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Heirs to Discord: The Supratribal Aspirations of Jamuqa, Toghrul, and Temüjin

Major Tribal Confederations (“Nations”) in 12th Century

Mongols—Tribe of Temüjin (Chinggis Khan). First united under Qabul Khan, dispersed in 1161 by Tatars. Reunited in last quarter of the twelve century by Temüjin. Support from the Jin Dynasty from mid-1190s to early 1200s.

Qabul Khan (approx. 1125-1140).
Ambaghai Khan (approx. 1140-1145)
Kutula Khan (approx 1145-1161)
Diaspora (approx 1161-1180s)
Temüjin (1180s-1227)

Tatars—Mongols’ enemies. Came to power in mid-twelfth century with support from Jin Dynasty. Destroyed in approximately 1196 by Mongols, Jin, and (maybe) Kereyids.

Kereyids—Tribe of Toghrul (Wang Khan). As powerful as the Tatars for latter half of the twelfth century. Support from the Jin Dynasty from mid-1190s to 1203. Toghrul returned first by Yesügei, Temüjin’s father, then by Temüjin. Absorbed by Mongols in 1203.

Kyriakus (unknown-1160s)
Toghrul (1160s-1160s)
Toghrul’s brother (unnamed)
Toghrul (1160s-1194?)
Erke Qara (1194?-1196)
Toghrul (1196-1203)
Absorbed into Mongol confederation.

Merkit—Tribe of Hö’elün, Temüjin’s mother. Abducted Börte, Temüjin’s wife, perhaps impregnating her with Jochi, Temüjin’s first son. Destroyed in early 1180s by Mongols and Kereyids.

Toqtoa’beki (unknown to 1180s. Survived until early 1200s)
Destroyed in early 1180s.

Naiman—Final power opposing Mongol hegemony. Jin support from 1203-1204. Destroyed in 1204.

Buiruk Khan (unknown; active in early-to-mid 1190s)
Tayang Khan (unknown-1204)
Absorbed into Mongol confederation.

Heirs to Discord: The Supratribal Aspirations of Jamuqa, Toghrul, and Temüjin

Thomas Barfield, in his work *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 B.C. to AD 1757*, writes of three types of founders of nomadic empires. The most common were hereditary rulers of confederations who expanded their power; others simply reorganized failing nomadic states; others yet became rulers of steppe empires through election.¹ The first can be exemplified by Mao-Tun of the Xiong-nu, the first nomadic hegemony; Bumin of the Göktürks exemplifies the second pattern, having reformed a collapsing Hunnish empire in the sixth to eight centuries; the Uighurs and the Ruanruan elected their own leaders. There is one monumental exception to this system, however: none of these systems explains the rise of Temüjin, the future Chinggis Khan. By Temüjin's time, no steppe empire had existed since the Kirghiz and allies had scattered the Uighur Empire in 840 (which means that the first and second options are eliminated).² Temüjin was elected to the position of khan of his own people, the Borjigin, but even they did not offer him a firm political base, and he often found himself deserted. When Temüjin finally did achieve supremacy over the steppe in 1206, he did so by conquest, not election (which eliminates the third method).

So why is Temüjin the great exception? How did he unite the Mongols to create one of the greatest empires in history? While some historians question why a nomadic power of Chinggis Khan's magnitude had not emerged earlier, it is clear that Chinggis Khan was only able to create such a potent force by both the tribal system of his people and by outmaneuvering the Jin system for controlling nomads.³ This paper will not address the question of why the Mongol Empire itself was so successful after 1206, but will instead examine how Chinggis Khan united the steppe and why he was able to consolidate nomad power, whereas Jamuqa, who shared similar supratribal aspirations, and Toghrul, the most powerful leader on the steppe before 1203, both failed.

To understand what was entailed in Temüjin's supratribal aspirations, we must first understand how the political system of the steppe nomads worked. Before the time of Temüjin, the tribe was the most basic unit of the political system and almost always of the entire body politic. Within the tribe, however, allegiances shifted almost as often as the seasons; kinship, real or mythical, was the most important factor for solidifying reality, but even this was no guarantee.⁴ Each tribe had two distinct leaders, the khan for matters of war and migration, and the shaman (*böge*) for supernatural matters.⁵ Before Temüjin's ascension to steppe potentate, the tribe would most often side with the shaman in the case of a disagreement between the two.⁶ The khan was elected to his position but could not hold it for life by that mandate alone; he had to buy the tribe's loyalty through successful raids, trading or peace, since to form any group larger than a family it was necessary to function as a political body.⁷ A sort of tribal council existed as well, providing the legitimacy to elect a khan and provide a counterbalance to him.⁸

It is also imperative to understand the regional political climate into which Temüjin was born. As seen above, the Turko-Mongol tribes of the steppes could work together, but they were for the most part divided into feuding confederations. The most

powerful confederations in the times leading up to Temüjin's birth were the Tatars to the southwest, the Nestorian Christian Naiman to the furthest west, the Merkits to the middle west and north, the Kereyid to the near west, and the Mongols themselves in approximately the area currently comprising south Siberia around Lake Baikal and north Mongolia.⁹ The Merkits and the Tatars were often allies against the Mongol confederation while the Kereyid and Mongols, if not active allies, generally did not feud with each other. The Naiman generally were remote enough to remain out of the major movements and quarrels. The only sedentary society of any power in the region was the Jin Dynasty of northeastern China, as shall be examined below. The Qara Khitay Empire would occasionally interfere in the southwest, but it had enough internal problems that it left the nomads to their own devices.¹⁰ To the immediate south of the steppe lay the Sinified Tangut dynasty of the Xi-Xia, important traders who generally did not interfere in steppe politics. In the southeast of China, the Song Dynasty still flourished but was drained from near constant war with the Jin. The roles of steppe tribes and the Jin Dynasty shall be examined in more depth below.

At the time of Temüjin's birth, two unifiers of the Mongol people were still fresh memories.¹¹ Temüjin's great-uncle was Qabul Khan, a chieftain whose reputation was such that he was invited to a feast by the Jin Dynasty of northern China, where he offended the court by becoming drunk and pulling on the emperor's beard. When Qabul Khan's power was too great, the Jin sent an expedition against him in 1237 that was outmaneuvered and defeated.¹² Qabul Khan died shortly later and was succeeded by his nephew, Ambaghai, who was betrayed to the Jin by the Tatars and executed.¹³ Kutula Khan, the other unifier of renown and Ambaghai's brother, succeeded to the chieftaincy and launched successful retaliatory raids against the Jin in the early 1140s. The Jin were unable to counterattack successfully and signed a peace treaty with the Mongols in 1147, at which time the Mongols declared war on the Tatars. However, thirteen lost battles against the Tatars and internal division led to a civil war among the Mongols.¹⁴ The Tatars and Jin jointly crushed the Mongol confederation in 1161, some six years before the birth of Temüjin.¹⁵

It is important to note the working relationship between the Jin and the Tatars. The Jin Dynasty was made up of Jurchenn stock, Manchurian hunter-agriculturalists, ancestors of the Manchus who created the Qing Dynasty. Familiar with nomad politics and warfare, the Jin were able to counter great powers on the steppe effectively by backing weaker tribes, then switching their support if their clients became too powerful. The Tatars, while not a weak group by any means, had originally presented less of a threat than the Mongols had. Even as the Tatars' power grew immensely after 1161, the Jin were already looking to the Kereyid confederation for a balance.¹⁶ When Temüjin crushed the Tatars in 1198, he did so at the Jin's behest and with their support. This system did, however, have one shortcoming: a minor tribe supported by the Jin may well become an uncontrollable, unstoppable force.¹⁷ The Tatars may have been the strongest tribe on the steppes, but they were by no means dominant, much less undisputed rulers of the steppe.

After the Tatars and the Jin broke the Mongol confederation, a divide still existed among the tribes that remained free. Political tensions over who should rule the Mongols existed between the Tayichi'ud, descendants of Ambaghai, and the Borjigin, led by Temüjin's father Yesügei Ba'adur, who himself was a nephew of both Ambaghai and

Kutula Khan.¹⁸ The remaining Mongols were either slaves to the Tatars or had allied themselves with the Kereyid. Yesügei was a powerful chieftain and renowned warrior who had helped Toghrul, the leader of the Kereyids, regain his position after being driven out by his brothers. His oldest son, Temüjin, was probably born in 1166 and was named after a Tatar warrior Yesügei had just defeated. At the age of ten, Temüjin was betrothed to Börte, a princess of the Oirat tribe (themselves allied in the Kereyid confederation). Temüjin was to be fostered under Börte's father for five or six years before the wedding ceremony, as per tradition, but Yesügei was poisoned by Tatars as he rode back to his camp, forcing Temüjin to return to his own camp.¹⁹

The amorphous nature of the steppe tribe revealed itself as Yesügei's enemies, the Tayichi'ud, deemed the young Temüjin too weak to rule and thus abandoned him, taking with them all the Borjigin except for Yesügei's immediate family. For five years, Temüjin knew hardship, malnourishment, even fratricide—he murdered a half brother.²⁰ At the end of this time, after having been captured by the Tatars twice and then twice escaping, Temüjin returned to the Oirats to claim Börte and her wedding dowry, a coat of sable on which an empire would be built. Taking this coat, Temüjin looked for protection for his family and found it in the form of one of his father's old allies, Toghrul, chieftain of the Kereyid.²¹

In a way, Toghrul's childhood was similar to Temüjin's. Born to a powerful chieftain, Kyriakus, Toghrul was abducted by the Merkit at the age of seven and forced to work with the women pounding millet. Although he was rescued, he was abducted again at thirteen, this time with his mother by the Tatars and forced to tend their camels. Once more he was rescued. At the death of his father, Toghrul killed two of his three brothers and drove out the other to secure power, before being driven out himself by his uncle.²² This was when Toghrul went to Yesügei for aid and Yesügei was able to reinstate him, though not without first having themselves declared *anda* (sworn brothers). It was for this reason, as well as Toghrul's growing alliance with the Jin Dynasty, that Temüjin sought Toghrul out to be his patron.

Because of his past troubled past, Toghrul was not self-confident in his own leadership, constantly frightened some new adversary would arise to take it away. While this had moved him to fratricide, it also made him a second-rate leader who was paranoid and skittish when the odds went against him. He could be fickle and his insecurity would lead to a very tumultuous early career for the future Chinggis Khan. The only thing he could do successfully was play Jamuqa and Temüjin against each other. But when Temüjin approached Toghrul to revitalize the bond he had shared with Yesügei, presenting him with the sable coat, Toghrul welcomed the homeless prince with open arms and promised to reassemble Temüjin's tribe at a later time. Until then, Temüjin was content simply to have a powerful protector.

Soon after Temüjin had secured this ally, probably in 1184, a band of 300 Merkits attacked his camp and carried off Börte and Qoakchin, the mother of Temüjin's half brothers.²³ Temüjin took his grief to Toghrul, who promised that "even to the complete destruction of the Merkit, I shall rescue for you your Lady Börte!"²⁴ Temüjin also appealed to a childhood friend, Jamuqa of the Jadarat, who had become a leader of no small repute himself. Both Toghrul and Jamuqa raised two tümen (a body of ten thousand fighting men) for the campaign, while Temüjin raised what followers he could before appealing to herders (who belonged to no tribe) for help.²⁵

The campaign was a complete success and through it Chinggis Khan's small band of loyal followers and the recruited herdsmen gained a great amount of plunder, along with Merkit slaves. These were men who rejected the tribal system, shepherds with no tribe, and serfs seeking freedom.²⁶ It was to Temüjin that they owed this newfound wealth and so it can be seen that this was the beginning of a personal career that would break old tribal alliances and create the highly disciplined, almost fanatically devoted nature of the soldiers of the Mongol empire. As the *Yuan shi (History of the Yüan Dynasty)* would later proclaim, "The Prince dresses his people in his own clothes, he permits them to ride his own horses; this man could certainly bring peace to the tribe and rule the nation."²⁷ But it was also Temüjin's success in this campaign and his increase in followers that drove a wedge between him and Jamuqa.

When Temüjin was a boy in his father's camp on the Onon River, he and Jamuqa were inseparable friends. Together they hunted, together they exchanged knucklebones and home-made arrows, and together they swore the eternal friendship of *andas* in front of amused adults. Abandoned by his own family, Jamuqa had managed to become a powerful chieftain in his own right. Some sources tell of how Jamuqa himself was abducted by Toqto'a-beki, leader of the Merkit, before he managed to secure his release through sedition.²⁸ Although he had declared his allegiance to Toghrul, his relation with the Kereyid leader was more fraternal than the father-son relation of Toghrul and Temüjin.²⁹ Still, *The Secret History* describes Jamuqa as a withdrawn man, often cold and moody. With the exception of Temüjin, no one was ever close to him.

After the Merkit campaign, Jamuqa and Temüjin traveled and camped together in the Qorqonaq Valley.³⁰ *The Secret History* describes a friendship based on mutual affection, saying that the two "loved each other; they enjoyed themselves reveling and feasting, and at night they slept together, the two of them alone under their blanket."³¹ Even though they renewed their compact as *andas* and spent a year and a half in each other's company, they soon quarreled and parted ways, their friendship likely a casualty of the two each seeking to reunite the tribes to their own ends.³² According to *The Secret History*, Temüjin terminated their friendship after these cryptic words from Jamuqa:

"Let us camp near the mountain, there will be enough shelter for our horse-herders! Let us camp near the river, there will be enough food for our shepherds and lamb-herds!"³³

Temüjin's mother, Hö'elün, and wife, Borte, interpreted this as a veiled threat of betrayal, and so the two men cut off relations. The next time they would meet would be as enemies. Soon, tribes began to defect from Jamuqa's *ulus* (control/territory) to that of Temüjin. *The Secret History* attributes some of these defections to visions, others to Temüjin's force of character, and yet others to a more pragmatic assessment of Temüjin's growing power.³⁴ Around 1185 these men elected Temüjin khan, giving him the title of Borjigin Khan.

Since their lands bordered each other's, conflict between Jamuqa and Temüjin became inevitable, if only through proximity. In 1187, a follower of Temüjin's killed Taichar, a kinsman of Jamuqa, for stealing horses.³⁵ The situation escalated into war, as Jamuqa responded by mobilizing three *tümen* (30,000 men) and crossing the Ala'ut Turga'ut Mountains into Temüjin's territory. Temüjin met him with an equal number of men at the marshes of Dalan Baljut, where Jamuqa, ever the more skilled general, defeated Temüjin and drove him into hiding in the Jerene Gorge. Jamuqa did not pursue his *anda*, but did massacre seventy Chinos, a tribe that had refused him assistance, on his

ride back to his *ulus*. This massacre disheartened the Mangqut and the Uru'ut, two tribes who had supported Jamuqa in the Battle of Dalan Baljut; they then defected to Temüjin, making Temüjin's defeat more similar to a victory.³⁶

Following the Battle of Dalan Baljut, Temüjin engaged in a brief feud with the Jürkin tribe (a dispute that would come to a head years later), but then he disappeared from history for nearly ten years, from the mid-1180s to the mid-1190s, at which point two jumbled events happened, seemingly simultaneously: Temüjin was recruited by the Jin to attack the Tatars and a deposed Toghrul returned to his rule over the Kereyids. The traditional chronology accepted by many historians puts Toghrul's deposition by his uncle or brother Erke Qara (Black Erke) in 1194, his restoration in 1195, and his campaign with Temüjin against the Tatars in 1196. Zhao Hong, a southern Chinese historian approximately contemporary with Chinggis Khan claims that during these missing years Temüjin acted as a vassal to the Jin Dynasty of northern China.³⁷

It was at this time that the Tatars had outgrown their usefulness to the Jin, who had previously used them to check the power of other steppe tribes and to provide a buffer zone against the steppe (as the Romans had used the *foederati*). The Tatars, however, proved too difficult to control and soon began raiding into Jin territory with impunity.³⁸ Convention says that the Jin contacted Temüjin to attack in conjunction with a Jin offensive, at which point Temüjin contacted Toghrul for assistance. Caught between the Mongols from the northwest and the Jin from the southeast, the Tatars were crushed and, according to tradition, the Jin general awarded Toghrul the title "Wang Khan" ("King Khan," pronounced "Ong Khan" by the Mongols) and Temüjin with a lesser title.³⁹ However, a title of such magnitude could only be bestowed by the emperor himself, so it seems likely that Toghrul received it at a different time.

Regardless of chronology, the political dynamic had shifted. Even though Temüjin was still a subordinate to Toghrul, it was clear that his personal power was greater than that of his patron. Still, the Kereyid were a more powerful tribe than the Mongols, while only the Naiman had comparable power now that the Tatars were dealt with. In the Year of the Horse (1198), Toghrul had regained enough power to launch an attack of his own against the remainder of the Merkit, from which he kept all the spoils of war for himself, thus angering Temüjin. This did not, however, prevent Temüjin from joining Toghrul for an attack on Buiruk Khan, the Naiman leader. Although they chased off Buiruk's forces, they found themselves surrounded upon returning to their camp. In the night, Toghrul took his Kereyid contingent and fled, leaving Temüjin to the mercy of the Naiman. *The Secret History* attributes this to the mendacity of Jamuqa, Temüjin's childhood friend who had returned to haunt him by convincing Toghrul that Temüjin was planning to join the Naiman and attack his patron the following morning.⁴⁰ The Naiman attacked Toghrul's baggage train and captured many Kereyid warriors, forcing him to request aid from Temüjin, who beat back the Naiman and restored Toghrul's people again. The Kereyid leader was only too happy to renew his *anda* ties with his adopted son, doing so in 1200.

Toghrul's betrayal and following reconciliation with Temüjin are prime examples of the difficulties the steppe nomads had in uniting. The allegiances of the nomads could shift so easily that Temüjin was curiously willing to forgive his wayward patron. Ratchnevsky offers the theory that the initial split had come when Temüjin had made demands of Toghrul, perhaps pertaining to succession in the Kereyid leadership.

Toghrul's plea for help could have been seen as acquiescence.⁴¹ Indeed, a storm pertaining to succession was brewing between Temüjin and Senggüm, Toghrul's only son.

But before the conflict between Temüjin and Senggüm, Jamuqa would rise to prominence again. In 1201, five tribes hostile to Temüjin met and formed a coalition. Soon afterwards, they elected Jamuqa Gür Khan (Universal Khan, a relatively common title) and vowed to attack Temüjin.⁴² The opposing armies would meet twice, first at the Onon river, with an indecisive result.⁴³ The second battle was near the Khalkha river, where Buiruk Khan of the Naiman (who had previously been attacked by Toghrul and Temüjin) and a wizard from the Oirats supposedly attempted to conjure a terrible storm to use against their enemies; however, it turned on Jamuqa's forces, which broke and fled.⁴⁴ While fleeing, Jamuqa took the opportunity to plunder his allies, an act that would end his contention for leadership of the steppes.

Temüjin was soon beset by Toghrul's son Senggüm, who tried to lure him into an ambush by acquiescing to marrying Temüjin's daughter. Temüjin narrowly avoided the ambush but was put into flight across Mongolia. Once more, the Mangqut and Uru'ut rallied to Temüjin, as they had after the Battle of Dalan Jalut, and with their assistance Temüjin turned on his pursuers at Kalakalzhit-elet. Senggüm's forces were still too powerful and Senggüm would likely have triumphed over Temüjin, had Senggüm not been wounded when an arrow struck his head. Temüjin was able to retreat to Baljuna Swamp with only two thousand and six hundred men.⁴⁵ Neither Toghrul nor Jamuqa pursued him, having written Temüjin off as a crushed leader. From Baljuna Swamp, Temüjin began something of a propaganda campaign, sending scolding messages to friends who had betrayed him, scathing threats to his enemies, and general calls to rally against the Kereyid. At the same time, Jamuqa was once more drawing together a seditious alliance, this time against Toghrul. Even though Toghrul was able to quell it after driving Jamuqa and his supporters to the Naiman, many of his own men defected to Jamuqa's cause.⁴⁶

Even with newfound support for his cause, Temüjin would have been powerless against the Kereyid had he not benefited from incredible fortune. In 1203, a messenger returning from Toghrul told Temüjin that the Kereyid were enjoying a feast that would last for days; Temüjin ordered an immediate attack. Even with the element of surprise, the battle lasted for a full three days before the last resistance was finally put down. Toghrul and his son Senggüm both managed to escape in the confusion. Senggüm fled to Tibet, Khosan, and Kashgar but eventually he was caught and killed.⁴⁷ Toghrul's life, however, would not be so long; abandoned by all his followers, he was mistaken by a Naiman patrolman for a cattle thief and was slain on the spot.⁴⁸ The Kereyid people were not decimated as Temüjin had done to the Tatars and the Tayichi'ud, but they were instead assimilated into Temüjin's followers and Temüjin himself simply took Toghrul's place.

When the Kereyid were subdued, Temüjin systematically began assimilating the small remaining tribes that would give themselves over to him while destroying those that resisted. In 1204, the only antagonistic power left on the steppe was the Naiman, who still harbored many of Temüjin's enemies, Jamuqa not the least of which. On May 17, 1204, Temüjin set out to meet them in combat at the river Chakirma'ut.⁴⁹ Although greatly outnumbered, Temüjin was able to postpone conflict until his forces were at their

strongest by making them seem larger than they were with extra campfires and dummies mounted on horses.⁵⁰ Tayang Khan, the Naiman leader, meant to fight the Mongols with cunning, but his own son and his advisors refused, and so they engaged in head to head combat in a river valley—the Mongols against the river Chakirma’ut pushing up against the Naiman situated on a mountain side.⁵¹ The Mongols, with superior discipline, were able to push the Naiman up the mountain until finally the Naiman broke and retreated, many falling to their deaths down the mountain’s cliffs.

According to *The Secret History*, Jamuqa played an integral role in the battle, but in support of his *anda*. As the Mongols and their allies smashed into the Naiman ranks, Jamuqa described them to Tayang Khan in increasingly terrifying terms. After each description, Tayang Khan became more frightful and retreated further up the mountain until he reached the very summit, at which point Jamuqa abandoned him and sent a messenger to Temüjin to inform him of Tayang Khan’s position and terror.⁵² This seems an odd thing to do, especially since Jamuqa would spend a year fleeing from Temüjin’s forces in the Tannu Mountains, until his companions turned him over to Temüjin. Temüjin executed Jamuqa’s companions for their disloyalty, and then he pleaded with Jamuqa to join him. When Jamuqa refused to consider anything but death, Temüjin eventually granted him his wish. The traditional account is that Jamuqa was wrapped in a carpet and then trampled by horses.⁵³ This account is almost certainly romanticized, as some chroniclers, notably Rashid ad-Din, claim that Jamuqa was dismembered by Temüjin’s cousin Eljigidei.⁵⁴

Temüjin also took the opportunity to crush the remaining Merkit definitively, with only Toqto’a-beki, the perpetual last ruler of the Merkit escaping. In 1206, Temüjin was unquestionably the most powerful ruler of the steppe. He used his power to call a *quriltai*, a meeting of the tribes, at which Kököchu, also called Teb Tenggeri, the most powerful and charismatic shaman in all of Mongolia, declared that Tengri, the eternal blue sky, had decreed that Temüjin should rule all the world.⁵⁵ Teb Tenggeri would also be Temüjin’s last competitor to steppe potentate, as the shaman used political intrigue to drive dissent between Temüjin and his brother Jochi Qasar; he felt confident enough to publicly beat Temuge-otchigin, Temüjin’s youngest brother. Earlier, this would not have been an unusual relationship between the khan and the shaman, but at this point Temüjin would not allow his power to be questioned. He had Teb Tenggeri’s back broken and his body cast out onto the steppe.⁵⁶ Thenceforth, the newly proclaimed Chinggis Khan, ruler of the earth, would appoint the most powerful shamans himself, starting with the tranquil Usun.⁵⁷ And so it was that Chinggis Khan entered his last twenty years, looking at the empires of China and Qara Khitay, confident in his reorganization of power on the steppe.

Unlike any other founder of a nomad empire, Chinggis Khan did not base his system around the tribe but instead on personally-appointed leaders.⁵⁸ Three of his “Four Hounds” were born as common herders with no special attachment to him. Shigiquutuq and Yeh-lü Chu-Tsai, the khan’s greatest advisors and administrators, were both assimilated from conquered peoples. The most important officers and administrators he appointed did not hold hereditary positions, but held positions won by merit. But even the mighty Chinggis Khan was unable to do away completely with the tribal system that had limited the steppe nomads. Even though the enemies he absorbed into his *ulus* were dispersed among his army, Temüjin did not break up the tribes that had supported him.

Some seventy percent of the 95 “commanders of a thousand” Temüjin appointed after his ascension were traditional tribal leaders; the other thirty percent were either Temüjin’s personal supporters (twenty percent) or connected to him through marriage or adoption (ten percent).⁵⁹ Even the great *yasa*, the law code Chinggis Khan composed between 1206 and 1219, was primarily a codifying of tribal values and mores. Chinggis Khan did, however, institute the *keshig*, a ten-thousand man personal guard, often recruited from the sons of chieftains. While the chieftains may have wished to return to the days of shifting alliances, their sons were both held as hostages and imprinted with dedication to the khan.⁶⁰ Chinggis Khan was only able to rework the tribal system to a certain degree, even while he was able to operate cunningly within it.

Temüjin was the only strong candidate for the steppe nomads. Unlike Toghrul, he was willing and able both to act and to innovate. Unlike Jamuqa, his charisma attracted men to him and encouraged them to devote themselves to him. Of course, he also had certain advantages wrought by chance; the fact that Yesügei died while Temüjin was young was actually a boon, as it made Temüjin forge his political career from a young age, rather than wait for his father to die. He was able to turn defeats into victories by attracting his enemy’s supporters on more than one occasion. By chance, luck or fate, his penchant for “unsteppelike” forced confrontation did not result in devastating losses.⁶¹ Like Alexander before him and Tamerlane after him, Temüjin was in the right place, at the right time, and was able to turn hardships into benefits.

¹ Barfield, Thomas. The Perilous Frontier: Nomad Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757. Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, 1989. 187-188. Those seeking further examples of these would be best served referring to The Perilous Frontier for a comprehensive, concise history of steppe empires.

² The Uighur Empire According to the T’ang Dynastic Histories. Trans. Mackerras, Colin. University of South Carolina Press, 1973. 124-125.

³ Joseph Fletcher was one of the most vocal historians pondering this particular question while Barfield maintains that the Mongols as a group and Chinggis Khan as an individual were anomalies.

⁴ Barfield 26-28.

⁵ To call the leader of a tribe a Khan is something of an oversimplification. Similar titles, such as Khagan, Ka’a, and others were also used. The Khan in Chinggis Khan is more accurately rendered Qan, meaning “Khan of Khans,” while his son Ögödei adopted the title Qa’an, meaning “Qan of Qans.” Fletcher, Joseph. “The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jun. 1986), 11-50. 37.

⁶ Ibid. 20.

⁷ Ibid. 15-16, Barfield 27.

⁸ Fletcher. 17.

⁹ Morgan, David. *The Mongols*. Basil Blackwell Inc, Oxford. 1986. 56.

¹⁰ Marshall, Robert. *Storms From the East: From Genghis Khan to Khubilai Khan*. University of California Press, 1993. 21.

¹¹ Qaidu, Qabul Khan’s great grandfather, who supposedly first united the tribes by defeating his rival Jelair, is either a mythical figure or his accomplishments were blown out of proportion. Grousset, René. The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia. Trans. Walford, Naomi. Rutgers University Press. 1970. 197.

¹² Barfield 183.

¹³ Ambaghai may actually have been trying to wed his daughter to a Tatar noble to ensure peace at the time. Saunders, J.J. The History of the Mongol Conquests. Barnes and Noble, New York, 1971. 46.

¹⁴ Lister 11.

¹⁵ Barfield 184.

¹⁶ Ibid. 184.

¹⁷ The Jin themselves were the byproduct of a failure of this system; they had been brought in by the Song Dynasty in the south to drive out the barbarian Liao Dynasty (Qara Khitay) in the North, then simply settled the lands they had cleared. Saunders 36-37.

¹⁸ The Tayichi'ud were hunters and thus a higher social class than the Borjigin herdsmen, which has led many historians to see Chinggis Khan's rise as a class struggle. Grousset 195.

¹⁹ Hoang, Michel. Genghis Khan. Trans. Cranfield, Ingrid. New Amsterdam Books, New York City. 1990. 47.

²⁰ The only primary source for this is *The Secret History of the Mongols* and it is this that other sources, including the *Yuan shi* and the writings of Rashid ad-Din, use as a basis. *The Secret History*, as it is properly called, was written during the reign of Chinggis Khan's son Ögödei or afterward. Various scholars have dated its writing at 1228, 1240, 1252, and even 1264. De Rachewiltz, whose translation I use, posits the original composition at 1228, the year of Ögödei's succession, with additions made later. *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Trans. de Rachewiltz, Igor. Brill, Leiden. 2004. xxix-xxiv. An illuminating history of the text can be found from pages xl to liv.

²¹ Toghrul is the Turkic version of the name and the version I shall use. The Mongolized form is To'oril. For a discussion of the Kereyids' ethnicity, whether Turkic or Mongolic, see Ratchnevsky, Paul. Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy. Trans. Haining, Thomas Nivison. Blackwell, Oxford. 1992. 2-3. Ratchnevsky's work is an invaluable source, as it collects and discusses works from historians who did not write in English, as well as primary sources not translated into English. As such, I have used it as my primary biographical source for Temüjin.

²² According to *Xixia shushi (The Historical Record of the Xi-Xia)*, this occurred in 1171, though the involvement of Yesügei and Kutula (who was dead at least ten years before) seems to suggest it was earlier. Ratchnevsky 32-33.

²³ Ibid 37.

²⁴ *Secret History* 35.

²⁵ At this time, it is unlikely that any tümen was actually at that number, but those in the later Mongol Empire would almost always be.

²⁶ Ratchnevsky 39.

²⁷ Quoted in Ratchnevsky 40.

²⁸ Ibid. 35-36.

²⁹ Throughout *The Secret History*, Jamuqa refers to Toghrul as brother, while Temüjin calls him father.

³⁰ Grousset 201.

³¹ *Secret History* 45.

³² Saunders is wise to warn us not to confuse a personal conflict between the two men with a social conflict, as the Russian historians Barthold and Vladimirstov have made of it. They have portrayed the dispute as one between the egalitarian iconoclast Jamuqa and Temüjin, who was devoted to maintaining a rigid class structure. Saunders 49-50.

³³ Ibid. 45.

³⁴ *Secret History* 47-49.

³⁵ Taichar's exact relation to Jamuqa is unknown. Lister says he was Jamuqa's younger brother, though Jamuqa says before his death that he had no brothers.

³⁶ Lister 106-107, *Secret History* 54.

³⁷ The best explanation of the trouble with current theories and chronology can be found in Ratchnevsky 47-49.

³⁸ Ibid. 52.

³⁹ This lesser title was *ja'ud khuri*, meaning approximately "minister of the peace." Jagchid, Sechin and Symons, Van Jay. Peace, War, and Trade Along the Great Wall: Nomadic-Chinese Interaction through Two Millennia. Indiana University Press. 1989. 76.

⁴⁰ *Secret History* 81. Why Jamuqa was at Toghrul's camp is unexplained, as he is not previously mentioned in this venture.

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- ⁴¹ Ratchnevsky 58-59.
- ⁴² Ibid. 62.
- ⁴³ Rashid ad-Din describes it as a pyrrhic victory for Temüjin and Toghrul, but afterwards the two retreated, Toghrul to Kuba-kaya on the Manchurian border and Temüjin in China, indicating that Jamuqa's forces were probably triumphant. *The Secret History* and most secondary sources (including Saunders) only record the second battle. Ibid. 61-62.
- ⁴⁴ It was this battle where Jebe Noyan, one of Chingghis Khan's famed "Four Hounds," joined Chinggis Khan's ranks and where Jelme, another Hound, crossed enemy lines to find water for a wounded Chinggis Khan. *Secret History* 64-69.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. 95.
- ⁴⁶ Ratchnevsky 78. No such event is recorded in *The Secret History*, but it would explain Jamuqa's absence in the following defeat of the Kereyid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. 79.
- ⁴⁸ *Secret History* 109.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. 115. This was later the site of Qaraqorum. Saunders 52.
- ⁵⁰ *Secret History*. 115.
- ⁵¹ Lister 172. *Tayang* is the Mongolization of the Chinese Daiwang, "Great King." The Naiman confederation had Jin support, but since the Jin were fighting the Song Dynasty at the time they were unable to contribute much to the battle. Barfield 198.
- ⁵² *Secret History* 119-122.
- ⁵³ Lister 184.
- ⁵⁴ Ratchnevsky 87-88.
- ⁵⁵ Fletcher 31-32, 34-35.
- ⁵⁶ Ratchnevsky 96-101.
- ⁵⁷ Grousset 219.
- ⁵⁸ Barfield 8-9.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. 193.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. 196.
- ⁶¹ Fletcher 36.

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