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Women in Steppe Society

To date, scholarly and popular histories of the Mongols have been dominated by the seemingly masculine topic of Mongol warfare, which makes it easy to suspect that steppe women enjoyed little political, social, or economic power. Furthermore, Mongol society before Chinggis Khan's rise was not only impoverished but also tremendously unsettled, so that nomadic women were vulnerable to aggression, violence, and rape. This may especially have been the case among rank-and-file nomadic subjects, among whom harsh circumstances might weigh more heavily on women and girls than on men and boys.[1] Nevertheless, despite the dangers inherent in their society, many nomadic women enjoyed control and exerted influence in a wide range of arenas. As for women at the pinnacle of steppe society, such as the Chinggisids, the picture is one of wealth, responsibility and tremendous opportunity for those with intelligence and talent.

It is only possible to appreciate the authority that some women enjoyed and the contributions they made to Mongol history if we understand the general situation of women on the steppe. To do this, we must examine their lives in detail. We begin with marriage, since women's most

[1] Ratchnevsky notes the infanticide of girls, selling children in hard times, or making restoration for crime by giving girls to the aggrieved. Paul Ratchnevsky, "La condition de la Femme mongole au 12e/13e siècle," in *Tractata Altaica: Denis Sinor, sexagenario optime de rebus altaicis merito dedicata*, ed. W. Heissig et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 522. Aubin agrees on recompensing murder with a girl, but she argues that infanticide was rare, and took place primarily in areas influenced by Chinese traditions. Françoise Aubin, "Le statut de l'enfant dans la société mongole," *Recueils de la société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des institutions* 35 (1975): 482–3, 492.

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extensive powers tended to appear after marriage through their status as wives, mothers, or widows. Next comes women's work, since they engaged all day long in a wide range of activities, which required the formation and maintenance of many complex relationships. Along with work, we must investigate women's economic opportunities, since their daily business included the management, control, and exploitation of animal, human, and other resources. An additional area of women's activity centered on hospitality and religious duties. Women also had a profound influence on the family: in the immediate sphere, they managed the upbringing of children with the help of others, while on a larger front, women were essential to the question of succession and inheritance, since a woman's own status shaped the options open to her children. Women also figured in politics in many ways, including as advisors to others, as political actors themselves, or as the critical links that joined allied families, among other roles. Finally, women's private, interior lives came to affect the empire in surprising ways, especially those conquered women brought into the Chinggisid house by force, whose loyalty to that house was never questioned, but perhaps should have been.

It is also necessary to remember that all women's lives were governed by status. Steppe society remained generally hierarchical in nature for women and men, even after Chinggis Khan upended existing social hierarchies to create a new, merit-based social and military system. We cannot understand the activities of women, and from them learn about their relationships and their control of resources, without locating these women in a hierarchy of rank of which nomads themselves were exquisitely aware.

BRIDE PRICE, LEVIRATE, AND SENIORITY AMONG WIVES

Although the Mongols were a polygynous people, wealth strongly shaped marriage, since rich men wedded more wives than poor ones.[2] One reason was that Mongol grooms paid a bride price to compensate a prospective

[2] Ratchnevsky sees no limitation in wives, but does not account for social class. Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 514. Holmgren sees unlimited wives only for wealthy men, otherwise one or two. Jennifer Holmgren, "Observations on Marriage and Inheritance Practices in Early Mongol and Yüan Society, with Particular Reference to the Levirate," *Journal of Asian History* 16, rprt. in *Marriage, Kinship and Power in Northern China* (London: Variorum, 1995), 147; similarly Morris Rossabi, "Khubilai Khan and the Women in His Family," in *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner), 155.

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wife's family for the "loss" of their daughter.[3] Brides with wealthy parents could bring a dowry (*inje*) of household items, jewelry, livestock, and even servants and slaves to the union. But this was not always produced immediately – in some cases the delay could be as long as three years – and in any case seems to have been less than the sum provided by the groom.[4] Furthermore, when the dowry did appear it remained the woman's personal property, not the man's, and later went to her children: livestock to sons, cloth and jewels to daughters, and servants to both.[5] If a family could not afford a bride price, the groom might instead pay off his debt by working for his father-in-law for a period of time. Another option was to arrange a double marriage between two families, where each family provided a son and a daughter, which allowed both sides to dispense with bride price.[6] Nevertheless, for poorer men in the chaotic period before Temüjin's rise, the bride price may have been such a barrier to marriage, and the idea of labor so unappealing, that one affordable way to acquire a wife became to kidnap her, even though this eliminated any chance of a dowry.[7] Thus one scholar has suggested that Temüjin's

[3] John of Plano Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in China and Mongolia in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey, ed. Christopher Dawson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 7; not in John of Pian de Carpine, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1235–55, as Narrated by Himself, with Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John of Pian de Carpine*, trans. W. W. Rockhill (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900); also C. de Bridia, *The Vinland Map and the Tatar Relation*, trans. and ed. R. Skelton, T. Marston, and G. Painter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965): §49.

[4] Holmgren, "Levirate," 129–31; Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 511–2; George Qingzhi Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty*, Asian Thought and Culture, vol. 60 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 4 for a dissenting view. Also *Secret History* §43 for a servant as part of the *inje*. Miyawaki-Okada suggests that women brought substantial property into marriage, although its relationship to the husband's property is not clear. Junko Miyawaki-Okada, "The Role of Women in the Imperial Succession of the Nomadic Empire," in *The Role of Women in the Altaic World*, ed. Veronika Veit (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 144–6. Aubin, "Enfant," 539 (the three-year delay). Also Bettine Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960–1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 206.

[5] Aubin, "Enfant," 541–3, 546–8; also *Secret History* §43 (a female servant becoming a son's concubine).

[6] Aubin, "Enfant," 535.

[7] Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 516; Holmgren, "Levirate," 144–5; Herbert Franke, "Women under the Dynasties of Conquest," in *La donna nella Cina impeiale e nella Cina repubblicana*, ed. Lionello Lanciotti (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1980), rprt. in *China Under Mongol Rule* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1994), 36–7; Birge, *Confucian Reaction*, 204.

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father, Yisügei, was himself relatively poor, first because he acquired Temüjin's mother, Hö'elün, by kidnapping her, not by negotiating an agreement with her parents; and second because he left their son Temüjin to work off the bride price for his fiancée, Börte, rather than simply providing the expected gift.[8]

The Mongols engaged in strictly exogamous marriages, which stipulated that individuals had to wed into a lineage other than their own.[9] Nomadic society was organized by larger groups (*oboq*, sometimes "tribes"[10]) descended from a real or mythical ancestor, and within these large groups, by smaller patrilineal descent groups (*uruq*), or lineages. One large group could contain multiple lineages, usually connected to one another by a cousinly relationship.[11] Marriages between descendants of related patrilineal groups were unacceptable, but loopholes did exist. In particular, the Mongols favored exchange marriages, where children married back into their mother's natal line. This could be a daughter marrying her mother's nephew "in exchange" for the mother's earlier marriage, or it could be a sister exchange, where a son and his male cousin married one another's sisters.[12] Such marriages were possible within the

[8] See Chapter 2.

[9] Zhao, *Marriage*, 15–21; Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), 92.

[10] Recently scholars have suggested that the term "tribe" has become fraught because of its association with questionable ethnographic practices influenced by colonial policies. David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), and Sneath, "The Headless State in Inner Asia: Reconsidering Kingship Society and the Discourse of Tribalism," in *Representing Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission and the Sacred*, ed. Isabell Charleux, Grégory Delaplace, Robert Hamayon, and Scott Pearce (Bellingham: Western Washington University), 365–415. Yet some of the historical sources from the Mongol period use "tribe" to categorize the peoples they discuss. Rashīd al-Dīn in particular uses "*qom*" (Persian, from Arabic *qawm*), which can indicate a "tribal group" of related individuals. This book will take a stance midway: it acknowledges that "tribe" can be problematic when used in the modern world, replaces it with "lineage" to indicate the ruling families of large groups and "subjects" or "people" to indicate those ruled by the lineages in question, but retains the "tribal" names associated with particular groups (the Merkits, Kereits, etc.), since these are the markers used throughout the sources.

[11] Buell and Kolbas, "Ethos," 48.

[12] Two forms of exchange existed: (1) When "in exchange for" his wife a man married a daughter to his wife's brother's son and (2) When he then married a son to his wife's niece at the same time; this latter was considered sister-exchange since the two grooms had "exchanged" sisters. Nobuhiro Uno, "Exchange-Marriage in the Royal Families of Nomadic States," in *The Early Mongols: Language, Culture and History: Studies in Honor of Igor de Rachewiltz on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday*, eds. Volker

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rules of exogamy because of the patrilineal quality of nomadic lineages, which meant that the bloodlines of fathers, not mothers, determined the relationship between two prospective partners.[13] Thus a couple could marry their daughter or son to the mother's nephew or niece without qualm, since the fathers in question – the man, his wife's brother – were not related by blood. By modern standards these marriages would be consanguineous on the mother's side, but this was not a concern for the Mongols.[14] Although consanguinity may have contributed to the poor health that plagued the Chinggisids in the later decades of their empire, it should not be seen as the sole cause.[15]

Although details on the negotiation process are scant for the early period, mothers are likely to have been actively involved in pairing their own children with those of their siblings. Certainly mothers shaped their children's marital futures through the preference for the woman's relatives as partners. It is reasonable to assume that women were also somehow involved in the negotiations for their children, especially since later marriage manuals point to the active participation of both sets of parents in the wedding ceremonies.[16] Fathers and mothers together might accompany their daughters to their new homes after the wedding.[17]

If a woman's husband died, the widow usually engaged in a second, levirate marriage to a junior kinsman of her deceased husband, such as a younger brother, nephew, or son from another wife.[18] Levirate marriage gave the widow a protector, and kept her from seeking remarriage outside the husband's family, taking his children and any property she controlled

Rybatzki et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 176, 179–80. Zhao prefers "one-way" marriages (a lineage only provided husbands to the Chingizids) and "two-way" marriages (a lineage provided husbands and accepted wives). Zhao, *Marriage*, 24–5, 102–10 (Qonggirats).

[13] Zhao, *Marriage*, 16.

[14] Zhao, *Marriage*, 16, 18–24; Jagchid and Hyer, *Culture and Society*, 92.

[15] Broadbridge, "Toluid-Oirat Connection," 122; John Masson Smith, "Dietary Decadence and Dynastic Decline in the Mongol Empire," *JAH* 34, no. 1 (2000): 35–52.

[16] H. Serruys, "Four Manuals for Marriage Ceremonies among the Mongols, Part I," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 8 (1974): 248 (texts can be dated to 1904–8, but originals are "much older"), 294–6 (presence of both male and female parents in wedding ceremonies). Jaghchid and Hyer, *Culture and Society*, 83.

[17] See the example of Börte's mother Chotan, who went to Temüjin's camp with her while Börte's father, Dei Sechen, turned back. *Secret History*, §94–6.

[18] Holmgren, "Levirate," 152–3; Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 517; and Paul Ratchnevsky, "The Levirate in the Legislation of the Yuan Dynasty," in *Tamura Hakushi shoju Toyoshi ronso*, (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1968), 45–62.

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with her.[19] Despite the levirate's origin as a nomadic practice, it later appeared in the Mongol Empire among subject peoples as well, even though at times it conflicted with existing, non-Mongol legal practices.[20] But although levirate marriage was widespread on the steppe, a few imperial widows of Chinggisid princes managed to avoid remarriage, and thus formed one important exception to this rule.[21]

Scholars have claimed that wealthy men with many wives treated their wives equally.[22] Even if this delightful theory were possible to carry out, it did not mean that wives were equal to one another in status. Rather, nomadic society distinguished clearly between wives according to rank, even though all wives had their own dwelling, servants, income, and husbandly attention. The senior wife was the most important, and was often the first woman the husband married. She controlled the largest and wealthiest camp (*ordo*). At the same time, a few other high-status wives controlled secondary camps. The junior wives and concubines then lived in the establishments of either the senior wife or the lesser camp-managing wives and answered to them.[23] A senior wife could be displaced if she had no children or died, in which case another woman would become the next senior wife through marriage and the bestowal of the senior wife's camp on her. If the second senior woman had been a junior wife, a reassignment of the main camp might take place; if she already had her own camp, she would simply increase in honors, respect, and ceremonial to reflect her new status.[24] Historical sources from China suggest that each Mongol khan had four main wives with four main camps, but sources for the

[19] Holmgren, "Levirate," 151–4; Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 517.

[20] Ratchnevsky, "Levirate," 45–6, 57–8; Birge, *Confucian Reaction*, chapter 4.

[21] Holmgren, "Levirate," 159–63; Birge, *Confucian Reaction*, 205–6. For imperial widows who remained single – Töregene, Oghul Qaimish, and Sorqoqtani – see Chapters 6 and 7. Bruno De Nicola suggests that the sons' importance also affected their mothers' ability to avoid remarriage. Email correspondence, June 2017.

[22] Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 516.

[23] *Yuan Shi*, 14:2693–6, 2698, 2701, Table of Empresses (unpublished trans. Buell). Bruno De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206–1335* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 130–2, 132–9, and his "Ruling from Tents: Some Remarks on Women's Ordos in Ilkhanid Iran," in *Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran: Art, Literature, and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand, A. C. S. Peacock, and Firuza Abdullaeva (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 128. For Ilkhanid examples see Chapter 9.

[24] For Töregene displacing Ögedei's senior wife, Oghul-Qaimish, see Chapter 6. For Chabi displacing Qubilai's senior wife, see Chapter 8. See Chapter 9 for Hülegü (two senior wives), Abaqa (three), Arghun (two), and Geikhatu (two).

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Western Khanates beginning in the mid-thirteenth century do not always specify a fixed number of camps.[25] Spatially, wifely dwellings within each camp formed a line arranged in strict hierarchy of rank, with the managing wife at the westernmost position, and the most junior wife at the eastern end.[26] Younger children lived with their mother, older children had their own gers (yurts, or round, felt-walled tents) behind her, and servants inhabited lesser quarters behind the family they served.[27] (Concubines were also positioned behind the wives, but in front of the gers of the bodyguard and officials.[28]) We may assume that when several camp-managing wives were together, the camps were lined up in order of the status of the mistresses. Once the Chinggisids had established their empire, all of the imperial gers became marvels of gleaming white felt outside and gold brocade inside, strewn with carpets and decorated with gems and pearls to mark the imperial status of the inhabitants.[29] The khan may have possessed his own establishment, and also a larger pavilion, which held the thrones for him and his senior wife.[30] But for daily living, the husband appears to have moved from ger to ger among his wives, accompanied by his guards (*keshig*).[31] Additional guards were responsible for the safety of the entire family compound, which was further protected by lines of carts, and an open space in front of the imperial gers.[32] Above and

[25] The *Yuan Shi* stated that Chinggis Khan's wives had four camps, managed by Börte, Qulan, Yisüi, and Yisügen. *Yuan Shi*, 14:2693–6, 2698, 2701, Table of Empresses, and 21:2422–7, Annual Gifts (unpublished trans. Buell); also Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: The Description of the World*, ed. and trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (London: Routledge), §82; De Nicola, "Ruling from Tents," 127–30.

[26] William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–55*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 74 (Batu's wives), 188 (Möngke's wives).

[27] For size of dwellings according to rank see Rubruck, *Mission*, 74, 95, 178.

[28] *Hei-Ta Shih-lüeh* [*Hei Da shi lü*], trans. P. Olbright and E. Pinks (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 104.

[29] Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13–16.

[30] The existence of a "male" ordo is a challenge to extract from the sources. More work is certainly needed. For now see De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 138, 152, 155–9, 161–5.

[31] Carpini *History*, 17–18 (not in Rockhill); Marco Polo (1938), *Description*, §82.

[32] Andrews, *Felt Tents*, 325–9; this additional contingent is unspecified, although half the nightguards guarded the camp when Chinggis Khan went hunting. *Secret History*, §232, de Rachewiltz, Commentary, 835–9. Also Charles Melville, "The Keshig in Iran: The Survival of the Royal Mongol Household," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill), 135–64.

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beyond the imperial guard, some women may have had their own guardsmen, although in smaller numbers than the *keshig*.[33]

In addition to holding the most prestigious place in the wifely line, the senior wife spent more time with the husband than did the junior wives, which may explain why senior wives often had many children (between five and nine), whereas junior wives and concubines tended to have one or two.[34] Although a junior wife enjoyed precedence over her co-wives during drinking-parties at her dwelling if her husband attended, otherwise the senior wife sat closest to the husband at ceremonies and receptions, and received other courtesies: at feasts in thirteenth-century Yuan China, for example, Qubilai (r. 1260–94) sat at a raised table with his senior wife, while the junior wives sat at a lower table so that their heads were level with the senior wife's feet.[35] (See Figure 1.1.) In the royal encampments of the Jochid khanate along the Volga River, the khan's throne had space for two – the khan and the senior wife – and was situated on a platform raised three steps off the floor.[36] Less vertical yet equally telling

[33] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 498, states that Özbek's third wife had 300–500 of her own troops, in addition to those provided by her husband. When Töregene was regent and Temüge advanced upon her to seize the throne, she sent word that the people and the soldiery (*lashkar va ulūs*) were upset, which suggests that she indeed had warriors at hand. Her emissary was accompanied by his own followers, also probably serving as soldiers: Juvaynī, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Atā'-Malik, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 244 (omitting any reference to Töregene's people, but then "retinue and troops" for her emissary); but in Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 802 ("*lashkar wa ulūs* " for Töregene's people, then "*aqvām va atbā'* " for the emissary's men), trans. Thackston, 391 (both "soldiery and ulus," and "ulus and army," then "clans and followers" for the emissary), trans. Boyle, 178 ("whole army and ulus," then "people and followers" for the emissary). See also footnote 63 in Chapter 5 on princess Alaqa holding the home front while her husband was out hunting.

[34] Carpini, *History*, 18 (not in Rockhill); Rubruck, *Mission*, 196, on Möngke's fourth, least-visited wife; Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 2:486. For Yisügei's senior wife, Hö'elün, and her five children, see Chapter 2. For Chinggis Khan's senior wife, Börte, and her nine children, see Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 for his junior wives. Ögedei's most influential wife, Töregene, had five sons; see Chapter 6. Tolui's senior wife Sorqoqtani had four sons and possibly a daughter; see Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 969, trans. Thackston, 471, albeit claiming five sons (sic). Note also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 38–9, on status and children among wives.

[35] Marco Polo, *Description*, §86; *Hei-Ta Shih-lüeh* [*Hei Da shi lü*], trans. P. Olbright and E. Pinks, 105; Rubruck, *Mission*, 76 (the precedence of the wife of the day in drinking parties).

[36] Carpini, *History*, 57 and trans. Rockhill, 10; also Rubruck, *Mission*, 132, and see Chapter 8 (Jochi and his probable senior wife, Sorghan).

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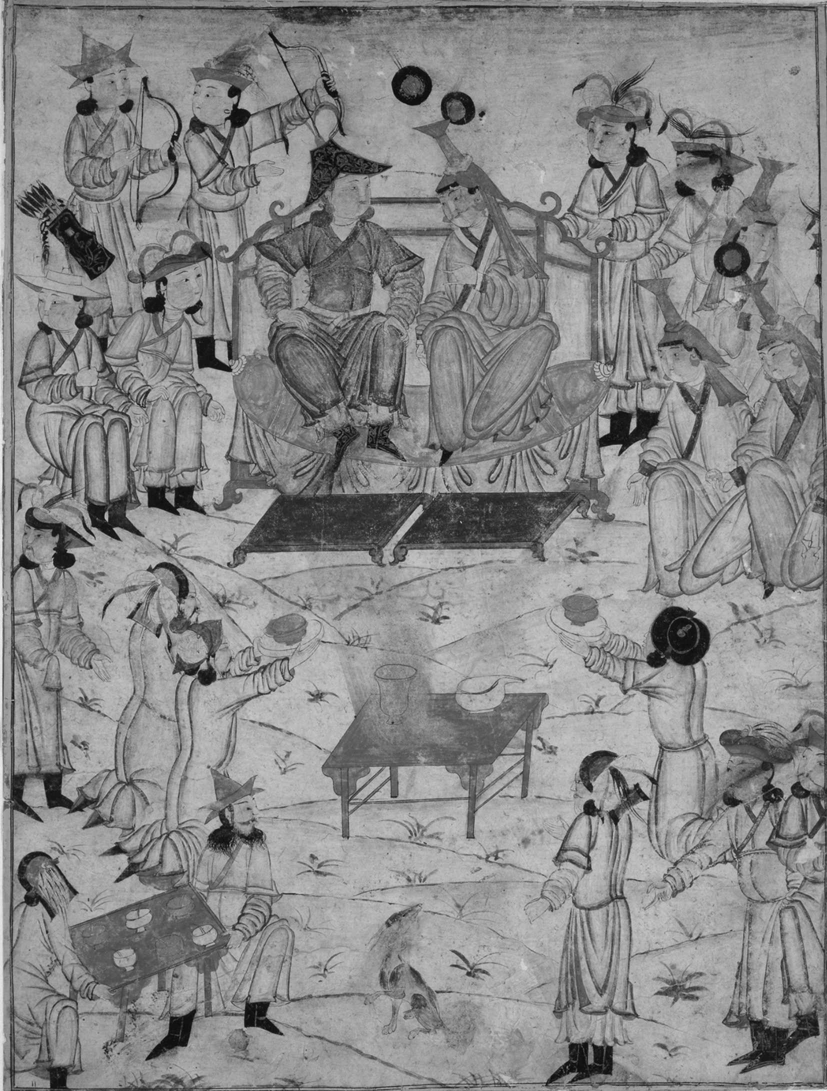

Figure 1.1 An enthronement scene from the Diez Albums, Iran (possibly Tabriz), early fourteenth century, ink, colors, and gold on paper. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Prussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Diez Album, fol. 70, S. 22.

ceremonial distinctions appeared during fourteenth-century Jochid social gatherings, where the khan walked to the doorway of an imperial pavilion to welcome his senior wife and seat her. He then met the junior wives in

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order after they had entered the pavilion, not at the doorway.[37] On the grimmer end of womanly duties in the steppe, widows in general and certainly senior widows in particular usually survived their husbands' funerals, whereas concubines could be dispatched – by strangulation, immolation, or live burial – to serve their master in the afterlife, along with male servants and livestock. Although wives were expected to rejoin their husband after death, they generally escaped being sent after him immediately, since duties to their live children, and to their new husband if they remarried through the levirate, outweighed duties to their dead spouse for the time being.[38]

WOMEN AND WORK

We can best imagine steppe women's lives by examining the work they did every day.[39] The Franciscan Friar Carpini, who traveled through the Mongol Empire in 1245–7, and his later counterpart, Friar William of Rubruck in 1253–5, both noted that women's responsibilities were extensive.[40] Friar William in particular catalogued the separate duties of women and men: men made gers and wagons, but women managed the journeys between summer and winter camps by loading the gers on to the wagons, driving the wagons to the next site, and unloading them again.[41] Gender similarly shaped livestock duties: women cared for cattle, men tended horses and camels, and both took care of sheep and goats. In addition, men fermented mares' milk (*qumiz*), fashioned weapons and tack, and cured skins; women made butter, cooked, and sewed clothes from the skins the men had cured.[42] As one scholar puts it, women handled all work relating to the hearth, to dairy production except from horses, and to childrearing (which will be discussed later); men handled

[37] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 483 (the Jochids).

[38] Jean-Paul Roux, "La veuve dans les sociétés Turques et Mongoles de l'Asie Centrale," *L'Homme* IX, no. 4 (1969): 61. Note Ögedei's decision to sacrifice forty "moonlike virgins," (concubines?), not his father's wives, for Chinggis Khan's funeral. Juvaynī, *World-Conqueror*, 189.

[39] Note Rossabi's important treatment of this topic in "Women," 153–5.

[40] Carpini, *History*, 18 (not in Rockhill); Rubruck, *Mission*, 90–1; Polo, *Description*, §69, and de Bridia, *Tatar Relation*, §49.

[41] Rubruck, *Mission*, 90–1, 73–4. Carpini explains that small gers were dismantled and carried on animals, while large ones were kept whole and moved on wagons. Carpini, *History*, 8 (not in Rockhill); also Rossabi, "Women," 153; *Hei-Ta Shih-lüeh* [*Hei Da shi lü*], trans. P. Olbright and E. Pinks, 105.

[42] Rubruck, *Mission*, 90–1; Rossabi, "Women," 153.

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hunting, fighting, and horses; and both cooperated to manage small animals, make felt, and preserve meat at butchering time.[43] The interiors of Mongol dwellings reflected the clear division of labor, with different sections designated for men and women, the tools they needed, and specific kinds of work.[44]

But Friar William's otherwise useful description overlooks both the way a woman's status determined her labor, and the question of overall management, which was the responsibility of wives in general and a senior wife in particular. Women maintained their camps both when men were present, and when they departed to hunt or fight, which they did regularly.[45] These were non-combatant camps (*a'ughruq* / *a'uruq*, sometimes called *ordo* as well).[46] Whenever the man was absent from the non-combatant camp, the senior wife supervised everything.[47] During military campaigns, a different kind of camp (potentially and confusingly also called *ordo*),[48] was also run by a woman with staff, but these accompanied the armies as they traveled.[49] When Chinggis Khan set out on his conquests, he took one wife with him to manage the traveling

[43] Barbara Frey Näf, "'Compared With the Women the ... Menfolk have little Business of their own': Gender Division of Labour in the History of the Mongols," in *The Role of Women in the Altaic World: Permanent International Altaistic Conference, 44th Meeting, Walberberg, 26–31 August 2001*, ed. Veronika Veit (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 71.

[44] Caroline Humphrey, "Appendix: Inside a Mongolian Tent," in *Nomads: Nomadic Material Culture in the Asian Collections of the Horniman Museum*, ed. Ken Teague (London: Horniman Museum and Gardens), 88.

[45] Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 509–10; Rossabi, "Women," 154; Valentin Riasanovsky, *Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law*, Uralic and Altaic Series 43 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Publications, 1965), 84; Franke, "Dynasties of Conquest," 36.

[46] Rashīd al-Dīn / Thackston, (glossary) 765; Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongoischen Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden, 1963–75), entry 496.

[47] For an example see Chih-Chang Li, *The Travels of an Alchemist: The Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang-ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan, Recorded by His Disciple, Li Chih-Ch'ang*, trans. Arthur Waley (Westport, CT, 1931, rprt. 1976), 70–1, at Chinggis Khan's *ordo*, run by the "Empress," while Chinggis Khan himself was on the Western campaign.

[48] Ordo could refer, confusingly, to an imperial camp during peacetime. Rashīd al-Dīn / Thackston (glossary) 765; Doerfer, *Neupersischen*, entry 496; also see Christopher Atwood, "Ordo," *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004), 426–7.

[49] Bruno De Nicola, "Women's Role and Participation in Warfare in the Mongol Empire," in *Soldatinnen: Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 108.

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camp, while the other wives remained in Mongolia to manage the non-combatant camps.[50] In addition to this routine management, some wives took on extra responsibilities temporarily or even permanently if their husbands died.[51]

The writings of the fourteenth-century Muslim North African visitor to the Mongols, Ibn Baṭūṭah (d. 1377), reveal further details of the labor of imperial women (*khatun*s, "ladies" or "queens"), gained when he met the wives and married daughter of the Jochid ruler Özbek Khan (r. 1313–41) in the grasslands near the Volga River.[52] Like Friar William, Ibn Baṭṭuṭah described royal women as they engaged in domestic activities, but unlike Friar William, he mentioned their managerial roles. Thus when Özbek's senior wife received Ibn Baṭṭuṭah, she was both personally cleaning a tray of cherries, and overseeing fifty female servants doing the same. Similarly, whereas Friar William suggested that all women sewed clothes, Ibn Baṭṭuṭah instead found another royal wife reading aloud to thirty ladies as they performed skilled embroidery for her.[53]

In the case of the wives of Chinggisid princes, the question of management became further complicated by the presence of the imperial bodyguards (*keshig*) after 1203.[54] A certain number of the guards were responsible for important household tasks that overlapped the wifely domain. Guards supervised some male and female household attendants, managed the care of some animals, maintained weapons, carts, and hunting equipment; supplied, staffed, and ran the kitchens, and helped distribute certain kinds of spoils.[55] Although clearly some of these responsibilities related to their military duties, others, especially food

[50] Qulan ran Chinggis Khan's traveling camp during the Western Campaign of 1218–23, while Yisüi did the same during the second Tangut Campaign of 1226–7. See Chapters 3 and 5.

[51] This happened in both nomadic and sedentary families. David M. Farquhar, "Female Officials in Yüan China," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1985): 21–5. See also Sorqoqtani in Chapter 7.

[52] The wives were with Özbek; the daughter was 6 miles away. Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 489. Also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 138–9.

[53] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 487–8.

[54] See Chapter 4.

[55] *Secret History* §192, §232, §234, §278; also Andrews, *Felt Tents*, 324; Thomas T. Allsen, "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251–59," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, no. 2 (1986): 515; Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2007), 35; Melville, "Keshig," 139; Samuel Grupper, "A Barulas Family Narrative in the Yuan Shih: Some Neglected Prosopographical and Institutional Stories on Timurid Origins," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 8: 39–41; Ch-i-Ch'ing Hsiao, *The Military Establishment of the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1978), 93–4.

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preparation, intertwined with women's work. Officers in the *keshig* appear to have answered both to the Chinggisid prince they guarded, and to the wife in whose camp they were assigned. For example, the Tangut Buda, who was a commander of a hundred in Chinggis Khan's personal unit of a thousand, reported militarily to Chinggis Khan, and domestically to his senior wife, Börte, as her personal camp commander (*amīr*-i *ordo* in later sources). The position of camp commander in an imperial woman's establishment became standard in the decades after Chinggis Khan.[56] Wives were responsible not only for working with the camp commander, but also for coordinating additional areas of activity that were not under the camp commander's purview, such as some animal care, children's needs, clothing and wardrobe, religious rituals like the mourning of the dead, trade and political advice (both of which will be discussed later). In addition to the camp commander, a set of male and female administrative officers reported to each imperial wife and helped manage her retinue.[57] The activities, equipment, and personnel a woman and her staff had to supervise could be extensive, as shown in a financial decision made by Ghazan (r. 1295–1304) in the Ilkhanate: "funds for the ladies' board, provisions, necessities of wardrobes and mounts would be assured, as would be funds for supplies for the department of potables and stables, for camels and pack horses, and for wages of maids, eunuchs, custodians, kitchen help, caravan drivers, muleteers, and other servants and retinue [of each lady] as necessary."[58] Even concubines formed part of the domestic work force: Marco Polo remarks that concubines on duty at Qubilai's court not only had sex with Qubilai, but also prepared and served food and drink. At the same time, other women spent their time sewing or "cut[ting] out gloves and … other genteel work."[59]

According to Friar William, one imperial woman might possess 200 wagons of belongings, as well as servants to tend to them.[60] Indeed, one of Chinggis Khan's secondary wives, the Kereit princess Ibaqa, came into

[56] The *amir-i ordo* was a routine post among the Ilkhanids, and could be a commander, or even a lesser Chinggisid (i.e., the son of a concubine). The duties of this officer are not entirely clear; note De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 137–8 and "Ruling from Tents," 131–2. For examples of *amīr-i ordo*s see Chapter 4, footnote 16.

[57] These included female chamberlains. Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 485–6.

[58] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 1508, trans. Thackston, 746; also Rashīd al-Dīn, "The Third Portion of the History of Gāzān Xān in Rasīdu 'D-Dīn's Ta'rīx-e Mobārak-e Gāzānī," trans. Peter Martinez, *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi* 6 (1986), 118.

[59] Polo, *Description*, §82.

[60] Rubruck, *Mission*, 74, 114, 131; Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 482.

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the marriage with at least 200 servants and 2 stewards (and the corresponding wagons), as well as slaves and followers, horses and cattle, and equipment and stores that included golden dishes.[61] Later the Jochid prince Sartaq (r. 1257) married 6 wives, whose wagons numbered 1,200 when gathered together.[62] In China under Qubilai, each of the 4 most important wives had her own dwelling and 300 ladies-in-waiting, male and female servants, and staff to help her manage all this, so that each establishment might number as many as 10,000 people.[63] In the fourteenth century Volga grasslands, each of Özbek's wives attended Friday court ceremonies with 370 attendants.[64] When Özbek's third wife, a Byzantine princess, returned to Constantinople to give birth, she took a retinue of about 500 people (servants and troops), 400 wagons, 2,000 horses, and 500 oxen and camels. Not only was this merely a fraction of her own people, but it did not even include the 5,000 additional warriors her husband sent to escort her.[65] In addition to their immediate retinues, some women controlled peoples given to them as spoils, such as the 3,000 Olqunu'ut subjects that Chinggis Khan gave to his mother, Hö'elün, in 1206, or the Tanguts he bestowed on his wife Yisüi during his final campaign in 1226–7.[66] Women's subjects, dependents and retinues could therefore be numerous, especially among women in the ruling elite. Some visitors to the Mongols were astonished to reach settlements as large as cities, whose inhabitants were mostly female; these were the establishments of imperial women.[67] When a Chinese visitor arrived at Chinggis Khan's home camp in summer 1221, he found an enormous moveable city – "hundreds and thousands of wagons and tents."[68] This was managed by the highest-ranking wife, the Empress (possibly Börte) while

[61] De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 143; *Secret History*, §208; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 304, trans. Thackston, 149.
[62] Rubruck, *Mission*, 114.
[63] Polo, *Description*, §82; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 133–4, 138.
[64] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 2:484. [65] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 2:498.
[66] For Hö'elün see Chapter 2. For Yisüi see *Secret History*, §268; also Peter Jackson, "From *Ulus* to Khanate: The Making of the Mongol States, c. 1220–c. 1290," in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, ed. Morgan and Amitai-Preiss (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 19; De Nicola, "Warfare," 105–7.
[67] Rubruck, *Mission*, 74, 100.
[68] Li, *Alchemist*, trans. Waley, 71. Also Noriyuki Shiraishi, "Avraga Site: The 'Great Ordū' of Genghis Khan," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 83–93 and esp. 84.

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Chinggis Khan was campaigning thousands of miles to the west, based in a traveling camp run by his junior wife Qulan.[69] Indeed, nomadic men were free to specialize in warfare to such a high degree precisely because nomadic women managed camps with such skill.

ECONOMICS, HOSPITALITY, AND RELIGION

Given women's extensive control of animal, human, and other resources, it comes as no surprise that they were economically important to the families into which they married. Any aristocratic wife acquired through negotiation (not kidnap or capture) had her dowry in livestock, cloth, jewels, household items, and servants. A senior wife also received a portion of her husband's wealth after marriage, often in livestock, which she managed for him during his lifetime and held after his death for their youngest son to inherit.[70] (Junior wives also held part of their husband's wealth, but the amounts relative to the share of the senior wife are unknown.)[71] Thus when a woman emerged from her ger every morning she might gaze on both her own animals and those of her husband; it is probable that she kept close track of which animals were whose over generations of livestock. Women could also employ Muslim, Chinese, or other merchants (*ortaq*s) to act as financial agents and engage in sales, purchases, or investments with capital that the woman supplied. Such merchants furnished women with interest, profits from enterprises, and gifts from third parties.[72] Even as the empire was forming, personal merchants soon became standard among imperial wives.[73] Thus, for example, in 1218 Chinggis Khan ordered all the princesses, princes, and major commanders to send agents with ingots of precious metal to trade in the Khwarazm-Shah Empire.[74]

But other than the dowry, the husbandly grant, and the potentially shrewd uses to which women put these assets, women did not receive a

[69] This was the Western Campaign (1218–23); see Chapter 5.

[70] Holmgren, "Levirate," 129–31; in contrast to Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 511–2. Also Rossabi, "Women," 155.

[71] Aubin, "Enfant," 547.

[72] Thomas T. Allsen, "Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners, 1200–1260," *Asia Major*, *3rd ser*., 2, no. 2 (1989): 85, 88–9, 91; Elizabeth Endicott-West, "Merchant Associations in Yüan China," in ibid., 129, 132, 140–1; De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 145–9, 153–4.

[73] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 1507, trans. Thackston, 745; Allsen, "Merchant Partners," 88–9, 91, 111, 117, 119.

[74] Allsen, "Merchant Partners," 87–92; Endicott-West on merchants as spies in "Merchant Associations," 134.

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regular income from men.[75] Instead men provided occasional gifts in the form of spoils from warfare by distributing goods, animals, territories, and peoples both to male followers, and also to wives, mother, sisters, and daughters, not to mention stepmothers, aunts, and daughters-in-law. After Chinggis Khan conquered Northern China, for example, he gave all his wives lands there, which became their own possessions, not his.[76] Similarly in 1219 he parceled out artisans captured at Samarqand to "officers, commanders and ladies."[77] At the quriltais where Grand Khans were elected, the princesses, princes, generals, and administrators were rewarded by the new ruler with handsome gifts.[78] Once the Mongol Empire was established, wives of rulers could expect to receive gifts from subject rulers or their envoys, or from ministers and officials working directly for the Chinggisids.[79] In later decades, imperial women acquired access to tax monies raised from conquered populations.[80] Overall this meant that the female kin of a steppe leader could control herds, deposits of ore or other natural resources, artisans and craftspeople, and even portions of industries.[81]

Yet a wife's duties hardly stopped with the practical matters of managing personnel and exploiting resources. According to a maxim attributed to Chinggis Khan, a wife bore the weighty responsibility of promoting her husband's public reputation by maintaining the hospitality of their home for guests, especially when the husband himself was away.[82] Thus in the case of the Chinese visitor to Mongolia in 1221, the Empress chose her guest's lodging site within the great camp and

[75] Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 1507, trans. Thackston, 745; trans. Martinez, 114–15; Allsen, "Redistribution in the Mongol Empire, Comparisons and Implications" (unpublished article), 6, 11; also Polo, *Description*, §69.

[76] Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 518; Allsen, "Merchant Partners," 110–1, Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jām'*, 1507, trans. Thackston, 745.

[77] Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 503, trans. Thackston, 249. Note *Secret History* §215, where Chingiz Khan rewarded his daughters and their offspring, but the text has been excised, probably for political reasons; de Rachewiltz, Commentary, 807. See Chapter 6.

[78] Juvaynī, *World-Conqueror*, 254–5; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 150 (gifts).

[79] Carpini, *History*, 39 (not in Rockhill); Allsen, "Redistribution," 13. The Mamluk embassy of the early 1280s to the Jochid Khan Möngke-Temür included gifts for his wives. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir, *Tashrīf al-Ayyām wa-al-'usūr fī sīrat al-malik al-Manṣūr*, ed. Murād Kāmil (Cairo: al-Sharikah al-'Arabīyah lil-ṭibā'ah wa al-nashr, 1961), 17.

[80] Rashid al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 1507–8, trans. Thackston, 745–6; trans. Martinez, 116–18.

[81] Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 77, trans. Thackston, 43 (Chinggis Khan's daughter-in-law Sorqoqtani trying to exploit silver deposits).

[82] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 584, trans. Thackston, 295–6.

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demonstrated her hospitality by sending him melted butter and clotted milk every day, while her co-wives, the Jin and Tangut princesses, dispatched gifts of clothing, millet, and cash (silver).[83] Similarly in 1246 it was the wives of the new Grand Khan Güyük (r. 1246–8) who arranged a welcome for Friar Carpini and his companions when they arrived at the imperial camp.[84] Social status and rank further shaped hospitality, just as it did the rest of Mongol society. Thus, when in 1254 Friar William paid calls on Möngke's family, he first met with Möngke and his senior wife in her personal gold-hung ger, went next to Möngke's oldest son, and then called on Möngke's other wives and daughter in order by rank.[85] Ibn Baṭṭuṭah similarly took careful note of seniority while paying his respects to Özbek's wives and daughter in the 1330s.[86] During such visits, wives could favor individuals by giving them bowls of *qumiz* with their own hands, or sitting and looking on while they ate; by contrast, less privileged guests were waited on by servants.[87]

Imperial women also acted as participants in and patrons of religion, whether shamanism, Taoism, Nestorian Christianity, Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, or a combination of several.[88] Women learned not only to practice religion but participate in religious ceremonies, and sometimes preside over them.[89] Some imperial women were known for the portable houses of worship that accompanied them everywhere, while others patronized a range of religions financially.[90] Imperial hostesses also facilitated religious events, as seen in the example of Özbek's daughter, who summoned the Muslim personnel in the camp so that Ibn Baṭṭuṭah and his companions could meet them. Similarly the senior wife of Grand Khan Möngke (r. 1251–9) attended Christian services, then hosted a meal that Friar William attended.[91]

[83] Li, *Alchemist*, trans. Waley, 70–1. [84] Carpini, *History*, 60 and Rockhill, *Journey*, 17.
[85] Rubruck, *Mission*, 192–6. [86] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 487.
[87] Ibn Baṭūṭah was welcomed by Özbek's Muslim wives and given drink from their own hands (Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 487, 488), but the less-respected Friar William did not enjoy such personal treatment. Rubruck, *Mission*, 194–6.
[88] See the extensive work of De Nicola, *Khatuns*, Chapter 5.
[89] Temüjin's mother Hö'elün and the Naiman queen Gürbesü were (or tried to be) involved in shamanistic ceremonies. See Chapters 2 and 3; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 186.
[90] De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 193 (Dokuz), 208–22 (patronage in the Ilkhanate) and E. W. Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 202; also see Chapter 7 for Sorqoqtani.
[91] Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Travels*, 489; Rubruck, *Mission*, 189–91; Bruno De Nicola, "The Ladies of Rum: A Hagiographic View of Women in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Anatolia," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 152–3 (the Seljuk example).

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Thus it is clear that although in a very small household a woman's duties might not exceed the activities that Friar William described, in larger establishments women had to oversee the coordination of significant resources (herds, flocks, subjects) as well as people (shepherds, stewards, craftspeople, household servants, and armed retainers). It is surely no accident that another of Chinggis Khan's maxims described an ideal steppe girl as not only naturally beautiful without "combs or rouge," but also spry and efficient.[92] Friar Carpini claimed that the reality matched Chinggis Khan's ideal: "In all their tasks they [the women] are very swift and energetic."[93] To keep up with their many responsibilities, they would have to be.

WOMEN, CHILDREN, INHERITANCE, AND SUCCESSION

In addition to the work they performed on a daily basis, women in general and mothers in particular had the potential to shape steppe society through childbearing, childrearing, and inheritance. Although mothers played a central role in bringing up children, childrearing was a joint endeavor shared by all adults.[94] This communal approach was strengthened by existing practices: some mothers sent their children out for extended visits with other branches of the family, while in all cases women with the means to do so employed wet nurses and attendants when children stayed at home.[95] Later during the independent khanates, tutors and religious officials taught the royal young, along with co-wives and others.[96] To gain a better understanding of childrearing in the Mongol period, scholars have combined a modern anthropological approach with careful mining of the historical sources to propose the following: young people seem to have been taught to have a sense of

[92] An ideal boy was brave, manly, wise, and clever. Rashid al-Din, *Jāmiʿ*, 588, trans. Thackston, 299.

[93] Carpini, *History*, 18 (not in Rockhill).

[94] Aubin, "Enfant," 504–5.

[95] Princes sent out to stay with other women include Grand Khan Möngke (r. 1251–9), who lived with Ögedei's wife Ang-hui, and the ilkhan Ghazan (r. 1295–304), who lived with his father's wife Bulughan Khatun, not his concubine mother Qultaq. *Yuan Shih*, trans. Abramowsky, 16 (Möngke); Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ*, 1213, trans. Thackston, 592 (Ghazan). Note Sorqoqtani's choice of two different wet nurses (a Naiman and a Tangut) for Qubilai, and the case of two nurses (a Muslim and a Sino-Jurchen) for the later Chinggisid prince Ananda (Bruno De Nicola, "The Role of the Domestic Sphere in the Islamization of the Mongols," in *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives in History*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017]: 360).

[96] De Nicola, "Domestic Sphere," 361 on the Ilkhanate.

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Figure 1.2 The modern game of turtle, Chinggis Khan Monument ger camp museum, Dadal, Mongolia (author's image).

honor, a respect for hierarchy, admiration for elders, and an appreciation for working with others.[97] Children were also encouraged to develop a certain "agility of spirit."[98] This could be achieved through games like chess, which taught strategy; or riddles, which were fun and also helped children learn to use metaphors and metonyms in place of taboo objects (See Figure 1.2).[99] Literature was oral among the Mongols at least until they acquired a script in the 12-aughts thus children not only memorized existing maxims, songs, stories, and epics, but were encouraged to produce new pieces extemporaneously, since the ability to create literature on the spot as occasion demanded was highly valued in steppe society.[100] Children furthermore learned rules, practical advice, and genealogy, which helped them follow the regulations of exogamous marriage.[101] In

[97] Aubin, "Enfant," 507–8. [98] The phrase is Aubin's in "Enfant," 508.
[99] Aubin, "Enfant," 508–9.
[100] Aubin, "Enfant," 508–9; for adults learning poetry and maxims see Larry V. Clark, "From the Legendary Cycle of Činggis-qaγan: The Story of an Encounter with 300 Tayičiγud from the Altan Tobči (1655)," *Mongolian Studies* 5 (1978/1979): 12–13.
[101] Aubin, "Enfant," 507–9.

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addition to these abstract forms of knowledge, children learned how to care for specific animals – goats, sheep, horses, cattle, camels – at specific ages as they themselves matured.[102]

To date, scholars have focused on the way mothers interacted with sons: they have noted that nomadic society expected women to promote peace and cooperation among their boys, and, when the mothers were high in status, rear their sons to be leaders.[103] One mother in Chinggis Khan's family was celebrated by contemporary authors and modern scholars alike for the way she taught her four sons Mongol customs, beliefs, and military practices, as well as the religions, beliefs, and habits of the sedentary peoples they controlled.[104] Certain mothers within the Mongol empire themselves held great political importance: Chinggis Khan's mother, Hö'elün, helped her oldest son establish himself, while others were instrumental in maneuvering their sons onto a throne they should not have held at all.[105]

In literature, including *The Secret History of the Mongols*,[106] mothers appear as responsible for harnessing the tremendous violence expected of males in Mongol society, and directing their sons' aggression outward against enemies, not against one another. The most famous example of such a portrayal was the ancestral Mongol mother, Alan-qo'a, who appeared in the *Secret History* using the example of individual arrows versus arrows tied together to teach her sons that cooperation would make them a force to be reckoned with: "If, like the five arrow-shafts just now, each of you keeps to himself, then, like those single arrow-shafts, anybody will easily break you. If, like the bound arrow-shafts, you remain together and of one mind, how can anyone deal with you so easily?"[107] Scholars caution us to view such stories of mothers and sons as folkloric motifs designed to teach lessons about the high costs of disunity among brothers, not as historical reality.[108] Nevertheless, such stories at least

[102] Aubin, "Enfant," 507–9. [103] Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 510.

[104] This was Sorqoqtani, wife of Tolui and mother of Möngke, Qubilai, Hülegü, and Ariq Böke. Rossabi, "Women," 161–2, but see Chapter 7 for an alternate view. Also Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 791–2, trans. Thackston, 386, trans. Boyle, 169.

[105] I.e., Töregene and Sorqoqtani, for whom see Chapters 6 and 7.

[106] Anonymous, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Igor de Rachewiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[107] *Secret History*, §20–2.

[108] Larry Moses, "The Quarrelling Sons in the Secret History of the Mongols," *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 395 (1987): 63–9 and esp. 63–4; he charts this motif in the stories of Temüjin murdering his half-brother Bekter and disputing with his brother Qasar, along with the argument between Chaghatai and Jochi in 1218.

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indicate that the author and audience of the *Secret History* were likely to see women as appropriate teachers on moral questions like proper sibling behavior. A later historian, writing without the arrow motif, described another woman in a similar vein: "she exerted herself to raise and educate them [her sons] and teach them skills and manners. She never allowed even an iota of disagreement to come between them."[109]

But scholars of the Mongol empire have paid little attention to the upbringing of girls.[110] Surely, however, steppe women worked as hard at raising their daughters as they did at everything else, since the competent wives, mothers, and widows who crowd Mongol history did not come from nowhere. A close look at the historical sources reveals that traces of their education can indeed be found. Thus Friar William observed women making and breaking camp, driving, cooking, sewing clothes, and tending animals, from which we may deduce that girls learned these activities when young.[111] Since many historical observers saw women riding and shooting, it is logical to assume that girls acquired these skills, too, probably with instruction given the danger involved for a novice – Friar Carpini notes that children began to ride at the age of two or three.[112] If we accept Chinggis Khan's maxim on a wife's duty to provide good hospitality, then we may infer that girls were taught about the proper reception of guests.[113] If we observe that most senior wives used a range of techniques to manage their people, herds, and property – possibly including memorizing their animals' strengths, weaknesses, and bloodlines[114] – then it is reasonable to conjecture that women began to acquire management skills as girls, and further that they probably passed them on to their daughters.[115] The ample evidence we see of women's religious involvement similarly indicates that girls learned to participate in

[109] This was Sorqoqtani. Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 790, trans. Thackston, 386, trans. Boyle, 168.

[110] A welcome exception is De Nicola, "Domestic Sphere," 353–76, although even De Nicola must comment more on boys than girls because of the limitations of the sources.

[111] Rubruck, *Mission*, 90–1.

[112] Carpini, *History*, 18 (not in Rockhill); Rubruck, *Mission*, 89; also Rossabi, "Women," 154; Yoni (Jonathan) Brack, "A Mongol Princess Making *ḥajj*: The Biography of El Qutlugh Daughter of Abagha Ilkhan (r. 1265–82)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 3 (2011): 333.

[113] Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 584, trans. Thackston, 295–6.

[114] On the indispensability of this skill among modern British shepherds see James Rebanks, *The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape* (New York: Flatiron, 2015), 117–8, 127–8, 153–7, 165–8, 199–200, 259–62, 281–2.

[115] On control of property in particular see Holmgren, "Levirate," 152–3.

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shamanistic ceremonies and rituals, or those of other religions.[116] In addition, politically successful women had husbands who listened to their advice and rewarded them for it with spoils; they must have figured out how best to advise others, as when Chinggis Khan's Tatar wife Yisügen convinced him to look for her sister and marry her, and when the sister, Yisüi, later persuaded him to make a partial reconstitution of his Tatar enemies.[117]

Another arena in which women played a critical role was that of inheritance, especially succession to a throne. On the steppe, succession was a complex, contrary, and contradictory process: a ruler could be followed by a senior male member of his family (uncles, brothers), a son, grandson or nephew that he chose himself (ruler's choice), or a widow acting as regent for a son.[118] Or the next ruler could be his oldest son (primogeniture) or his youngest (ultimogeniture), as long as their mother was his senior wife – sons of junior wives were not candidates for succession.[119] But Chinggis Khan narrowed the options for succession to his empire by limiting himself to the four sons of his senior wife, Börte, and cutting out his brothers, uncles, and nephews, as well as his sons from junior wives. His descendants similarly preferred their offspring as heirs. Thus whereas the senior wife of any steppe leader knew her sons might inherit rule from their father but had competition from other men in the family, the senior wife of a Chinggisid knew her sons' chances were much better because succession was so limited.[120]

As for daughters: these often married their father's political allies or vassals.[121] One theory is that the great nomadic empires that preceded the Mongols were confederations of various peoples led by rulers who maintained their alliances chiefly through marriage ties.[122] Although Chinggis Khan is widely credited with dismantling the confederation system, he did

[116] De Nicola, *Khatuns*, Chapter 5; Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 521. [117] See Chapter 3.

[118] Peter Jackson, "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal* 22 (1978): 186–244, reprinted in Peter Jackson, *Studies on the Mongol Empire and Early Muslim India* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Variorum, 2009), 193–5 (ultimogeniture, primogeniture, and seniority). Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 125–6 (all but ruler's choice even though Chinggis Khan favored this method). Juvaynī, *World-Conqueror*, 40 (favoring children based on mother's age); Polo, *Description*, §83; Holmgren, "Levirate," 148–9; De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 50 (women regents).

[119] De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 39; one rare exception was Abaqa (r. 1265–82) in the Ilkhanate. See Chapter 9.

[120] Holmgren, "Levirate," 146–7; 149.

[121] Holmgren, "Levirate," 164–7. Also see Chapter 4.

[122] Miyawaki-Okada, "Imperial Succession," 143.

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actually make confederation-style marriages himself, as seen in Chapter 4. It should come as no surprise that the most important of these alliances were reserved for children of his senior wife. Börte's five daughters, all of whose names are known to posterity, made good or even brilliant marriages in terms of wealth and status, and their husbands were important figures or major vassal rulers linked politically to Chinggis Khan.[123] Furthermore, Chinggisid princesses who married vassal lords and produced sons could expect to see their sons succeed to the vassal's throne.[124] Striking examples of the impact of Chinggisid princesses on succession appeared in Korea, first in 1298, when a ruler was deposed for refusing to have sex with his Mongol princess wife, and again in the thirteen-teens, when a Korean king requested three Chinggisid wives in succession, despite the fact that he had sons from other women.[125]

In contrast to the benefits heaped on the children of senior wives, the offspring of junior wives could expect lesser favors, as could the children of concubines. Chinggis Khan's junior children had respectable careers, but they were less brilliant than those of their senior half-siblings, despite claims to the contrary.[126] Daughters of junior wives made good marriages but not brilliant ones, while junior sons enjoyed military careers, but could not even dream of ruling.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

Women and men both played active roles in steppe politics. High-ranking women in particular joined men in the public expression of political

[123] For Börte's daughters see Chapters 2, 4 and 5. [124] Holmgren, "Levirate," 164–7.

[125] These were King Ch'ungsŏn (r. 1298) and King Ch'ungsuk (r. 1313–30, 1332–9). George Q. Zhao, "Control through Conciliation: Royal Marriages between the Mongol Yuan and Koryŏ (Korea) in the 13th and 14th Centuries," *Cultural Interaction and Conflict in Inner and Central Asia* 6 (2004): 3–26 and esp. 4–6, 22–3; Louis Hambis, "Notes sur l'histoire de Corée à l'époque mongole," *T'oung-pao* 45 (1957): 196–201; David M. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2009), 101–2, 122.

[126] Carpini, *History*, 17 (not in Rockhill), claiming no distinctions between sons of wives or concubines; but Marco Polo, *Description*, §83, applied strict primogeniture to inheritance in Qubilai's family, yet also acknowledges the lesser sons' careers. Herbert Franke argues that nomadic children of wives or concubines had equal status, which contradicts the specific Mongol examples. Franke, "Dynasties of Conquest," 37. But Rossabi, "Women," 155, acknowledges that children of lesser wives or concubines received smaller inheritances, while Zhao, *Marriage*, 74, cites the *Yuan Shi* that sons of concubines should not inherit the throne.

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power by attending and participating in political ceremonies, while decrees could be issued jointly through the authority of a man and his wife or wives.[127] Many women made strategic marriages and thereby participated in networks of personal and political connection, as will be discussed shortly. Women with access to political information could use it to advise others or shape policy. Finally, and as mentioned previously, women managed the essential activities of everyday life, which allowed men to engage in their specialties of raiding and war.

Women in the Mongol Empire and the successor khanates participated most visibly in politics at formal ceremonies like quriltais, coronations, and receptions of ambassadors. Visitors particularly noted the presence of women at official gatherings. As elsewhere in Mongol life, physical space was assigned to each gender: men sat to the right of the ruler, women to the left. Usually all of an important man's wives attended these ceremonies, but only the senior wife sat next to her husband, often on a raised dais, while the others sat below on designated benches or other seats.[128] (See Figure 1.3.) Thus for example the senior wife of the Jochid prince Sartaq received Friar William with her husband, and together they examined an incense burner and psalter that Friar William showed them.[129] Other women present at political events could be the daughters, sisters, aunts, and mothers of important men.[130] Ambassadors also routinely met with women independently from their meeting with the ruler, and might be given food, drink, and gifts by the wife or her servants.[131] In later centuries, nomadic wives usually received diplomats a few days before their menfolk. It has been suggested that the women were vetting the visitors in order to help men prepare for a later audience.[132] Unfortunately the existing information is too scant to tell us whether there was a Mongol precedent to this behavior.

Women also attended informal political meetings: if a man discussed politics inside any ger other than his own ceremonial pavilion, the ger

[127] See footnote 138. [128] Rubruck, *Mission*, 210, 132; Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, 483.
[129] Rubruck, *Mission*, 117.
[130] Juvaynī, *World-Conqueror*, 184–8, 249–52; Carpini, *History*, 64–5, trans. Rockhill, 24; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, 839, trans. Thackston, 409, trans. Boyle, *Successors*, 215 (Chinggis Khan's sisters-in-law at the 1251 quriltai).
[131] Carpini met Töregene separately from Güyük in *History*, 61, 65, 69, trans. Rockhill 19, 26, 30; Friar William met Möngke's wives in *Mission*, 190, 195–6, 204 (wives giving presents). Also Brack, "Mongol Princess," 340–7.
[132] Tom Allsen, referring to Muscovite diplomatic reports in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, covering the Noghai, Kalmuks and Khalka khanates, email correspondence, summer 2016.

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Figure 1.3 A recreation of a man's and woman's thrones with wolfskins, Chinggis Khan Monument ger camp museum, Dadal, Mongolia (author's image).

always belonged to a wife, who would be there waiting on (or directing servants to wait on) her husband and his guest as well as participating in or listening to their conversation. In this way women's roles in hospitality could involve them in politics. One such highly informal interaction took place between Temüjin and his youngest brother Temüge when the latter burst in late at night after a set-to with the shaman Kököchü. Since Temüjin was in Börte's ger, she participated in the conversation.[133]

Some women were therefore well-positioned to gain valuable knowledge of politics, personalities, and current events, which they could then use to advantage. But women rarely seem to have employed their political acumen openly for themselves; rather, historical and literary evidence suggests that they shared their ideas with men, many of whom deliberately sought out and followed women's advice.[134] Thus on one occasion Temüjin asked both his mother and wife about a cryptic comment that his friend Jamuqa had made, and decamped with all his followers as a result

[133] See Chapter 2. [134] Tom Allsen, email correspondence; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 38.

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of Börte's political advice.[135] Similarly both Hö'elün and Börte provided important political analyses and advice when Temüjin faced rivals, while the Tatar wife Yisüi is credited with convincing Temüjin to settle the question of succession to his throne.[136]

In addition to acting as advisors to their immediate contacts, women could interact extensively with a wide range of political players. A description of the Chinggisid princess Kelmish Aqa illuminates the networking practices of a politically active Chinggisid woman:

> Toqta [of the Jochids, (r. 1291–1312)] and the other princes hold her in a position of great importance. Since she is the offspring of [Chinggis Khan's son] Tolui Khan, she shows a constant affection to the Padishah of Islam [Ghazan in Iran (r. 1295–1304)] and continually sends emissaries to inform him of events that transpire in that realm. It is due to her that friendship has been maintained and strife and enmity avoided between Toqta and Jochi's Khan's other offspring and Tolui Khan's house. When [Qubilai's son] Nomoghan was surprised and seized by his cousins and sent to Möngke-Temür, the ruler of Jochi Khan's *ulus* [land and peoples], Kelmish Aga exerted herself to have him sent back to his father with honor in the company of some of the princes and great amirs [commanders].[137]

Nevertheless, few women ruled openly, and then only under certain circumstances. As noted above, more often women shared rule with their husbands by participating in government and enjoying inclusion on official decrees, most clearly among the fourteenth-century Golden Horde, Chaghatayids, and Ilkhanids.[138] Or, when a lesser Chinggisid or other important Mongol man died, his widow could administer his personal territory and continued to receive his revenues, income, gifts, and other resources.[139] A third possibility was for a woman to rule as a regent on behalf of a son for a limited period of time. This was the case for Börte's third daughter, Alaqa, who governed Öng'üt territory for a son; for Töregene, who ran the entire empire after Ögedei's death until enthroning her own son Güyük; and for Chinggis Khan's granddaughter, Orqīna, who ruled the Chaghatayid Khanate for a decade, also on behalf of a young son.[140]

[135] See Chapter 2. [136] See Chapters 2 and 4.
[137] Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 779–80, trans. Thackston, 382, trans. Boyle, 160.
[138] al-'Umarī, *Masālik*, 67, trans. Lech, 136.
[139] Carpini, *History*, 60, and trans. Rockhill, 17, on Orda's widow running his territory. See also Chapter 8.
[140] See Chapter 5 for Alaqa, Six for Töregene and Eight for Orqīna; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 50; Carole Hillenbrand, "Women in the Saljuq Period," in *Women in Islam: From the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. G. Nashat and L. Beck (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 114–15 (Seljuk women).

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Women also contributed to steppe politics by marrying the allies of their menfolk. Typically men formed certain kinds of alliances and friendships with other men. When enough such relationships were established among individuals, families, or lineages, larger organizations could result, among them confederations, as outlined above. But although scholars have focused on the political links among men, it is vital to remember that in most confederations these male alliances were matched by marriage ties between the two sides, which equally helped hold confederations together.[141]

This was the realm of in-laws. Among the Mongols, the word *quda* referred to in-laws in a general sense: when negotiating the marriage between Temüjin and his senior wife Börte, for example, the fathers in question, Yisügei and Dei Sechen, referred to one another as *quda*.[142] (A son-in-law earned a special name: *küregen*.)[143] The relationship of *quda* was one of mutual affection and assistance between the marital partners, and between their families. In this way it differed from other forms of political alliances between men, which only linked individuals.[144] Marriage negotiations were conducted with the assumption that both sides would benefit from the match, especially if the families involved had political standing.[145] Some benefits were long-term, as when a woman married a man expected to hold political power in the future. This was the case when the previously mentioned leader Dei Sechen engaged his daughter Börte to the young Temüjin, who could be expected to take over his father Yisügei's position as war leader.[146] Other benefits were more immediate, such as when the Kereit leader Jaqa Gambu married his loveliest daughter to the Tangut ruler Weiming Renxiao (r. 1140–93, Renzong) in return for immediate status in Tangut lands, or when Jaqa Gambu's brother Ong Qan matched his own daughter, Huja'ir, with the Merkit leader Toqto'a in return for protection in exile.[147] At other times marriage obligations could be perilous – the Mongol-Tatar feud that shaped Temüjin's early life began as a disagreement between the

[141] Miyawaki-Okada, "Imperial Succession," 143; also De Nicola, *Khatuns*, 40; C. Hillenbrand, "Women," 108.
[142] *Secret History*, §62–3, §65–6; Atwood, "Quda," Encyclopedia, 460–1.
[143] Rashīd al-Dīn / Thackston, glossary, 767; Doerfer, *Neupersischen*, entry 340.
[144] Chih-Shu Eva Cheng, "Studies in the Career of Chinggis Qan" (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1996), 212–7.
[145] Cheng, "Career," 217; Ratchnevsky, "La Femme," 511.
[146] Cheng, "Career," 218.
[147] Cheng, "Career," 43, 219.

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Qonggirats and the Tatars, not the Mongols, but expanded to include the Mongols because of their in-law connections with the Qonggirats.[148]

Particularly among political families, strategic marriages created a network of female and male informants across a confederation, whose loyalties were multiple and complex, and who were well-positioned to gather political information and send it where it could be useful.[149] Women could therefore draw on their birth families, their children, and sons- or daughters-in-law, and even their co-wives for information. Thus, for example, Temüjin's divorced Kereit wife Ibaqa traveled to Mongolia from China each year to consult with her sister Sorqoqtani, host parties for the major political players in the realm, and confirm her political and social connections at the heart of the empire.[150] Women with rank, privilege, and wealth also controlled additional networks of servants, staff and retainers. The daughters of such women must have learned both political savvy and the best ways to express political advice from their mothers, grandmothers (and perhaps stepmothers), then later applied them as situations warranted.

A nomadic lord could use the in-law relationship and the networks it created to promote and maintain his own power. One simple way to do this was to make a political subordinate into a son-in-law, which honored him, elevated him politically, and also guaranteed his service. Chinggis Khan did this with his Turkic sons-in-law from Qara-Khitai territory in 1211.[151] Less benevolently, a strong nomadic ruling family might seek to control the people ruled by the lineage into which it had married. This was the secret fear of Ong Khan of the Kereits when Temüjin proposed a double marriage between their families: the Kereits had endured unwanted in-law meddling before, and so Ong Khan saw the matches as a prelude to a takeover and refused to cooperate. Temüjin soon proved these fears to be well-grounded when he conquered the Kereit people and subjugated its rulers, albeit without the sanction of the in-law connection that he himself had suggested.[152]

[148] Cheng suggests that the feud began with the Mongol Qabul Qan, whose sister married the Qonggirat Sayin-Tekin. When the Qonggirats attacked the Tatars over a shaman's failure to cure Sayin-Tekin's illness, Qabul Qan participated as a brother-in-law, which sparked the Mongol-Tatar feud. Cheng, "Career," 214–15.

[149] Cheng, "Career," 212, 223 (an "eyes and ears" network).

[150] See Chapter 3.

[151] See Chapters 4 and 5.

[152] See Chapter 2; also Cheng, "Career," 20–7 (the precedent-setting earlier takeover); Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation*, 69–70.

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Later, Chinggis Khan used the ties of obligation and affection enshrined in the in-law relationship to bring other nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, like the Öng'üts, Oirats, Uighurs, and Qarluqs under his control without actually having to conquer them; unlike in the case of the Kereits, however, he left their subject people and their realms intact.[153] These "conquests" took place through the marriages of Chinggis Khan's daughters and granddaughters to these rulers, which made the brides into general managers of people, property, and resources for their princely husbands, according to steppe custom. These women were thus perfectly positioned to act both as local informants for Chinggis Khan, and as political advisors for their husbands, while their husbands gained political rights and privileges among the Chinggisids.[154] This reliance on the political network formed by in-law or consort families became business-as-usual throughout Mongol territory; indeed, after the Mongols were driven out of China in 1368, their Ming successors implemented a policy of restricting the activities, power, and influence of in-law families, which may have been a response to Chinggisid customs.[155]

WOMEN'S LOYALTIES

Whereas steppe women's marriages, work, and childrearing have commanded some scholarly attention, no attention has yet been paid to the larger question of women's mental energy, especially their loyalty, its focus, and the way it affected their behavior. The historical sources and literature mention loyalty in passing, usually when praising a woman for demonstrating it in a socially acceptable way. Thus the mother who worked herself to the bone for her children, the senior wife who remained sexually faithful to her husband, or the junior wife who advised her husband wisely were directly or indirectly lauded as exemplars of women's loyalty and its proper expression.[156] But the realities of women's experiences, and the ways they actually behaved, suggest that their real loyalties were far more complex than has been previously assumed.

[153] Cheng, "Career," 226. See also Chapter 5. [154] See Chapters 4 and 5.

[155] This began in 1425. Although the author overlooks the Yuan dynasty, it is reasonable to assume that the Ming knew of Mongol practices. E. Soulliere, "Imperial Marriages of the Ming Dynasty," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 37 (1988): 20.

[156] *Secret History*, §73–5, §254; Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 71–2, 94, 299–300, trans. Thackston, 41, 53, 146.

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It is helpful first to consider women whose loyalties were straightforward, that is, women who grew up in one family, married into another, and bore children, all without encountering abduction, captivity, rape, violence, or other hardship along the way. Scholarship on nomadic marriage has suggested that the bride price system limited married women's contact with their birth families, since once the bride price was paid the woman was no longer her family's responsibility; the levirate only exacerbated this situation, since a widow was a concern for her in-laws alone.[157] The resulting conclusion is that a married woman's loyalty was directed solely at her immediate family – her husband and children. Or was it? In contrast to scholarly claims, the historical sources suggest that daughters of steppe leaders maintained a sense of responsibilities that extended beyond their own wifely households to the peoples their parents ruled; that is, they retained their loyalty to their birth families and subjects even after marriage, and even as they developed new loyalties to their husbands and children. A famous poetic passage from the *Secret History* suggests that a well-placed steppe wife was entrusted not just with managing her husband's wealth and their family, but with protecting her own parents, kin, and people. The passage describes Qonggirat women, who were famed for their beauty:

> With us, the Qonggirat people, from old days,
> To have the good looks of our granddaughters
> And the beauty of our daughters is enough:
> We do not strive for dominion . . .
> We lift our good-looking daughters,
> We have them ride on a carriage with front seat;
> We harness a dark male camel,
> We lead them off to the qa'an,
> And seat them on the throne, at his side.
> From old days, the Qonggirat people
> Have the qatuns as shields,
> Have their daughters as intercessors.[158]

These lines imply that a woman who married a leader was expected to keep her family and people in mind even after she rode off to a new

[157] Birge, *Confucian Reaction*, 204–5; Holmgren, "Levirate," 151–2.

[158] *Secret History*, §64, de Rachewiltz, Commentary, 332; Isenbike Togan, "The Qongrat in History," in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer, Sholeh A. Quinn, and Ernest Tucker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 70–2; see also the *Altan Tobci*, 12–13.

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life, regardless of the mechanics of bride price or levirate.[159] Accordingly, then, even if a woman had only limited contact with her birth family after her marriage, out of sight was not supposed to mean out of mind.

Additional Chinggisid examples suggest that women in advantageous positions might continue to interact with their families after marriage, sometimes extensively. Although the tremendous political power Chinggis Khan wielded after 1206 certainly facilitated the abilities of his wives or mother to contact their families, it was not the only factor at play, since concepts of loyalty to birth family joined Mongol preferences for exchange marriages with a wife's relatives. One example was Temüjin's mother Hö'elün, whose relatives were not even on terms with her kidnapper husband Yisügei. Nevertheless, Yisügei deliberately chose Hö'elün's Olqunu'ut family as the one in which to find a wife for their son Temüjin, and the patterns of exchange marriage suggest that the bride would have been one of Hö'elün's close relatives.[160] Although ultimately Temüjin's bride (Börte) came from the Qonggirats instead of the Olqunu'-uts, Yisügei's original intent might have enabled Hö'elün to reestablish contact with her family. Later after Yisügei's death, Hö'elün's youngest son, Temüge, did marry an Olqunu'ut woman, which Hö'elün probably helped arrange.[161] Thereafter Chinggis Khan's unique position further supported Hö'elün's renewed contact with her people, since he gave her the Olqunu'ut subjects to command in 1206; at the same time her male relatives became commanders of a thousand in Chinggis Khan's army and married among Chinggis Khan's junior daughters.[162]

Börte also interacted with her family after marriage, although the Qonggirats profited far more from Börte's position than the Olqunu'uts did from that of Hö'elün. Although we know nothing about Börte's early contact with her people, the Qonggirat submission to Temüjin in 1203 certainly facilitated her (re-) connection to her relatives. Thereafter Chinggis Khan made some of Börte's male kin into commanders of a thousand in his army.[163] He and Börte also married one daughter to a

[159] De Rachewiltz, Commentary, 332, interprets this as "when the daughters and granddaughters of the Onggirat [Qonggirat] marry powerful chiefs and become *qatuns* they serve as shields against the Onggirat's enemies; and by the requests they make to their husbands, they obtain favors for the Onggirat."

[160] Uno, "Exchange-Marriage," 179–80.

[161] Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi'*, 280, trans. Thackston, 137.

[162] See Chapters 2, 4, and 5.

[163] *Secret History*, §176 (Qonggirat submission); Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 86; also see Chapter 4.

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Qonggirat man (a nephew or adopted nephew), and two sons to Qonggirat women.[164] It is reasonable to assume that both families were involved in the negotiations, and that both attended the weddings and the installment of the brides with their new husbands. Later the Qonggirats became the most important consort lineage for the Chinggisids, which further facilitated exchange between the families.[165]

Additional examples of contact between steppe wives and their birth families include those of Chinggis Khan's daughters who left Mongolia once they married.[166] Some of these women may well have encountered their father again during his conquests, since the Mongol armies crossed their territories, and their husbands joined Chinggis Khan's forces with their own warriors.[167] The princesses who married among Chinggis Khan's own followers were even more likely to see their natal family, since their husbands continued to work for their father.[168] Furthermore, even when a Chinggisid woman held the uneasy role of representing the Golden Lineage in a vassal country, as in Korea beginning in the 1260s, princesses were able to go back home for visits (in the Korean case, to Yuan China).[169]

But it is even more likely that women maintained multiple loyalties in cases where their lives were interrupted by hardship, despite the fact that these loyalties are harder to prove. Particularly in the violent and chaotic period before the rise of Chinggis Khan, steppe women were especially vulnerable to capture, rape, or other trauma. For a captured wife or daughter, then, where was her loyalty to go? In theory, to her new husband, even if he had just had her family and people killed. In reality, who can say? We cannot know the thoughts of people from such a different world, and the historical sources breathe no word of conflicts raging within these women's minds. But they were still humans as we are, and we can at least imagine that some captives may have harbored anger, resentment, or hatred. Many of Chinggis Khan's own women in the early years were daughters of conquered peoples, among them his wives Qulan, Ibaqa, Yisüi, and Yisügen, as well as the Jin and Tangut princesses, while conquered women who married his sons and grandsons included Töregene, Oghul Qaimish, and Sorqoqtani.[170] Unfortunately the historical sources, and the scholars, have generally not thought even to question

[164] See Chapters 4, 5 and 8.
[165] Zhao, *Marriage*, 94, 99, 101–18 especially tables 3, 4 and marriage lists 1, 2.
[166] See Chapter 4. [167] See Chapter 5. [168] See Chapters 4 and 5.
[169] Hambis, "Corée," 180, 186, 203; see also Zhao, "Conciliation," 3–26.
[170] See Chapters 6 and 7.

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where these women's hearts lay, or have assumed that their husbands or their children became their all.[171]

A clear example of women's contested loyalties does appear in the case of Chinggis Khan's Tatar wives, Yisüi and Yisügen, who went to Temüjin as part of the spoils when he annihilated the Alchi Tatars in 1202. As daughters of a leader, the sisters became Chinggis Khan's wives, not concubines; they then used their position to help those Tatars left alive. They contrived to rescue a few survivors almost immediately, then later maneuvered to gather the others in a remarkable, albeit extremely partial, reconstitution of their destroyed people.[172] The sisters thus maintained a sense of responsibility to their former subjects, alongside their new responsibilities in the households they were forced to establish with Chinggis Khan.

It is therefore essential to consider the question of women's mental energy, and particularly their loyalty, in order to understand their lives in nomadic society. The wide varieties in women's experiences, and the specifics of their behavior, suggest that their loyalties were multiple, complex, and sometimes hidden. Although the scholarly assertion that women were cut off from their families after marriage may be useful as a general rule, it must be tempered by the reality of measurable contact between a woman and her people, as shown in many Chinggisid examples.

CONCLUSION

Before we turn to specific women in the Mongol empire, it has been vital to investigate the general realities of steppe women's lives. This investigation has focused on married women, since it was particularly after marriage and childbirth that women were best positioned to exercise their powers. They then spent their lives engaged in a tremendous variety of activities: caring for animals, raising children, supervising workers of many kinds, and carefully husbanding or exploiting the human, animal, or other resources they controlled. Women were an economic mainstay for the families into which they married, and bore heavy responsibilities. Without their logistical, managerial, and economic contributions, to say nothing of their daily labor, steppe life could not have functioned: men

[171] One exception is Rossabi, who posits Sorqoqtani's difficult relationship to her husband, "Women," 160.
[172] See Chapter 3.

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would not have been free to raid, or to fight, or even hunt, and the histories of the great steppe empires would be very, very short. In what follows we will examine the individual women important in the life of the greatest empire-builder of them all, Chinggis Khan, and will consider their unique contributions to Mongol history in the specific light of their womanly training, abilities, world-view, and circumstances.

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