

Dschingis Khan und seine Erben: Das Weltreich der Mongolen. München: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland; Hirmer Verlag, 2005. 432 pp.

Reviewed by

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The popular clichés of Mongol history evoked in the title of this beautifully produced exhibition catalog did not fail to attract several hundred thousands of paying visitors to the exhibition shown in Bonn, Munich, and Vienna in 2005 and 2006. Steppe archaeology, the imperial Mongols, and the legacy of Chingis Khan are all covered in this book on Chingis Khan and his Legacy: the Mongol World Empire. What makes this project stand out from the crowd is that its main focus is a city, Karakorum (Kharkhorin) in Mongolia. An exhibition on the largest nomad empire in history centered around a city? Specialists might find this less surprising than the general public. But until very recently historians had to look at the residence of the Great Khan mostly through the eyes of medieval visitors and chroniclers. Precious little was known about the historical development of and daily life in medieval Karakorum. This is changing thanks to the efforts of a joint Mongol-German archaeological campaign, the "Mongolisch-Deutsche Karakorum-Expedition (MDKE)". The MDKE, a collaboration between the German Archaeological Institute (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut DAI), the University of Bonn, and the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia, began work at Karakorum in July 1999. The exhibition and catalog present the first results of this project to the general public. It was designed and first shown in Bonn, the center of Mongol studies in Germany.

The German archeologist Hans-Georg Hüttel formulates the main

goal of the project as follows: to gain a better understanding of urban planning and development at Karakorum and of the site's "changing role as the political and administrative center of the empire and the central Khanate, as a manufacturing city and long-distance trade hub, and as a religious center and locus of national cult" (p.139). The seemingly contradictory terms used in this context, "late-nomad and medieval urban history of Central Asia," indicate the new impulse this research gives to Central Eurasian studies. It is not hard to predict that the Karakorum campaign will contribute in an important way to the changing perceptions of the history of the nomad-sedentary continuum in Central Eurasia.

Within the built-up area of Karakorum the campaign focuses on two spots: the so-called palace area and the city center. The complete excavation of the "grand hall" interpreted in 1949 by Sergei Kiselev as part of Ögedei's palace confirms Kiselev's general reconstruction of the plan. But it also shows that the building cannot have been the palace hall. The countless Buddhist finds from the hall do not represent later strata ("monastery phase"), as assumed by Kiselev, but belong to the

original 13th/14th-century building. Hans-Georg Hüttel (pp.140-146) suggests an interpretation of the "grand hall" as a 13th- or 14th-century buddhist shrine. He compares it (and seems to be inclined to identify it) with the "pavilion of the ascent of the Yuan" described in a Chinese-Mongolian inscription of 1346. Within the "palace area" as well, three kilns for the production of construction materials were excavated and dated to the late 13th/early 14th centuries (Christina Franken, pp.147-149).

The MDKE also excavated a segment of the main North-South street and the adjacent residential and commercial area near the center of the city [Fig. 1] (Ulam-bayar Erdenebat and Ernst Pohl, pp.168-175). The rich evidence allows the identification of the 13th- and 14th-century residents of this part of the city as Chinese artisans, including a coppersmith and a goldsmith. The archeologists identified four to five strata over a period of around 200 years.

Particularly intriguing is a paleoenvironmental study of sediments from Lake Ögij (40 km north of Karakorum) which seems to indicate that the Mongol foundation of Karakorum fell into a period of stronger forestation in the Orkhon valley (Michael Walther, pp.128-132). The study of ecological changes in the "steppe belt" is only beginning,



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Fig. 1. The excavation of the Mongol-German archaeological expedition in the center of Karakorum. The flat stones in the center at the first step below the surface apparently are the 13th-century paving of the main street.

and the historical implications remain to be seen.

Illustrations to this part of the catalog include newly discovered fragments of the 1346 inscription and Buddhist finds from the grand hall. Small finds from the city dig give a vivid impression of daily life and work. A small ivory wand from the "palace area," probably of European origin and tentatively described as a stylus, underscores the cosmopolitan character of Karakorum's medieval population. Very aptly the section on the archaeology of the Mongol capital city Karakorum (part 4 of the catalog) stands at the center of the volume. It is framed by six chapters offering different perspectives on the "Mongol experience" as a context for the Karakorum chapter. An introductory section contains two essays by a Mongol and a German historian who look back on Chingis Khan and his legacy (Dschingis Khan und seine Erben). The second part (Vorläufer) traces the history of Asian "steppe empires" from the Xiongnu to the Mongols. Part 3 (Chinggis Khan und das Mongolische Großreich) looks at political, military and cultural aspects of the early Mongol Empire. Part 5 (Das Weltreich der Mongolen) covers the history of the Mongol Empire and its successor empires after Chingis Khan in the 13th and 14th centuries. The next section (Der mongolische Buddhismus) discusses the history of Buddhism among the Mongols, followed by a relatively brief concluding section on the post-Chingisid history of Mongolia and its relations with China and later Russia (Die Mongolei vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert).

The introductory section shows the range of new archeological projects in Mongolia. Jean-Paul Deroches presents the French-Mongol excavations at the Xiongnu necropolis of Golmod since 2000, Dovdoi Bayar the Turkish-Mongol excavations at the memorial for Bilgä Tegin. A fascinating chapter

is devoted to burials in crevices and caves (Ulambayar Erdenebat and Ernst Pohl, pp.81-89). The Mongols of Chingis Khan seem to come to life again in the almost perfectly preserved weapons, gear, clothes and jewelry from one 10th-century and two 13th/14th century burials.

Part 3 is the least even section of the book. It includes some excellent overviews of the Mongol successor states, for example Birgitt Hoffmann's elegantly written historical sketch of the Mongols in Iran. Several brief chapters provide insight in topics such as Mongol monetary history (Stefan Heidemann) and Qubilai Khan's failed attempt to conquer Japan (Josef Kreiner). Some contributions, however, are not completely up-to-date. The one-page (!) historical sketch of the Ulus Jöchi/Golden Horde serves up the cliché of the "Tatar yoke" without any reference to more differentiated interpretations of Moscovite-Mongol interactions. The following chapter by Mark Kramarovski makes up for some of these shortcomings with an intelligent discussion of 13th- and 14th-century golden belt ornaments and drinking vessels from the region of the Golden Horde, showing the diversity of their artistic traditions. His attempt to determine the stratigraphy of styles and techniques and connect them historically with the formation of the Golden Horde is very persuasive (though perhaps more geared toward a specialist audience). The chapter on the Ulus Chaghatai would certainly have gained from using Michal Biran's groundbreaking studies.

Hirmer publishers once again lives up to its reputation as a leading publisher of art books; the reproductions are splendid (with the exception of p. 392 in my copy). One of my favorites is a 15th-century sinocentric world map based on two 14th-century maps now in Japan (pp. 336-337, unfortunately printed across the

fold). Other objects that deserve to be singled out are the finds from the cave burials (particularly the men's and women's headgear on pp.86 and 89, so familiar from medieval paintings), and the early 20th-century manuscript maps from the collection of Walther Heissig on pp. 390-395 (now in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz).

Altogether this exhibition catalog presents a well-rounded survey of Mongol history and culture, while at the same time pointing to new directions in Mongol studies. Not atypical for a German exhibition catalog, the texts are quite scholarly. The appeal to a non-specialist readership lies mostly in its illustrations. Complaints? A map of the Republic of Mongolia showing the archeological sites mentioned in the catalog would have been welcome. Wishes? The publication of an English translation.

About the author

Florian Schwarz is an Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Washington. engaged in teaching and research on the medieval and early modern history of the Middle East and Central Asia. Publications include *Unser Weg schliesst tausend Wege ein: Derwische und Gesellschaft im islamischen Mittelasien im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2000), and two volumes of *Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen* (Berlin & Tübingen, 1995, 2002). He may be contacted at <fschwarz@u.washington.edu>.