Matthieu Chochoy
De Tamerlan à Gengis Khan. Construction et déconstruction de l'idée d'empire tartare en France du xvi^e siècle à la fin du xviii^e siècle

Leyde, Brill, 2021, xiv, 317 p.,
ISBN : 9789004499010

Mots-clés : Orientalisme, Tartars, Tamerlan, Gengis Khan, Asie centrale

Keywords: Orientalism, Tartars, Tamerlane, Chinggis Khan, Central Asia

Recent research into the history of Central Asia has seen as a return to the primary sources and closer scrutiny applied to how knowledge has been produced and transmitted. These studies focus on the networks linking writers within a community of letters, but also how texts were used by subsequent generations to construct new narratives. The study of how and why knowledge was transmitted, and sometimes ignored, has caused modern historians to re-evaluate their approach to the source material and question whether they are dealing with a set of facts or a selective reconstruction based upon the author's environment. It is in this context that Matthieu Chochoy's book, *De Tamerlan à Gengis Khan. Construction et déconstruction de l'idée d'empire tartare en France du xvi^e siècle à la fin du xviii^e siècle* makes a number of interesting interventions concerning Medieval and early modern French perceptions of the Tartar Empire, a concept of Asiatic statehood built loosely around the Mongol and Timurid empires, but housing broader knowledge about Central and East Asia. Tracing the origins and evolution of the Tartar Empire in French thought from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century allows Chochoy to illuminate how information about Asia was produced and digested by primary, secondary, and tertiary authors in a well-measured intellectual history of French Orientalism.

De Tamerlan à Gengis Khan is divided into three sections, each covering a different stage in the spread of the popular idea of the Tartar Empire. The first four chapters of the book focus on the origins of the Tartar Empire in the European imagination. Chochoy begins the story in the thirteenth century, when the Mongol invasions of eastern Europe and the Middle East opened the possibility of new trading networks, military alliances, and also objects of proselytization. This early interaction produced a limited body of literature on the history and geography of the Mongol and Timurid empires, whose nomadic population were typically referred to as "Tartars" in Western sources from the thirteenth century. These ostensibly Latin accounts were often reproduced between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries as part of compendia, integrating existing knowledge about the Tartars for further research and leisure reading. Chochoy demonstrates that the choice of which information to include and how it was to be interpreted was shaped by the motivation and intellectual environment of the compiler. He shows that much of the early interest in Tartary was stoked by the rapid expansion of the Ottoman empire into eastern and central Europe in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, which caused observers to seek new allies and trading outlets in other parts of Asia (p. 44-50). The travelogues of missionaries, merchants, and diplomats during this period was often mingled with more fictional literary accounts, which united the worlds of theatre, chivalric literature, and myths about Iran, Central Asia, India, and even China to build the concept of the Tartar Empire.

The second part of the book (chapters 5-7) charts the rise of a dedicated French tradition of scholarship on the Tartar Empire and its people beginning from the 1640s. Although not exclusive of other European scholarship, most notably from Italy or the Low Countries, Chochoy shows that there was an explosion in the number of French publications on the Tartars as mercantile and colonial competition in Europe intensified and Louis XIV began to more aggressively project his power abroad. This expansionism saw a scramble for information about the wider world, which required French writers to reconcile their conception of a Tartar Empire with the growing knowledge of China, the Americas, and South Asia. This process was not without problems as the expansion of Jesuit missionary activity in East Asia and of commercial and diplomatic links with the Ottoman and Safavid empires exposed competing historical traditions regarding the Tartars. Here again, knowledge was kept or discarded in line with French sensibilities regarding the respective functions of the monarchy and the nobility as well as the role of the church and religious scriptures in explaining the past. Indeed, Chochoy makes it clear that each generation of new scholars had debates and disagreements about their use of source material and the role of the Tartars in world history. Chochoy's analysis of these arguments adds nuance to his work and prevents him from over-simplifying popular attitudes towards the Tartars in any given period.

The last of these debates, covered in the final three chapters of the book, concerned the very existence of the Tartar Empire itself from the 1740s

onward. The question of whether there was indeed a Tartar Empire, or even a Tartar people, was raised by the increased availability of original Persian and Chinese manuscripts in Paris, which contradicted earlier ideas about the Tartar Empire; who it included, its flourishing dates, and its geography. The way that these primary sources were read by French Orientalists also altered as the enlightenment shifted focus away from kings towards nations as the driving force behind historical change. This shift in the historiography was accompanied by new ethnographic and linguistic studies, many of which abandoned biblical explanations for the population and settlement of the world in favour of polygenetic theories which caused both political philosophers and ethnographers to present a more complex view of the Tartars, comprised of Manchus, Mongols, Uzbeks, Chaghatais, and others. With the weight of evidence now pointing against a single Tartar imperium, scholars began to turn to other fields of research. Yet the decline of the Tartar Empire in French academic circles did not diminish interest in Central Asia. In fact, Chochoy hints that some of the fundamental assumptions and taxonomies that underpinned the idea of a Tartar Empire may have survived in later generations of scholarship into "Turco-Mongolians", "Steppe Empires", and Uralo-Altaic Languages (p. 282).

One of the strengths of Chochoy's study is that it leaves enormous scope for further research into the literature on Tartary and other branches of Orientalism. With its focus on the long seventeenth century, Chochoy suggests that more work can be carried out into how the concept of Tartary was re-shaped and used in the subsequent two centuries (p. 291). There is also potential for a broader investigation into how the texts produced by the French writers identified by Chochoy, such as Pierre Bergeron (1580-1637), François Pétis de La Croix fils (1653-1713), and Antoine Galland (1646-1715) circulated in other cultural and political contexts and how they in turn were influenced by wider discourse. Chochoy hints at this potential in the second chapter of his book, which acknowledges the debt owed by French writers to earlier Italian and Portuguese compilers. In fact there are interesting cases of overlap between the reports of Tamerlane identified by Chochoy, rising from humble origins as a shepherd to achieve imperial majesty and challenge Ottoman hegemony in Asia Minor (p. 51), and the Italian reports of the Aqqoyunlu ruler, Uzun Hasan (d. 1478), who is likewise described by Giovanni Ramusio rising from humble origins to become a natural ally of the Christian Europeans in their war with the Ottoman Turks, a status which passed to the succeeding "Sophie" (Safavid) ruler, Shah Isma'il (Ramusio, p. 1; Meshkat, p. 214)[(1)]. Yet Uzun Hasan and the Safavids are clearly described as exemplars of Persian kingship, which is traced back to the Achaemenid Darius Hystaspes. The fact that so much French literature regarding Tartary was based on Persian texts undoubtedly accounts for some of this overlap between French ideas of Tartar and Persian kingship. Chochoy is clearly aware of the influence that Persian texts exerted on French constructions of Tartary and this book may not have been the place to elaborate on comparative orientalism. Nevertheless, this overlap affirms that there is enormous potential for additional research based upon this study.

Readers of Chochoy's book are treated to a highly methodical approach to a diverse range of sources, which add colour and depth to this study of early modern Orientalism. Following on the recent research of Thomas Kuhn, who argues that science does not exist outside of its social context, Chochoy embraces a number of academic, artistic, and popular works to elucidate the fascination the Tartars held for the French humanists and enlightenment thinkers (p. 2). His book includes analysis of European travelogues, histories, and ethnographies, but also theatrical plays, cover-art, maps, encyclopaedias and cosmographies alongside the notes and correspondence produced by their authors. The content and transmission of these texts is expressed through extracts from the original texts but also in tables and graphs which makes it easier to digest the information being presented.

Chochoy's text will no doubt prove most interesting to historians working on European Orientalism and the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. Yet the book will also be useful to scholars currently working on aspects of Central Asian history, who can now see how the mood of the times shapes studies of the region's history. One need only reflect on the persistent trend of publishing early European travelogues in compendia to see how the grouping and prioritisation of knowledge influences our perception of history to present day. Chochoy's book should certainly provoke modern historians to think hard about where their ideas come from.

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(1) See also Charles Grey, *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1873 and Kurosh Meshkat. "The Journey of Master Anthony Jenkinson to Persia, 1562-1563", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 13/2, 2009, p. 209-228.