

## Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia

In the thirteenth century the Mongols created a vast transcontinental empire that functioned as a cultural "clearing house" for the Old World. Under Mongol auspices various commodities, ideologies, and technologies were disseminated and displayed across Eurasia. The focus of this path-breaking study is the extensive exchanges between Iran and China. The Mongol rulers of these two ancient civilizations "shared" the cultural resources of their realms with one another. The result was lively traffic in specialist personnel and scholarly literature between East and West. These exchanges ranged from cartography to printing, and from agriculture to astronomy. Unexpectedly, the principal conduit of this transmission was an obscure Mongol tribesman, Bolad Aqa, who first served Chinggisid rulers of China and was then posted to Iran where he entered into a close and productive collaboration with the famed Persian statesman and historian, Rashīd al-Dīn. The conclusion of the work examines why the Mongols made such heavy use of sedentary scholars and specialists in the elaboration of their court culture and why they initiated so many exchanges across Eurasia. The book is informative and erudite. It crosses new scholarly boundaries in its analysis of communication and culture in the Mongol Empire and promises to become a classic in the field.

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THOMAS T. ALLSEN

*The College of New Jersey, Ewing*



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## Preface

The present study originated some twenty-five years ago with a chance discovery that the Mongolian courts in China and Iran both sponsored the compilation of agricultural manuals in the course of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A few years later I discovered, again quite by accident, that this was not mere coincidence, and that there were indeed “agronomical relations” between these two courts. This in turn led to an interest in other types of cultural exchange between the Il-qans and the Yuan, an exchange that became the focal point of my research over the last decade.

My initial intention was to cover all facets of the interchange in one large monograph but this was clearly impractical. Consequently, I have concentrated here on cultural exchanges in the fields of historiography, geography, cartography, agronomy, cuisine, medicine, astronomy, and printing technology. My investigations into other areas of their contact – language study, popular entertainments, and economic thought, as well as the transfer of military technology and the transcontinental resettlement of artisans of varied specialties – will appear as separate studies.

I have had the opportunity to present my preliminary findings in the form of lectures at a number of academic institutions and the response has always been welcoming and the questions and comments from these audiences most helpful in shaping the direction of my subsequent research. To these various students and scholars I offer my thanks for their guidance and encouragement. I must also record my gratitude to the National Endowment for the Humanities which awarded me a Fellowship for the academic year 1998–99 that permitted me to complete research and prepare a first draft of the manuscript.

Peter Golden and Stephen Dale read and commented on this manuscript and helped to improve it in many substantial ways. So too did the many suggestions and corrections of the anonymous reviewers of the Press. I am deeply indebted to all of these scholars.

I must also offer special thanks to my current department chair, Daniel Crofts, who has supported and facilitated my research over the last several years.

Finally, I again express my profound gratitude to my wife, Lucille Helen Allsen, whose enthusiasm, patience, and editorial and word-processing skills are essential ingredients in all my scholarly endeavors.

## Note on transliteration

For Persian, Arabic, and Russian I have used the Library of Congress system. Chinese is in Wade-Giles, and for Mongolian I have used the system found in Cleaves' translation of the *Secret History*. Lastly, for Turkic, I have followed Nadeliaev *et al.*, *Drevnetiurkskii slovar*.



In the thirteenth century, the Mongols created a vast transcontinental empire that functioned as a cultural 'clearing house' for the Old World. Under Mongol auspices various commodities, ideologies and technologies were disseminated and displayed across Eurasia. The focus of this innovative study is the extensive exchanges between Iran and China. The Mongol rulers of these two ancient civilizations 'shared' the cultural resources of their realms with one another. The result was a lively traffic in specialist personnel and scholarly literature between East and West. These exchanges ranged from cartography to printing, from agriculture to astronomy. Unexpectedly, the principal conduit of this transmission was an obscure Mongol tribesman, Bolad Aqa, who first served Chinggisid rulers of China and was then posted to Iran where he entered into a close and productive collaboration with the famed Persian statesman and historian, Rashīd al-Dīn. The conclusion of the work examines why the Mongols made such heavy use of sedentary scholars and specialists in the elaboration of their court culture and why they initiated so many exchanges across the Eurasian landmass. The book is informative and erudite. It crosses new scholarly boundaries in its analysis of communication and culture in the Mongol empire and promises to become a classic in the field.

*Cover illustration:* Diagram for pulse diagnoses (sphygmology) from the 'Treasure Book of the Il-qans'.

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