MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, XXII

Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *The Mongol Empire*, review of 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, translated from the Persian by John Andrew Boyle, with a foreword by Steven Runciman, 2 vols., Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1958, in «The Observer», Sunday, April 6, 1958, p. 15.

THE MONGOL EMPIRE

By Arnold J. Toynbee

Dr. Boyle has done Western students of history a great service by giving them this scholarly translation of the thirteenth-century Persian historian Juvaini's work. Juvaini is one of the world's great historians. He had a twofold stimulus. Like Herodotus, he lived in an age when his own society's horizon had been suddenly and dramatically expanded by the impact of another society on it, and like Polybius, he was not only an historian but a man of action who played an important part in some of the events that he afterwards recorded.

Juvaini's family had been professional civil servants for at least two generations before his own. His grandfather had been Prime Minister to the last Shah of Khwarizm – a north-eastern successor-State of the Abbasid Caliphate that was overthrown by the Mongols. His father took service with the Mongol conquerors, and twice made the long journey from Khorasan, in North-East-Persia, to Qaraqorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire in what is now Outer Mongolia. On the second of these journeys, Juvaini accompanied his father, and he himself visited Qaraqorum again in 1252-3. It was during this second stay there that he was invited to write his history and duly set to work.

Like his fellow Persian historian-administrator, Rashid-ad-Din, who was his junior by twenty-one years, Juvaini had to do his historical work under difficulties, for the Mongol world-conquerors' Persian civil servants had a hard time. At any moment they might be called upon to travel enormous distances at high speed in cruel weather, and they were never free from personal anxiety. Their Mongol employers were suspicious of them just because the found their services indispensable, and their Persian colleagues were apt to intrigue against them by playing on the suspicions of their capricious and violent masters.

Juvaini accompanied Hülegü Khan, a brother of Chingis Khan's grandson the Great Khan Qubilai, on his campaigns in 1255-9, in which he first wiped out the Isma'ilis (alias Assassins, the Islamic sect that is presided over nowadays by the Aga Khan) in their fortresses in the Elburz mountains, and then conquered what remained of the territories of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in what is now Southern 'Iraq and the South-west Persian district, Khuzistan. In

1260, Hülegü appointed Juvaini governor of all these ex-Abbasid territories, and he held this post till 1281. His brother was Prime Minister to Hülegü and his successors from 1263 till 1284 for the whole of their dominions. which eventually included all of what is now Persia and 'Iraq, and also the eastern half of present-day Turkey.

Juvaini's history is in three parts.

Part I covers, rather sketchily, the rise of Chingis Khan in the Far North-east and, much more fully, the Mongol conquest of the Khwarizm Shah's dominions in what are now Soviet Central Asia. North-west Afghanistan, and North-east Persia from 1218 to 1222. Part ll deals with the previous history of the Khwarizm Shahs. Part lll with Hülegü's campaigns against the Isma'ilis. It will be seen that Juvaini was writing about events in which either he himself or his closest relatives had taken active and important parts. Occasional statements in his narrative show that he also made good use of the documents to which his official work gave him access. Presumably he could read and write the Uighur Turkish language conveyed in a Syriac alphabet which was the Mongol Empire's official language, besides having a mastery of Arabic and of his native Persian.

In writing his history as in performing his official duties, Juvaini was walking on hot bricks. His embarrassment makes itself apparent in has preface. The Mongols were his employers, patrons, and potential executioners. He had to watch his step all the time. Yet, as a native of North-east Persia and as a Muslim, he was bound to regard the Mongol conquest of his own homeland and of the rest of the Islamic world east of the rivers Euphrates and Halys as a fearful disaster for civilization. He tells us in Part I, chapter 15 (vol. 1, pp. 96-97 of Dr Bayle's translation), that the Islamic provinces north-east of the Oxus got off comparatively lightly. When Chingis Khan «took Bokhara and Samarqand, he contented himself with slaughtering and looting once only, and did not go to the extreme of a general massacre». By 1259-60, when Juvaini was writing these lines, «the prosperity and well-being of these districts» had «in some cases attained their original level and in others» had «closely approached it».

«It is otherwise» – he continues – «with Khorasan and Iraq: … every town and every village has been several times subjected to pillage and massacre and has suffered this confusion for years, so that, even though there be generation and increase until the Resurrection, the population will not attain to a tenth part of what it was before. The history thereof may be

ascertained from the records of ruins and midden-heaps declaring how Fate his painted her deeds on palace walls».

The conquest of what is now Persian Khorasan is described by Juvaini in Part I, chapter 28 (Dr. Boyle's vol. 1, pp 169-178), and. as far as this province is concerned. I can testify that, short of Resurrection Day, Khurasan was still depopulated 717 years after the great catastrophe. On June 1, 1957, I was standing on the site of the pre- Mongol city of Tus, and the next day on the site of the pre-Mongol city of Nishapur (some distance away from the present small town of the same name). All that remains of either city to-day is the lower part of the mud-brick city-walls. But the vastness of the four-square space that these walls still delimit gives the present-day visitor some notion of the size of the population that the Mongols wiped out.

At this fearful price. the Mongol conquerors went further towards building a world-State than any world-conquerors have managed to go either before or since the Mongols' time up to date. Their empire, at its widest, embraced 'Iraq and Iran, China, Russia, and everything else that lay in between these great countries. It extended from the west coast of the Pacific Ocean to the Euphrates, Halys, Black Sea, Danube, Carpathians, and Baltic. In the Old World, Egypt, Japan, and Java alone succeeded in repelling Mongol attacks. Europe and India had lucky escapes.

If this world-empire had lasted, it might have paid some compensation eventually for its founders' atrocities by becoming literally world-wide. In that event, the institution of war might have been abolished some time before the invention of atomic weapons. As it happened, the Mongol Empire fell to pieces within about a hundred years of its foundation, and so, in the atomic age, Mankind still finds itself divided into local sovereign States that have not vet discarded the habit of going to war with one another. If the Mongols could do the devastation that they managed to do with such old-fashioned "conventional" weapons as arrows, incendiary bombs, and halberds, what might we not be able to do with the hydrogen-homb war-heads of guided inter-continental missiles?