

THE UNITY OF MAN IN TURKISH-MONGOLIAN THOUGHT

It is certainly simplifying to attribute a common way of thinking to vast human groups. This evident observation is particularly applicable when examining the ethnolinguistic ensemble traditionally designated as “Turkish-Mongolian”. The definition that can be given to this ensemble is based above all on linguistic facts. Two language families exist in Eurasia, Turkish and Mongolian respectively, scientifically well-defined and attested to, not only by living speakers but also by documents that go back, for the former, to the 8th century, and to the 13th century for the latter. Moreover, there are considerable affinities between these two families, both in structure and in vocabulary; these affinities can be explained either through an original relationship between them or through many centuries of reciprocal influences, consequences of a long symbiosis. In addition, at a very early date there can be observed a very profound community of social structures and cultural

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traditions between the two groups (ranging from beliefs to material organization), the vestiges of which subsist even in our own times.

This cohesive ensemble of linguistic and cultural affinities naturally determines a great deal of convergence in modes of thinking, particularly concerning a capital point that interests us here, namely the concept of human unity.

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Turkish- and Mongolian-speaking people have been subject to very turbulent destinies over the centuries, marked at times by broad unifying expansion and at other times by schisms and withdrawal; all the while preserving certain specific concepts, they were led to adhere, partially or broadly, to various systems of thinking inherent in their religious conversions or in their political development. Thus, to cite only the most important examples, Islam among the Turks from around the year 1000 or Buddhism among the Mongols from the 13th century profoundly marked mentalities, as do today the various sociopolitical systems of the modern world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the diverse religions (Manicheism, Buddhism, Christianity or Islam) to which one or another Turkish or Mongol group belonged in the course of their history were all religions with a universal scope, vigorously affirming the unity of man; the same is true for the principal sociopolitical systems presently applied in Turkish-speaking or Mongolian-speaking societies.

Our purpose here being to determine the specific characteristics of Turkish-Mongolian thinking with regard to its vision of man and its concept of human unity apart from (but without being in contradiction to) these religions or systems, we will attempt to show the traditional constants of this thinking, which will lead us to devoting a large amount of space to an examination of their origins. To do this we have available an abundance of historical documentation, perfectly explicit, from which we will extract the most enlightening testimony, whether it comes from Turkish and Mongolian sources or observers from the outside world.

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To know different aspects of ancient Turkish thinking through its direct expression, we have, beginning from around the year 700 A.D., numerous inscriptions on stone steles, mostly funerary

monuments, which are the first known documents. They emanate from the leaders of the first empire of the *Türk* as such, a vast federation of tribes of wandering shepherds and warriors, formed in the middle of the 6th century and that extended from the Chinese border across the Oxus river.

The most famous of these epigraphic testimonies are Inscriptions I and II from the Orkhon (Mongolia), the political testament of the emperor Bilgä Kagan (died in 734). They each contain a “Genesis,” the text of which, in its concision, reveals a general concept of “humanity.” We propose the following translation, which we will comment on afterward: “When, above, the blue Heaven and, below, the brown Earth were formed, between them were formed Humans.”

Contrary to some of our predecessors, we will not allude here to the concept of “creation,” for it cannot be applied to Heaven, supreme God in ancient Turkish-Mongolian religion, normally described as “Eternal” and considered to be uncreated (his name, *Tengri*, will later serve to designate the one God and creator of monotheist religions, including Islam). The verb used, *kilin-*, literally signifies both “to make oneself” and “to be made”; another verb, *yarat-*, that signifies “to create,” was to be used later by monotheists.

The expression *kiši ogli*, which we translate by “humans,” is of capital importance for attesting to the existence of a general concept of “humanity” that determined a specific view of human unity. Its literal meaning is “the children of man.” The word *kiši*, “human person,” used without an indicator of number, can take on either a singular meaning or a collective one as desired. The same is true for the word *og(u)l*, “child,” followed only by the suffix *-i* to indicate that the previous word, *kiši*, is its modifier. In Turkish tradition, *ogli*, preceded by a proper noun, was regularly used to designate a member of a tribal formation or of a family: *Kirkiz ogli*, “a Kirghiz” (in a 9th century inscription), *Osman ogli*, “an Ottoman,” etc. In Turkish Islam, “humanity” was to be designated (with the plural *-lar*) by the expression *Âdem ogulları*, “the children of Adam.”

In Inscription II of the Orkhon, *kiši ogli* is used with a very clearly collective sense in a reflection on the common lot of humanity: *kiši ogli kop ölgäli törümiš*, “all humans are born to die.”

Thus we have, beginning even with the most ancient Turkish documents, explicit testimony to a unitary conception of humanity, an almost familial unit with “the children of man,” a concept that was never to be renounced later, since it was also the conception of the different religions or doctrines to which Turkish peoples adhered subsequently.

With regard to Mongolian tribes, our documentation is more recent. The most ancient Mongolian text known at present, the *Secret History of the Mongols*, dates from the year 1240. It recounts in particular the great conquests of the Mongol Empire, under the direction of Genghis Khan and his early successors, from China to Hungary, across the steppes of Eurasia. It designates “humans” with the general term *gü’ün* (in classical Mongolian *kümün*), whose meaning corresponds exactly to that of the Turkish *kişi*. Everything leads to believe that it carried the same universal, non-discriminatory meaning implying a sense of human unity. The original religion of the Mongols, dominated by the great Eternal Heaven-God, was so similar to the religion of the Turks that it could not, on this essential point, associate itself with any other concept of humanity.

All evidence, ancient or modern, direct or indirect, even while pointing to the diversity of the nations, shows that the Turkish and Mongolian peoples truly sensed the profound unity of human nature.

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This feeling of unity is clearly manifested in their matrimonial customs. The total absence of any “racial” discrimination in this realm is in fact the surest criterion of such a sense of unity.

Among Turks and Mongols, the matrimonial system was of the type defined by sociologists as “generalized exchange.” In their traditional societies, highly structured into agnatic clans (themselves organized into hierarchical tribal units), the male could not take a wife from his own clan. Therefore he had to seek a spouse belonging to another group. The relative stability of marriages (which was not obligatory and was sometimes belied) most often led him to marry a woman from the group that had given a wife to his father, thus from the group to which his own mother had belonged before her marriage. We intentionally say “had belonged”

because, in the original Turkish-Mongolian conception (numerous vestiges of which still subsist), when a woman married, she ceased to belong to her clan or to her natural family and became integrated exclusively into that of her husband. In these circumstances, the preferred marriage for the son was with the daughter of his maternal uncle, who was not thought of as a "relative" but as an "ally." However, this was not the obligatory solution, even though the absolute condition was not to marry a woman from one's own clan, which as a consequence fully authorized marriage with a "foreigner."

This latter type of marriage, even though unusual, did not violate the fundamental rule and was not only accepted but often sought out as an element of prestige or as a guarantee of power, in every period and down to our own days. In very ancient times it was rarely mentioned other than for high ranking persons, but such mention is relatively frequent and was, in the historical documents, in no way accompanied by astonished comments, let alone reproachful ones. Children born of such unions had the same inheritance rights as the others and were often promised great destinies. We will cite several particularly significant examples to illustrate this point.

Chinese records quite frequently describe matrimonial alliances between oriental Turkish dynasties, in regions neighboring on China, and Chinese dynasties. For both parties it was a special means for sealing diplomatic agreements.

In 551 the founder of the first empire of the oriental Türk, Tu-men (*Bumïn Kagan*), asked for and obtained as wife a princess of the *Wei* of the North. In 567, his son and successor Mu-han (*Mugan Kagan*) gave his daughter in marriage to the emperor Wu-di of the *Zhou* from the North, who in turn, in 579, was to give the famous princess Qian-jin as wife to the Turkish kagan Taspar (*Ta-bo*), brother and successor of Mu-han. Qian-jin later married two other oriental Turkish sovereigns. In 597 the Turkish kagan Tu-li married a princess from the house of the *Sui*, An-yi, and then, upon her death, another of the same origin. This second princess, Yi-cheng, was even to marry the three successors of Tu-li! Other princely marriages were also concluded between the *Tang* dynasty and the dynasty of the oriental Türk. This policy of matrimonial exchanges between Turks and Chinese was being

actively pursued when the *Uygur* empire replaced that of the Türk as such in Mongolia, with whom they shared common customs and language, and when this new empire was extended into the territories that are today part of Xinjiang.

If we have initially chosen, from among many others, these examples of “mixed marriages,” which go back to the origins of the well dated and abundantly documented history of the major confederations of Turkish tribes, it is because, in fact, they are certain evidence of the absence of racism in societies that remained generally very attached to their ancestral traditions. The simple fact that these unions were not only sought out by Turkish leaders, but also accepted by their subjects (none of the revolts mentioned in historiography ever used one of these marriages as pretext), clearly shows that they were considered to be in conformity with the social order. We can also note that the ancient Turks, who willingly married Chinese women, did not refuse, at least in the event of a princely union, to give their daughters to Chinese men, as was the case of Mu-han who married his daughter to the Emperor Wu-di.

We could accumulate examples from later periods of princely marriages with “foreigners” of diverse origins, both for Turks from central Asia as well as Turks who emigrated further to the west. In order to avoid an uninteresting enumeration, we will limit ourselves here to citing matrimonial customs of the most western Turkish dynasty, that of the Ottomans, whose reign lasted until the beginning of our own century.

We would need many pages to list the marriages of Ottoman princes and sovereigns with non-Turkish, and even non-Muslim, women. These marriages were especially remarkable in that they were almost never arranged because of diplomatic interests, unlike those we just mentioned, but because they were above all marriages of choice. The most famous of these is the marriage of Suliman the Magnificent with Roxelane, a Russian concubine who became the official spouse, mother of sultan Selim II. However, we should note that the ideological and social context of Ottoman marriages was Islam, a universal religion whose fundamental doctrines exclude racism.

With the Mongols, whose ancestral traditions, like those of the Turks, prohibited any marriage within one’s clan, exogamy was also

without theoretical limits, and unions with foreign women were also sought out by the aristocracy. Genghis Khan himself, in the course of his conquests, had the habit of taking a wife from among the subject peoples. For example in 1214, he set his marriage with a princess from the Chinese Tungus dynasty of the Djurtchät (*Jin*) as the condition for peace with the sovereign of Peking. After the expansion of the Mongol Empire, the Genghiskhanid khans frequently married Turks and women from the conquered regions, from China to eastern Europe, in addition to Mongols.

They also married some of their daughters to foreign princes. In this way the great khan Kublai chose as son-in-law the heir to the dynasty of Korea, which was thus linked to the dynasty of the Mongols of China, the Yuan.

Apart from princely marriages, “mixed” unions were always numerous in the Turkish-Mongol world, where they began essentially as abduction and concubinage. As long as the invasions lasted, the constant custom among warrior nomads was to demand a tribute of female slaves from the peoples they conquered. A Turkish inscription from the beginning of the 8th century states that in this particular case these were “daughters” and “widows” brought back from an expedition across the Oxus river (no doubt to a large extent Sogdian women). These slaves, who became concubines, were integrated into society when they had children, and were gradually emancipated. One of them is mentioned by name in an ancient Turkish inscription from the Upper-Yenisey region among the loved ones to whom the deceased husband bid a tearful farewell. Moreover, the abduction of women of every origin for the purposes of concubinage was an ongoing practice among the Mongols at the time of the conquests. As among the Turks, these women and their children were ultimately assimilated into Mongol society.

Naturally this resulted in much cross-breeding, which finally led to a mixing of the tribes.

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Women were not the only ones to be the source of this mixing. Turkish-Mongol custom called for drafting prisoners of war into military service to send them back to fight against the adversary, and to recruit for these same purposes soldiers from among the

subjected tribes (which partially explains, through a “snowball effect,” the rapidity of the conquests). Consequently the Turkish and Mongolian armies grew as they advanced, adding a growing proportion of foreign elements who ultimately were assimilated. Turkish and Mongolian history abounds even in examples of former captives integrated into leadership levels and rising to high positions.

Along the same lines we may recall that the janissaries, who at times held great power in the Ottoman Empire, making and unmaking sultans, and who furnished most of the viziers of the Sublime Gate, were for a long time recruited exclusively from among Christian (and not Turkish) subjects of the Empire.

The idea of racial discrimination was perfectly foreign to the traditions of Turkish and Mongol peoples, just as it was also to the various religious doctrines to which they adhered in the course of their history.

This comes in particular from the fact that genetic filiation, as a criterion for belonging to a structured social group, was taken into account in these peoples only in the patrilineal line. Because of this, apart from the prohibition against taking a wife from one’s own clan (which formed the basis for exogamy), wide liberty was theoretically given for the choice of a Turk or a Mongol when selecting the future mother of his children. This choice was only limited by questions of matrimonial alliances (not exclusive in a polygamous system, and in any case revocable) between families of necessarily different clans. It is clear that such a conception of filiation, exclusively patrilineal and excluding matrilineal filiation, is incompatible with any idea of racial segregation.

Moreover, the criterion of genetic patrilineal filiation was not absolute to the extent that Turkish-Mongol traditions allowed both adoption without any limitations of rights and a “brotherhood by oath” (with the symbolic exchange of blood), considered the equivalent of patrilineal brotherhood. Through the use (attested to many times) of these two methods, any male could be immediately integrated into the familial group, just as any woman could be integrated into the group through marriage (which was more frequent).

Although otherwise highly structured and hierarchical according to rules that determined social levels and forms, Turkish-Mongol

societies were “genetically open” societies. We might add that the rules that organized them did not lead to rigidly determined situations. The history of Turkish and Mongol tribes is full of incidents of restructuring through schisms, merging, formation or collapse of confederations; and it was possible to move from one level of the social hierarchy to another (upward as well as downward).

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One of the most important questions that can be raised with regard to the conception of human unity is that of religious tolerance. In this respect, any form of intolerance (which should not be confused with a stringent faith) that leads to an exclusion of the idea of humanity, or to its deliberate oppression, is obviously a manifest negation of human unity.

With regard to traditional Turkish-Mongol thinking, in its specific characteristics, it is possible, in the light of very many historical facts, to affirm that it was fundamentally tolerant in the religious sphere. The brief and sporadic explosions of fanaticism that can be determined in the history of this or that Turkish or Mongol state, brought on by competition between the major religions of a universal nature or by struggles between their rival fractions, are phenomena that do not derive from internal tradition. None of these major religions was, in fact, ancestral among the Turks or the Mongols, whose original beliefs, dominated by the Eternal Heaven (supreme God) and moreover shamanist in nature, never achieved the creation of a theological codification nor ever led to even vague threats of proselytism.

These somewhat vague beliefs varied between popular religion that appeared in numerous local forms and was particularly oriented toward shamanist practices and toward the cult of spirits and genies of natural forces that were meant to be mollified thereby; and, on the other hand, a religion of the governing class, dominated by the cult of the great God-Heaven, Tengri, dispenser of power and consecrator of sovereigns. These two tendencies coexisted without conflict, combining themselves in a variety of fashions, and they both inclined to a favorable attitude without exception toward all the major religions of Eurasia. Monotheism was perceived as a variant of the cult of Tengri; Manichean

dualism was seen as a belief that insisted on the struggle between good and evil spirits (a familiar theme in shamanism). As for Buddhist divinities and the genies of Taoism, there was nothing to prevent honoring them alongside the secondary divinities and local genies that had an equal share in popular devotions.

It can thus easily be understood why, in the first centuries of their history, when none of the major religions with which they were in contact was able to impose itself exclusively, Turks and Mongols accepted them all with curiosity or with approval, without a feeling of exclusivity, willingly accepting their preachers and respecting the conversions, always only partial, that they obtained. Such conversions, at the beginning, primarily involved members of the aristocracy.

Although in the 8th century the inscriptions left by the sovereigns and dignitaries of the eastern Türk empire, in Mongolia, speak only of the ancestral gods—Tengri, his consort Umay (the Mother Goddess), the sacred Earth and Water—a funerary stele, that of Bugut, found in the same region but a century and a half older, epitaph of a sovereign son of the founder of the Empire, is partially Buddhist in content. Erected around the year 581, it has an inscription in Sogdian (an Iranian language from central Asia) on three sides, and on the fourth an inscription in Sanskrit. In the inscriptions it is specifically mentioned that Bumïn, the founding kagan, commanded the construction of a large Buddhist monastery during a period of disturbances. Since the stele is a posthumous work, we can only deduce that Bumïn, during his life, had converted to Buddhism, but this official epigraphic document indicates at least that Buddhism had followers within the dynasty in the first decades of the Türk empire, a fact that is frequently confirmed by Chinese historiography.

The Uygur empire, which replaced the Türk empire in Mongolia, was, around the year 763, the scene of an unexpected religious event. Its sovereign, after a stay in China where he had met Manichean missionaries, converted to their religion and even decreed Manicheism to be the official religion.

When the invasion of the Kirghiz, in 840, obliged the Uygur to transfer the center of their empire to Khotcho (near Turfan), the Buddhism of the local population came into conflict with Manicheism, and the two religions shared the favor of the leaders.

Nestorian Christianity, which was also implanted in the region, equally had its followers among the Uygur. Thus within the empire there were three religions professed in the Turkish realm (with an increasing predominance of Buddhism), and we still have numerous religious manuscripts, in Turkish-Uygur, emanating from the three faiths (without counting those of Taoist inspiration, translated from Chinese). Not only did they exist with full understanding, but a sort of syncretism developed among them, illustrated in particular by a manuscript that begins by invoking Indra, Brahma and Buddha and then continues with a hymn to "Father Mani-Buddha," with whom is associated the Friend *Yisü*, Jesus! It is impossible to determine if certain Uygur manuscripts are Buddhist, Manichean or even Taoist, for elements of all three beliefs can be found in them. The entire history of the Uygur before their massive conversion to Islam (relatively late) bears witness to perfect religious tolerance in their State.

But it is among the Genghiskhanid Mongols that we find the most explicit declarations, not only of tolerance but of deep reverence for the various religions. Genghis Khan himself, in 1222, had the tenets of Islam explained to him in Bukhara. He approved them in general, although he condemned the practice of a pilgrimage to Mecca since the entire world was the house of God (identified, in his thinking, with Tengri, the Eternal Heaven, supreme Turkish-Mongolian divinity). He also had Muslims along with Nestorian Christians among his advisers and high dignitaries. His son and first successor, Ögödäi, demonstrated the same kind of tolerance, and his principal confidant was a Confucian. The great khan Güyük, son of Ögödäi, had mass celebrated before his tent by Nestorian priests. His successor, Möngkä (grandson of Genghis Khan), whose mother was Nestorian, divided his sympathies between Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism. In 1254 he organized at his court a doctrinal discussion between Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims and Christians of various rites; among the participants was the Franciscan friar Guillaume de Rubrouck, envoy of Louis IX, king of France. The Franciscan was able to observe that on the occasion of an important celebration, the great khan first had his cup blessed by Nestorian priests, then by the Muslim clergy and finally by the Buddhist and Taoist monks. Rubrouck also reported this observation by Möngkä: "Just as God

has given several fingers to the hand, he likewise has given several paths to men." This is an explicit declaration of religious tolerance. The Franciscan described also how the emperor of the Mongols had shamanistic ceremonies celebrated at his court (with sprinkling of koumiss on felt statues) and, like his predecessors, proclaimed his orders in the name of Tengri, the Eternal Heaven of Turkish-Mongol religion, who continued to be the basis for his beliefs.

A precious document that illustrates well the "ecumenical" religious policy of the Mongol empire has survived with the imprint of the seal placed on two letters addressed to Boniface VIII and Benedict XI, in 1302 and 1304, by the Nestorian patriarch Mâr Yahballâhâ III and preserved in the secret archives of the Vatican. Within the great square seal inscribed with a Maltese cross is written an inscription published in 1972 in the *Journal asiatique* by Mr. James Hamilton, from whom we borrow the beginning of his translation:

"An order from us, *Möngkä kagan* by the power of the Eternal Heaven: In order that vigils be celebrated for us and that by singing the praises (of God) there be procured for our descendants from generation to generation the benefit (of these meritorious acts), we have given the cruciform seal to My Lord Patriarch. May he be the exclusive guardian of this seal!..."

We see clearly in this text (written in Uygur Turk) the thinking of the great khan *Möngkä*, which was also similar to that of Turkish sovereigns of the Uygur Empire: religious eclecticism with a clear syncretic tendency that held that all the spiritual "paths" proceed from the supreme God (the Turkish-Mongol Tengri), that they are all respectable and even useful, and that the manifestations of piety they call for are universally beneficial. This universalist eclecticism appears in the very vocabulary of the text. Its first two words, *Menggü Tengri*, designate, in Turkish, the Eternal Heaven of the ancestral religion; after there comes the Syriac word *šahrâ*, the word for Christian vigils. And finally the benefit of meritorious acts is expressed by the word *buyan* which is a Turkish borrowing from the Sanskrit *punya*, belonging to Buddhist terminology. It is even probable that this *buyan*, essentially Buddhist, implored through the intermediary of Christian

prayers commanded in the name of Tengri, is destined, like Buddhism, to ensure for the descendants of the sovereign, “from generation to generation,” good reincarnations (traditional Turkish-Mongol religion included belief in metempsychosis).

We are in the presence of a Turkish-Mongol religious universalism that implies the essential unity of human spirituality, a constitutive element in human unity.

It is interesting to observe that the order of Möngkä (who died in 1259 during an expedition to southern China) remained officially valid up until 1304 in a new political and geographic context. The Nestorian patriarch resided at Maragha, in Iranian Azerbaijan, and he was the protégé of the Mongol sovereign of Iran, Ghazan Khan, a convert many years earlier to Islam after having been Buddhist. The spirit of tolerance persisted in this different situation, despite difficult circumstances marked by great local tension between beliefs and by various explosions of fanaticism that often provoked serious incidents (between Muslims and Christians, as between Sunnites and Shi’ites), which were severely repressed by the Mongol authorities.

Moreover, it would be completely erroneous to pretend that the various States under Turkish or Mongolian leadership were exempt from religious persecutions during the course of their long and relatively turbulent history or that all their sovereigns were exempt from fanaticism. Ghazan himself, at the beginning of his reign, in his neophyte’s ardor for Islam, ordered the destruction of numerous religious edifices—Christian, Jewish, Mazdean, and Buddhist; but he later changed his manner and returned to the Mongol tradition of religious tolerance and to a certain universalism. In this respect it is significant that, in 1298, he gave to Yahballâhâ III an exact replica of the great cruciform seal made of gold, conferred by Möngkä on the Nestorian patriarch, after the anti-Christian riot of 1297 in Maragha during which the original seal had been stolen. The “universalist” text that we just quoted bears the imprint of this replica, a text whose contents were therefore certainly known to the Mongol authorities and whose legal validity was thereby confirmed.

What is important to note is that the outbreaks of intolerance and fanaticism that occurred at various moments in the history of States under Turkish or Mongolian leadership were contrary to a

long Turkish-Mongol tradition, and that most often there was a return to this tradition.

The religious policy of the Ottoman Turks is quite indicative of this general tendency. Certainly at the beginning of their conquests of Christian countries, in the name of the Holy War of Islam, they demonstrated the usual fierceness in such cases and converted numerous churches into mosques. But they very quickly restored freedom of worship to Christians, leaving a large part of Christian religious edifices at their disposal, and they did not exercise strong pressures to convert them to Islam, faithful in this respect to the doctrine of the Koran that, for example in verse 256 of the sura *Bakara* proclaims: "No constraint in religion!"

Several days after the conquest of Constantinople, the sultan Mehmed II, after having put an end to the exactions of his soldiers, granted the vanquished population free exercise of religion and marked off a large sector of the city where all their churches would be left to them.

When Jews, victims of the Inquisition, were expelled from Spain towards the end of the 15th century, great numbers of them found asylum in the Ottoman Empire with total freedom to celebrate their rituals.

The Ottoman Empire gradually organized non-Muslim minorities on the basis of their religions, granting them a status that provided, for example, legal guarantees reserving for their own tribunals competence in areas involving their customs.

A major stage in the evolution of Ottoman law was reached in 1839 when the recently enthroned sultan Abdül-Medjid solemnly proclaimed in the presence of the diplomatic corps, Greek, Gregorian Armenian and Catholic Armenian patriarchs and the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul, an edict of reforms (*Tanzîmât*) instituting legal equality for all Ottoman citizens. The text of this edict, after listing measures intended to ensure the safety of people and property as well as fairness in the matter of taxes and military recruitment, continued with these words:

"These imperial concessions are extended to all our subjects; and no matter to what religion or sect they might belong, they will all, without exception, enjoy them. Perfect security is thus granted by us to the inhabitants of the empire, in their lives, their honor and their fortune, as is required by the sacred text of our Law."

This final remark, referring to the Law of Islam, is essential because it bases these liberal reforms (which were applied) on the ethical and religious principles of Muslim law.

It would, of course, be perfectly incorrect to see in this edict, the motives of which refer entirely to Islam, the influence of ancient Turkish-Mongol traditions forgotten for centuries. Instead we should see the result of the evolution in Islamic thinking, especially strong in the 19th century (while still referring completely to fundamental principles of Islam), and the result of the international situation that had precipitated the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the modern world. We simply wanted to point out that the obvious tendency of pre-Islamic Turkish thinking toward a global conception of the unity of man had not been overturned by the profound adhesion of the Ottoman Turks to Islamic ideology, whose principles in this respect were in no way opposed but were respected.

Analogous observations could be made with regard to the various Turkish-Mongol populations that adhered to religions other than Islam: the Khazars with Judaism, the Gagaouz and the Karamanlis with Greek orthodoxy (to mention but these three examples among Turkish-speaking peoples), or Mongols with Lamaistic Buddhism. In all these cases it is a matter of religions with a universal appeal that had been adopted all the more easily because they coincided with the universalism of the ancient worshippers of Tengri, the Eternal Heaven who covers all humanity.

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Such religious universalism has political universalism as a corollary. Whether it be ancient Turks or ancient Mongols, political theory flowed from the fundamental religious conception. Tengri, supreme God, commands everything on Earth; the supreme leader, kagan (or great khan), cannot be enthroned, therefore, other than by Tengri (which is explicitly declared in the most ancient Turkish and Mongol documents). Since the power of Tengri dominates all of humanity, the same should hold true for the power of the kagan.

The "Genesis" of the Inscriptions of the Orkhon, that we quoted at the beginning of this study, immediately after having mentioned

the appearance of human beings between Heaven and the Earth, continues in this way: “Over the Humans ruled my ancestors *Bumïn Kagan* and *Istämi Kagan*.”

Nearly a century and a half before these Inscriptions, the kagan, who in a period of internal dissension considered himself to be the supreme sovereign of the Türk, in 598 in a letter to the emperor of Byzantium, Maurice, referred to himself as “Master of the Seven Climates of the World.” This expression, that can be found among Arab authors, designates the entire universe, under the Seven Planets of our week.

From numerous pieces of evidence it is apparent that Genghis Khan also declared himself to be universal sovereign. In a Taoist stele, erected in a land he had conquered, in 1219, eight years before his death, the following words are attributed to him, which, although they may not translate his thinking literally, cannot, even so, have been unfaithful to his ideas. “In the space of seven years I have completed a great work, and in the six directions of space everything is subject to a single rule.”

These six directions are “before, behind, right, left, above, below”; they take in all of space. As for the “single rule” to which the entire universe is now subjected, it is evident that it is the rule established by Genghis Khan, certainly not by him personally, but through the mandate of Tengri. For when he was enthroned as great khan in 1206, he received this mission “by the power of the Eternal Heaven,” a reference that will always appear in his title and in that of his successors.

Among other documents the contents of the letter of Möngkä to Louis IX leaves no doubt in this matter:

“This is the commandment of the Eternal God (Tengri): there is but one God in heaven and one sovereign on earth, Genghis-Khan, son of God... This commandment is addressed by Möngkä Kagan to Louis, King of France, to all the lords and priests and to all the people of the kingdom of France so that they can understand my words and the commandments of the Eternal God to Genghis-Khan, which have not yet reached you... And so we send you, through your priests, the commandments of the Eternal God.”

Although in this text, which is only a translation of the letter (since lost) that was given to Rubrouck for Louis IX, it is possible

to doubt the exactness of the expression “son of God”—which seems to paraphrase a Christian idea and which never appeared in known official Mongol documents, the substance of the thought expressed conforms to everything learned elsewhere and seems authentic.

This idea of a mission of universal domination, for the good order of the universe, conferred on the sovereign by Heaven (or by God) is obviously not reserved to Turkish-Mongol leaders. It can be found within other cultures, and primarily in the Chinese ideology of power, with an emperor Son of Heaven, mandated by Heaven. But it was rarely expressed with such energy and continuity by the sovereigns themselves as in the Turkish-Mongol world, and the Mongol Genghiskhanid khans were the most ardent propagators of the idea.

In her excellent little book entitled *La Paix mongole* Madame Chantal Lemerancier-Quellejey very correctly observes:

“... The Mongol Empire had a religious foundation. It was conceived as an instrument of the eternal heaven for establishing order in the entire universe. The conquest of the world was an obligation for the great Khan, and universal peace was the ultimate objective. Consequently peoples and nations, including the most distant ones—those in Western Europe, for example—were considered to be subjects of the great Khan, and those who refused his supremacy were treated as rebels.”

The sovereigns of the ancient Türk shared this religious conception of their mission. Their title (as later that of the kagans of the Uygur) began with a derivative of the name of Tengri that can be translated as both “Celestial” and “Divine,” which declared them to be instituted by Heaven. The Inscriptions of the Orkhon even give a concrete image to this divine establishment. “Tengri seized my father *Kagan Elteriš* and my mother *Katun El-bilgä* by the back of their heads and raised them to the heights.”

However, there was a difference in degree between Turkish and Mongol kagans in their conception of a universal empire. It is true that the Turkish sovereign sent a message to the emperor of Byzantium in which he affirmed himself as “Master of the Seven Climates of the World,” but this is more the expression of an ideal than the conviction of a reality, and, in any case, he did not demand

that the emperor Maurice subject himself to him, as Möngkä was to demand of Louis IX. His letter is essentially an announcement of victory intended to reinforce his prestige and to attract the support, or at least neutrality, of Byzantium in the combats he was conducting in the north of Iran.

When Bilgä Kagan declared, "My ancestors Bum'in Kagan and Istämi Kagan ruled over the Humans," this was once more a glorious affirmation that seems, from the very context of the inscription, above all intended for internal use in a period when disorders, which ten years later were to lead to the ruin of the Empire of the Türk, were becoming more and more menacing.

Among Genghiskhanid Mongols, on the other hand, universal domination was not simply an ideal; it seemed to them to be within their grasp. The conquests of Genghis Khan had been overwhelming, and his early successors amplified them in an astonishing manner. At the end of this same 13th century, at the beginning of which Genghis Khan had ensured his dominance over Mongolia, Mongol power extended from the Pacific to the eastern Mediterranean, over all of China, central Asia and upper Asia, over southern Siberia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, half of Anatolia, Caucasia, the Volga basin, southern Russia. Despite the effective breakdown into more or less rival khanates, the theoretical unity of the Mongol Empire subsisted, and the various Genghiskhanid khans recognized the suzerainty of the great khan (a role exercised successively "by the power of the Eternal Heaven" by Ögödäi, Güyük, Möngkä and Kublai).

The reign of Kublai (1260-1294) marked the apogee of the Mongol Empire, particularly after completion of the conquest of China in 1280, and Marco Polo, who was the protégé of this great khan during the time he spent in his States, from 1275-1291, considered him to be the most powerful sovereign of all times:

"In this part of our book we want to begin relating all the very great deeds and the very great marvels of the most high lord of the Tartars, the Great Can who now reigns and who is called Cublai Kaan, which in our language means the lord of lords and emperor. And it is fully just that he has this name, for everyone truly knows that this Great Can is the most powerful man, in people, in land and in treasures, that ever lived on the earth, from Adam our first father until today, and that under him the people are held in such

obedience that never has been seen anything similar under any more ancient kings.”

Marco Polo, without ever referring to the idea of a universal empire, additionally affirms that the power of this great khan was greater than that of all the sovereigns of the earth combined:

“All the emperors of the world and all the kings, of the Christians as well as the Saracens, if they were all united together, would never hold so much power and could never do as much as this Cublai the Great Can is able to do, he who is Lord of all the Tartars of the world, those of the east and those of the west. For all owe him fealty and are his subjects.”

These lines clearly reflect the spirit that reigned at that time within the Mongol Empire, and there is no doubt that the imminent arrival, by the power of the Eternal Heaven, of a universal empire directed by the successors of Genghis Khan was the object of profound belief among Mongol leaders.

* * *

Thus it was among Mongols of the 13th century that political universalism, previously latent in Turkish-Mongol thinking and towards which Turkish sovereigns, from the 6th century on, manifested a clear tendency, found its most complete expression.

It appeared in a form that necessarily implied a concept of human unity, without distinction of ethnic or religious origins. It was essentially a religious and messianic idea, based on faith in Tengri, the supreme God (but a tolerant God who accepts every religion that does not deny him), who has conferred, not on the Mongols as a race but on Genghis Khan and his descendants, the mission to establish on earth a universal monarchy that ensures, with total peace and absolute order, the harmony of the Universe of which Tengri is the sovereign Master.

This universalism excluded any discrimination other than that between subjects and rebels. With the sole condition being to accept obedience to laws binding on all, inspired by Tengri to Genghis Khan and codified by him under the name *Yasak* (from a Turkish word then signifying “organization,” from the verb *yasa*—“to organize”), all members of humanity were placed on the same level.

It is true that for historical reasons the Mongols in fact held a

prominent position in military matters and in directing affairs, but alongside them in these activities they had people of various tribes and religions, with no exclusions. As the empire was extended, the proportion of non-Mongol leaders in the governing structures of the State grew constantly, as can be observed quite precisely, particularly in China and in Iran where Chinese and Persians assumed a more and more important role in administration. Even a Christian from western Europe, like Marco Polo, citizen of the Republic of Venice, could be delegated by the great khan for official missions; he undertook several of these during his stay, and Kublai entrusted him and his family (his father and his uncle) with the delicate task of accompanying, by sea from China to Persia, the Mongol princess that the great khan sent as fiancée to his nephew Argun, Khan of Iran.

No subject of the Mongol Empire was ever forced to renounce his religion in order to enter into the service of a khan or of the great khan. Moreover, never was there a movement seeking to give a meaning to conversion to "Tengrism," for this was a faith without clergy or precise theology, and all the divinities of all religions—monotheist, dualist or polytheist—were called *Tengri* in Mongol, every divinity being considered an emanation of Tengri. At the most their particular name was added to designate the fact that they were neither Heaven nor the God of monotheists (as had been the custom in earlier Turkish usage).

The fundamental law of the Genghiskhanid States, the *Yasak* of Genghis Khan, imposed religious tolerance and contained moral prescriptions of universal force (respect for old people and the poor, protection of innocents and wise men, condemnation of the wicked), with penal measures corresponding in general to the most widespread ethical vision of that time. However, these measures were extremely severe and extended even to the commercial sphere, with fraudulent bankruptcy punishable by death; they were conceived for application to all of humanity.

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Translation, whether oral or written, had always been a highly developed activity within Turkish-Mongol societies, from the known beginnings of their history. The presence of interpreters is

constantly attested to, and all Turkish or Mongol States of any importance had chancelleries in which translators played a major role. It is not without importance to observe that the most ancient official Türk inscription yet discovered, from the 6th century, is in Sogdian and in Sanskrit; that the Inscriptions of the Orkhon in the 8th century are in Turkish and Chinese; that the Inscription of Kara-Balgasun, erected in Mongolia by the sovereign of the Uygur around the year 810 is in Turkish, Sogdian and Chinese; that the first official inscriptions of the Mongol Empire were written in Turkish, and that Mongol sovereigns erected steles inscribed not only in Mongol but in the various languages of their empire.

The multiple exchanges of information between highly diverse languages (Turkish, Sogdian, Sanskrit, Syriac, Tocharian, Chinese, Mongol, Tibetan, Persian, Arab, etc.) attested to within the Turkish-Mongol world could only have reinforced the universalism that we have described.

And this universalism, based on a profound feeling for the unity of the human species, even though it often had the terrible applications that we know, did make a very great contribution to the contact between cultures from one end of Eurasia to the other.

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