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## *Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Mongols*<sup>1</sup>

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Charles Beckingham was a man for whom I had profound respect and great affection: it is for me a signal honour that the Council of the Society should have asked me to give a lecture in his memory. My own academic background, like his, was not in Oriental Studies. Indeed, I was never formally taught the subject I now profess, the history of the Middle East and Central Asia – a fact some of you may consider all too obvious – though I did manage to pick up a certain amount informally, especially from my PhD research supervisor, Professor A. K. S. Lambton, as well as from others at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Charles Beckingham not least. My first degree was in English and European history, and in the late 1960s I was teaching that subject at a grammar school north of London. One day, one of my sixth form students, hearing that I had an eccentric interest in the Middle East, remarked that his uncle was a professor of such things at London University: would it be a good idea to invite him to address the school's historical society? He did come, and talked, fascinatingly and without a note, about the Portuguese in Ethiopia. Such was my introduction to the man who was to become a greatly valued mentor and indeed my oldest friend among professional Orientalists – this was of course at a time when “Orientalist” was still a title of honour, not the pejorative term it was, unhappily, later to become.

Some of you will no doubt have seen the obituary of Charles which I wrote and which was published in last July's issue of the *Journal*.<sup>2</sup> I shall not repeat what I said there, except to draw attention to what I think were probably Charles's two major and most long-standing scholarly interests: Prester John, the subject of his London inaugural lecture and his last book (edited jointly with Bernard Hamilton),<sup>3</sup> and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. Both of these interests in different ways reflect the fascination with travel and travel literature which one would expect from a President of the Hakluyt Society. As he remarked in his 1977 Anniversary Lecture to the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, “In search of Ibn Battuta”, “I have found that travel literature – in particular older travel literature – is often a very rewarding study . . . [T]he study of travel narratives, especially travel narratives about a culture quite

<sup>1</sup> The revised text of the Charles Beckingham Memorial Lecture, read to the Royal Asiatic Society on 13 January 2000.

<sup>2</sup> “Professor Charles Fraser Beckingham, FBA, 18th February 1914 to 30th September 1998”, *JRAS*, Third Series, IX/2 (July 1999), pp. 287–92.

<sup>3</sup> *The Achievements of Prester John*, London, SOAS, 1966: reprinted in C. F. Beckingham, *Between Islam and Christendom* (London, 1983); C. F. Beckingham and B. Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, 1996).

different from the traveller's own, can be very revealing, not only about the culture he observed, but about the culture to which he belonged."<sup>4</sup> In the obituary I gave some account of Charles Beckingham's involvement with the Hakluyt Society translation of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Rihla*: how he had assisted Sir Hamilton Gibb, at the very end of his life, with preparing for publication in 1971 the third volume of the translation, which thus appeared nearly half a century after Gibb's proposal had originally been submitted to the Hakluyt Society, and a week after his death. Six months earlier Gibb had persuaded an initially reluctant Beckingham to take over and complete the project. This he did, and the fourth and final volume, most of it in Beckingham's own translation from the Arabic, appeared in 1994, Charles characteristically remarking in the Foreword that "The translation of the narrative of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travels has taken more than twice as long as the travels themselves."<sup>5</sup> After the death of Charles's friend and former Manchester colleague Professor John Boyle in 1978, Dr Peter Jackson and I were invited by the Hakluyt Society, I think at Charles's suggestion, to take on the version which Boyle had proposed of the journey of William of Rubruck to the Mongol court. We took some little time over this, and I remember at one point apologising to Charles because it appeared the project was likely to take us ten years (it was published in 1990). Charles urged us not to worry unduly. Ten years, he said, is nothing in the Hakluyt time-scale: look at Gibb's Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.

When I was invited to give this lecture, I was anxious if possible to choose a subject which would both relate to Charles Beckingham's scholarly interests and be something I was competent to discuss. I am indebted to my friend Dr Peter Jackson for suggesting that "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Mongols" might fit this particular bill. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is an obvious enough choice. But the curious fact is that, while the scholarly literature on him and his travels is very extensive, comparatively little attention has been paid to what he had to say about the Mongols, who are as it happens a people in whose history I have had a certain interest for many years – in fact, my interest (if not obsession) dates from some years even before I first met Charles Beckingham. It is worth remembering that at the time of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travels, which took place between 1325 and 1354, the Mongol Empire, though founded well over a century earlier, was still the major political entity on the Eurasian continent. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa travelled or claims to have travelled in, and wrote about, all four of the major Mongol states which together made up the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan's successors: the Ilkhanate in Persia, Iraq and eastern Anatolia (a kingdom which was to collapse before the traveller had returned to Tangier); the Golden Horde on the Pontic steppe; the Chaghatai Khanate in Central Asia; and the Great Khanate in Mongolia and China. When he lists "the seven kings who are the great and mighty kings in the world", he begins with the sultan of Morocco (whose inclusion smacks more of authorial tact than of political realism). There follow the Mamluk sultan of Egypt and Syria; "the sultan of the two 'Irāqs", i.e. the Ilkhan, sultan Özbeḡ of the Golden Horde; "the sultan of the land of Turkistan and the lands beyond the river [Oxus]", i.e. the Chaghatai Khan, "the sultan of India". i.e. the sultan of Delhi; and "the sultan of China", i.e. the Yüan emperor, who

<sup>4</sup> C. F. Beckingham, "In search of Ibn Battuta", *Asian Affairs*, VIII (1978), pp. 263–77: reprinted in *Between Islam and Christendom*, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa A.D. 1325–1354*, vol. IV, translated with annotations by H. A. R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham (London, 1994), p. ix.

might have been surprised to find himself enjoying the Muslim title of sultan.<sup>6</sup> That is, four of the seven (in reality six) major monarchs of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's world were members of the house of Chinggis Khan. There is no other contemporary witness of whom we have a record who can offer us so extensive a personal impression of the Mongol world of the day. What he has to tell us is therefore worthy of close attention. This is even more true when one remembers the date at which Ibn Baṭṭūṭa wrote his account. This was a period during which most of our best contemporary sources for the history of the Mongol Empire were no more. The great Persian historians, Juwaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn for example, were long dead; and good domestic sources for the Golden Horde and the Chaghatai Khanate are hard to find at any time. One must of course bear in mind the important principle that, as my colleague and friend the late Dr Michael Burrell was fond of pointing out to his students, in the absence of good sources, bad sources do not thereby become good. But whatever his limitations, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is not, I think, a bad source.

By way of introduction, some general remarks about Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and his travels may be appropriate at this point. He was a native of Tangier, which he left, initially and ostensibly to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, in 1325. A brief summary of his itinerary (a summary which ignores the various problems, chronological, geographical and so on, which that itinerary presents) will perhaps give some impression of what a remarkable life he was to lead. His route, approximately, was as follows: Morocco – North Africa – Egypt – Syria – Mecca – Iraq – Persia – Arabian Sea – East Africa – Egypt – Syria – Anatolia – the Qipchaq steppe – Constantinople – New Sarai on the Volga – Transoxania – Afghanistan – Delhi – South India – the Maldives – Ceylon – Bengal – Sumatra – China (perhaps) – Sumatra – South India – South Arabia – Persia – Iraq – Egypt – Mecca – Syria – Egypt – North Africa – Tangier; then finally Granada and Mali before returning again to Tangier. The total distance involved has been roughly estimated as of the order of 75,000 miles. No medieval traveller, eastern or western, who left a written account of his journeyings can compare with this. The great western travellers in the Mongol Empire, such as William of Rubruck or Marco Polo, are not remotely in the same league. It should be said, however, that there is one respect in which Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was less enterprising than William or Marco. They travelled into the unknown, into the lands of cultures very alien from that of Western Christendom. William of Rubruck famously remarked, on reaching the lands of the Golden Horde, that he was entering another world. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's much more wide-ranging travels, on the other hand, were – except when he visited Constantinople, touched briefly in Sardinia and went (if he did) to China – entirely within the Islamic world, the Dār al-Islām. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was “abroad” for nearly thirty years; but in another and a very real sense, he was almost always “at home”, always within the remit of Islamic law, and generally employable as a qāḍī in the Islamic courts. It is for this reason that Professor Ross Dunn, in his splendid book *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*,<sup>7</sup> was able, courtesy of his subject, to provide what one of the book's reviewers, Robert Irwin, called “an excellent synoptic introduction to the Muslim world in the Middle Ages.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Voyages*, ed. C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, 4 vols (Paris, 1853–8), vol. II, p. 382; tr. Gibb, II, pp. 482–3.

<sup>7</sup> London and Sydney, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 December 1986, p. 1398.

After Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's final return to Morocco, the Marinid Sultan Abū 'Inān, who evidently realised that this subject of his had accomplished something rather remarkable, commissioned a secretary, Ibn Juzayy, to consult with the traveller and to write it all down. The case is perhaps analogous to that of Marco Polo, whose story was produced in literary form, we are told, in collaboration with an experienced romance writer, Rusticello. It is probable that many of the conundrums arising out of Marco Polo's book are due to the manner of its composition; and something similar may be true of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's. There are certainly more than enough problems in the *Rihla* to keep interested scholars occupied for many years to come. In the mid 1970s Charles Beckingham spent four months in India, the Maldives and so on, hoping to clarify some of these. He remarked on his return that "as is so often the case in academic work, I have come back with far more problems than I started with."<sup>9</sup>

It has long been realised, for example that the *Rihla* contains a good deal of plagiarism. Much of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's material on the Middle East is in fact taken from the celebrated twelfth century traveller Ibn Jubayr; and in this *Journal* in 1987 (pp. 256–72), Dr Amikam Elad showed that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on Palestine, too, was lifted largely out of an earlier traveller, al-'Abdarī – a less well-known author than Ibn Jubayr. We do not know whether the plagiarist was Ibn Juzayy or Ibn Baṭṭūṭa himself, though it is certainly plausible to argue that Ibn Juzayy might have made use of his library to fill in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's lapses of memory on detail, or even to improve the book by quoting from writers who were better examples of Arabic literary style. Ibn Juzayy may also have conflated separate visits to the same place, for literary convenience. No one at the time would have thought that any of this, even without acknowledgement of sources, was at all discreditable. There may well be other examples of plagiarism yet to be discovered. We only know about those so far detected, of course, because of the survival of the original sources from which Ibn Juzayy copied. In the nature of things, anything copied from a source which is no longer extant is likely to remain undetected in perpetuity. I doubt, however, if this is a serious problem so far as most of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travels in the Mongol Empire are concerned. Ibn Juzayy would have found no difficulty in looking up earlier travel accounts of the eastern Mediterranean, but there is no reason to suppose that he could easily have found sources on the Golden Horde or the Chaghatai Khanate, which were very peripheral to the (largely *hajj*-centred) Muslim tourist routes of the Middle East

In any case, I sometimes feel that modern scholars are excessively captious and critical of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the accounts of such travellers as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Marco Polo. It seems to me that it is the absence of such difficulties that would be truly suspicious, when one bears in mind that the travellers were on the road for years, and that it is unlikely that they had much by way of notes to refer to when putting together the accounts of their travels. They were not researching Lonely Planet guides. Perhaps I may illustrate this by a personal anecdote. In 1974 I went on a journey through Persian Azerbaijan and eastern Turkey. A very few years later, I was talking about this trip to a friend. Subsequently I recalled that I had kept a diary of the journey. I looked it up, and found that my recollection of the journey was clear, precise, and in a number of significant

<sup>9</sup> "In search of Ibn Battuta", p. 268.

details, quite wrong. Dr Frances Wood, the author of *Did Marco Polo go to China?*, would perhaps conclude on this evidence that I was never actually in Azerbaijan, but that I had concocted my account from other travellers' tales without ever leaving Tehran. For myself, I have since that salutary experience been inclined to make much more allowance for travellers' lapses of memory, confusion in their recall of itineraries, and so forth. Above all, I do think it important not to jump to the conclusion, based on such evidence, that travellers whose accounts present problems must therefore have invented their travels.

In the light of all this, those of you who are familiar with the main Ibn Baṭṭūṭa problems may have concluded that on the biggest problem of all, the question of our traveller's alleged visit to China, I must be inclined to believe him. But I cannot in fact go as far as that. I have to say that I can offer no better answer to this puzzle than any of my predecessors. The original plan for the Hakluyt Ibn Baṭṭūṭa envisaged a fifth volume of "further editorial matter and the index to the entire work". Charles Beckingham, unhappily, did not live to complete that volume, in which he would no doubt have dealt fully with the China problem; and I do not know what view he would ultimately have come to. I have much sympathy with the view Gibb expressed in his 1929 volume of selections from Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, that it was "a problem better suited for investigation by the Psychic Society than by the matter-of-fact historian."<sup>10</sup> Briefly, the main difficulty is that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa gives a detailed account of the funeral, which he says he witnessed, of a Mongol Great Khan. The details are perfectly plausible, and there is no reason whatever to doubt the veracity of the account, except that no Great Khan died within many years either way of any conceivable date for Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's visit. The last Yüan emperor, Toghon Temür, came to the throne more than a decade before Ibn Baṭṭūṭa can have reached China, and he was still on the throne in Peking many years after Ibn Baṭṭūṭa returned to Morocco.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa first crossed into Mongol-ruled territory when he arrived, after his first pilgrimage to Mecca, in modern Iraq, which was part of the domains of the Ilkhan Abū Sa'īd, the last of the direct line to Hülegü to rule (1316–35). But he reserves his account of Chinggis Khan and the rise of the Mongol Empire until much later, when he is relating his experiences in the Chaghatai Khanate. Here he seems to think it necessary to give his readers some basic historical information. This might seem surprising; but we should remember that by that time Chinggis Khan had been dead for more than a century; and that as Ross Dunn justly points out, "The Tatar storm blew closer to England than it did to Morocco and had no repercussions on life in the Islamic Far West."<sup>11</sup> The average literate citizen of the Marinid sultanate, unless he was an avid student of Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil* or, just conceivably, as Dunn suggests, of the Arabic version of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, probably had no more than a very vague knowledge and consciousness of the vast but distant Mongol phenomenon. It is therefore interesting to observe what information, or misinformation, about the rise of the Mongols Ibn Baṭṭūṭa had available to him, and what he thought it appropriate to pass on to his readers.

Chinggis (who in the *Rihla* appears as Tankīz) puts in his major appearance when Ibn Baṭṭūṭa has reached Bukhara, which, he says, "was laid in ruins by the accursed Tankīz,

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, tr. H. A. R. Gibb (London, 1929), p. 373.

<sup>11</sup> *The Adventures of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*, p. 81.

the Tatar, the ancestor of the kings of al-‘Irāq’<sup>12</sup> – that is, the Ilkhans: I am not clear why he is not also described as the ancestor of the Chaghatai khans, in whose realm Bukhara was. Possibly it is relevant that the Mongols of Persia are called, like Chinggis, “Tatars”, whereas, so far as I can see, the Mongols in the Golden Horde and the Chaghatai Khanate are generally lumped in with their subjects and called “Turks”. “So,” Ibn Baṭṭūṭa continues, “at the present time its mosques, colleges and bazaars are all in ruins, all but a few.” Bukhara is by no means alone in this – for example, a little later, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa says of Balkh that “the accursed Tankīz devastated this city and pulled down about a third of its mosque because of a treasure which he was told lay under one of its columns.”<sup>13</sup> Our traveller has made his own contribution to the Mongols’ reputation for expertise in demolition. Although the recent and forthcoming work of Professor Thomas Allsen shows, more convincingly and in greater detail than ever before, that there was a great deal more, and a great deal more that was positive, to the Mongol Empire than endless variations on the theme of rape, massacre and destruction, I do not myself subscribe to the now widely canvassed view that the Mongols have been grievously misunderstood – though they have certainly been underestimated in a number of respects. But so far as demolition is concerned, anyone who has been to Bukhara will have seen that if it was Chinggis Khan’s intention to raze the city to the ground, he was singularly unobservant in failing to notice the still surviving twelfth-century *Minār-i Kalān*, at least one other minaret of similar date, and the even earlier Samanid mausoleum. It is perhaps worth suggesting that the literary topos about razing cities to the ground should be treated less than literally: total demolition of a city, once what is inflammable has been burnt, is not as easy a task as all that, if one lacks, as the Mongols did, the resources of modern destructive technology.

Chinggis may have been “accursed”, but like Jūzjānī, an earlier historian who also calls him that, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa gives credit where he thinks it due. Chinggis was, it is dubiously alleged, a blacksmith, who “was a man of generous soul, and strength, and well-developed body. He used to assemble the people and supply them with food.”<sup>14</sup> After this introduction, however, what we have is a reasonable enough, if slightly garbled, short summary of Chinggis’s career. He attracted followers, accumulated strength and power, became supreme in his homeland and then embarked on a series of campaigns of conquest in China and Central Asia as far as the lands of the Khwārazmshāh (here ‘Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwārazmshāh is conflated with his son and successor Jalāl al-Dīn). A detailed account is given in the celebrated incident of the Utrar massacre of merchants from the Mongol lands, which precipitated the Mongol assault on the empire of the Khwārazmshāh. The conquests continued, until in the end Baghdad was taken and the last ‘Abbasid caliph killed (here Ibn Baṭṭūṭa has conflated Chinggis Khan’s campaign of 1219–23 with that of his grandson Hülegü in 1255–60). At this point the amanuensis, Ibn Juzayy, intervenes with an anecdote to the effect that no less than 24,000 scholars were massacred in Iraq by the Mongols – one has the impression that for Ibn Juzayy, the millions of dead non-scholars were of much less account.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Text, III, p. 22; Tr., III, p. 550.

<sup>13</sup> Text, III, p. 59; Tr., III, p. 571.

<sup>14</sup> Text, III, p. 23; Tr., III, p. 551.

<sup>15</sup> Text, III, pp. 26–27; Tr., III, p. 553–54.

Of other material on Chinggis Khan in this part of the *Rihla*, the most interesting is the reference to Chinggis's supposed code of law, the Great Yasa. This crops up in relation to the deposition and death of the Chaghatai khan Ṭarmashīrīn. "Now Tankīz," Ibn Baṭṭūṭa tells us, "had compiled a book on his laws, which is called by them the *Yasāq*, and they hold that if any [of the princes] contravenes the laws contained in this book his deposition is obligatory . . . If their sultan should have changed any one of those laws their chiefs will rise up before him and say to him, 'You have changed this and changed that, and you have acted in such-and-such a manner and it is now obligatory to depose you.' They take him by his hand, cause him to rise from the throne of the kingship, and set upon it another of the descendants of Tankīz."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in his later mysterious account of a revolt against the Yüan emperor by his cousin (which resulted, allegedly, in the emperor's death and thus gave rise to the imperial funeral referred to earlier), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa says that "When he [the emperor] set out [against his insurgent cousin] most of the amirs revolted and agreed to depose him, because he had diverged from the precepts of the *yasaq*, that is to say, the precepts of their ancestor Tankīz Khān, who laid waste the lands of Islam."<sup>17</sup>

What is one to make of these references? In 1986 I published an article in which I expressed considerable scepticism about the "Great Yasa", so often seen as one of the major institutional foundations of the emerging Mongol state. I concluded that "there are difficulties, possible insuperable difficulties, in establishing the nature and contents of the Mongol *Yāsā*, its association with Chingiz Khān himself, or even whether it ever existed as a written, coherent, enforceable code of laws."<sup>18</sup> My view was that the reality is likely to have been a – probably unwritten – evolving body of custom, beginning before the time of Chinggis Khan and continuing after him. The issue has been fairly widely discussed during the past fourteen years, but I have yet to see any really convincing evidence which would lead me to change that view. In the article, I cited the first of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's references (it is possible that I missed the second because Charles Beckingham had not at that stage translated it into English) as an example of the later significance of the Yasa in the minds of the people of the Mongol Empire. People felt its precepts should be obeyed without question. They may not have known precisely what the Yasa contained – after all, it was not available for consultation – but it was an important concept which should be respected and always taken into account, deriving, as it was believed to have done, from the revered dynastic founder. At times it could be politically convenient, indeed, to attribute some provision or other to the Great Yasa: since the text could not be looked up, who could say to you nay? Perhaps this was what was going on when, according to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Ṭarmashīrīn was deposed for abrogating the Yasa's requirement (otherwise, so far as I am aware, unknown) that he should hold an annual feast. We are not told what precept of the Yasa the Yüan emperor was held by his amirs to have infringed.

It may not be mere chance that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's discussion of the career of Chinggis Khan is to be found embedded in his account of his time in the Chaghatai Khanate. Although that kingdom no doubt counted, in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's eyes, as part of the Dār al-Islām – Ṭarmashīrīn

<sup>16</sup> Text, III, pp. 40–41; Tr., III, p. 560–61.

<sup>17</sup> Text, IV, p. 300; Tr., IV, p. 908.

<sup>18</sup> D. O. Morgan, "The 'Great *Yāsā* of Chingiz Khān' and Mongol law in the *Īlkhānate*", *BSOAS*, XLIX/1 (1986), pp. 164–76: at p. 172.

was, after all, a Muslim – the reader nevertheless has a feeling that when our traveller is in those parts, and also when he is in the lands of the Golden Horde, he thinks of himself as being in some sense in alien if not quite infidel territory. It has often been pointed out that Mongol rule lasted longest in those parts of the empire – the Golden Horde and the Chaghatai Khanate – in which they made the least accommodation to the culture of their conquered subjects, and perpetuated as far as possible their ancestral nomadic way of life. This is the sort of society which is likely to make one think about a figure like Chinggis Khan, perhaps. There is nothing like this in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's material on the Ilkhanate, which as we have seen was the first part of the Mongol Empire he entered. Apparently the kingdom of Abū Sa'īd did not so easily bring to mind Chinggis Khan, massacre and destruction, and the Great Yasa. The two Iraqs were of course old Islamic territory, under Muslim rule since the first expansion of Islam. The Mongol impact, particularly since the Mongols had themselves gone over to Islam, might well have seemed fairly superficial, whereas the Islamization of the Golden Horde and the Chaghatai Khanate was still in its very early stages: not yet even irreversible – though Ṭarmashīrīn gets a very good Islamic press from Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, as indeed does Özbek of the Golden Horde, of whom he says, for example, that he is “diligent in the *jihād*”.<sup>19</sup> But a Muslim visitor like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa could travel in the Ilkhanate, visiting great historic cities like Baghdad and Isfahan and calling on Muslim holy men, without paying very much attention at all to the Mongols.

This does not mean he failed to notice the rulers of the Ilkhanate. He talks about them at length while recounting his visit to Baghdad,<sup>20</sup> since, as he tells us, Abū Sa'īd happened also to be there. We are given a slightly confused version of the conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam, and there follows a lengthy account of the fall of the great amir Chupan and his son Dimashq Khwāja – for Ibn Baṭṭūṭa had arrived in the Ilkhanate during 1327, a critical year in the kingdom's history. Abū Sa'īd, who had ascended the throne as a child, had been under the dominance of Chupan since the beginning of his reign. At an early stage, in 1319, there had been an unsuccessful amirs' revolt against him, in the plotting of which, Dr Charles Melville has persuasively argued,<sup>21</sup> Abū Sa'īd himself was almost certainly implicated. It was not, then, until 1327 that the Ilkhan was able to rid himself of his dependence on the Chupanids. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's recounting of all this – which is presumably representative of what was current in reasonably well-informed circles at the time of his visit – continues to the end of the reign in 1335, that is, between the time of his journey and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's return through the now defunct Ilkhanate on his way back to Morocco. He lists those who were able to seize power in the various parts of the Ilkhanate when Abū Sa'īd's death, leaving no direct heir of the house of Hülegü, plunged the kingdom into dissolution. The kingdom that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa depicts, less than a decade before its collapse, is a strikingly flourishing one to his eyes, which impression may have contributed to an assessment of mine which Dr Melville sometimes quotes (in order to refute it), that the Ilkhanate “fell without in any real sense having previously declined.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Text, II, p. 382; Tr., II, p. 482.

<sup>20</sup> Text, II, pp. 114ff; Tr., II, pp. 335ff.

<sup>21</sup> C. P. Melville, “Abū Sa'īd and the revolt of the amirs in 1319”, in D. Aigle, ed., *L'Iran face à la domination mongole* (Tehran, 1997), pp. 89–120.

<sup>22</sup> D. O. Morgan, *Medieval Persia 1040–1797* (London, 1988), p. 78. On this period see now C. P. Melville, *The*



Among the features of Ilkhanid rule which favourably impressed Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was the vast elaboration of ceremonial involved when the ruler travelled and when he made camp. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa tells us that “I left Baghdād after this in the *maḥalla* of the sultan Abū Saʿīd, on purpose to see the ceremonial observed by the king of al-ʿIrāq in his journeying and encamping, and the manner of his transportation and travel.”<sup>23</sup> This is then described in very full detail – it smacks somehow of a kind of ritual embalming of the old nomadic customs of the Mongols, anxious as always not to forget who they were and where they had come from. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was if anything even more impressed, later in his travels, when he saw Khan Özbeḡ of the Golden Horde trundling across the Pontic steppe: “Then the *maḥalla* came up – they call it the *urdū* – and we saw a vast city on the move with its inhabitants, with mosques and bazaars in it, the smoke of the kitchens rising in the air (for they cook while on the march), and horse-drawn waggons transporting the people.”<sup>24</sup> Whatever may have been true of Abū Saʿīd, there was nothing contrived about Özbeḡ’*s* ordu; this was a fully nomadic royal capital on the move.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa certainly had an eye for what struck him as unusual or striking. It did not at all follow that such phenomena would necessarily receive his approval. At one point in his description of the lands of the Golden Horde, he comments, “I witnessed in this country a remarkable thing, namely the respect in which women are held by them, indeed they are higher in dignity than the men.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on to illustrate this at length, and later he gives a detailed account of the wives of the khan of the Golden Horde and the ceremonial accorded to them.<sup>26</sup> He offers no explicit value judgement on the high status of women as a characteristic of society. However, the matter seems to have been preying on his mind, since he had already gone into it much earlier in relation to the Mongols of the Ilkhanate, and Abū Saʿīd in particular. He lays down, as a general rule, that “Among the Turks and Tatars their wives enjoy a very high position; indeed, when they issue an order they say in it ‘By command of the Sultan and the Khātūns’. Each khātūn possesses several towns and districts and vast revenues, and when she travels with the sultan she has her own separate camp.”<sup>27</sup> Charles Beckingham suggested that, after travel, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s principal interests were “food and the opposite sex”. He goes on to say that when Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was in the Maldives, “he tells us that he found the food – which I must say I thought some of the dreariest I have ever eaten in my life – had remarkable aphrodisiac properties. It consists mainly of dried fish and coconuts.” On women, Beckingham remarks that “the opposite sex clearly interested him very much, but he did not say, of course, a great deal about it”.<sup>28</sup> But the moral about the dangers of allowing women to get above themselves is clearly enough pointed in his story about Abū Saʿīd. One of his highly privileged wives, Baghdād Khatun (daughter of the amir Chupan), became used to her position of dominance over her husband. So when he married a new wife “whom he loved with a violent passion”,

*Fall of Amir Chupan and the Decline of the Ilkhanate, 1327–37. A Decade of Discord in Mongol Iran* (Bloomington, 1999). Reviewed in *JRAS* this issue p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Text, II, p. 125; Tr., II, p. 342.

<sup>24</sup> Text, II, p. 380; Tr., II, p. 482.

<sup>25</sup> Text, II, p. 377; Tr., II, p. 480.

<sup>26</sup> Text, II, pp. 387–97; Tr., II, pp. 485–89.

<sup>27</sup> Text, II, p. 122; Tr., II, p. 340.

<sup>28</sup> “In search of Ibn Battuta”, pp. 267–68.

and neglected Baghdād Khatun, “she became jealous in consequence, and administered poison to him . . . So he died, and his line became extinct.”<sup>29</sup> We can almost hear the unwritten comment: and let that be a lesson to the reader on the dangers of allowing women to become excessively privileged, as they are among the Mongols.

There are many incidental details of interest arising out of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s travels in Mongol-ruled lands. Of Takrit on the Tigris he says that the “inhabitants are distinguished by goodness of disposition”.<sup>30</sup> In his travels across the Pontic steppe he encountered “some of the tribesmen known as Qifjaq who inhabit this desert and profess the Christian religion and hired from them a waggon drawn by horses.”<sup>31</sup> There had long been Christians among the Qipchaqs, but this period was what Professor Peter Golden calls “the eve of their Islamization,”<sup>32</sup> so it is an interesting late sighting. He gives very full information on Mongol food and drink – confirming Charles Beckingham’s view of his major interests. He was offered the Mongols’ favourite drink, qumis (fermented mare’s milk), and comments: “I had never drunk *qumizz* before, but there was nothing for me to do but to accept it. I tasted it and [finding] it disagreeable passed it on to one of my companions”<sup>33</sup> – a judgement with which I concur. He understands the importance of horses in steppe nomadic society: “[I]t is from [the raising of] them that they make their living, horses in their country [that is, the lands of the Golden Horde] being like sheep in ours, or even more numerous, so that a single Turk will possess thousands of them.”<sup>34</sup> He goes on to recount how these horses are exported in great numbers to India, though most die or are stolen when they reach Sind.

There are details, too, the absence of which is interesting. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s account of Anatolia is important, for there is a marked dearth of contemporary local sources for its history at this time – the early 1330s, the period of the Ottoman ruler Orkhan. Recently some historians of the early Ottomans have begun to look at the Mongol background to the Ottoman state: something which earlier generations of scholars seemed to prefer to pretend did not exist. As Professor Rudi Lindner put it, “The Ottomans, indeed most of the Anatolian beyliks, thus received permission from modern historians to grow without the guidance or the example of Mongol rule”.<sup>35</sup> But there was surely some sense in which a large part of Anatolia, after the suppression at Mongol hands of the Seljuk dynasty, was a province of the Ilkhanate. One might have hoped that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa would offer us some evidence on this matter. Yet as Lindner has said, he “does not mention the Mongols as factors in west Anatolia.”<sup>36</sup> He does remark of a considerable number of cities in eastern Anatolia (Aqsara, Nakda, Qaisariya, Siwas, Arz al-Rum etc.) that they “are in the territories of the king of al-‘Irāq” (that is, the Ilkhan), or similar phrases; and he does comment that although Quniya (Konya) was ruled by Qaramanids, the Ilkhan “has seized it at various

<sup>29</sup> Text, II, pp. 122–23; Tr., II, p. 340.

<sup>30</sup> Text, II, p. 133; Tr., II, p. 347.

<sup>31</sup> Text, II, p. 357; Tr., II, p. 470.

<sup>32</sup> P. B. Golden, “Religion among the Qipchaqs of medieval Eurasia”, *Central Asiatic Journal*, XLII/2 (1998), p. 220.

<sup>33</sup> Text, II, p. 392; Tr., II, p. 487.

<sup>34</sup> Text, II, p. 372; Tr., II, p. 478.

<sup>35</sup> R. P. Lindner, “How Mongol were the early Ottomans?”, in R. Amitai-Preiss and D. O. Morgan, eds., *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden, 1999), p. 283.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

times, owing to its proximity to his territories in this region.”<sup>37</sup> This could be taken as suggesting that, in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s view, effective Ilkhanid rule extended that far west into Anatolia, and no further. But so far as any more extensive Ilkhanid suzerainty is concerned, this seems to have eluded Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s gaze as much as it has that of most of the historians of the early Ottoman state. Lindner has pointed to significant other evidence – from the Mamluk writer al-‘Umarī, from a fourteenth-century Persian accounting manual, from coins – which would seem to indicate that Mongol overlordship in western Anatolia in the early decades of the fourteenth century was in fact a political and financial reality. Perhaps it is simply that, in the absence of actual Mongols, of a Mongol army of occupation, such an overlordship would not have been particularly obvious to a mere private traveller holding no official status.

Charles Beckingham’s summary of what he sees as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s main reason for undertaking his astonishing three decades of globe-trotting reads as follows: “If one looks for the motive of his travel, or perhaps one should say the pretext, I think it was the accumulation of what in Arabic is called *baraka*, the blessings both in this world and the next which would come from visiting holy places and obtaining the blessings of saintly men.”<sup>38</sup> There was precious little *baraka* to be gleaned, one might think, from travelling among the Mongols and observing and reporting on their, to a Muslim scholar from Tangier, frequently bizarre habits. Those of us whose interests are more in the Mongols than in Muslim holy men and their associated *baraka* are thus fortunate that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was sufficiently curious about the former to tell us as much as he did about what he saw and heard as he travelled, perhaps, the length and breadth of the most extensive land empire in the history of the world.

<sup>37</sup> Text, II, p. 281; Tr., II, p. 430.

<sup>38</sup> “In search of Ibn Battuta”, p. 267.