

MONGOL NOMADIC PASTORALISM

A Tradition between Nature and History

Jacques Legrand

There is now a quarter of a century of unbroken study of Mongol realities, both historical and modern. Such long and sustained contact sometimes offers the illusion that one might oneself weigh upon the course of events. It means, in any case, that no episode can be shrugged off as some distant, alien incident and that familiarity with the events and the people carries an intense and ever present emotive charge. Even if curiosity had been lacking, my duty as an academic was to try to grasp events, occurrences, and developments in their broadest and most manifold implications. Beyond the trivial but so often acute perception of the inexhaustible vitality of ignorance, of the wily persistence of the object in eluding the grasp of intellect, a few ideas have taken shape that may be in place at this seminar. Although they are formulated in general terms and their scope may extend beyond the area of Mongol studies, these ideas and assumptions are not the “Mongol expression” of an imported vision. They arose from study of the Mongol area considered in and for itself, without the lure of hasty and lopsided comparisons and without any insistence that facts, to be confirmed as such, must fit particular moulds of explanation or justification. This in no way rules out interplay with the general trend of scientific knowledge, even if the disciplines concerned be sciences of matter as much as those of society.

Before coming more specifically to Mongol nomadism, I should like to stress an aspect pertaining both to knowledge and to practical forward-looking inquiry; pertaining also, I should add in this case, to the sense of responsibility that is an essential endowment of anyone advancing ideas, formulating projects or even—where the most foolhardy are con-

cerned—venturing a recommendation or a piece of advice. Cognizance of reality is, at one and the same time, overall grasp, global perception, and the recognition of dimensions and factors that are partial, lasting or momentary, complementary or contradictory. There is as much need of one type of vision as of the other: the stereoscopic and the microscopic are equally necessary. There is also a constant risk of making do with the overall image while remaining blind to the intrinsic existence of its individual components, or else of giving pride of place to those components, or any particular one of them, to the detriment of their interplay. In which case, it may be tempting to isolate the action which may influence that factor as the only decisive action. If it is possible to identify, among the features of Mongol nomadism, ecological, technical, social, and historical factors (each of these domains being itself made up of a complex package of parameters and relations), the selection of just one of those factors as the sole or dominant criterion of interpretation or evaluation may have serious consequences. What is more, while a great many techniques, such as economic management models, are now able to act upon isolated factors and modify their parameters separately, any practical priority given to that factor in implementing a transformation strategy would cause serious imbalances. There are many instances in history of effects of this kind, including the contemporary illusion that settlement was of itself a harbinger of social progress. The same goes for the major environmental upheavals induced by heedless development strategies. The possibilities on offer nowadays clearly increase that danger.

I should like here to outline a model of the cohesive nature of nomadic pastoralism, to emphasize the presence of a logic which, far from denying the inherent reality of each partial phenomenon, more closely gauges its impact on all the other aspects or dimensions—both distinctive subjects of study (pertaining to the most varied natural and human sciences) and components of a whole possessing an existence and a history—able to be perceived in terms of a global identity. Approached from this angle, Mongol nomadic pastoralism offers the image of a culture and a history built up in a remarkably homogeneous setting over a long period (since the middle of the first millennium B.C.); in conditions, on bases, and in accordance with models quite different from the transformations of societies that are agrarian and urban-based but, ultimately, confronted with the same essential challenge of satisfying and assimilating the changing needs of a constantly evolving population.

One constant is of considerable significance here and that is that Central Asian nomadism and Mongol nomadism itself in due course, has had no other choice, like any other model of socio-economic activity and organization, but to optimize the relationship between the needs of society and whatever resources were at its disposal. In other words,

since the final assessment can be expressed in terms of “adaptation” and “adaptability,” success and failure are measured as the balance, whether credit or debit, between what something brings in and what it costs. The two notions being of course taken in a very broad sense, from the energy and food balance (does an act of food production provide more or fewer calories than it uses up?) to the values and criteria of acceptability that are built up throughout a society’s history.

Ecological Conditions: Levels and Regimes

Pastoralism, from the growing priority given to the domestication of animals to the adoption of nomadic forms of activity and lifestyle, is a set of responses to that challenge, an appropriation and management of natural conditions and not a bid to evade them. In Mongol nomadism such management is confronted less with the rigour of absolute climatic levels (of aridity, cold, etc.) that often go to form the image than with the extreme irregularity both of physical regimes and of the ecological effects imposed by these, after all, classic features of continental climates.¹ This irregularity is no doubt the key to understanding entire segments of not only the economic, but also social and political, reality of Mongol nomadism. It helps dispel the illusion that one factor rather than another has a permanent decisive value and it needs to be well understood so as to ensure that nomadism is not measured by the criteria peculiar to the peasant societies of temperate zones.

Technical Constraints: Extensiveness and Competitive Control of Resources

The ecologically optimum responses consist in a “dispersion pattern” associating non-specialization of the herd (each holding possessing animals of several species, even though disparities in the structure of the livestock denote the operation of firmly implanted cultural and social models) with the various reflections of an imperative need for extensiveness. Optimum adaptation would involve the nomadization of small population groups living off herds which were also of limited size. It is clear, and this has been constantly borne out up to the contemporary period, that the relation between the needs of the population and the resources deriving from nomadic pastoralism is permanently fragile and that available surpluses are usually modest, nearly always irregular, and unpredictable. In other words, overpopulation thresholds may be exceeded by populations or herds whose absolute numbers (or density)

may on the face of it seem very modest.² It thus seems that present-day Mongolia, with a density of about one inhabitant per square kilometer, while there is nothing inviolable about it, does none the less convey the image of a very real threshold. Any departure from this configuration implies a deterioration which, if perpetuated, can only be fatal to the pastoral economy and society themselves. Population concentrations, herd concentrations, and prolonged occupation of the same site or grazing land are all factors in such deterioration and pressures to which the nomadic society is liable to succumb. Yet that society is neither subjected to the unyielding grip of an abstract doctrine nor faced with mere ecological constraints.

In view of these overpopulation thresholds and the abundance of favorable zones and sites (coupled with relief/grazing and water resources), it is possible to propose an optimum pattern: seasonal occupation by small population groups; living off modest-sized herds (livestock breeding in small family encampments or *ajil*); no large-scale livestock holdings; few or no population sectors not engaged in livestock breeding—the non-specialization of Mongol pastoralism being no doubt also attributable to this relative lack of division of labor. Under these optimum conditions of dispersion, however, the irregularity of resources becomes a significant factor. Competing pressures arise, necessitating the application of modes of regulation and prompting the formation and affirmation of bonds of fellowship and networks of alliances. Noteworthy in these processes is the direct and practical importance of communication and its implications for nomad culture.³

Both in their immediate social practice and in broader historical continuums, nomads must at times abandon their optimum dispersion in favor of multiple and often complex forms of assembly and grouping. It may be on account of techniques arising from the needs of pastoralism, such as sheep-shearing. It may also be on account of security and defense requirements engendered simultaneously by the optimum dispersion of nomadic pastoralism, the various competitive pressures it generates and the manifold relationships, networks, and strategies of alliance to counter them. A further factor may be the forms of urban development, in nomad territory having their origin in nomad history itself, forms of a far greater importance than sedentary populations are inclined to concede.⁴ Being profoundly affected by the extreme irregularity of natural regimes; the availability, management, and control of resources can only be secured in the extremely shifting and unstable interplay that constitutes the establishment and maturation of power relations.

Here we have the beginnings of a possible settlement of the old debate on the priority of the dispersed/regrouped modes—the transition to nomadism comes about as a result of the dispersion of communities of

farmers/stockbreeders, with the formation of *ajil*. Increasing competition for relatively scant and, above all, highly irregular resources gives rise to insecurity and produces not only multi-based groupings and self-defense positions, but also forums for establishing both social hierarchy (associated and usually intermingled consanguinity and neighborhood relations) and the strategies ultimately intended to permit a return to optimal, dispersed pastoralism as the only tangible means of ensuring the society's survival. The success of the concentration exercise is therefore crowned by its own negation (ephemeral and fragile nature of the hierarchies, necessity for the momentarily dominant groups to seek alternative bases of legitimacy—such as external prestige—in both the period formation and consolidation and when the bases of such legitimacy wane).

Such power relations cannot be maintained and perpetuated otherwise than in a profoundly contradictory mode: (1) aiming at the management of resources, they cannot but seek a return to nomadic society at its "optimum" state of dispersion; (2) in so doing, they undermine their own bases by restoring the free interplay of tensions, competing pressures, and alliances marked out to give rise to a new power relationship reflecting both the renewal of alliances and changes in material conditions.

On this basis stands the formation of the "empires of the steppes,"⁵ the apparent suddenness and relative, near cyclical regularity of their emergence, their practically original divisions (particularly between an eastern wing and a western wing), and their usually limited life span. The same goes for the signs of revival at a very early stage, in empires in the making, of phenomena reflecting less a centralizing political will than the acknowledgement of relations peculiar to nomadic society. A striking example, and one that contrasts with the view of the Mongol Empire as springing solely from the authority of Genghis Khan, is provided by the detail of the formation of the ninety-five *mingtan*, less an administrative procedure than the lending of more official form to preestablished bonds (but also by the fact that the *Secret History of the Mongols* makes a point of supplying those particulars).⁶ If the title of *mingtad-un nojan* is bestowed as a reward for services rendered and loyalty shown to Genghis Khan, the formation of the contingent was very much a matter of relations based on alliances and kinship peculiar to each nomadic group and not a mere distribution of persons. The circumscribed and often ephemeral sway of the political authorities also reveals one of their essential roles: their endeavor to perpetuate structures doomed by their very successes, successes which committed them, admittedly with varied strength and good fortune but with great regularity, to the path of continental conquests. From that point of view, the perception of a Central Asian area defined by its openness to nomadism—whether in terms of territories suited to pastoralism or the presence of ways and means of

exchange to which the nomads had become accustomed in the course of more or less regular relations—certainly provides a more operational framework for analysis than the supposition of a Mongol will to “world domination” (a wholly European view supported by only a few observations, scarce in number and made long after the day of Genghis Khan) for identifying the deep-seated bond uniting, over various periods, the fate of many peripheral regions confronted with nomadic invasions. It is also this history, with its clashes and violence, whose essential motive force, however far it may have carried its often devastating effects, remains peculiar to nomadic pastoralism, that has ensured for the latter such a constant and, on the face of it, such a paradoxical role as a link, a channel of contact between the most diverse cultures of the huge Eurasian landmass. Both the nomadic cultures themselves and the sedentary cultures, which are more aware at such times of their neighbors and of themselves, are transformed by such changes.

Whether we look at the “barbarian” empires and dynasties that dominated northern China throughout most of its history⁷ or at the invasions reaching western Eurasia, the nomad or nomad-inspired campaigns were first and foremost a response to one major circumstance: while the quest for ways of regulating access to resources made the formation of the nomad “empires” necessary, such regulation was quite incapable of modifying the actual level of those resources, or of freeing nomadic pastoralism from the irregular nature of its returns and from the overriding trait of all the wealth produced, specifically the highly perishable nature of the livestock. What is more, while the surpluses that could “pay for” empires were scant and irregular, the functioning and development, however modest, of such institutions as staging posts or the maintenance of permanent armed contingents and, *a fortiori*, the attempts such empires might make to maintain and consolidate their existence could not rest solely upon wealth derived from nomadic pastoralism. In these circumstances, it was essentially by resuming the patterns and channels of exchange, trade, and circulation in an already familiar area—by extending these patterns to partners who were themselves known—that conquests and also migratory movements, when such took place, for the benefit of the nomad empires and particularly their leaders, secured the vital resources that they sorely lacked themselves. The foregoing description applies, of course, to a highly developed and increasingly widespread form of nomadic pastoralism. To focus on that moment alone would adversely restrict the field of study. In other words, each episode—in this case, the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century—must be situated in a succession of major stages, in the knowledge that the breaks between those stages are more likely to be the sometimes arbitrary, or even self-seeking, choices of later commen-

tators than genuine frontiers, especially breaks experienced as such by their actors and their contemporaries. What simply looked like the intrusion of invaders from the East takes on another hue with the realization that, alongside other East-West movements (migrations of the Turkic peoples, in particular), and foreshadowing the last of them (the migration of the Kalmuks to the Volga in the first half of the seventeenth century), the Mongol conquests must also be inserted in a historical fabric just as open—for the whole of continental Eurasia—to West-East currents and impulses. This includes the spread of major forms of animal domestication (for example, horse-riding) as well as the spread of writing (for example, the encroachments of the Chinese graphic tradition are marginal in the Tangut, and partly Kitan, nomadic world to the extent that this point could contribute to the delimitation of Central Asia outlined above).

This is not the place for us to return to the “list” of those empires. It must simply be emphasized that the appearance of the Mongols is not, once more, to be seen in terms of a “sudden irruption.” What is more, any attempt to draw a dividing line, in time and in space, between the internal workings of nomad society in the process of unification and its embarking upon the conquest of an established empire pertains, barring extreme precaution, to a doubtless rather vain formalism.

While the constitution and the evolution of networks and strategies of alliance were inseparable from the formation of nomadic empires, this dimension includes relations with partners outside the nomadic world proper. At the most elementary level, the notion of “partnership” put forward here quite simply does not imply that the partners were similar. What would seem startling between nomads and sedentary peoples comes as no surprise when both partners are in the latter category. The preferential relations maintained with a particular partner, wherever located, are a means of moving the balance of power in one’s own favor. What the Mongols were concerned with, in their relations with China, were commercial exchanges (silk and cotton, cutlery, copper ware and arms traded, in particular, for horses)⁸ and the securing of advantages, honorary titles, and recognition through marriage. The same is true, for example, at the very time of Mongol unification, with the marriage ties established between the Naimans and the Uighurs. This in due course proved to be one of the factors, or a pretext, precipitating the intervention of the Mongols in the oases of Central Asia, a conquest henceforth to be seen as a direct consequence of the unification conflicts.⁹ More generally there should be no underestimating in the history of the Mongol conquests, the role of mechanical sequences, of automatic chains of events, and of the urge to flee from bad to worse. But would this vicious circle have had the same effect if the entire enterprise had not developed

in accordance with a persistent logic and in an area only exceptionally a *terra incognita*? Characteristically, and Plan Carpin's testimony is essential here, the Mongols of the conquest experienced as an often terrifying leap into the unknown their incursions into areas outside of Central Asia such as their Indian campaign and their crossing of the Caucasus.¹⁰

There is, unquestionably, a link between conquest and migration, but it is one that conforms to a historical calendar that is in no way an abstract reflex. It is not nomadism that opened the door to Eurasian migrations—the Palaeolithic Age was already peopled by them—with the Neanderthals crossing into Asia and even more so with the spread of *homo sapiens*. Population movements did not come to an end when the nomads' role declined, even if the European settlement of Siberia was deeply beholden to the Turks and Mongols, who sold the landless peasants the livestock which they sorely lacked. The fact nonetheless remains that it was nomadic pastoralism that shaped the outlines and development of Central Asia for two millennia. In this sense, those stages which, even until recently, were tempting to look upon as the final stages of nomadic pastoralism, actually constitute a remarkable laboratory—almost still within our reach—of the specific forms which shaped the entire history of mankind in a vast region, on our doorstep. They make us realize that migration, whether several millennia ago or nowadays, is one of humanity's main forms of existence, and that it displays certain invariables which are disguised by its outward appearance. It consists both of rapid advances and leaps which easily match the adult life of the migrant, even over considerable distances, and, at the same time, a protracted period which does not imply a unilateral rejection of all links with the starting point. More than a mere displacement, a migration is effected by creating a zone which encompasses the new centers of habitation as well as transport and trade routes which continue to link them to their initial focal point and to be used, in all directions on, a long-term basis.

A Long History of Contemporary Cultures

One can hardly fail to be struck by the myriad contributions, exchanges, transfers, and influences which shaped the cultures in this context. Each people looked not only to the resources and images it had created in order to find, or at least search for, the answers to its own problems, but also to its neighbors. Something which hardly seems surprising any longer must here be assessed according to its scale and consistency over centuries.

The relationship between nomadic and sedentary peoples has tended to monopolize the debate. This is certainly understandable and

we must hardly be surprised when the picture derived from this is often one of rivalry, of a "natural" hostility between them. But this picture is highly deceptive. So is the calm conviction of the sedentary cultures that they alone had something to offer. Much more than that, if viewed in the long term, this proximity, which is often many other things besides, must be seen as permeated by an essentially complementarity, by a multitude of interests which are shared, if not always common. Paradoxically, it is in this light that the brutalities and blows of history are most clearly explained.

Naturally, there were exchanges between nomads, and just as many, but whether the partners were nomads or sedentary people was not so much a choice, or indeed an expression of affinity or hostility as a consequence of varied and fluctuating needs. It would be rash to venture, in just a few lines, into the vast range of questions which arise from the links between nomadism and migrations, the creation of the pastoral zone and its nomadic development. As far as techniques and language are concerned, as on the level of symbolics, contacts between peoples of the steppe shaped all of them, and arguing over precedence is indeed futile here.¹¹

This complementarity is presented in all areas: material, intellectual, and spiritual. A large number of techniques were passed to the nomads from the sedentary peoples. It would seem likely, in the very first place, that the spread of different breeds of domestic animal came about in this way, in particular the practices of harnessing and riding horses, which came from the most westerly regions of Central Eurasia (Northern Mesopotamia and the steppes of Southern Russia and of Ukraine).¹² Such exchanges were multifarious, including equipment and foodstuffs, but also extending to institutions. In the long term, they brought into play the most diverse relationships and propinquities, encouraging if not uniformity then, at least, the homogeneity shown by the "Sythian" steppe, from the Black Sea to the Altai, at the time of the formation and rapid spread of nomadic pastoralism (from the middle of the second millennium B.C.).¹³ The most striking image of this homogeneity is provided by the wealth, but also the aesthetic and spiritual unity of the animal art of the steppes.¹⁴

With the formation and succession in the eastern part of Eurasia and the territory of what is now Mongolia of the great nomadic "empires" (initiated by the Hsiung-nu in the third century B.C.), the proximity of China (also in the making) altered the center of gravity of the exchanges between the nomadic cultures of the steppe and the "outside world" for many centuries. There is more to this shift than the work of chance. Northern China, nucleus of the Chinese entity, was formed in direct contact with the peoples of the steppe and often under their

pressure (a considerable number of dynasties from the nomad world reigned in China as a result of conquest by "infiltration"). Its history is repeatedly marked by nomad encroachments, but the picture which emerges, while not obscuring the conflicts, is rather one of a symbolic process without which each would today be very different. In short, the "face" of China and the "face" of the steppe, as we know them and to which we attribute, along with the peoples concerned, an unquestionable identity, might hardly be recognizable if we stripped them of what the "Other" contributed to them.

From the time of the Hsiung-nu, the contribution of Han China was essential to the life of the steppe, and the objects from the "royal" tombs of Noin-Ula (first century B.C., northern Mongolia) are revealing. Moreover, they were found in association with other objects and pictures which obviously came from the most westerly regions of Central Eurasia. Textiles and clothes, metalware (copper and brass, cutlery, bronze mirrors), and probably certain foodstuffs too, albeit in limited quantity, but also building techniques (as indicated by the systems of underfloor heating reminiscent of the Chinese *khan* [caravanserai] discovered in the town of Ivolga in Ulan Ude, Buryatiya) were all prized and sought. These goods and this expertise were for the most part integrated into nomadic, and particularly Mongol, culture, and would not henceforth be lacking there. They were integrated through direct border trade, trade relations, gifts relating to diplomatic contacts, the gathering of spoils during military expeditions (often in response to a break in trade relations), or the multifarious expansions of China's zone of influence at the heart of Central Asia. Thus, even if some Chinese products only became popular in the steppe thanks to the continually greater advances of Chinese commerce linked to the political domination of the Ch'ing empire from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were taking their places on a market which had been long prepared to accept them.

While attention should be drawn to the difficulty of assessing the effects of these "imports" given our very fragmentary knowledge of the nomadic peoples' daily lives up to a very recent period, it can be said that silk, satin, and cotton (the latter less prestigious but equally present) were among the main products supplied by China to the nomads. Rice (often supplied in response to a food shortage among the nomads), tea, and other products became more widespread in the same way.¹⁵

But trade did not only flow in one direction. The nomads had at their disposal resources which were of interest to their neighbors, particularly furs. This, again, was an exchange with a long tradition. *The Secret History of the Mongols* gives the example of a merchant from the oases of Central Asia, Asan, who traveled as far as the River Argun, in the north-

east of what is now Mongolia, to trade cattle for furs.¹⁶ At other times, it was cattle that the nomads supplied to their neighbors. This was particularly the case when the Russian settlers, who were lacking in livestock, were moving into Siberia (this trading role being extended through control over the salt of the lakes, a strategic resource).

But the most decisive contribution of the nomadic peoples to the material culture of their neighbors was still in connection with the horse. Apart from technical improvements, where their inventiveness was unmistakable (the rigid saddle and the stirrup), above all, the nomads supplied horses on a large scale. While Ancient China, with its limited horse-breeding abilities, hardly used horses except in conjunction with chariots, the Han and their successors equipped their cavalry with horses supplied by the nomads, through trade or tribute. There is both written and iconographic evidence (such as the famous bas reliefs in the tomb of the T'ang Emperor T'sai Tung 626-649) that this phenomenon persisted in Chinese history until the fall of the Ming dynasty. This change had far-reaching consequences not only in China's political history but also in its cultural history: it seems that China popularized the wearing of trousers at that time, a legacy linked to the importation of the Central Asian horse. Under the T'ang (618-907), in the field of arts the influence of the peoples of Central Asia was also appreciable; in particular, new musical instruments replaced the traditional ones. Thus, the contributions made by the nomads to the sedentary peoples were not insignificant.

It must be observed, and there is something symbolic in this, that once the musical instruments had become Chinese, these very same instruments were once more borne across the steppe where they established themselves again. There were many such comings and goings. One of the most fundamental and significant in world history, was undoubtedly the spread of the relay station. Attaining a remarkable degree of expansion, particularly under the T'ang, it seems likely that this institution, at least in rudimentary form, could have been introduced into China with, or at least have drawn inspiration from its most essential servant, the horse. In any case, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Mongol empire certainly based its own relay system on the Chinese post, even if the existence of a relay in the early years of Genghis Khan's campaigns would suggest that this was not only a question of a borrowing.¹⁷

This last example makes it possible to highlight the intermediary role played by the cultures and history of the nomads. To a great extent, it was more or less directly thanks to the Mongol post that the first European postal systems came into being. The effects were varied and manifold. Tea, for example, which had been brought from Southeast

Asia to China had, by the end of T'ang rule, changed from a medicinal stimulant into the popular drink that we know.¹⁸ But it was in the company of the west Mongol khan Altan (Altyn Khan) in 1604 that the Russian envoy Vassiliy Tyumenets first became acquainted with this product, which was destined for such popularity in Eastern Europe, and took back samples.¹⁹ It is this intermediary role which is again betokened in many linguistic conventions. Thus the name of the River Amur is known to us in its Mongol form *amur*, or "calm," which the guides of the Russian travelers called it, not in its Tungus autochthonous forms, which introduce the qualifier "black," still present in the river's Chinese name, Heilungkiang, "River of the Black Dragon."

It is once more this intermediary role that links the Central Asian nomads to the spread of Buddhism across the continent—in their own zone first of all. If the great expansion of that zone from east to west was quite obviously on a spectacular scale, it should not lead one to forget the abundance of contacts between north and south. Buddhism's journey to Central Asia undoubtedly took place in the steppe, the northern Wei dynasty (386-534), which was to introduce it into northern China, where it remained dominant, sometimes even intrusive, until the reaction and the T'ang persecutions in the period 841-845. But this is too wide-reaching a subject to be dealt with on a superficial level. At the most, I might suggest that the way in which Buddhism was introduced among the paths of the steppes seems to have affected both the successes it enjoyed and the resistance it provoked, but also its relationship with the great currents of Chinese thought, especially with Taoism. A whole host of questions remain unanswered about the development of an ideology and a culture which for many long years found common ground and a common language, but still remained alien to China. These questions remain to some extent those which originate in the history of nomads and sedentary peoples living in close proximity to one another.

Highlighting the importance of the borrowings and their reciprocity does not dispense with the need to observe that relations were often stormy, and sometimes even bloody. More than that, while basic affinities do emerge (thus, whilst not wishing to make too much of the image, I perceive in the cosmological conception of the Emperor of China as a pivot, major intermediary, and intercessor between Humanity and the Universe, something very close to a shamanistic role), some people have been stuck by the relatively few direct cultural influences—and not without reason.²⁰ Questions have really arisen as a result of the slight impact that Chinese culture seems to have had on its nomadic neighbors, indeed, the slight attraction it seems to have held for them. It must have been more important for the nomads to find a partner than a role model. At any rate, they both brought the cultures of the Mediterranean world

and those of the furthest points of Asia into contact, from one edge of the continent to the other, without losing their identity in the process. In short, the nomads and nomadism were much more than a mere means or zone of transmission. It was their own history and their own culture which were for at least a millennium the active instruments of an unprecedented expansion of the planetary horizon.

These few remarks may have a common thread. I think, for my part, that I can discern in them the various forms, the countless stages through which, realization after realization, experience against experience, something was built in the history and consciousness of a people, something we call a tradition. Something which we could define quite simply, in other words, as the existence of that people in all its dimensions. Tradition is neither the statue of the Commander pointing an accusing finger at the present, nor a golden age to which we could return. It is more than ever, a dimension without which it would, every day, be more and more difficult for humanity to build a better future.

Notes

1. N. Sodnom, A.L. Yanshin et al., *BNMAU Undestnij Atlas* (National atlas of the Mongolian People's Republic) (Ulaanbaatar and Moskva, 1990), pp. 53-64.
2. C. Hell, P. Quere, "Étude du système d'élevage de Bannière d'Uzumunqui, Mongolie intérieure (Chine)" (Ph.D. diss., Institut National Agronomique, Paris-Grignon, 1992). The authors rightly lay emphasis on the bottlenecks and, in particular, on the slow reproduction of winter resources, but also on the outlay in labor terms that intensification would involve (pp. 53-54).
3. J. Legrand, "Vents d'herbe et de feutre," in *Dits et écrits de Mongolie* (Paris: Findakly, 1993).
4. X. Lxagvasüren, "Kharkhorum khotyг maltan шинзhilз байгаа н" (The excavations of the city of Qaraqorum), in *Dornodakhiny sudlakyn asuudal*, vol. 1, no. 16 (Ulaanbaatar, 1987): pp. 74-77; D. Maidar, *Mongolyn khot tosgony гурван зураг* (Three maps of the cities and population centers of Mongolia) (Ulaanbaatar: ShUAKh [Shinzhlekh Ukhaany Akdemiin Khevlle], 1970); D. Maidar, *Mongolyn arkitektur be khot bayгуулалт* (Mongol architecture and town planning) (Ulaanbaatar: UkhG [Ulsyn Khevlleliin Gazar], 1972); Kh. Perlee, *Khayatan ulsyn khoer békhlélt (khot)-iyn úldeгdel (X-XI зуун)* (The ruins of two [10th-11th century] Kitan fortifications [cities]) (Ulaanbaatar: ShUKhKh [Shinzhlekh Ukhany Khevlleliin Khorool], 1957); and Kh. Perlee, *Mongol ard ulsyn ért, дундад үеийн khot сууринь товчоон* (Cities in Mongolia in Antiquity and the Middle Ages) (Ulaanbaatar: UkhKhÉKh [Ulsyn Khevlleliin Khorooly Erkhlekh Khorool], 1961).
5. In the words of René Grousset, *L'Empire des steppes* (Paris: Payot, 1939).
6. *Secret History of the Mongols*, paras. 202-4.

7. See, in particular, F. Aubin and T.H. Hahn, "A Bibliography of European Non-English Works on Sung, Liao, Chin, Hsi-Hsia and Yuan," *Bulletin of Sung Yuan Studies*, vol. 21 (1989; published in 1991): pp. 115-48.
8. On a late but well-studied period, see H. Serruys, "The Tribute System and Diplomatic Missions (1400-1600)," *Sino-Mongol Relations During the Ming II*, (Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques), vol.14 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1967).
9. J. Legrand, "Les Mongols en Asie centrale," *Autrement*, no. 64 (October, 1992), pp. 60-72.
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