliot.

The mention of this last name affords, however, an opportunity to honour the most erudite and laborious worker in the field of Asian antiquities. The daunting linguistic knowledge of Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), combined with a shrewd and unfailing judgment, illuminated every corner of the history of medieval Asia, and what had been confusion and uncertainty he nearly always left clear and unclouded: even his occasional errors were sometimes more instructive than other men's verities. He wrote no general survey, but bequeathed a rich library of articles, reviews, notes and essays to light the path of all who came after him. Of those successors, I may mention two distinguished Germans, Otto Franke, whose *Geschichte des chinesischen Reiches* (5 vols, 1930–52) accurately traces the story of ancient and medieval China down to the advent of the Ming in 1368, though the treatment is perhaps more narrowly political than is now the fashion, and Bertold Spuler, who has compiled with the same Teutonic thoroughness the histories of the Golden Horde and the Il-khans which have superseded the century-old pioneer work of von Hammer. The Mongol invasion of Europe in 1237–42 has been treated in detail by scholars of the nations which endured it, but those who are ignorant of Russian[6] and Polish, Czech and Magyar, are unable to profit from researches in which patriotism has sometimes,

I much fear, triumphed over strict academic detachment.

I am aware that to treat a subject of this scope and nature as I have done is a risky undertaking and may even be deemed foolhardy. But when I reflected that English historical literature is almost destitute of books on the Mongol conquests, which made so significant an epoch in world history, and that a considerable volume of specialist work has been produced in recent years which never reaches the educated public, I felt that some attempt, on the lines of René Grousset's *L'Empire des Steppes* (1939), an excellent piece of French *haute vulgarisation* now, however, thirty years old, might be justified. As no one can claim competence over the whole range of medieval Asian history, I have not been afraid (as Gibbon once said) to borrow the aid of the strongest glasses. My principal obligation is to Professor J. A. Boyle of Manchester, the translator of Juvaini, who patiently read most of the typescript and corrected me on many points of Persian and Turkish history and philology. Professor Owen Lattimore scrutinized and commented critically on whatever I wrote on Eurasian nomadism. In Dr Igor de Rachewiltz, of the Australian National University, I found a most valuable and generous guide through the intricacies of Mongol China, who has also supplied some of the deficiencies arising from my total ignorance of Japanese. Sir Gerard Clauson clarified for me several obscure questions of Turkish antiquities. Professor Vernadsky of Yale courteously answered my queries on the Golden Horde. Dr Bawden, Reader in Mongolian at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, while protesting only a general acquaintance with medieval Mongolia, none the less revealed by his most useful advice and comments how a firsthand knowledge of the land today can illuminate much of its past. But I must add the traditional qualification: none of these distinguished scholars is in any way responsible for such errors of fact or perversity of interpretation as may have escaped their notice and proceeded from my own ignorance.

In so far as the specialists who have recently examined and re-evaluated the contemporary literature on the Mongol conquests have reached a consensus, they may be said to have rejected the old theory of wholesale destruction and to have stressed the more positive and constructive achievements of the last of the great nomad empire-builders. Edward Glanville Browne, writing in the peace and security of late-Victorian and Edwardian England, saw

in the Mongol invasions 'a catastrophe which changed the face of the world, set in motion forces which are still effective, and inflicted more suffering on the human race than any other event in the world's history' (*A Literary History of Persia*, 1906, II, 426–7), but Wilhelm Barthold replied, in the year of the Russian Revolution, that 'the results of the Mongol invasions were less annihilating than is supposed' (*Mussulman Culture*, Eng. tr. 1934, 111), a judgment which is now commonly accepted, for a generation which has lived through world wars and revolutions and genocide on a hideous scale is more impressed by the recuperative powers of human societies than by the destructiveness of armies commanded by fanatical nihilists. Yet however we choose to judge the results, we must still stand amazed at the Mongol military achievement. Our theologically minded ancestors could find no other explanation than that the dreadful 'Tartars' were sent by God to punish the nations for their sins: a more secular age, while striving for a more rational judgment, may yet be pardoned for continuing to speak of 'the Mongol miracle'.