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Denise Aigle

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN ORIGIN MYTH

FROM SHAMANISM TO ISLAM*

The heroic figures of Antiquity and of the Bible have long drawn the attention of folklorists, who have established various models.[1] The life of the hero, in the broader sense of the term, is peppered with signs that mark him out from common mortals: miraculous birth; a royal or divine father; a virgin mother; the hero, abandoned as an infant, is saved by an animal; a lofty destiny is predicted for him; he overcomes initiatory trials; he dies an extraordinary death. A great conqueror such as Chingghis Khan is indisputably a hero of this type. The founder of an empire, scion of a "golden line" (*altan uruq*), he became a standard model with whom various historians down the centuries sought to link such Muslim sovereigns as Timur and the Mughals of India, as well as non-Muslim rulers such as, for example, Ivan IV. In 1793, Nikolai Novikov reports a letter addressed to the Tsar by the Noghai Mirza Belek Bulat, in which the latter refers to Ivan IV as the "son of Chingghis Khan" (*Chingisov syn*).[2] Thus did historiographers reinterpret, to the glory of these distant followers, the now mythical figure of the Mongol conqueror.

Chingghis Khan's origin legend is a particularly rich example of the transformations that mythical accounts undergo. The birth of his great forebear, Dobun-Mergen, was proclaimed to be supernatural, in line with the model of the heroic figure whose very birth foretells an uncommon destiny. This myth, marked by shamanistic traditions, was copied and gradually transformed. This article analyses the tales that include Chingghis Khan's origin myth, as they appear in the Mongol and Islamic traditions up to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I will also examine how the myth's symbolic structure was gradually brought into line with the religious and cultural universes of the conqueror's heirs: the variations and omissions reveal more as to each historiographer's personal approach than do the similarities between different versions of the myth.

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- In D. Aigle, *The Mongol empire between myth and realities: historic anthropoligical studies,* Leiden, Brill, in print, 2010. A shorter version of this article has been published under the title: "Les transformations d'un mythe d'origine: l'exemple de Gengis Khan et de Tamerlan," in *Figures mythiques des mondes musulmans*, ed. D. Aigle, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée,* vol. 89-90 (2000): 151-168.

[1] There is a considerable literature on this subject. J. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, 2 vol., London: Macmillan, 1918; A. Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," *Essays in Folkloristics, Kirpa Dai Series in Folklore and Anthropology* 1 (1978): 223-70. L. Raglan [*The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama*, New York: Vintage, 1956] is interested in the figures of Joseph, Moses and Elias. O. Rank [*The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, New York: Vintage, 1959] studied in particularly the birth myths of Sargon, Moses, Gilgamesh and Cyrus. J. Campbell [*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, London: Abacus, 1975] has constructed a model of the all-encompassing hero. E. Ishida "The Mother-Son Complex," in *East Asiatic Religion and Folklore*, Vienne: Die Wiener Schule der Volkerkunde, 1956, 411-19; idem ["Mother-Son Deities," *History of Religions* 4 (1964): 30-52] is concerned above all with the East Asian model.

[2] Ch. J. Halperin, "Ivan IV and Chinggis Khan," *Jahrbücher für Geschischte Osteuropas* 1 (2003): 481. I am grateful to the author for this reference.

Two Arabic inscriptions in Timur's mausoleum, the Gūr-i Amīr in Samarkand, mention a genealogy that links him to Chingghis Khan and his ancestors through a certain Amīr Budhunjar (Dobun-Mergen)[3] who is said to have lived in the second half of the tenth century.[4] The first inscription is engraved on the marble of Timur's tomb, located in the crypt, the second on the stone of his cenotaph on the ground floor. Neither inscription is dated, but a rough date can be estimated from the historical context. Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg, had the stones for the tomb's decoration brought back from Upper Asia in 828/1425. The inscriptions cannot have been engraved before then, that is, any earlier than twenty years after Timur's death.[5]

The inscription situated on the tomb, the shorter of the two, appears to be incomplete. I have supplied the apparently missing fragments in brackets, on the basis of the second inscription:

> "No father is known for this illustrious man but only his mother Alānquwā (Alan-Qo'a); it is told that she was not a prostitute [she was made pregnant] by the intervention of a ray of light; [it is said that he was one] of the descendants of Asadallāh al-Ghālib 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.[6]"

The second inscription, on the stone of the cenotaph, is more detailed:

> "No father is known for this illustrious man but only his mother Alānquwā; it is told that she was of a sincere and modest character; she was not a prostitute[7]. She was made pregnant by a ray of light that entered over the top of the door and appeared to her [in the form] of a perfect mortal and it is said that he was one of the descendants of Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and it may be that her illustrious children verify [the reasons] invoked by their mother.[8]"

We find this genealogical link with Chingghis Khan in other Timurid literary sources, but without the reference to 'Alī which appears only on the tomb inscriptions. The oldest of these is probably a genealogical tree of the Mongols and Barlas[9] in Arabic and Uyghur, composed by one Ḥusayn b. 'Alī-Shāh, perhaps under the patronage of Khān Sulṭān (r. 786-814/1384-1411), a grandson of Timur[10]. The most important source for the genealogies of the Mongols and

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[3] As the names of the characters in this legend have various spellings depending on the language and authors, I give the original Mongolian names in brakets.

[4] These inscriptions were published without analysies by A. A. Semenov, "Nadpisi na nagrobiiakh Tīmūra i ego potomkov v Gur-i Emire," *Epigrafika Vostoka* 2 (1948): 49-62 and 3 (1949): 45-54. On the Timur's genealogy, see J. E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam. Essays Written in Honor of Martin Dickson*, ed. M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990, 85-125. See an analysis of theses inscriptions in E. Herzfeld, "Alongoa," *Der Islam* 6 (1916): 317-27.

[5] J. E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy,": 85.

[6] A. A. Semenov, "Nadpisi na nagrobiiakh Tīmūra,": 53.

[7] Qur'an, XIX, 17: "Wee send unto her Our Spirit that presented himself to her a man without fault."

[8] A. A. Semenov, "Nadpisi na nagrobiiakh Tīmūra,": 57.

[9] Timur take power in the Mongol *ulus* chaghatay, and the Barlas tribe to with Timur belonged was descendant from the Mongol Barulas tribe of Chinggis Khan's confederation, who did not however belong to the imperial clan.

[10] J. E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," : 85.

Timurids is the *Mu'izz al-ansāb*, a continuation of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Shu'ab-i panjgana*, presented to Shāh Rukh in 830/1426-1427 by an anonymous author.[11]

To shed light on the origin of this legend and the transformations that it underwent, we must start from the Türkish origin myths.[12] The most ancient account is given in Chinese sources the *Chou Shu*, the annals of the Chou dynasty (556-581), which were completed around[13] 629 at a time when the Chinese were in constant contact with the Türks. The legend may be summarized as follows:

> There is no doubt that the Türk are a branch of the Hsiung-nu. They belong to the A-Shih-na clan, an independent tribe; they were totally annihilated by a neighbouring tribe, except for one boy aged ten. Because of his young age, the soldiers could not find the courage to kill him themselves. They cut off his feet and threw him into a pond. A she-wolf fed him meat. The boy grew up and mated with the she-wolf and impregnated her. When he heard that he was still alive, the king who had attacked his tribe sent someone to dispose of him [...]. The she-wolf fled to an amphitheatre in the mountains[14] with a grassy plain [...]. She gave birth to ten boys. When they grew up they took foreign wives[15] who in turn soon became mothers [...]. The most skillful of the boys was called A-shih-na. He became their leader. One day, they came out of the mountains.[16]

The Mongols found the Türkish myth alive and well in Upper Asia and they turned it to their own use. In the *Secret History of the Mongols*, composed to the glory of Chingghis Khan not long after his death, two successive myths are given which surely correspond to one single story[17]:

> "*At the biginning* there was a blue-gry wolf [Börte-Chino], born with is destinary *ordained* by Heaven Above. His wife [Qo'ai-Maral] was a fallow doe. They came crossing the Tenggis. After the hald settled as the source of the Onan river an *Mount* Burqan Qaldun,[18] Batačiqan was born to them.[19]"

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[11] On the literary sources that give this genealogy, see J. E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy,"; 85-6.

[12] See D. Sinor, "The Legendary Origin of the Türks," in *Folkloria: Festschrift for Felix J. Onias*, ed. E.V. Zhygas and P. Vooheis, Bloomington: Indiana University (Uralic and Altaic Series), 1982, 223-57.

[13] Very similar versions of this legend exist in other Chine sources, see D. Sinor, "The Legendary Origin,": 224.

[14] D. Sinor ("The Legendary Origin,": 246-47) explains that in the Chine sources *k'u* and *hüeh* refer to tow types of cavern, on is wich corresponds to an amphitheatre in the mountain.

[15] This is an allusion to the principle of exogamy.

[16] Translation after D. Sinor, "The Legendary Origin,": 224-25.

[17] The Mongolian text was completed in 1240, then again in 1323, but it is preserved only in the transcription into Chinese characters, drawn up in 1382 by the Ming dynasty who succeeded the Yüan, the Mongols of China. On dating this text see I. de Rachewiltz, "Some Remarks on the Dating of the *Secret History of the Mongols*," *Monumenta Serica* 24 (1965): 185-205. On other recent datation, see Ch. Atwood, "The date of the '*Secret History of the Mongols*' Reconsidered," *Journal of Song and Yuan Studies* 31 (2007): 1-48.

[18] Burqan Qaldun is consireded the Mongols' holy mountain. It is situated as the source of the Tula, Onan and Kerülen rivers, in the Kentei massif.

[19] *Secret History of the Mongols* §1. The italics are from the translator.

The story of Börte-Chino and Qo'ai-Maral is followed by a genealogical account which ends with Dobun-Mergen's death. The *Secret History* then gives the second myth wich can be summed up as follows:

> When Dobun-Mergen was no more, his wife Alan-Qo'a although without a husband, brought three sons into the world. The two children born to Dobun-Mergen secretly said: "See how our mother, without a husband, has brought these other three sons into the world; there was no other man in the tent except Baya'ut, the young servant. The three sons could well be his." One day Alan-Qo'a gathered together her elder children and the three young brothers to explain the mystery to them.[20]"

In the tale of the Mongol origin, we see again elements of the Türkish myth, in particular the wolf, which has a long history in the belief systems of the peoples living in the Eurasian steppes and Upper Asia.[21] The myth of the wolf is already attested among the Türks' immediate neighbours, the Wu-sun (end third to early second centuries BC).[22] In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the *Povest' vremjannyx let*, a Russian chronicle, mentions the case of Bonjak, one of the chiefs of the Qipchaq confederation,[23] who, before going into battle, would start howling so as to make contact with his wolf ancestor and gain the latter's aid in achieving victory.

In the *Secret History*, the Mongols' great ancestors are designated by the names of symbolic animals, in line with the representational system of shamanism, the dominant religion in that cultural region.[24] Shamanism was based on a system of exchange between the animal world and men the world, conceived on the model of the matrimonial exchange[25]. Traditionally, the shaman, who managed this exchange, had to be male because, in the system of alliance with the spirits, he occupied the position of "taker of women".[26] This representational system may explain why, in Mongol myth, the Türkish she-wolf became a yellow he-wolf, and his wife, Wild-doe, represented deer, the ideal game.

The second part of the Mongol myth, which seeks to locate these occurrences in a historic period, involves the intervention of a being which

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[20] *Secret History of the Mongols* § 20-21.

[21] On the beliefs of the populations living in this cultural area, see P. B. Golden, "Wolves, Dogs and Qipčaq Religion," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungerica* L/1-3 (1997): 87-97.

[22] P. B. Golden, "Wolves, Dogs,": 90.

[23] They are also known as Cuman or Polovtsy.

[24] Among the Mongols, animal names are common for people without animalizing them: the use of an animal name corresponds to the shamanistic representations of the soul which must leave the body and travel, most often in the form of a bird or on an animal steed. The standard reference on this topic is R. Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme. Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*, Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1990.

[25] R. Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 25 ff.

[26] When, in the eighteenth century, shamanism began to be supplanted in Mongolia by the spread of Orthodox Christianity and Lamaistic Buddhism, the position of shaman was little by little feminized, see R. Hamayon, "Chamanisme et bouddhisme épique: quel support d'identité pour les Bouriates post-soviétiques?," *Études mongoles et sibériennes* 27 (1996): 331.

takes the form of a dog. The dog, like the wolf, is an animal with an important role in the belief systems of the steppe and of Upper Asia. Many origin tales involve a dog ancestor. One Tibetan text dealing with the Uyghurs, for example, mentions that two dogs, the husbands of a sterile she-wolf, abducted and mated with Türkish women who later gave birth to male dogs and to girls.[27] Before Chingghis Khan's conquests, the Mongols were in contact with the peoples of the Manchurian forests, with whom they shared many beliefs. The Kitans claimed canine ancestors,[28] while a dog cult is attested among the Jürchen who ruled northern China.[29] Despite the evident presence of a dog cult among the populations of Upper Asia, it is hard to deduce from this that the Mongols had an independent dog myth. The dog in the *Secret History* seems to have been a kind of wolf. As we have seen, the shamanistic religious universe was based on a system of exchange that found concrete expression in a ritual marriage between the shaman and a female spirit belonging to the sustaining, that is the animal, world.[30] But the shaman was the one who, during the ritual, had to adapt himself by becoming an animal. Alan-Qo'a's account, conveying as it does a mental image, can be interpreted as a symbolic expression of the shamanistic ritual: the being with the clear yellow skin, who later takes the shape of a yellow dog, could represent the soul of the shaman finding its way out through the tent's smokehole. The symbolism of shamanism seems to have been used in this account to resolve a problem of a social nature – illegitimate birth. The purpose of this origin myth in vindicating a birth without a known father is also present in the Islamic sources which at the same time seek to conjure away the shamanistic representations that underlie the account given in the *Secret History*.

The richest Islamic source for Mongol traditions is the Persian historian Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*. The writer had access to a great number of oral traditions[31] Rashīd al-Dīn conveys the legend in a humanized form, but the way he speaks of the three sons borne by Alan-Qo'a after her husband's death clearly shows that these "illegitimate" births could not readily be accepted. He first of all recounts that Dobun-Mergen had a most modest wife, by name Alan-Qo'a. She gave him two sons called Bālkūnūt (Belgünütei) and Būkūnūt (Bügünütei)[32]. As for the three other sons, Rashīd al-Dīn writes that opinions differ greatly (*dar ān bāb ikhtilāf bisyār ast*).[33] He then reports Alan-Qo'a's explanation:

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[27] J.-P. Roux, *La religion des Turcs et des Mongols*, Paris: Payot, 1994, 193-94. He also mentioned other traditions concerning the myth of the dog.

[28] H. Franke, "The forest peoples of Mandchouria: Kitan and Jurchens," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, ed. D. Sinor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 405-6.

[29] P. B. Golden, "Wolves and Dogs,": 47.

[30] R. Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 25 ff.

[31] See D. M. Morgan, "Rašīd al-Dīn and Ġazan Khan", in *L'Iran face à la domination mongole*, ed. D. Aigle, Tehran: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1977, 179-88; Th. T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 72-90.

[32] Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, ed. B. Karīmī, Tehran, 1969, 168 [cited after Rashīd al-Dīn/Karīmī].

[33] Rashīd al-Dīn/Karīmī, 168.

> "Yes, every night I dreamt I saw a fawn[-coloured] being.[34] Softly, softly it would draw near to me; slowly, slowly it woul leave again[35] [...], these sons, Būqūn-Qutaqī (Buqu Qadagi), Būsūn-Sāljī (Buqatu-Salji) and Budhunjar (Bodonchar-Mungqaq), came to me in a different way, and that is why they will be great khans."[36]

We may observs that Rasīd al-Dīn's version is very close to that of the *Secret History of the Mongols*, but the yellow dog has become simply a "fawn-coloured being".

In a slightly later Arabic source, the Mamluk historian Ibn Faḍlallāh al-'Umarī's (700-749/1301-1349) *Masālik al-abṣar wa mamālik al-amṣār*, the mother's explanation to her elder sons is given as follows:

> I was not made pregnant by anyone. I was sitting down; my window was open. A light came in through it, three times. "As for me, I was pregnant with these three sons, for that light entered each time with a boy. [They say that] these three sons were conceived in one sole womb: Būqūn-Qūtāghī, Būsūn-Sāljī and Būdhunjar". They are called *nūrāniyyūn* because of the light that penetrated their mother. That is why Chingghis Khan is called the son of the[37] sun.[38]

Al-'Umarī nevertheless expresses considerable doubt as to the credibility of this story. He accuses Alan-Qo'a of having made up this explanation to escape death [by stoning] or, knowing the story of Maryam, of having made use of it to deceive her tribe.[39]

Nearly two centuries after Timur's death, the historiography of Mughal India gave a new interpretation of the Chingghis Khan origin legend. Under Uzbek pressure, Timur's descendants had seen their power weaken in Central Asia. Ẓāhir al-Dīn Bābur, who was in Kabul, decided to try his fortune in India where he founded the Mughal dynasty in 932/1526. In his *Memoirs*, Bābur makes much of his Timurid ancestry, albeit without according Timur any title higher than Bäg. Later, seeking to buttress the Mughal dynasty, the

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[34] In Arabic, the adjective *ashqarānī* is used to refer to a chestnut horse or the colour russet, while *ashḥal* is an Arabic adjective meaning fawn-coloured.

[35] Rashīd al-Dīn/Karīmī, 171.

[36] Mīrkh$^{w}$ānd explains this birth as a miracle. He also makes the connection with Adam, born without father or mother. The Mongols were divided into two groups. The Törölki were descended from the founding ancestors Nūkūz and Qiyān who had found refuge in Ergene Qūn, and the Nīrūn, "tribe of pure birth" were descended from Alan-Qo'a. They were the group to which Chingghis Khan belonged. The Nīrūn were considered the most noble and sacred among the Mongol tribes. See I. Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Fromation. The Kerait Khanate and Chinggis Khan*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, 125-6. *The Secret History* § 17.

[37] Al-'Umarī, *Das Mongolische Weltreich: al-'Umarī's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik al-abṣār wa mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. and trad. K. Lech, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Asiatischen Forschungen 14), 1968, Arabic text, 2-3 [cited after, Al-'Umarī].

[38] Al-'Umarī, Arabic text, 2-3.

[39] Al-'Umarī, Arabic text, 3-4.

historiographers emphasized the genealogical ties that linked the sovereigns of Mughal India to Timur, and through the latter, to Chingghis Khan.[40]

In his *Akbar-nāmah*, composed about 1003/1595, Abū l-Faẓl, the official historian of Jalāl al-Dīn Akbar (r. 963-1014/1556-1605), begins his account of the latter's reign with the praise of his glorious ancestors, amongst them Timur who is in turn presented as a descendant of Chingghis Khan.[41] The structure of Abū l-Faẓl's text deserves some attention. The passage relating the birth of Budhunjar (Bodonchar-Mungqaq) is preceded by a long account of the merits of Alanquwā (Alan-Qo'a), who is presented as a woman whose physical and spiritual beauty never ceased to grow, so that she became unequalled for virtue in her time. She was very pious and, alone in a private chamber, would meditate on the One God. Abū l-Faẓl then writes:

> "One night, this divinely radiant woman [Alanquwā] was resting on her bed when a glorious light shone a ray into her tent. [The light] entered the mouth and throat of this source of spiritual knowledge. This cupola of chastity became pregnant by the light, in the same way as Maryam the daughter of 'Imrān."[42]

Only after he has described Alan-Qo'a's miraculous impregnation does Abū l-Faẓl indicate that her husband, Dhūbūn-Bīyān (Dobun-Mergen) was no longer in this world when she bore child. The author then discusses the possibility of birth without a father, or without a mother, citing the cases of Adam and, above all, Jesus, born of a virgin mother: "If you have heard the story of Maryam, then believe that of Alan-Qo'a likewise."[43]

The Muslim authors make a number of variations to the *Secret History* and drop the animal reference. But Rashīd al-Dīn and the Mamluk historian al-'Umarī allow some doubt to remain concerning the legitimacy of Budhunjar's birth. These authors have not reimagined the contents of the myth within an Islamic frame of reference: Chingghis Khan, who derived his legitimacy from the world of the steppe, did not need to be presented as the descendant of ancestors who followed a revealed religion. In this, the two authors greatly differ from the Timurid and Mughal chroniclers who were constrained, in order to make Timur's ancestors respectable in Islamic eyes, to give a scriptural basis to their justification of the birth.

The legend of Alan-Qo'a aroused the interest of Ernst Herzfeld who discussed and commented on scholars' various interpretations in a 1916 article.[44] Blochet had seen this legend as a straightforward copy of the Gospels[45] while for Ostrüp it was an expression of Mongol religious tolerance and

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[40] I. Habib, "Timur in the Political Tradition and Historiography of Mughal India", in *L'Héritage timouride Iran - Asie centrale - Inde XV^e-XVIII^e siècles*, *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 3-4 (1997): 299.

[41] Abū l-Faẓl-i Mubārak, *The Akbar-Nāma*, ed. Mawlawī 'Abd Ur-Raḥīm, Calcutta, 1875, 64-7 [cited after, Abū l-Faẓl].

[42] Abū l-Faẓl, 65.

[43] Kh^w^āndmīr relates Rashīd al-Dīn's account. I. Habib ["Timur in the political Traditon"] shows that later historiography does not give the lineage of Shāh Jahān, Akbar's grandson, any further back than Timur, thus diverging from Abū l-Faẓl.

[44] E. Herzfeld, "Alongoa," *Der Islam* 6 (1916): 317-27.

[45] E. Herzfeld, "Alongoa,": 321.

syncretism through Manichaeism.[46] But these interpretations do not convince. In the *Secret History*, the miraculous conception of the three sons follows a well-established model of illegitimate birth, justified by an intervention of divine origin which itself is symbolized by light. This model is attested in ancient eastern traditions. The divine sign is supposed to appear at the birth of persons marked for a lofty destiny.[47] The being with the light yellow skin, who crawled out like a yellow dog, here serves as the symbolic representation of mastery over the real: a birth without a father. But, *a posteriori*, this miraculous conception, in which one can see the intervention of the *Tenggeri*,[48] the Mongols' Greater Heaven, gives Chingghis Khan an even higher status than that he had won as founder of an empire: he is the "son of the Heavens". The Mongols had certainly long been in contact with Nestorian Christianity, but the theory of a Christian influence in the Mongol origin myth is unfounded: the reference system is shamanistic. Chingghis Khan's origin legend belongs to a greater model, one found throughout Asiatic traditions and in which the father is rarely mentioned.[49]

Herzfeld himself analysed the inscription on Timur's tomb, on the basis of study of the Gospels and of a philological analysis of Greek and Syriac. According to the great orientalist, the essential features of the legend of Alexander's birth, as reported by Plutarch, influenced the Gospel according to Luke. This model was then taken up by Mongol legend. Lightning, that is, the manifestation of Zeus, fell onto Olympia's belly before her wedding-night with Philip.[50] This belief in the divine birth of Alexander was, in Herzfeld's view, spread throughout the East by Hellenism, particularly through the Pseudo-Callisthene's *Romance of Alexander*.[51] For all this, can we really speak of a direct influence by this myth on Mongol tradition? Alexander was indeed known in Central and Upper Asia, but mainly through a Syriac translation of the Pseudo-Callisthene's *Romance of Alexander*.[52] Neither the Greek text of this work nor the Syriac translations mention Alexander's supernatural birth, as transmitted by Plutarch. Nectanebus says to Olympia that the God Ammon will appear to her in a dream and that she will become pregnant by him.[53] It is thus difficult to accept Herzfeld's view that the legend of Alan-Qo'a is a replica of Olympia's.[54] While it is true that several

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[46] E. Herzfeld, "Alongoa,": 321.

[47] A. Dundes, "The Hero Pattern," 249; D. Sinor, "The Making of a Great Khan,": 243-5.

[48] *Tenggeri* appears to derive from the Chinese *t'ien* "heaven". The Türko-Mongols called *Tenggeri* the "higher Heaven" in the Türkish inscriptions in the Orkhon valley.

[49] A. Dundes, "The Hero Pattern,": 249.

[50] Plutarque, *La vie d'Alexandre. Sur la Fortune ou la Vertu d'Alexandre*, trad. R. Facelière and E. Chambry, Paris: Autrement, 1993, 8.

[51] On the Pseudo-Callisthène, see A. R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, Cambridge, Mass., 1932 and K. Czeglédy, "The Syriac Legend concerning Alexander the Great," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica* 7/2-3 (1957): 231-49

[52] See W. Budge (ed. and trad.), *The History of Alexander, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthene*, Cambridge, 1889.

[53] E. Herzfeld, "Alongoa,": 323. R. Hillenbrand ("The Iskandar Cycle in the Great Mongol *Šāhnāma*," in *Problematics of Power. Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great*, ed. M. Bridges and J. Ch. Bürgel, Berlin: Peter Lang, 1996, 222.

[54] We find the titles T'ien wang (King by grace of the Heavens) and T'ien tseu (Son of the Heavens). See M. Granet, *La religion des Chinois*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1998, 74; J. Levi, *Les*

Muslim sultans were clearly identified with Alexander by their historians in order to justify their conquests, Chingghis Khan, invested with the mandate of the *Tenggeri*, had no need whatsoever to claim the Alexandrian model of world conqueror. One may, on the other hand, discern an influence from the model of the Chinese emperor. The founder of Chinese unity, the emperor Qui Shihungdi, initiated the use of the word *wang* to refer to sovereignty as this term referred back to the supreme being. This amalgam between the divine role and sovereignty had its origins in the conception of the Chinese emperor, who was "son of the heavens" in the strict sense.[55] The cosmological ritual surrounding the cult of the heavens, the Sovereign on high, led to a theory of hypostases of the heavens which extended to a doctrine of the mystical birth of the "son of the heavens". Each dynasty was associated with one of the five hypostases of the heavens through ties of consanguinity with the legendary emperors who were themselves inserted into the list of celestial hypostases.[56] Given the close links between the Mongol and Chinese worlds, one may imagine that Chingghis Khan's origin legend inherited something from the Chinese imperial model.

A different question arose regarding Timur, a Muslim ruler whose legitimacy depended on both Islam and his ties to Chingghis Khan. The Muslim historiographers, on the basis of the Qur'an and Qur'anic exegesis, naturally saw the similarities between Jesus' birth and the story of Alan-Qo'a. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is cited several times in the Qur'an. Indeed, one entire sura is devoted to her. I have noted above that two Qur'anic fragments are included in the insciptions on Timur's tomb: God sends his spirit to Alan-Qo'a in the shape of a "perfect mortal"[57]; she is not a "prostitute".[58] The Qur'an does not name the spirit of God that visits Mary, but Islamic tradition identifies it with the Archangel Gabriel. The latter announces to her that the Lord wished to make of the child a sign (*āya*) to men.[59] The conception of Jesus, whose birth is considered by Muslim tradition to have been as miraculous as Adam's, is the result of a divine decree. In order to give an Islamic colouring to the fatherless birth of Chingghis Khan's ancestor, the author of the mausoleum inscriptions has had recourse to this tradition.

The reference in Timur's lineage to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib remains to be explained. In these inscriptions, a perfect mortal, the descendant of 'Alī, has taken the place of the yellow dog of the Mongol tradition. The explanation for the choice of 'Alī in Timur's genealogy no doubt lies in the personality of the fourth caliph, who, from the ninth or tenth century on, was considered by Muslim tradition as both a fighter and a sage. In Mas'ūdī's history (*Murūj al-dhahab*) 'Alī already appears as the model of the Islamic hero, fighting only for a just cause and with

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*fonctionnaires du divin. Politique, despotisme et mystique en Chine ancienne*, Paris: Seuil, 1989, 208-15.

[55] L. Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou la voie royale. Recherches sur l'esprit des institutions dans la Chine archaïque*, vol. II, *Structures politiques, Les rites*, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1980, 370.

[56] As to how Christians saw the Islamic view of Jesus's birth, see A. Harrak, "Christianity in the Eyes of the Muslims of the Jazirah at the End of Eighth Century", *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 347-56. The author makes use of Zuqnīn's chronicle.

[57] Coran XIX, 17.

[58] Coran XIX, 20.

[59] Coran XIX, 21. Marie had pledged her virginity to God (LXVI, 22; XXI, 91).

the greatest magnanimity. ʻAlī's lofty deeds were propagated in Persian through Balʻamī's (d. ca 363/974) translation of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh al rusul wa-l-mmulūk*. An *ʻAlī-nāmah*, dating from 482/1089 and composed in the metre of the *Shāh-nāmah*, related the episodes of ʻAlī's life in epic mode[60] As Charles-Henri de Fouchécour observes, this text was undoubtedly intended for public recitation so as to encourage the audience to imitate the model it provided. This epic poem on ʻAlī, to some degree based on the model of Rustam, the hero of the *Shāh-nāmah*, credits him with many battles against the Jinn, Iblīs, the Sasanians, dragons and demons, from all of which he emerges victorious. This image of the gallant fighter, magnanimous, generous and devoted to God's cause, also spread in the Türko-Iranian world. Muslim tradition, furthermore, attributes supernatural powers to ʻAlī and considers him to be the holder of a spiritual and esoteric wisdom. He is particularly venerated in eastern Iran and among the Türks of Central Asia; there is a tomb of ʻAlī in the Afghan city of Balkh.[61]

By establishing a genealogical connection between ʻAlī and Timur the author of the monumental inscriptions gave the Timurid conqueror the image of an ideal Muslim. The reference to ʻAlī, fighter of just battles and man of magnanimity, could erase the memory of the massacres of Muslims that Timur had perpetrated.[62] Later historiography, without referring to ʻAlī, paints the same picture of Timur as having the cardinal merits of the ideal ruler. He is humble (*ḥalīm*), wise (*ḥakīm*), "loves the descendants of the Prophet (*sayyid*)" and "is immoderate in [respecting] the *sharīʻa*"[63] Furthermore, making Timur a potential heir of ʻAlī's wisdom and charisma was in line with the image portrayed by his contemporaries. For the Timurid sultan claimed supernatural powers and ascendancy over holy men: Shāh Niʻmatallāh Valī Kirmānī was supposedly impressed on seeing Timur because he saw that behind the latter's appearance of earthly power lay the manifestation of divine power.[64] In his inscriptions, Timur therefore takes upon himself a double *nasab*, one relating to Chinggis Khan and the other to Quraysh. This dual ancestry was in accordance with his role of founder of an empire on Chinggis Khan's model and with the image of the ideal Muslim ruler that the historiographers wished to draw of him and "the aura of something akin to sacral kingship.[65]"

The Mongol origin legend underwent multiple transformations that illustrate the transmission of myths whose material is, by definition, fluid and capable of being adapted to different contexts. The flexibility of this myth is

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[60] B. Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of the Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21/1-2 (1988): 118.

[61] These tradition is reported by Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnaṭī; see D. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde. Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, Pennsylvania: Park University, 1994, 477, note 156. On ʻAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, see E. Kohlberg, "ʻAlī b. Abī Ṭālib », *Encyclopædia Iranica,* vol. 1, 1960, 843-45.

[62] J. Aubin, "Tamerlan à Bagdâd," *Arabica* 9 (1962): 303-309; idem, "Comment Tamerlan prenait les villes," *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963): 83-122.

[63] D. Aigle, "Les tableaux dynastiques du *Muntaḫab al-tavārīḫ-i Muʻīnī:* une originalité dans la tradition historiographique persane," *Studia Iranica* 21/1 (1992): 67-83.

[64] J. Aubin, *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shāh Niʻmatullah Walī Kirmānī,* ed. J. Aubin, Tehran-Paris, 1956, 15; Persian text, 43.

[65] M. E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition. Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*, Leiden-Boston: Brill (Brill's Inner Asia Library), 2007, 13.

illustrated by the various interpretations of it given by the historiographers. Furthermore, this origin legend deploys a particularly flexible and adaptable image, the "yellow dog". The colour yellow can recall the sun, light, and, finally, in a thoroughly Islamic context, can be transformed into a replica of the Qur'anic couple of the archangel Gabriel and the perfect mortal of Sura Maryam. Thus we have a typical illustration of the different symbolic uses that may be made of the same image, in very different religious systems.

The anthroponomous animals of the first part of the myth have been humanized, as we have seen, since the Mongols came into contact with Islam. Somewhat later, in the seventeenth century, when the official religion of Mongolia became Lamaistic Buddhism, the Mongol chronicles linked Chinggis Khan to imaginary Tibetan rulers.[66] In the tales recounted in these late texts, the subtle animal symbolism of the *Secret History* is greatly reduced: Börte-Chino and Qo'ai-Maral are, unequivocally, human beings. Recent research has brought to light the role played by the line of Chinggis Khan in the construction of the Mongolian nation and identity between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries[67]. Today, legend gives Chinggis Khan a Japanese origin: he is meant to have really been a Japanese general.[68] The origin of this legend lies in a book published by Kenchō Suyematsu in London, where he was studying, at the end of the nineteenth century. Since Chinggis Khan's death in 1227, this great historical figure has never ceased to act, through his legend, as a source of political legitimacy for many rulers who have claimed him for themselves.

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[66] In the *Erdeni-yin tobchi* of Saghang Setchen, rediged in 1662, Börte-Chino was the youngest of three brothers; he took a young woman called Qo'ai-Maral for wife, see D. Sinor, "The Legendary Origin,": 240-1.

[67] F. Aubin, "Renouveau gengiskhanide et nationalisme dans la Mongolie postcommuniste," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-ottoman* XVI (1993): 137–203; idem, "Alexandre, César et Gengis-khan dans les steppes d'Asie centrale," in *Les civilisations dans le regard de l'autre,* Paris: UNESCO, 2002, 73-106; notes, 262-69 [with the collaboration of R. Hamayon]; M.-E. Lhamsuren, "The Mongolian Nationality Lexicon: From the Chinggisid Lineage to Mongolian Nationality (From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century)," *Inner Asia* 8 (2006): 51-98.

[68] See J. Miyawaki-Okda , "The Japanaise Origin of the Chinggis Khan Legends", *Inner Asia* 8 (2006): 123-134.

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