

SOCIAL
SCIENCES
STUDIES
IN TURKEY

EYUP SARITAS
Editor



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CHAPTER 2

COURT POLITICS IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE FROM ÖGEDEI UNTIL MÖNGKE

Kubilay Atik^{33*}

Abstract

Following the Death of Jिंगgis Khan, the Mongol Empire continued its unity for a period of four rulers, Ögedei and his son Güyük, Möngke and his younger brother Khublai. Khublai was the last Mongol Khan to be recognized universally as the Great Khan within the Mongol realm, but by his death, the Mongol Empire had already dissolved into smaller Khanates and the Mongol civil war that not only devastated the pax Mongolica but also ended the Mongol supremacy in Eurasia had already started. This paper focuses on the Mongol court politics during the Ögedeid rule during which the four different Jिंगgisid houses became irreconcilably separate political entities.

Keyword: Mongols, Ögedei, Güyük, Möngke, court politics

Although there have been many studies about the Mongol Empire, court struggles and court politics of the early Mongol empire has so far mostly been neglected. The focus has mostly been either Jिंगgis or

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his more successful grandsons such as Khubilai or Batu. Ögedei has probably been one of the most neglected Mongol Khans since his reign has mostly been seen as a transition period. But it was during the reign of Ögedei that the later military and political struggles of the Mongolian royal houses began fermenting. Therefore, the court politics of the reign of Ögedei needs further attention in order to better grasp the background of the later struggles. The choice of Ögedei as a Khan was an exception in many ways. He was nominated as the heir by Jinggis while he was alive and therefore he was one of the very few Mongol Khans to be elected without much struggle and bloodshed. The nature of his selection by Jinggis Khan has mostly been given in an anecdote by the Persian historian Rashid al Din as a result of a fight between his two elder brothers Jochi and Chaghadaï during a banquet. Sensing that there might arise a civil war for supremacy between the followers of the two eldest brothers, Jinggis as a result nominated Ögedei who was on good terms with both brothers according to traditional accounts. Although such an inheritance was against the Mongol custom of primogeniture, both brothers agreed this decision. Actually, this event probably simply gave Jinggis Khan the excuse he needed for selecting an heir apparent. As the founder of a new state, Jinggis Khan had already been considering appointing an heir apparent in his later years. According to Juvaini Jinggis assigned certain roles to four of his sons from his primary consort Börte. Jochi was responsible for hunting, Chaghadaï for law, Ögedei for political administration and Tolui for the army. From this arrangement, it is evident that Jinggis actually planned his inheritance scheme from an earlier date and the fight between the two brother simply set the stage for him to announce his decision.

After the death of Jinggis Khan in 1227 during the punitive campaign against the Tangut Xi Xia state, Ögedei was selected as the great Khan of the Mongols almost unanimously, at least there was no other candidate or open opposition to his being selected as the Khan. This was, as stated above, an abnormal situation according to the Persian historian Rashid-al Din Fazlallah as he records in his *Compendium of History*.³⁴ Normally in a traditional Mongol family, the youngest son would inherit his father's house and was called "the hearth protector"

³⁴ Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, vol. 3, *Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World: Persian Histories of the Mongol Dynasties* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 2012).

and his elder brothers were expected to leave the paternal household and establish their own houses as they come of age. Jiggis Khan broke with this tradition. He did not select his fourth son as his heir and he gave the control of the whole realm to Ögedei. Before the rise of Jiggis Khan to power, the Mongol tribes were disunited and were in a constant war with each other. Jiggis ended this situation and he established the road for a Mongolian style feudal system. Under the influence of more developed Khitan, Jürchen and Chinese civilizations, he adopted a series of new measures towards changing Mongolian inheritance patterns. The abolition of the ultimogeniture inheritance system in favor of an sovereign selected by the father was one of these steps towards feudalization. But Jiggis Khan was careful in considering these changes and he continued to comply with the old traditions to a certain extent. As Rashid-al Din narrates vividly:

“When Jiggis examined the duties to be given to his men, he hesitated on arranging the inheritance to the throne, sometimes he thought of giving the throne to Ögedei Khan, and sometimes to his youngest son Tolui Khan. Although according to ancient Mongol customs, the youngest son would inherit his father’s yurt, later on Jiggis Khan said: Affairs of the throne and state are difficult, let Ögedei rule. However, as for my yurt, family, army, treasure and like, let them be given to Tolui.”³⁵

Tolui was Jiggis Khans favorite son since he came along with Jiggis Khan in all his campaigns and became in a way his companion during his long campaigns. With the aforementioned step, he probably compensated and gave security to his beloved companion. As a result of this arrangement however, the Tolui line possessed more military power and wealth which had an important effect on the outcome of the later court struggles. At the same time the ultimogeniture inheritance custom continued to survive and was kept as a basis for selecting the next khan by some of the Mongol rulers and ministers. The reason lying behind the struggle of Arigh Böke and Khubilai Khan was the continuity of this custom alongside other practices of selecting a khan.

³⁵ Ibid., 3:17–18.

Juvaini and Rashid al Din states that when Jİnggis Khan expressed his wish for the inheritance of his sons, they all agreed. But according to more reliable *The Secret History of the Mongols* Jİnggis Khan's announcement of his will was just before the beginning of his western campaign, and a struggle between his sons had already surfaced. Regarding the delicate question of inheritance, there two camps emerged: one camp was that of Chaghatai and Ögedei, the other was that of Juchi and Tolui. Actually, Rashid al Din points out to the struggles between Juchi and his younger brothers Chagahatai and Ögedei, and also he mentions the good relations between the family members of Juchi and Tolui and Tolui does not resent stories regarding Juchi's birth.³⁶ These personal struggles between the two parties later on constituted the struggles and the ensuing civil war within the Mongol Court. Members of the both parties did not hesitate to conspire, kill, or perform coup d'états in order to seize the imperial power for their own lineage.

The stance of Juchi and Tolui was not so strong, they could not defy the orders of Jİnggis Khan and thus they could not openly oppose the election of Ögedei. But Juchi's opposition to Ögedei soon surfaced. When Jİnggis Khan set for the expedition against the Kharazmians in the west, he took Tolui alongside him and he left his other three sons to capture the Kharazmian capital Ürgenj. According to *The Secret History of the Mongols* and Rashid al Din, Juchi and Chaghadaï had an argument and they could not attack the city. They sent a message to Jİnggis Khan asking for determining who should bear the command of the army.³⁷ Such a question by Juchi was a hint of opposition at the selection of Ögedei as the heir apparent rather than a simple argument between brothers who should lead the army since Ögedei was elected as the heir apparent at the eve of the Kharizmian campaign, it was apparent that Ögedei should lead the army, and Juchi also probably guessed what the answer to his question would be. But this seems to be a subtle show of opposition rather than an actual question. Rashid-al Din continues to narrate that the three sons were temporarily united under the command of Ögedei and managed to conquer Ürgenj. Afterwards, Chaghatai and Ögedei met with Jİnggis Khan while Juchi remained behind in his own camp. Originally Jİnggis Khan ordered Juchi to move towards the Qipchaq steppe for further conquests there and his disobedience angered the great Khan. But later

³⁶ Ibid., 3:98.

³⁷ Ibid., 3:118.

on he was ill and he died after which Ögedei and Chaghatai, continued the campaign. Jiggis was so raged that at one point he ordered Ögedei and Chaghatai to attack the forces of Juchi as the front and he himself prepared to attack with the main force. But just as they prepared for this campaign, the news of Juchi's death arrived and Jiggis regretted his decision to attack his own son whom he regarded as a great soldier.³⁸ Although there is no mention of reasons for Juchi's opposition to his father, the most probable reason seems to be his dissatisfaction with his father's choice of a heir.

Jiggis Khan passed away in the August of 1227 during a punitive campaign against the Tangut Xi Xia state. According to Juvaini, he gathered his sons around him at his death bed and bid them to unite under the command of Ögedei. In a story reported by Juvaini from Jiggis Khan's mouth, in a cold night a group of snakes were trying to enter a hole, but they were all hindering each other from entering the hole and in the end all the snakes died, if they let at least one of them to enter the hole, their whole generation would have been saved.³⁹ In the feudal system that Jiggis probably tried to build, the heir apparent would ascend the throne upon the ruler's death, but in the Mongol system a Khurultai had to be convened and Ögedei had to be elected as the Khan although this Khurultai was a mere procedure after Jiggis's will was in favor of Ögedei. But until this Khurultai could be convened and Ögedei could ascend the throne as the great Khan, Tolui ruled as the regent for a period of two years as the protector of the hearth of Jinnngisid house as Jiggis Khan's youngest son. A Khurultai was not merely convened for electing a Khan. It was also a gathering where all the heads and important members of each tribe could come together and decide on affairs such as war and peace. For instance, in the Khurultai of 1201 waging war was decided by the tribal leaders of eleven Mongolian tribes. Therefore, the Khurultais were not mere instruments of electing a Khan from among the ruling elite, but they were rather gatherings of decision-making where all the tribes had to be persuaded for acting in unison. Therefore, the Jiggisids had to persuade and influence the members of the tribes who attended the Khurultai, and even more so, to persuade the parties to attend the Khurultais since a Khurultai convened in the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ala' al-Din 'Ata Malek Juvaini, *The Tar'ikh-I-Jahan-Gusha of Alaud'-Din Ata Malik-I-Juwayni: Containing the History of Chingiz Khan and His Successors*, trans. Muhammad Qazvini (London: Luzac, 1912), 181.

absence of one or more important figures could be put into question in terms of the legitimacy of the decisions made. According to the Persian historians, the Khurultai that elected Ögedei as the great Khan went smoothly and Ögedei was unanimously elected as the great Khan and he has respectfully rejected the position three times until the others insisted that he must just as the Mongol tradition demands. On the other hand, the Chinese sources seem to contradict this smooth transition of power in harmony. *Yuanshi* relates the events under a different light than in the Persian histories of Rashid al Din and Juvaini. According to the passage in the biography of Yelü Chucai who was an old Jin official of Khitan origin and who began serving Jinglys Khan after the Mongol conquest of the Jin Dynasty, the decision making process dragged on for a while and Tolui and Ögedei alongside Yelü Chucai argued about the prolonging of the final decision.⁴⁰ Also according to *Yuanchao Mingchen Shilue*⁴¹ the passage in the biography of Yelü Chucai again relates a similar situation. According to this passage, the decision to elect the Khan was declared on the 24th of August 1229, but until the 22nd of August, there was still discussions going on. According to Juvaini, the Khurultai continued for forty days. The first three days were the welcoming banquets, and compared with the Chinese sources at hand, it seems that the decision-making process took thirty-five days and it was probably no smooth operation given the length of the decision-making process. If Ögedei was accepted as the undisputed heir of Jinglys Khan, then the time for selecting a Khan would not have been so long. The other possible candidate for the throne was Tolui. He, as the youngest son, was the protector of the hearth, and according to old Mongol tradition, had the right to inherit his father's belongings. This fight was not a mere fight for inheritance between the two brothers. This kind of a fight had been going on for centuries in different dynasties established by an elite of a nomadic background but conquered sedentary areas and created a hybrid administration. While one party always insisted on preserving the steppe traditions, the other party wanted innovation in order to adapt better to the new environment. The Wei dynasty of the Tabgach⁴², Khitan Lia, and

⁴⁰ Song Lian, *Yuanshi: History of Yuan*, Ershi Wushi Shi: The Twenty-Four Histories (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 2000).

⁴¹ Tianjing Su, *Yuanchao Mingchen Shilue*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1962).

⁴² Tuoba was the Chinese name, but the Orkhon inscriptions name them as Tabgach which was most probably the original pronunciation of this group.

more recently the Jürchen Jin dynasty had all faced this problem until the time of Jnggis. In fact, we can see the traces of the same struggle between the traditionalists and the innovationists even in the Türk Qaghanate as seen in the argument between Bilga Qaghan who wanted to build Chinese style cities and temples, and Tonyuquq who opposed this idea rather convincingly since his ideas were accepted in the end. Thus, the supporters of Ögedei were mostly the supporters of the innovations that Jnggis Khan tried to bring in to the Mongol political entity. In fact most of the innovations attributed to him such as the decimal army system, protocol, and other political novelties were in fact Turkic, Khitan, or Jürchen innovations. The fight between Ögedei and Tolui however was the first of tis kind in the Mongolian Empire and it would later be repeated between Khubilai and his brother Arigh Böke as well as in other Khanates that emerged in the aftermath of the Mongol civil wars. According to Juvaini, when Ögedei refused the throne for three times as the custom demanded, one of the reasons he cited for refusing the throne was the fact that according to the old Mongol tradition it was Tolui who should inherit the throne.⁴³ But Tolui is not reported to utter a word, and seems to have accepted the fact that Ögedei was the Khan. Tolui had already been the de facto ruler for two years and he had the largest army since he inherited Jnggis Khan's main army.given these facts it seems odd that Ögedei should mention such dangerous remarks for his legitimacy and Tolui should not oppose Ögedei. But by the time the Khurultai had been held, Juchi, the main ally of Tolui was dead and Ögedei and Chaghatai were a strong coalition. Also they occupied lands that divided the Toluid house in Mongolia and parts of China from the Juchids in the Qipchaq steppe. In fact, the Juchids seem to be silent during these affairs and Toluid party most probably reckoned that they would not be able to win a war if they attempted to seize the throne by force, and by the time Ögedei was refusing the throne he was only paying lip service to the Toluids and everything had already been decided in the Khurultai. Tolui was praised by both Persian and Chinese sources for his silence in this affair as being honest and good, and not causing any trouble as a dutiful brother.⁴⁴ But it should also be remembered that these histories were written in the courts of his sons, Khubilai and Hülegü, and it was quite natural that the Toluids did not want to represent their father as a

⁴³ Juvaini, *The Tar'ikh-I-Jahan-Gusha of Alaud'-Din Ata Malik-I-Juwayni: Containing the History of Chingiz Khan and His Successors*, 186.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 549; Song, *Yuanshi: History of Yuan*], chap. 115.

rebellious son who ignored his father great Khan Jinggis's wishes. To the opposite, the Toluids always tried to portray themselves as the protectors of the Jinggisid tradition and Yassaq. Thus, rather than portraying Toluid as a loser in the competition, the Persian and Chinese historians most probably under the direction of the court, saw it fit to portray him as a good son and harmonious brother.

After the enthronement of Ögedei, the struggles at court eased for a while. Tolui, the main opponent of Ögedei died for years later under suspicious conditions. Juvaini relates the death of Tolui to heavy drinking and illness. According to him, after the conquest of the Khitans, he was proud of himself and he began drinking heavily in the banquet and he died a few days later.⁴⁵ In *Heida Shilue* the Song diplomat Peng Daya states that the death of Tolui took place after his return from Henan.⁴⁶ But *The Secret History of the Mongols* relates the death of Tolui to self-sacrifice for his brother. According to the story in *The Secret History of the Mongols* the deities of the Jin realm were angry after the devastation that the Mongols brought to the Jin dynasty and Ögedei got ill after their return. A shaman said that in order to save Ögedei it was necessary that one of his relatives sacrifice his life for him. Tolui volunteered to sacrifice himself for his brother and after Tolui got ill and died after which Ögedei recovered. *Yuanshi* on the other hand, narrates this event in a different light. Again Ögedei gets ill and Tolui volunteers to give his soul to the deities in return for the recovery of Ögedei, but Tolui returns north after Ögedei recovers and he dies in the northern steppe. Rashid al Din mentions a wooden cup wherein the illness of Ögedei was put into so that he recovers but Tolui in order to show his respect knowingly drinks from the cup and dies. This motive of sacrificing oneself in place of a beloved relative which can be seen all the versions of the story is not unique to this story. A similar case can be seen in the case of Deli Dumrul of the Dede Korkut stories of the Oghuz tribes. But in any case, there seems to be a suspicion in the circumstances surrounding his death. whether he was poisoned as suspected or not, the supporters of Tolui did not seem to trust the Ögedeid house at all. In any case it was politically more convenient for the Toluid descendants to demonstrate their father

⁴⁵ Juvaini, *The Tar'ikh-I-Jahan-Gusha of Alaud'-Din Ata Malik-I-Juwayni: Containing the History of Chingiz Khan and His Successors*, 549.

⁴⁶ Daya Peng, *Heida Shilue Jiaozhu*, (Lanzhou: lanzhou Daxue Chubanshe, 2014).

as a loyal younger brother who could sacrifice his life for the good of the Khanate.

Ögedei after the death of Tolui made a bold move to conciliate the Tolui house, and he proposed that Tolui's wife Sorghaghtani Beki be married to his son and heir Güyüg. Sorghaghtani Beki declined the offer.⁴⁷ And later on, she would manage to make her sons Khans. After this there was a long but tense peace. In the meanwhile, the heirs of the four Jिंगgisid houses were busy building their own powers. Güyüg participated in the campaigns in Russia and Europe. During the campaigns, he had arguments and trouble with Batu, the eldest son of Juchi as well as his own brother Kadan. The Chaghataids were mostly interested in their own business. However, after Ögedei died at the age of 55 in 1241, the peace was broken again. Batu, the eldest son of the eldest son of Jिंगgis Khan delayed the Khurultai proceedings by refusing to participate in the Khurultai for a number of reasons, and since for a Khurultai to be legitimate, his presence was necessary, the Empire was ruled by Töregene Khatun for an interim of three years.⁴⁸ Like his father Jिंगgis, Ögedei also presented a heir apparent, and his choice was again a seemingly more neutral person who could be more easily accepted by the other houses. Instead of his son Güyüg, he presented Shiremün, his grandson as his successor, but his wife Töregene after a lengthy diplomatic battle with the other houses had her son Güyüg elected as the Khan.⁴⁹ Batu did not attend the Khurultai but he did not openly oppose it either. Sübüdei, the experienced Mongol general tried to reconcile the cousins, but he did not succeed. After Güyüg ascended the throne, he was not only angry at Batu, but also suspicious of him. In order to secure his place, Güyüg decreed that from then on, the Khan title would remain in his lineage.⁵⁰ Afterwards, Güyüg began moving his forces westwards in a suspicious manner as if planning to attack Batu who was situated on the Qipchaq steppe at the moment. *Yuanshi* does not mention the reason for his move with a huge force. But Rashid al Din narrates that Güyüg had the intention of attacking Batu with a surprise attack. He disguised his moving westwards as a hunting party. But Sorghaghtani Beki, the

⁴⁷ John Man, *Kublai Khan* (London: Bantam, 2007), 19.

⁴⁸ Song, *Yuanshi: History of Yuan*, chap. 121.

⁴⁹ Fazlullah, *Jami'ut-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles*. (20yi bul)

⁵⁰ Juvaini, *The Tar'ikh-I-Jahan-Gusha of Alaud-Din Ata Malik-I-Juwayni: Containing the History of Chingiz Khan and His Successors*, 181–182.

wife of late Tolui informed Batu about Güyüg's move.⁵¹ This was a point where for the first time two Jingsid houses came to the brink of open warfare. It is interesting that Güyüg would attack Batu and risk civil war even if he was elected as the Khan and took what he wanted. We do not know the exact motives for his hasty move. It might either be that he considered the Toluids to be neutralized about which he seems to be wrong, but judging from the fact that he trusted them enough to confide his move to Sorghaghtani Beki or to keep them in the inner circle, so that Sorghaghtani Beki would be able to acquire such an information, this option seems to be possible. Thus, he might have thought eliminating the Juchids before they got strong would be a logical move. Also Yuan Jue, a Yuan era writer in his work *Qingrong Jushiji* states that Güyüg had the intention of eliminating the house of Batu and conquering his domain.⁵² For a short while the Ögedeids seemed to be destined to rule the whole Mongol realm if they managed to beat the Juchids at war. Since the Chaghataids were on their side and the Toluids were seemingly neutral, Batu seemed to be cornered. But Güyüg died all of a sudden in 1248.

It is evident from the clues that we have both in Chinese and Persian sources that Güyüg's intention was not hunting when he moved his army westwards. And this was the first time that the Jingsid rulers waged open warfare to each other in their inner political struggles. Güyüg's mother Töregene was influential in Güyüg's election as the Khan and as he died. In Mongol court politics, the women had always been influential and active. Both in the election of Güyüg and his successor, it was the mothers of the Khans who played the decisive role. Sorghaghtani Beki, the wife of Tolui who warned Batu in time about Güyüg's imminent attack urged her son Möngke to visit Batu in his Orda and ask for his help. Either out of his gratitude or because he was not interested in becoming the great Khan from the very beginning, Batu held a Khurultai in his own domain and nominated Möngke as the Khan. Some minor Ögedeid and Chaghataid members also attended this Khurultai, but even still, a Khurultai held outside Mongolia could be deemed invalid, so accompanied by Berke and Tuqa Temür, two brothers of Batu, Möngke attended another Khurultai in Mongolia for which his mother had been making diplomatic preparations for a while. Shiremün, the heir apparent

⁵¹ Ibid., 120.

⁵² Jue Yuan, *Qingrong Jushiji*, Sibü bei yao: Ji bu bai bu congshu jicheng. Wushiliu. Yi jiatang congshu 49 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua Publishing House, 1969), chap. 34.

appointed by Ögedei bu replaced by Güyüg as a result of Törenege's maneuvers wanted to attend this Khurultai along with Güyüg's eldest son Khoja from his wife Oghul Qaimish, a Turkic princess from the Merkit tribe, but they were secretly bringing the Ögedeid army and planning an ambush. However, their plan was discovered and they were rounded up which not only ruined their chance of a surprise attack but also ruined the Ögedeid house as well as the Chaghataids who sided with them. Not all the Chaghataids sided with Oghul Qaimish and her faction who was behind all the conspiracy. But the man purpotrators and their supporters were all executed, attacking a Khurulai held in the sacred area of the Mongols and the Turkic tribes was an unpardonable crime. A Khurultai was a semi-sacred affair where all the parties had to persuade at least in appearance, all the parties, ideally without the threat of war or violence. But in any case, using violence and shedding blood were completely out of the way. Thus, what the Ögedeids did was not seen as amove against the Toluids and the Juchids but against the whole Mongol customs and traditions as well as the heritage of Jinggis Khan. If the claims of poisoning of Toluid are true, and since this story was mentioned by many historians in China, Persia, and other parts of the Empire, it seems this was widely suspected and was not a secret, both Ögedei and his son, the only two Ögedeid Khans did not hesitate to shed Jinggissid blood. Wha could have been the reasons that prompted the Ögedeid rulers to shed theirbrothers' or cousins' blood? They had already become great Khans, and did not need to shed blood. In the case of Toluid, he had already stated that he willingly gives up his claim to the thone in the Khurultai in front of everyone, and even after his death, Toluids did not resort to arms until Ögedei's sons tried to eliminate them by force. Güyüg in the same way was on the way to attack Batu who neither openly, nor as far as the sources reveal secretly had no purpose of becoming the great Khan, he was content with the western part of the Empire in Russia, Qipchaq steppes, Caucasia and parts of the Balkan peninsula which gave him great wealth and power as well as autonomy. They most probably understood the consequences of such actions, it would not only bring bad reputaition to the ruler to poison or attack his own brothers who were at the same time his vassals, but it also carried the risk of uniting the rest of the houses against the leader which was what happened after Güyüg. Later on Güyüg's son and the other Ögedeid contender Shiremün also resorted to arms. But these moves might not have been completely irrational on the Mongol political scene as well. For

Ögedei, the traditionalist party who united behind Tolui was still strong, and they opposed a new form of government that would jeopardize their interests. Tolui was raised by Jiggis Khan and he attended nearly all the wars with him. Thus, he had very close relations with the elder generation who built the Mongol Empire alongside Jiggis Khan. The Juchid house also backed him and Tolui as an inheritance took the large force of Jiggis Khans elite Khesig army. Therefore, Ögedei might have feared that a civil war would be imminent if he did not eliminate him at that moment. Later on Ögedei invested heavily on the Ortoğh companies of the Central Asian merchants, and his son Güyüg was also elected like him. There was no open opposition to Güyüg's election. The sons of Tolui were still too young and Batu had no interest in becoming the Khan so he simply did not attend the Khurultai. He neither wanted to be a Khan, nor wanted Güyüg with whom he had personal troubles to be the Khan. So, he simply delayed the Khurultai by not attending. In the meanwhile, the Chaghataids in central Asia and parts of Mongolia were busy with their own internal troubles and were not of great help to their Ögedeid allies. In fact, Güyüg felt the need to intervene their inner politics, lest their leaders shift their allegiance, and had Qara Hülegü dethroned, who would join Möngke upon the death of Güyüg and represent the Chaghataid house. Therefore, it might have seemed appropriate for Güyüg to attack Batu at a moment when he did not have Toluid allies and Chaghataids were still on his side. The third instance that the Ögedeids attempted to attack another house was the Khurultai where Möngke was elected by the Mongol tribes among whom there were Chaghataids such as Qara Hülegü and dissatisfied Ögedeids such as Kadan. What Güyüg and Ögedei before him feared seemed to have come to reality when not only the Juchids allied with the Toluids but the Chaghataids also sided with them. Therefore they had two options, either to accept their fate like the Toluids did and wait, or to attack and win the throne by sheer force.

At this moment, Töregene saw that the only way was a surprise attack. In this respect, she differed from another Turkic princess, Sorghaghtani Beki, who bid her time and made preparations for the opportune moment when she could strike. Both women were of Christian Turkic origin, but they did not put forward their Turkic or Christian origins to the fore, and acted like real Mongols. In the Mongol politics beginning from Jiggis Khan whose grand grandmother, mother and wife also came from the Onggirad tribe. The Merkits, Qaraits, and

especially the Onggirads acted as consort tribes in the Mongolian Empire and played significant roles in the Mongol politics. This was not unique to the Mongols. The Khitans had the Uighur Xiao clan as their consort clan. The Jürchens following the Khitans adopted this strategy and had women from tribes who had a better grasp of politics and cultural interaction. This strategy not only helped to build strong alliances, but also brought political knowledge and cultural exchange to the new dynasty. Just as the Uighur tribes had a more developed culture and political knowledge than the Khitans and the Xiao clan not only gave daughters but also gave ministers to the Khitans, the other Turkic tribes who continued the Turkic traditions and political culture brought their own culture and knowledge to the Mongol court and played significant roles. In the nomadic Empires of the Asian steppe, wives were also political actors unlike China where women were seldom on the front scene of the politics and needed intermediaries such as the eunuchs to intervene in the court politics whereas Khitan and Mongol women could even attend the military campaigns. Their ethnicity and religion or cultural background also did not matter in most cases. Sorghaghtani Beki, though a devout Christian herself if we are to believe the sources⁵³, did not raise her sons as Christians.⁵⁴ Töregene, Sorghaghtani Beki and Oghul Qaimish were all influential in the shaping of the Mongol politics, but what is less known is that the Onggirad consort tribe also played an important role in forging and maintaining the Juchid-Toluid alliance against the Ögedeids. Batu's mother was also an Onggirad. Thus, not only the consorts, but also their tribes played instrumental roles in shaping the Mongol court politics at its early stages through their networks in the different courts of all the four Jingsid houses. This did not change when the power passed to the Toluids as well. The Onggirads continued to play a decisive role, and they even brokered peace between the Juchids and the Toluids when later the Ilkhans and the Golden Horde were at war.

⁵³ Johannes de Plano Carpini, *Relation des Mongols ou Tartares* (Paris: Arthur-Bertrand, 1838); William Rubruck, *Mengü Han'ın Sarayına Yolculuk 1253-1255*, ed. David Morgan and Peter Jackson, trans. Zülal Kılıç, Kitap Yayınevi ; Sahaftan Seçmeler Dizisi 229. 21 (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2010).

⁵⁴ Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Univ of California Press, 2009), 28.

Conclusion

Although the reigns of Ögedei and his son Güyük were relatively short, they have been decisive in shaping the later political events and the alliances between the different families. These two reigns have mostly been examined in terms of the military conquests that have been made, but one of the important aspects of these reigns have been the shaping of the Ögedeid, Toluid, Chaghataid and the Juchid houses. Descended from the four sons of Jiggis Khan from his wife, these four families. Jiggis Khan originally bid his sons to unite against outsiders, but even while he was alive, his sons were struggling with each other. The struggle between his sons however, was not a mere family struggle over the inheritance of their father, but it was more a struggle of a political and ideological nature. Each party represented a certain ideology and political view and the struggle was more around whether to adopt a new political model based on the more developed Chinese, as well as Khitan and Jürchen hybrid models, or to continue the traditional steppe models that the Mongols shared with the Turkic peoples around them.

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