# The Postal Relay System in Western Asia under the Mongol Rule and Ghazan Khan's Reform

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## Introduction

In the early thirteenth century, to establish a broad transportation and communication network, the Mongols installed postal relay stations called *jam*, or *yām*, across their empire. This postal system was crucial in the efficient running of the empire. It is no wonder that a considerable number of studies have investigated the system. Especially, thanks to affluent primary sources, we have relatively in-depth researches on the conditions of the postal system in China, on the topics as diverse as postal relay routes, tablets called *paiza*, and postal households called *jamchi*.[1] On the other hand,

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* This translated article is a slightly shortened version of Hodong Kim, "몽골支配期 西아시아의 驛站制와 가잔 칸(Ghazan Khan)의 改革," 역사문화연구 35 (2010): pp.391-444.

1 Pioneering studies on the Mongol postal system, relay stations, and tablets include chapters in the work of Haneda Tōru, *Haneda Hakushi shigaku ronbunshū*, vol. 1, *Rekishihen* (Kyōto: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai, 1957), pp.32-136. For studies on postal routes and *pāīza*, see Chen Dezhi, *Meng Yuanshi yanjiu* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), pp.3-18, pp.113-200; and Cai Meibiao, "Yuandai yuanpai liangzhong kaoshi," *Lishi Yanjiu* 4 (1980), 125-32. See also recent works by Dang Baohai's *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu* (Beijing: Kunlun Chubanshe, 2006) and Mo Shumin's "Meng Yuan youyi yanjiu" (Ph.d. diss., Jinan University, 2004). There are few studies in the West, but we should mention Peter Olbricht's classical work, *Das Postwesen in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft im* 13 und 14 Jahrhundert (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1954).

studies on the postal system of the three western uluses have suffered as a result of the lack of such sources. There are very few studies on the relay stations in the Chaghadai Ulus[2] or Jochi Ulus, although those of the Jochi Ulus are mentioned in papers on the development of Imperial Russia's postal system.[3]

Compared to these two uluses, although the Hülegü Ulus has received a little bit more attention since a considerable number of Persian and Arabic sources have survived, we do not have yet sufficient and detailed researches on the Mongol postal system in Iran.[4] In this sense, Adam J. Silverstein's recent study[5] is noteworthy: he examines the postal systems in West Asia under the Mongol rule and then provides an analysis of the reforms of Ghazan Khan (r., 1295-1304) and their significance. Instead of levying special taxes to cover the huge expenses for the operation of the relay stations, Ghazan had the government pay them. Silverstein sees this bureaucratization of relay-station management as a sign of the postal system in West Asia returning back to the indigenous and traditional practices that had existed before the Mongol rule. He also regards the courier service (*paykān*) which was adopted during Ghazan Khan's rule and whose expenses were furnished by the Bureau of Treasury (*dīvān*) was also modeled after the Mamluk postal system called *barīd*.[6]

However, most scholars had considered the Mamluk postal system, especially *barīd*, was in fact modeled after the Mongol system,[7] not vice

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2 On the postal roads in Central Asia, now we have Shim Hosung's "The Postal Roads of the Great Khans in Central Asia under the Mongol-Yuan Empire," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 44 (2014), pp.405-469.

3 Gustave Alef, "The Origin and Early Development of the Muscovite Postal Service," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 15, no. 1 (March 1967): pp.1-15; John W. Randolph, "The Singing Coachman or, The Road and Russia's Ethnographic Invention in Early Modern Times," *Journal of Early Modern History* 11, no. 1-2 (2007), pp.33-61.

4 Jean Sauvaget, *La poste aux chevaux dans L'Empire des Mamelouks* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1941); Didier Gazagnadou, *La poste à relais* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994).

5 Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

6 Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, pp.159-160.

7 Sauvaget, *La poste aux chevaux dans L'Empire des Mamelouks*, pp.10-13; David Ayalon, "On

versa. One may wonder if Silverstein's conclusion was based on the analysis of this postal system primarily within the historical and spatial context of western Asia, rather than in relation to other systems within the Mongol Empire, specifically that of the Qa'an Ulus, the Great Yuan. So this paper aims to examine this subject in a broader imperial context and to ascertain if his conclusion can be justified. Fortunately, detailed records of the reforms of Ghazan Khan survive in the *Jāmiʿ al-tavārīkh* (hereafter *JT*), 'Compendium of Chronicles', compiled by Rashīd al-Dīn (1247-1318/9), a key person who advised Ghazan to introduce the reforms. This paper will focus on the questions such as what the issues and difficulties were in the postal relay stations before Ghazan Khan, why he and Rashīd al-Dīn were compelled to reform the system, and where they found a model for the reform.

## The Implementation of the Mongol Postal Relay System in Western Asia

*Yuanshi* ('History of Yuan Dynasty') confirms that the Mongol Empire introduced a postal system around 1229, the year Ögödei was proclaimed *Qa'an*: "When the princes and government officials were gathered and a great assembly was convened at Köde'e Aral near the Kerülen River on the day of *jiwei* (己未), in the eighth month of autumn," "a granary and relay station was first installed."[8] The paragraph 279 in the *Secret History of the Mongols* states, "Now We shall settle the matter once and for all by providing poststation masters and posthorse keepers from the various units of a thousand of different areas, by setting up a post station at every stage, by not allowing the messengers to move freely among the population unless on urgent business, but *instead* by having them ride in haste through the

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One of the Works of Jean Sauvaget," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), pp.298-302; Gazagnadou, *La poste à relais*, pp.77-80; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War*, 1260-1281 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.74-75.

[8] *Yuanshi* (Song Lian et. al. eds., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), p.29.

post stations. (italics in original)"[9] These descriptions suggest that Ögödei and Chagadai both established relay stations that connected their territories. In addition, Chagadai installed stations leading to the territories governed by Batu, thereby creating a postal route running east to west across the Eurasian steppe.[10]

The Mongols extended their postal system to newly conquered lands. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, there were two postal routes connecting Qaraqorum and north China, *bāyān yām*[11] and *nārīn yām*. There were a total of thirty-seven relay stations, one every five *farsang*,[12] or every thirty kilometers, each under the protection of a different *chiliarchy*, an administrative or military unit of a thousand people or troops.[13] *Yuanshi* notes that there were "119 *tergen, morin*, and *narin* relay stations in the north."[14] *Zhanchi* records that the postal route for wagons (*tergen*) had fifty-seven relay stations, the route for horses (*morin*) had thirty-eight relay stations, and the secret route (*narin*) had twenty-four relay stations,[15] for a total of 119 stations, the exact number of stations recorded in *Yuanshi*.[16]

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9 Igor de Rachewiltz tr., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.214-215.

10 *Yuanshi*, pp.299-300.

11 Earlier I have read this word as *tāyān yām,* not *bāyān yām* (Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rasideu at Din eui jipsa*, vol. 3, *Kan eui huyedeul*, tr. Kim Hodong, Seoul: Sagyejeol, 2005, p.97; hereafter *JT*/Kim). However, *bāyān yām* seems to be a more accurate reading as found in the Tashkent manuscript (The al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, ms. nr. 1620: 118v). In Mongolian, *bāyān* means wealth, while *tayan* does not make sense, so it is possible that the word was used because goods for the palace were transported along this route. Thackston also read this word as *tayan*. See Wheeler M. Thackson tr., *Jami'u't-tawarikh*. *Compendium of Chronicles* (3 vols., Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University, 1998-1999; hereafter *JT*/Thackston), pp.328-329.

12 *Farsang*, or *farsakh*, is a unit that has been used to measure distance in western Asian since antiquity. 1 *farsakh* equaled 5.94 kilometers in ancient Persia, or 5.985 kilometers in Islamic times. Today, 1 *farsakh* equals 6 kilometers in Iran. See W. Hinz, "farsakh," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition), vol. 2 (eds. by Bernard Lewis, Charles Pellat, and Joseph Schacht; Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp.812-813.

13 *JT*/Kim, vol. 3, pp.97-98. Cf. *JT*/Thackston, pp.328-329.

14 *Yuanshi*, p.1383.

15 *Zhanchi*, pp.158-159.

16 On the three postal routes between Qaraqorum and nothern China (Khitay), see Chen, *Meng*

The Mongols installed relay stations in western Asia first time around 1240, about a decade later than in northern China. According to *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushāʾī* ('History of the World Conqueror'; hereafter *TJG*) by ʿAta Malik Juwaynī, the Uyghur bureaucrat Körgüz received an imperial order (*yarlīq*) and a tablet (*pāīza*) upon being appointed by Ögödei Qa'an as the governor of western Asia. After reaching Ṭūs in Khurāsān in northeastern Iran, he turned the city into a base from which to rebuild western Asia, which had been devasted by war.[17] He constructed a government office and a park in the city and soon dignitaries and nobles began to set up homes there. The marketplace was restored, and excavations began to build a culvert. He also began the installation of relay stations, perhaps because he considered the construction of a transportation network an integral part of rebuilding the city.

> He established *yams* in various places complete with horses and other necessities in order that the people might not be put to inconvenience by the ambassadors; and so strict was his rule that no emir, who had previously cut off heads with no one able to protest, could now decapitate a chicken; whilst the peasantry became so self-assured that if a great army of Mongols encamped in a field they might not even ask a peasant to hold a horse's head, let alone demand provisions (*ʿulūfa*) and offerings of food (*nuzl*), and the same applied to ambassadors, coming and going.[18]

The above passage from *TJG* hints that envoys or troops were accustomed to arbitrarily pilfering livestock and other supplies from locals while on the move. It also demonstrates that Körgüz put an end to such practices and installed relay stations that would provide envoys with 'horses

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*Yuanshi yanjiu congkao*, pp.4-15.

17 *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushāī*, ed. Muḥammad Qazwīnī, vol. 2 (hereafter *TJG*/Qazwīnī; Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1912), pp.237-238; *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. by John A. Boyle (hereafter TJG/Boyle; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.500-501.

18 *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p.238; *TJG*/Boyle, pp.501-502.

(*chahār-pāī*) and other necessities (*maṣāliḥ*),' or postal mounts and food they needed for a swift, smooth journey.

Körgüz appears to have brought about these changes in late 1239 or early 1240. TJG notes that after visiting Qaraqorum and being granted jurisdiction over western Asia, or "the land beyond Amu Darya that general Chōrmāghūn's troops had conquered," Körgüz stopped by Khwarazm and Shahristāna before his arrival at Ṭūs in the month of Jumāda al-awwal 637 according to the Hijri calendar, or between November and December 1239.[19] Exactly where relay stations were installed around that time is, however, difficult to pinpoint. It is safe to assume that the stations extended from Ṭūs in Khurāsān toward areas already equipped with relay stations such as the uluses of Chagadai and Batu, i.e., Central Asia and the Qipchaq steppe. However, there are no sources indicating that relay stations operated in the west of Ṭūs, in what is now Iran and Iraq. When Chin Temür served as governor of western Asia (630-63 AH; 1232/33-1235/36 CE), the extent of his power was limited to northwestern Khurāsān and Mazāndarān along the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea. Körgüz, on the other hand, ruled a larger domain that included areas conquered by Chōrmāghūn's troops, modern-day Azerbaijan and Diyarbakr.[20] It is therefore quite possible that relay stations were installed in newly conquered areas to facilitate the transport of tributes, the exchange of envoys, and the procurement of military supplies.

Ögödei's death in 1241 deprived Körgüz of protection and eventually resulted in his execution. Thereafter, Töregene Qatun, Ögödei's wife who acted as regent after his death, appointed Arghun Aqa to take charge of western Asia. In 1243-44 (641 AH), he stopped by Khurāsān on his way across northern Iran to Tabriz. There, he set up a base and ruled the area for a decade until Hülegü's troops advanced into western Asia in 1256.[21] No

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[19] *Ibid.*

[20] John A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-Khāns," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp.336-338.

[21] Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-Khāns," pp.338-341.

details are known about the operation of relay stations during that period, but accounts in *TJG* indicate that even after Körgüz installed relay stations, envoys occasionally requisitioned supplies with impunity. In 1251, Arghun Aqa attended Möngke's enthronement ceremony and used the occasion to appeal to the new qa'an on behalf of his people, who were suffering from conscripted labor and expropriation due to an unstable tax system. He proposed the discontinuation of all other taxes and expropriations in exchange for the adoption of a tax called *qubchur*. This was based on the model of taxation introduced by Maḥmūd Yalavāch in Central Asia, which took individual differences in wealth and capability into account. Möngke accepted this proposal and adopted a graduated tax scale from one to ten *dīnārs*. The tax revenue was to be used to cover the cost of requisitioned labor (*ḥashar*), the operation of relay stations (*yām*), and the travel expenses of envoys (*ikhrājāt*).[22] In the Islamic realm, land taxes like *ushr* and *kharāj* collected one tenth of the harvest, but *qubchur* was an entirely new tax that resembled a poll tax levied on every liable individual.[23]

The implementation of *qubchur* was not limited to western Asia but extended to northern China as well. According to "Treatise on Food and Money (*shihuozhi* 食貨志)" in *Yuanshi*, the tax paid in silver (*baoyin* 包銀) was first introduced in 1251 during Möngke's reign. Initially, it seems that the Han Chinese were required to pay six *liang* (兩) in silver as tax, but the amount was later reduced to four liang, which was collected in installments of two *liang* in silver and two liang in other goods such as silk or dye.[24] In 1251, however, the *baoyin* tax was reduced from six to four *liang*, and this

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[22] *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p.254; *TJG*/Boyle, p.517.

[23] On the various uses of *qubchur*, see Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), pp.387-391. There has been considerable confusion among scholars surrounding the concept and meaning of *qubchur* as a tax. See Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp.163-171; Ann K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), pp.199-204; Herbert F. Schurmann, "Mongol Tributary Practices of the Thirteenth Century," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19, no. 3/4 (1956), pp.304-398; John Masson Smith, "Mongol and Nomadic Taxation," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 30 (1970), pp.46-85.

[24] *Yuanshi*, p.2361.

reduction make it reasonable to assume that the *baoyin* tax was introduced earlier in the beginning of Ögödei's reign.[25] Moreover, the household tax, called *kechai* (科差), consisted of the 'silver tax (*baoyin*)' and the 'silk tax (*siliao* 絲料)' introduced in 1236. The silk tax required one catty (*jin* 斤) of silk or other textiles to be paid to government officials by every two households and one catty of silk or other textiles to be paid by every five households to the original appanages (*ben touxia* 本投下).[26] After his visit to Mongolia between 1235 and 1236, the Southern Song envoy Xu Ting (徐霆) noted, "Regarding tax [*chaifa* 差發] in the Han territory, in addition to the silver levy in lieu of silk and cotton on each household and each person, the tax also includes the total funds required for regular and irregular public expenses such as the dispatch of envoys and war horses and the transport of food and tools."[27] This suggests that the implementation of the household tax, *qubchur* or *kecha*i, during Möngke's reign was intended to replace the practice of arbitrary collection of taxes to fund the operation of relay stations and instead to levy a lump sum so that people would no longer have to suffer because of envoys abusing the system.

To levy *qubchur* in western Asia, Arghun Aqa launched an extensive census (*shumarā*) of conquered areas, including Khurāsān, Mazāndarān, Iraq, Yazd, Tabriz, Derbend, Georgia, Arran, and Azerbaijan. He then set an annual levy of seventy *dināṛ-i ruknī* for every ten people.[28] *Dināṛ-i ruknī* means "*dināṛ* (gold coin) minted by Rukn al-Dīn," and according to Juwaynī, the exchange rate for this currency at the time was 75 *dināṛ-i ruknī* for 1 *bālish* or 500 *mithqāl*.[29] *Bālish* was a weight unit corresponding to the *ding* (錠) used in China at the time and was equivalent to two kilo-

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[25] Otagi Matsuo, "Genchō zeisei kō: Zeiryō to kasa ni tsuite," in *Otagi Matsuo Tōyō shigaku ronshū*, vol. 4, Genchōshi (Tōkyō: San'ichi Shobo, 1988), pp.257-297.

[26] Otagi, "Genchō zeisei kō: Zeiryō to kasa ni tsuite," pp.270-271; Zhao Gong, *Meng-ta pei-lu und Hei-ta shih-lüeh*, tr. Elisabeth Pinks (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1980), pp.142-145.

[27] Peng Daya and Xu Ting, "Heida shilüe," in *Menggu shiliao sizhong*, ed. Wang Guowei (Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1962), p.490.

[28] *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp.256-257; *TJG*/Boyle, pp.519-521.

[29] *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 1, p.16; TJG/Boyle, 23. In Boyle's translation, 500 *mithqāl* is mistranslated as 50 and there is no mention of *dāng*.

grams. One *ding* equals to fifty *liang* (兩), also called *guan* (貫), and same as 500 *qian* (錢), which indicates that one *mithqāl* was equal to one *qian*.[30] One *balīsh* equaled 50 *dinā[…]*, so one *dinā[…]* equaled 1.5 *dinā[…]-i ruknī*. One *dinā[…]* was generally equal to six *dāng*, which is probably why Juwaynī stated that one *dinā[…]-i ruknī* equaled four *dāng*.[31] The seventy *dinā[…]-i ruknī* for every ten people therefore amounted to approximately one *ding*, meaning each person paid about five *liang* in tax. This was similar to the six and later four *liang* levied to each household in northern China. The following passage in *TJG* describes how each person and household bore the cost of operating relay stations.

> Again, when the extent of their territories became broad and vast and important events fell out, it became essential to ascertain the activities of their enemies, and it was also necessary to transport goods from the West to the East and from the Far East to the West. Therefore throughout the length and breadth of the land the they established *yams*, and made arrangements for the upkeep and expenses of each *yam*, assigning thereto a fixed number of men and beasts as well as food, drink and other necessities. All this they shared out amongst the *tümen*, each two *tümen* having to supply one *yam*. Thus, in accordance with the census, they so distribute and exact the charge, that messengers need make no long detour in order to obtain fresh mounts while at the same time the peasantry and the army are not placed in constant inconvenience.[32]

The circumstances changed once Hülegü's conquest of western Asia began. After setting out from his base camp in Mongolia in the fall of 1254, he passed through Samarqand and Kish and finally crossed Amu Darya on January 1, 1256. He dispatched express messengers (*īlchīyān-i*

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[30] For a more detailed discussion, see Matsui Dai, "Mongoru jidai no doryōkō," *Tōhōgaku* 107 (2004), pp.153-166.

[31] *Dāng* means grain in Persian. Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu, 1220-1309* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.221.

[32] *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, pp.24-25; *TJG*/Boyle, 33.

*sarī' al-sair*) to deliver edicts to local leaders throughout the region, urging them to immediately provide support including troops (*lashkar*) and weapons (*ālat*).[33] Although estimates of the size of the forces Hülegü had under his command differ, it seems to have been 170,000 to 180,000 men, a force requiring the efficient use of existing relay stations to smoothly execute his campaign.[34]

Therefore, the *qubchur* of seventy *dinār-i ruknī*, which had been collected to cover the cost of labor, the operation of relay stations, and the travel expenses of envoys was nowhere near enough to meet the new demands. A sharp increase was inevitable, and Arghun Aqa implemented this after meeting with Hülegü in Arran in 1258: "since the expense (*ikhrājāt*) of levies of men (*ḥashar*),[35] post-houses (*yām*), relays (*ūlāgh*) and supplies for the army exceeded the estimates and could not be met by the *qubchur* as then fixed,"[36] the tax scale of one to ten *dīnārs* was changed to one to five hundred *dīnārs*. Although individual differences in wealth were still taken into consideration, the maximum contribution increased fifty-fold. Such an increase may have been justified during the war, but we do not have any specific source showing if it changed after the elimination of the Nizārīs and the subjugation of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad.

This section has examined how the Mongol postal relay system developed from the 1230s, when general Chōrmāghūn's troops advanced into western Asia to stop Jalāl al-Dīn's attempts to revive the Khwarazmian Empire, and the late 1250s, when Hülegü conquered nearly all of western Asia. Before relay stations were installed, envoys burdened the people of cities and towns along their route by arbitrarily requisitioning horses and supplies. However, once Körgüz became governor of Khurāsān and Mazāndarān in late 1239, he created relay stations along the major routes

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[33] *JT*/Rawshan, p.979; *JT*/Alizade, 25; *JT*/Thackston, p.480.

[34] John Masson Smith, "Mongol Manpower and Persian Population," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18, no. 3 (1975), pp.271-299.

[35] John A. Boyle usually translates the term *ḥashar*, which frequently appears in *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā'ī*, as "levy" or "forced levy." See TJG/Boyle, p.85, p.92, p.97.

[36] *TJG*/Qazwīnī, vol. 2, p.261; *TJG*/Boyle, p.524.

to provide envoys with livestock and other supplies. Arbitrary requisitions continued, however, because the existing tax system could not secure the funds necessary to cover the cost of maintaining relay stations. To rectify this problem, the *qubchur* was introduced. Corresponding to the *baoyin* tax adopted in northern China in 1251, the *qubchur* was a poll tax levied to cover the travel expenses of envoys, maintain relay stations, and procure war supplies. While each household contributed six, later four, *liang* in northern China, every ten people paid one to ten *dīnārs* in western Asia, the equivalent of approximately five *liang* (equal to 0.2 kilogram in silver) per person. However, Hülegü's expedition in the late 1250s drastically increased the cost of procuring war supplies and operating relay stations in western Asia. As a result, the *qubchur* drastically increased to between one and five hundred *dīnārs*.

## Issues Related to the Operation of Relay Stations in Hülegü Ulus

According to an Armenian source, after conquering western Asia, Hülegü requisitioned one man from each small village and two men from each large village and sent them to help restore areas devasted by the war. Such men were called *iam*, and in exchange for receiving tax exemptions, they were instructed to provide only "bread and broth" to Tatar travelers.[37] *Iam* is undoubtedly a variation of the Mongol-Turco term *jam* or *yām*, used to refer to relay stations, but it appears to have been mistakenly used instead of *jamchi* or *yāmchī*, the term used for keepers of relay stations.[38] Bread and broth, typically served to envoys, was called *süsi* in Mongolian and transcribed into Chinese as *shousi* (首思). While the reasons why Hülegü

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[37] Robert P. Blake and Richard N. Frye, "History of the Nation of the Archers (The Mongols) by Grigor of Akanc', Hitherto Ascribed to Matak'ia The Monk: The Armenian Text Edited with an English Translation and Notes," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12, no. 3-4 (1949), pp.269-399.

[38] The same error was made by William Rubruck, who referred to relay station keepers as *iam* in his travelogue about his trip to Karakorum between 1253 and 1255. See Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255* (Peter Jackson tr., London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990), p.114.

dispatched relay station keepers to help with reconstruction are unknown, one of their responsibilities was providing food to envoys.

Further evidence of the duties of relay station keepers comes from an edict Abaqa (r. 1265-1281), the son and successor of Hülegü, issued to the envoys sent by Pope Nicholas III.[39] The edict ordered a general named Samaghar as well as "overseers [*darughas*], government officials [*noyad*], postal inspectors [*todqaghul*], road patrols [*qaraghul*], relay station keepers [*jamučin*], and boatmen [*ongghačačin*] of all cities" to provide "plenty of horses [*ulagh-a*], drinks [*umda*], and bread and broth [*sigüsü*]" to the envoy 'Baračirqun' and priests (*marqasiyas*) the pope sent to Qubilai and Abaqa. Samaghar was a Mongol general stationed in Rum who led several attacks on Syria before his death on October 30, 1281, during the Second Battle of Homs.[40] 'Baračirqun' seems to refer to the Franciscan Gerard of Prato, who was appointed by Pope Nicholas III to lead a mission to the Mongol rulers.[41]

According to Abaqa's edict, relay stations had an obligation to provide three things: horses, drinks, and bread and broth. The edict therefore confirms that even after Hülegü conquered western Asia and became the ruler of an independent ulus, relay stations were required to offer horses and food to envoys. In this sense, the postal system in the Hülegü Ulus appears to have been no different from that of other uluses within the Mongol Empire.

There was still the issue, however, of where to find the funds necessary to provide horses and food and how such provisions were to be supplied to envoys. Arghun Aqa had responded to this need by levying the *qubchur* tax to stop envoys and troops randomly requisitioning supplies at

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[39] Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves, "Trois documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15, no. 3-4 (1952), pp.432-445.

[40] Mostaert and Cleaves, "Trois documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes," p.436.

[41] Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks, 1260-1281*, 101-102. The edict is thought to have been drafted in the Year of the Chicken. Although Mostaert and Cleaves have been unable to clarify whether the year was 1267 or 1279, Amitai-Preiss believes that the Vatican sent the envoys to deliver the news that Qubilai was converted to Christianity around 1276 or 1277.

relay stations. However, the question remains as to whether this tax was sufficient to cover these costs. The answer can be found among descriptions of Ghazan Khan's reforms in *JT*.[42] This provides useful descriptions of the disorder surrounding relay stations at the time.

Rashīd al-Dīn states that "Envoys were not content with their allowances for mounts and supplies: anyone they came across they would strip clean and press until they had taken large amounts of money", indicating that one role of relay stations was to provide horses and food.[43] He goes on to say that "If they passed by ten villages and *khaylkhanas* a day, they would take from them all many times the provisions allowed by custom and the law",[44] showing that there were specific rules and laws on the number of horses and the amount of food relay stations were obligated to supply. The following passage explains where the funds to secure such supplies originated from.

> Aside from this, in cities where huge sums of money were released for the post and envoys' expenses, provincial governors took other taxes on that pretext from the peasants, some of which they spent and some of which they embezzled. In all provinces the customs tax, which. is the one tax paid most in cash throughout the realm, had been earmarked for envoys' expenses, but it did not suffice even for their transport. Governors would charge provisions to the customs tax and then abscond.[45]

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[42] Honda Minobu, "Mongoru to Isuramu," in *Mongoru jidaishi kenkyū* (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1991), p.223. For Ghazan Khan's reforms, see Ann K. S. *Lambton, Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953); Honda Minobu, "Gazan Han no zeisei kaikaku," in *Mongoru jidaishi kenkyū*, pp.261-341; Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic Condition of Iran Under the Īl-Khāns," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp.494-500.

[43] *JT*/Thackston, p.715; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1446-1447.

[44] *JT*/Thackston, p.715; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1446-1447.

[45] *JT*/Thackston, p.716; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1448.

In other words, each city's budget was supposed to cover the costs of operating relay stations and the horses and food they provided to envoys. This scheme operated in tandem with the tax collection system in the Hülegü Ulus and the entire Mongol Empire. The Mongols generally levied two kinds of taxes on their conquered subjects. One was taxes that had traditionally been levied and the other was a new tax as subjects of the Mongol Empire. The former was a grain tax called *shuiliang* (稅粮) in China or *qalān* (*māl*) in western Asia, while the latter was a household tax called *kechai* (科差) in China or *qubchūr* in western Asia.[46] Apart from these, there were additional taxes referred to as *zafan chaiyi* (雜泛差役) and *hegu hemai* (和雇和買) in Yuan China.[47] These taxes were also collected in Iran.[48] In the Hülegü Ulus, three different kinds of *qalān* were collected: a land tax called *kharāj* from farmers, a commercial tax called *tamghā* from merchants, and a livestock tax called *marā'ī* from shepherds. The 'huge sums of money' of each city's budget allotted for the upkeep of relay stations and the travel expenses of envoys was raised through the poll tax *qupchūr* and the commercial tax *tamghā*.

Despite these two major sources of tax revenue to draw from, the operation of the relay stations fell into disarray. Rashīd al-Dīn pointed to two reasons for this. The first was a surfeit of envoys. Envoys and couriers were, of course, necessary for the emperor in dealing with state affairs. However, a multitude of other people also employed envoys. These included the emperor's wives; princes; high officials (*amīr*) of each palatial camp (*ordo*); military commanders of myriarch (*tumen*), chiliarch (*mingghan*), and century (*jaghun*); local supervisory officials (*shaḥna*); falconers (*qushchi*); leopard hunters (*barschi*); horse grooms (*akhtachi*); quiver bearers (*qorchi*); and provisioners (*idechi*). Furthermore, envoys were also involved in lawsuits involving inheritance claims, competitions for the posi-

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[46] Smith, "Mongol and Nomadic Taxation," pp.46-85.

[47] For *zafan chaiyi* and *hegu hemai*, see Chen Gaohua, "Yuandai yifa jianlun," in *Yuanshiyanjiu lungao* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1991), pp.21-46; Chen Gaohua, "Lun Yuandai de hegu hemai," in *Yuanshiyanjiu lungao*, pp.47-66.

[48] Honda, "Gazan Han no zeisei kaikaku," pp.282-301.

tion of village chief (*raʾīs*), and the transport of treasures (*tangsuq*) to the court.[49] It reached a point where there were more envoys on the road than caravans or other travelers. Even if each relay station had possessed five thousand horses, they would not have been able to handle the demands of such a volume of envoys.[50]

Under such circumstances, envoys on important missions were often unable to properly utilize relay stations and were forced to make several trips instead of one to complete their mission. This inevitably led to competition for the finite supplies at each station, leading to envoys traveling with armed escorts. Even for minor tasks, they were accompanied by two to three hundred troops, a number that sometimes rose to as many as a thousand.

This sharp increase in the number of envoys led to an explosion in the number of bandits. Envoys often hired thieves and ruffians as members of their entourage. It also became difficult to verify the authenticity of envoys. Thieves (*duzdān*) robbed the decrees (*yarlīgh*) and tablets (*pāīza*) issued to envoys and used them to impersonate envoys and plunder relay stations. Some took the horses from relay stations and sold them as their own property. Such thieves sometimes formed close relationships with village leaders (*rūʾasāʾ*) or magistrates (*ketkhudāyān*), allowing them to extort further goods from the villagers.[51]

The second reason Rashīd al-Dīn identified for the poor running of relay stations was the corruption of local officials. Regional governors collected separate taxes in addition to a poll tax and commercial tax under the pretense of covering the increasing costs due to the many envoys who frequented relay stations. These costs included the upkeep and provisions of relay stations (*yām*), horses (*ūlāgh*), provisions and fodder (*ūlūfa va ʻalafa*), bread and broth (*shūsūn*), and lodgings (*nuzl*). However, only a small part of the revenue from these separate taxes went toward relay sta-

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[49] *JT*/Thackston, pp.714-720; *JT*/Rawshan, pp.1444-1452.

[50] *JT*/Thackston, p.715; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1446.

[51] *JT*/Thackston, pp.718-720; *JT*/Rawshan, pp.1452-1453.

tion expenses. The rest lined the pockets of regional governors who forced commercial tax collectors to cover the travel expenses of envoys. When multiple entourages demanded supplies at the same time, regional governors encouraged competition among them, granting the supplies to the entourage that offered them the best compensation.[52] However, this corruption was not simply a product of personal greed; it was linked to a structural problem in the Hülegü Ulus' administration and tax system, one that Ghazan Khan sought to rectify.

## Ghazan Khan's Reform of the Postal Relay System

On the surface, the surging number of envoys and corruption by local officials were responsible for the problems with the postal relay system in the Hülegü Ulus. Ghazan Khan believed that the number of envoys had increased because princes, royal sons-in-law, princesses, and other high-ranking officials arbitrarily dispatched envoys to take care of their personal affairs. As such, he adopted strict rules about the envoys' use of relay stations. He ordered relay stations not to provide horses to envoys unless they carried royal letters (*khaṭṭ-i mubārak*) bearing the khan's signature (*nishān*) or stamped with a golden royal seal (*āltūn tamghā-yi khāṣṣa*).[53] In the Hülegü Ulus, the khan had several seals, each for a different purpose: (a) the big jade seal (*tamghā-yi yashm-i buzurg*) for documents related to important state affairs or the appointment of regional rulers, (b) the small jade seal (*yashm-i andakī kūchaktar*) for documents announcing the appointment of judges, imams, and sheikhs, (c) the big golden seal (*tamghā-yi buzurg az zar*) for documents related to moderately important state affairs, and (d) the special golden seal (*tamghāī-yi makhṣūṣ-i az zar*) engraved with a bow, club, and sword for the dispatch and stationing of troops.[54] Scribes (*bītīkchīyān*) had traditionally been entrusted with the key to the

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[52] *JT*/Thackston, pp.714-718; *JT*/Rawshan, pp.1444-1452.

[53] *JT*/Thackston, p.717; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1449

[54] *JT*/Thackston, p.726; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1468; *JT*/ Alizade, p.500.

box in which such seals were kept, but Ghazan Khan had the seals locked in a royal box (*qābtūrqā-yi mubārak*) that no one could access without his permission.

One problem with the new rules was that they made it difficult for commanders at the frontier to send envoys to the central court in critical circumstances. To overcome this problem, Ghazan Khan issued permits called *maktūb* engraved with his seal and signature. *Maktūb* differed in terms of the number of horses an envoy could claim at relay stations, which ranged from one to four. In an emergency, regional commanders would hand their *maktūb* to their envoys. Local officials issued a different kind of *maktūb* engraved with their own black seal and an inscription specifying the bearer's points of departure and arrival "from point A to point B."[55] These reforms sought to stop nobles and high-ranking officials from using envoys indiscriminately.

Ghazan Khan also came up with measures to deal with the bandit problem. He made the villagers nearest to the location of a robbery primarily responsible for pursuing (*pay-bordan*) and arresting (*bādīd*) the robbers. If anyone was caught cooperating with the bandits, they received an automatic death sentence. Ghazan introduced measures to prevent inspectors (*tutghāūl*) and patrol officers (*rāh-dār*) from habitually extorting caravans. At the points where they were stationed they should erect "steles of stone and plaster and plaques on which should be inscribed the number of patrolmen for that locale and the pertinent stipulations of the law."[56] According to Rashīd al-Dīn, previously inspectors had set up posts at random locations and charged caravans an "inspection fee" (*tūtghāū'lī*), and within two years of the introduction of the "tablets of justice" (*lawḥ-i 'adl*), such practices had disappeared and safety had been restored to the roads.[57]

The solution to the corruption of local government officials was fundamentally different from that of the envoys. The root of such corruption

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[55] *JT*/Thackston, p.717; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1449.

[56] *JT*/Thackston, p.720.

[57] *JT*/Thackston , pp.718-720; *JT*/Rawshan , pp.1452-1456; *JT*/Alizade, pp.486-490.

went deeper than personal recalcitrance, down to the tax collection system of the Hülegü Ulus. In other words, it was impossible to stop local government officials from exploiting relay stations without reforming the tax collection system.

The most important reason Ghazan Khan was compelled to carry out tax reform was because of tax farming.[58] This meant that the governor of a region pledged a certain amount of tax collected in his jurisdiction (*jam'ī-yi mu'ayyan*) in exchange for tax farming concessions in the region and a money draft called barāt (pl. *barāvāt*) issued by the central Bureau of Treasury (*dīvān*). Based on this contract, the governor collected taxes, used part of the revenue to cover ordinary expenditures (*ikhrājāt-i muqarrarī*), cashed the money drafts, and returned the balance to the state treasury. The salary of local officials (*marsūm*), the pension (*idrār*) of religious workers, and the cost of maintaining local government offices (*'imārat*), including the travel expenses of envoys (*ikhrājāt-i īlchiyān*) and the cost of maintaining relay stations, fell under ordinary expenditures.[59]

In addition to regular taxes such as land tax, commercial tax, and livestock tax, governors levied a poll tax called *qubchur*, which was infamous for the way it was collected.

> A governor would levy *qubchur* on the peasants ten times a year, though in some places *qubchur* was levied twenty or thirty times. It was the practice of governors to make a subtotal of the amount of *qubchur* that had been charged to him, and whenever envoys came to the province on business or to demand money or provisions, the governor would use them as a pretext to impose a *qubchur*. No matter how many envoys arrived — and their expenses and demands were without limit — the governor would rejoice at their arrival, for he would impose a levy once in the name of taxes, once in the name of provisions and expenses, and once in the name of contracts and demands. Some of it he would spend

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[58] Honda, "Gazan Han no zeisei kaikaku," pp.270-271; Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic Condition of Iran Under the Īl-Khāns," pp.529-537.

[59] Honda, "Gazan Han no zeisei kaikaku," pp.270-271.

> on supplies, and some he would take himself; some he would give to the *shahna* and *bitigchis* so that they would support him and corroborate his falsification.[60]

This description suggests that issuing money drafts to governors, thereby granting them tax farming concessions that allowed them to levy *qubchur* indiscriminately, was largely responsible for the disorder in the Hülegü Ulus' tax system prior to Ghazan Khan's rule. Governors took advantage of the system to line their own pockets, and officials higher up in the local and central government received goods from them in exchange for looking the other way.

To remedy the situation, Ghazan Khan had no choice but to reform tax farming via money drafts. He dispatched scribes to each province (*vilāyat*), county (*nāḥiyāt*), and village (*dih*) throughout the ulus to conduct a census and land survey for the creation of a tax registry (*qānūn*, pl. *qavānīn*) that would be kept in Ghazaniyya, a city newly built near Tabriz and named after the khan. At the central Bureau of Treasury, a scribe was assigned to each province to issue each village in the province a tax bill (*barāt-i mutavajjihāt*) stamped with a golden seal (*altūn tamghā*) based on the tax registry kept in Ghazaniyya.[61] To prevent locals working in tax administration from committing corruption, an itemized tax statement was engraved on a plate made of stone, limestone, copper, or steel and installed at the village entrance, mosque, or minaret.[62] Ghazan Khan's reform abolished the tax farming concessions given to local officials and determined and publicized in advance how much tax was to be collected on a specific date so as to prevent corruption and properly furnish the state coffers.

In carrying out his reforms, Ghazan Khan also had to consider the financial support offered to soldiers, a "tribal and financial matter" on which

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[60] *JT*/Thackston, p.701; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1415.

[61] *JT*/Thackston, p.706; *JT*/ Rawshan, p.1425; *JT*/Alizade, pp.462-463.

[62] *JT*/Thackston, pp.710-711; *JT*/ Rawshan, p.1436; *JT*/Alizade, pp.471-472.

the fate of the Mongol administration depended.[63] When the battles of conquest ended in western Asia, the Mongol troops there were left with no more opportunities to gather the spoils of war. Frequent unrest drove them into economic deprivation, with some even selling their own children as slaves.[64] This prompted the government to issue vouchers to the military that could be exchanged for supplies from the residents of a particular area. The troops presented their vouchers to the local tax collector who then arranged for them to obtain the supplies they needed. However, tax collectors used these vouchers as an excuse to indiscriminately levy the *qubchur* tax, while Mongol troops also extorted supplies from peasants. To rectify the situation, Ghazan Khan introduced the *iqṭā'* system. This system allotted land to Mongol military commanders in royal estates (*īnjū*), state lands (*dālāy* or *dīvānī*), or grazing pastures that nomads migrated through as the seasons changed. The commanders were allowed to let farmers there cultivate the allotted land and to collect tax directly from them to meet the expenses of their units.[65] Ghazan Khan hoped that ownership of land would motivate the troops to take responsibility for their property and refrain from exploiting civilians. He thus sought to kill two birds with one stone: to satisfy the financial needs of the military and to eliminate the harmful effects of levying the *qubchur* tax.

Ghazan Khan's reform of the postal relay system was thus carried out in tandem with the implementation of the *iqṭā'* system. Previously, envoys expected their travel expenses to be covered by the cities and villages along their journey, which prompted local officials to use envoy visits as an excuse to levy the *qubchur* tax, commercial tax, or other special taxes. After the reform, envoys received a predetermined amount from the central government to cover their expenses or from a local government along their travel route, which was funded by the revenue raised from a specific tax. Envoys received their travel allowance in cash, and unless they were on an

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63 Honda, "Gazan Han no zeisei kaikaku," p.261.

64 Honda, "Furagu urusu no ikuta sei," pp.234-235.

65 Honda, "Furagu urusu no ikuta sei," pp.250-251.

urgent mission, they were forbidden from using post horses. Ghazan Khan made this quite clear:

> He also ordered that if occasionally it was necessary to sell horses or donkeys for certain people to reach a province, they should pay the full price, and the animals would then be theirs. Under no circumstances was the word *ulagh* to be uttered.[66]

According to Rashīd al-Dīn, this was how Ghazan Khan freed cities, towns, and villages throughout the ulus from the cost of post horses and food for envoys.

Envoys were now required to purchase food with cash and were not allowed to use post horses. However, these horses still had an important use. We can find a statement in one of the sections in *JT* that Ghazan Khan had a relay station installed every three *farsang* (approximately eighteen kilometers) along main roads (*rāhhā-i muʻaẓẓam*), and fifteen well-fed horses were kept ready at each station. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, ministers called *amīr-i buzurg* were responsible for overseeing relay stations and their expenses. However, the relay stations were kept not for envoys on ordinary missions, but for those on urgent missions to the frontiers. Envoys were allowed to claim the same number of post horses at relay stations as the number inscribed on the *maktūb* they carried. Such stations were generally installed at locations far away from cities and villages.[67]

To facilitate 'urgent' correspondence, Ghazan Khan operated two different types of couriers. One was mounted couriers (*ūlāghchī*) who rode in relays (*ūlām bi-ūlām*) and could cover sixty *farsang* (approximately 360 kilometers) in twenty-four hours.[68] This meant that news from Khurāsān near the eastern frontier could reach the capital Tabriz within three to four days. Rashīd al-Dīn called such relay stations installed for the delivery of

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[66] *JT*/Thackston, p.718.

[67] *JT*/Thackston, pp.716-717.

[68] *Ūlām* is a translation of the Turkic word ulam, which means consecutive. Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, pp.107-108.

urgent messages *bīnchīk yām*. In Turkish, the word *bīnchīk* means "express post horse."[69] The other type of courier traveled on foot. Each relay station had two runners (*payk*) who ran in relays and could cover thirty *farsang* (approximately 180 kilometers) in one day.

The geographical treatise *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, compiled in 1340 by Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī, confirms Rashīd al-Dīn's claims.[70] According to a detailed description in the treatise about the six royal roads (*shāhrāh*) that existed during the reign of Öljeitü,[71] the distance between Nishāpūr, a major city in Khurāsān, and the capital Sulṭāniyya was 188 farsang, and the distance between Sulṭāniyya and the former capital Tabriz was 46 *farsang*. Adding the two distances indicates that Nishāpūr and Tabriz were 234 *farsang* apart, a distance which could be covered by the rapid relay horses in three to four days.[72]

The reforms of Ghazan Khan also appear in the historical work *Tārīkh-i Vaṣṣāf*. This states that Ghazan Khan ordered a relay station installed every four *farsang* throughout his ulus, which extended from Amu Darya to Egypt. Each station was equipped with post horses (*asbān-i yām-i multajim va masrūj*), horse keepers (*ulāghchiyān*), and couriers (*munhiyān va fuyūj-i mushammar al-ḍayl*). Mounted couriers were expected to cover sixty *farsang* in twenty-four hours in relays, while foot couriers needed to cover forty *farsang*. While the *maktūb* such couriers carried were sealed

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[69] Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, p.327. Doerfer described *bīnchīk* as "schnelle kurierpherd," and claimed that the word *bīnchīk* derived from *bin- or min*, meaning "to ride a horse."

[70] Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulūb*, ed. Guy Le Strange (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1915). This work was translated into English, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulūb*, tr. Guy Le Strange (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1916).

[71] Because Öljeitü moved the capital from Tabriz to Sulṭāniyya, the six royal roads spread out from the new capital to the south, east, north, west, southeast, and southwest. For further details, see Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulūb*, ed. Le Strange, pp.163-189; Ḥamd-Allāh Mustawfī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulūb*, tr. Le Strange, pp.160-179; Guy Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia, from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), pp.228-231.

[72] Mustawfī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulūb*, tr. Le Strange, p.169, p.175.

(*muhr-i khatama-i mushk*), they had a green stamp displaying the shape of a rider or runner at the top along with a note stating that "a courier named so-and-so departed from this location at this date and time." The note allowed the horse keeper at the next relay station to determine whether the *maktūb* carrier had arrived on time. A vertical line enclosed in a circle (⏀) was added to the *maktūb* if its carrier arrived on time, and if the carrier arrived more than an hour late, a circle with one horizontal, instead of vertical, line (⊖) was drawn. This system enabled mounted couriers to cover distances of more than a thousand *farsang*(!) in a week.[73]

The *pāīzas* issued to envoys and high-ranking officials were another integral part of the reform of the postal relay system. *Pāīzas* were commonly used not in the Hülegü Ulus only, but all across the Mongol Empire as well.[74] The problem was that the khan's wives and court ministers independently issued a variety of *pāīzas*. To resolve the chaos, Ghazan Khan invalidated all such *pāīzas* and issued new ones that varied according to the owner's rank. Nobles and high-ranking officials such as sulṭāns, maliks, and supervisory officials (*shaḥna*) received a large, round wooden *pāīza* engraved with a lion's head and the bearer's name. The *pāīza* was valid until the owner's retirement, upon which it had to be returned. Mid-ranking supervisory officials and maliks received a slightly smaller *pāīza* also engraved with the owner's name and a unique mark (*naqshi-yi makhṣūṣ*). Envoys using relay stations for urgent messages (*bīnchīk yām*) received a long *pāīza* (*pāīza-i dirāz*) made of copper and engraved with the

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[73] Waṣṣāf al-Ḥaḍrat (ʿAbd Allāh ibn Fazl Allāh), *Tajziyat al-amṣār va tazjiyat al-aʿṣār*, Majlis-e Milli 8321, Tehran, 868/1463-4, 201r-201v; *Kitāb-i Waṣṣāf al-Ḥaḍrāt: bi-ihtimām-i Muḥammad Mahdī Iṣfahānī*, Bombay lithographed edition, 1269/1853, pp.386-387; ʿAbd al-Muḥammad Āyatī, ed., *Taḥrīr-i tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1967), pp.232-233.

[74] Sheila S. Blair has confirmed the presence of an envoy (*ilchi*) bearing a *pāīza* running ahead of Hülegü in one of the miniature paintings included in copies of the *Compendium of Chronicles* kept at the National Library of France and the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Sheila S. Blair, "A Mongol Envoy," in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp.45-60. A poem written by a contemporary of Hülegü's son Abaqa features various Turkic and Mongolian words including *pāyze, sūsūn, yām,* and *yāmchi*. Vladimir Minorsky, "Pūr-i Bahā's 'Mongol' Ode (Mongolica, 2)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 18, no. 2 (1956), pp.261-278.

shape of a moon at the top. High-ranking frontier commanders had five *pāīzas* at their disposal and mid-ranking commanders three in the event that they had to dispatch express messengers (*īlchiyān-i yārātū*) in an emergency.[75]

## Similarities to the Postal System of the Qa'an Ulus

What stood out most about Ghazan Khan's reforms was how the state began to directly finance the operation of relay stations. Silverstein claims that through the reforms, the postal system of the Hülegü Ulus "finally came to resemble a great imperial postal system in the Near Eastern tradition."[76] He acknowledges that the adoption of runners "smacks of Chinese origins", but the fact that the cost was covered by the central Bureau of Treasury, he argues, appears to indicate that the system was modeled after the Mamluk *Barīd*.[77]

To answer the question of the origins of the postal system, it is necessary to determine who bore the cost of operating relay stations in the Hülegü Ulus. According to *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā'ī*, as mentioned above, the Mongols conducted a census in an area they had conquered before installing relay stations. Two *tümens* then jointly bore the cost of supplying the station with horses, food, drinks, and other necessary supplies. Armenian sources also describe how after his military campaign, Hülegü requisitioned one or two men from each village to help with the restoration of areas in western Asian that had been devasted by the war. These men provided bread and broth to Tatar travelers, that is envoys, in exchange for tax exemptions. As such, both the men assigned to serve as *yāmchī* at relay stations and the local population, through their taxes, were responsible for the operation of relay stations.

How the relay stations were actually run can be inferred from the

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[75] *JT*/Thackston, pp.727-728; JT/Rawshan, pp.1471-1472; *JT*/ Alizade, pp.503-504.

[76] Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, p.159.

[77] Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, pp.159-160.

way relay stations were operated in northern China within the realm of the Qa'an Ulus. The stations Ögödei installed along routes between the imperial capital of Qaraqorum and other regions were initially the responsibility of nomadic groups of *mingghan*('thousand').[78] The principle of collecting funds from the general population to finance the operation of relay stations remained the same in the territories Ögödei conquered in northern China. According to Xu Ting's account of his visit to Mongolia between 1235 and 1236, "in addition to the silver levy in lieu of silk and cotton to each household and each person, the tax also includes the total funds required for regular and irregular public expenses such as the dispatch of envoys and war horses or the transport of food and tools."[79]

Postal households, however, appear to have had an additional burden compared to the general population. This fact is confirmed by the two statutes found in the treatise of *Zhanchi* in *Jingshi dadian*. The first one stipulates that, from 1229, "ten postal households must pay one *dan* (石) of rice every year, which is to be carted [to the relay station in need of it] by a person from a *janghun* (百戶)."[80] One *dan* of rice per annum does not seem to be such a heavy burden for ten households to bear.[81] The second statute is imperial decree in 1238 given to postal households in Yanjing, Xuande, and Xijing:

> One horse must be offered by every four households from the 217 households on the older census and by every eight households from the 434 households on the new census. Also, one ox must be offered by every two households from the 169 old households and by every four households from the 338 new households.[82]

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78 Rachewiltz tr., *The Secret History*, p.215; *TJG*/Boyle, p.30.

79 Peng and Xu, "Heida shilüe," p.490.

80 *Zhanchi*, 2.

81 Ota Yaichiro, "Gendai ni no okeru tanko no keitai." *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 36, no. 1 (1977), p.45.

82 *Zhanchi*, 13.

In other words, old households had to provide one horse for every four households or one ox for every two households while the burden was reduced by half for new households. These payments were still about thirty times greater than those levied on ordinary households, which had to provide one horse for every 134 old households or one horse for every 268 new households. However, this burden may have been offset by the tax exemptions postal households received.[83]

These rules stayed more or less the same until 1264, the fifth year of Qubilai's reign.

> On the ninth day of the eighth month, the chancellor of the Central Secretariat proposed that since a gap between rich and poor exists among postal households, each household should be exempt from paying three *dan* of grain for up to four *qing* of land so that those grains may be used to cover expenses related to post horses and bread and broth, but they should pay tax on lands larger than that, and His Majesty approved.[84]

The proposal was meant to help postal households focus their resources on running relay stations by giving them tax exemptions on up to four *qing*, 1 *qing* being equal to 6.67 *hectare*, of farmland. Even so, postal households had insufficient resources to cover the ever-mounting operational costs of relay stations. From around 1281, the eighteenth year of the Zhiyuan era, the state began to provide funds for bread and broth, and this became standard practice in the later years of the Zhiyuan era.[85] Postal

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[83] Dang, *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu*, 35 (footnote 2).

[84] *Zhanchi*, 20.

[85] See Dang, *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu*, pp.128-129; Mo Shumin, "Meng Yuan youyi yanjiu" (Ph.D. diss., Jinan University, 2004), pp.90-92; Ota, "Gendai ni no okeru tanko no keitai," pp.48-51. However, it is unlikely that postal households gained much economically from state funding for bread and broth. Instead of being held responsible for covering the cost for bread and broth, postal households had to pay a tax called *zafan chaiyi*. Moreover, local officials embezzled most of the funds the state paid for bread and broth and then forced postal households to make up the deficit.

households were now responsible for supplying post horses, while the state took responsibility for supplying the bread and broth served at relay stations. According to a statute from 1264, four postal households had to provide one regular horse, which implied that they also had to provide another additional horse attached to the regular one.[86] For its part, the central government calculated the funds each region required for bread and broth and dispensed them to local governments twice a year, once between spring and summer and again between fall and winter. These funds were then redistributed to relay stations. For example, the paper notes the state issued for bread and broth expenses at 38 circuits in Fuli (腹裏) and Liaoyang (遼陽) amounted to 10,950 *ding* (錠). In addition, envoys dispatched by central government departments sometimes received allowances for their trips from granary clerks.[87]

There is considerable evidence that the operation of relay stations in the Qa'an Ulus influenced the running of the stations in the Hülegü Ulus. According to Juwaynī, the station keepers and the general population jointly provided horses and food for relay stations in western Asia. The station keepers also received tax exemptions for providing bread and broth. This is basically the same as the way relay station expenses were covered in northern China prior to Qubilai's enthronement: ordinary and postal households both bore the costs of operating the stations, while postal households supplied more grain, horses, and oxen than ordinary households in exchange for being exempt from household taxes (*kechai*). This practice seems to have been maintained in the Hülegü Ulus as well. Necessary expenses and services for the relay stations were met by the station keepers who provided the lodgings and food to traveling envoys while receiving in return tax exemptions, plus the *qubchur* tax and the commercial tax that local officials collected from the general population. However, the surging number

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[86] Chen Gaohua, "Lun Yuandai de zhanhu," in *Yuanshiyanjiu lungao* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1991), p.164.

[87] Dang, *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu*, p.255, pp.258-266. State funding of bread and broth had become commonplace by the mid to late years of the Zhiyuan era, but areas near the two Yuan capitals continued to cover the cost on their own.

of envoys and the corruption of local officials made the cost of operating relay stations unbearable. This prompted local officials to randomly collect extra taxes from the people who had no choice but to comply with their demands for food and supplies.

The practices in Qa'an Ulus during the Zhiyuan reign may also have influenced Ghazan Khan's decision to stop envoys taking whatever they needed from relay stations and to give them travel allowances from the central government's budget.

> Then he said, "We will give envoys who go to the provinces a provisions allowance from the treasury sufficient for their roundtrip so that they will not have to requisition supplies in any locale. When they arrive at their destination they will be fed from a special surtax." Thus any envoy who was assigned to a province was given cash from the treasury to cover his provisions on the way.[88]

Although the wording in the above passage is somewhat ambiguous, it still hints at the change in how the travel expenses of envoys were covered. Previously, envoys demanded the horses and food they required at points along their journey, and local officials collected all sorts of taxes from the locals to accommodate the envoys' demands. The number of horses and the amount of food envoys could request were, of course, stipulated by law, but this was mostly ignored. However, the existing tax system that granted tax farming concessions to local officials made it practically impossible to root out these practices. The tax reforms that Ghazan Khan undertook therefore made collecting taxes the preserve of the central government. They also specified the amount of tax that could be collected locally and made this information public so that envoys could only receive predetermined allowances from the central government or local officials. However, the cash allowance from the state treasury was for food and did not cover the provision of horses. Hence, the fact that the central govern-

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[88] *JT*/Thackston, pp.717-718; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1451.

ment covered the travel expenses of envoys does not mean that Ghazan Khan's reforms were a departure from Mongol traditions or a return to west Asian traditions.

A closer look at the postal system in western Asia in the age of the caliphs reveals that it was quite different from that of the Mongols. It was a communication network that focused on gathering intelligence on public sentiment, rumors, and signs of insurrection, while the Mongol system was a transportation network that allowed people and goods to move over vast distances.[89] In the former, the state covered the expenses of relay station keepers who were then charged with the responsibility of passing on intelligence. However, the number of stations was nowhere near that of the Mongol Empire, which had to handle a far greater volume of traffic, nor were they equipped with horses, food, and lodgings. The reason the state decided to cover the operational costs of relay stations in the Qa'an and the Hülegü uluses was not because it was following a west Asian tradition, but because the financial burden of running the stations became too overwhelming for postal households on their own.

The changes Ghazan Khan made to how expenses were covered were not the only reforms that resembled practices in the postal system of the Qa'an Ulus. The khan issued *maktūbs* to commanders at the frontier, and envoys had to produce these permits in order to use post horses. Such *maktūbs* were engraved with the khan's signature or seal and specified the number of horses an envoy could requisition, which was between one and four.[90] This practice was identical to the messenger permits called *puma shengzi* ('postal edict,' 鋪馬聖旨) used in the Qa'an Ulus. Such permits were also known as *yubao shengzi* ('edict with royal seal,' 御寶聖旨) because they were stamped with the imperial seal, or as *puma zhazi* ('postal document,' 鋪馬札子) or *yiquan* ('postal ticket,' 驛券) because they granted

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89 Francis Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services: The Ancient Near East, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Muslim Empires, the Mongol Empire, China, Muscovy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), pp.188-261; Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, pp.53-140.

90 *JT*/Thackston, p.717; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1450.

access to post horses. Multiple permits with different numbers of horses were issued to each local government depending on the demand in each area. For example, in 1282, permits for three, four, and five horses were issued to five circuits and permits for two horses to one circuit in each province. Permits for one or two horses were issued to five circuits in Sichuan Province in 1283 and permits for two or three horses were issued to five circuits in Huguang Province in 1284.[91]

The practice of stamping seals not only on *maktūbs* but on all imperial decrees was another practice that appears to have come from the Qa'an Ulus. The khan of the Hülegü Ulus had four different seals including the big and small jade seals and the big and special golden seals, which were kept in a box whose keys were entrusted to scribes. This led to widespread abuse of the use of the seals, prompting Ghazan Khan to lock them inside a royal chest that no one could access without his permission.[92] The storage and use of seals had also been an issue in the Qa'an Ulus. We do not know how the royal seals were stored, but we know the circumstances in the local government. It was *darughachis* who stamped the seals of local officials, but it was senior officials who kept those seals in their possession. In 1265, a few years after the revolt by Han Chinese, a royal order reversed these roles. It introduced a permanent policy of Mongols as overseers (*darughachi*) and keepers of the seals, Han Chinese as general administrators (*zongguan* 總管), and Muslims as associate administrators (*tongzhi*).[93] As a result, Han Chinese general administrators could no longer use seals without the permission of the Mongol overseers.

The Qa'an and the Hülegü uluses were also similar in terms of their courier systems. As previously mentioned, Ghazan Khan had two types of couriers that traveled in relays: mounted couriers who could cover 360 kilometers and foot couriers who could cover 180 kilometers a day. Writing in *Xinshi* (心史), the Southern Song dynasty loyalist Zheng Sixiao (鄭思肖)

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91 See Dang, *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu*, pp.211-218.

92 *JT*/Thackston, p.726; *JT*/Rawshan, p.1467.

93 See Kataoka Kazutada, *Chūgoku kan'in seido kenkyū* (Tōkyō: Tōhō Shoten, 2008), pp.197-201.

noted that "relay stations are ninety *li* [里] apart. A person sent on an urgent mission by a Tatar lord is called a *haiqing shichen* ['falcon envoy,' 海青使臣] who switches mounts at each station to ride past eight to nine stations in twenty-four hours."[94] This suggests that a mounted messenger could cover between 720 to 810 *li* in twenty-four hours, or 360 to 450 kilometers, assuming that one *li* amounted to five kilometers during the Yuan dynasty. On the other hand, the term *jidi pubing* ('express postal soldier,' 急遞鋪兵) often appears in Yuan Chinese sources and is the equivalent of foot couriers. According to *Yuanshi*, during the reign of Qubilai, "After taking the distances of terrain and the size of population into consideration, express stations [*jidi zhanpu* 急遞站鋪] were installed from Yanjing [燕京] to Kaipingfu [開平府], and then to Jingzhao [京兆]. One station was installed after every ten, fifteen, or twenty-five li, and express messengers were selected from registered as well as unregistered households in each *zhou* [州] and *xian* [縣]."[95] These express messengers also make an appearance in a description by Marco Polo, who noted that a relay station was installed every three miles within the Qa'an's realm and that the foot couriers assigned to such station ran ten days and nights in relays to cover distances that normally took a hundred days to travel.[96]

Adam Silverstein argues that the courier system established under Ghazan Khan was an imitation of the Mamluk Barīd. Originating from the Greek *beredos* or the Latin *veredus*, *barīd* means post horse.[97] However, a system of using post horses to deliver messages, with riders switching mounts at regular intervals to guarantee speed, would not have been a novel concept to Ghazan Khan or Mongol nomads who valued mobility from constantly moving between pastures with their livestock. It therefore seems unlikely that the Mamluk *Barīd* served as the inspiration for Ghazan

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94 Zheng Sixiao, *Xinshi*, quoted in Dang, *Meng Yuan yizhan jiaotong yanjiu*, pp.239-240.

95 Song, *Yuanshi*, p.2596.

96 Marco Polo, *Mareuko Pollo eui dongbang gyeonmullok*, tr. Kim Hodong (Seoul: Sagyejeol, 2000), p.278.

97 D. Sourdel, "barīd," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp.1045-1046.

Khan's courier system.

Although the Qa'an ulus first adopted foot couriers in 1261 and they came to be known as *jidi pubing*, their origin dates back to the reign of the Jin emperor Zhangzong.[98] According to *Jinshi* (金史), in 1206, the first express postal station (急遞鋪) was installed. Messengers wearing a belt strung with bells traveled in relays and covered three hundred *li* a day. However, they were permitted to ride horses only when their messages related to military mobilizations or flood prevention.[99]

It is difficult to pinpoint when foot couriers first appeared in western Asia. In *Siyāsat-nāma*, the author and Persian vizier Niẓām al-Mulk mentions a *paykān* who covered fifty *farsang* (about 300 kilometers) in twenty-four hours. While *paykān* usually refers to runners, Silverstein suspects that the term referred to mounted couriers since no runner could cover this distance on foot in twenty-four hours.[100] If this is true, the practice of using foot couriers must have been adopted in western Asia after it was conquered by the Mongols. In the section on the Mongol tribes in *JT*, the *Bekrīn* (*Mekrīn*) are described as rock climbers (*qayāchiI*) and mountaineers who originally lived in the steep mountains of Uyghuristan before some of them relocated to western Asia with Hülegü.[101] It is likely that Hülegü used them to target mountaintop fortresses, but it is also possible that he used them as couriers capable of swiftly carrying messages through mountainous areas. This is supported by miniature paintings of envoys, found in a few *JT* manuscripts, wearing a *pāīza* and running ahead of Hülegü, hinting at the possibility that they were in fact foot couriers.[102] It thus appears that the Mongol system of foot couriers was not necessarily derived from the Mamluk *Barīd*, regardless of whether Hülegü was the first Mongol ruler to use it.

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98 Mo, "Meng Yuan youyi yanjiu," pp.108-109.

99 *Jinshi*, (Tuotuo et. al. eds; Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), p.276

100 Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, pp.130-131.

101 *JT*/Thackston, pp.76-77.

102 Blair, "A Mongol Envoy," pp.45-60.

## Conclusion

The Mongols began to install relay stations in western Asia in late 1239 during Ögedei's reign, after Körgüz became governor of Khurāsān. This coincided with the Mongol decision to put an end to the military activities of Jalāl al-Dīn and be more directly involved in governing conquered areas. Körgüz's successor Arghun Aqa introduced a poll tax, *qubchur*, to prevent envoys from arbitrarily extorting supplies at relay stations. After Möngke's enthronement, he conducted a census throughout western Asia to provide the information necessary to levy the *qubchur* and to use the revenue to cover the cost of operating relay stations. However, Hülegü's subsequent military campaigns caused a sharp rise in the *qubchur*.

Once the Nizārīs were eliminated and the Abbasid caliphate subdued, Hülegü installed relay stations to effectively govern the conquered areas. Although details of their operation are difficult to verify, it seems clear that postal households called *yāmchī* were responsible for the management of relay stations and that they received tax exemptions in exchange for their service. Although such households had to make contributions in the form of horses and food, a substantial portion of the expenses of the relay stations seem to have been covered by revenue from the *qubchur* and a commercial tax called *tamghā*. Additional taxes were levied when the cost of running the relay stations surged due to Hülegü's campaigns.

By the time Ghazan Khan ascended the throne in 1295, the postal relay system was in chaos, if we can believe Rashīd al-Dīn's claim. The number of envoys dispatched by princes, royal sons-in-law, and ministers far exceeded the budgets local authorities had to run the relay stations. Moreover, bandits targeted both locals and envoys. To make matters worse, local officials illegally collected taxes from residents in their jurisdiction under the pretense of having to provide envoys with supplies. At the root of all these issues was the disarray of taxation system and the weakening of the royal authority.

Sensing the general crisis the Hülegü Ulus had fallen into, Ghazan Khan reformed the state's tax, land management, and postal relay systems;

overhauled procedures related to administrative documentation; and unified weights and measures. In his reform of the postal relay system, he sought to achieve two major goals: reduce the number of envoys and eradicate the corruption of local officials. To stop princes and nobles from arbitrarily dispatching envoys, only those with permits called *maktūb* bearing the khan's signature or seal were allowed to use post horses, and only *pāīza*, tablets issued by the central government, were accepted as a means of identification at relay stations. To deal with corruption in the taxation system, Ghazan prohibited local officials from collecting taxes from residents to cover the travel expenses of envoys. He also created a tax registry and had the central government use the revenue from locally collected taxes to purchase food for envoys. While taxes collected from the people continued to be used to cover the cost of operating relay stations, the collection of taxes and the redistribution of tax revenues came under the central government's strict supervision and control, thus putting an end to the practice of envoys demanding supplies from local officials or the general population.

In addition to these reforms, Ghazan Khan had relay stations installed every three *farsang* (approximately eighteen kilometers) along main roads throughout his ulus and ordered each station to have fifteen post horses available. To deliver messages swiftly, two types of couriers were operated: mounted couriers and foot couriers. Mounted couriers could cover 360 kilometers a day and reach the capital Tabriz from Khurāsān on the northeastern frontier in three to four days. At the same time, two runners (*paykān*) were stationed at each relay station.

In essence, Ghazan Khan's reform of the postal relay system was about centralizing the practice of dispatching envoys and the funding of relay stations. Many of the changes bear striking similarities to the postal relay system in the Qa'an Ulus under Qubilai's rule, including the central government's funding of food expenses at relay stations, the format of *pāīzas*, the use of signatures and seals, and the operation of express messengers. This suggests that the postal relay system of the Qa'an Ulus served as a model for Ghazan Khan's reforms.

The fact that the state became directly involved in financing the oper-

ational costs of relay stations does not mean that Ghazan Khan reverted to the traditional west Asian postal system prior to Mongol rule. Neither does it suggest that the courier system was an imitation of the Mamluk *Barīd*. His pride would have made it difficult for him to imitate a system from the Mamluks, whom he would have seen as Turkic slaves that had revolted against their master.[103] While he may have been trying to avoid political subordination to the qa'an after Qubilai's death and to strengthen his status as an independent ruler, Mongol traditions still mattered to Ghazan Khan.[104]

Recent studies have confirmed that frequent exchanges of envoys between the Hülegü and Qa'an Uluses led to them influencing each other in the realms of politics, economics, and culture.[105] Bolad Chingsang, who visited the Hülegü ulus as Qubilai's envoy and ended up staying there, had a knowledge and understanding of the Mongols that was second to none. The knowledge he gained from serving as chancellor in the Qa'an Ulus most likely helped Rashīd al-Dīn not only when he was writing *The Blessed History of Ghazan*, but also when he was devising plans for Ghazan Khan's reforms.[106] Moreover, the diverse contents of *JT* suggests that Rashīd al-Dīn had acquired an in-depth knowledge of the Qa'an Ulus from sources other than Bolad Chingsang. It is thus most probable that Ghazan Khan and Rashīd al-Dīn modeled their reforms on the system in the Qa'an Uulus. One of the best illustrations is their reform of the postal relay system in the Hülegü Ulus.

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[103] Charles J. Halperin, "The Kipchak Connection: The Ilkhans, the Mamluks and Ayn Jalut," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 63, no. 2 (2000), p.241.

[104] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamlūk Sultanate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, no. 1 (1996), pp.1-10.

[105] Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[106] Thomas T. Allsen, "Biography of a Cultural Broker: Bolad Ch'eng-Hsiang in China and Iran," *in The Court of the Il-Khans, 1290-1340*, eds. Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.7-22.

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