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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 10

Representing nomads in the medieval sources of the Turko-Persian world

The conquest of Transoxiana, the Iranian Plateau and Anatolia by Turkish dynasties such as the Qarakhanids or the Seljūqids in the 10th-11th centuries, followed by the Mongols in the 13th century, led to the establishment of nomadic rule over those regions and a large-scale settlement of populations originating from the steppes. The depictions given by certain sources and the projections of modern historiography have deeply rooted a vision of these nomads as an inverted reflection of the sedentary people they had defeated: barbaric, violent, unruly, stateless, and with no past. To rule, their elites would have had no choice but to gather around themselves an Arabo-Persian staff and to gradually acculturate themselves. However, making the history of the Turko-Persian world in the Middle Ages requires a reappraisal of the sources and their contexts of elaboration, to critically review the image of the nomads that they convey. This workshop thus proposes the study of several texts written in Persian and Turkish between the 11th and 14th centuries, showing how they relate to a stereotypical perception of nomads, or on the contrary, how they reveal the existence of a complex repertoire of government, cultural and political structures that the Turko-Mongol nomads brought with them into the eastern Muslim world from the Eurasian steppes.

Person in charge : Berger Simon (EHESS, CETOBaC)

Discussant : Toutant Marc (CNRS, CETOBaC)

Program

Nabiullina Anna (Institut d'Histoire de l'Académie nationale des sciences d'Ukraine)

The notion of royal charisma in Yūsuf Balāsāghūnī's Kutadgu Bilig (1069-1070): ancient Turkish traditions versus Islamic influences

Due to the absence of properly nomadic historical sources testifying to the existence of the political culture, ideology, and image vision of the sovereign, the Kutadgu Bilig is an important document for exploring these objects. This "mirror for princes" is a valuable source of information about the political and cultural life of the Turks at the beginning of their integration into the Islamic world. It was written in Karakhanid Turki by a vizier of the Karakhanid khaganate, considered the first Islamized Turkish state, in the 11th century. Our research focuses on how this work represents the ideology of power in the nomadic world. More specifically, we will be interested in the principles underlying the gain or loss of charisma by the sovereign, which make a part of political tradition. From there, we will be able to formulate some hypotheses about the forms that the political culture of the Turkish societies of the steppes took and especially of the nomadic vision of government, justice and the distribution of goods between subjects. This will allow us to better understand the notion of power in the Turkish steppe societies.

Rouse James C. (Aix-Marseille Université, IREMAM, University of Saint-Andrews)

Nomads in Ibn Bībī's al-Awāmir al- 'alā 'iyya fī l-umūr al- 'alā 'iyya

Nomadic activity in medieval Anatolia has long been characterized by modern scholarship in a widely negative fashion, presenting nomads as a disruptive element of society that needed to be dealt with, preferably by distancing them as much as possible from the sedentary population. This dichotomic view of Anatolian society stems almost exclusively from the writings of an urban-based elite that consciously played down and even ignored the different ways in which the nomadic population contributed to the development of the Seljuk state. Drawing on examples from Ibn Bībī's text, I wish to highlight the hostile attitude of this 13th-century dignitary of the Seljuk court in his writings towards the nomads.

Berger Simon (EHESS, CETOBaC)

Aqvām ō Lashkar. Naming nomadic groups in Persian sources from the Mongol period

Historiography generally presents the nomads of Central Eurasia divided into tribes, that is groups united by powerful solidarity from the common kinship of their members, which gives them a military edge, but which at the same time have only a rudimentary political structure. A close examination of the vocabulary used in Persian sources from the Mongol period (13th-14th centuries) to describe the organization of the Turks and the Mongols reveals that it does not correspond to the tribal paradigm. On the contrary, how authors such as Juvaynī and Rashīd ad-Dīn, among others, name and represent nomads highlight the extreme verticality of the authority exercised by some aristocratic elites over populations dominated, structured and regimented like armies at the orders of the nobles.

Jelinowski Jan (Institut d'Histoire de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences, Université de Strasbourg, GEO)

Designating otherness? The evolution of the use of Turkish-Mongolian vocabulary in the Persian historiography of the Hulegide period

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongol invasions and sovereignty over the Iranian regions largely transformed its social structures and representation system, down to its lexicon. Using the methods and tools of textual statistics, I will present the adoption and use of Mongolian vocabulary in a corpus of Persian historiographical documents from the Hulegide period. The evolution of the use of this vocabulary will allow us to interrogate the relationship to Mongols of selected historians (Jozjānī, Jovaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn).