The king’s underlings must not be allowed to assume power, for this causes the utmost harm and destroys the king’s splendour and majesty. This particularly applies to women, for they are wearers of the veil and have not complete intelligence. … But when the king’s wives begin to assume the part of rulers, they base their orders on what interested parties tell them, because they are not able to see things with their own eye in the way men constantly look at the affairs of the outside world.

Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyāsat’nāmah*

These words are attributed to the vizier of the Saljuq dynasty in Iran, Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), who painted this portrait of female rule in his work, the *Siyasatnamah* or *Siyar al-muluk*, almost 250 years before the arrival of the Mongols. Apart from any personal convictions about the matter, Nizam al-Mulk had political reasons for justifying the exclusion of women from politics: the influential role played by Terken Khatun, consort of Sultan Malik Shah (d. 1092), in the court of the Great Saljuqs was a challenge to his hegemony over state affairs. However, the Mongols’ perception of women’s political involvement appears to have been very different when we consider the accounts contained in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. For example, the survival of Chinggis Khan and his subsequent political success was, according to this source, determined by the actions of the women in his family. Consequently, rather opposing views on the role of women in politics are presented here: the more restricted approach expressed by the Persian vizier and the more receptive one contained in the Mongol sources. In turn, when the Mongols expanded throughout Eurasia and conquered Khurasan in the first half of the thirteenth century, these two contrasting conceptions of women’s involvement in politics came up against each other. It is in this context that this chapter explores the evolution of female rule in Eurasia before the establishment of the Mongol Empire. The first section examines women’s participation in political affairs before the appearance of Chinggis Khan in the political arena.
of the Mongolian steppes. Based mostly on *The Secret History of the Mongols*, we explore the way in which pre-imperial nomads explained their mythological origin and early history. Owing to the limited amount of sources and the elusive nature of their contents, we only highlight some examples of the political involvement of women in this period that may have served as the basis for the future development of an institutionalised role for women in politics, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, in the second section, we look at the role of women during the early years of Chinggis Khan’s life in the steppes. We look at what biographical information we possess about his mother, wife and other Mongol women of the period that have permeated the sources. Finally, the last section in this chapter explores whether there was, among the territories eventually conquered by the Mongols, any kind of female political involvement that might help to explain how women became rulers of the empire just one generation after Chinggis Khan. More specifically, we explore cases of women’s regency in Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East before the arrival of the Mongols, to see if there are any precedents that those influential Mongol women might have relied upon to legitimise their accession to the throne in the 1240s.

**Between Myth and History: Women in Pre-Chinggisid Mongolia**

Before starting our study on the role of women in different aspects of imperial Mongol society, it is worth looking briefly at a number of women who lived in pre-imperial times. The cases presented in this section serve as a starting point for our analysis, where we can establish certain characteristics of women’s interaction with society before the rise of Chinggis Khan. However, this task presents us with some difficulties regarding the available source material for this period that cannot be overlooked. In studying the early stages of the Mongol Empire, only two main Mongol sources have come to us. Fortunately, once we begin to look through them, we notice that they are full of references to women. Obviously, these references differ in extent but include specific information on Mongol ladies, and on women in general. This situation leads to a simple conclusion: if this source is a ‘genuine (not to be confused with reliable) native account of the life and deeds of Chinggis Qan’, then it might be argued that women played a crucial role in the development of the empire. On the other hand, if we consider a scenario in which the events narrated have been altered, then it is still proof of the high position of women within the traditional Mongol view of their past. Personally, I consider that, despite the bias, fabrications and exaggerations contained in every
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historical source, both points of view should be kept in mind when studying Mongol women in medieval times.

It is generally accepted among scholars that traditional Mongol women were involved in domestic, religious, economic and military activities. But, this in itself does not explain the high status that nomadic societies accorded their women in medieval times. In order to understand this, it is necessary to take a look at the traditional conception of female status in the time of the founder of the empire, Chinggis Khan, and the crucial influence of the women around him. Looking at the mythological origin of the Mongol tribe serves as a good starting point to explore women’s status in this nomadic society.6

It is told in *The Secret History of the Mongols* how the first Mongol (Batachiqan) was born of a blue-grey wolf and a fallow doe.7 Eleven generations after this first human ancestor, a descendant of his called Dobun Mergen married a woman named Alan Qo’a (see Plate 1) and they had two sons, Bügünütei and Belgünütei.8 Dobun Mergen died soon afterwards leaving Alan Qo’a ‘without brothers-in-law and male relatives, and without husband’. Yet, after the death of her husband, she conceived three more sons from ‘a resplendent yellow man’ who ‘entered by the light of the smoke-hole or the door top of the tent’.9 This supernatural being, as Thomas T. Allsen has described it,10 rubbed the woman’s belly every night and penetrated her womb with light.11 The youngest of the three sons (Bodonchar) born from Alan Qo’a and the ‘man of light’ was the founder of the Borjigin lineage, from which Chinggis Khan was later born (see Figure 1.1). Despite the combination of legend and myth contained in this story, it is relevant to highlight the fact that in the Mongol conception of their own ancestry, the mythical past and the historical presence of the Chinggisids were linked by a woman, and it is described in the source that this was the ‘Mongols’ own “official” accounting’.12

The relevance of women in the legendary past of the Mongols was not restricted to a single character. It is remarkable that *The Secret History of the Mongols* mentions the names of different women related to Chinggis Khan’s ancestors. For example, the grandmother of Alan Qo’a (Barqujin Qo’a) and both her mother-in-law (Boroqchin Qo’a) and grandmother-in-law (Mongqoljin Qo’a) are mentioned at the beginning of the story.13 No information other than their names is provided, yet it seems to be enough to establish the genealogical link between the direct descendants of Batachiqan and Alan Qo’a’s family. At this point, perhaps Allsen’s argument concerning the female linkage between the myth and history of the Mongols can be taken forwards, since apart from Alan Qo’a’s active role in starting the lineage of Chinggis Khan, the names of those women
Figure 1.1 The ancestors of Chinggis Khan (part 1)
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immediately connected to her were also considered significant enough to be mentioned, in the Secret History of the Mongols, to emphasise the genealogical connection of Alan Qo’a.

The emphasis on women’s role in the construction of a mythical past is not exclusively a Mongol phenomenon. Other Turkic tribes, such as the Qipchaqs, share these characteristics in their account of the past. According to Rashid al-Din, Oghuz found a woman after a battle who was pregnant with the first member of the Qipchaqs. When the child was born, Oghuz adopted him, incorporating from then on, this particular tribe to the ‘family’ of Turco-Mongol people. In fact, Oghuz’s early life was also marked by his interaction with the female side of his family. In his story, women are depicted as fundamental in establishing his position within the family. According to some sources, he is the only one in the tribe who believes in God and he is forced to hide this from the others. When he was only a baby, he rejected her mother’s milk until she embraced his belief in a single God, and later rejected his two first wives only to accept a third one because she converted to his faith. The other two denounce his beliefs to his father, who orders that Oghuz be killed. It is his third wife who alerts him by sending a loyal woman from her camp to warn him. Father and son fight and the latter emerges victorious in a story where women play a pivotal part in the construction of the narrative.

After this filial rebellion, the story concludes with Oghuz taking control of the realm in Central Asia and some of the relatives who had supported him going eastwards, becoming the ancestors of the Mongols. This foundation myth of the Turks as well as the Mongols has a strong component of female involvement. As we will see later on in the case of Chinggis Khan, the mother and the chief wife play crucial roles in the early development of nomadic heroes. In the case above, the first two people in the tribe to ‘believe in God’ after Oghuz are his mother and favourite wife. Later on, the confrontation between father and son is generated by women, who betray him by telling his father about his beliefs. Finally, his favourite wife sends another woman to alert him of his father’s intentions. This last action is frequently re-enacted in traditional Mongol society, with women advising rulers and protecting them from the treachery of other members of the family.

Continuing with The Secret History, after the death of Alan Qo’a, a description of the lineage of her youngest son Bodonchar (the ancestor of Chinggis Khan) is given. His story covers paragraphs §24 to §43, in which a succession of genealogical connections are mentioned. Unfortunately, we do not have the names of those women who had a relationship with Bodonchar, but we are told that he took one from a defeated clan and then received a concubine as a dowry (a housemaid of the mother of another
tribal chief), both practices being common among the Mongols. The incorporation of women by marriage into a Mongol clan was fundamental in establishing the status of the sons and daughters of the nomadic tribal chiefs. It seems that it was not the way in which women entered the clan but the status (either as chief wife, secondary wife or concubine) which determined the influence of their descendants. For that reason, the sons of the kidnapped women – both those born of Bodonchar and those born before by another man – founded their own tribes, which were fundamental in the development of the Mongol Empire. For example, the fate of two different family lines is marked by this distinction. On the one hand, the relatives of Jamuqa, first an ally and then an enemy of Chinggis Khan, were among the descendants of this ‘foreign’ boy. On the other hand, a child born of a concubine, despite being a son of Bodonchar, were not even allowed to participate in performing sacrifices with the family.

The genealogical connections of Bodonchar’s descendants described by The Secret History lead us to the first Mongol woman who appears as a historical figure (Numulun). Her influence in Mongol society will be considered in the following section of this chapter to illustrate patterns of continuity and transformation between the pre-imperial and imperial female role. The case of Numulun is important because, chronologically, it is the first reference that we have in which all the different aspects of a khātūn’s autonomy can be observed in a single person. She is portrayed as being in charge of the entire economic activity of her ordo (Mongol camp) and ordering the fundamental activity of feeding the herds of her subordinates.

In addition, three more women can be identified in the Jami’ al-tawarikh, before Rashid al-Din begins the story of Chinggis Khan’s mother. However, no reference to them is given either in The Secret History or in the Altan Tobchi, suggesting that their story might have reached the Persian vizier either through oral transmission from his Mongol patrons or via sources that have not come down to us. The first woman is Töra Qalmish, a daughter of the tribal chief Sariq Khan. She was given in marriage to Qur[r]jaghush Buyuruq Khan, in exchange for her father affording him protection, following the traditional nomadic practice of marriage alliance. We do not know much about her, but there is a reference to her involvement in shamanic rituals – or ‘magic’, as Rashid al-Din prefers to describe it – that allows us to consider religion as another aspect of Mongol life in which women were involved. In fact, there are references indicating that women acted as shamans in traditional Mongol society, but the available sources refer to female intervention in religion from a more political point of view, as was the case with Börte’s
confrontation with the supreme shaman Teb Tenggri explained below, or else depict the shamanic rituals as sorcery.

According to Rashid al-Din, these ‘magical’ practices were responsible for the constant discomfort of Töra’s husband Buyuruq Khan:

His wife, Törä Qaimish, used to practise magic, and every time he [Buyuruq Khan] went hunting, she would immediately bring him down. Since he was suffering at her hands, he ordered two concubines of his to kill her, and so they did. After that he was worried about his sons and wanted to conceal from them what he had done. Seizing upon some pretext, he killed the two concubines.32

It is interesting to note that Buyuruq Khan did not kill Töra himself, but sent two of his concubines to perform the act. The two assassins also had to be killed in order to avoid animosity and distrust from other members of the family, maintaining in this way the alliances generated by the marriage. The story also indicates that the murder ordered by Buyuruq Khan was something extraordinary, since he found himself in the situation of sending other women to kill Töra and then killing them to cover up his act. Though a patriarchal society, the high status of women prevented a husband from getting rid of his wife if he was not satisfied with her, which functioned as a sort of protection system for women in the face of masculine violence – the above example notwithstanding.

The second woman mentioned by Rashid al-Din in this pre-Chinggisid period is Qo’a Qulqu, the wife of Qabul Khan and mother of his six sons.33 We know that she was the older sister of Sayin Tegin, for whom she requests the assistance of a Tatar shaman when her brother became ill. Unfortunately, Sayin died after the treatment. The shaman is sent back home, but later on the ‘eldest and youngest brothers’ of Sayin go to the Tatar camp and kill the shaman. Enmity ensues between the Mongols and the Tatars, and, because Qabul Khan is ‘married to a sister of Sayin Tekin, Qabul Khan had to assist her brothers in battle’. This is the origin of the rivalry between the Mongols and Tatars that marks the early life of Chinggis Khan, since that tribe is held responsible for the killing of Chinggis’s father and handing over Ambaqai (an ancestor of Chinggis Khan) to the Chinese emperor.34 The relevance of this event for our purpose resides in the fact that, on the one hand, it is another reference to the role of shamans in traditional Mongol society and, on the other, it is a story constructed from the point of view of Qo’a Qulqu. In other words, Rashid al-Din does not refer to Sayin as ‘Qabul Khan’s brother-in-law’, but instead the woman is portrayed as the genealogical link between the men. If we bear in mind that Rashid al-Din based his history on Mongol
sources (either oral or written), it is feasible to suggest that, once Qo’a Qulgu entered the family of Qabul Khan, she became an influential character in her own right within the Mongol narrative of the past. If this assumption is correct, this episode offers further evidence of the high status that Mongol khātūns held in ‘traditional’ Mongol society as reflected in the transmission of Mongol ancestry.

Finally, a daughter-in-law of the same Qabul Khan also caught the attention of the Persian historian. Her name appears as Matai Khatun and, interestingly enough, no reference is made to her husband. The story is situated in a context of enmity between Qabul Khan and the Chinese emperor. After being captured by a Chinese envoy, Qabul manages to escape, make his way back to Mongolia and organise his defence, relying solely on the support of his daughter-in-law (Matai). The story is a good illustration of female intervention in military affairs. There is no specific reference to Matai’s participation in the battle, but Qabul asks for her help in attacking the Chinese envoy. Those whom Qabul Khan asks for military assistance include Matai’s subjects (slaves, servants and relatives) but her own participation in the struggle cannot be ruled out. There are also other references to female participation in military action, including the most probable legendary accounts of a daughter of Chinggis Khan participating in the conquest of the Persian city of Nushapur and Qutulun, daughter of the Ögeteid Qaidu (d. 1303), who allegedly defeated every man brave enough to fight against her.

So, this short survey of The Secret History of the Mongols, the Altan Tobchi and the Jamiʿ al-tawarikh shows that women’s involvement in Mongol society already had a precedent in pre-imperial times. Despite the relatively scant information available, it is possible to identify a variety of roles that Mongol women played in pre-Chinggisid Mongolia. These women not only are described as participating in politics, religion, the economy and warfare, but also some of them are mentioned by name, indicating their importance in the Mongol conception of their past. Perhaps the most significant example of this argument is to be found in the role of the legendary Alan Qo’a, who, as we have seen, is the only human link between the Turkic-nomadic tribes and all the Mongol clans. All these women paved the way for the involvement of women in society once the Mongols had expanded throughout Eurasia. Their role was not fixed, for it seems always to have adapted to new personal, historical and geographical circumstances. Mongol women were politically, economically and commercially active, with a singular religious worldview which they brought with them from the steppes into the Mongol domains of a new world.
Women and Political Affairs in Pre-imperial Times

Of the hundred women that I possess there is not one I really like. One has understanding, but I do not command her hands and feet. Another whose hands and feet are nice, I do not command her understanding, and there is no beauty who is servile, skilled, and possessed of understanding. The above sentences are attributed to the pre-Chinggisid nomadic chief Sariq Khan in Rashid al-Din’s *Jamiʿ al-tawarikh*. They seem to portray a scenario in which women are active and independent to the extent that Sariq Khan seems unable to find one who personifies the ideal of women being ‘servile, skilled, and possessed of understanding’. However, Persian sources are sometimes contradictory when it comes to events involving women in pre-imperial Mongolia. This is especially true of Rashid al-Din, who mixes eulogies to the independence and courage of Mongol women with a supposed search for female docility among Mongol men. This contradiction should be seen, I believe, as the consequence of both a conflict of interest between the Persian historian and his Mongol patron Ghazan Khan and the more general process of the acculturation of the Mongol elites into Islamo-Persian culture occurring in Iran during the second half of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century. In fact, only a few paragraphs before the above quotation, Sariq Khan, after defeating the Tatar tribe in battle, is addressed by a woman (Tabaray Qayan) from the defeated tribe in the following terms: ‘We [the Tatars] had conquered high and low. If all grow few, why should we not grow few, and if all fall to pieces, why should we not fall to pieces?’ In other words, she is suggesting that anyone can suffer a change of fortune. According to Rashid al-Din, Sariq Khan replied, “This [defeated] woman speaks truth” and for that reason he [Sariq] came under the protection of another Khan’. Consequently, within the space of only a few paragraphs, we can find two very different male attitudes towards women coming from the same man. The first is a somewhat ‘macho’ complaint against women as a gender, whilst the second is an implicit recognition of the wisdom of a particular woman hailing from a different, defeated tribe. Two distinct ideas about the political involvement of women are represented, illustrating the difficulties that sources present in dealing with the role of women in the political affairs of the Mongols.

In pre-imperial Mongolia – that is, before the coronation of Temüjin as Chinggis Khan in 1206 – both his mother Hö’elün and his first wife Börte are described as crucial in securing Temüjin’s political supremacy in the steppes during the late twelfth century. However, the first reference to a Mongol woman in the sources who is not only mentioned by name,
but has various aspects of her life described, is a certain Numulun. She is presented as the mother of Qaidu, the sixth forebear of Chinggis Khan and the first Mongol chief who apparently unified the different Mongol tribes. Despite confusion about the name of her husband, all the sources agree on her name and on the fact that she was the mother of Qaidu. Her story is described with special interest by Rashid al-Din. When her husband died, her eight sons (seven according to The Secret History) married and went away as ‘sons-in-law’ with their brides’ families, leaving her behind. But they did not leave their mother alone; although we have no reference to indicate that Numulun (or Monolun) remarried, we know that she remained in charge of the family possessions and pasturelands. In fact, it was not strange for a woman to remain single after the death of her husband.

Numulun played an important role in negotiating the unstable political balance of the steppes. Rashid al-Din mentions that a group of Jalayir Mongols escaped destruction after a campaign against them carried out by the Chinese emperor.

Seventy householders of them [the Jalayirs] fled with their women and children and came to the territory of Monolun [Numulun], Dutum Mänen’s wife. Since they were suffering from hunger, they pulled from the ground and ate the root of a plant called süëdisün, which is eaten in that region. By that act the place where Monolun’s sons raced their horses became pitted and rough. Monolun asked, ‘Why do you create such roughness?’ They therefore seized Monolun and killed her.

This denotes Numulun’s role as the highest political referee of the group, which was not only concerned with the administration of wealth, but also demanded her intervention vis-à-vis hostile tribes. As it happens, she failed to neutralise the aggression and was killed as a result. The unexpected arrival of the Jalayirs might have been the reason why we find no specific mention of any military resistance on the part of Numulun. Rashid al-Din’s narrative becomes somewhat confusing when dealing with the fate of this Jalayir group and the revenge exacted by Numulun’s sons. Whatever happened, only one of Numulun’s sons (Qaidu) remained alive after the struggle, whilst the men of the seventy Jalayir households were killed and their women and children given to Qaidu as slaves: ‘From that date until now that clan have been hereditary slaves and were inherited by Genghis Khan and his offspring’. Numulun’s assassination remained in the consciousness of the Mongols at least until the early life of Chinggis Khan, when it was said that,

[Nägúchäär] and a few horsemen went to a place called Ölägäi Bulaq in the vicinity of Sa’ari Kähär, Genghis Khan’s yurt, to steal animals from the house
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of Jochi Tarmala of the Jalayir tribe because some of them had killed Dutun Mänen’s wife Monolun [Numulun] and her sons and taken Genghis Khan’s ancestors prisoner.55

Therefore, Numulun not only played a role while she was alive in the political scenario of the steppes, but also remained as a social stigma in the Chinggisikhanid consciousness, serving to justify aggression towards other Mongol peoples during Chinggis Khan’s unification of the Mongols.

In addition, other women who were contemporaries of Temüjin illustrate the widespread phenomenon of female involvement in political affairs. Of the groups that the future Chinggis Khan forced into submission during his unification of the Mongols, there are two that deserve special mention for different reasons. The first of them are the people generally referred to as the Keraits, one of the tribes from which more women are mentioned in the sources, owing to their extensive intermarriage with the Chinggisid Mongols (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4).56 The Keraits were the most powerful nomadic group in Mongolia during Temüjin’s early life. They helped him to rescue his wife Börte after she was kidnapped by another Mongolian group (the Merkits), and later they campaigned together against common enemy groups such as the Tatars.57 But the relationship between these two allies began to deteriorate when the leader of the Keraits (the Ong Khan) decided not to share the booty with his Chinggisid allies after they had destroyed the Merkits. In addition, the ruler of the Keraits rejected Temüjin’s petition of marriage between Ong Khan’s daughter (Cha’ur Beki) and his son Jochi,58 an act which was a clear offense to Temüjin’s pride. Yet, we are told that at first the future Chinggis Khan did not complain, but that after he had succeeded in defeating some of his rival tribes with Ong Khan’s help, he broke from him, citing these two incidents as his main reasons for doing so.59 Despite this initial alliance and the subsequent enmity between the followers of Chinggis Khan and the Keraits, women of the latter group became very important in the later development of the empire by marrying the sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan. This might be the reason why so many Kerait women are mentioned in the source materials for the pre-imperial Mongol period. The names of at least six Kerait women are given for this period of Mongol history, without counting those who married Chinggis Khan’s sons.60 One of them (Alaq Yidun) was the wife of a Kerait commander who, after hostility between the Keraits and the Mongols had began, played the role of advisor and confidante in the same way that the sources portray Börte and Hö’elün in relation to Temüjin.61

The second group largely represented in the sources as having influ-
ential women in this pre-imperial period are the Naimans. One of its ladies, Gürbäsü Khatun, is mentioned as the one who stood up in front of her people and confronted the rising power of Temüjin in the steppes around the year 1203. There are contradictory accounts of her relationship with the nominal Naiman ruler Tayan Khan. According to Rashid al-Din, she was the favourite wife of Naiman Khan, who inherited her as a wife through the levirate system after his father had died, a common practice among the Mongols and Eurasian nomads in this period.\textsuperscript{62} Whereas, \textit{The Secret History} mentions that Gürbäsü Khatun was the mother of Tayan Khan.\textsuperscript{63} Whatever the relationship between them, scholars agree that she was the de facto ruler of the Naiman people.\textsuperscript{64} Her position among the Naimans underlines an interesting attitude towards female involvement in politics and its proximity to religious affairs.\textsuperscript{65} She is depicted as a ‘harsh’ ruler compared with the ‘soft’ character of Tayan Khan, who had ‘not thoughts or skills except for falconry and hunting’.\textsuperscript{66} When the Naimans saw the Mongols coming to face them in 1203–4, Tayan Khan decided to retreat against the wishes of his son Küchlüg. One of Tayan’s high officials, in the face of the Khan’s cowardice, asked him:

\begin{quotation}
how can you lose heart when it is still so early in the morning? Had we known that you would have lost courage in this manner, shouldn’t we have brought your mother Gürbësü, even though she is a woman, and given her command of the army?\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quotation}

It should be noted, however, that the use of the word ‘woman’ in this passage from \textit{The Secret History} is ambiguous. Despite the fact that the above quotation expresses a wish that the Naiman woman ‘Gürbësü’ [Gürbäsü] were in charge of the army instead of its male chief, the reference may be no more than a contemptuous way of saying that even a woman would command the army in battle better than a cowardly khan. However, the fact that the general mentions Gürbäsü in particular and not simply ‘a woman’, as we find in other parts of \textit{The Secret History}, leaves an open question as to what extent Gürbäsü herself was seen as a possible alternative ruler and military commander.\textsuperscript{68} Eventually, Chinggis Khan defeated the Naimans and effectively incorporated them into his domain. But, in order to cement the integration of this tribe, he took Gürbäsü as his concubine, which indicates her importance among her husband’s tribesmen. By these means, the Naimans were symbolically assimilated into the Mongol genealogy.\textsuperscript{69} 

\textit{The Secret History of the Mongols} offers some magnificent stories that illustrate the role of women in inner-nomadic politics in the steppes during the life of Temüjin; some of these stories concern Hö’elün and Börte, respectively the mother and chief wife of the future Chinggis Khan. From
Figure 1.2 The ancestors of Chinggis Khan (part 2)
this source we can also establish that there were three decisive events in the early life of the Mongol leader that shaped his career towards becoming the Great Khan, and in all of them the role of women appears to have been fundamental. The first was the abandonment of his family by the clan when his father died. *The Secret History* mentions that the origin of the split was a dispute between Hö’elün and the wives of Ambaqai Khan, who had deprived Temüjin’s mother of the right to partake in making offerings to the ancestors. Through this action, the two wives showed that they did not recognise the right of succession of Hö’elün’s children, and suggested to the rest of the tribe that it should abandon the wife and the children of Yesügei (Temüjin’s father). The wives of Ambaqai were closely related to Temüjin’s family and it seems that the performing of ‘sacrifices’ or, more specifically, ‘food-burning sacrifices’ in memory of the ancestors was a common practice in traditional Mongol society.

In these rituals, male and female members of the two groups would join together to offer meat, kumis (fermented mare’s milk) and other alcoholic drinks to the common ancestor, while a shaman (or shamaness) carried out the ceremony. What lay behind the exclusion of Hö’elün from the ceremony on the pretext of her being late was the political intention of excluding Yesügei’s clan from the Mongol tribe after his death and reinforcing the influence of the Tayichi’ut branch of the group among the Mongols. What is interesting is that this internal but crucial incident among the different Mongol subgroups is characterised in *The Secret History* as a conflict involving and solved exclusively by women, in which the wives of Ambaqai (Örbei and Soqatai) confront the widow of Yesügei (Hö’elün). The story continues by mentioning that Hö’elün did not simply accept her displacement from the rituals and the subsequent abandonment by the Tayichi’ut. On the contrary, when she found out about the departure of Ambaqai’s descendants, she ‘held the standard and, riding off all on her own, brought back half the people’. Unfortunately for Hö’elün and her children, the people she brought back did not stay long and soon abandoned them. On the one hand, this episode marks the beginning of the most difficult years in the life of the young Temüjin, whilst on the other it sheds light on the active role that women played in the not uncommon succession struggles which were faced by the Mongols from pre-imperial times into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

If we move forward in time, another example of female political intervention can be found in the conflict between Temüjin and his anda (brother by blood oath) Jamuqa. This episode took place after the young Temüjin had survived in the steppes (thanks to his mother) and after he had rescued Börte from the Merkits. It happened during a period when
Temüjin had acquired some wealth and had become one of the promising ‘tribal’ leaders of Mongolia under the protection of the Kerait Öng Khan. Being allies for a while, Jamuqa suggested they camp near the mountains, but he made the suggestion in such a poetic and ambiguous style that Temüjin could not understand it. Temüjin did what many other nomadic leaders did before and after him: he looked to his mother for advice. He asked Hö’elün about the meaning of his anda’s words, but the sudden, abrupt answer came not from his mother but from his wife, Börte. She warned him to take advantage of the night and keep going with their clan, leaving Jamuqa and his relatives behind in the camp. This passage can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, that in Temüjin’s family the women had changed positions in the hierarchy. Börte literally interrupted Hö’elün when she was advising her son. This might mean that, from this moment on, Börte had the female role of protector and judge in the family, a role that had hitherto been carried out by Hö’elün. Second, the split of the andas and the political implications of the division allowed different interpretations to be made by scholars regarding the responsibility for the disintegration of the alliance. No matter who was responsible for the breakdown, Temüjin decided to follow his wife’s advice and enmity ensued between the two allies. It is clear that, once again, there was female intervention (Börte in this case) in a succession struggle that was about to take place between the andas, and at stake was the Mongol leadership.

A third and final event can also be illustrative of the role of women in Temüjin’s early life. This time the conflict was not between rival political leaders or family members, but can be seen as a struggle between the religious and imperial powers. Once Temüjin had gained control over most of the Mongol tribes, Teb-Tengri, a supreme shaman of the Mongols, jeopardised the stability of the royal family by creating disputes between Temüjin and his brothers. First, the shaman revealed ‘signs of heaven’ in which Qasar (Temüjin’s brother) appeared as the ruler of the nation together with Temüjin, elevating the former to claimant of the throne. Second, the great shaman unilaterally took under his authority people belonging to the clan of Temüge (Temüjin’s youngest brother). By this act, he overstepped the inheritance rights of Temüjin’s brother and undermined his authority in the court. When Temüge complained, the shaman and his family humiliated him by making him kneel behind Teb-Tengri. For the first incident, Qasar was arrested by Temüjin under the influence of the shaman, their mother Hö’elün travelled all night to intercede in favour of her younger son. She confronted Temüjin. In front of his mother, Temüjin was ‘afraid of mother getting so angry’ and felt ‘shame and was really abashed’. The second case, Temüge’s humiliation, was resolved thanks to the intervention of
Börte. When the youngest brother of the Khan went to Temüjin’s tent in order to protest against the humiliation wrought upon him by Teb-Tengri, the princess spoke before the Khan and said: ‘How will people covertly injuring in this fashion your younger brothers … ever allow my three or four little “naughty ones” [sons] to govern while they are still growing up?’ This expression of common sense and political vision expressed by the khātūn led Temüjin to punish the great shaman. The incident seems to have served to warn Chinggis Khan later on of the threat that strong religious leaders could pose to his hegemony over the empire. In fact, in the Mongol Empire, there was no religious leader as powerful as Teb-Tengri had been, at least not until the time of Qubilai Khan (r. 1260–94) and the figure of the Tibetan monk Phags-Pa Lama, who, interestingly enough, had the support of Qubilai’s wife Chabui Khatun.

We can conclude that the political life of Temüjin’s early career was marked by the frequent intervention of his mother and chief wife. The different succession struggles faced by Temüjin were resolved thanks to the pragmatic involvement of these women who fought for his right to the throne, advised him on how to deal with the opposition and even pointed out any incorrect political decisions that he made. This model of politically active and outspoken women among the Mongol royal family would be exported beyond the context of pre-imperial Mongolia and into the Mongol Empire. The phenomenon of female interaction in politics would remain after the death of Chinggis Khan, but it adapted to the new challenges that world domination and a sedentary subject population demanded. Despite their political involvement, neither those women who had close family ties with Temüjin nor any others in pre-imperial Mongolia were recognised as rulers in the way their daughters would be in the mid-thirteenth century (see Chapter 2). The next section looks at possible precedents for the transformation in role from that of pre-imperial women with a clear political savoir faire, an active participation in courtly affairs and an influence over their husbands’ political decisions to one of being recognised kingmakers, regents and even empresses of the Mongol Empire.

**The Ruling Women of Medieval Eurasia: In Search of a Possible Precedent**

In recent years, George Zhao and Richard Guisso have suggested that, among the Mongols,

there was no statutory succession law. This enabled a number of Mongolian empresses to play an important role in the political arena of the Mongol
Empire, and they were often entrusted by the Mongol princes with the affairs of the empire in the absence of khans during a transitional period. Most of the time, they were able to effectively and fairly conduct state affairs with the help of ministers until a new Khan was elected.\(^\text{85}\)

However, when the Mongols started their military expansion into Northern China and Central Asia, women acting as regents and rulers were already known in these areas. The case of Princess Wu Setian (r. 690–705), who founded and became empress of her own dynasty during the Tang period of China (618–907), and the elusive case of the ‘Khatun of Bukhara’ in Central Asia during the eighth century suggest that, despite the exceptionality of the phenomenon, a woman could be entrusted with the affairs of state.\(^\text{86}\) Nor was the occurrence unknown in more western regions of Asia before the Mongol invasion. Within the Great Saljuq dynasty (1037–1157) and its successor kingdoms, such as the Khwarazmshah (1077–1220), the Saljuqs of Rum (1077–1307), Hamadan (1118–94) and Kerman (1041–1187), a number of women actively participated in politics and were fundamental in maintaining a complex network of marriage alliances between these kingdoms.\(^\text{87}\) However, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these Saljuq women were recognised as official rulers of the empire, which was the case with Empress Wu in China. Among the Mongols, without a customary law stating the possibility of female rule, or a precedent in Mongol tradition for women officially taking charge of the affairs of state, this practice must have been borrowed from one of the conquered states or from a neighbouring people. And, because there is no indication that female rule was recognised among the Muslim kingdoms of the Middle East and Iran, the appearance of women’s rule in Western Asia must have occurred after the Mongol conquest and not before.

**Nomadic heritage and women’s rule in Western Asia: Saljuqs, Ayyubids and the rise of the Mamluks**

Despite sharing a common mythological and geographical origin, the Saljuqs and other Turkic dynasties that ruled Iran before 1258 differed significantly from the Mongols in various aspects of their respective societies. First, the Saljuqs had entered the lands of the Abbasid caliphate in the eleventh century after having converted to Islam and found rather quick recognition as rulers by the local population. Second, despite their military superiority, they recognised the spiritual supremacy of the caliph, who was a source of legitimacy and potential opposition.\(^\text{88}\) By contrast, the Mongols arrived in the Middle East in two waves. The first wave was as
part of a military campaign (1218–23) led by Chinggis Khan that destroyed the empire of the Khwarazmshah in Central Asia and severely damaged regions such as Khurasan and eastern Iran politically, economy and culturally. The second was a campaign of slow advance and planned occupation led by Hülegü (d. 1265), in which this pagan-Mongol commander – under the orders of his also pagan brother and Great Khan Möngke (d. 1259) – destroyed the Ismaili stronghold in Alamut, conquered Baghdad in 1258 and executed the Abbasid caliph only months later.

Despite the quick recognition as rulers from their settled subjects in Iran, the Saljuqs continued their semi-nomadic lifestyle, which might explain the high degree of political involvement, economic independence and literary achievement of noble and upper-middle-class women in Saljuq Iran, still culturally connected to its nomadic past. However, their previous Islamisation and their relations with the caliph in Baghdad would have had an influence on the relationship between the Saljuq rulers and the sedentary Persian religious establishment of the court. As Carole Hillenbrand has suggested, we must be careful when interpreting portrayals of women in the sources, since these generally express an idealised conception of their role rather than a picture of the reality of the time. However, for the purpose of this chapter, it is important to underline the fact that for the Saljuq period there are no records of women being empresses or regents in their domains. Nizam al-Mulk’s warning against female rule quoted at the beginning of this chapter might have influenced or at least reflected ideas about the possibility of women taking charge of state affairs. In the Saljuq court, his relationship with Terken Khatun was characterised by personal problems and political rivalry, with the consort of the Malik Shah challenging Nizam’s hegemony over state affairs. However, despite her influence and capacity to undermine Nizam’s career, Terken Khatun never acquired recognition as de facto ruler of the Saljuq domains and always exercised her power through the figure of the male emperor. The same can be said of other influential women in the Saljuq Empire, such as Toghril Beg’s chief wife Altun-jan, Zubaida Khatun (wife of Malik Shah) and the mother of Toghril’s son Arslan.

Consequently, a precedent for the Mongol institution of female regency cannot be found in the history of the Saljuq Turks or their dependent states. It was only after the first invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century that some isolated cases of female rulers were recorded in the Islamic lands. The first was the Ayyubid Dayfa Khatun (r. 1237–43), who ruled Aleppo on behalf of her grandson al-Malik al-Nasir. This is an interesting precedent, but, as Peter Jackson has pointed out, she did not enjoy ‘the privilege of being named in the Friday prayers [khuṭba]’. It was not until 1250 when, after the death of al-Malik al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, his
favourite wife Shajar al-Durr (r. 1250–7) – mother of Khalil – was elected Sultana of Egypt by the amirs and Bahrites. On this occasion, she was made the ‘titular head of the whole state; a royal stamp was issued in her name with the formula “mother of Khalīl” and the khutba was pronounced in her name as Sultana of Cairo and Egypt.  

A common element shared in the historical context in which these women became regents in their territories was the increasing influence that the Turkish-origin population exercised in both Egypt and Syria (especially in the region of Aleppo) in the first half of the thirteenth century. Yasser Tabbaa suggests three factors that might explain the accession to power of women in the Middle East. First, he stresses that these women were princesses of noble origin and not concubines confined in harems as recounted in the studies of the Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties. This socio-economic condition – following Tabbaa’s explanation – might have allowed these women greater freedom of movement and, indeed, the capacity to manoeuvre in the court. Second, he claims that political marriages gave these women protection, since their role was fundamental in maintaining the unity of the Ayyubid ‘family confederacy’. Finally, their capacity to give birth to a male child – a potential ruler – increased their status. There is, though, something that has not been considered in this picture. The nomadic Turkish component in the cultural, political and ethnic spheres of medieval Middle Eastern societies went through one of its periods of greatest influence in the thirteenth century. As mentioned above, the area of Aleppo ruled by Dayfa Khatun seems to have been a region where the Turks played a pivotal role in society. In addition, the establishment of Shajar al-Durr – a Turk herself – as Sultana of Egypt has been interpreted as an indication of the rising influence of the Mamluks in Egypt. The increase in power of Turkish people with a nomadic past (or a memory of it) should also be taken into account when trying to understand the social and political circumstances that allowed the emergence of female rule in the Middle East prior to the second Mongol invasion during the 1250s. Nonetheless, a contrast should be mentioned between the political involvement and social recognition of these Middle Eastern women vis-à-vis their contemporary Mongol khātūns. As we see in Chapter 2, by the time Dayfa Khatun was maintaining power by ‘avoiding controversial acts’ and asking not to be ‘mentioned in the Khutba’, the Mongols had an empress (Töregene) who was signing edicts, engaging in diplomacy and actively taking government decisions that influenced the destiny of the Mongol Empire.

Is it a coincidence that these women had Turkish-Central Asian origins? Is it a coincidence that female rule occurred in the Middle East only after the first invasion of the Mongols? The appearance of women
in the Middle East who were recognised as rulers of states did not occur until the late 1230s. So, the phenomenon is not perhaps a precedent for the Mongol institution of women’s regency, but rather reflects changing socio-political circumstances in the Middle East after the Mongol invasion under Chinggis Khan (1218–25). The existing political involvement of women in Turco-nomadic societies, as seen in pre-imperial Mongolia, did not seem to evolve into the institution of female rule in the Saljuq Empire, but simply continued to limit the role of women in state affairs to the areas of counselling male rulers and amirs, and influencing their decision-making. The isolated examples of women acquiring ruler status in Western Asia occurred after the Mongol invasion and they are not, therefore, the precedent we are looking for which might help us to understand the rise of Mongol queens and empresses. It would seem prudent, then, to look elsewhere for the origin of female regency among the Mongols.

THE NOMADIC ELEMENT IN FEMALE RULE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE KHWARAZMSHAHS AND THE QARAKHITAI

If the Mongols did not acquire the institution of women’s regency from the Muslim states they had conquered in Western Asia or from their Turkic predecessors, the alternative place to look for a precedent of this practice would be the eastern lands of their empire. Mainland China was not, as we have seen, rich in examples of female rule. However, Northern China had been dominated by nomadic dynasties since the early tenth century up until the arrival of the Mongols. The Liao dynasty (r. 916–1125) and later the Jin dynasty (r. 1115–1234) ruled ‘major parts of modern Manchuria, of Inner and Outer Mongolia and the north-eastern parts of China proper’. The first dynasty saw the rise of women’s rule from its very beginning. During the reign of A-pao-chi’i (r. 907–26), the founder of the dynasty, his wife Ch’un-ch’in (later Empress Dowager Ying-t’ien) exerted her influence on various aspects of society. When A-pao-chi’i died, she refused to be buried with him (which was the tradition), but instead asked for her hand to be cut off and placed in her husband’s tomb while she continued controlling the army and the succession to the throne. Although her husband’s wish had been that the throne should pass to his eldest son, she managed to change the line of succession in favour of her second son, and then immediately assumed control herself. She defined her position as regent, claiming that ‘her sons were still young and the country was without a ruler’. By establishing this institutional precedent, ‘she remained in firm control while the succession was settled and exercised great influence for many years to come’. This practice was not an isolated case and,
although the case of Ch’un-ch’in has no equal in scope, Liao China saw the rise of other women who ascended to the throne and controlled the affairs of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{115} The recognition of their high rank in the governmental structure of the Liao dynasty is borne out by the fact that imperial envoys were accompanied by a same-rank delegate sent by the emperor’s mother and also by the biographies dedicated to the empresses in the \textit{Liao Shih}.\textsuperscript{116} So, the already influential women among this nomadic dynasty went a step forward and gained nominal recognition of their role in society as dowager empresses ruling in the name of their young sons.

In 1125, the Liao dynasty of China was forced to move westwards to Central Asia under pressure from the Jurchen people coming from Manchuria. In their new territories, they consolidated a new dynasty known as the Qarakhitai and ruled over a majority Muslim population.\textsuperscript{117} Among the royal family of the Qarakhitai was a more established tradition of female rule than that of their newly conquered territories of Central Asia for, out of the five rulers of this new Central Asian dynasty, two were women.\textsuperscript{118} After the death of the first emperor Yeh-lü Ta-shih (r. 1124–43), the empire found itself with an underage heir and so widow, Empress Kan-t’ien (r. 1144–50) Yeh-lü Ta-shih’s assumed power in accordance with her late husband’s will.\textsuperscript{119} The enthronement of a woman as the head of one of the powers of the region did not pass unnoticed by Muslim sources.\textsuperscript{120} In fact, Juvayni’s description of the accession resembles the formula used later to address the enthronement of Mongol empresses. He mentions that once she had ascended the throne ‘as his [Yeh-lü Ta-shih’s] successor … [she] began to issue commands [and] all the people yielded obedience to her’.\textsuperscript{121} During the seven years of her reign, the political situation in Central Asia did not undergo significant change. The Khwarazmshah dynasty, the western neighbours of the Qarakhitai, continued to pay tribute, respecting an agreement established previously between Yeh-lü Ta-shih and King Atsiz of Khwarazm.\textsuperscript{122}

Although information about Empress Kan-t’ien’s seven years in office is meagre, it seems that she was not a simple nominal figure but rather performed as an active empress of the realm. Two diplomatic embassies were recorded during her reign. The first was an envoy sent by the Uyghur people to the Jin dynasty of Northern China, taking them news of the death of Yeh-lü Ta-shih. A man named Nien-ko was assigned to follow the envoy back and gather information about the Qarakhitai realm. This act of attempted espionage was discovered and the spy was executed in 1146 by order of the empress.\textsuperscript{123} The same source mentions a second embassy sent by the Chin to Central Asia around 1146. When it arrived it found the empress hunting, and the emissary had the temerity not to dis-
mount but to ask the empress to dismount first because he himself was the representative of the ‘son of heaven’ (the Chinese emperor). The ambassador paid with his life for this act of disrespect: he was pulled from his horse and executed.\(^1\) According to Karl A. Wittfogel, the fact that the account was written thirty years later might mean that the encounter was in fact between the Chin representative and a male dignitary representing the empress. However, this interpretation is ‘scarcely necessary in view of the Ch’i-tan tradition that permitted empresses and princesses not only to participate in ceremonial hunts, but also to lead armies and to conduct independent military expeditions’.\(^2\)

In 1150, the empress passed the throne to her son I-lieh (r. 1151–63), who ruled for thirteen years. After his death, his son was also at a young age and ‘with her brother’s expressed will’ the sister of the Qarakhitaid emperor (Gurkhan) assumed control of the realm.\(^3\) Empress Ch’eng t’ien (r. 1164–77) ruled for fourteen years, but there is not much information available regarding her skills or political agenda. What was mostly recorded about her period was a succession of military campaigns into Khwarazmshah territory and sporadic envoys received from China. The first Qarakhitai campaign against the kingdom of Khwarazm was a punishment for the latter’s failure to pay the established tribute. Although there is confusion in the chronology of the events,\(^4\) the invasion captured the attention of Muslim chroniclers, since the Shah of Khwarazm died during the attack.\(^5\) There is no evidence, as far as I am aware, that Ch’eng t’ien personally commanded the troops, but it seems clear that the military expeditions which were carried out during her reign helped to trigger the rise of another woman, Terken Khatun, as a politically influential figure in the Khwarazmshah Empire.\(^6\)

In the diplomatic sphere, contacts and trade continued to flow towards the east in the constantly tense relationship between the Qarakhitai and the Jin dynasty of China.\(^7\) At the same time, an interesting relationship was forged in the west:

Terken Khātūn [mother of the Khwarazmshah Emperor] ordered the gūr-khan’s envoys to be received with honour and respect. She treated them courteously and paid up the annual tribute in full. She also sent some of the notables of her court to accompany Maḥmūd Tai to the gūr-khan and apologize for the delay in payment; and confirmed that the Sultan was still bound by the terms of subjection and submission.\(^8\)

With this renewal of submission, peace was re-established between the kingdoms, a peace forged thanks to the diplomatic ability of these two women. The end of Ch’eng t’ien’s reign is, however, shrouded in
an atmosphere of infidelity and jealousy involving the empress and her brother-in-law. When an affair between them was discovered, the queen’s father-in-law – the father of both brothers – gathered an army and seized the imperial place, capturing and killing the two lovers.\textsuperscript{132}

Although this is a short survey of the institution of regency among the Qarakhitai, its role in state affairs cannot be easily dismissed. Both Barthold and Clifford Edmund Bosworth have suggested that, by the time of Chinggis Khan’s arrival in Central Asia, the Qarakhitai Empire ‘was weakened by the long periods of regency exercised by women’.\textsuperscript{133} However, it seems that the reason for the decline of the Western Liao cannot be based on a preconceived idea of the incapability of women to rule. In fact, the sources suggest otherwise: first, women were chosen by their predecessors as heirs of the kingdom and, second, they actively participated in the development of the empire by acting as empresses with the full right to conduct diplomacy and war with their neighbours. Finally, the empire did not collapse after the last empress was killed in 1177, but continued as the supreme ruling entity in Central Asia for just over forty years until Chinggis Khan conquered it in the second decade of the thirteenth century.

The high status acquired by Terken Khatun in the Khwarazmshah kingdom seems to have been connected to the geographical proximity and close vassalage relationship between the Qarakhitai and this subject Muslim state.\textsuperscript{134} The Western Liao dynasty was the most important political power in Central Asia and it did not lose its nomadic attitude of receptivity towards female rule, neither when it originally ruled in Northern China nor when it had moved to the west. Its cultural proximity to the nomadic milieu of the steppes might not only have acted as an inspiration for its Turkish neighbour states like the Khwarazmshah but also functioned as a model when the Mongols conquered these territories. The rise to power of Mongol women such as Töregene Khatun, the political involvement of Sorghaghtani Beki and the rules of Oghul Qaimish and Orghina Khatun, which we will explore later, all found a suitable precedent in the Qarakhitai Empire to legitimise their right to rule, not only in the eyes of Mongols but also among their subjects. The tradition of female regency was not confined to Central Asia, but spread to faraway territories through the Mongol conquest. This, I suggest, is the reason for the appearance of female rulers not only to the west in the Middle East, as we have seen above, but also to the south in India.\textsuperscript{135}

An institution that does not confer any benefit cannot be sustained through tough times and will not be incorporated by other states. Women rulers in the Qarakhitai seem to have been neither the cause nor indication of decline that Barthold and Bosworth suggested. On the contrary,
their rule seems to have been in tune with that of their male predecessors and successors, with the result that this tradition was exported into other nomadic or semi-nomadic empires. It is perhaps in nomadism where the key lies to understanding the practice and institutionalisation of women’s rule. Wittfogel says: ‘The overt rule of women … may well reflect an old Ch’i-tan tradition – a tradition which found expression throughout the Liao Empire, and which, with added force, asserted itself in the “Black” Ch’i-tan dynasties of Hsi Liao and Kirmān’. This ‘tradition’, present at an embryonic level in pre-imperial Mongolia and then institutionalised by the Qarakhitai, seems to have served as a model later adopted by the Mongols as a common practice in the succession of their leaders. In the following chapter, we look at the materialisation of women’s rule in the Mongol Empire in the crucial years of its development.

**Notes**


6. See Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for the ancestors of Chinggis Khan.

7. *SH*, §1. On the debate about the origin of this name and the possibility of it being read Batachi Qan (King Batachi), see de Rachewiltz in *SH*, I, p. 235.


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14. On different representations of Alan Qo’a, of particular significance is the illustration made in a manuscript of the *Muʿizz al-ansab* copied in India in the nineteenth century, where this woman is dressed in a traditional Afghan burka. See Plate 1.
15. Different Turkic dynasties in the Middle East claimed to be descendants of this legendary ancestor, especially the Saljuqs and the Ottomans. See V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, 4 vols (Leiden, 1956–63), III, pp. 82, 109, 111–16.
17. Meaning a ‘single god’.
19. Because they were unbelievers, Oghuz rejected the first two wives offered to him by his father. See *JT*, I, p. 48/Thackston, p. 28.
20. See the case of Börte, wife of Chinggis Khan.
22. Different examples of these practices can be found, for example, in the story of Qutuqu Noyan in *JT*, I, p. 84/Thackston, p. 47.
23. See notes in *SH*, p. 280.
25. It is important to mention that, despite the incorporation into the clan of children from ‘foreign’ fathers, they were named in ways that recalled their foreign origin: see *SH*, p. 278. The same can be applied to the doubtful paternity of Jochi, the first son of Chinggis Khan, whose name means ‘guest’ or ‘visitor’; see Lane, *Daily Life*, p. 235.
28. *Numulun* in *JT*, I, p. 229. Here we use ‘Numulun’ as a transliteration of the name, despite Thackston’s transliteration being ‘Monolun’.
29. On the role of the *ordo* as a centre of economic activity, see Chapter 4; also, *JT*, I, p. 229/Thackston, p. 119.
33. The tribal origin of Qo’a Qulqu is not clear, but Rashid seems to suggest that she belonged to a Qonqirat tribe. See *JT*, I, p. 253/Thackston, p. 128. On Qaidu as the first ruler of ‘all the Mongols’, see *SH*, §52.
34. *SH*, §53.
44. *JT*, I, p. 91/Thackston, p. 51. This means that Sariq realised that his fortune might change thanks to the advice of this woman and therefore decided to search for protection under another ruler.
46. On the problematic genealogy of Numulun, see *SH*, pp. 283–4.
50. The Persian edition of Rashid al-Din’s work mentions هفتاد خانه in order to
underline that only a portion of the Jalayir tribe participated in the struggle with Numulun. See JT, I, p. 230.

53. JT, I, p. 231/Thackston, p. 119. This episode seems to be in line with Atwood’s claim that Rashid is ‘retrojecting all status to one’s position in the imperial founding’ by stressing that the position of the Jalayir tribe is subordinate to the Chinggisid family. See C. P. Atwood, ‘Mongols, Arabs, Kurds, and Franks: Rashid al-Din’s Comparative Anthropology of Tribal Society’, conference paper presented at ‘Rashid al-Din as an Agent and Mediator of Cross-Pollinations in Religion, Medicine, Science and Art’ (London, 9 November 2007).

58. In the first incident, two daughters of the Merkit ruler Toqto’a Beki (named Cha’alun Khatun and Qutuotai Khatun) were among the booty. See JT, I, p. 364/Thackston, p. 176.
59. JT, I, p. 389/Thackston, p. 188.
60. Such as Sorghaghtani Beki and Doquz Khatun, among others.
61. JT, I, p. 373/Thackston, p. 185. The same episode is mentioned, albeit with some modifications, in the narrative in The Secret History of the Mongols (see SH, §169).
63. SH, §189.
65. In fact, she is the one who opens and closes the story of the Naimans in the SH. See P. Kahn, ‘Instruction and Entertainment in the Naiman Battle Text: An Analysis of §189 through §196 of The Secret History of the Mongols’, in

Kahn, ‘Instruction and Entertainment’, p. 104. Because she is not listed in the Yuan Shih as a concubine, Anne Broadbridge has suggested that Gürbesü might be actually a wife and not a concubine of the Naiman ruler. I thank Anne F. Broadbridge for this observation, email September 2016.

Ambaqai Khan was the leader of the Tayichi’ut, a clan belonging to the Mongol tribe, and a relative of Yesügei.

The episode echoes the role played by women such as Sorghaghtani Beki and Töregene Khatun in their attempts to promote their children to the khanate. The difference lies in the way in which the role of women is presented at the time of Temüjin – the image of Hö’elün riding with the banners – namely, a way that would appeal to the nomadic audience of The Secret History, compared with the highlighting of the diplomatic skills of the khātūns in the 1240s and 1250s described by the Persian sources. See Chapter 2.


The Secret History suggests that this was Hö’elü’s final political intervention and that she died soon after this event. However, Moses has pointed out that the reference to her death at this point might be only an epic motif to serve the narrative of the Secret History and therefore the actual moment of her death is unknown. See L. Moses, ‘The Quarreling Sons in the Secret History of the Mongols’, The Journal of American Folklore 100:395 January–March (1987), pp. 63–8.
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14th Centuries’, Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia 7 (2005), pp. 20–1.


93. SN, p. 226/SND, p. 179.


96. For aspects of political intervention of these Seljuq women see A. K. S. Lambton, Continuity and Change, pp. 259–72.


108. Tabbaa construes Dayfā Khatuṭ’s name not being mentioned in the *khuṭba* as her decision to keep a low profile. Jackson, on the other hand, sees this as characteristic of the lower status of regency compared to Shajar al-Durr in Egypt and Radiyya bint Iltutmish in the Delhi Sultanate. See Tabbaa, ‘Ḍaīfa Khātūn’, p. 31; Jackson, ‘Sultan Radiyya’, p. 181.


110. The Liao dynasty is commonly referred to as the Khitan dynasty.


115. See, for example, the description of the reign of Ch’eng-Tien in Twitchett and Tietze, ‘The Liao’, pp. 87–91.


117. According to Juwayni, the exodus was embarked upon by the emperor and eighty members of his family. For a discussion of the terminology, see Boyle, I, p. 354, fn. 3.

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121. Juvayni calls her Kuyunk (کویونک), which Boyle translates as ‘Kuyang’; see *TJG*, II, pp. 88–9/Boyle, I, p. 356.


123. This embassy is recorded in the official history of the Jin dynasty (*Jin shih*), see *Chin Shih* 4, 11a and 121, 4b, quoted in Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society*, p. 643.


127. According to Barthold, the most accurate date for Il-Arslan’s death is the one given by Ibn al-Athir as 1172. See V. V. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London, 1928), pp. 336–7.


129. She was the mother of the new Shah of Khwarazm, Muhammad. See *JT*, I, p. 474/Thackston, p. 234.

130. See *Chin Shih* 121, 4b–5a; 7, 7b; 88, 16b–17a. All quoted in Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society*, p. 646.


133. Bosworth, ‘Political and Dynastic History’, p. 189. This idea is also expressed by Barthold, *Four Studies*, I, p. 105.

134. See Jackson, ‘Sultan Radiyya’, p. 190, and references in fn. 61.
