The Qara Khitai

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Summary and Keywords

The Qara Khitai or Western Liao dynasty (1124–1218) ruled in Central Asia in the period that preceded the rise of Chinggis Khan. Founded by Khitan refugees who escaped from north China when the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234) vanquished their Khitan Liao dynasty (907–1125), they soon carved out for themselves a multicultural empire in Central Asia that combined Chinese, nomadic, and Muslim elements. Vanquishing the Qarakhanids and the Seljuks and making the Khwārazm Shāhs, the Gaochang Uighurs, and various Mongolian tribes their vassals, at its height the Qara Khitai Empire stretched from the Oxus to the Altai Mountains (namely, from Uzbekistan to western Mongolia including most of Xinjiang, China). Their biggest victory in 1141 against the Seljuks even became the basis for the legend of Prester John. Practicing religious tolerance and mostly indirect rule—leaving local rulers largely intact apart from in their capital Balāsāghūn (Burana, Kyrgyzstan)—and, using their Chinese and nomadic cultural capital, the Sinicized Buddhist nomads ruled over their heterogeneous but mostly Muslim sedentary population in rare harmony. The aging dynasty, however, could not survive the repercussions of Chinggis Khan's rise, which coincided with the bolstering of the Khwārazm Shāh's power. In the early 13th century, after a Naiman prince who had escaped from Chinggis Khan usurped the Qara Khitai throne, the Mongols vanquished the Qara Khitai, incorporating most of their troops into the Mongol army and channeling their skilled subject population for imperial needs. A scion of the Qara Khitai established the Muslim Qutlughkhanid dynasty of Kirman (south Persia, 1222–1306) that ruled under Mongol and later Ilkhanid aegis.

Keywords: Qara Khitai, Khitans, Liao dynasty, Central Asia, China, nomads, Islam, Khwārazm Shāhs, Mongol Empire, Jin dynasty

The Qara Khitai or Western Liao西遼 dynasty (1124–1218) is the only dynasty that did not rule any part of China proper but is still considered a Chinese dynasty by both Chinese and Muslim historiography. Founded by Khitan refugees who escaped from north China when the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234) vanquished their Khitan Liao dynasty (907–1125), the Qara Khitai ruled over Central Asia in the period that preceded the rise of Chinggis Khan, their multicultural empire combining Chinese, Khitan, Inner Asian, and Islamic elements. Moreover, the Sinicized Buddhist nomads ruled over a mostly Muslim and

sedentary population in rare harmony. The dynasty existed for nearly ninety years and was finally vanquished by the Mongols.

From Liao to Western Liao: Yelü Dashi and the Founding of the Qara Khitai

The Khitans, pastoral nomads originating in the eastern slopes of the Khingan Mountains separating Mongolia and southern Manchuria, appear in Chinese sources since the 4th century.[1] During the Tang era (618–907), they alternated as allies of both the Tang and the Turks (mid-6th–mid-8th centuries) or the Uighurs (744–840), absorbing political culture from both China and the steppe. In the early 10th century, making use of the fall of the Tang and the lack of nomadic empire in Mongolia since the Uighurs' collapse, the Khitans established the Liao dynasty (907–1125). They took over Manchuria and subdued most of Mongolia. In 938, they obtained the cession of sixteen prefectures of north China in the region of modern Beijing from the northern Chinese state of Jin (晉 not to be confused with the later Jurchen Jin 金). These prefectures were a constant bone of contention between the Khitans and the rising Han Chinese Song dynasty (960–1279), which attempted to unify China.

In 1005, after several decades of border warfare, the Liao and the Song concluded a peace treaty. The treaty of Shanyuan, in which the Song agreed to give the Liao a considerable annual payment, also clearly demarcated the border between the two states, leaving the sixteen prefectures in the Liao's hands. The treaty was concluded in terms of parity, defining both the Liao and Song emperors as legitimate Sons of Heaven, in contrast to the traditional Chinese world order. The treaty not only set the stage for the two empires' peaceful coexistence throughout most of the 11th century but also brought much wealth and prestige to the Liao. It received tribute from its East Asian neighbors Korea and the Tangut Empire of the Xi Xia (1032–1227), centered in the modern northwest China (Ningxia and Gansu), and used the Song annual payment as a basis for extensive commerce with lands to the west, in Central Asia and beyond. Therefore, *Khitai* (Cathay), the Turkic form of the ethnonym "Khitan," became associated with China across Eurasia.

But while Chinese features were an integral part of the Liao imperial culture, it also included Khitan and Buddhist facets. The Liao created two Khitan scripts, still only partially deciphered, that were used side by side with Chinese (and sometimes Turkic) and a unique, sophisticated material culture, in which gold played a central role. Throughout their reign, most of the Khitans remained nomads, and their emperor, who bore also the Turkic title *khan* (or *khaqan*, great khan), moved throughout the year among his seasonal camps (*nabo*) and the five capitals of his kingdom, his mobile court (*ordo*) following closely behind. An essential feature of the Liao imperial culture was the combination of Chinese and Khitan characteristics, the latter closer to the steppe tradition. This blend was also apparent in the Liao dual administration: the northern branch of the administration controlled the affairs of the nomads, Khitans and others, in a typical nomadic way, while the southern branch handled the affairs of the sedentary population, mostly Chinese and

Bohai, through a Chinese-like bureaucracy. To cement their heterogeneous population, the Liao used Buddhism, which was also instrumental in their relations with their many Buddhist neighbors, simultaneously retaining their indigenous Khitan religion.

This system worked well for nearly two hundred years. But in the early 12th century, the declining power of Liao emperors, combined with natural disasters, a harsh climate, and the resulting economic difficulties prompted the Jurchens, a north Manchurian subject tribe, to rebel. In 1114, a full-scale war broke out between the Khitans and the Jurchens, eventually resulting in the establishment of the Jurchen Jin dynasty, which succeeded the Liao in 1125.[2] Even before the final dissolution of the Liao, Jurchen military superiority induced one Khitan prince, Yelü Dashi, to flee westward, thereby launching the history of the Western Liao.

Little is known about the background of the Qara Khitai founder. Yelü Dashi was a member of the Yelü royal clan of the Khitan, an eighth-generation descendant of Abaoji (r. 907–926), the Liao's founder, but nothing is known about his more immediate family. He received the dual education typical of the Liao elite, namely was well versed in riding and archery but also in the Khitan and Chinese scripts. In 1115, he even received the title *Jinshi*, awarded to those who passed the last stage of the Chinese imperial examinations.[3] From then on, he filled various offices in the Liao administration and military, especially on the Liao-Song border. But as Dashi rose in the imperial bureaucracy, the Liao was losing more and more ground to the Jurchens. In 1115, the Jurchen leader, Aguda (r. 1115–1123), proclaimed himself emperor of the new Jin dynasty and began establishing his authority over former Liao regions in Manchuria. The Khitan emperor, Tianzuo (r. 1101–1125), proved incompetent in dealing with the Jurchen challenge. His disappointed clan members attempted to replace him with more suitable candidates. Tianzuo managed to avert such mutinies in 1115 and 1122, but each time involved annihilating and alienating a significant part of the Khitan elite, some of whom deserted to the Jin, and encouraged unrest among the Khitan subjects. It also facilitated the rise of a relatively marginal clan member like Dashi.

In 1122, Dashi was among the Khitan notables who, in a third and successful mutiny, enthroned Yelü Chun (r. 1122), Tianzuo's talented relative, after the emperor had run away from the approaching Jurchens. Chun became the emperor of the Northern Liao, whose center, however, was at the Liao southern capital, Yanjing (modern Beijing), near the Song border. Dashi's familiarity with the region came in handy when the Song, trying to benefit from the Liao turmoil, attacked Yanjing in 1122. Dashi managed to defeat them several times, a success that secured him a leading position among the Northern Liao. However, when Chun died a few months afterward and the Jurchens were approaching Yanjing, Dashi decided to return to Tianzuo. The Liao emperor found refuge in the Yin Mountains near the Liao-Xia border. Despite Dashi's role in Chun's enthronement, Tianzuo welcomed the experienced commander who arrived with a few thousand warriors. In 1123, Dashi, fighting for Tianzuo, was captured by the Jin, and even led their attack on his monarch. Five months later, and despite tempting Jurchen offers, he escaped back to Tianzuo. Soon afterward, perhaps afraid of the emperor's revenge and aware of

the latter's unrealistic plan to attack the Jin without enough preparation, Dashi deserted the emperor for good. In 1124, he declared himself king, an act that symbolized the beginning of the Western Liao, and headed westward with a small retinue. He marched to Kedun 可敦 (also Zhenzhou, modern Khermen Denzh in central Mongolia), the Liao's westernmost garrison post, hoping to recuperate for subsequently restoring the Liao to its former domains.[4]

In Kedun, Dashi gained many adherents among the local nomads and the city's garrison (which in the Liao heyday numbered twenty thousand soldiers), but failed in his diplomatic efforts to enlist the neighboring East Asian polities' support against the Jin. During these years, the Jurchens not only eliminated the Liao (1125) but also conquered most of north China from the Song dynasty (1127). Aware both of his inability to challenge the Jin and the relative weakness of the Central Asian kingdoms, he thus decided to continue farther west.

Central Asia offered richer resources (as compared to Mongolia), access to commercial routes, and political fragmentation. The Liao maintained close commercial and diplomatic relations with some of the main Central Asian kingdoms, such as the Buddhist Uighurs of Gaochang (near modern Turfan, Xinjiang), and the Muslim Qarakhanids, especially the Eastern Qarakhanids (1041–1205) who ruled the Tarim Basin and Semirechye (modern south Xinjiang, Kyrgyzstan, and parts of south Kazakhstan). Moreover, Liao border tribes, like those that had joined Dashi, were familiar with the "western" terrain and politics due to their occasional raids into Central Asia.[5] A more immediate reason for the move was probably Dashi's fear of a severe Jurchen reaction to his provocations in 1129–1130, when his troops had raided several Jin camps.

In early 1130, Dashi therefore left Kedun, heading westward with a modest force. Despite a series of setbacks, including defeats from the Yenisei Qïrgïz and the Eastern Qarakhanids in Kashgar, and severing his relations with the Gaochang Uighurs, he managed to establish a base on the Emil River (north Xinjiang, near the Irtish River) and to make the best out of the withdrawal of the Jurchen force that was sent against Kedun. Arriving in 1131, after Dashi had left, the Jin force dispersed, and some of its troops even joined Dashi. Portraying this as a huge victory, Dashi gathered new supporters. Around late 1131, he therefore adopted his first reign title (*yanqing*, receiving good luck) and was enthroned as both a Chinese emperor and as Gürkhan, universal khan, a new Turco-Khitan title.[6] This double titulature, bore by all Western Liao rulers, played a major part in their legitimation.

From Emil, Dashi slowly expanded westward to the Qarluq cities of Almalïq (modern Yining, north Xinjiang) and Qayalïq (modern Kopal, south Kazakhstan), gradually building his reputation as a regional leader. As such, he was summoned by the Eastern Qarakhanid khan to help him against the Qarluq and Qanglï tribes in his army. In 1134, Dashi entered the Qarakhanid capital, Balāsāghūn (Burana, Kyrgyzstan), and took over the city without a fight. Degrading the Qarakhanid khan and exiling him to Kashgar, he made Balāsāghūn the new Qara Khitai capital, as it remained throughout their rule. This was a major

achievement for the Western Liao. To mark it, Dashi took a new reign title (*kangguo*, the country pacified) and broadened his realm eastward and southward, taking over the whole Eastern Qarakhanid realm and sending governors to the Yenisei Qïrghïz and the Uighurs in Beshbalïq as well as submitting rebellious tribes. He was also joined, allegedly, by ten thousand Khitan mercenaries, previously serving the Qarakhanids, and strove to revive the local economy.[7] From this new standpoint, he also sent an allegedly large expedition against the Jin, but as it ended in a fiasco, Dashi instead decided to focus on the West.

The Qara Khitai's continued advance westward to the fertile Farghana valley resulted in open conflict with the Western Qarakhanids. In 1137, Dashi defeated the Western Qarakhanid khan, Maḥmūd (r. *c*. 1135/6–1141), in Khujand (north Tajikistan). The latter retreated to his capital Samarqand, and summoned his overlord, the Seljuk sultan Sanjar (r. 1118–1157). Dashi, however, withdrew beyond the Jaxartes and did not re-enter Transoxania until 1141, when he was summoned by either the Qarluqs in the Qarakhanid armies or Sanjar's rebellious vassal the Khwārazm Shāh Atsïz, to intervene against Sanjar. The two armies met on September 9, 1141, in the Qaṭwān steppe near Samarqand. The overconfident Seljuk army was badly defeated, with the humiliated Sanjar barely escaping to Tirmidh, leaving his wife and top commanders as captives.

This huge victory brought the vast and fertile Transoxania into the Qara Khitai realm, making the Western Qarakhanids their vassals. In 1142, the Khwārazm Shāhs also accepted the Qara Khitai's overlordship, further increasing their power and prestige. The Muslim defeat by their non-Muslim enemy reached even Europe and gave a boost to the legend of Prester John, the Christian priest-king who was supposed to have hastened to the aid of his coreligionists in Palestine (the Crusaders) from his remote Asian kingdom.[8]

Dashi did not have long to enjoy his victory, but when he died in 1143, he was ruling a vast Central Asian empire that stretched from the Oxus to the Altai Mountains and, until 1175, even farther eastward into the territory of the Naiman and the Yenisei Qïrghïz, namely most of modern Xinjiang, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and south Kazakhstan, and to western Mongolia. The population of this empire was multiethnic and heterogeneous. Apart from the Khitans, who were a small minority in their empire, it was mainly composed of Turks (including Uighurs), Iranians, Mongols, and a few Han Chinese. Most of the population was sedentary and Muslim, although there was a considerable nomadic component (including the Khitans), as well as flourishing Buddhist, Nestorian, and even Jewish communities.

The organization of this empire was mostly Dashi's creation. The empire was divided into two main domains: the central territory, organized around the Qara Khitai capital, Balāsāghūn, and directly ruled by the Gürkhan-Emperor; and the subject kingdoms (the Gaochang Uighurs, the Eastern and Western Qarakhanids, and Khwārazm, a more "outer vassal" than the other states) and subject tribes (the Qarluqs, holding power in Qayalïq and Almalïq and scattered as mercenaries across the empire and, until 1175, the Naiman and the Qanglï) that were ruled indirectly. Qara Khitai indirect rule was minimal: The lo-

cal dynasties remained mainly intact, and most preserved their rulers, titles, and armies. No permanent Qara Khitai army was stationed in the subject territories, whose duties included paying annual tribute, supplying troops in case of need, and acknowledging the Gürkhan's authority by carrying his seals and tables of authority (*paizi*). The Gürkhan's representatives, either commissioners (known as *shiḥna* [Persian], *shaojian* [Chinese], or *basqaq* [Turkic]) stationed in the subject kingdoms and tribes or emissaries, were mainly responsible for collecting taxes and tributes, though in a few cases local dignitaries carried the tribute to Balāsāghūn. While the Qara Khitai emissaries were mainly Khitans of noble origin or high officials in the central administration, their commissioners came from the subjects' ranks and, moreover, professed the prevalent religious belief of the respective territory (e.g., Buddhists in Gaochang, Muslims in Samarqand). Such commissioners also collected taxes, according to census, in the Qara Khitai's central territory.[9]

The Qara Khitai's standing army resided in peacetime in the central territory. Unlike most tribal armies, this army was salaried. Moreover, the salaries were paid in cash or kind alone, not by appanages. This method of payment attracted many nomads to the Gürkhan's ranks and enabled him to keep his troops under relatively strict control, yet it also laid a huge burden on the Gürkhan's treasury. After Dashi's time, this induced the Qara Khitai to hire out their troops for their vassals' wars in return for a generous payment. The multiethnic, decimally organized army was led by noble Khitans (of the Yelü or Xiao clans), comprised mainly of light mounted archers, and included also a royal guard. It could quickly reach from the central territory to the empire's frontiers, but this arrangement, combined with the Qara Khitai's continued interest in the East, limited the empire's expansion westward. This partly explains why the Qara Khitai did not continue to expand after Qaṭwān.[10]

The Middle Period: The Reign of Yelü Yilie and the Empresses (1143–1177)

The era between Dashi's demise and the rise of the last Gürkhan is by far the least documented in Qara Khitai history. During this period, the Qara Khitai were ruled by Dashi's widow, Xiao Tabuyan (1143–1150); their son, Yelü Yilie (1151–1163); and his sister, Yelü Pusuwan (1163–1177). Chinese sources describe the empresses as mere regents, but unlike other Chinese regents, they had their own reign titles. Moreover, their further titles (Gürkhan, Dashi [after the Qara Khitai founder]) and Muslim accounts all vouch for their unlimited authority. Apart from female rule, major trends in this period were the growing conflict between nomads and the state, within and without the empire, as well as the Qara Khitai's struggle with their new vassal state of Khwārazm that was trying to assert its independence.

Dashi was succeeded by his wife, Xiao Tabuyan, later known as Empress Gantian, who adopted the reign title *Xianging*, "completely virtuous." She coped successfully with attempts, from both east and west, to undermine the Qara Khitai authority after Dashi's demise. Notably, she executed the Jin emissary who in 1146 haughtily came to suggest

"peace," which actually meant submission. Thus, unlike the contemporary polities (the Song, the Xi Xia, and the Mongols), the Qara Khitai, though by now firmly located in Central Asia, were not ready to recognize Jin's superiority, nor were they afraid of challenging it.

Tabuyan was succeeded in 1151 by her son, Yelü Yilie, who ruled under the reign title *Xuxing* (續興 "continuous flourishing") and was known as Emperor Renzong.[11] He conducted a census of people more than eighteen years old (i.e., recruitable), where it was found that there were 84,500 households in all, a small number, which probably refers only to the Qara Khitai's central territory. The census might have been connected to another attempt to challenge the Jin. Indeed, in 1156, a Jin commander had run into a small group of Yilie's troops near Kedun (Hedong) in Mongolia, but they quickly withdrew, perhaps due to the events in the West.

In the early 1150s, the Khitans benefited from the wars in Khurasan, which involved the Ghuzz (Oghuz) nomads, the Seljuks, and the Qara Khitai vassals: the Khwārazm Shāhs and the Western Qarakhanids. The Ghuzz, who had relocated to Khurasan following the battle of Qaṭwān, and once again after raiding Bukhara in 1144, wrought havoc in the province. Imprisoning Sanjar in an iron cage, they accelerated the disintegration of the Seljuk state, thereby facilitating the rise of the Khwārazm Shāhs. In the later 1150s, the atrocities reached Transoxania. In early 1156, the Qarluqs in the Western Qarakhanid army murdered their khan, the Gürkhan-appointee Ibrahim Tamghaj Khan (r. 1141–1156). His brother, Chaghrï Khan (r. 1157–1161), reacted by killing one of the Qarluq leaders and threatening the others. Some Qarluq leaders fled to Khwārazm, pleading for help from the new, ambitious Khwārazm Shāh Il Arslan (r. 1156–1172). When the latter entered Transoxania in summer 1158, the Western Qarakhanid khan found refuge in the Samarqand citadel and asked for the Gürkhan's help. The Qara Khitai sent to his aid Ilig Turkmen, probably the Eastern Qarakhanid ruler, who managed to restore peace with the mediation of the Samarqandi religious elite. The Qarluqs were restored to their former domains, and Il Arslan returned to Khwārazm. Yet the Qarluq-Qarakhanid conflict erupted again in early 1161. The Qarluqs took over parts of Transoxania and threatened the new Western Qarakhanid khan, Mas^{c}ūd son of Ḥasan (r. 1161–1170/1). In response, the Gürkhan ordered Mas^{c}ūd in late 1163 or early 1164 to drive the Qarluqs from Transoxania to Kashgar, where they were supposed to engage in agriculture and refrain from taking up arms. The Qarluqs refused to leave and tried to take over Bukhara, but Mas^{c}ūd managed to drive them away from Transoxania, thereby putting an end to the conflict.

The (unimplemented) resettlement of the Qarluqs was probably one of the first decisions of the new Gürkhan: Yilie died abruptly in 1163 and was succeeded by his sister, Yelü Pusuwan, known as Empress Chengtian, who ruled under the reign title *chongfu* ("exalted happiness"). Her succession is ascribed to the explicit will of Yilie, whose sons were still minors. Such lateral succession by a daughter was certainly an exception, even among the Khitans, known for the high position of their royal women. It probably had to do not

only with the unique prestige of Yelü Dashi's immediate family but also with the position of Pusuwan's father-in-law, Xiao Wolila, a leading general in Dashi's troops.

The new Gürkhan-empress came to power with much vigor, turning most of her attention westward. In 1165, the Qara Khitai took part in Mas^{c}ūd 's invasion against the Ghuzz in Khurasan, taking over the city of Balkh, which remained under Qara Khitai overlordship until 1198. The Qara Khitai crossed the Oxus once more in 1171/1172 to fight again the Khwārazm Shāh Il Arslan who, while meddling in the Khurasanid affairs, neglected to pay his dues. Badly defeating the Khwarizmian army, whose shāh died soon afterward, the Qara Khitai returned to Transoxania, but soon found themselves deeply involved in the ongoing succession struggle in Khwārazm. Il Arslan's two sons, Tekesh and Sulṭān Shāh, both coveted the throne. Tekesh, the older brother but not the chosen heir, asked for Qara Khitai help, promising them a share in Khwārazm's treasuries and an extended annual tribute. The empress sent her husband, Xiao Duolubu (known in the Muslim sources as *fūmā* [Chinese: *fuma* 駙馬 "Imperial son-in-law"]), to his aid with a huge army. The Qara Khitai force enabled Tekesh to ascend the throne in December 1172, while his brother had escaped.[12] Tekesh sent the *fuma* home with great pomp, but after establishing himself in Khwārazm, enraged by the continuous financial demands of the Qara Khitai's emissaries, in the mid-1170s he killed the Qara Khitai's chief envoy, a royal scion, and ordered the elimination of every Qara Khitai who arrived in Khwārazm. The empress responded by summoning Tekesh's brother, Sulṭān Shāh, from Khurasan, and sending her husband once more to Khwārazm, this time to depose Tekesh.

Simultaneously, the Qara Khitai also had to cope with unrest among their eastern vassal tribes. This ended in 1175 with the Naiman's and Qanglï's surrender to the Jin, thereby considerably contracting the northern and eastern frontiers of the Khitans' realm. Despite this setback, the Qara Khitai did not give up their eastern ambitions. In 1177, the Jin caught four Qara Khitai spies. Afraid of "a border catastrophe" and a possible Western Liao-Xia alliance, the Jurchens exiled eastward, to Manchuria, myriads of their Khitan subjects who had resided near their western border, and closed an important border market on the Xia-Jin frontier for four years. Whatever plans the Qara Khitai might have had, however, they were all delayed due to a palace scandal. Empress Chengtian, who had gallantly sent her husband to fight in Khwārazm, started in his absence an affair with his younger brother. She intended to get rid of her husband to spend more time with her lover, but her father-in-law foiled her plans: in 1177, Xiao Wolila surrounded the palace with his troops and executed both the empress and her lover, his younger son. Wolila was probably instrumental in installing the new, and last, Gürkhan, Yilie's son Zhilugu (r. 1178–1211).

While this survey may give the impression of frequent atrocities, one should bear in mind that many of the conflicts took place outside the empire's borders or on its margins. Most of the empire—Xinjiang (i.e., Gaochang and the Eastern Qarakhanid realm), Semirechye, and Farghana—was relatively peaceful since the late 1130s and up to the very end of the 12th century. Even Transoxania fared much better than neighboring Khurasan. The Qara Khitai's sensitivity to the needs of the sedentary population due to their Chinese experi-

ence, and their ability to control the nomads in their realm for most of their reign, allowed them to secure relative prosperity and stability in Central Asia. This is attested by literary and archaeological evidence, which reveals growing urbanism, a highly monetarized economy (in which most coins were minted by the Qara Khitai's vassals), developed agriculture, thriving commerce (especially with the East), and a high level of artisanship. All this became harder to maintain in Zhilugu's reign.

The Fall: Between the Khwārazm Shāh and the Mongols

Zhilugu ruled for thirty-four turbulent years under the reign title *tianxi* ("heavenly blessing"). After the scandal, he had to assert his authority among his family, generals, and provincial cadres, who manipulated the central power's weakness to increase their impositions on the subject population, in contrast to the Qara Khitai's former policies. Their behavior encouraged Qara Khitai vassals to look for other lords, especially when alternative powers were rising east and west of Balāsāghūn.

The first menace was Khwārazm. By Zhilugu's coronation, a huge Qara Khitan army headed by the late empress's husband was accompanying Sulṭān Shāh to Khwārazm. Tekesh managed to check its advance by flooding the Oxus dams. Alarmed and disillusioned about Sulṭān Shāh's popularity, the *fuma* withdrew, but for a generous sum of money, he agreed to leave behind a segment of his troops. These contingents fought on Sulṭān Shāh's side in Khurasan until 1181, in what was the westernmost involvement of the Qara Khitai. The support of the rebel Khwārazmian prince had its price, however, as Tekesh let his troops raid Qara Khitai pastures, such as Talas (modern south Kazakhstan, in the central territory), and in 1182 personally attacked Bukhara. The opposition of the city's population to his "liberation" hastened his withdrawal. While no Qara Khitai reaction to these provocations is recorded, a sort of rapprochement must have taken place after Sulṭān Shāh's death in 1193, since later on Tekesh dutifully paid his tribute to the Qara Khitai, focusing his ambitions on the central Islamic lands.

In the late 1180s to early 1190s, the Qara Khitai might have been again involved in the East. Around 1186, they tried to ally with the Tanguts against the Jin or at least secure their approval to advance Khitan troops through the Tangut realm, a plan that aroused great expectations in the Song court but came to nothing. That the Jin decided to take precautions against both the Qara Khitai and the Mongol tribes around that time suggests that the Qara Khitai were involved in Mongolia, where the future Chinggis Khan was engaged in internecine wars. The Western Liao provided a temporary refuge to Toghril Khan, the Kerayit leader (Chinggis Khan's patron, ally, and then rival, known later as Ong Khan). Yet from Toghril's fallout with the Gürkhan and his return to Mongolia in 1196 and up to 1208, namely during the critical stages in Chinggis Khan's accession, there is no record of their involvement in Mongolia (although Muslim merchants from

their realm traded there). This might have been related to the new western menace of the Ghūrids.

The Ghūrids (*c*. 1100–1215), an Iranian dynasty centered in Ghur in central Afghanistan, were involved in Khurasan since the mid-12th century. In 1186, they put an end to the dwindling Ghaznawids (944–1186) that they had squeezed to Lahore, and renewed their ambitions in Khurasan. They were involved with Sulṭān Shāh, whom they first brought into their domestic feuds and later confronted. Numismatic evidence suggests that they held a certain authority in Balkh and its environs since the early 1190s, but around 1198, after they had refused to pay tribute to the Khitans, they forcefully took over Balkh, which had been under Qara Khitai overlordship since the mid-1160s.[13] Tekesh, himself threatened by the Ghūrid advance, encouraged the Qara Khitai to attack them. But when Qara Khitai troops appeared in Khurasan later that year, they suffered a humiliating defeat. The enraged Gürkhan demanded Tekesh to recompense him for the lost soldiers. A sort of agreement must have been concluded shortly before Tekesh's death in 1200. Tekesh's heir, Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh (r. 1200–1220), began his reign as a loyal Qara Khitai vassal. During his first years on the throne, he competed with the Ghūrids in Khurasan, and when the latter assaulted Khwārazm, he asked for the Gürkhan's help. In September 1204, the Qara Khitai army, led by Tayangu (Turkic: chamberlain) of Talas, pursued the Ghūrids to Andkhud, a fortified village between Balkh and Marw, inflicting a massive defeat on the Ghūrid sultan. They returned with plenty of booty, including war elephants, restoring the Oxus as their border (but leaving Balkh in Ghūrid hands). The true winner of the conflict was, however, the Khwārazm Shāh, who increased his authority in Khurasan. His growing power alarmed the caliph (whom Muḥammad's father already challenged), and he tried—in vain—to convince both the Qara Khitai and the Ghūrids to attack Muḥammad. The Ghūrids were more interested in taking revenge on the Qara Khitai. In 1205, they crossed the Oxus and took over the city of Tirmidh. The Ghūrid sultan's death in the following year enabled the Khwārazm Shāh to return Tirmidh to the Qara Khitai's suzerainty in return for the Khitans' acknowledgment of his rights over Khurasan (including Balkh). Yet the increasing power of Muḥammad, combined with the haughty attitude and increasing financial demands of the Qara Khitai, encouraged him to turn against them, especially as similar dissatisfaction was now apparent among their other vassals. In 1207, allegedly complying with the Bukharan notables' request for help against a local rebel, and in cooperation with the Western Qarakhanid khan, Sultan ᶜUthmān of Samarqand (r. 1202/1203–1212), the Khwārazm Shāh invaded Transoxania. The Qara Khitai managed to defeat him and get their tribute, although Bukhara remained in Muḥammad's hands. In the next years, Muḥammad was busy fighting in Khurasan, eventually eliminating the Ghūrids, but the Qara Khitai were unable to benefit from the turmoil, as their eastern frontier was deteriorating.

The increasing demands and mighty attitude of the Gürkhan's commissioners aroused opposition in the East as well. Zhilugu managed to quell a rebellion in Khotan and Kashgar in 1204 and replace the hostile khan of Qayalïq, but his ability to pacify his eastern vassals declined considerably after Chinggis Khan was enthroned in Mongolia in 1206. The upheavals in Mongolia brought many nomadic refugees to the Qara Khitai realm, thereby

endangering the delicate balance between nomads and sedentaries. Among the refugees was a bitter enemy of the Great Khan, the Naiman prince Güchülüg (Quchlug). Seeking refuge in the Western Liao court following Chinggis Khan's defeat of the Naiman and Merkit tribes in 1208, Güchülüg was warmly welcomed by the Gürkhan, who even gave him his daughter in marriage. In the meantime, the Gürkhan's eastern vassals began defecting to the Mongols: in 1209, the Uighurs murdered the Gürkhan's commissioner and surrendered to Chinggis Khan. The Qarluqs of Qayalïq followed in 1211. Thus, when Güchülüg suggested, around 1209, to gather his tribesmen and put them under the Gürkhan's standard, Zhilugu rejoiced. While Güchülüg was assembling troops in Mongolia, however, the Gürkhan hurried to Samarqand, to quell the revolt of the sultan ᶜUthmān. The Qara Khitai quickly regained Samarqand, but had to evacuate it almost immediately to deal with Güchülüg's threat.

The latter indeed gathered a considerable army of Naiman and other Mongolian refugees as well as attracted many Qara Khitai commanders by permitting them to plunder the sedentary population, in contrast to the Gürkhan's policy. With these troops, he plundered the Gürkhan's treasury in Uzgand (on the Jaxartes) and marched toward Balāsāghūn. The Gürkhan's returning army defeated him near the capital, but their retreat was exploited by the Khwārazm Shāh who took over Transoxania, replacing the Gürkhan's representatives with his own. In 1210, Zhilugu sent his experienced commander, Tayangu of Talas, against Muḥammad, but Tayangu died on the field before completing his mission, and his troops retreated hastily, some of them eventually joining the Khwārazmian army. Despite the shaky victory and certain local opposition, Muḥammad managed to hold Transoxania. Moreover, when the remnants of Tayangu's troops reached Balāsāghūn, the city dwellers, confident that Muḥammad would follow behind, refused to open the city gates. The Qara Khitai troops, joined by the Gürkhan's contingent, managed to enter the city only by using elephants (previously captured from the Ghūrids) to smash Balāsāghūn's gates. A huge massacre followed, destroying an almost century of harmonious relations.

Güchülüg, probably in coordination with Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh, used the turmoil to capture Zhilugu. In autumn 1211, he deposed the Gürkhan, degrading him to "emperor emeritus" (*taishang huang*). Güchülüg did not mean to eliminate the Qara Khitai, just to take the Gürkhan's place. He adopted the Qara Khitai's clothes, customs, and titles and treated Zhilugu as a filial son up to the latter's death in 1213. Contemporary and later sources, however, never credited Güchülüg with the title Gürkhan and saw Zhilugu's demise as the end of the Qara Khitai dynasty. This was probably due to Güchülüg's non-Khitan origin, his radically different policies, and his quick annihilation by the Mongols, which put a complete end to the Qara Khitai Empire.

Güchülüg might have attempted to restore the Qara Khitai state, but unlike the Gürkhans, he was insensitive to the needs of the sedentary population and quickly alienated it. His famous religious policy, namely enforcing his subjects to adopt either Buddhism or Christianity or don the Khitans' clothes, if indeed it took place, estranged his subjects as did the ruthless behavior of his troops who plundered their own realm. Güchülüg managed to

enforce his rule in the Tarim Basin and Almalïq and to scare off the Khwārazm Shāh, but his growing power soon attracted the Mongols' attention. Chinggis Khan saw Güchülüg as a threat to his authority in Mongolia. Soon after his decisive victory over the Jin in north China in 1215, the khan sent his renowned general Jebe to annihilate Güchülüg. In a relatively bloodless campaign, the main goal of which was Güchülüg himself, Jebe, assisted by the former Qara Khitan vassals, chased the escaping Naiman prince, eventually seizing him in 1218 in the mountains of Badakhshan (modern Tajikistan). Gaining the support of the Central Asian Muslim population, either by reasserting religious freedom or by parading Güchülüg's head in the main cities, Jebe incorporated Güchülüg's realm into the nascent Mongol Empire. Soon afterward (1219–1220), Chinggis Khan's troops went against the Khwārazm Shāh, taking over Transoxania and Khurasan and completing the subjugation of what had once been the Qara Khitai Empire.

Most of the nomads in the Qara Khitai realm were incorporated into the Mongol ranks either after the Mongols defeated Güchülüg in 1218, or in 1220 after the Qara Khitai units that had been attached to the Khwārazmian army defected to the Mongols. Soon afterward, a scion of the royal family, Baraq Ḥājib, also deserted the Khwarāzmian cause and migrated to Kirmān, in south Persia, where he established the Muslim Qutlugh Khanid dynasty, also known as the Qara Khitai of Kirman. This dynasty existed for nearly a further century (1222–1306) under the aegis of the Mongols and later the Ilkhans (1260–1335). Famous for its female rulers, it was abolished by Ilkhan Oljeitü (r. 1305–1316), who subjugated Kirmān to his direct control.[14] A few Qara Khitai administrators continued to serve the Mongols, but Qara Khitais did not figure prominently among the different ethnic groups active under the Mongols, in sharp contrast to the Jin Khitans who played a considerable role in the Mongol conquest of the Jurchen state and the shaping of the Mongol world empire. However, many of the people who became influential under Mongol rule, especially in north China, such as Uighurs, Qarluqs, and Central Asian Muslims, were former subjects of the Qara Khitai. Their functioning in China was probably facilitated by their exposure to Chinese traditions and language and their experience in serving eastern nomads during the Qara Khitai era.

The sweeping changes the Mongol Empire inflicted on the Inner Asian peoples left their mark on the Qara Khitai as well. Dispersed across Eurasia, most of the Qara Khitai (just like the Jin Khitans) did not retain their ethnic identity during Mongol rule; they were either assimilated into the sedentary civilization surrounding them, or absorbed by the Mongol or Turkic nomads.[15] The Qara Khitai experience, however, was instrumental for the Mongols, mainly because their precedent narrowed the gap between the ways of ruling in Muslim Central Asia and China, thereby facilitating Mongol ability to borrow institutions and personnel from both directions.

Culture

The Qara Khitai culture was a unique blend of Chinese, nomadic, and Muslim elements, which allowed the migrating Khitans to rule effectively over their heterogeneous popula-

tion up to the rise of Chinggis Khan. The Khitans arrived in Central Asia with the dual, Chinese Khitan cultural capital of the Liao. They retained it also in their new environment, which, in turn, impacted their polity and was influenced by them. Indeed, recent philological and archaeological studies suggest that the Khitan character of the Qara Khitai was more pronounced than was previously thought: thus, for example, Daniel Kane suggested, on the basis of newly found Kitan inscriptions, that the Mongolian term **hara-kida* (i.e., Qara Khitai) was actually a version of the Kitan **xuri*(*s*) *kida*(*n*), the Chinese equivalent of which is the Liao Kitans. This was the name by which the Kitans called themselves on the eve of the Jurchen conquest. Thus the Liao dynasty in China and Yelü Dashi's state in Central Asia were known by the same name (as *The Secret History of the Mongols* and Rashīd al-Dīn's Persian history treat the two polities).[16] Moreover, the regular rendering of the Qara Khitai name as the Black Khitans (*Qara* meaning black in Turkic and Mongolian) was probably also connected to the Liao. The Liao dynasty adopted the Chinese theory of the five elements for buttressing its legitimacy, and chose the element water, the color of which is black. This color determined, among others, the court dress of the dynasty. Since the Qara Khitai also donned black clothes, sometimes demanding it also from their vassal rulers, they must have continued this Liao feature, which was probably responsible for their appellation.[17] As for archaeology, recent artifacts unearthed in Central Asia attest to the preservation of elements of Khitan material culture, script, and perhaps also historical writing under the Qara Khitai.[18] The inclusive use of Khitan language, scripts, and titles is attested also by the literary sources, as is the preservation of their indigenous religion and nomadic lifestyle.

However, the Qara Khitai also retained some of the Chinese characteristics of the Liao. They preserved the trappings of the Chinese imperial system (the elevated position of the emperor, reign titles, nominating heirs), symbols of rulership and vassalage (tablets of authority, tribute, dress code), and the Chinese language: most of the recorded administrative and honorary titles of the Qara Khitai were Chinese, and Chinese was the language that appeared on their coins. This Chinese facet, though inclusive and mainly symbolic, secured for the Qara Khitai the designation of Chinese in both Yuan China and the Muslim world. The Qara Khitai retained these characteristics mainly because they were useful: The institutional means embedded in the Chinese Liao tradition, such as the elevated position of the emperor and the nomination of successors, helped in consolidating the power of the dynasty and overcoming one of the most pressing problems in nomadic states—succession struggles. This Chinese facet also provided them with a strong sense of identity, differentiating them from other Central Asian nomads. Moreover, it also gave them much prestige, even among their sedentary and Muslim population: In Muslim Central Asia, China, although vaguely known, was closely connected with notions of grandeur and prestige, and the memory of former Chinese sovereignty was still alive even in the Western Liao's westernmost province, Transoxania. Retaining aspects of the Chinese tradition therefore contributed to the Western Liao legitimation even among its Muslim population.

But aside from being Chinese emperors, the Qara Khitai were also Gürkhans, the allegedly universal rulers of the nomads. Again, this facet of their cultural capital proved useful not only among their nomadic subjects but also among their subject kingdoms, where most of the rulers were former nomadic Turks who ruled over partly Turkicized populations. The consolidation of Qara Khitai rule was further facilitated by the common features they shared with those Central Asian Turks. The Qara Khitai shared social values, such as the important role of warfare in everyday life and the high position of women and merchants. They also shared certain aspects of political culture, such as the importance of marriage alliances, the policy of holding subjects as hostages, the practice of hunting as a royal sport, and certain aspects of military organization. Indeed, beneath its Chinese veneer, Qara Khitai government was basically Inner Asian and much influenced by their new environment. Notably, Qara Khitai rule was far less direct and centralized than the Liao one and did not retain the Liao peculiarities such as the dual administration, the five capitals, or even—and despite the use of Chinese titles—Chinese bureaucracy. Instead, in a typical Inner Asian amalgamation, the Qara Khitai multilingual administration also used Turkic and Persian (side by side with Chinese and Khitan); Turkic and Persian titles, such as *tayangyu* (Turkic: “chamberlain”) and *shiḥna* (Persian: “commissioner”), were among the dynasty’s most prominent titles, and even the ruler’s title, *Gürkhan*, was a hybrid Khitan Turkic title. Talented Uighurs and Muslims were employed at the Gürkhan court, and in times of need, its mounted army used war elephants.

Despite these influences, however, and in sharp contrast to their predecessors and successors in Central Asia, throughout their rule the Qara Khitai did not embrace Islam, the dominant religion in their new environment. This was not only because they arrived with their own universal religion—Buddhism (its role is, however, hard to measure) as well as with their indigenous beliefs. It wasmainly because the Chinese Liao tradition adhered to by the Qara Khitai fulfilled the same functions that Islam provided other nomads: communal identity, means of statehood, and legitimation.[19]

Indeed, despite their “infidelity,” local Muslims were surprisingly sympathetic toward the Qara Khitai. This was not only due to the Qara Khitai’s shrewd use of their Chinese and nomadic cultural capital but also because of the relative stability and prosperity they brought to Central Asia, their religious tolerance, and their loose notion of sovereignty, which enabled their Muslim vassals to retain their authority. Moreover, since the Qara Khitai used Chinese, not Muslim, symbols of submission, their subject rulers could retain their Islamic symbols of power (on coinage and at the Friday sermon), allowing their population to feel that it was still part of the abode of Islam despite its infidel overlords. Indeed, Muslim scholarship, notably Ḥanafī law, flourished under the Qara Khitai (as did the nonreligious sciences).[20] Jihad terminology did not come to the fore until the early 13th century when the economic and political stability had deteriorated.

Despite their minimal rule, however, the Qara Khitai era left a certain mark on Muslim Central Asia: the blurred boundaries between China and Turkestan, and Muslim perception of Central Asia as a part of China (or vice versa), continued and were even strengthened. Thus, both Kashgar and Balāsāghūn were described as cities of China in 12th-cen-

tury and later geographical works; the Turkic Qarakhanids, Qara Khitai vassals, continued to use the title “Tamghaj Khan” (Turkic: “the Khan of China”); and several epitaphs from Samarqand and Balāsāghūn use the title *Muftī al-sharq (or al-mashriq) wa’l-Sīn*, the mufti (jurisconsult) of the East and of China.[21] Chinese influence is also apparent in architecture, such as in the 12th-century ᶜĀ’isha Bibi Mausoleum in Talas, which was an important Qara Khitai center, and in the murals of the Qarakhanid palace in Afrasiyab (Samarqand).[22] Some of the Muslims employed in the Qara Khitai administration seemed to have acquired a degree of proficiency in the Chinese (and/or the Khitan) language. Moreover, the emergence of female rulers in the 13th-century eastern Islamic world, most of them having Khitan connections, suggests that the impact of the Qara Khitai on their sedentary subjects might have been deeper than the external sources enable scholars to detect.[23]

Discussion of the Literature

Scholarship on the Qara Khitai is meager, mainly due to the sources’ limitations. The modern study of the Qara Khitai has been based on two monumental works, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion* by the eminent Russian orientalist V. V. Barthold, originally published in 1900 (in Russian; English translation by V. Minorsky, with many reprints), and *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* by Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, published in 1949.[24] Barthold’s work includes a (now outdated) chapter on the Qara Khitai and the Khwārazm Shāhs, while a detailed appendix in Wittfogel and Feng’s *magnum opus*, prepared with the help of Karl Menges, contains information on the Western Liao from many Chinese sources and a few major Muslim sources. Both works are superseded (in relation to the Qara Khitai) by Michal Biran’s *The Qara Khitai Empire in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World*.[25] This is the only monograph on the Qara Khitai in a Western language, and it is based on a close reading of a wide variety of Chinese and Muslim sources. Some of Biran’s later articles are also relevant (see FURTHER READING and the NOTES of this entry). The standard Chinese history of the Qara Khitai is *Kalahan wang chao shi, Xi Liao shi* (*喀喇汗王朝史,西辽史*)by Wei Liangtao 魏良弢, a history of the Qarakhanid and the Western Liao, which is, however, based on his 1980s and 1990s works.[26] In Russian scholarship, V. V. Pikov, a Liao scholar, devoted a monograph and a few related articles to the Qara Khitai. Rare studies dealing with the (also meager) archaeological and numismatic remains related to the Khitans in Central Asia were mentioned in the notes. RecentLiterature on the Qara Khitai vassals or rivals, notably Jürgen Paul’s articles on the Khwārazm Shāhs, Yuri Karev’s work on the Qarakhanids, and Andrew Peacock on the Seljuks(all at least partially represented in the notes) provide some further light.[27] For a balanced short summary of Qara Khitai political history, see also Christoph Baumer, *The History of Central Asia*, vol. 3, *The Age of Islam and the Mongols*.[28]

Primary Sources

Almost none of the meager sources on Qara Khitai history is indigenous. Most of the fragmentary and often contradictory information, mainly compiled by the dynasty's neighbors, is scattered primarily among various Chinese, Arabic, and Persian sources. The basic source for Qara Khitai history is the short chronicle of the Western Liao included in chapter 30 of the *Liaoshi*, the official history of the Liao dynasty (compiled in 1344 under the Yuan dynasty), which reviews the political history of the Qara Khitai from the rise of Yelü Dashi up to Güchülüg's usurpation. The sources of this chronicle, however, are unknown, though it seems to have been based on certain written materials. A partial and somewhat outdated English translation is available in Bretschneider's *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, which also contains translations of other important relevant Chinese texts.[29] The dynasty and its rulers are mentioned also in a wide variety of Chinese sources including other dynastic histories (of the Jin, the Song, and the Yuan) and various, mostly Song, private histories, collections of documents, and literary collections; notable among them is the *Sanchao beimeng huibian* (Compilation of documents on the treaties with the North during Three Reigns), compiled by Xu Mengxin (1126–1207). Travelogues, of Song envoys to the Jin or of Chinese envoys or visitors to the Mongols, are also important, especially those of Hong Hao (1088–1155); the Taoist patriarch Changchun (1148–1227); and the Khitan astrologer and adviser of Chinggis Khan and his heir, Yelü Chucai (1187–1243). The travelogues of the latter two are available in English translation.[30]

The main Muslim sources for the history of the Qara Khitai are those of Juwaynī (d. 1283 in Baghdad), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233 in Mosul, Iraq), and Jūzjānī (d. after 1265 in Delhi), all available in English translation.[31] Just like in the *Liaoshi*'s case, however, the sources of their information are not always clear. Juwaynī, an administrator in the Mongols' service, is by far the most knowledgeable Muslim source on the Qara Khitai. Still, his Persian work *History of the World Conqueror* ignores their most remarkable victory, that over the Seljuks at Qaṭwān in 1141, and brings two contradictory versions of their fall. Ibn al-Athīr's voluminous annalistic work, *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rīkh* (The complete history), a universal history in Arabic beginning with the creation, includes unique information about the consolidation of Qara Khitai rule in Central Asia as well as a detailed description of their fall, of which the author was a contemporary. Jūzjānī's *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* (The Nāṣirī tables), a Persian general history from the creation till 1259, arranged by dynasties, includes a short chapter dedicated to the Qara Khitai, and he also mentions them in the chapters dealing with their contemporaries. His description of the rise of the Qara Khitai is unique, and he also retained distinctive details on Qara Khitai attitudes toward Islam. Many other contemporary and later Muslim works briefly mention the Qara Khitai. These include books of various genres written in the Qara Khitai realm (manuals for courtiers, local histories, belles-lettres (*adab*) works, Muslim legal works) and works from other parts of the Muslim world, mainly universal histories; chronicles of the Seljuks, Abbasids, Ayyubids, or local histories; collections of contemporary official documents, mainly from Khwārazm; geographical works; travelogues; and biographical collections. Of this latter

genre, ᶜAwfī's *Lubāb al-albāb* (Quintessence of hearts) is of special importance. ᶜAwfī (d. *c*. 1232) spent much of his youth in Qara Khitai Transoxania, and his uncle wrote a (now lost) history of Turkestan. His work is an anthology of poets, including those who wrote poetry in addition to their career as rulers or administrators. His biographical notes are important for various Qarakhanid rulers and Muslims employed at the Qara Khitai court. Sources in other languages, such as *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the only indigenous source for the rise of Chinggis Khan, the Tangut law code of the 12th century, and European and Syrian writers of the Mongol period, are also relevant. The archaeological findings are as scarce and fragmentary as the written ones, thereby making the reconstruction of the Qara Khitai history a piecemeal, painstaking work.[32]

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) Unless otherwise noted, this survey is based on Michal Biran, *The Qara Khitai Empire in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

(2.) For the Liao: Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, *Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Herbert Franke (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43–153; Shen Hsueh-man, ed., *Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907–1125)* (Milan: Five Continents, 2006); Valerie Hansen, Francois Louis, and Daniel Kane, eds., "Perspectives of the Liao," special issue, *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013); and Yali Li, Gideon Shelach-Lavi, and Ronnie Ellenblum, "Short-Term Climatic Catastrophes and the Collapse of the Liao Dynasty (907–1125): Textual Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 49, no. 4 (2019): 591–610.

(3.) The Khitans were usually debarred from taking these examinations; Dashi is the only known example of a Khitan *jinshi*.

(4.) For Kedun's site, see Nikolay N. Kradin et al., "Khermen Denzh Town in Mongolia," *Silk Road* 13 (2015): 95–103.

(5.) Michal Biran, "Unearthing the Liao Dynasty's Relations with the Muslim World: Migrations, Diplomacy, Commerce, and Mutual Perceptions," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013): 221–251.

(6.) Gürkhan is explained as khan of khans or universal khan in the Muslim sources and in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Daniel Kane suggested that the *Gür* element of *Gürkhan* derives from the Kitan **gur*, state (in this respect, "all-under-heaven" and, hence, "universal Khan"); *khan* is a Turkic word meaning "ruler." This title was not in use in the Liao dynasty. See Daniel Kane, "Khitan and Jurchen," in *Tumen jalafun jecen akū: Manchu Studies in Honour of Giovanni Stary*, ed. Alessandra Pozzi, Juha Janhunen, and Michael Weiers (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2006), 124–125.

(7.) Michael Fedorov, "A Hoard of Khytai Copper-Lead Alloy Silver-Washed Dirhams from the Krasnaia Rechka Hillfort," *Numismatic Chronicle* 164 (2004): 322–327.

(8.) For Prester John: Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996); and Denis Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 41–

65. On the battle: A. S. C. Peacock, *The Great Seljuq Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 100, 104–105.

(9.) Michal Biran, “Between China and Islam: The Administration of the Qara Khitai Empire,” in *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, Sixth–Twentieth Centuries*, ed. David Sneath (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University, 2006), 63–84.

(10.) Michal Biran, “Like a Mighty Wall: The Armies of the Qara Khitai,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 44–91.

(11.) The *Liaoshi* gives his reign title as Shaoxing 紹興, which has a similar meaning. Yet all the recently unearthed Qara Khitai coins from Kyrgyzstan, the only existing authentic Qara Khitai coins, are inscribed with *Xuxing*. Belyaev, Nastich, and Sidorovich suggest that the *Liaoshi* deliberately changed the reign title due to a later Mongol taboo on the character *shao*. See Vladimir A. Belyaev, Vladimir Nastich, and Sergey V. Sidorovich, “The Coinage of Qara Khitay: A New Evidence,” in *Proceedings of the Third Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic Coins, Rome, 23–24 September 2011*, ed. B. Callegher and A. d’Ottone (Trieste, Italy: EUT, 2012), 128–143.

(12.) On Sulṭān Shāh, see Jürgen Paul, “Forces and Resources: Remarks on the Failing Regional State of Sulṭānshāh b. Il Arslān Khwārazmshāh,” in *Complexity of Interaction along the Eurasian Steppe Zone in the first Millennium CE*, ed. Jan Bemmann and Michael Schmauder (Bonn, Germany: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2015), 597–622.

(13.) Brill’s *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, s.v. “Ghūrids,” by Michael O’Neal, 2015; and C. E. Bosworth, “The Gurids in Khurasan,” in *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World: Iranian Tradition and Islamic Civilisation*, ed. Andrew S. C. Peacock and Deborah Gerber-Tor (London: Tauris, 2015), 210–221. For Balkh: Jürgen Paul, “Balkh, from the Seljuqs to the Mongol Invasion,” *Eurasian Studies* 16 (2018): 313–351.

(14.) On the Kirmanid dynasty: George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 102–121; and Michal Biran, “Khitan Migrations in Eurasia (10th–14th centuries),” *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 3 (2012): 85–108.

(15.) Biran, *Qara Khitai Empire*, 86–90. For the fate of the eastern Khitans: Michal Biran, “The Mongols and Nomadic Identity: The Case of the Kitans of China, in *Eurasian Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2015), 152–181.

(16.) Daniel Kane, “The Great Central Liao Kitan State,” in *Perspectives on the Liao, Collection of Papers Prepared for the Yale-Bard Graduate Center Conference, September 30 to October 2, 2010*, ed. V. Hansen and F. Louis (New Haven, CT, 2010), 7. This paragraph,

however, does not appear in his published article: Daniel Kane, “The Great Central Liao Kitan State,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013): 27–50.

(17.) Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Samarqandī, *al-Multaqaṭ fī al-fatāwā al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. M. Naṣṣār and Y. Aḥmad (Beirut: Manshūrāt Muḥammad ʻAlī Bayḍūn and Dār al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya, 2000), 254–255; and Yuan Chen, “Legitimation Discourse and the Theory of the Five Elements in Imperial China,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 44 (2014): 345–346. See Chen also for the theory and its implication.

(18.) Viacheslav P. Zaytsev, “Rukopisnaiia kniga bol’shogo kidan’skogo pis’ma iz kollektsii Instituta vostochnyx rukopisei RAN,” *Pis’mennye Pamiatniki Vostoka* 2, no. 15 (2011): 130–150; and Viacheslav P. Zaytsev, “Identifikatsiia kidans’skogo istoricheskogo sochineniia v sostave rukopisnoi knigi-kodeksa Nova N 176 iz kollektsii IBR RAN i soputstvuiushchie problemy,” *Acta linguistica Petropolitana* 11, no. 3 (2015): 167–208. Zaytsev analyzes a book in the large Khitan script, unearthed in Kyrgyzstan. This is the only extant Kitan book, and by far the longest text of the Khitan large script. He suggested that the book is composed of several distinct compilations, one of them is the Khitan veritable records (*shilu*, the records subsequently used for compiling a dynastic history) of the first nine Liao emperors, while another is a collection of corresponding biographies. Unfortunately, the book remains mostly deciphered. See also Frantz Grenet, “Maracanda/Samarkand, une métropole pré-mongole: Sources écrites et archéologie,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 59 (2004): 1064, which mentions the fragments of a gilded silver saddle ornament featuring a Liao dragon motif found in Samarqand and not yet published; and Michal Biran, “Scholarship and Science under the Qara Khitai (1124–1218),” in *The Coming of the Mongols*, ed. David O. Morgan and Sara Edwards (London: Tauris, 2018), 58–72. For Qara Khitai coins: Belyaev, Nastich, and Sidorovich, “Coinage of Qara Khitay”; and Fedorov, “Hoard of Khytai Copper-Lead Alloy.”

(19.) Michal Biran, “True to Their Ways: Why the Qara Khitai Did Not Convert to Islam,” in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 175–199.

(20.) Biran, “Scholarship and Science.”

(21.) Bakhtiyar Babadjanov et al., eds., *Epitaphs of Muslim Scholars in Samarkand (10th–14th centuries)* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2019), 211, 272, 342, 370; and Biran, “Scholarship and Science.” For replacing Turks with Chinese under the Qara Khitai, see also Francesco Calzolaio, “A Boundless Text for a Boundless Author: The Representation of the Chinese World in Sadīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ʻAwfī’s *Jawāmiʻ al-Ḥikāyāt wa Lawāmi al-Riwāyāt*,” *Studi e ricerche* 9 (2017): 109–129, esp. 124–126.

(22.) V. D. Goriacheva and S. I. Peregudova, *Pamiatniki istorii i kul’tyry Talaskoi doliny* (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, 1995), 62–68; Yuri Karev, “From Tents to City: The Royal Court of the Western Qarakhanids between Bukhara and Samarqand,” in *Turco-Mongol Rulers,*

Cities and City Life, ed. David Durans-Guedy (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 99–148; and Biran, “Scholarship and Science.”

(23.) Biran, *Qara Khitai Empire*, 160–168.

(24.) Vasily V. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, trans. V. Minorsky (4th edition, London: Luzac, 1968); and Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949), 619–674.

(25.) Biran, *Qara Khitai Empire*.

(26.) Liangtao Wei 魏良弢, *Kalahan wang chao shi, Xi Liao shi* (*喀喇汗王朝史, 西辽史*) [History of the Qarakhanids; History of the Western Liao] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010).

(27.) E. g., Paul, “Forces and Resources”; Paul, “Balkh, from the Seljuqs to the Mongol Invasion”; Karev, “From Tents to City”; and Peacock, *Great Seljuq Empire*.

(28.) Christoph Baumer, *The History of Central Asia*, vol. 3, *The Age of Islam and the Mongols* (London: Tauris, 2016), 138–150.

(29.) Emil Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources* (London: Trübner & co, 1888), 1:208–235.

(30.) Biran, *Qara Khitai Empire*, 3–7 and bibliography.

(31.) ᶜAṭā’-Malik Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i jahān gushā*, ed. M. M. Qazwīnī, 3 vols. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1912–1937); John A. Boyle, trans., *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror* (repr., Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997); ᶜIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1965–1967); Donald Sidney Richards, trans., *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al-Kāmil fī’l-Ta’rīkh of ᶜIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Minhāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ed. ᶜA. Ḥabībī, 2 vols. (Kabul: Daryā-i kitāb, 1342–1344/1963–1964); and Henry George Raverty, trans., *Ṭabaḳāt-i-Nāsiri, a General History of the Muhammadan Dynastics of Asia*, 2 vols. (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881–1899). Boyle’s and Richards’s are masterful translations; Raverty’s is outdated.

(32.) Biran, *Qara Khitai Empire*, 7–10 and bibliography; and the further sources mentioned in Biran, “Scholarship and Science.”