



12-2015

The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century

Igor de Rachewiltz
The Australian National University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/cedarbooks>



Part of the [Asian History Commons](#), and the [East Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rachewiltz, Igor de, "The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century" (2015). Shorter version edited by John C. Street, University of Wisconsin—Madison. Books and Monographs. Book 4. <http://cedar.wvu.edu/cedarbooks/4>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Books and Monographs at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Collection of Open Access Books and Monographs by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

The Secret History of the Mongols

*A Mongolian Epic Chronicle
of the Thirteenth Century*



TRANSLATED BY
IGOR DE RACHEWILTZ
The Australian National University

SHORTER VERSION
Edited by John C. Street

December 11, 2015



The Secret History of the Mongols, Translation by Igor de Rachewiltz is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit www.creativecommons.org.

Cover illustration: Ögödei Qa'an (Ogedei Khan), third son and successor of Činggis Qan (Genghis Khan, ?1162-1227), reigned from 1229 to 1241. He was the real founder of the Mongol empire and, in the author's opinion, he played an essential role in the composition of the *Secret History of the Mongols*.

Colour on silk, date unknown (? 14th c). Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

order.¹ But if the elders of the companies do not proclaim this order to the guards they shall be guilty *and liable to punishment*. Further, elders of the companies without permission from Us shall not, merely on the ground of seniority, reprimand my guards who have enrolled as *guards equal to them*. If *any of them* breaks the law let it be reported to Us. Those liable to death We shall certainly cut down. Those liable to punishment We shall certainly discipline. If, without informing Us, they themselves² on the ground of seniority lay hands on *my guards*, as requital for fists they shall be repaid with fists, and as requital for strokes of the rod they shall be repaid with strokes of the rod.³ Thus he spoke.

Further, he ordered as follows: ‘My guards are of higher *standing* than the outside commanders of a thousand; the attendants of my guards are of higher *standing* than the outside commanders of a hundred and of ten. If outside leaders of a thousand quarrel with my guards We shall punish those who are leaders of a thousand.’⁴

279

Further, Ögödei Qa’an said, ‘We shall not cause suffering to the nation that Our father Činggis Qa’an established with *so much* toil. We shall make *the people* rejoice, causing them to rest

Their feet upon the ground,

Their hands upon the earth.

Sitting *now on the throne made* ready by Our father the Qa’an, so that people do not suffer, every year from these people one two-year-old sheep out of *every* flock shall be given *as levy* for *Our* soup.⁵ They shall *also* provide one sheep out of *every* hundred sheep and give it to the poor and needy within the same *unit*. And when the *Qa’an’s* brothers and the numerous troops⁶ and guards gather

Begin here

¹ See above, §227 ad fin.

² I.e., the elders of the companies.

³ See above, §227 ad fin.

⁴ See above, §228.

⁵ I.e., for the support of the Qa’an.

⁶ I.e., the Qa’an’s family and the officers.

together *at feasts and meetings*, how could drink *for all* be levied every time from the people? From the various units of a thousand of different areas mares shall be provided and milked, and the mare-milkers shall be the ones to tend them. The camp-masters shall constantly provide replacements *of mares* and shall *in turn* be herders of the milch mares. And when the *Qa'an's* brothers gather together We shall give them gifts and rewards. Conveying satins, *gold and silver* ingots, quivers, bows, breastplates, weapons and the land-tax grains into the storehouses, We shall have *people* guarding them: storemen and grainkeepers must be selected from different areas and made to guard *the storehouses*. And, dividing camps¹ and waters, We shall give them to the people. If We select campmasters from the various units of a thousand to reside in the camps, that will surely be *an appropriate measure*.

‘Moreover, as there is nothing but wild animals in the Čöl² country, Čanai and Ui’urtai, being put in charge of the campmasters, shall make them dig wells in the Čöl for people *to live in this* rather vast *area*, and they shall build brick walls *around the wells to protect them from wild animals*.

‘Further, when the messengers ride in haste We allow them to ride moving freely among the population, and *as a result* the pace of *these* riding messengers is slow and they are an affliction on the people. Now We shall settle the matter once and for all by providing post-station masters and post-horse keepers from the various units of a thousand of different areas, by setting up a post station at every stage, by not allowing the messengers to move freely among the population unless on urgent business, but *instead* by having them ride in haste through the post stations. If we do this, it will surely be *an appropriate measure*.

¹ I.e., the grazing grounds (*nuntuq*).

² Lit., ‘the Desert’ (= the Gobi; cf. above, §188), but perhaps more generally ‘the desert country’ (RSH 2.1027).

‘When Čanai and Bolqadar,¹ being well informed, proposed these measures to Us We considered that they were indeed right *and said*, “Let elder brother Ča’adai decide. If these measures under discussion are appropriate and he approves them, let *the decision* come from elder brother Ča’adai.”’

After Ögödei Qa’an had sent this message, *a reply* came *from* elder brother Ča’adai, saying, ‘I approve these very measures about which you have asked me in your message – all of them. Thus, act *accordingly!*’

Further, elder brother Ča’adai’s word came, saying, ‘From here I shall have post stations connecting with *yours*.² Also, from here I shall send messengers to Batu, and Batu shall have his post stations connected with *mine*.’ And a further word came *from him*, which he sent saying, ‘Of all the measures, the one *concerning* the establishment of post stations is the most appropriate that has been proposed.’

280 Thereupon Ögödei Qa’an said, ‘Elder brother Ča’adai and Batu, and the other brothers, princes of the right hand³ – all of them; Otčigin Noyan and Yegü, and the other brothers, all the princes of the left hand,⁴ the princesses and sons-in-law of the centre, and the commanders of ten thousand, of a thousand, of a hundred and of ten, have all together approved the following: “If, for the soup of the Universal Ruler⁵ one provides *every* year one two-year-old wether out of *every* flock, it won’t be a *burden* at all. To provide one one-year-old sheep out of *every* hundred sheep and give it to the poor and needy is good. If we have post stations set up and provide post-station masters and post-horse keepers *to manage them* there will be peace for the many peoples, and for the messengers in particular convenience in travelling.” They unanimously approved *this*.’

¹ The Bulqadar of §278 above.

² I.e., to facilitate communications.

³ I.e., of the west.

⁴ I.e., of the east.

⁵ I.e., for the support of the Qa’an. Cf. above, §279.

Having taken counsel with elder brother Ča'adai regarding the order of the Qa'an, and *this* having been approved by elder brother Ča'adai, all the people from the various units of a thousand of different areas according to the Qa'an's order were made to provide every year one two-year-old wether out of *every* flock for the soup of the Qa'an, and one one-year-old sheep out of *every* hundred sheep for the poor and needy. They were made to provide mares, and herders of milch mares were *also* assigned. They were made to provide herders of milch mares, storemen and grainkeepers. They were made to provide post-station masters and post-horse keepers, and measuring the distance between each stage they had post stations set up. Aračan and Toqučar were put in charge of them. At a single stage of the post there had to be twenty post-horse keepers, and at every stage there had to be a post station with twenty post-horse keepers each.

The Qa'an ordered: 'With regard to the geldings to be used as post horses, the sheep to be used as provisions, the milch mares, the oxen to be harnessed to carts, and the carts, from the amount fixed by Us from now on,

If one causes *even* a piece of string to be lacking,
He shall be guilty *and liable*

To "splitting in half along the top of the head";¹

If one causes *even* a spoon-shaped spoke of a
wheel to be lacking,

He shall be guilty *and liable*

To "splitting in half along the nose."¹

281 Ögödei Qa'an said, 'This I have done after I sat on the great throne of my father:

'I campaigned against the Ĵaqut people² and I destroyed them.³

'As my second deed, I had post stations set up so that our messengers could ride in haste *all* along the way; and for that *purpose* I had all necessities conveyed to the post stations.

¹ I.e., to the confiscation of half his goods. See RSH 2.1031-32.

² I.e., the people of north China. See RSH 2.1032-33.

³ Lit., 'I destroyed the Ĵaqut people.'

‘As to the next¹ deed, I had wells dug in places without water and had *the water* brought forth, thus providing the people with water and grass.

‘Further,² I established scouts and garrison troops among the people of cities everywhere and so I let the people live *in peace*, causing them to rest

Their feet upon the ground,
Their hands upon the earth.³

‘After my father the Qa’an I have indeed added four *good deeds to his*.

‘But, being placed on the great throne by my father the Qa’an and being made to take upon myself the burden of my many peoples, I was at fault to let myself be vanquished by wine. This was indeed one fault of mine.

‘As to my second fault, to listen to the word of a woman without principle, and to have the girls of my uncle Otčigin’s domain brought to me was surely a mistake.⁴ Even though I was the Qa’an and lord of the nation, to participate in wrong and unprincipled actions, this was indeed one fault of mine.

‘To secretly injure⁵ Doqolqu was also a fault of *mine*. And why was it a fault? *Because* to secretly injure Doqolqu who strove fiercely in the service of his rightful *lord*, my father the Qan, was a fault and a mistake. Who will now strive so fiercely in my service? *Therefore*, I have myself acknowledged the fault of having secretly harmed, without discernment, a person who diligently observed the principle of *loyalty* in the service of my father the Qa’an and *in the service* of all.

‘Further,⁶ being greedy and saying *to myself*, “What if

¹ I.e., the third.

² I.e., as the fourth deed.

³ See above, §279.

⁴ For this complicated incident, nowhere mentioned in the *Secret History*, see RSH 2.1034-36.

⁵ = ‘poison’? Cf. above, §68. And for this third fault, see RSH 1036-37.

⁶ I.e., as the fourth fault (for which we have no direct additional evidence). See RSH 2.1037-38.

the wild animals born with their destiny *ordained* by Heaven and Earth go over to *the territory of* my brothers?”, I had fences and walls built of *pounded* earth to prevent the animals from straying. As I was thus confining them, I heard resentful words *coming* from my brothers. *That, too, was a fault of mine.*

‘After my father the Qa’an, I indeed added four *good* deeds to *his*, and four deeds of *mine* were surely faults.’ Thus he spoke.

282 The writing of *this book* was completed at the time when the Great Assembly convened and when, in the Year of the Rat, in the month of the Roebuck, the Palaces were established at Dolo’an Boldaq of Köde’e Aral on the Kelüren River, between Šilginček and [...].¹

¹ The name of the second locality is missing owing to a lacuna in the text.