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## Mongol Origins in Mamluk Texts: An *Origo Gentis* in Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Durar al-Tijān* and *Kanz al-Durar*

*On the Qarāṭāgh Mountain lived many powerful and vicious wild animals. Therefore, despite the riches of the land, no humans set foot there. At a great distance to this mountain was the land of Tibet. One day, a Tibetan woman had entered the valleys of this land searching for firewood, only to go into labor and give birth to a son. Having nothing to cover him with, she went to find some grass to wrap him in, when an eagle snatched him up and flew away with him. The eagle dropped the newborn at the foot of the Qarāṭāgh, where he fell right into a lioness' den, "as God the Exalted wanted him to." The lioness had just borne her own cubs and nursed and raised the baby boy with her own cubs, as God had filled her with compassion for him.*

So begins the story of the Mongols according to an origin legend as recounted to us by the Mamluk author Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 735/1336): this baby boy was to be the ancestor of the great Mongol conqueror Chinggis Khan. Ibn al-Dawādārī included two connected origin stories about the Turks and Mongols in both his surviving works, *Kanz al-durar* and *Durar al-tijān*. Well aware of their singularity within the Arabic historiographical tradition—no parallel versions have been discovered as of yet—Ibn al-Dawādārī states that maybe “no one has mentioned them in their histories because they do not know about them, and because there are things in there that do not agree with the pure religion [i.e., Islam].”<sup>1</sup> This has caused other historians to only relate the story of the Mongols from Chinggis Khan onwards, rather than including the Mongols' full history, he says.<sup>2</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup>Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aybak ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān wa-ghurar tawārīkh al-azmān*, ed. in *Die Epitome der Universalchronik Ibn-Ad-Dawādārīs im Verhältnis zur Langfassung: eine quellenkritische Studie zur Geschichte der Ägyptischen Mamluken*, ed. Grunhild Graf (Berlin, 1990), 51. See also Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-ghurar*, vol. 7, ed. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāh ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1972), 217.

<sup>2</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:224.



indeed true that some contemporary scholars had little to offer on this subject. As al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327) aptly put it, little was known about them, because “they were not mentioned on the tongues of the people” before they began their conquests, due to the vast distance that separated them from the Muslim world.<sup>3</sup> There is more than just its uniqueness, however, that makes the legend presented by Ibn al-Dawādārī fascinating.

Ulrich Haarmann, who edited part of Ibn al-Dawādārī’s *Kanz al-durar*, was the first to study these two stories, or as he calls them, on account of the connection that was forged between them, a “Turco-Mongolian” origin story. In several of his articles he not only provided a summary of this passage, but also analysed its contents in the context of Turkish influences on Mamluk intellectual and literary culture. According to Haarmann, Ibn al-Dawādārī—as well as other *awlād al-nās*—served as a mediator between these two worlds, which is exemplified by the way the author used material of Turkish heritage in his Arabic chronicle, including these origin stories.<sup>4</sup> In this article I want to look at the Mongol origin story in Ibn al-Dawādārī’s text from another angle, namely from the perspective of *origines gentium* (sing. *origo gentis*), the literary genre of myths describing the origin and descent of peoples, with a particular focus on the function this story had for Ibn al-Dawādārī’s contemporaries.

## The Genre of *Origines Gentium*

*Origines gentium* tend to begin in a mythical past. As Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney have pointed out, these narratives often, but not always, contain two “divides.” The first is the passage from the divine, supernatural, and mythological to

<sup>3</sup>Shams al-Dīn al-Ansārī al-Dimashqī, *Kitāb nukhbat al-dahr fī ‘ajā’ib al-barr wa-al-baḥr* (St. Petersburg, 1865), 264.

<sup>4</sup>Ulrich Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān und Čingiz Ḥān bei den ägyptischen Mamluken,” *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients* 51 (1974): 1–36; idem, “Turkish Legends in the Popular Historiography of Medieval Egypt,” in *Proceedings of the VIth Congress of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Visby 13–16 August, Stockholm 17–19 August, 1972*, ed. Frithiof Rundgren (Stockholm and Leiden, 1975), 97–107; idem, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 81–114; idem, “‘Großer Vater Mond’ und ‘Schwarzer Löwenjunge’—eine mongolisch-kiptschakische Ursprungssage in arabischer Überlieferung,” in *Die Mongolen in Asien und Europa*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jan Kusber (Frankfurt am Main, 1997); idem, “Mongols and Mamluks: Forgotten Villains and Heroes of Arab History,” in *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies: Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Working Group Modernity and Islam Held at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch (Würzburg, 2001), 165–76. See also Haarmann, “Quellen zur Geschichte des islamischen Ägyptens,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 38 (1982): 201–10.



the humans of legend. The second is the move from these legendary narratives to a recognizable past, a history, set in known places, which is where the connection of the contemporary people to this mythical past takes place.<sup>5</sup> These stories appear in a variety of texts, from world histories to administrative texts.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of this genre has so far been focused mostly on medieval Europe,<sup>7</sup> with much less attention having been paid to the uses, circulation, and contents of these stories elsewhere, including in the premodern Islamic world. The recent publication of a special issue of *The Medieval History Journal* titled “Narratives of Ethnic Origins: Eurasian Perspectives” (2018)—in which traditions from various parts of Eurasia are discussed (medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, South Arabia, Tibet, and the Central Asian steppes)—is therefore a very welcome addition to the scholarly corpus. It is a step toward a more inclusive analysis of patterns, parallels in, and functions of, this type of stories, as well as allowing local and periodical trends to come into sharper focus.

It is to this scholarly pursuit that I wish to contribute in this article, by analyzing in detail the Mongol origin story as given by Ibn al-Dawādārī. Where in the past these stories may have been studied primarily in order to reconstruct distant folk traditions or even to try to unearth a people’s “actual” origins and/or historic beliefs, they are now used more and more to reveal their authors’ concerns and those of the societies the authors lived in.<sup>8</sup> Even when these stories seem to contain material from older sources, it is adapted to the authors’ present, purpose, and perspective.<sup>9</sup> This is evident in the way in which medieval European authors frequently used *origines gentium* of their own peoples for political ends, such as the legitimization of rulers or the justification of territorial claims.<sup>10</sup> But origin stories were also told about outsiders—narratives that, more often than not, did

<sup>5</sup>Walter Pohl, “Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 206.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick J. Geary, *Women at the Beginning* (Princeton and Oxford, 2006), 18–19.

<sup>7</sup>The works of, and debates between—to name but a few—Walter Pohl, Herwig Wolfram, Walter Goffart, Patrick Geary, Alheydis Plassmann, and Shami Ghosh come to mind.

<sup>8</sup>Geary, *Women at the Beginning*, 19–20. See also, for instance, Pohl, “Narratives,” 198–200.

<sup>9</sup>See for instance the way the role of women develops in medieval *origines gentium*, as described by Geary. Some fascinating examples of such changes in oral cultures can be found in Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London and Nairobi, 1985), passim, e.g., 118–19, 176–77.

<sup>10</sup>Susan Reynolds, “Medieval Origines Gentium and the Community of the Realm,” *History: The Journal of The Historical Association* 68, no. 224 (1983): 378–90; idem, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), 258–59; Alan V. Murray, “Ethnic Identity in the Crusader States: The Frankish Race and the Settlement of Outremer,” in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan V. Murray (Leeds, 1995), 66–67; Alheydis Plassmann, *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin, 2006), 17.



not correspond to the stories those peoples themselves related about their origins.<sup>11</sup> Of course, these stories reflect a broader interest in other peoples, their histories, and places in the world. But just like *origines gentium* about one's own people, these too served purposes beyond simply relating a people's mythical history. They frequently show us the images and perceptions their narrators held about their subjects, as well as explanations for, and interpretations of, present-day concerns they had.<sup>12</sup>

As I will show, this particular story about the origin of the Mongols offers explanations for phenomena and interpretations of historical events related to the Mongols (shedding light on medieval Islamic concerns about the Mongols along the way). Not only does it explain the provenance of this previously unknown people that overran the east of the Muslim world in the seventh/thirteenth century, it also accounts for other parts of the Mongols', and their enemies', history—from their methods of warfare to their relationship with the Turks. Contemporary phenomena are thus explained through this *origo gentis* of an outside group. This shows how these stories are flexible and dynamic, which is also reflected in the way that this particular *origo gentis* contains echoes of the Mongols' own interpretation of their history, as well as the versions presented by some of their vassals, underlining the flexibility of these stories to be repurposed for other goals by other authors/narrators. As it is not generally well known and I wish to refer to certain aspects of it in a detailed manner, I will first summarize the story and relate the way Ibn al-Dawādārī claims to have learned the contents of the legend

<sup>11</sup>See for instance the many Greek stories describing foreign peoples as discussed by Elias J. Bickerman, "Origines Gentium," *Classical Philology* 47, no. 2 (1952): 65–81, as well as Herodotus' version of the Scythian origin story (Geary, *Women at the Beginning*, 12–14).

<sup>12</sup>One of the few such stories that has been studied in this light, and which has various elements in common with the Mongols' *origo gentis* in the abovementioned texts, is William of Tyre's (ca. 1130–84/86) origin story for the Turks, which he discussed under the heading "De ortu et prima origine gentis Turcorum" (Concerning the source and the first origin of the Turkish race). Alan V. Murray has shown that William's inclusion of this story was clearly triggered by the military danger posed by the Seljuk military forces in the region. Apart from this, Murray has also shown how this story adheres to the typical features of the European *origo gentis* genre as described by Herwig Wolfram, as well as showing how William of Tyre's use of biblical echoes—the Book of Ezekiel, to be precise—provides a framework for explaining the Turkish military gains *vis-à-vis* the Crusader states. We can thus see how contemporary concerns not only prompted William of Tyre to include this story, but how they also influenced its shape and contents. See Alan V. Murray, "William of Tyre and the Origin of the Turks: Observations on Possible Sources of the *Gesta Orientalium Principum*," in *Dei gesta per Francos: Etudes sur les croisades dédiées à Jean Richard*, ed. Michel Balard, Benjamin Z. Kedar, and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Aldershot, 2001), 217–29. For Wolfram's analysis, see Herwig Wolfram, "Le genre de l'*Origo gentis*," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990): 800–1. See also idem, "Origo et Religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts," *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994): 35–36; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 360–62.



before turning to my analysis, showing how this *origo gentis* of the Mongols is an excellent example of the explanatory function of these stories, as well as of their adaptability to new contexts and audiences.

### **Ibn al-Dawādārī and the Mongol *Origo Gentis***

Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī, known as Ibn al-Dawādārī (686/1289–after 735/1336), wrote several works, of which two survive: the universal chronicle *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-ghurar* (The treasure of pearls and the collection of the finest), which stretches over several volumes, and its abridgement *Durar al-tijān wa-ghurar tawārikh al-azmān* (The pearls of the crowns and the finest of the histories of the ages).<sup>13</sup> For *Durar al-tijān*, Ibn al-Dawādārī began collecting information in 709 (1309–10), he says, and began writing in Ṣafar 731 (November/December 1330), finishing in Rabī‘ II 732 (January 1332).<sup>14</sup> *Kanz al-durar* contains reports until 735/1335, and so was finished later. While much information in *Durar al-tijān* corresponds to that in *Kanz al-durar*, it is more than a summary, as *Durar al-tijān* also contains material that the multi-volume history lacks.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn al-Dawādārī, as one of the *awlād al-nās*, belonged to the country’s elite. His father ‘Abd Allāh had been in the service of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Balbān al-Rūmī al-Dawādār al-Zāhirī al-Bunduqdārī, and he was therefore known by the *nisbah* “al-Dawādārī.”<sup>16</sup> The author’s father and mother were of Turkish descent and he was, consequently, familiar with Turkish tradition. At the same time, however, he was born, raised, and educated in an Arabic cultural environment. His Turkish background, Haarmann has argued, had a significant influence on Ibn al-Dawādārī’s works. Not only did he transcribe and translate Turkish names and terms, he also included Central Asian traditions in his work, leading Haarmann to describe him as a witness to the beginning of the use of Turkish themes, mo-

<sup>13</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 9–11; Grunhild Graf, *Die Epitome der Universalchronik Ibn-ad-Dawādārīs im Verhältnis zur Langfassung: Eine quellenkritische Studie zur Geschichte der ägyptischen Mamluken* (Berlin, 1990), 11.

<sup>14</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 96; Haarmann, “Quellen zur Geschichte des islamischen Ägyptens,” 203–4. Page 204 contains a list of the most significant passages that either add to or differ from the corresponding passages in *Kanz al-durar*.

<sup>16</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 9; Hans Robert Roemer, “Einleitung,” in *Kanz al-durar*, vol. 9 (Cairo, 1960), 16–17; Ulrich Haarmann, *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit* (Freiburg, 1970), 67; idem, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 7–9; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 99; idem, “Arabic in Speech,” 110–11.



tifs, and *topoi* in Arabic historical writing in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup>

Prime examples of this are the connected origin stories of the Turks and the Mongols, who were widely considered to be ethnically closely related. Ibn al-Dawādārī included them in both *Durar al-tijān*, under the years 615 (abbreviated)<sup>18</sup> and 628 (1230–31),<sup>19</sup> and in *Kanz al-durar*, under the year 618 (1221–22).<sup>20</sup> While, on the one hand, he himself emphasizes the uniqueness of this narrative, as we have seen above, he is at the same time presenting himself as highly knowledgeable about it. As Haarmann pointed out, Ibn al-Dawādārī displays pride in his knowledge of Turkish (“unverkennbarer Eitelkeit”) when transcribing and translating words and phrases<sup>21</sup>—an approach that was clearly a conscious decision, as Ibn al-Dawādārī himself points out that he “left some expressions in Turkish in it.”<sup>22</sup> Another piece of proof the author offers for his familiarity with these traditions is his interpolation of another short Turkish story in *Durar al-tijān*: that of Depe Göz (Dibā Kūz).<sup>23</sup> That story serves, he writes,

so that the reader knows that I am informed about the wealth of the circumstances of these people, and to not deny what I have put down about their affairs and events, and to put that in his [the reader’s] heart and ears.<sup>24</sup>

So, Ibn al-Dawādārī argues, he has the required credentials to inform the reader of the causes of the early circumstances of the Mongols and their “exodus” (*khurūj*). He does so by means of what we could call a triptych consisting of a Turkish origin story, followed by a Mongol origin story, and concluded by a third part connecting the two peoples and describing the rise of Chinggis Khan.<sup>25</sup> The

<sup>17</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 32–33; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 99–100, 105; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 123. On the life of Ibn al-Dawādārī and on his family, see Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 61–79.

<sup>18</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51–53.

<sup>19</sup>The entire story in *Durar al-tijān* runs pp. 54–72.

<sup>20</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:217–37.

<sup>21</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 32.

<sup>22</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219.

<sup>23</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 55–56. See also Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 14–16; idem, “Turkish Legends,” 101–2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 56.

<sup>25</sup>In *Kanz al-durar*, the beginning of the third part of the story is indicated by a chapter heading that reads “Recollection of the cause of the defeat by the Tatars of the king Alṭun Khān and what there was of war tricks” (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:232). See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 131. An English translation of the first, Turkish part of the legend is given in Yehoshua Frenkel, *The Turkic People in Medieval Arabic Writings* (Abingdon and New York, 2015), 60–66.



author relates that he stumbled upon these stories in a book entitled *Ulūkhān Bitikjī* in Turkish (in *Kanz al-durar*) or Mongolian (in *Durar al-tijān*), which he translates as “The Book of the Great Ruling Father.”<sup>26</sup> This book, he says, is held in high esteem by both the Kipchaks and the Mongols.<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī learned of this book from one Amīn al-Dīn al-Ḥamawī, who had served as secretary to the important amir Badr al-Dīn Baysarī (d. 697/1298).<sup>28</sup> This Amīn al-Dīn frequented Bilbays, where Ibn al-Dawādārī’s father was serving as governor of the eastern provinces.<sup>29</sup> Both Amīn al-Dīn and Ibn al-Dawādārī were part of a group of intellectuals who convened regularly—a group that also included Ibn Dāniyāl, the well-known ophthalmologist and author of shadow plays. One day in 709 (1309–10), relates Ibn al-Dawādārī, this select party was discussing history and the early days of the Mongols, when the aforementioned Amīn al-Dīn told them about a rare, precious book that had belonged to the late Badr al-Dīn Baysarī and was now in his possession. The next time he called in at Bilbays, he brought the work to the meeting, and Ibn al-Dawādārī had the opportunity to copy from it, the result of which he then used in *Kanz al-durar* and *Durar al-tijān*.<sup>30</sup>

According to Ibn al-Dawādārī, the part containing the Turkish origin story had been translated from Persian into Arabic by the Baghdadi physician Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshūʿ (d. 212/827) in 211 (826–27). This Persian version was itself a translation by Abū Muslim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (al-Khurasānī) (d. 137/755) of a Turkish original. Ibn al-Dawādārī relates that Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshūʿ reports that Abū Muslim claimed that this book originally belonged to the latter’s ancestor Buzurgmihr ibn Bukhtakān (Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān), the famous Sassanid vizier.<sup>31</sup> The story

<sup>26</sup>“*bi-lisānihim al-mughulī*,” Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51–52. The title is rendered somewhat differently elsewhere in *Durar al-tijān*, as “Ulū Khān Aṭā Bitikjī” (ibid., 55), which is also simply described as “in their language,” and in *Kanz al-durar* it says that “it is called in the Turkish language ‘Ulū Ay Aṭam Bitikī’” (Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:218), meaning “the Book of the Great Father.”

<sup>27</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 55.

<sup>28</sup>Haarmann, “Turkish Legends,” 99.

<sup>29</sup>He served in this position from 699/1299–1300 to 710/1310–11, before dying in an accident in 713/1313 (Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 69–70).

<sup>30</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 56–58; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:218. Among the others attending these gatherings were Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Zaytūn al-Balālīqī, Maṣṣūr al-Adīb al-ʿAbbāsī, and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Samlūṭī. Ibn al-Dawādārī writes that Ibn Dāniyāl was not present at the reading of the Turkish book, which was possibly because he died around that time, in 710/1310 (Safi Mahfouz and Marvin Carlson, trans., *Theatre from Medieval Cairo: The Ibn Dāniyāl Trilogy* [New York, 2013], xx).

<sup>31</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219. The claim that Abū Muslim al-Khurasānī was a descendant of Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān is considered doubtful (Ġ. Ḥ. Yūsufī, “Abū Moslem Ḳorāsānī,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1983, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-moslem-abd-al-rahman-b>). On Jibrīl ibn Bukhtīshūʿ see D. Sourdel, “Buk ḥ tiṣ ḥ ū,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Brill Online,



of the Turkish origins, Ibn al-Dawādārī informs us, was followed in the book by an appendix written by a certain Sulaymān ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī, who has not been identified as yet.<sup>32</sup> This appendix was likely composed in the seventh/thirteenth century,<sup>33</sup> and this in itself, again, attests to the flexibility and dynamism of such origin stories, and the way they were adopted and adapted to contemporary concerns.

It is unfortunate that al-Adharbayjānī remains unidentified, for knowledge of his background could provide valuable information on the source of this origin story and the area(s) in which it circulated. For now, we will have to content ourselves with a number of smaller conclusions. First, the story circulated somewhere in the Islamic world, surely to the east of Egypt (where, after all, Ibn al-Dawādārī was among the first to learn it), where the Mongol presence was felt. Second, it resonated with Ibn al-Dawādārī: not only did he feel that his readers would benefit from the information and be interested in it, as he makes clear in his introduction to the story, his occasional personal comments on some of the explanatory elements of the story (see below) show that he understood them and found them useful.

### Summary of the *Origo Gentis* of the Mongols

While the first, Turkish part of the triptych is intriguing—both its contents and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s handling of the aspects of it that contradict Islamic teaching—constraints of space mean I will confine myself to discussing those elements that are relevant to (the interpretation of) the Mongol origin story that follows it. The Turkish origin story relates how Ulū Ay Aṭājī, “Great Father Moon,” came to life in a cave on the Qarāṭāgh Mountain (the Black Mountain), created from the four elements: clay and water were formed into a human being by the sun and wind.<sup>34</sup> This is clearly the mythical past of which Pohl and Mahoney speak. The descen-

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2012, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_1514](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1514)); and for Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān, see Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh, “Bozorgmehr-e Bokhtagān,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bozorgmehr-e-boktagan>.

<sup>32</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 21–22. At this point in *Kanz al-durar*, Ibn al-Dawādārī states that Jibrīl’s account ends here, and he continues with the story of the Mongols as related by Sulaymān ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:227). In *Durar al-tijān*, however, Jibrīl’s text supposedly continues well into the Mongol story, up to the introduction of Chinggis Khan. There it is taken up by a (there unnamed) narrator of an appendix in “the Turkish book” (*Durar al-tijān*, 66). The division given in *Kanz al-durar* is likely the original one, as the sources given for the Turkish story are all dated to the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. See also Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 21, n. 97.

<sup>33</sup>Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 17, 21–22.

<sup>34</sup>Similar tales of the creation of a man out of clay can be found in Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* and Ibn al-Nafīs’ *Al-Risālah al-Kāmiliyah*.





dants of Ulū Ay Aṭājī came to rule as the Alṭun Khāns, the Golden Kings, and they made the cave in which their ancestor originated into a temple—the story has now made its first passage, to the humans of legend. At the foot of the Qarāṭāgh is a large lake, on which the magnificent cities of Asharmāq<sup>35</sup> and Aydarmāq lie. Here the Alṭun Khān rules over his people, who live in joy, wealth, and great health, and who do “not have enemies that frighten them.”<sup>36</sup> That remark appears to foreshadow the imminent appearance of just such an enemy: the Mongols. For, as Ibn al-Dawādārī himself interjects here, “fate made them servants after ruling, humiliating them after glory,”<sup>37</sup> at which point the text turns to the story of the origin of the Mongols.

Before I embark on the summary of the Mongol origin story, it must be noted that the two versions in *Durar al-tijān* and *Kanz al-durar* are not exact copies of one another: the phrasing varies, but there are also other elements of difference between them, ranging from genealogies, names, and other details that are somewhat different, to some parts of the story that are present in *Kanz al-durar* but not in *Durar al-tijān*. Given the minimal difference in content, I consider it justified to present the two versions as one narrative in the summary below, while including the sections found only in *Kanz al-durar*. I will indicate variations and discrepancies between the two where relevant.

The Mongol narrative begins with a description of the setting on the Qarāṭāgh Mountain, as we have seen in the introduction. Because of the vicious wildlife, it long remained uninhabited by people, despite its riches. A human first appeared there when the Tibetan woman gave birth, left her son to gather some grass to wrap him in, and an eagle snatched up the baby and dropped him at the foot of the Qarāṭāgh, right into a lioness’ den. She nursed the newborn with her own cubs, and the boy grew up to be an incredibly strong man, killing the lions he was living among with his bare hands and eating their meat. Consequently, the lions were afraid of him and kept clear of him, fleeing whenever they saw him. One day, a group of seven people arrived in the area. The man saw them surrounded by lions and suddenly recognized them as being similar to himself: he felt *jinsīyah* (here probably best translated as “kinship”) and human nature, and went to rescue them from the lions threatening them. Initially, this wild man frightened the group, but they soon came to realize he meant no harm: like themselves, the man

<sup>35</sup>“Kāsharmāq” in *Durar al-tijān*.

<sup>36</sup>The version in *Durar al-tijān* is somewhat short, as Ibn al-Dawādārī states that the story of a spontaneous generation from the elements conflicts with what revelation tells us about creation, from which he therefore “turned away.” In *Kanz al-durar*, however, he apparently had no such qualms and does relate the entire story, although he still criticizes its contents. Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 59–63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:219–27. Quote in *ibid.*, 7:221.

<sup>37</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227.



was human, although his good qualities had been altered by his “savage foster mother” (*al-waḥshīyah al-rabībah*). The man hunted lion meat for them, which they cooked for him—he had always eaten it raw. The wild man learned their language and asked the seven who they were and where they came from. This turns into a folk etymology for the word Tatar, as they answered:

We are Tatars, which means we have fled from our land. A people of our ethnicity (*min jinsinā*) has conquered us and killed us, and driven us from our homes, so we left fleeing, and we do not know where we are headed. So we have come to this land as *tatār*, meaning wanderers (*tāʾihīn*).<sup>38</sup>

“This,” the text adds, “is the origin of the word *al-tatār*.”<sup>39</sup>

The group consisted of three men, three women, and one girl (or three men and four women in *Durar al-tījān*), and this “savage person” (*dhālik al-shakhṣ al-waḥshī*) and the girl had a son together. He was named Tatār Khān, “meaning ‘the wandering king’ [*al-malik al-tāʾih*],” and the wild man was given a name by the Tatars as well: Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī, meaning “Son of the Black Lion (*farkh al-asad al-aswad*).”<sup>40</sup> The story then continues with a genealogy of the descendants of Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī, including stories about some of them. The genealogies given in *Durar al-tījān* and *Kanz al-durar* differ slightly (Fig. 1).

Among the descendants of Alb Qarā Arslān Biljikī was the inventor of the Turkish flute called the *şibuṣghū*—Tatār Khān (the eldest) according to *Durar al-tījān*, Tatār Khān Kūçükerī according to *Kanz al-durar*.<sup>41</sup> He used the flute to exactly mimic bird song to lure the birds to him so he could capture as many as he wished.<sup>42</sup> Jikiz/Shikiz Khān, Oghuz Khān,<sup>43</sup> and Aṭun/Alṭun Khān are the ancestors of all Tatars, i.e., the Mongols.<sup>44</sup> In the days of Tatār Khān Bayghū, the Tatars

<sup>38</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. See also *Durar al-tījān*, 65.

<sup>39</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. See also *Durar al-tījān*, 65–66.

<sup>40</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 66; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>41</sup>The Arabic spells this K-Sh-K-R-Ī; the rendition as *kūçükerī* is taken from Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 129. Cf. modern Turkish *küçük*, meaning “small, little.”

<sup>42</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 66; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>43</sup>Haarmann points out that the presence of the name “Oghuz Khān” in this genealogy is striking, as it is a southwest Turkish name rather than Kipchak. Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 25; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 130.

<sup>44</sup>The differentiation between “Mongols” and “Tatars” in Arabic sources remains problematic. Some sources use the two interchangeably; others appear to regard them as distinct in one way or another. I discuss this problem in more depth in the introduction to my dissertation; for now, see, e.g., Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 1995), 108, n. 8.



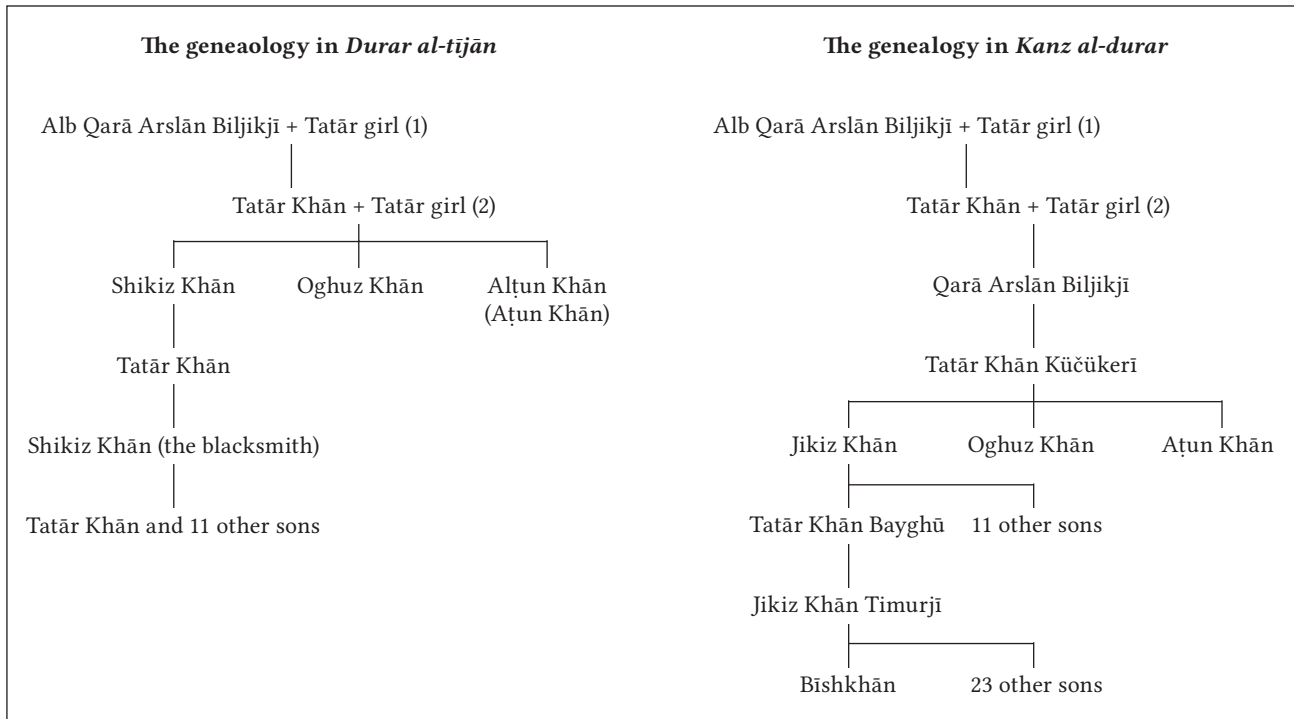


Figure 1. The genealogies as presented in *Durar al-tijān* and *Kanz al-durar*.

submitted to the Turkish Alṭun Khān<sup>45</sup> and this is where the Turkish and Mongol origin stories meet. The Alṭun Khān was gifted rare wild animals by the—still very barbaric—Tatars, upon whom he in turn bestowed favors, giving them horses and livestock.<sup>46</sup>

The story then turns to “the blacksmith,”<sup>47</sup> who is referred to as “Shikiz Khān the blacksmith” in *Durar al-tijān* and “Jikiz Khān Timurjī” in *Kanz al-durar*. This is the Chinggis Khan who conquered vast parts of Asia, and for reasons of clarity I will adhere to this standard spelling of his name. It is here that the legendary setting changes to a more or less recognizable history—albeit a different one than modern historians of the Mongol Empire are used to. In the narrative, Chinggis Khan is called “the blacksmith” because he regularly visited one of the Turkish

<sup>45</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 66. The story of Tatār Khān Bayghū is missing from *Durar al-tijān*. Here the Tatars are only ruled by the Alṭun Khān in the days of Chinggis Khan himself. However, given the fact that the rule of the Alṭun Khān seems well-established at that point, the version given in *Kanz al-durar* has a greater likelihood of being the chronology as found in the original copy of the story as read by Ibn al-Dawādārī. Cf. the aforementioned discrepancy in authorship as discussed in n. 35.

<sup>46</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:230.

<sup>47</sup>See below for a discussion of this etymology.



cities,<sup>48</sup> where he frequented a blacksmith, who taught him how to make arrowheads. Chinggis Khan would bring iron home with him to make arrowheads, which he sold in order to provide for his family.<sup>49</sup> The eldest of his many sons, called Tatār Khān in *Durar al-tijān* and Bīshkhān in *Kanz al-durar* (see the genealogical overview above), had a strong character and was very courageous. Moreover, he was very talented at, and fond of, hunting with birds. Every year, the son of the Alṭun Khān, Kumush Khān, would come to the lands of the Tatars, speak with their leaders—including Chinggis Khan—and go on bird hunts before returning to the Turkish cities.<sup>50</sup>

During one of those hunting trips,<sup>51</sup> Kumush Khan was hunting with Chinggis Khan's eldest son, and their respective hunting birds targeted the same swan. Rather than letting Kumush Khan, his superior, have the prey, Chinggis Khan's son snatched the former's bird off the swan, and let his own hunting bird take it. Kumush Khan left in a rage and returned to the city. Chinggis Khan was informed of the events by his son, whom he then reprimanded: as the Tatars were vassals to the Alṭun Khān, this would inevitably cause trouble. However, Chinggis Khan was not too worried, as he had had a dream that appeared to foretell a Tatar victory: "It was as if I was at the top of the Qarāṭāgh, and I grabbed the sun by its horns, from East to West, and I gave it to you (pl., i.e., his sons). But the western side slipped away from my hand."<sup>52</sup>

Chinggis Khan then gathered the elders and leaders of the clan (*ashīrah*). They turned out to be 360 people in total, a number Chinggis Khan contentedly concluded that was equal to the number of days in a year.<sup>53</sup> At this gathering, Chinggis Khan formed a bundle of 360 arrows and asked the men present to break it. They replied that they could not. He then gave all 360 of them each a single arrow, which they easily broke. He then voiced the lesson learned: united they

<sup>48</sup>This blacksmith is located in Asharmāq in *Durar al-tijān* and in Aydarmāq in *Kanz al-durar*.

<sup>49</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 66–67; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>50</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67–68; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>51</sup>The two versions of the story do not agree on a date for this event. In *Durar al-tijān*, Ibn al-Dawādārī relates that the "Turkish book" has the year as 609 (1212–13; *Durar al-tijān*, 68), while in *Kanz al-durar* he says that Sulaymān 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn al-Bahlawān al-Adharbayjānī reports that it was in the 620s (i.e., 1223–32; *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232).

<sup>52</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 68.

<sup>53</sup>*Durar al-tijān* has 300 (p. 69). The order of the story and the numbers mentioned are a bit different here in *Durar al-tijān*, which describes the messenger with the ensuing massacre first, followed by the *quriltai*. As the version in *Kanz al-durar* is more complete and is likely closer to Ibn al-Dawādārī's source regarding the genealogy and the narrators, I will stick with the order of events and the numbers mentioned as they are presented in *Kanz al-durar*. The gathering described here reflects the Mongol practice of convening a *quriltai* to choose a leader. Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 28, n. 136.



were invincible, divided they were effortlessly shattered. Chinggis Khan, the text adds, “was the first one to apply this proverb.”<sup>54</sup> He also argued that a leader was needed, and the number of candidates was rapidly brought down to three, among whom was Chinggis Khan himself. The three embarked upon a ritual in which they put a felt doll called Tunkā Khātūn in a tent,<sup>55</sup> an idol served by a shaman called Bakhshī,<sup>56</sup> and each offered it bowls of stew (*tharīd*).<sup>57</sup> That night they heard a voice proclaiming Chinggis Khan’s future rule, and indeed, his sacrificial bowl was found emptied, apart from a small portion on the western side of it.<sup>58</sup>

Though the Tatars were ready to fight, they struggled with a dire shortage of weapons, gear, and horses. For four thousand men they had only three hundred sixty horses, eighty of which, the story in *Kanz al-durar* tells us, descended from the primeval horse that belonged to the Tatars’ ancestor Tatār Khān Bayghū.<sup>59</sup> On one of the islands in the lake near the mountain, he had captured and tamed a primeval horse that struck fire with its hooves—hence its name Aṭ Aṭn, “fire horse.” Aṭ Aṭn could outrun the wind and overtake any other animal. It was said, relates Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī, the author of the appendix, that this horse talked to and understood its master. The heirs of Tatār Khān now rode the descendants of this horse into battle against the Alṭun Khān.<sup>60</sup>

In order to learn what the Alṭun Khān was planning, Chinggis Khan sent some spies to his old friend the blacksmith and learned that the Alṭun Khān had contrived to send a messenger to summon him and his sons to court. This, however, was a ruse, and they would all be killed there. When the messenger and his retinue arrived, rather than going with them to the Alṭun Khān, the Tatars waited until nightfall and attacked and killed them.<sup>61</sup> Chinggis Khan divided their gear and horses and among his under-equipped troops. The Alṭun Khān answered by sending an army of fifty thousand. As they far outnumbered the Tatars, Chinggis Khan decided to trick them by having the Tatars flee into the wilderness at

<sup>54</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233.

<sup>55</sup>Haarmann renders it as Tūngā Khātūn (Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 132).

<sup>56</sup>The term *bakhshī* means a Buddhist teacher (Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston [Cambridge, 1998], 3:766). We encounter one serving Qubilai (r. 1260–94) in Rashīd al-Dīn (*ibid.*, 1:105).

<sup>57</sup>Haarmann renders it as “broth and meat.” Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 132; *idem*, “Mongols and Mamluks,” 172.

<sup>58</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233–34. Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 69–70.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 70, which mentions 1200 horses and omits the story of the primeval horse. The genealogy in this episode is not entirely correct, as a contamination of Tatār Khān Kūcūkerī and Tatār Khān Bayghū occurs (see Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 133).

<sup>60</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:234.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:234–35. Cf. *Durar al-tijān*, 68.



the first attack and wait for the Alṭun Khān's troops to settle down for the night and get drunk in celebration of their victory, at which point the Tatars returned and slaughtered them. Following this victory, more people came to join Chinggis Khan's ranks. The Alṭun Khān sent an even larger army, which consisted of the descendants of Ulū Ay Aṭāji, the aforementioned Turkish forebear. As the Tatars were still outnumbered five to one, they dressed sticks in leftover gear from the previously defeated army in order to appear more numerous. Split up into four groups of five thousand soldiers each, the Tatars attacked the Turkish army from four sides and defeated them, then rode into Aydarmāq dressed in the vanquished troops' gear. Chinggis Khan killed the Alṭun Khān and ascended the throne, sending the Turkish subjects into the countryside, making them till the land and pay him tax, and he divided the lands among his sons.<sup>62</sup> Here, Ibn al-Dawādārī says, the story from the "Turkish book" ends. He then turns to the works of Ibn Wāṣil (604–97/1208–98) and Ibn al-Athīr (555–630/1160–1233) to discuss the Mongols' appearance in the Islamic world.

### Foretellings and Explanations

This story on the origin of the Mongols clearly uses a legendary past to explain why and how the Mongols came to power, the causes of their "exodus and the story of their origin."<sup>63</sup> It thus serves in the manner *origines gentium* tend to do: as a way to make sense of their authors' and/or readers' contemporary situation. In this narrative this is clearly visible in its "foreshadowing" of later historical developments and its explanation of events and phenomena regarding the Mongols that would have occupied the audience at the time. The story thus explains not only the later Mongol defeat at 'Ayn Jālūt, but also the nomadic origins of the Mongols, their use of weaponry—the bows and arrows for the use of which they were famous—and other war tactics, and the relationship between the Mongols and the Turks.

### The Mongol Failure to Conquer the West of the Islamic World

The most obvious foreshadowing has already been discussed by Haarmann,<sup>64</sup> but for the sake of completeness I will briefly mention it here as well: the omens of the sun and the bowl, which foretell the Mongol failure to capture the western part of the Islamic world. The omen of the sun appears in Chinggis Khan's dream:

<sup>62</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:235–37; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 68–72.

<sup>63</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 51.

<sup>64</sup>Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 27–29, 32; idem, "Arabic in Speech," 111; idem, "Großer Vater Mond," 137; idem, "Mongols and Mamluks," 171–72.



I have seen while sleeping that we will be victorious over them. There is no doubt that we will rule the earth from east to west except for a little bit. Last night [I saw myself] standing on top of this mountain [the Qarāṭāgh] while the sun was rising and I extended my hand and grabbed its horns. When I wanted to embrace it, it slipped from my hands in the direction of the west, and I did not rule it.<sup>65</sup>

Chinggis Khan's sacrificial bowl of stew, which was emptied, "apart from a little bit which was on the western side of the bowl,"<sup>66</sup> foretells the same outcome. As Haarmann pointed out, both occurrences are clear references to the fact that the Mongols did not manage to conquer the west of the Islamic world. The Mamluk armies defeated them at 'Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260, and apart from Eastern Anatolia they never managed to rule the area past the Euphrates for a protracted period of time, despite the fact that they had planned to expand into Syria, Egypt, and likely beyond.<sup>67</sup> The legend thus foretells a historical fact that would take place at a time beyond the temporal boundaries of the story itself, explaining to its audience that the Mamluk victory was always in the stars—or, in this case, in the stew. But was it Ibn al-Dawādārī himself who interpolated this prediction here, or was it his source we are hearing?<sup>68</sup> In any case, as Haarmann states, Ibn al-Dawādārī must have been pleased to pass on this message to his readers from an unexpected perspective.<sup>69</sup> For despite the peace treaty that had been concluded between the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Ilkhan Abū Sa'īd in 723/1323—less than ten years before Ibn al-Dawādārī wrote *Durar al-tijān*—fear of the Mongols had not yet entirely dissipated. This is evident when Ibn al-Dawādārī states, writing somewhere between 731/1330 and 732/1332, that Chinggis Khan's sons

are the twelve men who rule the world in the east and west, except for Syria, Egypt, and what is behind them in the west. May God the Exalted preserve them from their evil and corruption, and make them *dār al-islām* until Judgment Day.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 68.

<sup>66</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:234. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 70.

<sup>67</sup>On this lasting conflict between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanid Mongols, see for instance Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*; idem, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout, 2013).

<sup>68</sup>Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḥān," 32.

<sup>69</sup>Haarmann, "Großer Vater Mond," 137.

<sup>70</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 53.



## Etymological Explanations

Scholars of medieval Europe have pointed out that the etymological explanation of ethnic names was an important part of ideas on ethnicity, as they were considered to give knowledge about the ethnic group itself, reflecting on its characteristics. These etymologies thus referred to, for example, myths of descent, geographical features, external characteristics, and character traits.<sup>71</sup> As such, they regularly appear in *origines gentium* as well, where ethnonyms may also be explained as going back to eponymous ancestors.<sup>72</sup> Whether etymological explanations of ethnonyms are a recurring theme in (Eurasian) origin stories is a question that awaits further and more inclusive research, but in such a study this Mongol origin story would provide evidence for a positive answer to that question.<sup>73</sup> Of course, in Islamic tradition in general we also find these etymological explanations of ethnonyms. A well-known one is that the Turks were so named because Alexander the Great left (*taraka*) them behind his barrier wall.<sup>74</sup> Another example is the work of Rashīd al-Dīn, who gives etymological origins for various Turkic tribal names in his *Jamī' al-tawārikh*, stating for instance that the Qanqli tribe was named after the cart (*qanqli*) they used to carry plunder.<sup>75</sup>

In the Mongol origin story, we find such an etymology for the term “Tatar.” Once the young man in the wilderness has mastered the language of the people he rescued, he asks them what they are. As mentioned above, they give the following answer:

We are Tatars, which means we have fled from our land. A people of our ethnicity (*min jinsinā*) has conquered us and killed us, and driven us from our homes, so we left fleeing, and we do not know where we are headed. So we have come to this land as *tatār*, meaning wanderers (*tā'ihīn*).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Walter Pohl, “Ethnonyms and Early Medieval Ethnicity: Methodological Reflections,” *Hungarian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (2018): 5–17; Claire Weeda, “Images of Ethnicity in Later Medieval Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012), 58–61; 210–17.

<sup>72</sup>Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 365; Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney, “Editorial: Narratives of Ethnic Origins: Eurasian Perspectives,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 188.

<sup>73</sup>See also the *TMHJ* special issue contribution by Peter B. Golden, “The Ethnogenic Tales of the Türks,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 291–327.

<sup>74</sup>See for instance Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Absār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Maghribī, vol. 2 (al-ʿAyn, 2008), 116.

<sup>75</sup>Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī' u't-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:30. Other examples can be found elsewhere in the text, but especially on pp. 29–35.

<sup>76</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:229. The quote as given in *Durar al-tijān* reads as follows: “We are from a faraway land and we are Tatars (*tātār*), which means that we are wanderers. We arrived in this land that we do not know, and we have enemies that destroyed our land and killed





While the Tatars reportedly fled their homes, *tā'ihīn* is better translated as “wanderers” or “those who lost their way” than as “refugees.”<sup>77</sup> In this sense, it might well be a reference to the Mongols’ nomadic origins. Arguably, there is also an implicit version of the eponymous ancestor-etymology, seeing as various ancestors of Chinggis Khan are named “Tatār Khān.”

Another etymological explanation given in the story is that of Chinggis Khan’s birthname “Temüjin,” or, as it is rendered in *Kanz al-durar*, “Timurjī.”<sup>78</sup> *Durar al-tijān* does not give the name, but simply states: “[T]hen Tatār Khān had a son, whom he called Chinggis Khan after his grandfather, and this was Chinggis Khan the blacksmith.”<sup>79</sup> According to the Mongols’ own story of their origins as recorded in the thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols*, the newborn Chinggis Khan was named after a Tatar chief that his father Yisügei had captured around the time of his birth.<sup>80</sup> The name Temüjin, however, was rapidly equated with “temürči(n),” the Turco-Mongol word for blacksmith (*temür* meaning “iron”),<sup>81</sup> and so it is in this story. This popular etymology for Chinggis Khan’s birthname was widespread, as is also evidenced by the simple statement made in *Durar al-tijān*: “Chinggis Khan the blacksmith,” in a line of other Chinggis Khans. Apparently, this was sufficient for the audience to identify the great conqueror. The story then explains why he was called “the blacksmith”: it is related that Chinggis Khan was taught by a Turkish blacksmith to make arrowheads and that he would sell these to provide for his family. This conveniently explained Chinggis Khan’s birth name, following the widespread etymology. What is more, the story of Chinggis Khan forging arrow tips also links the Mongols to their use of arrows, making it one of various aspects of Mongol war tactics that are explained in this *origo gentis*.

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our people (*qawm*). So we left and are refugees, and we got lost until we found ourselves here, so we are Tatars (*tātār*) which means ‘the lost’” (p. 65).

<sup>77</sup>The root is also connected to the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert after their exodus from Egypt. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93, repr. New York [1955–56]), 1:326.

<sup>78</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231.

<sup>79</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 66.

<sup>80</sup>*The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Igor de Rachewiltz (Leiden, 2004), 1:13. Paul Pelliot points out that this agrees with the Mongol habit of naming children based on recent events or observations soon after the birth of the child (*Notes on Marco Polo* [Paris, 1959], 1:289).

<sup>81</sup>Denis Sinor, “The Legendary Origin of the Türks,” in *Folklorica: Festschrift for Felix J. Oinas*, ed. Egle Victoria Žygas and Peter Voorheis (Bloomington, 1982), 248.



## Mongol War Tactics

Arrowheads were key to the Mongols' military success, as their primary weapon was the composite bow.<sup>82</sup> Archery was a skill that played a key role in the Mongols' military campaigns, and their mastery of it was unmatched. Many sources, both Chinese and Western (like John de Plano Carpini), note how Mongol boys were trained from toddlerhood onwards to ride horses and handle the bow and arrow.<sup>83</sup> They used arrowheads of different types and materials for different purposes.<sup>84</sup> Islamic sources, such as the Syrian historian al-Dhahabī (673–748/1274–1348), also comment on the Mongol use of bow and arrow. Basing himself on the Iraqi physician and polymath Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baghdādī (557–629/1162–1231),<sup>85</sup> al-Dhahabī relates that “most of their weapons are arrows, and all of them make them. Their arrowheads are of horn, iron, and bone.”<sup>86</sup> Chinggis Khan's making of arrowheads in the story not only served to explain the popular etymology of his birthname, but also connected the Mongols to their famous use of bows and arrows. (Incidentally, the Mongol skill with bow and arrow is also explained in a fourteenth-century Tibetan origin story—the matter apparently drew attention across Eurasia.<sup>87</sup>) Other typical elements of Mongol warfare are also explained in this origin legend.

Apart from learning how to make these arrowheads, Chinggis Khan profited from his teacher in other ways as well. The blacksmith also provided him with precious information on his enemies' moves. The Mongols' intelligence network is famous to us, and this was apparently also the case in the medieval Islamic world:

<sup>82</sup>Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Barnsley, 2007), 50; idem, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London, 2012), 130.

<sup>83</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 42–43.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 51–52.

<sup>85</sup>On him, see N. Peter Joosse, “‘Abd Al-Laṭīf Al-Baghdādī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three* (Brill Online, 2018), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_24150](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24150). On al-Dhahabī's use of al-Baghdādī as a source, see Joseph de Somogyi, “Adh-Dhahabi's *Ta'rikh Al-Islam* as an Authority on the Mongol Invasion of the Caliphate,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 68, no. 4 (1936): 595–604.

<sup>86</sup>Shams al-Dīn Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-a'lām*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut, 2003), 13:19. See also idem, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma'rūf and Muḥyi Hilāl al-Sirḥān (Beirut, 1985), 22:227.

<sup>87</sup>In this story, the Tibetans, Chinese, and Mongols are presented as being descended from the same ancestor through three half-brothers. After their father died, the brothers and respective ancestors of these three peoples ritually divided his body. The Mongols received his waist and thumbs, with the latter being tied to their skill in archery. Reinier J. Langelaar, “Chasing the Colours of the Rainbow: Tibetan Ethnogenealogies in Flux,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 347–48.



Ibn al-Dawādārī himself emphasizes this element in the story, stating that “Chinggis Khan was the first after Alexander to send spies.”<sup>88</sup> While that is evidently untrue, the Mongols did indeed attach great value to proper intelligence, and employed their own scouts and spies, as well as engaging merchants to provide them with information,<sup>89</sup> as is reflected in the narrative and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s statement.<sup>90</sup>

Another key element of Mongol military success was their horses. Having been raised in trying environments, they were strong and tough and, moreover, eclipsed their European or Middle Eastern counterparts in endurance, despite their smaller stature. Contemporaries also commented on their thorough training. Mongol soldiers would have had more than one mount on hand while campaigning, with some three to five horses per archer.<sup>91</sup> The importance of horses to the Mongols and their warfare is reflected in Islamic sources from the period. Not only do many contemporary authors mention, based on Ibn al-Athīr, that early Mongols relied on sheep and horses for a living,<sup>92</sup> the Shafi‘i jurist and physician Ibn al-Nafīs (ca. 607–87/1210–88) even commented on Mongols’ large backsides, which was supposedly “caused by their frequent horse-riding from an early age onwards.”<sup>93</sup> The importance of horses to the Mongols is similarly evident in this *origo gentis*. After the episode of Chinggis Khan’s election to leadership, *Kanz al-durar* includes a brief excursion into a separate tale involving one of Chinggis Khan’s forebears (the genealogy in this episode is not entirely consistent with earlier parts of the story). He captured and tamed a primeval horse that struck fire with its hooves, hence its name Aṭ Aṭn, or “fire horse.” It was faster than the wind and could overtake any animal, and some of the horses the Mongols rode into battle against the Aṭun Khān were descendants of this mythical animal. Thus, the story connects the Mongols’ origins to their contemporary use of excellent horses, for which they were famous.

The Mongols did not invent all these elements of warfare, of course, but they had mastered them to such an extent that they were apparently associated with

<sup>88</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 70.

<sup>89</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 69–70.

<sup>90</sup>Haarmann has also pointed to Chinggis Khan’s fame as a sender of spies in this regard (Haarmann, “Aṭun Ḥān,” 29; idem, “Großer Vater Mond,” 133.).

<sup>91</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 54–56.

<sup>92</sup>Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 2012), 10:334–35; Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār Banī Ayyūb*, ed. Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Rabī‘ and Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1972), 4:36; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 22:237; idem, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 13:290.

<sup>93</sup>Max Meyerhof and Joseph Schacht, eds., *The Theologus Autodidactus of Ibn Al-Nafīs* (Oxford, 1968), .



them. The Mongols were known not only for their mounted archers and intelligence networks, but also for their cunning battle tactics based around their main military strengths: their skilled bowmanship and their mobility (i.e., their horses). These two typical features were incorporated into military maneuvers and augmented with a third essential part of Mongol military strategy: subterfuge. While not necessarily a Mongol innovation, they did perfect this strategy.<sup>94</sup> A frequently used Mongol tactic was a feigned retreat before enemy troops while firing at them using the Parthian shot.<sup>95</sup> Once the pursuing army was drawn out, stretching its ranks over a large distance, the Mongols would turn around at an agreed location and attack their pursuers, while other troops attacked their flanks.<sup>96</sup> Another favorite was surrounding enemies based on the *nerge* hunting practice: hunters would form a circle around prey and gradually close the animals in. Similar tactics were used against enemy armies, encircling them and attacking from several directions at once—this could be successful even when the Mongols were outnumbered by their opponents.<sup>97</sup> In order to trick their opponents into thinking they had greater numbers, they employed various ruses, such as having riders stir up dust with branches tied to the tails of their horses or mounting dummies on spare horses.<sup>98</sup>

Such cunning practices by the Mongols were frequently commented upon by contemporaries. Both the Mongols under Chinggis Khan and the later Ilkhanids were frequently accused of subterfuge and trickery by Mamluk authors,<sup>99</sup> and al-Baghdādī (through al-Dhahabī) again provides us with interesting detail on Mongol behavior during sieges:

A party of them first goes back from the city until its people become greedy and spread out behind them until they are far removed, and this party has fled before them. Then they assault them like nightfall.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 71; May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 130–32.

<sup>95</sup>The Parthian shot is a tactic in which mounted archers retreat, but turn their bodies back towards their enemies and fire at them.

<sup>96</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 71, 74–75.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 46, 75–77; May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 131–32.

<sup>98</sup>May, *The Mongol Art of War*, 80.

<sup>99</sup>I discuss this in detail in my dissertation. Some examples can be found in Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah* (Beirut and Riyadh, 1966), 13:83, 226–27; Shāfi' ibn 'Alī Ibn Asākir, *Al-Faḍl al-ma'thūr min sīrat al-Sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr Sayf al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn Sulṭān al-Islām wa-al-Muslimīn Abī al-Faḥ Qalāwūn khalada Allāh salṭānathu*, ed. Paulina B. Lewicka (Warsaw, 2000), 285; Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir'āt al-zamān fī tārikh al-a'yān* (Hyderabad, 1955), 2:34.

<sup>100</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām*, 13:19.



Next, he says, the Mongols kill those who have ridden out after them, then enter the city and kill the women and children. Such tactics are reflected in the description of the battles waged by Chinggis Khan against the Alṭun Khān, in the segment Ibn al-Dawādārī aptly titled “The cause of the defeat by the Tatars of the king Alṭun Khān and what there was in war tricks (*ḥiyal al-ḥurūb*).”<sup>101</sup> The narrative relates how Chinggis Khan ordered his troops to flee into the wilderness—feigning a retreat—only to return at night and butcher the Alṭun Khān’s army. Similarly, the Mongols pretend to be more numerous by dressing sticks in leftover gear.<sup>102</sup> We also find the *nerge*-based encircling practice, when Chinggis Khan splits his outnumbered army into four groups of five thousand in order to attack the Alṭun Khān’s hundred thousand troops from different sides. In the story, these tactics are presented as resulting from the Mongols’ dire lack of resources, forcing them to be creative and cunning in order to defeat the Turks. In the historical reality of the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, the Mongols were known for these tactics, for which the story thus offers an origin.

### Turkish Connection

The last army sent by the Alṭun Khān before his final defeat consisted of his son Kumush Khān and a hundred thousand troops “descended from the great khan Ulū Ay Aṭāji,”<sup>103</sup> the ancestor of the Turks. The Mongols and the “purest” Turks thus face each other on the battlefield, and the latter are definitively beaten. Ulrich Haarmann briefly mentioned the connection between the Turks and the Mongols in this story, stating that when Tatār Khān Bayghū submits himself and his people to the Alṭun Khān “the two themes—Turkish and Mongolian—converge in a deeper sense, reflecting as they do the obscure and complex historical relationship between Mongols and Turks in their Central Asian homelands.”<sup>104</sup> In this way the story indeed refers to a shared history in the Eurasian steppes, but the connection between the Turks and the Mongols in this narrative goes further

<sup>101</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:232.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the story of the Mongol fight against the Naimans in the *Secret History*, in which each man is ordered to light five fires in different places, in order to confuse the enemy about their real numbers (*Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:115–17). Haarmann states that we know this ruse from the *Secret History*, referring to Poucha’s translation. Poucha indeed refers to “puppets,” although de Rachewiltz does not include that in his translation. Poucha also points to Plano Carpini, who reported that the Mongols frequently used puppets to make it seem like they had bigger numbers (Haarmann, “Alṭun Ḥān,” 30; Pavel Poucha, *Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* [Prague, 1956], 130–31).

<sup>103</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 71. See also *Kanz al-durar*, 7:236.

<sup>104</sup> Haarmann, “Turkish Legends,” 104. He makes the same statement in “Alṭun Ḥān,” 105.



than that. The origin stories of these two peoples are inextricably woven together, not only in the presumed original version, where the Turks of the Alṭun Khān play a key part in the Mongols' story, but also by Ibn al-Dawādārī himself, who explicitly connects the two stories by reflecting on the Turks' change of fortune, caused by the Mongols.<sup>105</sup>

Many Islamic authors regarded the Turks and the Mongols as ethnically related. The most obvious example to quote here is the Mamluk annalist Abū Shāmah (599–665/1203–68), who wrote: “The strange thing is that the Mongols were defeated and destroyed by sons of their own people of the Turks” (*wa-min al-‘ajā’ib anna al-tātār kusirū wa-uhlikū bi-abnā’ jinsihim min al-turk*).<sup>106</sup> This statement, as well as the verses following it, has been frequently quoted—by both later Mamluk chroniclers, including Ibn al-Dawādārī,<sup>107</sup> and modern-day historians.

In the story under consideration here, this close relation in origins is reflected in the Turks' and the Mongols' homeland, as both are from the Qarāṭāgh Mountain: the Turks were created there, while the Mongols were carried or wandered in. This mountain is initially just the homeland to the Turks, whose ancestor spontaneously came into existence, having been generated from the local clay and other elements—autochthonous in the literal sense of the word. The Turks then rise to great glory and prosperity before the Mongols even appear on the scene, quite literally: their male ancestor is imported from Tibet, whereas their female ancestor is part of the wandering Tatars, who end up in the area after fleeing their homeland.<sup>108</sup> That the Turks come first, then the Mongols, reflects the historical reality that the Turks rose to power in Central Asia well before the Mongols did, but it also reflects al-Dimashqī's problem: that no one had really heard of the Mongols before they took Asia by storm. It might even indicate an ideology that the Mongols had no real right to this area, that it rightfully belonged to the Turks, who were the children of its earth rather than a foreign import. Such an interpretation could be supported by the story of the initial conflict as given in the origin legend: Chinggis Khān's son snatched his Turkish master's

<sup>105</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227; idem, *Durar al-tijān*, 63. See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 128.

<sup>106</sup>Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ismā‘īl Abū Shāmah, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-al-sābi‘ al-ma‘rūf bi-al-Dhayl ‘alā al-rawḍatayn* (Cairo, 1947), 208. See also Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u-t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:24ff.

<sup>107</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, vol. 8, ed. Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo, 1971), 51. See also David Ayalon, “The Great Yāsa of Chingiz Khān: A Reexamination (Part C1), The Position of the Yāsa in the Mamluk Sultanate,” *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972): 121; Haarmann, “Mongols and Mamluks,” 167.

<sup>108</sup>For an interesting analysis of women's roles (and the lack thereof) in medieval origin legends, see Walter Pohl, “Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, 2004), 23–43; Geary, *Women at the Beginning*.



hunting bird off the swan and gave it to his own, taking for himself what was his lord's by right.

This episode further serves as an explanation for the continued enmity between the Turks and the Mongols: taking what rightfully belonged to the Turks culminated in a war between the two peoples, which ended in the Mongol takeover of the Turkish throne. That it was specifically the *Turkish* throne they took, and not another, is phrased particularly expressively in *Durar al-tījān*: “Chinggis Khan slit the throat of the Alṭun Khān *on his throne*, and then sat *on his throne*, and wore *his crown*, and ruled *his kingdom*.”<sup>109</sup> This representation of the events in Central Asia in the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century also provides the reader with an explanation for the continued enmity between the Turkish Mamluks and the ethnically closely related Mongols, in addition to the contemporary Mongol threat to Mamluk-held lands. As such, the Turkish and Mongol origin legends aim to explain not only their shared heritage, but also their relations in the time of the Mongol conquests.

Such discussions of interethnic relations are frequently visible in origin stories, especially when triggered by contemporary political circumstances.<sup>110</sup> This function of the story also corresponds to one of the elements Herwig Wolfram has described as typical in the structure of a medieval European *origo gentis*: the so-called primordial event or deed (*fait primordial*). This *fait primordial* is often the crossing of a body of water—medieval European origin stories tend to have a strong element of migration—or waging war against a stronger enemy over whom they triumph (or a combination of those two). In case of war or battle as primordial deed, that enemy remains the people's foremost adversary.<sup>111</sup> We see the same mechanism in this *origo gentis* of the Mongols: the battle against the Turks functions as the Mongols' *fait primordial*, and the enemy they fight at that stage remains their primary adversary in the eyes of their contemporaries.

## Circulating Stories on the Mongols

This *fait primordial* thus explains the basis for the continued enmity between Mongols and Turks. As Haarmann pointed out, the origin stories of the Turks and the Mongols were initially two independent stories that were connected at a later stage, supposedly going back to Jibrīl ibn Bukhtishū' and Sulaymān al-

<sup>109</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tījān*, 71. See also *Kanz al-durar*, 7:237. Emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup>Pohl and Mahoney, “Editorial.”

<sup>111</sup>Herwig Wolfram, “Le genre de l'*Origo gentis*,” *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990): 800–1. See also idem, “Origo et Religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts,” *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994): 35–36; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 360–62. On the topos of migration stories in medieval European origin narratives, see for instance Pohl, “Narratives,” 194–96, 211–12.



Adharbayjānī respectively. Ibn al-Dawādārī presents the latter story as a continuation of the former in the “Turkish book,” but he also emphasizes the connection, adding among other things that “[f]ate made them servants after ruling, humiliating them after glory.”<sup>112</sup> This underlines the explanatory function that *origines gentium* served for a contemporary public, as well as the ability of such stories to be molded to the purposes and demands of contemporary narrators and audiences. The various foreshadowings of the Mongols’ eventual failure to conquer the west of the Islamic world is another case in point—whether these were added by Ibn al-Dawādārī himself or were already extant in the “Turkish book.”

The flexibility of origin stories and the way they could be (re)used is visible in this story on another level as well. In this *origo gentis* as related by Ibn al-Dawādārī, based on Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī’s text, traces can be found that suggest elements from other narratives were apparently circulating and somehow became incorporated into this version of the Mongol origin story—wherever in the Islamic world that may have been. Though this story of the Mongol origin appears to be unique, at least in the surviving sources, numerous elements in this narrative echo other accounts of the history of the Mongols, such as that found in the Mongols’ own *Secret History*, as well as those by the famous Persian historians ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī (d. 681/1283) and Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh (d. 718/1318). To mention just a few examples:

- In the folk etymology for the word “Tatar,” the Tatars mention that they had come into conflict with others “of their ethnicity” (*min jinsinā*), by whom they were wiped out, leaving only the seven refugees mentioned in the origin legend. Rashīd al-Dīn relates that some two thousand years earlier, other Turkic tribes (he considers the Mongols to be a Turkic tribe, for which see below) “overcame the Mongol tribes and so slaughtered them that no more than two men and two women survived.”<sup>113</sup> These then fled to a harsh place in the mountains, and from them the Mongol tribes descend.<sup>114</sup>
- In this origin legend, the shaman plays a significant role in the appointment of Chinggis Khan as leader in the episode with the sacrificial stew. A similar role is played by a shaman in Juvaynī’s and Rashīd al-Dīn’s versions of events, who relate how a shaman called Kōkōchu Teb Tenggeri proclaimed him king and gave him the title “Chinggis Khan.”<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 63; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:227. See also Haarmann, “Großer Vater Mond,” 128.

<sup>113</sup>Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:80.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 1:80, 114.

<sup>115</sup>‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭā Malik Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle (Manchester, 1997), 39; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:89–90; ibid., 2:289. Teb Tenggeri is conspicuously absent in this episode in the *Secret History*, which





- The episode in which the Alṭun Khān calls Chinggis Khan to his court as a ruse to kill him sounds similar to an episode in Chinggis Khan's relationship with Ong Khan (d. 1203), his former patron and later enemy—like the Alṭun Khān in this narrative. The *Secret History* relates how Chinggis Khan and his son Jochi had planned an exchange of brides between the two families, but this was shot down by Ong Khan's son Senggüm, who continued to manipulate and eventually managed to turn his father against Chinggis Khan. Senggüm and his group of allies then sent word to Chinggis Khan that Ong Khan offered his daughter in marriage to Jochi, as per request, and invited Chinggis Khan to a celebratory banquet. But one of his old friends, in light of the earlier refusal of the proposal, warned Chinggis that it might well be a ploy to kill him. Chinggis Khan decided not to go, and it indeed it turned out to be a plot.<sup>116</sup>

It is hard to immediately determine which of these elements in the legend found in Ibn al-Dawādārī's text are truly an echo of those "official" works (Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn both wrote in the service of the Ilkhanid Mongols) or, rather, a product of stories about the Mongols or other foreign peoples that were circulating more broadly (whether based on retellings of those official works or otherwise), and which ones may be based upon commonplace motifs, for this origin legend is replete with well-known motifs and symbols. Several of these can be found in Stith Thompson's extensive collection of motifs found in folk literature, primarily drawn from Europe, Asia, the Near East, and the Americas.<sup>117</sup> There is the animal nurse of an abandoned child, well-known from the story of Romulus and Remus, but also found in the traditions of India, Ireland, the Arab world, and elsewhere.<sup>118</sup> It is a motif that usually indicates the exceptional status of a child and its being under divine protection.<sup>119</sup> Another example of a worldwide motif

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focuses instead on his later challenge to Chinggis Khan's leadership and his subsequent death (*Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:168–74; *ibid.*, 2:761).

<sup>116</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:84–88. See also Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:184–85.

<sup>117</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington and London, 1975); E. J. Michael Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (Oxford, 2012), 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 52, 64; *idem*, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:228–29. It is motif number B535, "Animal nurse," in Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 448; Sinor, "Legendary Origin," 239; Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995).

<sup>119</sup> Marc Huys, *The Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth in Euripidean Tragedy: A Study of Motifs* (Leuven, 1995), 289.



found in this story is that of the abduction of a person by an animal,<sup>120</sup> as well as various formulaic numbers.<sup>121</sup> There are two features of this *origo gentis*, however, that suggest that elements from the Mongols' own vision of their origins did in fact make their way into this story, which then also makes it more likely that the examples mentioned above originate there. These two features are the use of the expression “*min ‘azm*” and the motif/tale-type of the unbreakable bundle of arrows.

The phrase “*min ‘azm*” (literally “of the bone [of]”) refers to a common descent. In this *origo gentis* it appears several times. For instance, the soldiers sent to fight Chinggis Khan are described as being “of the bone of the great khan Ulū Ay Aṭāji” (*min ‘azm al-qān al-akbar Ulū Ay Aṭāji*).<sup>122</sup> After killing the Alṭun Khan, Chinggis Khan “killed the rest of those who were of his bone” (*wa-qatala sāʿir man kāna min ‘azmihi*).<sup>123</sup> The term *yasu(n)*, “bone,” is an important kinship term in Mongol tradition. It refers to a common patrilineal line of ancestry.<sup>124</sup> In the *Secret History* it shows up in phrases such as *Merkidei ele yasutu gü’ün-ni*, “any men of Merkit stock.”<sup>125</sup> I am not aware of this being an indigenous expression in Arabic, nor in Persian. In the latter it appears as a Mongolian loanword,<sup>126</sup> and as a calque. Rashid al-Dīn used this terminology when relating Mongol history, stating for instance that “Genghis Khan’s two wives ... were of that ‘bone’” (*ostokhan*),<sup>127</sup> and “The Olqunu’ut clan is all from the ‘bone’ (*ostokhan*) of Olqunut.”<sup>128</sup> Rashid al-Dīn, of course, based his history on Mongol sources, both human and textual.<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere too, this expression appears in a Mongol context in Arabic sources.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 64; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:228. Motif number R13, with the motif of “Person carried off by bird” at R.13.3 (Thompson, *Motif-Index*).

<sup>121</sup> The twelve or twenty-four sons, 360 people, selections of seventy, thirteen, and three, etc. E.g., Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 67, 69–71; idem, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:231–34. Motif number Z71ff, Thompson, *Motif-Index*.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Durar al-tijān*, 71. The corresponding fragment in *Kanz al-durar* reads: “*fa-innahum min ‘azm Ay Aṭām al-kabīr*” (*Kanz al-durar*, 7:236).

<sup>123</sup> Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:237. See also *Durar al-tijān*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:249, 429.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:429.

<sup>126</sup> Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit.*, vol. 1, Mongolische Elementen im Neupersischen (Wiesbaden, 1963), 553.

<sup>127</sup> Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, ed. Muḥammad Rushan and Muṣṭafā Mūsavi (Tehran, 1373 [1994]), 1:86; Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:48.

<sup>128</sup> Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, 1:162; Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘u’t-Tawarikh*, trans. W. M. Thackston, 1:80.

<sup>129</sup> He used many Mongolian terms in his *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, albeit not always entirely correctly: Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente*, 1:44–48.



Ibn Wāṣil, for instance, reporting on Hulegu in Aleppo writes about Hulegu's orders, including that "anyone who is of a person's bone, meaning that he is a paternal relative, will inherit from him" (*wa-kull man kāna min 'aẓm insān ya'nī min 'uṣḃatihi yarithuhu*).<sup>130</sup> The expression appears to be strongly linked to Mongol history, perhaps in particular to the Mongols' own version of it. It would thus appear that this element of the Mongols' own ideas about history and descent has managed to make its way into this outsiders' version of Mongol origins.<sup>131</sup>

Another element in this *origo gentis* that is strongly connected to the Mongols and the stories of their history is, as mentioned above, the story of the unbreakable bundle of arrows contrasted with the fragility of a single arrow, which aims to show that strength is found in unity. The motif is indicated by Thompson as that of the "quarreling sons and the bundle of twigs."<sup>132</sup> In this form it was well known in Asian and Mediterranean traditions, although, as we shall see below, it did become predominantly associated with the Mongols at a later stage. This origin legend contains a similar arrow-related narrative with the same moral but presented in a different manner than usual.

The general pattern of the story is as follows: a parental figure, often on their deathbed, has a number of quarreling sons. The parent challenges them to break twigs (or arrows). While it is easy to break just the one, it is impossible to break the whole bundle: in unity lies strength.<sup>133</sup> In Western Europe, the story is best known from Aesop's fables, but it is also found in Scythian, Tu-yü-hun, and Seljuq traditions, as well as in the *Secret History*.<sup>134</sup> Naturally, the fable is adapted to its respective contexts, so in the Inner Asian nomadic variants, for instance, arrows take the place of twigs or sticks.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Ibn Wāṣil, *Die Chronik des ibn Wasil: Ġamāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Wāṣil, Mufarriḡ al-Kurūb fī Aḥbār Banī Ayyūb: kritische Edition des letzten Teils (646/1248–659/1261) mit Kommentar: Untergang der Ayyubiden und Beginn der Mamlukenherrschaft*, ed. Mohamed Rahim (Wiesbaden, 2010), 201.

<sup>131</sup>I thank Nicholas Kontovas, Gabrielle van den Berg, and Richard van Leeuwen for their input on the matter discussed in this paragraph.

<sup>132</sup>Motif number J1021, Thompson, *Motif-Index*. As a tale-type—a larger unit than a motif, usually a complete narrative with an independent tradition—it is labelled as 910F by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis Der Märchentypen* (Helsinki, 1961).

<sup>133</sup>Larry Moses, "The Quarrelling Sons in the Secret History of the Mongols," *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 395 (1987): 63–64; Jonathan Ratcliffe, "Some Comments on the Longevity of the Fable of the Bundled Arrows in Inner Asian Cultures and Its Reception in the West," *Eurasia Studies Society of Great Britain & Europe Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 2.

<sup>134</sup>Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 1–12; *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:262. For the story in Aesop, see for instance Joseph Jacobs, ed., *The Fables of Aesop: Selected, Told Anew and Their History Traced* (London, 1912), 173.

<sup>135</sup>Moses, "Quarrelling Sons," 64; Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 3–6.



In the *Secret History* the motif is found in the story of Chinggis Khan's female ancestor Alan Qo'a, an important figure in the Mongol historical tradition.<sup>136</sup> She had two sons when her husband, Dobun Mergen, died, but after his death she had three more sons. The two sons she had before widowhood criticized their mother behind her back and suggested that their three brothers were the offspring of a male servant. Alan Qo'a was well aware of their talk, and one day she sat all five of her sons down and handed each of them an arrow. She ordered them to break them, which they did.<sup>137</sup> "Then she tied five arrow-shafts into a bundle and gave it to them saying, 'Break it!' The five sons each took the five bound arrow-shafts in turn, but they were unable to break them."<sup>138</sup> She warned them that the arrow-shafts were like them: if they were to keep to themselves, they would all be easily broken, but "[i]f, like the bound arrow-shafts, you remain together and of one mind, how can anyone deal with you so easily?"<sup>139</sup> This story is then referenced on several occasions by later female actors in the *Secret History*.<sup>140</sup>

Ratcliffe argues that these "bundle of twig" fables are repeatedly placed in the mouths of integral cultural founders in order to encourage the solidarity required in the familial structure of their nomadic political rulership.<sup>141</sup> In this vein, he also points to the motif of biological unity found throughout the *Secret History* in relation to this story, and argues that the "deathbed' element" is also present in this version, as Alan Qo'a's death is related immediately after the telling of this story.<sup>142</sup> The Seljuq version, reconstructed through Persian texts, is something of an anomaly in this regard. Ṭughril Beg gives arrows to his brother rather than his sons, and he is not dying. It is still, however, a matter of biological connection with an emphasis on the importance of solidarity within the family for rulership: the story is told in the context of a peace treaty among Ṭughril Beg, his brothers, and his uncles.<sup>143</sup> Juvaynī included a version of the fable in his Mongol history, which he likely based on Mongol sources that would have been familiar with the story of Alan Qo'a. In his version of the story, however, Chinggis Khan is the one demonstrating the importance of unity to his sons through the parable of the bundled arrows, again in a clearly familial power structure. Juvaynī himself reflects on this moral of familial unity by stating that the Mongols abided by this

<sup>136</sup> *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 1:244.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:1–4.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:5.

<sup>140</sup> Moses, "Quarrelling Sons."

<sup>141</sup> Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 2, 15, 19.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.



principle, with one man at the helm but with his relatives all having their share of power and wealth.<sup>144</sup>

In the story that Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī relates, which has reached us through Ibn al-Dawādārī, the arrows do not represent Chinggis Khan's immediate family but rather the entire clan. Additionally, there is clearly no "deathbed" element present. This might suggest that the version in the story that reached Ibn al-Dawādārī was compiled in an environment distant from the nomads of the Eurasian steppe, one where the substratum of this tale-type was absent. That, in turn, suggests the possibility that it was the arrival of the Mongols that introduced the story to the part of the Islamic world where Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī put it to paper. More importantly, however, it shows that the story of the bundle of arrows had become intimately connected to the Mongols. Not only did the Mongols themselves employ the fable, it also appears in an altered version in this explanatory story of the rise of the Mongols for a clearly non-Mongol public. In Europe, too, the story had become linked to the Mongols in general and to Chinggis Khan in particular.<sup>145</sup> This perceived connection between the Mongols and this story in the Islamic world is emphasized in Ibn al-Dawādārī's statement, commenting on the story in *Kanz al-durar*, that Chinggis Khan "was the first to use this parable."<sup>146</sup>

The story of the bundle of arrows was an important one to the Mongols themselves: it was included in the *Secret History*, of course, but Ratcliffe argues that its use in Juvaynī illustrates the importance of the fable to Mongol political identity.<sup>147</sup> The presence of the parable of the bundle of arrows in the origin legend at hand is another example of how an existing part of an origin story can be molded into new versions—new stories with new purposes. Parts of the Mongol origin legend were thus first used by the Mongols themselves, and later by others *about* them. Similarly, the use of the term "bone" (*azm*) in this text and elsewhere suggests the influence of a Mongol basis somewhere in the history of the *origo gentis*. This means that the other story elements mentioned above—familiar, albeit in somewhat different forms, from the "official" Mongol histories—may well be similar echoes of stories that were circulating about the Mongols in the Islamic world at this time. From here, they made their way into Sulaymān al-Adharbayjānī's story, which was then used by Ibn al-Dawādārī. For now—at least until we learn more about al-Adharbayjānī, his background and sources—it is hard to pinpoint

<sup>144</sup>Juvaynī, *Genghis Khan*, 41–42. He briefly recalls the story on pp. 593–94. As Ratcliffe also points out, this version of the fable lacks the "deathbed" element (Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 16–17).

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>146</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:233.

<sup>147</sup>Ratcliffe, "Some Comments," 16.



the exact processes behind the formation of this narrative.<sup>148</sup> It does, however, again demonstrate the flexibility and dynamism of such stories to be reshaped into new versions as required by the demands and purposes of other audiences and authors, which could then serve to explain and interpret contemporary phenomena and events, as this origin legend did for the Mongols.

## Concluding Remarks

The peace treaty concluded by the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd did not immediately result in a dissolution of the fear the Mongols instilled in the inhabitants of the central Islamic lands, let alone in a diminishment of their interest in them. This is evidenced by the attention that Ibn al-Dawādārī paid to them in general, and by his inclusion of this origin story in particular, which the author says he discovered in the aforementioned “Turkish book” and clearly found fascinating. In general, the passages in which this story is contained in his works constitute a rich source of information on various topics, giving insight, for instance, into book culture and reading in the Mamluk sultanate. Similarly, its contents (and Ibn al-Dawādārī’s own interpolations in particular) give a good picture of images of the Mongols that were current in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, on which I focus in my Ph.D. dissertation.

At this point, many questions about this specific origin legend remain open: its sources, its transmission, and its circulation, to name but a few. Nonetheless, the study of this origin legend contributes to a better understanding of the genre of *origines gentium* in general, which has in the past been strongly focused on narratives from Greek and Latin Antiquity and medieval Europe. This particular story served to offer explanations for the Mongols’ origins, the causes of their “exodus,” other historical events such as their defeat at the hands of the Mamluks, and some of their habits and characteristics. Some of these elements are very subtle, others decidedly less so. At the same time, the narrative contains echoes of the Mongols’ own interpretation of their history, and those of their vassals. These stories about the Mongols, such as that of the bundle of arrows, must have circulated within the Islamic world, whence they found their way into this *origo gentis* where they served a purpose of their own. Contemporary concerns are thus reflected in a narrative on the beginnings of a foreign, relatively unknown people. The purpose that *origines gentium* of one’s own people serve—explaining causes and essences, thereby explaining the present and the future through the prism of the past—is the same as that of an *origo gentis* related about an outside group. This origin legend of the Mongols is therefore an excellent case study of the ex-

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<sup>148</sup>Oral lore does appear to play a significant role in the spread of some origin stories (Pohl and Mahoney, “Editorial,” 189) which may well have been the case here as well.



planatory function of *origines gentium*, also when it concerns a foreign people, as well as of the dynamism and flexibility of these stories, which allows them to be adapted to new contexts and for this interpretative role in particular.

As mentioned above, relatively little attention has been paid to the genre of *origines gentium* in Islamicate texts. An analysis of the sort that has been done for antique and medieval European stories remains a desideratum for their counterparts circulating in the premodern Islamic world, not only to study the traditions of origin legends in Islamic culture, but also because of the potential insight a comparative perspective has to offer. Some of the recurring elements of European *origines gentium* as described by Wolfram are present in this legend, including the typical *fait primordial* as well as the divine guidance that appears in the election of Chinggis Khan. A thorough comparative study of *origines gentium* from all over—at least—Eurasia might well be very helpful to further analyze the genre, also with regard to common motifs. This way, we may be able to learn not only “the wondrous event and strange thing” that is the story of the Turks and Mongols,<sup>149</sup> or those of other peoples, but shed light on many other aspects of the genre as a whole.

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<sup>149</sup>Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, 7:217.

